Curiouser and Curiouser!

by Galaxy_Raven

Summary

A MGiT set during Dragon Age: Inquisition. With a twist! She is put into the body of a child! How will the inquisition fare with an 8 year old leading them? Will she ever get her body back? Who of the companions is actually good with kids?

See chapter 9, 11, 14, and 16 for art!

Notes

This is my first fanfiction. I would appreciate comments and advice! I will try to update regularly.
Rain was gently tapping at the window of the apartment. Cat, 25 grad student that she was, just laid back on the couch and watched the drops hit the glass. She had a book open in one hand and a wine glass in the other, just breathing and contemplating life. Her phone chirped and she stretched, setting down her glass and reaching for it.

*I made it to Hong Kong!*

The message was from Renee, her best friend, a travel journalist, and her roommate.

*Great to hear! Enjoy your trip and take lots of pictures! Stay safe! Talk to you tomorrow!*

With the message sent, Cat curled up onto the couch, yawning. Whenever Renee traveled somewhere new, Cat would wait up to make sure she arrived safely. The wall clock showed it was almost 2 am.

“I have got to get better about late nights.” Cat grumbled to herself. It didn’t help that she had to go into work early, but then grad students were supposed to be sleep deprived, right? At least Renee arrived safe. She reminded herself as she drifted off that she wanted to get Renee to play Dragon Age when she got back. She was really curious to see what choices her friend would make and to be able to talk about it with her and for her friend having some point of reference. With that final promise to herself, she drifted off to sleep.

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Her dream was fragmented, stranger than usual. Cat had always been a vivid dreamer, but this seemed different. She felt overwhelmingly like she was being watched. She slowly turned in her space, trying to figure out what landscape her tired mind had led her to. It took her a moment and then she realized she was in what looked like the Fade, a la Dragon Age: Inquisition, with lots of glowy rocks and green. She relaxed, it was not uncommon for her to dream about Dragon Age, although this was decidedly less steamy than many of her dreams.

She decided to just go with it and see what happens, her sub-conscious mind often delighted her, so this just another adventure. She wandered for a bit, seeing wisps and maybe demons in the distance, but nothing came close. She walked for a while, until she started to get frustrated. This had to be the most boring dream she had ever had. She stopped walking and sat, cross legged on the ground. She closed her eyes and she focused on changing her surroundings. If this dream wasn’t going to get interesting, she might as well try lucid dreaming.

She concentrated for a few minutes and opened her eyes, hoping to see her bedroom, where she usually started if she managed to lucid dream. But when she opened her eyes, it was just the same green environ around her. She let out a frustrated sigh. At least this should make waking up easier.

“Is the dream not up to your standards, little human?” Cat whipped her head around to see the owner of the voice, letting out a small gasp when she saw the glowing golden body of what looked like, in her mind, to be an angel.
“Who are you?” Cat asked as she stood, backing up a bit from the strange figure.

“Who I am is not entirely germane to the current situation. What is important is that your soul is drifting, dear. You are just lucky that I found you and not some other enterprising spirit.”

Cat shook her head in frustration. Of course she would dream up an uncooperative spirit.

“Since this is my dream and I am in “the Fade,” I assume you are supposed to be Andraste or something? Maybe the spirit of Mythal?” Though she could not actually see any facial details, she could sense the smirk.

“Something like that.” The figure floated closer. “I think you will do just fine for what I need.”

Even though she knew it was a dream, the certainty and intensity of that statement made Cat’s heart palpitate. “Okay, nice glowing lady, I am just going to wake up now. You know, important things to do and all that.” Cat pinched herself and then let out a yelp. It hurt. Things in dreams are not supposed to hurt, at least not physically. And if they did, she should be awake.

“Now now, don’t be rash, dear. I have great plans for you.” Cat felt another smirk. “And you dreamed about such an opportunity before, even wrote about it.”

Cat looked at her in disbelief, quickly catching up. “So, let me guess, you are going to drop me in Thedas?”

The figure positively radiated smugness. “Such a smart little human. Yes, I think you will upset things quite well.” The figure considered for a moment. “But first, I think a make-over is in order.” She, they, it (?) (she thought it was a woman) waved their hand and a mirror appeared in front of Cat. The first thing that was startling was that she looked like herself. Usually in dreams, she looked entirely different, with just the sense that the person she saw was in fact her. But now, her own untamed short brown hair and tanned skin were clearly reflected. She stepped closer and her own brown eyes looked back.

It felt wrong and all too real.

“Now dear, I think I know just the form you will like. Let’s see.” The figure waved her hand and Cat’s features suddenly shifted. It was not painful, but very disorienting. When she looked at the mirror again, a different figure looked back. An elven figure. The rest of her features were mostly the same. She reached up to brush her now elongated ears. Cat wondered if this was what it felt like to use the mirror in the Black Emporium. It wasn’t so bad, looking at her elven form.

“Yes, that looks good. But I think this will be better. No point in staying so close to the original.”
“What do you mean-“ Cat started to ask and then the figure waved her hand again. A lesser
disorientation gripped her and when she steadied herself this time, she didn’t recognize the figure
looking back at her at all. The figure was slimmer than she was, with long black hair pulled back into
a braid that reached her lower back. Bright green eyes and skin a few shades darker than her own
added to the image before her. Her nose, mouth, everything was different. But the most striking
feature was the vallaslin that now graced her face. It was branching across her forehead and down
across her nose. One of Mythal’s then.

“No vallaslin.” Was Cat’s immediate response. The figure chuckled.

“Is that the only complaint?” Not giving Cat time to respond, she continued. “Excellent. I can work
with that. Perhaps it is better if you don’t look Dalish.”

“Excuse me, but I think I would like my old body back. You now, the ‘little human’ one.” Cat was
confused, frustrated, and a sense of dread was building in her stomach and her snark was coming
out. “I would also like to wake up now.”

The figure circled her, evaluating.

“I am sorry, dear, but that won’t be possible. However, you mentioned your old body…little
human…hmm…” Cat did not like the tone that the figure was using. With the amount that she was
panicking, she should be waking up. Something wasn’t right.

“Yes, I think I like this idea.” Without another word, the figure waved her hand and another wave of
disorientation flooded Cat. This the worst of them. “There, perfect! What will they think!”

Cat looked into the mirror and was floored. An elven child looked back at her. An elven child with
black hair and green eyes looked back at her. She raised her hand and the child raised their hand as
well, eyes wide in shock.

“Why am I a child? What the fuck is going on? Why can’t I wake up?” A stream of questions poured
from Cat, eyes darting between the mirror and the figure.

“Hush, dear. This form will help you.” That same smirk showed up. “Or at least it should make
things very entertaining. Now dear, time for you to go.” With a final wave of her hand Cat’s clothes
changed to a simple wool dress and leggings. Small leather boots and a fur lined cape completed the
ensemble. “Try to have fun dear!” The figure practically singed at Cat as a flash of green enveloped
the now small child and she was gone.

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Cat felt herself falling and then there was cold. She pushed herself up and she realized she had fallen
into a snow bank. She raised herself up gently, unfamiliar small limbs supporting her. She looked
around and saw a road, or rather a path.

* * *

_Might as well see where I am._
She reached the path, with a gate and it looked a little too familiar. As she walked further, tents started appearing. As she rounded the corner, she stopped and stared, mouth agape. She was looking at Haven. She quickly looked to the mountain and yes, there in the distance, the Temple of Sacred Ashes. Very much not destroyed.

*Well, Shit.*
Chapter Summary

In which Cat encounters some familiar people.

Chapter Notes

Thoughts are in italics.

Cat shook herself a bit and darted off to the side, trying to look harmless and definitely not hyperventilating. She stood, situating herself mentally.

*It’s okay, you are in Haven. Which is a lot bigger than you thought, but that’s fine. You don’t know the exact day the temple explodes, but you know who. Should I go to Leliana?*

*Wait no, that is a horrible idea. I don’t think she would harm a child, but she did go a bit dark. Cassandra? No, she will probably just think that I am possessed. Cullen too. I don’t even know if Josie is here yet. Solas isn’t or shouldn’t be here yet and Varric is under watch.*

Cat considered a few minutes, weighing her options.

*I guess I’ll just have to go directly to the top and try to warn Justinia.*

*Wait, why I am so okay with this? This is crazy. How do I get home? Renee, my family, they are going to be so worried. Am I dead? Is this all a dream?*

*Let’s go with it is a very cool dream, but I should treat it like it’s real. That seems the safest option. Good on me, not totally freaking out, no definitely not.*

Cat started to wander when it hit her. What if the language here wasn’t English?

Head down and moving fast, she started towards the front gates, now actively listening. Soon, she heard a familiar voice yell out.

“*That’s a shield in your hand, block with it!*”

She couldn’t help the grin the sprung up. She turned to get her first look at Cullen. He had his normal armor on, with that oh so fluffy pauldron. He was running the men through their training. With a start, she realized that Rylen was standing next to him. They were both way cuter than they were shown in the game.

*Well, at least I know the language.*

She hurried off, not wanting to draw attention to herself by staring at the commander and knight-captain. She spent an hour just wandering, finding cabins and people she recognized. As she walked
by the tavern, the smell of cooking food made her stomach rumble.

_Crap, what am I going to do about food? I don’t have any money…or do I?_

She instinctively reached down to her left side and she in fact found a small leather coin purse.

Damn it, what else is on my person that I don’t know about?

She quickly and furtively moved behind one of the cabins, one that wasn’t in the game. Looking around to make sure no one could see her, she started examining her clothing and pockets. She found that she had a leather pouch with 15 silvers and 10 coppers, a pocketful of what she assumed was elfroot, a handkerchief, a small paring knife, and a small carved figurine of a mabari.

_How very Ferelden. At least the woman…I’m going to call her Trickster for now…at least Trickster equipped me with some things._

Moving back towards the tavern, Cat managed to find a seat at the bar, against the wall. The room wasn’t bursting, but it did have a lively crowd. She got her first look at Varric, sitting at a table by the fireplace, a conspicuous guard standing behind him. He had the people at the table fully enthralled by the tale he was weaving.

_I wish I could hear what he was saying. Imagine, hearing Varric tell a story, in person._

Cat flagged down Flissa.

“What do you need, pet? Where are your parents?”

Cat started to respond and then realized, she didn’t know what to say.

_Crap, what do I tell her?_

“My parents came for the conclave.”

_Is that my voice? Oh right, puberty hasn’t hit yet._

“They told me to wait here for them and to get food.” Cat tried to put on an innocent face. A please-don’t-question-it look.

Flissa looked skeptical but nodded.

“It is 5 copper for a meal, pet.”

Cat nodded and dug out the required coin. Flissa took it and a few minutes later, placed a bowl of stew and a cup of water before her.

_I don’t think I want to know what is in this, but I am too hungry to care._

Cat seemed to inhale the food. It was gamey and there was something in it was she was pretty sure was vegetables. When Flissa noticed how fast she ate, she slipped a piece of bread to her. Cat tried to give her the biggest smile she could. When Flissa turned, she put the bread in her pocket for later, just in case.

_Waving to Flissa, Cat left the tavern. She wandered a little more, daring to enter the Chantry. The building was much bigger that it looked in the game, grander, but still simpler than say, Notre Dame. The size made sense, since in the not-too-distant future the entirety of Haven’s population was going to be hiding in here. She noticed one of the chantry sisters looking at her and she hurried out of the_
building.

*I need to be careful not to draw too much attention to myself.*

As she exited the Chantry, she saw Leliana’s tent. She could see movement inside, but not who.

*Best avoid that for now.*

She exited Haven, heading in the direction of the bridge, but then stopped.

*Do I have magic?*

She turned and made her way around the lake and came up near Master Taigen’s cabin. She peaked inside, but no one was there. She looked around, checking for patrols or anyone else. Seeing no one, she set herself on an outcropping of rocks, legs crossed. She closed her eyes and thought.

*Now, how does one go about accessing magic? It is about willpower, right? So, I focus my mana (if I have any) and do something? The basic spells are elemental, so I should try one of those. Or is that putting the cart before the horse? Magic looks so easy in the game, but then mages are trained for years. Would Trickster even have given me magic?*

She sat meditating for what felt like an hour, but no matter what she did, no magic happened.

*Well, I guess I either don’t have any or can’t access my magic. I’ll just have to wait for Solas, Sir Egg himself to find out.*

With that she rose, stretching, and made her way back towards the bridge.

*I guess I better check on the conclave. I need to find a way to warn Justinia, if I have time.*

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Cat thought more people would have commented on a lone child, but perhaps her being an elf made her near invisible? As she made the trek, her legs started to burn. She was in decent shape back home, but then again, she wasn’t a child.

*So, goal one is to scope out the situation in the temple, try to find out how close we are to the boom. Goal two, find a way to warn Justinia. Failing that, find Lavellan, Trevelyan, Cadash, and/or Adaar. Should I try to evacuate the conclave? What if I change things too much?*

She shook herself mentally.

*No use thinking that way. I need to find out what is actually going on up the mountain first.*

The going was slow, but eventually, she made it. The temple was impressive and so very large. It reminded Cat of Durham Cathedral in England. It looked nothing like she remembered it looking like from Origins, but then the graphics weren’t great on it. There were so many people about. She could tell who the mages were by their robes and staffs and the templars stood out with their rather distinctive armor. It also helped that people gathered in groups of mages or templars. There wasn’t a lot of mixing. The only real go betweens were the servants, most of whom were elves, and a few nobles.

Cat drifted to the shadows, listening in. There was a lot of anger and worry, from all sides. From what she could gather, Justinia was in main chamber, with representatives from both the mages and templars. They had been in there all day.
As long as Justinia is with the rest of the group, it should be fine. I wonder how much longer they will be today.

A large figure moved in front of Cat, looking down at her small figure. Cat looked up and couldn’t keep her eyes from going wide. Right before her was a qunari, a rather large qunari man with a greatsword. He had ram-like horns that framed his angular face. His black hair was gathered in a braid. He had dark grey skin and near golden eyes. Her mind started whirling.

Is this Adaar? Or one of the other Valo-kas? Will he be the inquisitor? He is so tall! Like scary tall! And those horns! Oh no, I am staring, I shouldn’t stare.

She looked down and blushed, embarrassed at her gawking.

“Don’t worry, little one, I don’t bite.” His voice was deep and very familiar. It matched the American voice for Adaar.

Cat gathered her courage and stuck out her hand. “My name is Cat, pleased to meet you.” She looked up into his eyes, not wavering, but the blush still on her cheeks. He seemed surprised at my boldness and lack of fear.

He let out a low chuckle and bent down to a knee, reaching his hand out. It engulfed her own. “Nice to meet you, miss. My name is Kaaras.”

Cat gave him the biggest grin she could. Before she could say anything else, another qunari stepped into view.

“Come on, Adaar, our shift is up, we can head back to the camp.” They noticed her. “And stop scaring the child.”

“I am not scaring the child. This is my new friend, Cat.” He gave her a wink, rising up. “Stay out of trouble, little bit.” With a small wave, he was gone, following after his friend.

Well, he was nice. I bet he would make a good inquisitor.

Cat explored a bit more, fitting in with the servants at times. It wasn’t long before she heard another familiar voice. This time, it was a soft British accent. She strained her neck to get a look and there, in noble clothing, stood the woman who had to be Trevelyan.

She had long, dark brown hair done up in a complicated style. Her eyes were blue and she had a small tattoo that underlined her left eye. Cat noticed that she had two daggers strapped to her waist. She was currently talking or more likely arguing with a mage.

“The circles should be reinstated, Galyan. Mages need protection from danger as much as the general populace needs protection from them.”

Cat thought the name was familiar. Where had she heard it before?

“Lady Trevelyan, I have to disagree. We have to come up with a new solution.” They started to walk off. “The templars have proven…”

Well, so Trevelyan is not a mage. I wonder who the man is? His name sounded…oh shit! That’s Cassandra’s lover or former lover or whatever. Wow. I wonder if there is a way that I can save him?

Cat’s stomach started to grumble. She moved further in and found a small, unoccupied room. It was
neat, with a couch and a couple of chairs and a desk. It was nice. She didn’t see anyone, so she plopped herself down on the small couch and ate the piece of bread Flissa had given her.

So, I have encountered two of the possible inquisitors. I am not thrilled that Trevelyan is a circle supporter, but maybe she can be reasoned with. Then again, I have no idea what Adaar thinks of the circles. Just as long as Vivienne is NOT made divine, it should be fine.

Cat was thrown from her musings when a figure materialized in front of her by the desk. In her shock, she let out an ‘eek!’ The figure turned to her, staff raised. The figure paused when it noticed her small form and no doubt the crumbs that had gathered on her dress.

The figure lowered their staff and raised the other hand in a I’m-not-going-to-hurt you motion. The figure lowered their hood to reveal an elf.

“Shush, I mean you no harm, da’len.” Another familiar voice. The man in front of Cat had platinum blond hair and blue/violet eyes. His white inked Mythal vallaslin was stark against his dark brown skin.

So, now I have met Lavellan.

“I won’t tell anyone you were here, if you don’t either. Deal?” Cat thought a moment and then nodded. Lavellan took this in stride and started searching the papers on the desk. Finding nothing of interest, apparently, he turned back and gave a small bow. “You may not wish to linger in the Divine’s office, da’len.”

“I won’t.”

This was the divine’s office? Why isn’t there a guard here, unless…

Before she could finish the thought, Lavellan had raised the hood on his cloak again and slipped out the door.

Cat started to get worried. If this was the Divine’s office, there should be a guard here. The only reason she could think of that there wouldn’t be a guard here was if Corypheus was getting in place.

What if tonight is the night that Corypheus strikes? Heck, I need to get off this mountain.

She followed Lavellan’s example and slipped from the room. She stuck to the shadows and started to make her way towards the entry way. Before she could go far, a small delegation appeared around the corner and was moving towards her. There was an older woman in chantry robes who she immediately recognized as Divine Justinia. Trailing her were two guards, in battlemage attire.

Those must be her knight-enchanters.

As Cat moved to get out of the way, a voice called out.

“Excuse me, your Holiness, might we have a word?” Three figures appeared. Three figures in grey warden attire.

Crap. Crap. It is happening now.

The Divine turned to look at them, her face obviously tired, but resigned. “Very well, please step into my study.”

Cat watched as they all filtered into a room. She made it to the entry way to find it near bursting,
with the conclave in recess. Even though or perhaps because of her small size, she was having trouble actually getting to the entrance. She ran into a female dwarf, whose voice she recognized as Cadash’s.

*Well, that’s all four then.*

Cat managed to get to the door, by following Cadash, funnily enough. As she stepped outside, she froze.

*Wait, Cadash is leaving down the mountain and Adaar left earlier.*

Cat looked around fervently. There, a bit further down the path was a small group of nobles, one of which was Trevelyan.

*And there is Trevelyan. Does that mean Lavellan is going to be the one?*

That thought was halted when she looked over to the trees and saw a pair of elves, one of which she was sure was Lavellan, slip out of sight.

*SHIT! That means…*

Not one of the possible inquisitors was going to run in to help Justinia and grab the orb.

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Cat walked away from the entrance and started pacing.

*Maybe one of them will come back? Maybe that wasn’t actually Lavellan and he is still snooping around inside? Do I go get one of them? How would that conversation even go?*

Cat went back and forth until she reached a conclusion.

*I have to go back and check. If one of them isn’t there, it is going to have to be me.*

Swearing under her breath, she snuck back in. People were still milling about, talking and arguing. Food had been brought out. In the large entry way alone, there had to be at least a hundred people. Cat found her way to the hallway where she has seen the Divine. The hallway was strangely empty. Not even a servant in sight.

*Maybe the wardens are just making contact today and the actual event will be tomorrow. Yeah, that is totally probable. Way to stay optimistic.*

That thought was dashed when she heard a voice cry out, “Someone help me!”

Cat ran, bursting through the large doors. She quickly took in the scene. The knight-enchanters were dead and tossed aside. The Grey Wardens stood around the Divine and she was held up by magic. And there, there was Corypheus. His broken and mired flesh was repulsive. Seeing him in reality was horrifying. And in his terrifyingly too long fingers he held the orb. Cat gathered herself and shouted, “Let go of her, you freak!”

“We have an intruder, slay the elf.” Corypheus’s voice was toxic. It made Cat’s skin crawl.

“Go! Run while you can!” The Divine yelled out, kicking at Corypheus’s hand. The orb went flying. Cat scrambled for it reaching out with her left hand.

*God help me, I guess I am doing this.*
The last thing she remembered before she blacked out was a yell and then a shooting pain up her arm. The world went green and that was it.
Chapter Summary

Little vignettes of the explosion and the two days between the explosion and Cat waking up in the dungeon.

Chapter Notes

I won’t have alternative POV often, but I thought this fit and gave a chance to see what happens before Cat actually woke. Any comments are appreciated.

Cassandra POV

“Justinia will want to speak with Varric tonight when she returns.” Leliana said, shifting though some notes on her table.

Cassandra stood beside her and Cullen stood at the entrance to the tent.

“Do you think she will get more out of him than Cassandra?” Cullen asked, rubbing the back of his neck.

I wonder if the headaches are back.

“If anyone can, she can.” Cassandra said. She wasn’t sure if the dwarf was lying about knowing where the champions were, but Justinia was the best bet for convincing him to tell. At the very least, the Divine would hear the tale herself.

“Quite, I am still trying to track down Tabris, but she has proved elusive. Alistair doesn’t even know where she is.” Leliana said, glancing up at the other two. “Do you think that-”

There was a thundering crack and then a force burst through the tent, sending the three of them to the ground.

“Maker’s Breath, what was that?!” Cullen yelled, pushing himself up. He was the first out of the tent. He looked around and froze, his face paling. “Maker preserve us.”

Cassandra and Leliana rushed outside to look as well. They were stunned. There was a great green tear in the sky, right above the temple. Or where the temple should be.

“How can this be? The Divine! All the people at the conclave. Galyan…

She focused, feeling her faith grounding her. The Divine either lived or she would be avenged.
“Let’s go, we must find out what happened.” Cassandra said. This snapped the other two out of their daze and then together, they started running.

**Varric POV**

Varric stepped outside the tavern and stretched. His trusty shadow of a guard right behind him.

“Say, am I going to get a name from you or should I just give you one? I need to know for my next book.”

The guard just glared.

“How about grumpy? Or maybe-”

He was cut off as an explosion rocked the world, pushing him against the side of the tavern. He looked up and saw that where the Temple of Sacred Ashes should be, there was nothing. And right above it, a gaping green hole.

*Shit, not again. This better not have been you, Blondie.*

**Cat POV**

Cat slowly opened her eyes. She felt the sharp pinch of rock beneath her. She sat up, a little dizzy. As her eyes focused, she saw green and rocks. It was so strange.

*Where am I? What happened?*

She tried to think, but everything was a jumble. There was a glowing figure, a laugh, and then…

Cat stood up, looking around. She saw a glowing portal in the distance.

*I guess that is the way?*

She pushed onwards, slowly approaching the portal. As she got closer, she realized it was up in the air, she would have to climb to get to it.

*I hope this is the way.*

She suddenly heard a skittering sound. She turned and she felt dread fill her. There were creatures coming towards her, fast. She turned and ran. The incline increased and she started climbing. Pain and terror filled her and pushed her onwards. She looked up, not daring to look back, although the skittering noise was getting louder. She saw a woman, reaching for her. She could almost grab her hand.

The next thing she knew, she was falling. And then there was pain and blissful peace as she fell unconscious.

**Kaaras POV**

Kaaras was one of the first to reach the temple. He was on his way back up to check in with the rest
of his company when the explosion hit. After that, it was demons upon demons.

_Shit, I didn’t sign up to fight demons._

He met up with some scouts and soldiers. They fought together, comrades in crisis.

_Herah and Arish were at the temple. Did they survive? Best not think of that._

His group fought hard and when they finally reached the temple, he felt his knees shake.

_What did this? What could do this?_

His group spread out, searching for survivors. But, the hope grew faint as they moved further in. There was just bone and ash left. One of the scouts was throwing up. Kaaras was sorely tempted to follow him, his stomach clenching.

There was a crackle and a slice of green energy opened in front of them. They all tensed, prepared for more demons, but a single small figure fell out, the small rift closing behind it. They rushed forward, swords bared, to face this new threat.

As Kaaras got closer, he realized it was the body of a child. It groaned and turned over.

“Little bit?” Kaaras rushed forward, setting aside his sword. It was the child from the temple, Cat was her name. She was unconscious and had a few bruises.

_How had she survived?_

A green energy pulsed from her left palm and she let out a pitiful sound.

“Someone get a healer!” Kaaras yelled. He quickly sheathed his sword and moved to pick up the child. She was so small. He gently gathered her in his arms. As he rose the other scouts were still standing there. “Move!” That got them going. As a group, they headed back down the mountain, the soldiers flanking him. Cat made another noise, curling in closer to him. “Don’t worry, little bit, I got you.”

_Cadash POV_

Cadash was halfway down the mountain when the explosion hit. The chaos that followed would haunt her, she knew. She saw a demon eviscerate a soldier. She managed to stab it, but it was too late for the soldier. He just looked on with dead eyes. After a seemingly endless tide, there was a pause. Those around her braced for the next attack, barely daring to take the time to breath.

There were shouts and a group of people were headed up the mountain, more soldiers and a trio that looked in charge. She turned and another group was coming down the mountain. At the head was a qunari, one she had seen earlier. As he got closer, she noticed he was carrying something. No, someone.

It was the child from the temple. The little elf who had run into her and then followed her out from the temple.

_By the Paragons's fucking asses, a child. Was she in the temple? If she was, how did she survive?_

The two groups converged and there was a lot of shouting. One of the leaders, a tall dark-haired, stern faced woman, drew her sword, but before she could do anything, another wave of demons
appeared. Cadash jumped in, blades swinging.

*Where will it fucking end?*

**Trevelyan POV**

Trevelyan had just reached Haven when the explosion hit. She was thrown down with the other members of her group. Other minor lords and ladies sent to the conclave.

She looked up to see a swirling green mass in the sky, above where the temple should have been. She stared, she didn’t know how long.

A group ran past her, the man yelling at the nearby soldiers to follow them. This brought her back and she hurried to her tent. She removed her clothing quickly, grabbing her armor instead.

“My lady! What is happening?” Her maid, Helen, rushed in, wringing her hands.

“I don’t know, but I plan to find out. Help me with this.” Helen dutifully moved to her side, her quick hands buckling Evie in. Evie grabbed her bow and quiver. “Go to the chantry, it should be safer there.”

“Yes, my lady. But where are you going?”

“I am going back to the temple.”

“But my lady, the danger!”

“I must fight, Helen. Maker help us.” With that, Evie ran, making her way up the mountain. It wasn’t long before she ran across her first demon. She managed to send an arrow through its eye and she watched as it disappeared.

She fought her way up and it wasn’t long before she was met by a group coming down the mountain. One of the qunari mercenaries was at the front, as well as Seeker Cassandra. The man was carrying a child.

*What was a child doing at the temple?*

**Solas POV**

Solas walked to the edge of the cave he had found and looked out towards the mountain. His agents had led Corypheus to his orb and it was only a matter of time before he unlocked it. Then, Solas could go about fixing his mistake, fixing the world.

He felt a tremor in the air, his mana reacting instinctively.

Finally, it was happening.

He started to smile, but then there was a shock wave and a crack of an explosion. He was pushed back, managing not to fall by leaning on his staff.

He focused back on the mountain and his blood ran cold. There was a great green tear in the sky. The veil had been torn.
This wasn’t supposed to...What have I done!?

**

Solas had made his way towards the breach, joining the fighting. It took him hours to even get to it. Once there, he tried to close it, but in his weakened state, it was impossible. His orb was gone, taken by Corypheus.

*How had he learned the secret to effective immortality?*

After another wave of demons, as the soldiers were talking, he heard that news that there was a survivor. That someone had actually walked out of the fade.

Solas presented himself to the leadership, to a woman his agents had informed him about, a Lady Cassandra, Right Hand of the Divine. She was skeptical at first, but finally acquiesced to him examining the survivor.

He was led down the mountain. It was well into the night. His guide seemed focused, interrogating him along the way. He answered as truthfully as he could. He was an expert of the fade, he was an apostate, and he came from a village in the north. All close enough to the truth. They reached the village of Haven and Cassandra led him to a cabin. There were guards outside. Of note, there was a qunari man standing outside. His eyes scrutinized Solas, searching for who knows what. The man simply gave a nod to Cassandra and they entered.

“Master Adan, this man is a mage and claims to be able to help the survivor.”

“He’s a healer then, good, I’ve done all I can do for the girl.”

Solas stepped in and froze. There, lying on a cot, was a small elven girl.

That can’t be the survivor…

Green energy, pulsing with an all too familiar signature, flared from her left hand. The child let out a groan, but didn’t wake. At the sound, Solas moved forward, gently taking the girl’s hand in his own, sending cooling healing and numbing through it.

This can’t be, but it is. This child has been marked by my orb.

As his magic interacted with the mark, he felt the twisted magic. It wasn’t removable. A deep sense of guilt and self-hate filled him.

My mark is killing her.

Lavellan POV

Mahonan Lavellan moved quickly through the trees, Ylsa right behind him. The two had been making camp when the explosion hit. Since then, they had been fighting off demons that stumbled into the woods.

After a day of the unending horde, Lavellan moved towards Haven. The keeper would want to know what happened. Ylsa wanted to just leave, let the shems take care of the mess.

But Lavellan was first of Clan Lavellan and he would not leave without answers.
They crept into the village. There was chaos. They heard the villagers talking about a survivor. Many spoke of them with anger and a few were plotting to kill them. They blamed the survivor for what happened.

As they approached the cabin, a bald elf stepped out, clearly exhausted. The two of them skirted around, staying just out of sight.

There was a large guard at the door, so they slipped behind the cabin. There was a low window. Cloaking themselves in shadows, they moved in.

What they saw when they entered did not sit well with Mahonan. There was a girl. A little elf child.

This is the survivor? Wait, this was the girl that was in the Divine’s office. How did this happen?

He reached out a hand to brush her hair back when the door opened. Two women came in, and when they saw him, they started shouting. The dark-haired woman pulled a sword and the cloaked woman pulled a dagger. Soon the qunari from outside joined them. All he could do was surrender.

“I told you this was a bad idea.” Ylса hissed at him as they were both dragged away.

Ylса is never going to let me forget this.

Cullen POV

It had been two days. Two non-stop days of battle. His soldiers were faltering. There was no end in sight.

Leliana and Cassandra had left him to fight towards the breach. They were working from Haven, trying to figure out how to actually close it, if they could even get close to it.

A fear demon loomed closer, reaching out to strike at one of his soldiers. Cullen struck faster. This would not be another Kinloch Circle nor the tragedy of Kirkwall.

The soldier he just saved screamed and fell, a terror demon standing over his body. Cullen charged forward, striking it down, but it was too late. He was always too late.

Maker help us.

Leliana POV

Leliana shuffled more reports on her desk. The usual order and tidiness that she imposed gone with the chaos of the breach.

Her agents had been trying to find out information, trying to find out who did this. If they knew how and who, perhaps they could reverse it.

The elven mage, Solas, had told Cassandra that he theorized the mark on the child’s hand could close the breach, that the energy was the same.

How does this child fit into this mess? Did the Maker send a child?
She rubbed her eyes, feeling the weariness and grief rising up.

Dorothea…No, I don’t have time to dwell on this.

She focused back on the reports about the child. She had been able to piece together a few things, but she was no closer to finding out who the child actually was. She had thought at first that she was one of the servant’s children, but she had 15 silver on her, more than a simple servant’s child would have. Perhaps one of the rebel mages was her parent? Kaaras, the mercenary, told her the child’s name was Cat. He had met her briefly at the Conclave. Since the girl emerged from the breach, Kaaras had been a constant guard, which proved more and more necessary as time went. There were already 3 attempts on the girl’s life. They had moved her to the more secure dungeon for the girl’s safety.

Flissa had reported that the girl, Cat, had gotten lunch in the tavern. But before then, no one had seen her or had any information.

Lavellan had given her a bit more, but she was still suspicious of the Dalish elf. She was sure he didn’t try to kill the survivor, but she didn’t know his or his companion’s full motivations and that worried her.

As she stared at the papers, Cassandra entered.

“She is waking.”

Maker may she help us.
Cat slowly woke up, feeling numb. She shifted. She was on something soft, but lumpy. Her eye lids heavy, she opened her eyes and took in her surroundings.

There were four people standing around her, with heavy armor and large swords. The room was fairly dark and lit by torches. There were cells along the wall, but she was in the center. She sat up, she had been laying on a cot. One of the guards left, noting she was awake.

*Where am I? What happened? There was a woman?*

Try as she might, she couldn’t remember more. She could barely remember her name.

*My name is Cat…Cat Bell. I am sure my name was longer, but that is all I can remember.*

She tried to remember, but it was just making her frustrated. She balled her small fists up, clutching at the blanket.

The door opened and two women walked in. Or maybe stalked in was a better description. One woman had short dark hair and some scars on her face. The other had red hair that peaked out from under her cloak.

*That is Cassandra and Leliana.*

*Wait, how do I know that? Do I know them?*

“Tell me what happened. The Conclave is destroyed. Everyone who attended is dead. Except for you.” Cassandra said, anger in her voice.

*She is just upset, she doesn’t know what happened. Do I know what happened? Everything is so fuzzy.*

When Cat didn’t respond, Cassandra surged forward, grabbing her left hand.

“I…can’t.” Cat’s eyes were wide, staring at her hand.

*What is this? Why does it hurt?*

“What do you mean, you can’t?”

“I don’t know what this is or how I got it. I don’t even know where I am.” *Haven, in the dungeon of the chantry. Okay, so I do know that and a few other things. “I know that you are Cassandra Pentaghast, Right Hand of the Divine. You secretly like romance novels. And I know that you,” she motioned to Leliana, “are Sister Nightingale, Leliana, the Left Hand of the Divine. You have a nug named Schmooples. But I don’t know how I know this! I can’t remember!”*
Cassandra looked shocked. Leliana’s face was hard to read.

Cassandra regained her composure and yelled at Cat, “You’re lying!” She made a move as if to shake Cat, to force the truth from her when Leliana cut in.

“We need her, Cassandra. We will deal with any strange knowledge she has later.”

“I don’t understand what is happening!” Cat said, just above a whisper.

“Do you remember what happened? How this began?”

“I remember running. Things were chasing me. And then…a woman?”

“A woman?”

“She reached out to me, but then…” Cat’s face scrunched up.

Why can’t I remember?

Cassandra sighed. “Go to the forward camp, Leliana. I will take her to the rift.” Leliana nodded, gave one last searching look at the girl, and then turned to leave.

“Do you know what happened?” Cat asked, timidly.

I should be afraid of Cassandra and yet I have a feeling I can trust her, that she will protect me.

It will be easier to show you.” Cassandra started to move towards the door, when a voice called out.

“Wait, we can help. We want to help.”

Cat turned and saw two elves in one of the cells. A man and a woman. The woman had a scowl on her face, but the man seemed nice. He sounded…familiar?

Do I know him?

“You are prisoners. I will not simply let you out to escape.” Cassandra said, with an exasperated grunt.

“Cassandra, I…I think we can trust them.” Cat ran over to the cell, looking up at the elf’s face. He was giving her an encouraging smile. He had Mythal’s vallaslin on his face. Looking over at the elf, she noticed that dark-haired woman bore Andruil’s markings. Who Mythal and Andruil were was a question for a later date. She looked back at Cassandra. “Please?”

“Take them, Cassandra, we could use them.” Leliana said from the door, before continuing on.

Cassandra made a disgruntled noise, but waved for guard to unlock the door. The woman finally spoke, her voice a deep alto. “So, now if you just give us our weapons…”

“Don’t be ridiculous. I am not going to arm prisoners.”

“Cassandra…” Cat looked up with big eyes, imploring. “They want to help. We need help.”

“Fine.” She had another guard get the elves’ things. “Are you quite ready now?” Cat gave her a timid smile. Cassandra stared down the two elves. “If you try to run or attack us, I will not hesitate to end you.”
She is a very scary lady.

The elves nodded, gathering their things. Together they headed up and through the chantry. After they reached the top of the stairs, a large horned figure greeted them. He looked down at Cat, a gentle look on his face.

“How are you doing, little bit?”

The voice and face were familiar, but again, I don’t know why, there is so much I don’t know.

“I…I think I’m okay.” Cat gave him a small smile. He nodded and fell in with the group, trailing just to her right.

When they made it outside, Cat stopped, mouth hanging open and staring at the thing in the sky.

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

The male elf spoke. “An explosion can do that?”

“This one did. Unless we act, the breach may grow until it swallows the world.” After Cassandra said that, the mark on Cat’s hand flared and she doubled over, grimacing. “Each time the Breach expands, your mark spreads…and it is killing you. It may be the key to stopping this, but there isn’t much time.”

“Perhaps you shouldn’t lead with telling little bit that she is dying, Seeker.” The large horned man said, raising his eye brow.

“I won’t lie to the child.” Cassandra said with a huff.

Cat sat on the ground and thought.

That should work. In fact, it is the only thing that will work. I don’t know why I know this, but I do. I have to help them.

“I understand.”

“Then…?”

“I’ll do whatever I can. Whatever it takes to help.” Cat looked up at Cassandra, with a defiant look in her young eyes. Cassandra simply nodded and their rather strange group moved through Haven.

As they walked, many of the villagers scowled at them. Their eyes were shooting daggers at Cat. One of them spit at her. She instinctively moved closer to the large horned man.

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

The group reached the edge of the village, soldiers opening the gates.

“We lash out, like the sky. But we must think beyond ourselves, as she did. Until the breach is sealed.” Cassandra turned to Cat.

“There will be a trial. I can promise no more.”
“You would put an elven child on trial?” The elven man said, confusion and anger in his eyes.

“You are surprised?” The elf woman retorted.

“There are demands for one, yes.” Cassandra responded. “Come it is not far.”

“Where are you taking us?” The horned man asked.

“Her mark must be tested on something smaller than the Breach. We are headed to one of the smaller rifts.”

They walked up the path, towards the bridge. Casualties were laid out. Cat let out a gasp.

They are dead. What did this to them?

Oh right, demons.

But, I’m just a kid. What can I do?

The large horned man noted her staring and put a hand gently on her head, giving a light pat.

“Try not to focus on them, little bit.” Cat gave him a nod and moved forward, keeping her eyes straight ahead.

Cassandra yelled to the soldiers. “Open the gate! We are heading into the valley!”

The group trudged on, passing more soldiers and signs of battles. As they crested the hill, another pulse struck, throwing Cat to the ground. She panted, looking at the cursed thing on her hand.

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

“How did she survive the blast?” The elf man asked.

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

“It is true, I was there. I didn’t see a woman, but everything else…” The horned man said.

The group approached a second bridge but before they stepped onto it, Cat let out a squeaking noise and pulled Cassandra back.

“Don’t go on the bridge! Tell the others to push back!” Cat looked up at Cassandra with big, frightened eyes.

“What do you mean?” Cassandra asked, just as a large fade rock hit the bridge, sending rubble and soldiers tumbling. The four adults turned to Cat, shock on their faces.

“How did you know?” Cassandra almost growled.

“I just knew. I don’t know. Maybe the mark…?” Cat said, confusion heavy on her voice.

After a moment of stunned silence, the male elf said, “We can deal with this later, we should move
forward. Down the side of the bridge.” Cassandra nodded and the group moved forward. As they reached the ground, a couple demons formed in the residue from the green rock.

“Stay behind me!” Cassandra said to Cat and attacked the demons.

_Those are shades, I think._

The horned man and the elf woman moved to assist. The male elf kept back, firing spells from his staff. They were focused on the ones in front, that they didn’t see the one coming up from behind. Cat turned in time to see it starting to strike at her. She gave out a yelp and dropped, its claws swiping above her. She scrabbled back, hitting something. A dead body. She gave out another yelp, but then she saw the dagger by the body. She grabbed it and faced the demon.

_I don’t know what to do with this._

Luckily, her yelps were noticed and the elf man sent a lightning bolt at the demon, just as Cassandra stabbed it.

Cat looked around. “It’s over.” She said, her voice low, her heart beating fast.

“Drop your weapon, now!” Cassandra said. Cat immediate dropped the knife and held her hands up.

“I don’t even know what to do with it, I just…” She had a sad look on her face.

“I cannot protect you alone. Stay close to one of us.” She turned. “I should remember that you agreed to come willingly and that you are defenseless.” From a crate by the bridge, Cassandra pulled out a bandolier. “Take these potions. Maker knows what we will face.”

“Where are all your soldiers?” The horned man asked, moving to flank Cat again. This time, the elf man flanked the other side. The elf woman brought up the rear, with Cassandra leading them.

“At the forward camp or fighting. We are on our own, for now.”

They moved onwards, fighting a few more demons. But the adults managed to keep the demons far away from the elf girl.

As they moved up a staircase, the sounds of battle reached them.

“We’re getting close to the rift. You can hear the fighting.”

“Who’s fighting?” Cat asked, breathing heavy.

_Do they realize I have small legs?_

“You’ll see soon. We must help them.”

As they crested the stairs they saw several soldiers, as well as an elf and a dwarf, fighting demons. The three melee fighters jumped down and joined the fray. The mage elf hung back with Cat, firing off shots of lightning towards the demons.

As the last demon was struck, Cat bolted forward.

_I have to get close to the rift. To Solas._

The elf beside her tried to grab her, but she was quicker. When she reached Solas’s side, he grabbed her hand and raised it towards the rift.
“Quickly, before more come through!” He yelled. Cat felt a surge of energy and then pain, she focused on the sensation, focusing on the rift and imagining it closed. After a moment, she pulled her hand back and the rift slammed shut.

“What did you do?” Asked the elf mage, running up behind them.

“I did nothing. The credit is the girl’s.” Solas said.

“I closed the thing? How?” Cat asked, confused eyes turned towards Solas.

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

“Meaning it could also close the Breach itself.” Cassandra stated.

“Possibly.” Solas turned back to Cat. “It seems you hold the key to our salvation.”

“Good to know! Here I thought we’d be ass-deep in demons forever.” Cat turned to see the dwarf.

_Varric Tethras…and Bianca. Why am I so excited to see them?

Varric moved closer. “Varric Tethras: rogue, storyteller, and occasionally unwelcome tagalong.”

“Are you with the Chantry or…?” The elf mage asked.

“Was that a serious question?” Solas said with a chuckle.

“Technically, I am a prisoner, just like you lot.” Varric said.

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

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

Cat walked up to Varric and put out her hand. “Please to meet you, Varric.”

“You may reconsider that stance, in time.” Solas quipped as they shook hands.

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

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

“Have you been in the valley lately, Seeker? Your soldiers aren’t in control anymore. You need me.” Cassandra just responded with a disgusted noise.

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

“He means, ‘I kept that mark from killing you while you slept.’” Varric said.

Cat turned to the elf. “You did?” Solas nodded. She rushed forward, throwing her arms around him. “Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!” She squeezed tight.

Solas seemed at a loss, just gently patting her back. “Of course, da’len.” Cat pulled back and looked up at him.

“Wait, you know about the mark? What is it? How does it work?” Cat asked, questions spilling
“Solas is an apostate, well-versed in such matters.” Cassandra said.

“Technically, all mages are now apostates, Cassandra. My travels have allowed me to learn much of the Fade, far beyond the experience of any Circle mage. I came to offer whatever help I can give with the Breach. If it is not closed, we are all doomed regardless of origin.” Solas said.

“And what will you do once this is over?” The horned man asked.

“One hopes that those in power will remember who helped, and who did not.” He paused.
“Cassandra, you should know: the magic involved here is unlike any I have ever seen.”

*Liar. Wait, what? Why would he lie?*

“There’s a young prisoner is a mage, but I find it difficult to imagine any mage having such power.”

*I’m a mage? I have magic?*

“Understood. We must get to the forward camp quickly.”

“Wait, can we go through some formal introductions first, please?” Cat asked looking between all the adults, even Varric was still taller than her.

“Of course. You know that I am Seeker Cassandra Pentaghast.”

“Yes. And this is Varric and Bianca.” Cat motioned to the dwarf’s crossbow. “And that is Solas, a dreamer, or somniari, who detests tea.” Solas quirked an eyebrow at that detail. “And you I think are Adaar of the Valo-Kas mercenary group.” Cat gestured to Kaaras. “And you are Lavellan, first of your clan.” Cat paused. “I am not sure what your name is, but I assume you are also from clan Lavellan.” All the adults stared at her, mixed expressions on their faces.

“How do you know this?” Solas asked, a measured look on his face.

Cat shrugged. “I just do. I can’t remember much, but I meet people or see things and I just know things about it. Things that have happened or will happen.”

“Like at the bridge?” Adaar asked.

“Yeah.”

The elf woman chimed in. “Well this is weird and all, but we should move. My name is Ylsa.” She gave a nod to Cat. “And what is your name?”

“My name is Cat…Cat Bell. I think.” Cat sighed. “Everything is muddled.”

“My name is Kaaras Adaar. We met before, but it seems you don’t remember.”

“And I am Lavellan. Mahonan Lavellan. You are correct that I am the First of my clan.”

“Shit, this is weird.” Varric said. “Not the weirdest thing I have seen, but weird.”

“Don’t I know it.” Cat stood taller. “Cassandra and Ylsa are right, we should move forward.”

Together the group advanced, with more questions than answers.
They moved onwards, coming across more demons. Solas and the other elves sniped at each other over the Dalish. Varric and Kaaras discussed the Qun in mostly friendly terms.

“So…I am assuming you are innocent. You seem a little young to be blowing up temples, although I did know some orphans in Kirkwall who wouldn’t be above it.” Varric inquired.

“I don’t remember what happened. Nothing makes sense.” Cat replied.

*But I didn’t blow up the temple.*

“That will get you every time. Should have spun a story.”

Cassandra hmphed. “That’s what you would have done.”

“It’s more believable, and less prone to result in premature execution.” With that cheery remark, they started climbing again. They fought a few more demons and then they came upon another rift.

The adults made quick work of the demons and Cat stepped up to the rift, raising her hand.

*Focus. Focus on the feeling from before.*

Cat took a deep breath and then something connected. Her hand flared green and the energy pulsed to the rift. She had to fight to keep from being pulled towards it. After a few seconds of pain, she once again pulled back and the rift closed. Solas gave her a nod of approval.

“Open the gate! The rift is gone!” Cassandra shouted.

“Right away, Lady Cassandra!” A soldier shouted back.

“We are clear for the moment. Well done, da’len.” Solas said. Cat gave him a winning smile.

“Whatever that thing on your hand is, it’s useful.” Varric replied.

The gates opened and the party moved forward. Cat was kept at the center, so she heard the yelling before she saw them. She peeked around Cassandra to see a man in robes arguing with Leliana.

“We must prepare the soldiers!” Leliana said, frustration in her voice.

“We will do no such thing.” The man in robes replied with indignation.

*Ah, right, Chancellor Roderick. I don’t think I like him.*
“The prisoner must get to the Temple of Sacred Ashes. It is our only chance!”

“You have already caused enough trouble without resorting to this exercise in futility.”

“I have caused trouble?” Leliana said.

_The chancellor better watch it or he will find a dagger in his face._

“You, Cassandra, the Most Holy – haven’t you all done enough already?”

“You’re not in command here!”

“Enough! I will not have it!”

The group finally reached the arguing pair. Kaaras leaned down and whispered, “Stay close to me, little bit, just in case.” Cat moved right beside him as the chancellor acknowledged them.

“Ah, here they come.”

Leliana’s face flooded with relief. “You made it. Chancellor Roderick, this is–”

“I know who she is. As Grand Chancellor of the Chantry, I hereby order you to take this criminal to Val Royeaux to face execution.” Cat heard Ylsa give out a low growl and saw the elf tightening her grip on her daggers. Kaaras and Mahonan turned similarly tense.

Cassandra’s face went dark. “Order me’? You are a glorified clerk. A bureaucrat!”

“And you are a thug, but a thug who supposedly serves the Chantry!”

“We serve the Most Holy, Chancellor, as you well know.” Leliana tried to mediate.

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

_This is getting us nowhere._

“Excuse me, but shouldn’t we try and close the big hole in the sky?” Cat’s timid voice asked.

“You, or your people, brought this on us in the first place!” The Chancellor said. “Call a retreat, Seeker. Our position here is hopeless.”

“We can stop this before it’s too late.” Cassandra said.

“How? You won’t survive long enough to reach the temple, even with all your soldiers.”

“We must get to the temple. It’s the quickest route.”

“But not the safest. Our forces can charge as a distraction while we go through the mountains.” Leliana suggested, pointed to the route on the map that was on the table.

“We lost contact with an entire squad on that path. It’s too risky.” Cassandra replied.

“Listen to me. Abandon this now, before more lives are lost.” The chancellor pleaded. After he spoke, another pulse of pain hit Cat. She hissed through the pain, managing not to collapse on the ground again.

Cassandra turned to Cat, waiting for the pain to pass, “How do _you_ think we should proceed?”
Cat thought hard.

_The mountain path. Some of the scouts still live. We can save them. Also, I know the mountain path, but not the other route. Should I know the other path?_

“We should take the mountain path. I think some of the scouts are still alive.”


“On your head be the consequences, Seeker.” Roderick gave a final warning, before turning and leaving.

Kaaras pulled Cat back. “Little bit, I should charge with the forces.” Cat looked up at him, worry in her eyes.

“Why?”

He chuckled. “I can be a pretty big distraction.”

“I will go with you as well. I can provide magical support.” Mahonan stepped forward, clapping his hand on Kaaras’s back.

“I guess that means I’m charging too. Can’t trust you to stay out of trouble.” Ylsa said, joining Mahonan and elbowing him in the side.

Cat looked at them.

_They might die. I just met them and they might die._

Cat threw herself at Kaaras first, hugging tightly. She moved quickly to the two elves. On impulse, she ran over to Leliana and hugged her as well. Cat caught the look of surprise that crossed the otherwise controlled woman.

_Please, whoever is out there. Don’t let them die._

Cat just as quickly turned, fighting off unwanted tears, and ran back to her much smaller party. She looked back, hands on her hips, and scolded them, “Don’t die!”

Ylsa let out a barking laugh. “Same to you, da’len.” Mahonan just gave a small smile and a nod.

Kaaras gave her a wide grin and said, “We will see you at the temple, little bit.”

With that Cat’s smaller party set out.

_I hope I made the right choice._

**

The small party started making their way up the mountain. Soon, they came to a set of ladders.

“That is a long way up.” Cat stared up with trepidation.

_Maybe this wasn’t the right choice._

“Don’t tell me you are afraid of heights?” Seeing her downcast face, Varric amended. “Come on, Cat, we will help you up.”
“We won’t let you fall, da’len.” Solas said.

Cassandra took the lead, then Cat followed with Solas and Varric right behind, saying words of encouragement as they climbed.

“The tunnel should be just ahead. The path to the temple lies just beyond it.” Cassandra called back to them, the wind almost pulling the words away completely.

“What manner of tunnel is this? A mine?” Solas shouted back.

“Part of an old mining complex. These mountains are full of such paths.”

“And your missing soldiers are in there somewhere?” Varric inquired.

“Along with whatever has detained them.” Solas added.

“We shall see soon enough.” Cassandra shouted as they reached the top. As they started to approach the entrance, Cat pulled at Cassandra’s arm.

“Wait, there is something there.” A flash of the tunnel filled Cat’s mind.

Three demons inside. 2 wraiths and a shade. Why does this feel like a memory?

“There are two wraiths and a shade inside, you need to be careful.” Cat looked to the three adults. Cassandra looked slightly concerned, but resigned, nodding her acknowledgement. Varric just shook his head and readied Bianca. Solas looked thoughtful.

The three adults moved inside and sure enough, the three demons were waiting. Forewarned, they made quick work of them.

“That is a pretty useful talent, Cat.” Varric said, swinging Bianca to his back.

“I guess. I just wish I understood why I know these things.” Cat said with a sigh. They made their way through the mine.

“We will have to study it later. I am quite curious about it myself.” Solas said. “Do you receive visions?”

Cat thought for a few minutes.

How do I even describe it?

“Sometimes. It’s like I see what is going to happen. But other things I just seem to know, with no prompting, like I’ve always know them.” She frowned. “It is a strange feeling.” A flash of vision or memory hit her. “Like now, there are more demons ahead. 3 shades and 2 wraiths.” The adults nodded and moved forward, motioning for her to hang back. As they fought, Cat considered.

Can I control this? Can I trigger the knowledge/visions?

Cat focused her mind, thinking of the path they would go down or at least trying to. Nothing seemed to happen.

The 3 fighters took care of the demons quickly. Again, warned of the danger, they managed to avoid any injuries themselves.

“Are there anymore demons in the tunnels?” Cassandra asked.
“No, I don’t think so.” Cat replied.

_I hope not._

The group moved onwards, exiting the mine. Right outside, they found 3 corpses.

Varric gave out a sigh. “Guess we found the soldiers.”

“That cannot be all of them.” Cassandra said. “She said that some still lived and no scouting party would only have three members.”

“So, the others could be holed up ahead?” Varric asked.

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

“I’m leaving that to the kid with the glowing hand.” Varric said.

Cat felt another vision. “We need to hurry, they are just up ahead and there is a rift.” With that announcement, the group hurried on. Soon they saw the rift and 4 soldiers fighting off the demons. The adults joined the fray.

“Lady Cassandra!” One of them exclaimed, after the last demon fell.

“You’re alive!”

“Just barely.” At the soldier’s word, the rift flared and two demons spawned. They were tall and spindly, with twisted faces.

_Terror demons._

The fighters started attacking. One of the demons crouched to the ground and then it disappeared.

Where did it go?

Cat thought, just as it reappeared in front of her, knocking her to the ground. Blind panic filled her as she stared up at its horrifying visage. Her heart started racing and she couldn’t move away. Time seemed to slow as her mind could not move past the panic gripping her body. She saw it raising its clawed hand up and preparing to strike, when a crossbow bolt ripped through its chest and a fireball engulfed its body. It gave out a scream and crumpled to the ground, disintegrating.

“You okay, kid?” Cat looked up to see Varric.

_You are fine. It was just the demon. You can do this. You have people to help you._

Cat willed her thumping heart to calm and nodded. She stood and approached the rift, lifting her hand as before. She managed to only slightly grimace at the pain and then closed it.

“Sealed, as before. You are becoming quite proficient at this.” Solas said, a warmth to his voice.

“Let’s hope it works on the big one.” Varric said.

Cassandra was helping a soldier to their feet.

“Thank the Maker you finally arrived, Lady Cassandra. I don’t think we could have held out much longer.” The soldier who spoke before said.
“Thank our prisoner, Lieutenant. She insisted we come this way.”

“The prisoner? Then you..?” The four soldiers turned to stare at Cat.

“We couldn’t abandon you.” Cat said, uncomfortable with the attention.

“Then you have my sincere gratitude.” The soldier gave a salute, which the other three quickly followed.

“The way into the valley behind us is clear for the moment. Go, while you still can.” Cassandra ordered.

“At once.” The soldier looked to the others. “Quickly, let’s move!”

“The path ahead appears to be clear of demons as well. Do you agree, da’len?” Solas said.

Cat thought a moment, and with no new vision or memory, nodded.

“Let’s hurry, before that changes.” Cassandra said, sheathing her sword. “Down the ladder. That’s the way to the temple.”

Cassandra took the lead again and Cat approached the edge.

*This is very, very high.*

Noticing Cat’s panicked look, Cassandra motioned her to the ladder. “Come here, you can climb down with me.” Cat nodded and joined Cassandra there, her small frame fitting between the ladder and Cassandra. Together, they slowly made their way down.

*Don’t look down. Don’t look down. Just breath.*

They finally reached the bottom and Cat gave out a sigh of relief. Cassandra gave her a gruff pat on her shoulder.

“So…holes in the fade don’t just accidentally happen, right?” Varric asked.

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

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

“That is true.”

“Why would anyone want to explode the temple or cause a hole in the veil?” Cat asked, looking up at the Breach.

“I’ll have to tell you about an old friend of mine from Kirkwall who…” Varric started.

Cassandra interrupted him. “We will consider how and why this happened once the immediate danger is past.” At Cassandra’s words, the group fell silent and made it the rest of the way down the mountain.

It wasn’t long before the group made it to the blackened ruins.

“The Temple of Sacred Ashes.” Solas said.

“What’s left of it.” Varric remarked.
“That is where you walked out of the Fade and our soldiers found you. They said a woman was in the rift behind you. No one knows who she was.” Cassandra said.

Cat surveyed the scene, her stomach clenching.

_How did I survive this?_

She took a step and something crunched beneath her foot. She looked down and saw a charred bone, crumbling underneath her foot. Her eyes moved to look away, but they fell on a pair of crumpled blackened figures, seemingly huddled together. She noticed more and more bodies.

_All those people…_

Her hand flew to her mouth and she didn’t know at first whether to scream or throw-up. Her stomach decided for her. She barely made it to a low wall before she was retching. She didn’t have much of anything in her stomach, but what was there was soon on the ground. She felt cool fingers coming to rest on her back.

“I am sorry, da’len. We should have warned you. You should not have had to see this.” Solas said, gently rubbing her back. “Take deep breaths.” Cat focused on her breathing.

“Poor kid.” Cat heard Varric say under his breath. A waterskin appeared in front of her. “Here, take a drink.”

Cat took a swig and soon started gulping it down. She hadn’t realized how thirsty she was. “Slow down, kid. You are just going to make yourself sick.” Varric cautioned. She took a final drink, a deep breath, and then handed the waterskin back to Varric.

“Thank you. I’ll be okay.” Cat rose up, still a little shaky. “We should move on. The Breach won’t close itself.” She gave the adults a thin grin.

The group makes their way through the temple, Varric and Solas moving to flank Cat, mostly blocking her view of the destruction.

A voice calls out. “You’re here! Thank the Maker!” The group turned to see Leliana approaching with several soldiers, including Kaaras, Mahonan, and Ylsa. And a tall, blond-haired man. Cat ran up to them.

“You didn’t die!” She threw her small arms around them, managing to pull Mahonan and Ylsa down together.

“What about Kaaras, little bit? He might feel left out and he is the one who’s injured.” Mahonan said, picking up on Kaaras's nickname for Cat.

Cat pulled back from the two elves and quickly moved to Kaaras. “WHAT! How bad is it? Do you need a potion? I have potions!” She was checking him over, finding a hastily bandaged gash on his right arm.

Kaaras gave out a chuckle. “I’m fine, little bit, it’s just a scratch.” She narrowed her eyes at him and checked herself. It didn’t seem to be bleeding too badly. Seeing that he wasn’t near death’s door, she hugged him as well. As she hugged him, she got a closer look at the armored man with them. He was wearing a fluffy red cloak thing. He had dark circles under his eyes and his face seemed worn.

_Cullen. Commander Cullen Stanton Rutherford. He isn’t looking too well._
Before Cat could say anything, Cassandra spoke. “Leliana, have your men take up positions around the temple. Cullen, have your men provide back-up.” Leliana and Cullen moved to talk with their people. Cassandra looked down at Cat. “This is your chance to end this. Are you ready?”

Cat moved back from Kaaras and nodded, looking up at the Breach.

“I’ll try, I’m not sure how to reach it, but I will try. It has to work.” Cat said.

“This rift was the first and is the key. Seal it, and perhaps we seal the Breach.” Solas said, motioning to the large rift below the Breach.

“Then let’s find a way down. And be careful. Stay close to us.” Cassandra said. The group moved around, looking for a way down.

The air started to shift a bit in front of Cat.

What is this?

A voice rang out. “Now is the hour of our victory. Bring forth the sacrifice.” Cat felt a shiver go up her spine.

“What are we hearing?” Cassandra asked.

“At a guess: the person who created the Breach.” Solas said. They continued on, archers breaking off to get into position.

Before the group, glowing red rocks sprung up. Cat edged around them, feeling sick and sensing a thrumming in her head.

Red lyrium.

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

“I see it, Varric.”

“But what’s it doing here?”

“Magic could have drawn on lyrium beneath the temple, corrupted it…” Solas extrapolated.

Varric made a disgusted noise. “It’s evil. Whatever you do, don’t touch the stuff.”

They group didn’t go far before the voice spoke again. “Keep the sacrifice still.”

Another voice called out. “Someone help me!”

The voices sound familiar.

“That is Divine Justinia’s voice!” Cassandra exclaimed.

The group made their way down the steps and then jumped the rest of the way into the pit.

“Someone help me!” Justinia’s voice called out again.

“Let go of her, you freak!” A small angry voice yelled back.

My voice.
“That was your voice. Most Holy called out to you. But…” Cassandra said.

As they approach the rift, the mark on Cat’s hand flared and the air shifted and there was a flash of light. Ghostly images appear, playing out a scene. A shadowed figure with red eyes loomed above, while Justinia was held up with red glowing magic.

“Let go of her, you freak!” Cat’s ghostly image yelled.

*Is that what I look like? That doesn’t seem quite right…*

“Go! Run while you can!” Justinia yelled.

“We have an intruder, slay the elf.” The shadowed figure ordered, before there was another flash of light and the scene faded.

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

“I don’t remember!” Cat said, frustrated.

*Why can’t I remember? I was clearly there.*

“Echoes of what happened here. The Fade bleeds into this place.” Solas observed. “The rift is not sealed, but it is closed…albeit temporarily. I believe with the mark, the rift can be opened and then sealed properly and safely. However, opening the rift will likely attract attention from the other side.”

“That means demons. Stand ready!” Cassandra yelled out her order. The soldiers prepared themselves, bracing for the fight.

Cat moved to Solas. “How do I open it?”

“Just try doing what you did before, but think of opening. I can help, however you need, da’len.” Cat nodded and moved to raise her hand up, when another vision flashed in her mind. She lowered her hand and turned to the group.

“Watch out. There is going to be a really big Pride demon, as well as some shades.” She said grimly. As her words took hold, Kaaras moved to her side, the rest of the group tensing up.

“Stay close to Solas and I, little bit.” Cat gave him a tired smile and reached her hand back up. The energy built up, connecting with the rift.

*Open. Open up.*

She felt a pulse and a flash of green light. A hulking form burst from the rift. A pride demon.

Cassandra raised her sword and shouted out the command, “Now!” Arrows flew and the melee fighters charged. Cat stuck with Solas, who was slinging spells at the demon, while Kaaras guarded her back, on the lookout for other threats. It was soon evident that the demon was not taking the damage it should be.

“We must strip its defenses! Wear it down!” Cassandra shouted.

*You know what to do. Disrupt the rift. It will weaken it, for a bit.*

Cat moved closer to the rift, eyeing the demon as it flung a soldier away from it. She lifted her hand and tried to close the rift. It didn’t close, but it shifted, throwing the demon to its knees.
“The demon is vulnerable – now!” Cassandra ordered, attacking the demon with new vigor.

After a few moments, the rift shifted again and several shades poured through. One came up behind Cassandra. Time seemed to freeze. Cat had moved away from Solas and Kaaras was too far away to help, keeping a shade off of Cat. Everyone else was distracted. It was going to hit Cassandra completely unawares.

NO!

Cat felt the panic building inside and she felt something else. It pulsed like the mark, but different, more familiar in a way. She reached inside for the energy and let out a scream. Her right arm extended and a fireball arched out and slammed into the shade behind Cassandra, throwing it off. Solas noticed and sent a bolt of lightning its way, ending the demon. He gave the briefest of nods to Cat before focusing on the bigger demon again. The feeling of relief filled Cat. And then wonder.

I did magic!

Cat refocused and managed to disrupt the rift again, giving the rest of the party time to defeat the demon.

“Now! Seal the rift!” Cassandra yelled.

Cat raised her hand, feeling the energy connect with the rift. This hurt more than the other. She grimaced, focusing on the pain. Solas drew nearer, steadying her. She felt a flash of vision.

I’ll be out for three days. And this is going to hurt. It won’t close it, but it will stabilize it. It will buy us time.

As the energy built up, pulling her in and straining her body, she felt her limit being reached. She muttered through gritted teeth to Solas and Kaaras, the only ones close enough, “See you in three days.” With that she pulled her hand back and the effort threw her back against the wall. She felt the burst of pain and then nothing.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry this chapter is late. I am taking a summer class and have needed to focus on the work for that. I will hopefully have the next chapter up by next weekend.

If you have questions, let me know (however, I reserve the right to respond no comment if I plan to answer it naturally in the story).
Cat slowly came to consciousness, the fuzziness of her dreamless sleep drifting off. As she gained a sense of herself again, she jerked awake, sitting straight up.

_I was at the temple and I used the mark. There was pain. Where am I now? Is everyone okay?_ 

Her eyes took in the room she was in. An elven woman was standing near the foot of the bed and jumped, dropping the box she was carrying.

“Oh! I didn’t realize you were awake, I swear!” The woman exclaimed.

“It’s okay, I just woke up. Do you…?” Cat started to ask, but then the woman dropped to her knees.

“I beg your forgiveness and your blessing. I am but a humble servant. You’re back in Haven, my lady. They say you saved us. The breach stopped growing, just like the mark on your hand. It’s all anyone has talked about for the last three days!”

_Three days. Just as I thought. For some reason._

Cat took a moment to look at the woman. She had brown hair and eyes, though she was barely willing to meet Cat’s gaze for more than a second.

“So, we are safe for now.” Cat said, relief in her voice.

“I’m only saying what I heard. I don’t mean anything by it.” The woman got up, still keeping a subservient posture. “I’m sure Lady Cassandra will want to know you’ve wakened. She said ‘at once!’”

“Of course. Where is she?”

“In the Chantry with the Lord Chancellor. ‘At once,’ she said!” With that the elf woman fled the cabin.

_I didn’t even get the woman’s name... I will have to ask later._
Cat took a few minutes to explore the cabin. She found a set of clothes laid out for her on the end of the bed. She was currently wearing a wool nightgown. She quickly changed into the pants and shirt that were left for her. She pulled on the thick socks and laced up her boots. Her cloak had been cleaned, but it was hers. She pulled that on as well. She poked around the room a bit more, but there wasn’t much of interest. There were some notes on the table, but she couldn’t read them, which surprised her.

I thought I knew how to read…I guess I should go find Cassandra and then check in on the others.

Thus resolved, she opened the door. She almost closed it, after seeing the sight in front of the cabin. Soldiers lined the path and there were people all around. When she opened the door, the soldiers saluted, fists to their chest, and the others stared. It was unnerving, to say the least.

A woman was standing guard right outside the door. She had long brown hair and blue eyes, with a tattoo under her left eyes. She had a bow slung across her back.

“When you are ready, I can take you to the Chantry, my lady.” The woman said.

Her voice is familiar, but I don’t remember her.

“Okay, yes. I am ready to go.” Cat said. The woman nodded and led her through the crowd. As they made their way through the village, the people gossiped, some calling out to Cat in reverence. The tone was very different from the last time she had walked through town.

“That’s her. That’s the Herald of Andraste. They said when she came out of the Fade, Andraste herself was watching over her.” A man said.

“Hush! We shouldn’t disturb her.” A woman replied.

“Why did Lady Cassandra have her in the dungeon? I thought Seekers knew everything.”

“It’s complicated. We were all frightened after the explosion at the Conclave.”

“It isn’t complicated. Andraste herself blessed her.” The man concluded. The pair noticed Cat watching them and they bowed slightly.

“Maker be with you.” The man said.

“Blessings upon you, Herald of Andraste.” The woman said.

Cat heard others talking as well, saying she sealed the breach, but didn’t close it. More calling her the Herald of Andraste.

Should I know who Andraste is?

Memories started forming in Cat’s mind. Things she didn’t realize she knew.

Wait, she is the bride of the Maker. And the Maker is the god of the Chantry. Chant of Light. Who the Divine was the head of, right.

But how does that make me her herald? Wait, who is my guide. I should ask.

“Thank you for leading me to the Chantry. May I ask your name?” Cat asked, looking up at the human woman.

“Of course, it is my pleasure, my lady. My name is Evelyn Trevelyan. You may call me Evie if you
wish, my lady.”

“Why do you call me ‘my lady’? I’m just a girl.” Cat asked.

Evie paused, her face serious. “Because you were sent by the Maker to help us and I say it as a sign of respect. Would you prefer I call you something else?”

“My name is Cat Bell. I don’t particularly feel like a lady. Could you just call me Cat?”

“Yes, my lad…Cat, I can do that.” Evie said. They entered the Chantry. As they approached the back, they heard loud voices.

“Have you gone completely mad? She should be taken to Val Royeaux immediately, to be tried by whomever becomes the Divine.” Chancellor Roderick exclaimed.

“I do not believe she is guilty.” Cassandra responded.

“The elf girl failed, Seeker. The Breach is still in the sky. For all you know, her people intended it this way.”

“I do not believe that.” Cassandra said.

“That is not for you to decide. Your duty is to serve the Chantry.”

“My duty is to serve the principles on which the Chantry was founded, Chancellor. As is yours. I do not see those principles being served by sending the child to Val Royeaux.”

Evie and Cat reached the door.

“I guess I should go in.” Cat said, hesitating.

“Don’t worry. Seeker Cassandra won’t let anything happen. I will wait outside, my la…Cat.” Evie said, taking a position by the door. Cat gave her a small smile and walked into the room. There was a large table in the center, with a large map laid across. There were torches along the wall, but the room was still dimly lit. Cat saw the Chancellor and Cassandra as she entered, as well as Leliana as in the shadows.

“Chain her, I want her prepared for travel to the capital for trial.” Chancellor demanded, motioning to the two soldiers at the door.

“Disregard that and leave us.” Cassandra counter-ordered. The guards saluted and left.

“You walk a dangerous line, Seeker.” The Chancellor warned.

“The Breach is stable, but it is still a threat. I will not ignore it.”

“I tried to close it. I guess I didn’t have enough power to close it. I don’t know what else I could have done.” Cat said.

“You have done plenty. Your actions will be taken into account by the new Divine.” Chancellor Roderick said.

“Have a care, Chancellor. The Breach is not the only threat we face.” Cassandra said through clenched teeth.

Leliana finally spoke up, “Someone was behind the explosion at the Conclave. Someone Most Holy
did not expect. Perhaps they died with the others – or have allies who yet live.” Her eyes darted to the Chancellor.

“I am a suspect?” He said incredulously.

“You, and many others.”

“But not the prisoner.”

“I heard the voices in the temple. The Divine called to her for help.” Cassandra stated.

“And really, Chancellor, do you believe that this elven child was the mastermind behind the Breach?” Leliana asked.

“So her survival, that thing on her hand – all a coincidence?”

“Providence. The Maker sent her to us in our darkest hour.” Cassandra said with conviction.

“Are you sure the Maker sent me? Would send me?” Cat asked.

*That doesn’t sound right, but then I can’t really remember, so what do I know?*

“The Maker does as he wills. It is not for me to say. Humans are not the only people with an interest in the fate of the world. And as for your age, again, the Maker does as he wills. We must trust in his wisdom.”

“The Breach remains and your mark is our only hope of closing it.” Leliana said.

“This is not for you to decide.” Roderick responded.

*I really do not like that man and I think the feeling is mutual.*

Cassandra picked up a book from a desk and slammed it onto the center of the table.

“You know what this is, Chancellor? A writ from the Divine, granting us authority to act. As of this moment, I declare the Inquisition reborn.” Cassandra said. Then she suddenly advanced on the Chancellor, poking him in the chest as she continued, “We will close the Breach, we will find those responsible, and we will restore order with or without your approval.”

Roderick straightened his robes and left in a huff.

“This is the Divine’s directive: Rebuild the inquisition of old. Find those who will stand against the chaos. We aren’t ready. We have no leader, no numbers, and now no Chantry support.” Leliana stated, but there was no trepidation in her voice.

“But we have no choice: We must act now. With you at our side.” Cassandra said, turning to face Cat.

*An inquisition? I can help, I think. I can close rifts and Cassandra can lead. That will work. There was a lot of chaos and I feel… I know I can trust Cassandra and Leliana. I feel like this is the right path.*

“I want to help close the breach. To bring peace, if possible.” Cat said.

“That is the plan.” Leliana said.
“Help us fix this before it’s too late.” Cassandra put her hand out, waiting for Cat.

I am doing this.

With a look of determination, Cat grasped Cassandra’s hand and shook it.

I hope they know what they are doing. Cause I sure don’t.

**

The rest of the day was a bit of a blur. Cassandra and Leliana went over some of the details with Cat, as they would pertain to her, but she was soon fading. Leliana noted Cat almost falling asleep at the table and summoned Evie in to escort her back to her cabin. Cat barely made it inside before she passed out again.

I guess attempting to close the Breach took more out of me than I realized.

The next morning, Cat was woken by the smell of food. She jolted awake, her stomach growling.

When was the last time I ate?

The same elven woman was at the desk, arranging a plate and glass, as well as a small wooden vase with some flowers.

“Oh, good, I was going to wake you. Lady Cassandra said to wake you and make sure you ate, my lady.” The woman dipped into a bow, keeping her head down.

“Thank you. You don’t have to bow to me, you know. I’m just a girl.” Cat said, getting up from the bed. She was in the wool nightgown again.

I don’t remember changing. I need to stop passing out.

“My lady, you are the Herald of Andraste and I am just a simple servant.”

“Well, my name is Cat and I could use a friend. You never told me your name.”

“Oh, my lady, I apologize. My name is Lena.” She shifted nervously. “I will leave you to your breakfast. I was told to inform Lady Cassandra and the others when you woke up.” Giving another bow, she fled, again, leaving Cat alone.

Sigh. I need to work on that. I hope not everyone reacts that way.

Cat’s stomach growls again and she made her way to the desk. There were several sausages, some eggs, and couple biscuits on the plate. The biscuits had honey drizzled on them. The glass was empty, but there was a full pitcher of water. Cat dug into the food.

This tastes amazing! When was the last time I ate?

She forced herself to eat slowly and enjoy the food. By the time she was done, all the water was gone and the plate was scrapped clean.

She found another outfit set out for her. This one was different though. There were layers and the coat was leather, more like armor.

Where do I even start?
As luck would have it, Lena returned to pick up the tray.

“Lena, could…would you help me, please? If you have time?” Cat asked, embarrassed.

“Oh, of course, my lady!” Lena quickly took care of things, helping Cat into the dark leggings and dark undershirt, and then the deep green dyed leather coat. The coat didn’t have sleeves, but it was long, reaching past Cat’s knees. Cat’s boots had been replaced with black leather ones that laced up to her mid-calf. A pair of matching green leather bracers were laced up to her elbow.

“Would you like me to braid your hair, my lady?” Lena asked timidly.

“If you wouldn’t mind, thank you.” Cat said, sitting on the bed with her back to Lena. Lena used deft fingers to untangle the knots in her hair and soon her hair was pulled back into a tight braid that reached her lower back.

“You should be all set, my lady. Do you need anything else?”

“No, thank you, Lena. Do you know where I am supposed to go?” Cat asked. The new clothes fit well, although it felt a little strange.

“There is a woman waiting outside to take you where you are needed.” Lena bowed again. “I should take my leave, my lady.”

Lena hurried out as Cat said, “Thank you again, Lena!”

Cat made her way out the door. She was expecting to find Evie there, but instead, a dwarven woman stood there. She had dark red hair and brown eyes, freckles covering her face. She had a tattoo on her right cheek and daggers strapped to her side. She gave Cat an appraising look and then nodded, as if judging what she saw.

“Hello, are you the one who is going to lead me to Cassandra?” Cat asked.

At least there aren’t people lined outside to see me this time.

“I’m Cat, by the way.”

“Name’s Malika Cadash. And yes, I am to escort you to the Chantry.” The woman said and did not elaborate further, just started to lead the way. Cat hurried to follow. Even though the woman was only a few inches taller than herself, she set a fast pace. Half-way to the Chantry, Cat caught sight of a large figure.

“Kaaras!” She ran up to him and hugged him.

“Hey little bit, good to see you awake. You had us worried.” He returned the hug. “You are needed at the Chantry, but come find me later.” He gave her another quick squeeze, then waved her on. “Take care of her, Cadash.” He said, as an order. Malika just nodded.

Feeling better knowing that at least one person she knew was around, she followed Malika the rest of the way. Cassandra and Leliana stood in front of the Chantry, as well as a dark featured woman in fancy clothes and the commander. A crowd was gathering of soldiers and villagers. Cat noticed two soldiers on the roof of the Chantry, putting up something.

“Good, you are here. Please join us.” Cassandra said. Cat moved beside them. Malika hung back, merging with the crowd. Cassandra moved forward to address the crowd, looking authoritative and only a little uncomfortable.
“Thank you for joining us today. Many of you already know, but the inquisition of old is to be reformed. The Herald of Andraste will join us and together, we will close the Breach and restore order to Thedas. Thus, we declare today, on the 5th of Guardian, 9:41 Dragon, by writ of Divine Justinia V, the Inquisition reborn!” As she finished her announcement, the soldiers on the roof unfurled a banner. It was red and decorated with an eye/sun/sword design.

*That was dramatic.*

*Oh no, people are staring at me again.*

A cheer went up from the crowd. People shouting blessings on the inquisition and the Herald. There was hope in their eyes.

*What have I gotten myself into?*

**

After a seemingly endless line of well-wishers, Cat was finally free to retreat to the Chantry with Cassandra. Leliana, Cullen, and the fancy woman had slipped away in the celebration.

Cat felt like she should know who the fancy woman was...

There were some bright spots to the madness. Cat saw Mahonan and Ylsa, as well as Evie and Malika. She saw Solas and Varric in the distance, but they didn’t join the crowd itself.

Once inside, Cat let out a sigh and rubbed at her left palm.

“Does it trouble you?” Cassandra asked.

“I just wish I knew what it was. Or how I got it.” Cat replied, letting her hand fall to the side.

“We will find out.” Cassandra said, striding forward. “What’s important is that your mark is now stable, as is the Breach. You’ve given us time, and Solas believes that a second attempt might succeed – provided the mark has more power. The same level of power used to open the Breach in the first place. That is not easy to come by.”

“Do you have a plan?” Cat asked, curiously.

“We do.”

Cassandra opened the door into the back room, waiting for Cat to enter. As she entered, she saw that Leliana, the Commander, and the fancy woman were waiting for them.

“May I present Commander Cullen, leader of the Inquisition forces.”

“Such as they are. We lost many soldiers in the valley, and I fear many more before this is through.” The commander said. He still looked pale and worn, but better than he had looked at the temple. He gave Cat a small smile and bow.

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

“Andaran Atish’an.” Josephine said with a curtsy.

*Wow. She is really pretty up close. Was that elven? I think it was.*

“You speak elven?” Cat asked.
“You’ve just heard the entirety of it, I’m afraid.”

“And of course you know Sister Leliana.” Cassandra said.

“My position here involves a degree of…”

“She is our spymaster.” Cassandra cut in.

“Yes. Tactfully put, Cassandra.” Leliana said, slightly exasperated.

Cat gave a tiny curtsy, trying to emulate Josephine. “Please to meet you all.” This garnered a smile from Josephine.

“I mentioned that your mark needs more power to close the Breach for good.” Cassandra said, moving up to the table.

“Which means we must approach the rebel mages for help.” Leliana said, pointing to a spot on the map.

*The map looks familiar, but I can’t read any of the names. Curious.*

“And I still disagree. The Templars could serve just as well.” Cullen countered.

Cassandra said, “We need power, Commander. Enough magic poured into that mark–”

Cullen cut-in, “Might destroy us all. Templars could suppress the breach, weaken it so–”

Leliana cut him off, “Pure speculation.”

Cullen: “I was a Templar. I know what they’re capable of.”

*Cullen was a templar?*

A vision rocked Cat. Images of a man in a magic cage. A man that looked like the Commander. Younger, but it was definitely him. And he was in pain. Another flash and he was in full templar armor, near some giant and ugly statues.

*Kinloch. Kirkwall. Lyrium…*

Cat attention snapped back as Josephine addressed her, “Unfortunately, neither group will even speak to us yet. The Chantry has denounced the Inquisition – and you, specifically.”

“They still think I’m responsible?” Cat asked, still shaking the visions off.

“That is not the entirety of it any longer.” Josephine said, picking up a board with a candle in it. She started making some notes. “Some are calling you – an elven child – the ‘Herald of Andraste.’ That frightens the Chantry. The remaining Clerics have declared it blasphemy, and we heretics for harboring you.”

“Chancellor Roderick’s doing, no doubt.” Cassandra said in disgust.

*I see I am not the only one who doesn’t like him.*

“It limits our options. Approaching the mages or templars for help is currently out of the question.” Josephine said.
“Can I ask how I am the Herald of Andraste?”

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

Leliana started, “Even if we tried to stop that view from spreading—”

“Which we have not.” Cassandra clarified.

“The point is, everyone is talking about you.” Leliana finished.

“It’s quite the title, isn’t it? How do you feel about that?” Cullen asked.

“I’m not sure how I should feel.” Cat thought. “I have no memory of meeting Andraste, but then I don’t have many memories at all.”

“The Chantry has decided that for you, it seems.” Cullen said, with a bit of a rueful chuckle.

“People are desperate for a sign of hope. For some, you’re that sign.” Leliana said.

She sounds detached. Colder than I think she should be.

“And to others, a symbol of everything that’s gone wrong.” Josephine said.

“They aren’t more concerned about the Breach? The giant threatening hole in the sky?” Cat asked.

“They do know that it is a threat, they just don’t think we can stop it.” Cullen said.

“The Chantry is telling everyone that you’ll make it worse.” Josephine said.

“There is something you can do. A Chantry cleric by the name Mother Giselle has asked to speak to you. She is not far, and knows those involved far better than I. Her assistance could be invaluable.” Leliana said, picking up a missive. “You will not go alone, of course. Cassandra will accompany you and there are a few others who have volunteered.”

“I guess it can’t hurt to meet with her.” Cat said.

“You’ll find Mother Giselle tending to the wounded in the Hinterlands near Redcliffe. We will prepare a party to set out in a couple weeks, after my scouts have gotten a foothold in the region. There are a few reports already of rebel mages and templars in the area and we don’t want to send you in unprepared.” Leliana explained.

“Look for other opportunities to expand the Inquisition’s influence while you’re there.” Cullen said, more to Cassandra than to Cat.

“We need agents to extend our reach beyond this valley, and you’re better suited than anyone to recruit them.” Josephine directed this at Cat, giving her an encouraging smile.

Sure, no pressure or anything.

“In the meantime, let’s think of other options. I won’t leave this all to the Herald.” Cassandra said.

Bless you, Cassandra, I knew there was a reason I liked you.

“Now, there is the matter of your visions.” Leliana said, looking up from her notes.
“Visions?” Cullen asked, quirking an eyebrow.

“The Herald has had a number of visions of the future and has expressed knowledge that she should have no way of knowing. We do not know what is causing it. It may be connected to the mark, but Solas is unconvinced the two things are connected.” Cassandra said.

Cullen looked skeptical. “Truly?”

“We would not have brought it up if we thought it was simple tricks.” Leliana said.

“How strange!” Josephine said, making a note. “Do you think she is a Rivaini Seer?”

“We considered it, but no one from Rivain came to the conclave, except a few templars. And her accent is not Rivaini.” Leliana said.

“I have trouble believing this.” Cullen said.

Wait, he doesn’t believe me OR Cassandra and Leliana?

“I’m not making it up! I don’t understand it, but I’m not trying to fool you.” Cat said, indignantly.

“Perhaps a demonstration?” Josephine inquired, ever the diplomat.

“I can’t control it…” Cat looked at Cullen’s disbelieving face. “But I can try.”

She approached Cullen. “Would you give me your hand, Commander?” She asked, shyly.

“I don’t think this is-“ He started.

“You are the one questioning it, Cullen.” Leliana interrupted. “We have already seen proof of her… abilities.”

Cullen sighed. “Very well.” He held his hand out to Cat and she grasped it, closing her eyes.

Okay, focus on what you saw before. His name is Cullen Stanton Rutherford. He is from Honnleath. He has 3 siblings. He was at Kinloch Circle. Bad things happened. He fell in love there with a woman… an elven woman named… Surana. Sybil Surana. After the bad stuff, he went to Kirkwall and more bad things happened. He does NOT trust magic. Will he trust me?

Cat took a deep breath and opened her eyes, looking up at Cullen. “Your name is Cullen Stanton Rutherford. You are from the Ferelden village of Honnleath and have 3 siblings. You first served as a templar at Kinloch, before going to Kirkwall.” He looked shocked. She pulled him down in his confusion and whispered to him. “You were in love with Sybil Surana, before the bad things happened.” He reeled back, his hand going for his sword. His face paled.

“How do you know THAT!?” He all but yelled.

Cat took a step back, not able to keep a frightened look from her face. “I don’t know! I just do!”

“Commander, control yourself!” Cassandra ordered as he started to draw his sword. “We asked her for a demonstration.”

“How does she know these things? Is she possessed?” Cullen asked, his hand still on the hilt of his weapon.

“We already checked. As far as the templars and mages can find, she is simply a mage child.”
Leliana spoke up, her eyes darting between the young Herald and Cullen.

“Yes, that was quite impressive.” Josephine said, trying to calm the situation.

“Solas is going to investigate her abilities, as well as her loss of memories.” Cassandra said.

“He will also start training her in her magic, until another tutor can be found.” Leliana said, more to Cullen than Cat. “It is important she learns to control her abilities. All of her abilities.”

Cullen still looked pale, but was composing himself. “Of course.” He turned to Cat. “I…apologize if I scared you. You surprised me. There should be no way for you to know those things about me.”

“I apologize, too. I didn’t mean to frighten you, Commander. I just wanted you to believe me. I won’t tell anyone else what I saw.” Cat said, looking down at the ground.

“Maker, what did she see…” Cullen said under his breath.

“Now that we have that addressed, there is the matter of your lessons.” Leliana said.

Cat turned to Leliana. “Lessons?”

“You will be representing the inquisition. The fact that you are so young will of course be taken into consideration, but there are still many things you should know.” Josephine explained. “Leliana already mentioned that you will learn about magic with Solas. You will have lessons on nobility, history, and courtly manners with me for now. Cullen will assess your riding abilities and teach you as needed.” She picked up a book from the table. “I picked out this book to start with. Brother Genitivi is a good place to start in terms of history and politics.” She handed the book to Cat.

Cat stared at it, flipping it open. The runic looking letters ran across the pages.

*Yup, still can’t read this.*

“Um, I can’t read this.” Cat said, embarrassed.

“Oh! We should have realized that you might not have learned. I apologize.” She thought for a moment, tapping the end of her pen to her chin. “I will ask Master Tethras if he is willing to teach you.” She made another note. “Who better than the famed author to teach you to read and write in the common trade tongue?” She noticed Cat’s downcast face. “It is nothing to be ashamed of, Mistress Bell, and it is easily remedied.”

“I think that is all for now. We have a few more things to discuss, but you are free to go, Herald.” Cassandra said. “Kaaras should be waiting for you outside of the Chantry. If he is not, come back here. We don’t want you walking around Haven unaccompanied.”

“Please come see me later. I would like to discuss what you remember and see if we can find your family.” Leliana requested.

“Okay, thank you and I will.” Cat gave another curtsy and left. She closed the door behind her and leaned against the wall, her heart pounding.

*Talk to a Mother, learn magic, learn to read and write, close the breach. This is so much! I am just one kid!*

Chapter End Notes
Just a few notes.
First, to make it easier on myself, timeline wise, I have decided that each month is 30 days long. For more information about the Thedan calendar, I am referencing http://rederiswrites.tumblr.com/post/130524594571/thedosian-calendar-and-rough-modern-equivalents. I have everything outlined and figured out a way for it all to work in a two year period without being too crazy (if only fast travel was real).

Second, I decided that since the written language was developed by dwarves and the language we see in game looks runic, that it is runic and therefore, Cat would not know it. Her knowledge might come up at some point, but we will see.

Again, if there are any questions or comments, feel free to comment below. Thank you for all the encouraging notes thus far!
Kaaras found her there, leaning against the wall. He surveyed the situation and joined her, his large frame settling beside her small one.

“You okay, little bit?” He asked.

“I don’t know. It’s just…it’s a lot to deal with, Kaaras. I think they are maybe forgetting that I am just a kid. They think I am blessed by Andraste or something, but I don’t feel special or blessed or anything. I’m just me and I don’t actually remember who me is.”

You think Andraste would give ME a sign if she sent me.

Kaaras put his arm around her and pulled her in for a hug. “I know it is a lot to take in, little bit. But you aren’t alone.” He pushed her chin up so she was looking him in the eyes. “I don’t know if you were sent by Andraste or not. I don’t even know if I believe in Andraste or not. But I do know that I will be by your side, whatever comes.”

Cat felt tears welling up in her eyes.

“Why? Why do you care about me? About the Inquisition?” Cat sniffled out. There was a pause before he answered.

“I don’t have a good answer for you. I saw you fall out of the rift. As you said, just a kid. Maybe I’m getting old and sentimental, but I felt protective. An organization like this, this Inquisition, it could do a lot of good, but, it could also go bad. I have worked as a mercenary for most of my life, we keep things small, but we work for nobles and politicians. I have seen that lot and they use people to get what they want. I want to make sure the Inquisition doesn’t use you badly, little bit. I will be here to remind them that you are a person, not their pawn.”

They both sat there on the ground for a few minutes, Cat trying to get her emotions under control. Eventually, Kaaras got up and stretched, then put his hand out for Cat.

“Ready to face the world, little bit? If you are feeling up to it, there are some people I would like you
to meet.” He pulled her to her feet. “But only if you feel up to it.”

I guess I can’t hide from the world forever. And I trust Kaaras.

Cat gave a nod, grabbing his hand and letting him lead her from the Chantry.

**

Kaaras led her through the village, pointing out places of interest. It was mid-day, the sun right above them, providing warmth to the cold landscape. They crunched through the snow-covered path to a building. The building had carved wolves surrounding the door. Or were they mabari? Cat wasn’t sure. Kaaras opened the door and a wave of warmth and laughter greeted them.

The interior was bustling, most of the tables and chairs filled. The tavern smelled strongly of food and alcohol. There were a number of soldiers, scouts, and town folk milling about. A few noticed the Herald’s entrance and gave a nod or raised a glass. Cat was hoping to be discrete, but it seems that she wouldn’t be able to wander unobserved around Haven.

I don’t know why Leliana and the others were concerned about me walking alone. It seems I will have people watching me where ever I go.

Kaaras moved them to the bar, people stepping out of the way of his imposing form. As they approached, a human woman greeted them.

“Hello, what can I...Oh, Maker, you’re her. You’re the Herald of Andraste. And you were sent to shame us for mistreating the elves. I pay my elves good and proper, you should know. Friend of the alienage and all, and...I mean, I’m Flissa. Can I get you something?” Cat didn’t really know how to respond.

“Thank you, Flissa, for being a friend? I guess...something to eat would be nice?” Cat looked up to Kaaras for approval and he nodded.

“Make it lunch for two, Flissa.” Kaaras said.

“Of course! I will get right on that! Have a seat wherever and I will bring it out to you!” She quickly ducked into a back room that Cat assumed housed the kitchen.

Kaaras tugged at Cat’s arm and motioned for her to head towards a table. It was mostly filled, but there were notably two empty seats. As they come nearer to the table, Cat realized that she knew the occupants. Malika and Ylsa had seats by the wall, drinking out of flagons and eyeing the room. Mahonan was at the end, beside Ylsa. Evie had her back to the tavern crowd, her bow across her back.

Kaaras took the seat beside Evie and had Cat take the corner seat at the opposite end from Mahonan. Ylsa and Mahonan gave out a warm welcome to Cat, Evie and Malika giving nods of respect.

They just got settled when Flissa hurried over with a tray. She set down two plates of food (some meat, potatoes, and non-descript vegetables), two forks, and a glass of water and a tankard of beer.

“Can I get you anything else?” She asked nervously.

“This is fine, thank you, Flissa.” Kaaras answered, picking up the tankard.

“Alright, just let me know if you need anything.” She left, looking back frequently as she walked away.
Cat looked around the table and noted that everyone else had already eaten, so she dug in. The food was good, if a little bland. She just started to cut into the piece of meat when Kaaras spoke up again.

“So, little bit, I know you already know Mahonan and Ylsa. And you briefly met Evelyn Trevelyan and Malika Cadash. We have gathered together because we think you will need protection in the coming days and the higher-ups agree.” Cat looked at each of them, then back at Kaaras. “We are going to be your bodyguards, little bit. Well, all of us except for Ylsa, she has other things she needs to do.”

Ylsa chimed in then. “Someone has to report back to the clan. And since Mahonan has decided to join the Inquisition and doesn’t want to leave, it will have to be me.” Ylsa said.

But she is one of the few people I know. And she will be travelling alone? How far away is the clan?

Ylsa saw Cat’s conflicted face and reassured her. “Don’t worry, da’len. After I give my report, I plan to come back here. Can’t trust this one not to get into trouble.” She pointed to Mahonan. “You will have to watch him while I’m away.” Ylsa gave Cat a conspiratorial wink.

“Hey! I don’t always get in trouble! I’m just curious by nature. DeShanna says that makes me a good First.” Mahonan replied.

“You keep telling yourself that.”

“Anyways.” Kaaras cut-in, eyeing the two elves. “We have devised a schedule, but we want to run it by you first. Evie would take early morning, Mahonan afternoon, I would take evening, and then Malika would take the overnight shift. Does that sound okay to you?” Kaaras was looking to Cat for her reaction.

“That seems fine to me. Do you really think I need bodyguards?” Cat asked.

“Many people are not happy with the Inquisition and you are not exactly in a position to defend yourself. Therefore, Maker willing, we will defend you, Cat.” Evie said, with conviction in her voice.

“Your magic hand is the only thing that can stop the hole in the sky. That means you have power and people with power are always under threat. Doesn’t matter if you are a kid or not.” Malika stated nonchalantly, taking a drink.

“People won’t like that you are an elf, da’len. History has shown that the world is not kind to elves with power. We will be there to keep anyone from getting to you.” Mahonan added.

“We will travel escort you around the village and travel with you when the Inquisition sends you out. We will need you to trust us, but I know trust is earned, not given. Take some time to get to know us, little bit.” Kaaras said.

Cat spent the lunch time getting to know them. She took stock of what she learned.

Malika is hard to read, but I sense that she is angry about something. Not with me, but something. I’m not super clear why she volunteered for my protective detail.

Evie is obviously a devout Andrastian, with how much she has been mentioning the Maker. I should probably find out more about him and the Chantry.

Mahonan is nice, if a bit too curious for his own good. Sarcastic too. I think he will be fun to have around.
Kaaras seems like a solid dude. I think I trust him the most. He seems earnest in his intent. I think he really cares about what happens to me, not just because of the mark on my hand.

The group wrapped up their meeting. Ylsa said her goodbyes. Mahonan left with her. He was going to see her on her way. Malika went to get some sleep before her night shift and Evie followed after her, saying she wanted to check in with someone at the Chantry. That left Cat with Kaaras to finish their meal.

I guess I really won’t be alone. I think that is a good thing.

For some reason, I trust them already. Maybe that is not wise, but the feeling is there. I will trust my instincts until they steer me wrong.

**

After lunch, Kaaras let her explore the village a bit, trailing behind her, but answering her questions as they went. They went by the training fields were the Commander was putting the soldiers through drill. They passed the small paddocks that served as the stables and the forge, the blacksmiths hard at work. A man with a big fuzzy mustache gave a shout in greeting. After an hour of wandering, Cat finally decided to make her way to Leliana’s tent.

Maybe she knows more about where I came from, where my family is. I had to have a family, didn’t I? Friends at least. Someone to look after me.

I don’t know what to make of Leliana. I think I should trust her, and yet, something is telling me to be leery.

As they neared the tent, Kaaras took up position outside and Cat made her way in. She saw Leliana kneeling and reciting something. Cat stood back, uncertain, and not wanting to interrupt her.

The Chant of Light. Right.

“Blessed are the peacekeepers, the champions of the just. Blessed are the righteous, the lights in the shadow. In their blood the Maker’s will is written.’ Is that what you want from us? Blood? To die so that your will is done? Is death your only blessing?” Leliana turned towards Cat. “You speak for Andraste, no? What does the Maker’s prophet have to say about all this? What’s his game?”

“I don’t know if I was sent by the Maker or Andraste, but I can only speak for myself. I’m sorry.” Cat said, a bit baffled.

“Then we can only guess at what he wants.” Leliana said. “The Chantry teaches that the Maker abandoned us. He demands repentance for our sins. He demands it all. Our lives. Our deaths. Justinia gave Him everything she had, and He let her die!”

She must have really cared about the Divine.

Cat approached Leliana and gently set her hand on her shoulder. “I’m sorry for your loss, Leliana.”

“She was the Divine. She led the faithful. She was their heart!” Leliana said, her voice full of emotion. She slipped from under Cat’s hand and stood up and paced to the tent opening. “If the Maker doesn’t intervene to save the best of His servants, what good is He? I used to believe I was chosen, just as some say you are. I thought I was fulfilling His purpose for me, working with the Divine, helping people. But now she’s dead. It was all for nothing. Serving the Maker meant nothing.”
“I don’t know if I’m the one to talk to about this. Perhaps Evie could help you? I don’t really know that much about the Maker.” Cat tried to comfort her, but was at a loss for what to do.

“No, this is my burden. I regret that I even let you see me like this. It was a moment of weakness. It won’t happen again.” Leliana straightened her back and her face went blank, all emotion gone in a flash. “I asked you here to go over what you remembered, from before. I have been trying to track down where you came from, who your family is. What do you remember?”

“Oh, um, not much. I remember my name, or at least part of it. I have tried to remember more, but I get mostly blanks. I do remember a woman singing and a man laughing. I think they were my parents.” Cat looked at Leliana’s calculating face. “I just remember impressions mostly. Sometimes, it feels like I know more, but I just can’t recall it? If that makes any sense.”

“Do the names Cyyrith and Danora mean anything to you?” Leliana asked.

Cat thought a minute. “No…the names don’t mean anything to me. Or I can’t remember them if they should. Who are they?”

“They attended the conclave and were said to travel with a child. If I learn more, I will let you know. Now, I should get back to work.” Leliana gave a curt nod of dismissal and then turned to her desk.

*Why is Leliana so hardened? I feel like this is wrong. I wish there was some way I could-*

A flash of memory entered Cat’s mind. A couple names. Butler and Farrier.

“Wait…Leliana, I need to tell you something.” Cat rubbed her temple, trying to make sense of what she suddenly knew.

Leliana turned with interest, her face still blank, but her eyes gave her away. “Yes? Did you remember something?”

“I think it is something that will happen. Do the names Farrier and Butler mean something to you?” Cat asked.

Leliana considered for a moment and then nodded. “What do you know?”

“I think Butler is going to kill Farrier. I don’t know why or when or anything else. Just that fact.” Cat said. Cat saw Leliana’s eyes just slightly darken, she turned and started pulling reports up.

“Thank you for telling me. I had some suspicions, but this…” She started mumbling under her breath.

Another memory hit Cat. Images of Leliana. A future that did not look bright. She reached up to grip Leliana’s arm. “Leliana! Don’t kill him! You cannot kill him, it is very important that you do not.”

Leliana looked at Cat questioningly, weighing her options. Cat saw her make a decision. “You feel very strongly about this.” She sighed. “Very well. I will think of another way to deal with him.” She called for a messenger. Cat moved her hand away and started to leave. “Thank you for telling me, Herald. If you see anything else, please let me know.”

*I think that went well.*

**

As Cat exited the tent, Kaaras took up position behind her again.
I guess this is the new normal.

Not that I remember what normal was for me.

As they started down the steps towards the lower part of the village, a messenger flagged them down.

“Yes, what is it?” Kaaras asked.

“Message for the Herald, sir. Lady Josephine would like to see you in her office, if it is not too much trouble.” With that the woman gave Cat a small bow and ran off on some other errand.

“You okay with this?” Kaaras asked.

“Yes, let’s go.”

**

The room that Josephine was using for an office was nice, but kind of dark.

They need some windows in this place.

Josephine was intently writing something at her desk, she didn’t even notice as they entered. Kaaras gave a knock on the door frame.

“Lady Montilyet, you asked to see the Herald?”

“Oh, yes, please come in.” She rose from her chair, shuffling some papers to the side and grabbing a few others. Kaaras leaned against the wall, but motioned Cat to step closer. She approached the desk.

“Now, I just wanted to apologize for earlier. In our first meeting, we put rather a lot of responsibility on you.” Josephine pulled a small tin from her desk. “We just want you to be informed, but you will not be without guidance. We would like you to make appearances at certain places and meet some people. Of course, closing the rifts is very important, but we will do everything in our power to protect you. I fear we did not make that clear.” She opened the tin. “I hope we can be friends and so I thought I might share a secret with you. This is my stash of sweets. Would you like one?” Cat smelled the contents from where she stood.

Chocolate.

Cat gave Josephine a big smile. “Yes, I would like one, thank you.”

They each grabbed a piece. Cat set the small chunk of chocolate on her tongue and let it melt, savoring the sweetness. She let out a small sound of delight.

Josephine might be my new favorite person.

“I thought you might enjoy it. Chocolate is my weakness. Expensive this far from the city, but I always try to keep a small stash. I am more than willing to share with you, Miss Bell.”

Josephine put the tin away. “Now, there is something else I needed to talk to you about.”

Uh-oh, what now?

“You have some standing, as the Herald. It would be proper for you to have a maid, someone to help you prepare for the day. There are not many options right now, but Lady Trevelyan has offered the services of her lady’s maid, if you would like.”
Someone else I don’t know? Wasn’t Lena working as a maid already?

“What about Lena, the woman who has been helping me already? Unless she already has a job.”

“If you prefer, of course. Lena does not have the training that Helena has, but she has waited on many of the nobles here. I could always arrange training…yes that could work, if that is what you want.”

“If Lena wants to, I would like her to be the one. She is nice. Not that Helena isn’t, I just don’t know her and I already know Lena, she did my hair today and helped me with my outfit and…I’m sorry, I’m rambling.”

“It is not problem, Miss Bell.” Josephine grinned. “I will talk with Lena to see if she is amenable to the idea.” Josephine made a note. “One last thing. We should start our lessons tomorrow morning. Just come to my office when you are ready. We can figure out a schedule then.”

“Okay, I will.”

“Have a good evening, miss Bell. I will see you tomorrow.”

**

Kaaras walked Cat back to her cabin. He checked, looking under the bed and verifying that the windows were locked. He added some logs to the fire and stoked it. Once he finished, he gave Cat a quick hug and left her alone, taking up a guard position outside.

Cat explored her space, getting to know her surroundings.

This is a big cabin for one girl. You could fit like 10 of me in here comfortably.

The fireplace was nice and large. There was the bed, big enough for two adults, with a large wooden trunk at the foot of the bed. The desk was mostly empty, except for a quill and ink and the note Cat had seen before. There was also a small box on the desk. She opened it and found a small dog figurine, some coins in a purse, a handkerchief, and some plants.

I wonder whose things these are. Is this a mabari?

I think this is elfroot. Maybe?

Curious.

She put the items back in the box and closed it for now. There were several pelts tacked to the wall. For insulation or decoration, Cat was uncertain. There were a few rugs across the stone floor. Some shelves with various bottles and household items and a shelf with books. A small thread-bare couch was set near the fireplace.

At the front of the cabin, by the door, there was storage and a small kitchen area. Various herbs and plants hung drying from the ceiling. There was a water pump with a small basin in the kitchen and a few simple dishes.

I wonder who lived here before? Where did they…oh, they probably died.

With that cheery thought, she laid on the bed for a while, just decompressing everything that had happened. She tried to remember more from before, but nothing seemed useful. Just a flash of memory. A bit of a tune, a feeling here or there. It was frustrating.
Cat didn’t know how long she just laid there, but she was roused by a knock on the door. She opened it to find Kaaras there, with Lena carrying a metal basin of some kind.

“Hello. What’s going on?”

“My lady, Lady Josephine told me that I was to be your maid. I thought you might like a bath, so I brought a tub with me.” She was still timid, but she also sounded hopeful. Or grateful.

Cat hadn’t realized, but she did feel rather grime-y. Thinking back, not as gross as she probably should. Did someone wash her before?

“I would like that, thank you.” She let Lena in and Kaaras closed the door for them. Lena set about getting the bath ready. Setting some water on the fire to heat and then filling the rest of the basin. She pulled out a bar of soap from her apron and set it to the side. Cat didn’t really know what to do, so she just sat on the bed and watched. She had tried to help, but Lena had just shooed her away.

At least she didn’t bow again.

“Wait, Lena, Josephine asked you if you wanted to be my maid, right? She didn’t just order you to?” Cat asked, suddenly worried.

“Oh yes, my lady, Lady Josephine asked me. It is my great honor to serve you.”

Cat felt a bit uncomfortable with someone serving her. She wasn’t really sure she liked the idea of servants in general, but at least they are paid…

“They are going to pay you right?” Cat asked.

“Yes, my lady. Lady Josephine said I will be paid as a lady’s maid, which is more than I made before.” She checked the water on the fire. “I wanted to thank you, my lady. Lady Josephine said you specifically requested me.” She looked up hesitantly. “May I ask why?”

“I like you, Lena. You helped me a lot already.” Cat said. “If you want to thank me, would you please call me Cat?”

“Yes, I think I can do that.” She checked the water again and satisfied that it was hot enough, she poured it into the tub. She tested the water and then motioned for Cat. “It is ready, my la-Cat.”

Cat quickly undressed and got into the tub. It felt amazing. She sighed as she leaned back, letting the warmth wash over her. A moment later, Lena helped her wash her hair, undoing the braid and combing out the knots. It wasn’t long before Cat had drifted off to sleep.

Lena gently roused her and helped her dress. She then asked Kaaras to help her dump the tub. Seeing Cat’s sleepy face, Kaaras had a tray of food brought in for her. She ate and then, just managing to murmur a thank you to Kaaras and Lena, quickly fell asleep.

Chapter End Notes

Note: This is not beta-read, so all mistakes are my own.
Dreaming of Haven - part 2

Chapter Summary

Cat starts her lessons and gets to know people.

Chapter Notes

This is a long one, peeps. I could have split in in two, but then I was like, nah.

Cat woke early the next day, sunlight streaming into her room. The chantry bell rang out 6 times and she snuggled back into the blankets. The fire had died down overnight, so the room was chilly. The remnants of her dream drifted off, just the feeling of running and the sound of a song she didn’t know.

After a few minutes of debating, Cat worked up the courage to venture out of bed.

Cold cold cold cold cold.

She quickly pulled on her boots and slipped the coat over her nightdress, before she went to the door and opened it a bit. Evie was outside, fletching arrows, by the look of things. The sun was just cresting the mountains and the village was waking up. Cullen ran by with a group of soldiers. They didn’t have their usual armor on. A couple of them started to lag behind.

“Keep up, men, just three more laps to go.” Cullen said, leading them onwards. One of the men at the front had a face tattoo and Cat would swear it looked familiar.

How do they have that much energy this early in the morning? Unnatural.

“Good Morning, Evie. Do you know what I am supposed to do now?” Cat asked.

Evie rose from the bench she was sitting on and set aside her work, standing at attention.

“Good Morning, Cat. Lena should be here soon and she can get you sorted. Then, when you are ready, we will go and see Lady Josephine. It is a little early for the ambassador, so perhaps you would like to take a walk before that. Can I help you with anything right now?”

“No, I’ll just wait for Lena. Thank you, Evie.” Cat gave Evie an awkward wave and slipped back inside. She looked around the cabin again, but, not surprisingly, didn’t find anything new.

I guess I can put logs on the fire and stoke it. I saw Kaaras do it, it didn’t seem too hard.

She dropped two logs into the fire and started poking at it, trying to get it to catch. It took a few tries, but she finally got it. Cat felt rather accomplished.

She was still poking at the fire, more for something to do than with any actual purpose, when the door opened and Lena walked in.
“Oh, Lady Cat, you don’t need to do that! I can get it.” Lena set down an armful of clothes and a small tray and then took the poker from Cat. “I’m sorry I am late, I didn’t realize you would be up so early.”

“It is no trouble, Lena, I haven’t been up for long and I don’t even know how early it is.”

“It is just after 6 now, Lady Cat.” Lena set the poker aside and set out the cloths on the bed. “I have your outfit ready for the you, if you want to get dressed now.”

“‘Yes, that would be great, Lena.”

In short order, Lena had Cat dressed, her hair plaited back, and the bed made. She left Cat with her breakfast and told Cat that the box on the desk was full of her belongings.

Those are my things? Huh.

Cat ate quickly and then put the few things from the box into her pockets.

I guess I have money. Not that I know how much this is. Maybe I can buy something?

Cat, dressed warmly in her green outfit, exited the cabin. Evie was still there, but now she was done fletching and was just standing watch.

“I would like to take that walk now, if that is okay, Evie.”

“Of course, Cat. Wherever you would like.”

They wandered around the town. Cat was finally starting to feel like she knew the place. They exited the gate and approached the training field. The Commander was leading the men through calisthenics. The man with the tattooed face was also there, but he was at a table, looking at a report. Cat was curious and so she went up to him.

He looked up when she approached. Once he realized who she was, he stood at attention.

“Good morning, Herald.” He said with a thick accent. “How can I help you?”

A Starkhaven accent, I think.

“Good morning! I just wanted to introduce myself around. I guess you already know me. May I ask your name, sir?” Cat asked politely.

I wonder if I will get used to people calling me Herald?

“It beg your pardon, Herald. Knight-Captain Rylen at your service.”

“Nice to meet you, Rylen.” Cat stuck her hand out to him. “Or should I call you Knight-Captain? Which would you prefer?”

“You may call me whichever you prefer, Herald. I am here to serve.” He took her hand tentatively and shook it.

Can’t people just have a preference? Sigh.

“Very well, Rylen then. You can call me Cat, if you like. Where are you from, if I may ask? You have a particular accent that I can’t place.” Rylen finally loosened up a bit and actually gave a small laugh at that.
“Starkhaven, originally. I served with the templars in Starkhaven until they all ran off to the hills, barking at the moon. Commander Cullen offered me a job and I was glad to do anything to help stop all this madness.”

*So I was right. Starkhaven. In the Free Marches.*

“And Starkhaven is in the Free Marches, right?” Cat asked.

Evie finally spoke up. “Yes, Starkhaven is in the Free Marches. As is Ostwick, where I am from, Kirkwall, Tantervale, and a few other smaller cities.”

“Yes. It is always nice to meet a fellow Free Marcher, Lady Trevelyan.” Rylen gave a small bow to her and Evie gave low nod in return. A soldier ran up to the group.

“Excuse me, Knight-Captain. The commander wanted you to help him demonstrate something.”

“Of course. If you will excuse me. Herald Cat. Lady Trevelyan.” With a bow and a salute, he was off.

Cat and Evie watched for a minute and then Cat turned back towards the gate.

“So, what is Ostwick like?”

“It is…not very exciting, Cat. Ostwick is considered the most Ferelden of the Marcher cities. We have a Teryn and then many nobles of lesser status. My family is noble and one of the largest families. The city itself has a double wall, which it needs to protect itself from invasion. It is situated along the Waking Sea, between Kirkwall and Hercinia. We have problems with raiders, just like any other port city, well except for Kirkwall. It is a trade city and it does well enough. We have a fantastic Wintersend celebration that the entire city takes part in.” She considered for a moment. “It is home.”

“Maybe I will see it someday.”

Evie smiled at that. “Perhaps. My family would love to host the Herald of Andraste.”

They made there was towards the chantry. The bell rang again, 7 times. Cat noticed a long table set up, with a blond man setting up things. He looked a little familiar. She wandered up to the table and looked at some of the wares. There were weapons and armor, as well as food and cloth and random little things.

“Ah, you’re awake and out of Lady Cassandra’s clutches. And here I paid that little knife-ear to inform me the moment you were free. No matter, no matter. Seggrit, honored to meet you. Thank you for all you’ve done, and hopefully, will still do.”

*Knife-ear? Does he mean elf? That seems rude.*

*And who did he pay to tell him? Would that have been Lena?*

Evie looked uncomfortable. “Watch who you call knife-ear, sir.”

“I meant to offence.”

*I don’t think I like him at all. I guess I won’t buy anything from him.*

Cat just gave him a nod and moved on. She made her way closer to the Chantry. Near Leliana’s tent, a woman was looking over paper on a table. She also looked familiar. As Cat approached her, the
woman looked up.

“If you’re here to clean, Hess can get you a bucket and a broom. Anyone calls you “knife-ear,” you come to me.”

Cat was at a loss.

*I’m supposed to clean? Is it because I’m an elf? And she said knife-ear again. I think it is a slur.*

“Oh, you’re her. Threnn, Inquisition quartermaster. I’m doing what I can to supply this mess. Can I help you with something?”

“No, nothing, thank you.” Cat replied.

*I don’t know if I like her that much either. I guess she’s okay...*

Cat quickly made her way to the Chantry.

*I hope Josephine is ready for me.*

Cat made her way through the Chantry, going to the ambassador’s door. Cat heard voices behind the door, so she slowly opened it. Inside, she saw Josephine arguing with a man with a mask.

*He looks kind of silly. Why would he be wearing a mask?*

She had a flash of memory.

*Oh, right, it is an Orlesian thing.*

“The Inquisition cannot remain, Ambassador, it you can’t prove it was founded on Justinia’s orders.” The masked man said.

“This is an inopportune time, Marquis. More of the faithful flock here each day.” Josephine said. She noticed the entrance of Cat. “But allow me to introduce you to the brave soul who risked her life to slow the magic of the Breach. Miss Bell, this is the Marquis DuRellion, one of Divine Justinia’s greatest supporters.”

He looked slightly taken aback at Cat, because of her age, elfy-ness, or both, she didn’t know. He quickly recovered.

“And the rightful owner of Haven. House DuRellion lent Justinia these lands for a pilgrimage. This ‘Inquisition’ is not a beneficiary of this arrangement.”

“People have been injured. You can’t just turn them out onto the snow.” Evie interjected.

“And who benefits if they stay?”

“Divine Justinia, Marquis. The Inquisition – not the Chantry – is sheltering the pilgrims who mourn her.” Josephine said.

“Why is the Chantry ignoring the faithful?” He asked.

“Because it remains in shock.”

The Marquis sighed.
“We face a dark time, Your Grace. Divine Justinia would not want her passing to divide us. She would, in fact, trust us to forge new alliances to the benefit of all, no matter how strange they might seem.” Josephine

“I’ll think on it, Lady Montilyet. The Inquisition might stay in the meanwhile.” He left.

“Does the Marquis actually own Haven?” Cat asked, bewildered.

“His Grace’s position is not so strong as he presents it. Despite their Ferelden relations, the DuRellions are Orlesian. If the marquis wishes to claim Haven, Empress Celene must negotiate with Ferelden on his behalf. Her current concerns are a bit larger than minor property disputes.”

“I am sorry for interrupting, Josephine. I heard voices, but I didn’t realize you were meeting with the marquis.” Cat said.

“You did little harm. In truth, the debate was most beneficial as practice for those to come.”

“You expect more nobles in come to Haven?” Cat asked.

“Undoubtedly. And not just nobles. Each visitor will spread the story of the Inquisition after they depart. An ambassador should ensure the tale is as complimentary as possible.”

*Seems like a tough job. Having to deal with people like the marquis.*

“How did you become the Inquisition’s ambassador?” Cat asked.

“Sister Leliana approached me. We’ve been acquainted for quite some time. For better or worse, being the Inquisition’s diplomat had become as interesting as she promised.” Josephine said with some humor in her voice.

Evie jumped in then. “If you don’t mind my asking, what sort of dealings have you had with nobility?”

“For some years, I was the royally appointed court ambassador from Antiva to Orles. The nobility of Thedas is a rather singular sphere. Those I’m not acquainted with, I know through reputation, Lady Trevelyan.”

“We—the Inquisition is lucky to have you as our diplomat, Josephine.” Cat said.

“Thank you. Let us hope so. Thedas’s politics have become…agitated as of late. I hope to guide us down smoother paths.” She set down her notes. “But you came here for your first lesson. Really, encountering the marquis was as good an introduction to Thedan politics as anything. Today, I wanted to start with the basics of the nobility. You heard us talk of Empress Celene, she is the ruler of Orlais. She is currently…”

**

After nearly two and a half hours learning the basics of the rulers of Thedas and some of the major political issues, Cat was more than ready for a break. Some of the things Josephine and Evie had said seemed familiar, so perhaps Cat knew them before or was it her strange knowledge? Who knows.

At 10 bells, Mahonan showed up to take over for Evie. He had a rather jaunty spring in his step.

“Good morning, how are you doing today? You look rather confused, da’len.” He greeted them.

“Good, I think. I am just trying to remember if a Teryn is higher than a Arl, who is above a Bann.
Did I get that right, Evie?"

“Yes, Cat. That is right. It will get easier.” Evie saw Cat’s look of disbelief. “Really, it will. I had my whole childhood to learn these things. Don’t feel bad that you don’t remember it all at once.”

Cat sighed. “Thanks, Evie.”

“I will see you tomorrow morning, Cat. Enjoy the rest of your day.” Evie said, with a small bow.

I wish people would stop bowing.

“You too, Evie.” Evie left them there, in front of the Chantry.

“Well, da’len. What would you like to do? After lunch, I am supposed to take you to Solas for a magic lesson. But, until then, the day is yours.” Mahonan said, sweeping his arm out to Haven, dramatically.

“I don’t know. I have already walked around Haven several times. I’m not sure what else there is to do or who I should meet.”

“Well, we could throw snowballs at the soldiers in the training field, test their response time. I doubt we will even get in trouble, what with you being the Herald and all. Or we could make a snow monster and hide it behind the barracks.” Mahonan suggested, a devious glint in his eyes.

His suggestions did make Cat laugh, easing the stress from her first lesson.

“Or, if you wanted to meet someone, we could go bug Adan, the apothecary. He is a bit of a grouch, but he did take care of you when you were out. Well, him and Solas.” Mahonan suggested.

“Sure, sounds like a plan.” Cat said. She started to walk off, but then turned to him. “Where would I find Adan?”

**

Mahonan led her to a cabin not too far from the Chantry. It didn’t really look all that different from any other cabin. They entered to find a bearded man in robes talking with a messenger.

“Flissa said to check with you to make sure these are safe to serve.” The woman said.

“They’re fine. Nobody will take sick as long as she boils them right. Smart woman for asking, though.” The man, Cat assumed Adan, said. He turned to them as the woman left.

“Look who’s back from the dead. Again.” Adan said.

“I’m sorry, I don’t remember meeting you before.” Cat said.

“I’d be surprised if you did. You weren’t particularly coherent. Someone had to patch you up after you fell out of Maker-knows-where, though, so you’re welcome.” He said, gruffly.

I don’t know why, but I like him. He did help me and his curmudgeon-yness is cute.

“Oh, well, thank you for helping me, sir.” Cat said and then thinking fast, gave him a quick hug.

Adan looked like he wasn’t expecting that reaction. “Yeah, well. You can pay me back by fixing the world. Name’s Adan. I’m in charge of keeping our little band here stocked with potions and elixirs.” He added as an aside. “Not that Seeker Pentaghast seems to care whether we’ve got the
supplies to actually do that.”

*Wait, I think there is something I can do for him.*

“Is there anything I can do to help?” Cat asked, eagerly.

*Please give me something to do.*

“We’re fine as far as raw labor goes. You’ve more important things to do than tend to me.” He said. “I only wish I’d been able to find Master Taigen’s notes. Old Bastard was working on something special. He died at the conclave, and his notes weren’t here. Been too busy dealing with the wounded to look for them.”


“We can always use more, but again, I am sure you have better things to do. If you find any interesting recipes on your travels, just bring them back to me and I can mix them up.” He said. “Now, I have work to do and I am sure you have other things you need to be doing. Good day.”

Well, I guess it is time to leave.

Cat left the cabin with Mahonan. She decided that with nothing else to do, she would hunt for elfroot and maybe find Master Taigen’s notes.

Unless he had them with him at the conclave…

**

As they exited the gate of Haven, Cat saw the commander yelling at a group of recruits.

“You there! There’s a shield in your hand. Block with it. If this man were your enemy, you’d be dead.”

*Harsh. Probably true, but kinda harsh. I should try to patch things up with the commander.*

“Lieutenant, don’t hold back. The recruits must prepare for a real fight, not a practice one.”

“Yes, Commander.” His lieutenant saluted and left, taking over with the yelling at the recruits.

Cullen finally noticed Cat and Mahonan.

“Ah, Herald, Good morning.” He shifted a bit. “As you can see, we’ve received a number of recruits – locals from Haven and some pilgrims. None made quite the entrance you did.”

Mahonan laughed at that and Cat gave a smile.

*Did the commander just make a humorous remark? Will wonders never cease.*

“Well, my entrance wasn’t exactly planned, Commander.”

“I’d be concerned if it was.”

Cullen started to walk back towards the end of the training recruits. He commented, to Mahonan more than to Cat. “I was recruited to the Inquisition in Kirkwall, myself. I was there during the mage uprising – I saw firsthand the devastation it caused.” A soldier came up and handed Cullen a report. “Cassandra sought a solution. When she offered me a position, I left the templars to join her cause. Now it seems we face something far worse.” He was looking at the report and talking to them at the
same time.

“You left the templars for this. You must believe the Inquisition can work.” Mahonan said.

“I do.” Cullen looked back to them. “The Chantry lost control of both templars and mages. Now they argue over a new Divine while the Breach remains. The Inquisition could act when the Chantry cannot. Our followers would be part of that. There’s so much we can– Forgive me. I doubt you came here for a lecture.”

“No, but if you have one prepared, I’d love to hear it.” Mahonan said.

Cullen laughed. “Another time perhaps.” Mahonan just grinned at him. Cullen cleared his throat, “I, ah…There’s still a lot of work ahead.”

Mahonan is flirting with him! I wonder where this will go? I guess the commander is cute enough, if a little up tight. Maybe Mahonan could help him with that?

Another soldier approached. “Commander! Ser Rylen has a report on our supply lines.”

“As I was saying.” Cullen said and then walked away with the soldier.

Well, I guess I will have to talk to the commander another time.

“Too bad.” Cat heard Mahonan say under his breath. She did notice he was watching the commander leave, rather closely.

“Mahonan Lavellan! Stop ogling the commander!” Cat reproached playfully, lightly slapping his arm.

“Very well, da’len. The things I do for you.” Cat laughed at him and led the way to the forest surrounding Haven.

Now I just have to find some elfroot…

**

After an hour of searching, they managed to find 20 elfroot plants AND Master Taigen’s notes. They had come across a cabin in the woods and Cat had had a vision. She walked right inside and found them, just like that. Mahonan took it in stride, joking with her and trying to get her to tell him his fortune.

They had a quick lunch at the tavern, where they ran into Varric. Josephine had talked to him and he agreed to teach Cat to read and write. Cat promised to stop by his tent after her magic lesson.

Cat was a bit apprehensive as Mahonan led her to the cabin next to Adan’s. What if she wasn’t any good?

Solas was standing outside, with a journal and he seemed to be observing the Breach. He turned as they neared him.

“Oh, da’len. The chosen of Andraste. A blessed hero sent to save us all.” He said with a bit of a smile.

“Do I get a to ride in on a unicorn for this?” Cat asked, cheekily.

“I would have suggested a griffon, but sadly, they’re extinct. Joke as you will, da’len, but posturing
is necessary.” He closed his journal.

No, they aren’t. Wait, what?

“I’ve journeyed deep into the Fade in ancient ruins and battlefields to see the dreams of lost civilizations. I’ve watched as hosts of spirits clash to reenact the bloody past in ancient wars both famous and forgotten. Every great war has its heroes. I’m just curious what kind you’ll be.”

He thinks I am going to be a hero? Me?

Mahonan asked curiously, “What do you mean, ruins and battlefields?”

Solas turned to him. “Any building strong enough to withstand the rigors of time has a history. Every battlefield is steeped in death. Both attract spirits. They press against the veil, weakening the barrier between our worlds. When I dream in such places, I go deep into the Fade. I can find memories no other living being has ever seen.”

“You fall asleep in the middle of ancient ruins? Isn’t that dangerous?” Mahonan followed up.

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

Giant spiders? No thank you.

“I’ve never heard of anyone going so far into the Fade. That’s extraordinary.” Mahonan stated.

“Thank you. It’s not a common field of study, for obvious reasons. Not so flashy as throwing fire or lightning. The thrill of finding remnants of a thousand-year-old dream? I would not trade it for anything. I will stay then, at least until the Breach had been closed.”

“You were going to leave?” Cat asked, surprised.

“I am an apostate surrounded by Chantry forces in the middle of a mage rebellion. Cassandra has been accommodating, but you understand my caution.”

“You helped me, you helped us all, Solas. I would not let them hurt you.” Cat said emphatically.

“How would you stop them?”

Cat thought a moment. “However I had to.”

“Thank you, da’len. For now, let us hope either the mages or the templars have the power to seal the Breach.” He opened the door to his cabin. “Now, let us go inside and see where you are at with your magic.”

“Okay, I have a lot of questions.” Cat said.

**

After 2 hours of lectures and tests, Cat was ready to be done with magic. She thought there would be a lot more explosions or flying or something.

She did learn that dwarves can’t be mages, because they aren’t connected to the Fade. She did get tested for the four primary branches of magic, which she now knows are Spirit, Inferno, Tempest, and Winter. Solas and Mahonan mentioned some other, but those are more advanced, ones like Entropy and Creation. Mahonan and Solas agreed that she had an affinity with Spirit and Inferno, but
her connection with Winter and especially Tempest was weaker. She would have to train much harder to learn spells from those studies of magic.

She learned about mana, which is how much magic she can use? And it is related to her connection to the Fade. She wasn’t entirely clear on how that worked. They instructed her on how to reach for her mana, which she realized is what she used when she created the fireball at the Breach. It was a strange sensation, but the two mages said it would become easier and even feel natural with practice.

Mages use staffs to channel energy for basic attacks and to enhance their casting. Solas talked a bit about magical theory and magic history (circles and such). Mahonan chimed in with how the Dalish teach magic, Cat could see that Solas was trying not to say anything.

*Does he not like the Dalish?*

Cat was not a fan of the Circles. They seemed restrictive at best. She certainly didn’t want to live the rest of her life in some tower. If she had a choice, she would much prefer to live with the Dalish.

As the lesson came to a close, Solas moved to test a theory. “With your permission, da’len, I would like to see if I can sense a magical block on your memory. There is no physical damage, but I would like to check.” He moved his hands to either side of her head after she gave a nod of assent. “This won’t hurt, but it may tickle, da’len.”

“Okay.” Cat closed her eyes as she felt the magic probe her mind. It was gentle, curious. The sensation was like wind tickling the skin, but not physical, but mental? She felt him searching, focusing, at times pressing.

After several minutes, a feeling of unease settled in her stomach.

*I can trust Solas, right? Why is it taking so long? Is he only looking for a block?*

Cat just finished this thought when Solas pulled away, a look of confusion on his face. “I am sorry, but this is beyond my ability. There is no barrier, but there is a magical mark. Something removed your memories. Perhaps in the creation of the breach itself, they were removed? I have not heard of such magic, even in all of my studies in the Fade. I will have to research this before I can tell you more, da’len. Ir abelas.”

Cat was disappointed, but not surprised. “So, there is no way to restore my memories?”

“I did not say that. I will not lie to you, there may not be a way. But, there are many texts I can consult, and I will study in the Fade, to try to find answers for you, da’len. Do not give up yet.”

“Okay. Thank you for trying, Solas.”

*I guess I will have to be content with the memories I do have.*

“Now, there is the question of your ability to ‘see’ things.” Solas said. Cat’s face dropped.

*And here I thought we were done for the day.*

Mahonan noticed her change in disposition and said, “Perhaps this can wait until tomorrow, Solas. It has been a long day and Cat still has a lesson scheduled with Varric.”

Solas looked like he was going to protest, but then seeing Cat’s face, said, “Very well, of course. It can wait.” He rose from his chair. “You did well today, da’len. Get some rest tonight and we will resume tomorrow.”
“Thank you, Solas.” Cat said, standing up from her own chair. She impulsively rushed in for a hug with Solas. He was better prepared for this hug and returned it. “Have a good rest of your day! Bye!” And then she was out the door. She didn’t want to give Solas time to change his mind.

She turned towards Adan’s cabin and entered, Mahonan hurrying to catch up.

When she entered, she found him working at the table, measuring out ingredients.

“You’re back, and in one piece.” He said.

“I am. We found some elfroot for you and you said you thought Master Taigen was working on something special. If it helps, I think I found his notes.” Cat said, handing the things over.

“Ha! The old codger was on the edge of a breakthrough here, but he couldn’t see it.” Adan said, looking over the notes. “You want some of these mixed up, you just give the word. Thank you.”

“You are quite welcome. I’m glad I could help.”

**

After leaving Adan’s, they made their way down to Varric’s tent. He was sitting by the fire, at a small desk, where it looked like he was answering letters. He set down his pen and walked over to them as they approached.

“So, now that Cassandra’s out of earshot, are you holding up all right, kid? I mean, you go from being the most wanted criminal in Thedas to joining the armies of the faithful. Most people would have spread that out over more than one day.”

“Honestly, I’m just trying to keep up with it all.”

“That makes two of us.” Varric said. “For days now, we’ve been staring at the Breach, watching demons and Maker-knows-what fall out of it. ‘Bad for morale’ would be an understatement. I still can’t believe anyone was in there and lived.”

“Why did you stay? Cassandra said you were free to go.” Mahonan asked.

“I could ask you the same thing, Stealth. I like to think I’m as selfish and irresponsible as the next guy, but this… Thousands of people died on that mountain. I was almost one of them. And now there’s a hole in the sky. Even I can’t walk away and just leave that to sort itself out.”

“Stealth?” Cat asked.

Mahonan groaned. “Varric’s nickname for me, da’len. It has to do with how I was caught by the Inquisition. There is no need to go into it.”

Varric leaned over to Cat. “I will tell you about it later.” He gave her a wink. “However, you might want to consider running at the first opportunity. I’ve written enough tragedies to recognize where this is going. Heroes are everywhere. I’ve seen that. But the hole in the sky? That’s beyond heroes. We’re going to need a miracle.” Cat turned to stare at the Breach. “Ah, but what do I know? You can here for a lesson, not doom and gloom. Let’s see where you are.”

Varric moved some papers around on his desk, putting some blank ones and a pen and ink in front of the chair. “Just sit here. Can you write your name?”

Cat sat down and took the pen, dipping it in ink. She thought of the runes she had seen before but
they didn’t bring anything to mind. However, when she placed the tip of the pen to the paper and thought of her name, she started writing. She wrote out, “My name is Cat Bell.” She smiled and showed it to Varric.

*Ha! I can write!*

“Hmm. That script looks a bit like Antivan or Rivaini, but I don’t recognize the words. Maybe it is Tevene? But then I thought that wasn’t used anymore.” He thought a minute. “Well, I guess weird just follows you, kid. Do you know any Trade?”

Cat shook her head.

*Well, I guess I can write an unknown language. That is helpful.*

“Alright, we will start at the beginning.” Varric took the pen. “I will write out the letters for you and then you will practice writing them. There is even a little ditty to remember the alphabet.”

**

During the lesson, Cat learned the alphabet song and practiced writing each letter, over and over again. By the end, though, she could passably write her name in Trade, which was something. Varric kept her spirits up by telling her stories and tales. He mentioned his friends from Kirkwall and once he realized that she, of course, had not read his Tale of the Champions, he promised to read it to her when they were travelling.

Kaaras took over for Mahonan during the lesson, becoming a comforting presence behind her as she practiced.

“That should do it for the day, kid. You are a fast learner. Same time tomorrow?”

“That sounds good, Varric, thank you.” Cat gave him a hug and then walked off, taking some notes to study with her.

“See you later, kid!” Varric called after her.

As they walked away, Cat told Kaaras about her day. They walked around outside of Haven, passing the forge and training field again. They wandered into the woods and Cat showed him the cabin she and Mahonan had found. They went on aways further and stumbled across an abandoned logging stand. Kaaras said he would tell Threnn about it, they might be able to use it. They saw a few rams and even a druffalo in the distance. It was nice.

“Kaaras, do Evie and Malika know about my…abilities?” Cat asked as they walked back to Haven.

“They know as much as I do, which isn’t much, little bit.” He looked down to her. “Evie just sees it as another sign that you are blessed by Andraste. Malika…Malika just thinks it is a weird mage thing. I thought they should know, since they will be protecting you. Should I not have told them?”

“No, it is fine, I just wondered.” They walked the rest of the way in silence. As they approached the training field, they saw Cassandra pummeling a dummy. Cat decided to check in with her.

Cat and Kaaras stood and watched for a moment as Cassandra attacked. She did a complicated move and then made a disgusted noise at the dummy.

“You’re kind of a force of nature aren’t you.” Kaaras said.
“When I need to be.” Cassandra said.

“It’s impressive.”

“You flatter me.”

“Doesn’t make the statement untrue.” Kaaras retorted.

_Kaaras and Cassandra? That could work…_

Cassandra looked to see that Cat was with him.

“Did I do the right thing? What I have set in motion here could destroy everything I revered my whole life. One day, they might write about me as a traitor, a madwoman, a fool. And they may be right.”

“What do you believe, Cassandra?” Cat asked, genuinely curious.

“I believe you are innocent. I believe more is going on here than we can see. And I believe no one else cares to do anything about it. They will stand in the fire and complain that it is hot. But is this the Maker’s will? I can only guess.”

“Do you think I’m the Herald of Andraste?”

“I think you were sent to help us. I hope you were. But the Maker’s help takes many forms. Sometimes it’s difficult to discern who it truly benefits, or how.”

Cat nodded.

_That sounds logical, I guess._

“What happens now?”

“Now we deal with the Chantry’s panic over you before they do even more harm. Then we close the Breach. We are the only ones who can. After that, we find out who is responsible for this chaos, and we end them. And if there are consequences to be paid for what I have done, I pay them. I only pray the price is not too high.”

“If it matters, I think the Inquisition can do good, Cassandra.” Cat said, supportively.

“Thank you, at least you are convinced.” Cassandra dropped her sword to the ground. “My trainers always said, ‘Cassandra you are too brash. You must think before you act.’ I see what must be done and I do it! I see no point in running around in circles like a dog chasing its tail. But I misjudged you in the beginning, did I not? I thought the answer was before me, clear as day. I cannot afford to be so careless again.”

“I guess it was rather suspicious, me being the only survivor and all that.”

“I was determined to have someone answer for what happened. Anyone. Even you, a child.” She shook her head. “You’ve said you don’t remember if you were chosen. But you did not say…do you believe in the Maker?”

“I honestly can’t say. As with everything else about my life before the Breach, I don’t remember. Perhaps I did. Or perhaps I followed Elven gods, or something else.”

“I suppose it doesn’t really matter now. I have to believe we were put on this path for a reason, even
if you do not. Now it simply remains to see where it leads us.” Cassandra picked up her sword. “Have a pleasant evening, Herald, Kaaras.”

**

Cat and Kaaras went back to her cabin after that. Kaaras had Lena bring dinner for the three of them (Cat insisted) and they had a quiet evening in. Cat started yawning and Lena offered to tell her a story, about the Black Fox. Kaaras was set to take his place outside, but Cat asked him to stay a while. He agreed and Cat climbed up in his lap with a blanket, snuggling. Lena wove a tale of a dashing rogue who ridiculed the tyrannical lord of Val Chevin and ventured off with his merry-band of companions.

_**I am lucky to have these people with me.**_

Lena was just in the middle of a daring escapade, when Cat fell asleep to dreams of adventures and foxes.
Dreaming of Haven - part 3

Chapter Summary

Cat’s life gets structured and she has a bad encounter (warning: some violence).

Chapter Notes

Now with art!
I love this design so much!
https://daydreamingdragonage.tumblr.com/post/176927406961/daydreamweaver-cat-the-icon-i-commissioned-from

See the end of the chapter for more notes

From there, Cat’s days started to take on a routine. She would get up in the morning, get breakfast, practice her writing, and then go to her lesson with Josephine and Evie from 8 – 10. She had met Minaeve after one of the lessons. She is researching demons and other things, magically. Minaeve was nice, and she knew a lot about magical enemies and stuff. She was the one who told Cat about the tranquil, which Cat was horrified about. Cat was glad that Minaeve was looking after them though and Cat was determined to be on the lookout for things to help Minaeve’s research.

After her etiquette and history lesson, Mahonan would take over and accompany her to her riding lesson with Cullen. (Mahonan told her that Cullen wasn’t interested in him, apparently. Cat replied that Cullen had bad taste, apparently, which made Mahonan laugh.)
After her riding lesson, Cat would hunt for elfroot in the area, taking whatever she found to Adan. He got used to her daily visits, warming to her a bit, though still keeping his gruff manner. She would then go to the tavern for lunch. On a good day, she would see Varric, Rylen, and/or Minaeve there. Flissa had finally come around and stopped freaking out at the sight of Cat, which was a nice change.

After lunch, it was magic lessons with Solas and Mahonan, then writing lessons with Varric. Kaaras would take over and she would have lessons on the Maker and the Chantry with Cassandra or Leliana. Once they had realized she knew next to nothing about Andraste or the Maker, they felt the need to teach her. She found it rather dull and she was almost certain that she did not follow the Maker before the Conclave incident. Some of the chantry folk seemed put out that a mage child was the “Herald of Andraste.” If she heard another Chantry sister say, “Magic must serve man not rule over him,” she might scream.

If she felt up to it after all her lessons, Kaaras would take her to dinner at the tavern, where she would chat with any number of people, or they would have a quiet night in with Lena in the cabin.

Cat hadn’t seen much of Malika since she was introduced, but she was assured that Malika was guarding her while she slept. Cat wanted to get to know her more, but she wasn’t sure how to go about it. She was thus far unsuccessful in figuring out where she spent her days at.

After a week of lessons, Cat thought she was going to burst with all the information she had taken in.

“How was your day so far, little bit?” Kaaras asked.

“Long. Lady Josephine started teaching me what she considered the ‘basics’ of table manners. Who needs that many forks anyways? Cullen went over the how to clean tack today, I didn’t even get on the horse! Then I spent hours sitting on the ground with Solas and Mahonan trying to teach me how to focus my magic in a lightning bolt, which ended with no magic except for my hair standing on end, which Mahonan found hilarious, the traitor, and a cold butt. Plus, Solas is no closer to figuring out how to restore my memories or why I seem to know things. He just says things like, “in all my travels in the fade,” blah blah blah. Now I have a short break before I have lessons on reading and writing with Varric and I need to see Master Harritt about a staff.” Cat gave out a huff. “It’s just a lot.”

“It will get easier, little bit. And if things get too bad, just tell me and I will get you out of here.” Cat stopped and stared up at him, seeing his smile, but also the solemn sincerity in his face.

“You mean that, don’t you? You would help me just leave the inquisition?”

“Yes, little bit. I swore to protect you, not the inquisition. And if they ask too much, we are gone.”

Cat pondered this for a few moments. She reached up and gently squeezed Kaaras’ arm.

“Thank you…I need-I want to stay and help, but thank you for offering.”

“Always, little bit, now let’s go get you a staff.” He said, picking her up and placing her on his shoulders, carefully in front of the pommel of his great sword. Cat gave a shout of glee as she could now tower over everyone, gripping Kaaras’s horns for balance.

He walked from Solas’s cabin to the forge, Cat waving at people as they passed by and enjoying her view and feeling better about her whole day.

As they walked by the paddock that served as the stables, Cat overheard two people talking.

“Come on, you’ve seen our mounts. Most of them should be pulling plows.” A man said. She
recognized his voice as that of Garwin Reisinger. She saw him during her lessons with Cullen.

“We didn’t all grow up with fancy noble horses, Ansburg. You ride whatever holds you. Why are you here with the scouts instead of fobbing around with the nobles, anyway?” A woman replied. Cat thought her name was Naomi, but she wasn’t sure. She was one of Leliana’s scouts.

Ansburg is in the Free Marches, I think. Hmm. We need more horses then. I think…Master Dennet? Hmm…

“My uncle died at the conclave. I’m a good rider, and…well, I thought I’d be more useful here.”

“Eh, we’ll see.”

At the forge, the blacksmiths were hard at work and the heat was pouring out. Cat recognized Harritt with his big mustache talking with Syla, one of the tranquil who worked with Minaeve.

“Researcher Minaeve has notes on alloys that may prove more effective against demons.” Syla said.

“Oh, does she? Well, we’ll take anything that gives our blades a bit more bite. You mages aren’t half bad.” Harritt replied.

“I am no longer a mage.” Syla said, with the same even tone.

The tranquil are so wrong. I can’t believe the practice is allowed.

“I expected you’d be by. How’s the new gear fit?” Harritt asked, turning to look up at Cat.

“It is perfect, thank you Harritt!” Cat gushed, her mind turning to happier thoughts, as Kaaras set her down.

“Good.” His mustache twitched a bit, a look of pride in his eyes. “World’s gone mad. Stock armor and blades are good against bandits, but we’re not fighting bandits. My gear will see you through demons, apostates, whatever this world throws at you. So, you need custom work? Something special? You bring the materials to us, we’ll make it happen. That mage fellow said you would be by, to be measured for a staff.”

“Yes, that would be great.” Cat said. “What do you need me to do?”

“Just come over here. Tandy will get you measured, just so we don’t make it too long for you. We will get right to work on it then.” Cat walked over and a dwarven woman came over with a long stick. She held it up to Cat and drew a mark on it, just above Cat’s head. She gave a nod and headed back to her section of the forge.

“Now, was there anything else you needed in it? We have materials that it can be enchanted with fire, ice, or lightning. What kind of staff do you want?”

“I think a fire staff, please. I don’t have any other preference, I trust you to make it.” Cat said.

“Very well. We should have this done in a few days, no problem.” He said. He started to join Tandy, but Kaaras spoke up.

“If you wouldn’t mind, Master Harritt, I was wondering what you had in the way of great swords or battle axes.”

“We have a few things lying around, but nothing very good. The quartermaster took most everything we had and gave them out to the soldiers.” Harritt said.
“I thought that might be the case. It is no matter. I will not trouble you.”

“Wait, Kaaras, what happened to your great sword?” Cat asked.

“Well, little bit, mine was broken in the fight to stabilize the Breach. A demon froze it, making it brittle and when I hit it, I killed the demon, but the blade broke off in the process. I picked another up on the way and it works well enough.” Kaaras explained.

“But you need a good weapon, Kaaras!” Cat exclaimed. “Mister Harritt, you can make him something, can’t you? You are the best smith around, right?” She gave him the biggest puppy dog eyes she could.

_Come on, no Ferelden can resist puppy eyes, right?_

“I don’t want to bother-” Kaaras started to say.

“Nonsense, we can’t have the Herald’s bodyguard going around without a proper weapon.” Harritt seemed suitably moved by Cat’s plea. “Let’s have a talk about what you need. We have a couple of designs. Do you have a preference about metals?”

“I do prefer an obsidian blade, but I won’t be picky at this point.” Kaaras said.

“We don’t have enough obsidian, currently. We did get some onyx in, though.” Harritt said.

They proceeded to talk shop. After a few minutes, Cat was distracted and started to wander, she didn’t get far before Kaaras stopped her.

“Where are you going, little bit?”

“I was just going to go over to the stables and visit the horses. I didn’t get to ride today.”

“Alright, then we will go.”

“Kaaras, you aren’t done talking with Harritt. I’m just going right over there. You will be able to see me. Please?” She turned the puppy dog eyes on him. He chuckled.

“Alright, but just there and stay in sight. I won’t be much longer and then it will be time to get you to Varric.” Kaaras said.

“Deal!” Cat ran over to the paddock, slipping under the fence. She waved at Garwin and Naomi as she passed. She worked her way to the horse she had been riding, a chestnut mare named Delilah. She nickered softly and lowered her head as Cat approached. Cat pet her nose and cooed at her. Delilah was little more than a pony, but she was sweet and liked Cat. Cat visited a few of the other horses, as well.

One horse was tied to the other side of the fence. He was a big one, with rather fancy tack. Cat went up to him, cautiously.

“I haven’t seen you here before, handsome.” She said, putting her hand out. The horse leaned forward, sniffing her hand.

“That tickles! I think I like you.” She looked back at the forge, catching Kaaras’s eye. She gave a wave and then ducked under the fence again and went to the horse’s side, petting him. She noticed that he was still in a lather, from travelling.

_Had no one cooled him down or at least taken the time to rub him down? He is going to get cold_
and sick if someone doesn’t take care of him.

She didn’t see anyone in the area looking like there were planning to do anything, so she set about taking off his tack.

Well, maybe my lesson this morning was good for something after all.

Cat had to position the horse in such a way that she could balance on the fence so that she could reach the saddle.

He still has his saddle bags on and everything. Who would leave him like this?

Cat managed to uncinch the saddle and to get it to the ground, mostly without dropping it. The horse gave out a snort and nuzzled her shoulder.

“You are very welcome.”

She started to pick up the saddle and tried to move it on top of the fence to hang, when a masked man appeared from around the horse’s flank.

“You! Knife-ear! What are you doing?!” The man yelled in a thick Orlesian accent, storming towards her.

“I was just unsaddling the horse, sir, I didn’t mean to offend.” She started backing up.

“A likely story! I see you pawing through my saddlebags with your grubby little hands. What did you steal?” He grabbed her arm, hard. “Tell me!”

“I didn’t take anything, I swear.” A part of Cat was angry at this man, how dare he do this? But the greater part of Cat was scared. “Let go of me, please!”

“Because I discovered you in the act! Get away from here, filthy knife-ear brat!” He backhanded her across the face, letting go of her arm at the same time. The force sent her back and her head hit the fence, her world briefly going black. She started to sit up, but all she saw was stars and a ringing in her ears.

Just breath, Cat, focus, you need to get away...

The horse started snorting and pawing at the ground, agitated. “I expected better of the inquisition. That they would keep the vermin away from the nobility.” Seeing that she wasn’t moving away, he started to move towards her again. “I said to go away-” He was cut off as a large hand grabbed him and tossed him aside. Cat heard a roar fit for the battlefield. The noble let out a curse and started yelling in Orlesian.

Cat’s vision started to clear, and she saw that Kaaras was standing between her and the masked man, his great sword drawn. She saw that Harritt was there as well, with a hammer in his right hand. Garwin was there at the side, taking the reins of the horse and calming him.

Kaaras knelt down beside Cat, gently setting his hand at her back to support her. “Little bit, can you hear me? How bad are you hurt?”

“Do YOU know who I am!” The Orlesian screamed, his face going red under his mask. “How dare you treat me in such a fashion!”

“How dare you, you bastard! You just hit a child!” Harritt yelled back, waving his hammer.
Kaaras was ignoring the noble, focusing on Cat. “Little bit, can you answer me?”

Cat took a breath, forcing herself to look at Kaaras instead of the angry man, “Yes, I’m a bit dizzy… and I am seeing spots.” Kaaras sharply inhaled.

“Okay, I’m going to pick you up slowly and take you to Solas, so he can look you over, alright?”

Cat tried to nod, but it made it worse. She turned to the side and threw up. Kaaras supported her weight and held her braid back. Harritt and the noble were still yelling at each other. After she had finished retching, Kaaras picked her up, trying not to jostle her.

Once she was in his arms, he turned. The noble came right up to him. “You! Oxman! I will see you lashed for treating me this way! I am Antione Chambrun of Val Chevin! You savage!”

Kaaras held up his left hand, his eyes hard and threatening. “You are not worth anything, Antione Chambrun of Val Chevin. You have raised a hand to the one under my protection. You have attacked the Herald of Andraste. Pray to your maker that you are forgiven for such a sin, for I will not be so forgiving.”

At Kaaras’s words, the noble sputtered. “This knife-ear is the Herald of Andraste!?”

“Aye, she is.” Harritt said, “You best back away before my friend here decides to do more than throw your sorry arse.”

As the realization dawned on him of the danger he was in, the fact that he was threatening a man 2 feet taller than him, and that he had apparently assaulted the most important person in the Inquisition, he paled, backing away. “I…I”

Kaaras ignored him and just walked away, making his way through a crowd of people who had gathered at the ruckus. Cat turned towards Kaaras’s chest closing her eyes.

Maybe if I just rest my eyes for a few minutes…

“Hey little bit, no falling asleep on me, not till I get you to Solas.” As he carried her through Haven, they passed Varric’s tent. Varric looked up. Seeing the serious and worried look on Kaaras’s face, he stood up.

“What happened to the kid?”

“An idiot noble happened.” Kaaras said, trying to keep the anger from his voice.

“Shit, is the kid alright?” Varric asked.

“I’m taking her to Solas to find out.”

“I’ll go with you.” Varric quickly grabbed Bianca and running to catch up with Kaaras’s long strides.

Don’t fall asleep. Kaaras said not to fall asleep.

In no time, they were in front of Solas’s door. Varric knocked loudly. “Hey, Chuckles, you in there?”

A moment later the door opened. “Master Tethras, what do I-” He saw Kaaras cradling Cat. “Fenedhis! What happened?!” He said, moving to look over Cat.
She turned to him, squinting against the light. “Hi, Solas, I think I need another lesson in barriers.” She gave him a weak smile.

“Da’len, hold still. Let me examine the damage.” His hands were gently and cool as they moved along her face and head. Kaaras shifted so he was holding her lower.

“Shit, you got one big shiner, kid.” Varric said, finally able to see her face. Along the left side of her face, a deep purple-blue bruise was forming.

*I am actually feeling better…*

“I think I’m okay…” Cat said, rising up to stand.

“Da’len, I don’t think that is wise-”

*Uhh oh.*

Suddenly the world shifted and went black.

**

Cat woke up feeling warm and numb. It took a few minutes for her to get her bearings. She slowly opened her eyes, waiting for the pain to set in.

*Huh. Nothing happened.*

*I really need to stop blacking out.*

She turned her head and she realized she was lying on a bed in Solas’s cabin. Kaaras was sitting in a chair right next to her. She was just about to say something when Solas walked into view.

“Ah, Da’len, you are awake. Good.” He was carrying a potion of some kind. “Master Adan made a tincture for your pain. When you fell unconscious, you had us worried.”

“Ir abelas, Solas, I didn’t mean to.” Cat said. She started to sit up, but then froze. “Do you think it’s okay for me to sit up?” Solas nodded.

Kaaras moved to help her, moving the pillows to prop her up. “How is that, little bit?”

“Good, thank you.”

“Now, I need you to drink this. Adan mixed some Crystal Grace with it to make it more palatable.” Solas uncorked the small vial and handed it to Cat. “Slowly, da’len.”

Cat took it and sipped.

*It tasted…strange. Kind of like violet?*

After she had finished the vial, Solas took it, moving to sit on the edge of the bed. “If I may, I would like to examine your injury again.”

“Okay.” Solas moved his hands to her head, gently prodding with his magic.

“The swelling is down and I do not sense a break. You may experience a headache tomorrow morning, but the worst is past.”
“How long have I been out?” Cat asked.

“2 hours, little bit.” Kaaras said.

“What has happened since I blacked out?”

“Perhaps Varric can tell you. I haven’t left your side, Cat. I won’t again.” Kaaras said. Cat could see the pain in his eyes.

*He blames himself for what happened…*

“Kaaras, it isn’t your fault. It was that stupid Orlesian nobles fault.” She said.

“I am supposed to protect you, little bit, even from stupid Orlesian nobles. I won’t give someone else an opportunity like that again.” Kaaras said.

Cat was trying to think of what to say to make him feel better when Varric entered with Lena close behind. Lena was carrying a tray.

“Lady Cat! You are awake! We were so worried.” Lena set the tray down on the end of the bed, managing to shoo Kaaras and Solas out of the way. She immediately started fussing over Cat, checking her pillows and making sure she was comfortable. Before Cat could really process what was happening, Lena had her hair rebraided, the pillows fluffed, and the tray with broth set on Cat’s lap. “You should really try to eat something, Lady Cat.”

“Thank you, Lena, I am hungry.” Lena nodded at that.

“You are feeling well, then?”

“Yes, much better. Solas and Adan have taken care of me.” Lena looked at Solas and gave a nod, then started to clean things up in the room.

“So, you have had an interesting day, kid.” Varric said, stepping closer to the bed.

“You could say that, Varric. Can you tell me what happened after I passed out?” Cat asked, taking a bite of her soup.

“Well, everything went a bit crazy, kid. Once the Seeker and Curly were pulled from the field and found out what happened, Cassandra had Chambrun thrown into the dungeon. Both of them looked like they were going to throttle the man. Nightingale showed up right after that, one of her scouts had gotten her, and she set about finding out what happened.”

“Yes, she stopped by earlier to get our side of the story.” Kaaras informed her.

“Leliana got Ruffles involved and the asshole at this point was very apologetic. Ruffles gave a scathing talking to the man, I wish I had seen it. I hear he was terrified. They worked it out so that he will leave first thing in the morning and never come back. If he ever tries to return or defames the Inquisition in any way, Ruffles threatened to ruin his reputation in Orlais, Ferelden, and Antiva. He won’t be a problem anymore, kid.”

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“Yes, she stopped by earlier to get our side of the story.” Kaaras informed her.
“Of course, Herald. How are you feeling?”

“Much better.”

“That is good to hear.” He shifted again, “I should be going. Be well, Herald.”

Cullen’s visit marked the beginning of the parade of visitors. Josephine stopped by, with chocolate. Leliana visited, remarking that Chambrun would be watched by her agents and he would know. Cat almost felt bad for him. Almost.

Evie stopped by to rant about how much of a cad the noble was and how dare he strike the Herald of Andraste.

Malika stepped in briefly, offered to have her carta contacts take care of him, and then left. Cat really couldn’t get a read on her, but she thought she cared.

Mahonan teased her about her battle wounds and that it wouldn’t make her magic lessons easier, just because she got in a fight.

Cassandra was awkward, but well-meaning. She offered to teach Cat some tricks for dodging attacks.

Harritt, Adan, and Minaeve both stopped by, saying their “feel betters” and checking for themselves that she was well.

Once the last of them left, it was just Solas, Varric, and Kaaras.

“I know I promised to start on the road, but would you like me to read you the first chapter of the Tale of the Champions?” Varric offered.

“I would love that, Varric! I want to hear all about your Kirkwall adventures!” Cat said enthusiastically.

Varric read to her and then Kaaras carried her to her cabin for the evening.

_The poor champions, losing their sister like that…_

**

Cat walked along the mountain path. She felt the cold wind lashing against her, but she knew she had to keep walking.

She looked up and she was under the Breach.

_I’m going to do it this time._

She lifted her hand up, feeling the familiar pain. The mark pulsed and connected. There was a deafening explosion.

Suddenly, she was surrounded by demons. Out of nowhere, Kaaras was by her side, Varric, Lena, and Solas beside him. She looked to her right, and there was Cassandra, Leliana, and Cullen. Mahonan, Ylsa, Malika, and Evie were across from her. She looked again and saw Josephine and Harritt, Minaeve and Rylen, even Flissa was there. They all started to attack the demons.

_Wait…some of them can’t fight…_
Cat tried to move, to fight with them, but she was frozen. Paralyzed by something.

She watched on in horror as wave after wave of demons attacked. She tried to open her mouth to scream for them to run, but no words came out. The non-combatants fell first, demons tearing them apart. Cat managed to let out a cry when Lena fell, Josephine right behind her.

Soon, Kaaras was the only one standing. Cat refused to look at the others lying broken on the ground. Her friends lying on the ground.

One of the demons lashed out at Kaaras’s unprotected side and he fell, still trying to shield Cat’s body with his.

“I promised I would protect you, little bit…” He said, the life draining from his eyes. She looked up and a demon was looming over her. Its face shifted and it was wearing the mask of the Orlesian noble. A voice sounded in her head, “I can help you, make this all go away, you just have to let me in…”

It was finally too much and Cat let out a scream, breaking the paralysis.

**

Cat woke up screaming. Malika burst through the door, daggers ready.

“Where is the threat? Are you hurt?” Malika asked, eyes darting around the cabin, searching.

Cat breathed deeply, focusing on the present. “There isn’t anyone here. I had a nightmare.” The fear was still there, she couldn’t shake it.

“Let me in…”

She pulled her legs to her chest and breathed in and out, trying to calm herself. But the panic was building, she didn’t even hear Malika get closer.

“Cat, Cat!” Malika set a hand on her shoulder. “Look at me! Whatever you saw, it is gone. It was a dream.”

Cat looked at her, but all she could see was Malika’s body torn apart by demons. She cried out and threw herself at Malika, holding tight. She sobbed into her armor.

“There there, Cat…little bit.” Malika said hesitantly, awkwardly patting the girl’s back. “It will be okay…”

Cat just sobbed more.

_I failed them all…I’m going to fail them all._

“Can I…Paragon’s ass…can I go get someone for you?” Malika asked. Cat shook her head. “What about Kaaras? Or Mahonan? Or even Evie?”

“No…please don’t tell them, they are already worried and they can’t help me. Can you just stay here for a little while, Malika? Please?” Cat asked.

“Cat, I can’t really help you with dreams…dwarves don’t dream.” Malika did gently hug her, still awkward. “Is there anything I can get you?”

_It was a dream…only a dream…unless, was it caused by a demon?_
Cat sat up quickly, wiping her eyes. “Can you get Solas? I think… I think he can help.”

“Okay, stay here, little bit. I will go wake him up.”

“Wait, no! Never mind, you shouldn’t bother him.” Cat said, grabbing Malika’s arm.

“Cat, if you need help—”

“No, I will be fine. You helped. It is fine.”

Malika looked skeptical. “If you say so. I am going to go stand watch again, but I will be right outside.” Malika almost fled.

Cat tried to settle herself. She paced the room and talked it through mentally. Nothing would work. There were just the flashes of her friends dying around her, of the masked demon, and then the voice…

After her 7th time walking around the cabin, there was a knock. She jumped and stifled a yell. She went to the door and asked, “Who is it?”

“It’s me, Malika Cadash, can I come in?” Cat opened the door. Behind Malika, Solas was standing, looking rumpled and sleepy. “I brought Solas with me.”

“I thought you said you were going on watch. I told you I am fine.” Cat looked at the ground, her face going red.

“I lied. I may not be great with people, but even I could tell you needed help. You asked for Solas, you got Solas.” Malika said, apologetically.

“Da’len, Miss Cadash said you had a nightmare?” Solas asked.

“Yes but…” Tears involuntarily rose up again, and she rushed up to Solas, throwing her arms around him.

“Shush, da’len, let’s go inside.” He gave a nod to Malika before going inside. He held Cat’s quivering form close, gently rubbing her back. Once inside, he sat down on the bed. “Da’len, do you want to talk about it?”

“No… talking about it might make it more real.” Cat said, still clinging to him. “How do I keep demons away, Solas?” She could feel Solas tense up.

“Is there a demon talking to you in your dreams, da’len?” Solas asked.

“I don’t know. Maybe. Something asked to be let in. It scared me, Solas. I don’t know what to do.” She could feel the panic swelling again.

*What if I am possessed?*

“It will be okay, da’len. I will set a ward and it will keep demons away from your dreams.” He gently set her down and went to work, drawing the lines in the air for the ward. Cat was fascinated by the magic, the design flaring up and then fading into the ether, the only sign it was still there was the taste of lingering magic. “This will keep you safe. You should try to sleep, da’len.” He started to go to the door.

“Wait! Solas… would you stay? Please?” Cat asked with a tear stained face. She could see that he
was torn, that he wasn’t sure what to do.

“Very well, da’len. I will stay.” He said. Cat moved to the side to make room for him on the bed. She gave him a tired smile. He laid down, getting comfortable. “Good night, da’len.”

“Good night, Solas.” She yawned and then cuddled up beside Solas. Solas tensed up for a moment and then seeing Cat’s relaxed face pressed against his shirt, he smiled, putting his arm protectively around her.

*It was just a dream...just a bad dream...*

Chapter End Notes

Hey, next chapter, we will finally be going to the hinterlands! Let me know what you think so far in the comments below!

Thanks!
To the Hinterlands! - Part 1

Chapter Summary

Hey, finally made it to the Hinterlands!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Cat's days fell into routine again, this time with her bodyguards sticking closer than ever. In fact, most of the town went into protective mode around their Herald and many eyes were on the visitors to Haven.

She healed up quickly, with help from Solas and Adan, as well as the mother hen-ing antics of Kaaras and Lena. Every night, Solas would cast wards in her cabin, to keep demons from her dreams. These wards kept her dreams light and free, so she barely remembered them.

A week after the incident, Harritt and Tandy presented Cat with her new staff. It was made from a dark wood with a drakestone core. The top of the staff was wrapped around a red focusing crystal. They also gave her a harness like thing to wear and she could use it to hook the staff behind her. It would take her time to get used to it, but she did feel better having it. She, of course, hugged them and was very enthusiastic in her thanks. She made Harritt blush and he and the others at the forge started calling her their little Herald. She made sure to visit them every day.

Her magic lessons were going well. After the few weeks they had to work, she could cast a basic barrier and fireball. Winter and Tempest spells were still too much for her, but Solas and Mahonan were confident that she would get there in time. She could also create a veil light, a simple glowing spell that could illuminate a small area.

Cassandra was true to her word and substituted the chantry lessons for defense lessons. She showed Cat how to dodge and maneuver against a larger opponent. It was these moments with Cassandra that she seemed most at ease and in her element, like she could relate to Cat in some way.

Rylen or Cullen would stop by at times to help or comment, but for the most part, Cat practiced against Kaaras. After two weeks, she could roll out of the way well and learned to keep a solid stance that allowed her to move quickly. Cassandra actually said she was doing well, which Cat felt pride over.

On the 27th of Guardian, it was finally time to leave for the Hinterlands. Leliana’s scouts had managed to gain a foothold in the region and thus, Cat needed to go to see Mother Giselle.

Cassandra was going, as well as Solas and Varric and of course, Cat’s four bodyguards.

Cat said goodbye to the advisors and her friends before they left. Leliana pulled her aside as they were getting ready and informed her that her agents apprehended Butler before he could kill Farrier. They were bringing him in for questioning. She requested that if Cat had any visions, she send the information back with the scouts’ reports.

Josephine asked that she review their lessons with Evie on the trip and she sent her with a tiny box of
emergency chocolate. She got a big hug from Lena and Lena gave her a care package to take with her on the journey. Minaeve asked for any samples they could gather and Adan wanted any plants they could find. Harritt also wanted them to look for any metal deposits they could mine. With that list of things to look for, as well as their mission to search for allies and to stabilize the region as much as possible, they were ready to leave. How Cat was supposed to help in all this, she wasn’t sure.

Cullen and Rylen saw the group off in the morning. Cat was starting to warm up to Cullen and he wasn’t quite as freaked out by her as he had been, so that was progress (she wouldn't go as far as to call them friends, but it was what it was). Rylen had quickly warmed up to her and she found that he was a practical man, with a wicked sense of humor. If you wanted something done, one of the quickest ways was to ask Rylen.

They left at dawn and Cat was still sleepy. Kaaras carried her for the first hour until she fully woke up. It was a long first day. The Inquisition couldn’t spare 8 horses for them, so they walked and Cassandra set a fast pace for the group. They only stopped for a brief lunch and then they continued.

Towards the end, Kaaras had set Cat on his shoulders again. Her little legs could only do so much. As they walked, Kaaras told her about his time with the mercenary company and some of the funnier things that had happened, including a time they had blown up a bridge (it was funny in context).

Cat tried to ask Malika about her background, but the most she would say was that she was part of the Carta. Varric made a comment about her family running the Carta, but Malika shot him a dirty look and he stopped. Evie did her best to review the information on nobles and etiquette with Cat, but Cat was easily distracted by the flora and fauna they passed by. She was more interested in the magical debates that Solas and Mahonan were having. Cat would ask for clarification now and then, but it was fascinating just to listen to, for the most part.

They made camp a couple hours before dark. The group had managed to make it to the bottom of the mountain, leaving most of the snow behind them.

That night, under the clear sky, Cat looked up at the two moons.

*Wait, two moons?*

*Shouldn’t there only be one?*

Since no one else seemed perturbed by the night sky, she shrugged it off and just looked at the night sky.

Cassandra wanted to continue her training, but after seeing that Cat was sluggish to say the least, she let her go to bed. Varric continued to tell her the Tale of the Champions as they ate their simple dinner. He wasn’t reading from the book (he didn’t bring it with him), so he was just telling her from memory. The Hawkes had just recruited Fenris and they were getting ready to track down the Grey Warden. It was very exciting.

*And very familiar. Perhaps I have heard the story before...they almost feel like old friends...*

**

It took them seven days to reach the Hinterlands. They arrived at the Inquisition Camp late on the seventh day, everyone exhausted. The group ate and then went right to sleep. The lead scout wasn’t in camp anyways.
They woke bright and early on the 3rd of Drakonis, 4 weeks since the Inquisition had been officially founded.

After they ate breakfast with some of the scouts, a red-haired dwarven woman approached them.

“The Herald of Andraste! I’ve heard the stories. Everyone has. We know what you did at the Breach. Inquisition Scout Harding, at your service. I—all of us here—we’ll do whatever we can to help.” She said.

“Harding, huh? Ever been to Kirkwall’s Hightown?” Varric asked.

“I can’t say I have. Why?”

“You’d be Harding in…oh, never mind.”

_Harding in Hightown! HA!

Cassandra just made a disgusted noise and Cat snorted a laugh.

Cat quickly recovered. "It is nice to meet you, Scout Harding."

“And you, Herald.” Harding gave her a smile and then her face turned serious again. "We should get to business. The situation’s pretty dire. We came to secure horses from Redcliffe’s old horse master. I grew up here, and people always said that Dennet’s herds were the strongest and fastest this side of the Frostbacks. But with the mage-templar fighting getting worse, we couldn’t reach Dennet. Maker only knows if he’s even still alive."

_He is._

“Mother Giselle’s at the crossroads helping refugees and the wounded. Our latest reports say that the war’s spread there, too. Corporal Vale and out men are doing what they can to help protect the people, but they won’t be able to hold out very long. You all best get going. No time to lose.” Harding said. “Be safe out there, Herald.”

The group left their travel packs in the camp and started towards the crossroads. Mahonan, Malika, and Evie scouted ahead. Cassandra pushed forward, leading the way, leaving the others to follow behind.

“Varric, you joined the Inquisition when Seeker Pentaghast questioned you?” Solas asked.

“She was very insistent that I help.” Varric said.

“Interesting.”

“What’s interesting?”

“It surprised me that an elven apostate is the one who joined the Inquisition voluntarily.” Solas concluded.

“Varric could have left, but he decided to stay, Solas.” Cat commented. “Cassandra didn’t make him join.”

“Don’t let too many know that, kid, I have my reputation to think of.” Varric responded.

“He wasn’t the only to join voluntarily.” Kaaras remarked. Cassandra hung back to join their group, after hearing their remarks.
“I confess, Solas, I’m surprised you decided to remain.”

“Why? The Breach remains a threat to us all.” Solas retorted.

“Just the same, I wondered if you might leave now that we have a plan to seal it.”

“Ah, because I am an apostate. I might flee before the Inquisition throws me in chains? I take my commitments seriously, Seeker. Come what may, I shall see this through.” He said, indignantly.

“As you wish, though I cannot guarantee what will happen in the days to come.” She said. Solas was going to comment further, but Malika appeared from the trees and put a finger to her lips.

“Shit, Charmer, some warning would be nice.” Varric said.

“Trouble up ahead. Mahonan and Evie are getting in place. Mages and templars.” She melted back into the shadows.

_How does she do that?_

“Kaaras, stay back with the Herald, we will deal with the threat.” Cassandra ordered.

“As you say, Seeker.” Kaaras said. Solas, Varric, and Cassandra moved onwards, leaving Cat and Kaaras behind. All they had to do was wait.

It wasn’t long before they heard the sounds of battle. Kaaras drew his new great sword, the black blade shining, his eyes searching the path and surrounding area for any threats. Cat held tightly to her staff, going over in her head how to cast a barrier for Kaaras and herself.

_I hope they are all right._

After a tense 10 minutes, Mahonan staggered up the hill. “We are all clear.” He said.

Cat rushed up to him, checking him for wounds.

“I’m good, little bit, just got hit with a templar’s smite, which really packs a punch. Cassandra countered the attack, using her special Seeker powers and Malika made short work of him.” He paused to rub his side. “The others are tending to the wounded Inquisition scouts. We should head down. Cassandra says Mother Giselle is nearby.”

Cat nodded and walked between Kaaras and Mahonan down the hill. She couldn’t keep her eyes from darting to the fallen figures, some frozen or burned, others bled out from wounds. It was horrible. At the end of the hill, they found the rest of their group and several inquisition scouts cleaning up, helping the survivors and moving the bodies off the road.

_So much death._

Cat stayed close to Kaaras. They made their way into the center of the village, or really gathering of houses. It didn’t seem big enough to be an actual village. People were tentatively coming outside of the houses. A couple scouts were raising inquisition banners.

Outside one cabin, a woman was tending to some of the wounded.

_Wow, that is one big hat. That has to be Mother Giselle._

“There are mages here who can heal your wounds. Lie still.” The woman said with an Orlesian accent.
“Don’t…let them touch me, Mother. Their magic…” The soldier the woman was tending said, fear thick in his voice.

“Turned to noble purpose, their magic is surely no more evil than your blade.” The woman who must be Mother Giselle said soothingly.

“But…”

“Hush, dear boy. Allow them to ease your suffering.”

“Mother Giselle?” Kaaras inquired as they neared.

“I am.” She nodded to him and then turned to Cat. “And you must be the one they’re calling the Herald of Andraste.”

“That’s what they tell me. You wanted to see me, Mother Giselle?” Cat said, trying to be polite and not stare at Mother Giselle’s pursed lips.

*Duck face…what does that mean?*

“Yes, child, I did. I know of the Chantry’s denouncement, and I’m familiar with those behind it. I won’t lie to you: some of them are grandstanding, hoping to increase their chances of becoming the new Divine. Some are simply terrified. So many good people, senselessly taken from us…”

“What happened was horrible.” Cat said, her thoughts going back to the ruined and charred temple. Kaaras put a comforting hand on her shoulder.

“Fear makes us desperate, but hopefully not beyond reason. Go to them. Convince the remaining clerics you are no demon to be feared. They have heard only frightful tales of you. Of a demon child running a heretical movement. Give them something else to believe.”

“You want us to appeal to them?” Kaaras asked.

“If I thought you were incapable, I wouldn’t have suggested it.”

“Will they even listen?” Kaaras said.

“Let me put it this way: you needn’t convince them all. You just need some of them to doubt. Their power is their unified voice. Take that from them, and you receive the time you need.”

“Thank you for the advice.” Cat said.

*Great, now I have to go talk to more clerics in big hats who think I’m the worst…*

“I honestly don’t know if you’ve been touched by fate or sent to help us…but I hope. Hope is what we need now. The people will listen to your rallying call, as they will listen to no other. The Inquisition can become a force that will deliver us…or destroy us. I will go to Haven and provide Sister Leliana the names of those in the Chantry who would be amenable to a gathering. It is not much, but I will do whatever I can.” She went back to tending the wounded.

*That is a lot to take in. People are placing their hope in me. Me!*

“You alright, little bit?” Kaaras asked.

“Yes, I am.” A flash of memory. “We should get going. We have a lot to do.”
“You, there! Can you help my wife? Please, I beg you!” An elven man asked.

“What’s wrong?” Cat asked, coming out from behind Kaaras. The man acknowledged her, but addressed Kaaras.

“She gets sick when the weather’s foul. Can’t catch her breath, like cobwebs in her lungs. Our son Hyndel makes a potion that lets her breath. He’s the only one who can make it, but he’s joined that cult in the hills. Please, get to him and tell him what’s wrong. Without that potion, she’ll die.”

“We will get it for you, sir. Perhaps Solas can take a look at her to see if he can help.” Cat asked, looking up at Kaaras.

“Doesn’t hurt to ask. HEY SOLAS!” Kaaras yelled across the Crossroads.

Solas looked a bit perturbed to be yelled at, but he did make his way to them. “Yes?”

“Solas, can you take a look at this man’s wife? He says she’s having trouble catching her breath. His son makes a potion, which we can get later, but is there anything you can do now?” Cat asked.

“I will see what I can do, da’len.” Solas followed the man to his cabin, the man thanking him profusely as they walked.

While Solas did that, Cat ran over to a man by another cabin, a hunter by the looks of it. There she found out that the refugees needed food. After that, she ran over to Corporal Vale and asked about blankets and other needs. She just knew where to go and who to ask. Kaaras shook his head after they talked with Recruit Whittle.

“It is rather strange when you do that, Cat. Strange but good.” Kaaras said. “Maybe you are touched by the Maker or something.”

Cat just shrugged in reply.

Kaaras and Cat gathered their group together and Cat informed them that they would be hunting rams to feed the refugees. Cassandra looked like she was going to make a comment, but she just shook her head. They moved west, looking for good hunting places along the way. Evie hit two, Mahanon one, and Varric got one as well. They marked a location by a waterfall that would make for a good camp and they were going to drag the rams back to the Crossroads, but Cat noticed something shining on the edge of the hill.

She approached it cautiously, feeling this whispering sensation as she neared it. As she got closer to it, she saw that it was a skull on a post. And it had some kind of crystal in it?

“What’s with the skull?” Varric asked.

“I don’t know… I feel like I should know more. The skulls are from…” For the briefest moment, she knew more, knew what the skulls really were, but it faded away, except for the name and use. And a really bad feeling about them. “They are Ocularum. We can use them to see things. Shards or something.”

“Creepy skulls. Great.” Mahanon said.

“Is this a Nevarran thing, Seeker?” Kaaras asked.
“I have never seen anything like it, but I am not well versed in the ways of the Mortalitasi.”

Cat tried to look thought it, but couldn’t quite reach it.

“Should you really be touching the random skull in the middle of a war zone?” Varric asked.

“I think it’s important.” Cat said, still struggling to reach it.

“Let me help, da’len.” Solas lifted her so she could see. It worked to magnify the area. Cat reached to steady herself and found that she could turn the skull. It wasn’t long before she had found 4 shining things. She showed them to the others.

“Curious. I am unfamiliar with this magic.” Solas said.

“I also have never seen anything like it. We should mark the locations as best we can on the map and investigate. They might be important, like little bit said.” Mahonan commented.

“Agreed. No one puts up something like this unless it leads to something valuable.” Malika added.

Malika made the notations on the map and the group headed back to the refugees. Solas hit another ram on the way, so they brought 5 to the hunter. The other inquisition scouts had found some as well and would work on hunting each day to keep the refugees provisioned. The hunter was grateful, as well as the refugees. Cat just smiled. It was gross to kill them, but the people needed it. She had helped. Or, made others help. Something like that.

After eating a small lunch, they moved on. There was reports of a rift to the north east, so the group headed towards it. As they neared it, the mark pulsed.

The group fought off the demons, Kaaras keeping Cat back, as usual. She managed to throw a couple barriers over her friends, but they did most of the hard work. After two groups of demons, Solas motioned her forward and she closed the rift. It hurt, but not as much as the last time. It was more of an uncomfortable pressure that built up in her arm and then released.

Solas and Mahonan harvested some bits of the demons for Minaeve and the group walked back to the main camp, to clean up and plan. Cassandra in particular needed to clean up, a demon had dissolved on her and its goo was seeping into her armor. She wasn’t actually complaining, but her replies were short and Varric suggested that they might want to head back.

Cat picked elfroot and embrium on the way, stuffing them into her pack. Adan wanted plants, so she would get him plants. Mahonan and Evie helped her.

Malika noted some iron and onyx deposits and marked them on the map as well. Varric made a comment about her still having her stone sense and she shot daggers at him again.

Yikes, I do not think she likes Varric.

Back at camp, they got cleaned up and talked with the scouts. While they were getting cleaned up, Cat went to Malika.

“Hey, would it be okay if I look at the map?”

“Sure.” Malika said, then led Cat over to a makeshift table. There were reports held in place by rocks and two quills. Malika spread the map out and secured the edges with the natural paperweights. Then, she left Cat to her musings.
Cat grabbed a quill and started making notes. She managed to make 20 marks before Evie noticed what she was doing.

“Hey, little bit, what are you doing?” Evie asked, curious. (After the trip, her bodyguards had all adopted the term little bit for her. She actually liked it.)

“I don’t know. I just know there are important things at these points. Like here there are like a ton of bears. And this place? It will make a good camp, but we have to be careful, because there is a dragon close to it.” Cat continued to make marks, making symbols for each thing. A stick figure for someone they need to talk to, a skull for danger, a squiggly line for rifts, etc. Evie just watched, fascinated.

“You truly are Maker sent. We should show the others.” With that, Evie gathered the group. Cassandra was cleaning her armor and Varric had to be pulled away from a group of scouts, apparently, they were comparing stories.

“So, little bit, what do you have to show us?” Kaaras asked, taking up position at the back of the group.

“It seems you have been busy.” Mahonan said. “I think there might be room for more art, in the corner there.” Cat hit his arm. “Or not.”

“Is this a dragon?” Malika asked, focusing in on the Eastern section of the map. “Are we going to have to fight a dragon?”

“Possibly?” Cat replied.

“I can work with that.” Malika said. Cat couldn’t tell for sure, but she thought Malika might actually be looking forward to fighting a dragon.

“Here, there are bandits, but not actual bandits. We should talk to the scout here, first though. And then the rebel mages are camped out here, we should really try to talk to them. I don’t know if it will work, but we should try. The templars are here. Oh, and the cult is located here at the Winterwatch Tower.” With each new thing, Cat was pointing out the locations she had marked.

“Hey, kid, slow down.” Varric said, taking notes.

“Da’len, what is this thing here, close to the camp?” Solas asked, peering over at the map.

“This?” She thought for a moment, focusing. “This is an astrarium. There are three in the area and if we activate them they lead to something…a hidden room? Not certain.” She rubbed her head. “We should check that out tonight.”

“And you just know all of this?” Cassandra questioned.

“Yes, maybe? I looked at it and it felt familiar. If I focused in on a location, more information came to me. Faces, names, items, and quests. Lots of side quests.” Cat considered the marked-up map. “We can do a lot of good here, help a lot of people. We can make a difference.”

Cat looked around at the group, the people who could help, would help make the world a better place.

“Let’s do it.”
Hope you enjoyed this chapter!

As always, let me know what you think in the comments below!
Theories/Questions/Comments/Advice are all welcome!
Chapter Summary

The party clears part of the Hinterlands and Cat gets to know a few companions better.

Chapter Notes

Sorry this took so long! Grad School took most of my energy, this last semester and I was wrangling how I wanted the story to go. Thank you for your patience and enjoy!

Before they turned in for the night, they planned out the next day. They went over the things Cat marked on the map and planned a strategy for how to best tackle the area.

“We have to go there first! That man’s wife needs the potion from his son. Plus, there are rifts we can seal, and supplies we can gather to help the refugees.” Cat pleaded.

“We should deal with the mages and Templars first. Their war is endangering everyone in the area.” Cassandra said.

“The Seeker has a point, Little Bit.” Kaaras commented.

“It may be wise to deal with this group of rifts first. They may prove a greater danger than the mages and Templars.” Mahonan said.

“That is true.” Solas agreed. “The rifts are unpredictable, as of yet, and if they are open, demons will be coming through to the countryside.”

“If Cat wishes to deal with these rifts first, I think we should follow her. She has not steered us wrong yet.” Evie said.

“We need to make a decision.” Malika said, frustration in her voice.

“There’s too many refugees out here. Reminds me of Kirkwall during the Blight.” Varric added. “We should do what we can for the poor bas- these poor folks.” Cat noticed the slip up. Last night, Cassandra had yelled at Varric for using foul language around the Herald. They shouldn’t be teaching her bad habits and all that. Cat didn’t have the heart to tell her she already knew much worse language, although, as with most things, she didn’t know how or when she learned such things.

“Very well. We will deal with the cult first and the surrounding rifts. Then we will contain the Mage/Templar threat, Herald.” Cassandra conceded.

“Thank you, Cassandra.” Cat said, sincerely. “Now that it is decided, can we check out the Astrarium?”
“I will accompany you, da’len. I am curious as well.” Solas said.

“Count me in.” Mahonan said.

“Well, I better go along to make sure you stay out of trouble.” Varric added.

“Guard the Herald well, gentlemen.” Cassandra cautioned.

“Come on, Seeker, don’t you trust us?” Varric said, giving her one of his winning smiles. She just rolled her eyes and walked away.

“Great! Let’s go!” Cat said.

Breaking off from the camp, the small party made their way through the Hinterlands.

“Why can’t the ground stay flat?” Varric grumbled.

“You could have stayed in camp, Varric, where the hills wouldn’t jump up and bother you.” Mahonan commented teasingly.

“Not a chance, Stealth. I have to be able to detail these things for the book.”

“There is going to be a book?” Cat asked.

“Giant hole in the sky? A kid hero with a missing memory and knowledge of the future? The book writes itself.”

“Can I help write it?”

“Sure, kid, once you get your letters down, I’ll let you edit.”

Smiling, Cat almost missed the destination.

“There, that looks to be the Astrarium you marked.” Solas pointed out.

The group approached the thing. What it was exactly, Cat wasn’t sure. It was overgrown with vines and leaves, no doubt the reason the scouts hadn’t reported it. Mahonan pulled out a knife and started cutting away the foliage.

*Wait, I can help!*

Cat pulled out her own small knife and helped, cutting through the thick plants.

Once cleared away, they found that there was a lens you could look through.

“A kind of telescope, then.” Solas commented. “By the markings, Tevinter in origin.”

Solas looked through and, taking a moment to adjust some of the gears of the mechanism, motioned Cat over. She looked through and saw the stars, in hyper focus.

“Wow!” Cat said, marveling at the sight. “Mahonan and Varric! You have got to see this!”

As Varric and Mahonan took their turns, Cat had a chance to look at the details of the mechanism with Solas.

“What do you think these buttons do, Solas?”
“I am not sure, there are some markings—”

Cat pushed one of the buttons and pulled a little lever. The mechanism started making a whirling/clanking noise and a blue glow emanated faintly from it. Mahonan, who had been looking through, jumped back.

“What the—”

“Glowing telescope in the middle of nowhere. That seems fine.” Varric said with sarcasm.

“Da’len, perhaps it is better to be more cautious when encountering strange artefacts.”

Slightly chastised, Cat said, “Maybe, but I was curious, Solas! Did anything change?”

Mahonan, over the sudden shock, stepped back up and looked. “There is some kind of overlay to the view, like a grid.”

“Let me have a look, Stealth.” Varric took his place and looked. “The constellation is Judex, I think, in case anyone was wondering.”

“You are versed in constellations, Master Tethras? It seems an odd choice of study for a child of the Stone.” Solas asked.

“I have many hobbies, Chuckles.” Varric said. “And I was born on the surface, so I don’t think I count as a child of the stone, anyways.”

“Let Little Bit have a look.” Mahonan said. She did and there was now a layer of something obscuring the view. The thousands of stars above, clear and bright. As she looked, she had a thought.

“Mahonan, do you think Ylsa is alright? Will she have made it back to your clan?”

“Perhaps. She traveled with a few scouts. Depending on if they were able to get a ship, they might be there.” Seeing Cat’s worried face, he said. “Da’len, just think, the same sky is overhead us all. Ylsa sees the same ones we do. Maybe she is even looking up at the sky right now, just like us.”

“Wondering if you got in trouble without her, most likely.”

“Da’len, I am wounded!”

Cat smiled. She looked back at the telescope. This time, as she looked, an idea came to mind, she started moving the gears, once she was focused over one of the stars, she would hit one of the glowing buttons. Her companions watched with interest as she tried to figure it out.

“Anything happening, kid?” Varric asked after a few minutes.

“I think I’ve almos—” The device made a loud thrumming noise and a beam of light shot out of it, quickly disappearing into the night. As the light dissipated, the machine went silent and dark, whatever magic powering it seeming to have been expended. “I think I got it.”

“What exactly?” Mahonan pondered.

Cat just shrugged. “I connected the dots of the constellation and that happened. Like I said, there are two more of these…they will lead to something.”

“Fascinating.” Solas said, at the same time Varric said, “Weird.”
“Is there anything else you need to do, da’len? If not, it would be wise to return to camp.” Solas said, eyes scanning the dark. “The noise may have caught someone’s attention.”

“That is all. Thank you all for coming with me.”

“Anytime you want to look at weird magical artifacts in the wilderness, just let me know.” Mahonan said, rubbing her head.

Taking one last look at the Astrarium, the group hiked back to camp.

**

Back at camp, the group split up to their different tents. Cat was sharing one with Evie and Malika, but Malika was taking the first watch with some of the other scouts, so she found herself alone with Evie.

Evie volunteered to brush her hair out and as she did, Cat had a chance to talk with her, one-on-one.

“Evie, why were you are the conclave?” Cat asked, as Evie’s lithe fingers combed the tangles out.

“I was sent by my parents to represent our family. I went with a couple other cousins and relatives, and Helena, of course. We have a vested interest in seeing the war ended. Many of my family members are templars and many others are…were part of the Circle of Magi.” Her fingers slowed. “My older brother Emmet was sent to the Circle when we were children and his magic presented. His twin, Emmaline, vowed to become a templar so that she could be with him. She ran away to train when she was 9 and the chantry accepted her. We hadn’t heard from either of them since the war started. I had hoped…” Her hands dropped to her lap. Cat turned and saw the pained look on her friend’s face. She reacted and threw her arms around her.

“I’m sure we will find them, Evie!” Cat said into her shoulder. “They weren’t at the conclave, were they?”

“No, they weren’t, thank the Maker. But I still don’t know where they are…but do not worry, little bit. The Maker watches out for them and I pray for them daily.” She patted Cat’s back and turned her back around to resume brushing.

“What about the rest of your family?” Cat asked, settling back in her place.

“I have a large family. My aunt Lucille throws amazing parties and she probably wields the most influence of anyone in the family, even more than my father. My father, Bann Willem Trevelyan, is one of the most influential men in Ostwick, after the Teryn. He is a very devout man, as is most of the family. But of course, he couldn’t do it without my mother, the Lady Saida Trevelyan, née Amell. She is said to be a distant cousin to the Champions of Kirkwall, for what that is worth.”

“You are related to the Hawkes?” Cat asked, excited. “Varric has been telling me all about them!”

“Distantly, yes. Though in recent years, that has been less of a blessing, in terms of politics. What happened at Kirkwall is said to have started the war and the champions were right at the heart of it. My mother had to publicly denounce them and their actions, for fear that we would face backlash from the rest of the family or worse, the Chantry.”

“But…the Hawkes are heroes!”

“To some, yes, but…it is more complicated than that, Little Bit.”
I guess Varric hasn’t gotten to that part of the story yet.

Sensing Cat’s distress at her words, she changed the subject back to her family. “I have three siblings besides the twins. My eldest brother, Maxwell, was named for our grandfather. He is the heir and takes his duties very seriously. He married a merchant’s daughter from Hercinia. He and Lydia have two children already, Willem and Christoph. Next is my sister, Lucille, named for our great-aunt, although we call her Lucy. She became a chantry sister when she was of age, she serves at the Chantry in Ostwick, so we see her at services. Then there was my brother Constantine. He…was never truly well and he passed some years past when a sickness came through the city. My parents had hoped for him to enter politics, for he had a great mind. Then with the twins away, there was just me. I had hopes of joining the templars, but my father decided that I should stay, learn to help Maxwell and carry-on the family name and help secure our position.”

Silence fell in the tent.

“Do you miss them, Evie?”

“Greatly, especially my nephews. I was teaching them archery before I left.” She leaned forward and wrapped her arms around Cat. “But, I am glad to be here, helping the Inquisition and protecting you.”

Cat hugged her arms, “I’m glad you are here, too, Evie.”

Evie finished brushing her hair and then tucked her in to her bedroll. Solas stopped by briefly to cast the ward and say good night, leaving after Cat gave him a hug.

I know what Evie said, but I can’t believe the Hawkes are bad. Varric likes them and it just seems wrong...

This thought followed her into her dreams, flashes of memories playing in the back of her mind.

**

Cat woke up early to find Malika and Evie already dressed and ready. They helped her, saying the group was eager to leave and see how accurate the rest of Cat’s map markings were.

Hair freshly braided and staff firmly in place, the group headed for Winterwatch Tower and the cult, after a brief breakfast with the Inquisition scouts.

Cat found herself travelling between Malika and Evie, the latter commenting here and there, but the former mostly walking in silence.

Ahead, a group of mages and templars were fighting.

“Stay here, Little Bit, we will be back.” Evie cautioned.

Cat took position behind a boulder, with Mahonan staying with her this time. When they returned, they resumed their order. Cassandra was at the front, with the map, Varric and Solas adding commentary.

“Are you okay? You didn’t get hurt, did you?” Cat asked.

“We are fine, the trouble has passed for now.” Evie said, glossing over the fight.

“Trevelyan, you know that Little Bit is going to have to deal with the reality of this fight eventually.”
Malika finally commented.

“I believe we should keep that possibility as far off as possible, Cadash.” Evie replied.

“Suit yourself. She is older than many who have had to face worse. We do her no favors by hiding the facts. No one is coming away from this clean or innocent.” Malika said and then strode forward to scout. “Paragon’s fucking asses…”

“Don’t worry about her, Little Bit. She means well, she has just had a…rougher life.” Evie said.

“It is okay.” Cat said, reaching up to touch her staff. “I guess I should have realized I’m not being trained just to fight demons.”

_I don’t know how I will fight anything else, but I have the feeling I will have to before this is all over._

_Could I actually attack a person?_

“Well that day will be far off, if I have any say over it.” Evie declared.

Cat just nodded and continued onward. A sinking sensation taking over, the feeling of dread rising.

_I hope Malika is wrong, but I fear she is right._

**

They crested a low hill and before them were several bodies. Kaaras moved to block Cat’s sight, but she stopped him.

_There is no point in hiding, is there?_

“Wait, there is something in the woman’s pocket.” Cat said, rubbing her head as a memory hit. “A letter we need to take to someone at the keep.”

“I’ll check.” Kaaras said. He patted down the body and found a letter and a ring on the woman’s finger. He placed them in his pocket. “I’ve got it, Little Bit.”

“Thank you.” Cat said. As she looked at the bodies, she asked, “Can we have the Inquisition bury them? It seems wrong to just leave them…”

Cassandra turned to her. “It will be done, Herald. We will mark their location and have it taken care of.”

Cat nodded and took Kaaras’s hand as another memory/vision flared. “There are some templars up ahead. One of them will have a Dalish ring. We should take that and return it to its owner, if we can.”

The group moved forward, taking care of the templars and then returned. Mahonan held the ring. “It was just as you said, Cat.”

“Good to know my knowledge is reliable.” Cat said softly, the amount of death around them weighing heavily on her.

More sedate, not even Mahonan’s teasing could lighten her mood. Using her knowledge, they closed a couple rifts, more prepared with her forewarnings. They also marked a number of supply caches for Recruit Whittle.
At least the refugees will be warm…

**

They finally approached the keep of Winterwatch Tower, after taking care of a rogue mage in a mine who had summoned several shades, as well as saving and recruiting a scout as an agent.

We need to tell her friend that she is okay…

Speaker Anais was certainly, something. Once they were actually let into the fort, Cat knew they had several things to do. There were so many people here, hiding from the chaos and seeking answers.

“I suppose it only natural that some would turn to worshipping the Breach, if only to appease it.” Solas said.

“But it’s a hole in the sky. How can you worship it?” Cat asked.

“People worship a lot stranger things, whether they know it or not.” Varric said.

Weird.

Their group made short-work of the rift, relatively easy in comparison to others they had closed. It was the fourth rift of the day and Cat’s hand was tingling from the effort.

Trying to shake it off, she led them to Hyndal and got the potion for his mother, as well as the instructions for how to make it. Solas made a note and promised Cat he would give the information to Adan when they returned. They told Lord Berand about his fiancé and he swore to join the inquisition, after some prompting.

Poor man…

Finally, returning to Anais, she asked what they could do, since Cat was obviously blessed by the Maker.

I really don’t think it is that obvious, but at least she will be helping the refugees…

**

By the time they reached camp, Cat’s spirits had been raised a bit. They had returned the ring to its owner, who was shocked at their kindness. They found another site for a camp and notified the scout that his friend Ritts was fine. A scout was sent to the crossroads with the potion and instructions. They found a couple more supply caches, as well, so they were hopeful that the refugees would be taken care of for a while.

The group was tired, having closed so many rifts and fought off so many mages and templars. Evie assured Cat that they tried to reason with them, but they wouldn’t listen.

At least they are trying.

Cat found herself sitting next to Varric by the fire, as he told her more of the story.

“Now, there they were, ready to head into the Deep Roads, when Leandra entered the square!” Varric said.

“Was she going to go on the expedition, too?” Cat asked, her attention fully on the storyteller, a number of scouts listening in as well.
“She just might of, but no, she was there to ask them not to go.”

“But they didn’t listen, did they?”

“No, they assured her they would return and off we went. Bartrand, Bartrand’s men, me, the three Hawkes, and Anders, off to the Deep Roads in search of lost fortunes!”

“No one else came along? What about Isabela or Merrill?” Cat asked, a feeling of unease starting to build.

“Well, Rivaini said she wouldn’t step foot into the Deep Roads, too far from the sea and the Hanged Man. And Merrill, well, the Hawkes were worried she would get lost and then we would spend weeks finding her. No one worried about her being alone, Daisy could take care of herself, but her sense of direction was horrible.”

“What about Fenris or Aveline?”

“Aveline couldn’t leave the guard that long. She was in training to be Guard Captain, after all. The city guard would have fallen apart without her. Broody probably would have gone, but right before we got notice about a group of slavers, so he and Rivaini went to take care of them.” He said. “I was surprised Blondie even came. Garrett Hawke must have been very convincing for him to come with us, he complained almost every day about how much he hated the Deep Roads, but it was a good thing he was there…but that comes later in the story.”

I wonder why-

A harsh flash of visions, people running through dark tunnels. A dark-haired man stumbling and falling, a woman crying out and reaching for him. It flashed again, this time the dark-haired name, Carver, was being carried between two others, a mage lighting the way. Anders. Another flash and Carver was being led away, barely able to keep his head up. His siblings holding onto each other, Varric’s hand on the man’s arm. The vision cleared and Cat was back at the fire, but the emotions tied to the vision lingered, the fear and despair, the loss.

“Anders was the only one who could save Carver.” Cat said, a certainty to her voice. “He was the only one who could find the wardens.

Varric gave her a look. “Visions, right?”

“Yup.”

Now I’m seeing the Hawke family.

“Shit. I think I need a drink. Where’s the Hanged Man when you need it.” Varric said, shaking his head.

“In Kirkwall, along with the Blooming Rose.” Cat commented.

“Now how do you know about the Blooming Rose?”

Cat just shrugged. “How do I know anything?” She leaned against Varric.

“Hey, kid, it’s okay. Weird, but okay.” Varric said, putting his arm around her small shoulders.

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“Hey, kid, it’s okay. Weird, but okay.” Varric said, putting his arm around her small shoulders.

“How can it be okay, Varric? I see visions of things past. Horrible things. I can’t control it, not really.” A tear ran down her face. “I get all these memories, except for my own. I see other people’s
family, but never my own. Where are they, Varric? I had to have someone.”

“Kid, Leliana is searching. If anyone can find them, Nightingale will.”

“What if they were at the conclave? What if I am alone? So many people have died…” Cat said, sniffing into his shoulder.

“Hey, kid, you’ve got us.” He said. “You’ve got the grumpy Seeker, Chuckles, who isn’t so bad, Stealth, Fletch, Charmer, Momma Bear-”

“Momma Bear?” Cat asked through her tears.

*I haven’t heard that one before.*

“Kaaras.”

Cat snorted, she couldn’t help it.

“And then you have me.”

“What should I call you? Papa Varric?” Cat giggled through her tears.

“Papa Varric? I can work with that, kid.” Varric said, hugging her, “I can work with that.”

She sat there with him for a few minutes.

“Will you continue the story, Papa Varric?” Cat asked.

“Even though you know the ending?”

“I want to hear you tell it. And it isn’t really an ending, is it?”

“You’ve got me there, kid. Let’s see, oh right, entering the Deep Roads…”

With the crackling fire and Varric’s narration, Cat was soon asleep, the darker emotions held at bay, for now...
Picture by the lovely @trollskine on Tumblr!

https://daydreamingdragonage.tumblr.com/post/178797042713/dreamingdragonage-trollskine-a-full-body
Chibi drawing by the lovely, @tevinter-biscuit on tumblr!


Chapter End Notes

Let me know in the comments below what you think!

You can follow me on Tumblr here (https://daydreamingdragonage.tumblr.com), where I will answer questions and post fanart as it appears (I have one more commission in the
works!)

Thank you again for reading and to everyone who has left comments/kudos!
The Crossroads already looked better, even after just two days. The scouts had managed to keep the warring parties at a distance and the refugees were able to gather in relative peace, with full bellies and the promise of blankets.

The Herald’s group made their way up to their second camp and surveyed the state of things in the valley.

“Look at this. The apostates have gone mad with power.” Cassandra commented as they saw the flashes of magic in the valley.

“I see just as many templars, Seeker.” Solas remarked.

“Mages and templars, and innocent people caught in the middle. Some things never change.” Varric said, resigned.

“We should avoid this chaos, if possible. Cat has marked the location of the different camps. We should take the fight directly to them and end this.” Kaaras commented, his trained eyes tracking the movement below.

“Agreed.” Malika said.

“We will have to backtrack around, if we want to avoid the valley.” Evie said, looking over the map.

“Very well, let us be on with it.” Cassandra said and marched forward.

As they made their way back through the Crossroads and into the hills, Cat felt her anxiety rising.

*Is this the right thing to do? It feels wrong…*

“I’m watching you, Varric. Just so you know.” Cassandra said as they walked.

“Well, that makes me feel all warm and fuzzy inside. What’d I do now?” Varric complained.

“Nothing. Yet. Just keep it that way.”

“Varric Tethras, Paragon of Good Behavior, at your service, Seeker.”

“You told the Herald about a brothel, Varric!”

“In my defense, the kid already knew about it.”
“I thought you were the Paragon of Manliness, Varric?” Cat asked, a brief vision flaring.

“And you’re sure you don’t know Rivaini, kid?” Varric asked.

“Not that I know of.” Cat replied, shrugging.

Cassandra just made a disgusted noise and kept moving forward.

They hadn’t gone far when a scout waved them down.

“Recruit Belette reporting. Watch yourself. Bandits up ahead – or something, anyway. They’re blocking the road.” The woman said, her bow in hand as she scanned the road.

“You don’t think they are bandits?” Kaaras questioned from his place beside Cat.

“Bandits wait until people are vulnerable, then hit them fast, so nobody escapes. These bastards show themselves too early. They care more about driving people away than taking loot. They’re either stupid, or they’re more than just bandits. And they’re too well armed for stupid.”


“Several groups, some of them with bows. They’ve got better armor than most around here. It’s too many for us. If you head out there, careful you don’t get flanked. They don’t take prisoners.” The scout cautioned.

Cat reached up and gripped Kaaras hand. He squeezed it back, catching her eye and giving her a wink.

Another danger for them to face. But we can’t leave them to attack the refugees.

“Thanks for the warning.” Mahonan said.

They moved slightly ahead, before Cassandra stopped them.

“Is there another path we can take? We will need to deal with the bandits, but the mages and templars should be dealt with first. Can we go around?”

“I only see this path, unless we want to go through the valley, Seeker.” Evie said.

“Very well, we will deal with the bandits and then the mages.” Cassandra said and started moving again.

“I will scout ahead.” Malika said, before slipping into the tree line and out of sight. Shortly, she appeared again.

“Seven bandits ahead, 4 archers, 3 guards, all well armored.” Malika said. “But no mages. If we get behind them and take out the archers, it shouldn’t be too difficult.”

“Good. Trevelyan, you stay with Cat, the rest of us will deal with them.” Kaaras ordered, reaching for his greatsword.

“Understood.” Evie replied.

Kaaras crouched down to look Cat in her worried eyes. “We’ll be right back, okay?”

“Okay. Be safe.” She said, letting go of Kaaras’s hand and moving beside Evie, unbuckling her staff.
and holding it in her hands.

The group slipped away.

*Will it ever get easier to watch them go ahead of me?*

**

The first group of bandits dealt with, they moved on. They had found a letter on one of the would-be bandits and it proved they were more than just bandits. From the amount of goods they had in their camp, they had killed or scared away a number of people.

*We needed to stop them. They were hurting innocent people.*

Rounding the bend, the group found a woman yelling in Elven and fighting off a fiery rage demon. Solas and Mahonan jumped forward to help, setting off simultaneous spells. The demon must have been close to death, because it roared out and faded, just remnants of ash left behind. As the rest of the group approached, they heard the woman speak.

“Andaran Atish’an. I did not expect to see another of Dalish blood here. My name is Mihris.” She said to Mahonan. Looking to the full group, she continued, “By your weapons, I see you come ready for battle. Perhaps we face a common enemy in these demons.”

Cat looked at the woman and noted her gnarled staff and light brown hair. She had a brown-inked vallaslin, June’s, if the flash of information was accurate.

“Are you fighting the demons on your own?” Mahonan asked, tilting his head. He had a smile on his face, seemingly excited to meet one of his kin, however distant.

“Fighting the demons is pointless. There will always be more. And I have no means of closing the rifts.” She explained, shifting to lean against her staff, rather heavily. “But I have heard of elven artifacts that measure the veil. They may tell us where new rifts will appear. I was not expecting so many demons, however. I believe one of the artifacts is nearby.” She looked over the group again, noting Cat this time. “Can you help me reach it?”

“Well-” Mahonan started to say.

“We cannot afford too many detours from our goal.” Cassandra interjected.

“It could be important, Cassandra.” Cat added.

“Such artifacts could be invaluable to our cause.” Solas noted.

“Seeker, it sounds worth investigating.” Mahonan asserted.

Cassandra sighed, “Very well, but we need to hurry.”

“Thank you. It shouldn’t be too much farther ahead.” Mihris replied.

They moved together through the ruins.

“Da’len, these are dangerous times to be travelling.” Mihris said to Cat.

“They are. But I am well protected.” Cat said, smiling at her guards and friends. The woman inclined her head in reply, but said nothing.
They reached an entrance into a cavern, but the entrance was covered with rubble from two collapsed pillars.

“We’ll need focused magical energy to get by.” Mihris commented. Looking to Solas, she taunted, “You, flat-ear. Can you manage it?”

Flat-ear? What does that mean?

“Ma Nuvenin, Da’len.” Solas replied. He stepped forward and motioned for Cat to step forward. “Watch what I do, da’len.” Taking both of his hands, he brought them together in front of him, pulling power from his mana. His hands glowed green, like the Breach, and it spread out to the rubble. As he pulled his hands away, the rubble moved and gracefully set back into place. The air around him was electrified, sending a tingling sensation up Cat’s arms.

“Can I try that next time?” Cat asked, wonder in her eyes.

Solas chuckled, “If there is a next time for such a feat, then yes, da’len.”

Entering the archway, as her eyes adjusted, Cat saw something coming towards her. She reacted instinctively and raised her hands in front of her. She felt a wave of magical energy cover her and heard the impact as the attack hit the edge of a barrier. She looked back and saw Solas, his hand outstretched from casting. “Get back, da’len!” He shouted, sending a chain of lightning towards something.

Cat didn’t have time to move back, before Cassandra and Malika had pushed in front of her, blocking her from the demons, blades striking.

Evie and Varric fired well placed arrows at their foes and it was over by the time Cat made it outside.

“Little Bit, maybe you should let one of us enter a dark cavern first.” Evie advised.

“Whoops.” Was all Cat said and gave her a sheepish grin. Looking forward, she inquired, “Can I enter now?”

“The entrance is clear and we got a few more samples for Minaeve. And we managed not to let the demons eat our Little Bit, so good all around.” Mahonan teased.

“I am sorry…” Cat said.

As she entered with Mahonan and Evie, Mihris turned to them and said, “Thank you for joining me. I do not think I could have done this alone.”

“What took you away from your clan, if I may ask?”

“They were all killed…by a demon that our keeper was foolish enough to summon. I am the only survivor of Clan Virnehn. I was searching for another clan that would take me in when the Breach appeared.”

Wait…not all the clan was killed…the children still live? And the demon was…wait I just had the name!

“Now, I am doing whatever I can to help with this madness.” She finished, resigned note to her voice.

Mahonan had a serious sorrowful look, “Ir abelas, lethallan.”
“Ma serannas.” She said, inclining her head.

_She has lost much._

Solas stood examining a brazier on the wall, a curious look on his face. “Da’len, come here, I think you will enjoy this.”

Cat slipped past the others, apologizing as she went. “What is it?”

“I will show you how to summon Veilfire.” Solas said.

“Is it like the veillight you showed me?” Cat asked.

Mahonan and Mihris edged closer, listening in.

“Similar. Veillights are made from your memory of what light is. Veilfire is summoned to an object when you remind it that it once burned.” He explained. “Here, focus on the center, concentrate on what fire feels like.”

Cat moved in front of the thing, crinkling her nose and concentrating.

“Remember what the heat of the fire feels like, how it smells, the way it dances.” Solas instructed. Moving behind her, he leaned down and guided her hand, “Once you feel it, pull gently, but quickly at the veil, creating a circle with your hand. You have to pull the memory of the fire from the Fade.”

Cat focused, feeling Solas’s magic mix with her and guide it. With the thought of fire firmly in mind, she tugged at the Fade. It went heavy, like something stuck in molasses, so she tugged harder. It suddenly came loose, as she motioned a circle in front of her body, towards the brazier, it flickered to life in front of her, a pale, but vibrant green. She looked at it in shock, but then beamed up at Solas. “I did it!”

“Excellent, da’len.” He said, pride in his voice. He showed her how to cup it in her hand, to carry it will her. It tickled her right hand, but it didn’t feel hot, but cool, like a breeze. The other mages followed her example and the flickering light lit the way.

The group moved down the steps, further into the ruins, Cat at the back. As they descended, Cat warned them of more demons, a flash telling her that there would be shades and wraths below.

_Could have used that warning earlier…_

Her companions had no trouble with them and they all stood in the chamber as the mages lit the torches around the room with veillfire.

“There. If we activate that crystal, it should react to the strength of the veil.” Mihris said, coming upon a device of some kind.

It looked like an orb or a globe? Cat wasn’t sure, but she approached it, eyes looking for the way to activate it. Another flash of vision and her hand found a button. Pushing a bit of her magic into it, it started glowing and crackling.

“Yes, the wards are helping to strengthen the veil. This area should be safer for travelers now.” Solas said. “You intuited the way to activate that very quickly, da’len. Well done.”

“Thank you, Solas.”

_It was a vision, but…_
“Well, that should prove useful.” Mihris commented, before bending down to look at something under the loose stones. “And it seems the ancestors left something for me as well. Interesting. I believe our alliance is concluded. Go in peace, strangers.”

Cat tugged at Solas’s sleeve and motioned towards Mihris. He turned.

“Ma halani, ma glandival. Vir enasalin.” Solas said to her.

_I wonder what that was?_

“I…perhaps you are right. Here. Take it.” She said, handing the thing, a pendant, to Solas. “Go with Mythal’s blessing.”

_I didn’t want him to…oh well._

She turned to continue exploring the ruins, but Cat gently tapped her arm.

“I don’t know…that is…you said you wanted to help?”

“Yes, da’len. I am trying to do what I can.”

“Perhaps you would join the Inquisition? The Inquisition is trying to close the Breach and we could use more help.”

“Little Bit, are we not enough for you?” Mahonan asked, mock hurt in his voice.

“Well, we may need a Dalish mage who knows what they are doing.” Cat responded reflexively with sarcasm. Realizing what she said, she clarified, “Oh no! I didn’t mean it like that, I was just joking!”

Mahonan looked surprised before he started laughing heartily. “I’m glad Ylsa is not here! I couldn’t handle both of you!”

Cat turned back to Mihris, giving her the puppy-dog eyes that worked so well before.

“I will consider it, da’len. If I decide to join, I will find one of your camps.” She said.

_Yes! I am recruiting people!_

_Well, possibly._

“Thank you for considering it.” Cat said, giving a small bow to her.

Taking the veilfire in her hand, she explored the room, the other mages following suit. Kaaras beside her, they found a couple broken weapons, more rumble, and one old chest with a weathered old book. It had some interesting drawings, of armor, by the looks of it, so Kaaras placed it in his pack for Harritt. It was so exciting and Cat felt…somehow more at home around the ruins?

As they moved around a pillar, Cat heard a sound, like a…she wasn’t sure how to describe it.

“Kaaras, did you hear that?”

“Hear what?”

She moved and it sounded again, it was like a chime?
“What do you hear?”

“I don’t know, but I think—” She moved closer and suddenly on the pillar, something flared bluish-green and one final chiming sound echoed in her head. A symbol appeared by the light of the captured veillfire.

“Solas, would you come over here?” Kaaras asked. Solas joined them and examined the symbol.

“This is a rune.” He said. “The veillfire must be making it legible. If I’m not mistaken, it is a rune for fire.”

“What would it do?” Cat asked.

“A skilled enchanter could use this design to imbued weapons with fire.” Solas explained, pulling out his journal from his pack. Carefully, he copied it into his book, Cat watching him the whole time.

*Maybe I should get a journal…*

“We need to move on now.” Cassandra said, the impatience clear in her voice. “We have wasted enough time, we must continue.”

“Of course, Seeker.”

“Dareth shiral.” Mihris said to them as they climbed the stairs.

“To you as well, Mihris!” Cat called back.

*I wish we had more time to explore…*

**

They made short work of the remaining “bandits.” The documents on them indicated they had a stronghold somewhere in the Hinterlands, but that would have to wait until a later date to be dealt with.

*The refugees should be safer on these roads now.*

They had fought off a few smaller groups of templars and mages, each time, one of the body guards shielding Cat from danger.

“You fight hard, Seeker.” Solas commented after the last group of rogue mages.

“We would be dead if I did not.” She said. She held out a hand, sensing something. “We are nearing the apostates. Be on your guard.”

The party prepared. The woods around them had an energy, like after lightning hits. There were wooden things, symbols, dangling from the limbs, which made Cat at least feel uneasy. As they got closer, large spikes of ice jutted out of the earth, some with bodies in or around them.

Cat shivered, more from the scene than the cold.

“Mahonan, since we are facing mages. I want you to guard the Little Bit.” Kaaras instructed.

Mahonan nodded.

“Do you think they can be reasoned with?” Cat asked.
We don’t have to fight them, do we?

“It is passed time for that.” Cassandra said. “They will not listen to us.”

“Can’t we try?” Cat pleaded.

“Little Bit, these people are desperate and they have done a lot of damage. Such people rarely can be reasoned with, fear makes them react violently.” Kaaras said.

But, what if we could…

The group moved in, leaving Cat and her doubts behind, shouts and yells soon echoing through the wood. Flashes of magic and clanging steel. Cat gripped her staff, knuckles white with the effort. She hated her friends being in danger while she could do nothing to help. Her stomach felt upset, from worry and uncertainty.

As the fight ended, Mahonan peeked around and then guided Cat forward. A few bodies were on the ground, which Cat avoided as best she could. Solas was examining a glowing orange barrier over a cave entrance, Cassandra consulting with him.

They are just trying to protect themselves. Surely there is another way…But they know better. I trust them.

“Stand back.” Solas said. As everyone did, he send a series of quick blasts from his staff. As he did so, the barrier broke, fizzling into nothing.

Then all hell broke loose.

Solas was barely able to throw up a barrier when a barrage of spells hit it. Cassandra and Malika charged in, with Kaaras, Evie, and Varric close behind.

Cat’s heart started thumping as she stared at the entrance, waiting for them to emerge. Mahonan kept casting barriers over them, his own eyes trained on the entrance.

Please, let them be okay. Pleasepleasepleasepleaseplease....

Her body was tensed, limbs almost shaking from the effort, her heart beating fast as she watched and waited.

Kaaras’s bellowing shouts echoed out from the entrance, “Varric’s down, somebody cover him!”

VARRIC!!!

Cat raced forward, thoughts of safety far from her mind, barely hearing Mahonan shouting for her to stop.

Nononononononononono...

She entered the cave and discovered pandemonium inside. The mages had the high ground, using barricades to block the attacks. Sigils glowed across the ground, in icy blues and fiery oranges. Magic was heavy in the air and the noise was cacophonous, figures shifting, barriers and shields blocking. It was hard to distinguish friend from foe in the din.

Tearing her eyes from the chaotic scene before her, they darted to Varric’s prone form on the ground. She stifled a cry and ran to him, dashing between the marks on the ground, her agile, small feet avoiding them. A stray spell flung overhead.
She slid to the ground beside him, uncorking a healing potion from her small pack. He was groaning, his eyes unfocused, Bianca on the side, out of his hands. Cat carefully poured the potion into his mouth, lifting his head slightly, hoping he wouldn’t choke. He swallowed and as the magic took hold, his breathing steadied, and his wounds started closing.

*He is going to make it!*

Varric opened his eyes, and they went wide. “CAT LOOK OUT!”

Cat turned and everything went slow.

A man stood there, sword raised above them both, preparing to bring it down.

*What do I-*

Cat gasped and a vision rocked her, flashes upon flashes of memories flooding her, stronger and faster than any she had experienced before. Her staff was on the ground beside Varric, no time to raise it. Her hand went to her belt and she pulled the small knife, the new memories guiding her. Her hands moved, unconsciously, with muscle memory not her own.

She bolted upward, her hands jamming the tiny knife into the man’s chest, perfectly between his ribs, straight into his heart, a bolt of fire following through the blade and into his body, burning as it impacted, scorching his body around the wound. He let out a cry of pain as she hit.

She watched as his face contorted into shock and pain, and then, he fell, dropping his sword, his knees giving out. She could truly see his face then. Young. Pale eyes and freckles, sandy hair. Her hand was still on the knife in his chest, the hot blood pouring onto her arms. His dead eyes stare at her, now at her level, before he crumples completely to the ground, the knife slipping out of his chest as he falls.

Cat stares. She can’t breathe. She can’t move. Blood on her hands.

Her own legs give out and she is by his body.

Cat drops the knife, an afterthought. She distantly hears shouting, her name barely registering, her full focus on the body before her.

*What have I done! I have to do something, anything!*

She grabs a potion, pouring it into his mouth, but it doesn’t work. She knew it wouldn’t, it just spilled out of his mouth, pooling on the ground.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry!” She chants, over and over, her thoughts racing, her body shaking.

*I killed him…*

Reality snapped back, time no longer slow, but all too fast. Her eyes darted around, seeing other bodies, people fighting, so much death.

*I killed…*

Vision going black, blood on her hands, she threw back her head and let out a keening wail. The sound ricocheted through the tunnel, reverberating through the veil itself, making everyone who was attuned to such things pause in confusion, before a wave of force pushed against everyone in the
cavern, throwing several of them to the ground.

And then there was silence.

Chapter End Notes

Let me know in the comments below what you think!

You can follow me on Tumblr here (https://daydreamingdragonage.tumblr.com), where I will answer questions and post fanart as it appears (I have one more commission in the works!).

Thank you again for reading and to everyone who has left comments/kudos!
The Hinterlands - Part 3

Chapter Summary

Picking up where the last chapter left off, Kaaras and Cassandra deal with the fallout. Malika has a talk with Cat about what happened.

Chapter Notes

I didn't want to leave y'all hanging after the last chapter, so here is the next one.

Kaaras heard Varric’s shout, but he wouldn’t, couldn’t, believe it.

_No, she can’t be in here!_

He pivoted, his previous assailant on the ground, and he saw the familiar small form of Cat beside Varric.

But he was too far away, the mercenary already over them, his sword posed to strike.

_NO!

He watched, terrified as suddenly Cat shifted upwards, a streak of motion and then the man fell. Just a flash of a blade and fire and he was down.

“Cat, get back! Get to cover!” Kaaras fought through, trying to reach her, spells still flying in the air. “Someone get to her!”

The others were shouting, but Kaaras was too focused. He batted aside a sellsword, legs carrying him too slow to his charge.

_Little bit!!_

As he neared her, she dropped. He had almost reached her when she looked up and cried out, the most heart-wrenching sound he had ever heard.

A death wail.

And then he was hit with an invisible wall of force. It pushed him back several feet, only his years of training and luck keeping him from being pushed to the ground.

The cavern went silent, except for the sobbing cries of the crumpled little girl. Kaaras looked around and saw most of the people, Inquisition and rogue mages alike, sprawled on the cavern floor.

Kaaras rushed to her side, reaching her just as Varric was able to sit up, placing a hand on her shoulder, and Solas, who had fade-stepped to her. On either side, they tried to pull her away from the
body, but she wouldn’t move.

“Little Bit, we need to move, we need to get out of here.” Kaaras said.

She didn’t respond, didn’t even seem to hear him. For a loss at what else to do, Solas picked her up, holding her protectively, her little hands grasping at his neck, leaving bloody marks, as he cast a barrier around them. Varric rose, picking up Bianca. Kaaras regripped his sword. Together they turned back to the mages.

“Stop, peace!” A mage yelled, throwing up a barrier around their people, now grouping together, but raising their hands up, in a placating motion. “We mean no harm to the child!”

The others of their party had regained their footing, weapons ready. Mahonan appeared next to Kaaras, blood across his cheek, staff glowing.

“There has been enough bloodshed! Let us speak.” Their words cut through the cavern.

“Talk?! You wish to talk now?!” Cassandra asked, incredulous.

“I had heard rumor that the Herald was a child, but I didn’t think it possible.” They said. “Our war is not with her nor the Inquisition.”

“Then who is it with?” Solas asked, his quiet voice full of accusation.

“With those that would threaten our freedom.” The mage declared. “I am Asher, formerly of Kinloch, freed at last. Our quarrel is with the templars, not with you.”

“I know many countryfolk who would argue.” Varric commented.

I’ve seen the wreckage myself.

“Some of our brethren have acted rashly, but we are desperate! Few of us even remember life outside of the Circle! What would you have us do?” They implored.

“Not torment the innocent people of this land!” Evie cried out, her bow drawn.

Their voice grew heavy. “Perhaps we have gone about this the wrong way.” They looked at the fallen forms of their comrades, some still groaning. They looked up, meeting Cassandra’s eyes. “We surrender to you. We ask to be allowed to join those gathered in Redcliffe. If that is not allowed, we beseech mercy. This was a tragic misunderstanding. We thought you with the templars.”

“The templars?”

“You travel with a Seeker, what were we to think?”

Shit.

“After the chaos you have caused, you would have us unleash you onto the villagers?” Cassandra demanded.

Seeker, tread carefully…

“We are losing this war, as you call it. We cannot hide. We tried to make it on our own, but we have failed.”

“Asher?” One of the other mages looked at them, uncertainty in her voice.
“We are running out of options. Redcliffe is our only hope, if we are allowed to leave.”

“After all this, you think it will all work out?” Malika demanded. “That we will just let you walk away? You must think us fucking fools.”

The mage sighed and reached to summon a spell, “So be it. We will not be caged again.” Kaaras moved fully in front of Solas and his charge, sword barred. But before the mage could release it, a small voice spoke up.

“Please don’t.” Cat said, still clinging to Solas. Her voice sounded…hollow, broken. It echoed through the cavern, everyone turning to look at the small one.

Oh, Little Bit…

“There is so much death…” She shifted in Solas’s arms and her eyes focused for the briefest time, filled with purpose and certainty, looking out to the ragged group assembled. “As the Herald of Andraste, I bid you to leave. Go in peace.” Her green eyes stared into Asher’s, despair and horror shadowed in her gaze. That the mage did not flinch to see it spoke volumes to the tragedies they had seen.

Oh, Little Bit, do you understand what you have done?

**

They made it back to camp, the remaining rogue mages sent on their way to Redcliffe. After it was all said and done, 13 sellswords and 2 mages were dead in that cavern. Those who survived grabbed what things they could and ran, promising not to bother the Inquisition and to leave the villagers be.

The Herald had been silent the whole way, after her holy proclamation. She responded to nothing, her eyes unfocused, tears slowly streaming down her face, and her breathing erratic.

Solas said it was the shock and he cast a spell, murmuring elven words of comfort as it covered her and gently forcing her to dreamless sleep.

How could we have let this happen?

Cassandra was furious and terrified. The sound the girl had made would haunt them, haunt her.

Reaching the camp, the Herald was placed into one of the tents with Solas watching over her. One of the field medics was checking over Varric. And the four bodyguards were in deep discussion, intense whispers so as not to disturb the Herald.

Cassandra was left to explain the situation to the scouts, to write the report to send back to Haven. She wouldn't have chosen to let the mages go, but what could she do after the Herald's declaration? And could she truly say it was the wrong decision?

Maker help us, what will Leliana say?

Finishing the report, as brief as she could make it, she exited the tent to find Adaar, speaking lowly, but intently to the others. Cassandra walked passed. Adaar’s body held barely contained rage, Lavellan pale beside him, any signs of the usual jokes and smiles far from sight. Cadash looked grim and Trevelyan herself looked shocked, her bow still gripped in her hand.

“We. Have. To. Be. Better.” Kaaras said through clenched jaws.
“I’m sor-”

“Not just you, Mahonan. All of us. The whole thing went tits up from the start. We assumed they were beyond reasoning and they weren’t. Cat was right and we didn’t listen. We have to guard and listen.” He looked around, catching each of their gazes. “We have to be better.” The last words a whisper as the group fell silent, just sound of the crackling fire.

Cassandra walked faster, away from the defeated people. They had failed, they all had.

_We should have listened to her. I should have listened to her. What would Justinia say? We assumed the mages beyond reason and they responded as we expected. She begged us to try…_

Doubt gnawed at her, so certain had she been before. The path had seemed obvious. Rogue mages, terrorizing people, they had to be dealt with, as her training dictated. But now…

Cassandra found her way to the Herald’s tent, pulling back the flap. Solas glanced up when she entered.

“Sheeker, I need to remove the spell. It would be unwise to force her to sleep for too long.” He said.

Cassandra looked down at the Herald. Her clothes had been changed, the blood washed off. Her hair was loose around her, her face unhealthily pale. She looked so…small.

_Andraste, why did you send a child?_

“Do it.” She said.

Solas nodded and placed his hand to the Herald’s brow, a slight flow of magic and her eyes flickered open. They were unfocused at first. Her confused expression glancing between Solas and Cassandra.

_Perhaps she won’t remember…_

But her face fell, her body shaking again.

“Da’len…” The herald flung herself at Solas, her little arms hugging at his torso, her face buried in his chest. Her muffled sobs cut through Cassandra.

_We brought a child to a war._

“Shhh, shh, da’len.” Solas said, rubbing her back.

_We allowed this to happen…I should tell the others she is awake._

Cassandra moved as if to leave and Cat’s head whipped around.

“Wait, is Varric okay?” Her words were coming out in gasps, her eyes wide.

“A scout is seeing to him.” Cassandra reported.

Cat whipped back to the mage. “You have to check on him, Solas!” Her tear-stained face looking, imploring him to, her soft hiccupping breaking up her sobs. “You have to make sure he is okay…”

“I will, da’len.” He said. He rose slowly, cradling the girl. “Seeker, if you would stay will her.”

_ME? But-
Cat looked at her, her bright green eyes dimmer behind the building tears.

“Of course.” Cassandra said, reaching to pick up the child. She was awkward, unpracticed. It had been years since she had help a child, so long ago, she couldn’t actually remember.

The Herald’s grip was tight. As she settled, Cassandra felt her quivering body.

_She is so young._

“I will return promptly.” Solas promised, before ducking out.

Cassandra just stood there, feeling like a new recruit who didn’t know how to hold a shield.

_I should have gotten someone else._

“Cassandra…what do I do?” Cat’s unsteady voice asked.

“How do you mean?”

“How do I…I killed someone.” The Herald’s voice was barely above a whisper.

Cassandra shifted her in her arms, looking down at her little face, staring up at her for answers.

“You move forward.” Cassandra said. “It is never an easy thing to kill, nor should it be. The man threatened you and you did what was necessary.” She tried to sound encouraging, but the words sounded empty to her own ears. Words were never her strong suit. She preferred action. She understood action. And what do you say to a child?

“I don’t know if I can believe that…” She mumbled. Her shuddering sobs had slowed, her eyes heavy.

“Perhaps you should lie down?” Cassandra suggested.

“I don’t want to be alone…” _I will call someone-_ “Will you stay with me, please, Cassandra?”

Looking at her pleading eyes, Cassandra sighed. She set the Herald down and arranged the bed roll, slipping into it and motioning to the girl.

The Herald curled up next to her. The silence was deafening.

_How do I comfort her?_

Reaching for memorized lines, she softly began reciting the Chant of Light, mimicking Solas and rubbing the girl’s back.

Cat, tucked in against her chest, was lulled to sleep by the old familiar words, said over and over in respect and devotion, and now serving as comfort to the young and troubled Herald.

_Maker watch out for this young one. Maker watch out for us all._

**

Cat woke up the next morning, alone in her bedroll. She sat up quick and saw Malika sitting in the corner on a barrel.

She felt like she was in a fog, nothing seemed real. How could any of it be real?
Malika sharpened a knife, focused on her task. The scraping sound filling the tent consistent, steady.

“Should I tell the others you are awake?” Malika asked, not looking up.

“I…don’t know.”

Malika nodded. “Okay then.”

Cat looked down, letting her hair cover most of her face, trying to block out the world. She felt numb, like she was walking through a nightmare she couldn’t wake up from. She pulled her knees up to her chin, just trying to process what had happened.

From her place in the corner, Malika spoke. “Everyone dies. It is either now or later. Someone comes at you, you have to decide if it is going to be them or you. It’s not pretty, it’s not clean, but it is reality.” She paused her work, holding up the knife to look at it.

“Does it get easier? The guilt?”

“Yes. And no.” Malika finally looked at her. “Fuck. I’m not good at this. It took me the morning to come up with that first part.”

Cat looked back down.

“A lot of shitty things happen to good and bad people. But you, the Inquisition, you are helping to keep the fucking world together. That means decisions have to be made, hard decisions, because it’s the end of the world. The man came at you, a kid. You reacted and saved yourself. Is the situation shitty? Yeah. But from where I am, it could have been a lot worse.”

“How?”

“You could be dead. Varric could be dead. We could all be dead in that cavern.”

That made Cat pause.

*If I died, there would be no way to close the Breach…and I didn’t want the others to die…*

“Feel bad, if you have to, but don’t feel bad for being the one alive. They made their choices and you made yours.” Malika stood, setting the whetstone down.

“This was the first person I killed, I don’t want to kill someone else.” Cat looked down at her hands, sure there was still blood on them.

“Then don’t. Stay behind us. We all already have blood on our hands, no reason for you to. You have seen the reality, but you don’t have to live it.”

“But didn’t you say-”

“I was wrong.” Malika said. “Paragon’s asses, I was wrong.” She moved beside Cat and held out the knife. Cat’s knife.

Cat tried to scramble away, but Malika grabbed her shoulder, holding her in place.

“I was wrong, but you should not be defenseless.” She placed the knife in her small, trembling hands.
I don’t want this…

Cat just stared down at it. The blood was gone, but she kept seeing it in his chest, his lifeless eyes.

Malika pulled out a blade from behind her. It was worn down, obviously old.

“This was my first dagger, Little Bit. Stolen off an unsuspecting merchant.” Cat looked at her, confused. “I was 9 years old. It wasn’t the first thing I stole, nor was it the last. I killed for the first time when I was 13. A deal went fucking bad, both sides double crossing the others. One of them came at me with a knife, so I stabbed them with my own, watched them bleed out, writhing on the floor.”

She paused, Cat tentatively placed a hand on her arm.

“I keep this dagger to remember what could have happened. The man was no worse than me, but I decided to live. This reminds me that I choose to live.” She looked at Cat. “I don’t know if this makes anything better or if I just made things worse, but that is my take on things.”

Cat considered her words, realizing this was the most she had ever heard Malika talk.

She does care…

“Come on, the other will want to see you. Still have a hole in the sky.” Malika said.

I have to focus on the Breach…

Malika helped her dress and braided her hair, quickly and efficiently. Malika slipped Cat’s knife into its little sheath at her side. Straightening her shoulders as best she could, feeling heavier than ever, Cat followed Malika out of the tent, into the late morning light.

I have to focus on the Breach…

Chapter End Notes

Let me know in the comments below what you think!

You can follow me on Tumblr here (https://daydreamingdragonage.tumblr.com), where I will answer questions and post fanart as it appears (I have one more commission in the works!).

Thank you again for reading and to everyone who has left comments/kudos!
Chapter Summary

The rogue templars are dealt with, Cat talks with Harding, they find the horsemaster, and finally, they are going back to Haven.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Little Bit, if you want to take some time…” Kaaras asked, his voice betraying how much he cared. Everyone was treating her like she would break, like anything they said would set her off. Well, everyone except Malika. Once they rejoined the others, Malika had resumed her reticent watch.

“No, we can’t wait around.” Cat sighed.

*I might want to just go back to Haven, but we can’t. I can’t.*

“We have to deal with the templars, Kaaras.” She said.

Cat looked around the tent, the map on the table in the middle. Her companions wore varying levels of concern on their faces.

*They are worried about me…I guess I would be too…*

“Can we reason with them?” Cat asked, her voice soft, hesitant.

“We can try, Little Bit.” Kaaras said. “We will try.” He amended with more conviction.

She nodded. Her head ached, but she didn’t want to mention it. She would bare the pain, she deserved it.

The others talked strategy, looking over the map, throwing suggestions and arguing the finer points. Varric shifted over to stand beside Cat and he gently bumped her shoulder with his.

“Hey kid, thanks for saving me in there.”

She gave him a tired smile. “Of course, I couldn’t let Papa Varric die, you still have to finish the story.” She tried to make the statement light and teasing, but failed.

“Looking out for me, I see how it is. Hey, maybe I will have to start calling you Hero.”

“I’m not a hero, Varric.” Cat said, looking down.

“Few heroes think they are.” Varric said, as Cassandra and Kaaras hashed out the details of their plan.

Heroes *don’t have blood on their hands,* right?

**
“The templars have secured a position ahead.” Cassandra said. “They have an outpost by the bridge. We should proceed with caution. Let me speak first. They may yet respect my status as a Seeker.”

“Very well. Mahonan and Solas, stay to the back. If they attack and use smite, they could cripple you.” Kaaras advised.

“Let’s hope they can be convinced by the Seeker’s charms.” Varric commented, earning him a glare. “What?”

“Be careful, everyone.” Cat told them, trying to show a brave face. They each nodded or gave her an encouraging smile. No one was truly optimistic though, as they left to try to parley with the rogue templars.

Evie stayed back with her this time. She was even more vigilant, eyes watching Cat as much as the road.

“I’m not going to run in this time.” Cat said, after catching Evie watching her.

“I was not…well, we are all worried.”

“I know.” Cat flashed back to the cave, rubbing her hands on her pants, whipping off imagined blood stains. The noise, the smell of magic, his pale eyes…

“You do not need to put yourself in unnecessary risk, Cat.” Evie said, breaking through.

“I had to get to Varric.”

“I know…Maker, we are supposed to protect you.” Evie said, her hand worrying at the feather on her arrow.

Cat leaned against her. “I don’t like feeling useless.”

“You are not useless. You can close the rifts. Only you can do that.” Evie said. “I do not know why Andraste chose you nor why she blesses you with visions, but I have to believe she had reason. You have led us this far.” Evie said. “I was gladdened to hear you claim the title in the cavern, if nothing else. Do you believe Andraste chose you now?”

“I don’t…Evie, I still don’t know. She might have.” Cat said.

_I did call myself the Herald of Andraste, didn’t I? It made sense at the time…_

“I know you want me to believe, so does Cassandra and probably Leliana and who knows all else… and I don’t believe, I just don’t remember.” Cat sighed, brushing off dust from her staff, which Mahonan had returned to her. “I feel like something or someone is influencing this all, but who…I don’t mind you believing it is Andraste, I’m just undecided.” Cat shuffled, looking down at her feet.

“That is…” Evie sighed. “I do not mean to pressure you. It would be easier if you believed, but…my faith will be enough.”

The time dragged on. After 10 minutes, they heard the shouts. Cat tensed.

_Please let them be okay, please._

**

After almost an hour, their party returned to them, bloodied but whole. No templars were with them.
Cassandra reported. “Herald, we tried to reason with them. They even agreed to talk, but once they realized we traveled with mages, they stopped listening and attacked.”

“I understand, Cassandra.” Cat said.

* I had hoped… *

“We did try.” Mahonan said. His voice was strained. It had lost the familiar mirth.

“I believe you.” She looked up at them, “Thank you for trying.”

The group sedately made their way back towards the camp, to clean up before attempting to reach the horsemaster.

**

Cat found herself sitting on one of the rough-hewn benches, the others changing armor and bandaging their wounds. One of the scouts had returned to camp with a shard, after using the map location they had marked. She held it in her hands and it was bigger than she expected. It was bluish, kind of like the lyrium potions she had seen and it had part of a skull imbedded in it. It proved an interesting distraction from her darker thoughts.

* So, this is what the skull on the hill led to…I know they are important, but why? *

Interrupting her pondering, Scout Harding sat down beside her.

“Herald, are you okay?”

Cat just shrugged.

“I heard what all you have been doing, for the people here.” Harding said. “This was my home, it means a lot to me that the Inquisition has done so much to help. I heard that you are the main reason for that.”

“I guess, but it was mostly the scouts.”

“You asked them to do it. Truly, thank you.”

Lace paused, seeing Cat’s still conflicted face.

“I heard what happened with the mages.” She said, softly. “People still believe in you, in what you stand for…and you have good people, ready to help you, don’t forget that. You are not alone, Herald.”

*I guess everyone knows now.*

“Thank you, Lace.”

“You know my name?”

“I guess I do. Is it alright if I use it?”

“Of course, Herald, I was just surprised. Most don’t get past the Scout part and those that do usually stick with Harding.”

“You can call me Cat, if you want.”
“Okay, Cat, it’s a deal.” Lace gave her a smile. “I just got orders. I’m moving on. Just wanted to check in before I left.”

“Oh, thank you. Where are you heading?”

“North, I’m not supposed to say more than that for now.”

Wouldn’t want to upset the spymaster…

“Be careful, Lace.”

“You as well, Cat.”

Will I ever see her again?

Lace stood up to make her way, but Cat got another flash of vision.

“Lace!”

“Yes?”

“See you soon.” Cat smiled.

I will see her again.

After watching her walk away and feeling a little better about the future, Cat returned to the shard, feeling the faint magical energy from it.

I wonder what your purpose is? And how do skulls connect to it?

**

Kaaras forded the river, the water only coming up to his knees, helping the others cross the broken bridge. Cassandra, Malika, and Mahonan were already across and it was Cat’s turn.

“Is the water cold?” Cat asked, looking down over the broken planks.

“Doesn’t bother me, Little Bit. Come on, I won’t drop you.” Kaaras said, reaching out his arms to her.

“Okay.” Cat leapt up to him, flinging her arms around his neck.

“I got you. I got you.” The second time he said it, it was more to himself than Cat.

Once everyone was across, Kaaras set Cat up on his shoulders, like they did in Haven. Cassandra looked to say something about it, but the happy look that covered Cat’s face, even for a moment, made her pause.

Coming around the bend, they saw a pack of wolves.

“Stay back, we will try to drive them away.” Cassandra said, drawing her blade.

The rest followed after her, leaving Kaaras and Cat alone.

“Little Bit, it’s okay to not be okay.” Kaaras said.

“I…I know, Kaaras. But I don’t have time to not be okay.” Cat said, leaning on his head from her
perch.

“We will make time.”

“I just feel...everything. One minute I just want to curl up and cry, the other I feel like it was a nightmare, that it wasn’t real. It leaves me feeling, numb, distant.”

“You will feel it, probably for the rest of your life. But, you can’t let that stop you from living.” Kaaras shifted, and whispered. “Twice now, I have failed you.”

“No, you haven’t, Kaaras. I think it was always going to come to this.” She said, sounding wiser and older than her years. “I just have to find a way to live with it. To live in this role I fell into.”

They both went silent, Cat’s thoughts cycling through what happened.

“I want to find out who he was, let his family know.” Cat said.

“We can try to find out, Little Bit.”

Conversation was cut off as the others returned.

“No normal wolf would fight with such determination.” Cassandra declared.

“It is possible the Breach has driven them mad.” Solas commented.

“Everyone okay?” Cat asked, looking over them.

“One got Charmer’s leg, but Chuckles took care of it.” Varric said, slinging Bianca over his shoulder. Malika was favoring one leg, but gave Cat the briefest of nods to indicate she was fine.

*They are safe again, for now.*

**

“Now, I had Seanna bring in some of the horses.” Dennet said, standing up from the table. When they had arrived at the ranch, after taking care of a rift nearby, Dennet had welcomed them and he and his family hosted them for a late lunch. It was simple fair, but hot and fresh. “Let’s see if they will take to you.”

While not giving them horses to outfit the entire Inquisition, he had offered to provide horses for their party. He had given them each an evaluating look and gave Seanna instructions to pull certain horses from the stables and into the paddock.

As they walked, he said, “I pride myself on being able to gage a rider, see what would be the best fit for them.”

As the group approached the paddock, Seanna was brushing off a horse, a big muscular grey/white stallion.

“Ah, here is one of our Imperial Warmbloods. An imposing mount. This fellow descended from the stock brought down when the Tevinter Imperium ruled. Course, they have changed a bit since then, but they still have the power of their old sires.” Dennet turned to Cassandra. “Why don’t you go see if he likes you, Lady Seeker?”

*He is so pretty!*
“Very well.” Cassandra approached him and he nuzzled at her hand.

Dennet gave a whistle and a huge horse came plodding forward.

“This here is a Ferelden Draft, bred for their strength. We usually use them for hard labor, but I figured you could use the extra strength, less likely to tire after a long ride.” Dennet said, slinging a halter on him and handing the rope to Kaaras. “At 17 hands, he is the tallest in my herds.”

**HE IS ENORMOUS!!!**

Kaaras nodded and started walking his new mount around the paddock. “Thank you, Master Dennet.”

Cat watched as Dennet would bring a horse forward for each member of the party. Varric and Evie ended up with Free Marches Rangers, Varric’s a smaller paint gelding and Evie’s a light chestnut mare. Mahonan was given a palomino Taslin Strider mare, with a wide white blaze on her face. Solas and Malika each got a Ferelden Forder gelding, both dark bays, but Solas’s had two white socks.

It was finally Cat’s turn.

Cat stared at the horse in front of her. When Dennet had offered them steeds, Cat was excited, but now…

Now she was over the moon! The stocky blue roan mare in front of her was for her! Her!

“Now, this here is a Dalish All-Bred.”

Mahonan muttered from his place atop his mount, “Doesn’t look like any Dalish I know.”

“Shush.” Cat said, staring at the horse.

“A hardy and sure-footed mount, to be sure. Fiercely loyal to their riders. They may not come from the prized lineages of the Orlesian Coursers, but you would be hard pressed to find a better mount, especially for a young rider.” Dennet said, rubbing the mare’s face. “This little one is 14 hands, 5 years-old, and dead-broke. She’ll take you anywhere you want to go, steady and true.”

Cat took the lead Dennet offered and slowly approached the horse, not wanting to spook her. Her hand reached out and gently stroked the horse’s neck, the hair course. The mare snorted in response and dropped her head over Cat’s shoulder, almost like a hug. Cat froze, but then wrapped her arms around the mare, as best she could. She buried her nose in the horse hair, smelling it.

A sudden memory hit, this one different, visceral. She saw flashes of a black horse, the feeling of muscles working together, riding across land. The smell of straw and sawdust, leather and oats.

Was that...one of my memories?

“I see she likes you. Good.” Dennet said. “Want to take her for a ride?”

“Yes!” Cat said, scrambling back to let Seanna tack her up. After the bridle was in place and a small saddle, Dennet boosted her up. Cat steadied herself, petting her new horse at the withers.

“I’ll lead you around, until you are comfortable, okay?” Seanna asked. Cat nodded, to overjoyed to say anything. In the excitement of the moment, all dark thoughts were pushed away. She gripped a bunch of mane hair for balance and straightened into the posture Cullen had been teaching her.
This feels so familiar…I must have ridden horses before.

Soon, Seanna let her take over and Cat was trotting around the paddock, her other companions similarly testing out their new steeds.

*What should I call you?*

Cat slowed her mare, rubbing her side and considering.

*I know! Starburst!*

“Hello, Starburst.” Cat said, slumping over to give her horse a hug.

“Starburst, huh? What does that mean?” Varric asked, back on the ground. He seemed…less comfortable to be off the ground than the others.

“I… I don’t know, but it just fits, I think.” Cat said, sitting back up. “What are you going to call yours?”

“Patches.” Varric replied.

“Oh, very original.” Mahonan said, pulling his horse up to them.

“Hey, what can I say, it fits. Is your name so much better?”

“This is Elgara. It means Sun.” Mahonan said, patting his own horse.

“Well, that seems pretty obvious to me.”

“Perhaps.” Mahonan said, clicking at his horse and riding away.

Malika rode by next, more at ease atop her horse than the other dwarf in the party.

“Malika, what are you going to call him?” Cat asked.

“Horse.” She said.

“Horse? Really?”

“It is accurate.” She said, before continuing on around the paddock. Cat shook her head.

Kaaras and Cassandra were next.

“What about you two, what did you name them?”

“The Mountain.” Kaaras said. “I’ve never had a horse that could carry me easily, so he must be a mountain.”

Varric laughed, Cat even managed a smile.

“What about you, Seeker? Some formal name, I’m sure.” Varric asked.

“I will call him Champion.” She said.

“That seems pretty romantic, Seeker. People might think you are softening up.”

*Is Cassandra blushing? No, that can’t be right.*
“Do not be ridiculous, Varric.” She was scowling at him.

She and Kaaras rode on. Evie and Solas stopped by next, Solas dismounting.

“What did you name him, Solas? And Evie?”

“I will call him Falon, for now.” Solas said.

“Lady.” Evie replied. “She is such a little lady.”

“Good names. Solas, what does Falon mean?”

“It means friend, da’len.” He replied.

_Huh, a very good name._

_I wonder if Solas and Mahonan will teach me elven?_

**

The next day was spent marking out locations for the watchtowers that Dennet had requested and dealing with the wolves. They made camp a short way from the ranch, so the Inquisition would have a presence close at hand. After the excitement from the horses wore off, Cat resumed her melancholic state.

_Those poor wolves…_  

Cat was sorry they had to fight the wolves. They didn’t choose to be influenced by the demon, but they couldn’t leave them to attack the farmers.

Cat currently rode atop a druffalo they had found, its horns stuck in a tree. They helped it out and were slowly making their way back to Dennet’s place. From her perch, Cat had a clear view of her party members. Cassandra and Kaaras were leading the way. Evie and Malika were covering the rear. Solas and Varric were to the right of Cat, talking about something that happened in the Free Marches.

Mahonan walked beside the druffalo, to her left. Except for a few comments, he had mostly been quiet since the mage encounter. He had made a few snarky comments, but they were missing the laughter that usually accompanied them.

_How do I make this better?_

Leaning over a bit, she said to him. “It’s not your fault, Mahonan.”

“What’s that, Little Bit.” He said.

“It’s not your fault I ran into the cave. None of it is.”

“See, you say that, but I was the one charged with protecting you.” Mahonan said, the ghost of a smile on his face. “Hard to see it not being my fault.”

Cat thought a minute and then started sliding off the druffalo. Mahonan was surprised and moved to catch her.

“Little Bit! Maybe stop the beast before dismounting.” Cat just hugged him tight.
“I knew you would catch me.” She mumbled.

“Da’len…what would Ylsa say if she saw us now?”

“She would say to stop blaming yourself.” Cat said. “If you had stopped me, I don’t know what would have happened. But we can’t change the past. You have to move forward.”

Mahonan held her as he walked, thinking.

*Did that help at all?*

Finally he spoke up, “You know, I don’t think Ylsa would have said that.”

“No?”

“No, she probably would just hit me upside the head and call me an idiot.” He said, just the hint of teasing back in his voice.

“I could do that, if it would make you feel better.” Cat offered.

Mahonan just gave a dry laugh and helped her back onto the druffalo.

“Thanks for the offer, Little Bit. I think I will pass for now.”

**

It was finally time to return to Haven. They had horses and with Mother Giselle’s help, they would need to leave for Val Royeaux soon.

So, on the morning of the 16th of Drakonis, the Herald’s party left the Hinterlands for the mountains.

Riding on her horse, Cat looked back down the road, at the Inquisition camp.

The Hinterlands had changed her and she wasn’t sure it was for the better. But she couldn’t afford to dwell on it. So, shoving her feelings as deep as she could, she clicked to her horse and trotted on, her companions around her.

*I have to try and move on…I don’t know if I can, but I have to try...*
Commission from @sadfishkid of Cat and Kaaras!!!


Chapter End Notes

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Thank you again for reading and to everyone who has left comments/kudos!
Haven Again

Chapter Summary

Cat and company return to Haven. Some discoveries and bonds are made.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The group arrived back to Haven late on the 19th of Drakonis, making better time up the mountains on horseback than on foot.

It had snowed recently, the snow glistening brightly in the dual moonlight. The horses trudged on faithfully, Kaaras’s Mountain leading the way and marking a path for the other horses. The light of Haven was a welcome sight after the trek up.

Kaaras shifted around in his saddle, to look back at the group.

Cassandra was first, with Mahonan close by her. Varric, Solas, and Little Bit were next, with Little Bit riding in front of Solas, head bobbing as she tried to stay awake. After nearly sliding off her horse into the snowbank, they had adjusted the riding order. Evie and Malika covered the back, with Cat’s horse tethered to Malika’s large bay.

Riding up through the tents that had popped up around Haven, a good twenty more added since they left, the village was quiet, the late hour meaning most had the decent sense to be asleep.

Pulling up to the make-shift stables, the horses snorted and stomped, biting at their bits and switching their tails in the cold night air.

“Welcome back!” A chipper voice called up. Knight-Captain Rylen approached the group, a couple scouts with him. They hurried to take the horses reins as the group dismounted. Kaaras had to stretch, his muscles stiff from the long ride.

“Indeed. Pushed through from the last checkpoint, figured a real bed was better than the bedrolls again.” Kaaras replied, patting his mount’s neck.

“Good to have you back. Lots of new recruits, many of them from the Hinterlands. Seems you have been doing good work out there.”

“Little Bit, mostly.” Kaaras pulled his pack off from the saddle as the scout led his horse into the make-shift stables.

“Whadya say, Kaaras?” Cat asked with a yawn, walking up beside him and rubbing her eyes.

“And welcome back to you, Lady Cat.” Rylen said, saluting to the Herald. She gave him a sleepy smile and wave.

“Thanks, Rylen. How are things here? Anything exciting?”

“Better. We’ve got more people in, but we are getting more organized. Some tensions between the
mage and templar recruits, but Commander Cullen has been handling it. You missed a bout of food poisoning that went through half the camp, apparently one of Adan’s new assistants didn’t know the differences between his herbs well enough. Got that cleared up fast enough.”

*Not sorry to miss that.*

“Did you get sick?” Cat asked, now leaning against Kaaras’s leg.

“Me? No, I have the Starkhaven constitution. Takes more than that to take me out.” Rylen gave her a wink. “Anyways, you’ll be wanting to turn in, I expect. Truly is good to see you, Herald.”

“You too, Rylen.” Cat yawned back. Kaaras moved his pack to one shoulder and picked up Cat in his other arm.

“Let’s get you inside, Little Bit.”

“Okay.”

Walking through town, the group splitting up to their respective cabins, everyone tired and ready for the warmth of their hearths and blankets. Malika followed after the two of them, though, ready to take her post.

On entering Cat’s cabin, Kaaras saw Lena stand up from the fire.

“Oh, Lady Cat! You have returned! Come, come inside before you freeze!” She bustled over, taking Cat from Kaaras’s arms, fussing over her charge.

“Good to see you, too, Lena.” Kaaras chuckled.

“Oh, yes, hello Kaaras!” Lena replied, but still focused on Cat, getting her closer to the fire and helping her get into her nightdress. It was a marvel to watch her work. In under ten minutes, Lena had Cat dressed and tucked in, talking with her in a low voice as Cat nodded sleepily.

She is in good hands now.

Kaaras exited the cabin, feeling the frigid wind cut through his armor. He shook it off and turned to look down at Cadash, in her place by the door.

“All set for the evening?”

“I’ve got her, Adaar.” Her voice was gruff, but there was an underlying protectiveness to it. When Cadash had first agreed to be a guard, Adaar had been hesitant, she seemed too much of a wildcard. But, she had proven herself in the Hinterlands and he had little doubt of her loyalties now.

Kaaras nodded and started for his own cabin he shared with Lavellan. Solas passed him on the way, giving him a brief nod before continuing on, no doubt to set the wards for the Herald.

*Finally, some rest.*

Before he could enter his cabin, Cassandra stopped him, her voice cutting through the dark.

“Kaaras, Leliana wishes to speak with us.”

Kaaras sighed. All he wanted to do was fall into bed…but, duty called, so he rolled his shoulders and gave her a nod, trudging after her.
Always something, isn’t it?

**

“Having the Herald address the clerics is not a terrible idea.” Ambassador Montilyet said, making a note. The advisors had assembled at the late hour, debating what to do next.

“You can’t be serious.” Cullen said, exasperated.

“Mother Giselle isn’t wrong: at the moment, the Chantry’s only strength is that they are united in opinion.” Josephine defended.

“And we should ignore the danger to the Herald?” Leliana questioned.

A bunch of clerics? I would like to see them try to hurt her, over my dead body.

“We will protect Cat. I’m more concerned this won’t actually solve anything, just make more problems for the Inquisition.” Kaaras said, crossing his arms.

“I agree. It just lends credence to the idea that we should care what the chantry says.” Cullen added.

“I will go with her.” Cassandra said, stepping up to the table, a determined look on her face. “Mother Giselle said she could provide us names? Use them.”

“But why? This is nothing but a-” Leliana started.

“What choice do we have, Leliana? Right now we can’t approach anyone for help with the Breach. Use what influence we have to call the clerics together. Once they are ready, we will see this through.” Cassandra declared. She stared a Leliana for a moment, but the spymaster nodded.

“Very well, I will send word to my agents in Val Royeaux.”

This really could have been done without me.

“Sister Leliana, what did you need from me?” Kaaras asked, his training keeping his frustration out of his voice.

“I wanted to talk to you about the Herald.” She said, her calculating eyes betraying nothing. It was disconcerting how difficult it was to get a read on the woman.

“What do you want to know?”

“I heard what happened in the Hinterlands, from Cassandra’s report.” She started.

“It was unfortunate. I do not think it wise to have let the mages leave.” Cullen added, with some force.

“Commander, I am more concerned about the Herald. It obviously affected her greatly.” Leliana said, brushing away his concerns.

“Little Bit took it hard, yes.”

“Oh, the poor girl.” Josephine commented, her hand to her chest.

“She has recovered better than expected.” Cassandra said. Kaaras would swear there was a bite of protection to her words.
“But she is still scarred.” Kaaras added, guilt weighing heavy on him.

“Precisely. Which is why I need to speak with you.” She paused. “I have found more information on the Herald’s parents.” Leliana informed them.

“Truly? You found her parents?” Josephine asked, hopeful.

“It is almost certain that her parents were Cyrrith and Danora.”

“Were?”

“As far as we can tell, they both died at the conclave. My scouts report that they traveled with their daughter. Cyrrith was a mage, Danora raised outside of Lothering. Cyrrith was able to live most of his life outside of the circle, living as a healer with his wife. After the Blight, apparently the templars from Kinloch tracked him down, following a rumor. Cyrrith was taken away when Danora was pregnant. After the rebellion, they reunited and decided to attend the conclave. I am still searching for more information, but so far, it matches up. The girl is reported to have had black hair and the age is consistent enough to be her.” Leliana reported.

Oh Little Bit…

“I am worried what this information might do to the state of the Herald. Even if she has no memory of them, it would be jarring. Given the recent trauma she has undergone, I thought it best to withhold it, for now.” Leliana stated. “However, you have been with her longer and more recently, it is up to you to decide.”

Kaaras sighed, “I do not like the idea of lying to Little Bit, but I don’t know what good it would do telling her.” Why must I decide this? “Does she have any other family?”

“I have agents looking.”

“We must do our best to support her.” Cassandra said. “But I do not think we should keep this from her for long. I do not think she will take it well if we hide it.”

“I will let you decide when it is best to tell her.” Leliana said. “I will inform you know when my agents have more information.”

Kaaras just nodded.

Of course it would be my choice…

**

Cat woke late the next day, the light already streaming in from the windows on the far wall.

No dreams again…I guess that is good.

Lena was waiting with food and warm clothes. She happily chatted away, getting Cat ready for the day. Cat gave her a big hug before she left for the day, the smell of fresh soap filling her nose as she held her.

I have missed her.

She was surprised to see Malika was outside when she exited.

“Good morning! I thought Evie would be here by now.” Cat said.
“We’ll meet her in the Chantry, then I’ll be off.” Malika said, starting to walk that way.

How is she not exhausted? And she has a bit of a shadow on her face? Do all dwarves grow facial hair? Huh. That would be cool. Why can’t I grow a beard?

As they neared the Chantry, they heard raised voices. A crowd of people were there, angry voices and flaring tempers. Malika keep herself just ahead of Cat, shielding her as they moved through the crowd.

By the time they reached the center of the conflict, Cullen was telling for them to get back to their duties. The crowd quieted a bit, but was still grumbling as they dispersed, although they still bowed to the Herald as they passed.

“Mages and Templars were already at war. Now they’re blaming each other for the Divine’s death.” Cullen said as they approached.

“Which is why we require a proper authority to guide them back to order.” Chancellor Roderick declared.

Ugh, I don’t like him.

“Who, you? Random clerics who weren’t important enough to be at the Conclave?” Cullen rebuffed.

“The rebel Inquisition and it’s so-called ‘Herald of Andraste’? I think not.” The Chancellor countered.

“Why are you letting this prick stay?” Malika asked, staring down the Chancellor, who harrumphed in response.

“He’s toothless. There’s no point turning him into a martyr simply because he runs at the mouth. The chancellor’s a good indicator of what to expect in Val Royeaux, however.” Cullen said, looking down finally to Cat, giving a slight bow of his head.

“I’ll do what I can to make the Chantry hears us, make them see we aren’t the threat.” Cat said, trying to give him an encouraging look. She wanted to smooth things over with the commander. He had given her riding lessons, been at meetings, but he was still very stiff around her, uncertain.

“I pray you’re right.” Cullen said, before turning to talk with a messenger.

As they entered the Chantry, they found Evie talking with Mother Giselle. Cat stopped to listen before joining them, curious to hear what they were discussing. Malika let her, actually giving her a nod of…approval?

I probably shouldn’t eavesdrop, but...

“The original Inquisition was formed after the First Blight, well before the Chantry as we know it. The Inquisitors were hunters, zealots who tracked and killed cultists and dangerous mages.”

Flash of memory, an older elven face…a dragon…then it was gone. Cat rubbed her head, frowning at the words spoken and the vision both.

“As Andraste rose to power, the Inquisition came into her service. Instead of hunting those who would do harm, the Inquisitors spread the Chant of Light by force.”

“No wonder everyone is so nervous around us. I had of course heard some of this, but not the extent
of the past Inquisition. Who decided to use that name?” Evie asked.

“Divine Justinia herself. I understand that it was not a popular decision. In any case, once the Chant of Light had spread far and wide, there was less need for zealots. The Inquisitors became the Seekers of Truth, and eventually the templars.”

“This is a dark chapter of history for the Divine to revisit.”

“Do you know what impresses me most about the original Inquisition? They fought horrific battles, killed and died for their cause…and when it was time, they put their swords away. Perhaps the name was Divine Justinia’s message: That when the Inquisition is needed, it will strike without mercy.”

Cat’s thoughts flashed back to the cavern, a sinking feeling building inside. Are we-am I any better? “But when its work is done, it will put its sword away.”

Evie finally noticed the pair, turning to them both and pulling Mother Giselle’s attention as well.

“Greetings, Herald of Andraste. How fare’s your quest to seal the Breach?” Mother Giselle asked, kindly.

“I am doing what I can.” Cat said, her thoughts still on the conversation she overheard, about what it might all mean.

“A task such as closing the Breach is a heavy burden. I hope you do not carry it alone. We remember Andraste, but Andraste did not carry the Chant of Light alone. She had Generals, advisors, and though it is considered heresy to say it, she had the aid of the elf Shartan. Do everything within your power…but remember those who would help you.”

“I appreciate your advice, Mother Giselle.” Cat replied, shifting awkwardly. “I know my friends are here for me, for the Inquisition.” The word feels heavier now, with the weight of past tragedies on it.

“Take it for whatever it is worth. You walk a difficult path, and there is little enough I can do to aid you. In any case, I pray the Inquisition proves less brutal than its predecessor.”

Cat thought back again to the words she overheard and nodded. If I have any say, the Inquisition will not be what it was in the past. “I should go, Mother Giselle.”

“Fare well, Herald.”

Evie took up her place beside Cat, while Malika slipped away, without a word. But her silent exit was familiar now, expected.

Cat turned to Josephine’s office, the door creaking open.

“Oh, Miss Bell, please come in!” Josephine said, moving from behind her desk. Cat walked into the room and was surprised when Josephine kneeled down and hugged her. “I am so glad that you have returned safely!”

Cat smiled and hugged her back. The smell of her perfume strong, but pleasant, comforting, floral. And her clothes were so soft, like satin…or was it silk? Whatever it was, it was lovely and so perfectly Josephine.

“I was wondering if I would have a lesson today?” Cat asked. “I don’t know how much time I will have before we go to Val Royeaux, so I thought I should make the most of it?”

“If you would like, we could.” Josephine answered kindly, standing back up.
“I think…I think I need it.”

“Well then…” Josephine considered for a moment, before clapping her hands together. “I will demonstrate how to conduct a proper tea party! A valuable skill that any lady should know!”

In a truly incredible turn of events, Cat found herself seated on the little couch with pillows and blankets, Josephine next to her, with Evie sitting across from her, dazed at how quickly it all went.

“Now, since I am the host, I will pour the tea. Watch how I do it.” Josephine instructed, her actions smooth and precise from years of practice. “See how angle my wrist so as not to spill?”

Cat tried to pay close attention, but it was difficult. However, with Josephine and Evie’s gentle guidance, she was able to pour a respectable cup of tea herself. They showed her how to hold her cup, how to stir her tea without clinking against the side. It was a lot, but Cat found herself having fun. Conversation ebbed into less instructional subjects, the small group just enjoying their tea. Josephine shared a bit more chocolate with Cat, dotting on her.

She is like a big sister…or how I imagine one would be.

The thought tickled at something in her memory, but no vision was forthcoming.

“This lesson reminds me of my own, growing up. My governess would drill my siblings and I until it was second nature.” Evie said, sipping her own tea, a thoughtful look in her eyes.

“My mother insisted that we learn, but it was always lovely. We would have tea in the salon, the sea breezes blowing in through the windows.” Josephine sighed, lost in memories. “I used to bring my dolls to tea, practicing with them.”

“Did you have many dolls?” Cat asked, a tickle of a memory. Dolls were important to her? Or someone?

“Many. My father spoiled me.” Josephine had a fond look. Suddenly, she started. “Oh, let me get something!” Setting her tea down, she bustled over to her desk, pulling out a small box. She brought it over to the sofa, placing it gently on the table. “I had my family send this to me…and well, I think you might enjoy it more.” Lifting the lid, she carefully pulled out a finely made porcelain doll. Setting it on Cat’s lap, she said, “This is Arabella, one of my favorite dolls.”

Cat held her, almost afraid to break the pretty thing. But, seeing the encouraging look on Josephine’s face, she tugged the doll to her chest and smiled. “Thank you, Josephine. I will look after her, I promise!”

“I am sure you will.”

Not knowing what else to do, Cat threw her arms around Josephine, squeezing her close. “THANK YOU!!!”

Josephine chuckled, lightly, but hugged her back just as fiercely. “Of course, Miss Cat.” She pat her back, placing a kiss to the top of her head. “Now, I do have a question for you.”

Cat held the serious tone and straightened, suddenly nervous. “What is it?”

“Well, I should like to know if anyone here has treated you unkindly, Herald. For being an elf.”

Cat was a little thrown by the question, not really expecting it. Taking a minute to think, there had been some instances, but should she really bother Josephine with them? She was already so busy…
“There have been a few comments and such, Lady Josephine.” Evie commented.

“Tsk. I shall speak with the staff regarding such conduct. If we’re to convince the world that Andraste’s Herald is an elf, the Inquisition must give her, you it’s utmost support. Stories of wild elves have gotten even more outrageous as people learn of our Herald.”

“Wild elves?”

Josephine set her hand on Cat’s shoulder, reassuringly. “Do not worry, Herald. I will deal with the rumors. Thedas will know what a lady you are, that Andraste sent you to us.”

Cat thought for a moment, considering Josephine’s words. “Do you really believe Andraste saved me?”

Josephine paused, weighing her words, but answering earnestly. “I should much like to believe so, Your Worship. The miracles Andraste performed were so long ago, they’re difficult to picture. If it were truly her in the Fade who saved you…Well. In any case, many already believe you walk in the Maker’s light.” Josephine gave her a smile.

Cat nodded, uncertain how she felt about it. Josephine believed she was sent by the Maker, as did Evie, and who knew who else? Was she really?

Shaking the thoughts from her mind, she refocused on the tea party and conversation, the new doll in her lap, her friends around her and she felt…safe.

**

Before leaving the Chantry, Cat checked in with Minaeve to make sure she got the samples they collected. And spent a few minutes chatting about her research. Minaeve and the tranquil were meticulously studying the samples. They didn’t smell great, but it was fascinating what they could learn.

_I wonder if I could learn to do what they do…_

Next, after running back to put her new doll in her cabin, she headed to see Adan and Flissa, in turn, and finally Harritt and the forge workers, making sure they had everything they needed and catching up with what was going on. She got lots of hugs and well-wishes.

_I feel…like I’m home? Like what happened in the Hinterlands was just a bad dream…_

She ended the evening in the Tavern with Varric, Mahonan, and Kaaras, hearing more of the Kirkwall story, before her yawns were so frequent that Mahonan started teasing her.

As she drifted to sleep that night, she had the thought. Solas kept setting wards, keeping the bad dreams away, but they also kept any dreams away.

_I miss dreaming…_

**

The next day she wandered, greeted the people of the village, checking in with everyone she could. The air was so much brisker here in the mountains than in the Hinterlands, hitting her lungs harshly as she walked.

But, her thoughts kept returning to her dreams, or really, lack-there-of.
Perhaps I should talk to Solas...or should I bother him?

She tried to shove the conflict in her mind away. After a morning of lessons with Josephine and Evie, she had her afternoon with Mahonan and Solas. She thought again about bringing up her dreams, but decided against it, focusing on the lessons instead. Mahonan and Solas had gone over some motions, to summon a ring of fire.

“Closing the Breach is our primary goal, but I hope we might also discover what was used to create it. Any artifact of such power is dangerous. The destruction of the conclave proves that much.” Solas said, talking with Mahonan as Cat tried to focus on the spell they had taught her. They had her practicing the motions and had lapsed into conversation as she tried to focus…but their conversation was so interesting…

“You don’t think whatever created the explosion was destroyed in the blast?”

“The Herald survived.” Solas said. “The artifact that created the Breach is unlike anything seen in this age. I will not believe it destroyed until I see the shattered fragments with my own eyes.”

A flash of something, green with swirls, broken...was it already broken?

Cat rubbed her temples, starting to speak, but freezing. What good would it do to say anything when she wasn’t certain?

“I would be interested in seeing it. Perhaps it can be recovered.”

“Leliana’s people have scoured the area near the blast and found nothing. Whatever the artifact was, it is no longer there.”

There was a knock at the door, interrupting the discussion.

“Come in.”

Malika entered, silently. “Mahonan, Kaaras wants to speak with us all.”

“Alrighty. Solas, I trust you got the da’len.”

“Of course.”

With a nod to him and ruffling Cat’s hair with a wink, he and Malika were gone.

Solas’s attention now on Cat alone, he led her through the steps, his voice soft, but firm. After he was content that she understood the motions, they took a break, and Cat found her thoughts returning to her question. But how to approach it?

As they took their break, Solas was focused on one of the shards, taking notes and testing the magic around it. He was so focused, should she bother him…but it wouldn’t hurt to just ask, right?

“Hey Solas, I don’t really know that much about you…”

Solas quirked an eyebrow at her, tilting his head as he considered her from his place at his desk. “What would you know of me, da’len?”

Cat swung her legs back and forth as she sat on the edge of the bed. “Um, why did you decide to study the Fade?”

That’s related, right?
Solas sat back in his chair, resting his hands together as he considered her question.

“I grew up in a village to the North. There was little to interest a young man, especially one gifted with magic.” He started. “But as I slept, spirits of the Fade showed me glimpses of wonders I had never imagined. I treasured my dreams. Being awake, out of the Fade, became troublesome.”

“So, you slept all the time?”

“No, eventually I was unable to find new areas in the fade.”

“Why was that?” Her own question momentarily forgotten, she sat enthralled by what he said. The way he spoke sometimes…it reminded her of something, but she wasn’t sure what.

“Two reasons. First, the fade reflects the world around it. Unless I traveled, I would never find anything new. Second, the fade reflects and is limited by our imaginations. To find interesting areas, one must be interesting.”

“Is this why you joined the Inquisition?”

“I joined the Inquisition because we were all in terrible danger. If our enemies destroyed the world, I would have nowhere to lay my head while dreaming of the fade.”

That seems…intense, but it makes sense. “I wish you luck, Solas. The Fade sounds cool.”

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

“Really?”

Solas gave her a smile, “Training you to control your magic and will has been…fascinating. It has been a long time since I have worked with a new mage and you have adapted very quickly. I suppose it reminds me of how wonderous magic can be, seeing it through your eyes.”

Cat beamed up at him at the praise.

“I have good teachers.” He inclined his head to her.

“You said you’d travelled to many different places?” Cat asked further, her curiously getting the better of her.

“This world, or its memory, is reflected in the Fade. Dream in ancient ruins, and you may see a city lost to history. Some of my fondest memories were found in crumbling cities long picked dry by treasure seekers. The best are the battlefields. Spirits press so tightly on the Veil that you can slip across with but a thought.”

“Anyplace in particular?”

He thought for a moment before speaking. “I dreamt at Ostagar. I witnessed the brutality of the Darkspawn and the valor of the Ferelden warriors. I saw Alistair and the Hero of Ferelden light the signal fire…and Loghain’s infamous betrayal of Cailan’s forces…”

Cat’s vision blurred and Solas’s voice became distant. She felt pulled away, like she was floating. Images and sounds crowded her mind.

Clashing steel and screams, roars of rage, a tall human man in armor with a small elven woman, fighting against monsters.
The sound of a horn, barking, crying.
The smell of burning, the taste of iron.
Blood.
Blood everywhere.
A bearded man, fighting, falling. Chaos around him.
Pain.
The sense of hopelessness.
It was too much to process. But she couldn’t look away, couldn’t make it stop.

Make it stop!

“Da’len? Are you alright?” She snapped out of her visions, giving an involuntary shudder. Solas was kneeling in front of her, concern flickering in his eyes, his hand resting on her shoulder.
“I…don’t know.”

Her mouth tasted like ash and blood. She could still hear the cries of the dying.

“Was it another vision?”

“Yes, it was…I think it was Ostagar.” The images, the sounds and tastes faded away, but the memory remained.

It was horrible…

Solas gently pulled her into a hug. “Can you tell me what you saw, da’len?”

She took a shuddering breath, hugging tightly to her friend, her mentor. “I will try.”

Slowly, she described what she saw, what she felt, everything. Solas held her when she cried, soothing her.

Once she had finished telling him, he sat her back down, getting her a glass of water.

“Thank you for telling me, da’len. I know not why you have such strong visions of Ostagar…it was a momentous occasion to be sure. I wonder if the actions taken there are still reverberating into this present, or that they will…” Seeing Cat’s confused face, he shook his head. “Musings for another time. I believe we have practiced enough for the day. Would you like to take a walk? I will endeavor to not mention any more violent dreams.”

Cat nodded, taking his offered hand. The vision was intense, but she was glad she had someone to she could trust with it, who could help her figure out what it meant.

**

It wasn’t until she was in her cabin that night that she realized she never got to ask Solas about her dreams. The vision kind of derailed any other conversation.

The rest of her day was a bit of a blur, to be honest. Solas covered for her, telling her guards that she
had a strong vision and was dealing with the aftereffects. Kaaras didn’t pry, but did stick close with her the rest of the day, the closeness of his presence sign enough of his worry.

She opted to have dinner in her cabin. She couldn’t deal with the crowds and noise…it would be too much like her vision…her memory? It felt like both somehow.

She bid Lena goodnight and sat, waiting for Solas to stop by. She still wanted to ask about the dreams, maybe it would distract from her other issues. She held her doll close as she thought.

His light knock roused her from her thoughts.

“Come in!” She called.

Solas entered, walking into the cabin proper. “How are you feeling tonight, da’len?”

“Better, thanks.” She worried at her braid.

Solas nodded and started to set the wards, as usual. “That is good to hear, but if you need to talk about what happened-”

“Wait!” She almost shouted.

Solas paused, swiveling to face her, the question clear on his face.

“…I just…I miss dreaming?” Cat managed to say. “I was wondering what would happen if you didn’t set the wards?”

She was so nervous, she just looked down. After a moment, she felt the bed shift as Solas sat next to her.

“If the wards are not set, you would dream as usual. However, you would not be protected from demons, such as the one that threatened you before.” He said.

“So there is no other way to be protected from demons?”

“There are ways…” He said, somewhat reluctantly.

“It’s just, after what you were saying about the fade and dreaming, and well, I remember liking dreaming, I just thought it might be nice to…but if it means demons are going to attack, then…”

“Da’len, I could teach you to guard yourself, while dreaming, if you wish. Anyone who can dream has the potential. And demons are not the only ones who inhabit the fade. I have many friends in the fade, myself, when I travel there.”

“Friends?”

“Yes, I have built many lasting friendships. Spirits of Wisdom, possessed of ancient knowledge, happy to share what they had seen. Spirits of purpose helped me search. Even wisps, curious and playful, would point out treasures I might have missed.”

Faint flashes, impressions of memories, glowing figures…

“They sound nice.” Cat said, truthfully. She twirled her braid in her hand, finally looking up at him. “Could I meet them?”

“It …might be possible, yes. I will admit my curiosity, since you have these visions, as to how that
would translate in the Fade. But, it will be difficult. Do you truly wish to do this, da’len?"

Cat didn’t have to think long before she said, “Yes, I want to see the Fade. The not scary part of the Fade.”

Solas considered. For what seemed like a long moment. Cat was sure she could hear the gears turning as he considered the possible course of action. But, Solas eventually nodded. “Very well. Just in case, I should stay here tonight. I will inform your guard.”

Solas moved to the door, quickly speaking with Malika. Once back, he had Cat lay back on the bed.

“I will send you into dreams, da’len. Try not to wander too far, I will find you.”

Cat swallowed hard but nodded. She did want to dream again.

“Fear not, I will find you and keep any malevolent presences away.”

“I trust you, Solas. I know you will protect me.” Cat said with sincerity.

Something flickered in Solas’s eyes, an emotion she couldn’t place. But, he nodded and set he hand to her head. There was a sensation of magic, the familiar feel of Solas’s, and then…nothing.

**

She was drifting, floating, free.

Her feet hit the ground and she opened her eyes to forest. It was bright, the path well worn. The sunlight filtering through the trees felt warm.

She heard giggles from ahead.

“Come on, Cat! We are almost there!”

She ran, catching up to her friends. Right, her friends.

Cat smiled as she ran up the path, finally breaking into a small clearing and seeing a large treehouse in the branches of an oak. Movement at the top showed that they were already there. Wasting no time, she climbed the ladder.

When she reached the top, she saw her friends. Ricky and Lisa.

She was happy, the afternoon seeming to pass in an instance. Laughter and jokes abounded.

But then, the sun set, casting the treehouse in shadows. Cat shivered against the sudden cold.

“We should get back.” She said.

“But we aren’t done! We are having so much fun!” The laugh that followed Ricky’s words was echoey, muted.

Something was wrong, this felt wrong. They were supposed to be back before dark.

Lisa grabbed her hand. “Just stay with us!”

Lisa smiled too wide. Heart pounding, Cat ripped her hand away and ran to the ladder, sliding down recklessly.
This is wrong, very wrong.

Her friends, or were they even her friends, yelled behind her. Calling her back, but she ran back down the path. They had to be back before dark.

Running blindly, the sun fully set, she was rushing through a dark forest. There was a crash behind her. She whipped her head around, starring back, but there was nothing.

She ran full bodied into something…someone and yelped.

She looked up and it was…Solas. It was Solas.

“It is alright, da’len. You are safe.” She hugged him close, her eyes still darting to the forest around them. The forest that was so welcoming and warm before, now was hungry and cold.

“Let’s go somewhere more pleasant, yes?” Solas said. Leading her forward, the world shifted ever so slightly and then they were standing by the water near Haven, the sun bright in the sky again.

Cat let out a heavy sigh, letting her heart calm down and wrapping her arms around herself.

“Da’len, are you well?”

“Yes, I’m okay, Solas. Just a nightmare.” Cat turned and gave him a timid smile. The world around them was so familiar, it was hard to believe it was a dream. But it had to be, didn’t it? There were no people about, no soldiers practicing in the yard, no scouts running by. Although, she could still hear the sounds from the forge, sounds of the town. It was strange.

Finding her resolve, pushing the memory of her dream away, she looked up at Solas. “The Fade looks an awful lot like Haven, Solas.”

“I thought the familiarity would help, since you are just starting out, da’len.” Solas said.

“I was just sassing you, Solas.” She said. She started examining the world around them and the questions started spilling forth. “Can the Fade look like anything? Shouldn’t it only look like Haven since that is where we are sleeping? Wait, can we see other people’s dreams? Wait, no, we shouldn’t that would be rude…why is it light out? Is Haven always sunny in the Fade? Are you controlling it? Can I control it? How about-”

“One thing at a time, da’len.” Solas cut her off, but he was not angry. On the contrary, he was smiling at her, chuckling when he saw her face all scrunched up in concentration. “They are good questions to ask. Yes, the Fade could look different. The Fade reflects the minds of the living, like in your dream. To explore the Fade, one must step out of their own dreams, beyond their own experiences. In the Fade itself, yes, it would be a reflection of Haven, since that is where we are. We could seek out others dreams, but it can be difficult and not advisable. I chose for it to be sunny in this memory of the Fade. So yes, I am controlling what the Fade looks like right now for us. In time, if you train, you could learn to control it yourself.”

Cat just starred as he explained, the stream of information adding to her wonder. As he finished and looked down to her, she spun around and squealed, “This is so cool!”

Once she finished spinning, she walked right up to Solas. “What do I need to do first?”

“Let us try something simple, first.” Solas said, but he couldn’t keep the smile from his face, her youthful exuberance rubbing off on him. “Focus on the world around us, try to move us to your cabin.”
“How do I do that?”

“Patience, da’len. Concentrate on what it looks like, how you feel when you are there, what sounds you hear, the smells, everything. Think about the walls around you and-”

Cat closed her eyes and thought about it. She wanted to be there, in her cabin. The light streaming in from the windows, the fire low, the sound the wind hitting the roof. Warmth and comfort. The wood and wool of her bed, how wide the room was, everything. She was there, she knew it.

And she opened her eyes.

They were still outside of Haven.

She sighed, slightly deflated that it didn’t work.

“Da’len, do not lose hope quite so quickly. That was just your first try.” Solas was encouraging.

He led her through some practices, helping her learn to bend the Fade around her. It was frustrating, but after a while, she could shift them to her cabin.

Mostly. The size wasn’t quite right, and it was always night time, but they were there and she did it!

Feeling more assured that she could do something, she listened to him explain how to identify friend or foe in the Fade. How to retreat back to her mind if threatened. It was more advanced that what she could do right now, but it was something to work towards.

“Do not accept things nor make deals while in the Fade, da’len.” Solas cautioned as they walked around Fade-Haven. “Things are not always as they appear to be.”

Cat stopped and side-eyed him. “How do I know you are you, Solas?”

“That is an excellent question. One you should have asked earlier, but still a good one.” He replied. “How do you think?”

“I could ask you something only Solas would know!”

“But would I not know that, if it was reflected in the Fade?”

“Oh…well how about, no, never mind…” Cat thought it over, but she couldn’t figure it out.

“Da’len, I will teach you how to read magical auras. Once you can see them, it will be harder for spirits to confuse you in the Fade. Powerful ones still could, but most will not be able to.”

Watching intently, he showed her. It was…easy actually. She already knew what his magic felt like, so this was just ‘looking’ at it. It was very bright. She could feel the power, the control, a lot of things she couldn’t put a name to, but mostly, she just felt…Solas. It was his, but it was him?

Interesting.

As they practiced more, Cat asked more and more questions about the Fade. Finally though, she looked around and asked, excitement in her voice, “Weren’t we going to meet some of your friends?”

“Perhaps not tonight, da’len. We would need to travel through part of the Fade and I do not think we should risk it, not until you are better prepared.”
“Oh…okay.” She tried (and failed) to keep the disappointment from her reply.

“So eager to meet spirits are you?” He said, fondness in his voice.

“Well, they are your friends, right? Is it wrong to want to meet them?”

“No, not at all.” Solas was quiet for a moment. “Da’len, when I found you, there were a few demons near, but I banished them away. However, there were a few spirits lingering as well. They have kept their distance, but I could invite them to approach.”

“Really? Why do you think they were hanging out here?”

“Perhaps they were interested in you. You do shine brightly in the Fade.”

“Hm. Okay, yeah! I want to meet them!”

“Very well.” He made a motion, the thrum of his magic reaching out. “I should caution you, the spirits may look strange to you.”

“What do you—AH!” Cat yelled, stumbling back and falling to the ground as a big fluffy…thing was suddenly in front of her. She scrambled back.

“Now, that was rude. You scared her.” A sweet high voice said. Cat turned back and saw a rather odd pair before her. First, there was a kid, maybe a little older than her, with bright orange hair and glowing eyes. They smiled and waved. “Hello.” Ah, the one who spoke before. Cool. Cat found their smile infection and couldn’t help returning it. Now, beside the kid, or spirit kid, was a big purple…cat? It had black stripes and glowing blue eyes and it was floating several feet off the ground looking not at all sorry to have scared Cat.

“I wanted to see what she would do.” The cat spoke, then stuck its tongue out at the kid.

“Hello, friends.” Solas said, interrupting them. “I think introduction are in order.”

“We know who you are, old one.” The cat said, yawning.

“But it would be polite to, anyways.” The kid said. They curtseyed to them both. “I am Joy. Nice to meet you.”

“Oh, all right. I am Curiosity.” The cat, Curiosity, said. “Who are you?”

Cat had the sense that Joy was older, somehow, no matter that their form looked young. Solas said things were different in the Fade.

So they are spirits of joy and curiosity…and those are also their names. I guess that is easy enough to remember.

“My name is Cat. Please to meet you both.” Cat attempted her best curtsy. Curiosity circled her, sniffing at her dress, rubbing against her leg.

“I like her!” Curiosity declared, their inspection done.

Joy shook their head but was smiling. They hadn’t stopped smiling.

“I think I do as well.” Joy said, more controlled.

Curiosity was looking at Solas, quirking their head, tail switching back and forth. “Are you Cat’s
father?"

The look on Solas’s face was priceless. Cat laughed. “No, silly, he is my friend. Why would you think he is my dad?”

“Well, you magic looks so similar. Or part of it does? Hm?” Curiosity replied. “Weird. Anyways, do you want to play?”

“Oh, we do know a lot of fun games!” Joy declared, clapping their hands.

Solas had recovered. “It is almost morning, so perhaps another time.”

“Aaaaww.” Joy and Curiosity said together.

“What about tomorrow?” Cat said, pleading up at Solas.

“Perhaps.” Solas said, he considered the two spirits. “They might be able to protect you in the Fade. They are fairly strong, they would be able to keep weaker ones away.”

“We will help, if we can!” Joy said.

“Yeah, we want to get to know Cat!” Curiosity seconded.

“Very well. We will return.” Solas said. “Da’len, it is time to wake up.” He reached out his hand to her.

“Alright.” She waved at her two new Fade friends, smiling. Feeling excited and a little mischievious, she said, “Let’s go…dad,” and took his hand. She woke up, not seeing the conflicted look that crossed Solas’s face at her words.

**

Last night’s fade experience still fresh in her mind, she was rather distracted during Josephine’s lesson. Josephine didn’t press, but she did look worried. Cat did her best to reassure her. After that, Cat tried to push the experience from her mind for a while and focus on the rest of her day. After all, Solas said they would return to the Fade tonight.

After lunch, before her other lessons, she took to wandering around Haven a bit, trying to pick out the differences from the Fade. Mahonan was with her, of course, talking to her about random things, making her laugh.

As they walked around the trebuchet, she overheard the soldiers talking about why they were building it. It was interesting, she supposed, but she was more intrigued by a boarded-up tunnel. She stared at it for long enough that Mahonan noticed, teasing her about having stone sense and wanting to explore the depths.

She didn’t know why, but she knew it was going to be important. She was pretty sure. Probably. It was really just the ghost of a feeling. She shrugged it off and headed back to the gates, before Mahonan could say something else.

She got a note during her lesson with Josephine that Cullen would be free to give her another riding lesson. So, she headed towards the paddock.

Starburst was already saddled, Garwin there, holding her reins.

Cat greeted Cullen cheerfully, but he just nodded in reply.
Garwin helped her mount, adjusting the stirrups for her. She thanked him and prepared to start. Cat hadn’t noticed before now, but she realized that the commander never touched her, never got too close. Well, not since the incident in the Chantry.

Was he afraid of me? Of what I might see?

As she circled the pen, warming up, Cullen yelled out instructions, verbally correcting her posture.

I wonder how I can ease his worries?

I should do something, he is the Commander of the Inquisition. Plus, he is always so serious all the time. He could use a friend.

Thus resolved, Cat plotted ways to befriend Cullen during her lesson. She had found her seat. Riding was starting to feel like second nature. Whether it was Cullen’s instruction, the journey from the Hinterlands, her past experiences, or all of the above, she really felt comfortable in the saddle.

And Starburst was a great horse. Sweet, with an easy gait. Before dismounting, Cat threw her arms around Starburst and hugged her, letting the warm horse smell fill her nose.

After that, she slid off her back, handing the reins to Garwin. Normally, she would have helped untack and brush her horse, but the Commander was getting ready to leave and Cat was on a mission.

“Commander Cullen! Do you have a minute?” Cat asked, hurrying to duck under the fence.

“I really should get back to my duties, Herald.” Cullen said, shifting awkwardly.

“I will walk with you!” She said, giving him her best smile.

He sighed, but nodded. “Of course, Herald. This way.”

Okay, less than enthused, but I can work with this!

“What did you need?”

“I thought we should get to know each other. We are both part of the Inquisition and all that.”

“What would you like to know?”

Um, right, well.

“Where are you from?” I kinda already know this, but I have to get the conversation started somewhere.

Cullen gave her a look. Apparently, he remembered that she already knew this, too. “I grew up in Ferelden, near Honnleath. I was transferred to Kirkwall shortly after the Blight. This is the first I’ve returned in almost ten years.” His reply was curt, just the bare facts.

Okay, let’s try something else.

“Varric’s from Kirkwall. Are you friends?” Cat asked. She saw that Mahonan was trailing behind them. A curious look on his face, but he was giving them space.

“I knew he was friends with the Champions of Kirkwall, but little else. We’ve spoken more since I joined the Inquisition. Largely at Varric’s insistence. Apparently, I spend too much time with a
serious expression on my face, and it’s bad for my health.”

“Well, Varric is usually right.” Cat said brightly. Cullen still had a serious look to his face. In fact, his face was rather drawn. He looked…tired, uncertain, beat-up. He was also keeping a careful distance. Not so far as to be rude, but just barely close enough to be considered walking with Cat. “What was Kirkwall like? I’ve heard a bit from Varric, but I’m curious how you found it.”

“While I was there, Qunari occupied and then attacked the city, the viscount’s murder caused political unrest…Relations between mages and templars fell apart, an apostate blew up the Chantry, and the Knight-Commander went mad. Other than that, it was fine.”

Dry humor? Or just annoyance? This is not going well. Time to retreat.

“Well, thank for talking with me, Commander. Oh, and if you want to know something about me, just ask! But then, I don’t really remember much, but you can still ask!” Cat tried to sound positive, but the closed off commander was immune to her charms.

He gave a sigh of relief. “Another time then, Herald.” He bowed stiffly and continued on to the field, away from her.

Maybe that helped? I will have to try again. No one will resist the power of friendship! Right?

Mahonan walked up to her and gave her a look. “Trying to sweet talk the Commander?”

She elbowed him and stuck out her tongue. “I’m just trying to be friendly, Mahonan.”

“Sure, sure, that’s what you say it is.” He teased.

She rolled her eyes at his antics but did walk with him towards Solas’s cabin. Putting the issue of befriending the Commander aside, her excitement grew with each step. She was excited for her lesson today, and even more so to explore the Fade more tonight.

I wonder what games Joy and Curiosity know?

Chapter End Notes

Let me know in the comments below what you think! Sorry it took so long to update, but enjoy this over 8,000 word chapter!

You can follow me on Tumblr here (https://daydreamingdragonage.tumblr.com), where I will answer questions and post fanart as it appears.

Thank you again for reading and to everyone who has left comments/kudos!
Haven Again - Part 2

Chapter Summary

There is some fall-out to Cat’s trip to the Fade. 
Told from Varric, Kaaras, Mahonan, and Solas’s perspective.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Varric stood outside of Solas’s cabin, Cat sitting on a bench beside him. He was attempting to distract her from the raised voices coming from the cabin behind them.

Varric had been tending to things by his tent, when Mahonan had stomped by, asking him to watch Cat. From what he was able to put together, Solas had taken Cat into the Fade last night, and Mahonan was not happy about it. Varric wouldn’t say he was either, his own experiences with the Fade leaving much to be desired and not something he would recommend for the kid. But, apparently Mahonan was livid.

I didn’t think Stealth had it in him.

The two elves were currently having heated words, which Varric was only able to catch a few of. Cat could hear more, from the winches and twitching ears she had.

“…arrogant fool! You risked her in the Fade?! When you knew demons were drawn to her!”

“I took every precaution…”

It had been going on for some time now.

“So, Papa Varric, hear any good rumors lately?” Cat asked. She turned those big green eyes to him, pleading him to distract her.

“Well, I have heard many, but I don’t think I should tell you all of them. The Seeker might get mad at me.” Varric said, drawing out the last part, baiting her to ask more.

“Well, what is one you can share? Please!!” She begged dramatically, leaning against him. “PLEASE, Papa Varric!”

Varric tapped the end of his chin, considering, “Rumor had it Curly fell in the snow the other day, completely faceplanted.”

Cat grinned, “Really?”

“Apparently the soldiers who laughed had to run extra laps in the morning, but it was a sight to see.” Varric laughed, spreading his hands out in front of him, inviting her to imagine the scene. “Commander of the Inquisition Forces, beaten by a patch of ice.”

“…You didn’t even consult with us!” Mahonan shouted, Cat’s eyes flicking to the door, her brief smile fading.
“I informed her guard…”

“Who is Dwarven and doesn’t understand the dangers of the Fade! Creators, Solas! What if something had happened!”

Cat looked worried, biting her lip. “Should we do something or…”

*This is not good for the kid. Shit.*

“Let them work it out, kid. Mages can get weird about the Fade.” Varric shrugged. “Let’s take a walk, no use freezing out here.”

She nodded and followed after him. Cat bobbed along beside him, swinging her arms as they walked.

*How to distract her…*

“Well, we have some time…I could teach you how to play Wicked Grace.”

Cat quirked a smile at him. “And that wouldn’t make Cassandra mad? Leading me down the road to gambling and poor decisions?”

“I am offended! All my best friends play Wicked Grace!” Varric grasped at his chest.

Cat just raised her eyebrow at him. “And you are saying your friends make *good* decisions?”

He chuckled and shook his head. “Alright, I get it, fair point. Sheesh, tough crowd.”

*Kid is quick…and sassier than you’d think.*

“Well, what do you want to do, kid?”

“I know we haven’t reached the end of the story…but I was curious where everyone is. The Hawkes are okay, right?”

Varric sighed, kicking at the snow. “Last I heard, they were.”

“Where are the Hawkes?”

*Shit well…*“Well, not in Kirkwall and not here, kid. I don’t know specifically where they are.” *It is only a small lie, and it does her no good to know that.*

“Hmm.” Was all Cat said. She gave him a look, but pressed onward. “What about everyone else?”

“Merrill decided to look after the elves left homeless by the fighting. She’s done a pretty good job of keeping them away from the mages and templars so far. I guess she had plenty of practice avoiding stupid human battles with her old Dalish clan. Carver is with the wardens still, but he checks in at Kirkwall when he can, for obvious reasons. Fenris has kept himself busy, hunting down the Tevinter slavers who came south to prey on the refugees. I’m not sure exactly where he is at the moment. You can usually follow the trail of cor- of a, his.” *Shit, gotta keep things positive, not mention corpses.*

“He isn’t stealthy. Isabela went back to the Raiders. She’s calling herself an admiral now. I don’t know if she’s actually in charge or just has a really big hat.” Cat giggled at that. “Might be the same thing, honestly. I doubt she will leave the Siren’s Call II anytime soon, well, unless Mar asks her. Aveline is still guard-captain. I’m pretty sure Kirkwall would fall into the sea if she quit her job.” *If it hasn’t already.* “Donnic is by her side, of course. And Sebastian went back to Starkhaven. I’m sure he’s boring all sorts of people there.”
“Why don’t you like Sebastian?” Cat quirked her head, questioning.

*Aw, she caught that.*

“Well, I don’t dislike Choir boy, it’s just something that happens later in the story. We didn’t part on great terms.”

“Oh… I kinda liked him. He reminded me of someone, I think.” Cat commented. They walked in silence for a moment, before she followed up. “Wait, you didn’t mention Anders. He’s okay, right?” She looked at Varric with now very worried eyes.

“He… I don’t know, kid. He fled Kirkwall with the mages from the circle. Stayed with them awhile. But he had to move on. Somehow, a lot of mages blamed him for making them live as fugitives. I don’t know where he is now, and I don’t want to know.” *It is safer for Blondie that way.*

“So, he isn’t with Garrett?”

“He might be, kid. He isn’t quite right anymore.”

“That is sad. He seemed like he was trying to do a lot of good, with Justice and all.” Cat said.

*Better not let too many people hear the kid is sympathetic to Blondie. Don’t need those rumors going around.*

“Say kid, you seem to have some strong opinions about them. Do you have a favorite character from the Tale?” Varric asked, half teasing. “Besides me, of course.”

Cat giggled a bit at that. “Well, besides my very favorite dwarf… I don’t know, I like a lot of them, for different reasons. Merrill is so sweet, but also powerful. More people should listen to her. Isabela sounds fun and cool. She definitely knows how to have a good time, plus she was a raider captain. The Hawkes are both great and funny and they have been through so much, yet still kept trying to do good, in their own way. And Carver seems like a great brother, even for all his moodiness. Aveline is strong and in charge.” Cat side-eyed Varric, before mumbling under her breath. “And seems like the only truly responsible one.”

“What was that, kid?” Varric asked. He couldn’t disagree with the statement, not really. Aveline was the most, lawful of the bunch. Well, her and Choir Boy. And how many times had she covered with the guard for them?

Cat continued, “Anders helps people and he loves cats, which is very important. And I think it was brave of him to not only escape the circle, but decide to merge with Justice, even if it didn’t go how he expected it to go. Sebastian has strong convictions and I think he means well. I mean he lost his whole family and still kept his faith. Plus, I like when you try to do a Starkhaven accent.” Cat laughed a little at Varric’s face.

*It is good the kid can still laugh.*

“So, that’s everyone except for Fenris.” Varric raised his eyebrow at her. “No thoughts on Broody?”

“He seems cool. He freed himself and learned to trust mages, even after everything he went through. He had a dry sense of humor and helps to free other slaves.” Varric decided against bringing up her slightly pinking cheeks. Perhaps it was just the cold. And even if it wasn’t, a little crush wouldn’t hurt anything, right? Get her mind off all the other shit happening around here.

*Broody, though, huh?*
They reached his campfire, when they both heard a slamming door. A few moments later, an agitated Mahonan approached, muttering under his breath.

“Hey, everything alright, Stealth?” Varric asked.

“It will be.” He took a deep breath. “Come on, little bit, let’s go practice.”

“What about Solas?”

“He…we are taking a beat. We both need to cool off. A difference of opinion.” Mahonan said in a huff, his ears twitching. Cat reached up and set her hand on his arm.

“Hey, it will be okay, Mahonan.” She gave him a timid smile. He took a deep breath and gave her a tired and strained smile in return. “Let’s go practice.” She tugged on his arm. “I’ll see you at dinner, Varric!” She gave him a wave and pulled Mahonan to the practice area. Varric could see the concern Cat was hiding behind her smile, looking up at her friend and tutor.

*Kids got a lot to deal with. Shit.*

**

Kaaras stood with Cat at the war table. Preparations were in order, quicker than he thought they would be, but the Left Hand was efficient. Her agents would prepare the way for them in Val Royeaux and the advisors thought it better for them to leave now instead of waiting for word to arrive.

“Did you see the message I sent?” Leliana asked, moving a figure on the table.

It took Lady Josephine a moment to catch her meaning. “Oh, yes. Thank you. And we received more contributions today.”

Cat was fidgeting. Kaaras could understand her frustration. They felt rather superfluous to the advisors’ deliberations. They had already decided to help Varric with a request of his and to send soldiers to build watchtowers in the Hinterlands.

*All things that could have been decided without us.*

Cassandra herself did not seem particularly thrilled to be here, either, though her frustration was shown in tensed shoulders, still, ready to move, a warrior’s stance, itching to move, to take action.

*I can respect that in her.*

Kaaras looked back down to find Cat looking up at him with pleading eyes.

*We really don’t need to be here.*

He nodded to her and cleared his throat, loudly.

“If we are finished today, I’ll take Cat to get dinner.” He interrupted.

“Oh, of course. It is getting late.” Josephine said. “Have a pleasant evening, Lady Cat, Kaaras.” She smiled at Cat, giving her a warm look.

*Lady Josephine looks out for Cat, worries about her. She will be a good ally to make sure the nobles don’t get their hands on her. Well, her and Evie.*
“We can finish things from here.” Leliana said, her focus on her reports, barely giving the pair a glance.

*Leliana is efficient, but cold, distant. Can’t truly get a read on her. She is good at what she does, so that works in Little Bit’s favor. Still, I don’t know if I fully trust her motivations or her methods.*

“Yes, farewell.” Cullen said, giving Kaaras a nod.

*Cullen is an odd one. Doesn’t trust mages, yet has a mage Herald. Jumpy. Going through withdrawal of some kind, based on the signs. But a fair commander. He doesn’t trust Cat, so I still have to watch him. He did defend her from that Orlesian prick, so he isn’t unreasonable.*

Cat tugged at his hand leading him from the room, waving at the advisors. “Good night, everyone.” Before the door closed, she popped her head back into the room, cupping her hands over her mouth. “You are doing a great job!” Kaaras couldn’t see their reactions, but hopefully they appreciated her efforts.

Her encouraging words said, she hurried through the Chantry with Kaaras, eager to move, to not be in the same room, standing and doing nothing.

As they exited the Chantry, Cat dramatically threw herself down on the bench, letting out a huff. “Finally, we are free!”

Kaaras chuckled, tapping her legs to get her to move, so he could sit down beside her. Once settled, she leaned against him, wrapping her little arm around his. She was silent, just watching the movements around the town, swinging her legs back and forth.

*She is so small…and has been through so much.*

Kaaras watched her, guarded her, and yet, he was keeping a secret from her. Does he tell her, tell her that it was highly likely her parents had died in the same tragedy that left her marked as a holy figure? But how could he burden her with the information? It wasn’t going to change.

He had informed the other guards about the news. Malika swearing, and both Evie and Mahonan nodding, but obviously stricken. Perhaps it was kinder that she had no memories, no reminders of what she had lost…

And now Solas and Mahonan were fighting. Which is no doubt causing Cat stress, though she tries to hide such things. She had the bad tendency to bottle everything up.

Little Bit looks up to them both. Mahonan said Solas took her to the fade? Don’t know how that all works, but Mahonan said he would handle it, that he would work it out with Solas and Cat would be protected. There was iron in Mahonan’s voice when he said it, strange for the elf.

Kaaras might be in charge of her guard, but he had to trust the others to protect her as well. So, he would trust Lavellan to take care of it.

“Kaaras?” Cat’s voice cut through his thoughts, her hand patting his arm. “Are you okay? I said your name a few times before you noticed me.”

*Fuck. I can’t space out like that.*

“I’m fine Little Bit, just thinking.”

“About what?”
He thought how to respond to the question. “Family.”

“Oh.” Cat said, sitting up. “You haven’t talked about your family. Are they okay?”

“Well, Little Bit, the Valo-Kas have been my family for years, really. A few of them were lost at the Conclave, the rest are still working a job in Orlais. I got a message from the leader of our band and they are doing alright, all things considered. Had some trouble with some nobles, but they worked it out.”

It is strange to realize Arish and Herah are both gone.

Cat nodded, but hugged his arm tightly.

“I didn’t realize you lost anyone at the Conclave. I should have. I’m sorry.”

Kaaras patted her head with his free hand. “No reason for you to know.”

“And what about your family, before you were a mercenary?” She asked it, gently. Curious, but hesitant.

His nostrils flared slightly at the thought. They were all gone or as good as. Cat didn’t need to know the details.

“My folks passed on a long time ago.”

“Oh.” Cat said.

Trying to change the subject, Kaaras ruffled her hair, making her crinkle her nose at him. “But hey, I’ve got you, right?”

She did smile. “Yup, you do Kaaras.” The genuine affection, the love, that she was looking at him with, it made his heart clench.

I will die before I let anything happen to her. I will swear this to whoever I have to, she is making it out of all this alive.

Cat jumped up from the bench, stretching her arms up.

“Let’s go eat, Kaaras.” Cat said, pulling at his hand to get him to stand up. He let her tug for a few moments, watching her struggle and pull with all her mighty 8-year old strength. It was adorable. She finally gave up and plopped down on his lap, tilting her head up and giving him big puppy-dog eyes. “Please?”

Kaaras chuckled and stood, picking her up in his arms, before shifting her up onto his shoulders. She gave out a whoop and grabbed his horns.

Her joy was infectious and pushed any lingering thoughts of the past away. Yes, he missed his band of friends, but he had a place here. He had someone who needed him.

I won’t fail her, not like…

Shaking the thought away, he made his way to the tavern, swinging her down from his shoulders when they reached the door.

As Kaaras ducked his head in, he saw that Varric had claimed his usual table by the fire, Rylen laughing at something he said.
“That is the worst Starkhaven accent I have ever heard!” Rylen was shaking with laughter, his hand at his temple.

“Well, that sounds like a challenge. What’s your best Kirkwall accent like, Knight-Captain?” Varric taunted him.

“Oh no, you aren’t pulling me into this!”

Little Bit was grinning at their interaction and sensing a lull in their bantering, she rushed up to Varric and almost tackle hugged him, joy painted across her face, “Papa Varric!”

As Kaaras watched her, he felt assured in his decision.

*No. It is better to shield her, for now. Let her find some happiness.*

Kaaras hoped that he was right.

**

Mahonan walked the path through Haven, his thoughts conflicted. He had…exploded at Solas earlier.

Perhaps he had over-reacted, but Solas had over-stepped, made decisions about Cat’s safety, her magic.

*Solas was risking her to demons!*

His frustration was building.

True, much of his initial anger stemmed from fear, but still.

As he reached the door to Cat’s cabin he paused, huffed out a breath and calmed himself.

After their lesson, after he had a chance to step back and look at things, he went back to Solas’s. Things were still tense, but they struck a deal. Cat could continue to explore the fade and train, if Mahonan was there.

So, here he was, getting ready to ‘journey into the fade,’ to possibly confront demons…

*Mythal guide me.*

“So, are you going in or are you going to stare at the door?” A familiar deep voice asked.

Mahonan started, turning to see Malika leaning against the cabin, watching him, nonchalantly, a dagger in her hand. He felt his ears getting warm, glad the dark was hiding the pink they were certainly turning.

“Right, yeah.” He stuttered, running a hand through his hair. “I’ll be staying with Cat tonight, to protect her in the fade.”


Taking a deep breath, he finally knocked on the door.

“Come in!” Cat’s voice rang out.
He quickly slipped inside, out of the judging gaze of the dwarf.

Mahonan found Cat sitting on her bed, a doll on her lap, as well as a little dog figurine. He quirked his head.

This is new.

“Mahonan!” Cat greeted him. “What are you doing here?”

“Well, da’len, I’m going to guard you while you sleep, while you are training in the Fade.” He said, walking into the room.

“Oh, are you joining us?” Cat’s smile turned tentative, her ears twitching ever so slightly, giving away her anxiety.

Mahonan himself tensed. He never thought he would be so willingly rushing headlong into the fade, not after what happened to…

He padded closer, sitting on the edge of her bed, “I will be, Little Bit. An added guardian, if you will have me.”

Her smile grew warmer, and she set aside her toys, wrapping her arms around his abdomen, hugging him tight. “Of course! You can meet Joy and Curiosity! You’ll see how cool the fade is!”

He gently hugged her back. “Maybe, da’len. But I still worry. Things like this are not taken so lightly in the Clan. We know the dangers well.” He cautioned.

She leaned back, giving him a considerate look. “I know that it can be dangerous. But that is why I have Solas, and now you, to look out for me!” She hugged him again. “If it makes you feel better, you could tell me more about what you learned from the Keeper. I am curious.”

“If it makes me feel better?” Mahonan chuckles. “Very well.” He thought back to what he had learned and how. It was many bitter memories, hard learned lessons. “Deshanna, my grandmother, always cautioned against trusting beings of the fade. But, not everyone listened to her warning.”

The words were harder to say than he realized. Thinking back to what happened…

“You don’t have to tell me more, Mahonan.” Cat said. “I promise to be careful. Really.”

“I know.” He stroked her hair. “I know you will. I just want to protect you.”

“You are.”

He kissed the top of her head. “Alright, let’s get to sleep. The fade is waiting!” He tried to add his usually teasing optimism, poking at her side and making her giggle.

Mahonan tucked her into the blankets, tucking in her doll beside her, before stretching out beside her. She shifted, so that she was snuggled against his side. “Good night, Mahonan. See you in the fade.”

“Good night, da’len.” He stroked her hair, humming a lullaby, an old Dalish tune to ward off the Dread Wolf, lulling her to sleep.

Mentally, he said a prayer to Mythal and the Creators, to protect this little one. To protect her from the mistakes of the past. To give him the strength to protect her and face his fears.

**
Solas moved through the Fade with predatory grace, the familiar sensations greeting him like an old friend.

The fade around Haven was curious to map, the breach pulling at the edges, a gaping hole that loomed large and oppressive. He had been careful to shield Cat from it, from the strange allure that it had. He did not know what would happen if one were to attempt to step through while dreaming and he would not risk the child to it. It would be beyond foolish to do so.

His steps slowed.

And he had already put the child in incredible danger. Even inadvertently. His mark was on her hand, making her a target. Not to mention that if he didn’t find a way to remove it, it would likely kill her. Eventually.

And she trusted him so completely. Trusted him to guide her, when he was the cause of her suffering, when he was responsible for her being thrust into the spotlight and into a role she was too young to carry.

And then there was her lost memory and visions. How were they connected? In all his years, in all his searching of the fade, he had not encountered something quite like it. Yes, there were seers, those who treated with spirits for knowledge, but this was different. She had knowledge of the past, present and future, in various degrees, with little control and no spirit had made itself know to her. Not even when she manifested in dreams in the fade, which is what he had hoped to test. There was something, something blocking her memories, but the answer eluded him.

Solas pushed the thoughts away. Until he had access to better resources, there was little he could do to fix things. He also could not risk consulting his friends. Wisdom might know something, but it was too dangerous to summon them this close to the Breach.

He circled the ‘town,’ memories playing around him in a discordant medley. Something dark had happened here, several years ago, staining the fade with blood and terror in pockets of memories. He saw the Hero of Ferelden and her party, a younger spymaster, the grey warden Alistair, a roguish elf, and an older mage. Their imprint in the fade had been troublesome to untangle, even though he had heard the tale. The white-haired elf led her group against the cultists that once resided here. Her daggers flashing. The roar of a dragon. Blood on the ground.

He felt a ripple in the fade. Cat was asleep.

It was a miracle there weren’t more demons clamoring towards her presence. The Breach must be cloaking her. She shone so brightly, it was like someone screaming out into the fade, announcing her presence to any who might be near.

Dismissing the fade memories around him, he set it back to the current Haven, in the middle of day. Tugging at her aura, he pulled the young mage to him.

She stumbled into the town. Her small form materializing from the immaterial, ethereal dreamstate she was in. Soon her familiar elven form stood in front of him, her childlike wonder taking in the fade Haven again, her grin wide and enchanting.

He would never tire of seeing her reactions to the fade, to magic. She treated each new thing as a special surprise, a revelation that she had to understand and experience.

It filled him with even greater guilt that his mark marred such a bright young life.

She focused her eyes on him, briefly, before she smiled again and greeted him. Good, she
remembered to check my aura. “Hi Solas! Mahonan should be right behind me!” She swung her arms around, looking intently around, searching for…

“Ah, are you looking for your new friends?”

“Yes! Have you seen them?” Cat asked, eagerly.

Solas chuckled, tilting his head. “I’m sure they will arrive soon. You intrigued them.”

He felt another presence close, the magical aura ripple faintly in the fade. Not the splash the da’len had, but still there.

Lavellan has arrived.

Solas had not appreciated being yelled at, having his rationale questioned. But, he had to admit there was some merit to what his companion had said. Introducing the girl to the fade the night that she asked was…rash. And he wasn’t the young trouble maker he once was, he should show more restraint.

Perhaps it was the da’len’s influence.

She was currently willing snow into balls, her little hands outstretched as the fade bent to her magic.

She made him remember what it was like to discover magic.

He felt a smile form on his face. She was easy to love, to want to protect. Her whole being was bright and friendly, the mark aside.

His smile grew strained. She was goodness itself. What would the world do to her?

Sighing, he gathered his magic and pulled at Mahonan’s aura, bringing him to them.

Mahonan manifested in his clan attire, the vallaslin on his face still jarring to Solas, even with one to his…friend.

*How far the Dalish have fallen, how much they have lost.*

Mahonan straightened up, his whole body tense, his aura agitated. He surveyed the world around him, relaxing slightly when he saw Cat safe and sound. Well, then he let out a rather undignified yelp, as a ball of snow hit him on the shoulder.

Cat’s giggles made Solas turn to find the culprit, just in time to duck as a snowball sailed over him.

*Hm, this is one way to train her Fade abilities.*

Solas grinned, forming a snowball in his own hand, setting his concerns aside, if only for a moment.

*Let’s see how quick she is.*

**

Their snowball fight ended rather quickly, Solas winning after dumping a mound of snow on top of both Mahonan and Cat. The spirits Curiosity and Joy showed up, while Cat was figuring out how to will away the snow from her hair.

Cat introduced them to Mahonan, who was leery around them, especially after Curiosity did their
inspection. Once he met with their approval, the two spirits moved on to play with Cat, while the two elder elves talked.

They built two snowmen, which morphed into a snow Solas and a snow Mahonan, which then prompted much giggling from the trio.

Curiosity still looked like a cat, but they could manipulate the fade in fun ways. And Joy still looked like a kid. Cat kind of wanted to ask them about their forms, but she was worried it would be rude.

*I don’t want to offend my new friends.*

Cat turned back to look at her mentors, her friends. Mahonan was still stiff, uncertain, or even… worried? Cat wasn’t sure, but he clearly wasn’t comfortable. Solas was engaging him, showing him how to affect the fade and in some theoretical debates.

“…Is Cassandra defined by her cheekbones and not her faith? Varric by his chest hair and not his wit?” Solas posited.

“I had not thought of it that way, I will consider your point.”

“I…thank you. Few are willing to entertain such a notion.”

“Well, I’m here aren’t I?” Mahonan replied, smirking at Solas.

*At least they are talking, without yelling.*

The spirits pulled her back for a game of hide-and-seek, which proved interesting when you can shift things around you. Or, yourself.

Cat still had a lot to learn. She couldn’t ever find Joy or Curiosity on her own and they always found her too quickly. Still, it was fun.

The night ended too soon, with the trip for Val Royeaux awaiting her in the morning.

*We just got back to Haven…*
Picture I commissioned from @pegaeae on tumblr of Varric reading to Cat!

Link to Tumblr post

Chapter End Notes
Hey, we are almost to Val Royeaux!

You can follow me on Tumblr here (https://daydreamingdragonage.tumblr.com), where I will answer questions and post fanart as it appears.

Thank you again for reading and to everyone who has left comments/kudos!

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