Guns and Roses

by EAVanGeek

Summary

After the Hero of Fereldan in the Dragon Age, The Champion of Kirkwall during the Blood Age, Thedas has been at peace for most of the Silverite Age. However trouble brews between the New Templar Force and the Enchanter Colleges. Agent of Truth, Seeker Pentaghast, has been sent to the Free Marches city of Ostwick to investigate why they have been unaffected by the rise in violence...
“...and that was the Rivainen Pirate Queens with their latest hit ‘Isabela’. Up next is Princes of Starkhaven and their new single ‘All for Honor, All for Her’, but now we go to local news.

After the turmoil in our neighbours in Kirkwall, many are starting to wonder what will happen to the ol’ Templar Force. Now I know this might confuse our younger listeners, but the Templar Force is NOT our boys in blue in the Ostwick Guard. No, the Templar Force is in charge of all magical surveillance, which has been in motion since the Blood Age. During that time the Kirkwall Revolts, led by the then Champion of Kirkwall, eventually brought our Enchanter Colleges in order to replace the Circle of Magi. Now today when we think of the College we think of the sprawling campus, the study of magic and training of both mages and nobles alike. But back in the day the Circle of Magi was restricted to ONLY mages, and those poor souls weren’t able to go home during the holidays. No they lived and died in those terrible Circles. But that all changed didn’t it?

That’s right folks, nearly a hundred years ago Thedas was flipped on it’s head when the Old Templar Order and the Mage Circles fell in Kirkwall. Now the riots from Kirkwall Enchanter College and the Templar Force has led to infighting in the city. Once again Kirkwall has turned into a battleground, with students at the College, mages and nobles alike, state that the Templar Force has too much control over what is taught and the security on campus has cracked down, leading to some mage scholars having to fight their way off campus. Imagine! Now I’m just your friendly dwarf radio host, I’ve never been in those campus, no siree! But we have a special guest with us, the Valedictorian of her time in Ostwick College, our very own Alexandra Maria Dawn-”

“Please, Alex is just fine, Mr Cadash.”

“Arolf! Please, just Arlof if we’re being friends here. Now the rest of the Free Marches has been at arms at this situation, but Alex it’s been said that you were able to stop protests at Ostwick Enchanter College. How did that work?”

“Well I’m glad you asked, Arlof, you see the problem between…”

Cassandra turned down the radio in the patrol car. She had moved to Ostwick a little over a month ago, and found out that nearly everyone listens to this station, mainly for Arlof Cadash’s talk show. She didn’t get the appeal of it, but it was important to her job to stay informed about the city.

She knew about the Kirkwall Revolts, how history was repeating itself once again. Ostwick however seemed to be an exception to this, the College experiencing not only peace but prospering during the turmoil. All because of this Alex. Alex Trevelyan, who wasn’t a mage, and if local gossip was correct, had been disowned by the Trevelyan House. Yet now she was the most influential person in the city, having taken down two of the most influential men: the former Commissioner and the Knight Commander.

She pulled into the headquarters for the Ostwick guard. A Vashoth on duty nodded at her car as she parked it. Their jaw clenched, their posture straightening up at the sight of her Seeker badge flashing from her waist. Cassandra ignored it, knowing that look from experience. She walked up the steps to the door and went through. Cubicles filled with officers and detectives were doing paperwork or
questioning suspects. She passed the tank, noticing that it was an elf in a red medical mask again. They weren’t talking but the officer didn’t notice the elf put salt in his coffee, until he took a sip. In the elevator, a dwarf officer rushed to get in with Cassandra. He had a short blonde beard, his green eyes looking up as if to pray. It was then he noticed Cassandra badge.

“... Is there a prayer I can say that will save my ass from the new Commissioner?”

“Sorry?”

“Your badge. Your one of those Sister Cops yeah? You know any prayer that will help break the news?”

“I’m a Seeker, not a Chantry Sister.”

“Oh. Shit.”

The rest of the ride was filled with an awkward silence all the way to the top floor. A human was sitting at the clerk office. The dwarf grunted at the greeting he gave and made a beeline for the Commissioner's door.

“Morning Seeker!”

“Good morning, Jim. How is the Commissioner?”

“Oh he’s fine! A bit tense tho, there’s a cold case that just recently got hot again.”

“Oh? Who’s in charge of the investigation?”

“You just saw him, Sergeant Cadash. One of the few officers who wasn’t sacked when Commissioner Rutherford took over.”

“He must be good at his job then.”

“Well, not necessarily. He used to just answer the emergency hotline, sending buses out. A good man the Sergeant, but…”

“What do you mean he’s not in the system!”

Cassandra and Jim looked at the Commissioner's door. Two figures, one clearly a dwarf, the other wearing either a fur-lined hood, or a very short bear.

“He’s still wearing that ridiculous jacket, Jim?”

“Yes, Seeker Pentaghast. It was gift from his sister in Ferelden. You’d think that the Ostwick winters would be summer for him, but he’s made his office purposely colder than the rest of the building. To be honest, I think he just wants an excuse to wear it-” Cassandra stopped listening to the clerk when she opened the door.

The office was cold, even in her bullet-proof vest and sports coat. Sergeant Cadash was visibly shaking, but whether that was because of the cold of the room or the stare of his new boss, it was hard to tell.

“Commissioner Rutherford. Seeker Pentaghast reporting.” both men looked up at her, and the taller of them straightened up when being addressed. His parka was open, showing a simple suit that was unbuttoned. The dwarf relaxed, putting his hands back down. It was a flash movement but Cassandra could’ve sworn that he had a tattoo on his left thumb. It was a different pattern than the
Casteless marking on his cheek.

“Cassa- Seeker. If you don’t mind but I’m in the middle of Sergeant Cadash’s report.”

“The cold case, I presume.”

“Yeah,” the dwarf said. “Wait, how’d you know about that?”

“You wouldn’t happen to be related to Arolf Cadash, would you sergeant?”

“He’s a cousin, a second or once-removed. Distant cousin really- wait a minute. That bastard didn’t fucking talk about the body did he?”

“Sergeant Cadash, did you tell a radio host about this case, when I gave specific orders to not tell anyone?”

“Commissioner, your John Doe is not in the computer systems, I had to try something. Arolf knows everyone and everything, the prick. Without any identifiable markings, I had to look for other avenues and-”

“If I may. I only asked because you and Arlof share the same last name. It is just a coincidence that you looked to… other avenues.”

“Me and my fucking mouth.” muttered the dwarf. “Commissioner, I’m not a detective! Give this case to someone else, otherwise you’d have it go cold again, not me.”

Cullen sighed and waved the sergeant free. The Sergeant stopped his rambling to look between the two humans, only to give a salute and run out of the office. With just the two of them things relaxed, but not by much. Cullen went back to his desk, not sitting down but looking at the file that the dwarf had left behind.

“How did he become a sergeant, if you don’t me asking?”

“Honestly? He was the only one in his department who wasn’t corrupt or under the former Commissioner's thumb. Immediately went from Officer to Sergeant. He’s better at barking orders than solving cases, but he was- is the only one who remembered the previous murders.”

“Because everyone else involved has been let go?”

“Yes.” Cullen ran his fingers through his hair, the carefully set locks ruffled out, leaving one curl to rest on his forehead.

Cassandra remembers when Cullen was just a Captain of the Templar Force in Kirkwall. He had moment of faith and went against his orders, around the time that the street riots in Kirkwall started, two years ago. Cullen left the Templar Force, went into rehab for a year just outside the city limits. He had been a wreck then, the withdrawals from the lyrium supplements wracking his body. Once initial withdrawal had subsided, the two began to talk outside of the case. Cassandra was proud that Cullen had gone back to protecting people, even if it wasn’t as a Templar. When Ostwick needed a new Commissioner, it was a shock that Cullen’s name had been suggested by an anonymous voter of the Ostwick City Council. He lead the investigation of corruption in the ranks last year, and in the last month has tried to keep the city streets safer. Looking at the man now, even in his fur-lined parka, he was leagues better than when he was in hospital garbs scratching at his face and arms from withdrawal. Cullen was looking at the files again, as if staring at them would give him the answers he desperately wanted. Cassandra stood next to him, looking at autopsy reports and crime scene shots.
“Your John Doe is a dwarf, but you don’t know if he has Noble ties? Usually the Casteless do facial markings to distinguish themselves-”

“Yes, except that John Doe had his head smashed in. The body is preserved, having been found in a fisherman's net just off the Wounded Coast. But the body is… too bloated to really identify anything.”

“No teeth means no dental work. No skin means no fingerprints or scars to help identify him. What about his clothing?”

“Besides it being covered in moss and torn to shreds? Standard work clothes, most of it made with cotton or lambswool. The only lead we have is that his left thumb was cut off before he died. The rest of the body, minus the smashed in face of course, is intact. Two other bodies were found during the previous Commissioner's time. Both were missing their left thumb, both were dwarf.” Cullen flipped the page, the other victim's files on display.

“Both victims have ties to the local Carta. A noble hunter who went by the stage name “Golden Beryl”. Poison was the killer, but she had been beaten post mortem. And a lyrium smuggler, male. Went by the name “Isana”, apparently because he was able to find surface veins of blue lyrium and not red.”

“I thought all of the red lyrium had been blocked underground, along with the remaining darkspawn?”

“You would think so, but like darkspawn, red lyrium finds a way. Meredith had found a red lyrium vein, remember?”

“I do. Continue.”

“Isana’s cause of death is unknown, his body was found by some Grey Warden scouts. Apparently deep stalkers had been eating at his corpse, so most of the evidence was tainted. The Grey Wardens did however note his Carta markings and that his left thumb was cut off, not eaten. Again, the thumb was taken before death.”

“When did these two deaths occur?”

“According to the autopsy reports? About 15 years ago. The fact that a new body has shown up, same missing thumb, and if my theory is correct, the same ties to the Carta, we could be experiencing a turf war.”

“A turf war.” Cassandra raised her eyebrow, “who would the Carta compete against in Ostwick? The Red Jennies are anarchists, they don’t believe in anything organized. And the Coterie has had to repeal to Kirkwall because of recent infighting.”

“True, but who’s said it’s outside of the Carta? Ostwick has had one Carta House since the Dragon Age, but they didn’t start running things until the end of the Blood Age. Remember that movie, ‘The Godmother’.”

“Yes, I do. A shame it never got a sequel.”

“Well that’s because the sequel is Ostwick today. That story is based off Moma Cadash and her four sisters. They took over the Carta at the end of Blood Age, stating heritage to a former warrior caste turned golem. Shale, from the Fifth Blight. Still, times change and Moma apparently didn’t have a solid heir. It’s not a stretch that each of her sisters broke off and made different, smaller, houses.”
“But if that’s true, then both your Sergeant and that radio host are-”

“Connected to the Carta? I know. I may be the Commissioner, Cassandra, but I don’t have the men or the respect to start poking into those ties. Who knows, they might actually have no ties to the Carta, just the unlucky coincidence of sharing the same name with one the Queenpins.”

“Give me the case.”

“What?” Cullen started to laugh, but then stopped when he saw the look on Cassandra's face. “Oh, you’re serious?”

“I am. Why is that so hard to believe?”

“Well it’s just, I thought you were busy, scoping out the Enchanter College and the Templar Force.”

“Cullen, not everything has to revolve around mages and templars. It’s the people of this city that determine if there are riots or if there is silence. I need something—anything, to do. This case will get me out of your hair and allow me to continue my other investigations.”

Cassandra picked up both files, and headed out the door. Cullen cursed and followed her to the elevator.

“Where do you think you’re going?”

“To get answers. Starting at the morgue.”

Chapter End Notes

I'm hoping to update every Thursday/Friday, but I'm posting during Uni... so please bear with me if I don't keep up. I've got about 20 ish chapters written, so that yea. 40 is just a guess, it might end up longer.
The morgue was not meant to be comforting. It was here that people would be brought down to identify loved ones, where Chantry Brothers would help with the cremation of the faithful, Vashoth and Elves collect their family remains to do with as their separate faiths required, and would be necromancers haggle for the uncollected, the unwanted, and the unloved to use for personal experiments.

Cassandra felt the hairs on the back of her neck stand up. The morgue in Ostwick burned an incense similar to those in the Necropolis. It must be comforting to some, but it was not to her. Thankfully the anesthetic smell overpowered the incense in the examination rooms. The forensic on duty was a Tevinter man, his oval glasses hanging off the edge of his nose. His assistant, a Dalish if the markings on their neck and cheeks were correct, was helping him.

“Ah, Commissioner Rutherford and,” a pause as the Forensic look first at Cassandra face and then her badge, “Miss Seeker Pentaghast. My, My! It has been ages since I heard the name Pentaghast. I suppose my little corner of the world reminds you of home, doesn’t it?” He smiles, showing teeth yellowed from chain smoking. His assistant rolled their eyes, working on peeling back the skin on a corpse that looked to have been dumped in the local mines.

“How can I help you two on this very fine Tuesday.”

“We’re here to inspect the John Doe with the missing thumb.”

“John Doe, John Doe, hmmm…. Andruil? Do you know a John Doe by chance? One that lacks a thumb?”

“Of course, sir. I can show them the body, I already did an autopsy on him.”

“Splendid, Andruil! I’ll finish that one on the table, now go on. Impress our guests!”

The dalish elf put down their scalpel and walked towards one of the walls in the back. The forensic started to hum a death march. The body was in locker D23, and the elf went to go look for the rest of his clothing in evidence. Cassandra noticed that his lower jaw was missing as well, but considering the rest of the head it was not put on the reports.

“Here’s his clothes. When I was taking them off the body I found this business card in his front pocket. Or what remained of it anyway. It’s for a florist shop in the Old Alienage District.”

“You wouldn’t happen to know the shop, would you?” Cullen asked

“I know the tattoo parlour next door to it. My uncle went there to get his vallaslin touched up. They have a traditionalist there, but they mostly do Sailor and Dwarven styles. The manager is a city elf who does piercings, but the owner is supposed to be Half-Dalish.”

“I didn’t think The People accepted ‘Half-Dalish’”. Cassandra said

“In Orlais or the Frostbacks they might not. But this is Ostwick, Miss Seeker. Still, pretty sure my uncle was being crude, I’m sure the owner is actually Dalish, just does business with Shemle- sorry, with humans.”
“Thank you, Andruil.”

“That’s not my name, Commissioner. My name is Sabrae, of Clan Lavellan.”

“Thank you, Sabrae. Please report that your supervisor is not calling you by your name. I don’t want this precinct to go backwards.”

The dalish blinked, and then nodded. Cassandra felt a swell of pride from Cullen’s actions. However, she knew from experience that the young elf wouldn’t file the report. Cassandra turned to inspect the body as Sabrae walked away from them.

“Tell me what you see, Cassandra.”

“It’s just as you said, smashed in head, most likely down with a warhammer of some kind. He’s missing his lower jaw as well, and it looks like someone may have taken the time to pull out his teeth before giving the killing blow. As for his hands... Missing left thumb. Strange, he has a bomb and a small rune tattooed on his right middle and forefinger. If he was a miner, he might have been an artificer. Starkhaven artificers have the same markings, though they use rings and not tattoos. Look, his hands were tied together. He struggled against the restraints- check his feet.”

“Same bruising... So our John Doe was tortured before killed. If they pulled out his lower jaw, that must have been down post mortem, or after they got what they wanted.”

“Autopsy says poor liver and kidneys, so a heavy drinker. But it also states that the kidneys were bruised and his right lung is collapsed.”

Cassandra took out her phone and snapped a photo of the dwarf’s right hand. She also took a photo of the business card. The card read “The Snapdragon of Ostwick- Unique Boutiques for the Gentle Freaks. Open Mon-Sun 10 am- 4 pm. 24 Loc Muinne, Old Alienage District”

“Care for a drive? I think I might have our lead.” Cullen grinned, as if this was the most fun he’s had in months.

During the drive down, Cullen talked about the Old Alienage District. How nearly thirty years ago it had all been burned down by city elves; their reasoning? Gentrification. Most elves still lived in the District, but when specialist stores and clothing franchises started buying out blocks, rent spiked. The homelessness problem escalated and the ones who were hit the worst were the elves and surface dwarves with no Noble ties. It was lead by a woman name Scoia’Tael of Ostwick, just an average city elf, and her dwarven counterpart. There is little to no records of the two, most of the information about both gaining fame similar to the Boni and Klyde cases of 10:32 Blood. Today, rent is controlled in the area, and while there are still several specialist shops in the district, they’re owned and run by those who live in the area. When the city gave in, Scoia’Tael disappeared. The local Red Jennies claimed ownership of her, many still going by the name or an abbreviation of it.

“It’s made patrolling the area difficult, but just between us? It keeps most of the people in Noble and Upper district away from there. The less nobles that go into the district, the less crime that happens overall. It’s not perfect, hell it’s chaotic. But the Red Jennies don’t hit their own home base.”

“It almost sounds like you admire the Jennies.”

“What? No! Well, a little. Only in this one instance. What are you laughing for? This isn’t funny, do you know how many times I get a report on my desk saying that the Red Jennies have spray painted a vagina on my patrol cars? At least three times a week!”

They had pulled up to 24 Loc Muinne. It had a front parking lot, only enough for one row of cars. A
small median strip separated traffic flow with elevated flower beds. Instead of poppies, buttercups or
daisies, there was Elfroot and Andraste Grace. Medical Herbs. Cassandra thought it was odd, but
Cullen didn’t pay it any mind. He took off his badge and threw it into the glove compartment of the
car. She wished he’d take off his parka, since he was more recognized by that than the badge.

The tattoo parlour sat right next to the florist, and it was obvious where one started and the other
ended. Flower beds sat in front of the florist, but the same beds had been replaced with mailboxes in
front of the tattoo parlour and a smoking bin was on the far side. The sign for the tattoo parlour had a
painted black sword with a brass crown on the hilt. “Shartan’s Oath” was written just below the
blade, followed by “Tatts and Piercings”. A sign on the window read “We do touch-ups!” The
windows were painted, depicting a dark forest and wolves around the edges. The florist shop had a
Dragon with the head of the namesake flower. It was a gaudy green and pink scales, resting on the
name of the shop, the paint faded orange, almost yellow. Cassandra scoffed at the visual pun of the
“Snapdragon”, but noticed that instead of keeping customer privacy through window murals, there
was shelves shaped like honeycombs, showing products that were sold. Creams, Scarves, Candles,
Hand pressed flowers on cards, and yes, honey that was made from certain pollen.

“So Cullen, you choose. Tattoo, or Flower Shop?”

“Let’s get the needles out of the way first.”

The desk clerk for the tattoo parlour was Vashoth, one of his horns broken off and capped, with a
small silver bell at the end. Their arms were covered in Vitaar-like tattoos. He pointed Cassandra and
Cullen to an artist named Burok, his beard done in two long braids, matching his hair.

“Sorry officers, I’ve done dozens of artificer markings. Usually on elves though, they like playing
with fire if you know what I mean.” He winked and went back to sketching a design for someone’s
back.

“What about a dwarf, maybe a worker at the local mine.” Cassandra asked

“Well now let’s see. I’ve been doing this for, oh, 8 years? Been here since Tael re-opened shop. But
I don’t-”

“Wait, Tael? As in… that Tael?” Cullen whispered, his surprise obvious. Cassandra raising her
eyebrow at the man.

“Nah, but close I’m sure! I was living in Ansburg when those burning were going on, but anyways. I
was saying. Don’t know about any miner but had a driver come through. Imagine! Dwarf driver, but
hey! Wasn’t gonna complain. Oh but that was a few years back, might be three? Do you have a
photo of his face, I’m great with faces.”

“Sadly, no.” Cassandra said. “If there is anyone else who might be able to help us please contact me
through this number.” She handed the artist a small, plain business card with her name and phone
number. Nothing about her job or address.

“Yeah, sure thing miss- wow that’s Nevarran- Pentaghast. Hey boss!”

Cassandra turned to see an elf woman standing at the door. She wore a sleeveless hoodie, her hair a
vibrant red, shaved close on the sides. Her pupils were yellow- no an incredibly pale brown, and she
had three rows of piercings on both ears.

“You two, follow me.” Her accent was thick, definitely a local. Cullen followed the woman without
hesitation, but something about her unnerved Cassandra. She hesitated, but the artist chuckled.
“Yeah, she has that effect on people. Don’t worry she doesn’t bite.” Burok smiled at Cassandra. She nodded at the dwarf and followed the Commissioner.

The woman’s office was plain, nothing personal except the deathroot leaves and and rashvine drying. A small prayer table sat in the corner, Andrate on the stake the only thing similar to Cassandra. There were other small shrines, two bowls of burning incense and a a miniature black sword, identical to the sign outside; the sword sat in a bowl of water. Cullen closed the door behind her, and the woman sat at the desk. She put her legs up on the corner of the desk, her bare feet clean.

“Sit.”

Cassandra sat down in the chair across from her. Cullen looked around and then took a seat in the worn couch by the door. Books were strewn about the surface of the desk, most of them covered in scratchings about sales and purchase for equipment. A corkboard was on the wall to the left, directly across the entrance. It had a timetable for the next two weeks, including booked appointments and who was working. It was a regular office, minus the deadly herbs and the assorted shrines on the prayer table.

“What is the new police commissioner and a Seeker Agent doing in my parlour asking about artificer markings.” It wasn’t a question, but a demand. Cullen opened his mouth to talk.

“Shut up.” He immediately closed his mouth at the glare the elf- Tael, if Cassandra guessed- gave him. She didn’t have any grey hair, but the corners of her eyes were wrinkled. Cassandra put her in her late 40’s, just turning 50 at the most. The woman moved her gaze to her, probably expecting Cassandra to talk.

“We’re trying to identify the owner of this hand.” Cassandra showed the photo she took at the morgue.

“Was the head too ugly for you take a photo of?”

“There was no head.”

The woman narrowed her eyes, the crow’s feet becoming more pronounced. She grinned, showing off sharp canines that were common among elves.

“Liar.” Her eyes looked yellow for a moment, sending a chill down Cassandra’s spine. The woman leaned back in her chair, her eyes going back to the light brown they were before. She wasn’t sure if it was a trick of the light or if this woman was... something else.

“He had the business card of your neighbor, the Snapdragon. What can you tell us about the owner.”

“Kallak? He’s half-dalish.”

“There’s no such things as a half-dalish.”

“You haven’t met Kallak.”

“Kallak, that’s a dwarven word.” Cullen butted in

Tael glared at him and then turned her attention back to Cassandra

“We do a lot of tattoos. We do a lot of piercings too. You won’t find anything here. Go next door, that’s where you were going, wasn’t it?”
She stood up and opened the door. She snapped ‘Out’ at Cullen, who quickly got up and left the parlour. Cassandra took her time getting up from her chair. She looked at Tael, who was at least a two feet shorter than her. The elf woman grinned again and did a mock bow, leaving the room before Cassandra. The desk clerk waved at Cullen as he walked past and exited the parlour. Cassandra turned around and took the business card for ‘Shartan’s Oath’.

“We do religious tattoos as well, Miss. Anything from Avaar to Andrastian. Just make an appointment with one of our artists and we’ll see what we can create!” The Vashoth had a silverite tooth, his round face kinder than his boss. Cassandra thanked him and walked out, seeing Cullen standing outside the Florist shop. She shook her head at him.

“I got the feeling she knew you.”

“What makes you say that?” Cullen grew red in face, messing with his hair again.

“Just a guess.” Cassandra chuckled.

They opened the door to the floral shop; an ancient oak cabinet was displaying the same products that were in the windows. In the front of the shop, there were display holders for flower arrangements. Some hanged on ledges, while others were in vases, but that was not the strangest part of them. Sunflowers were arranged with red cabbage leaves, Lilies and Royal Elfroot in brown paper, Dawn Lotus and Aloe Vera Leaves together wrapped in newspaper. They were not traditional in any sense of the word.

An elf in yellow plaid and a red dress was behind the counter, making a new arrangement. She looked up to see Cullen and Cassandra, then immediately spotted Cassandra badge. Her eyes widened and she went running into the back.

“Well, that could have gone worse.” Cullen remarked.

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter I *finally* get to my boy. Sorry, but I don’t know how to just jump into shit, I need a bunch of fucking. World Building.
Sera ran into Kallak’s office with a panicked look in her eyes. At first he thought it was because she put Rashvine in the coffee pot again, right up until she staged whispered ‘The Fuzz’. He motioned for her to go into the back, into the cold room to be exact. He got up from his desk and rolled up his sleeves. His Dirthamen and Falon’Din markings wrapped around his forearms, the dark blue standing out against his tanned skin.

Kallak rolled his shoulders and cracked his neck walking down to the store front, which was elevated from the entrance in order to have his employees come eye to eye with some of his more “classier” clients. He adjusted the green handkerchief wrapped around his neck, making sure that it covered up the fact he was wearing modern chainmail under his buttoned shirt. He found two officers, one wearing a bulletproof vest and a sports coat, the other the most hideous and Fereldan looking parka Kallak had ever seen.

“Welcome to the Snapdragon, Unique Boutiques for the Gentle Freaks. How can I help you?” Kallak put both his hands on the counter, making sure that his posture was relaxed but the officers could see his vallaslin on his arms and the Casteless tattoos on his shaved head.

The woman did a double take on him, meaning that it worked. The Fereldan in the parka was too busy looking at the flower arrangements and the coffee pot next to it. Kallak smirked, his goatee scrunching up against his nose.

“The coffee’s free, just fyi.” The Fereldan looked up, and Kallak’s stomach dropped. It was the new Commissioner, Cullen Rutherford. He heard from Tael that he took out nearly every spy they had on the inside, along with the other more ‘influential’ officers. He had no idea why he was here in his shop. The Commissioner smiled and started to help himself. He stopped and turned to Kallak.

“Sorry to ask, but is it organic.”

“...No, honey is raw tho.”

“Thank the Maker,” the man said, as he poured himself a cup. “The only thing we get at the office is that organic stuff, it’s terrible.” He took a sip, grimaced and added a packet of sugar. Once the coffee was to his liking he went back to browsing Kallak’s store.
The woman walked up to the counter. Even with an elevated floor, the woman was taller than Kallak. If he had to guess she was tall even for a human. But that also meant he got a glimpse of her badge. *Agent of Truth, Seeker Pentaghast*. Kallak felt his stomach disappear into the Deep Roads.

“Do you recognize this hand?” She put her smartphone on the counter, a picture of a dead man’s hand on it. The photo was trying hiding the fact that the body is on a morgue table, but it didn’t leave out the wrist. It had rope burns, the nails broken from fighting someone. An old protection rune on the forefinger, and a frost bomb on the middle. He knew the hand.

“Sorry, can’t say I do.” Kallak handed back the phone, returning his hands to their position. The woman, Agent Pentaghast, took it back. She paused, microscopic, but she was staring at his left thumb. He brought his hands to cross over his chest, hiding his thumb from her view. She was hiding something about the body, but he didn’t know what.

“Nice Tattoos.” She said bluntly. Kallak smirked, a laugh rising from his chest to his throat.

“OH these old things!,” He brought his right hand up to his forehead smoothing his palm across his Casteless markings, the dark blue matching his Vallaslin. “Got ‘em when I was lil’ tyke. You know how it is with us Stone Folk. Traditiooon, Tradition!”

Kallak laughed when he ended the poorly sung note with his finger pointed at the ceiling, the Commissioner snorting into his coffee. The woman didn’t take her eyes off Kallak.

“Not what I meant.”

“Oh, then you must mean these.” He held up his forearms, tucking both thumbs into his fists. “These aren’t Tattoos darlin’. These are Vallaslin.”

“I’m aware.” her tone had yet to change from bored, “I thought only the Dalish had Vallaslin.”

“They do.”

“Then you would have me believe that you’re Dalish?”
“Well darlin’, my ears aren’t pointy for no reason now are they?” he crossed his arms and wiggled his ears. The metal bar in his right ear must have caught the overhead light, because she finally noticed his tipped ears. He grinned at the sudden shock on the Seeker’s face. *Got you.*

“Now, unless you two are here to hire us for your wedding arrangements, I’d suggest you leave. Your patrol car and fancy badges are scaring my assistant. She’s just a young little thing, not able to go to the Enchanter College, but she tries. Real proud of that one, her bees have helped us tremendously, but I really do need her to stand the counter.”

“The owner of the hand I showed you had your business card.”

“Well darlin’, lots of folks have my card. Snapdragon is pretty well known in these here parts.”

“Mind if we take a look in back.”

“Do you have a warrant?”

“No, but-”

“Well then no, you’ll have to come back with a warrant.”

“I noticed your business card doesn’t have your name on it.”

“Well darlin’ it’s a business card, not a greetings card.”

“Mind if I ask your name.”

“Do you have a warrant?”

“I don’t need a warrant to ask for your name.”
“You do if it’s on private property, related to private business, or is for an investigation into a crime.”

“And what makes you think I am questioning you about a crime.”

“Why else would a Seeker of Truth come into the Old Alienage District, with the new Guard Commissioner no less, and demand to see the back of my shop.”


“Come back with a warrant and I just might tell you. In the meantime, help yourself to a cup o’ joe and leave my shop.”

The woman slammed her hands onto the counter. Her jaw clenching, a blood vessel near her temple jumping. Kallak kept smiling, but lowered his hands and mimicked the seeker’s posture. Their faces were inches away from each other, and Kallak leveled his green eyes with her grey.

“Darlin’, I don’t know how they do things where you’re from. But threatening a store owner in the presence of another officer is liable to a court order. Now I’m no rich noble, hell it don’t take a genius to see that from my “nice tattoos”. But I’ve got some high brow clients. I’ve done funerals, weddings, hell even name days for the Trevelyans. You don’t wanna go there.” Kallak kept smiling, his thick eyebrows knitted together on his brow. He hoped the cameras were rolling, otherwise it would be hard to actually hold that threat.

It was at that moment that the doorbell chimed, and two people walked into the store.

“Welcome to Snapdragon, Unique Boutiques for the Gentle Freaks. How can I help y’all?” Kallak growled, never looking up from the Seeker’s face.

“Uh… If you’re busy we can come back.”

“Nonsense! Officer, is there a problem here?”
“...No.” the woman stood up straight, and adjusted her jacket. Kallak relaxed at the same time, crossing his arms again like before. “We were just leaving. Cullen.”

The Commissioner seemed too busy with whoever was at the door; it wasn’t until the woman turned around that Kallak saw why. A Vashoth was standing to the side, holding a tray of baked goods in sample sizes. His companion, a younger Tevinter man, lighter than most, was standing awkwardly beside the door, keeping it half ajar.

The Seeker left, the Commissioner following closely behind with three of the samples in his hands. He had left his coffee on the display by the greeting cards. The woman marched to the car and got into the driver seat, her fury still on display. Just before she pulled out she made eye contact with Kallak. He smiled and winked at her, and felt a swell of pride when the woman angrily pulled out and drove off.

Sera came running out of the cold room to watch the car leave. She then noticed the Vashoth in the pink and frilly apron holding free sweets. She jumped over the counter and grabbed what looked like a bear claw. The Tevinter closed the door and whistled, tucking his hands into his jeans.

“Are the cops always like that around here?”

“No, just the ones trying to prove something. Ever since that new Commissioner came through we’ve been getting all kinds of folk in the Guard.”

“Thought that was the Commissioner.” The Vashoth spoke, his accent cultured, but something about it threw Kallak off. He just noticed that the man was wearing an eyepatch, and was covered in scars. Scars that don’t happen if you’re a baker.

“How’d you figure that?”

“Parka was a dead giveaway. You’d think Fereldens would realise fur doesn’t have to go on everything.”

“Ah but what else would we make fun of them for? Mabari?” Sera snorted and started to giggle at Kallak remark. He was glad she got over the Guard showing up at their store.

“I apologize, didn’t quite get y’all's names.”
“Name is Krem, and this is The Iron Bull. We’re gonna be moving across the street and figured we introduce ourselves to the rest of street.”

“And you’re gonna take over the bakery huh?”

“That’s right, we know that the District Council wants bread loaves and corn wraps made for locals to use, but we’re showing off the rest of our stuff.”

“And what’s all this then.”

“Well, your employee took a Great Bear Claw, which has hazelnut and chocolate drizzle. We’ve also got Strawberry Twists, a Par Vollen treat. Careful though, they can be a bit spicy. And finally,” Krem plucked one of the small cups, this one filled with a flaky crust only being held together by a maple stick. “Halla Horns.”

“Haven’t had Halla Horns in years. You know usually the crust is made with wild wheat and tree nut flour.”

“We’ve got Dalish who helps with that. She’s pretty great at that sort of thing. This recipe is her clan’s.” Kallak took a bite, and immediately closed his eyes.

It was good, reminding him of years long past. When he opened his eyes he saw both men beaming at him. Kallak grunted and gave a thumbs up. The Iron Bull picked up the empty coffee cup on the display. It was then Kallak noticed he was missing some of his fingers as well. Alarm bells were going off in his head; something wasn’t right and it was shaped like a fake baker. A fake baker who can actually bake.

“Well, I’m Kallak, that over there is Sera. Got a young boy in a big hat who works here too, goes by Cole. Gangly lad, but he’s harmless. Tael runs the tattoo parlour next door but I own this complex, including the apartments upstairs.”

“Nice to meet you Kallak… Sorry I didn’t get your last name” Bull gave a lopsided smile, one that Kallak has been known to give to other people if he wants information. The alarm bells became sirens.
“Well, Bull, I don’t have one. Neither does Tael. You’ll find most folk in this District, specially locals, don’t have last names ‘round here.” Kallak shot a lopsided smile right back at the Vashoth. Krem coughed and patted his companion, leading Bull back through the door.


Sera burped as she jumped behind the counter and finished her bouquet. It had forget-me-nots, daffodils, and hydrangeas. She put it on the front display next to the red cabbage leaves and sunflowers. Kallak threw out the rest of the Halla Horn, and went into the back. He checked the security footage, noting that the entire time the commissioner was enjoying a free coffee, Kallak’s smugglers had transferred the lyrium from the back of the cold room into the van. He also rewatched his stand-off with the Seeker. Pentaghast, he thought. You’re gonna be trouble aren’t you.

One of Sera’s Red Jennies had been keeping watch. At some point they had gone from the alley in the back to the front parking lot. Kallak smirked when he saw they had spray painted the patrol car. He also noticed that his new neighbours had been busy finishing their fence around the new outdoor sitting. Just thinking about the two weeks it took for construction to change three parking spots to a patio brings back headaches. Kallak transferred the storefront footage to a tape, then erased the rest of it.

He went back to his office. It was small, considering he had most of this floor made into a cold room for both flowers and lyrium. He did have a few personal things. A rock poster with a man in a top hat and black leather jeans playing a guitar hung next to the door. Several art pieces, some were Dalish murals, others Dwarven Artifacts, and a large sketch, Vashoth in design. He had two photos on his desk. One was a blurry photo of two girls, one Vashoth with her horns just starting to come out holding a human girl with ashen grey hair. The human is giggling, her eyes shut tight as she clings to a voodoo doll. The Vashoth girl is laughing as well looking away from the camera. The other photo was still, the same two girls but now young adults. They had graduation caps and diplomas in their hands, the Vashoth girl holding up the human in one arm, and a mage’s staff in her other. His computer screen was an old box, his cord phone even older. He picked up the phone and held the number six, after hitting the pound. A click and Kallak heard a voice on the other side.

“One of our transporters is dead; artificer. I want to know how this happened and when. I also want anything you have on two names. I’ll wait… Got a pen now? Good. Seeker Agent Pentaghast. And a Vashoth going by the name The Iron Bull. Yes, ‘The’ is part of the name, travels with a Tevinter man, goes by Krem. Don’t fuck this up.” Kallak hung up.

Chapter End Notes
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gRdfX7ut8gw

Also Slash is definitely a bard, just saying.
Law District

Sometimes being a Seeker had it’s perks. Like when it came to parking at the precinct, or being able to get away with not having to wear formal attire during ceremonies. Or like today, when getting a judge to sign for a warrant without having them ask questions. Especially if said judge is a follower of the faith. Cassandra was nearly out of the Old Viscount Offices to head back to 24 Loc Muinne when a familiar face was waiting for her.

“Leliana, what are you doing here?” the redhead woman was dressed similar to a Chantry Sister, but instead of a prayer cap she wore a red hood.

“How goes your mission, Cassandra?” Her Orlesian accent was soft, not even echoing off of the marble in the courtroom.

“Fine, though I am still unsure how Ostwick has not been affected by the recent College revolts. All I do know is that most credit this woman, Alex Trevelyan.”

“Hm, yes. Your report did speak about her. I had my informants look into her history.” The two started walking down the hall, going towards the exit.

“And what have you learned?”

“That she had been disowned by her family, that is until very recently. Perhaps it had something to do with her public service, or maybe it was because she led the case against the former Commissioner and Knight Commander, and won.”

“Why did her family disown her?”

“Senator Trevelyan, her father, is an avid follower of the faith. His children have all been in the Templar Force, and the family's more fade-touched ancestry served as Knight Enchanters in the Dragon Age. But it is recorded that he was not always in favour of the elven and Vashoth citizens. Alex was quietly disowned when she was eight, when rumors began to circulate that his youngest spent her time down in the Old Alienage District, coming home because an elven woman would bring her back.”

“And this woman, who is she.”
“She doesn’t exist on any public records, but I believe you met her yesterday. At her tattoo parlour.” Cassandra stopped in tracks, red hair and yellow eyes flashed in her mind.

“Bullshit.” Leliana smiled and opened the doors to outside, Cassandra following closely behind.

“Tael is what she goes by, no? Well, the woman raised the girl, but she wasn’t alone. Alex had a roommate during her time at the Ostwick College, a childhood friend in fact. A Vashoth mage by the name of Saare Adaar.

“The two were in the same year but have very different masters. Alex studied Historical Order and Modern Law, while Saare was a Fade Mage with a focus in Enhanced Elemental Magic. Alex went to the Orlesian Chevalier College, tradition and new age thinking all in one place. She came back to Ostwick about five years ago and started working as a public lawyer, most of her clients being those who couldn’t afford anyone close to her credentials. And then came the case of the Age.

“It was found that the former leaders of law enforcement were making money on the side for locking up a mage student here, ignoring an elf murder there, and noblemen not paying their share of city taxes. She got the title “People’s Noble” and when news spread to the Free Marches Senate, well. Father dearest had a choice: either tell the world that she doesn’t have any legal ties to his name, and face backlash and get voted out of his seat next election, or publicly come out in support of his youngest daughter, even if every action and deed she’s done has gone against his base.”

“So she exposed two corrupt officials. I still don’t understand how that’s connected to the rest of it.”

“Oh Cassandra, I do love you my dear, but sometimes I forget that you have a claim to nobility at all. You’re not seeing the big picture here- Alex disrupted the known norms in the city, so now everyone is on their best behaviour. One little slip, one small under the table deal and the alarms will ring. Until people know how the new Commissioner will run the Guard, and Templar Force elects a new Knight Commander, no one is worried about what the College does.

“The College also knows that the city has their eyes on them. They can’t hide behind the Templar Force if one of their students decides to use blood magic or start a revolt. What would they revolt against, the Chantry itself? Who forced their hand to blood magic if the Templars are trying to elect a new leader and not trying to control magic?” Leliana sighed, having reached the bottom step.

Autumn in Ostwick was lovely, most of the trees turning different colors, but the leaves were stubborn, clinging to the branches. In the Law District, what used to be the Viscount District, it was
more open than in Kirkwall. Broken Pillars that must have once held a ceiling now had various sculptures of past heroes. Most were Pirates or Sailors, but Champions, Merchant Princes, even the Black Fox adorned the top of some of these pillars. The courtyard in front of the building had a large fountain and pool. The pool was filled with water lilies, the statue in the center depicted the first Ostwick Champion, a Trevelyan. The Nobleman was holding a sword, it’s point dug into craggy rock as he reached behind him to grab a hooded woman. The hooded woman was pushing her infant into the Nobleman, the rest of her body sinking into the water.

Ostwick College Students sat around the pool, their grey hoodies and sky blue scarfs separating them from the other bystanders. Cassandra remembers the black and red of Kirkwall College, most students proudly tying their scarf around their wrists and red paint across their nose, to match their mascot and founder, the Champion during the Blood Age. Ostwick didn’t have anything so bold, but some students, most of Rivani descent, had the sky blue scarf wrapped around their heads instead of their necks.

“So I suppose that in order to stop this fighting, we should simply fire every Knight Commander and call it corruption.” Cassandra said

“Not exactly. It only worked here in Ostwick because of the College’s history of cooperation with both the Templar Force and the Chantry itself. Such a tactic might not work in Starkhaven, where the younger Prince of Starkhaven is the current Knight Commander.”

“Or in Ferelden, where he’s had the position since the beginning of this Age. I see your point. But what does Divine Justinia want from me? To report that Ostwick is fine for now, but the moment her choice of Commissioner has settled into his position that riots will start?”

Leliana looked at the fountain, lost in thought.

“...I don’t know. All we can do is have faith.”

Cassandra put her hand on Leliana and squeezed her shoulder. She knew Leliana was worried about her lover. She never asked about them, but she knew enough to know they were separated by their jobs. Cassandra sometimes felt jealous, Leliana had someone who loved her regardless of her occupation, her past. They loved Leliana for her. Cassandra didn’t have anyone like that anymore.

Anthony was gone, and now so was Regal. Her brother and her only lover, both taken from her by the Maker. She doesn’t blame them, nor does she blame the Maker. But it still hurts, even now. Leliana puts her hand on top of Cassandra and smiles at her. A small moment, gone just as quickly as it came.
“I see you’re keeping yourself busy here in Ostwick. You have a case?”

“Yes,” Cassandra starts, “Thank the Maker. It was cold but a new body showed up, and it might be linked. The only connection we have though is that all the victims had their left thumbs removed. They all died in a different way, came from different walks of life. They were dwarves, but I won’t simply assume that it is connected to the Carta.”

“But it involved Casteless Dwarves, otherwise I would have heard something about them.”

“Yes. My only lead is a flower shop, run by dwarf. He’s also Dalish if you can believe it.”

“Strange,” Leliana says, her mind already working on the problem. “It’s true that dwarves and elves started looking out for each other on the surface shortly after the fall of the Circles, but to think the Dalish and Casteless having ties, let alone a child-”

“Oh no! This is my case.” Cassandra laughs, making the blow lighter to Leliana’s ego. The redhead pouted, almost child-like.

“Oh you’re no fun, Cassandra! This would be just like when we tag-teamed on that writer. Oh! That reminds me, he’s in town.”

“What? Why didn’t you say that before!”

“Well, I was having too much fun with your Dwarven Dalish riddle, I got distracted.” Leliana giggled at the look Cassandra gave her.

“Don’t worry, your favourite author is keeping to the College District. My spies inform me he’s writing a new historical fiction, and he’s here to collect information for it.”

“Varric Tethras is a fiend, and if it wasn’t for his memoir on the Blood Champion in Kirkwall we wouldn’t be in this mess! As if there weren’t enough stories about that Champion, Hawke.”

“I just hope he doesn’t try to write himself into this next one as well. Or print four different versions, each with a different romantic interest.”
“You take that back! That was the best part!”

“Perhaps for you, but not for the rest of us.” The two laughed at the odd turn their conversation had taken. Leliana said her goodbyes as Cassandra went to her car.

Someone had spray-painted her patrol car, so Cullen gave her an undercover car. It was a faux muscle car, the suspension so low Cassandra was afraid she would scrape her exhaust off if she went over a speed bump.

Driving through Ostwick was beautiful, and since moving here a month ago, Cassandra has gotten more comfortable with the layout and location of all the districts. The city was built on two peninsulas and an island in between, each having a resource at some point. The middle island held the Old Alienage District, along with the College District. Originally lyrium was mined here, but after 9:58 Dragon, lyrium was scarce and most of the workers from the alienage started working in the silverite and coal mines. Silverite and Coal was made on the peninsula to the west, surrounded by bog and swamp. The Middle and Lower District were located here. Before cars and non-magical construction techniques, the only way to get there was by flatbed canoes, making the famous Floating Market, which would wrap around the center island and bring the two peninsulas together. Today the market is a tourist trap, most of the major showboats tethered under the bridges that connect the island with the rest of the city. The eastern peninsula held the Law and Noble District. The coral and crab fishing made it richer than the other two areas, and since it was the one facing the Wounded Coast, it had greeted visitors for Ages. In the modern Silverite Age, it was the political center of the city state, with two preservation parks and most of the museums in the city state.

She arrived on Loc Muinne Avenue, and just noticed the bakery across from the flower shop. Cassandra stomach growled; she had skipped breakfast in order to get the warrant. She pulled up to the front of the flower shop, making sure that her car was parked at the edge of the spots available and not in the middle again. She didn’t feel like explaining why there was crudely spray painted vagina on the side again.

Cassandra walked across the street, brushing her fingers against the elfroot on the medium. The bakery was the only store open on the street, a young man with thick blonde hair was in the standing window. A glass display case was next to him, showcasing what they had for sale. The door to go into the bakery was next to the display, painted a gaudy shade of pink. A muffin with bull horns coming out of the top was painted on it.

“'I'll take a, Great... Bear... Claw.”' Cassandra pulled out her wallet as the young man grunted and got the pastry. All of a sudden she heard a familiar voice call out.
“OI CHEF! IT’S THAT COP FROM YESTERDAY! Grim don’t charge her, she ran out before she could get a sample.” A young man brushed his hands off, flour still covering his fingers when he gave his hand to shake.

“You ran out before I could introduce us. I’m Krem, that’s Grim behind the counter. He don’t talk much.” His grip was firm, his hands calloused but warm.

“Cassandra Pentaghast, Seeker.” A sudden *thunk* came from inside. Grim quickly moved out of the way as a great hulking mass took over the counter.

“Pentaghast, like the dragon hunters??” It was the Vashoth from yesterday, still wearing the pink apron and no shirt. His face was excited at hearing her name, his single eye shining.

“Yes,” Cassandra chuckled. “Those dragon hunters. I’m surprised you even know about that.”

“Chef just loves dragons,” Krem shook his head, laughing at his oversized friend. “When we found out that our new neighbour was ‘The Snapdragon’, he couldn’t wait to go see them.”

“Oh. I suppose then yesterday was… not what you expected.”

“To be fair, the owner was more of a surprise than anything. Figured he ran the tattoo parlour, but guess not. Still, tall for a dwarf.” The Vashoth smiled.

“The floor behind the counter is elevated.” Cassandra said, “Most stores run by dwarves have that, makes it easier for them to see eye to eye with other customers.”

“Ooh, that, actually makes a lot of sense.” he grinned, but then started to sniff the air. Krem cursed and ran back inside, leaving the two to talk. “I’m The Iron Bull, by the way.”

“*The* Iron Bull.” Cassandra deadpanned

“Yeah, well. Most just stick with ‘Bull’ but my boys call me ‘Chef’. What brings you back here if you don’t mind me asking?” Cassandra took a bit of the pastry before speaking, but moaned when she tasted it. Bull smiled at her reaction.
“This is amazing!” Cassandra blurted out, her mouth full with the second bite

“Thanks, always glad to see I can still make people moan.” Bull laughed at his own joke, his body shaking the lowered frame he was leaning on. Cassandra ate the rest of the bear claw, and then coughed, embarrassed that she was so distracted.

“I’m only here to ask the owner of the Snapdragon a few more questions. He was… less than cooperative yesterday.”

“He asked if you had a warrant didn’t he?”

“Yes, how’d you-”

“I used to be a cop, not for Ostwick or the Chantry though. People always go demanding warrants or talking about their rights in places like this. Don’t take it personal, it’s how they greet officials.” Bull grunted and then put on a terrible Orlesian accent. “Good morrow sir, do you have a warrant to stand on this street?’ ‘Hello my dear, I have rights that let me step on your shoes and not face charges.”

Cassandra started to laugh, Bull straightened up from the stand, letting Grim take over again. It was then she noticed that a few elfs were lining up to buy food. Bull was putting loaves of pumpkin bread in the display, along with sourdough, rye, and whole grain. He smiled and waved at Cassandra, then started shouting orders in the store. Cassandra walked back across the road, the day starting for the rest of the city. She checked her watch, 10:15 am. The Snapdragon should be open now.
Kallak looked at his watch. Cole was late for work. Again. He cursed and rubbed at his goatee with his left hand. He wasn’t wearing his chainmail today, no shipments were scheduled. But he was gonna be late for his meeting with the First Enchanter at the College at this rate. The more he thought about it, the more he wanted to go put the chainmail on.

Tael was sitting in his office with him, throwing pencils up into his ceiling. He hated it, but he knew better than to try and stop her. One pencil lodged itself just above his head, completing an image of a serpent coiled around itself. Last time it was a wolf’s head howling at his door frame.

“Wish you wouldn’t do that.” Kallak grunted, finishing another piece of paperwork. He put it in a pile, and pulled a new sheet of paper to write on.

“You don’t care.” Tael had her hood up, a tuft of red hair covering most of her face. “You’ve got bigger things to worry about.”

“Ah yes. Bigger Things. You done your taxes yet?”

“Nope. Alex does them.”

“You know she only does them for you because you wait until the last minute and then tell her so, right?”

Tael snickered, now throwing an eraser shaped like a sun at the suspended pencils. They fell to the floor, and she pulled the string tied around the eraser to bring it back to her. Kallak breathed heavily through his nose, his pen having stopped moving when a pencil landed on his head.

“Think that cop is gonna come back?”

“Who, the Seeker Agent? Or the Fereldan who happens to be the new Commissioner in town.”
“Heard he used to be a Templar.” Tael missed a pencil and clicked her tongue.

“Hmm,” Kallak flipped the paper, having finished it and moved on to the next.

“Glad that new Commissioner is in charge. Last one was corrupted.”

“Tael, you used to bribe him. With sex. First time he came down here you sat on his face and then told him to fuck off.”

“Yeah, but I wasn’t the only one. Bastard had other people bribing him. I just did it without a paper trail.”

“Well, how’d Rutherford react to you.” Kallak adjusted his glasses, the large and wide frame having slowly moved down his nose.

“Rutherford’s a good choir boy. Probably got that ridiculous parka from his mother and don’t take it off for anyone.”

“Hmm.”

“I’ll have to get the cops off our back some other way. Maybe through that cousin of yours. Heard he was promoted to Sergeant.”

“Hmm. Mhm.”

“Then again, no Knight Commander yet, could wait until then. A few of my booty calls is up for the promotion, might be easier than before.”

“Mmm hm.”

“Or I could fuck that Seeker, she was cute. Scars and all.”
“No.”

“Oh, so you are paying attention to me. Good. Thought your hearing had finally gone.”

“My hearing is fine. Cole’s late for work again.”

“Fire him then.”

“Can’t. He’s good at his job, Tael. Reads people better than most, get’s the nobles and locals exactly what they need, even if it’s not what they want. Good business having him.”

“You almost sound like a real florist there for a second.” Kallak ignored the jab from Tael. She stopped throwing her eraser at the ceiling and looked at him. He ignored her, continuing to fill out paperwork.

“Do you know who got the hit?”

“...I do.”

“Was it a transporter or a miner.”

“Neither. They’d gone legitimate.”

“Fuck.”

“Someone is targeting us again. This time it’s not me they’re after though, otherwise they would have hit someone in the Carta.”

“You got a theory, don’t you.”

“Last time this happened, Saare was turning 18. Legal age, she could have taken over. Remember
“what she chose?”

“Yeah, Saare wanted to go to school with Alex.”

“Exactly. Murders stopped when the news spread.”

“So why now?”

“Not sure. Might be word got out that I’m wanting to go legitimate. Might be that I did my job too good, and if I leave the market, the South won’t have a steady supply of lyrium.”

“You don’t think it has to do with Saare again? Heard she’s coming back to study with that prodigy in the College.”

“What makes you think it’s Saare? It could be Alex. She just gained attention internationally. They might be hitting the few legitimate folks Alex could call in if word gets out about her connection with me.”

“The sky could fall and that girl would be just fine.”

“Maybe, but not her reputation. She told you what she plans to do?”

“She did. She has the Alienage District, most of the western peninsula. They’d vote for her even without our help.”

“Taking on three districts won’t be enough. She’ll need people to vouch for her, a campaign based on values and not a one-time miracle case.”

Tael sat up, picking up the pencils that had landed on Kallak’s desk, leaving the ones strewn around the floor alone. It was in these small moments that Kallak realized how old they had gotten. He had grey in his goatee and his braided sideburns were starting to thin. Tael had the undercut to hide that she was grey at her temples; it was still obvious that she had grey in the red. Tael put her hood down, her piercings silver and obsidian today. He had veridium, like he always did. The elf turned around, her pale brown, nearly yellow eyes showing the only emotion on her face.
“They’ll be okay, Old Man. They’ve got each other.” Tael left through door that connected their offices.

Kallak sighed and put his glasses on the table. The time on his computer said 9:45. He got up and walked down the narrow hallway to the store front. He flicked a switch, the soft lights blinking on. He knew Cole preferred to work with the tissue paper, unlike Sera who would use newspaper and gift wrap.

When the bouquet stand was set up, he turned around and slide the door open to allow access to the cooler room. The security cameras were switched on, the footage from yesterday already replaced with filler. Kallak padded to the glass door, unlocking it. He looked across the street and saw the Seeker agent. She was laughing and eating one of those pastries. He sneered at the image.

“Just what I needed,” muttered Kallak. “Those two to talk. Probably swapping stories about order and rules.” He didn’t know what it meant, that both a Seeker and a Ben-Hassrath had taken an interest on his street.

“They so much as fucking come near her, I’ll kill them.” Kallak said, the empty shop quiet at his anger.

He flipped the sign to “Open” and went back behind the desk and pulled out the books for appointments and bookings. In red ink was his handwriting. ‘11- College Meeting, DO NOT BE LATE’, the door chimed and a gangly boy had his back pressed to the door. Kallak look up and sighed, a soft smile on his face.

“I’M SORRY! I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean to be late, but there was a rabbit and the weather was sad and I—”

“You’re late, Cole. Just have to stay past to clean up the floor.”

“...You’re not mad.” The boy was gaunt, as if he was starved to death. Kallak never asked where he was from, but he kept food around just in case Cole needed it. His hat was drenched, but the dwarf had never seen the boy without it.

“No, I’m not mad. Go clock in and get to work. I’ll leave a list of the clients who’re coming in today for you. I’m sure you’ll work your magic with ‘em.”
“But I’m not a mage.”

“I know son, I know. Hurry now, I’m gonna be late if you dawdle.”

Cole unglued himself from the door and went to the office to check in. Kallak wrote the names from the book, noting their usual occupation and flower preference. Cole came back, wearing the gardener apron that was part of the uniform around his waist. He went into the cooler room, talking to the flowers inside. Kallak smiled to himself, a feeling of calm rushing over him as Cole picked his first batch to make into bouquets.

The door chimed and he looked up. It was the Seeker, still wearing her bulletproof vest under her sports jacket. It suited her, Kallak thought. She wasn’t laughing anymore, but she had a bit of chocolate frosting on the edge of her lips. She walked right up to the counter and pulled out a piece of paper and placed it next to his book.

“I have a warrant. Now, may I see the back.” She was confident that the paper would let her pass. Kallak glanced at the document and then grinned. He went back to writing names down for Cole.

“Wrong Warrant.”

“It is not!” the Seeker turned the paper over to read it and then groaned.

“That warrant,” Kallak said, “let’s you ask any questions you have about my business or anything related to your case. It does not let you go into the back to have your pick of poppies and roses, SO!” Kallak closed his book, laughing in front of the officer. “What question do you have such a burning desire for me to answer?”

It was at this moment that Cole came out of the cooler room and quietly shut the door. His arms were filled with a variety of flowers, but what struck Kallak was the assorted tulips and white hydrangeas. The Seeker raised her eyebrow at him, probably noting his hat more than anything.

“Hello. I’m Cole.” His pale blue eyes were poking through his bangs, his hands working on separating the flowers. Kallak sighed, his lip quirked into a soft smile. He handed the list to Cole, who just nodded his head, water dripping to the floor. The dwarf walked around the stand and started to walk out of the shop.
“I’ll be back, Cole. Watch the shop while I’m gone.” Kallak stepped outside, seeing that the clouds were growing darker by the minute. The Seeker shouted at him as he was exiting, grabbing her warrant and following him outside.

“You know how to get to the College, right?” Kallak looked up at the Seeker, her anger back in full force.

“Yes.” she said through gritted teeth.

“Awesome!” Kallak clapped his hands and went to the passenger side of her car. It was obvious from the Guard lights that sat in the windshield. He waited for her to get inside the car, twiddling his thumbs.

“I am not taxi service.” She said, slamming the door closed as she got in. She started the engine anyways, pulling out of the parking spot.

“And I’m not your man, if you’re still trying to find out who killed your dwarf artificer.” Kallak said, looking out the window, watching the rain start. “But I’m late to a meeting at the College. And I’m sure you’ll find better things to harass there, Seeker Pentaghast.” She clenched her jaw, turning into the main road that lead to Ostwick College.

“What. Is your name?”

“Kallak.”

“Just Kallak.”

“Well, you could try saying Mr. of Ostwick, but nearly half the Alienage is named that. So yes, just Kallak.”

“Fine. I’m Cassandra Pentaghast, Seeker of Truth. But you apparently already knew that, didn’t you.”
“Your badge was a dead giveaway, yeah. Turn right here, there’s free parking under the Astronomy Building.”

“So who is it that we are seeing exactly, Kallak of Ostwick?”

“The First Enchanter for the College, Mademoiselle Vivienne.”

Chapter End Notes

Happy Good Friday y’all. I've been invited to have a 'piss up' with my coworkers. Apparently it's normal for a bunch of mid 20 Aussies to all get drunk in a park on a Public Holiday. Better than church tbh... But that's why this week’s chapter is up earlier.
Cassandra had yet to visit the College grounds. She didn’t think it would be so extravagant. Most of the buildings were ancient, dating from the Steel Age. The ‘Circle’, where most of the magical teachings still took place, was older, much older. If she had to guess it was constructed during the Tower Age, but the closer they got to the building she could see that it was reinforced multiple times, at least every Age. Kallak navigated through the grounds, avoiding the downpour by weaving through the covered walkways and buildings. Gaggles of undergraduates in grey hoodies would run from one building to the other. A few postgrads in their sky blue jackets would pass by, talking about their studies.

A young female dwarf came running towards them. Cassandra tensed up when she calls out, but Kallak just starts walking faster, his attention on other dwarf.

“Oh good! You’re here, the First Enchanter is running late but she didn’t want anyone to know. Wait, I just said that out loud didn’t I? Woo, sorry. You won’t believe what we’re discovering in Arcane studies.”

“Dagna! So good to see you again. This is Cassandra, my bodyguard for the day. Cassandra, don’t be rude, say hello to Dagna.” The young dwarf just noticed Cassandra walking beside Kallak. Her eyes went wide.

“You are… so tall. Even for a human! Wow.”

“I- thank you?”

“Dagna, you said Mademoiselle is running late?”

“Hm? Oh! Yes she was talking with that new professor, the one who’s studying time magic. Time magic! Could you imagine being able to bend time, you could have two breakfasts and skip dinner or freeze time to take a nap but not worry about your fungi going bad or-”

“Sounds really fascinating. What was his name again? Pavlove?”

“Pavus! Professor Pavus, but he’s a lot younger than I thought he’d be. They’re saying he’s from Tevinter, a noble and a mage too! But I think those are the same things in Tevinter? I don’t
Cassandra noticed that Kallak was listening to her with genuine interest. He nodded and smiled at the young dwarf the same way he did with the boy in his store. Perhaps she read him wrong, he really was just a regular store owner. The young dwarf followed them all the way to the entrance of the Circle Tower, the sliding glass doors opening without anyone's help.

“I’ve got to get back to class, but it was nice talking to you! Oh, it was nice meeting you too, Cassandra! Okay, bye now!”

“She was happy to see you.” Cassandra raised her eyebrow at Kallak. He was wiping his feet on the welcome mat, shrugging his shoulders at her statement. They passed the welcome desk and went to the elevator, floating orbs indicating which level to go into; an antique now, but it was considered modern by most standards. Kallak touched the top orb, glowing sky blue, and the platform started moving up.

“Good kid, that one. Used to live in Orzammar if you’d believe it. She’s here on a scholarship.”

“Do you know which scholarship?”

“Yeah, mine.” Kallak snickered at the look Cassandra gave him. He cocked his head to the side and lifted on burly eyebrow to look at her.

Strange, Cassandra thought. *His eyes are green. Why haven’t I noticed his eyes before?*. There was a lot she didn’t noticed in their first meeting. He was tall for a dwarf, for one. He was thinner too, but she had to guess that was because of his elven heritage. He had grey sprinkled in his goatee, which was cut neat. But his sideburns were braided, defining his jaw and finished in two metal clasps; they were hidden just under his goatee. He wasn’t wearing that green scarf around his neck, but he did have a small pocket hankie in the same color as the one from yesterday.

The orb went from sky blue to white, signalling that they had reached the top of the tower, an atrium greeted them. Indoor balconies faced them, most were connected to staff offices, but those on the lower levels were Enchanter Dorms. Kallak stepped out, and it was then that Cassandra saw he was wearing Dalish leggings. *Had he not been wearing shoes since the store?* She followed him to the center of the room, a lowered platform, the steps having once been used as seating in past Ages.

In the center of the stage stood a woman in altered First Enchanter Robes. She held a mage staff that
had the school’s mascot, an owl mid-flight, in one hand and was casting a levitation spell in the other, a thick tome at her eye level. She had several people coming to her with samples of cloth, cake, even diagrams for construction work, which she would glance at and either hum her approval or snap her fingers. It was a relatively quiet process, the woman occasionally making a comment on whatever was brought to her. Kallak waited about five feet back, admiring his bare toes on the pristine marble floor. Cassandra continued to stare at the woman.

“No, the Comte despises purple, something about his mother and leather. Dreadful tale, really.

“Last time we had glass horses, the Senator from Markham wouldn’t shut up about cattle production

“Lavender and green gold embroidery? Darling that’s absolutely scandalous! Order enough for the Antivan tables.” She had the tome shut itself and one of her many assistants took it as it floated down. She turned around, her black makeup shaping her face. Cassandra was impressed by it, she could never quite master the smokey eye herself.

“Kallak, my dear. Just in time. Naturally you know the anniversary of our fine College is nearing. I tire of what our gardeners have suggested. Imagine, White Roses and Bluebonnets on every table. Again.” The woman began to move towards another elevator, this one controlled by a mage's staff. Cassandra barely got onto the platform before the First Enchanter tapped her staff on it.

“I need your help with the floral arrangements, of course we have had some… light suggestions from Senator Trevelyan.”

“I guess he didn’t enjoy the deathroot and rashvine from last year.”

“Apparently it did not help when his second son decided to rub his greasy fingers on every arrangement he came across, no. What a foolish, foolish boy. I don’t blame you, of course. Maxwell has always been the dunce of that family.”

“Senior or Junior?”

“I won’t speak any ill to his father, but apples and trees my dear.” She tapped the floor again, and stepped off. Kallak quickly shuffled off the platform, Cassandra not far behind him. When the staff was about five feet away, the platform dropped at a rapid pace, leaving Cassandra with a sickening image of someone dropping with it it.
A cough made Cassandra look up, noticing that Kallak was holding a door open for her. She straightened her sports coat and walked into the office, the dwarf following closely behind. The First Enchanter had put her staff on a stand, a hat with ivory horns on display next to it. Her outer robe was taken off and placed on the swivel chair. A snap of her fingers and a tall pitcher filled with iced tea levitated itself, along with three cups. Kallak picked up one of the delicate cups and raised it, allowing the pitcher to pour him a glass. Cassandra remained standing at the door, taking in the desk and the woman who sat behind it.

The First Enchanter had her hands clasped together, resting her chin on her fingers as she watched the pitcher move back to the side counter. An oil painting was above the tea set, A faceless Knight Enchanter mid-swing, cutting down a pride demon. It was done in classical Orlesian, but Cassandra noticed that the hands of the Knight Enchanter were black, just like the mage behind the desk. It also wore the same helmet that was on display next to the staff.

“Do you like the painting, my dear?” the woman had a small smile on her lips, calm, calculated. It had no doubt unnerved students who have been on the receiving end of that smile.

“Every First Enchanter who has led this College has had a portrait done of themselves. One that is displayed in our Hall of Heroes, and one for their office. My predecessor had their personal portrait of them healing someone. It was meant to reflect their own specialization, their focus and passion when studying here. I, however, got my degree from the White Spire and spent countless balls and galas as the Enchantress of the Orlesian Court. But one does grow tire of the needless in-fighting of the dying race that is Nobility. No, teaching has always had benefits, such as influencing the minds of tomorrow. Don’t you agree?” She took a sip of her tea, Kallak watching Cassandra closely.

“I would guess then you are a Knight Enchanter before Headmistress then?”

“You would be correct, my dear.” The woman rested her head on her hand once more, her nails painted in a marble pattern, black and silver. “Have a seat.”

“No, thank you.”

“I insist.” It sounded more like a demand. Cassandra narrowed her eyes. The First Enchanter did not flinch.

“Seeker Pentaghast has a warrant. She’s only here because she wants to ask me a few questions. Of course, I didn’t wish to make you wait, Mademoiselle. She’s a guest of mine but if she doesn’t want to hear us discuss business, then perhaps…” Kallak put his cup down and leaned back in his chair.
“If the Seeker does not wish to be here, she can wait outside.” The First Enchanter never took her gaze off of Cassandra, the two staring down each other.

“... I’ll wait outside.”

“Of course dear. We won’t be very long.”

Cassandra opened the door and left the office. The moment the door clicked, Cassandra felt magic course through the handle. A privacy rune was split on the doors. She looked around the room, knowing she wouldn’t be able to leave until someone came up the magic platform or Kallak was done with his meeting with the First Enchanter. No one was at the front desk. Until something was. The Seeker had to do a double take, but what she thought was a statue ended up being a sleeping cat. It was a Nevarran sphinx, the hairless kind with black paws. It was wearing a diamond and sapphire color. Real jewels, if Cassandra had to guess.

She looked around the waiting room, noting the Ostwick colors everywhere. Somehow it fit with the Orlesian decor, from the lion statuettes by the only entrance, to the glass murals on display. She noticed that an assortment of weapons were on display opposite the office door. The centerpiece was a practical but elegant Knight Enchanter hilt. A Qunari whip, alongside a cat-of-nines with a Tevinter emblem engraved into the hilt were on either side. Above the Knight Enchanters hilt was a basic Templar blade, broken. At first Cassandra thought it was tactless, until she realised each broken piece held a part of the Templar vows on it. The backlight was subtle, mimicking the fire of Andraste behind the sword. She wondered if the display was meant to test those who waited for the First Enchanter. It suited her, the Enchanter, given that her personal portrait was bold enough to frighten, unless you knew what it was supposed to convey: humility over pride.

Business cards for each of the Head Enchanters was put in front of the weapon display, along with the general subdivision college cards. Cassandra searched for one in particular. Pavus. It looked as if he didn’t have his business card here, so that must have meant he wasn’t a new Head Enchanter, but rather a visiting Scholar. The other names and professions did not interest her, but next to the First Enchanter's own card was an empty stand. Cassandra straightened her back and regarded the entire room again. Everything had a purpose, it was all meant to convey a message. I’ll have to ask Leliana about this First Enchanter. She could be keeping the peace just as easily as the lack of a Knight Commander.

She heard a soft chime, the sphinx purred awake as well. It sat up and looked the part of a desk clerk. It’s great blue eyes looking at the platform, waiting for whoever was using it. Cassandra turned to the entrance, hoping it was someone to save her from this situation. Anyone to talk to while she waited for Kallak…
...Unless it was another dwarf in Kirkwall colors, his red shirt opened and a black scarf loose around his shoulders. Varric Tethras was reading a book, pamphlet really, when he stepped off the platform and tossed a dark blue orb back to the platform. It dropped, the orb disappearing back into floor itself. He hadn’t noticed that he was alone in the room until the sphinx meowed at him. He looked up, acknowledged the cat, then the Seeker, and took a seat. Only to jump back up and break into a nervous ramble.

“Seeker Pentaghast! What a surprise! I- you- still wearing a protection vest everywhere you go?” The dwarf moved himself behind a coffee table, probably to protect himself if Cassandra decided to move.

“It might surprise you, Varric, but I’m not here for you.” Cassandra went back to studying the weapon display, her hands on her hips. The dwarf seemed to breathe a sigh of relief, until he realized where she was standing.

“And, uh. Who might you be after then?”

“Why? Do you plan on crudely adding them to your latest dribble? I’d suggest making them the clueless narrator.” Cassandra snapped.

“I’ll admit, that might have been tacky of me.” He rubbed the back of his head, still keeping his distance from her. “But my fans adored you, hell they even liked you.”

“That did not give you the right to include me into a fictional narrative,” Cassandra was walking towards the dwarf, who moved to hide behind the fake help desk. “A narrative, I might add, that put the world on edge. AGAIN!”

“How the hell was I supposed to know? I wrote a story. That’s what I do! I’m a writer, not some revolutionary!”

“Yet here we are! Kirkwall is burning, and the rest of the Colleges are following. But you just had to come to the ONLY remaining College that was faithful-”

“Faithful to what? A dying religion? Or were you talking about old traditions? The same traditions that had people locked up for no good reason other than ‘They might blow up a building if they get their feelings hurt’?”
“So you admit it! You admit to stirring shit up for no good reason!”

“Seeker if I stirred up anything, it wasn’t shit. But if that’s what you wanna call it, then fine! Call it shit! But think of it this way, you finally get to see what everyone else does about your Chantry.”

Cassandra swung, Varric ducked under her arm and ran to the other side of the room. Kallak walked out of the office to see Cassandra in a fighting stance, Varric on the other side. The First Enchanter was right behind him, a look that could only be described as bored. Kallak pinched the bridge of his nose and walked towards the platform.

Cassandra and Varric both straightened up, Varric going into the First Enchanter’s office, Cassandra following Kallak. Kallak had a grey ball in his hand and tossed it down, calling the platform. *Fuck* was the only thing Cassandra could think of.
“I must apologize for her,” Kallak turned his attention to Vivienne. “She showed up at my shop yesterday and is hellbent on knowing everything about me.”

“And here I was thinking you were the only bachelor in Ostwick left.”

“What- No. No no no, she’s not. We’re not. Ugh.” Kallak put his head into his hands as Vivienne laughed at him.

“My dear there’s no need to blush. How long have we known each other?”

“Since you came to town, if memory serves correct.”

“And to think, I was once under the impression you were with that elven woman, what was her name again?”

“Tael?” Kallak laughed, “oh she would hate it if she knew that. No, she’s just a good friend. We go back further than… huh, guess we’ve been friends longer than some of your postgrads have been alive.”

“Hmm. But I did call you in for business.”

“Oh?”, Kallak leaned forward. “Did you have any problems with the last boutique?” A code, in case they were being listened to. The transfer from yesterday was meant to come directly to the College, but if something had happened...

“No my dear, your flowers were marvelous as always. But I do think we’ll need another boutique next month. Just before the ball of course, but perhaps it would be wise to separate them from those meant for the ball itself.”
“I’ll have my boys see to it. Same price, but it might be extra for special care. Hate to have an incident like last year.”

“That would make two of us.” Vivienne took a sip of the her tea, the cup heated from magic. Kallak knew she only used the iced tea when he was coming, but she hated drinking it cold.

“So, how’s the rest of your planning going. Big event, the anniversary ball.” Kallak got up from the chair, knowing that he looked like a child trying to lean back in it. He took the pitcher of tea off the side counter and poured himself another cup, offering some to Vivienne, who politely refused.

“It’s fine.”

“That bad, huh?”

“I’ve had to hire on two new assistants because of mix up between fireflies and fire lights.” Kallak hissed, shaking his head as he took another sip.

“Oh it’s just,” Vivienne put her hands to her temples, her usually elegant posture gone as she tried to calm another headache. “I do love this time of the year, but it’s gotten ridiculous beyond belief.”

“Well, next year is only gonna be worse. It’ll be 100th, oh what do they call that in fancy speak. Emerald? Diamond?” Kallak smirked, knowing Vivienne would correct him.

“Platiniun, my dear,” Vivienne shot him a look, her elegant posture back as she took a sip of her now steaming cup. She stood up, facing the reflective mirage. It was an illusion of course, the lack of noise making it obvious. Kallak moved to stand next to her, holding his own cup.

Ostwick was lovely this time of year. Even through the mirage window, Kallak could spot the Vhenadahl, it’s branches nearly overtaking the rooftops in the center of the Old Alienage District. The Market was floating past, bright Riviani canvas and Antivian pleasure ships the only one’s on the river, and just beyond the Districts laid the famous double wall. There were two entrances, one to the rest of the Free Marches, the other to the Waking Sea. Vivienne sighed, placing her hand on Kallak’s shoulder. She rubbed at his binder, reminding Kallak to stand taller and breathe deeply.

“I heard you finally booked yourself in for a surgery.”
“Yeah well, the reduction was nice, but I figured I’d wait until I had enough money to get it taken off. It’s hasn’t really been a bother, but it’ll be nice to wear nothing with my swim trunks.”

“I’m glad you’re happy in your skin, my dear.” Vivienne glanced down at him, a soft look on her usually guarded face.

“At my age, there’s not a lot else I’ve got left.” Kallak grinned, just as Vivienne walked to her chair. “After all, these damn kids and their new age thinking. What’s next? The Dalish holding Noble Titles?”

“Kallak, you are Dalish.”

“Ah ah ah. I’m half Dalish. They won’t take some child o’ the Stone, no siree.” Vivienne rolled her eyes, a rare smile crossing her lips as Kallak played his elder card.

“As I was trying to get to say,” Vivienne began, “I actually called you here for preparation on the Platinum Jubilee. You’ve been hired as our florist, of course, but I already have something in mind for the arrangements.”

“You don’t want to argue about this year’s arrangements? Well, color me impressed.”

“Charmed, really. No I have already proved your arrangements for this year, our gardeners are following your instructions for it. I was told by a young bird that you have dabbled in genetic floristry. The designing of flowers without the use of magic or cheap tactics such as food coloring in the water.”

“Well, Snapdragon has had a few unique flowers created for our clients, all through a mixture of basic biology and Dalish botany. We might not be able to make corn grow in the winter, but our flowers can last longer that most.”

“What about different colors? Say for example, Silver Lilies and Blue Roses?”

“Are we talking about living flowers?”
“If I wanted true silver lilies I am well aware I could simply go to our Smithing Building.”

“Well,” Kallak rubbed at his goatee, “Silver Lilies… the actual flora would be difficult to breed, but cross pollinate with, oh Amrita Vein? I could give you silver leaves and stems. The edges of the petals might be green though.”

“So the Lilies don’t sound like they’ll be a problem. And the roses?”

“That’s gonna be impossible. There’s no gene for blue roses. Only two ways that people have it in the past. Color dye in the water, which we both now is tacky and cheap, and magic. I’m no mage, but something makes me think you don’t want to involve magic in this arrangements.”

“It will be our Platinum Jubilee, and I would love to show off the magical talents here in Ostwick. But with the College Riots sweeping Thedas, and rumors flying that the Divine might make an appearance in Ostwick for the occasion-”

“The Divine is coming? To Ostwick?” Kallak felt a cold sweat run down his back.

“Just rumors for now my dear, but the White Spire is at war with the Chevalier Prestige, and news is that is it’s not about competitive sports this time, but the Game itself.”

“… How blue are we talking.”

“I’m not expecting sapphire, though that would be ideal. No, a sky blue to match Ostwick’s colors would do splendid, but the bolder the better. No red undertones, having purple roses would not suit us, considering that we would not wish to cause a scandal with the Nevarran diplomats about how we’ve taken their colors from them as well as their brightest pupils.”

“True blue, probably have to start with white roses then, so as not to get a fuck-up strand that ends up burgundy. A year is pushing it, but I’ll see what I can do. If push comes to shove, I’ll just have to bargain with security and explain why there’s an aura on the flowers.” Kallak heard shouting outside the door. Vivienne raised her eyebrow at the commotion as well.

“You expecting anyone after me?”
“A minor celebrity, he came to town to research his new subject.” Vivienne walked over to the door, waving her hand over the privacy rune. “You’ll find it amusing, he’s wanting to write about your grandmother.”

The door opened and Cassandra was in a fighting stance, a dwarf with strawberry blonde hair and a five o’clock shadow standing opposite. His silk red shirt and black scarf marked him a graduate of Kirkwall College, one of the rings on his finger had the year, “11:23”. Kallak sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose. He took a descending orb from the front desk, and continued to walk towards the exit. Cassandra followed behind.

“Kallak, I can-”

“Not here.” Kallak refused to look at her, his conversation with Vivienne and Cassandra’s behaviour giving him a migraine. Cassandra had the decency to remain quiet the entire walk back to her car.

She pulled out of the Astronomy parking lot, the rain having finally lifted, grey clouds still hanging in the air. The city was quieter at this time; they made it back to the shop in half the time it took them to get to the College. Kallak saw that the bakery across the street was busy, a queue outside. The picnic tables had umbrellas, the gaudy pattern reminding him of their cocktail relatives. He clenched his jaw, not knowing why they would decorate their front so terribly. Maybe that was the whole point.

Cassandra turned off the engine, the both of them sitting in her car. Kallak was stubborn, but he got the feeling that so was the Seeker. Eventually she started to talk.

“I don’t harass dwarves.”

“Could’ve fooled me.”

“I knew him. From… a previous investigation.” Kallak grunted, turning his head to look away. He could see the Seeker’s reflection in the glass. She looked upset, as if she knew what happened was embarrassing and things had gotten out of her control.

“... Vivienne said he was a writer.”

“Vivi- oh, the First Enchanter.” Cassandra rubbed the steering wheel, as if holding onto it would
ground her. “Yes, he is. He... wrote a book recently. ‘The Tale of the Champion’. He... put me in it.”

“Hell of a way to flatter you.”

“It wasn’t flattering, actually. I was painted like some kind of thug. Ironically enough, he wrote himself into the story as well. The only reason I- my character is in the story is to harass him.”

“How’d that work?”

“It was written rather unique, I suppose. Much like a confession, one character recalling the life of the Champion in Kirkwall during the Blood Age, the other an interrogator, wondering why his story didn’t match what we know from history books.”

“...You were the interrogator.”

“Yes.”

“I’m sorry.” Kallak meant it. Cassandra looked over at him, and he saw her shock in the windows reflection. It reminded him of the first time he took in Cole as an employee. How Sera was shocked when he agreed to keep quiet about the Red Jennies. How Tael looked when he said he wanted to go legitimate for the girls.

“You never did get to ask your questions today, Pentaghast. Come back tomorrow, I'll be as honest as I can.” Kallak faced her, both had put their masks back in place.

“I will, thank you.”

“Don’t thank me, I’m still a suspect to your murdered dwarf.” Kallak felt the side of his mouth turn up, knew what it would look like. He held her gaze for a beat longer, and then got out of her car.

Cole was still making bouquets. Soft music played from the radio in the corner, a soft lullaby. The migraine from the day's events slowly left, the tension in Kallak’s shoulders bleeding from his body. Cole looked up and smiled, placing a finished bouquet on the display stands. It had ferns and
wildflowers, the centerpiece being two sunflowers, their centers white and petals red. A specialty flower, one that Sera helped to create when she first started.

Kallak walked down the long hallway, noticed that on the corkboard Cole had been crossing out the clients who have showed up, and then a note was pinned delicately next to it. The handwriting was elegant, but done as if a deep emotion had moved the writer. ‘He did wonderfully, the funeral went off without a hitch. I tipped the boy, please keep him. -Lord B.’

‘There is love in your body but you can’t get it out
It gets stuck in your head, won’t come out of your mouth
Sticks to your tongue and it shows on your face
That the sweetest of words have the bitterest taste’

He kept moving, going into his office. At some point the cleaner came by, all the pencils from this morning were in the coffee mug his daughter got him one Feast Day. It read ‘World’s Shortest Dad’, and had bits of ribbon and twine wrapped around the handle. He never drank from it, also using it as a pen holder. Kallak sat in his chair, putting his head in his hands.

His mind was spinning. The world was falling apart, and to top it all off the Divine might be coming to his city? Was that why the Seeker was here? Had he assumed wrong? If Cassandra was in the city to scope it out before Her Most Holy showed up, then what was Bull doing on his street? Was someone planning to attack the south, when the Colleges were fighting the Templar Force and the Chantry struggling to hold on to what little power it had left on the people? Why did one of his men die, a man who got Kallak’s blessing to leave the Carta? What did it all mean? Why was everything happening now? When did he get so old?

“I wonder what Cassandra’s favorite flower is.” Kallak looked around his office, hoping no one heard him say that. The song on the radio faded, and Cole and continued to hum the tune. Arlof Cadash voice broke through the static, bringing afternoon traffic.

Chapter End Notes

https://open.spotify.com/user/12173687934/playlist/5Vn72UMTkTcrka1nqnwCjN?si=0ye7kV6UTa2nq8V4J5I_xA

Spotify Playlist for Kallak, first song is what he's listening to. Some of them are kinda spoiler-y, but I kept them in.
Thursday. Sera always brought new honey on Thursdays, and Tael closed ‘Shartan’s Oath’ for the day. Today was also a test run for Sera’s housemate. Kallak had only heard good things about him, a man by the name ‘Blackwall’.

“He’s a Grey Warden, or was I guess. He’s been building and shite.” Sera’s thick Fereldan accent always came out when she cursed or talked about girls.

“He ever done anything with flowers?” Kallak pruned the Royal Elfroot, the bud not yet open. It was dangerously close to the Water Lilacs, and he didn’t feel like experimenting with either plant this season.

“Nah but he’s good with his hands. Been redoing the deck, and the bees like him! He don’t mind them neither, don’t swat at them or nothing. Single too.” Sera shoved the rest of her muffin into her mouth.

“Why do I need to know he’s single?” Kallak clipped a leaf, only for it to land in his goatee. Sera snorted at her boss, nearly falling off her chair in the greenhouse. The building was in the alley, the walls bricked and then reinforced, turning it into a bunker just in case someone decides to shoot up Kallak’s storefront. It only happened once but once was enough for the dwarf. The sun was out today, so the artificial and magical heat lamps were switched off.

“You need to get laid!!” Sera blurted out, bits of blueberry flying out of her mouth. Kallak grunted as he stood up, moving onto the tree saplings, making sure they were healthy before they were shipped out today.

“I’m perfectly fine, Sera. Besides, if I wanted to get fucked I would just call up the town council. Quickest way to get bent over, that’s for damn sure.” Sera laughed, falling off the bench this time.

Kallak picked up his flower samples, moving them to the separated area in the greenhouse. White Lilies in a row of six were already planted and waiting to be pollinated. He put the roses he cut in water, knowing they wouldn’t open until next week. It would give him time to figure out which plants he wanted to cross pollinate them with. He had a basic idea, but he knew that the entire venture might be for nothing.
Roses didn’t have a gene that made them blue, and when breed with other plants, they usually took the traits of the other flower, losing their shape. In that regard, roses and elves were the same. However if Kallak was able to pollinate the white roses with a more recessive flora, it might take on the pigment of said flower, without differentiating too far from the rose family. Like himself, the flowers would look like a rose, except for one specific trait. Kallak scratched his ears, feeling the pointed tip of them.

“When is your housemate coming?”

“Dunno, told him to be here before we opened though.”

“And did you happen to tell him when that is?”

“Midday?”

“Did you say ‘midday’ or did you just go ‘show up at the middle of day’.”

“Uuuh… He’s bringing the honey over.”

“Great. When he shows up just let him know that we have parking the next block over.”

“Right, after he drops off the goods, yea?” Kallak nodded. “Thanks Inky!” Sera ran out the greenhouse, laughing as she ran to get to the front of the store. Kallak shook his head, closing the doors behind him as he followed his employee.

It rolled to being about 11 before a rundown pick up pulled into one of the front parking spots. Kallak had finished Carta business that morning, having moved to the storefront to start research on Vivienne’s request. He didn’t look up until Sera shouted ‘Beardy’ and a gruff voice called for her to help out. Kallak took off his reading glasses and looked up. Oh. He felt his heart skip a beat.

A gruff man in a beaten up flannel was moving boxes inside, Sera putting the jars away or on display in the honeycomb window stands. He was a Free Marcher, long black beard done in twin forks, his long hair held in a loose bun. He wore steel toed boots, but unlike Sera, his were tied up with caked dirt and grease. His nose had been broken at some point and hadn’t quite healed up correctly.
“You must be the owner,” a thick Markham accent, Kallak couldn’t take his eyes off his mustache and the grey in his beard and temples. “Thom Rainer, at your service.”

“Sorry?”

“Oh. Uh, Sera said—she told me that.” The man coughed into his hand, the cords of muscle in his forearm jumping.

“Oh. OH! Right! Sorry, Sera said your name was Blackwall.”

“No,” the man, Thom, chuckled at that. “No, that’s the name of my parole officer.”

“You have a parole officer?”

“Grey Wardens recruited me a few years back, but I didn’t make the cut to be active, so I’m on reserve. In case another Blight comes, that is. Blackwall comes and checks in on me, making sure I’m still fit for duty, can fight in the Deep Roads, that sort of thing.”

“...Huh. I didn’t know the Wardens had a reserve in Ostwick.”

“They’ve got us in every city, but most are stationed in Kirkwall at the Bone Pit Base.” Thom smiled, but Kallak saw Sera grinning like a she-devil by the displays. Kallak clears his throat and got off his chair.

“Well, let me give you tour. This all here is the front, you’ll spend most of your time up here but I’ll show you the back just so you get an understanding. Sera, older honey up front, you know the drill.”

“Sure thing, Inky.”

“Now,” Kallak clapped his hands, walking to the back, Thom following behind. “This is the door to the cooler room. We use these flowers in the bouquets, usually when you get here early you’ll just pick and go. They’re a couple plants that aren’t the best to have on bare skin— they’re just in this
corner here and we use the dragon hide gloves. Two sizes, you might find it easier to use my pair than the one Cole and Sera use.

“Through that back door is the alley, if we’ve got a big shipment, a moving truck will be back there. Don’t worry about that too much but out that same door and directly to the right is our greenhouse. This way...

“We’ve got the hallway, I’ll have to get a corkboard for you. This one is Cole’s, and the one with the bee cut outs and graffiti around it is Sera’s. Obviously. You’ll get to decorate your’s but if you don’t I’m sure Sera will do it. Down at the end of the hall is my office and the clock in machine. It’s done with your fingerprint, and then a four digit code you gotta put in. Unfortunately it’s random but you’ll only have to remember it once. Now, did Sera tell you how the hours worked?”

“Sort of,” Blackwall drawled, following Kallak back into the store front. “Stay the whole day, come an hour early and expect to stay an hour after.”

“Kind of,” Kallak stopped in the middle of the show floor, turning to face Thom. “Yes, you’ll have to show up an hour early, in order to pick your flora and help open the shop. I only need you during the weekends, Sera works Tuesday and Thursday and Cole, the other employee, works Monday, Wednesday and Friday. When closing up, a bicyclist comes around and takes whatever bouquets we don’t sell for the day and goes around town and sells them for us. I would hope whatever he don’t sell he just gives to old ladies on the Vhenadahl streets, but honestly? Doubt it.

“I’m gonna have you come in everyday for the next two weeks though. Pay will be legal minimum though. If you’ve got questions you can ask Sera or Cole while they’re working on the weekdays, and it’ll give you a test run for two weekends. How we doing so far?”

“I don’t need any health insurance, get that through the Wardens. But what about paid leave and the like?”

“Well, officially there is none. I’ll expect you to work every weekend, but if something comes up, say Warden business or you’re sick, giving a heads up will do. Easy enough to call in someone else. You got family, Thom?”

“Not really, why?”

“Have to ask. Right I think that’s ‘bout it. Oh! Sometimes we’ll get Nobles coming in wanting a
floral design. Nothing to it, but we’ve got one rule here about that.”

“The customer is always right.”

“What, no, fuck the customer. The one rule is fuck symbolism. We make our shit to either be pretty or to look interesting. You think Sunflowers and Kale is a good bouquet? Go for it. Sera over there is a master at throwing curveballs like that. Cole’s got his own thing, pretty sure it’s all based on what people feel and shit. Sure you’ll figure it out. Today though you ain’t making any bouquets.

“Sera. Help Black- sorry, Thom. Help Thom get the old flowers out of the cool room. You’re gonna show him how we make the greeting cards.”

“Shouldn’t he know where they go first?”

“We’ll get to that bridge when we get there. Scat.” Sera stopped putting honey away, leaving a box still filled with the jars unpacked. She grabbed Thom by the wrist and yanked him to the cooler room. Kallak looked at the mess of his display stand. He sighed, shrugged his shoulders and put the rest of the honey away. Most of the it was labelled for Sunflower, but the box remaining held Joe-Pye and Goldenrod flavoured honey.

Kallak had never been on Sera’s farm, something she said she inherited from her ‘Bat of a Bitch Mother’. It was on the western peninsula, near the mountains. He had a few of his Carta scouts scoop it out. It must have been a heritage estate, one that had been abandoned for years. Sera didn’t mind though, it was far enough from the city that no one looked for her or her Red Jenny Gang. It was also close enough one of the three highways that connected the island to the rest of the city. The bees weren’t on the property until about a year ago, when Sera suddenly got an interest in them, after College protesters came into the store asking if Kallak was ‘Saving the Bees’. The honey helped to bring in customers, especially when the old baker across the road packed up and left.

It had been Cole’s idea to press the old flowers into cards though. The boy nearly started crying when he realized that some of the flowers they had were seasonal. ‘But what if they need the sun in winter?’. Kallak felt bad, and ended up getting him a book on how to press them onto card stock. Surprisingly enough Kallak got a wave of thank you cards from the medical center a week later, saying that someone had been sending pressed flowers with poems or psalms written in them. A rather moving thank you letter came from a woman in intensive care, who was put in for a suicide attempt. Cole still has the letter pinned on his corkboard, the woman thanking whoever gave her the card with sunflower petals pressed into the stock and the simple message ‘It’s okay. She would want you to be happy’.
Thom was a good worker, but it was obvious that he had never done delicate work. Sera kept laughing at his pressed cards. Eventually Kallak stepped in and helped the Warden conscript with the work. Tael came by to visit the dwarf when he went back to his office. They ended up making more phone calls, hoping to try and figure out what happened to the transporter.

Cassandra never came by the shop. Kallak shouldn’t have given it any thought, but he did. After how they left things yesterday, he thought she would be here today. Sera and Thom were handing over the bouquets to the bicyclist, a young Dalish. The boy waved at him through the glass, Kallak waving back.

Chapter End Notes

Is it obvious who I wanted to romance?
“And welcome back to my little corner of the radio, I’m your host Arlof Cadash! Well folks fall has finally arrived, or if you’re posh, autumn. Yes siree, the trees are all kinds of shades today, and news is that the first leaves have already fallen from the Vhenadahl in the Old Alienage District. If you’re heading down to our famous floating Market District, be sure try some spiced rum or even our maple cider! It’s cheap around this time of year and every boat will have a pot! For those who aren’t locals, let me just dive a little bit more into this.

“The market district used to be the docks themselves, where the peninsulas would ship each other goods since the Ancient Age! But during the Storm Age we had our two walls constructed, blocking most external trade from the sea and a good hundred miles up the coast. Well the traders found out that this pretty much calmed the ocean, letting ships float from shore to shore with ease. That started our floating Market District for the western peninsula, with the more, shall we say refined, goods still sailing to the Noble and what is now called the Law District. Don’t be to frightened if someone calls it the Teyrn District though! Ostwick is known for tradition and folk round here tend to take ages to finally start calling things by their new names. Literally!

“These days, locals think of the Market District as a tourist trap, with pleasure cruises and floating stands so packed on the delta that you can just walk across the decks. Personally, I love visiting it! You get to see so many new things just walking around, Antivan Sages, Riviani Rum and Orlesian Wine. Hell, there are a couple of dwarf sailors, selling some real nice jewelry and decorative helmets, yes siree! Don’t be afraid if it rains on the water though, most ships are covered, or convert their sails to tarps in order to protect their goods. Now go on and haggle with the locals, but don’t tell ‘em Arlof sent you. We go onto global news now, and it looks like the White Spire and Chevalier Prestige had another game ending in a riot...

Cullen leaned forward, turning down the radio in Cassandra’s car. The last three days had flown by, not giving her anytime to go back to ‘The Snapdragon’. First came the official announcement that Empress Celene and her cousin the Grand Duke Gaspard, were fighting. This only escalated the fighting between the White Spire College and Chevalier Prestige, but that wasn’t what had shocked the world. What shocked them was that the Templar Force in Val Royeaux had left the city, going into the country and rooting out underaged mages in their homes and schools. The same thing had happened in Kirkwall, nearly a year ago. The White Spire was the only College left in Thedas that was exclusively for mages, but when the Chevalier Prestige was created, the rivalry between the universities began. Now the two most powerful people in Orlais were at war, and with the Empress in support of the White Spire, and the Grand Duke was a Chevalier. It left everyone in the Chantry on edge.

Then there was the outrage towards the Divine, for not interfering at all. Some reporters wanted to bring up that the Agency of Truth, how it’s Seekers weren’t doing anything to stop the fear or
fighting between the Templar Forces and Enchanter Colleges. It was easier to point fingers at a lone person, rather than a shadow organisation, and it was starting to show. Cassandra tried to get into contact with Divine Justinia and even the Lord Seeker himself. Silence. Leliana was the only one to respond, telling her to find out why Ostwick was still unaffected. It put her on edge that no one would tell her why this was happening; that she had to sit and watch.

“Maker, I hope we’re not too late.” Cullen was drumming his fingers on the passenger car door, his parka finally suited for the weather.

“You said there was someone I could get in touch with about the John Doe case.” Cassandra turned left, getting off the Overseas Highway and into the Law District.

“Human male, goes by Matthew Cleaver. He said he would meet you on a ship called ‘Liquid Rush’. Don’t worry, it’s just a cafe, but they’re quite popular this time of year if Jim is to be believed.”

“And he’ll be able to explain why our John Doe had his left thumb missing?”

“Matthew works in the Lower District, helps run the library there. Apparently he helped to testify against the former Knight Commander, having records of where his Templar’s were and what they were doing. Unfortunately, Matthew was let go from the force, it was found that he had been money laundering at the Guard for years. Still, I hated to see him leave after the trials, so he’s become an informant for the Guard.

“If anyone will know who our John Doe is, and why someone didn’t want him to be identified, Matthew will.”

“What about Sergeant Cadash,” Cassandra looked around for a parking spot, Cullen silently pointed one out further down the road. “He’s not upset that I took this case off of him.”

“No, he’s relieved to be honest.” Cullen waited for Cassandra to finish parking before getting out of the car. “I think he wanted someone to take the case away from him the moment I gave it to him.”

The two walked silently, heading towards the courthouse for a press release. Cassandra had no idea what to expect; in fact the only reason she was coming along was because Cullen asked her to. The steps to the entrance were crowded with reporters, some for news, others for the radio. Cullen’s guards spotted them and let them pass the barrier to reach the front door. A reporter had spotted
Cassandra, and the specialized vest she was wearing with the Seeker emblem on it. A thousand questions were shouted at her, but she ignored them, following Cullen inside.

“Mind telling me why there are so many reports for a regular press release?” Cassandra adjusted her sport’s jacket, hoping to cover her specialized vest.

“Well, Alex Trevelyen is going to be making an appearance, and First Enchanter Madame de Fer is here as well. The Templar Force has yet to choose a Knight Commander, so she’s having to represent them today.”

“I met the woman. She’s a Knight Enchanter.”

“I heard. Not everyone finds that a comforting thought. Hell, when I took office the local news went on for weeks about how the Chantry was pushing their faithful into powerful positions.”

“When did it stop, or is it still going?”

“Well,” Cullen gave a cocky smirk, “It died down when it was found that a lot of the guard that was let go had heavy ties to the Templar Force.”

They found the room, some selected reporters already seated. Cullen nodded at Cassandra and went to the front of the room to talk to Jim, his assistant. Cassandra walked towards the refreshment table, and grabbed a coffee for herself. A dwarf with red hair was making himself a green tea. He was wearing a tweed jacket and had his hair pulled back in a simple braid. He shuffled a little to the side in order to make room for her.

“Didn’t think the Seeker’s were gonna give a statement in Ostwick.” The dwarf looked up at Cassandra, his soft eyes almost innocent.

“We’re not,” Cassandra added one sugar to her coffee, taking a sip and grimaced. The dwarf chuckled and handed her some creamer.

“Name’s Arlof.” he said, puffing his chest out a little. “Got a little radio show in town, you might have heard it a little.”
“I have,” Cassandra tried to not to sound shocked. “I thought you were on the air right now.”

“Ah, just a little trick in the business see. I record about an hour before it goes on the airwaves. That way my listeners get their tunes in and when I come back, I’ve got all the good stuff to tell ‘em.”

Arlof beamed, grabbing one of the dry muffins on the stand.

Cassandra saw only a flash, but Arlof had six black spots on his left thumb and a colored band above it. It was almost identical to Sergeant Cadash, the only difference being that Arlof’s band was white; the sergeant had red. Cassandra sipped her coffee, not knowing how to bring it up.

Arlof left, going to sit in his designated chair with the rest of the reporters, most of whom were human, with three other dwarves, a Vashoth who didn’t have horns, and an elf. Cassandra moved to the back of the room, trying to blend in with the wallpaper.

The First Enchanter had walked in, wearing a tailored suit, the blouse cut low and embroidered. She didn’t have her mage staff with her, but the rings she wore were clearly arcane. She was followed by Varric Tethras, who was wearing his now iconic silk red shirt and brown blazer. Neither noticed Cassandra by the door. Varric moved to sit next to Arlof, the two leaning towards each other. Arlof seemed to have gone into a long tangent about something, Varric’s attention entirely on the other dwarf. If she had to guess, Varric was using Arlof’s knowledge of the city for his supposed new book.

Leliana entered in behind some local Chantry representatives, standing next to Cassandra. Her red hood was gone, replaced with a wrap around scarf. She quietly handed Cassandra a folder, her eyes on the podium ahead. Three radio crews were busying setting up their equipment, giving the two women privacy from everyone else in the room. Leliana filled Cassandra in on what was happening in Val Royeaux.

Justinia was planning to remain calm, trusting that Cassandra could find the main reason Ostwick has been unaffected from the recent fighting. However the declaration between the Empress and Grand Duke were making things difficult, since both sides expected the Chantry to back them. It was a mess, one that the Divine did not want to deal with. However, Orlais was one of the few places in Thedas that respected Chantry Law more than Regional Law. It was also the home to the Grand Cathedral. Justinia and some of her trusted clerics have moved to Haven, in the disguise as a pilgrimage, but the truth was to separate her from the Game.

As for the Templar Force and their behaviour towards underage mages and the Colleges themselves, the Lord Seeker has sent agents to each arm. The folder held the files of each Seeker team, where they were stationed, and how they’re investigations were going. But the more troubling news was that the Enchanters had held a meeting, of whether to disband the Colleges and have their mage students go into hiding. Grand Enchanter Fiona from Ferelden had voted to disband, but the actual
vote was a tie. First Enchanter Vivienne had made counter arguments to it, stating that disbanding would only further justify the Templar Force’s behaviour. Another vote was set for next week, but there is a clear power struggle going on within the College of Enchanters as well as the Templar Force.

“How is your investigation going, Seeker Cassandra?” Leliana eyes flicked between the door and the podium, as if expecting someone else to appear.

“As I said last time, it’s the people of Ostwick who are keeping the peace, not the Templars nor the College. Commissioner Rutherford has set up a meeting for me with one of his informants; I’m hoping to get more information about the city and the reason for the calm.”

“All in the disguise of that cold case.” Cassandra nodded. “Excellent. Her Most Holy is wanting to know our answer very soon. But I will warn you, she is planning to hold peace talks for the First Enchanters and Knight Commanders soon. The talks will no doubt go on for months, but anything we can do to help find a compromise, one that will work, will be a great help.”

A woman in her early thirties walked in. She had natural grey hair, but in the fluorescent light it was more silver. She was wearing the Ostwick College colours, a grey pantsuit with a sky blue scarf hanging around her shoulders. However she had a Prestige pin on her coat, along with a golden blouse, a mark of a Chevalier graduate. Her hair was cut in a styled bob, bangs swept to the side and blending in with the styled curls. She went to stand next to Cullen, the man leaning into her ear and saying something that made the woman smirk. They were both blushing, even from the back of the room Cassandra could tell. She turned to Leliana and raised her eyebrow.

“The woman is Alexandra Maria Dawn Susanna Trevelyan.” Leliana whispered

“The ‘People’s Noble’ if the tabloids are to be believed.” Cassandra said, most of it hidden in her coffee cup.

“She graduated with a double degree of Communications and Law at Ostwick. In three years, an impressive feat on its own. She then went to Chevalier Prestige, on a fencing scholarship, and got a Master’s in Constitutional Law.”

“That is impressive,” Cassandra watched Cullen take the podium, greeting the reporters and went into his speech on crime rates. “Did you find out which country she specialized.”
“She didn’t.” Leliana continued. “Usually that kind of Master’s would take three years, but add another year and half, you could get the full Constitutional Law, including study into Dalish and the Avaar Nations. She came back to Ostwick, and defended a few lower cases on Alienage property damage. About a year after being home she sued the Templar Force on behalf of twenty anonymous clients. You know what happened afterwards.” As did the rest of Thedas. Ostwick’s former Knight Commander got pulled into the scandal, and Alex Trevelyan gather enough dirt on the two most powerful men in Ostwick to put them behind bars for life.

The First Enchanter’s speech was short, detailing that the Winter Ball, an annual celebration for the creation of the local College, was in two weeks. She praised her students for remaining vigilant against the dangers of temptation and demons, and that she wished the Templar Force luck, congratulating them for taking the time to choose a leader ‘who will bring honor back to the position’. Alex Trevelyan then took the podium, and the room went hush.

“Good morning everyone.” No one replied, but the woman smiled gently. Cassandra noticed she had freckles that decorated her cheeks and nose.

“I suppose this is the point in my speech where I state my name, but to be perfectly honest, it is rather long.” this was received by a barking laugh from Arlof, the rest of the room chuckled along with him.

“My name is Alex Trevelyan, and I stand before you today in order to thank this city for continuing to be the home that I grew up to love. Our streets are clean, and the fear that once kept many in our lower districts from venturing out at night is gone. There are many who would put me on a podium, stating that because of one lucky case that I single handedly save our community.

“This is not true. We saved our community. We stood up against a tyrant and a bully, two men who had taken vows to protect and serve us, but went back against every word. I know that when Commissioner Rutherford took on his role, many of us did not think an outsider could solve our problems. I’m sure that now, after many internal investigations and thorough background checks on our Guard, he has proven himself. I would also like to once again thank Madame Vivienne, for who at such short notice five years ago, took the role of our First Enchanter. I’m a graduate of Ostwick College myself, but to see the pride in our College of Enchanters shining through not just our students, but our locals as well, is a tremendous feat. Education is a door to many opportunities, and our local schools have raised the bar for our population under Madame Vivienne’s guidance.

“I would also like…” Alex looked down at her notes. She then moved them to the side. Several reporters leaned forward in their chairs.

“I would like to set the record straight. A man by the name of Maxwell Trevelyan, Senior, has boasted in the press that I am his daughter. He is not. He disowned me when I was a child, and I
grew up in the Old Alienage District. I have seen what happens to the average person who lives in this city. I remember the protests about tearing down the Vhenadahl; I also remember playing by that tree. I know the elves and the dwarves of this city far better than I do the Nobility. I also know that many people still fear mages, and that it was once common practice for people to give up their infants, their own children, just because they had a little magic.

“I know this city, but more importantly I know it’s people. Our history, which is written on the side of boats, in the mines, on our streets. Thedas is watching us because somehow, through all odds, the chaos and fear of the outside world has yet to reach us. I came back to Ostwick not because I had somehow proven myself to a man who did not want me. I came back to this city to help the very people who raised me. The press has called me ‘The People’s Noble’, but I have never been treated as a noble in my life.

“I am only one voice, but I will not waste my breath for those who already have a podium to shout from. Yes, I am considered a Noble by name and birth, but I was raised to know that no one person should hold an advantage for simply existing. I am here to announce my campaign. I am running for Teyrn of Ostwick.’’

Leliana gasped and Cassandra choked on her coffee. Immediately the room exploded into a frenzy, reporters trying to ask Alex Trevelyan questions. She thanked the room and left, her head held high. Vivienne smirked and followed closely behind, leaving Cullen to try and calm down the room at the podium, and failing miserably.

Chapter End Notes

Yes, She is literally called Alex "Mary Sue" Trevelyan. B/c she is. She is the token white haired female protag and was my friends first play through. I "Adopted" Alex and, well. You know :)

Chapter End Notes
Cassandra’s mind was still reeling from the press release. News had already spread to the streets. As she was walking through the Noble District the air was tense. Most of these people were for Maxwell Jr., the existing Teryn. His father, Maxwell Sr., was the Ostwick Senator in the Free Marches Polis. The two men had gone unrivaled for years, decades in the case of Senior. But for Alex Trevelyan to both denounce her noble connections, and then declare she would be running for office in one meeting was dramatic. Chaotic even.

She found a water taxi to go to the ‘Liquid Rush’. The driver nodded, but his smile dropped at hearing the name of the boat. On the water, Cassandra could see that the ‘Floating Market’ was more concentrated by the inland coast and the western peninsula. She could see some boats were celebrating, but whether it was for the cooler weather, or for the announcement of Alex Trevelyan campaign, it was too soon to say. The water was a deep blue, reminding her of Kallak. His Casteless tattoos, which covered his entire scalp, were the same color. His pattern reminded her of arrowheads, the tip settling between his thick eyebrows.

Her mind wandered to the man himself, how he was unlike anyone she had met. She didn’t think 50 to be an old age, since most people could live to eighty easily, but somehow he looked older than most. His brown goatee streaked with grey, his braided sideburns grey at the temples. His head was shaved close to his scalp, but she knew that most men who were losing their hair would opt for that style. His hands had looked as if he had seen some fights, but his physique would have suggested he was more of a rogue than a warrior. And his ears, with vidirium piercings, were tipped. When she first met Kallak, he had his shirt sleeves rolled up to show off his Vallaslin, thin dark blue lines that weaved around his forearms. The same dark blue on his skull, but the design was as if someone had to modify the Dalish markings for thicker forearms, or perhaps for it be hidden under clothing. Could that mean that Kallak had the same markings under his shirt? Cassandra tried to stop that thought, before it ventured to what Kallak would look like shirtless. He was fit but he could be soft in the middle from age. Those thin blue lines on his arms could weave across slim shoulders, moving around to his back and chest-

“Miss?” The water taxi had stopped next to a boat with a red tarp as sun coverage, its patrons sitting in small tables, quiet conversation compared to the neighbouring boats. Cassandra paid the man and stepped onto the ‘Liquid Rush’. A man in spectacles and a worn cotton coat raised his hand to Cassandra. She passed a couple, who stopped talking until she passed by. The man who waved her down was looking at a menu, his thin hair brushed backwards, hiding his bald spot poorly. He didn’t look like a man who was once part of the Ostwick Guard, or even an informant. He looked like an average librarian; the perfect disguise.

“Seeker Pentaghast, I assume? I would have suggested a more, well, less official look for this meeting. But, I am just a local.” The one waitress on the boat came over, and as Cassandra sat down,
handed a single menu to the man.

“I’ll have a cup of Spiced Rum and some Maple Cider as well. Are you hungry, Miss Pentaghast? No? Well, I’ll take cucumber sandwich and some vinegar chips on the side.”

“I’m sorry sir, but we don’t have any vinegar chips, is dill okay?”

“It’ll do. Thank you.” He waited until she walked away before introducing himself. “Matthew Cleaver, at your service. Jim told me you had some questions about this lovely city of ours.” He waved his hand at the boat, the red tarp turning everything on the ship shades of crimson.

“In the summer, this boat has such a romantic feeling to it you know. This very tarp causes the tables, chairs, food, even the people to turn shades of rose and pink. Today however the sun is not so playful, so I apologize for this bold color.”

“It is fine.” Cassandra heard the distant sound of a champagne cork popping, followed by various shouts. Matthew poured some water that was given beforehand. He took a sip, his pale eyes never leaving her face.

“Quite a scar you have there.” He made a motion, indicating the long jagged line down the side of Cassandra’s face. It was mostly healed, but it still protrude outward. It would most likely remain that way.

“Do you know why everyone here is so happy?” Cassandra said, ignoring the statement.

“Alex Trevelyan has announced her campaign for Teryn. To be perfectly honest it’s about time that someone challenged the current Teryn. He’s an idiot and he trails around his father like a dog.”

“Quiet the accusation.”

“No, it is fact.” Matthew put down his drink, and the waitress came back with a thermal mug, an open ended thermos and two more thermal mugs, empty. He only started talking again when she left.

“So, Jim was rather sparse about your case, hell he didn’t even tell me what you are doing in the
“I can not tell you why I am here in the city.” Cassandra lied. “I am simply looking into a cold case at this point in time. In order to-”

“In order to travel around and get information for your mission. Of course.”

“Do not interrupt me.” Matthew paused, his face grew pale at Cassandra’s words. He got over his fear quickly, however, and reached for the full mug.

“Apologies, it has been a while since I was called on for my knowledge.”

“First, what can you tell me about the relationship between the Trevelyan house and Ostwick.”

“Well, the Trevelyans were not prominent during the majority of the Dragon Age. However, during 9:87, Maxwell the First became Champion of Ostwick when he helped rebuild the city from a mine collapse. The mines, as you might be aware, are not just for lyrium. They started out as silverite mines, but when the mines began to go further we found veridium and sapphires. Ostwick college commemorates our miners through the grey in their colors, and our sailors in the sky blue. We may be sitting in a delta, but Ostwick is a port.

“After having a Champion, the Trevelyan House took a rather active part in the state’s politics. Rebuilding went into the Blood Age, ending around 10:08. Here is where it gets interesting. The Trevelyan House has always had close ties to the Chantry, the first daughter and son of course does not become a part of the Faith, however every other child in their bloodline has become a Chantry clerk or Knight Templar. The same practice was found in Starkhaven, as you know of course. But Maxwell the First was not devout. It was recorded that he was a drunk and it was his wife who held the reins when it came to running Ostwick. It was his wife who was able to bring fame and position to their name after Maxwell the First went back to adventuring and whoremongering.

“Now you have Alexandra, who is the youngest of the current household, being everything people are told about the Champion. Just, fair, dramatic! But! She is more like Kirra, the wife of the Champion, in the sense that she’s actually doing something. So you have this woman showing the traits that Ostwick loves and needs. I would be surprised if people weren’t celebrating this.”

The waitress came over with the sandwich, which Matthew quickly took a bite out of. He drained his cup, and called for another spiced rum. Cassandra took the two empty mugs and poured what she
guessed was Maple Cider. It was thicker than she expected, but the steam rising from the drink filled
her with warmth. She found herself holding the mug, rather than drinking it.

“And what about House Cadash?” She pretended to take a sip of her drink, noticing the pause in Matthew
crunching.

“What do you want to know?” Matthew said, swallowing his last bite and leaning forward

“I know that Moma Cadash was supposed to have brought her family here, but nothing more. I
know that some of them are part of the Carta…” Cassandra paused. Matthew waited a beat before
taking a deep breath and beginning.

“First off, the Cadash aren’t just part of the Carta. They are the Carta. Moma Cadash made sure that
Ostwick became the stranglehold and source of lyrium from the Free Marches. Whoever holds the
lyrium, holds the power. It used to be Orzammar, but when it was found that if you dig deep enough,
you can find lyrium, well, anywhere. The Carta made sure that they had a cut if there was a hint of
that stone.

“Moma isn’t just some legend, like Maxwell the First. She died in this Age, and didn’t leave a heir. I
guess you heard about her four sisters as well? Yes? They all died long before she did. Each was a
Noble Hunter in their heyday, and all had kids. Theirs kids had kids. Half of the dwarves in Ostwick
have the last name Cadash, even the boys. If you know anything about Dwarven culture, you know
that doesn’t happen unless you can trace your bloodline to a Paragon. Orzammar may not have
recognized her, hell Kal Sharok sure as shit isn’t recognizing anyone, but here? In Ostwick? You
pray to Moma before you pray to the Stone.”

“What made her so powerful? I get the lyrium, but what else?”

“Her compassion.”

“Bullshit.”

“I honestly wish it was. It would have made things easier back then. Moma outlived two
Commissioners and three Knight Commanders. She had the first Commissioner on her payroll, the
second she made run around in circles until he caved and stuck to harassing the western peninsula.
When she came to Ostwick, the Knight Commander at the time was trying to flush the Carta out
before they got a hold of the mines. At the time, it was recently found out that lyrium was there.
Moma helped him take out most of the street bosses, in exchange for legal documentation for herself, her sisters, and her nieces. Boat licenses, a bar here, and a brothel there. The cherry on top was Moma’s name on the deed to one of three mines. It just so happened that the other two mines had underlying contracts to the street bosses, and when they died, Moma got their cut. When the Knight Commander found out, Moma had him killed.

“The second Knight Commander stayed away from Moma. Why? Moma didn’t get rid of the street bosses through dirty tricks like poison or rigged fights. She would have one of her sisters saddle up next to their second in command, hear from them their treatment of their thugs and workers. She would then open her doors to the same thugs, offering better pay, better community. A thug all of a sudden had a child and didn’t want them to be starving on the streets? He’d go to work for Moma, who would take the child, feed them, clothe them, and sometimes even teach them. Literacy rose in the lower districts and amongst the dwarves because of Moma Cadash. It wasn’t just the dwarven population either. She was given a rocky plot of land, just beyond the double walls. She set up a sanctuary there for elves, and the Alienage began to grow their own food. Recently exiled dwarves taught the local elven population how to grow food from rocks and poor soil, and once you get a tree planted, it’ll product fruit and nuts as well. If the chantry didn’t want to initiate a marriage, Moma would do it. If an elf didn’t want to go with tradition, Moma gave them a new name and a job; all they had to do was ask. Soon enough, the Alienage District was a safe haven, the Carta ruling it better than the Trevelyans had in Ages. The Mines followed, especially after Moma had her name on the deeds. She owned the mines, she ran the lyrium. Moma Cadash had all of Ostwick in her hand in the first ten years of being here, and held control all the way until her death. The Trevelyans in charge of the upper part of Ostwick were pissed off. Told the Knight Commander to do something. When he didn’t, they fired him.

“Third Knight Commander who came around, the one our dear Alex took out of office? He was on Moma’s payroll. When she died, he pulled a 180 and tried to tear down the little communities she made. First it was Vhenadahl, then the mines, and then the College itself. But Moma built loyalty, if nothing else. The Alienage burned down instead of being turned into an upper class shopping mall. The mines stopped running for three years, and the Nobles had no income to speak of. Fishing stopped, the Floating Market lost the majority of its appeal when the pleasure cruises and brewboats, like this one, got off the water. The Trevelyans may be in office, Seeker. But the Cadash Carta runs this city.”

Cassandra felt her stomach drop at every word Matthew said. If what he said was true, then the only reason that Ostwick was peaceful was because of one woman. A woman who has been dead for thirty years, and who wasn’t a Trevelyan.

“If Moma didn’t leave an heir, then who runs this city?”

“If I had to guess, her grandson.”
“But you said-”

“I know, I know.” Matthew seemed to have forgotten Cassandra’s previous threat, “Moma didn’t have a daughter. She had one son, halfway through the last age. He wasn’t in the spotlight much, she probably treated him like any of the other grunts her sisters or nieces gave her. The boy ran off to Orlais. Rumor has it he fell in love with someone, and they lived happily. That is until the Carta arm in Orlais got mad at Moma for rationing them like they were common thugs. The burned down their little shack in the woods, her son burned with his lover. Moma had the Orliasian brutes killed, of course, but there was only one survivor: an infant.” Cassandra felt a chill go down her spine.

“Well, apparently Moma was overjoyed, named the infant, Lapis. Then the kid turned old enough to say that they were a boy, and they changed their name. Kid was never in any records, but after the young boy came out, he dropped off the grid like his father. Moma still loved the boy, he was her only grandchild. But Dwarves have strict rules. Daughters take after their mother’s, sons after their fathers.”

“...How do you tell if a Cadash is part of the Carta? I doubt every Cadash is a criminal.” Cassandra faked another sip of cider. Matthew took off his glasses, to clean them, the lens reflecting the crismon of the tarp.

“Well, a Cadash is marked at birth by six black spots on their left thumb. If they do any work for the Carta, they’ll have a ring above these spots. The color will usually tell you what they do. I don’t know what every color means, but you can usually assume that black is assassin. Blue is either an informant or smuggler. White and Red swaps, white used to just mean a Noble hunter or someone who worked on the pleasure cruises. Red though, that can mean security or a miner. But I heard recently that they don’t mark the workers anymore. Understand however that those colors change, and I can be wrong.”

“And if they had a ring around the bottom, below the black spots?” Matthew stopped moving. Cassandra quirked her eyebrow, not knowing what she said wrong. The man leaned in further, his nose incredibly close to Cassandra cup.

“Please don’t tell me you have a body in the morgue with a tattoo like that.”

“I do not.”

“But you do have a body?”
“...Yes.”

“Does it have its thumb?”

“Which one?”

“Don’t try to be smart, Ms Pentaghast, this is not the time for it.”

Cassandra said nothing. Matthew didn’t move. The boat swayed in the breeze, the couple from before laughing together before they kissed. The two then got up and walked over to a passing boat, one with no tarp and several vendors.

“If that body is missing its left thumb, the peace in Ostwick is about to disappear. If your Doe’s left thumb, regardless of race, has two rings, one above and one below six black spots…” Matthew stood up, grabbing his overcoat and throwing some money on the table.

“Then I would suggest you get out of Ostwick. This city has become a war zone.”

Chapter End Notes

Just as an FYI: This is the version of Cass that I visualize.

https://www.nexusmods.com/dragonageinquisition/mods/1491
Arlof pulled into a parking spot just as Cole flipped the sign to close. Thom was sweeping the sidewalk, Kallak counting the till for the day. Another dwarf got out of Arlof’s car. He didn’t have a beard, but a five o’clock shadow. Kallak recognized him as the dwarf Cassandra had fought with at the College. Varric Tethras.

Thom raised his eyebrow when Arlof pushed the door open, Kallak shrugged back at him. Thom just shook his head and went back to sweeping. Cole came back behind the counter, greeting the two of them.

“Howdy, Cole!” Arlof grinned, his lower jaw filled with braces. “How’s the shop, eh?”

“It was happy, a lady came in for lilies, but she didn’t want them. She wanted jasmine and primrose. The nights were her favorite, the endless talking, laughing, crying. How they would realize it was dark, that the stars were just as bright as his smile. She wanted them to bloom during night, something soft and delicate, like her memories.” Arlof looked uncomfortable as Cole continued; Varric, however, perked up at the young boy’s rambling.

“...Right. Forget I asked.” Arlof turned his attention to Kallak, who still had not looked up from the till. “Evening, Kallak!”

“Thought I told you not to come in after hours, cousin.”

“Well, yes.” the red headed dwarf chuckled, holding up his hands in a sign of surrender. “I know, I know. If I come over, do it during hours, or if after hours, at your apartment. But cous-”

“Who’s this?” Kallak moved onto to counting bills, having just finished debit payments.

“This here is Varric Tethras. He wrote that book I lent you. You have read *Tale of the Champion*, right?”

“Nope.”
“Really? Why not?”

“Been busy.”

“Busy! You run a flower shop, surely Cole or Sera could’ve held the front while you read it!”

“Cousin, in case you didn’t see him when you pulled up, I hired someone new,” Kallak looked up now, his reading glasses having slid down the bridge of his broken nose. Arlof gulped.

“... But- But I lent you that book months ago!”

“Well. I’ve been busy.” Kallak took off his glasses, and scratched at the large, horizontal scar on his nose. It crossed his cheekbones, a chemical burn that had taken off part of his Casteless markings.

“We’ve met,” Varric chimed in, saving Arlof from fumbling. “I think it was at the First Enchanters office.”

“It was.” Kallak said, his tone neutral. Thom then walked in.

“Blackw- fuck, sorry. Thom, you and Cole can clock off. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“You sure, sir?” Thom was halfway taking off the apron, but he kept looking at the intruders.

“I’m sure. We sold all the boutiques today anyway. Go clock off.” Kallak finished the till, then handed it to Cole. The young boy took it and went by humming a soft tune. It didn’t escape Kallak that the tune seemed to relax Varric.

“So, cousin. Why the hell did you bring a writer into my shop? And why the hell couldn’t it wait till tomorrow?” Kallak came around the counter to face Arlof, his arms crossed.

“Well you see, Varric is a mockumentary writer. The thing is, he’s really good at it! He’s wanting to
write about Moma and—"

“I’ll stop you right there. No.”

“But you haven’t—”

“No, Arlof.”

“But—”

“Dammit boy, I said no. Take your mock friend home now, I won’t hear it.”

“Kallak, isn’t it?” Varric put his broad hand on Arlof shoulder, his gloves worn and older than the rest of his clothing. “I don’t want to write about Moma Cadash rise to power. I want to write about who the woman was, what her life was like in those final years.”

Kallak gave the other dwarf a harsh look. Varric’s eyes were a hazel color, the younger dwarf just starting to get grey in his strawberry blonde hair. Kallak didn’t know why, but he didn’t really trust him. Maybe it was the fact that the weather was getting colder and he was wearing his shirt unbuttoned, maybe it was the fact the other dwarf had actual chest hair to flaunt, unlike Kallak. Maybe it was the fact that, like Arlof, Varric didn’t have any noticeable Casteless markings. Kallak knew why Arlof didn’t have any, but Varric? The dwarf was either a recently exiled Merchant or he’s from a family of them.

“I’m afraid someone beat you to that. Those hacks who did ‘The Godmother’ come to mind. Every other snobbish youth from the Law District who writes their citation on the woman. Hell, the bards when she was alive too. Forget it.”

“Cousin, please!” Arlof moved to stand next to Kallak, hesitating to put his arm around the older dwarf at the look he was given. “Hear him out, at least?”

“...First, what did this doofus of a cousin tell you?” Kallak waved at Thom who was walking out of the shop. He watched him get into the beat up truck and drive away as Varric talked.
“Well, first off he told me that you two are probably the closest living relatives to Moma Cadash. The rest of the family are second cousins, third cousins, once removed, twice removed- you get the point. Second is that he told me you were the expert on Moma personal life, something about being her favorite.”

“What else?”

“Just that if Moma had any heirs, their thumb would look different than others in House Cadash.” Varric stopped talking when Cole came out, the young boy leaving the shop.

“Well then,” Kallak stroked his goatee with his left hand. “What would this book of yours be focusing on then.”

Varric gaze immediately noticed Kallak’s left thumb. The dwarf visibly paled, but did not give away anything else. Kallak felt himself grin; Arlof was always a gossip, but now that Varric knew who he was it would make things easier.

“I don’t want to talk about the Carta side. Everyone knows that side. I want to know the woman, why she was in control for so long. I’ve only been in Ostwick a week, but already people talk about her like she’s a Saint.”

“...You’re Andrastian.” Kallak said.

“I- yes. How’d you know?”

“You said Saint, not Paragon.” Kallak snorted, which then turned into a teasing tone. “So guess Arlof finally found someone like himself then!”

“Kallak…” Arlof blushed, the redhead’s face matching his hair.

“Arlof, cousin. If you wanted to just show off your new boy, you didn’t have to come up with some cock and bull story!” Kallak laughed, only to then realize that Varric and Arlof weren’t laughing with him.
“Mr Kallak, while I’m flattered, I’m not dating your cousin.” Varric grinned back, a rogue’s twinkle in his eye.

“Damn.” Kallak sighed, dragging out the teasing. “Do you know any free dwarves then? Poor boy is a bachelor, but don’t want him to grow old alone! Otherwise he’ll end up like me, some poor old duster with no one to warm their bones.”

“Cousin, please…” Arlof begged, a lisp forming from embarrassment.

“Well, if you’re announcer didn’t mind coming to Kirkwall, I know a very broody elf who’d be perfect for him. They’d either be the sun and moon, or water and oil.”

“Better than nothing! The last couple of suitors I threw at him didn’t like it when he went on and on about food though. Then there was that one who thought because he talked about food, Lil Arlie here could cook!” Kallak laughed out loud when Arlof groaned and hid his face in his hands. Varric laughed as well, putting his hand on the younger dwarf’s shoulder.

“Tethras, right?” Kallak asked. “Listen, I’d love to help but there’s a lot about Moma that people don’t know. I may have been her favorite, but she was a private woman. I’d suggest looking for something else.”

“Well, what about you then?” Varric smiled

“Me?” Kallak was taken aback by the request. “Why in the world would you want to write about me?”

“The whole world thinks Moma didn’t leave a legacy, that when she died that was it! You’re proof that this isn’t the case!” Varric was getting excited as he went on.

“I don’t need to know everything about Moma, but your relationship with her would be perfect! A young dwarf- who I assume has some elf in him- becomes her legacy and heir! It’s obvious that you’ve gone legitimate, like Arlof here, so why shouldn’t your story be out there?” Kallak saw red flags going off in the back of his mind.

“I’m not that interesting, trust me.” Kallak lied, hoping Varric would believe him.
“If you’re worried about the safety of people I can change all the names. If it’s about your old work, or the Carta coming after you… I knew your Commissioner when he lived in Kirkwall. I’m sure I can do something to help.” Kallak let Varric go on, ignoring every word.

He remembered Cassandra from a few nights ago. How she told him about what Varric wrote last time, how she had been painted a villain. It wasn’t hard to see why the dwarf had done so; the Seeker wasn’t the best at first impression. Kallak also remembered her face in the car, the reflection he saw in the glass. A look that wasn’t meant for him. There was something more to the woman, something she was afraid to show. Did he give the same impression? Was he as much of a hard ass to deal with at first? If he helped get this book finished, maybe she’ll read it, see who he is. Maybe she would come back to the shop to tell him he got written into a book too, then they’ll have that in common.

“If, IF, I let you do this.” Kallak breathed heavily through his nose. “You come in and ask me anything you want once a week. You’re a man of the Faith, so come to the shop after service. I’ll talk with you. That’s the only time you’ll get during the week. Arlof can tell you what he knows, and the First Enchanter is my best customer. If you feel like prying into my past or Moma’s personal life, those are the only other two people. The rest you can get from secondary sources, no doubt the Mademoiselle will give you plenty of that. If you find someone else, anyone at all, I have to know. I’ll let you know if they’re blowing smoke up your ass or not.”

“Thank you, Kallak.” Varric grabbed his hand and shook it. “You won’t regret this, I swear.”

“I better not.” Kallak squeezed Varric’s hand once, and let go. Arlof babbled at the two of them, but neither dwarf paid much attention to him.

Varric adjusted his coat, and he and Arlof left the shop. The dwarf stood in the middle of the room, thinking. He switched off the lights and went to the back of the store. He closed the door to his office, just as the phone began to ring. It was one of his informant’s; the phone only rang for Carta business. He sat down in the chair, and answered the phone.

“Boss.” a female voice was on the other side.

“What do you got?” Kallak pulled out a notepad and pen, ready to write the information down.

“Your new neighbour is a real Ben-Hassrath. His workers aren’t, they’re his cover. Originally hired security, did a bunch of odd jobs around Orlais. Apparently he’s up for evaluation. My guess, Qun
doesn’t know if he’s gone AWOL or something. Valo Kas has been informed, they’re heading up for the winter anyway.

“Great.” Kallak jotted down a few notes, then made a line under. “Next.”

“Seeker Cassandra Pentaghast. Got as many middle names as any other noble. 78th to Nevarran throne, never went to College. Became an Agent of Truth at sixteen, stopped a conspiracy about the last Divine in its tracks. Promoted to Right Hand, still is. Divine Justinia X asked her to stay on, brought in some red headed Orlesian bard as her Left. The Left has been in Ostwick, but we still don’t know why they’re here.”

“Give me your guess, they’re usually close.”

“Either they found out about you, or they’re here to observe the city. Probably focused on the People’s Noble, found the connection or something. Could be a coincidence.”

Kallak put his pen down, and leaned back in his chair. He waited for the informant on the other line to go on.

“The line is secure?”

“Yes.” Kallak said.

“Identified the missing dwarf. Family is compensated and the wife thanks us. Problem is, he went dark on his way back from Orlais. Might have gotten mixed up with our actual shippers. Ambush or sabotage gone wrong. Body was found on Wounded Coast, but his route for the company he was working for was all over the place.”

“Tell me the good stuff.”

“Kirkwall, Hunter Fell, Montfort, Val Foret, Lydes, and Mont-de-Glace. Most of it was in Orlais, but still. Coterie was never happy with us, and Hunter Fell is filled with Necromancers wanting their goods. What do you want done?”
“Keep our guard up here in the city, watch out for those who’ve gone legit. I won’t let this scare us back to the shadows. Send loyalists to those cities, see what you can find out about his whereabouts. The sooner we find out where he was killed, the better. One more thing.”

“Sure thing boss.”

“How’s your daughter?”

“...She’s happy. Gonna get the ring off next week. Don’t know how Kal-Sharok will take her though.”

“Glad to hear. If she don’t find what she likes, I can get her on the scholarship. One of students is about to get their degree, can keep it open if she wants.”

“I-Thanks Boss. I’ll let her know.” The line went dead.

Chapter End Notes

I missed last week, so this late. Uni has been stressing me out so I'm not sure if I'll be able to keep up with posting every week. I'll try, but no promises...
Cassandra sat in her car a block away from ‘The Snapdragon’. It was Saturday, meaning that if she went down to the floral shop it might be filled with customers. It could also mean that Kallak might not be in the shop, going out to some event. She squeezed the steering wheel, making her knuckles turn whiter.

She didn’t know why she was so nervous. She was told that she could come back to ask her questions, but that had been days ago. She pulled out the warrant she got what seemed like ages ago. It was still valid, would be until the end of the month. Which was in three days. Cassandra groaned and rested her head on the steering wheel. It was at that moment her stomach began to growl. She remembered Bull and his bakery. She got out of the car and started to walk down the side street.

Autumn was in full bloom; trees in different hues of red and yellow, the occasional evergreen seen inland, their green crowns peaking through. The traffic island from before had been replanted, now it with Mint, Sage, and Rosemary. Lavender was in some of the flower pots around the stores, but in front of Shartan’s Oath was Arbor Blessing, the vines plots most likely hidden behind the sword. It gave off the illusion that the blackened blade was covered in the plants, like a fairy tale. The Snapdragon was the same as she left it, honeycomb shaped shelves seen through the windows, displaying honey and hand-pressed cards. The sign was still tacky as every, the dragon head replaced with a blooming flower, pollen instead of fire, the name a faded yellow.

Cassandra was walking on other side of the street, taking in the plastic flamingos and metal sunflowers. The outdoor seating was filled with people, mostly elves and dwarves, but she recognized the Ostwick colors that crowded around one table, some even leaning on the picket fence that surrounded the bakery. She walked over to the counter, noticed that the young Tevinter, Krem, was there. He smiled and waved at Cassandra, then shouted something inside the store. The door swung open, Bull holding it open for an elderly elf. Cassandra was in his blind spot, but the Vasoth turned his head and saw her.

“Pentaghast! You came back!” Bull shouted, even though Cassandra was only a few steps away. He grabbed a small paper bag and walked towards her.

“Hello, Bull.” Cassandra gave a small smile, remembering her last conversation with the man. “I see your bakery is doing well.”

“Yea, it’s Saturday though. Lots of the College kids come down to the Alienage on the weekends. At least, that’s what Skinner says.” Bull held out the paper bag for Cassandra. She could smell the
sugar and honey, and took the bag. It had some kind of flaky pastry that was twisted around itself. The only thing that held the delicate pastry together was a caramel stick. She gently pulled one of the pastries out of the bag, making sure not to get any of it on herself.

“That’s ‘Halla Horn’. If you’re going across the street, the Grump might enjoy them. Don’t know about his new employee though. Whole town was celebrating yesterday,” Bull continued. “Did’t know what had happened until Grim turned up the radio. Guess that’s why you’d been so busy, hadn’t come back to say hello to all us on Loc Muinne Avenue. Ahh, but it’s not so bad, you’re a big Seeker, and a Dragon Hunter to boot! Well, happy hunting!”

Bull swung his arm and smacked Cassandra on the back. He laughed out loud, and went back inside. It took a moment for Cassandra to realize that ‘Happy Hunting’ was pun. She scowled at not catching it, but took another bite of the Halla Horn. She crossed the street over to The Snapdragon.

A man was standing behind the counter, looking as if he was struggling with his bouquets. He only had two others on display, but they were terrible. Cassandra felt bad for him, he clearly was not used to this. Kallak was nowhere in sight, causing Cassandra’s mood delfate. It was quickly replaced with confusion; she didn’t get why she would be upset that the dwarf wasn’t here. After all, it’s not like he was some statue, he had places to be, things to do. Far more important people to talk to, like the First Enchanter. Cassandra tried to ignore her sudden mood swing.

“Welcome to the Snapdragon, unique boutiques for the gentle- SONUVABITCH!” The man pulled his hand back from the flowers, quickly sucking on his pointer finger to get rid of the blood. Cassandra placed the warrant on the counter, raising an eyebrow at the man. His beard was forked, the mustache waxed in order to keep it out of the way of his mouth. His hair was down, the strands in disarray. He looked up at Cassandra and noticed her badge. He let go of his finger, blood still trickling from it.

“Sorry about that milady,” He said, applying what looked to be the fourth bandaid to his hands. “Not having any luck with this.”

“It’s alright.” Cassandra looked down the opened hallway, noticed that the door at the end was closed. “Would the owner be in today?”


“Seeker Pentaghast.” They shook hands.
“So, you’re the Seeker? Strange, Sera didn’t mention your looks.” He gave a cocky grin, then let go of her hand.

“So, you’re the Seeker? Strange, Sera didn’t mention your looks.” He gave a cocky grin, then let go of her hand.

“Sera? Is that the young elf, or the boy with the hat?”

“The elf, though she hates it when you point that out.” Thom went back to his doomed bouquet. “Mind if I ask why you’re here, Seeker?”

“Just need to ask your owner a few questions.” Cassandra put the Halla Horns on the counter, their smell taking over the room.

“Well, I haven’t been here for very long, but Kallak is good man.”

“So I’ve been told. Rather secretive however.”

“Everyone has a past, secrets they don’t want to come to light.”

“I suppose, but why should one hide?”

“Sometimes you hide who you were in order to be better.” Thom clumsily tied a ribbon on the bouquet, placing it on the display stands. He looked at Cassandra, his eyes gentle; he was holding back something.

At that moment two doors opened; Kallak came out of his office, and the front door banged opened. A hand with several magic runed rings slammed the counter, a wad of various bills gripped in it. Kallak heard the sound and picked up his pace, stepping onto the elevated counter. Cassandra then noticed that Thom must not be on the elevated part, leaning over the step in order to not crouch over during his work.

“I want a bouquet that screams “Stop clucking you oversized hen.” No! I want the worst bouquet, I want it to just say “Fuck. Off.” The owner of ringed hand was dressed in black, his overcoat had an embroidered golden snake on the back. While Thom mustache was waxed to keep it out of his mouth, this man’s mustache was waxed for style. He had some scruff, but it was clearly there for fashionable purposes. Cassandra noted the Minrathous colors, black on gold, the dark red
underlining. The man stood up to his full height, but was a few inches shorter than Thom. Cassandra may have only an inch or two above Thom, but standing next to the stranger she could look over his head with ease.

“Welcome to the Snapdragon! Unique bouquets for the gentle freaks! How can we help you?” Kallak flashed a smile, diverting the young man’s attention from Thom to him.

“I need flowers.”

“Certainly sir, but if you could just tell us what you’re trying to say, or even who they’re for, I’m sure Thom and I can help you.”

“I work at the College, but some of the more persistent Chantry mothers there continue to harrass my students and I need them to. Back. Off.” The younger man pulled out a business card from his overcoat, the same golden snake on his coat poised on the card.

Cassandra leaned back onto the counter, watching the entire scene play out. Kallak took the card and read it. His eyebrows quirked, then he started to laugh and shake his head. He patted Thom forearm and said he would be right back. The two men were then left to look at each other, both confused as to what was happening. Kallak had gone to the cooler room, only to return with this arms filled with flowers. Most had yet to bloom, but those that had gave a horrendous scent. Cassandra knew only one particular flower. She recognized it from one of her first cases: felandaris. The young man had gleam in his eye, but his body seemed to deflate a little. So, a mage then. Cassandra thought.

“Mr Pavus, I’ve got quite a bounty here. Now, it’s Thom’s first day doing the bouquets but I’m sure that between the two of you, ya’ll can make something that’ll make them Chantry singers regret it.” Kallak then began to point at some of the buds, describing what they would look like, the smell they would give off, even at some flowers Cassandra had never seen.

Thom and Pavus went to work, the young professor immediately pointing to which flora he wanted and Thom trying to put them together. Kallak walked over to Cassandra. She must have imagined it, but Kallak seemed relaxed, as if he was glad to see her.

“You came back.” Kallak said, his voice soft; Cassandra assumed to not be overheard.

“I did.” Cassandra said. “I still have to question you of course.” The dwarf’s small smile disappeared, quickly replaced with a professional, blank expression.
“Right. Course you do.” Kallak grunted, straightening up and standing his ground.

“So… You have the warrant, I see. Nick of time too, thing expires at the end of the month. Well, you’re first question then, Seeker Pentaghast.”

“Where were you during the month of Parvulis?”

“You mean Kingsway? Had a business trip to Ferelden, down near Haven.”

“Can you describe why you were in Haven?”

“Collecting a few seeds there, most just Ferelden local flora, but I did manage to get a Andraste Grace budd there. The one’s around Haven have a unique coloring, a reddish center surrounded by a purplish grey petals. It’s growing pretty nice in the back, hoping to have a few petals to press into cards for Santalia, know it’ll be hit for those of the Faith.”

“Anything else?”

“Hmm… No, that was the business part. Oh! My daughter was down in Ferelden, met up with her at Amaranthine before getting back to Ostwick.”

“You have a daughter?”

“Sure do,” Kallak smiled, his entire posture becoming relaxed. “Funny story that. She actually named this store you know. When she was a teen everyone around here called her ‘The Dragon of Ostwick’. She’s supposed to becoming home soon. Gonna do some work at the College.”

“What’s her name?” Cassandra asked, her tone shifting from professional to curious.

“Saare. Saare Adaar. Raised her since she was, oh, six or so. She’s originally from Amaranthine, but…” Kallak paused, as if the memory was stopping him. Cassandra felt a pang of guilt, and place her hand on the dwarf’s. It was only for a moment, Kallak focusing on the Seeker touching him. He
didn’t move to stop her; she was the first to move away.

“You said she’s going to work at the College? Was she on your scholarship?”

“Surprised you remembered that.” Kallak smiled, and stood straighter. “Nah, Saare’s a mage. Didn’t know til she got a cold when she was little. She kept sneezing sparks everywhere. Oh you should’ve seen it!” He laughed out loud, Pavus chuckling along.

“Getting sick was the worst as a child. Did she ever freeze a room with a fever?” Pavus leaned toward the two, Thom making a third bouquet for the man.

“Nah, but there was one time,” Kallak had to stop because he was laughing, then continued “There was one time she got mad at her teacher. She electrified the desk and made some of the books grew vines!” Kallak bursted out laughing, his entire body shaking. Pavus snorted and joined in.

“That’s terrible!” Cassandra said.

“Maybe, but it’s funny now!” Kallak wiped a tear away, Pavus coughing in order to stop laughing, hiding his joy from Cassandra.

“Well, Mr Pavus. How many bouquets has Thom made you?” Kallak said.

“Four, after this one.” Thom grunted, struggling with wrapping the last one.

“That’ll be 15 crowns each, so that’s… 60 total.”

“Crowns… Silver?”

“Just came over then huh? Yea, Ostwick uses Orlesian currency. Royals are gold, Crowns silver, and Pennies are all those lovely coins you seem to be lacking. I’ll take three small Royal, be 20 each. There we are!” Kallak smiled and put the bills in his til.

Thom gathered all the bouquets and helped Pavus put them in his car. The young man drove away, leaving Thom confused at the entire exchange. Kallak snorted and went to shuffling paperwork at
the counter. Cassandra watched him for a while. It was then she noticed Kallak’s thumb. Six black spots, a black band on top, and what looked like a gold band on the bottom. The tattoo was faded, most likely something Kallak got when he was much younger. She remembered what Matthew Cleaver had said.

“If that body is missing its left thumb, then peace in Ostwick is about to disappear. If your Doe’s left thumb, has two rings… Then I would suggest you get out of Ostwick, Seeker.”

“You’re thumb. The tattoo looks different than the ones on your arm.” Cassandra said, without realizing it was out loud. Kallak’s forearm twitches, his eyes now avoiding her. They were small quirks, most people would have assumed that it was involuntary. Cassandra was not most people.

“It don’t mean nothing these days. Old history.” Kallak said, short and tense. She wanted to press, wanted to know what it meant, why this dwarf with pointed ears didn’t want her to know. Something was stopping her however. Her eyes wandered up to his exposed forearm, noting the thick cords of muscle.

“And the tattoos on your forearms?” Cassandra looked Kallak in the face, hoping he would look at her directly.

“It’s Vallaslin for one, and it’s for the twin gods, Dirthamen and Falon’Din.”

Cassandra didn’t get anything else out of Kallak, his entire posture tense after she asked about his thumb. The phone started to ring from the back, and Kallak went to go answer it. Just before he left, he offered Cassandra to come back if she wanted to just talk. Cassandra left, not knowing what to think about the owner of the Snapdragon.

Chapter End Notes

So everything is due, like now. I’m posting two chapters today in order to make up for not being active. Gonna be a lil hiatus until I get settled in for an internship I’m taking between semesters.

Might be mid-June until I post again, sorry about that!
The First Interview

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Kallak waited in his office, his wrist giving him some trouble. He recalled yesterday, how a phone call saved him from answering the Seeker’s questions. He had been grateful really, he didn’t think he could lie to the woman again. Hell, he didn’t think he wanted to. She was unlike anyone he had met. Harsh, blunt, unafraid to show emotion. Whether it was the fact that she was a Seeker of Truth, or something more was the question.

A knock on the door interrupted his thoughts. Kallak grunted a greeting, Varric Tethras letting himself into his office. Kallak took his feet off the desk and moved to shake the other dwarf’s hand. This close to him, Kallak noticed the subtle grey in his hair, that his hairline was just starting to recede. Kallak was envious of Varric, the fact that at 40 or so, Varric still had a youthful charm. Meanwhile, the older dwarf had started losing his hair during his 30’s.

“Tethras! You’re early.”

“Well, technically this is are first meeting. Noticed that Cole isn’t out front.”

“Cole works during the week. Mondays and the like. I’m surprised you remembered his name. He doesn’t leave a big impression on folk, most forget him in a snap.”

“Are we sure we’re talking about the same kid? The one with the big hat.”

“I know, I know,” Kallak chuckled. “Dunno how he does it, but folk always forget him, just as soon as they forget whatever it is that they came in worried about.”

“Now,” Kallak grunted as he sat back down, Varric taking a seat across from him. “Where do you wanna start?”

“Well, let’s start off with the tattoos.” Varric opened up his bag, producing a recorder and leather bound journal.

“Which ones?” Kallak sat back down in his chair, trying to get comfortable. The older dwarf ended
up putting his feet on the desk in the end, leaning backwards in the chair. The desk was clear of paperwork, allowing Varric to sprawl.

“Let’s start with the Vallaslin.”

“Well, I’ve got about five Pantheons on me, Mythal and Elgar’nan, Dirthamen and Falon’Din. And June.”

“You’re doing great. Why five though?”

“Pardon?”

“Well, I don’t know a lot about the Dalish, but five is a lot.”

Kallak rubbed at his goatee, unsure how to explain it. He rolled of his sleeves, showing off the intricate lines, Falon’Din and Dirthamen inseparable, even on his skin. He sighed and looked at Varric. He was patient, his eyes soft, his broken nose making him charming. A pang of envy shot through the dwarf, knowing that his own concave nose didn’t help him.

“I was born in Orlais, way down south. My mother’s clan, Duirme, they live in the Frostback Mountains. During the winter months they live in the Dales, and in the summer they migrate to the mountains. I was about 18 when I went looking for them.

“It wasn’t the best introductions, hell I had ran to Ostwick the moment I heard the name Duirme come out of Moma’s mouth. But it turned out that my mother had a twin sister, who was the First. I only have one token—” Kallak pulled out the necklace he wore.

“It’s ironbark, was the only reason it survived the- well, the accident. When my aunt saw it she just… she knew.”

“What was she like, your aunt.”

“Auntie- she only ever wanted me calling her that in private, she was First in front of the others. Auntie was… sad. Apparently she had come down the mountain to visit her sister, never knew that I
existed, or that I had survived the… the accident.

“Well the Keeper was on his last life when I was brought to camp, but when everyone found out who’s son I was, most of them accepted me. The elders didn’t like me much though. One elder, the crafter, wanted to know if dwarves really knew anything about metal work.”

“Oh no.”

“Yea… I didn’t know shit about metal, but I did know leather and bows. He taught me how to make weapons out of near anything you can find, spot iron ores and veins that are really easy to break. June is the Pantheon for the Craft, and after six months the crafter recommended that I get his Vallaslin.

“The Keeper died, Auntie went from the First to the Keeper, and I was her first Vallaslin. She had to modify it a bit, but I’ve got June on my collarbone and shoulder blades. Course, I didn’t really feel connected to June, it was just the first Creator I was taught. I found out about Mythal and Elgar’nan, how Mythal was the Protector and- actually it’s pretty funny.”

“What is?” Varric was writing short notes, looking up when Kallak paused.

“Elgar’nan, according to the hahrens, is the Creator that made the dwarves all live underground. Mythal is the people’s protector, like my mother had been, but apparently my father had thought it was hilarious that the hunters who prefered Elgar’nan didn’t like him much. It was impulsive, really, but the clan had a new First who needed to practice Vallaslin and, well…”

“You didn’t!”

Kallak smiled, watching Varric laugh, tears threatening to fall.

“It gets better.”

“No!!”

“I’ve got a lovely tree and sun on my back, for Elgar’nan. But do you know what Mythal’s favorite
creature was, according to the People?”

“I’m afraid to ask.”

Varric put a hand on over his mouth, trying to stop himself from laughing. Kallak kept smiling. He waited until just so, the moment that Varric was starting to regain his composure.

“I’ve got a dragon between my tits.” Kallak snickered, watching the younger dwarf wheezed. Varric had to take a few minutes to regain himself, Kallak waiting patiently.

“What about the last two?” Varric finally asked, writing down notes again.

“It took a long time, but the stories of the Twin Creators, Falon’Din and his brother, Dirthamen. They... stuck. Guess some people would say that having them with me makes being an Assassin easier, especially if you have the Creators who lead the souls through the Fade with you. Most folk think that being Dalish means you have one god you like above the rest, but that’s not really true. Sure, I pledged myself to the Twin Creators, but I know that Mythal watches over me, that Elgar’nan will judge me and eventually guard me. I know that even if I’m not a crafter, June is clever and will guide my hands. Most Dalish children have their entire childhood to figure out which god speaks to them the most, but they know that every god watches over them.

“My Auntie was covered in Vallaslin, for each and every Creator, so was her First. My mother… My mother had Elgar’nan. He’s not just the All-Father, he was the god of vengeance. In fact, that’s how she met my father, a quest for vengeance. My father, Howlite, was a Reaver and well, the noble who had killed some of the da’len of the clan was… let’s just say that he was trying to back out of a deal with the Carta. According to my Auntie, my mother didn’t understand this hot-headed dwarf but appreciated the help. According to Moma, my father was smitten. He wasn’t gonna be the heir at the time, so he got her blessing to leave Ostwick, go and try to court this Dalish hunter.”

Kallak stopped, breathing deeply. He didn’t talk about his parents, it had been so painful for so long. But now, after years of avoiding it... talking to Varric was lifting something off of his chest, a weight he didn’t know he had. The older dwarf grunted, taking his feet of the table, leaning forward, one hand covering his mouth, the other flexing. Varric gave a soft smile, and then asked a question.

“You said that there had been an accident before. Can you go explain that, or do you wanna talk about something else?”
“No, no it’s just… My parents fell in love, and it was an odd coupling. Moma didn’t think anything of it, and I found out years later why the elders of Duirme… why they had been so cold to me when I first showed up.” Kallak dropped his hand, avoiding Varric’s gaze as he went on.

“It was during a summer, there had been a fire. My father had built a cabin in the woods, because he wasn’t very good at climbing the Frostbacks and staying with the clan… And my mother was pregnant, so she stayed behind with him. The clan wasn’t anywhere near the cabin when it went up… I was about four months old.”

“I’m… I’m so sorry.”

“Moma… had trouble when my father left the city. Turns out she never told anyone that he wasn’t the heir, so when he left town… some rivals thought he had gone to make connections in Orlais. They burned the home, with all of us inside… Moma was too late… I only survived because… Because that was all she could carry out of the fire. I never knew my parents, but- I was raised by Moma, and later I became a man with my Auntie. Clan Duirme has a few really good Reavers because of Howlite Cadash, and Moma… well, she started taking more of an interest in elvish affairs, making sure that, uh, the Alienage was taken care of.”

Kallak rubbed at his eyes, not sure when he started crying. He had let his guard down, not knowing what to do now in front of the writer. Varric hadn’t written anything down, but the recorder was still running. Kallak hated this silence. He clear his throat and started talking.

“Growing up, I had Casteless markings, two lines on my cheeks, and a small diamond just above my eyebrows. When I came back, after living with Clan Duirme, I got my whole skull done in arrowheads. Of course, I tried to grow back my hair to “blend in” but, I started losing my hair around, oh, 28 or so. By the time I got being 35, I started shaving my head. Been bald ever since, but I have kept my sideburns braided and my goatee trimmed, so at least I still look a little dwarfy.”

“And what about that one, on your thumb?” Varric was gracious enough to act like nothing had happened in the last half hour.

“Well, Moma wore a ring, Silverite with two golden bars on top and bottom, and six obsidian spots on it. You’ve probably seen or read or heard about that the Cadash Carta identifies each other through a small tattoo on the left thumb. A lot of folk think that the color is meant to be the occupation of the owner, such as red for security, white for noble hunters, so on and so forth. That’s partly true, Moma and her sisters loved to adopt strays. But! But, originally the color on top was meant to let you know which sister that the Carta member in question was allied with.
“Now, I have black on top, because I trained to be an Assassin. Moma wore a ring, never had this
tattoo put on herself. Howlite Cadash, however, had two rings, just like mine. He had a red band on
top, because he was a Reaver and security, and a golden one on bottom. My youngest aunt, Moma’s
youngest sister, her color was white because she dealt with the noble hunters and whores. Red was
originally Moma’s second sister, she had been a… well let’s just call it a prized fighter. I have a
golden band on bottom because I’m Moma’s grandkid, and Arlof has a white band on top because
he is my youngest aunt’s, youngest son. We all have six black spots, even some of the elf and the
one or two Vashoth, but if they’re really part of the Carta, they’ll have the top band to let you know
which sister they work for.

“We had that system in place even after some of Moma’s sisters started dying, and then I had cousins
who tried to take over, but Moma didn’t want none of that. No, when an aunt died, Moma just took
over for her, and kept the color for the relative job. Of course nowadays, this lil tattoo is just part of
the Casteless marking of dwarves in Ostwick. Those who are Andrastian don’t have them, nor do
they have the face brand. You go up into the hills on the mainland you won’t find this marking, but
here in the city? Just shake anyone’s hand who ain’t a noble and you’re sure to find six black spots.”

“But you’re the only one with two bands, right?”

“That’s right.”

“So if you ever had an heir, then…”

“My daughter has Moma’s ring. She doesn’t have Casteless tattoos, and she sure as hell doesn’t look
a thing like me. But I don’t have an heir to the Carta, Varric Tethras.”

“And why is that?”

“Because I’m going legitimate.”

The recorder clicked. Varric had stopped writing his eyes wide at Kallak’s last statement. Kallak
smiled, the same smile he would give rude customers, or a hit. The florist got up from his chair and
held the back door open.

Varric shoved his equipment back into his bag, quickly moving to leave the office. Kallak closed the
door and locked it, putting his hand on the other dwarf’s shoulder. With absolute silence, he walked
him to the front door. A black car was waiting outside, the streetlights not penetrating the darkened
glass. Kallak stopped at the front door, nodding at the driver who was waiting outside. Varric, for his part, tried to look normal.

“I haven’t told anyone that last statement. Not even my daughter. Varric,” Kallak smiled again. “I’m trusting you to tell the truth about that little part. Do we have a deal.”

“Kallak, I don’t know if anyone has told you this.” Varric shook the florist hand. “When you smile like that, I get the feeling you don’t like me very much.”

“I know.” Kallak opened the door.

Varric stepped outside, telling the driver his address. The driver opened the door and shut it behind the writer, leaving without a single word. Kallak watched the car leave the street. The lights above the bakery were still on, but when the car made a left turn, they turned off. Kallak waited a minute, watching the darker shadows move.

Bull walked outside, not bothering to check the road for traffic. He smiled and waved at Kallak. He had a bunch of letters under his arm, was busy putting them into the post office box at the corner. When he finished he came up next to Kallak, who had pulled out a pack of cigarettes and started smoking.

“Those things will kill you, you know.”

“You sound like my daughter when you say that.” Kallak offered a smoke, Bull took one. The Ben Hassrath took a lighter out from his jean pocket.

“How’s the bakery.” Kallak asked.

“It’s getting there, how’re your flowers?” Bull’s eye twinkled.

“Growing, not sure what will bloom.”

The Not Baker finished off his smoke and waved goodbye to the Not Florist. For the time, Ostwick was quiet, waiting.
Chapter End Notes

Second chapter before my mini-hiatus. I'll be back late/mid-June, posting on Thursday/Friday nights. I've just got an internship and all my group assignments/ final papers due this week.
Cassandra was talking with Bull in front of his bakery. It was raining, but they were fine under the awning. She watched a gangly boy in a large hat run to Kallak’s floral shop. She raised an eyebrow at the Vashoth. He shrugged, then waved the Seeker goodbye as she went across the road.

The boy was still sopping wet, but he didn’t seem to have noticed. Cassandra went to the refreshment stand, and got herself a cup of coffee. Kallak walked out of the cooler room, trimmers in one hand, white roses in the other.

“Cassandra?” Kallak quickly hid the white roses behind his back. “You’re here early.”

“Hello, Kallak.” Cassandra took a sip of the coffee. It was fairly average, but on a day like this it was exactly what she needed.

“I- I have a couple of phone calls first. In the office.” Kallak didn’t move. It was at this moment that the boy from before walked into the room.

“Hello.” he said, his pale blue eyes catching Cassandra off guard.

“Hello.” Cassandra replied. “Do you- have we met?”

“Maybe, but you don’t remember.” He shrugged. “No one remembers.”

“Cassandra, this is Cole. Cole, go get your flowers. I’ve got to- make phone calls.” Kallak walked out, bumping into the doorframe before leaving. Cole stood there looking at Cassandra for a little longer. When it was getting uncomfortable, he left to go into the cooler room.

She went over to the display counter, saw that the labels on the honey were hand written, usually with a little scribble on them. A soft melody played from the little radio behind the counter. She glanced back over her shoulder, saw that the boy- Cole- was focused on his task. She looked back at the display, and found what she wanted. Stock paper that was pressed with flowers. The one’s on the counter were small flowers, blue petals with yellow centers.
“Forget-me-nots.” Cassandra jumped at the voice. Cole was looking at her again.

“Sorry?”

“The flower on the card. They’re called forget-me-nots.”

“I see…” Cassandra took another sip of her coffee. She didn’t know how long she stood there, looking at all of the cards. Halfway through she realized that the shelves were filled with even more.

Cole hummed along to the radio, the station set for something classical. An orlesian noble had come in, wearing an everyday mask. He had stood in front of Cole, saying nothing. The boy nodded and then went into the cooler room. Cassandra watched the exchange; not a single word was said. The noble overpaid, barely getting the words ‘thank you’ out of his mouth. When he left Cassandra saw that the man was crying under his mask. An elderly Vashoth came in some time afterwards. She picked up a single jar of honey and the forget me not card. She paid Cole in ribbons, a soft pale yellow, sun bleached to nearly be white. They left, standing a little taller than before. Each customer that came in never said a word. Yet each one left happier than before.

“How are you doing that?” Cassandra finally asked.

“They come in to be happy. Kallak says I help, but I have to work hard at it.”

“What do you mean, how do you work hard at it?”

“It used to be so easy,” Cole voice became distant, “all he had to do was say the word, and the problem would be solved. But it’s harder now, having to follow the rules. Sometimes he thinks of going back to the shadows, letting the blood flow between his fingers. But then they come for him, fire and light. He feels bad, but not for the killing. He hates the guilt, now that he has someone worth protecting.” Cole looked directly at Cassandra.

“It’s not his fault. They keep coming for him because of the lyrium.”

“What did you just say?” Cassandra felt the hair on the back of her neck rise.
“That’s enough Cole.” Kallak said, leaning on the doorway.

Cassandra looked at Kallak, then back at Cole. The boy had already gone back to work, the fifth bouquet being tied with the faded ribbon from before. Kallak quirked an eyebrow at Cassandra, then started to walk outside. Cassandra followed, throwing away the now empty coffee cup.

“You’re not wearing the vest.” Kallak said, his thumbs tucked into his belt.

“You’re still not wearing any shoes.” Cassandra looked up, noticing that the rain from this morning was gone, but dark clouds still loomed overhead.

“Well, hate to tell you that I don’t wear shoes. Family heritage and all that.”

“Hmm. And where exactly are you taking me?”

“Just down the road, have to check in on something.”

“Something? Or someone?”

“You have a warrant?” Kallak grinned at Cassandra, who gave the dwarf a mock glare. He laughed, a robin in a tree flying away at the noise.

“I’m kidding, we’re in a public place after all.” Kallak didn’t stop grinning at Cassandra. She felt herself blushing, and turned her head away.

The two walked in comfortable silence for some time. The ancient oak in the middle of the Alienage started to loom over them, its branches blocking out the gloom from the clouds. Cassandra found that the further they got from the College, the more propaganda posters she saw. Most were dated, depicting pictures of the Former First Enchanter, or slogans of the Guard before Cullen took over. She did however see newer ones, Ostwick blue with gold lettering. “The People’s Noble”, “Alex of Ostwick”, “Change for Peace”. There was still spray paint everywhere. the Red Jenny symbol was the most notable, an arrow connecting the a ‘R’ and ‘J’ together.
“Kallak,” Cassandra started. “Where exactly are we going.”

“Well,” Kallak scratched at his goatee and crossed the street. “I helped this one girl when she was growing up. She’s a friend of my daughter’s see. Not a mage, but she’s got a fancy College education. She wanted to talk with me and Tael. Tael already went over there, but I’m running a little late.”

“Was she under your scholarship, here in Ostwick.”

“You could say that, but my scholarship is reserved for dwarves, mostly. We’re here.”

The building was an old Chantry, converted for a local law building. It stood across from a short boulevard; this led directly to the Vhenadahl. It was free from graffiti, however the windows had personalized decorations. The third floor windows were covered in the same blue and gold posters Cassandra had seen from before. Kallak pushed the front door open, and waited. Cassandra walked through, Kallak closing the door behind her. The main office was filled with public press, cameras and reporters hovering around welcome desk and elevator to the right. Kallak veered left towards the stairs, Cassandra following. One reporter stood by the stairs, but she recognized the red hair and beard.

“Arlof.” Kallak clasped his hand on the younger dwarf’s shoulder.

“Cousin! My my, you’re a bit late aren’t you? Oh, hello Seeker!” Arlof smiled at the two of them, but the moment the word ‘Seeker’ slipped out of his mouth the horde they had avoided swiveled towards the three of them.

“Dammit, Arlof.” Kallak grabbed Cassandra’s hand, “I’ll talk later!” The two sprinted up the stairs, Kallak guiding them. Without shoes on, his footsteps were quiet. Meanwhile Cassandra’s shoes echoed on the hard marble floor. Kallak opened a door and yanked her through, quickly closing it. Cassandra found herself crouching, trying to avoid the cleaning supplies in the storage room. Kallak had his tipped ear pressed to the door, his breathing already steady and slow. A few seconds passed, but Kallak waited a few moments longer ear to the door.

“We’ll be out in a few,” Kallak whispered, “comfortable?”

“Incredibly.” Cassandra deadpanned. She was shushed by the dwarf, the two staring at each other. Eventually Cassandra caved in and looked away.
“I fucking hate those bastards.” Kallak muttered.

“You have no idea.” Cassandra whispered back.

“Like a bunch of vultures, wanting a piece of the action.”

“Creating drama for the sake of it.”

“At least with bards you get a funny tune out of it. They don’t even have the decency to dress up for us.”

Cassandra had to cover her mouth to stop from laughing. Kallak finally took his ear off the door to see the woman like that, he got a wicked gleam in his eye and continued.

“If I get told the world is ending for the third time this week, can they at least throw in a jig? A limerick? What ever happened to the pizzazz of reporting, huh? Did it go the same way that privacy did? Where’s the carrier pigeon, the crow messengers? If I wanted to know what the nobility are eating I’d go digging through their garbage myself!” Kallak stopped when Cassandra snorted, unable to hide her laughter anymore.

“Are you laughing at me, Seeker Pentaghast?” Kallak asked, a cocky grin on his face. Cassandra shook her head, not trusting herself to talk.

“Well, I hope not.” Kallak started to giggle, “Though I am pretty funny looking. Don’t even gotta open my mouth to get a laugh.”

Good gracious my dear,” Kallak had put on a terrible Fereldan accent, “Is that a short elf? No my dear it is hairless dwarf!

“Hon hon hon, monsieur,” Kallak had swapped to Orlesian, though it was hard to tell from him holding back his snickering “Why do you not wear shoes? Is it to feel the Stone?”
“People don’t actually say that to you.” Cassandra whispered.

“You’d be surprised what people say when they think you can’t hear them.” Both had stopped laughing at that.

Kallak was looking at Cassandra, his eyes a pale green. She hadn’t noticed it before, but now she couldn’t stop looking. The large scar across his cheeks and nose was less threatening in the dim light. It must have hurt when he got it.

“Not as much as you’d think.” Kallak whispered. Cassandra realized she said the last part out loud.

“How did you get it?”

“My daughter.” Kallak scratched at his nose bridge, or what was left of it. “She was mixing some paint together, that Vitaar stuff. She had a bunch of it on her arms, and neither of us knew it was dangerous for folk who’re… anyways. She took a good bit of it and put it on me. She probably thought it would protect me or something. I didn’t take it off when it started to sting, figured that was how it was supposed to feel.”

“What happened next?”

“I passed out. Woke up in some healer’s facility. Saare was so scared, she thought she killed me. Lost a good chunk of my nose-” Kallak pointed at the burn, how it caved inward. “-But we learned our lesson. Vitaar is NOT for dwarves.” Kallak tried to laugh it off.

Cassandra suddenly felt guilty. She came into his small floral shop, had demanded answers for something that Kallak didn’t do. And she still came back, asking about his personal life. What she learned was that Kallak was a father, had tried so hard to raise a Vashoth mage. He was covered in scars, some in Vallaslin ink, some Casteless tattoos, and then there was the scar on his nose. A simple mistake, but it had left him disfigured. If she hadn’t been told she would have assumed it was something with the Carta. Cassandra put her hand on his face, her thumb tracing the edges of the chemical burn.

Kallak didn’t move, barely breathing. Slowly his eyes fluttered closed and he let out a jagged breath. He cupped Cassandra’s hand with his, his left thumb moving in a similar motion to hers. She saw the six black spots, it’s twin bands. One black, one gold. Cassandra knew that the mark was for someone in the Carta, part of the Cadash House. It was probably Kallak’s oldest scar, but she wasn’t close
enough to the man to ask about it. The dwarf clearly didn’t want to talk about it yet. He looked starved for affection, the way he held her hand closer to his face. But it was gentle, unassuming. It made Cassandra’s heart ache, her body instinctively leaning forward.

Kallak opened up his eyes and saw Cassandra looking at him. He held her gaze, the burn growing red, a blush? He looked away and cleared his throat, turning the door knob. The hallway was empty, the two cautious as they came out of their hiding spot. Kallak brushed his goatee down with his hand, Cassandra straightening her sports jacket. A door slammed open, an elven woman and a younger human woman came out into the hallway.

“Tael, I told you not to put those posters out!”

“I didn’t do it, Little One.”

“Don’t you ‘Little One’ me! I told you! I didn’t want any help with this election!” The woman ran a delicate hand through her grey hair. The styled bob was braided back, the bottom coming loose from it’s braids. It was a Fereldan style, however Cassandra had only seen it on governors and lords.

“Alex, I did not put up those posters. You can thank the locals for that. Now if you asked who designed them... That’s was Shokrakar son.”

“Then perhaps you might explain why all those reporters are down stairs.”

“You might have to ask Arlof that, Starshine.” Kallak called out

His bare feet didn’t make any noise on the marble floor. The gray haired woman turned towards the dwarf, Cassandra recognizing her as Alex Trevelyan. She relaxed at seeing the older man, but only slightly. The red headed elf- Tael- crossed her arms, the tattered hoodie out of place for the offices.

“You're late, Old Man.” Tael narrowed her eyes. “What is she doing here?”

“Tael. Alex.” Kallak nodded at both of the women. Alex knelt down and gave him a hug, slightly pulling him off of his feet. The dwarf chuckled, squeezing once before gently patting the woman on the back.
“It’s so good to see you, Uncle Kallak.”

*Uncle??* Cassandra felt a cold sweat run down her back.

Chapter End Notes

Y’all get two chapters b/c I'm... feeling guilty. We're going back to our regularly scheduled posting after these updates.
Cassandra stood outside of the private office of Alex Trevelyan. She was scolding Kallak and Tael, but for what she couldn’t quite make out. The room had been silenced, no doubt with magic, as the walls were made of windows, the blinds open. The elven woman, Tael, was unreadable. Kallak, while still calm, at least show a little amusement at whatever the conversation was about. The Noble was becoming more frustrated by the minute.

Cassandra was handed a take away cup of coffee, vanilla creamer filling her nostrils. She gladly took the cup, giving a small smile at the gesture. An antivan woman in a puffy shirt stood next to her, a clipboard resting in the crook of her arm, her now free hand holding a phone to her ear.

“I understand that the Marquee does not think that Ms Trevelyan is suited for the position, but I would remind him that the only reason he is having trouble with Guilds and Unions is because he publicly sided with the current Teryn. A Teryn which made vast cuts to infrastructure, harming the very people he represents in the court… That would be wise of you… So shall I put him down for a donation then? How does 600 royals sound?... 450 and a photo op will do nicely. Have a lovely evening.” The Antivan ended the call, turning her attention to Cassandra.

“Forgive me, but Ms Trevelyan didn’t say anything about Kallak having a bodyguard. Josephine Montilyet, at your service.” A manicured hand reached out.

“Cassandra Pentaghast.” She said, shaking the woman’s hand. “I’m not his bodyguard.”

“Oh? Then a girlfriend, perhaps?”

“Seeker Pentaghast.” Cassandra deadpanned. “Kallak of Ostwick is a person of interest for a… Cold Case.”

“I see. Strange.” Josephine looked at her clipboard, and scratched something out, only to write something else over it.

“What’s so strange, if you don’t mind me asking.”
“Ms Trevelyan did not tell me Mr Kallak last name is all. She simply referred to him as ‘Uncle Kallak’. Perhaps that has to do with his relationship with Tael of Ostwick…”

“What can you tell me about her?” Cassandra took a sip of the coffee. The creamer was incredibly sweet, too much for her taste.

“Only that the woman took Ms Trevelyan in when she was young. Apparently it was Ms Tael who had taught her how to use a sword and dagger- but she stressed that it was Mr Kallak who taught her when to do so. An interesting pair.” Josephine turned around at the sound of a thump.

Cassandra looked in the office as well. Tael had sunk a twisted dagger into the desk, Alex looking triumphant. Kallak was in the process of dragging his hand across his face, his fingers catching on the chemical burn on his nose. Alex leaned forward, and while the room was silenced, it was obvious the younger woman was saying ‘Ha Ha’, sarcastically at the seething elf. The main office had gone incredibly quiet, most of the clerks watching the scene unfold. Kallak walked over to the interior window, and closed the blinds. The room remained quiet until Josephine coughed into her fist.

“Seeker Pentaghast,” Josephine leveled a neutral face at Cassandra. “Do you happen to know The Nightingale?”

“I do…” Cassandra said, cautious for a moment. The younger woman sighed and her expression softening.

“Thank goodness! She is a dear friend, and told me that I could help if I came to Ostwick. At first I was afraid, perhaps I had done something wrong at the embassy. Leliana is such a wonderful person, but she’s always thinking about her work, even when she gets on to me for being a workaholic. I hoped that- I’m sorry, perhaps I should start from the beginning?”

Cassandra laughed, and let the younger woman start over. It turned out that Josephine had met Leliana during her time in Orlais, when she was working as the Antivan Ambassador. They were close friends, but Leliana had warned Josephine that things were changing. Josephine had asked Leliana to keep her in mind, so when she got a call that Ostwick needed her, the young woman dropped everything to come here. She had met Alex at the end of one of her cases and the beginning of her fame. When Alex made her campaign official, Leliana had called Josephine, asked her to get close to Alex.

“… It turned out that Alex- sorry, Ms Trevelyan, didn’t have a campaign manager! I’ve been busy every since. It’s been chaotic, but who knows, it might be worth it in the end.”
“Do you believe in Alex Trevelyan?” Cassandra asked

“Well… I’ve only been here for year, in Ostwick. On top of that I’ve been secluded to the embassy or the Law District but-” Josephine looked around the room and then pointed at a clerk. “That man there was unable to pay for his child’s schooling fees. He had to choose on whether to send his child to the Chantry for magic lessons, or abandon him on the streets. Ms Trevelyan represented him in his case, now his child is able to go to the public schools and has a mage tutor who comes every day to give lessons. That woman over there lost her son in the mines, but the company wouldn’t let her keep her son’s pension. Now she does, along with companies health insurance. Ms Trevelyan can be… idealistic. But those two cases were done in the last two weeks.

“Imagine what she could do if she was Teryn. Or even as a Senator in the Free Marches!” Josephine sighed, a distant look in her eyes. Cassandra gave the woman a soft smile.

“Josephine, did Leliana tell you why she wanted you close to Alex Trevelyan?”

“Well… no. Why, is there something I should know?” Josephine tilted her head at Cassandra. The Seeker gave a small smile and shook her head no. Tael exited the office, Kallak holding the door open. Alex called out for Josephine, who stood up and walked into the room. Kallak cleared his throat, and jerked his head, as if to tell Cassandra to come in. She stared right back and took a sip of the incredibly sweet coffee.

Instead of sighing or storming off, Kallak continued to hold the door open. The two of them refused to budge, but when Cassandra grimace at the coffee, the dwarf snorted. Cassandra rolled her eyes and stood up, tossing the empty cup into a bin. She walked into the office, and scoffed at Kallak’s mock bow as he closed the door behind them.

Alex and Josephine had started without them, going through a list of sponsors and potential high brow voters. On the whiteboard behind the desk was a district map of Ostwick. The center island was split into three sections, the eastern peninsula in two, which were each broken into five smaller parts. The western peninsula was split evenly into three. Cassandra assumed it was to correlate with the mines in Ostwick. The remaining land which connect the two peninsula was considered its own section. Every section was a different color, Blue and Gold. While the gold on the board seemed to be more, Cassandra knew that the blue was concentrated in more heavily populated areas. A single spot of blue was in the middle island, surrounded by a sea of gold.

Kallak was leaning next to the door, his head down and tucked into his chest. His breathing was even, and slowing down by the second. Cassandra had a suspension that he was pretending to be asleep but the more she looked at him, the less sure she was. Josephine had finished her list with
Alex; Alex erased a blue spot in the board and colored it gold. It was miniscule, but the ashen haired woman seemed proud. Josephine left the office, Kallak not moving as the Antivan left.

“So, you’re Seeker Pentaghast.” Alex voice was softer than Cassandra expected. Most nobles today kept an edge to their voice, even in private conversations.

“I am.” Cassandra said. Alex was nearly her height, only a few inches shorter. In fact if she had to guess, Alex was probably only an inch shorter than Cullen.

“Commissioner Rutherford informed me that I might get a visit from you.” The younger woman absentmindedly tucked her hair behind her ear when saying Cullen’s title. “He didn’t, however, tell me that you would accuse my Uncle Kallak of a crime he didn’t commit.”

“I am not accusing Mr Kallak of anything at the moment.”

“So you deny coming into his establishment and demanding access to the shop?”

“I do not-”

“You admit to demanding to see his goods then?”

“Now hold on.”

“Not only did you try to pull rank on an official of this city, but threatened a civilian in his own store, even to go so far as physical intimidation?”

“I did no such thing!”

“Mr Kallak has visual evidence to prove otherwise, Seeker Cassandra Pentaghast.”

“Starshine, I’m not pressing charges against her.” Kallak piped in, his head still down.

Alex stopped talking. She relaxed her posture, going from a grounded position of a warrior into a
more relaxed position of a noble. Cassandra eyes widened, realizing what just happened. Kallak grunted as he push off the wall and moved to stand next to Alex. He was beaming, a pride that was usually reserved for someone who just won the lottery. The dwarf’s shoulders came to the younger woman’s elbow, but it didn’t seem to matter.

“Seeker, allow me to introduce you to my first alumni. Alexandra Maria Dawn Susannah Trevelyan. The People’s Noble.” Kallak was grinning ear to pointed ear.

“It’s just Alex, actually.” she held out her hand, “I am sorry for that small display, but I had to be sure of something.” Cassandra still stunned, shook Alex hand.

“Alec here is of course an old family friend. Well, I say “old”- known her since she was a lil tike. Hell, it’s just like it was yesterday that she decided to climb onto the Vhenadahl and put a-”

“Uncle Kallak!” Alex face grew red at the older man’s rambling. Cassandra sat down in one of the chairs, Kallak laughing at the younger woman’s obvious embarrassment.

“You’ve still got a few tells, Starshine.” Kallak wagged a callused finger, eyes crinkled and still beaming at Alex. “Still, don’t expect you to be a real rogue. You’re a Champion of the People!”

“Well, that all aside, I wish to speak to Seeker Cassandra in private. Uncle Kallak, could you…”

“Course! I’ll wait outside. Cassandra.” With that the dwarf left, Josephine waiting outside to ask him a few questions. Cassandra watched for a second longer, noticed how the warm and welcoming attitude disappeared when Kallak left the office. She recognized the disgruntled look he was giving Josephine, his answers short and brief.

“Commissioner Rutherford said you were looking into a cold case, one that went hot roughly two weeks ago.” Alex had her back turned to Cassandra, going through a file cabinet. Her Ostwick blue blouse was tucked into loose grey slacks, a golden belt bringing the outfit together.

“You can call him Cullen, if you want.” Cassandra turned her attention back to Alex. “You two are close, aren’t you?”

Alex didn’t pause in her movements, but again she tucked some her hair behind her ear. She turned around with four folders and put them on the desk. She sat down at her desk and wrote a brief note
before slipping it into one of the folders.

“What makes you say that?”

“Every time you mention him, you tuck your hair behind your ear. A common twitch, most do it when they are attached to what or whomever they are talking about.” Cassandra leaned back and went on. “During your announcement for the election, it was Cullen who escorted you out, rather than one of his officers.”

“Anything else?” Alex was trying to keep a neutral face. It would have worked on anyone who wasn’t a Seeker.

“Cullen told me about you.”

“What? He can’t have! We’ve only had two dates and he- wait.” Cassandra smiled at Alex, watching the younger woman go from bewildered to regret. “He didn’t actually say anything, did he.”

“You’re not the only one able to get information from unsuspecting victims.” Cassandra said.

“I… I see.” Alex gave a soft laugh and moved the four folders closer to Cassandra. “Regardless, I think you’ll find these Missing Persons files to be helpful. Cullen is a good commissioner, but a terrible liar. I assume your John Doe is a male dwarf, but other than that you don’t have any other information?”

“This is off the record?” Cassandra took the four folders and opened the first folder to a beardless dwarf file.

“I took these cases, but since the campaign I will be unable to do them personally. Some of the clerks are looking into them, but they are busy with other cases, such as insurance claims and educational rights for mages and elves. So yes, off the record.”

“The John Doe was missing his left thumb. The tattoos on his remaining fingers indicate that he was an alchemist. Do any of these files match those descriptions?” Cassandra watched Alex face, hoping that she would react different to how Matthew Cleaver had. She was not wrong, but the woman’s reaction somehow made Cassandra gut drop even further.
“For the past fifteen years, former Carta members have been trying to leave and become legitimate. If anything, the thumb removal could imply that your John Doe did have affiliations, but whether he was killed because he was Carta, or someone who had left, is hard to tell. The only reason I know this is because the first few dwarves who did leave were killed shortly after. No one was able to find out how or why, officially.”

“And un-officially?”

“The murders stopped. Most would just say it was because the Carta takes care of their own; I think it was something else, however. But I was still a teenager back then. Uncle Kallak- I’m sorry. It’s not my place to talk behind Kallak’s back.”

“I was informed that Tael of Ostwick raised you.”

“Yes. She took me in, when my father… Well I lived with her. Kallak lived next door, with his daughter. We’re still good friends, Saare and I.”

“Saare? That’s a Qunlat word, isn’t it?”

“An abbreviation of ‘Saarebas’. Kallak didn’t know any better back then, and it was the only thing she answered to- that is if you believe what my caretaker would say.” Alex tucked a piece of hair behind her ear again, this time at the mention of Tael.

“But is- I mean is Saare a...”

“Is she a Qunari mage?” Cassandra nodded. “Yes. Her full name is Saare Adaar.”

Chapter End Notes

Next one chapter up Thursday/Friday!
Kallak had waited outside of Alex office for Cassandra, after having answered her new campaign managers questions. Josephine had been informed he was ‘Kallak Cadash’, but had changed the record on her notes. She had other questions as well, some of them not all that strange. One however stood out; It appeared that Josephine was under the assumption he and Tael were married.

Cassandra had finished her meeting with Alex, and after a short chat with the soon to be Teryn, they left. The overbearing press were nowhere to be seen, but Kallak had them use the stairs exit, rather than the front entrance, just in case. Cassandra had a travel briefcase with her now; Kallak suspected that Alex gave it to her so the four case files weren’t in plain view. Kallak gave a short nod at no one in particular, making a mental note to thank Alex for that. It had just been a small idea to give Cassandra the actual file for the dead transporter, but for it to happen and have no obvious connection to Kallak was wonderful.

They walked in relative silence the entire way back to the floral shop. The sun had finally come out, after the downpour from the morning. A small pebble caught itself between Kallak’s bare toes, but it didn’t bother him. He had gotten used to it after years of wearing Dalish leggings everywhere. He didn’t think he could wear boots without feeling trapped. Cassandra was incredibly straightforward, not even looking at the streets as they passed.

“Sun came out.” Kallak winced at his own voice. Cassandra looked up and hummed an agreement.

“You know,” Kallak continued. “The Floating Market usually isn’t crowded this time of the day. All the tourists are gone and the only shops and food boats open are the locals.” Kallak looked up at Cassandra, then back down at the sidewalk.

“Oh? I’ve never been down there.” Cassandra looked then crossed the street.

“Could show you around, if you wanted.” Kallak said

“Hmm.”

“There’s this one boat that sells some good whetstones. Does ‘em engraved and sometimes even has them shaped into animals and what not. A fish shop that if you know to bring Fereldan gold coins
will give you ol’ fashioned fish and chips. The kind in newspaper cone.”

“Those are a health hazard, the ink seeps into the food and can lead to lead poisoning.”

“You can just say, ‘I don’t want to go’. It’s fine.” Kallak grumbled, crossing his arms. The pebble was starting to irritate him.

Kallak had walked a few steps ahead before realizing that Cassandra had stopped. He turned around to look at her. She had this look on her face that Kallak had seen too often. She was confused, frustrated even. He took a deep breath, exhaling through his nose, and waited for her to talk.

“Why are you being nice?” Cassandra’s grip on the travel briefcase tightened; her knuckles going white.

“Should I stop?”

“No! It’s just… You have no reason, no motive to be nice to me. I stormed into your shop and demanded answers. I’ve been coming into your shop nearly everyday and continuing to question you about your work.”

“Well, you do have a warrant. By law I’ve gotta answer your questions.”

“That doesn’t mean you have to be- When we went to College! You took me with you. Why?”

“I didn’t know how long that meeting was gonna go. Figured it would be better to have you come with me than have you waiting in my shop.”

“Most people would have let me wait.”

“I’m not most people.” Kallak flexed his toes, dislodging the pebble. Cassandra was still looking at him. It was obvious this wasn’t the response she was expecting.

“No, I suppose you are not.” Cassandra ducked her head down and started to walk again. Kallak
pursed his lips, then cleared his throat to get the woman’s attention.

“I suppose you’re not like most Seekers.” Kallak glanced at Cassandra’s back. “Course, never met one before.”

“Your daughter.” Cassandra began. She gave a heavy sigh and then turned around. “She’s a Qunari, isn’t she.”

“...Alex tell you that?”

“She did.”

“Well, it’s not exactly wrong. I assume her parents were Qunari, but Saare... She’s different. She’s Vashoth, and a mage at that. I tried to raise her myself, but I don’t know anything about magic. I had to get help, so I-.” Kallak stopped. He was going into dangerous territory, telling this woman about Saare. Then an idea struck him.

“Look. If you want to know about my daughter, come to Floating Market with me.”

“What?” Cassandra seemed shocked.

“It’s not a date!” Kallak said quickly, “It’s just- uh. You should see more of this town. I’m not the most handsome of tour guides but, well, I live here. Have for a long time now.” Kallak could feel his palms get sweaty, regretting every word the longer it took Cassandra to reply.

“I… I would like that. Yes.” Cassandra grip on the briefcase loosening. “But, not today, I have-”

“That’s fine.” Kallak smiled up at her. “Just let me know when is a good day for you. You know where I work.”

“Oh I couldn’t, the shop probably needs you.”

“Sera and Cole are pretty good at their jobs, and Blackwa- shit, Thom is an adult. They’ll be fine
Cassandra smiled back, and nodded. The two walked the rest of the way back to The Snapdragon. Cassandra got into her car and left without coming into the store. Cole was handing the last bouquet to a Dalish customer. He was wearing a faded band shirt today, and was waving Kallak to come over.

“Uncle!! Uncle Vhenallin! Come here!” The young hunter quickly switched to a mix of elven and Orlasian. Kallak was barely able to keep up with his fast talking.

“Uncle Vhenallin, another hunter has come to take me back, but wishes to stay until first snow. Is it okay if they stay with me in the apartment?” The hunter was darker now than when he first arrived, his vallaslin showing more than ever.

“Of course Da’len. Do they need a job or are they fine working on the docks?”

“I do not know, they did not tell me, they’ve been seasick since arriving. I will ask. Is it true what they say? That woman is a Seeker?”

“She is, but I don’t think she will be coming back to investigate me.”

“It looked like you want her to come back. Do you like the Shemlen?”

“I’m not sure yet, Da’len. She’s headstrong and stubborn. Not unlike some of our elders.”

“But Uncle, you are an elder! You are Dalish!”

“Some might not think so. My face does not have our people’s mark. My skull is covered in Dwarven markings, and my body is small.”

“Those elders are wrong,” the hunter slumped over his bike handles, his flowers jostling at the sudden movement. “You should be considered Uncle Hahren, not Uncle Vhenallin. I should talk to the Keeper. The Keeper likes you, most Hunters miss you!”
“Most, but not all. The longer I stay away, the less our Hunters remember about me.”

“You should come back with us then! Just for the First Snow, and then you can stay at the camp for a month!”

“Da’len, my daughter comes back home for the winter-”

“She can come too! She can get the People’s Mark and we can all-”

“Alasar. No. The Keeper is already putting the clan in enough danger letting young hunters like you stay here for summer. I will not come back to the clan.”

Alasar ears fell, his entire posture changed. Cole had left at the beginning of the conversation, making them the only two on the street. Kallak sighed and pinched his nose.

“I will not come back… This winter. Perhaps when all the elders who did not want me to stay have gone with Falon’Din, then maybe I will come back.”

“Really?!!” Alasar immediately cheered up. “You would bring your daughter too?”

Kallak laughed and held up his hands in surrender. Alasar yelped, making the older dwarf shake his head at the youth’s enthusiasm. He waved goodbye as the hunter left. Tael walked outside of her tattoo parlour and lit a cigarette. Her hood was up, yellow eyes reflecting the lit bud. Kallak raised an eyebrow at the woman, who offered him a cigarette. He took one and asked for a lighter. Tael lit his, and the two took a long drag together.

“Still freaks me out your eyes reflect like mine.” Tael whispered.

“Ah well, can’t help it. Like my ears.” Kallak said, wiggling them for effect. Tael elbowed him.

“That assistant of Alex ask you anything weird.”
“Asked if we were married.”

“Why?”

“Turns out Alex told her my actual last name. Woman must have assumed I took yours once we got hitched.”

“You straightened that out, right?”

“Sure. Still, pretty funny though.”

“Humans. Always think the strangest things.” Tael finished her cigarette, only to pull out another one and light it.

“Humans don’t get the whole ‘Bastard’ name thing, Tael. Let it go.” Kallak took another drag, trying to puff smoke rings and failing miserably.

“Alex gave that woman the files.” It was matter of fact, not a question. Kallak hummed an answer.

“So she shouldn’t be back to harass us.”

“Hm.”

“Think she’ll come back anyway.”

“Mm Hm.”

“Why the fuck would she come back? We don’t have anything to hide.”

“Tael, my shop is a front for lyrium smuggling. You have a felony record that’d make the Black Fox blush. And the fucking baker across the street is a gods forsaken Ben Hassrath agent. There’s plenty
of reason to come back.”

“You asked her out on a date, didn’t you.”

“It’s not a date,” groaned Kallak. He flicked his cigarette bud and refused a second one. “It’s just being nice.”

“I can’t believe you.” Tael snickered. She doubled over trying to keep herself from laughing.

“What’s so fucking funny?” Kallak snapped

“Burok owes me 10 crowns.”

“You put a bet on- How the hell are we friends?? Was there a pool?”

“Oh yeah. The baker is in on it too.”

“You made a betting pool.” Kallak deadpanned. “... Spit it out, what were the odds.”

“Well,” Tael finished her second cigarette and pulled out a third one. She was dragging it out, so much that Kallak snatched the lighter and lit her cigarette for her. “There were two candidates. Thom Rainer, your new employee, and that Seeker. More money was put down if it be you or one of them that made the first move.”

“...And you didn’t think to let me in on it?” Tael snickered, green and yellow eyes reflecting the lit cigarette. “Fucker. I could’ve won the whole damn thing.”

“Nah. You’d have lost.”

“How’s that?”
“You’d have bet that nothing was gonna happen. But I knew. That Bull knew. Hell, Sera was rooting for Thom but eventually she switched sides too.”

“Of course she did. Thom is straight.”

“Really?”

“Oh shut up, I don’t wanna hear it.”

“Your taste in men was always off. Shame though, between the two of you that would have been quite a beard burn.”

Kallak and Tael looked down the street they have lived on for nearly 30 years. They continued talking until Tael was done with her pack of cigarettes. Ostwick’s docks could be heard from here, but the street was quiet.

Chapter End Notes

I love communication!!! But these two are so thick headed!!! fuck!!!
Kallak was wearing his bulletproof vest today. He wrapped his green handkerchief around his neck, making sure it covered the front of his buttoned shirt and neck. He had asked Thom to come in a little earlier than usual, hoping that he’d pass this little test. If not, Sera was going to have to find a new housemate. A knock at his office door caught his attention; he finished the call with the transport for today and let the knocker in.

“You wanted to see me, Kallak?” Thom didn’t step into the office, but was rather relaxed.

“Thom, come on in.” Kallak put down his pen and leaned back in his chair. Thom took a seat in the only chair in the office, the beaten up couch in the corner still covered in Sera’s jackets.

“Thom, how much did Sera tell you about this job?”

“Just that it was a flower shop.”

“Nothing else? Nothing at all?”

“Should I be worried?” Thom guard went up, squinting at the dwarf.

“I’ll be honest, didn’t think Sera would want me to hire you unless you were okay with one minor detail.” Kallak cleared throat. “This shop is a front for the Carta.”

Thom didn’t say anything. Kallak watched as the man’s brow furrowed, his confusion and anger rising. Kallak didn’t move, sitting in his chair and leaning back with his hands in his lap. Thom stood up suddenly, pacing the room. His hair was down today, the long black strands slicked back. The dwarf thought it might be gel but quickly dropped the idea, realizing it was sweat and grease from whatever it is Thom does during the week.

He remembered his conversation with Tael last night. He suddenly hated himself for being so predictable in his taste of men and women. Black hair, pale eyes surrounded by dark circles, usually from a lack of sleep or too many bar fights. Strong hands, arms corded with muscle, shoulders that
know what it is to carry a weight on their shoulders. It used to be that the person was a little older than Kallak, the signs of age attractive. But as time went by they started getting closer to his age. Kallak was proud of the white and grey that was in his goatee, brushing it just so, the streaks outlining his chin and the corners of his mouth. Thom had grey at his temples, the strands barely noticeable right now. Cassandra kept her hair short, but Kallak remembers how she looked up close in the closet. The soft grey near her temples, only the roots there showing her age. She didn’t have deep crows feet like Tael but they were there. Soft, gentle. Her hands had calluses on them, probably from her gun. Thom was flexing his hands, the callus from his work at Sera’s house, repairing the deck and roof. Kallak closed his eyes and tilted his head back. He lost his train of thought, forgetting that Thom wasn’t pacing the room for no reason.

“What is it that you- what kind of front is this?” Thom nearly growled.

“Lyrium, almost exclusively.” Kallak answered, looking Thom in the eye. The other man hadn’t left yet. Good.

“Almost? What in the Maker’s name does ‘Almost’ mean?”

“Like most fronts, moneylending happens too. Don’t worry, your paycheck doesn’t come from that, you get paid through the legitimate business that goes on here.”

“Right. Anything else?”

“Like what.”

“People. Woman, children, guns, enchanted armor and the like. I don’t know, would you classify red lyrium or darkspawn blood as different?”

“I don’t smuggle people. If someone is wanting to get away from their problems, the Carta has protection clauses. As for enchantments or weaponry, the worst thing we’ll do is raw lyrium. None of that red shit and I’ve kinda made it a rule to stay the fuck out of Warden business. So no, no darkspawn blood every crosses my threshold; it kills every living thing it touches and this is a floral shop.”

“What happens if I report you.”

“Who the hell would believe you?”
“The College, or the Templar Force.”

“They’re our biggest buyers. In fact this front is the last stop before the lyrium reaches them. Those folk give the excuse that the rations they get from the Chantry and state government aren’t enough. So they look to us to fill in the gaps.”

“The Noble Congress then.”

“Half of them are in the Templar Force to begin with. The other half don’t give a flying rat’s ass about one front shop, and will laugh at you.”

“The Guard.”

“Sure, Commissioner Rutherford might listen. But an actual Guard? More likely they’ll report you to the head of the Carta, then you’ll be killed. You’re body will be dumped in the Deep Roads, so it would help to explain your death.”

“The People’s Noble then.”

“One, I raised her. Two, she knows not to touch the Carta in Ostwick, unless she wants to lose this election before it starts. Three, even if she did believe you, and she won’t, she’ll most likely blab to Commissioner Rutherford who won’t find anything here. Because again, I’m the last front for the College to get their goods. And state government makes it a rule not to mess with Chantry.”

“What about that woman, Seeker Pentaghast?”

“She’s Chantry. More likely she’ll shut down this store, but someone else on this street will become the new front, and they won’t be so nice about external officers poking their heads in. You’ll also be named in her report, but that’d happen regardless of who you told. Meaning a target is on your back.”

“The Wardens then!” Thom was getting desperate, but Kallak expected this to happen.

“Wardens are neutral. I’m not trading in people, or darkspawn blood. No enchanted crap, no guns,
so what I’m doing is harmless in their- sorry, your eyes.”

Thom crossed his arms, his anger from before deflating. He looked tired, as if this little surprise was the icing on the cake of one massive mistake. Kallak raised an eyebrow at the man.

“...Did you know that Sera was a Red Jenny?”

“I did. She actually got hired here because she needed an alibi. Told the guard that the scrawny elf covered in dirt was an employee, then she showed up the next day to work. Been here ever since.”

“Why does that not surprise me.” Thom chuckled, his exhaustion bleeding off of his body.

“Well, to be fair, Cole was a little more difficult. It’s a funny story now, but back then it was hell.”

“I bet,” Thom sat back down.

“I tell you we’re a front because I know you won’t tell anyone. Sure, we just went through all that, but be honest with yourself Thom. You’re not that kind of man.”

“I was once.”

“Doesn’t matter. You’re not anymore.” Thom flinched at that. Kallak made a mental note to look further into the man’s history. The two sat in relative silence for a while.

“...What happens now?”

“Well, one of two things. You can leave, find a new job, and never speak of this again. I won’t judge you, hell I’d might even be proud of you for that. You go back to whatever it is you were doing before, work on Sera’s house or Warden duties, I don’t care.

“Or… You keep working here. Deliveries are erratic, but on days that you work here and a shipment comes in, there’s a script that you’ll have to follow. I won’t say anything until you tell me your answer.”
Thom looked down at his feet. Kallak put his feet up on the desk, his Dalish leggings making no sound. The dwarf flexed his toes, waiting on the man to answer him. Thom finally cleared his throat and asked a question.

“My parole officer, Blackwall. He wants to move his bi-monthly check up to times I’m working here. Saturday lunch times. What would happen with that?”

“How does Blackwall conduct them?”

“Mostly asks a few questions, sometimes buys lunch. I go in for physicals and combat training the next week if he thinks it’s necessary.”

“That’ll be fine. You don’t ever deal with the smugglers anyway. Just have to deal with my face and make bouquets.”

“Then I want to keep working here.”

“Alright,” Kallak grunted as he got up from his desk and walked towards the cooler room. Thom followed, keeping his distance. “Well the first thing is that you’ll make one specific bouquet. White lilies and bluebonnets, these red ones here though. Don’t matter what you put with them, but it’s gotta to be white lilies and bluebonnets. If someone comes in and buys it, then just make another one to replace it. Usually we don’t get anyone who’s an officer. But if we do- and this is gonna include that Seeker- I’m not in. If they insist on seeing me, tell them they can come back later or make an appointment for the week. If they still haggle you about it, ask for a warrant. No warrant, no access, no answers to questions, nothing. If they have a warrant, then tell them to come back tomorrow, when I’m in.”

“And where will you be.”

“I’ll be in the greenhouse, the back of the cooler room will be open. Keep your door closed, rather not have a wind tunnel hurt the flowers. Any questions?”

“No, I think I got it.”
“Repeat it back at me then.”

“You’re not here, if they want to see you make an appointment. If they insist, ask for a warrant. If they have a warrant, tell them to come back tomorrow when you’re here. Make a bouquet of white lilies and red bluebonnets. They have to be displayed today, no matter what.”

“Good. Other than that, it’s a normal day Thom.” Kallak closed the cooler room door.

It was a relatively small shipment, the van that had The Snapdragon logo painted on it’s side was only ever used for this kind of work. Every front had its own van, a trait that Moma had given to them. Kallak kept it, remembering his grandmother personally checking the suspension on each of the vans. The dwarf tagged along for the shipment, the young transporter driving through the Alienage and College District. Just as they were driving out and passing the store, Kallak saw Cassandra. She was talking with Thom, who was leaning over the counter. The Warden conscript must have told a joke, or did something because Cassandra was laughing, her entire body relaxed. A pang of jealousy shot through him. It was gone as soon as the transporter turned the corner.

The drive was dull, the van pulling into the lower docking bay under the main tower for the College. Madame Vivienne was waiting, as she always does. Kallak got out of the car and watched his workers unloaded the cargo to her own goons.

“Those new Templars?”

“Yes, the Force is still in council choosing the next Knight Commander.”

“Hmm. It’s been some time since they went in to draw a name.”

“How very observant of you, my dear. I believe the count is at a year and seven months now.”

“Should I burn sage at the Chantry? Usually gets all the ghosts to leave so some real work can get done.”

“Knowing them, they’ll actually be even more lost without the spirits to guide their actions.”
Kallak chuckled, then snapped at a grunt for carelessly dropping a box on the ground. They jumped, their eyes wide and frightened at seeing Kallak standing there. Madame Vivienne studied her manicured nails, continuing on their conversation.

“Professor Pavus has made himself quite a few friends with the sisters. Apparently he had ordered ten different bouquets, all of them blooming to smell like an open morgue in the Hissing Wastes.”

“Really? Well, he and Saare will get on just fine when she comes back next month.”

“Apparently he purchased them all from a floral shop whose name was some terrible pun.”

“Well, that could be anyone in Ostwick. A business without a pun is heresy, especially in the Free Marches.”

“Yes, particularly those that are next to tattoo parlours. Or have been known to have a certain Vashoth biker gang that solicites in front of it.”

“Quite a mystery.” Kallak grinned, the enchanter not giggling. Vivienne never giggled, just smirked.

The two made more small talk, and when the goods were handed over, Kallak left with the van. They eventually made it back to the store, just as Thom was sweeping up and closing the shop. Kallak said goodnight to him, neither bringing up what had happened today.

Varric was leaning on the window display, his jacket actually buttoned up to stop the cold breeze. His red shirt, however, was still opened. The younger dwarf stood up as Kallak walked to the front door. The two didn’t talk until they were in Kallak’s office. Varric took of his jacket, Kallak unbuttoned his shirt and took off the bulletproof vest and then buttoned up his shirt again.

“So… The Seeker still comes around here?” Varric was pulling out his tape recorder and notepad, making himself comfortable.

“She does. That gonna be problem for you, Tethras?” Kallak sat in his chair opposite of the other dwarf, his back to the wall and eyes on the door.
“No, no trouble at all. Just so long as she doesn’t drag me away from my home again. Question me until she’s blue in the face and then get mad when I tell her I’m innocent.”

“Were you innocent?”

“Of course I was! Just because that lunatic read my book, doesn’t mean he got the idea from me! Hell, he could have gotten it from his textbooks, or made it up on his own. I’m not an accessory to arson.” Varric continued to mumble under his breath while he set up. The rest of the evening went relatively smoothly.

Kallak laid in his bed later that night, trying not to think about how Cassandra looked today. He had never seen her without her bullet proof vest. She had been laughing, was at ease with Thom. The jealousy came back in full force. The dwarf tried not to think about it, but he didn’t get any sleep for the rest of the night.

Chapter End Notes

This internship is keeping me really busy, so I haven’t been able to post as often as I want. Soz
“So you spent a few years in Orlais, but what happened when you got back?” Varric asked.

“What, like immediately after? Nothing much. Went from Cadash to Ostwick until Moma got ill.” Kallak said.

“Anything before that? Leaves quite a bit of time.”

“Well, could tell you how I met Tael...

Kallak had been back in Ostwick for four months. Moma was still pissed off he ran away, but she let him move around in the city limits without an escort. The Carta was still watching his every move, but he didn’t mind.

He was in the Floating Market, looking for a pleasure cruise. Kallak had started drinking Auntie’s tea twice a day, and it was starting to have an even bigger effect. For one, the small stubble that he used to be able to grow was coming in thicker, especially his sideburns. Kallak didn’t shave his sideburns to show off the growth, but he was starting to lose some of his hair on the top of his head. The slicked back ponytail was in fashion, but with a receding hairline and sideburns, it made it harder for people to want to sleep with him.

He found the ship he was looking for, Captain’s Daughter. He went down and pulled his head scarf turned handkerchief over his mouth and nose. He recognized two of the patrons, and five of the workers. He gave a short nod at the bouncer, a second cousin who knew better than to ask questions. Most of the girls working were elf or dwarven. A Vashoth whose height was probably closer to a giant was in the back, leaning on several pillows. They had an attractive human man leaning on their chest, the man wearing a golden harness and transparent pants. The Vashoth horns had been sawed off, only to be replaced with silver caps that looked like nuggalope horns. They were taking a drag from the hookah next to them, the smoke of lyrium and elfroot filling the main room.

The boat had two lower decks, the first an open orgy room, with most here just to get a hit and goggle at those who were brave (or paid) enough to have sex in the room. Various states of undress, Nobles and Orlesians wearing masks to obscure their faces from the lesser clientele. Kallak sat next
The decorated human had clearly taken a lot of lyrium, his eyes dazed and blue with energy. He didn’t seem to mind when the Vashoth waved over for a few of the girls to drag him into the middle of the room. Various patrons came to hold him, some even slipped a few coins into the other girls hands in order to have the chance to fuck him. Kallak sneered under his handkerchief, taking the offered spiced rum cup from a dwarven waitress.

The second lower deck had private rooms, to rent one was a small fee to the guard at the stairs, the Vashoth smoking from the hookah. Kallak knew that rooms below were little more than thick curtains and perfumed cushions. A small chest in each room filled with contraceptives and toys, some of the rooms having unique harnesses and ropes already made, waiting for the lovers to use. The Vashoth noticed Kallak and waved their hose at him. He got up, standing in front of the Vashoth as they unbuttoned his shirt. Kallak wasn’t wearing his binder or leggings, his breasts hanging as loose as his sleeves. The Vashoth looked at Kallak’s sideburns, then looked back at his bare chest, and smiled. They waved for another round of drinks.

“So good to see you, Lapis.”

“It’s Kallak now.”

“Of course… Kallak. That is dwarven for war, no?”

“It is. How’s business?”

“Better now that you’re here. What would you like tonight?” The Vashoth had settled Kallak in their lap, their jeweled hand easily making its way into his pants. Kallak had been aroused the walk down the docks searching for the ship. He hissed when a manicured nails pulled at his pubic hair. The Vashoth chuckled and continued to watch the scene in front of them.

The two sat together like that, the Vashoth teasing Kallak but never going further than that. The man in the golden harness had been passed around the room, sometimes the workers making a show of using his mouth, but the patrons being more enthusiastic and creative. At some point an officer had came up from the lower deck, his pants still hanging around his knees as he scrambled after an elf.

The elf was different than the others in the room, a red handkerchief hiding the lower part of their face, and wearing the officers shirt. Her hair was a vibrant dark red, her body not having the soft delicate curves of the other workers. Her back was defined, her calves and thighs having seen more use than some of the other clients. Kallak felt the Vashoth scraping their teeth against his tipped ears, causing the dwarf to gasp.
The elven woman turned around, her yellow eyes locking with Kallak’s. Kallak grunted something, and the Vashoth laughed. The elven woman moved into his personal space, her red handkerchief brushing Kallak’s green one. She waited a single beat and then yanked Kallak down to the lower deck.

Neither said a word, choosing an open room with a single lantern. Kallak would probably come the moment this elven woman touched him. She instead yanked his ponytail and he hissed, gripping the woman’s hips. Neither of them had taken off their handkerchiefs, but Kallak felt the woman shove her face into his neck. Kallak lifted the red head up and spun around, trapping a thigh in between his legs. The elven woman grunted and then gasped when Kallak started to suck on an exposed nipple through his own handkerchief. She groaned and began to buck into Kallak’s jeans. He whined and began to do the same, his zipper giving him more friction.

Several things happened all at once. The first was that the Guard had come, most of the patrons above fleeing the moment an officer started shouting. Kallak somehow remembered the warning from his grandmother about the Red Jennies, and how they wore red handkerchiefs; this thought was then quickly forgotten when the elven woman under him shoved her hand in his pants and he came, soaking her fingers. The third was that a Guard had yanked the curtain back and started to shout at the two of them, causing them to stop what they were doing. Kind of.

“You’re under arrest for conspiracy, theft, and murder!!”

Shit. Kallak thought.

“You are to come with us, Scoia’Tael of Ostwick.”

Wait. Kallak looked down at the disheveled elf under him. She was cocking her head at Kallak, and raised an eyebrow at him.

“If I get us out, can I eat you out after?” Kallak asked, his mind somehow still thinking about sex.

“You get me out, I’ll fuck you sideways for a week.” Scoia’Tael, the elf, whispered.

Kallak grinned, and then kicked the officer in the crotch without looking.
“We ended up stealing the patrol boat that had docked next to *Captain’s Daughter*. Found out later that Tael thought I worked there, never expected that I was just a random patron like her.”

“I can’t believe that you met her in a brothel.” Varric said, holding back his laughter rather poorly.

“Ah well, if it was any other way it’d have probably been in jail.” Kallak heard a sharp knock on the door, grunting for whoever it was to come in. Tael opened the door, her hoodie up, her ears poking through slits she cut into the it. She glared at Varric’s back and then walked in to lay down on the couch.

“Tael, just talking about you.”

“Good things, I hope.”

“How we met actually. This is Tethras, you rude shit.”

“Hello.” Tael reached out for the mug filled with pencils, then proceeded to throw them up into the ceiling.

Varric and Kallak watched Tael do this for a few moments. Kallak gave a heavy sigh and pinched his nose when the first pencil fell down. Varric turned his attention back to Kallak.

“So you two have known each other for…”

“About, oh, little over 30 years now. When we first met, Moma wasn’t ill yet. We ran around together, sometimes for Carta business, sometimes for Red Jenny things.”

“Wait, you were a Red Jenny?” Varric sounded shocked. Tael didn’t move from her position, and continued to throw pencils upwards.

“I was.” She said.
“Interesting,” Varric scribbled something on his notepad. “But your actual name is Scoyah-”

“Scoia’Tael of Ostwick.” Tael threw one pencil so hard that a different one fell from the roof. It landed on Varric’s head, the pencil finding a home in the back of his shirt.

“Right, and when did you two get married?” Varric asked, after dislodging the pencil that fell on him.

“Married?” Kallak snorted. “We’re not married.”

“Oh, sorry. You’re divorced from each other, I understand.” Varric smiled gently at Kallak.

“No, you don’t understand.” Kallak sat up and pointed a finger at Varric. “Tael and I aren’t married. To each other, or ever. What the hell made you think we were- that?”

“I- well.” Varric coughed, clearly in an uncomfortable position. Tael started to snicker to herself. Kallak swiveled his head to the elf, then quickly grabbed a pencil and threw it at her.

“You evil lil’ shit!” Kallak snarled, standing up from his seat.

“It’s too easy, fucking with you.” Tael jumped up and wrapped her arms around Varric. “Honestly, the two of you working on this book, I had to spin something!”

Varric raised his hands and tried to look innocent, failing miserably since he was laughing alongside Tael. Kallak glared at the two of them, until he finally groaned into his hands and went back to his chair. Tael was laughing and went around the desk and gave his bald head a quick peck. Kallak mockingly swatted at her, only for the elf to grab his head and continue to pester him. Varric laughed at Kallak becoming even more of a grump than usual.

“So you two aren’t married, and never were.”

“Well,” Tael began, “there was that one time where we had to-”
“First off,” Kallak snapped, “He doesn’t need to know that. Second, it was fake engagement and it worked fine until you fucked the Chantry Sister in charge of the marriage.”

“That sounds like an interesting story.” Varric leaned in, his pen hovering over his notepad.

“If it helps, there was a rabbit involved.” Tael stopped talking when Kallak thwacked her thigh.

“Go home, Tael. We’ll talk tomorrow.”

“Goodnight, Old Man.”

“Yeah yeah. Night.” Kallak waited until the redheaded elf was gone before turning to Varric.

“What exactly did she tell you about… that.” Kallak asked, his nerves getting to him.

“Well, she didn’t really say anything actually. I came just before you had closed shop here, and Seeker was still in the shop. Turns out she was waiting to catch you after work, but when I showed up, well…” Varric coughed and shrugged.

“Shit, sorry about that.” Kallak rested his face in his hand, motioning with the other for Varric to continue.

“Well, she didn’t really say anything actually. I came just before you had closed shop here, and Seeker was still in the shop. Turns out she was waiting to catch you after work, but when I showed up, well…” Varric coughed and shrugged.

“Wait.” Kallak tried to hide his nerves. “Was Cassandra in the room?”

“Yeah, why?” Varric raised an eyebrow when Kallak groaned and brought his head down onto the desk. “Am I missing something?”
“... I asked Cassandra if she wanted to see the Floating Market with me.”

“Like a date?”

“It’s not a date.” Kallak snapped. Varric smirked and leaned his elbow on the table. A soft click of the recorder interrupted the silence in the office. Kallak put his head in his hands again. Varric slowly started to put his things away.

“Can’t believe you asked that woman out on a date.” Varric mumbled. “What were thinking?”

“She’s not the big hardass you keep seeing.” Kallak said, roughly rubbing his face before standing up.

“Oh yeah? And I suppose you’ve seen this ‘softer side’ then?” Varric closed his bag and got up as well.

“Once. In her car. She was… You wanna know the dumbest thing? She reminded me of myself, when I was younger, much younger. She’s trying so hard for a job that doesn’t care about her. And I…” Kallak trailed off, holding the door open for Varric, staring at an empty space on the ground.

The younger dwarf gave a soft smile, then clasped a hand on Kallak’s shoulder. The two locked eyes and for a moment they both understood each other. Kallak said goodnight to Varric, and locked the door. He went upstairs to his apartment. Tael’s apartment was silent for once, but the lights were still on. Kallak stood outside of her door, wanting to bang on the door, cuss her out for talking the way she did. How he was probably never going to see Cassandra again, since she probably jumped to the same conclusion as Varric.

He didn’t. Even after all these years, he loved Tael in his own way. She was there when Moma passed. Tael helped him with Saare, and he returned the favor with Alex. They had more in common, had been thick as thieves since the Captain’s Daughter. He let out a heavy sigh through his nose and continued on to his own apartment.

Besides, Kallak could get back at Tael at her funeral next week. He made a mental note to add more petunias to the bouquets, and invite the clergyman she dumped a month ago.
Second Semester makes a liar out of me once again!!!! Sorry about the delay, it'll be a little while until I publish on a consistent basis. Uni is... being a pain.
Monday was Kallak’s top surgery. He was told he should take two weeks off from work, but he figured that now he had Cole, Sera, and Thom working the shop, he’d just sit around and watch more than usual. Cassandra came by Tuesday, and Kallak just said he had surgery and would have to wait until he could give her a tour of the town.

Even after this, Cassandra kept coming by everyday. Every morning she would stop by Iron Bull’s bakery, and bring something over for whoever was working to eat. She would talk with Kallak for the first hour, and then leave. Kallak had gotten used to the routine a little too quickly, moving his Carta business an hour back, just so he could spend more time with Cassandra. He didn’t know how to bring up Tael, and she never did. The two weeks of recovery were nearly over.

Tael had her fiftieth, and according to Cadash tradition, her birthday party was actually an empty casket funeral. Tael hated the flowers, hated the clergy who was invited even more; the party went off without a hitch. It ended how most parties with the Carta did: The Guard showed up and those who were part of the Guard faked arrests for a few of the younger folk who attended. Thom had come with Sera, so he ended up in handcuffs while Sera spray painted all of the cars outside. Kallak slide a few coins to a cousin to have the two dropped off near the bridge instead of at the station.

The next day Cassandra complained about it. Thom lied about how he didn’t know it was party, saying he was invited by Sera. He talked about how when the Guard came, some young officer nearly pants him when he was making the arrest. Or how the entire time the clergyman went into great detail about Tael’s sleeping habits. Kallak felt guilty for being jealous earlier, Thom was able to make Cassandra laugh so easily. He tried not to stare at her, how when she laughed he fell in love a little bit more. He went back to listening to radio.

...Well winter is well on its way in Ostwick folks. Nearly all the leaves have fallen, except the Vhendahl’s of course. Since most of the tourists are gone for the season I can finally get to real news! At least as real as news gets here in our fine city.

The polls between Trevelyan and the Peoples Noble stand 40-55, with 5 percent undecided. Now while I am obligated to voice no strong political opinions, I will only state the facts that the People’s Noble has solved more cases since the campaign than the current Teryn has in his entire law career. She has also of course raised money for the Lower Districts schools, whereas the current Teryn was found sipping cocktails at a certain scandalous party in the Noble Districts. Yes siree, heard that about 10 various Nobles and Templar associates were caught fixing the votes for the Knight Commander. Thankfully our Commissioner Rutherford caught them red-handed.

In other news, the College Jubilee will begin later tonight, but early toastings and public entry starts at 8 o’clock. Now for those confused from last years announcement, that’s 8 o’clock AT NIGHT, not 8 in the morning. Don’t forget to grab a hoodie and gift baskets run for 20 crowns. The gift baskets this year include a free pen and cap, and an assortment of other goodies made by college undergrads of the non-magical majors.

Now I wanna talk about a local bakery recently opened called ‘Sticks and Scones’, located 27 Loc Muinne, Old Alienage District. Now folks I consider myself to be a foodie, a connoisseur of all things sweet and a treat! ‘Sticks and Scones’ has a wide range of goods, from Strawberry Twists to Halla Horns. If you’re looking for something more substantial, ask for The Iron Bull’s sourdough!
It’s mixed with seven grains in order to fill any hungry belly. While you’re down on Loc Muinne, be sure to pop into the Snapdragon for some gift cards and raw honey. More of a rebel? Then next door you’ll find Shartan’s Oath, tattoo and piercings! Traditional and contemporary, a fair price for art that lasts for life! And now for the weather forecast…

Iron Bull was heard shouting from the other side of the road, the large Vashoth barreling towards Kallak’s store. Tael had slammed the door open before the Vashoth, her eyes glaring at Kallak. Kallak raised a single eyebrow at the woman, waiting patiently for Bull to barrel past her. He didn’t but instead picked Tael up and swung her around a few times in the store. Thom chuckled at the sight of the redheaded elf being handled like a ragdoll.

“Before either of you ask, I didn’t put that ad in. Pretty sure Arlof is just bragging again.”

“Kallak! Come here!” Bull went to grab the dwarf, but Kallak quickly moved, leaving Thom to take his place in the hug. “Don’t you know what this means?”

“Customers.” Tael snarled at Kallak. “Customers who don’t know what the fuck they want, who come into my shop and ask for, for-”

“For something pretty and cool and then they’ll come back a month later to have it removed, I know. You’re gonna make money off of them.” Kallak glanced at Cassandra, seeing her giving a small smile. He winked at her and smiled back.

“Jackass.” Tael spat.

“Language.” Kallak replied not looking away from Cassandra

“Fuck you!”

“You say that but I’m pretty sure you just want to kill me.” Kallak kept looking at Cassandra, noticed how she was trying to hide her laughter. He felt something swell inside of him.

“First the funeral, now this!” Tael walked out of the store, just as a Guard car pulled up into the parking lot. She started to harass the officers as they got out of the car. Bull laughed at the scene then turned around and asked Kallak a question.

“What was that about a funeral?”

“Hm? Oh, it’s uh, old family tradition ‘round here. When someone turns fifty, a mock funeral is held instead of a name day. Open empty casket, everyone makes a speech and then drinks. It’s complicated really, but a lot of fun.” Kallak started to snicker to himself.

“First the funeral, now this!” Tael walked out of the store, just as a Guard car pulled up into the parking lot. She started to harass the officers as they got out of the car. Bull laughed at the scene then turned around and asked Kallak a question.

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“What did you do?” Bull teased, his large frame leaning on the counter. Kallak and Blackwall started to laugh together, remembering last night. Cassandra raised an eyebrow at them.

“I may have invited her ex.” Kallak finally got out. “A roaming clergyman, he spent a good twenty minutes bawling in the ceremony and when he got up to speak it was. It was great. Tradition has the ‘deceased’ remain quiet the entire time but Tael has always been a rule breaker.” Kallak had to wipe away a tear as he tried to hold back. Thom wasn’t successful and banged on the counter because he couldn’t breath from laughing so much.

“Oh that must have been rich! You’re a lucky man Kallak; she sure is a handful to deal with.” Bull slapped Thom on the back, the three men still in a fit of giggles. Kallak coughed and finally brought himself back.
“Listen! Listen Tael deserved it. She made up some shit about us being an item. Like we were married or something!” Kallak had to cover his mouth as Thom howled, him and Bull making fools of themselves.

“Then you’re…oh.” Cassandra said. Kallak looked at her and saw genuine shock and... hope?

“Tael and I… we’re friends. Been friends for little over thirty years now. Neither of us married- to each other or anyone else.” Kallak stopped laughing, looking at Cassandra as she processed the information.

The officer outside had a dwarf partner, who had somehow escaped Tael’s wrath. He came into the store and saw Cassandra. He jumped into a salute and gave his rank and name to her. She went back to being a Seeker, harsh edges. The feeling from before of making Cassandra smile, seeing her being happy, growing soft and human didn’t leave. Kallak took a deep breath, realizing that reality had set back in, that he was just some florist to her, and she was a Seeker of Truth. He was so caught up in his disappointment that he didn’t hear what the officer was talking about. His first clue that something was wrong was when Thom stopped laughing.

“Are you Mr Kallak of Ostwick?” the dwarf officer asked, most likely repeating himself.

“I am. Do you have a warrant?” Kallak grunted.

“I’m Lieutenant Lace Harding, sir. I need you to come with me to the College.”

“Mind telling me what this is about.”

“You- you haven’t heard?” The officer was young, freckles covering her face, a thin scar that traced her jaw barely noticeable. “The College was attacked, and you’re the only designated Guardian for a student that was…”

“What happened.” Bull stood up straight, his horns casting a large shadow on the doorway.

“A student by the name of Dagna was targeted, and has been taken into intensive care, but the Arcanist Wing at the College has been blown up from-”

“Thom, call Sera. Tell her it’s-fuckwhatwasthatnameshe- Widdles! Tell her it’s Widdles. Pentaghast, I-”

“I’m coming with you.” Cassandra turned to Lieutenant Harding and began to ask several questions.

Kallak followed the two of them into Cassandra’s car, and she flipped a switch that caused the emergency lights to ping. Kallak didn’t carry a cellphone, Alex said that they could be tracked, which meant that he only gave two numbers to people. The front office phone for the shop, and the one in his office that was for more personal things. If he had been in his office, he could have heard Dagna ring for him. Why the hell was someone wanting to target Dagna? She was innocent, just some kid who wanted to learn how magic worked, the only connection to any kind of dirty dealings was-

Kallak Cadash.

The drive was tense, Cassandra asking several things at once, the officer trying her best to answer them. Kallak didn’t hear any of it. He kept thinking of Dagna, about her last phone call, when the last meeting they had was. If there was something he had missed. Something, however, did click.

“Seeker Pentaghast.” Kallak croaked, not realizing his voice had left him.
“Yes?” He couldn’t see her face, but her voice was soft.

“Did you ever find out who that hand belonged to?”

“...Yes. I did.”

“Do you know who did it?”

“...No.”

Kallak felt his stomach drop. His informants hadn’t found anything out either. They were still chasing the leads from Kirkwall and Hunter Fell. Nothing had turned up yet. Meanwhile Kallak received the severed thumb a week ago in his P.O. box. An old scare tactic, but he didn’t think anything of it. His mind kept going back to Dagna, how she would always squeal and jump for joy whenever Kallak would come by late at night and check on her progress. The fact that the last thing he recalls is telling her to rest easy, that if there was a way to grow lyrium artificially she would find a way...

The hospital was on the edges of the wharf on the island. There was another, newer one in the Law District but this one was closer to the College. Kallak wanted to ask why Dagna wasn’t rushed to the College Healing Wing, but then remembered that the Arcanist Wing was in the basement of the Healing Wing. Lieutenant Harding was able to get them through most of the security in the hospital. When it reached to being Nobles and their fussing to see their kids, Cassandra took over, getting Kallak through to Dagna’s room. Kallak took a seat, looking at the empty bed. A nurse was setting up machines in the room, quietly said that Dagna would be here in a few minutes. Kallak nodded and found himself in deep thought. Cassandra was standing by the door, waiting. He was numb for the first time in years.

“Sera,” Kallak cleared his throat, trying to sound normal. “Sera is gonna want to see Dagna. They’re dating and all that. If you don’t mind…”

“I’ll wait outside. If the doctors say it’s okay, I’ll bring Sera here.”

“Thank you.” Kallak whispered, didn’t even notice that Cassandra paused to look at him, before leaving the room.

It was quiet for only a few moments, a different officer entering the room. Short blonde hair and green eyes, the dwarf officer put his hat on the stand and stood at the window.

“Sergant Cadash.”

“Mr Cadash. A pleasure.”

“What can you tell me about this- this fucking mess.”

“Well, the explosion was most likely was caused by your prodigy. The one trying to grow lyrium without the use of the red stuff. Other than that…” the dwarf sighed and gave up trying to pretend to be an officer.

“Most likely the same people who killed the transport. The security we had at the door was killed, his left thumb taken off. The body is mangled, from the explosion, but his partner said that they took his thumb.”

“Anything else?”
“Security said they were Orlesian, but they had masks on. They were-” Sergeant Cadash stopped, looking scared.

“What were the masks, Sergeant.” Kallak looked up, making the other dwarf jump in the semi-dark room. Kallak knew his eyes were reflecting what little light there was in here.

“They were Qunari masks, sir. Fake ones, like for Spirits Day. Their leader apparently had a Saarebas mask on, but they had painted your Carta markings on it, sir.”

“When I told you make sure that case didn’t get into anyone’s hands, did I ever say that a Seeker of Truth was the exception?”

“Mr Cadash, sir. I had no idea that-”

“Shut up.” Kallak stood up, and walked over to his grunt. The officer was about two inches taller than Kallak but he cowered and flinched when Kallak grabbed him by the jacket.

“You make sure that Seeker doesn’t get anywhere fucking near this mess. Force her to be put onto security for the girl, I don’t care! I don’t want that woman solving this case. Bad enough she’s on my ass…” Kallak shoved the grunt, the younger dwarf’s eyes wide with fear.

“Do I make myself clear, Sergeant Cadash?” Kallak growled.

The officer nodded, vigorously. Kallak snapped his fingers and the other dwarf bolted out of the room. It was dark in the room, the curtains having been drawn closed by the Sergeant. Outside the room it was a frenzy, nurses and reporters scrambling to do their job. The radio was switched to a new song, the rhythmic drum bleeding into a piano solo. It was a love song, broken and heartbreaking, and a million miles away.

Kallak went numb, found his body going to sit next to the radio. He remembers it as the song that played what felt like years ago. When Cassandra told him about Varric’s book; the genuine shock when Kallak said he was sorry. How that moment in the car, everything had changed. How this attack was about to change everything. He desperately wanted to tell her the truth, that he was the Carta. But he couldn’t not yet. He had to kill this son of a bitch first.

Chapter End Notes

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yVBu_Jbo4jg

Surrender- Walk the Moon.

Pretty much this song is Kallak and Cassandra's interaction with each other. When I first heard it, hit me like a goddamn train.
Cassandra saw Thom and Sera walking up to the door. Sera was holding some kind of tool kit and a poorly knitted blanket. She ran past her, Thom following closely behind. It has been three hours since Cassandra and Kallak had been rushed to the hospital by Lieutenant Harding.

Cassandra had spent the better part of the last three hours on the phone with Leliana. Harding was one of Leliana’s informants, her codename simply ‘Scout’. The explosion was unrelated to any of the other bombings of Colleges around Thedas. Those bombings had been targeting the Mage Dormitories and the Enchanter Towers, both of which were still standing in Ostwick. However there was no information on who caused the bombings, or why they had attacked an exiled Smith Caste girl. The girl in question, Dagna, was originally a prodigy of the Ferelden Circle and was given a lump sum to pursue her education by a nameless Warden. Leliana told Cassandra she had known Dagna twelve years ago, when she was wanting to leave Orzammar. Apparently the money ran out, and since the Ferelden Circle couldn’t keep her, Dagna had applied for scholarships. She caught the attention of the Nameless Grant of Ostwick and Dagna continued her research in the Arcane.

Then there was the cause of the explosion; she had called Cullen for more information. By the Maker’s Grace, Cullen was near the College when the explosion went off, and had stayed behind to watch forensics work. It was caused by a handheld device, though the original purpose of it was undetermined until they could get it to the lab. Dagna had been left alone in the laboratory, the supervising enchanter trusting the young dwarf with the equipment for the last six months. Apparently Dagna was researching a way to grow synthetic lyrium. Further questioning and forensics however showed that all experimentation was done on blue lyrium, not red. The ongoing assumption was that the Carta was responsible for this explosion, but Cassandra wasn’t so sure.

The potential to grow lyrium? The Carta would have prefered to take any research, rather than have it destroyed. Perhaps it was a botched kidnapping, with Dagna refusing to cooperate. There was also the fact that Kallak’s scholarship was the Nameless Grant of Ostwick. But why was he the sole guardian for Dagna? Why was Dagna researching how to grow lyrium? Wasn’t that illegal? Were the lyrium mines around Ostwick dry? Had they been corrupted? She remembers Thom telling her about Markham’s own small mine, how red lyrium started to corrupt the miners slowly, then all at once. The Wardens and Markham Guard ordered the mine to close up and the miners had to find different work. Markham is a university city, most of the common folk are farmers. Ostwick however had two industries: mining and fishing. If the mines stopped because of fear of red lyrium, then fishing might stop as well. Ostwick would dry up, and panic could start a war.

Matthew Cleaver’s words echoed in her mind. ‘The peace in Ostwick is about to disappear’. Thedas had its eyes on Ostwick, the only city to not fall into chaos from the fights between mages and templars. If the mines disappeared, the common folk will look to the faith. With no Templar Commander, that would lead the Chantry to ask The First Enchanter Vivienne for guidance. A
Thom finally caught up, nodding at Cassandra as he came to the door. Cassandra followed the two into the waiting room. The reporters from before had all gone, Arlof Cadash the only one still there. He had a small corner set up for him by the nurses, a microphone and his laptop charging. He had been keeping the city informed every half hour. Lieutenant Harding was in charge of censoring sensitive information, but Arlof seemed fine with this, usually pulling a worker who was from the nursery to talk about the newborns if he didn’t have enough for his 10 minutes on air. Security was stationed at every hallway, two at each end. Sera was bargaining with the desk clerk.

“Don’t be dick! I need her room number! Widdles is looking for me! You gotta let me in!” Sera was crying, wiping away her tears and snot on the blanket.

“I’m sorry miss,” the clerk said, too tired to fake sympathy, “But no one outside of family is allowed to see the patients. And I don’t have any patient registered under the name of ‘Widdles’.”

“Her name is Dagna, Dagna of the Fereldan College? Can’t remember the name but it’s, uh, Something Hold.” Thom said, a hand on Sera rubbing the elf’s shoulder. She didn’t fight it, leaning heavily on the Warden conscript.

“I’m sorry, but that patient has a security protocol. You can’t see her unless you have an escort from law enforcement.” The nurse jumped when Cassandra slammed her badge onto the counter.

“Agent Cassandra Pentaghast, Seeker of Truth. Do I qualify as an escort?” Cassandra ignored the looks she got from Sera and Thom.

“I- yes! Of course! Room 325-B.” the nurse had barely finished her sentence before Sera grabbed Cassandra badge and raced up the stairs.

Thom thanked the nurse and went towards the elevator. Cassandra waited with him. The elevator gave a soft ping and the two went up to level three. Thom pulled his hair back into a loose bun, the silk strands slowly slipping out. Cassandra pulled her phone out and sent a quick text to Leliana, asking her when she was free to talk again. She didn’t get an immediate reply.
“Thank you for this.” Thom said, his gaze firmly fixed on the elevator door.

“How does Sera know Dagna?”

“Through Kallak. Apparently when Dagna first came to Ostwick, she would spend her free hours at the shop. Sera took forever to ask the girl over for dinner, but when she did, they ended up spending the entire night making a mess in the kitchen.”

“Oh? I assumed cooking wasn’t Sera’s strong suit.”

“They weren’t cooking food.” Thom shook his head, a small smile on his face. “They were cooking Tempest bottles. Had to sleep in the barn after that.”

Cassandra laughed, Thom joining in with her. The door pinged and Cassandra was greeted with Sera biting into an Guards arm. The toolkit was in his partners hands, but Sera threw Cassandra’s badge at their face, the enchanted metal heavy enough to give the officer a black eye. Thom muttered ‘Shit’ and went to grab Sera from the guard who was currently screaming from having an elf bite at his forearm. The other officer had picked up Cassandra’s badge, but when he saw Cassandra standing there with her arms crossed, and a bulletproof vest, they gave it back. After a few minutes, Cassandra and Thom managed to calm Sera down enough to go to the room. Cassandra went to open the door until Sera grabbed her wrist. The elf gave three rapid knocks, followed by two slow ones. Kallak grunted, and then Sera swung the door wide open.

Cassandra hadn’t been back in the room since she had left. Kallak had moved his chair to be directly across from the door, a compact bow resting in his lap, one arrow notched. She noticed the quiver that rested next to the chair, and again on the table by the window. Dagna, the young dwarf in the hospital bed, had her arms and hands heavily bandaged. She had Sera laying next to her in the bed, the young elf having thrown the poorly knitted blanket over them both. Sera’s brown hands had Dagna’s pale and freckled face, the two talking in whispers. Thom took the seat by the radio, silent. Cassandra closed the door, and went to stand at the foot of the bed.

“Oh, Miss Seeker!” Dagna croaked, a small smile on her face. She had a large bandage on her neck, and it looked as if someone had tried to smash her left hand. Sera was still kissing the dwarf’s face, ignoring that there were other people in the hospital room.

“Hello, Dagna.” Cassandra smiled, flexing her hand on the bar of the bed. “Are you feeling well.”
“I am now,” Dagna tried to laugh but it ended in a cough. Kallak sat up and Sera started to worry about her. “Are you still Mr Kallak’s bodyguard?”

“No, Dagna.” Cassandra took a deep breath. “Actually I wanted to ask you a few questions about what happened at the College.”

“Well—”

“No.” Kallak was tired, but he was still stubborn. “Not now. Let her rest.”

“...Okay.” Cassandra didn’t fight him. She made a motion for Kallak to follow her outside the room.

Kallak nodded and handed the compact bow to Sera. He waved at Thom to follow, and the three of them went to talk in the hallway. Thom looked uncomfortable being here, but he stayed. Cassandra watched as Kallak went from alert to exhausted. The two Guards from before had moved to the other end of the hallway. The clock on the wall chimed to 6 in the afternoon. Cassandra tried to remember what had happened three hours ago. They were laughing about something, but it was too long ago.

“Thom, the hospital is releasing Dagna in three days into my care. I can’t take her to the shop, and my apartment isn’t secure. Do you think…” Kallak brought his hand to scratch at his goatee. The grey strands were in disarray, somehow making the dwarf look even older.

“Our place is pretty much trapped for anything. If these bastards can get through the woods, the bees will get them. Besides, the barn has a few swords and hammers.” Thom’s eyes flickered over to Cassandra before he continued. “Blackwall is coming up from Orlais tomorrow to check in on me. I’m sure he’ll be happy to stay until this blows over.”

“Good. Great,” Kallak turned his attention to Cassandra. “Suppose you’ll want to look into this but… I’d feel better having you come with us. I’d rather have you than whatever Guard they try to give us for protection.”

“I’ll do what I can for this,” Cassandra looked Kallak in the eye. “I’ll talk with the Commissioner, see what I can do to help.”

“Cass- Seeker Pentaghast.” Kallak rubbed his goatee down, as if to give some semblance of order. “I don’t want you to get hurt looking into this. I want you helping us-Thom and me- protecting the
She looked at Kallak and suddenly, as if a storm had finally passed, saw the dwarf. He was so tired, tired from the stress. He was tired and scared but not for himself. He was scared for Dagna, for Sera and Thom. He was scared for Cassandra. His ears weren’t the only evidence of his elven blood, his deep green eyes full of emotion. Cassandra realizes it’s the first time she’s actually seen his eyes. Why now? What did she look at before? Was it the chemical burn that slashed across his face? The dark blue Casteless tattoos that covered his scalp, the arrowtip resting between two thick eyebrows? Cassandra couldn’t stop looking at his eyes, realizing that this man, who tried so hard to come off as crass and angry, was anything but. He was trying to protect people for so long, and now he was wanting to protect her.

“I…” Cassandra let out a heavy sigh and just nodded.

Kallak closed his eyes, all the stress and fear bleed from his face. It was almost blissful, something in Cassandra chest pulled when she saw his face. Kallak opened his eyes, that unnatural dark green the only organic color in the bleached hospital lights. The two of them didn’t say anything, neither wanting to break eye contact. Thom finally coughed into his hand, Kallak tearing his gaze away to look at the Warden.

“The doctor said he would be back in about twenty minutes. I’ll see what I can do about Sera, but Thom. You should go home, get everything ready for them. I’m going to be closing the shop for two weeks, just to give Sera time to… to help Dagna.”

“Do you want me to give you a room?”

“Nah, the barn will do. Lads in the barn, Lassies in the house. But I will be coming over, just to give extra security. Go home, Thom.” Kallak watched Thom walk off, then the two of them were left alone.

Kallak messed with his goatee for a while longer, probably a nervous tick. Cassandra sat down in a chair in the hallway, pulling out the bobby pin that held her braid in place. It fell down to rest on her shoulder, the starting part just behind her right ear. Absentmindedly she undid the braid, and started to redo it. Halfway through she realized that Kallak was staring at her. He immediately looked away when he was caught.

Slowly he brought his hand under his goatee and Cassandra hear metal clink. The braided sideburns unfurled, and Kallak stood there with a lopsided grin as the braids came undone, leaving his face framed with wild mutton chops. Cassandra snorted, then covered her mouth. Kallak’s grin got wider
and he started to snicker, causing Cassandra to laugh into her hand. The two of them devolved into a fit of giggles in the hallway of critical care. Kallak leaned on the wall opposite of Cassandra, then started to redo his own braids as Cassandra redid her’s.

The two sat in silence, each focused on their own braids. Cassandra was done first, and she watched Kallak finish his first sideburn. He was in the process of finishing it off with the metal clasp, the design on it plain. He moved to his other sideburn, brushing through it with his fingers. Cassandra leaned back in her chair and realised where she recognized the braiding technique.

“Did your daughter teach you that?” Cassandra asked.

“Hm? Oh, the braid. No, actually I learned from… They’re Saare boss now, but back then they were just an old friend. They owned a ship called ‘Captain’s Daughter’ years back, but now they have a security crew now. The Valo Kas. They taught me how to braid Saare’s hair and well, between Tael bickering and Saare threatening to shave them off, been braided my sideburns back for a few years now.”

“It must have been hard, raising Saare alone.”

“Was never really alone. Tael lived next door and Shokrakar kept visiting to make sure Saare didn’t get to be, and I quote, ‘Too dwarfy’.” Kallak laughed to himself and kept braiding his sideburn.

“I see. Where does Saare live now?”

“She travels around with Valo Kas, they usually do jobs in Orlais. Right now they’re doing a charity ride, they’ll be back before first snow. Saare has a solo contract with the College when she gets back.”

“Oh?” Cassandra waited until Kallak tied off the end of the braid before continuing. “What is she going to do?”

“Working with that new professor, an enchanter or whatever. Dorian Pavus?” Kallak shrugged.

Cassandra remembered the first time she had met Dagna, how at a rapid pace she talked about Professor Pavus being from Tevinter, and something about time?
“I think I’ve heard about him. This wouldn’t have to do with time magic?” Cassandra leaned forward, Kallak still sitting on the floor.

“Don’t know about time magic, but Saare got her degree in Fade Studies. It’ll be good to have her back though.”

A human doctor came walking towards them, a clipboard in hand. Kallak got up from the floor, and the doctor seemed to pause when he saw the dwarf in Dalish leggings and a Seeker in a bulletproof vest. He explained Dagna’s injuries regardless; her left wrist had been shattered, most likely from blunt force. The gash in her neck was from a dagger, but the poison never went as far as her skin. The rest of her injuries are from the explosion. Kallak asked what kind of poison, and when the doctor gave him an odd look he told him he was a florist. The doctor glanced at Cassandra for approval, and after she nodded he said it was most likely Fleshrot, but it was a poor concentration, and they were able to get rid of all the poison before it took the girl’s vocal chords.

Cassandra offered to take Kallak home, but he refused, saying he should make sure Sera didn’t try to kill the nurses. Cassandra knew he was lying, but she didn’t say anything. She drove back to her apartment in the Law District, the white bare walls making the end of the day even worse. As she fell asleep, Kallak’s laughing face was her last thought before sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Sera is black you can't change my mind.
Cassandra had gone to Cullen’s office the very next morning. The front of the building had a crowd in front of it, some holding signs, most protesting the recent explosion. After Cassandra had parked, a guard came out to meet her. He took her keys and the two walked to the check-in. A simple clearance and Cassandra was allowed inside. Inside the offices, most of the officers were dealing with phone calls from across the city. Detectives were talking in groups, some discussing missing persons, others trying to figure out the explosion and damage. She also saw a few Templar Knights, the few who were designated to continue protection during an election period. They had been given their own corner, many of the non-human Guards wanting to avoid talking with them. They had the College ground blueprints sprawled across a table, the group quiet and not in a frenzy as everyone around them were. Cassandra noticed that the blinds had been pulled shut so no one could look into Cullen’s lower level office.

Cullen was not alone in his office. Maxwell Trevelyian, the current Teyrn, and his assistant were both talking at the commissioner. Alex Trevelyian was standing in the back of the room, Josephine Montilyet talking in whispers to the young woman. Cullen was on the phone, his anger rising.

“Then you can tell the Noble Council that if they have something to say, they can come down here and say it! Their puppet Teryn Trevelyan is already here!” Cullen snapped, slamming the phone down.

“What in the Maker’s name are you going to do now, Commissioner?” Maxwell sneered, his hair dyed charcoal, with white roots starting to show.

“My job.” Cullen yelled at Maxwell, making the man jump back. “I’d suggest you do the same, Teryn, but you were never good at that to begin with. Now get the fuck out of my office.”

“Or what? You’ll feed me to your dogs, Rutherford?” Cullen stepped out from behind his desk and glared at the Teryn.

“Don’t. Tempt. Me.” Cullen growled. Maxwell gulped and quickly ran out of the office. Cassandra sidestepped, leaving the office door open for the man to leave. Jim followed behind, muttering something about public appearances. She closed the door as Cullen leaned on his desk, his red parka still on him.

“Well, that could’ve gone worse.” Alex said, her face neutral.
“Your brother is an ass.” Cullen snapped, then grimaced when he realised what he just did. “No offense.”

“None taken. I’ve been disowned for years now.” Alex turned towards Cassandra. “Seeker Pentaghast, I’m surprised you’re still in Ostwick.”

“Miss Trevelyan.” Cassandra said. “Mind if I ask what you’re doing here?”

“Well as an alumni and valedictorian of the Ostwick College, First Enchanter Vivienne asked me to represent the College at the meeting you just saw. Clearly however that upset the representative for the City Government.”

“So you being here isn’t for a political movement?”

“If it were, I would have come through the front door.” Alex nodded at Josephine, who went to leave the room. The Antivan had already pulled out her phone and taken a phone call when she left.

Alex sat down on the worn and beat up couch, the calm facade she had up moments ago gone the instant Josephine was gone. Somehow the movement reminded Cassandra of Kallak last night, how he showed his vulnerability in the hallway. She tried not to smile as she remembered him with his sideburns unfurling from the braids. How his hands quickly, gently, put the braids back together. How he was laughing and smiling before they heard the news from Lieutenant Harding. She was failing miserably as she was reminded of that night in the car, the chance meeting with Varric and the reaction that Kallak had seen. How his forearms were covered in thin dark lines, the crows and a bear. The arrow on his scalp, it’s aim as sure as Kallak’s-

“Is there something you needed Cassandra?” Cullen asked, his body slumped, the opened parka a shield to the rest of the world.

“Yes, actually. It’s about this case.” Cassandra bit the inside of her cheek when Cullen groaned out loud.

“Cassandra you can’t have the case.” Cullen picked up a folder from his desk. “Look, you did well on the John Doe, the family has been found and a funeral was held last week. But this isn’t something we can keep quiet.”
“Between the Knight Commander and now the Teryn election, it might be helpful for Seeker Pentaghast to work the case.” Alex piped up, her exhaustion gone, replaced with that poised appearance.

“And have another scandal on our hands? You heard your brother, and as much as I hate to admit it, he is right. This case needs to be solved by an Ostwick-born. Besides those Templars have told me that a decision was made for the new Knight Commander.”

“Really?” Alex stood up, and walked over to Cullen, stopping a foot away from him before remembering Cassandra was there. “Do you know who it is?”

“I’m not a Templar anymore.” Cullen said, rubbing his neck. “But yes, I do. Wish I didn’t though.”

“Who is it.” Cassandra said, crossing her arms.

“A man by the name of Delrin Barris. Second son of a Ferelden noble.” Cullen sighed heavily and looked at Alex. “Another doglord in power here at Ostwick.”

“Stop that.” Alex closed the distance, her hand moving to pick at imaginary dirt on Cullen’s fur collar. “I’m sure Barris was chosen for his merits, not for his lineage. This city has to realise the world is changing.”

“It doesn’t make this any easier, the announcement was meant to go out today, but with the explosion and the tension in the air, it’s been delayed by a week.” Cullen kept looking at Alex’s face, even if she wasn’t looking at him.

“I wasn’t asking to be given the case to solve, Cullen.” Cassandra waited for the commissioner to look at her. “I’m telling you to put me on the security team on the primary victim, Dagna of Kinloch Hold.”

“Wait, you want to be on security? Why?” Cullen looked puzzled, but Alex had a small smile on her face as she excused herself to leave the office.

“Why not? It’s not an odd thing to ask.” Cassandra said, not meaning to have an edge to her voice. Cullen’s eyes flicked to Alex leaving before coming back to Cassandra.
“You hate security. Even as the Right Hand you’ve always preferred to take action rather give protection.” Cullen crossed his arms, the two now mimicking each other.

“It’s the dwarf isn’t it?”

“Which one?”

“It’s the dwarf.” Cullen snorted and rubbed at his face with both his hands. “I can’t believe you.”

At that moment, Sergeant Cadash busted into the room, Jim following close behind. Cullen dropped his hands, his face blank. Almost the same expression as Alex Trevelyan. Cassandra raised an eyebrow at the man, as the dwarf came in with a Vashoth detective, their horns curved by the side of their face like a rams.

“Sir, we’ve got a problem- Seeker- Sir we have a problem with the recent case.” the Vashoth started.

“Detective, I assume this has to do with the Dagna case.”

“It does Commissioner.” Their accent was Rivian, their black hair done in small cornrows. Cassandra had a brief realisation that Kallak had braided his sideburns like that, his coarse facial hair most likely a similar texture to the Vashoth actual hair.

“Then report.” Cullen crossed his arms, still leaning on his desk.

“The young girl gave a description of the culprits, however they had been wearing ‘Spirits Day’ masks. The dwarf said that the leader, the one who had first slashed at her throat and then broke her left wrist, was a wearing a Vashoth mask that, well.” The detective glanced down at Sergeant Cadash.

“That sonuvabitch had painted Casteless markings on that Spirit Day mask, sir. Someone’s trying to send a message, and if word gets out that a bunch of dwarves are going around wearing racist masks like that, the hills are gonna be in a uproar.”

“Why the hills?” Cassandra asked the Vashoth, who turned to answer her question.
“The mainland, or the hills as the Sergeant just said, is our main farming community. The population there is mostly Vashoth who recently left the Qun. For a long time, dwarves who were hiding from the Carta ended up living and working there, since the mines weren’t safe. It’s an uneasy truce in the hills between the two communities, but the peace is always a little uneasy whenever mages are involved. The Vashoth in the hills still fear magic, and will abandon their children. There had been cases where the Guard have found Vashoth mages being adopted by the Casteless, and the adoptive families will tattoo them. It’s been a few decades since then, there are laws against it now, but a lot of folk in the hills still remember.”

“So why attack the Arcane wing? It doesn’t make any sense?” Cassandra whispered back.

“It doesn’t have to, if news gets out about the masks, the hills won’t be safe.” The detective shrugged, his shoulder touching the bottom of his horn.

“I want this kept quiet, the media can’t know about this. Send the Sketch Artist and find out exactly what Casteless marking it was.”

“Don’t have to sir, the girl explained that the markings matched her sponsor for the College. A man by the name Kallak of Ostwick.”

“What?” Cassandra joined the conversation again. “Are you sure?”

“Sure as my beard, Seeker.” Sergeant replied, quickly realising who he was talking to and then coughing into his fist.

“Seeker Pentaghast, what can you tell of us Kallak of Ostwick.” Cullen had remained neutral the entire time of the conversation.

“Commissioner,” the detective piped in, the large man only now standing to his full height. “Why would the Seeker know about this dwarf?”

“I was looking into a cold case, Kallak of Ostwick was the only lead we had.” Cassandra said, the Vashoth tilting his head and thinking. Finally he nodded slowly and let her continue. “Unfortunately, I may know enough to help fill in the gaps. Kallak has a daughter, her name is Saare Adaar, and she is a Vashoth mage.” The detective groaned and started to whisper a small prayer. Cullen cursed. Cassandra noticed that the Sergeant didn’t react until she was looking at him.
“He runs the Nameless Grant for the Ostwick College.” Cassandra continues, “According to my own research, he found Dagna during her last semester at Kinloch Hold and had her brought here to continue her research. Within the first two years she had completed her research and proved that lyrium vapors can affect the supply of magic to mages. She has been working a different project for the last three years.”

“Can you tell us what it was?” The detective had once again lowered himself, his slumped shoulders making him seem harmless, a tactic Cassandra knew all too well.

“No, that is classified information.” Cassandra lied.

“Great, This is just perfect!” Sergeant Cadash stopped his shouting when the detective glared down at him.

“ Commissioner, between this explosion and the missing person cases, we’re unable to have anyone look into this Kallak of Ostwick in relation to the case.” The detective shrugged at Cullen.

“Between the regular work and now crowd control, our Guards are spread thin. The best I can do is give one, maybe two lieutenants to do guard duty. Mr Kallak told us he’s gonna be moving the girl, Dagna, into the hills. That’s too much ground, it would have been easier if he took the girl to his fucking apartment but—”

“Sergeant, it’s fine. You’ll release Dagna of Kinloch Hold back into Kallak of Ostwick’s custody. Seeker Pentaghast has already volunteered to be put onto protection for the man.”

“The best we can- wait.” the blonde dwarf looked back and forth between the two humans. “Oh. Well, good! That’s good because uh…”

“Two birds, one stone.” The detective gave a small smile and nodded. “I’ll look into this Saare Adaar character. From the last name I can assume she’s from one of the Fereldan Vashoth sanctuaries. There’s a private security company that’s entirely Vashoth, the Kalo Vas, that works here in the city. If I recall they had a mage in their numbers, on who’s vitaar is incredibly close to dwarven design. If that brings nothing up I’ll need to get into contact with Mr Kallak. Seeker Pentaghast, if I can get a phone number from you?”

“Of course,” Cassandra pulled out her slim wallet and handed over an official business card.
“Sergeant, is there anything else Miss Dagna told you about the suspects.”

“Orlesian accents, dwarves, there were four but we’ve found five dead dwarves in aftermath. Three had masks, but the other two were guards posted outside of the laboratory. All Casteless. Besides the description of the mask, we have no other leads to the leader.”

“Did any of the bodies have missing fingers?”

“Bodies were too mangled at the crime scene. Forensics are still piecing things together.”

“And the weapon that caused the explosion, detective?”

“As best as we can tell, Miss Dagna used some kind of device that allowed a non-magic user to create fire magic, spells and the like. It was overloaded with raw lyrium and caused the accident. Self-defense, like the sergeant said, Forensics is trying to figure out how and where it went off.”

“Thank you. You may go.” The two Guards left, Cullen’s jaw clenching when his men didn’t wait for him to dismiss them.

“Did the dwarf tell you about his daughter?”

“Did your girlfriend tell you about Saare?” Cassandra teased. Cullen’s professionalism dropped.

“Wait, did she call me her boyfriend? What did she say- that’s not funny.” Cullen said.

Cassandra laughed, for the first time since… was it really only yesterday morning? She remembers a cleaning closet in the Alienage, a dwarf with Casteless tattoos and tipped ears doing terrible impressions of Nobles. His face losing all tension at such a small touch from her. For a brief moment, Cassandra wanted to make Kallak laugh again.
Kallak locked the door to the floral shop, holding his most promising rose in a small pot. The tips of the petals were sapphire, the veins on the outermost petals teal. The other experimental plants were in a portable nursery sitting in the back of Thom’s truck. Thom was putting several bags into the bed of truck, taking care with some coolers filled with plant samples. Kallak was wearing Tael’s old bomber jacket. It had several makeshift patches, most from bands and gangs that no longer existed. He looked up at the Snapdragon sign, the painted dragon breathing petals onto the roof. The sign actually hung on his balcony from his apartment, the same as the sign for Shartan’s Oath for Tael. Kallak felt a hand on his shoulder, and he looked up to see Krem.

“Chief told us what happened.” Krem gave Kallak a small smile. The dwarf heard Thom talking to Bull, the rest of the Chargers climbing into the bed of the truck.

“Krem, no, I-“

“Listen, we’re neighbours. Besides we pay you rent for the bakery, so that makes you the Boss. We’re just gonna come and help you get everything prepped. We’ll be back down to open up for Monday.” Krem patted Kallak and then went back to the truck, pulling Rocky and Dalish out of Thom’s truck and the three piled into a minivan.

Kallak noticed that the minivan was loaded with bags and weapons, including a large axe and dragontooth hammer. Thom got into the driver seat, warming up the truck, but Bull walked over to Kallak, the Vashoth wearing the tackiest hawaiian shirt the dwarf had ever seen.


“Thanks Boss.”

“I’m not your boss. What the hell are you and your crew doing?”

“Don’t get mad, Cadash.”

“What did you just say to me?” Kallak snapped, his grip on the flowerpot tightening. Bull laughed, loud enough for the others to here, then started to talk in a low voice.
“I know who you are. And while you might have already looked into my past, I’ll let you know who
I am.”

“...Talk.”

“I’m Ben-Hassrath, I was sent here to watch and see what happens in Ostwick. Everyone thinks that
the peace here is because of Alex Trevelyan, but the Qun wants answers. So do the Seekers.”

“So, did you tell Cassandra you were a fucking Qunari?”

“I did.”

“When.” Kallak demanded.

“About the third time she came and bought something from me and asked questions about you.”

“Did you tell her my name?”

“No, I didn’t tell her you really are.”

“Are you blackmailing me?”

“Boss-” Bull held up his hands in mock surrender.

“Sorry, forgot you don’t have any free thought. Is the Qun blackmailing me?”

“Boss, I’m leaving the Qun.” Bull waited for Kallak to get over his shock.

“Why- you- what happened? Did they try to hurt the others?” The qunari gave a small smile at
Kallak’s concern.

“Nice rose.”

“Don’t sidetrack this. I need to know, what happened?”

“Got a letter, they wanted me to come down for one last test. I knew what it was though.”

“A test of loyalty.”

“They had wanted me to bring the Chargers, my men.”

“And you said no.”

“I said no.” The two men looked at each, then Bull stood up straight.

“Shit.” Kallak relaxed his grip on the pot, his thick eyebrows knotting together in concentration.

“Need my boys to get out of town for the weekend. Krem knows, but the others don’t. Not much to tell, it’s really just like writing letters back home. Most of them do that anyway.”

“I know someone, they used to be Tamasaran. Leader of a security team, the Valo Kas. Her kid is the clerk next door, good lad, only sixteen. She helped me raise my daughter, I’m sure she can do something about… helping.”

“I’m still Qunari,” Bull said, his eyes not matching his relaxed stance. “I’m not Tal-Vashoth.”

“Neither is my daughter, nor any of the other folk in the hills. They’re good people, Bull. They look out for their own. Just like you look out for Krem, for your boys.” Kallak pulled out the burner phone he got yesterday. “Give me your number.” Bull paused before giving the dwarf his number. The two talked quietly, but eventually something was planned out.
Tael came out and waved Bull and Krem goodbye, flipping off Kallak as he went past in Thom’s truck. The dwarf stuck out his tongue and flipped her off as well. The drive to the hills was an hour, with one stop just past the last bridge to the mainland. Cassandra was there waiting for them, her faux sport car traded out for a brand new SUV. While it didn’t have any obvious markings, it was still Guard property. She drove behind Bull’s minivan, the three cars driving further inward.

Orchards and fields of corn and wheat dominated the landscape, the occasional pumpkin patch seen. Thom knew the beaten roads, slowing down just before the speed traps for the one or two villages they passed through. The Noble estates they passed were sprawling lawns with minimal forestry, usually bordered by either another Noble or a natural water reservoir. Kallak knew that most Nobles who live out here made their money off of private land tax to farmers or selling fresh water from the reservoirs. Moma had wanted to live out here in her last years, something about making both the Nobles and ‘Maker-fearing Dusters’ uncomfortable. She never did, spent her last days in the Alienage, bickering about the price of bread and lyrium. Kallak was glad she never moved out of the city. It would have been too cliche.

They passed a run down Chantry and a plain looking office, the Warden sigil on a street sign, and went two more kilometers before turning onto a gravel road. Thick, ancient trees lined the drive, the shade hiding the midday autumn sun, shades of green and red filling the truck. Kallak noticed the ripe and rotten apples, lemons, cherries littered the ground. The trees eventually were replaced with stumps and beehives. Huge sunflowers in round shallow gardens sat in the center of a few beehives; Kallak saw that the others had similar shallow garden plots.

The house itself had been a Noble estate, one that had clearly seen better days. An almost comical red barn sat behind the two story house. It must have housed riding horses, but it had been converted into Thom’s workshop. The Warden conscript stopped the truck in front of the house, Kallak getting out when he turned off the engine. Sera wasn’t home, but two different elves with red handkerchiefs tied on their arms came rushing out of the house. They started to shake Cassandra’s car as she parked it, and then ran away when the Seeker got out of the driver’s seat. Kallak saw that the deck was ripped up and only half finished. The remaining boards were under a tarp, a bucket of varnish and paint rollers next to the pile.

“This is… interesting.” Cassandra said, her clear disgust at the state of the house.

The Jennies having moved to rock Bull’s minivan. Grim and Stitches joined them, Rocky having a hard time getting out of the back. Bull was laughing and then lifted the van from the back bumper. The Jennies were laughing and cheering the Qunari to flip the van with Rocky and the gear still in.

“Could be worse.” Kallak said. “You could’ve been here when Sera decided to get sledgehammers and make a hole in the roof because she was bored.”
“You’re kidding.” Cassandra looked up at Thom. “He’s kidding, right?” Thom just laughed and started to unpack the bags from the bed.

“Boss, who’s going where?” Bull shouted, the Chargers holding a mix of sleeping bags, shields, and one cooler that had a padlock on the front.

“Lads in the barn, Girls in the house. Thom, that good with you?”

“S’Fine, long as Dalish and Skinner don’t mind sharing the guest room.”

“We’ll be good!”

“Right, well come around this way, kitchen has a door to come through for. Seeker, there’s a servants house, fully furnished and the like. It’s the best I can do for you, the place is usually used during the winter but- well the main house is mess.”

“Oi! Why ain’t we getting the servants house?”

“Because there’s one bed, that’s why!”

“It’s alright Thom, they can take the servants house. I’ll be fine with the guest room.”

“Hey Chief this lil house is good enough for all of us!”

“Wait really?” Thwack

“Bull, don’t think you’re gonna fit through the door.”

“You think, Boss?”

“Just a little.” Kallak flashed a smile, taking his rose and sleeping bag to the barn.
The ground was relatively free of woodchips, the gravel pricking his toes and exposed heel. He found himself smiling at the slight discomfort, hearing his Auntie's voice in the back of his mind, criticizing him for not having mountain feet. The soles of his feet were tougher now than when he was in his early twenties. Kallak paused, realizing he was thinking about the two women who shaped him more and more often. He quickly blamed Varric and the meetings they were having. The barn in inside had a ladder leading up to the upper area, a military cot and Thom’s things on one side, boxes filled with gear on the other end. Kallak didn’t bother going upstairs, taking an empty horse stall and put his bag inside. Bull had taken the other side of the barn, gave Kallak a small smile. The dwarf ignored him, still angry about the other man.

Kallak came back out to see the two Jennies with the coolers. He jerked with his head towards the makeshift greenhouse next door, hidden from view by the house. Kallak looked around at what he had to work with, setting the potted rose down. The Jennies started bringing in the rest of the equipment. By the time the sun had finally set, Kallak had gotten everything unloaded and set up for the next batch. Cassandra knocked on the frosted glass door. Kallak wasn’t paying attention when he told her to come in, but now she was there, watching him water flowers.

“The others are eating dinner.” she finally said.

“Hm.”

“I haven’t started yet.”

“Go, you should eat. Tomorrow is gonna be a long day.”

“You should eat as well.”

“I’m fine.”

“No, you’re not.”

“Pentaghast, I’m fi-”

“Cassandra.” Kallak stopped what he was doing to look at her.
“Sorry?”

“My name is Cassandra.” She crossed her arms, “I would prefer if you called me by that.”

Kallak kept still, barely breathing. Cassandra. He didn’t think he could say it out loud, even after being given permission. He looked away and cleared his throat after a few moments, putting down the watering can. The two of them left the greenhouse and went into the kitchen. Krem and Thom were washing the dishes, two plates of food still sitting on the table. The rest of the group were in the living room, the radio on to Arlof’s station, and a board game in the middle of the coffee table.

“Hey Boss.” Krem called out, turning around to face Kallak as he entered. “All settled in?”

“Plants are, not too worried about myself. Bull manage to fit in with the rest of you?”

“Nah, he’s gonna be in the barn with you and Thom here. Hey what was that weird flower for anyway?”

“It’s a commission for the College Jubilee.”

“The Jubilee. The one that was three nights ago?”

“The one next year. 100th anniversary of the College being refounded. First Enchanter is wanting blue roses and guess who got the job.”

“Is that what it’s for? Here I thought we were just making some crazy new flower to sell.” Thom said.

Thom handed Krem another pan to wipe off with a towel, moving on to the next one. Kallak and Cassandra ate their meals, Krem and Kallak continuing their conversation into the living room. Thom and Cassandra joined the board game, the goal being to have the most influence on the map. Bull was the only one not in a team, but he won every round. Eventually, the two Jennies from before came sliding down the stairs on cardboard boxes, and the party decided it was time for bed. Kallak waited, taking his time to get up from his seat on the couch; Cassandra had waited until the two Jennies had passed out in front of the radio before going upstairs to the guest room.
“Cassandra.” Kallak said, quiet enough to not wake up the elves. The Seeker stopped on the stairs, staring at the dwarf. “See you tomorrow.”

“Goodnight, Kallak.” She gave a soft smile and continued back upstairs. Kallak watched her leave, feeling his heart beat faster, his head light after saying her name out loud. It felt… nice.

Chapter End Notes

I'm in my last year of uni.... Soz about the delays
The rest of the week went by without incident. The Chargers helped to set up traps in the abandoned orchards that lined the property. Bull and Thom spent their time pulling out the remaining tree stumps. Sera and Dagna were picked up by Cassandra, patient as the two girlfriends settled inside. Sera cared for her bees, collecting the last honey for the year. Saturday morning, Bull and the Chargers left in their minivan, jars filled with honey and honeycomb. Thom moved back into the servants house, Kallak taking the couch. Sera wasn’t happy about it, but Kallak was able to convince the young girl that he was going to be on a couch, whether it was in the estate or the servants house.

Dagna wasn’t able to talk as much as she was used to, the wound on her neck still recovering from the fleshrot poison. The kitchen became a chemistry lab, Sera and Dagna making Tempest bombs. At some point, Sera grabbed an empty jar and filled it with bees. They ended up keeping the ‘Bee Jars’ scattered around the house. It was chaotic, the house constantly in action, but for the most part everyone got used to a system.

Like today, with Cassandra and Thom practicing with the weapons that the Warden conscript kept around. Kallak and Sera had climbed onto the roof to practice trickshots, most involving the burnt muffins that they had made with Dagna.

“Ha! Eat it Inky!” Sera screamed, having fired an explosive shot at one charcoaled muffin.

“Pull!” Kallak shouted. Dagna pushed a button on her remote, the kiddie trenchbucket flinging three more muffins into the air.

Kallak notched two arrows at once, pulled back, and breathed. He let go, one arrow going through two muffins, the other catching the third muffin. The heavier arrow landed just outside the barn door, rolling for a foot; the other kept flying, until a resounding thwack. It hit its mark on the second floor of the barn.

“I win.” Kallak turned towards Sera, a shit eating grin plastered on his face. The young elf stuck out her tongue and then moved to sit next to her girlfriend. Dagna was laughing at Sera, the elf hiding her face in the younger dwarf’s hair.

Kallak heard Cassandra shout from below, Thom beating his sword onto his shield. The two ran towards each other, bashing their shields together. Cassandra drove her sword forward like a spear,
aiming for Thom’s exposed thigh. He blocked with his own weapon, pushing forward. She moved to the side, forcing Thom to lurch forward and adjust his bodyweight. The fight was over when Cassandra twirled around, her shield blocking Thom’s wild swing, and her own blade resting on his neck. The two warriors stood up, immediately starting another mock fight. Kallak left the girls on the roof, climbing through the open window. He pulled out a burner phone just as it rang.

“What is it.” Kallak put the bow on the dresser, walking out of Sera’s room.

“We found them. Val Foret. Apparently we’re the only source that can ensure no red stuff. Must’ve heard we were closing up shop, and they’re the last stop.”

“Good work. Send some bashers and slashers to Val Foret. We still need to find that bastard here, he got away according to the girl. How far is the Valo Kas?”

“Too far to help in Val Foret, they’re on the boat heading to the city. Be here near the end of your vacation.”

“And my shop.”

“Secure, warded, and waiting for you. The key is chivalry isn’t dead. What about the shipment?”

“Take it to the docks, the old crab shop will do.”

“And our locals?”

“Families first, pull back on singles, they know how to handle themselves. I want search parties in the streets, that bastard is still running around.”

“Like old times?”

“Like old times.” Kallak hung up as he reached the bottom of the stairs. The living room was a mess, Sera decided yesterday she wanted to paint over the floral wallpaper. Thom had moved most of the furniture to the middle, plastic sheets covering everywhere. The kitchen was relatively free of the girls experiments, empty vials stacked in the sink. Kallak walked outside through the servants door,
just as a service truck pulled up to the driveway. The warden sigil painted on the truck door.

An older man, human, and a city elf got out of the car. They watched Cassandra and Thom fight, but Thom stopped when he noticed the newcomers. He walked over to the car, wondering what was happening. Cassandra raised an eyebrow at Kallak as he walked passed.

“Thom, good to see you.” The older gentleman shook Thom’s hand.

“Warden Blackwall. Is there something wrong?”

“Hm? No, but I need you to come with me. This here is Tyrael, a new recruit. This weekend is his initiation, and I need another Warden to come along. You think your boss will give you the weekend off?” Blackwall looked down at Kallak as he finished his statement.

The older man had a long grey beard. He smiled and the snaggletooth caught on his lip. Kallak put the man in his late 50s, but Wardens were always hard to guess. The elf, however, he did recognize. Tyrael of Ostwick, his grandmother was on the hahren council. He had heard from Tael that the boy had been caught stealing in the Law District, but no one was sure what his punishment was going to be. Kallak walked up to the elf, his feet silent on the gravel, and the boy recognized him immediately. He bowed his head, a blush coming to his ears. Kallak smiled at him, and handed the boy a fruit leather from his pocket. Tyrael had shaved his head, meaning he wasn’t able to hide his face behind his hair. He took the fruit leather and nodded his thanks. Kallak patted the boy’s elbow before going over to introduce himself.

Warden Blackwall turned around as Thom introduced Kallak. The man was Orlesian, but his accent was more from the farmlands than the cities. Kallak realized why Sera had called Thom ‘Blackwall’ now; the two looked similar, nearly identical, but the Warden was older than Thom. Kallak shook the man’s hand, noting his knuckles and age spots, the veins slightly bulging on the back of his hands. Kallak didn’t know a lot about Wardens, but he did know that something caused them to change, and he never saw one past the age of 60.

“The shop is closed for the next week or so, Warden Blackwall. Thom is more than free to help you out.” Kallak let go of the man’s hand. “Tyrael over there, he’s a sharp boy. Don’t go thinking that he can’t handle a sword, known him since he was tyke. Give him a two-handed axe and you’ve got yourself a fighter.”

“Thanks for the advice,” Warden Blackwall said. “but the court already said something about him taking down three guards on his own.” the man laughed and looked at Thom. “Reminds me of someone.”

“I’ll pack my things.” Thom nodded at them both and walked off. A black muffin hit him on the
head, Sera laughing from the rooftops. Warden Blackwall waved at her, and then saw Cassandra walking towards them. Tyrael moved to get back into the car, putting his feet up on the headboard when he was inside.

“Evening miss.” Blackwall smiled, his aged and cracked face kind. Cassandra smiled back, standing next to Kallak.

“Hello, Warden. Is something wrong in the Deep Roads?”

“Hm? Oh no, I just need to borrow Thom for the weekend. We have a new recruit, and we need to do the initiation. You know how it is, secretive groups and all that.” Blackwall kept smiling, but Cassandra stiffened at ‘secretive groups’.

“I suppose Thom told you who I am then.” Cassandra was keeping her voice even. Kallak scratched at the scar on his nose, hiding his smirk.

“He told me who both of you were, actually.” Blackwall laughed. Kallak felt Cassandra staring at him, but he force himself to act natural.

“Damn, here I thought my seat on the Hahren Council was a secret!” Kallak lied. It wasn’t really a lie, but he knew that wasn’t what Blackwall was told. The Warden kept smiling, his snaggletooth, somehow, a charming trait on his weathered face.

“I suppose it must be hard, hiding such a thing like that from a Seeker of Truth.”

Blackwall turned his attention to Cassandra, who started to ask him about the Warden business. Kallak left the conversation, just as Thom was coming out of the servants house.

“Stay safe.” Kallak reached out his hand.

“Are you actually worried about me?” Thom didn’t take the dwarf’s hand. He had been distant ever since he learned about the shop being a front. Kallak clenched his teeth and dropped his hand.

“Can’t I be?” Kallak waited, Thom’s face still dark.
“Didn’t think the Carta cared about bystanders.”

“I’m not the Carta, Thom. I’m your boss, and frankly I thought I was your friend.” Kallak walked away, his anger getting the better of him. He stopped after a few steps, however, and turned around.

“Thom!” The Warden conscript turned around to look at him. “If you die, Sera will kill me, so stay safe.” Sera threw another muffin at Thom’s head for emphasis. He smiled and walked away, getting into the truck with Warden Blackwall.

When Thom left, the estate began to grow colder. Kallak gave the girls his stash of firewood, even though Cassandra tried to protest. He didn’t regret it, until he spent the night shivering in the servants house. Kallak woke up early the next morning to cut some firewood for himself. It was the first time since his surgery that he was able to do something physical. The entire time they had been setting up the estate he had watched, forcing himself to heal so that the surgical scars could heal properly. But now the dwarf was more than happy to be able to work again. Especially since he could work without a shirt or binder on. Kallak kept his leggings on, the soft leather waistband resting low on his hips. The fresh scars pulled slightly when he swung the axe down, but he had put on the ointment before working.

The sky was a changing colors this early, the abandoned orchards holding onto the morning mist longer than the rest of the grounds. Kallak swung the axe again, breaking the log in half. He had been at this for an hour, the vibrant red sky going grey, then finally turning a soft blue. Kallak heard the kitchen door open, but he didn’t turn around. He put another log on the stand, waiting for Sera’s voice. It didn’t come in the first swing, nor the second.

“You know Dagna, the doc said it was okay for you to talk.” Kallak remarked, smiling to himself as he broke another log.

“I’m not Dagna.” a very Nevarran accent called back. Kallak froze, the sweat on his back growing much colder than before.

“Cassandra.” Kallak swallowed the lump in his throat. *Fuck, where’s his shirt?*

“Nice tattoos.” Cassandra was walking towards him, a hand with sword and gun calluses picking up his shirt and handing him.
“It’s Vallaslin.” Kallak took his shirt from the woman, not yet putting it on, just holding it in front of his chest. Did she see?

Cassandra was dressed casual, a soft plaid shirt, the first two buttons undone, and relaxed jeans with combat boots that might have actually seen combat. In this light, Kallak could see she had a faded scar on her cheek, a large nasty gash that had puckered and was in the process of fading. She was holding a cup for him to take. Kallak slowly put his shirt back on. It was an old tee shirt, the collar stretched out, showing off his collarbones and some of his chest. It had the logo for an old science fiction series, but after so many washes it was barely recognizable. Cassandra smiled around her sip of coffee as Kallak took his mug from her hands.

“What do they mean?” Cassandra sat down, another tree stump not far from them. Kallak leaned on the chopping block, leaving the axe embedding in it. He took a sip, realizing that she had made him tea. She’s calm… and she remembered I don’t drink coffee.

“Which ones?”

“Let’s start easy. Those ones, on your arms.” She was relaxed, a rare sight, espically after the last week of activity.

“Well,” Kallak cleared his throat, trying to remember what he had told Varric when he asked. “They’re the twins, Dirthamen and Falon’Din.

“There’s a tale about them… Falon’Din had wandered into the Fade, and his brother Dirthamen had gone looking for him. Two ravens tried to sway Dirthamen away from finding his brother, but he tamed them and had the ravens guide him to his lost kin. Falon’Din guides the People across the Veil, and Dirthamen kept the secret of how to return. Was always partial to the twins, so I got them together.”

“And the one on your back?”

“Well there’s June, the Elven God of the Craft. My Keeper thought it would fit me, considering, well.” Kallak waved at his figure, and then pointed at his goatee. Cassandra snorted into her coffee, causing the dwarf to laugh.

“That’s rather rude!” Cassandra said, laughing with him.
“Relax, it’s only the knot between my shoulders that represents June. Actually my back has Elgar’nan, The All Father. The People have a tale that says Elgar’nan is feared by the dwarves, since the sun would burn us.” Kallak shrugged, taking a sip of his tea. “Got enough sunburns in life to prove them right.”

“...That’s... I’m sorry.”

“What for?” Kallak cocked his head to the side.

“That your people hate you.” *Oh. He thought. Shit.*

“My people don’t hate me, Cassandra. It’s just a story.” Kallak smiled at the woman, his expression soft. She didn’t buy it, putting her mug down before walking up to him.

“And this?” She put her fingers on his exposed collarbone, tracing the edges of the Vallaslin. Kallak took a deep breath, the bold move shocking him.

“It- It’s June, but...” He was staring at her face, but she was too busy tracing the blue line. *Say something! Anything!* He felt the surgical scars under his shirt, the cold air making his nipples stand up. *She saw them... but she didn’t say anything about it.* Was she really just interested in his Vallaslin? After a shaky exhale, Kallak revolted against his fear and took his shirt off again.

“Here.” He took a hold of her wrist, placing her hand on his chest. His heart pounded, not knowing how the woman would react to this.

Her pupils dilated, breath caught in her throat. Her fingers never left his skin, tracing the delicate blue that curved and spiraled downwards. She placed the palm of her hand on his sternum, tracing the dragon head that rested there. Cassandra finally let go of her breath, feeling Kallak’s heart beating so loudly against her hand. He put his own hand on top of hers, this touch finally, finally letting him breathe.

“Mythal. The All-Mother... The Protector.” Kallak said, his breath still shaky.

Cassandra looked up from their hands, into his eyes. She was soft, warm. The scar on her cheek was
sharper than ever, the edges of her face clear as day. She was, in that moment, the most perfect thing in the world. Her hand travelled up, the other one coming to rest on Kallak’s neck. The edges of the Vallaslin ended here, the Twins blending together with Mythal on the left and Elgar’nan on the right. The diamond of June and his Casteless markings matched, one rested between his eyebrows, the other nestled between stroking thumbs. Her fingers were so soft, trailing across thin blue lines. Kallak felt a small smile grow on his face, his own hands finding themselves resting on Cassandra’s hips.

“It… suits you.” she said, a soft smile on her face.

Chapter End Notes

If you're wondering, the logo on Kallak's tee is Stargate. B/c I fucking love Stargate. I grew up on that shit, every Tuesday/Thursday there was a new episode!!

Now it's Classic SyFy Channel?? Wtf, I'm not *that* old...
Faith

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Cassandra sat next to Dagna in the Chantry. Kallak and Sera didn’t want to come in, Sera dragging the older dwarf to the small towns center while she and the younger dwarf prayed. Cassandra looked around the faithful, noting that most of the pews were filled with dwarves. The choir and sisters were human. No Vashoth, no elves. Cassandra stuck out like a sore thumb in the pews, towering over everyone.

She couldn’t stop thinking about Kallak, how his Vallaslin was not for one, but multiple elven gods. She didn’t know much about the Dalish, she always assumed that even though they had several gods, people stuck to praying towards one. To see his faith on his skin, Elgar’nan and Mythal, Dirthamen and Falon’Din. June. The fragile wings of the dragon twisting around to woven branches and diamonds on his upper arms. She had seen the brambled oak that twists on his shoulders, the hidden sun shrouded in darkness on his spine. The fact that his Casteless tattoos, ending on the back of his neck, the bold blue arrow dripping down into his Vallaslin; the broad strokes of his dwarven blood nearly dominating his elven. But it would peak out, like his ears or his vibrant green eyes.

And then there was the fresh surgical scars on his chest. She knew he had been avoiding work for the last week, but to see why… Cassandra got up and continued to sing as she went to the confessional. She closed the heavy curtain, clasping her hands and resting her forehead on her knuckles. She heard the mother sit down on the other side.

“What troubles you, my daughter.”

I’m falling in love and I’m afraid. Cassandra didn’t say. She sat up and leaned back in the booth. The mother waited patiently.

“I have strayed from my mission, here in Ostwick.”

“The Maker is here with you. What mission do you think you have fallen from?”

“To watch, to observe. To understand why this city is free of conflict.”

“Ostwick is peaceful, true. But conflict is a constant, it is proof that we are in the Maker’s Light.”

“Why would the Maker want us to fight then? Why must history repeat, that mages hate templars, dwarves fight over Castes, the elves against everything- Why can’t we just stop fighting!” Cassandra didn’t shout, but she struggled to keep her voice even. The mother was quiet before she spoke.

“You are Nevarran, aren’t you my daughter.”

“What does that have to do with-”

“Ostwick is very different from your Nevarra. The Maker speaks to all his children, even when they have roots in the caverns. The faithful in this Chantry are Casteless, but they are still the Makers children. We do not turn them away simply because they are from the Stone. We have faithful in the city, with ears that are longer than either of ours. The Maker welcomes his children, even if their ancestors prayed to false gods. We would welcome the Vashoth in the Makers light, but we in Ostwick do not force them to do so.
“Ostwick is unique, the Maker made it so. It’s never one person or one people who lead our city. The Nobles may not want to admit it, but without our sisters and brothers of the different races, we would be lost.”

Cassandra waited for the Mother to say more, but she didn’t.

“My daughter, the faithful fumble and fall, thinking that the Maker’s light is limited. The Maker abandoned us because we fought over who he loved more. Andraste tried to tell us that we did not need to fight for His Light. We must fight for those who have yet to see His Light; we must fight for those that claim to be of the faith but abandon and look down on others for their race, their birth, their gifts. Andraste fought against Tevinter to help us live alongside others. The False Gods were greedy, true. But it is corrupted priests and shadowed authority that twists men's hearts.”

“So we are to accept that there are those who will never feel the Maker’s Light?”

“The Maker loves all his children, my daughter. Even those who have turned their backs to him. It was when we started to fight with ourselves, and drag his children to the fire that he abandoned us.”

The mother said the final prayer, leaving Cassandra alone in the confessional. The singing had stop, the voice of the Reverend barely reaching her. Someone had entered the other side of the confessional, but they were humming a bard’s tune.

“Leliana.”

“Cassandra.” Leliana opened the privacy door in order to look at Cassandra.

“What’s happened?”

“The Divine is wanting a report, the bombing has her worried that Ostwick might not be the shining city on the hill she was hoping for.”

“Ostwick is facing a difficult time, between the election for a new Knight Commander and Teryn. Whatever we were looking for is no longer here. The Enchanter College is run by a Knight Enchanter who has ties to the Orlesian Court and the current Commissioner for the Guard is Ferelden.”

“You haven’t heard then?” Leliana continued. “The new Knight Commander was elected. Ser Delrin Barris. His family resides just northwest of Lake Calenhad.”

“Oh, perfect.” Cassandra says, sarcasm dripping from her voice. “So those who are in charge in Ostwick aren’t actually from Ostwick… Tell the Divine there’s nothing here, it was just a coincidence that the city hasn’t fallen to chaos.”

“This isn’t just nothing, Cassandra. If peace can only be found by placing those in power who are not from the region, it might help. Ages ago, mages were scattered across the several Circles. Perhaps it’s time we do the same with the Templar Force.”

“What would be better is if we had the Knight Commander role changed, perhaps it should not be a lifelong commitment. The same with the First Enchanter, but we cannot ask the Colleges to do so now.”

“You’ll have to come back with me then. Justinia will want to hear this for herself. She’s always respected your opinion on these matters.”
“I… I can’t. Not yet, I still have somethings to deal with here in Ostwick.” Cassandra wanted to leave, to not think about her duty. She wanted to go see Kallak.

“I’ll stall for as long as I can, but you’re wanted back at Val Royeaux. The Conclave has been postponed, there were sightings of red lyrium around Haven. I can give you a month, at most. A written report might give you longer.” Leliana said a finishing prayer, closing the privacy door. Cassandra left the confessional, watched as an older dwarven woman in a shawl took her place.

Dagna was waiting outside, Kallak talking to the girl. The faithful gave the two a wide berth, and it wasn’t until Cassandra was outside herself that she saw why; a muscular Vashoth woman was standing just behind the pair, several motorbikes and other Vashoth not far. They all wore Vitaar, and the Vashoth standing just behind Kallak had a whip and a curved sword strapped to her side. Cassandra walked up to them, not sure what was going on.

“Seeker, this is Shokrakar, leader of the Valo Kas. Rakar, this is Cassandra Pentaghast.” Kallak smiled, a hand on Dagna’s shoulder.

“Well, well, Shok-Kallak. Are you sure you need my help in protecting the girl?” She smiled, showing off her teeth. Cassandra saw that the teeth on her bottom jaw were replaced with silverite fangs.

“I’m sure. I need to get back to the shop, and I’m pretty sure that Seeker Pentaghast has some business to attend to in the city.” Kallak looked up to Cassandra, “Unless you want to stay, of course.”

Cassandra looked at the rest of the Vashoth. They weren’t hiding their weapons, but none of them carried mage staffs or guns. Some had daggers, two with bows, but most had two handed axes or curved swords like Shokrakar. Cassandra had worn an overcoat today, but when she moved to put her hand on her holster the group didn’t move. She looked back at Kallak, how at ease he was around this mercenary group.

“Mind if I asked how you two know each other?”

“That’s actually a funny story,” Shokrakar started. “See, I used to own a ship down at the Floating Market, and Shok-Kallak used to come in all the time!”

“Dammit Rakar!” the scar that stretched across his nose and cheeks grew red, Dagna laughing at Kallak’s embarrassment. Shokrakar rubbed at his scalp, the rest of the Vashoth laughing with her.

“Shok-Kallak, that was many years ago! Long before daughter was yours!” The Vashoth woman look back at Cassandra. “I’m Saare’s boss, and the only reason that girl knows what it means to be Vashoth. She is smart, considering who her father is.”

“Shok-Kallak?” Cassandra crossed her arms, a soft smile crossing her face.

“When Saare first came to Ostwick, so scared the little thing! But she has a knack for language. Shok means same thing as Kallak, little Saare call her father Shok for months! But see, I am Shok too! So we both are Shok, as we both are parent!”

“Speaking of,” Kallak said, changing the subject away from himself, “Your boy is nearly finished with his studies. You gonna let him stay with Tael or you still stubborn enough to get him to go with your posse?”

“Avaard is poet, he’s better off in the city.”
“You have a son?” Cassandra asked.

“Hm?” The Vashoth smiled, shaking her head. “Yes, young boy, mid-twenties. Was surprise when I found pregnant, but Shok-Kallak already had Saare, and so figured he owed me.”

“He’s part of the Nameless Grant,” Dagna spoke up, her voice still raspy from the accident. “He’s really good, he even helped me with some designs. He’s pretty shy though.”

When they all reached the estate, the motorbikes were parked in front of the barn. Two from the Valo Kas (also named Avaard, Cassandra found out) had gone into the abandoned orchid to check the traps, and came back with apples. Shokrakar had started barking orders the moment they arrived. Around dinner time, a group of elves and some gangly human teenagers showed up at the doorsteps. Sera dragged them in and kicked out the Seeker to the servants house for the evening. Cassandra didn’t pay attention to any of this, her mind still reeling over what had happened in the confessional.

The house was loud, ten Vashoth and a gaggle of rowdy teenagers doing… something, a party of some kind. Cassandra was sitting outside the servants house, still holding her mug of coffee. She went to take a sip; cold and tasteless. She grimaced, throwing the liquid out onto the ground. Something crashed from the estate, followed by cheering. The Cassandra looked through the window into the servants house, saw Kallak was talking on his phone. She knew it was burner phone, that he got it when Bull had left. She didn’t listen into his conversation, but his face was grim. He hung up and walked outside. He spent a minute standing there, flexing his hands, breathing deeply.

The dwarf cursed when he saw Cassandra sitting on the bench behind him. He laughed at himself and went to sit next to her. A light upstairs went out, followed by a crash of glass and more shouting. Cassandra snorted in the estates direction, Kallak sighing heavily. His feet didn’t reach the ground, but he didn’t seem to mind that the bench wasn’t made for dwarves.

“You packed?” He asked, watching the abandoned orchid in the dark.

“Yes, do your plants need special treatment?” Cassandra held the mug in her hand, mindlessly moving her thumb on the rim.

“Shokrakar had a few of her boys move them this morning. Thought my daughter was with them, but she’s not.”

“You sound angry about that.”

“Haven’t seen Saare in a year. Usually she’ll come find me and drop her stuff at my place.”

“...What’s she like?”

“A stubborn hard ass who won’t take no for an answer.” Kallak scratched at his nose, a nervous tick.

“So she’s like her father.” Cassandra said, grinning to herself.

“I can take no for an answer.” Kallak grinned up at the Seeker, pretending to be hurt by her comment.

“Bullshit.” Cassandra laughed, the dark becoming easier to bear with Kallak.

A lot was becoming easier to bear with him. When she first arrived in Ostwick, she was alone. Yes, there was Cullen, but he was the new Commissioner and far too busy for Cassandra to just drop by. Her missions were usually isolating, spending months in one location, only to leave at a moments
notice. She wouldn’t leave a note or even a hint of where she was going. She only felt the urge once, but she never did leave one. There was no time. Sitting here in the relative quiet, Kallak offering her a smoke, his presence calming.

“Did I ever tell you why I am in Ostwick?” Cassandra whispered. Kallak shook his head, taking another drag of his cigarette.

“I was suppose to find out why Ostwick hasn’t fallen. Because of the fighting between mages and templars.”

“...So the murder case, you coming to my shop.”

“It was a cover. One that would let me move freely in the city.”

“...My meeting with Vivienne. That wasn’t the only time you saw her, was it?”

“It was the first, actually. I went back a week later for my investigation. I found nothing. Ostwick is… it’s just an outlier. It’s only a matter time before tensions rise and the war comes here too.”

Kallak finished his cigarette, flicking the bud onto the gravel. He turned his body to face her, and looked at her. Really look at her. The dim lights from the estate made the scar across his face menacing, but his eyes, his elven eyes. Was he- was he sorry for her? She couldn’t look away as he spoke.

“You don’t know that. Things could change, maybe… Alex won’t let the city fall. Even if she loses this election, she’ll fight to keep peace.”

“Is that really what is needed? Peace?” Cassandra had to breath, in order to stop herself from crying again today. “What if we need this war, to help everyone?”

“I- huh.” Kallak chuckled, his hand hesitating before he took her mug from her hand. Cassandra didn’t even realize she had a deathgrip on it. “I don’t think war is ever gonna help things get better. It just satisfies an itch, reminds us that things can always be worse. War is always worse.”

Cassandra watched as pulled out another cigarette, offering her one again. She doesn’t smoke. She took one anyway, letting him light it for her. The glow from their buds gave off a different glow, something warm, something romantic. He was beautiful, the signs of age in his braided sideburns, the wrinkles that clung to the corners of his eyes. The deep blue on his scalp, the same blue peaking just out from under his shirt collar.

“Your a good man, Kallak of Ostwick.” Cassandra took a long drag from the cigarette, watching the orchid with him.

He grew quiet, his body still as he smoked. He finished his cigarette before finally speaking.

“I’m glad you think so.”

Chapter End Notes

Once again, it's exam time and I'm Dying and Not Studying. I actually started writing this story this time last year... and just finished the 1st draft of the final chapter. Yay!
Cassandra had dropped Kallak off Monday, they scheduled their time in the Floating Market for tomorrow. Cole apparently hung out in front of the shop the whole week, Bull and Krem coming over to feed him. He never ate, but he thanked them regardless. The boy was happy to see Kallak again, even offered to cover Sera’s shifts while she was gone. The dwarf told Cole he didn’t have to, but he appreciated it.

The shop had orders backed up, and Vivienne called at noon to ask why he wasn’t there for the last shipment, complaining about the tardiness and lack of manners from the grunt who did bring the shipment. Kallak asked the First Enchanter if the Seeker had come by after their initial meeting about the blue roses.

“Of course, my dear. It turns out that the Seeker was wanting to know how our students are being treated. She also wanted a meeting with Professor Pavus. By the way darling, the next time that man wishes to use my florist for his own petty reasons, charge him double will you?”

“Mademoiselle, I will be sure to add a healthy donation fee for the Nameless Grant to any of your staff who wish to be passive aggressive to each other. Including the Chantry representatives.”

“Thank you darling. Is there anything else I can do for you?”

“I was hoping to get into contact with my daughter, she’s back in town and last we spoke, she said she would be working with Professor Pavus.”

“I’ll see what I can do, keep your line open for now.”

“Thank you, Mademoiselle.”

“...Dorian Pavus speaking.”

“Professor Pavus! I’m Saare Adaar’s father, I was just wondering if I can talk with her.”
“Who is this?”

“Kallak? The florist.”

“Oh! From the Snapdragon? I didn’t realize that Saare was your daughter.”

“I get that a lot, might have to do with her being taller than me. Is she in?”

“She’s just ran down to get lunch, I can tell her to call back if you like.”

“If you don’t mind, I’d like to stay on the line until she comes back.”

“I- very well. What would like to talk about?”

“Saare tells me that you don’t have anywhere to go for Santialia. If I can, I’d like to invite you to ours. It’s usually me, Saare, some of the youngins on the Nameless Grant who can’t go home, and other friends.”

“That’s… very considerate of you.”

“Well, you were able to convince my daughter to come back to Ostwick! I don’t know much about magic, just that she uses it. I figure no one should be alone during the Holidays.”

“I won’t have to wear an ugly sweater will I?”

“Only if you bring fruitcake.”

“Hahaha, oh I see.”
“If you really feel pressed, I heard that a certain vintage of rivani rum is on sale at the Elven Brews. Can’t really leave my shop, but it might make a good Secret Saintalia gift.”

“I’ve always preferred single malt whiskey or a nice shiraz, but I suppose rum would be interesting.”

“Noted, shiraz and rum don’t really mix, but I know a good port that might be to your liking. You don’t have to stay for long, just enough so that Saare won’t go chewing my ear off for not checking in on you.”

“I very much appreciate that, Mr Adaar.”

“Please, I’m not Mr Adaar, just Kallak.”

“Well, Kallak, Saare is right here if you still wish to talk with her.”

“Much appreciated, thanks for keeping on the line Professor.”

“Please, Dorian will do.”

“...Hello?”

“Hiya Stranger.”

“Kallak! Hey, you weren’t at the shop and Tael said that there had been an accident, but no one wanted to talk to me about. Are you okay?”

“I’m okay, I’m back in the city, just had to do some errands at Sera’s place.”

“I heard about the College.”

“I know, what else did you hear?”
“Just that some of your boutique trucks were in a crash.”

“Yea, the driver had trouble, but insurance has pulled through.”

“And what about the other driver?”

“It was a hit and run, but most likely they had dropped by the College before leaving town. We’re figuring it out.”

“...Dorian is gone, you secure?”

“Was patched through by the First Enchanter.”

“Do we know who made the hit?”

“No, but we’ve got a list. I need you to be safe, you and Alex.”

“I stayed with her last night, I’m gonna become her security guard for the rest of the campaign. Public spotlight, the whole thing.”

“That’s my girl. Have you checked in with your Godfather?”

“Arlof? I tried, but he wasn’t in the studio. Figured he may have gone to the country for Chantry things. Alex says that there’s a small pilgrimage thing, but that’s in two days…”

“He’s probably getting interviews with the workers. Listen, there’s a writer in town, goes by Varric Tethras. If you see him, ask where Arlof went. Other than that just keep checking in on his studio, you know how he gets.”

“Alex said there was a Seeker of Truth that had been tailing you for the hit, is everything okay?”
“I’m fine, actually I’m gonna be taking her down to the Floating Market tomorrow. I won’t have my-”

“Wait, you’re going a date with a Seeker?”

“It’s not a date.”

“It sounds like one.”

“Saare.”

“If I call Tael, is she gonna tell me it’s a date?”

“It’s not a date! The woman just hasn’t seen the city, I offered to show her, that’s all this is!”

“Most people who are questioned don’t take their interrogators on a tour of the town.”

“Get that tone out of your mouth, this is not a date.”

“Do you like her??”

“…”

“Oh Creators. You do!”

“What? No! I didn’t say anything, that’s not a yes!”

“You taught me that silence is everything! You like her!!”
“I’m hanging up now.”

“Have fun on your date.”

IT’S NOT A DATE! Kallak slammed the phone down, still red in the face.

It was a date. It was very much a date. Cassandra had told him that her investigation was almost over. She would most likely be leaving, never to return to Ostwick and yet… She had said yes. The woman had said yes and smiled. Kallak booted up his dinosaur of a computer, making phone calls for the rest of the evening. By the time it got dark, someone was knocking on his office door.

Varric Tethras stood in the doorway, one hand on the handle. Cole was just behind him, the brim of the boy’s hat hiding his face. Kallak finished his last call, waving the two of them in. Varric quietly got himself ready, Cole clocking out and hanging up his apron. Kallak opened a drawer and handed Cole an envelope, all cash. The boy took the envelope, leaving an old tulip head, the tips of the petals a deep blue. The boy left without a word, the door clicking shut just as Varric started the recorder.

“Varric, sorry about the last week or so. Had business to attend to.”

“That’s alright, gave me time to do some secondary research.” Varric leaned back in his chair, pen ready.

“Right, so. We talked about my youth. My Auntie, and my coming of age with the Carta… What am I missing.”

“How about Moma and her sisters.”

“Ah. Right. Well the first thing you’ve got to know is that Moma didn’t fight. She had the twins, Aunt Lai and Aunt Mei. Aunt Lai was the prized fighter, she would go toe to toe with anyone in the ring, even some Vashoth, and then at night she would work for Moma. Aunt Mei was a tax collector. She was the nicer one of two, Aunt Mei would go around asking nicely with a few muscle on hand. If they didn’t pay, Moma sent Aunt Lai. Aunt Opal, Arlof’s mother, was called Madame Opal back in the day. Moma would talk numbers and trade, but Madame Opal, she’d talk… luxuries. Arlof is able to be a radio personality because his mother owned half of the pleasure boats in the floating market.”
“Then there was Aunt Kari. If Moma was the talker, Aunt Kari was the doer. The reason they worked so well was that Aunt Kari hated being in charge. Give her a job, she’ll do it, but she didn’t have the tack to think ahead. Moma would keep her hands clean, signing documents and deeds, making dealings with other branches of the Carta. Aunt Kari was the insurance policy. She had two daughters, Ari was the eldest. She was pissed when she found out that I took over that part of the family business when Aunt Kari died.”

“That… is something.” Varric scribbled something down before turning back to Kallak.

“We’re not a family Carta. We never have been, but I suppose it was just easier back then for Moma to claim sisterhood rather than survival.”

Varric’s pencil snapped, Kallak yawning through it. The older dwarf looked up to see the writer frozen in place. The florist cocked his head to the side, a small smile crossing his face.

“You… you didn’t know that?”

“How- no! No one does!!”

“Varric, you’re a dwarf. You know we don’t have the best fertility rates. It’s a miracle to have two kids from the same parents. You, did you really think…”

“I know that! It's just that-” Varric finally found another pencil, whispering the last part harshly. “I thought maybe half-sisters or something not- not that!!”

Kallak laughed out loud, taking Varric back. He pulled a drawer from his desk, looking through the files. He found what he wanted, a folder in the far back, much older than the rest of it. Kallak put it on the desk, Varric hesitating before opening it.

“These… these are birth certificates.” Varric looked at Kallak.

“Relax, mine’s not in there, but Arlof’s is. That, what you have there, is Moma’s, her “sisters”, and their immediate children. My father is Howlite Cadash… there you are, that’s his.
“Those are the only official documents about the family. Everything else is newspapers, interviews, deeds that have been passed to various charities and companies, hell, none of us drive because you have to have a Security Tag. Nowadays they give them to you when you’re born, but back then you had to register at eighteen.”

“This is… do you realize how big this is?” Varric was giddy, nearly out of his seat from the newest revelation. Kallak just smiled, hoping this wouldn’t backfire on him.

“How far are you from finishing this thing?”

“About two months, why?”

“You think you can hold back the publishing date til I give you the greenlight?”

“Kallak, I’d do anything for you if I can publish this.”

“Let’s hope it doesn’t come to that, Tethras.”

Varric left shortly after, leaving Kallak with more time on his hands than he liked. He ended up spending it staring at his closet. He had no idea what he was going to wear… until he spotted it.

“Oh no.” Kallak pulled out the shirt, laughing at himself. “She’s gonna hate this.”

He set it aside to wear for tomorrow, a smile on his face.

Chapter End Notes

Can you tell that I fucking love writing dialogue? B/c I do.
Cassandra wasn’t expecting Kallak to show up at her flat. She really didn’t expect him to be wearing… that.

“Please tell me that is not a fanny pack around your waist.”

“What’s wrong with it?”

“It’s… tourist-y”

“Cassandra.”

“What?”

“I’m wearing what is essentially a Hawaiian crop top and Dalish leggings. I don’t have any pockets. Besides, I’m taking you out to see all the ‘touristy’ areas in Ostwick. Have you never heard of blending in?”

“I have! It’s just- I didn’t think you would-”

“Are you going to be wearing that?”

“What’s wrong with what I have?”

“It’s what you wear everyday. Pressed slacks, office shirt and a sports coat. The only thing you’re missing is that bullet proof vest.”

“I happen to be very comfortable in this.”
“So am I.”

The entire conversation, Kalla was relaxed, his body weight resting on one leg. He had a pair of simple sunglasses hanging on his shirt, the bright neon pack around his waist the only thing out of place. The weather was cold; it was sprinkling outside. And the dwarf still didn’t wear shoes.

“You’ll freeze outside dressed like that.” Cassandra said, but she let the man inside her small apartment.

He smiled, walking in as if it was the most natural thing to do. He made a beeline for her kitchenette, finding the electric kettle. He pulled out a burner phone and some loose leaf tea. She closed the door, walking over to stand next to him.

“I’ve got a driver outside, he’s on loan from one of my clients. Older noblewomen, her husband died a few years back. She sends her suitors to my shop and, everytime, the poor bastards ask to have roses in her bouquets. She hates them, remind her of her late husband.”

Kallak pulled down two mugs that the apartment came with. Very delicately he put the loose leaf into the mugs. As he poured the hot water into the mugs, the coiled leaves unfurling inside. He handed her one, continuing on with his conversation.

“I’m not going out like this, just wanted to see what you would do. My daughter got back while we were at Sera’s. She’s got a trickster side too, if it wasn’t for the fact she’s a mage, I’m sure she would have been the best bard that ever lived. I’ve got an extra pair of clothes in the car, I’ll change before we head out… So! I figured I’d ask where you have been in the city just so I can get a feel for what you’ve seen. Obviously I promised you the Floating Market, but the local shops don’t come out until 3 ish, late afternoon. We’ll probably finish the day there. Did you want to see anything else?”

Cassandra watched as the ball of tea leaves unfurled in the mug. She recognized the jasmine and lemongrass that sunk to the bottom, but she couldn’t figure out what plant had stayed on top… until the rose bud opened. It was green and blue, a very faint fragrance escaped, not quite rose, but it wasn’t jasmine or lemongrass. Kallak took a sip of his own tea, his green eyes watching her.

“... What kind of tea is this?”

“It’s my auntie’s recipe. Pale Buds. She would use wildflowers for the bloom, but I have a client
who wants a very specific kind of flower to be bred. That one there is a dud, but it had been cross bred with some old Dalish brews. Do you like it?"

“It’s beautiful.”

“How does it taste?” Kallak whispered, as if it was the biggest secret.

Cassandra brought the mug to her face, the steam just as gentle as the bloom in the center. She took a sip, the bitterness from the jasmine hitting her tongue first, and then rose.

“It’s… a little weaker than it looks.”

“Give it some time. First impressions are hard to overcome, but I’m sure you’ll come to like it.” he took another sip of his tea, eyes twinkling. Cassandra had the suspension that he’s not just talking about the tea.

“My work has kept me in the Law District, mostly.” Cassandra explained, “I usually take the overpass to get to your shop, and besides Sera’s little village, I haven’t seen anything else of the city.”

“So you haven’t seen the Middle or Lower Districts on the west peninsula?” Cassandra shook her head, taking another sip of the tea. “Alright, then I guess we’ll start there.”

“Here’s the thing about the Lower Districts,” Kallak began, quickly texting on the burner phone. “It’s where the three big mines are. One does Silverite, another does lyrium, and the last one got shut down about 20 years back. The mine now serves as a sort of tour museum type of deal, but it’s partly flooded this time of the year. I’ve got a second cousin who runs the front building, so we can go walking around there… and maybe I can convince him to take us down the first three levels of the mine. Only if you want to, of course.”

“I think I’ve seen plenty of mines in my time. Besides, I know the mine you’re talking about; the Grey Wardens operate out of it.”

“Okay, so just the surface museum then. Second, the Middle District. It’s mostly residential, but it is the second largest district, outside of the farming lands. There’s an actual dock, got renovated a few decades back. Whatever isn’t sold on the Floating Market is there. It’s also where most of the filming
for “The Godmother” happened.”

“I love that movie!”

“Wait, are you serious?” Kallak was in disbelief, putting the phone back into the fanny pack. “You-you can’t be serious.”

“It was a good movie, I ended up reading the biography about Moma Cadash after seeing it.”

“... Huh.” Kallak sipped at his tea, trying to look nonchalant. He was terrible at it, his discomfort clear as day.

“You don’t like it?”

“Let’s just say I was asked to help with that trainwreck. I told those hacks that they had gotten it wrong, but they went ahead with it all.”

“I see…”

“We can still go, I’ll show you the old sets. Just… If you really want to know what was just for the movie and what was the reality, I can tell you.”

“I would like that.” Kallak’s ears went red as Cassandra said that. He didn’t talk for a while, staring at his nearly empty mug before remembering himself.

“Right... right. So that covers the Lower and Middle Districts. The driver knows to take the scenic routes today, so whatever you didn’t see last week, you’ll see when we drive through the farmlands. The Alienage is nice, hell it’s my home, but as of right now it’s filled with radio hosts and news reporters; Alex’ campaign for Teryn is in full swing and I’d rather avoid another broom closet incident. As for Enchanter College, it’s an old Mage Circle and the only students there right now are mages. The nobles have left for holidays and Mademoiselle wants to keep her students safe until this mage-templar spat is over with.”

“If I’m not in the Law District, I’m usually at the College. I think you’re right, let’s avoid politics for
“Brilliant. By the time we get done with the mines and the docks, all the really tourist-y people should be gone. We’ll take a water taxi to the Floating Market and wander around until it gets dark; I don’t have a reservation for dinner, but I know a few of the captains. We’ll find something to eat and then I’ll bring you back here.”

Kallak put his empty mug down, and he started walking out the door. He turned around and winked at Cassandra as he went to go get changed, leaving the bag of loose leaf tea on the counter.

She still didn’t know what to think of the man. Was he what he said he was? A florist, a father, a dwarf with dalish roots? There were certain things that stuck out, things that didn’t make sense on their own. The Nameless Grant, for one. He was the sole donor, according to the First Enchanter; only recently had others started to donate to the Grant as well, but they remained anonymous. And then there was his daughter. She had never met the girl, but records didn’t show any adoption under the name Kallak of Ostwick. The girl had graduated, but it took investigating the College records to find out her name; Saare Adaar. The fact that all his employees had some sort of history. Sera had misdemeanors, Cole was apparently the top suspect in several murder cases. And Thom Rainer. She was afraid to look him up, but he was a Warden conscript. She would hope that the Markham had noble reasons for joining, but history would say otherwise.

He was kind, and a prankster. He was like nobody she had ever met. Stubborn, so fucking stubborn. Any time she would ask to see something other than the front of his shop, he would ask for a warrant, or some sort of legal paper. And everytime she came back with the paper, he would come up with a legitimate clause or loophole that kept her barred from whatever it was she wanted to see. Maybe the dead transporter had his business card by accident. But she had been in the store everyday for the last month. No one ever took a business card from the stand. So why would the transporter have had it? And what about the bombing at the College? Was it really retaliation for the current global climate? Why was Dagna targeted with poison then, if the end goal was to blow up the main Circle Tower? And out of all the targeted students, why was it someone on the Nameless Grant, a local fund?

“Too many loose ends.” she muttered, putting the used mugs into the sink. “Why do they all lead to you?”

Cassandra took off the sports coat and changed into a black turtleneck. She decided on a subdued overcoat, her badge tucked into the inner pocket out of habit. As a final touch she grabbed a dark red scarf, letting it hang loose around her shoulders. She grabbed her keys and wallet, locked the door to her apartment, and started to walk outside.

Kallak was on the burner phone- another thing that didn’t make any sense- but was, thankfully,
changed. Pressed jeans, walking boots, and a deep sea blue sweater. He had a tweed coat with leather elbow patches on, an oversized scarf wrapped around his neck. It was forest green. She had never seen him without something forest green, whether it was a handkerchief, scarf, or even that faded tee shirt from that one morning. It was a good color on him, bringing out the green in his eyes. The driver was in a suit, a young human in his late twenties. The moment he saw her, he bowed and opened the lobby door. Kallak hung up, and smiled at her.

“You look good.”

“You’re wearing shoes.”

“I can wear shoes, I just prefer not to.”

“So why now?”

“Two reasons,” Kallak got into the car, sliding across to let Cassandra in. “First, didn’t want to embarrass you any more than I already plan to. Second, it’s fucking cold.”

She laughed, and he beamed at her. She still didn’t know enough about this man, but he had grown on her. He had been vulnerable around her, showing his chest scars and not shying away from her. He could go on forever about his daughter and her best friend, Alex Trevelyan. But she hadn’t told him anything about herself. Maybe…

“So,” Kallak said, “I don’t know a whole lot about you, Cassandra.”

“Oh?” Cassandra couldn’t help but wonder if she was so easy to read.

“I know plenty about Seeker Pentaghast, but not about you.”

“What would you like to know?”

“What’s your favorite color?” The question caught her by surprise.
“What does my favorite color have to do with anything?”

“I could guess, if you’re gonna be like that.”

“Then guess.”

“... It’s purple.”

“Well done, how did you figure that out.”

“You always wear two colors; red or purple. But whenever Cole is working, you smile more when he uses lavender. You get this distant look when he brings out poppies though. I had a fifty-fifty shot.” Kallak smiled at her, soft, gentle.

“If I didn’t already know, I would have assumed you were part of the guard with that sort of observation.”

“You wound me, Cassandra.” She laughed again.

“Okay, next question. Have any siblings?”

“I did. An older brother…”

“... I’m sorry.”

“What for?”

“You lost him, and it’s painful… We don’t have to talk about it if you don’t want to.”

“What about you?”
“It’s incredibly rare for dwarves to have siblings. Besides, my parents died in a fire.”

“Oh… I’m so sorry.”

“It happened when I was an infant. My grandmother brought me back to Ostwick after that. She raised me, taught me the family business.”

“Floristry?”

“No, I started the Snapdragon when I got Saare. It was easier, not raising a kid on the road, and I didn’t want risk the chance of someone taking her away from me.”

“What did your grandmother do?” Kallak got quiet, that small smile still on his face. He grew distant, as if struggling with something. Just as Cassandra thought she had lost him, he spoke.

“You have a warrant?” Kallak grinned.

She scoffed and hit his knee. He was laughing, but Cassandra was reminded about her suspensions. No, not today. You promised, no work. She smiled at him and watched the world pass by in the car.

Chapter End Notes

I have an exam on Tuesday... Please pray for me b/c I Do Not Want To Do It. But!!!!
Last year of uni!!! I'm so fucking close...
The museum was runned by an old mining dwarf, his hair pure white and wild. He was waiting outside when they pulled up, greeting Kallak like he was a nephew. Cassandra waited for a while, until Kallak waved her over.

“Kallak!” roared the curator, “If I didn’t know any better, I would say you came to see how we miners are doing!”

“Karl, you ol’ coot, how you been?” Kallak hugged the older dwarf, winking up at Cassandra as he did so. “Still giving the working girls a hard time?”

“They won’t see me, those picky snobs. I still got teeth and hair, don’t I?”

“Three teeth and your hair is a mess. If you want a wife you better wash up and use deodorant. Otherwise all you’ll have is Marg. By the way, how is the gal?”

“She left me! Some hot-headed Orlesian boy came after her, and off she went!”

“You ever figure where form Orlais?”

“No, never got a look at him. Marg would go on and on. ‘He bought me emeralds, you never get me emeralds, it’s always opals with you.’ What am I supposed to do? Opal is all we got here!”

“Karl, you know you’re not supposed to be mining anymore! Remember what the healer said?”

“What’s some snot nosed healer know? Young’un be telling me I gotta eat greens more or something.” The dwarf spat, only just noticing that Cassandra was standing next to Kallak.

“Morning!” The dwarf smiled, showing his three yellow teeth. Kallak put his hand on the small of her back. “Kallak, lad. Where did you find this giant of a woman?”
“She’s visiting Ostwick, and I offered her a tour of the place before she had to leave for Orlais.”

“Orlais?” He glared up at her, “You’re not Orlesian are you?”

“I am not.” Cassandra replied.

“Ooo, a Neverran! I like her! Not a dwarf, but nevarrans are made from good stock! I bet-”

“Karl!” Kallak snapped. “Karl, mind opening the museum for us?”

“We don’t open for another two hours!”

“Then why are you here early?” Cassandra asked.

“Opals! This mine here did Opals for years! Decades! But those damn darkspawn, blasted bastards started ruining things and then them Wardens came and told us we can’t go mining.”

“Karl…”

“Oh but that ain’t stopping me! See, this museum just help pay for my upkeep on equipment and-”

“Karl, for Mythal’s sake. Cassandra is a Seeker Agent.” Kallak covered his face as the older dwarf froze up. He grew pale as his hair and then turned purple in the face.

“Speak up sooner boy! Miss I ain’t doing nothing illegal, this museum is legit, legit, legitimate. I’ll tell you what, why don’t I open up right now, then you can have a look see and you’ll see! I ain’t mining for Opals, no sir!” The old miner- Karl- ran over to the small warehouse and opened the door, pushing the large door open.

Cassandra looked down at Kallak, who was currently trying to rub the sour look on his face away. All it did was flatten his greying goatee. She snorted, making her host groan and cover his face with
his hand again.

“Sorry about him.”

“I’ve had worse.”

“Yeah, who?”

“A certain Dalish dwarf comes to mind.” she walked towards the door, winking back at the shocked look on his face.

Karl’s equipment had been haphazardly shoved into a corner behind the ticket booth, the dwarf standing inside. He kept talking, every word more incriminating than the last, but handed over two tickets for them. Kallak took them, harshly whispering at the older dwarf to ‘please shut up about Opals for two seconds’. Cassandra thought the entire exchange was comical.

“So, how do you know Karl?”

“He’s my second cousin… by marriage. Marg married him because he was the first dwarf to just talk to her. Poor girl didn’t realize he doesn’t know how to shut up at the time.” Kallak grumbled, his tipped ears drooping down. It was cute, the way the veridium bar in his ear would follow.

“So how many great uncles do you have then?”

“None. Most of my ‘great aunts’ were just friends with my grandmother. They had wanted to play matchmaker, get all their kids to marry each other and eventually have one big prime dwarven lass. But my grandmother wasn’t having it. Didn’t stop the others from referring to each other as ‘auntie’ and all that.”

“It sounds like you grew up with a lot of family.”

“I guess, it was pretty dwarven that way.”
“My brother and I were raised by our uncle.” Kallak didn’t say anything, but he took her hand. “He was part of the Necropolis. He would take care of the dead better than the living… I don’t have many good memories about my time there.”

“Were your parents gone a lot?” Kallak asked. He wasn’t looking directly at her, but his thumb had begun small motions on her palm. She felt his callus there; it was soothing.

“My parents… what do you know about the Pentaghast name?”

“Not much, just that it’s yours.”

“The Pentaghast Clan were notorious for being dragon hunters in ages past. We have had a few kings in our name. My father was part of the Noble Elective, and my mother… she was a diplomat for Tevinter. An uprising had happened, and my parents were on the wrong side. They were killed, and the only reason my brother and I weren’t was because we were children at the time.” Cassandra didn’t realize she had started to tear up, she brushed the tear away, shocked that it was there.

Kallak was quiet, but he never let go of her hand. He started to read the displays for her after that. How the mines had begun during the Tower Age, the rise of Nobility Rights and the laws that dictate how often they would mine. The silverite boom, the discovery of a Titan that lead to lyrium being mined. The several riots and worker strikes. Eventually they came to the Dragon Age.

“... Shortly after the discovery of the Titan, the Fifth Blight broke out in Ferelden. With many of the refugees looking to the Free Marches for support, Ostwick took in more than two thousand refugees, many that ended up working here in the silverite mines.”

“Kirkwall had taken in four and a half thousand during this time.” Cassandra piped in. “The Champion’s family was one of them.”

“Didn't know that.” Kallak went on. “Shortly after the end of the Fifth Blight, it is assumed that the infamous Moma Cadash entered Ostwick. In 9:58, the first reports of the woman are recorded. Here on display is the contract that had been negotiated by Moma Cadash and the Opal Nobles, giving workers 10 hour days with an hour lunch break in between, and free access to healers and housing. This was a vast improvement to the previous 12 hour minimum and no benefits.”

“Moma Cadash… Did your grandmother know her?”
“Do you have a warrant?”

“Kallak.”

“Sorry, instinct… My great aunts knew Moma Cadash. This contract here was official, but there was more to it than just this.”

“Oh?”

“Mhm. Reason why Varric comes by every Sunday is because I happen to be the only historian in town on the woman. See this signature on the bottom left? That was Vividali, the head noble in charge of the silverite mines. Moma had cut a deal with his son, a weasel of a man who didn’t want anything to do with the mines. She had talked him up and broke the boy down into signing this contract. Because of that, the same rules that applied to the Opal mine also applied to the Silverite mines. Half the Nobles jumped ship when that happened, and the other half were too old or too stubborn to do the same. Their kids were left with the bag and Moma Cadash came to them as a representative of the miner’s union. By 9:72 she had a stake in all three mines, her name on every contract, and own around 45 percent of the mineral rights.”

“What about the rest of it?”

“There are some Noble houses that still stake a claim here, but they’re capped at a max of 5 percent. Only two houses are close to that number, most are just happy with their one or two percentage. The money made in the mines that Moma Cadash has, about two thirds of it went back into the community, and she kept a third for herself.”

“That’s… incredible.” Cassandra let go of Kallak’s hand, putting her own on the display case. The woman’s signature was short and small, only four letters.

“Karl might not look it, but he actually has a living claim on the Opal mine, about 15 percent. He’s a dodgy bastard but was the best miner in these parts. When he goes, the rights get passed onto his kids, if he had any.”

“If he doesn’t have children, who will it go to?”

“His nieces, or the nephew if he plays his cards right. But most likely he’ll write in someone else.
Someone who was there for him when Marg left the first time, or maybe the second time the healer put him on house arrest. I wouldn’t be surprised if the name changes to whichever working girl gave him the time of week.”

“But you have an idea.” Cassandra looked at Kallak from the corner of her eye.

“I do.” Kallak smiled. “Just so happens that my daughter loves Karl like an uncle. When she was trying to get used to her magic, it was Karl who helped her focus it. Granted, he just didn’t want to blow himself up in the mines, and a mage is a mage. But it really helped Saare.”

“So your daughter might own the Opal mine then.”

“Only 15% of it. Besides, it’s decommissioned and the only money coming in from it is from the Wardens who pay to use it. Saare has had a respect for Wardens for a long time, I’m sure she’ll decline a third of the money or give it back to the museum at least.”

“And what if Saare doesn’t want it?”

“Then she’ll hand it off to someone else. Or ask me to do it.” Cassandra raised her eyebrow at Kallak, who kept smiling at her, hands in his pockets.

A loud crash came from the front of the museum, and Karl began to swear profusely. Kallak started running to the front of the museum, Cassandra following at a much calmer pace. She found them with Karl wearing a rusted helmet and a bag with pickaxes flung to the other side of the room. Kallak was either helping the older dwarf or strangling him with his harness; it was difficult to tell.

“Figured your lady friend would like a tour of the real deal!”

“Karl, gods dammit, the healer said no. More. Mining!”

“Healer ain’t my wife!”

“And where is she?”
“How should I know, bloody woman ran off with some Orlasian! Wine drinking, mask wearing—”

“Karl, for the love of fuck.” Kallak undid the strap for the helmet and tossed it next to the mining bag. “If you won’t listen to the healer then listen to me. You’re not going in that mine without a Warden escort. If I hear from anyone that you did, I’ll skin you alive, you hear me!”

“I- but I- You know this museum is boring as hell, only reason it’s here is because Marg wanted it but she ain’t here and so now I’m stuck with it and I don’t want it but I—” Karl finally got vertical, grabbing his helmet from the ground. “I know rocks! I know Opals! I thought I knew women, but I sure as hell know mining!!”

“Karl!” Kallak was seconds away from beating the older dwarf. Cassandra was reminded of herself, how she would act around recruits and lieutenants of the agency. Unlike those younger people, however, Karl stopped struggling.

“Alright, fine. I won’t go in today.” the older dwarf walked over to Kallak, who started to dust off his shirt.

“There, was that so hard?” Kallak patted his cheek, and then turned to face Cassandra.

“So no tour of the mines then?” Cassandra said, teasing her guide.

“No, afraid our would be guide is preoccupied with his health. Right?”

“... Right.” Karl grimaced and then went to go put the rest of his gear away.

The two left the museum, getting in the car. The driver took the more scenic route through the Lower District, passing the inner city farmer markets and housing. Cassandra couldn’t stop smiling as Kallak pointed out spots here and there, his hand gently resting on her knee.

She knew she should be paying attention to what he was saying, but she couldn’t. After a while, she was caught looking at him. She felt his hand squeeze her knee, that same circular motion he had made in the museum. She felt herself heat up, and wanted to even the odds somehow. Just as they pulled up to their next destination, Cassandra put a free hand on Kallak’s neck. She mimicked his
thumb, and smiled at the red tint his ears got.

Chapter End Notes

Guess who finished their exams today is mildly worried she failed all of them? This fucking Trainwreck.
Kallak was talking to the driver for the last time; this was their last stop before making their way to the Floating Market. Cassandra looked the other way when Kallak slipped the driver a handful of gold coins. To his credit, the young man didn’t give anything away about the transaction. Kallak walked towards Cassandra as the black car drove away.

She looked around at the wharf, the line of fish stands on one side, bread and dried produce on the other. There were small entertainers in the middle of the closed off street. Some Vashoth drummers with a dwarven singer, a couple of elven gymnasists, even some human dancers. She felt Kallak’s hand on the small of her back, guiding her away from the docks and towards the open warehouses. There were five, each specialising in something. The center one had been heavily modified, a covered theatre inside. The first one was an extension of the stands out at the docks, with a massive crowd of hagglers, tourists, and locals.

“This is actually the start of the floating market.” Kallak said, his voice barely audible inside. “Whatever can’t be sold out in the open waters is sold here. Animals, Fragile Art- mostly glass- and other stuff. Sera comes down here on the weekends, sells her beeswax and jams. Don’t know if she still does that tho, since I’ve been selling her stuff at the shop.”

A roar of motorcycles came through, and a crowd at the back started to cheer. As they wandered they were able to see the crowd watching four Vashoth bikers do tricks in a closed pen. They wandered around the stalls, nothing really catching their interests. Kallak led her through to the back entrance, the roar of the motorbikes gone. Then Cassandra recognized where they were.

“This is- this is from ‘The Godmother’!”

“Yeah, most of the outdoor scenes were filmed here, just outside the warehouses. The last confrontation has been memorialized in the last warehouse, way down there. But Moma Cadash never did any of her dirty work at the warehouses.” Kallak said. He stopped, watching her reaction. “... Did you want to take a photo?”

“I- I shouldn’t. It would be unprofessional-”

“Give me your phone.”
“What?”

“Give me your phone, if you’re afraid of someone seeing you taking a photo, I’ll do it.” Cassandra was shocked, then quickly gave her phone to the dwarf.

Kallak started to take photos of the warehouses, as she walked around, in awe of the place. When she wasn’t looking, he had started taking photos of her as well. She finally spotted him, and went to take the phone away. The dwarf got a gleam in his eye and then started to take selfies, trying- and failing- to keep Cassandra away. The two laughed at it all, a younger couple clapping and cheering them on the entire exchange. She gave the photos a brief look, saw that their shared photos are blurry and out of focus. Then one in particular with her standing in front of the warehouses, the collar of her coat framing her jaw. The scar that was so large and ugly on her cheek wasn’t in this photo. It lacked any vivid color, except for her red scarf, but the picture was… calm. Inviting, but harsh. Mysterious. Romantic. She loved it.

“See anything you like?” Kallak asked, hands in his jean pockets. He looked like an average dwarf like this, no sign of his Dalish heritage, a scalp full of Casteless tattoos. The pointed tips of his ears were pink, just like the scar across his cheeks. He was handsome, the speckled grey in his goatee and the wrinkles around his eyes making him… She couldn’t describe it, but she also couldn’t look away from him.

“Thank you.” Cassandra whispered. He smiled back, his ears getting redder. She put her phone away. “Tell me about this place.”

“Well, where do I start?” He took her hand, the two of them walking towards the second warehouse, an art gallery with several sculptors and painters working inside. It was much quieter here, a conversation easier to have than the first warehouse.

“How about the movie?” Cassandra asked.

“Moma Cadash had four sisters, not seventeen or whatever they showed in that hack of a movie. Rumor is that they all came from Orzammar, but they’re actually from all over the place. Moma is the only one who was born in Orzammar, the twins were born in Kal Sharok and the last two were born here in Ostwick. Half the dwarves in Ostwick can trace their lineage from the Cadash house, but only about an eighth of that number are legitimate. Besides, the boys don’t count, dwarven heritage and all that.”
“So if a male dwarf has the last name Cadash, what does that mean?”

“Usually that his mother decided to keep him. But that kinda stopped in the last generation. Most dwarves here are Andrastian nowadays, very few go by the Stone. Why’d you ask?”

“You’re cousin, Arlof. He has the last name Cadash. There’s a few lieutanants with the last name Cadash as well.”

“Arlof is the last living relative to Moma Cadash. His mother was the youngest of the sisters. Youngest son of the youngest sister- sure there’s a riddle somewhere in there.”

Cassandra stopped dead in her tracks. The crowd moved around her, Kallak going ahead a few steps before her hand slipped out of his. He turned around, his eyebrow raised.

“Arlof is- but that’s- how?”

“It just is.” Kallak shrugged, looking an artist's painting. It was Kirkwall, stylized with green and gold flames. The one next to it was a bowl of Par Vollen fruit. Cassandra felt as if she was still missing a piece of the puzzle, the last few months leading to… something. The case had gone cold again but she didn’t want to give up. And with the Divine wanting her to come back… No, she wasn’t thinking about work today. She started walking next to Kallak again.

“Tell me about Saare, your daughter. What’s she doing?”

The dwarf perked up, but he didn’t take her hand again. He started to talk about his daughter, his fatherly pride and bragging coming out in full stride. This eventually lead him to start talking about Alex, how the would be Teryn was like as a child. And Tael, who didn’t know what to do with a girl who had gotten attached to her for ‘no reason’, according to the elf. As he talked, they walked down the warehouses, Cassandra in awe of it all. The large group of tourists left after lunchtime. By the time they had reached the fifth warehouse, most of the entertainers had finished packing up and leaving the docks.

The fifth warehouse had a glass front, the logo used for the movie, showing it was ‘The Godmother’ museum. Kallak held the door open for Cassandra, the museum quieter now than when they first arrived. A punk-ish human was sitting behind the clerk’s office, flyers for local tourist sights and pamphlets for the current visiting display. She took one and wanted to start the tour.
“Five copper, please.” the human said, not looking up.

“Hello Clark, how’s the family?” Kallak leaned on the counter.

“Mr Kallak! They’re- my mom is getting better. We owe you, really. But why are you…”

“My friend here is visiting from Orlais, you don’t mind if we…”

“Of course! But my boss says that no one can come through for free- I’m sorry Mr Kallak but I have to ask.”

“S’alright lad… here you go, keep the change.”

“Thank-Thank you so much Mr Kallak!”

Cassandra felt Kallak’s hand on the small of her back again, not realising she had missed his touch for the last few hours. He then put his hands back in his jean pockets.

“You know that young man?”

“He works with Alex on the weekends, runner of sorts. Good kid, but his mother is in the hospital for a minor illness.”

“I see… and him owing you’?”

“You got a warrant?” Cassandra hit him with the pamphlet, only for the dwarf to dodge it, a smile on his face.

The museum was tacky, scripts signed by the lead actress and several costumes on display. A large map was in the center of the room, several buttons that could be pressed to show where specific scenes were filmed. Kallak stood in front of the map, a grim look on his face. Cassandra wandered alone, quietly sneaking photos of some of the stands.
Something was off about this last warehouse; it was smaller than the others. She knew outside they were the same size, and the other’s had been weather-proofed and insulated just like this one, but the museum was much, much smaller. Almost as if half of the warehouse was being used. She was standing on the second floor, and started walking to the far back, mentally counting her steps. She looked back downstairs, saw Kallak was on that burner phone again. Was it just a replacement phone? Maybe the florist had lent his phone to his daughter and just bought that one at a corner store. Or did he just not have one, like how he didn’t have a car? Something tugged at the back of her mind, but she pushed away.

There was an office in the far back, fogged glass on the door, but she could see someone in there. She knocked, careful of being loud. The figure behind the door looked up and no doubt saw something that looked like a guard and not a tourist, quickly going to open the door. She hid the pamphlet in her pocket. It was Matthew, his faded jacket and pale slicked hair in disarray. He didn’t say anything and let her in. As he closed the door, Cassandra could hear him slicking what little hair he had left back, quickly putting out his cigarette.

“Seeker Pentaghast. How goes the case?” Matthew asked, his posture sending alarm bells in Cassandra’s head.

“It’s gone cold.” Cassandra replied, slipping back into being a Seeker. “I’m leaving Ostwick very soon, however, but we were able to identify our John Doe.”

“That’s- both good and terrible news.”

“It is. I thought you worked at a library.”

“I do. The library is on the other side of that door your looking at.” Cassandra nodded, finally solving the riddle of the size of the museum. Matthew quickly took off loose papers from a chair, allowing Cassandra to sit; she remained standing as he sat back down in his chair. Silence. Finally, Matthew spoke up, getting uncomfortable with it.

“I see you brought a guest.”

“I did, a florist by the name of Kallak.”

“Kallak… That’s a name that everyone knows around here.”
“So I’ve learned. I don’t suppose you know anything about him.”

Matthew steepled his fingers in front of his face. No doubt he was wanting to look mysterious, but with the obvious lack of sleep, let alone that his lack of chin led to several more being made in excess over his collar, all it did was exaggerate his less attractive qualities. Cassandra raised her eyebrow, waiting.

“You said he was a florist.” Matthew finally said.

“I did.” Cassandra remained alert.

“Did he tell you anything else?” Matthew was watching her face, turning alarms to sirens in her head.

“He’s the sole donor for the Nameless Grant, sending non-Nobles and non-mages to the College. He’s a father to a vashoth mage, and the adopted caretaker for Alex Trevelyan. Am I missing anything?”

“A last name.” Matthew snided.

“He doesn’t have one.” Cassandra snapped. The man leaned back, putting his hands up in surrender.

“... You ever seen him make a boutique.”

“...”

“Tell me, has he told you who is cousin is?”

“Arlof Cadash.”

“That’s right.” Matthew blinked, before leaning forward. “Has he told you about his parents?”
“...”

“What about his grandparents?”

“He has an Aunt, a Dalish keeper in Orlais.”

“I’m talking about family here in the city, Seeker. How do you know he’s not your murderer? That is why you came to me, wasn’t it? You wanted to know about the Cadash household.”

“Get to the point.” Cassandra snapped, not wanting to be here anymore.

“That man down there… there’s more than meets the eye. I’m actually surprised he came here to this museum with you, his disgust for us is not a secret. Something must have changed his mind… or someone.” Matthew gave a sneer

Cassandra pulled her gun on the man, the muzzle pressed at his nose. He cowered, closing his eyes at the weapon. Then she saw it- bruises on his wrists, his left hand missing three fingernails. She lowered the gun, still pointing it at his chest. Matthew blinked his bloodshot eyes at her, his shock pallable.


“... The Carta runs this city, Seeker Pentaghast. I’d be careful about who I call friends.” Matthew swallowed, his adam apple hitting the muzzle.

She put her gun away, leaving the office with the door wide open. Kallak saw her coming down the steps, off of his phone. His scarf was undone, his vallaslin peeking through the collar of his jumper. An hour ago she would have rejoiced at the sight. But an hour ago she wasn’t Seeker Pentaghast, she was just Cassandra.

“Is everything okay?” Kallak asked, concern written all over his face.
“I-” She had to think, quickly. “I saw Varric in the office. Upstairs.” She lied.

Kallak cocked his head to the side, his lips pursed. For a split second she was afraid he would press further. Instead he just shook his head and laughed.

“C’mon, this place sucks anyway.” Kallak started walking towards the exit.

She felt relief, knowing that he had bought it. She shoved the conversation with Matthew aside, wanting to focus on the last leg of today with Kallak, free of distractions. How do you know he’s not your murderer? Cassandra breathed in the air from the docks. Tomorrow. She thought. I’ll look at it tomorrow.

Chapter End Notes

I did say this was Fluff/Angst didn't I? hehehehehehehe
Kallak really wished he had left work at the shop that morning. Unfortunately, there were three shipments going out today, along with the first debate between Alex and Maxwell Jr. On top of that, they weren’t any closer finding the bastard who had set off the bomb at the College weeks ago.

Cassandra had gone wandering around the awful display, the only other people here were security (who could be paid off) and Clark (young lad, knows better than to talk). He just finished talking with two of his clients, the third one being Vivienne.

“My dear, please tell me there’s a good reason you are not here in person. Again.”

“I’m on a da- meeting. In a meeting.”

“With a certain attractive Seeker, I presume.”

“... yes.”

“Then I shouldn’t waste anymore of your time then. While I know you can do better than that woman, I’m very happy to see you like this. The only time you’re in good spirits is when your daughter is nearby.”

“Mademoiselle, while I appreciate your sharp wit and even sharper tongue, I must insist that you don’t treat this any different than anything other time I have been distracted.”

“If I did that my dear, you would be standing next to me and not this worker of yours. Honestly, a burner phone? Really?”

“I don't like cell phones.”

“Spoken like an old man.”

“I am, according to my daughter, an Old Grump.”
“That you are, my dear. It appears that everything is in order, and not a speck of red in sight.”

“I’m glad you like them, hopefully they bloom just in time.”

“As do I. Have fun on your date, darling.” Vivienne hung up before Kallak could say anything else.

He felt his ears go red, the old chemical burn on his face growing hot. He looked up at the map he was standing in front of, the bright colors and several little lights that flickered on and off. He looked over at Cassandra, saw her trying, and failing, to hide the fact that she was taking photographs of the clothing on display.

The pencil skirt that the actress had worn throughout the movie was ugly, and something Moma would have never worn. She wore trousers or jeans, nothing else. Even in the more high-class parties she would attend, it was pressed three piece suit, her hair in a bun with the side fringe curled, framing her very square, very dwarven, face. Kallak rubbed at his own goatee, remembering his grandmother’s facial hair, how it grew thicker this time of the year.

He hated this, everything in here reminded him that no one knew the real woman, just the gangster. She had loved weapons, sure. But it was the craftsmanship that caught her eye, how a rapier from Antiva was made, how the same materials could be used to make a Fereldan shield or an Orlesian dagger. She was a historian for Mythal’s sake. She never beat someone an inch to their life- she would talk circles around them and smile the entire time. But that didn’t make for good cinema apparently. Instead the world would remember Moma as a gangster, a thug. Kallak sighed, watching as the lights flickered from early Carta families, to the alliance that Moma made. The legend just said “Moma Takeover”. He knew better.

One group of lights didn’t change. He didn’t recognize the name… then lights turned off, the family attached to them having left Ostwick. The legend indicated it happened around the time his father was introduced to the Carta.

Strange… Why wouldn’t you tell me about them? Did you not think they’d come back, Moma? Kallak thought. The family that had refused to join… Their name was Orlaisian… Dagna said something about the dagger… Kallak dialed a number in his phone. He got the desk clerk, a Tranquil mage. He asked to speak with Dagna.

“Mr Kallak! Wow, you almost never call me when I’m at school! I’m getting better, the doctors say that I’ll be able to move onto solid foods in a week and Sera-”
“Dagna, the weapon that was used on you. Do you remember the make?”

“Sorry?” The young dwarf was caught off guard by the question.

“Was it an Orlesian dagger?” Kallak looked up, hoping that Cassandra didn’t hear him. She was up in the second floor; he recognized her coat.

“The handle was,” Dagna started. “but Orlesian daggers can’t take deathroot, not unless it was bathed in acid during it’s making, rather than oil. But no one has done that since the early Blood Age, and even then it was rare. You had to use Draconic-” Kallak hung up, and speeddialed four.

“Boss.”

“There was a family that never joined in Ostwick. They might have moved back to Orlais, possibly to Val Foret. Name was Toxiven. I want to know if they’re still alive. Now.”

“How did you- Boss one of the leads is a man name Trent Toxiven. He was excommunicated from his branch, he’s been trying to prove himself to his father.”

“Where is he?”

“Last known location was three weeks ago. We just tracked down his old man.”

“The Toxiven’s were here in Ostwick. Ask him if he knows, and what happened. Find his son, bring him to the docks the fucking moment you do.”

“On it Boss. We’re having-” Kallak hung up again. His head reeling.

Why wouldn’t his grandmother tell him about them? She would go on and on about every person who ever wronged her. She wasn’t a paranoid woman, but she was cautious. Meticulous. Why? Why now? Why him? It’s not like it was-
He remembered when he first asked about his parents. About the fire. Moma didn’t say anything, she had grown distant and cold after. So cold, like the very Stone she had been a part of. Kallak wracks his brain for the name of bastards who did it, but nothing. No name, no ties to her past. His Auntie said they were most likely human nobles, but what if it wasn’t? What if it had been these people, a branch of the Carta? Moma would have known, she had to. He had been so mad at her back then, he left Ostwick to find answers. He had found Auntie, found his faith. But no answers. Nearly half a century since that fire and he still didn’t have any answers.

A door swung open upstairs, he could hear Cassandra coming down the metal stairs. He looked up, trying his best to look happy. She didn’t return the smile.

“Is everything okay?” Kallak asked, not trying to hide his concern now.

“I- I saw Varric in the office. Upstairs.” She was lying, badly. Somehow, it was cute.

“C’mon,” Kallak says, chuckling. “This place sucks anyway.” He turned around, wanting to get out of this place as fast as he could.

Clark was listening to the radio, some jazz number playing quietly. The boy was resting his head in his hand, asleep. Cassandra walked through the door, Kallak just shaking his head at the poor kid, overworked and overstressed. It was a nice song, something about it was… familiar.

Getting a water taxi to the floating market was easy enough. They shared it with a young couple and their toddler. The young girl wore pigtails, her pink overalls covered in mud. Cassandra caught the young girls attention, and was asked several questions by the toddler. Mostly about her favorite animal. Kallak spent the trip making small talk with the parents, the mother exhausted. When they came to the first string of boats, the girl waved at Cassandra the entire time they got out of the taxi. Cassandra waved back, whatever had scared her at the museum long forgotten now.

“Alright,” Kallak clapped his hands, rubbing them together to get them warmed up. “You ever been to one of these?”

“No, I’m afraid not.” Cassandra said, still waving at the young girl as her family left for the other peninsula. “Should I be concerned?”

“Well, right now we’re on the wine and tobacco boats, but it’s a non-smoking area. There’s two boats that do candles here as well, if you like.” Kallak looked up at Cassandra as a wave rocked all
the boats. The taller woman wobbled for a second, widening her stance at the last moment. Kallak snorted, and she gave him a dirty look. It only made him laugh more, and she eventually joined him.

“Candles?” Cassandra asked, and Kallak nodded, taking her hand again and weaving between the planks that connected the boats.

With no tourists here, only a few of the boats had people shouting their goods. Most of them were in their early tweens, children of the crew. The first boat they entered was a small local winery one, with small samples given below deck. Alongside the vintages and barrels, there were candles that coordinated with the wine that was sold.

“Are you a drinker, my dear?” asked the seller, a human woman who was twice Kallak’s own age. Cassandra had to duck in here but she seemed comfortable enough.

“I’m afraid not.” Cassandra said. The older woman smiled, and held up one of the candles.

“That’s alright, neither is my husband. The healer on the mainland told him to stop, but he loves his wine. We made these candles so we could still share a glass. Each candle here is made with our vintages. Instead of flowers or citrus, we use the dreads of the barrel and the first two cups of the harvest. It’s so nice, and very festive! Red for Saintalia, White for the New Year, and this...” She held up a deep purple candle, the base almost black. “Port for anniversaries.” She winked at the both of them.

They both grew as red as the wine, the woman smiling at them clueless. Her husband— the captain— was heard laughing from up above. Cassandra ended up ordering six red candles and had them sent somewhere, along with two white to a friend. They left the boat as the grandkid who was sitting on the edge of the boat told them to come back soon.

“You didn’t correct her.” Kallak whispered, still holding Cassandra’s hand.

“Neither did you.” She replied, looking at the various boats.

“No, suppose I didn’t.” Kallak smiled to himself.

They spent the rest of the evening moving from one cluster of boats to the next. Kallak wanted to avoid the pleasure cruises, but Cassandra wanted to see them anyway. When they landed on the
planks, three of the captains shouted out to him- and then saw the very tall, very intimidating woman he was holding hands with. The workers, however, didn’t seem to care. Most of them had gone to school with Alex and Saare when they were little. A young Vashoth, around Cassandra’s height, waved at Kallak from the edge of the deck. When Kallak waved back, they were swarmed and pushed up onto the deck.

“Mr Kallak! It’s been ages!” The captain, one of his ‘nephews’, was smiling up at him from below deck. Two of the workers, twin elves, tried to take Cassandra’s coat before Kallak took it himself.

“Hey, I’m Serisha.” The Vashoth had draped themselves across Cassandra’s back. The woman stiffened looking at the dwarf.

“Serisha, you remember me?” Kallak handed his own coat over to the twins so they could put them away.

“... Oh! You’re Saare’s dad! I totally forgot, I’m so sorry! Cap, it’s-”

“I know who he is, he’s my uncle!!”

“Wait, really?” Cassandra asked.

“Sure!” the captain called back. “Just as much as your my sister!” The workers laughed, Cassandra still confused.

“Kashuk, Serisha, been busy tonight?” Kallak asked, avoiding below deck and moving to the sitting area on the deck.

It was built to have an elevated fire pit and the a wet bar. Cassandra eventually got Sarisha to peel off her back, quickly sitting next to Kallak in the corner. The twins came back up, handing them both a mug of warm cider. Sarisha had a small book with them, and went to sit next to the captain.

“Nah, just locals like yourself.” Kashuk answered, leaning heavily on the mock steering wheel. “Serisha here has just been reading us some poetry though, got the others downstairs in the mood. Hey Sister, you like poetry?” Cassandra didn’t answer until one of the twins elbowed her.
“Cassandra’s not part of the cloth, Kashuk. She’s got a little more class than us here in Ostwick.” Kallak said, putting his arm around the woman.

“I am fond of poetry. What kind is it?” Cassandra asked, leaning into Kallak’s arm.

“Don’t know, it was given to me by a client. Most of it is naughty, the man said it was illegal in four countries.” Serisha thumbed to a poem before beginning to read.

“On aching branch do blossoms grow, the wind a hallowed breath. It carries the scent of honeysuckle, sweet as the lover’s kiss.” Serisha stopped for dramatic effect. A client from below moaned out loud, the swaying of the boat and the sounds of the floating market adding to the effect.

Cassandra sighed, drinking the cider as Serisha continued on. Kashuk had the radio on, that same jazz number from before playing again. Kallak didn’t know why, but the more he listened to the melody, the more uneasy he became. But today was nice, far too nice to be ruined by that thought. They ended up staying for a few readings, until the twins pointed them in the direction of a good food boat.

The water taxi was listening to the same jazz number, which had been put on repeat. Eventually he switched the station, the debate between Alex and Maxwell Jr. about to begin. Cassandra seemed better now, a soft smile on her face. Kallak didn’t know if it was the cider they had drank or the walk through the floating market. Maybe she actually enjoyed his company. A namecall was given off the radio.

“... and that’s our reporters for the night. Unfortunately, Arlof Cadash isn’t present, but he will be giving interviews to both of the candidates, which will be broadcasted tomorrow morning. Without further ado, we will begin introductions of the judge delegates and the rules for the debate…”

Strange. Kallak thought. Arlof would never miss this, even if he was giving interviews. He pulled out the burner phone. The battery was dead. Kallak put it back in his jacket pocket, making a mental note to call Arlof when he got back home.
Their last stop was quiet, the waitress led them to a table at the bow, with a view of the city. Kallak had never been to this particular boat. At least, not that he can remember. Maybe when he wasn’t sober.

“Kallak, so good to see you!” It was definitely when he wasn’t sober.

“Hey, it’s good to see you too!” Kallak lied, shaking the man's hand.

He was human, his beard having more grey than black, the tanned sailor face making bright blue eyes pop even more. He straightened up and saw Cassandra, immediately taking the woman in a hug, laughing out loud. Kallak guessed this was the captain, given that he wasn’t wearing a leather apron or dressed entirely in black like the waitress.

“It’s so nice of you to come and visit me again, my old friend. Is it just the two of you this evening?” His teeth were slightly yellow, one had a silver cap.

“Just us, we heard this was a good place for a quiet meal, and well, it’s been a while since I was last on your ship, captain.”

“Captain!” The man laughed and stage whispered to Cassandra. “He’s such a flatterer, eh?”

“You have no idea.” Cassandra teased back. Kallak kicked himself, his guess wrong.

“Well, the girls told me they just sat down a dwarf with blue tattoos and I just knew it was my favorite customer! So, what can I get you, anything you like?” The Not Captain pulled out Cassandra’s chair, letting the two of them sit down.

“What would you recommend?” Thank the Creators for Cassandra, thought Kallak.
“Well, hehe, we usually do sweets on this ship, but! But, I was able to haggle for some nice salmon this evening from the market next door! I also have a few citrus fruits lying around, and maybe some asparagus? Or not! Perhaps you’re wanting something that’ll, shall we say, lighten the palette for later this evening?” The Not Captain winked at Kallak.

Kallak was starting to think he never came here alone either. He started to look at anything but the two humans. Like this empty wine glass, which had salt stains from being this close to the edge. Guess no one shows up to eat on the top deck. Fuck, what the hell was below deck? Wine? Company? Lyrium? Why couldn’t he remember this goddamn boat?

“Salmon sounds lovely, thank you.” Cassandra smiled, coming off a little tight. The chef- captain- the complete fucking stranger gave a small bow and went off, whistling all the way to below deck.

“Sorry about that.” Kallak said, clearing his throat and trying very hard not to look like he just failed at remembering that man’s name.

“What’s his name?” I changed my mind, Fuck the Creators.

“It’s uuh… something.” Kallak put his elbows on the table, now letting his guilt show on his face.

Cassandra snorted, then tried to stop herself from laughing out loud. Kallak smiled, resting his head in his hand. Today had been… perfect. She had been smiling all day. The weeks, hell the last two months, they would talk back and forth, but it was a delicate dance. And then the bombing happened, and the walls and restrictions started to come down. She was opening up to him, and so was he. Sure, Kallak had his very large secret, but he was sure Cassandra had one as well. She already told him why she was here in the city. It wouldn’t be long until she went back to… somewhere.

“Here I thought you knew everyone in Ostwick.” Cassandra sighed, “I guess I was mistaken.”

“This is my home, but I’m not famous by any means.” Kallak said, still smiling at her. “…When do you leave?”

She stopped laughing, a sadness taking over her face. The sun was setting, matching her scarf and purple shirt. She didn’t talk for a long time, playing with the empty wine glass. The waitress finally came over and replaced the glasses with warmed cider, cloves and orange peel floating in the mugs.
“I don’t know. I know that my next mission will take me to Haven, in Ferelden. But… I already asked for an extension on this assignment.”

“Your boss is nice for that.”

“She is. She has always been kind to me, I just hope…” Cassandra gave out a heavy sigh. Kallak put his hand over hers. “I just hope I don’t fail her.”

“You won’t.” Kallak said. Cassandra was shocked, looking up at him. Her shoulders dropped, that soft smile returning to her face.

“Have you seen your daughter at all?”

“Nah, she went off to go see her uncle. Arlof. Heard from Alex’s secretary that Saare made herself head of security. Those two have never been apart for long. But they have different lines of work now.”

“Is that why Arlof isn’t at the debate you think? He could be with Saare.”

“I don’t know, actually. My phone is dead so I can’t really call either of them to find out what’s going on.” Kallak felt his stomach drop the moment he said that.

His phone was dead, no one knew where he was today or how to get into contact with him. His agent said they were having a hard time with… something. He hung up so he didn’t get the rest of it. What if Saare was missing? Or hurt?

“I’m sure they’re okay.” Cassandra said, snapping Kallak out of it. “Arlof is well liked in the city isn’t he?”

“Yeah,” Kallak cleared his throat, his worries gone just as quickly as they manifested. “Actually Arlof is one of the few Cadash’s that doesn’t have a criminal background. He started out as a temp at the radio station and then one day they asked him to do a midnight talk show. He was pretty good at it too, the boy always knew what to say to people.”
“There are a few Cadash’s in the Guard. They seem… very happy just answering phone calls.”

“Yeah, well. Not everyone is cut out to be in charge. Hell, I’m a florist for Creator’s sake.” Kallak laughed, his eyes nearly shut from how much he was smiling.

“Tell me something, Cassandra,” Kallak leaned forward, wanting to be closer. “What did you do to make Varric so afraid of you?”

“Promise you won’t tell.” Cassandra was drunk, her breath smelled like spice rum and the cider they were drinking.

“Promise.” Kallak stage-whispered.

“… I stabbed him. In his book! I may… have thrown my copy of Tale of the Champion at him and then put a dagger through his author’s portrait.” Kallak’s choked on his drink, laughing at the guilty look on the woman.

“That’s it!? You stabbed a book with his picture on it!” Cassandra nodded, biting her lip. “Cassandra… that’s nothing.”

“Really?” Cassandra said, “and what would be worse then?”

“How about how I met Saare? She was- gods I want to say four? Five?- she was a toddler, begging for food from some village Chantry just outside of Amaranthine. I was down there for business, before the shop, and-” Kallak paused for effect. His date leaned in closer. “She had never met a dwarf before, and she had a cold. Poor thing ended up sneezing fire at me when the Sister introduced us. Nearly lost my face because of that. Adopted her the next day, I did.”

Cassandra eyes went wide, her jaw on the floor. It was then that their food showed up. It was nice, not especially fancy, but after walking for most of the day they would have eaten anything at that point. The rest of the evening went on, the two of them talking and drinking more and more. By the time they decided it was probably time to leave, the floating market had come in for the night.

It turned out that the man who greeted them on the ship was the chef. The captain was his daughter, a young twenty-ish girl. Thankfully, he bragged to Cassandra how he and Kallak had met. Apparently Kallak had done his wife’s funeral, and then when he had nearly lost his boat, it was
Kallak who told the man to go and see Alex.

“...I didn't have to pay a copper! That girl was so kind, and she was so helpful too! I got my boat back and my daughter was able to finish secondary school! Now that Alex is running for Teryn, and well, I bet you can guess who I’m going to vote for, eh?” he laughed and quickly gave Cassandra a take away bag. “For the road!”

They had docked near the Law District, not too far from Cassandra’s apartment. The streets were relatively quiet, most people in the area had tickets for the debate. They would pass by open cafes, the radio’s tuned in. It was wrapping up, commentary from the radio hosts mostly. The chef had given Cassandra pastries with sea salt caramel drizzle and raspberry filling. They were soft, but somehow Cassandra managed to get crumbs in her scarf.

Kallak meant to drop her off in the lobby, but then she was laughing at his jokes. The elevator had a flickering light, so he ended up getting off with her. By the time they reached her apartment, it was too late for Kallak to not say goodbye properly. She was fumbling with her keys, so Kallak took them and opened the door for her. He held the door open, and then common sense finally hit him.

“Won’t you come in?” Cassandra asked, already out of her coat and her scarf tossed on a chair. She was leaning heavily on the doorframe, the rum and cider not yet out of her system.

Kallak clutched at the door. He really, really, wanted to. But she was drunk, hell he was drunk. And this wasn’t a date, not really. Sure there was the walking and talking, the drinks and poetry and dinner. He was standing there, in her doorway-

“I… I shouldn’t.” His voice sounded scared. She didn’t seem to notice.

“Please.” She whispered, leaning forward. He could still smell the rum on her breath. This close up he saw she had some raspberry jam on on the corner of her mouth. “Just for a drink.”

Kallak swiped the jam off with his finger. Cassandra watched as he brought it up to his mouth, a breathy gasp escaping her lips. He closed the door, bringing one hand to the back of her head, lips brushing together before finally, finally, there was a kiss. His body moved before he knew what was happening. His coat came off. Then his shoes. She was still kissing him, a soft groan escaped his body. The world shifted, the center of the world was here, on her mouth, in her apartment.

He walked her backwards, the taller woman sitting down on the loveseat, Kallak grabbing her legs
and wrapping them around himself. His mouth moved down to her neck, his goatee scratching her. Cassandra’s hands found his shaved scalp, nails scraping across and down, her fingers diving under his collar. His own hands pulled her closer, the calluses catching on the edge of her sweater. He bit down and then kissed at the mark. She yelped, and then purred at the attention. His own shirt was being pulled at by the collar, warm hands exposing the back of his shoulders, his teeth moving to the other side of her neck, mouthing at her throat.

The rum and cider were replaced with his nerves. He looked up, not realising he had run out of breath. He shouldn’t do this, she was an Agent of Truth, a Seeker for Mythal’s sake. She must know, she had to know by now who he was. And if she didn’t, then all of this, all of today would…

She was repaying the favor, her teeth dragging across his earrings, the helix bar clinking against her mouth. She pulled at his ear with her teeth, his hands acting on instinct, pulling her in closer, grinding his pelvis with hers. It felt so good, too much. Kallak pulled his head back, panting, eyes wild. She doesn’t know, she can’t. If she did…

“I-” Kallak swallowed. “I’m drunk.”

Cassandra tilted her head, the only light coming from the closed curtains. She didn’t move her legs, in fact she squeezed, her ankles resting on the back of his knees. He felt her forehead land on his own, her hands now roaming across the front of his sweater. He wasn’t wearing any layers, could feel it every time she would sweep her fingers across his nipples. It was becoming increasingly harder for him to stop this.

“I really liked today.” she whispered, her Nevarran accent thicker now. In the dark. With her legs still wrapped around his waist. With his hands on her ass.

“I’m- I’m really glad. Sorry I-” Kallak let go, his hands hovering at her waist. “I just. It’s been a while. If we were… I would want to remember this. With you.”

“I know.” She sighed, her legs, her long legs, finally on the ground. He was still leaning over her, her arms now resting around his neck.

They were so close, all he had to do was lean forward and he would be able to kiss her again. The taste of her, rum and cider and sweat. It would be so easy to just take everything off of her, to kneel right there and worship her, pray to her-
He helped her up from the couch. Kallak helped her get out of her boots, then her sweater. He went
to the bathroom and filled a glass with water as Cassandra took off her slacks and slid into bed.
When he had turned on the light in the bathroom she groaned, blocking the light with her hands. He
turned off the light when she was under the covers.

She was asleep by the time he picked up her slacks and put them on a chair in the room. A part of
him was reminded of his own daughter when she was a teenager, drunk for the first time. In the dark
Cassandra was only missing another foot of height and two horns. Kallak felt the weight of the
burner phone as he put on his coat and shoes.

The walk down to the lobby felt much longer than it did this morning. He had seen one of the agents
when he was walking Cassandra back to her apartment. He guessed someone would be downstairs,
waiting for him. Or maybe he would get lucky and they would assume he was getting lucky. The
alcohol was starting to wear off, a hangover fast approaching. He knew he did the right thing. But he
felt like shit. Cassandra was leaving, for Ferelden. It could be tomorrow, hell it was most likely this
week. He missed his chance. But… maybe she would come back to Ostwick. Hopefully for personal
reasons, not work. Yea, maybe she would be back.

The elevator door opened and a very familiar figure stood in front of it. Dark skin and white
dreadlocks pulled back into a ponytail, the length coming down their navel. Several piercings, a
matching set to his own, and Vitaar that was a mixed style of Casteless and Qun. Saare was pacing
the lobby, still wearing her motorbike leathers, several runes stitched and burned into arms of the
coat.

“Saare… what are doing here, I thought you were at the debate?”

“Why didn’t you answer?? I’ve been trying call you for hours!!”

“The phone, it died- what happened, are you okay?” Kallak looked around, the lobby completely
empty.

“That fucking bastard, he got away, I tried to catch him but he got away and I- I’ll kill him! I’ll gut
him!” Saare’s magic was coming off in sparks, her mouth pulled back into a snarl, smoke pouring
out of her mouth. Electricity started to come off her hair, the metal on her horns conducting more.

“Slow down, tell me what happened.”
“He got Arlof. Arlof is dead.”

Chapter End Notes

Aaaaaand back to plot.
Arlof Cadash was dead. Cassandra found out the morning after her date with Kallak. It went public two days later; a leak from within the Guard. Ostwick mourned their local radio host, outrage poured into the streets. And then fear.

She was waiting in the morgue, the body covered by a sheet. She hadn’t heard from Kallak since that night. She didn’t remember a whole lot about the end of the night, but she knew they kissed. She can’t remember what happened after, but she had a feeling it wasn’t sex.

Cullen was standing next to her, his parka still on in the morgue. The young dalish from weeks ago was gone, a new assistant must have been hirded, but they were still an elf. Alex Trevelyan was to be escorted in, along with the head of her security and her campaign manager. Maxwell Jr was already shown in, but the man didn’t want to testify to his whereabouts when the death occurred. He also declined to identify the body.

The People’s Noble came through the doors, wearing Ostwick colors and a tan overcoat. Josephine Montilyet was following close behind, her now iconic blackberry still in hand, a high bun and modest makeup. And Saare Adaar, head of security. She was tall, even for a Vashoth. If Cassandra had to guess, Saare was as tall as Bull from the bakery- and then there was everything else about her. Dark, charcoal skin with white dreadlocks. Standing next to Alex Trevelyan, the human’s hair was obviously just naturally grey. The tips of Vashoth dreadlocks had been dyed pink, the long ponytail brushing against the small of her back. She didn’t wear Ostwick colors, instead she wore deep blue color and leather. The Guards had taken her staff upstairs, but the metal inlaid into her horns had runes, even the small amount of vitaar that peaked out from under her sleeves were for magical use. And then there was her horns themselves, which curved straight back, carved and shaped into resting dragons, the metal inlay highlighting what would be scales and claws.

She was not what Cassandra was expecting. Everytime Kallak talked about his daughter, it was with a fond smile and a boasting that only came from a proud father. She had known Saare was Vashoth, knew that she worked with a mercenary group. But she also knew that Saare was a mage, and Cassandra had expected someone soft, a long robe or even someone with a more feminine touch, like Alex Trevelyan. Adaar was none of those things- she was the very image of a Tal Vashoth punk, the bone crusher, the conqueror.

“Ms Trevelyan, Ms Montilyet…” Cullen had to strain his neck to look at the Vashoth “Ma’am.”
“Commissioner. May I ask why we were brought down to the morgue before an interrogation room?” Alex spoke.

“We need help to identify the body. I was told you were close with victim.” Cullen was keeping professional.

“Arlof knew everyone. He is… he was a good man.” Alex was strong, but Josephine was in tears now.

“Would you be able to identify Arlof?” Cullen asked, the morgue assistant ready to pull back the sheet.

“My head of security can. He was her uncle, we grew up with Arlof telling us stories. But most of the city can say that.” Alex stepped back, allowing Saare to stand front and center.

The assistant pulled back the sheet to expose the head. There were strangle marks around the neck, someone with medium to large hands. Saare stared at the head for a while and then moved to take hold of the left arm. The body was missing it’s left thumb.

“What happened to his thumb?” Saare looked directly at Cullen, ignoring Cassandra.

“It was gone by the time we found him. My guards are searching around the area-”

“Don’t bother.” Saare said, moving the arm back under the sheet. “This is Arlof. He has a mole on his right bicep in the shape of an oval. Check it.”

The assistant brought the other arm up for inspection. Just as she said, there was a birthmark. Saare stood up, her horns nearly hitting the overhead light. She was staring at Cassandra, her face blank. It reminded her of the First Enchanter… and of Tael of Ostwick.

“Is there anything else?” Saare asked, not once looking away.
“We just need you all to answer some questions, specifically where you were after the debate.” Cullen started to walk the other two out of the room, the assistant pushing the body back. Saare was handed some paperwork, which she took without looking.

The two of them stood there, measuring the other one up. Cassandra was wearing her bullet proof vest, the symbol for the Seekers on the front. She had her gun on her, the holster in plain view. The incense in the morgue was making her sick, but she refused to say or do anything until the Vashoth did.

“Where were you the night of the debate.” Saare finally said. It wasn’t a question.

“I should ask you the same.” Cassandra crossed her arms.

“Looking for my father, since my uncle was missing from the debate.” Shit.

“Who’s your father?”

“You know who he is.” Saare turned around and left.

Cassandra closed her eyes counted backwards from ten. It could have gone worse. You could have met her because you arrested her for having illegal vitaar on her person. Or having unsanctioned runes on her body. She thought. She really hated the morgue, the incense nauseating and it didn’t cover the disinfectant smell. She went upstairs, past the box where people were giving alibis for the night of the murder.

Cullen had given her an office, next to the elevator. She opened the door to walls covered in evidence and clues. One wall was older evidence, the original cold case. The second was surrounding a transporter, the case now three months old. The third surrounded the bombing of College, and the primary victim/suspect; Dagna of Kinloch Hold. And finally, Alrof Cadash. A cold case that was supposed to be cut and dry for a Seeker. Now there were two more bodies and an entire city that was on edge. She came to Ostwick to find out how it had managed to avoid the conflict between its mages and templars. Instead she had found a conspiracy that surrounded it’s dwarven population- and one florist.

Kallak. He was her only clue to who had killed the transporter, but it lead to a dead end. Kallak, who had helped to raise the political celebrity Alex Trevelyon- The People’s Noble. Kallak, who is the only named sponsor for the Nameless Grant, who’s star pupil was the target for an assassination.
Why the hell was he in everything? He was just a florist, a high end florist, sure. His clientele was more than happy to brag about his services- the Nobles, the politicians, the rich merchants, even the First Enchanter. They would go on and on about his bouquets, but he also sold to those of no power. The chef from night before, those from the Alienage. She had watched people from all walks of life come into his shop and not a single one of them were alike. So why, why the hell was Kallak in the middle of her cold case? Why did it bother her so much?

She needed more information, but she didn’t have the first clue as to where to look. There was always a pattern with serial killers- not just in their tactics but in their victims. Cassandra wasn’t anywhere close to finding it; all she had was what she started with. Each victim had ties to the Cadash household, either from work with the Carta, or in Arlof’s situation, from birth. The left thumb was cut off, but the deaths themselves? It was random and the body was mutilated even further after death.

Arlof had been strangled, but he had gotten some skin fragments under his nails. If it was in the system, it would pop up. Cassandra had informed Leliana, hoping that she could help broaden the search beyond Ostwick’s borders. It could be that whoever was murdering people has done something similar in different parts of the Free Marches.

She went over her notes one more time. Each victim had been in a legitimate business for more than a year, at minimum. The faith of the victims wasn’t something to worry about, with the noble hunter having been part of the Qun, the miner and Arlof Andrastian, and the transporter classified as non-religious. Unless… the killer was targeting dwarves who didn’t follow The Stone? No, that wasn’t it, Ostwick had the largest conversion of Andrastian dwarves outside of Val Royeaux.

She looked at criminal records… the noble hunter and Arlof had nothing on file. Not even a parking ticket. The transporter had a DUI about a year ago, the miner was the only one who had been arrested multiple times. Each lived in a different part of Ostwick as well. The thumb, something about the missing digit was her clue.

She remembered what Matthew Cleaver had said, how you could tell what kind of work someone from the Carta did based off a tattoo on there left thumb. Something she had said afterwards had made the man leave immediately… ‘If your John Doe has two rings, I’d suggest you get out of Ostwick’. It was worth a shot, but she would have to talk with someone who was close to the victims. Or just the most recent one.

She left her office and went to the box, standing in the observing room as Alex Trevelyen was questioned by an elven detective. Cullen stood in the room, watching the Teryn delegate from the one way mirror.

“I want to interrogate Saare Adaar. I need to ask her some questions regarding a working theory.”
“What’s the theory?”

“The left thumbs are taken off the body. Whatever is on them is important and I believe that she’ll know what Arlof’s had. If I’m right, it’ll give us a new lead.”

“Alright, but I want it peppered in. I still need her alibi for the night. Don’t go too off topic.”

“You might try telling her that.” Cassandra left to go replace the detective as Alex got out of the chair.

The detective was going to protest, until he saw her badge. He got out of the chair as quickly as he could. Cassandra skimmed the questionnaire, looked up at the listening orb in the corner. It was on, the quiet hum of magic in the object a constant. Saare walked in without her leathers, the vitaar around her wrists had been scrubbed so that the runes and magic circles were made useless. The metal inlay in her horns remained, but the listening orb continued to hum; it did change from a white to green as the mage walked into the room.

“State your name for the record and reason for questioning.”

“Saare Adaar, and I’m giving my alibi for the night of the debate.”

“Did you know that Arlof Cadash was murdered the night you just mentioned?”

“I do. I was the one who reported the body.”

“Where were you between the hours of ten and two.”

“I was trying to get into contact with my father after the debate, but he wasn’t answering his work phone, so I went down to his apartment. His neighbour, Tael, told me he had gone on a date with a detective name Cassandra Pentaghast.”

“What happened after that?”
“What’s your name, detective?”

“Answer my question, Ms Adaar.”

“I tried his new cell phone, went straight to voicemail, so I went back to the Law District and hung out with his new tenants. Nice group, the baker calls himself The Iron Bull. Was there for an hour and then it got to be about one ish. Decided to see my uncle, Arlof. Figured I would say hello and scope out his place for the interview for the morning.”

“Did Arlof Cadash have any distinguishing features? Tattoos, birthmarks?”

“The fuck does that have to do with anything?”

“Ms Adaar, I need you to answer my questions.”

“He’s Andrastian, those people usually don’t get tattoos. Ever. He has a birthmark on his right bicep and he’s got red hair, just like his mum if my dad is to be believed.”

“And did he wear a ring of any kind, or perhaps have a marking on his thumb?”

Saare leaned forward, squinting at her. Cassandra stared right back, keeping her face as blank as she could.

“He was Andrastian. What do you think?”

“His last name is Cadash, it’s a legitimate question.” The listening orb flashes red then went back to green. “After you went to the studio, what happened?”

“It was dark and quiet.” Saare leaned back into her chair, but her guard was still up. “Arlof hates recording alone, usually has one of assistants at the front, and his manager in the other room. I called the Guard and went ahead to check it out.”
“And what did you find?”

“His manager had been killed, throat slit with something that had poison- the wound was starting to puss. And I saw someone strangling Arlof in the recording room.”

“Can you describe the suspect?”

“Mid, late twenties, dwarf. He was covering his face with a mask, but his clothes were Orlaisan in fashion. He had two daggers strapped to his back, and a warhammer was blocking the door. He didn’t see me come in until I started burning through the glass. Bastard ran off through the back window. It was smashed beforehand, most likely he came through that way and he had a buddy who had come through the front door and killed the manager.”

“Was anyone with you when you discovered this?”

“I went to the studio with another cousin of mine. But I went in alone. I can give you his contact information, and he has an alibi as well.”

“Write it down please. Was there anything else you noticed of the culprit?”

“No, it’s just like I said. Mid to late twenties, had his face covered. If you find him I hope you kill the fucking bastard where he stands.”

“Just one more question. Most dwarves in the city have some kind of connection to the Carta, especially when they’re last name is Cadash. Did you know if Arlof had any such connections?”

“Arlof was a civilian. He’s never picked up a weapon in his life, and he was a terrible liar. The only crime he ever committed was skipping classes in secondary school. That’s it.”

“What about family?”

“His mother was part of the Carta, sure. But she left and converted to Andrastian before Arlof was born. Besides, she died when he was an infant, was taken cared of by his godfather.”
“And who is his godfather?”

“Kallak of Ostwick- my old man.”

“Thank you for your time, Saare Adaar. An officer will give you back your things and show you the way out.”

Chapter End Notes

I love a Good Dramatic Irony.
Leliana was waiting for Cassandra in her apartment, sitting in the dark. Even for the bard, this was a little over dramatic.

“Left.” Cassandra closed the door.

“Right.” Leliana got up and turned on the kitchenette light.

“How is Haven?”

“There’s been a bomb threat. Her Most Holy is in transit back to the throne. My agents have figured out the cause for the dispute between the Prestige and the Spire. It turns out that a certain scandalous play was put on production for the chevaliers.”

“So what?”

“It was recorded with a camera and then distributed for the Game. I suppose the newly minted filmography students are wanting to prove the use of film would have an effect on the Game.”

“So the Spire reacted, and the entire country was thrown into chaos over it. Again.”

“I know you don’t like the Game—”

“It’s pointless, nothing is achieved and lives are lost over senseless violence. All because the nobility gets bored.”

“Not every noble can be Alex Trevelyan. If they were, she wouldn’t be such a celebrity.”

“Has the Divine done anything about it?”
“No, a civil war has broken out in Orlais. If we’re lucky, the Chantry won’t be dragged into it. The new Lord Seeker is leading the investigation into the bomb threat at Haven. Hopefully it’s nothing, and we can return there.”

“Why? The talks aren’t for another year.”

“Her Most Holy is thinking of sitting out of the civil war; she’ll move the flock to Haven and claim that prayer will help enlighten and guide us towards an answer to these battles.”

“And the truth?”

“The Sunburst Throne has to be moved. Orlais has been in chaos for the last two Ages. Ferelden is thriving now, and the Free Marches are becoming a boom of trade. It might not ever happen, however. After all, we both know the Divine is not as young as she used to be.”

“Hm. But you’re not here just to inform me about this.”

“She needs both hands, now more than ever. I know you finished your report, what is stopping you?”

“It’s the case. Another body has been found.”

“Are you sure it’s just the case?”

“…”

“Oh, Cassandra.” Leliana went to hug the woman. “I’m so sorry.”

Neither had to say it; Cassandra was in love, and it made the case that was meant to be her cover that much harder to close.
“What did you find out?” Cassandra asked.

“You aren’t going to like it.”

“Tell me. Please.”

“The Snapdragon is a legitimate business. But once upon a time it was a front for smuggling. The cool room has containment for lyrium in the floors. With constant exposure to lyrium, the greenhouse in the alley has become excellent at growing incredibly rare and strange flowers. Some species that don’t exist anywhere else. Your florist has patented at least seven flowers there, including red bluebonnets and something he calls ‘Dipped Tulips’.”

“...Anything else?”

“He’s not in any of the systems. He doesn’t even have a social security number.”

“What? But that’s impossible!” Cassandra looked up, her mind reeling.

“It’s not terribly uncommon. They only started issuing them twenty years ago. That said, you need one to get a bank loan or even a driver’s license.”

“Which would explain why he doesn’t drive.”

“I looked into his past. It’s true that his mother is Dalish, but his parents had died in a fire when he was young, around eighteen months old. The report indicated that he also died in the fire.”

“So either he’s lying or-”

“He has a death certificate. But the name is not Kallak.”

“... What was the name on the certificate?”
“Lapis Lazuli Cadash. Junior. Does the name sound familiar to you?”

“Yes. It’s the real name of Moma Cadash.” Cassandra felt her world collapse.

Leliana maneuvered them onto the couch. Cassandra had gone into shock, her mind replaying every moment she had spent with the man. Did he ever talk about his parents? Or his grandmother? She knew about his Auntie, the former Keeper for Clan Duirme. He knew his father’s name was Howlite- that was what she had given Leliana in order to further her investigation. How didn’t she see it? All this time, Kallak was actually a Cadash?

“... Do you think he knows?”

“I’m not sure. Most likely someone saved him and brought him back to Ostwick to be raised. We can’t assume that Moma Cadash found out she had a surviving heir. Or that the heir even realizes that’s the case. Someone might have given him a fake name, and then when he was older- he changed it to Kallak. It’s not an uncommon story, especially for trans people.”

‘If an elf didn’t want to go with tradition, Moma gave them a new name and a job; all they had to do was ask... didn’t have a daughter. She had one son... burned with his lover... there was only one survivor: an infant...’ That was what Matthew Cleaver had said, when she first met the man.

Saare and Dagna gave a similar testimony for the culprit. A dwarf in their twenties with Orlaisan clothes and weapons. What if Moma Cadash never killed the men who murdered her son? What if she took the infant and never acknowledged them as an heir, in order to keep them safe? It’s happened before, hell she’s worked cases were the child was worked as a common servant their entire life and never knew that their master was their parent. Kallak was her first suspect, but what if he was the target the entire time?

“Leliana, I need you to do a favor for me.”

“Of course.”

“I have files on every one of the victims. I want you to look into their lineage.”

“What am I looking for, exactly?”
“There are four bodies. I think they might be heirs to the four sisters of Moma Cadash. If I’m right, then that means—”

“It means your florist is the next target.” Cassandra nodded, still in shock. “Once this case is done, you’ll have to report back to the Divine. You can’t stay here.”

“But… I understand.” Cassandra wanted to go to bed, desperately.

Leliana got up and left the apartment. Cassandra rested her eyes for a few minutes. She pulled out the business card from her pocket—the one for The Snapdragon. She went to the telephone in the room and dialed the number. The phone rang forever. No one picked it up. She expected that to happen, it was late at night and no one would be in. She still had to try.

She hung up and started to get undressed, exhaustion finally setting in. Just as she was going to crawl into bed, the phone rang. She let it go for a moment, contemplating if she really wanted to pick up the phone. Sleep made the decision for her, if it was important she would hear about it tomorrow morning.

Cassandra was sitting outside Bull’s bakery, the large Vashoth sitting across from her. He was trying a new recipe, a mix of Tevinter and Nevarran sweet bread. She wasn’t alone, Saare and Professor Pavus were here as well.

“Remind me why you brought me all the way out here?” Pavus asked, his question aimed at Saare.

“Because if you make me spend another afternoon looking at relative time theory I’m going to burn you alive.” Saare was standing, wearing the modified leathers from the other day.

She had a motorbike parked across the street, the paint job a mix of thunderstorms and galaxies. It was a monster of a vehicle, built for long trips rather than speed or maneuvering in tight areas. It turned out that Saare had been testing Cassandra in her own way yesterday, just like Alex Trevelyan had the first time they had met. Kallak had told Saare about her, but seemed to have forgotten to tell his daughter that Cassandra was a Seeker agent. Or that the man who moved in across the street was a former Qunari spy.

“Come on, try it!” Bull’s eye was bright, his nerves getting to him as he waited for them to try it.
“First, whatever gave you the idea to try and blend Tevinter and Nevarran sweet bread? They are nothing alike!” Pavus crossed his arm, not moving an inch closer to the covered treat.

“Krem seemed to think it was a good idea.”

“Krem? Who’s Krem?”

“Another baker, he works with Bull.” Cassandra said. “He’s from Tevinter as well, but Professor Pavus does have a point. Nevarran bread is made with goat’s milk, not cactus water.”

“It’s Dorian, one. And it’s not cactus water- though I suppose I can’t hold that against you. Agave powder is used instead of starch, makes the bread lighter. Besides, why ruin a perfectly good sweet bread with goat’s milk?’

“It’s traditional! And adding chili powder does not make it sweet!”

“Neither does adding dates! Or sprinkling ash on the top of the bread for rising.”

“Oh for the love- Bull, give me a slice.” Saare grabbed the chair Pavus was sitting in and, with the man still in the chair, moved him to the side to make room for herself.

Saare was given a slice by Bull. The three of them waited as she chewed and the swallowed. Krem was sitting in the open window, having watched from afar. Pavus raised an eyebrow, playing with the sleeve of his overcoat. Cassandra was wearing thermals under her suit, the only one besides Bull without a coat. Bull was wearing a sweater that was a salmon color, the V-neck cut deep enough to allow him to get it over his horns.

“...Well?” Bull leaned forward, his expression still unreadable for the Seeker.

“It’s fine.” Saare coughed. She then started wheezing and coughing as the chilli and ash hit the back of her throat.
Krem started laughing from the window as Saare stood back up again had a fit as the disaster of sweet bread fought back. Dorian waited until Saare had turned around to grab a slice. The put together mage took one bite before he gagged and grabbed a water bottle. Bull cursed and reached for the other half of Dorian’s slice, shoving the rest of it in his mouth. The larger Vashoth shrugged and then started coughing as well.

“Fuck! Nope! Dammit Krem what the fuck did you to do this?” Bull started screaming, Saare finally throwing up in the public trash can.

“Just did what you asked Chef! Combine both recipes! No substitutes!”

“You fucker! We’ve got ten loaves of this crap, what the fuck are we gonna do with it?”

“I have an idea.” Dorian wheezed. “Give it to the Trevelyans, say it’s a gift.”

“Dorian that’s evil,” Saare started grinning. “Let’s give it to Sera. Sure she has friends who would love it.”

“She’s gotta buy it!” Bull had finally stopped coughing, wiping away the tears that came.

“I could have told you that Nevarran sweet bread is not for the living, Bull.” Cassandra smiled as everyone looked at her in disbelief.

“No.” Dorian started laughing out loud. “You mean it’s for the Necropolis!”

Cassandra started laughing with the mage, nodding. Bull groaned and grabbed the loaf to throw it away in the trash can Saare threw up in. Bull and Saare stared down at the poisoned carbs. They talked back and forth about setting the whole thing on fire, but instead just decided not to, leave it for whatever poor bastard had to pick it up later in the day. Most likely Krem.

“Seeker, I know why I’m here, but what are you doing this far away from the Law District?”

“I’m checking up on a suspect of mine. He owns the flower shop across the street.”
“Ah yes. Terrible name, that one.”

“What are you talking about?” Bull joined in. “That's a great name for a flower shop!”

“I named the store, you rude shit.” Saare sat herself back down, in between the two humans. “You’re checking on my dad?”

“Yes, I have new evidence on the case and I think Kallak might be able to help me with something. It's just local information.”

“Well you might be here for a while. Kallak is out of town for a while, he had to go pick up a new shipment.”

“A shipment of what, exactly?”

“Flowers. Haven’t seen him for a few days though.” Saare was calm when she said it.

Cassandra felt the hairs on the back of her neck go up. She excused herself from the conversation and started to make another phone call.

Chapter End Notes

But who was trying to call her back???? It's a mystery hehehehehe
She took the elevator up to Cullen’s office. He was in a meeting with Maxwell Jr. but she went in anyway, polite necessities be damned.

“For the last time, Mr Trevelyan, if you do not give a testimony to your whereabouts the night of the murder we will have no choice but to have you remain a suspect.” Cullen was pinching his the bridge of his nose, explaining the situation for the thousandth time.

“This is outrageous! I will not stand for your guard treating me like a criminal! I have nothing to prove to you people, I am innocent!” Maxwell Jr. pointed his finger at the Commissioner, completely clueless to the situation.

“Then give a testimony to prove it.”

“Commissioner,” Cassandra interjected, bumping into Maxwell in the process. “I need a moment of your time.”

“Now listen here, detective-ah!” Maxwell tried to grab her shoulder and turn her around but it failed. Cassandra grabbed his hand and twisted it behind his back in one quick movement.

“Don’t you know who I am?” his hair was poorly died, as if he was afraid of the early grey hair that his sister had. *It must be a family trait.* The thought passed just as quickly as it came.

“Do you know who I am?” she asked, so quiet it was barely above a whisper. “I am Cassandra Pentaghast, Seeker Agent and the Right Hand to the Divine. I suggest you leave. Now.” She shoved him towards the door.

She turned around to an exasperated Cullen. She raised an eyebrow at the man, who simply rubbed at his temples and leaned on his desk.

“Well, I guess have no choice but to listen now.”

“I found the pattern.” Cullen stood straight up, motioning for her to continue.

“The Cadash household has been trying to go legitimate. About fifteen years ago two of the heirs were murdered and didn’t leave any offspring. Then the murders stopped, and the Cadash household has continued to smuggle lyrium in and out of the city. That left three heirs remaining, including Moma Cadash’s. Arlof Cadash was a bachelor and the youngest son to the youngest sister. The transporter was the great-grandson of one of the sisters and had a boy who died before he was two years old. That’s four bloodlines, all that have a direct connection to a Cadash sister. The next victim is the grandson of Moma Cadash, who was previously thought to have died in a fire when he was an infant.”

“Kallak... It’s Kallak, isn’t it?”

“Yes. He has the Nameless Grant, which helps dwarves with no connections. The botched assassination was meant to get rid of any potential heir who was educated. Because of Dagna’s quick thinking, it turned into a bombing but covered the Carta’s tracks in the process. He helped to raise
two girls- one is Alex Trevelyan. The other is the head of her security, Saare Adaar. Alex is in the spotlight, and Saare is a mage- working with lyrium in its raw form is dangerous for her. Neither can take over for the Carta at the moment, and will most likely never do so. The next target is Kallak of Ostwick.”

“Why the hell did the murders stop fifteen years ago, only to pick back up again?”

“I don’t know. What I do know is that the whereabouts of Kallak are unknown. We have to find him. In the meantime, I want you to amp up security around Saare Adaar. Pretend it’s an extra precaution for the upcoming election, have publicity frame Arlof’s murder as something political, tie it to the Mage Rebellion if you must. But I need full access to your search and rescue team.”

“Granted. Anything else?”

“Yes- bring in Matthew Cleaver and have him kept in custody. He knows everything about this city, including it’s underbelly. If my suspicion is correct, he was the murderer’s source of intelligence. I want to interrogate him myself, then you can arrest him for conspiracy to a serial murderer.”

“I can’t.”

“Why not?”

“He’s dead. The autopsy is being done right now but it was clear he had been tortured for an extended period of time. He was missing all of his nails and sustained massive bruising to his lungs and kidneys.”

“...Shit.”

“Cassandra… I need you to answer one question. When was the last time you had seen him? Be honest.”

“... I was drunk. So was he, but…”

“Cassandra, you didn’t.”

“Nothing happened! He made an excuse and then left. The last I saw was him leaving my apartment, after we- after we saw the city.”
“You went on a date with your primary suspect!? And now you want to try and tell me that he’s the next victim to these murders? How do we know he’s not the serial killer?”

“He’s not the murderer! Why would he attack the College? Or his cousin for Andraste Sake! He was with me the entire day!”

“If he’s Moma Cadash’s heir as you think he is, why wouldn’t he? He must have been caught last time, stopped the murders and figured that this election was the perfect cover!”

“He’s not a criminal!”

“Prove it!” Cullen and Cassandra were yelling at each other this point.

_He’s not criminal_. The thought played over and over in her head. Leliana told her. The Snapdragon is a legitimate business. His daughter was a professor at the College, he cared for each and every single kid he had on the Nameless Grant. She had watched him for months in his shop, had seen him at Sera’s farmhouse. He was innocent, and missing, and he _was not a criminal._

“He’s not Carta.” She hissed at Cullen.

She was taller than him, the parka’s extra bulk not intimidating her like it would others who went toe to toe with the man. He stood his ground… only to sigh and bow his head in defeat.

“When you find him, I want your report on my desk. I’ll have to give the case to someone else to complete. You have to understand.”

“... I want to know...”

“You can’t. Cassandra... you’re attached to the case. Your judgement is clouded and you can’t. Look, find your florist. If you can prove he’s not Carta, if he really is just a victim, fine. But it’s over. The moment you find him you’re off the case. Understand?”

Cassandra felt the impulse. To draw her gun and pull rank on Cullen. To take over the entire Ostwick Guard and turn the city inside out, hoping, praying that she would find a Dalish dwarf. One
with tanned skin and grey in his goatee. The deep blue of his Casteless markings, the arrowhead dripping into thin Vallaslin. She want to so desperately find him, to cover his body with her own- to be the dragon on his chest, or the sun in the tree on his back. She wanted to see his face alive, laughing, drunk and without a care in the world. More than anything, she wanted him here, next to her. On her lips. In her bed that night.

“Understood.” Cassandra left the office. Jim had been listening in, his fumble to pretend to be busy obvious to the woman.

Her phone started ringing. She answered with ‘Pentaghast’, expecting it to be one of Leliana’s agents. Instead she was meet with the sound of water. There were seagulls in the background, but the waves were far more prominent.

“...Who is this?” She demanded.

Nothing. Waves, the other person on the line was breathing through their nose. Deep, calm. She strained to listen more. Was that ships? No, it was some other kind of vehicle. She heard muttering, then someone said ‘Gag him’. Whoever was on the phone grunted at someone else. The phone call ended when a different voice was getting closer.

She looked down to see the number. It wasn’t one she recognized… Kallak had a burner phone that day. He had been making calls at the museum but then he said his phone had died… She never got the number. Someone had said ‘Gag him’. What if…

She went down to the ITM division of the building. With technology and magic so interlinked, they have to be able to track a phone number down. When she got down there, Sergeant Cadash was leaving the room. She felt the hairs on the back of her neck stand up.

“She went down to the ITM division of the building. With technology and magic so interlinked, they have to be able to track a phone number down. When she got down there, Sergeant Cadash was leaving the room. She felt the hairs on the back of her neck stand up.

“Sergeant. With me, now.” Cassandra didn’t wait for an answer, pulling the dwarf with her by his shoulder.

She went to the Vashoth that was sitting behind the desk, an elven mage working on something on the other desk. She noticed the stitching scars around their lips- a former saarebas. She pulled out her phone and showed him the number.

“Just got a call from this number. They didn’t say anything but I suspect it has to do with my case. Most likely a death threat will come next. I need to track down it’s location.”
“Sergeant?”

“It’s alright, Han. She’s a Seeker.” Cadash brushed back his blond hair, the tattoo on his left thumb noticeable again.

“Alright… You’ll have to call them back though. I can’t do a tracking spell without a running connection. I can only do so much on just a number. I’ll just need to set up the equipment and attach the phone-”

“Do it.” Cassandra handed her phone over, letting Han get to work.

She turned to the sergeant, taking his left hand and examined his thumb. Six black spots with one ring on top. She had seen it in brief passing, but Arlof had two rings, one on top and another on bottom. So did Kallak, but his was much older.

“What is this?”

“A Casteless marking?” the Sergeant was avoiding the question, playing dumb.

It was pissing her off. She took a deep breath through her nose but it wasn’t working. She grabbed the dwarf by the shoulder again and went out of the room, only to spin him around and pin up against a wall. She activated the rune on her gun, bringing the muzzle under the dwarf’s throat. He hissed as her Seeker abilities made the metal hot to the touch, but he didn’t make any other sound.

“Who do you work for.” She said, her voice level.

“Don’t do this, please.” He was being unbelievably calm for someone with a gun to his throat.

“Answer me. Now.” She pressed the weapon a little more, the hot metal no doubt going to leave a mark later.

“S’il découvre, je suis un nain mort.” He was speaking Orlasian.
“Où gardez-vous l’otage?”

“Sur l’île, dans un ancien magasin de crabes. Quoi que vous trouviez ... Ça ne venait pas de moi.” She put him on the ground, putting her gun back in holster.

“Make the call. Inform Saare Adaar about the location and send a search party. When that’s done, turn in your badge.” She leaned in for the next half. “If you want stay alive, you’ll never come anywhere near the Guard again.”

Kallak looked down at the burner phone. He shouldn’t have kept it. He should have thrown it in the ocean. But he wanted to hear her voice. He looked back at the crab shop. His men were in position, Sera standing next to him.

“You gonna kill him?” she asked, the red surgical mask not able to stop her breath from becoming a mist.

“I have to confirm it’s him, Jenny.” Kallak didn’t bother to cover his own face with his green handkerchief. After all, it was most likely going to be his last day as a Kingpin. No point in hiding.

“He hurt Widdles. You better kill him, alright? Cause if you don’t I- I’ll-” Sera’s grip on her bow tightened.

Kallak just nodded. The seagulls were obnoxious; he made a mental note to pay off the neighbours about the noise later. The shop hadn’t been used like this in years. The owner came out of the store, a human man in his late thirties. It was faint, but Kallak knew that the man’s ears were tipped like his own.

“Mr Cadash. I did just what you asked. The crabs haven’t been fed in the last 36 hours, and my workers- they’re going to okay?”

“They’ll be compensated. I can’t thank you enough.”

“Please, Mr Cadash. I owe you a debt.”
“Hopefully, you won’t have one by the end of the night.” Kallak held out his left hand, the old tattoo on his thumb in full view.

The man knelt down and rested his forehead on the dwarf’s thumb. A beat up truck pulled up, the crunching of seashells and gravel alerting the three of them. Sera walked over to the car, everyone in the car wearing the same red mask on their face. Kallak’s informant came up behind the owner and escorted him away. They came back to stand next to Kallak, watching as rogues and berserkers were scattered and positioned around the shop.

“Before you ask, the neighbours were paid off already. You should be able to have a nice long talk with him.”

“What about the Sergeant?”

“He’s supposed to be on the phones tonight.”

“Supposed to? He needs to be.”

“He’ll be there. Afterwards, he’ll be disposed of.”

“Good… Can’t believe he was our leak.”

“You couldn’t have known, Godfather.”

“ Fucking hate that nickname.”

“After tonight, you won’t ever have to hear that nickname again.”

“Let’s hope.”
The Godmother was not a historically accurate movie, but it was one of Cassandra’s favourites. It was set later in Moma’s career, her sisters had children who had taken over for them in the family business- until they got cocky and wanted to split up the Cadash house into five. The rest of the movie was about Moma using tactics to get rid of the ambitious upstarts, replacing them with more loyal people. People from all walks of life, including one elf. But the film had been exaggerated; it was never confirmed that such an even had ever occurred…

But looking at the abandoned wharf, she had to second guess herself. She recognized the red mask of the Jennies. The one or two humans who were with a group of dwarf berserkers. A Vashoth fistfighter, his hands wrapped in bandages. The thicker the group, the more cautious she had to be. For once she was grateful for the specialized boots that Leliana made her wear, the lack of noise that came from moving past the guards.

Moma Cadash was not someone who Cassandra was invested in, but her legend was up there with the Black Fox, even the Hero of Ferelden. Of course some of the more wild tales would have a little truth to them. Maybe Moma was a cutthroat. Maybe the only reason Kallak is considered a target is because of his blood- maybe Moma had her son killed and raised her grandchild to never take over. But why now? Why would the Head of House Cadash wait so long to kill off the blood heirs?

She found the building that was most heavily guarded. By now the sun had gone down, the crescent moon barely illuminating the building. There were four archers on the roof in the back- probably more at the front. As she waited, two guards were walking around the perimeter. One squadron was hovering 10 feet from the front entrance, but only two guards were by the back door.

She waited a little longer, finding that there was a pile of crates stacked next to a window- which was open. She heard screams coming from inside. She felt her heart jump to her throat- Kallak. It had to be. If he was screaming, then she wasn’t too late. But he was being tortured, and with the amount of guards around, whoever was torturing him didn’t want anyone to find out. Her phone buzzed in her pocket. She went further into the shadow, and check the message. It was from Leliana, a coded message. It took her a few seconds, but all it did was confirm what she already knew- this was the building. The attachment was a floor plan, a small red dot indicated where Cassandra was hiding. Sometimes it was scary how the bard was able to do this, but right now Cassandra was just relieved.

She turned off her phone, putting it back into her pocket. She checked her gun, making sure there was a bullet in the barrel. She put it back in the holster and waited for her moment. The patrolling guards stopped at the back gate, one of them taking a smoke. A new archer walked to stand just above the open window. The floor plan indicated that it was into the office, right next to a gambling
room and direct access to the kitchen. It was a converted warehouse, so the there would most likely be exposed support beams, something that was common to see in the wharfs.

Did Kallak know he was being targeted? He wasn’t naïve, she had been around him long enough to know that. Another cry of pain came from the building. And then gunshots from across the street. The patrolling guards rushed over to the sound, which was followed by war cries. The archer who was hovering by the open window jumped down from the roof. They notched an arrow that had something tied around the arrowhead- explosives. Now was her chance.

Cassandra ran for the crates, using the shadows from the commercial trash bin to hide herself from the front guards. She was just able to hide in the pile as one of the berserkers came to the see what the ruckus was about. The skirmish was over as soon as it had began, the archer limping over to the guard. They exchanged a few words, the archer limping back to a healer by the front door. The berserker lit his cigarette and turned his back to Cassandra. She waited until he finished his smoke. Another cry of pain from inside signalling him to go back to his post.

She hoisted herself to the window, saw that one guard was napping at the office desk. She stepped down on the floor and looked up. Just as she thought- exposed support beams. As a precaution she pulled out the small vial of sleeping potion from a pocket in her vest. She always hated this part, but she need to make sure. Carefully she pinched the guards nose, and then put a few drops into his open, snoring mouth. She waited ten seconds, and the guard snored, loudly. Quickly she scrambled up onto the side tables, then the file cabinets. No one was watching from the support beams, but she saw how the archers got up on the roof. There were some port windows scattered around the roof underneath the kitchen, ropes tied and pulled down for easier access.

She took a step forward only for another cry of pain to pierce the air. Then she heard a sickening punch to the gut, whoever was screaming silenced. A knife was swung down somewhere, the sound of meat and bone being torn apart. A latch was opened and the sound of splashing caught her ears. She had to move, quickly.

She came to the main room, booths separating the room into two areas. The smaller one had two tables. One was covered in body parts- most were dwarven. The other had papers scattered across. She couldn’t see the man who was looking at the papers, but she saw the butcher was busy hacking away at the corpses. He was a tall, burly Vashoth, one who never grew horns. His long white hair was tied back into ponytail, the strands slick from… something. The Vashoth handed a bucket to another dwarf. Carta, their forearms and forehead covered in Casteless markings. The Carta thug moved the bucket to the larger part of the room.

There were a few lights on, one above the victim sitting in chair, another two above an open latch in the floor. Cassandra watched was claws reached up, lashing out of the water. She recognized them, feeling her stomach drop; mutated crabs. She had read a case about a serial killer mixing lyrium dust with food, causing the crabs to become three times larger than they did naturally. Afterwards, some
shops sold the crabs as a gimmick, but it was illegal to own them in Orlais… But this was Ostwick.

The bucket filled with body parts was dumped into the open latch, and a frenzy of activity responded. There was a lobster held in a crate next to the chair, its claws were snapping at the exposed toes of the man in the chair.

“Talk.” The Carta thug threw the now empty bucket at the prisoner.

This caused the lobster to latch onto a toe and the dwarf screamed out in pain. Cassandra moved around, praying that she would see a familiar bald head in chair. Instead she saw a blond dwarf, his clothes torn and frayed but clearly Orlaisan. What relief she felt was replaced with dread. Where was Kallak?

“I said, talk!” the lobster was busy eating the severed toe.

“Jamais.” He replied. Cassandra recognized the Orlesian.

“Do I look like a mask wearing schmuck to you? I SAID TALK!” The Carta interrogator grabbed a baseball bat to swing at the dwarf. But then a sharp whistle came from the other table, the one who was reading all the papers.

The dwarf—most likely the boss—moved away from the table to the interrogation. He stayed in the shadows, but his footsteps were quieter than the others. He began to speak fluent Orlasian at the prisoner, almost no accent.

“Do you know who I am.” The shadow spoke.

“Stand in the sun, bastard.”

“Awfully bold of you, duster. We’re the same, you know. I’ve simply embraced what you fear. I’ll ask again. Do you know who I am.”

“Lapis Lazuli Cadash!! You’re a traitor!!”
“That’s not my name. Your info is out of date. Fifty years out of date. A shame, really. In another life, you would have made a wonderful goon for me.”

“Boss.” The Carta thug handed the shadow the bat, but they refused.

The interrogator shrugged, then picked up the cage with the lobster. The shadow stepped into the light. Cassandra covered her mouth, hoping that no one could hear her heartbeat, praying that this was a trick. It had to be. It couldn’t be him.

“See, I’d call you a fish out of water… but you’re just another bottom feeder like this one.” Kallak smiled, his green eyes cold.

“Please,” the prisoner begged. “Please don’t do this. What do you want? I’ll get you anything, anything at all!”

“There’s nothing I want.” Kallak spoke again, his Orlesian indistinguishable from a Noblemen. “Your grandfather died long before he could warn your mother. You belong to nothing, and there is no more Stone to go back to.”

The prisoner was crying now, his begging getting louder. Kallak nodded at his grunt, and they opened up the latch for the lobster to climb out of. The crabs went into another frenzy as Kallak pulled out a vial of electric blue dust.

“You are nothing, Toxiven. You should have never come here. Your mother died right here, in this very shop fifteen years ago. She thought that she could kill the Cadash bloodline. She was a fool. You’re little gang killed my godson. You murdered my cousin, who was so weak I didn’t even realize it was him. Thank the Creators for that spy of yours. He was so easy to sway, just a few gold coins and he told us all about you. A shame… you’re barely able to satisfy this lobster. I hate to make these crabs lower grade, but!”

Kallak sprinkled the dust across the lobster before tossing it into the open latch. It was torn apart in seconds, the crabs getting anxious for their next feeding. The Vashoth butcher was filling the last bucket with the remaining pieces of his work. He grunted as he walked over to Kallak, passing just under Cassandra. Kallak had looked up to watch the butcher…

And made direct contact with Cassandra. He didn’t move, didn’t even breath. His pants were splashed with water as the rest of corpses were dumped into the open latch. The butcher wiped off
his knife, and untied the prisoners left hand, pulling at it. A quick cut and the thumb fell off. The screaming went on, Toxiven still begging for his life. She couldn’t bring herself to care. She had guessed wrong, she shouldn’t have come, Cullen was right, she didn’t want to see this. *This had to be a dream, it had to be!!*

Kallak was still staring at her. Then police sirens were heard from far away. He looked away, started to shout orders. Someone was calling from the office, her exit, and the windows were shut. The Butcher asked something in Elven, and Kallak responded in turn. The butcher kicked at the chair, the prisoner falling into the open latch. Kallak shut the latch and locked it, the dwarf’s cries of pain muffled. She had to act, fast. She jumped down and had her gun in hand.

“Ostwick Guard, hands up or I’ll shoot!” Cassandra shouted.

The Butcher yelled, blocking Cassandra’s view of Kallak. She fired, aiming for their shoulders. They dropped one the knives but swung at Cassandra with another. She ducked and tackled him, firing into the inside of his knees. The Vashoth fell on top of her, trying to grapple her. She shoved him down and kicked at his face, stepping over the broken body. Two archers shoot fire arrows into the building, and then she saw it: Oil and dynamite. Cassandra looked around, not seeing Kallak anywhere in the room. The doors slammed open, several guards who had been stashed elsewhere running towards the only exit, the front door. A few saw Cassandra standing there, the larger Vashoth struggling to get back up on one leg.

Two berserkers smell the blood and go into a rage, their weapons glowing from enchantments. Cassandra hits one directly in the head, the other in the chest. The first one goes down, the second raises his warhammer. Cassandra rolls away, grabbing the sword and shield from his fallen comrade. The Vashoth stands up again, pulling at a table chair and using it as a club. *Not good.*

Cassandra was running towards the front door, knowing that the building would blow any second. The two warriors followed close behind. She couldn’t see Kallak anywhere, did he disappear? Why didn’t he say anything to her? He *lied to her!!!* She felt the gravel under boots and turned on her heel, bringing the shield up to her chest. The Vashoth got out, but the dwarf was caught in the explosion. The forced air would have thrown anyone else- but she had planted her feet and was moved a good six inches. The Vashoth was screaming, his back on fire.

She bashed the shield into his chest, bringing her sword towards the knee she shot from before. The guard sirens were growing louder, but she had to keep fighting. The butcher was in pain, the only thing keeping him up was adrenaline. The fight went on for another minute, until a flash of blue and gold caught Cassandra’s eye. Alex Trevelyen had a rapier and dagger in her hands, and was flanking the Vashoth with her. A spark of electricity and ice flew over the three of their heads, Saare Adaar wielding a staff. The two human warriors nodded, facing off with the wounded Vashoth.
The fight didn’t last long after that. The guard showed up, guns aimed at the Vashoth butcher. He dropped to his knees when he saw Saare, who had started to walk up to him, her hand out as she casted a basic healing spell on the man. They spoke briefly in Qunlat, and he admitted to the murders in Common. Alex and Cassandra were given blankets and waited next to a patrol car. There were a few burn victims, most were dwarves. Alex talked at Cassandra, her voice kept low in order to not draw attention. Cassandra didn’t respond, anger and shock keeping her voice away.

It turned out that Sergeant Cadash had done what Cassandra asked, and had informed Saare that her father might be the next target. The two of them didn’t wait for the call to go through, instead they went straight to tracking Cassandra’s phone instead. When she had turned it off, Saare and Alex hopped onto her bike and headed this way. The guard was called when they saw how many people were patrolling the area. As for Kallak…

“Did you know?” Cassandra croaked. She still had smoke in her lungs

“... You saw him working then.” Alex looked at the older woman.

“He lied to me.”

“Kallak doesn’t lie. He never has. He just… you just need to ask the right questions.”

“Where is he? He left the scene, I need-”

“You have to give a testimony. I’m not gonna ask you to lie about what you saw. Just realize that… I’m his lawyer.” Alex got up from the hood of the car.

Cullen had pulled up at that moment, taking off his parka and putting it over Alex’s shoulders. Saare was standing near the ambulances, talking with the detective from a month ago. The red and blue lights of the patrol cars filled the wharf. Cassandra tugged the blanket closer, hiding that she was turning on her phone. She pulled up the number from before- Kallak’s phone number. She hovered over the call button for a few moments. Then a message pinged.

I’m sorry.

Cassandra wanted to cry. She instead chucked her phone at the ground, the screen cracking on the gravel and broken seashells. The detective was walking over, and he crouched down to pick up her
phone. His horns had been recently buffed, reflecting the flashing lights.

“Seeker.” he said, his Antivan accent thicker than before. “I believe this is yours.”

“Did he confess?” Cassandra didn’t take the phone back.

“He did. Apparently he was hired by a rival Carta house in Orlais. They had tried before, nearly, uh, a decade, give or take, ago. They wanted confirmation of the murders, hence the left thumb missing from victims in the past… A shame.”

“... I suppose.”

“Carta business has always been so… filthy. But, this is a new Age, perhaps the turf war is over, hm? I have to ask you a few questions about what you saw.”

Cassandra gave her testimony, but she didn’t say Kallak’s name. And then the detective asked about him. She told him everything after that. The detective listened, taking notes here and there. It was obvious from his face that he was trying to be sympathetic. She didn’t want pity. She wanted to go back to bed, she wanted to march over to 24 Loc Muinne and question a certain dalish dwarf. She wanted to kill him, to hold him in her arms, to strangle him until he couldn't breathe, to tie him up and force him to tell her the truth. The entire truth. She wanted to kiss his face, know that he was safe, that this was all just a horrible dream.

Cassandra was never able to do any of that, she spent the rest of the night at the hospital, continuing to give her testimony. She never even got to pack her things.

Chapter End Notes

Hmmmmmmmm Yes. I Love This Song.
Kallak was sitting behind the counter today. Sera had ended up getting a cold from standing outside around the crab shop. He had put on an old record, the woman’s voice echoing slightly off the white walls in the floral shop. It had been one of Moma’s favorites, the singer an old jazz idol.

He had made a few bouquets at the beginning, but gave up after the third one. He was too distracted to really put his heart into it. Instead he opted for reading the newspaper, thumbing through the obituaries. A few ‘of Oswtixks’ who were actually Cadash’s were listed. One of the hahrens had passed away, a heart attack in the middle of the night. A soft piano came across the record, and Kallak felt himself singing along to it without thinking.

“...Of a great love for me... Again, I was wrong…”

“Life is lonely again. And only last year, everything seemed so sure. Now life is awful again” a soft Orlesian voice broke the silence, harmonizing with the record.

A human woman was standing next to the few bouquets on display. She was playing with the petals of Andraste Grace, her red bob had a small braid that was gently tucked behind her ear. Kallak raised an eyebrow at the woman. The song continued for a while, the next track just as plain and sad as the last one.

“Welcome to the Snapdragon.” Kallak said, “Unique Bouquets for the Gentle Freak. How can I help you?”

“It’s been ages since I heard that song.” She smiled and leaned over the counter. Kallak noticed the pin on her scarf, the songbird clutching a dagger in its talons.

“I’m sure it has… Miss Nightingale.” Kallak went back to looking at the newspaper.

“Mr Cadash.”

“That’s not my name.” He was sharper than he had to be.
“Oh? So I suppose it’s not you who is the talk of the Guard?”

Kallak looked at the woman again, keeping his face as blank as he could. She had that small smile on her face, as if this was just some kind of game, and not an interrogation. He sighed heavily through his nose and put the paper down.

“Is she…” Kallak swallowed and then straightened up in his chair. “Is she okay?”

“She left this morning. Guard protocol dictates that officers too close to a case are no longer allowed to work on them. It took some convincing, but she did want to come see you before she left I’m afraid.”

“Probably to kill me.”

“Or kiss you. I heard you had been the quite the gentlemen during your date with the Seeker.” Kallak felt his stomach drop.

“So why are you here?” He ask, not really wanting the truth.

The bard pulled out a letter from her coat pocket. It was done on hotel paper, the logo for the chain on top of the paper. Kallak took the letter and skimmed over it. The handwriting was short and brief, emotions running as high as the lettering. Just like the woman who wrote it.

“This was the compromise. Her phone number will be changing when she reaches Fereldan, but if you can answer something for me-”

“Anything.” Kallak look the bard in the eye. She blinked, taken back by his intensity.

“... Did you love her?” she asked, her eyes cold.

“I still do.” Kallak answered. “I loved her the moment I saw her.”
“She threatened you the first time she came in here.”

“That was the Seeker. I fell in love with Cassandra.” Kallak held the bard’s gaze.

She was smiling at him, her gaze falling at his hands. He followed her gaze. His old tattoo, the one that marked him as the heir to House Cadash and been burned off. The scar was fresh, the skin just as angry as the one across his nose.

“She was smiling at him, her gaze falling at his hands. He followed her gaze. His old tattoo, the one that marked him as the heir to House Cadash and been burned off. The scar was fresh, the skin just as angry as the one across his nose.

“Vitaar is poisonous to non-Vashoth, you know.” she went back to looking at the Andraste Grace bouquet.

“True, but… it’s pretty good at getting rid of tattoos. Trust me, I have some experience with it.” Kallak scratched at the bridge of his nose to emphasize his point.

“Here.” A small slip of paper was put down on the table. “She’s usually free around lunch time. I can’t guarantee she’ll want to talk. There’s the mailing address if you’re feeling more romantic, but fair warning,” she looked back at him. “Her Most Holy is… a little nosey.”

“I’ll be sure to send something for the Divine then.” Kallak pulled the bouquet with the Andraste Grace out from its display, and handed it to the bard. “For you.”

“...Thank you. How much?”

“You already gave me more than enough.” Kallak smiled back at the woman and went back to reading the newspaper.

He waited a minute before going back to Cassandra’s letter. There were parts that had been crossed out, the imprint of several other letters being written before this one. He felt his heart in his throat as he took his time to read it.

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After months of being together, knowing you, I did not expect to find out that you were part of the Carta. I knew you were secretive. I knew that you were trying to hide something. I thought it was
because of your past, but never-

Kallak,

You lied to me-

Cadash,

I want the truth. I thought I had it, but I guess I was wrong. I assumed, stupidly, that you had no idea about who your parents were. You had told me they died in a fire, that your Auntie took you in at eighteen. Why did you hide your last name? You had no right to lead me - I never did ask about your youth, before you were eighteen.

I'm a Seeker of Truth, and the Right Hand of the Divine. I would have found out eventually, so I just want to ask one thing. Did you love me? Was it real? Why did you keep your last name a secret from me? I never felt—did not expect you to blow up the College, let alone hurt Dagna. I watched you, I trusted you, I cared about you and you just--

I told the Guard everything. Alex said she was your lawyer, so whatever parole you are given, I hope it is a long one. You bastard. I love you--

Regards,

Pentaghast

Kallak read and re-read the letter for the next hour. He looked at the phone number and address he was given. He sighed and shook his head as he pulled out one of the greeting cards he sold. It had red bluebonnets pressed on the front.

He wrote ten letters on scratch paper before he gave up and threw them all in the trash. He was too mad to try and put a smile on his face, fuming for the rest of the day. He closed the shop early and went into the greenhouse. His thumb was throbbing, the burn needing more ointment. He ignored it to look at the roses Vivienne had commissioned all those months ago.

This batch was budding, the petals a deep blue, hints of purple at the very tips. It was the closest he had gotten, but the stems were covered in thorns. He had to wear his dragonskin gloves in order to
handle them. He grabbed the polaroid camera and snapped a few photos, holding the white and silver lilies next to the buds for comparison. He went back to his office and dropped the pictures on the desk. He must have sat in front of his computer for half an hour, the ancient computer mocking him, the black screen reflecting back at him. He didn’t recognize what he saw, a lovestruck fool, some broken hearted bastard with so many scars he could never be considered handsome. Grey in his goatee, the deep wrinkles around his eyes and dark blue on his scalp. Green eyes filled with tears, hands gnarled and shaky as they wiped away the evidence of his pain.

Eventually, the sun went down, and he couldn’t stand looking at himself anymore. He climbed the outdoor steps to his apartment, felt something cold and wet on his shaved head. He looked up to see it was snowing. Kallak stood outside for a minute longer, the last week rushing over his body. *I'm too old to feel like this.* He opened the door to his apartment, closing it with his body leaning on the frame. His body slid down, all of his energy gone.

Kallak began to cry, the tears refusing to be held back anymore. It didn’t take long for him to start sniffling and shaking into his hands. He heard Saare’s footsteps, his daughter picking him up like a ragdoll. She set him down on the couch, the dwarf not resisting. He was openly sobbing, body shaking from the pain. His left thumb hurt, but it didn’t matter anymore. Nothing mattered anymore.

Saare was sitting with him on the couch, not letting go of her father. She had the radio on, the news describing the burning of an old crab shop in the Alienage. She was playing with a ring hanging around her neck, six black spots on the jewelry catching the street lights outside. Kallak continued to cry, until he lost his voice. Now he was mute, leaning heavily on his daughter, just wanting to go to bed but afraid of what he would see in his dreams.

“*It’s over.*” Saare spoke up. “I went to the meeting today and the houses are in agreement.”

Kallak didn’t say anything, just nodded absentmindedly.

“It’ll take a while, but the mines are okay with going legit. We can give Alex the credit at the end of it, should help her get the office. The election day was set too, gonna be in late spring. Promised her to cut down the Carta business as much as I could, at least in areas she has support in.” Saare stretched and got up from the couch, heading over to the kitchen.

She was making tea for him. He could smell the black and lemon blend, blowing his nose with the tissues that were set next to him at some point. She handed him a cup, only for him to hiss in pain at his hand. Saare grabbed the ointment she had made, rubbing it into his left hand.

“... What’s this?” Saare pulled at Cassandra’s letter; it had been tucked into his shirt pocket.
“It’s nothing.” Kallak lied. He went to take it back, but his daughter was taller.

“... Wow. She’s pissed at you.” Saare put it on the coffee table, handing Kallak his cup again.

“I guess.” Kallak croaked, rubbing at his eyes. “Kinda deserved it though.”

“So what are you gonna do about it? No, wait, let me guess. You’re going to... run away to Fereldan to get her attention again. Go to her workplace and get all her coworkers to like you so she has no choice but to get back with you? A single rendezvous for crazy sex-”

“Saare.”

“Oh, I got it! Convince her that your not really a bad guy, you were just pretending!”

“I’m just gonna write a letter back.” Kallak sipped at his tea.

“That’s… really sweet. Like stupid romance novel sweet.”

“Unlike some people, I like taking my time.”

“You take too much time. You’re gonna be seventy with a white beard before you get laid again.”

“Saare…”

“Please tell me you fucked her? Because she was pretty hot- for a Seeker at least.”

“Saare!”

“You didn't fuck her, did you? Creators, you’re so old fashioned.”
He knew what she was doing. He had done this to her everytime she had a break-up; tease her until the tears would stop, replaced with snickers and laughter. Then watch one of their science fiction movies, probably the really bad ones, and in the morning it would be forgotten. So he played along, and he did feel better while they made fun of the crappy special effects. But it didn’t go away, the lump in his throat when he thought about a certain Nevarran still there.

And then Saare got a text from someone and she put Kallak to bed. He was alone, with his thoughts. He couldn’t go to sleep, so instead he went back to his desk and tried to write again. Somehow, it was easier now than it was hours ago.

_Cassa - Pentaghast,_

_The truth? The truth is that my parents were killed for leaving the Carta. My grandmother raised me, hoping that someday I could do what she only dreamed of: going legitimate. She didn’t care that I was a man, she welcomed me back when I came home from my time with my Auntie. I’ve been Kallak of Ostwick my entire adult life. I was never a Cadash. I never will be. But you want the truth, so here it is._

_Tael and I were the stupid jumpstarts who burned down half the Alienage. We had waited until after Moma had died. Then with the money from my inheritance, I bought the entire street and then some. I’ve been living off rent money in the Alienage for the last thirty years. Every penny that is made from lyrium smuggling goes to the Nameless Grant. Tael bought one apartment complex and makes Nobles who want to live near campus pay out of their ass for it. Not sure if that’s legal… but that’s the truth._

_The truth is that the girls met completely by accident. Alex was visiting her siblings (they were renting from Tael at the time), and she got really curious about us. Course, having a Vashoth for a daughter makes you stand out in the crowd. Maxwell Sr. hated us, especially when I suggested a playdate. Soon after he had us signing papers to adopt Alex, didn’t want to deal with his empathetic youngest. Alex is not a Cadash, but she’s not a Noble either. That’s the truth._

_Saare was the only person I ever smuggled. She was starving in Amaranthine, and the Chantry didn’t think I could raise her, since she was a mage and I was… me. It took a while, longer than I care to admit, but I think I did a good job. Yeah, she’s a punk and spends most of her time with a mercenary group, but there are worse things. She is a Cadash, but not by my choice. We had competitors in Orlais who found out, so they started killing us off when she turned eighteen. That was a while ago, and I did what I had to do to make it stop. That’s the truth._

_I have been trying to go legitimate for the last ten years, thinking that the bastards from before were
gone. But then I would get a thumb in the mail, or someone would hassle one of the students under the Nameless Grant so I would have to start all over again. The bombing at the College was just another example of that. Dagna thought faster than the others- she's still alive because of it. That’s the truth.

I burned off my tattoo the morning after the wharf. I’m done with the Carta. The man you saw, he was the last in his line. Someone else is in charge of the Carta now. They know not to fuck with us. The truth is that Saare Adaar was Moma’s heir. I’m just her father. They were never after me, they were after her. But she’s my daughter- I wasn’t going to let some hopped up asshole from Orlais scare her out of living her life. I had done that already, I don’t want her to ever feel like she has to hide. That’s the truth.

When you showed up at my shop, I didn’t think anything of it. Thought you were another jumpstart detective, that you had heard somewhere who I was, wanted to prove a point or something. And then I got to know you. After the floating market, I wanted to tell you the truth… but I didn’t know how. I haven’t had anyone get as close as you did. I don’t think I ever will. I’m old, not in the best of shape and with a temper that’s shorter than I am. But I love you. That’s the truth.

I know I hurt you. I never wanted to lie to you. I would understand if you never want hear from me again. But you deserve the truth- and this is all of it. I love you, and I hate the fact that I hurt you. I’m sorry, Cassandra Pentaghast.

Kallak. of Ostwick.

The snow continued to fall outside. He wondered if it was cold where Cassandra was. He hoped she was sleeping better than he was. He crawled back into bed as the sun started to come up. Not being open for one day wouldn’t kill him, the shop would survive. He was grateful for once for his dwarven heritage, his dreamless sleep the only solace for the whole day.

Chapter End Notes

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J0bUP-RyCqk

Ella Fitzgerald- Lush Life
Simple Poetry

Cassandra watched the candle burn in her small study. The room smelled like Ostwick, the sea salt and shiraz covering up the smell of stale hay. Ferelden was cold, almost unbearable. She was thankful that the Divine had sent her one of the candles she had purchased what seems like years ago.

In truth it had been two months. The candle had been burned halfway, the only thing keeping it together was the stolen pint glass she used as a holder. Without it, the candle would be nothing but a puddle of wax. She was writing up her report on Haven, the small tavern in town served as her base of operations. Her room had a furnace, but it was old and required more effort that it was worth. So instead she opted for a sweater and thermals, doubling her socks until she got into the bed.

A knock came on her door. She gave permission and an elf walked into the room. She was quiet as she went to work, placing the enchanted bed warmer under the cot. She got Cassandra’s dishes, pausing to smell the candle.

“It’s so lovely.” the elf said absentmindedly. “Where did you get it?”

“Ostwick.” Cassandra tried to concentrate on her report again, hating herself for daydreaming. “They have a floating market there.”

“Sounds romantic.” the elf sighed again, her ears turning red at the tips.

Cassandra hummed back, leaving the elf to finish her chores before closing the door behind her. When she did Cassandra threw down her pencil and rubbed at her eyes. She was too exhausted to do anything. So she pulled out the letters. They started coming about two weeks after she left. Leliana had been making sure they got to her, but Cassandra didn’t think it was a good idea at the time. At first, she wanted to burn them, not even looking at what was written. But then she saw that they were the pressed cards from his store. How many times did she watch him make those cards, taking the time to immortalize the dying flowers from his shop.

Now they were a balm, like her candle. She moved said candle to her bedside, climbing under the covers in order to read the letters. She never wrote back, was too afraid to. But that didn’t stop Kallak. The first one was written in a shaky hand, obvious tear marks. The second one was calmer, but it had been written by Bull from the bakery. The third was again by Kallak. It was an ordinary letter, as if he was writing to a friend about the comings and goings of the Alienage. The fourth was a rant about some poem; a love poem to be exact. She picked this one up, reading it over again.
Pentaghast,

I kept thinking back to that book of poems the girls had read out loud that night. I ended up borrowing it and… I fucking hate it. It’s nothing but dribble and makes no sense. Half of the time it’s innuendo after innuendo, or it’s so cheesy you could have any lovestruck teenager recite it by heart. Whatever happened to the poetry that actually described love? Or was it always so easy? Hold on, let me try something...

Love is not a battlefield, it is a war.
It ebbs and flows like the ocean,
Seemingly calm, until you look below

It grows deeper the more adventurous you become
But it will hurt your lungs if you forget to breathe
A single kiss turns into a thousand oceans
A broken goodbye becomes the storm

Sailors journey out to sea, hoping for glory
But that sirens song is a battle cry.
With every scar comes a story
Every fight becomes a dream

Love is not skin deep, for it were
We would be kings without crowns
I think of you, your harsh face
Growing soft against my old wounds

Love is something that cannot be described
But for you, my heart, I would try.
... It’s literally that easy to write poetry and these assholes want me to think that it’s hard? The people who had these poems banned are a bunch of blooming Sisters (no offense). Sera is making fun of me for writing a poem, but I won’t let her read it.

I miss you. I didn’t realize how quickly I got used to you coming in every morning and asking your questions. I would give up everything just to hear your voice again. But I don’t have a phone outside of the one for the shop, and I wouldn’t blame you for not wanting to talk to me. I don’t even know if you read these. If you throw them away or burn them. I should stop.

I love you.

Kallak.

The most recent one came in yesterday, but she had afraid to open it up. It was late… she wasn’t going to finish that report anyway. She took a deep breath and opened it up.

Pentaghast.

Cole keeps asking if you have written back yet. He seems to be under the impression that you read these. Usually I would tell someone to knock it off, but it’s Cole. He’s always had a way with people, even when they’re really far away.

A court date has been set. They want me to come out and testify to a jury about my whereabouts during the murder. Word got out that I was Moma Cadash’s grandkid. I would blame Varric, bastard is still hanging out around here. Truth be told, I think it was the Mademoiselle. She was the only one I ever told… Mostly because she had guessed it, out of the blue one day. I ran out of Carta money, finally. Unfortunately that means that the Nameless Grant isn’t gonna last long. I guess the Mademoiselle is gonna pick up the tab, but the world is about to find out my dirty little secret.

I thought of asking Varric to send you a copy of that book he’s writing about me. Figured we would have something to bitch about together. Actually, the only reason I said yes to him was because of Arlof. The boy had always wanted someone to write about Moma, the real Moma at least. The problem is, it doesn’t matter how many books are out there- no one is gonna get that woman right. No one is gonna be able to write about a person and get everything about them just right. Otherwise, who the fuck would read it? Historians? Even those bastards like to twist things here and there.

This might be the last letter I send you in a while. My face is about to be seen pretty much everywhere. Aaah the glory of being born to fame. I’m gonna hate every minute of it. No doubt
people will call me ‘the grumpiest bastard to ever walk the planet’. Hopefully this’ll all blow over soon. I’d hate to detract from Alex’s campaign. Fuck I forgot that she was linked to me. Maybe I should get a different lawyer. I’m sure I’ll be fine.

I keep thinking of you as ‘Cassandra’. I don’t deserve to call you that. I broke your trust, something that I can’t get back. Not without you coming back to Ostwick but that’s… slim. Tael is getting on my ass, keeps telling me that I need to stop acting so heartbroken. But we weren’t really anything, were we? It was a few intense months, an infatuation on my end. You were just doing your job. That doesn’t make what I feel any harder to process.

I miss you, more than I think I should.

Kallak

Cassandra closed her eyes, picturing him. His bald head covered in the thick blue arrowhead tattoo. The diamond that was in the center of his forehead, how his verdium piercings matched the color of his scarf, the one that was old and tattered. A sentimental piece of clothing, but he wore it so openly, with pride even. Like his Dalish leggings that were made for his dwarven frame, how his feet were heavily calloused after walking out in public for years, decades even. The large chemical burn across his face, making him look harsher than he was.

His green eyes, the elven heritage making them shine. The grey streaks in his goatee, the braided sideburns that framed his jaw. His vallaslin at the farm. The fresh surgical scars on his chest, the dragon’s head that rested on his sternum. The way his back muscles caused the tree and sun to stretch. The crows and bear that weaved themselves around his forearms, the difference of his skin with the farmer’s tan he had. Most dwarves, even proud Surfacers like Varric Tethras, avoided the sun. But not Kallak. He was kissed by it, years of living outdoors with the Dalish leaving its mark on his skin.

She read the poem again. *Your harsh face, growing soft against old wounds*. It was… very Kallak. She knew what he had meant. She was not the most attractive woman. She was not like Leliana, who was able to be soft and warm at the drop of a hat. She wasn’t made of curves, her shoulders too broad for a delicate woman. Her face was angular, the hair too short to put into some stylized design. She was prone to violence, blunt, and not at all the women described in normal, sappy, lovestruck poetry.

But despite that, despite them meeting in the worst circumstances, he fell in love with her. He *loves* her. She looked at the clock, and then back at the letters. It would have to wait for the morning.

The Lord Seeker was an impatient man. But he was also new to his job. The previous one had been
murdered, the case never solved. Cassandra was walking with the man to his car.

“... The group responsible was too clean. I should still remain behind to ensure-”

“Lord Seeker.” Cassandra interrupted. “Her Most Holy thanks you for your service, but you must turn the investigation to me now. Is this everything on the group?”

“Yes, it is. Apparently they have no connection to those draconic cultists from before. Wolves seem to be their idol. No idea why though.” The man got into the passenger side, his window open as he put on his seatbelt.

“Thank you, Lucius.” Cassandra didn’t salute.

“I don’t know what the Chantry has planned, but remember,” He looked at her directly. “You are a Seeker of Truth, first. The Right Hand, second.” He whistled and the car moved forward.

She went back to Haven, the wooden gates protected by the carved statues of dogs. She passed the general store and herbalist, a group of pilgrims passing by on the streets. She was wrapped up in her overcoat, the red scarf tucked into her coat, her combat boots laced up and insulated for the weather. She nodded at the Sister that was leading the faithful through the street. She nodded back, continuing her prayer.

Cassandra found herself in a knick knack shop. It was cluttered with trinkets and odd bits. Most were Andrastian in nature- a small prayer kit, incense for warding spirits away. She made a beeline for the greetings cards, hoping to find a blank one. She stood there for a minute, looking for something that wasn’t so... religious.

“Can I help you with anything?” The store owner asked.

“I’m looking for a blank card, I’m hoping to write back to… a friend.”

“I see, well we have plenty-”

“They’re not of the Faith.”
“Ah… Here.” they handed her a card that was just a sketch of Haven.

It had the temple as the centerpiece but at the forefront was the wooden wall, complete with the mabari statues. It was mass produced, the clean edges and basic cardstock a dead giveaway. Cassandra paid for the card, along with a wooden keychain, Andraste and her Mabari.

She went back to her room, pulling out scratch paper and began to write. It took her a few tries, but when she was finally satisfied, she started to transfer it over to the card.

**Kallak,**

I’m nearly done here in Haven. Your letters have been unexpected, and yes, it did cross my mind to throw them out. But I didn’t. Thank you for the poem, and for keeping me informed on local gossip. I did not realize how much I had missed hearing about Sera’s pranks or of Cole’s own… unique way of helping people.

I was taken off of your case after the murder of Toxiven. I am sorry to hear about the Nameless Grant, I know it was something you were proud of. Perhaps the First Enchanter will continue it, but I am unsure if the new Knight Commander is aware of it’s value. It might be wise to speak to him, if Dagna is to continue her research in alternatives to Titan’s blood.

I had nearly forgotten that Tethras was writing a book about you. In truth, I would have thought he was more interested in Moma Cadash. But I suppose you are one of the few people who were close to the woman. I am sorry to hear that you are about to be thrown into the spotlight. I did not enjoy my time in court as a young girl, but I found that once you break a nose of a reporter or the arm of a suitor, people tend to leave you alone. But the Seeker Agency does become interested shortly after.

I know now that why you did not tell me the truth. Why would you? I was a Seeker, and you had no right to trust or even believe me. But you did. You did not stop me from coming back to your store. You had let me into your life, the florist one at least, and you did not ever lie as far as I can remember. I was shocked and hurt, yes. But I should have expected you to have kept secrets. It is not often that someone would show me everything about their life… especially after I threatened them in their store.

I miss you. I close my eyes and I can picture your face.

Your tattoos, the vallaslin
Your skin, the wrinkles around your eyes

The small callus’ on your fingertips, the knicks and cuts

Old and new scars,

The way your lips had tasted.

Poetry is incredibly hard to do. Not everyone is a natural with words.

Love,

Cassandra

She looked it over, made sure the scratched out line was still readable. She felt heat come to her face, a small smile refusing to leave. She got up and went to the post office, still remembering the address for The Snapdragon. She slipped in the keychain, and paid for overnight shipping.

The walk to the chantry in Haven wasn’t long, but at night it was crowded. Chancellor Roderick was waiting, letting her into the main… troubled area. The shrine was odd, but was odder was the broken sphere that floated in the middle of the room. The floor was covered in blood, the red and gold of the Chantry covered in sickly green light and wolf pelts.

“Apparently, this might be the work of the Dalish. They have a god- the heathens- that is called Fen’Harel.” Roderick sniffed, not wanting to go further into the room.

“Solas, what do make of the sigils on the floor?” Cassandra turned to the apostate.

“They’re Tevinter in nature, not Dalish.” The elf stood up, his clothing plain and almost comically out of date.

It was better suited for something in the Dragon Age, but Solas made it work. He had been in Haven for some time, the Lord Seeker vouching for the man when she first appeared on the scene.

“Is the… orb still a threat?” Cassandra asked.

“No, I should be able to disable it in the week.” Solas leaned on his staff, looking at the Seeker.
She nodded, and waited as the mage began to work. It was going to be a long night.
Kallak was escorted to the courtroom by Shokrakar and one of the Ashaad’s. He had worn a green vest with a grey-blue buttoned shirt. He was also wearing dress shoes and pressed slacks, the sleeves rolled up his elbows and his archery bracers on his arms. The leather had been pressed to match his Vallaslin underneath, but you had to get close to realize that was the pattern. He hated hats, always had, so he wore sunglasses instead to try and ‘cover’ his face.

It didn’t matter, the press was shouting questions at him, Ashaad and Shokrakar keeping them at a distance. When they entered the building, Saare was waiting for him. She was wearing Moma’s ring on a chain around her neck, the iconic six black spots reflecting the overhead light. She was dressed for work, the specialized leather jacket burned and stitched with various sigils and runes. The dragons carved into her horns were lined with metal, the scales and claws of the metal peeping out from her scalp. Shokrakar was following behind, her horn caps looking like nuggalopes today. He knew remembers when the older Vashoth wore them for a very different kind of work.

“Right, let’s get this over with.” He grumbled, shoving his hands into his pockets and walking ahead.

The courtroom had a few windows opened, winter finally giving way to spring. The hearings had gone on for weeks now, the press making it drag out longer than expected. Inside he saw Maxwell Sr, sitting with a group of his supporters. Just behind his side of the court, was Vivienne and Alex, along with her campaign manager, Josephine. He nodded at Blackwall and Sera, who were seated in the far back. Saare slipped in beside Dorian; the Tevinter dressed to the nines for the final hearing. Kallak sat at his bench, alone. He felt a hand on his shoulder, and patted it. Vivienne squeezed back and began to talk quietly to Alex. He looked up at the judge’s seat, which was empty.

He opted to not have a lawyer, but rather let the court decide on one for him. He was then swarmed with several candidates, most who were fresh out of law school. None of them meshed with him—until Varric pushed forward some he knew personally. He had been a detective at Kirkwall, but apparently had married a close friend and went into private practice as a side hobby. Donnic Vallen, who had been a ball of nerves meeting the Ex-Kingpin, came into the courtroom at the last minute. He rushed his apologies, to which Kallak finally took his sunglasses off and grunted a response.

“How’s your wife?” Kallak asked, wanting to avoid the tension in the room.

“Aveline? She’s fine, we talked last night over the phone. A new recruit was giving her trouble and, well.” Donnic responded, keeping his voice low.
“She smack him on patrol?”

“No, actually. Gave them a cold case; they’ll be busy for the next month.”

“Good on her.”

The judge entered the room, and everyone stood up. Formalities were read, Kallak sworn in, and the final testimony.

“Can you tell us your name for the record.” the interrogator, one of Maxwell Sr’s paid goons, asked.

“Kallak Cadash of Clan Duirme.”

“Mr Cadash-”

“Kallak.”

“I’m sorry?”

“My name is Kallak. Use it.” Donnic shut his eyes at that, pinching his nose.

“... Mr Kallak.” continued the interrogator, “Where were you during the death of Arlof Cadash?”

“I was in the Floating Markets, as I have previously stated.”

“And the bombing of the Arcane Wing of the College?”

“Was working at my shop. The Iron Bull and my employees can testify to that, along with my security cameras.”
“And what about your Carta thugs? Where were they during all of this?”

“Objection!” Donnic stood up. “The witness is to be question about their personal locations, not-”

“I had my boys doing security for Dagna of Kinloch Hold, and my ‘thugs’ as you put it, were searching for the bastard that killed my godson. Let the record state that I have been cooperative for this shit for brains who can’t seem to remember he asked these questions yesterday. And the day before that.” Kallak leaned back in the stand.

One of the jurors was nodding off. Kallak looked at Maxwell Sr. The man was surrounded by his yes men, but he was never more alone. Three out of four of the most powerful people in Ostwick were on his side. The Knight Commander was watching the College, but he was just as stubborn as Commissioner Rutherford, meaning that Maxwell wasn’t able to pay him off. Kallak winked at the Ostwick Senator. Maxwell Sr stiffened in his seat, a blood vessel jumping in his head.

“If the defendant can come up with newer questions, they may proceed.” The judge said, his tone just as bored of the hearing as the jury.

“...No further questions, your honor.”

“Mr Vallen, you have the floor.”

“Thank you, your honor.” Donnic pulled out the paper Kallak had written him at the beginning of the hearing. Kallak sat up, leaning forward on the stand.

“Mr Kallak, is it true that the Carta is based of hereditary bloodlines?”

“That’s correct.”

“And is it true that you have a daughter, but she is adopted?”

“Saare is my daughter. And she is a Vashoth, on top of being a mage.”
“And what about your relationship with the Teryn candidate, Alex Trevelyan?”

“The girl lived next door to us for years, she and Saare have been friends for as long as I can remember.”

“Did you ever expose them to the Carta?”

“I did not.”

“I would like to stress again, Mr Kallak, that you are under oath.”

“I did not expose the girls to my dealings with the Carta. When Saare turned eighteen, it was expected that she would take over the family business, but she went to Ostwick College instead. Then someone let slip that I was part of the Carta to the girls.”

“And what happened after?”

“Alex became a lawyer, wanted to build a case against me. Saare was about ready to just take my head off my shoulders.”

“And what changed?”

“The Toxivens. They were old enemies of the Cadash House. So Alex went to Orlais, became a Chevalier and Saare travelled around Fereldan. They stayed out of Carta business, and Ostwick, until I could handle the situation.”

“And by handling the situation… did you mean to murder Toxiven bloodline?”

“No. But they intended on killing my family. It was self defense, every time.”

“And what happened on the night of the last Toxiven’s disappearance?”
“He threatened to kill my daughter, and had my godson’s thumb sent as the warning. I ran after the bastard, hoping to stop him myself. By the time I got to the scene, that butcher was there. Feeding his crabs.”

“Did you see what he was feeding them?”

“Body parts? Tongues, toes, bits of hacked off torso.” Kallak looked at Maxwell Sr as he responded.

“What did you do after?” Donnic asked, waiting for a response.

Half of the jury was pale, the idea of someone being chopped up and fed to crabs more than unsettling. The other half was looking back and forth between Kallak and the Senator for Ostwick, saw the battle that was going on between a former Kingpin and retiring Senator.

“I wanted to run away,” Kallak looked back at Donnic. “But then I saw the Seeker in the rafters. So I stalled, hoping she would run first. She didn’t. The building was lit on fire, and, well, I used to be street rat. Pinched some cloaking powder and ran out before I could see anything else.”

“Did you ever see the Seeker after that?” Donnic was going off script.

“No.” Kallak was caught off guard by the question, his voice broke on the answer.

“... No further questions.” Donnic went back to the bench, Kallak was un-cuffed and allowed to sit with his attorney.

He turned around, found Varric in the crowd, and shot him a dirty look. Donnic nudged Kallak and pointed at the notepad. Divine asked for tapes. And a copy of the book. First edition prints next week! -VT. Kallak rubbed at his face and shook his head. The jury was murmuring for sometime, the judge summarizing the last few hearings. Kallak wasn't paying much attention, fiddling with his bracers.

An hour passed, then two. When the jury came back they had a verdict.
“We find Kallak Cadash of Clan Duirme… not guilty on accounts of mass murder and conspiracy.”

Maxwell Sr got up and left the courtroom as Kallak felt a weight lift off his shoulders. He heard Dorian clap his hands, Saare screaming in joy in the courtroom. Kallak leaned his head back, saw Alex’s mop of grey hair next to him. Her breathing was shaky, the girl trying to steady herself. Vivienne was laughing at the both of them, the woman never caught off guard. Sera and Blackwall ran up to Kallak, Sera talking a mile a minute. Blackwall just kept shaking his head, laughing at the whole thing.

Most the group found themselves on a drinking boat in the Floating Market, celebrating. Vivienne, Josephine, and Alex had to leave after the hearing, stating work. Donnic stayed for a drink, but his seasickness got to him shortly after. Dorian wasn’t far behind, but Saare made him stay, the poor Tevinter stuck with the rest of Valo Kas. Bull and his boys joined up later, along with Tael. Kallak found himself with spiced rum in his hand, the glass never empty. By the time he had finished the fourth drink, he started to just hand them off to random people on the deck. According to Blackwall’s count, he was supposed to be on number sixteen.

The deck was getting too crowded, two other booze boats had attached themselves to them. Kallak found himself a quiet place at the back of the boat. His head was swimming with rum, his excitement getting the better of him. He was definitely drunk. He felt someone hand him another glass.

“Noo, thank you.” Kallak singed, giggling to himself afterwards.

“Didn’t think you were one to pass up a free drink.” Varric replied.

“I’ve… been giving the free ones away. Think one of the… one of the girls on the boat was giving me eyes for it.” Kallak tried to look at the other dwarf, but ended up staring at Varric’s open shirt. “You’re real fuzzy.”

“Thanks?” Varric pushed the older dwarf’s face away from his chest, sitting down with him. “That’s water, by the way.”

“Oh thank fuck.” Kallak immediately drank it all.

The two sat there in silence, Kallak looking at his home. Varric still had the one glass of wine,
swirling the shiraz in the glass. At some point Kallak had taken off his shoes during the party; his slacks rolled up and his feet were dipping into the icy water.

“... She wrote me a letter.” Kallak said, too drunk to care.

“Who did?” Varric asked, his curiosity peaked.

“Cassandra.” Kallak sighed, her name enough for him to smile wide.

“The Seeker? Why would she write you a letter?”

“Because I’ve been sending her letters. She said she loved me.”

“She did not.”

“She did! She wrote a poem! It was, well. It wasn’t great.” Kallak snorted, devolving into a heap of giggles.

“No.” Varric was laughing out loud. “Do you have it? Here?”

“I got it here.” Kallak poked at his forehead, and then began to recite.

“I miss you! I picture your face… when I close my eyes! Your eyes, your scars! Those wrinkles around your… something. The bruises on your fingertips, the way your lips taste! And then she wrote ‘Love, Cassandra’.”

“That’s… so awful.” Varric laughed into his wine cup, taking a sip.

“It’s not bad! She was trying! It was so… so cute!” Kallak sighed, the rocking from the boat not helping his drunken state. “... I have her phone number.”
Varric choked on his wine, looking at Kallak with fear in his eyes.

“Kallak. Don’t do it.”

“I’m gonna call.”

“It’s two in the morning in Orlais, don’t!” Varric said. He didn’t really stop Kallak- after all, it would make for a great story to tell him when he was sober.

The older dwarf pulled out his phone and dialled the number. It went straight to voicemail. Soon after, Kallak blacked out, waking up in his apartment with four people asleep on his floor. Alex was in the kitchen, Commissioner Rutherford helping her cook breakfast.

Kallak pulled out his phone from his pocket, saw that he had one text message. He groaned into his hand, hoping his hangover would go away. He opened up the message, fearing what he was going to see.

*Kallak. I don’t know how you got this number. But congrats on being innocent. Maybe next time, call me when you’re sober. -CP*

Chapter End Notes

Don't drunk dial people, it only ends in embarrassment and hangovers.
Orlais in spring was insufferable. Between the Nobles wanting to outdo each other in the latest fashion, and preparations for Mothers to pay respects to the Divine, Cassandra barely had any time for herself. There was also the fact that Varric’s new book was the talk of the town, and she didn’t have time to read it. But the Divine had, as did Leliana.

“Cassandra, I promise I won’t talk about the book, but I have to know… is he really… grumpy?” Her Most Holy was being measured for robes as she asked.

“Most Holy, I will not discuss this here.” Cassandra was standing by the windows, scanning for threats.

“Of course not, but perhaps you should read it. My copy is my bag.” Leliana was sitting in chair near the entrance, watching as the seamstress took more measurements before sticking in placement pins.

“The book has been out for a month. I give it another week before people are talking about something else.” Cassandra said, but she still picked up the book. The cover had a bouquet on it, along with a gun that look suspiciously like her own.

“I doubt it.” Leliana teased. “Moma Cadash is an icon, and her heir is no different. To think that he could-”

“Hush, Leliana. We promised, no spoilers.” Her Most Holy said.

Cassandra raised an eyebrows at them. They had both been bards before they had joined the Chantry, and she recognized the mischievous twinkle in their eyes. She scoffed and flipped to a random page of the book.

… They were trapped in a supply closet. This close, he was forced to realize that she was tall. Kassa’s chest was at his eye level, the lack of armor not hiding her feminine- She dropped the book on the floor, immediately glaring at Leliana. The redhead just took a sip of her tea.

“I’m going to patrol the grounds.” Cassandra said, not waiting for a reply. As she left the building, her phone was buzzing in her pocket. She recognized the number and took a deep breath.
“Pentaghast.” she answered, hiding herself behind a planted bush.

“Whatever I said, I am so sorry. I was drunk and had blacked out.” she felt her heart skip a beat hearing his voice.

“It took you two weeks to call, and that is how you start this conversation?” Cassandra couldn’t help but smile.

“Well,” Kallak cleared his throat before going on. “I was… worried. I honestly don’t remember what I had said, and- I didn’t know if you would pick up.”

“Why wouldn’t I?”

“It’s a little different. From letters to calling someone. I’m… did you get all of my letters?”

“Yes.” she couldn’t stop herself from smiling.

“Oh! Good, that’s, that’s good!” Kallak cleared his throat again; it was obvious he was nervous. It was… sweet. “Well, I could still write to you, if you’re okay with that.”

“I would love that. I’m afraid I won’t be able to write back as often.”

“That’s fine. I know you’re busy, and I… I think your poem was good.”

“Have you read Varric’s book?” She blurted out. She winced at the how desperate she sounded.

“What? No, of course not. Why? Have you?” Kallak’s voice had a gruff baritone to it over the phone, his Ostwick accent a balm to her nerves.

“I just peaked at it and… It was…”
“Oh no.”

“He wrote me in it.”

“Oh, fuck. So that’s what the gun on the cover is.”

“There is a scene with a supply closet.”

“Am I poking fun at Nobles?”

“I assume you’re poking at something else.”

“Sonuvabitch… it’s a dirty book?”

“You aren’t overly familiar with Varric’s work, are you?”

“No… why?”

“All his books are dirty.” Cassandra laughed as she heard Kallak groan.

“He told me he didn’t do romance! He said, to my face, he didn’t do romance.”

“Romance does not always have to be dirty, Kallak.” she teased.

“Now you tell me.” Kallak was teasing right back.

They ended up talking for an hour. It was… nice. Neither of them talked about the trial, or her job. Instead it was idle gossip, like how Tael had shown up to a gala in leather pants… and nothing else. Or how one of the Nobles in Orlais was trying to bring feathers back into fashion. Cassandra could
hear Thom in the background, Kallak still training him in how to make bouquets without bleeding everywhere. When she hung up, Leliana was waiting at the entrance of the shop. Cassandra didn’t say anything, but the bard laughed at how red the Seeker was in the face.

“Here.” Leliana handed her the book. “You might like it.”

“I won’t.” Cassandra lied. “It will be horrible and biased and completely one-dimensional.”

Later that night, she ended up reading through the whole thing. It was… different than Varric’s usual works. She feared that it would be about her time in Ostwick, but it was actually about the Ostwick Fires. ‘Kassa’, as it turned out, was a simple detective that was following a lead for a cold case, ‘Calok’ being said lead. But that was where the similarities ended. For one, she wasn’t from Nevarra, but Ferelden. For another, ‘Kassa’ was portrayed as being much younger. Almost ten years younger than ‘Calok’, not the few years that she and Kallak actually were.

The story followed ‘Calok’ leaving his mother’s clan, coming back to Ostwick. Beyond the obvious name changes, she could see where fact and fiction were. Her Kallak must have taken over the Carta shortly after coming home, Moma Cadash quietly retiring in the background. How he met Saare, at an orphanage was true- she remembers him bragging about her when she was younger, how smart she was. But in the story Saare Adaar was painted as some timid thing, afraid of her own shadow. Alex Trevelyan was nowhere in the story, but Tael was, the hurricane and secondary love interest. A part of Cassandra wondered if she and Kallak really 

Cassandra went to the computer and looked up the Ostwick Fires. Varric’s story followed the facts, an elf and dwarf were suspected to having started the fires. And Kallak’s first letter to her, didn’t he say something similar? She pulled it out, reading to the paragraph.

... Tael and I were the stupid jumpstarts who burned down half the Alienage. We had waited until after Moma had died. Then with the money from my inheritance, I bought the entire street and then some. I’ve been living off rent money in the Alienage for the last thirty years...I burned off my tattoo the morning after the wharf. I’m done with the Carta. The man you saw, he was the last in his line. Someone else is in charge of the Carta now.

Cassandra look at her phone. She could call him. It would be so easy, to call him and say… something. To say sorry? Sorry about what? About barging into his flower shop and threatening him? For coming back, day after day, asking questions and him avoiding the answers? For filling the room with nonsense, like the price of bread or the importance to prune tomato plants? For listening to him go on and on about his daughter, for asking how he was half-Dalish? For staying with him when Dagna was released from the hospital? For coming into his life and making a mess of it? Before she could even think of anything, the phone rang. She watched it ring for a few seconds before
scrambling to answer it.

“Pentaghast.” She said.

“... So I have the book in front of me right now.” Kallak said.

“I just finished it.” her heart was starting to beat faster.

“Ah. So there’s no point in me reading this then?” She heard Kallak put the book down on something.

“I just have a few questions.”

“Varric told me that the Divine asked for the tapes he recorded. The bastard has left for Kirkwall, actually I think his flight was yesterday morning.”

“I was just- wait. What?”

“I said that Varric, the dirty schmuck, had been asked to give the tapes of our meetings to the Divine. Your boss.” Kallak sounded amused.

“...”

“... Are you there?”

“Yes! It’s just, this is the first I’m hearing of it.”

“I wouldn’t bother, I’m not a storyteller. Besides, it’s a lot ‘Where was I this year’ and ‘What’s it like being a Carta heir?’ Which I’m not. But it’s stuff like that.”

“In the book, it was implied that Mo- your grandmother had met Saare. Did that really happen?”
“Yeah,” Kallak’s voice grew soft, a heavy sigh following. “Moma met Saare. She loved her, always was talking about finally having someone tall in the family. I don’t think Saare remembers her though…”

“Was- I mean-”

“It’s okay. You can ask.” Kallak was so patient. Something in Cassandra’s chest pulled.

“Did she get recognized by the family?”

“… Yes. Saare got recognized, has the ring to prove it. She wears it on a chain around her neck, since the ring was fitted for dwarven hands, not Vashoth.”

“Were you? Recognized, I mean.”

“No. No, I took over, but I wasn’t part of the family. Wasn’t disowned either, but my father had been.”

It was odd, getting confirmation on something that had been eating at her since the wharf. Cassandra brought her knees to her chest, still sitting at her desk.

“I guess we have that in common.” She said, wanting to say… something.

“I know.” Kallak’s voice was still soft, she could picture his face, the soft smile, the way his goatee would turn up just a little, the grey accenting it. “I looked you up the first day. I’m… sorry about your family.”

“It was a long time ago. I was too young, so the court gave us to our uncle. It was… nice I suppose. But I was always missing-”

“Something. Yeah, a part of yourself that’s just… not there anymore.”
“You found your clan.”

“You found the Seekers. That’s kind of a family.”

“Not as much as you think.”

“Yeah, well. It’s been a few decades since I saw Clan Duirme. The younger hunters don’t see the problem with me, but there still a few harens who remember my mother.”

Cassandra recalls the morning at the farm. His upper body covered in Vallaslin. The various gods, the significance of all of them to himself. How his face grew so gentle, his shoulders a little straighter when he talked about his Auntie. He missed being a part of the clan- but he was needed in Ostwick. Cassandra felt it again, that pull in her chest. She sighed into the phone.

“I’m sorry.” Cassandra whispered.

“For what?” Kallak asked, chuckling into the phone.

“I came to your store and uprooted everything. If I hadn’t shown up-”

“Cassandra…”

“You’d still have Arlof. And you would have never been made to look like a criminal or have this stupid book written about you and-”

“Cassandra!” Kallak snapped, causing her to stop. “You… you don’t have to be sorry.”

“I am.” She was crying, the tears she had been holding back for weeks finally coming.

“You… If you didn’t show up that day, I would still be part of the Carta. I would have caved into whatever demands the Toxivens made, and nothing would have changed. Alex was always going to go and become Teryn, and Saare would follow her and I- I wouldn’t have changed at all. It’s not your fault. Arlof is dead, but that’s not your fault, it’s no one’s fault.”
“Then why do I- Why do I feel so guilty?” She started to cry into the phone, not realizing it had slipped and she could barely hear Kallak.

“I’m not sorry.” Kallak said. “I’m so glad you walked into my life. I-I love you.”

Cassandra felt herself stop breathing. She clung onto her phone, holding it so close to her ear she was sure to break it.

“What did you say?”

“I love you.” Kallak said. “I love you, Cassandra. I’m so glad you walked into my life. I’m just sorry… I’m sorry that you couldn’t be here next to me. That you have to hear that over the phone. I-”

“I love you.” Cassandra said, the words rushing out of her. The weight that was pulling at her chest exploded. “I love you, and I miss you so much. I want to see you but I-”

“I love you.” Kallak said again, his voice becoming firm. “I love you and I will see you. I promise.”
As Time Goes By

Kallak and Cassandra would call each other every other night after that. It made her job just a little easier. Most of the time they would talk about nothing in particular. Sometimes Kallak would just listen to Cassandra bitch about bureaucracy. Other times Cassandra would beg for updates on everyone in Ostwick.

The Teyrn election came and went. Alex lost, but she had gained enough international attention that she was being asked to come to various Colleges to act as a mediator. Dorian and Saare had reached a wall in their research with Time Magic.

Of course, Kallak thought it was as simple as just adding Space to the mix, like how it was in his favorite science fiction films. When Cassandra asked how that went over, Kallak told her how he had learned a new phrase in Tevene. Bull and Krem had closed up the bakery, a representative from the Qun having finally found him. They went back to being mercenaries, but they kept writing letters to Kallak.

He would occasionally read them to her over the phone. Then one night he confessed to Cassandra that he didn’t know if Bull was dating Dorian or his daughter- and which option was worse. She told him he was exaggerating, but he grumbled something about his poor impulse of adopting every basket case that came into his house.

Cole and Sera were still working at the shop, but Thom had been given a mission into the Deep Roads. He hadn’t been back in a while… Cassandra later looked into it, found the man was trying to atone for his crimes. Kallak was shocked to hear about Thom Rainer’s past. But Cassandra was glad that at least one of them was forgiving enough to still talk to Thom. It was going to take some time for her to warm up to the man again, but Kallak seemed more than fine having him still work at the shop.

Kallak still wrote letters, the pressed flowers on the card would be tied together with ribbon and then twine. Cassandra had warned Kallak on the phone that someone read her mail. So he started to write letters for the person who did.

At some point Kallak was given a fake name by the correspondent, and started to send things for ‘Lucy’ with Cassandra’s letters. Cassandra had been horrified when she walked into a meeting with Her Most Holy, only to find her drinking Kallak’s tea, or burning one of the Shiraz Candles during prayer.

This went on for a few months, the end of winter giving way to spring, to finally fall. It was then that
Cassandra was told about the upcoming trip.

“Your Excellency,” Chancellor Roderick began, his discomfort obvious, “I do not think it would be wise to go to Ostwick College. It might show favoritism amongst the Free Marches Enchanters, there are several Colleges that are turning a hundred, perhaps Starkhaven-”

“My dear, Vivienne has invited me personally.” the Divine was signing papers, Cassandra standing to her right. “I already said yes, and besides. Ostwick has remained at peace for the last three years. Our last report indicated that it was one woman who kept the peace, but she has been travelling across Thedas for the last two months, and the city is still standing. I wish to see with my own two eyes the peace in Ostwick.”

“Of course, Most Holy, but the Conclave-”

“The Conclave isn’t for another month. I’ve made up my mind.” the Divine looked up from her paperwork.

The sun was shining through the stained glass, the Divine’s throne letting the light refract across her office. Unfortunately for the Chancellor, it meant that he couldn’t see Cassandra’s or the Divine’s face. He was force to bow his head in order to not be blinded by the light. Cassandra was in full regal armour, her usual purple sport coat replaced with red and white, the armor made from silverite and obsidian, the Seeker emblem burned into the chest piece. She still had her gun, but it was strapped to her back where a dagger was traditionally, ceremonial sword on her hip instead.

“I… see. Shall I make the preparations for your trip then?” The Chancellor’s eyes tried to catch Cassandra’s, as if she could save him. She said nothing, standing like a statue.

“The Conclave seems to be on your mind more,” the Divine went back to signing documents, a small smile on her lips. “Please ensure that that trip is fully prepared. I’ll leave Ostwick to Leliana.”

“As you wish, Most Holy.” Leliana bowed, walking away from the Divine’s left. She was also wearing her regality, the chainmail of her armour in Chantry colors.

“As you wish, Your Excellency.” the Chancellor bowed again, before following behind Leliana.

The two left, and the Divine finished writing her letters. She sat up, allowing two aids to takeaway
her desk, the Sunburst Throne an actual throne now. Cassandra scanned the room a second time, before giving a nod to the Templars at the door. One left to go retrieve the next person.

“Madame de Fer told me that she had commissioned something special for the ball.” Divine Justinia sighed, a twinkle in her eye as she looked back at Cassandra.

“I’m sure it will be extravagant. Nothing but the best for Madam de Fer.” Cassandra replied, still at work.

“I wonder if it’s magical. It’s been ages since I’ve been to a gala with high magics.”

“It is the College’s Jubilee. I’m sure there will be displaying the best of the best.”

“Hmm, what was it like around this time last year? I hear the trees don’t lose their leaves until the rest of the world was well into winter.”

“Most Holy, you have a new guest.”

“So it would seem.” The Divine straightened up, and began her duties for the evening.

In between meetings, the Divine tried to make small talk with Cassandra about Ostwick. After the third meeting, Leliana had returned from her errand and joined in. It took some effort, but Cassandra did describe the city. She tried to avoid the one thing they wanted to hear about- especially since his letter had come that morning.

“He is such a wonderful gentlemen, that Kallak.” The Divine was finally going for the throat, tired of beating around the bush.

“I met him once,” Leliana tilted her head, her hood covering her face from Cassandra’s view. “He was listening to an old jazz songstress. He had such a lovely singing voice. A shame really, that he is a florist and not a bard.”

“He’s a good florist.” Cassandra winced at her reactionary statement.
“Is he now? What was his shop called again?” Her Most Holy was leaning towards Leliana. Cassandra felt her stomach drop as the two teased her, all while leaving her out of the conversation.

“The Snapdragon.” Leliana giggled, the Divine joining her.

“A pun! Oh I do love puns!” Her Most Holy laughed.

“His daughter was the one who named it… But he likes puns as well.” Cassandra tried to remain professional, but it had been hours, and the armour was starting to get heavy. Thankfully, the sun was almost down- she could retire.

“He must be very handsome, I can’t think of our dear dragon slayer with anyone else.” Her Most Holy said.

“...He has a chemical scar, here. It runs across the entirety of his cheeks.”

“That is true, Most Holy.” Leliana whispered. “But he has the most wonderful eyes. A sort of forest green. And you should see his beard.”

“Goatee.” Cassandra corrected. “It’s a goatee.”

“But he does have braided sideburns. A little grey around the temples. Very distinguished.” Leliana straightened up as the last group was brought in.

“I can’t wait to meet him. Madame de Fer said he was the florist for the event.” The Divine stood up from the Sunburst Throne to greet the visiting Revered Mother.

Cassandra’s head whipped over to Leliana, her eyes wide. She had forgotten! Leliana wasn’t looking at her directly, but there was a small smile on her face. Cassandra felt her heart start to beat faster. She was going to see him. She was going to see Kallak again. She didn’t know if she was going to be sick or pass out, but she had to wait until he called later tonight.
Kallak rubbed at his face, his goatee in disarray. He was in the College’s nursery, supervising as the apprentices gave the final endurance treatment to the rose buds. One of them had gotten too close, the bush scratching at their hands so bad that they had to be sent to the infirmary for treatment. Vivienne was walking through the room, observing the procedure with him.

“I must say my dear, you really have outdone yourself.” She brushed her hand across one of the buds, the blue petals contrasting her dark skin.

Kallak was reminded that the Mademoiselle was a wonderful sight all on her own. The stress of the last week finally wearing on his nerves.

“Can’t believe it worked.” Kallak shook his head, checking that the next bush was completely blue. “After that last batch I didn’t… Christ if you hadn’t told me there was difference in that shade, you would have had violet! Violet!”

“Kallak these are wonderful. I only expect the best, and that’s why I get my flowers only from you.”

“You didn’t have to tell me that!” Kallak grumbled. “Put me in a frenzy, nearly fuck up the entire event before it begins. A jubilee without flowers is like a- a- a surface dwarf without Casteless markings.”

“They do exist, my dear.”

“Sure, but they’re fucking weird.” Kallak looked back at the First Enchanter.

She had an eyebrow quirked at him, the enchanted rings and necklace humming with ice magic. Kallak took a breath, letting it all out through his nose. She was laughing at him, her hand up to her lips, the black makeup framing her eyes.

“He’s lucky to have you.” Kallak said, knowing it was out loud.

“Anyone would be.” Vivienne waved it away, moving on to the white lilies. “Is she going to be coming?”
“I… I actually don’t know. We haven’t talked about it.”

“And what do you talk about, I wonder?”

“Adoption papers. Cole is an orphan and your Professor Pavus would make a fine addition to House Cadash.” Kallak teased.

“He already belongs to a house. Besides, he’s well past the age of adoption.” Vivienne leaned down to smell an early bloom.

“Not if I can get him to marry a cousin. What do you think about Karl? He’s a good fit.”

“Karl, Karl… Is that the one from last week, the one without any front teeth?”

“No, that was Max. Karl’s the ginger with the pet rat?”

“Please tell me that you’re joking.”

“What? You don’t think Dorian will like him?”

Vivienne gave Kallak a blank stare. Kallak couldn’t keep his face straight, finally devolving into a fit of giggles. Vivienne rolled her eyes at the dwarf, the two exiting the greenhouse, walking the quiet grounds of the College. The Law District was shining, the lights reflecting off the water, the Floating Market reflecting the pattern of lights. Vivienne didn’t slow down her pace for Kallak, but he didn’t mind. He walked on the turf, feeling the grass on his toes.

“Are you sure you want to name the roses that?” Vivienne was watching a group of students walk across campus.

“Of course.” Kallak tilted his head back, the wind a comfort.
“You are a romantic, my dear… But those flowers have cut up more apprentices of mine than I like to count.”

“Side effect of it’s breeding. The more blue they have, the more thorns they get.”

“I suppose that’s not the only thing, given breeding.”

“You calling me a grouch?”

“Never out loud, my dear.” Kallak opened one eye to look at Vivienne.

“She is lucky to have you.” Vivienne said, catching him off guard.

“Who? Tael?” Kallak cocked his head to side.

“The Seeker.”

“… Oh. Um.” Kallak coughed, avoiding the mage’s stare. His face felt hotter than before.

“I’ve already sent an invitation to Her Most Holy. She said yes, but asked if she could bring her security. Naturally, I let her.” Vivienne walked back to the College, her hand brushing past him, her fingertips grazing his face. “Do try and dress for the occasion.”

“Wait, what are-”

“Well, the Divine wants to know my secret. Naturally I’ll have to introduce her to my personal florist. A minor celebrity in his own right, but… Only the best from Ostwick.”

Kallak stood still, his lungs refusing to cooperate. Cassandra. It was one word, one woman, and it was repeating over and over in his head. He didn’t have anything to wear, he’d have to go shopping, did he take Saare? No, Dorian would be better, maybe Cole too? The kid always picked out the card for the week, and he got it right everytime-
He was gonna see Cassandra. Kallak couldn’t wait.
Kallak kept messing with the ascot tie. It was a similar color to his scarf, the one he wore when he used to smuggle lyrium. Ever since the wharf, he’s had it hidden away in his closet, not wanting to be reminded of anything about that part in his life. But the color… it stuck for some reason.

“Here.” Dorian said, as he bent over to fix it.

He was making the fabric poof out in order to be seen from the opening in his shirt. While he was there, Dorian also straightened out the double breasted vest, the grey wool making his navy blue shirt stand out even more. Kallak thanked the mage, but went back to messing with the ascot as soon as the mage turned around to fix his hair.

“Kallak, stop it.” Saare groaned.

She was already dressed, the femme fatale styled tux lacked a shirt, the blood red bralette it’s replacement. The Cadash Crest hung on a golden chain. Her horns had been polished and inlaid with gold, her dress vitaar a deep blue and gold, supposedly to match Alex’s dress for the event. Dorian was smirking in the mirror a black kurta trimmed with gold, the red dhoti peeking through the asymmetric cut of the top. The human was the only one wearing a scarf, the his family’s crest, a snake, still wrapped around his body, black and gold making it pop out in the red material.

“Sorry, sorry. Just… will you hurry up? I want to get there before all the booze is gone.” Kallak sat back down, watching Dorian take his time in the mirror.

“Never rush perfection.” Dorian said, applying the last of his eyeliner.

“Shit, forgot to do my makeup.” Saare got up and went to stand next to Dorian, who handed her the eyeliner he finished with.

Kallak groaned, becoming more dramatic with every second that passed. They were in Dorian’s apartment, one of the Enchanter's rooms inside the College itself. It was larger than Kallak was expecting, the studio feel made it so that Dorian’s bed was hidden behind a foldable divider, the kitchenette had a wet bar, and the two desks were covered in books and scrolls. It was decorated in a Tevinter style, but most of the furniture was still Orlesian in nature- even Enchanters had to deal manage with dorm fittings sometimes.

Kallak stood up and began to pace, before pulling down on his vest and checking his sleeves. Then he took out the cufflinks and started to roll up the sleeves instead. He looked at himself in a different full length mirror. Dorian came up behind him, adjusting his scarf and then re-adjusted Kallak’s ascot.

“You look fine.” Dorian rolled his eyes and walked off. “Still think trousers would have been better.”

“I'm Dalish, dammit. Let me look like it for once.” Kallak snapped. He felt something hit him in the back of his head.

“Don’t be rude! He’s just trying to help!” Saare snapped back.
“If this is supposed to be a functioning family, I don’t think I’m missing much.” Dorian teased, now waiting on Saare to finish.

“You have the brandy?” Kallak asked, mouthing his apology to Dorian.

“Right here, care for a sip?” Dorian asked.

“Please.” Kallak walked over to the small bar and pulled out two tumblers. Dorian poured a generous amount for both of them.

“I think I like it with the sleeves rolled up.” Dorian reached out to straighten the fold, letting the shirt rest in Kallak’s elbow naturally.

“Don’t, he’s already not wearing shoes.” Saare was re-applying her vitaar to her lips, the red horizontal line on her lower lip stretching down to her chin. “This is supposed to be formal.”

“You don’t have a shirt on.” Dorian said, causing Kallak to snort into his brandy.

“I’ve got sleeves.” Saare turned around, leaning against the make up table. “Where’s my glass?”

“Here.” Kallak handed her his tumbler. She downs it in one go. “Mythal’s ass, can you wait until we’re on the bloody floor before you go chugging everything?”

“Nope!” Saare burped, causing some fire magic to blow out of her mouth.

“Right, let’s get this over with!” Dorian opened the door to his apartment, letting the three of them exit into the main Circle building. “I want to swindle as many Nobles as I can for a grant.”

“I could just-” Saare started.

“No.” Dorian gave her a look. “We’ll use that for bribery.”

“You’re no fun.” Saare pouted at the man, but walked arm in arm with him.

Kallak look down at himself, what little brandy he had had yet to hit his system. He just hoped that when it did, he would be calmer. The walk to the main ballroom wasn’t long, but it did require them to walk outside. The press that hadn’t been invited waited beyond the gates, Templars and Guardsmen keeping them back. When they saw Dorian and Saare, several photos had been taken, but it was Kallak that caused them to start shouting. Kallak felt a dwarven hand come down onto his shoulder. He turned his head to see none other than Varric Tethras, his shirt still wide open.

“Didn’t think I’d see you tonight!” Varric said, grabbing Kallak into a side hug. The press snapped more photos; Kallak knew that his face was gonna have a scowl in them.

“Varric Tethras… I never should have listened to Arlof.” Kallak sighed and then started to chuckle. “I hate being famous, you know that right?”

“Live a little, it’s not gonna kill you. Well, not anymore at least.” Varric walked with him inside, the two dwarves finding themselves in a sea of taller people.

The ballroom was in silvers and blues; Ostwick colors. Kallak saw the Trevelyans, Maxwell Sr and Jr surrounded by their own group of ‘yes’ men. This last year had been a hit to both of their social groups, however… an even larger crowd surrounded the losing candidate for Teryn. Alex Trevelyan, her grey bob was curled and held out of her face with golden pieces, sparrow wings and budding flowers. She was wearing a blue ombre dress, the color starting sky blue until it became
navy around her ankles. And the golden half-cape, with the Chevilar emblem pressed into the velvet. Standing next to her was Commissioner Rutherford in dress uniform, with a rather Fereldan style half-cape on himself, the fur lining a match to his iconic parka.

Kallak found Vivienne in the crowd. She was wearing a backless dress, the Ostwick blue matched with black accessories and silver makeup. She was also carrying her First Enchanter staff, the owl on the top, now with sapphires in the eye sockets. The room was filled with Nobles, diplomats, high-ranking officials from Colleges around Thedas… and several Chantry representatives in red and gold. What he didn’t see was The Divine, or her Right Hand.

He walked around the room, some of the locals recognizing him and pointing him out to guests. Kallak tried to be polite, but his smile was forced and any small talk that was directed at him was cut short when he didn’t respond to curious questions. He continued to wander around the room, taking in the guests and their regal attire. Not a single one of them was an elf, but there were a few dwarves. He stayed away, knowing that he’ll get dragged into a conversation about Carta business, or even worse, Orzammar politics.

The first entertainers were brought to the room, the young students showing off their magic. Kallak didn’t pay attention, finding himself looking out the window he was next to. The College grounds had been cleared out, Guards patrolling the area with the newly trained Mabari hounds. Kallak took another sip of champagne, finishing his third glass. A waiter came by with another, replacing it just as he finished. The dwarf looked back into the room, watching people pass by his flowers. Some would admire and simply walk away, but most didn’t even seem to notice the blue roses. Kallak sighed, using his left hand to rub his goatee down. His whiskers caught on his thumb, the newest scar finally healed.

It was ugly, the vitaar burn. He had done it in a fit of rage that night, grabbing an old tin from the sink and smearing it around the entire band on his thumb. The skin had caved inward, the outer edges bubbling over and making his knuckles look angry. It would take a few years, but eventually it would match the scar on his cheeks- ugly and dignified in it’s own violent way. Just thinking about it made him pick at the old chemical burn on his face. Kallak watched as another Noble ignored his blue roses. He had spent a year cultivating them, making sure that they were completely natural, no dyes, no magic… and no one was paying them any attention.

The first round of entertainment had ended, polite applause as the room went back to polite conversation. Kallak felt himself become even more depressed, so he drank his glass in one go and went to the bar. He ordered a mug of spiced rum, then decided to make the rounds again. Vivienne waved him over, and she introduced him to potential customers. Kallak had to remind himself that he was a florist now, nothing else. So he tried to sell himself, making an effort in small talk.

“... I heard that you are a bit of a celebrity in these parts, Messre Kallak.” The fifth Orlesian Noble asked.

“A bit, but I’m not something to brag about. My flowers though-”

“Is it true that you are Moma Cadash’s grandson? I did not think that she had chi-”

“If you want to talk about that woman, go somewhere else.” Kallak snapped, glaring at the masked woman from behind his mug.

“... You could at least pretend that you’re not a Cadash.” Vivienne sipped at her glass of champagne.

“Woman’s been drinking brandy mixed with bubbles for the last half hour, don’t worry about it.” Kallak said, scanning the room again.
“Looking for something, my dear?” Vivienne began to walk towards the front stage, Kallak following out of instinct.

“No, why do you ask?”

“For a recently retired Kingpin, you’re not a very good liar.”

“Never lied, not even then.”

“Hmm, I know. I was one of your top buyers, remember?”

“You still are, though now it’s with actual bouquets.”

“She’s here, but it’s a surprise for later.”

“... Where?”

“The question is when, my dear. And in about five minutes. I’d sober up, but... well, everyone’s a little light-headed right now.”

“Thank you, Mademoi- Thank you, Vivienne.”

“Don’t thank me yet, I’m about to introduce you to the most powerful woman in Thedas. She is quiet a fan... of your family’s history.” Vivienne waited to the side as Kallak opened the door for her, the private space behind the stage blocking out the conversation from the main room.

Kallak took one last swing of his rum- his nerves never did settle down. His hands twitched, wanting to adjust something, anything, in order to look more presentable. But he didn’t, he could practically hear Dorian and Saare bickering at him. The only sound as the two walked came from Vivienne’s heels and staff, Kallak’s bare feet not leaving any noise. He brushed his ankles together, the rough broken leather from his Dalish leggings giving him some grounding.

The room they entered was large, several Chantry hands waiting for Vivienne. There were two Seekers in regal armor, but neither were tall enough to be Cassandra. Kallak felt sweat running down his spine as they looked at him from closed helmets. Shit shit shit shit shit shit.

“Your Most Holy, may I introduce my florist for the evening, Kallak of Clan Duirme.” Vivienne stepped to the side, leaving Kallak alone in the middle of the room.


“The pleasure is all mine.” Kallak replied back in Orlaisian.

Vivienne cocked an eyebrow at him, that he tried very hard to ignore it. He couldn’t help himself from smirking though. The Divine, however, wasn’t surprised by this at all. In fact she was smiling at him, her wrinkles folding in as she laughed.

“I must say, your accent is most impressive. Where did you learn?” Her Most Holy was sitting down, but she was dressed in all of her regal attire.

“My mother’s clan hails from the Frostback Mountains, near the Dales, Your Grace. I must apologize ahead of time, most of my Orlaisan is elven in nature. If you don’t understand something, I’m happy to translate in Common.” Kallak’s eyes flicked to her left, seeing a familiar redhead. He stood straighter, blinking several times.

“... Madame.” he said, nodding at the woman. She nodded back.
“This is Leliana, my Left. She told me a most… interesting song. Your family is not blood related at all? I was told Moma Cadash had four sisters.”

“She did, Your Grace, but your… Left is correct. Moma came from Orzammar, originally. When she started to travel North, she picked up a few people on the way. Opal Cadash, my youngest aunt, was born in Ostwick. The rest are from everywhere, but most of the household these days live and dies in Ostwick.”

“Is your family well, Messere Duirme?”

“Kallak is fine, Your Grace… My daughter is attending the jubilee this evening. She is researching Time Magic with a young Tevinter magistrate, Dorian of House Pavus. As for the rest… I’m afraid to say that my last living cousin passed away little under a year ago. He was… better at being in the public spotlight than me. His name was Arlof, and he was a radio host here in the city. He was loved by many, and hated by one.”

“I see, I am so sorry to hear this. You have no other family?”

“My mother’s clan still lives in the Frostbacks. Occasionally one of the younger hunters comes to live here in Ostwick. I get news of the clan, and they get to experience a shemlen city. Most hate it, the noise and constant foot traffic. I’ve only ever had the trouble of informing the clan about two hunters who decided to stay permanently. But no other family.”

“Are you still with the Carta, by any chance?”

“That depends, Your Grace.”

“On what, I wonder?”

“How much lyrium are you willing to buy? My daughter would be more than happy to discuss that kind of business.” Kallak smiled, not looking away from the Divine’s face.

She was laughing, the redheaded woman handing the Divine a handkerchief to dab at the tears that had formed. Vivienne caught Kallak’s eye for a second, but she was smiling at him, and winked.

“Messere Kallak,” The Divine had switched to common, “You are just as funny in person as you are in your letters.”

“I beg your pardon?” Kallak looked at the Divine.

“You must forgive me, I am Lucy.” The Divine was giggling as Kallak’s jaw dropped to the floor.

Chapter End Notes

Who DOESN’T love finding out that the FBI agent who's been reading your mail is actually the fucking Pope????
Cassandra was torn. She was supposed to wear her regal armor whenever she was out with the Divine. But it was going to a formal event, meaning dresses and capes and coats and traditional clothing- And Kallak was suppose to be there. The situation wasn’t made any easier with Leliana.

“Just pick something, I’m sure it’ll be fine.”

“Protocol dictates that we-”

“We wear the regal armor and are fully armed for any situation, yes. We’ve been over this a thousand times, Cassandra.” Leliana was still in casual wear, watching as the sun went down.

“What are you going to be wearing?” Cassandra asked, panic starting to set in.

“An outfit, silly.” The redhead quirked an eyebrow as Cassandra gave what was, at this point, an iconic snort.

“I hate this.” Cassandra fell into the dressing chair, glaring at the two outfits on the bed. “Why did she give us the option, she never does that!”

“Security will be high at the event, and my agents have ensured me everything has been done to our standards. The ballroom is not going to have hidden magic items, Templars are to be at every exit and at least two Guards along with them. It’ll be fine, just wear the dress!”

“It doesn’t fit.” Cassandra said, her face in her hands.

“Then don’t wear it.” Leliana shrugged, getting up from her perch at the edge of the bed. “Wear the armor.”

“But-”
“Cassandra. It’s fine, what are you so worried about?”

“... *He’s* going to be there.”

“Oh, I see.”

“Stop that. We’ve been talking every night, and he writes letters and- and- and why should this be any different!”

“Because the last time you saw him face to face, you found out he was a Kingpin of the Carta?”

“... He’s not anymore.”

“That doesn’t change the facts.”

“Why did I have to fall in love with someone like *him* !?” Cassandra groaned, becoming more dramatic by the second.

“Because you’re a hopeless romantic, and he checks every one of your boxes. Troubled past, doting parent, pinning obsession but awareness of your boundaries. I could go on.”

“Please don’t...”

“Why not wear something else? It doesn’t have to be a dress.”

“What, then?”

“I hear that a few women are wearing tuxedos. Maybe we can get you a purple one, or something red!”
“I can’t! The Jubilee is tomorrow, where are we going to find a tailor?”

“I have my ways.”

“... Not red.”

“Done. Now get dressed, the rehearsal is in an hour.”

“You must forgive me, I am Lucy.”

Cassandra actually heard Kallak’s jaw drop. It was… oddly satisfying. She had to bite the inside of her cheek from behind the Divine’s chair to stop herself from giving her position away. She of course only found out yesterday that it wasn’t Leliana who had been reading her letters, but The Divine herself. She was reminded about the first time she met Alex Trevelyan, how the young woman had grilled into her before Kallak gave it up and introduced the woman like a daughter. A dish best served cold indeed.

Cassandra smoothed down the lapel of the tux, royal purple dress shirt the only thing distinguishing her from the traditional style. She counted to ten in her head, making her face as blank as possible. She took one final breath before moving away from the chair and into the light. She nodded at Leliana, noting that the redhead had dressed in a bard’s attire, the ruffled sleeves perfect for hiding knives. She nodded back, looking at the dwarf in the center of the room.

Hearing his voice every night did not prepare her for seeing him again. He was just as handsome as she remembered, but dressed the way he was… It took every ounce of self control to not want to run over and kiss him.

“I’m- I- Oh.” Kallak coughed into his hand, the scar on his face growing red. Cassandra bit her cheek again.

“Most Holy, I have a gift for you.” the First Enchanter tapped her staff, a potted plant that was covered in silver silk floated to stand next to Kallak.

Kallak saw Cassandra. She saw his chest hitch, his eyes staring at her as if she was the only thing in the room. His jaw kept clenching, but his shoulders had dropped from their tense position. The pot
settled itself next to him, the plant a few inches taller than him. She smiled back at him, and he beamed, before quickly realizing he had the stage.

“Your Grace, I was commissioned a little over a year ago. I was informed that this would be the Platinum Jubilee for Ostwick College. Naturally, such an occasion requires a certain amount of flair.” Kallak moved the the silk away, revealing the plant underneath.

It was a rose bush, half of the flowers in full bloom. The room was filled with a faint scent tea, but the rose was still there. The roses themselves were a deep blue, but it was the bush that caught Cassandra by surprise. The stems were covered in thorns, their black tips and purple tinted leaves causing the blue to pop out even more.

“This is one of my personal pet projects. I call it ‘Rosa de Pentaghast’.” Kallak bowed, his blue shirt the same color as the roses… and his tattoos.

“Consider this a gift, from our gardens to yours.” the First Enchanter bowed, the Divine bowing her head back.

“They are so wonderful.” The Divine sighed.

Kallak glanced up at one of the helpers and was handed a pair of dragon hide gloves and bush clippers. He took on of the blooming roses and cut it, gently snipping away at the various thorns. When he was satisfied, he walked up to the Divine and handed her the flower. The Divine giggled and took the rose.

“You’ll find, Lucy,” Kallak said, in Orliasian. “That this is the same flower used in the last tea that I sent to you.”

“It is so lovely. Why do you use this flower for the tea?”

“The leaves. I had to cross breed this flower with some… Dalish teas. It is a hardy bush, and will last more than just one season.” Kallak stood back up, nodding to himself as he walked back to the bush.

Cassandra didn’t pay attention to the rest of the conversation. Kallak helped to escort the pot over to the rest of the gifts, a small smile on his face as the Divine continued to bring the rose up to her nose to smell it. He stood to the side, letting Vivienne take over. He was stealing glances at her, a soft look
on his face.

She thought the wool vest was a nice touch. She could also see his Vallaslin peeking out from underneath his tie. His forearms were exposed, the farmer’s tan hidden, but those thin blue lines stuck out. He was standing half in shadow, his green eyes reflecting the light in the room, and then he winked at her. She had to look away, but she knew he was laughing. The rest of the visit went smoothly, ending when the Divine stood up, making her way towards the main stage. It was time.

Cassandra nodded at the two Seekers, watching as they took their place just behind the Divine. Leliana grabbed her lute, tuning the instrument as she disappeared somewhere to perch. Vivienne was having a few words with Kallak before leaving with the Divine. He had kissed her hand, and then Cassandra saw the burn mark on his thumb. It looked raw, almost angry. It was similar to the scar across his face, but the scar on his thumb would take years to reach it’s cousin’s visage.

Cassandra walked out with Kallak in front of her. They had taken the back exit, the one that Kallak had entered the private room through. It was darker in the makeshift hallway, the heavy curtains blocking them away from the party… She felt his hand pull at her, dragging her into the curtains. His lips were on hers, the hair from his goatee scratching her chin, his hands pulling her face down to his own.

“Been wanting to do that for a while.” Kallak breathed, his smile so wide.

Cassandra pulled him up, taking advantage of the fact he had to stand on his toes in order to reach her mouth. They started to shuffle backwards into the curtain, Kallak’s back hitting a temporary wall. The heavy curtain hid them from view, the air becoming too hot for either of them to breath- but she didn’t care. Hands began to roam, finding the ascot tie, the fact that even though he had shaved there was that hint of scruff on his neck. Kallak groaned into the kiss, pulling her down further, the lapels of her tux no doubt wrinkling.

“I missed you.” Kallak was panting into her mouth. “Creators I missed you. I thought I’d be fine. Just your voice, just to hear you forever but this. I can’t believe it. You’re here.”

Cassandra wasn’t good at words, she never was. Her back was starting to hurt, hunched over like this, so she did what seemed logical at the time. Her hands left his neck and grabbed him, hoisted the dwarf up. Kallak’s eyes went wide, then he looks up at Cassandra, awe in his face.

“I… I missed you as well.” She gives him a small smile.
Kallak is laughing, his head thrown back. So she moves forward, planting on kiss after another on his neck— but the curtains are making it harder for her to breathe, and Kallak is still built like dwarf, regardless of his elven heritage. So he pulls her hair and she’s gasping for air— teeth. There are teeth on her neck.

“We’ll get caught.” She’s trying to warn him, but it comes out like a whisper.

“Like you care.” Kallak bites down, soothing the mark with his tongue, the scruff from his goatee doing *something* that she never expected. She wanted him to keep going. “If you did, you’d put me down.”

“I missed you.” Cassandra tried to grab at hair, only to have Kallak laugh as her nails scraping his bald head.

“Did you now?” Kallak had his mouth on hers, but he didn't kiss her. “Tell me.”

Cassandra’s eyes snapped open, Kallak’s face was… sinister. His facial hair was all over the place, her lipstick had mixed with the grey hairs. This close she could see all the small cuts and scars, the years of sunburn on top of sunburn. His eyes had that glint to them, the kind that only a rogue could have. It was… a sight. Cassandra felt her arms tremble, his weight finally getting to her.

“Talk to me.” Kallak says, his mouth once again on her neck.

They both freeze as footsteps come towards them. They were both panting in the curtains, the lack of oxygen finally getting to them. Cassandra tried to drop Kallak, but he had started to kiss her again, in an attempt to get her to be quiet. What ended up happening was Kallak falling on his ass, Cassandra following close behind. Someone was speaking, and then there was clapping.

Kallak cursed, then he looked at Cassandra’s neck and cursed again. He was fixing her tux, making the collar come up higher than it was before. She pulled them away from the curtain, the small hallway feeling much cooler than it was before. He ushered her towards the door, just as she was trying wipe off her makeup from his face. She ended up coming out of the door, no one looking in her direction as she fixed herself through the window reflection. She was… presentable, so long as she stayed in the shadows. Kallak, however, was struggling to put his ascot back in place, his facial hair standing up on one side of his face. She blushed and made a mental note to apologize later. Right now, she was working.
Kallak tried to keep to the back, hoping not to get busted by certain people.

“Here.” Dorian was in front of him, fixing the tie. Again. “You’re a mess.”

“Way to go, Old Man.” Saare was snickering into her glass, Alex and Cullen standing next to her.

“Maker, what happened?” Cullen asked, taking his eyes off of the Divine as she was giving her speech.

“Nothing.” Kallak snapped, but he knew his face was red.

“That hickey doesn’t look like nothing.” Dorian said, taking his glass back from Saare.

“Shit!” Kallak tried to cover his neck just for the four of them to giggle at him. “... There’s no hickey, is there.”

“Don’t tell us,” Alex said, without even looking away from the stage. “You’re going to say something like ‘Should’ve seen the other guy’.”

Kallak rubbed his goatee down, refusing to answer. Then he saw the lipstick that came off of his beard. He smiled to himself, looking ahead.

“... Did you seriously make out with the Seeker like a teenager?” Saare asked.

Kallak shrugged, not looking at his daughter. Alex snorted into her champagne flute as Cullen choked on his own glass. Dorian’s hand was on his shoulder, the Tevinter leaning down to congratulate him.

“Good thing Varric isn’t here.” Kallak sighs.

“Well, he’s coming this way.” Saare laughs as Kallak tries to rub the rest of the lipstick off his face in a fit.
Nearing the end Folks... I did promise a happy ending
Youthful Dance

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The Divine’s speech went on for ten minutes. It was planned to be thirteen and a half, meaning that Cassandra didn’t miss as much as she feared. She found Leliana in the crowd, the bards that were scattered across the ballroom a perfect cover for her. She saw that the newly elected Knight Commander, Delrin Barris, was standing next to Vivienne. He was younger, much younger than she expected. Looking around the room, she spotted a certain half-dwarf, half-Dalish florist. She just hoped that she didn’t look as unkempt as Kallak.

She saw him walk to the back, his wool vest creased near the bottom. His gait was just a little wider, his hands trying to desperately groom his goatee back into place. Cassandra was glad that her hair had been cut a few days ago; she can’t imagine how her hair would be acceptable otherwise.

Once the Divine was done, she was escorted back to her private room, the two Seekers following close behind. The First Enchanter watched and then walked past Cassandra, who was still standing beside the door.

“You have… a bruise. Just there.” Vivienne pointed at Cassandra’s neck. “If you like, I’m sure one of my apprentices will have concealer that would match your skintone.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Cassandra lied, before excusing herself to leave her post.

She found a Templar, along with two Guardsmen, and told them to watch the door and do as the First Enchanter said. She then walked out of the main ballroom into a bathroom. The hickey was large, and was rested just under her ear, directly on her jugular. She closed her eyes and tried counting backwards. She looked at her neck in the mirror once she was calm, only to have the feelings return all over again at the site of it. Kallak was going to pay for this… but first she had to finish her job. She pulled out her phone and started to text Leliana.

Unable to stand guard at door, have sent T & 2G to take post. It took a few moments, but she eventually got a reply.

What happened?

Bruise, obvious place.
It’s a hickey, isn’t it.

Unable to stand guard at door, have sent T & 2G to take post. Do you have concealer?

I can’t believe you have a hickey!! Send me a picture!

No.

There’s a balcony next to my post. I’ll leave a gift in the flowerpot. Will confirm with package if early leave is allowed.

Not needed.

Not yet :)

Cassandra snorted at the smiley face. Then she found that she was touching the… bruise. It didn’t hurt, it was just, well, obvious. Suddenly she wished she hadn’t gotten her haircut so recently; if it was just a little longer she might be able to hide it. But a part of her didn’t want to hide it. She was touching it again, quickly she yanked her hand away.

“I can’t believe you.” Cassandra whispered, mostly to her reflection.

She waited another five minutes, until she heard the bards begin to play. The schedule indicated that there was supposed to be dancing at this point, the guests given a break from the displays from students of the College. She tried to keep to the walls, making sure the hickey wasn’t in the light for very long. Thankfully, no one stopped her, and she was able to get to the balcony Leliana had suggested.

The night air was nice on her face, the island that the College was on had the perfect view Ostwick. She couldn’t help but smile as she saw the Floating Market, the party cruises in full swing. The bands had taken over, the strings not quite reaching the balcony. It was peaceful… serene. The last few months seemed to fade away, the stress from her job leaving her body.
“You look good in purple.” Kallak said.

Cassandra turned her head to look back at the dwarf, who was leaning on the doorway. He had that soft smile on his face, and then she snorted at seeing the lipstick smear on his cheek.

“What?” Kallak stood up and walked over to her. “Something on my face?”

“Just, a little-” Cassandra motioned with her finger, laughing as Kallak cursed and began to lick his thumb to try and rub off the lipstick. All it did was smear the color even more.

“You know, I was gonna make some joke.” Kallak shook his head and rolled his eyes, leaning his body against the balcony with her. “Something like, ‘Some Noble wanted to talk about soup for thirty minutes’. But then I just… saw you.”

His eyes were reflecting the lights, the green standing out even more. Cassandra tapped the mark on her neck, cocking an eyebrow at the man. He started to smile, biting his lower lip in the process.

“I look good in purple?” Cassandra teased. Kallak laughed, his head falling forward in his chest.

“You do!” Kallak kept smiling as she groaned at him, playfully shoving the dwarf away.

“You’re insatiable.”

“That’s a big word. Does it mean something nice?”

“Naturally… It is good to see you again.”

Kallak took one of her hands, his fingers rubbing against her knuckles. He was focused on them, his eyes so soft. She saw the stress leave his body, his shoulders dropping as he brought the hand to his mouth, his lips brushing across her knuckles. Somehow this was more intimate than the back room. The dwarf closed his eyes as he kissed her hand one last time, breathing in her scent.

It was different than when she was last in Ostwick. Back then, he kept his distance. She was the one
who would move first. At the barn, it was Cassandra who had moved to trace his Vallaslin. Kallak kept a distance back then, guarding himself… protecting them from his past. But now the world knew. For months they had talked with each other on the phone, and he was here. Playing the gentlemen, but making the first move.

Cassandra found her hand moving forward, her fingers brushing against his jaw. She followed the braided sideburn, saw that the grey near his temples was starting to turn white. Kallak’s other hand came to rest on her hip, his hand flexing, the touch so light that it was barely there. She pulled him close to her, leaning down slightly to rest her forehead against his own. She breathed him in, her hands stroking at his jaw and upper back. Kallak moved, standing once more on his toes to reach her face. His lips brushed against hers, waiting.

She pressed forward this time, the kiss lazy and slow. The song from inside changed, Kallak’s movements become more bold. He was swaying her, back and forth to the beat. He gave her one last kiss before taking her hands and moving them into a slow waltz. He never stopped smiling, this dance another private moment for the two of them. He was leading with his left hand, his thumb moving against hers. She brought it close to her face, pressing a kiss onto the scar there. To what it meant. Kallak swallowed, his eyes flicking from their hands to her face. She gave a smile before returning their hands back into position.

“This isn’t so bad.” She said, still smiling at him.

“You know… transplanting can be pretty stressful for rose bushes.” Kallak steered them away from the doorway, keeping their waltz on the balcony. “I might have to move to Orlais for a little while.”

“Really?” Cassandra didn’t hide her excitement

“And with Saare taking over the… family business, there’s no reason for me to stay here in Ostwick. It’s a nice city, sure! But I’m… a little attached.”

“Kallak- I…”

“It’s been a while since I was in Orlais anyways, might as well go down to see the clan, but I’ll still need somewhere to stay in Val Royeaux. Do you think… Lucy might have a room for me?”

The song came to an end, the shock of what he was saying allowed Kallak to dip Cassandra. It was at that moment her phone buzzed with a text message. She didn’t care, touching his face, pulling the
dwarf into another kiss.

“Wait, what about the shop?” Cassandra asked, pulling away, Kallak moving to brush his lips on the bruise he left. “And Cole, or Sera- the Nameless Grant!? You have- there’s so many people who need you here and-”

“Cassandra.” Kallak had stopped moving.

“This is your home- I couldn’t ask you to-”

“Cassandra!” Kallak’s finally broke through. “Listen, okay? Everything is going to be fine. Tael can watch the shop, and Sera is most likely going to go to Val Royeaux sometime soon anyway. Dagna got a new scholarship for the White Spire, doubt you can keep those two apart. Thom is, well, Thom. Saare has a bike, she can come visit.” Kallak started to laugh as he tried to give her another kiss.

“But… what about Ostwick?” Cassandra said, not trying to move back up from the dip.

“It’s just a city. I love you more.” Kallak said, his mouth finding her neck again.

Her phone buzzed again. Cassandra started to groan as she pulled her phone out of her pocket. Kallak huffed, and helped her to stand up straight. He was looking across the water as she checked her phone. There were two messages, but she saw the photo first. It was of her and Kallak, the dip that they were just in almost comedic from the angle, her long legs stretched out as the dwarf held her. It was also slightly blurry.

**Package secured, early leave permitted.**

![Image]

**Early leave Highly Recommended.**

“Can’t believe her.” Cassandra muttered, putting her phone back.

“Work?” Kallak looked back at her.
“... Did you want to get out of here?” She asked.

Cassandra watched as Kallak’s face went from lovestruck to completely blank, and then his eyebrows started to rise higher than she ever thought was possible. He was blinking at her, Cassandra not sure if she had broken the poor man.

“Yes.” he finally croaked, before clearing his throat and nodding vigorously. “Yeah, let’s get out of here.”

Apparently ‘getting out of here’ meant that Kallak was going to climb over the balcony and jump down onto the grounds from below. Cassandra wasn’t nearly as graceful as the dwarf, but the two found themselves running across the lawn to one of the taxis that were waiting at the College docks. The ride to Kallak’s place kept her head spinning, Kallak’s hands never leaving her. Once they were on Loc Muinne, Kallak threw several wads of money at the driver, apologizing profusely in between the opened-mouthed kisses he was planting on Cassandra’s neck.

His apartment was directly above the Snapdragon, most of the furniture a hodge-podge of dwarven and Vashoth. She would have laughed at it, if she wasn’t preoccupied with a certain dwarf.

Kallak woke up in his bed, hungover and sore. He tried to rub at his eyes, hoping to block out the light that was coming in from the window. Instead he found one arm pinned under something—something that was moving. He started to remember the previous night. Kallak tried to steady his breathing, really hoping that his heart wasn’t so loud. He really wanted to stay like this, but he really had to pee.

“... Cassandra?” he whispered. A groan was his reply, along with a very warm, very sleepy kiss landing on his neck. “Cassandra, I have to get up.”

“Five more minutes.” her accent was thicker this early in the morning.

If he didn’t have to pee, it would have been really cute. Instead he had to pull an old trick, grabbing a pillow and wedging himself out, using the pillow as a replacement. She took the bait, letting him grab his pants as he walked over to the bathroom. He tried to be quiet as possible, not wanting to wake her up.
When the dwarf came back from the bathroom, he saw her sleeping in his bed in the morning light. Her feet were hanging off the edge, the morning light hit her figure, years of active service showing off. He looked down at himself, the slight pouch from old age, shaking his head as he looked back at her broad shoulders. She shifted, holding the ‘not-Kallak’ pillow closer to her face. That’s when he saw the marks he had left. He hissed, and pulled up his sweatpants to go to the kitchen.

He passed by a hallway mirror, before doing a double take. His neck and chest were covered in bite marks, the bruises tinged yellow at the edges. He gingerly touched one bruise that was just above his ear, wincing at the slight pain. He had to admit, Cassandra gave as good as she got. Kallak walked into the living room, hoping that Saare hadn’t come home last night. So far, so good, the rest of the apartment was dark.

He made some breakfast, pulling out some nug meat and cutting up sweet potatoes. It was greasy, and after about six eggs and some Dalish spice, it was the perfect hangover cure. He grabbed the toast and paused. He had no idea how Cassandra liked her toast. Or if she even ate greasy food. As a panic, Kallak grabbed an orange and buttered half of the toast, the other half was slabbled with Saare’s chocolate spread. Kallak walked back into the room, only to find Cassandra was sitting up, realizing she had been fooled by a pillow.

“Morning.” Kallak said, his voice a little gruff.

“Good morning.” Cassandra was smiling.

Kallak raised up his greasy offering, only for Cassandra to pull out his harness from last night, the pink dildo still in place. ‘Ah’ was all that came out of his mouth, causing the human to chuckle at the color that spread across his face.

“Thought it would be blue.” she said, taking the tray from him.

“Gotta keep you on your toes.” Kallak placed a small kiss on the side of her head. “Coffee?”

“Tea is fine.”

“It’s sweet tea. From the fridge.” She wrinkled her nose at him.

“Please tell me the coffee is warm.”
“You’re in luck. I got a kettle, some instant, and milk. I’ll be back.” He grabbed the strap on, throwing it into his bathroom sink.

By the time he got back, Cassandra had found one of his shirts and had put it on. She had gotten back into bed, thanking him as he handed her a cup of coffee. They ate breakfast together, neither of them sober enough to deal with the lights on. Afterwards, Cassandra tried to leave… until she saw the state of her neck. Kallak was then immediately lectured about it, but said lecture died in her throat when he pulled her back into bed.

They spent the day together, far away from Ostwick, from work. From the past. Kallak was, for the first time in his life, in love. He couldn’t stop smiling. It was a good look on him, according to Cassandra.

Chapter End Notes

I got an Epilogue coming but this is the end of this story!! Sorry for how quick things were moving in the last three ish chapters... I didn't feel like dragging this out anymore than I needed to.

That being said, hope y'all enjoyed!!
Kallak was watching the gardeners from the covered gazebo. The blue rose bushes were doing well, but here in Orlais they had a terrible habit of hogging the nutrients in the soil. ‘Rose de Pentaghast’, he had named it. ‘La promesse de l'amour’ was what the Nobility were calling it. They had no idea.

Five years. It had been five years since the Platinum Jubilee. The talks between Mages and Templars did come, nearly a year after the ball- but ended with a bombing and a dead Divine. Alex and Saare had been there, but not Kallak. He had been busy playing florist in Orlais- when news had gotten to him, he had raced to Haven to find them. Only to find that the Inquisition had been reborn and the two girls he raised were in the middle of it all.

He and Cassandra had stayed with them, Cassandra acting as an advisor for Alex, the newly minted Inquisitor. With Saare proclaimed as the “Herald of Andraste”, Kallak had no choice but to go back to being a Kingpin, using old contacts and allies to supply lyrium for the Inquisition- and then some. Three years of fighting and negotiations and Thedas was changed… but he had no idea if it would be for the better.

The war was over now, and talks of disbanding the organization had spread across Orlais. Slowly but surely, Kallak had been handing the reins back to Saare, becoming a florist once more. A new Divine had been elevated, and Cassandra was debating of whether or not to take the Lord Seeker position- or retire. Kallak didn’t mind, but he did have other plans for the two of them.

For now, he watched over the gardens outside the Sunburst Chantry. He felt a manicured hand on his shoulder. He looked up, and saw Vivienne in her Divine cloth. He bowed and went to pour the tea.

“My dear, it’s so good of you to come and visit me.” Vivienne sat down, waiting for her cup.

“The Exalted Council is meeting soon.” Kallak gave her a cup, sitting across from her. “If you think I was going to miss this, you and I aren’t friends anymore.”

“Nonsense,” She waited for her cup to be heated before taking a sip. “You raised such exceptional leaders. What father doesn’t want to see them succeed.”

“I guess…” Kallak looked back, the gardens too clean, too perfect. A part of him missed the wilds of the Emerald Graves. “... I’m going to ask her.”
“Ask what, my dear, and to whom?” Vivienne set her cup down.

“Cassandra. I’m gonna ask her to marry me.”

“About time.”

Kallak’s head whipped around as he looked at Divine Justinia.

“The hell does that mean?”

“It means you take too long to make a move. If she wasn’t such an impulsive woman herself, I’m sure that nothing would have ever happened between you two.”

“That’s… a little too close to the truth.”

“She is a Seeker of Truth.” Vivienne had that smile on her face, the one that would have sent lesser men running for the hills. “You have a ring, yes?”

“About that… I was going to do- I mean-”

“You’re going to propose to her, without a ring?”

“Technically, rings have a very different meaning for the Cadash household.”

“Then how are you- Oh, Kallak, you sap!”

“What? She likes flowers…”

“She’s completely clueless to the more, shall we say, delicate meanings.”
“... Fuck. I’m so stupid. I should have a gotten a fucking ring.”

“Nonsense. You have always been one to stray from tradition, why should this be any different?”

Kallak had to lick his lips, his nerves getting the better of him. It was at that moment, Saare walked up to them. She was wearing her official ‘Herald’ clothing, the blue top exposing her stomach, which was covered in war vitaar. Her dreadlocks had grown longer, the faded red dye turning the tips pink. She sat down in the remaining chair, spreading her legs across one of the armrests.

“Did he tell you?” Saare was looking at the ceiling of the gazebo

“He did. But he hasn’t told me what flowers.” Vivienne waited for a response, looking at the dwarf.

“It’s not-” Kallak started before his daughter interrupted him.


“Saare, I swear to the Creators.” Kallak snapped. She just looked down at her adopted father, and gave a wicked smile.

At some point, she had replaced her canines with gold plated inserts. It was something she had always wanted to do, but Kallak had told her she could get it when she was ‘richer than Alex’- didn’t help the fact that Alex had paid for the inserts herself. He rolled his eyes at his daughter and leaned back in his chair. He knew he wasn’t going to get any sympathy from Vivienne, who was looking at him.

“She’s right, you know.” Vivienne put her empty cup down. “Lilies are notorious for being held at funerals. They’re more associated with innocence of the departed, not the devotion to a girlfriend.”

“I’m not changing shit.” Kallak grunted as he got up from his seat. “If you two excuse me, I’m going to be ‘a sap’ somewhere else.”
The two watched as the dwarf walked out into the garden. Saare waved her hand, filling Vivienne’s cup with more tea, making the pitcher float over to herself afterwards. The Vashoth drank directly out of the pitcher, the iced tea cooling her down in the summer heat.

Kallak was pacing. He hated pacing. He also hated the fact that Orlais was filled with so many little alcoves. What if he had sent her to the wrong one? Shit, what if he was at the wrong one? Leave it to his nerves to get him lost, to have planned something and for it all go to straight to-

“Kallak?” Oh thank Mythal she found me.

“Cassandra! Hi!” Kallak winced at how high his voice sounded.

She was wearing the regal armor, the Seeker emblem staring straight through the dwarf. Sure, he was in formal wear, the old modern chainmail hanging off of him like second skin, but suddenly this didn’t feel appropriate. They were both dressed for war, not for… this. Maybe I should have waited.

“What are you doing?” Cassandra crossed her arms, her eyebrow raised at the bouquet in his hands.

“I… I got you something.” He didn’t move.

Cassandra walked forward, her head cocked to the side as she looked at the bouquet. Kallak felt the hairs on the back of his neck go up, her gloves brushing against his own. She had a look on her face, as if she was trying to solve a puzzle. His fears started to grow, the knot between her eyebrows worrying.

“What… is this supposed to be?”

“A… bunch of flowers.” He answered lamely. “I- fuck. I can explain-”

“I get the rose, but the lilies…”
“Devotion- and humility. I- I know that they’re used in funerals, but- I wasn’t thinking about that.”

“And the pink ones? For… your friend?” Cassandra was laughing at him, but it didn’t help.

“No, nope. That’s not- I meant- Makersassontoast- It’s a proposal. Will you marry me?”

Kallak shut his eyes, waiting for… something. When nothing happened, he opened up one eye and looked up at her. Cassandra’s face was red, her eyes wide. She looked down at the bouquet and then at Kallak, then back at the bouquet.

“I should sit down.” Cassandra said, before stiffly moving to sit on the steps.

Kallak kept looking at her, not sure how to react. He didn’t know what was going to happen. What did he think was going to happen? That she was going to laugh at him, or smack him? A part of him was hoping she would drop the flowers and kiss him. Instead there they were, five feet apart, both in shock. Kallak’s nerves got the better of him as he started to just, snap his fingers to calm himself down. He was pacing, again.

“I didn’t get a ring.” Kallak started, “Because I don’t like rings, because of… reasons. I should have gotten a ring, or fuck, maybe I should have done the dwarven thing? You know, make armor or something, because, dwarf. But I thought, ‘Cassandra’s okay with me being Dalish and the clan finally warmed up to her, so, maybe, do it the Dalish way!’. Clearly, that wasn’t the way to go, uh-”

“Kallak, I-”

“I told Saare, she laughed at me, said I really was an ‘Old Man’. Sera and, hell even Mademoiselle, they called me a sap. I used to be mean, like super mean. People were afraid to piss me off. Sorry, I promised you- But I’m not that, and I figured that, I love you, and it’s about time that I-”

“Kallak!” Cassandra yelled, causing the dwarf to stop halfway through his pacing. “Yes.”

Kallak blinked. Then he blinked again.

“What?” he whispered.
“Yes.” Cassandra was smiling. “I do.”

He was moving before he realized it. He was taller with her sitting on the steps, meaning that he was able to control the kiss. He knew he was crushing the flowers, one hand quickly moving the bouquet to the side to bring her closer to him. She was giggling, Kallak’s hands not wanting to leave her face. He felt her try to pull away but he just started to kiss her face, his lips trying to cover every inch of skin available to him. Finally, he ran out of breath, resting his forehead against her own.

“Really?” he panted.

“Yes!” Cassandra was leaning into him, her hands pulling him into a hug.

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