### Curiouser and Curiouser!

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#### Summary

A MGiT set during Dragon Age: Inquisition. With a twist! She is put into the body of a child and loses her memories! 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, so i admit it starts a little slow, relies a bit too much on in game dialogue in the beginning, as I get a feel for it. But I think it gets better!

I try to update monthly, at least.
**Is this a dream?**

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 starred, 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.*
I hope this is a dream

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 peeked 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
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 her 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. 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.

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.

“Dorothea…” Leliana whispered, almost a prayer, under her breath.

Cassandra was in shock.

*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.
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.” Ylsa hissed at him as they were both dragged away.

Ylsa 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 stuck 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.
Dreaming the breach - part 1

Chapter Summary

The first part of closing the breach - sorry in advance for all the game dialogue.

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 peeked 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.

“Explain this!” Cat’s hand glowed and crackled. Green light pulsing. It hurt.

“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.

“Do you know what happened?” 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 scrambled 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 forth.

“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?

“Your 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 hear, 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).
The Inquisitions Awakens

Chapter Summary

The inquisition is born! Tiny Herald of Andraste!

Chapter Notes

So, a bit of inspiration and motivation hit and I finished this much earlier than expected. Enjoy!
Note: Thoughts are in italics.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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.

_My name is Cat and I could use a friend. You never told me your name._

“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.

_World 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.”

“So 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. “…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._

“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!_
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
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 Andristian, 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 Cyrith 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 Trevelyans 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.
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?*

“I 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 inopportun 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 Orlais. 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.

“Ah, 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 if 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 away 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://chaotic-good-hawke.tumblr.com/post/176927406961/daydreamweavercat-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.

“How, 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 breathe, 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-“

*Uh 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.”

“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.”

“That’s good to hear, Varric.” There was a knock at the door. Lena opened it and Cullen entered.

“I was just going to check on the Herald.” He said. “Some of the men were worried.” He shifted.
“Rylen wanted me to give these to you.” He handed Cat a bunch of Winter’s Breath flowers.

“Thanks and tell Rylen thank you as well.”

“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.

Wait, why does this look so familiar?

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.”

Chapter End Notes

Hope you enjoyed this chapter!

As always, let me know what you think in the comments below!
Theories/Questions/Comments/Advice are all welcome!
The Hinterlands - Part 1

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!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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 almost-” 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 at 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.

“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.

“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, sniffling 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!

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 Hinterlands - Part 2

Chapter Summary

Cat and company continue their quest to stabilize the Hinterlands, dealing with some bandits, meeting a possible ally, and encountering the rogue mages.
Warning: things get a bit dark.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

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.

“Are you 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.”

“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 veilfire.

“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 veifire.

“Solas, would you come over here?” Kaaras asked. Solas joined them and examined the symbol.

“This is a rune.” He said. “The veifire 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.

*I have to get to him! I have potions!*

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 shallowed 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://chaotic-good-hawke.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.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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.

“Seeker, 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.”
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 helped 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.

“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 scrapping 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

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The Hinterlands - Part 4

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 not 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
“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, 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 Ylسا 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

Let me know in the comments below what you think!

You can follow me on Tumblr here (https://chaotic-good-hawke.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

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.
“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.”

“They?”

“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 kept 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 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 its 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 hear 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 head 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.”

“Allrighty. Solas, I trust you got the da’len.”

“So 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.”

“What 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. Kaaaras 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 stared 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?
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 mischievous, 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.”

“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://chaotic-good-hawke.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?”

“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://chaotic-good-hawke.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!
To Orlais

Chapter Summary

Cat and crew travel to Val Royeaux.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Cat woke up sprawled across the bed, having almost pushed Mahonan off the bed in the night. So close, that when he woke up and stretched, he did fall off, hitting the floor with a thump.

Cat couldn’t help giggling, especially when he let out of string of Dalish curses.

“Are you okay?” Cat asked, trying to stifle her giggles.

He rose up from the floor, his eyes just peeking over the bed, eyes narrow and ears twitching.

“Find this funny, huh?”

“Maybe.”

Definitely.

Quick as a flash, Mahonan was back on the bed, poking at her sides, tickling her, making her giggle even more. “Oh, so you push me out of the bed and then laugh at me. I see how it is.”

After a few more pokes, he stopped, sitting up and stretching again, not falling off the bed this time, running his hand through his blond hair.

Catching her breath from her laughter, Cat joined him, her bare feet hitting the cold floor, hopping quickly over to the rug by the fire.

“I guess we should get ready.” Cat said, chewing on her bottom lip. The weight of the plans made the day before were heavy on her conscience.

I don’t want to leave yet. But I have to. They are counting on me.

“Yes, da’len. We are leaving at 9 bells. I’ll go finish packing my things and you should get dressed for the day.” He turned and booped her nose, mischief playing across his face.

“Hey, what did you think of the Fade?” Cat asked, rubbing her nose and resisting the urge to retaliate. She really didn’t have time this morning for more shenanigans.

I should have spent more time with him last night. Whoops.

“I am…curious. But still apprehensive.” Mahonan said, tugging at her braid. “I have had many warnings about the Fade and wandering in it, as well as experience that leaves it not the playground you seem to think it is. However, I am willing to learn.” His face turned serious.

“Little Bit, Solas and I discussed it and decided that it would be best for you to not dream in the Fade while we travel. Solas said the Breach is shielding you from most demonic attention, but as
we travel away from it, more will take notice.”

“Oh.” Cat said. “But what about my friends?”

“They will still be there when we return. You just need to train more, that’s all.”

“So, shouldn’t I dream every night?”

“When we are in Haven, sure. But on the road, no. Solas agrees to this, too. He is going to cast the wards again, while we are away, okay?” Mahonan said, but leaned down, so he was at her eye-level. “We don’t want to risk you. Can you accept that?”

I will miss my friends, but if both Solas and Mahonan think it is best…

Cat sighed, but nodded. “Alright. Fine. No more dreams until we are back.”

Mahonan gave her a small smile, “Come on, it won’t be so bad.”

“Yeah, yeah.” She conceded, but stuck her tongue out at him. “Now get out of here, I have things to do, people to say good-bye to.”

Mahonan just laughed, ruffling her hair, and leaving the cabin to make his own preparations.

**

After Mahonan left, Lena arrived with a quick breakfast and helped Cat get dressed for travel, layering her up for the cold. Lena had packed for her the previous evening, setting aside a few dresses for the city. Kaaras would pick up the bags later.

Lena chatted with her as she braided her hair back, this time looping them around into a fancy bun. She fussed over her, worrying over all the little things, giving her a big hug when she finished. Cat promised to bring her something from the capital.

Lena was attentive and sweet, dotting even. She fussed and cared over the girl, much like an Aunt. Or what Cat assumed an aunt would be like.

The rest of the early morning was spent visiting everyone else and saying her good-byes, with Evie shadowing her as guard. She stopped in the training grounds, the blacksmith, the tavern, the apothecary, everywhere she could think of, talking with people she knew well and those new to the Inquisition.

Cat was not ready to leave again.

She left her doll Arabella with Josephine, thanking her and promising to be on her best lady-like behavior in Val Royeaux and she even checked in with Leliana, hugging her. Leliana had a strange look to her, briefly, before she wished the Herald well and returned to her work.

All too soon, though, Cat was back on her horse, her travelling companions around her, taking the western path down the mountains, Haven fading behind them.

**

After three days on horseback, they reached Jader. They stabled their horses, with a minor noble sympathetic to the Inquisitor. They managed to leave without the bespoke noble throwing them a minor fete, which was in most part due to Evie. It was actually kind of scary to see her work, using flattery and manners like a finely-honed weapon.
From there, they would be taking a ship, the fastest way to the capital. Cat was excited, having no memory of being on a ship, but they did look very impressive. Sails flapping in the wind, different colored woods with beautiful mastheads. It felt like a fabulous adventure.

She was excited, that was, until they actually left port.

After throwing up everything in her stomach, she no longer looked forward to the journey over the Waking Sea.

So, the first day was spent below deck, in the small room she shared with several of the companions, feeling all around terrible.

But, she wasn’t alone in her misery. In the birth next to her, an equally sick Malika lay. She tried to be stoic about it, but it is hard to be stoic when you are emptying your stomach. Kaaras checked in on them from time to time, sometimes with Cassandra, leaving water and plain bread for them, but after Malika threw a dagger at them and groaned to leave them alone, they had a bit of peace in their shared predicament.

The ship was rocking under them.

“I don’t remember ever feeling this sick before.” Cat complained, trying to take some sips of water and not think about the shifting world around them.

“I have, once before.” Malika said. Her eyes were closed, yet she still played one of her knives across her knuckles.

“Really? Were you on a ship?”

“Nope. Actually managed to get this far without taking a ship.”

“Really?”

“Yup. Last time I was this sick, I was poisoned by a rival in my carta band. That fucker wanted to take my place, thought they were better than me.”

“Woah, what happened?” Cat asked, turning to look at Malika with wide-eyes.

“I knew something was wrong. We had just finished a job and were taking a break, everyone splitting off to relax for the night after a drink. I started throwing up, getting dizzy, warm. I recognized the signs. The idiotic bastard bought poison off one of our contacts. Anyways, sick as I was, I tracked them down to the tavern they were staying in, all high and mighty, celebrating. We had a bit of conversation and they were persuaded to give up the antidote. At least they weren’t a big enough idiot to buy the poison without the antidote.”

She roughly chuckled before grasping at her stomach and grabbing a cup of water, blindly.

*Wow. That is some story. She survived poison!*

“What did you do to them?” Cat asked. “Did you report them?”

Malika snorted. “Slit his throat and dumped his body in the garbage.”

“Oh.”

Malika opened one eye and gave Cat a look. “Fuck, probably shouldn’t have told you that part. Sorry, kid.”
“No…it’s okay.” Cat said. But was it? Malika’s life was much more brutal than anything Cat had considered. But did it make it wrong? If she hadn’t tracked the person down, she would have died. It made Cat uncomfortable to consider. “Did you get in trouble with your bosses?”

“Nah, told them they turned traitor, skimming off the top of our takes and that I took care of it. The Carta doesn’t question that much and I picked up the slack they left behind, so nothing was said about it.”

“Huh.”

As if understanding her dilemma, Malika responded. “Try not to think about it too much. Dwelling on the past doesn’t do anyone any good.” With that she turned over, facing the wall. “You should try to get some sleep.”

“Okay. G’night, Malika.”

“Night, Little Bit.”

**

The next morning was better, for Cat at least. Malika refused to leave the cabin, muttering about land and fricking Orlesians. Or something.

Cat felt a little light headed, having an empty stomach, but for the first time since they left port, she didn’t feel nauseous and the rocking of the ship didn’t seem so terrible.

She wobbled up to the deck, finally taking in the merchant ship they booked passage on. It had a 20 person crew, including the Captain, who was a short and broad Free Marcher with a big mustache. He was friendly enough, though a little loud. Kaaras was currently talking with him, discussing something about trade routes. From the sounds of it, Kaaras’s mercenary group had provided security for the captain before.

Varric was pestering some of the sailors, his notes out, asking them questions. She was going to approach them, when a hand landed on her shoulder. She turned quickly to look up at Cassandra.

“Herald, should you be up?”

“I’m feeling much better. I’m actually kind of hungry.”

Cassandra looked fine, unaffected by the trip, although her armor was left off, a simple tunic and leather bracers in their place. Apparently, she felt the ship was secure.

The warrior considered the young Herald’s statement, before nodding and motioning to the stairs.

“Of course. We can get you some food in the galley.”

“Okay.”

Cassandra led her back below deck, taking another set of steps down into a large room with several tables. It was mostly empty, except for Solas, who was sitting and drinking something. Cat vaguely remembers him coming to the cabin to cast the wards the night before.

He nodded to them as Cat slid onto the seat across from him, Cassandra continued on towards what must be the kitchen. “Good morning, Solas!” Cat said.

“Good morning, da’len. I see you are faring better.” He took a sip of his drink.
“Much better, thanks. What are you drinking?” A strong scent coming from the cup he held.

“Ah, I asked the cook for some ginger and made a tea. I was going to bring you some when you woke, but it seems you need it not.”

“Oh, are you sick too?”

“Just a little unsettled. Sea travel has never agreed with me. This is one of the few instances in which I will willingly drink tea.” He paused, tilting his head a moment. “If you would still like some, I can make more for you.”

“Thank you, but I’m okay for now. I really just want food. Maybe later.” Solas nodded at her response.

“You should be careful not to eat too much, da’len.” He cautioned. Cat crinkled her nose at that, she wanted to eat so much food!

Cassandra wandered back over to them, setting a small plate of food in front of Cat. A couple pieces of bread and some sliced apples. “This is what the cook recommended you start with. If you can keep it down, you can eat lunch with the crew later.”

It wasn’t much and Cat was going to protest that she was really hungry, but Solas gave her a look over his cup, a raised eyebrow, a slight chastisement to listen to what they were telling her. So she accepted the food and tried not to devour it too quickly.

Solas finished his drink and bid them good day, wanting to get some fresh air on deck.

Cat was working through her second piece of bread, but was feeling a bit uncomfortable. Cassandra was still standing and it felt awkward.

“You can sit down, Cassandra.”

She shifted, seeming to way the choice, before sitting in the seat Solas had vacated.

The silence was…loud. They were not often alone. In fact, Cat couldn’t think of a time since the Hinterlands that they had been alone. And she didn’t really want to think about the Hinterlands, but there wasn’t anything to distract her.

“So, Cassandra, tell me about yourself.” Cat asked, grasping for any distraction.

“There’s…not much to know, Herald.”

At her tense shoulders, Cat backed off. “Oh, I’m sorry, I’m not trying to pry.”

“No, I just…fine, what do you wish to know?”

“Um, so you are from Nevarra, right?”

“Yes. I am a daughter of the royal house of Nevarra, seventy-eighth in line for the Nevarran throne. I joined the Seekers of Truth as a young woman and was with the Order until they withdrew from the Chantry. I remained as the Divine’s Right Hand, carrying out her order to form the Inquisition – and here we are.”

“Wait, you’re royalty?” Cat asked excitedly, momentarily forgetting her food.

Cassandra sighed, not sharing in the youth’s excitement, but granting a small smile. “The
Pentaghasts are a very large clan. Half of Cumberland could say the same."

*Cumberland is in Nevarra, right?*

“Really?”

“No, but it feels that way. I have hundreds of relatives so distant, they need charts to prove we’re related at all. And they have them, oh, yes. The Pentaghasts value their precious blood like it runs with gold.”

“You must have big family reunions, huh?” Cat leaned forward, the conversation becoming for interesting by the moment. She really did want to learn more about the stoic warrior.

“We do. The last time I attended a large gathering of the family, it took four estates just to hold all the guests and servants.” Her tone was not fond.

“I guess you’re not close with them.”

“I do not visit them, no.” Once she saw Cat’s questioning look, she elaborated. “The Pentaghasts are famed for dragon-hunting, but few actually pursue the craft. Most are fat and lazy. They pay lip service to the Maker and care only for idle pleasures and past glories. My brother was all that kept me in Nevarra. Once he was gone, so was I.”

Oh.

“I’m sorry for your loss, Cassandra.” Cat said, reaching her small hand across the table to set it lightly on Cassandra’s.

“I…Thank you, it was a long time ago.” Cassandra clearly did not wish to continue the conversation.

Wanting to shift the conversation, Cat latched onto the most obvious thing she could. “So, have you fought a dragon before?”

“Once, but that is a story for another time. I’m surprised Varric has not told you yet.”

Seeing the conversation not going anywhere, she tried again.

*I’m going to have to talk to Varric about this story…or try to convince Cassandra to tell me later…*

“What can you tell me about the Grand Cathedral. That’s where we are going to meet the Chantry mothers, right?”

“That is the idea, yes.” Cassandra crossed her arms, a thoughtful look on her face. “The capitol is gaudy, pompous, decadent. The people deal in secrets like gold, almost everyone will be wearing a mask, telling their station or house. It is crowded and loud. I do not particularly care for the city itself.” She paused, finding the words. “But, it is the seat of Faith for all of Thedas. I will not deny that there is something about standing in the cathedral, where thousands of the faithful have prayed and worshipped before…the feeling is incredible. I wish more could experience it that way, instead of just a museum to the wealthy and nobility.”

Honest and at times, impassioned. A truly Cassandra response.

“Well, then I look forward to seeing the Cathedral, if not the city. Will you give me a tour of it?”

Cassandra smiled, actually honestly smiled. “I would be honored to, Herald.”
Cat spent the rest of the day with free rein of the ship, mostly. Evie chased her down at one point to slather on some ointment to ward against the sun. She wiggled out from her fretting, the ointment fragrant and thick.

Cat shadowed the captain for a while, then slowly climbed up the ropes to the top of the mast to the crow’s nest with Mahonan, taking in the view of the sea, no land in sight.

There was an allure to it, the sea, lulling and vast. The smell of salt water. The waves a blue so deep, glittering like a million gems under the sunlight.

That evening, as the sun set, the sailors gathered on deck, lighting lanterns and joking, laughing raucously. Cat watched curiously from her perch on the quarterdeck, tired from being sick and her long day, swinging her feet.

One of the sailors picked up an old ragged fiddle, weathered, salt stained into the wood, looking like it had been plucked from the sea itself. He was an older gentleman, with a trimmed white beard and deep-set eyes. He tuned his instrument, the notes filling the night, along with the gentle waves hitting the ship, the creaking wood as it swayed beneath them. Another sailor brought out a hand-held drum.

And then they played.

Like magic, the music started, the sailors dancing to the sound. Even the captain was joining in. Wine bottles were brought out. Varric and Kaaras were there, too. Mahonan and Evie coming back up as the music started, Solas and Cassandra not far behind.

There was a warm glow to the whole affair, starting with shanties, the seafarers singing along loudly and mostly in tune. Varric, his deep baritone voice joining the throng, was singing along enthusiastically.

_I wonder if Isabela taught him the songs back in Kirkwall._

Cat leaned forward, stifling a yawn, but drawn towards the revelry.

Mahonan jumped in, dragging Evie behind him, springing around with a jaunty step. Evie just laughed, taking the lead and steering them into a more elegant dance, prim and proper, although still with a wide grin. Solas leaned against the railing, watching the dance, his foot tapping, but abstaining from the crowd. Kaaras muttered something to Cassandra, she shook her head in response, but he held out his hand, giving her a look laced with a dare. She narrowed her eyes, but took it, letting him sweep her into an elegant waltz.

Cat smiled. She didn’t know he could dance. It would make sense for the Seeker to know, she was technically royalty after all, but she wondered when the mercenary had learned.

_I’ll have to ask him about it sometime._

The energy of the dance, the music, the night on the sea, building and ebbing, a flow that felt natural and wonderous. A moment stuck outside of time. An energy that coursed through the young girl’s being, kindling feelings, longings she hadn’t felt before.

Wanting to join the moment, Cat stood and stretched, hopping down onto the deck, pushing the tiredness away. She weaved through the crowd, ending up next to Varric and the musicians, the swirling bodies a flurry of color and movement. It was enchanting. Cat felt light and warm, her
muscles itching to move and join the group.

As the current song came to an end, Cat tapped Varric’s shoulder, hands behind her back, a charming grin on her face.

“May I have this dance, Papa Varric?” Cat asked, using her best noble voice, dropping into a small curtsy.

“Why, I would be delighted.” Varric replied, an equally big grin on his face. He snapped his fingers, shouting out. “Hey Jonesy, play something jaunty.”

The fiddler nodded and struck up a rollicking tune, the drummer following suit. Varric pulled Cat into the dancing group, spinning her around so much that she sputtered out a laugh. It wasn’t long before she was feeling the music, feet jumping.

It felt…familiar.

Soon, Cat had broken away from Varric, twirling on her own, stepping to a dance all her own, chasing the sensation of belonging, of the motion triggering muscle memories.

She jumped and stepped, her arms and legs moving in tandem, both wild and graceful. She spun and spun, picking up her skirt and twirling, laughing, sidestepping and gliding.

She pulled in Solas to the dance, he easily followed after her. He was surprised, but his own grace leant itself to the dance. She skipped from companion to companion, but she never stopped, one dance flowing flawlessly into the next, and she chased the feeling of glorious joy in movement and being. One moment Kaaras was lifting her up into the air, the cool air hitting her cheeks, the next Evie had her waltzing noble lines. Her friends, her allies, their faces meshing together, far off memories mixing, feelings of love and freedom and unadulterated joy. A celebration, a red dress, warm hands, and flushed cheeks. As long as she kept dancing, she felt perfectly in tune, her past and present together, existing in harmony to the music, to the rhythm of feet.

Cat didn’t want the evening to end.

**

Evie descended the stairs, quickly passing to the doorway in the shadowed corridor lit by lanterns, even in the day. She knocked gently, but hearing no response, opened the door.

Inside, the room was dark, but the light from the hallway hit the Herald’s face. The girl reacted, eyes slowly opening, squinting out.

Cat had collapsed asleep the night before, so exhausted she fell asleep in Kaaras’s arms before he even reached the stairs. She had danced for hours, so delighted and enthralled, no one could bring themselves to stop her.

“What time is it?” Cat croaked out, her voice hoarse and dry. Her curly black hair was plastered against one side of her face, tangled, having fallen out of its braids sometime last night.

“Nearly noon. Time for you to be up, little lady.” Evie said.

“Uh, five more minutes?” Cat whined, burrowing back under the covers.

Evie smirked, the reaction so similar to her nephews back home.
Dear Andraste, I miss them.

She walked in, sitting on the edge of the bed. Tapping her fingers lightly against the girl’s head. “Now, you have been asleep for almost 12 hours. It is time to get up.”

“No.” Cat replied, squirming under the covers further.

She tried an old tactic. “There is food in the galley.” Cat stopped moving, considering the rogue’s words, before slowly peeking out.

“Fine, you win.” The girl mumbled, shifting and stretching.

Evie heard Malika snort from across the room, before her breathing went back to normal. The poor woman was not faring the trip well at all.

Evie’s opinion of Malika was…mixed, to say the least. She held no love or respect for the Maker and the Chantry, she was foul-mouthed, uncouth…

But she was quick with a blade and she protected the Herald as they all did, fiercely and loyalty. While she might not truly be aligned with the Inquisition, Evie could not question her commitment to their duty. Strange allies in extreme times.

The Maker does work in mysterious ways…

Evie poured Cat a glass of water from the bucket, holding it out to her. After she drank it all down, Evie stood.

“Now, do you want me to fix your hair now, or after lunch?”

“After lunch, please.” Cat replied with a yawn, rolling out of bed and onto the floor, in a heap of limps and blankets. “Or I could just stay here.”

“Come now, Little Bit, I hear there is bacon.”

“You don’t play fair.” Was the mumbled reply.

Evie helped her up, though the girl leaned heavily against her, rubbing her eyes.

Together they walked out the door.

The child perked up after eating some, Kaaras taking the initiative and untangling her hair, rather deftly. The qunari was full of hidden talents, tying the now detangled hair back and patting her on her shoulder.

There was in fact bacon and Cat ate all her pieces and even managed to steal a piece from Varric, though from the look in his eyes afterwards, he let her do it.

The dwarf was going to spoil the girl if they didn’t watch out.

But, considering the pressure they were putting on her, she could do with a bit of petting.

Mahonan joked with her a bit, getting her to smile and snark back. Evie had to bite back the urge to correct her, but they weren’t in the city yet. Eyes were not upon her.

And, Evie wasn’t her mother.
No, let her be a kid. Whether sent by the Maker or not, Andraste blessed or not, she was just a kid. Around the same age as Willem.

*Maker, she is the same age as Willem.*

Little Willem, who would rather play in the fields than sit through the lessons. And barely older than sweet Christoph, who was so much like Constantine, which terrified Evie, fearing that his sickly disposition would cut his life short.

And here she was, being blinded by hope and faith, treating this child like a Holy Figure. Which, she may be, but she was still an innocent.

Maybe that was why she was sent. Because of her innocence and goodness. Because only a child could light the way through this chaos.

Evie watched her there, laughing and spreading joy in her words and actions. She was explaining that she wanted to get gifts for everyone while they were in Val Royeaux, she had 15 silvers after all.

A child. They are taking a child to the Orlesian capitol…

*Maker, let them protect her.*

Maker, we have to prepare her.

**

Cat was sore, tired and sore. But Evie hadn’t let her wallow and sleep. No, she lathered in in sun ointment again, and then had her up on the deck, practicing her balance, having her stretch out her muscles, practicing the dodges Cassandra had taught her.

All the while quizzing her on noble titles and customs and things she learned from Josephine.

Evie let her take a break with Mahonan in the crow’s nest, taking a snack for them both. Then Evie escorted her over to Varric, insisting she have another reading lesson. Varric was patient, as always, leading her through some simple words and sentences. Solas stopped by to check in on them, complimenting her on her diligence, which made her focus all the more as she basked in the praise.

That evening, she brought some simple broth for Malika, since the other thought the dwarf would be less likely to complain if the Herald brought it to her. She grumbled out a thanks and Cat decided to leave her in peace.

It was late, around 10 bells, when the call went out that they were coming into port. The sailors rushed around, taking their stations, preparing to dock. It was practiced, yet frenzied.

Kaaras lifted Cat up onto his shoulders again, out of the way, after one crew member almost ran her over in their rush.

Cat wanted to watch them, see what they all were doing, but she was so tired…

She managed to hang on, leaning down on Kaara’s head.

They docked, disembarked, a very grateful Malika almost sprinting off the ship. Cat was nodding off when they found an inn that had rooms. Cat vaguely remembered seeing a warm hearth before
fading completely asleep.

**

The city was glittering, opulent. There were golden lion statues on gates, pillars, edifices. Not to mention all the lion statues. Planters overflowing with lush plants and flowers, yet meticulously manicured, each flower carefully chosen for its color, its scent. The walls shades of blues and creams, statues prominently placed around the city of holy figures and leaders.

As the group crossed a bridge, a woman in a mask gasped, backing away from the group. And this was not an unusual response to their party.

“Just a guess, Seeker, but I think they all know who we are.” Varric said, his hand itching, ready to grab for Bianca if things went sideways.

“Your skills of observation never fail to impress me, Varric.” Cassandra deadpanned, but she was equally tensed, not expecting the reactions they were receiving. She moved closer to the Herald, instinctually.

Cat herself was flabbergasted by the sights and smells, spinning around, trying to take everything in at once, the frightened reactions failing to temper her curiosity.

An Inquisition scout rushed up to intercept them, saluting and taking a knee, before the Cat and Cassandra. “My Lady Herald!”

“You’re one of Leliana’s people. What have you found?” The Seeker asked.

“The Chantry mothers await you, but...so do a great many templars.” The scout warned.

“There are templars here?”

“People seem to think the templars will protect them from...from the Inquisition. They’re gathering on the other side of the market. I think that’s where the templars intend to meet you.”

They entered the gates along a thoroughfare of monuments. All of them towering overhead. They would even tower over Kaaras, if he were with them. Cassandra had convinced him (after failing to order him) to stay at the inn. She was concerned that he would cause more of a stir than they would like. Evie backed her up, saying it would be the best way to appeal to the Mothers. Kaaras was not at all happy, but he agreed finally, hoping to smooth things over with the Chantry, since they were already riled up.

Malika had decided to make some contacts in the city, stating that she was more use in the shadows than trying to ‘make pretty with a bunch of old stuck-up religious biddies.’ Evie sighed a bit at her absence, glad she wouldn’t be there to say something they would all regret.

So, Mahonan and Evie stood as guards for Cat, along with her other three companions and guides.

As Varric and Cassandra talked with the scout, Cat stepped closer to one of the statues, Mahonan right behind her. There was a plaque, and underneath, scraped into the stone, something else was written.

“Mahonan, what’s this say?” Cat asked. She could read the individual letters, but the words were too complicated.

“Let’s see. This statue is called “Maferath’s Remorse.” The message underneath says,” He
chuckled, “‘At meeting a low door frame.’”

Cat looked up at the statue, the man with head in hand and giggled herself. “Well, he is really tall, he must have forgotten to duck.”

“You should not laugh at that! We are in the capitol!” Evie admonished, but Cat would swear that Evie was fighting a grin of her own.

“The people may just be assuming what the templars will do. I’ve heard no concrete plans.” The scout said, behind them.

“You think the Order’s returned to the fold, maybe? To deal with us upstarts?” Varric asked.

“I know Lord Seeker Lucius. I can’t imagine him coming to the Chantry’s defense, not after all that’s occurred.” Cassandra looked concerned. “Return to Haven. Someone will need to inform them if we are…delayed.”

“As you say, my lady.” The scout saluted to her and to the Herald, before turning and rushing off.

Cat wanted to check out the other statues, but seeing the grim expressions on some her companions faces, she refrained. They moved through the thoroughfare, sounds of people and shouting building. Looking into the square, they saw a large crowd.

Cassandra was evaluating it, a tactician look.

Butterflies filled Cat’s belly, the hint of a warning at the edge of her mind, not danger, exactly, but it was a feeling that warranted caution.

“Herald, are you ready?” Cassandra asked, briefly setting her armored hand on Cat’s shoulder.

Cat, swallowed, but squared her shoulders, and nodded. “As I’ll ever be.”

“We have your back.” Evie said.

“And your front.” Mahonan joked, but his eyes were already scanning the crowds.

“We will protect you, da’len.” Solas said gravely.

Together, they moved into the square.

“This ought to go well.” Varric muttered under his breath.

**
Thought I would share the moodboard I made for Cat Bell a while back.


Also, here is the playlist I put together for her!

Cat Bell
A Curiouser and Curiouser! Playlist

1. Dragon Age Inquisition Theme
2. Journey to the Past // Christy Altomare
3. Into the Open Air // Julie Fowlis
4. Don’t Know Who I Am // Rebecca Roubion
5. Warrior Daughter // Wildwood Kin
6. Mon Esprit // Sweet Crude
7. Federkleid // Faun
8. Hercules // Sara Bareilles
9. Recover // CHVRCHES
10. Everything is Color // Through Juniper Vale
12. To Feel Alive // Iameve
13. All That You Are (From "Lost Ember")
14. Lotus Flower // Alexa Melo
15. One Girl Revolution // Superchick

“Who in the world am I? Ah, that’s the great puzzle.” - Alice in Wonderland

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14. Lotus Flower // Alexa Melo  
15. One Girl Revolution // Superchick

LINK TO SPOTIFY PLAYLIST

Chapter End Notes

We reached Val Royeaux!!! Sera and Vivienne will soon join the party!

You can follow me on Tumblr here (https://chaotic-good-hawke.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!
Cat and company meet with the mothers, encounter the templars, receive some messages and invitations.

The feelings and awareness flowed through Cat. The situation in the square had been strange and off-putting. She had already been uneasy with the amount of people pressed into the area, listening to the mother speak. There were too many bodies, all taller than her, too close and too many. Then the Chantry Mother had yelled accusations against the Inquisition, before being punched down by a templar. Cat could barely process it all. It didn’t help that as soon as she laid eyes on the Lord Seeker, a blinding pain hit her mind, a screeching warning. She grabbed onto Evie for support, barely hearing the rest of the confrontation. She remembered a sweet-faced man among the templars, whose name she felt she knew. She remembered Mahonan whispering, worried, his blue eyes in front of her face. But anytime she looked at the Lord Seeker, with his doughy face and cruel eyes rimmed with madness and malice, she felt the resounding warning to beware, to hide, to avoid.

And pain.

It was not a feeling she had had before. Not a vision. Not a memory. But a searing warning. Where does it come from?

The templars had left and the pain was easing, Evie and Mahonan had Cat sat down beside a vendor’s stall, drinking some water. The water tasted amazing against her parched tongue and throat.

Solas ran a hand over her brow, checking without magic. It did not seem like a good idea to use magic openly, considering the reception they received.

His fingers were cool against her scalp, against this strange warning heat.

“The feeling has passed?” Solas asked, concerned, his brow creased with worry.

“Yes. It was strange. It was when I looked at the Lord Seeker, just pain and warning.” Cat explained.
“This does not bode well. The man’s actions and this mysterious warning the Herald experienced, perhaps he really has gone mad.” Cassandra pondered, hand on her sword as her eyes scanned the square.

“Wouldn’t be the first leader of the templars to go that way.” Varric said.

“We should get her out of the sun.” Mahonan commented. “And the public eye.”

“I’m okay now, really.” Cat insisted.

The internal heat was fading as she rested in the shade. She didn’t know why the Lord Seeker caused such a reaction. And she did feel better, out of the crowd, away from the strangers. Here she could focus on the problem, although she could also go for a nap.

I feel like the answer is just out of my reach...

The vendor of the booth chose that moment to approach them, a hesitant smile under her mask.

“Excuse me, but…is what they’re saying real? The Inquisition’s going to fix the hole in the sky?”

“We’re going to try, at least.” Evie responded, standing tall and angling her body in front of the Herald.

“No one is doing anything. The Chantry’s useless, and the templars…Andraste, I never thought they’d abandon us.” The woman shook her head. “Listen. Your camp will need food. I have contacts. We’ll have deliveries there in days.”

That would be good. Lena was talking with Flissa about the rations and supplies...

“You want to help the inquisition?” Cassandra asked.

“Never been part of something this big before, but…If your Inquisition’s going to seal the sky, I want to help.” The woman looked at them, specifically Evie.

Evie turned to speak with Cat. “Well, what do you think, Herald?”

Me? Why me? Is there some reason we shouldn’t accept her help? Some lesson Josie taught me I’m forgetting?

Uncertain, Cat looked pleadingly to Cassandra, for guidance.

She is the one to ask. Cassandra has authority.

“I think the woman is asking you, not me.”

The woman grasped the situation quickly, turning her attention to Cat. “Well, she is?”

“The Herald of Andraste. Yes, I understand. Haven is a mess, but we won’t turn away anyone willing to help. Invite her, if it pleases you.” Cassandra advised.

Thinking back to her lessons, she stood up, looking the woman straight in the eyes and took a deep breath. “We would accept whatever help you can bring to Haven. We need good people. People willing to help.”

“I don’t know if I’m that, but it’ll be nice to see. Thank you.” The woman bowed to her.
“Thank you.” Cat said.

_We need all the help we can get._

**

“Should we try to talk to the Chantry Mothers again?” Evie asked, her voice clipped and frosty. “Perhaps now they will be willing to listen to us, with the templars abandoning them.”

Evie was not happy. Disgusted, actually, with the reactions they had received. If the pompous asses would think beyond their fear for 2 seconds, maybe they would realize the inquisition was just trying to help. That the girl, elven or not, was sent as a guide for them, a pure young soul, someone worthy of the title of Herald. But they had just hurled accusations at them, nearly inciting a mob, had the templars not arrived. And then things had really gotten out of hand.

“Surely it cannot hurt to try.” Cassandra said, though her voice left some doubt that it would change anything.

“Because it went so well the first time.” Varric snarked.

“I, for one, am against this.” Mahonan said. “Probably going to do it anyways, so I don’t know why I try.”

Solas stifled a chuckle at his fellow elf’s long-suffering tone.

“We should at least try to talk to them. That is why we came here.” Cat said. “And Evie is right, maybe they will listen.”

“Still think it’s a bad idea.” Mahonan muttered under his breath, too low for Cat to hear, but Evie could. She shot him a look, which he responded to by sighing. Cat picked up on the tension, a look of concern on her face. How could she miss it?

“Solas, Mahonan, Varric, would you gauge the reactions of the people, try to talk to them?” Evie suggested. None of them were particularly interested in dealing with the mothers and it was unlikely the mothers would be interested in them, especially if one of them made a snide comment.

Varric laughed. “Want us out of the way, Fletch?”

“I…did not say that.” Evie crossed her arms, fighting off a flush from her face. She did not have the authority to ask them this, but it was reflex. To speak and be listened to by those around her. Especially those that were not noble or well, human.

And she should not think that way, how could she? Perhaps that was why Andraste sent an Elvhen child in the first place, because of their pride and arrogance, of her pride and arrogance...

“Don’t worry, we’ll get out of your way, right, Chuckles? Stealth?”

“Very well. The chantry might be more open without wild elves and a dwarf present.” Solas said, although the last words were said with a hint of distain. Or was it humor? She had a hard time reading him.

“Don’t want to scare the frightened shemlans.” Mahonan said, mocking.

“Indeed. I expect this will be brief. One way or another.” Cassandra said, ignoring his tone. She sounded as Evie felt, but they needed to try, the support of the chantry mothers could do much and
at least they could show that the Inquisition wanted to ally with them.

The trio slipped away, not before saying a quick word or a pat on the head to Cat. The girl was shifting around now, inching closer to Seeker Pentaghast and Evie, her eyes glancing around at the still crowded square, eyes flicking to watch their companions melt into the crowds and vendor stalls.

Evie set her hand on the girl’s shoulder, reassuring her. “Their bark is worse than their bite, I promise.”

Cat just nodded in response, giving Evie a timid smile, a look that said she was uncertain, but she would do it, she would trust the Seeker and Evie.

Together the three of them headed back to the platform, now cleared of the throng of people, though most still lingered in the area, in smaller groups, gossiping about what happened, masked faces hiding intent.

Evie had never truly gotten used to the Orlesian fashion of wearing masks, or the Orlesian fashion of backstabbing people with words and knives. Oh, she could play the game, but it was not one she enjoyed. It was one instilled from birth, hammered into her being by her mother and governesses.

But, if her skills could help the Inquisition, could help the Herald, then it would be worth it.

Stepping up the platform, a few mothers gathered with Revered Mother Hevara. The injured woman squinted up at them, a grimace on her face.

“This victory must please you greatly, Seeker Cassandra.” The mother said.

“We came here only to speak with the mothers. This is not our doing, but yours.” Cassandra retorted.

“And you had no part in forcing our hand? Do not delude yourself. Now we have been shown up by our own Templars, in front of everyone. And my fellow clerics have scattered to the wind, along with their convictions.” She gripped her side, catching her breath. Her gaze fell to Cat, the Herald who had been sticking close to Evie’s side. “Just tell me one thing: Do you truly believe you are the Maker’s chosen?”

“I…don’t know, honestly. Some think I am, others don’t. I don’t know. I don’t remember what happened. I’m sorry I can’t give you a better answer.” Cat’s voice was hesitant, but ringing with sincerity. She stood up straight when she said it, looking the mother in the eyes, letting her see the truth to her words. Evie was proud of her.

“That is…more comforting than you might imagine. I suppose it is out of our hands now. We shall see what the Maker plans in the days to come.”

“What…what do you think I am?” Cat asked, her bright green eyes questioning.

“Our Divine, Her Holiness, is dead. I have seen evidence for everything except what would comfort me.”

“That doesn’t answer her question.” Evie said, crossing her arms.

“For you to be true, a great many things must be false. And if you are false, a great many things must have failed. There is chaos ahead, whatever your intentions.” The mother sighed. “However, it is harder to believe you a demon when I see you with my own eyes.”
That is something. Not much, but something.

“Will the Chantry continue to denounce the Herald and the Inquisition?” Evie pressed.

The mother chuckled, struggling up with the help of another. “We have already done so, and what good has it done us? Now it falls on us to select a new Divine, if we can, and leave the next step to her.”

“Provided such a selection is even possible.” Cassandra commented.

“I truly don’t know. Any Revered Mother who could have followed Justinia died at the Conclave. What becomes of us, and your Inquisition, is in the Maker’s hands now.”

“There has got to be a way to calm everything down and clean up this mess. Create some order.” Evie said, letting her frustration show.

“I hope against hope that may be the case. For whatever it is worth,” The mother looked down at Cat, a thoughtful, conflicted look on her face, “may Andraste light your path, child.”

The small group of mothers shuffled off the platform, merging into the crowd.

“They seem less inclined to outright attack us, at least.” Evie said, trying to turn it into a positive.

“But they will not support us. They refuse to do anything until a new Divine is chosen and Maker knows when that will be. We will have to look for support elsewhere.” Cassandra said.

“We tried.” Cat said.

“We did at that.” Evie sighed. “We should get off this platform, get the others and regroup.”

*It could have been worse…*

**

Mahonan leaned against a pillar, watching the crowd, listening to the conversations, snippets here and there.

“They left us. The templars left us to the mages! Chantry liars!”

Like they should fear mages more than templars. The mages were unlikely to start storming the capital, considering the state of the rebels they saw in the Hinterlands.

And the templars were just as much a threat as any mage. The look in some of the men’s faces, it was…haunted, unyielding, glazed.

“A learned child is a blessing upon his parents and onto the Maker.”

Mahonan snorted at the passing chanter.

True. The child was a blessing to them. Mahonan heavily doubted that she was sent by the Maker or Andraste, but she was a blessing. A blessing with a curious mind and an optimistic spirit. Perhaps the Creators sent her, or Mythal herself.

Mahonan wasn’t really sure. He wasn’t sure it mattered. She was a child, an Elvhen child being called the Herald of the human god’s chosen. He had learned more about the Chantry and the shems beliefs than he ever truly wished to in the last several weeks. There are many things he
wished to research, to understand, but the Chantry teachings were not high on that list.

He could respect the faith many of his companions had, but this fear and hate they encountered in Val Royeaux, it left a bad taste in his mouth. The disdain that many of his kin held for the human’s religion, it made sense. The human Chantry had done much to elves over the years, much to lead to distrust or even hate in return.

It is because of this past that Keeper DeShanna, his grandmother, had sent him and Ylisa to the conclave, to monitor, to spy, yes, on what the humans were doing, on what they would decide. The conflict with the templars and mages had spilled over. A number of mages had sought refuge with the clan, a number of templars had to be dealt with. It was chaos that could not be ignored.

“Do you truly think the Inquisition would be better?”

Creators he hoped so.

“Hey Stealth, you look a little serious over there.” Varric had walked close to him, sneaking up on him as easily as Ylisa might. It didn’t help that he was more attuned to forests than cities.

“I’m stuck with the nickname forever, aren’t I?”

“That’s usually how it works, but you are avoiding the issue.” The dwarf said.

Mahonan laughed, ruefully. “You caught me, Varric.” He ran a hand through his hair. “I’m just feeling uptight around all these shem religious folks is all. My people don’t have a good history with them. A little more than worried about what might happen.”

“Look on the bright side.”

“What bright side, exactly?”

That made Varric pause. “Well…we’ve got each other.”

Mahonan barked out a laugh. “Technically true. Though I’m not sure how comforting that it.”

“I am offended!”

“Sure you are.” Mahonan chuckled out.

“What’s so funny?” Cat asked. Mahonan looked over to see her, with the Seeker, Evie, and Solas.

“Nothing, just humoring the dwarf.”

“Hey!” Varric protested.

“The talk did not go well, I take it?” Mahonan said, ignoring the sputtering of false outrage from Varric, a grin on his mouth. He wasn’t gloating, really he wasn’t.

“No. We will not find any support from the Chantry, besides what we already have in Haven.” Evie conceded.

“Perhaps the mages will be more open.” Solas offered.

“I still have hope for the templars. Surely others in the Order do not agree with Lord Seeker Lucius and what he is doing. Either way, we should first return to Haven and inform the others.” Cassandra said.
Mahonan did not support the option of the templars, after what happened. He didn’t particularly like them before. They were too full of themselves, with powers that left mages like himself powerless, too certain that their path was god ordained.

Several of the templars at Haven were fine, even nice, but he had received his share of dirty glances and curses.

“Leaving the capitol so soon? And I was just getting used to the hateful sneers.” Varric said.

Their group started to walk, but were interrupted by the twang of a bowstring, something hitting the cobblestone in front of them. Cassandra had moved on instinct, her shield over of the girl, her eyes surveying the area, the balconies above them. The others looked as well, but the threat was gone, no signs of who did it.

Mahonan fingers itched to hold his staff, the familiar rough wood, security that he could not have here. Magic built up, sending prickling sensations over his hand, the hair on his arms standing up. They were too exposed here.

“What is that? An arrow with a message?” Cassandra asked, keeping her shield up, even as wandering eyes and whispers from the crowds around them picked up.

“Someone sent a message with an arrow?” Cat asked, any fear fading. “That’s… kind of cool.”

Of course she would think so…and well Mahonan found it intriguing as well.

Evie pulled up the arrow, untying the message from it. She unfurled it and quickly read it to herself.

“Well, don’t keep us in suspense, Trevelyan.” Mahonan said.

“Curious. It says, ‘People say you’re special. I want to help and I can bring everyone. There’s a baddie in Val Royeaux. I hear he wants to hurt you. Have a search for the red things in the market, the docks, and ‘round the café. And maybe you’ll meet him first. Bring swords.’ It is signed the Friends of Red Jenny.” Evie reported, passing the note over to Varric’s outstretched hand, Cat and Mahonan looked over his shoulder to see the note was also covered with doodles.

“I don’t trust this.” Cassandra said.

“Seeker, can we really be choosy with allies?” Varric asked. “Plus, Hawke and I did some work for the Red Jennies in Kirkwall. They could offer good support, or at least some support.”

“The kind of help they would offer is debatable, but Varric is correct that we cannot afford to be picky at this point.” Evie said.

“I have not heard of these Red Jennies. Who are they?” Solas asked.

“Rogues, troublemakers, spies, vigilantes. No one really knows, that’s the beauty of their group.” Varric said.

“Could be worth a look.” Mahonan commented. They were mysterious, sure, but that could be to their advantage.

“So, a scavenger hunt, then?” Cat asked, her nose crinkled up as she tried to read the letter herself, much more advanced than what she was ready for.
“Very well. But first. I believe that messenger is trying to get our attention.” Cassandra said, finally putting her shield back and nodding over to a man in robes. Seeing that he had their attention, the messenger hurried over, bowing at the waist to Cat.

What now?

“You are the Herald of Andraste, are you not? I have an invitation for you.” He presented the envelope to her, the elegant script on the front addressed to the Herald.

Cat took it from him, curtsying slightly. “Thank you.”

“Good day.” The man, a mage from his outfit, hurried off.

“Um, who wants to read this?” Cat asked, holding it up.

“I’ll take it, kid.” Varric said, taking it and removing the letter from the envelope. “It says, ‘You and a companion are cordially invited to attend my salon held at the chateau of Duke Bastian de Ghislain.’ Signed, yours, Vivienne de Fer, First Enchanter of Montsimmard, Enchanter to the Imperial Court.”

“Duke Ghislain is highly respected, his family is very devout.” Evie commented, taking the invitation.

“I am familiar with the First Enchanter. Curious that she would reach out to us.” Cassandra said.

“Surprising that the title still holds merit, considering the circumstances.” Solas added.

“We are certainly more popular than I thought we would be.” Mahonan said.

Perhaps it was a good sign, it must be. Others outside of the Chantry wanting to help.

“Oh, didn’t you know? I’m a very important person.” Cat replied, smiling up at him.

“Ha, that’s what I like to hear, kid. Now, about that arrow message.” Varric said, looking at the first message again. “First place we should check is the docks.”

This should be interesting. How hard can it be to find a clue at the docks?

**

Cat sat at a table in the café, her companions around her, filling the table, music played by a brown-haired minstrel in the corner. Cat was drinking a sweet tea, with a little pastry, glad to be resting.

They had found all three clues, wrapped in red handkerchiefs. The one by the docks was caught up in an old net by some barrels. Cat also found a magazine of some sort behind the barrels, but Evie had promptly confiscated it. Varric had laughed when he saw it. They wouldn’t say what it was, just saying she was too young. Cat thought they said something about the “Randy Dowager.” So, it was probably a dirty publication or something. It’s not like she could read it anyways...

The clue on the balcony had taken longer to find. They had to go up a couple different stairways, since the balconies weren’t all connected. But Evie had spotted a bit of red across the way from the second balcony and they made their way from there. Mahonan shooed away a pigeon that was pecking at it, but they got it.

Varric spotted the one in the café as soon as they entered, just before Cat saw it. Their height gave
them the advantage, as it was stashed under one of the tables, the table they now sat at.

Cat had cast some rather longing looks at the dessert someone was having, so Evie had decided they should rest and have tea. Well, tea and wine for those who preferred it and were of age. Cat had sniffed at Varric’s glass and made a face. Making him and a few others chuckle.

“Someday you may like it, kid.”

*Why do people drink that? It smells like bad juice.*

But the pastry was delicious, flaky and sweet. Cat licked her fingers, her companions going over the clues. The three notes and a key.

“Okay, so the time is 11 bells, tonight.” Mahonan said.

“And this one has a map drawn on it.” Varric pointed out. “A little rough, but it should get us there.”

“It must lead to a private courtyard, which one would assume this key goes to.” Evie added, holding up the bespoke key.

“I am curious to see who is behind the messages.” Solas said, sipping his wine.

“We will check it out, but the Herald should not go.” Cassandra said.

“What! But, it says for me to go. What if they don’t show up if I’m not there?” Cat asked.

“Going to a random courtyard late at night could very well be an ambush. We are not going to subject you to that risk.” Evie said.

“Everything I do has risk, Evie.” Cat said. “Besides, it’s not like I would be going alone. And I can cast a barrier if I need to.”

“Perhaps we should discuss this later.” Solas cautioned. “There are many ears listening.”

There were a number of people glancing their way. Varric slipped the notes and key into his pockets.

“Agreed. We should be on our way, the others will be wondering what happened.” Cassandra said, rising from her seat. “I will go pay.”

“I hope Kaaras isn’t too worried.” Cat said, brushing off some crumbs from her dress as she stood.

“Mama Bear will be fine.” Varric said. “Well, maybe not after we tell him what happened…shit, anyone else want to tell him?”

“Not it.” Mahonan said.

“I will tell him. He can’t get mad at me, I’m too cute.” Cat said.

“We will all report what happened.” Cassandra said, putting the change in her pocket. “Though he might have already heard. Orlesians do love to gossip and any rumors spread like wildfire in the city.”

“We should get back.” Evie said. If her brow was creased in worry, the others weren’t saying anything. How Kaaras might react setting them all a bit on edge. They all realized it was time to
Before they left the café, Cat dropped a few copper in the minstrel’s jar, who thanked her in Orlesian, the simple phrase Cat understood, which was surprising to say the least.

*Do I know some Orlesian? Curious.*

Cat skipped back to her friends, feeling much better about things. The pain had long since subsided, they had gone on a scavenger hunt, gotten a pastry, and there was a mysterious meeting tonight. In two days, they would be going to a party to see the Enchanter de Fer. Things were looking up after the confrontation in the square.

It had cleared out considerably, the crowds dispersed, though the vendors and shops were still bustling. The group was able to easily make their way through the square back out to the entrance corridor. They hadn’t gotten far when a voice called out to them.

“If I might have a moment of your time?” Cat whipped around, to see a dark haired, older elven woman approaching them.

“Grand Enchanter Fiona?” Cassandra asked, confused.

“Leader of the Mage Rebellion. Is it not dangerous for you to be here?” Solas asked.

*Hm, I thought she would be in Redcliffe...* 

“I heard of this gathering, and I wanted to see the fabled Herald of Andraste with my own eyes. If it’s help with the Breach you seek, perhaps you should look among your fellow mages.” Fiona said, with a light Orlesian accent.

“I’m surprised the leader of the mages wasn’t at the conclave.” Mahonan said, tilting his head.

“Yes. You were supposed to be, and yet somehow you avoided death.” Cassandra commented, suspicion lacing her words.

“As did the Lord Seeker, you’ll note.” Fiona defended herself. "Both of us sent negotiators in our stead, in case it was a trap. I won’t pretend I’m not glad to live. I lost many dear friends that day. It disgusts me to think the templars will get away with it. I’m hoping you won’t let them.”

“So you think the Templars are responsible.” Evie said.

“Why wouldn’t she?” Cassandra added.

“Lucius hardly seems broken up over his losses, if he’s concerned about them at all. You heard him. You think he wouldn’t happily kill the Divine to turn people against us? So, yes, I think he did it. More than I think you did it, at any rate.”

*Yes, of course the mages would blame the templars as the templars blame the mages. And yet, could it be someone else?*

Even though her companions seemed weary around her, Cat felt comfortable, the feeling that this woman could be trusted.

“Does that mean the mages will help the Inquisition?” Cat asked, meeting the woman’s blue eyes. Her gaze was direct, framed by wrinkles, worry lines clear. Yet she looked resolved, certain, in control. Like a leader.
“We are willing to discuss it with the Inquisition, at least.” Fiona said. “Consider this an invitation to Redcliffe: come meet with the mages. An alliance could help us both, after all. I hope to see you there. Au Revoir, my young Lady Herald, members of the Inquisition.” With a bow, she turned and walked away, pulling the hood of her cloak over her head.

“Come. Let us return to the inn.” Cassandra said, motioning them on. “We have many things we need to discuss.”

“That’s an understatement.” Varric said.

Cat cast one more look at the retreating figure of the Grand Enchanter. They would meet again, Cat was sure of it. But she didn’t know if it would be a good meeting or not. She felt she could trust Fiona, but there was a nagging feeling that things were not so simple.

Nothing seemed as simple as they wanted it to be.

Chapter End Notes

You can follow me on Tumblr here (https://chaotic-good-hawke.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!

I'm trying to get a better voice for the 4 guards. This chapter featured Evie and Mahonan, but the next will focus on Malika and Kaaras.
Val Royeaux - part 2

Chapter Summary

Val Royeaux is explored and two allies are recruited.

Chapter Notes

This chapter is a bit longer, because I wanted to wrap up Val Royeaux. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Malika returned to the inn around 6 bells that evening, some extra coin in her pocket and a bit more information from her black-market contacts. Her contacts didn’t care so much about the breach, the Herald, or the Inquisition, except that the fear was making it easier to make money off common items.

And if the Inquisition needed assistance, they would be happy to provide.

_Fucking nug-humpers, the lot of them._

Who did they take her for? Did they think she lost all sense at the Conclave? So, she busted a few heads, made her point. Any deals would go through her or the spymaster or there would be consequences.

And her reputation proceeded her of course. One didn’t become the Carta’s main enforcer without one. She earned the title of the Wraith because of her years of bloody, silent service.

Malika had been sent to secure contracts with the mages and templars at the conclave, yes. But also to take care of any rogue competition. They learned not to mess with the Carta’s business at the edge of her dagger. She knew a hundred ways to kill someone silently, how to injure someone just enough. Her bosses had called her gifted and the whisper of her name was common in the back alleys and dingy corners. She was feared like a ghost, a boogeyman.

And yet there was more freedom with this Inquisition. No expectation for what she must do, the larger than life version of the Wraith left behind. She was just Malika Cadash, something she hadn’t been in a long time, if she thought about it. Maybe it was the senseless slaughter she saw at Haven, maybe it was the girl, maybe she was just getting tired of it, of the blood and fear at someone else’s beck and call.

Whatever the reason, she was here and she liked it here, even when she walked into the inn to her party arguing over some meeting that evening and what the plan was. She didn’t flinch when Cat’s eyes found her across the room and brightened. No, the Little Bit had wormed her way to Malika’s good side. So much so that Malika found herself wanting to grin at her in return.

_Stone. Fucking Stones._
“What shit are we in now?” Malika asked, shifting back against the wall, jumping into a conversation she knew nothing of.

“You’re back. Good. Feel like walking into an ambush tonight?” Kaaras asked, leaning over the table.

Malika raised her eyebrow. *What the fuck did I miss?* “Sure, sounds like a party.”

He smiled. “Exactly.”

“Your idea of a party is very different from mine.” Evie muttered and shook her head.

“Come on, Evie! We can’t not go.” Cat said.

“Agreed. But I still think you, Little Bit, should stay here.” Mahonan said.

“But then you would have one less person to back you up. And if it is a trap, what if they knew you would leave me behind with only one other person and then they attack here?”

_Ha, the kid is out-logic-ing them. Nice one. She is more clever than they give her credit for._

“That’s…well kid, that’s actually a good point.” Varric said.

“This is ridiculous.” Cassandra said, throwing her hands up.

Kaaras looked around the table at them all, before leveling his eyes down at Cat. “Fine. But you, Little Bit, are going to stick beside Solas the entire time, you understand?” His voice left no room for argument.

“Yes, Kaaras, I understand.”

“Adaar, really-” Evie started to protest.

“Trevelyan.” He held up his hand. “I know it isn’t a great plan. But, if there is a threat we need to deal with, this is the best option. We have few friends in this city. If we don’t deal with it now, they could come for Cat when we are unprepared.”

Cassandra sighed. “Fine.”

Evie stared at Kaaras, before nodding. “Understood.”

“Now, Little Bit, since you are going with us, you should try to sleep some.”

“Okay, Kaaras.” Cat said, but she narrowed her eyes. “You aren’t going to let me sleep through it, are you?”

He chuckled. “No, Little Bit, I won’t do that to you.”

“Blast, that would have worked.” Mahonan mumbled.

_Heh, it would have been tricky._

“Well, alright.”

“Since I know what role I will play, I shall accompany you upstairs, da’len.” Solas said.

After Solas left with the girl, Malika approached the table, leaning against it, casually.
“Now, what the fuck is going on?”

**

The alleys were shadowed, but still smelled nice. Of course they would. Rich people can’t have shit smelling alleys around them.

*Fucking nobles. All the same, whether it is Orzammar or Orlais.*

Malika was with Kaaras, Solas, and Cassandra. And the kid of course. Evie, Mahonan, and Varric were trailing them, providing support and making sure no one snuck up on them.

*Don’t know why they would bother, they were walking right towards them.*

Once Malika had learned the plan, she hated it. A big group of them just waltzing right in where they were expected.

*This plan fucking sucks.*

But she had been overruled, so here she was, in this awful position with a child in tow. At least Solas was responsible for her tonight.

They were making too much noise. The two warriors wouldn’t know stealth if it ran up and punted them in the asses. Solas at least walked quietly and the kid was small enough to be mostly silent.

The alley emptied out into a terrace between several buildings, wider here, with stairs leading up to a door.

And it was filled with 8 mercenaries.

*Son of an Aeducan bitch!*

“The Inquisition is here!” One of them called, removing any surprise they might have had.

“Well, they know who we work for, at least!” Kaaras said, leaping forward with his great sword, crashing into the closest mercenary. “Looks like we’re in the right place.”

“No shit, Adaar!” Malika grunted, throwing one dagger at a target, before running towards another. She felt the now familiar sensation of magic simmering around her. A barrier. Whether Solas or the kid cast it, she was too preoccupied to check. Malika had work to do.

Her daggers sunk into the flesh of her opponent, a gargled protest sounding before they slumped over. Beside her, Cassandra bashed her shield into a soldier, throwing them back into another, her sword following after.

After five minutes, Malika was pulled her daggers out of the last mercenary, wiping them on his pants. Just in time for their “back-up” to show, finally.

“And you didn’t save any for us.” Varric said.

“You were too slow, Tethras.” Malika responded. He just harrumphed in response.

“Is it over? Was that it?” Cat asked, peaking around Solas, trying to avoid looking at the freshly killed bodies.

“We still have to get into the courtyard. If this was what was covering the entrance, we should
prepare for more inside.” Kaaras said.

“Varric, you, Trevelyan and Lavellan should get to higher ground, cover us from above.” Cassandra ordered, pointing out a low point on the roof. “Take out any archers that might be lurking.”

“As you say, Seeker.” Evie said, slapping Mahonan’s arm. “Don’t get lost this time.”

“Hey! I wasn’t lost. I just took a detour.”

“Yeah, you keep saying that, Stealth.” Varric said, following after the other two as they made their way upwards.

And they are our back-up? Fucking serious?

“We should get this over with.” Solas said.

“Right, I’ll open the door.” Kaaras said. They approached the ornate door, Kaaras slipping the key in and unlocking it. He opened it and immediately dodged as a fireball flew at him. Another followed. Stumbling in, they saw a masked nobleman, clothed in pale colors, with fancy boots and dripping with a haughty air.

“Herald of Andraste! How much did you expend to discover me? It must have weakened the Inquisition immeasurably!”

Yup. This man is a complete asshole.

And he was addressing Kaaras. Just how bad was his information?

Kaaras quirked his head and deadpanned, “I don’t know who you are.”

The man sputtered. “You don’t fool me! I’m too important for this to be an accident! My efforts will survive in victories against you elsewhere!”

Sure asshole, keep talking.

Malika shifted her grip on her daggers, ready to fling one at him. Not like their back-up would be in place yet.

There was a twang of a bow and suddenly a man from the shadows fell forward, dead. A slight little blonde elf emerged behind him, with arrow notched and aimed at the arrogant noble.

“Just say ‘What!’”

“What is the-” The noble started, before the elf released her shot, shooting the man through the mouth.

Ha, nice shot.

“Eww!” Sera scoffs. “Squishy one, but you heard me, right? Just say ‘What.’ Rich tits always try for more than they deserve.” She didn’t seem to be talking to anyone in particular. She walked over to pull out arrow from his skull. “Blah, blah, blah! Obey me! Arrow in my face!”

The elf’s accent was Ferelden, not Orlesian. Denerim, if Malika wasn’t mistaken. Rough, course, like a number of contacts she had worked with.
The elven archer was facing them now. “So, you followed the notes well enough. Glad to see you’re…You’re well fit. Heard about your kind. Seeing’s different.” The elf woman was addressing Kaaras. *Hm, perhaps a lot of misinformation was spreading, wonder if the Spymaster is behind it?* “I mean, it’s all good, innit? The important thing is: you glow? You’re the Herald thingy?”

Kaaras looked her over, evaluating. Solas and Cat were behind him, the kid was pointedly not looking at the body, Cassandra beside her with her shield, angled to partially cover the girl.

“I’m not the Herald. She is.” Kaaras finally said, great sword over one shoulder, pointing his thumb back at Cat. “But who are you and what’s this about?”

“Ah, the little elfy one. Weird. Heard rumor some kid was, but that seemed bonkers. Guess the whole thing is, really. Anyways, I’ve no idea who this stiff it, or was. I don’t know him from manners. My people just said the Inquisition should look at him.”

“Your people? Elves?” He questioned.

“Ha! No. People people.” She paused, looking back at the other side of the courtyard. “Look, name’s Sera. This is cover. Get round it. For the reinforcement. Especially you, Glowy.” Sera pointed at Cat. “Don’t worry. Someone tipped me their equipment shed. They’ve got no breeches.”

The shouts of the guards announced their presence, a dozen stumbling out into the moonlight. Pantless, but still with weapons.

“Why didn’t you take their weapons?!” Malika shouted, ducking behind a barrel as an arrow flew overhead.

“Because no breeches!” The elf responded, cackling.

*Paragon’s asses!*

The fight was over surprisingly quickly, what with the guards’ exposed state and the rooftop backup of lightning and arrows. After the last one fell, Cassandra waved to Evie, Varric, and Mahonan to make their way down.

“Friends really came through with that tip. No breeches!” Sera laughed, slinging her bow over her shoulder. “So, Herald of Andraste. You’re a strange little one. I’d like to join.”

Cat looked up at her with wide-eyes, looking a little green at all the bodies. Malika sighed, sheathing her daggers and walking up beside the kid.

“How about we get to know each other first? You know, names and such?” Malika said, crossing her arms.

“One name. No, wait, two. It’s…well, it’s like this. I sent you a note to look for hidden stuff by my friends. The Friends of Red Jenny. That’s me.” Sera said. “Well, I’m one. So is a fence in Montfort, some woman in Kirkwall. There were three in Starkhaven, brothers or something. It’s just a name, yeah? It lets little people, ‘friends,’ be part of something while they stick it to nobles they hate. So here, in you face, I’m Sera. ‘The Friends of Red Jenny’ are sort of out there. I used them to help you. Plus arrows.” She looked at the girl.

Cat had recovered a bit, focusing on Sera’s face. “Okay…” She was confused.

Kaaras broke in. “The Inquisition has spies already. Can you add to them?”
“Here’s how it is.” Sera explained, gesturing with her hands. “You ‘important’ people are up here, shoving your cods around. ‘Blah, blah, I’ll crush you. I’ll crush you.’” She made a kissing sound, causing Cat to giggle, breaking some of the tension. “Oh, crush you. Ahem.”

Sera refocused and continued. “Then you’ve got cloaks and spy-kings. Like this tit. Or was he one of the little knives, all serious with his…little knife. All those secrets, and what gave him up? Some houseboy who don’t know shite, but knows a bad person when he sees one. So no, I’m not Knifey Shvidark, all hidden. But if you don’t listen down here too, you risk your breeches. Like those guards. I stole their…look, do you need people or not? I want to get everything back to normal. Like you?” The question was posed at the group, though she wrinkled her nose at Solas. A fair response, he was an odd one.

“Yes. Normal would be better.” Cat said, she had that look on her face, the look that she was seeing more than what was there. It was off-putting, but useful. I need to work with her to better mask the signs of her visions, use it to her advantage. She quickly looked around at her companions, before adding. “If you and your allies want to join the Inquisition. We would be happy to have you.”

“Yes! Get in good before you’re too big to like. That’ll keep your breeches where they should be.”

“I do like my breeches where they are, thank you.” The girl snarked, giving the taller elf a small smile.

“Plus! Extra breeches, because I have all those…you have merchants who buy that pish, yeah? Got to be worth something.”

“Probably? Seggrit will probably buy them.” Cat said.

“Right?” Sera smiled. “Anyway, Haven. See you there, Herald. This will be grand.” Sera winked, before turning and shifting into the shadows.

An interesting addition. She can shoot, at least.

“What did we miss?” Mahonan asked, the three back-up members finally down from the roof.

“Little Bit recruited a curious ally.” Kaaras said, ruffling her hair. “Come on, time for bed.” He picked her up, letting her perch up on his arm. “The Seeker and Solas will come with us. The rest of you, see what you can find on the bodies, see if there are any papers, valuables, then get back to the inn.”

Oh, we are going to find out all about this fucker and his friends. Not a single one is going to be left standing. By the tits of my bastard ancestors, the threat will be dealt with.

**

Kaaras rose at dawn, per usual. He went outside, near the stables of their inn and ran through his morning work-out. The Seeker was there as well, a silent partner as they both went through the motions.

His muscles were still tensed from the previous night. They had gotten back after midnight, Little Bit still wide awake, rambling on about their new ally, avoiding talk of the death involved, but fascinated with the elf. Cat had gotten the sense from her visions that she would be a lot of help. Solas had taken her up to her room when they got back, trying to settle her and setting wards.

All things considered, their mission had been a success, although he regretted exposing the kid to more violence. There seemed no way around it. She was handling it better, but then she wasn’t the
one causing it. She just stood back, casting barriers around them and staying out of the way.

The rest of their party was sleeping in. Kaaras didn’t know what time most of them got back from
the courtyard.

Malika was the first one up. She never seemed to sleep much, perpetual dark circles under her eyes,
but her performance in the field was the same, so Kaaras let it slide. Cadash was not the kind of
person to take well to worrying. She might stab him if he asked if she was getting enough sleep.
Unless he had Cat ask…

Cadash briefly touched base with him and Cassandra, saying she was going to track down some
information they found on the bodies in the courtyard, get rid of the loose ends. Kaaras nodded,
watching her slip away again. He had no doubt there would be a few more bodies by the end of the
day, but that threat to Cat would be dealt with.

The sun was rising well up into the East, so he and the Seeker made their way inside to wait for the
other. It was 9 bells before another showed.

Trevelyan was up next, followed by Solas and Mahonan, who both looked a little bleary eyed.
They reported that Varric was watching over Cat and would wake her soon.

“The Herald will need a proper outfit for the Salon tomorrow night.” Evie said. “This will be an
event in front of Orlesian nobility. I have something that will work, but she will need something
much more formal if she is to make a good impression.”

*Always prepared that one. Well, prepared for issues of nobility. Better than the rest of us, at least.*

Cassandra sighed. “Very well. We will go shopping.”

Kaaras chuckled, she sounded she would rather face darkspawn.

“The invitation is for Cat and one companion. It can be me, but would you prefer to attend, Seeker
Pentaghast?” Evie asked.

“No!...no. You should attend.”

“Why, Seeker, Orlesian parties not your scene?” Mahonan asked.

“It would be better if someone more…diplomatically trained went.”

Kaaras shook his head. “Whether I can get inside or not, I will accompany you to the Chateau.”

“Lady Trevelyan, you mentioned that you had a cousin at the University here. Do you believe you
could get us access to the library?” Solas asked, shifting topics.

“Very well. We can see what the academics have to think about the Inquisition.” Evie turned to the
Seeker. “I trust you, Seeker Pentaghast, to get something suitable for the Herald.”

Cassandra nodded her assent, though it looked like she was dreading the prospect. “I’m certain we will find something acceptable.”

A creak on the stairs and a stifled yawn announced that Little Bit and Varric had arrived.

“Is there any bacon left?” The girl asked.

**

They found themselves in a dress shop, in the shops district of Val Royeaux.

Well, it was the fifth shop they had visited. The first two had refused them because they were Inquisition. Two others because Little Bit was an elf. The second such one muttering a string of curses, making Little Bit cry. Kaaras sent her out with Varric and Cassandra, the latter with heavy protests, and had a word with the shop owner. They had learned their lesson, there were some advantages for being large and intimidating.

But, their party still found another shop. This one was smaller, a little out of the way of the main thoroughfare. An older human woman ran the shop, with two elven assistants. When Cassandra (entering before the group to check) asked if she would have any issues clothing the child, the woman responded that money was money and that the two assistants were like daughters to her. Elf or not, the Herald would be ready for the salon.

If Kaaras was the religious sort, he would have thought it divinely provided, the way they took care of things, bringing out bolts of fabric and pre-made dresses and bows. As it was, it meant that Cat was smiling and giggling as she was dotted on by the three shopkeeps, the frowns and tears left forgotten with the other hate they faced in the capitol. In here, she was just a girl getting ready for a party.

Varric was trying to get Cassandra’s opinion of this and that design, which she just responded to with disgruntled sighs, though even she couldn’t keep a small grin entirely off her face at the kid’s joy. They sat on a settee, while Kaaras kept guard nearer the door, behind them.

“What do you think?” Cat asked, twirling in her dress. It was a soft blue, layered over silken leggings. It was a little big for her, but was pinned to fit, the adjustments small enough to be done quickly.

“Hmm, I don’t know.” Varric dramatically, thumb to his chin.

“Varric, it is perfectly adequate.” Cassandra said.

“Just adequate?” Cat asked, deflating a little.

“Come now, Seeker. Look at the lines, and that bow!” Varric said, standing up so that he could gesture to the features on the dress. “And it’s very…what’s the word I’m looking for?”

“Swooshy?” Cat offered.

“Swooshy, yes, that was the word.” Varric confirmed, taking Cat’s hand and spinning her around.

“Fine. It is a lovely dress.” Cassandra sighed, at Varric and Cat’s imploring looks, she added. “…very swooshy.”
“Are you an authority on swooshy-ness?” Kaaras leaned over to ask.

“Don’t push it, Adaar. You make a large target.” Cassandra threatened under her breath.

“As you say, Seeker. I was merely curious.”

“And look! It has pockets!” Cat exclaimed, hands in said pockets and spinning around so the skirt billowed around her.

“But of course, Miss.” Terese, one of the assistants said. “They are very practical.”

“Madame Toulouse, we will take this one.” Varric declared. “You are sure you can have it ready by tomorrow morning?”

“Monsieur Tethras, it will be no trouble at all. Between Terese, Coralina, and myself, the dress will be finished this evening. We will have it delivered promptly.”

“Excellent. Thank you.” Varric said, bowing slightly.

“The pleasure is ours. Please, do not hesitate to visit us again.”

“Alright, kid, time to get changed.”

“Okay, Papa Varric.” She ran off to the back, where Coralina waited to assist and unpin her from the outfit.

“Ah, to be young again. You must be very proud of your daughter, Monsieur Tethras.” Madame Toulouse remarked.

*Ha, I suppose the dwarf has truly taken on a fatherly role for her…or more like a corrupting uncle.*

“Of course, but actually-” He started to correct the woman.

“Varric, I believe the Herald wished to do some more shopping today. Would you settle up the bill, so we can be on our way.” Kaaras cut in. Would it harm to let a rumor start that the Herald was the child of the famous author? At least it would be some good rumors to confuse from the negative they had encountered and heard repeated since they arrived in the city.

*Since when have I become so conniving?*

“Sure.” Varric said. “Now, Madame, you said that…” He pulled the woman aside to her desk, chatting amiably.

“How much shopping do you think the Herald wishes to complete?” Cassandra asked, rising from the settee.

“Oh, well, she said she wished to get gifts for everyone in Haven.” Kaaras said.

“Everyone?!”

“Do not worry, Seeker. I talked her down to only those closest to her. So only about 20 gifts.”

“You can’t be serious.”

“Completely.”
She just sighed.

*And it took a lot to bargain her down to those 20.*

**

The task of getting all these gifts proved more challenging than anticipated. The first issue was that Cat only wanted to spend her own money on the gifts. Once she realized how little money she actually had, she finally allowed them to ‘help’ her acquire the gifts.

Then it became the issue of what she wanted to get them.

After two hours of searching, broken up by a stop at a café for lunch, she finally decided on some scarves and novelty fabric flowers. She made the Seeker and Varric go to the other side of the square while she picked them out, though, so it wouldn’t ruin the surprise. Cat would have tried to get Kaaras to go as well, but she realized it was a lost cause, they would not let her shop alone.

With eleven scarves and ten fabric sunflowers, she was finally done.

“I think they will like these. Afterall, it is cold in Haven. And I tried to pick out colors I thought people would like. And I didn’t get scarves for some people, cause I don’t know what color they would like and like Harritt is always by the forge and would be too hot in a scarf. Plus it could catch on fire. But I think the sunflowers are pretty and different.” Cat was rambling, swinging her arms along her side as they made their way back to the inn, the late afternoon sun starting to set. “I really like sunflowers. They are so big and bright. Plus the seeds taste good, though these of course aren’t real ones, but I don’t think real ones would last in Haven...”

“Little Bit, if you keep talking, you are going to wear yourself out.” Kaaras cautioned, though he wasn’t very serious.

“Will not! I could talk for hours!”

“I know you can.” He chuckled. “I was not issuing a challenge.”

They strolled together through the city. The stares they received were not so noticeable anymore, more from them becoming common than from the attention actually lessening. Some people, he could tell, were just here to catch a glimpse of the Inquisition and the Herald.

*Cat at least seems to ignore it. Whether she truly doesn’t notice or not, I don’t know.*

Kaaras kept his eyes out over the crowds, up on the balconies, those loitering back in shadowed alcoves. Escort missions were never his favorite, too many things could go wrong. But now, his whole job was one extended escort mission, with the child who was quickly rising to be known and possibly targeted across Orlais, if not beyond.

*The world did have a funny sense of irony.*

“Are we quite finished for the day, Herald?” Cassandra asked when they reunited.

“Yes, Cassandra. I have all I need here.” She replied, lifting the basket they got to carry all her gifts, each wrapped up and tied with a string.

“Thank Andraste, we can leave.” The seeker muttered.

“Now, Seeker, are you sure you don’t want to stop by that shop over there?” Varric asked, with
false innocence. She just shot him a glare.

“Papa Varric, don’t tease Cassandra. She already shopped with us this whole time.” Cat chastised him, looping her free arm through his and leaning against him.

“Me?! Tease the Seeker?! I would never!”

“Of course not.” Kaaras said. “Not more than twenty times a day.”

“I resent that!” Varric said.

“What? Is it only 19 times a day?” Cassandra commented. Varric was just delighted by her snarky response.

“Don’t encourage him, Cassandra. You’ll just make it worse.” Cat said, smiling all the way.

Kaaras shook his head and followed behind them, Varric needling Seeker Cassandra and Cat playing giggling peacemaker.

**

The early afternoon sun was shining through the window to their room, Cat sitting in a chair and Evie brushed her hair.

The day before had been certainly an experience.

After tracking down her distant cousin at the university, with two elven mages in tow, she had to assume her mother’s I-have-a-right-to-be-here-how-DARE-you-insinuate-that-I-don’t posture. It was instilled in her, but it was chilling to slip into the role so easily.

With the word of her cousin to vouch for them, as well as her commanding air, they were allowed into the library.

The library which had been near empty, save for a few researchers so engrossed with their work that the panic of the city had not reached them.

Still, it gave Solas and Mahonan almost open access to the stacks and resources.

They spent hours going through texts and manuscripts. Evie spent her time talking with the librarian and her cousin, trying to spread some positive information about the Inquisition. The academics at the University did not have great influence at present, but they needed any allies they could gather.

However, Evie might have overplayed her role, because if not for Mahonan interrupting them, the librarian might have proposed to her on the spot.

Today, Evie had focused on prepping the Herald for the salon, practicing how to curtsy, teaching her how to respond to the prying nobles. Evie would speak for her as much as she could, but the gossips at the Salon would unlikely settle for her voice alone. Lady Vivienne would unlikely settle for Evie alone.

*I wonder what the Enchanter’s goal is in meeting with the Herald. She is a supporter of the Circle, I have heard, and her message corroborates that, but her motives are still unknown. This could just be a power play, a way to stir up influence.*

Cat was jittery already, her feet swinging back and forth, fingers tapping on the stool.
“Hold still, please. I do not wish to pull your hair.” Evie cautioned.

“Sorry, Evie.”

“I know you are very nervous, but you will be fine, Little Bit, really.”

Cat’s hair was long and thick, black as a raven’s wing and a mix of wavy curls that easily tangled. Hair that many nobles would be envious of. Evie was doing her hair up, braided and pinned up, two curls left out to frame her little face. Evie had to watch to keep her fingers from brushing against the girl’s sensitive ears, Cat twitching anytime she did.

“What if they ask me about the plans for the Inquisition?” Cat asked.

“Well, what do you think it is? How would you phrase it now?”

Cat sat in silence for a few moments, considering Evie’s words. “Our plans are to close the breach and support peace efforts across Thedas.”

“That is correct and an appropriate answer.” Evie said. “If prompted, you might also mention that the Divine herself planned the Inquisition.”

“Okay. What should I say if they ask if I was sent by Andraste? I don’t want to lie, but I feel like I will have to.”

“Herald. I will be able to answer some of the questions, of course.” Evie said.

“But I don’t want you to lie either, Evie.” Cat sighed. “I know you believe I am sent by her, but we don’t actually know.”

“Very well. I can be vague, let them make their own conclusions if you prefer.”

“That still feels like lying.” Cat commented. “But I guess it’s better. We wouldn’t be telling them things we didn’t know for fact. And this is Orlais.”

With a final twist of her wrist, she placed the last hair pin.

The girl’s dress was a good fit, a little out of season, but children’s fashion usually didn’t follow the trends quite as closely. The seamstresses had sent it over the previous evening, including a capelet as a gift. The note said they worried the young Herald might catch cold. Varric was pleased, as was Kaaras. In feature, they would likely order outfits for the girl from their shop. From what Evie had heard about the shopping experience, she regretted not being there.

The blues of the outfit were a close match to Evie’s own formal clothing, which would better help to link them together visually at the event tonight.

Cat already wore the slip and leggings for her outfit. Her hair done, Evie carefully slipped the dress over the girl’s head, letting it fall down around her. She tied the back, smoothing out the skirts.

It really was a decent dress, especially since they had to get one premade and refit, with their limited time.

Now fully dressed, Evie sat her back down and started to apply the barest bit of make-up. Cat wrinkled her nose at it.

“What is it?”
“It just smells a little funny, that’s all.”

“It does at that. I will not be using a lot, do not worry.”

Cat nodded and closed her eyes, turning her face up to Evie.

Evie focused on her cheeks, dapping a light pink to her face. Her lips she covered with a soft red and she outlined her eyes with black mascara. Not too much, but enough to create a sort of subtle mask. All touches to make her features stand out, but with the wisps of innocence. Anything to give her an advantage.

There was a knock at the door.

“It’s me. Can I come in?” The deep voice resonated through the door.

“Yes, we are almost ready.”

Kaaras entered. He was wearing almost all black, function over fashion. His hair was neatly pulled back in a braid. He looked the part of a hired guard, which, Evie supposed he was, in a way, still. Though were any of them truly hired guards? Or were they responding to some greater calling, a need to protect the girl? Evie certainly wasn’t getting paid, her mother would die of shock if she were. Reduced to a mere mercenary.

*It might be worth it to hear mother sputter in outrage. Almost.*

With one last brush across her nose, Evie was finished. Cat stood up and curtseyed to Kaaras, dipping just low enough to be correct.

*She remembers well.*

“What do you think?” Cat asked.

“Adorable. Ready for a party.”

Cat wrinkled her nose, but smiled.

Evie smoothed her own skirts, checking that her two daggers were secured. It would be gauche to attend openly armed, but foolish to truly be unarmed.

*Andraste help us, here we go.*

**

The coach ride to the Chateau was long, yet smooth, paved roads the whole way. It was a curious sensation, riding inside a carriage instead of on horseback, more like a ship rocking on the waves. Solas had had the foresight to brew a cup of ginger tea for Cat before they left, so she wasn’t feeling nausea on the journey, which she was extremely grateful for. She was nervous enough without feeling sick.

Kaaras rode up with the driver, the carriage too small for his large frame, so it left just Cat and Evie inside. Evie continued to review things with her over the trip, equal amounts of quizzing and letting Cat ask questions.

*I hope I don’t mess it up.*

Sensing her anxiety, Evie let the second half the trip lapse in silence, leaving the girl to ponder
things on her own. For as long as the ride was, all too soon, they were pulling up the gravel drive to
the grand Chateau.

Kaaras opened the door for them, settling into his role as the guard easily, helping them down from
the carriage and then trailing behind them.

Evie had the invitation, presenting it at the door, Kaaras staying behind, immediately chatting with
one of the doorkeepers.

“Are you ready, Herald?” Evie whispered.

“As I’ll ever be.” Cat said back. She straightened her posture, standing tall, shoulders back,
breathing deeply. Faint music was trickling out, the sound of laughter, conversation.

*I can do this. I will do this.*

Together, they entered the doors.

Through the entryway, they were met with a large candlelit room, people mingling, talking, masks
common, on almost every face. Servants bustled silently here and there. Not quite as many people
as Cat was expecting actually, but then she had never been to a nobles gathering before, so perhaps
this was a normal amount of people. At least this way, she wouldn’t have to fight through crowds
or feel closed in by them.

A man approached them, talking with Evie, before turning back to face the floor.

“Lady Cat Bell and Lady Evelyn Trevelyan on behalf of the Inquisition.” The man announced. The
sea of faces turned to look at the new arrivals, whispers behind hands, quick judging glances.

“Steady on, Herald.” Evie said.

Cat plastered a pleasant look on her face, trying to copy Evie’s effortless look of disinterested
interest. Evie had told her she would only refer to her as Herald tonight. Formality would be
important.

They had not moved far into the hall, when they were intercepted by a noble couple.

“What a pleasure to meet you, my dear ladies. Seeing the same faces at every event becomes so
tiresome. So, you must be a guest of Madame de Fer. Or are you here for Duke Bastien?” The man
asked, no introduction, just jumping in.

“Are you here on business? I have heard the most curious tales of you. I cannot imagine half of
them are true.” The woman asked in a high-pitched voice, not giving them time to reply.

“What tales have you heard of us? There are so many.” Evie asked, airily.

“Some say that when the Veil opened, Andraste herself delivered the Herald from the Fade.” The
woman said, her voice titillated, eyes eager.

“And that is a pretty common one.
“The Inquisition? What a load of pig shit!” A man walks down stairs, his voice cutting though the chatter of the hall. “Washed-up sisters and crazed seekers? No one can take them seriously. Everyone knows it’s just an excuse for a bunch of political outcasts to grab power.”

*Hey, he shouldn’t talk about Leliana and Cassandra like that!*

Cat clenched her jaw, taking an instant dislike to the man.

“The Inquisition is working to restore peace to Thedas.” Cat said, her voice indignant, feeling the need to defend her friends and their motives.

“Here come the outsiders, restoring peace with an army! We know what your ‘Inquisition’ truly is.” The man taunted, turning to look down at Evie, he continued. “If you were a woman of honor, you’d step outside and answer the charges.” He reached for his sword, Cat starting to raise her hand to cast a barrier, Evie’s hand dropped to where she had a dagger strapped, when the man froze, frost forming around his body, his breath puffing out.

“My dear Marquis, how unkind of you to use such language in my house…to my guests. You know such rudeness is…intolerable.” An elegant woman descended the stairs, slowly, with purpose. Her dark skin was contrasted against her silvery horned mask. Her bearing was regal, commanding, intimidating; her voice demanded attention by right. She had no look of casting magic, save for a bit of frost clinging to her own hand, casually held at her side.

“Madame Vivienne, I humbly beg your pardon!” The man gasped out, fear in his eyes.

“You should. Whatever am I going to do with you, my dear?” Madame Vivienne said. Approaching them, she addressed Cat and Evie. “My ladies, you’re the wounded party in this unfortunate affair. What would you have me do with this foolish, foolish man?”

Evie looked down at Cat. “Herald?”

*Wait, are they going to kill him? Are they asking me if he should be killed?*

“He is rude, but I think he has learned his lesson.” Cat said to Evie, keeping her voice even, sincere.

*He doesn’t deserve to die for his opinion, even if I disagree with it.*

Evie replied to Vivienne then. “I think the Marquis has seen the error of his ways.”

Vivienne nodded and then snapped her fingers, the frost melting away from the Marquis, giving him control of his limbs again. “By the grace of Andraste, you have your life, my dear. Do be more careful with it.” The man took deep, heaving breaths before hastening out the doors. Once gone, Madame Vivienne refocused on the Herald and Evie, a slow smile on her face, more mask than her actual mask. “I’m delighted you could attend this little gathering. I’ve so wanted to meet you.”

“The pleasure is ours, Lady Vivienne.” Evie said, bowing slightly.

*Why does she get to bow while I curtsy? These etiquette rules are bonkers.*

“Quite. Now, I would like to speak with the Herald privately. I’m sure you understand.” The words were not truly a question, more a statement to be followed.

*Wait, alone? I have to speak to her alone?!”*
“Very well, Madame Vivienne. I trust you will guard her and of course, you understand that I will be close by. I will ensure that you truly can have your conversation uninterrupted.” Evie said. She agreed, but there was an underlying threat, that she would not be truly left alone. Cat was surprised, still, that she didn’t protest more.

“Of course, my lady.” Vivienne said with a dip of her head, a satisfied grin on her face. “Just this way please.”

Cat was led to a side hallway, lined with large windows, the moonlight streaming in, creating a blue glow. Evie waited at the end of the hallway.

Cat knew it was a possibility she would have to answer for herself, but she had not expected to do it alone.

*I need to watch my words carefully.*

Vivienne turned to her. “Allow me to introduce myself. I am Vivienne, First Enchanter of Montsimmard and Enchantress to the Imperial Court.”

“Lady Cat Bell, Herald of the Inquisition.” Cat replied, curtsying. “It is a pleasure to make your acquaintance and an honor to receive your invitation to your salon.”

“Ah, but I didn’t invite you to the Chateau for pleasantries, though you know them very well.” Cat couldn’t tell if the compliment was sincere or not. “With Justinia dead, the Chantry is in shambles. Only the Inquisition might restore sanity and order to our frightened people. As the leader of the last loyal mages of Thedas, I feel it only right that I lend my assistance to the cause.”

*Last loyal mages? I still don’t know what that means.*

“When you say last loyal mages, what do you mean?”

“The last loyal mages to the people of Thedas, of course. We have not forgotten the commandment, as some have, that magic exists to serve man. I support any effort to restore such order.”

*Well, I don’t necessarily agree with that, but she does support order. I suppose she supports the circles, even though she is a mage.*

“May I ask what you would bring to the Inquisition?” Cat said.

“I am well versed in the politics of the Orlesian Empire. I know every member of the Imperial Court personally. I have all the resources remaining of the Circle at my disposal. And I am a mage of no small talent. Will that do?” Vivienne asked, but it was rhetorical.

“There must be more reason in it for you to want to join the Inquisition.”

Vivienne gave her a considering look before answering, if Cat was reading it right, it was one of respect. “I want the same thing anyone gets by fighting this chaos: the chance to meet my enemy, to decide my fate. I won’t wait quietly for destruction.”

Cat had been waiting all evening to get some sort of vision, a feeling, anything, but so far, she was met with nothing but her own intuition.

“What are your thoughts of the Chantry? I must assume you know that are not aligned with the Inquisition. Yet, at least.”
“I was a great admirer of the late Divine Justinia V. The Chantry, at its best, unites the disparate cultures of Thedas and looks after its most vulnerable. Had she lived, Justinia could have accomplished so much. In her absence and with the chantry petrified and mourning, other must rise to the occasion.”

*Well, I think I can agree with that, at least the idea behind it.*

Trusting her gut, perhaps she had been relying too heavily on her strange foresight. Cat replied to Vivienne, in her best authoritative voice. “The Inquisition would be happy to have you, Lady Vivienne, and any support you can gather to it.”

“Great things are beginning, my dear. I can promise you that.” Vivienne looked satisfied. Cat realized this was a test for her, as much as she was interrogating Vivienne. Apparently, Madame Vivienne was content with what she found. And at her words, Cat finally felt a brush of certainty, that she made the right choice.

*She certainly holds influence her and we can use that. Josephine and Leliana will be happy.*

“Oh, will the Marquis cause any issues?” Cat asked as they walked back down the hallway towards the party.

“His aunt is the Vicomtesse of Mont-De-Glace. Not a powerful family, but well-respected…and very devout. Alphonse will be disowned for this. It’s not the first time he’s brought his aunt disgrace, but I’m sure it’ll be the last. After such a public humiliation, I expect he’ll run off to the Dales to join the Empress’s war effort. Either to make a good end or to win back a modicum of self-respect.” Vivienne glanced down at her. “So no, he will not pose a problem.”

“That is good to hear, Lady Vivienne.”

*We don’t need any more enemies.*

With Evie, Vivienne and Cat stepped back into the grand hall, more nobles moving to talk with them.

*Shoulders back, head high. I can do this. Another ally made, another challenge faced.*

Chapter End Notes

Thank you again for reading and to everyone who has left comments/kudos!

This chapter was really fun, getting to write more from Malika’s perspective. Let me know your thoughts in the comments below! (Finally, Vivienne and Sera have joined the party! Maybe everyone will be recruited before the end of the year.)
Haven Interludes

Chapter Summary

Cat and company return to Haven. Plans are made, allies arrive, and Cat learns about herself and the Fade.

Chapter Notes

Warning: descriptions of anxiety.

The trip back to Haven was uneventful, leaving in mid-afternoon the day after the salon. They took the same ship back, Cat faring this journey better than the last one, though Malika was no better, remaining in their cabin and growling at anyone who entered, except for Cat.

Varric added a few more reading lessons on the trip, Cat tripping over words, but the runic language getting more familiar. She felt comfortable with the alphabet at least, humming the song Varric taught her often, as she wandered the ship, and able to spell out simple words and phrases.

On the ship, Cat had given her friends their gifts, the different colored scarves, picked just for them. Varric, in turn, after twining the gifted scarf around his neck, surprised her with a small journal, so she could practice writing, get her thoughts down, draw, whatever she felt like. It was wrapped in leather, proofed against water, something small she could carry with her.

It was still blank, carefully tucked away in her bag. She didn’t know what she wanted to put in it, hesitating every time she raised a quill, dismissing whatever idea she had and putting away the quill. Worrying about marring the pretty little journal, wanting to put something important in it.

Back in Jader, it was then a few days on horseback. Cat glad to see Starburst again, often leaning down to hug her mare and take in the scent of her course coat.

Making good time, they returned on the 10th of Cloudreach to find Haven had expanded even further, more tents and even a few basic cabins added. They heard the village before they saw it.

They had arrived in the middle of the day, so their group was warmly greeted, people shouting out welcomes and many yelling out praises and blessings to the Herald.

The attention still agitated Cat, her heart beating faster, the feeling of being unworthy, an imposter. In some ways, it was a reprieve in Val Royeaux, so many doubting the stories, less fawning, more suspicion. The praises and hope placed on her left a tight weight in her belly, making her clench her teeth, her breathing unsteady, even making her heart stutter. She worked to distract, when she could, throwing her mind and focus into lessons, conversations, or daydreams. Often, she was successful.

Though, perhaps the attention was more a sign of the people’s faith in the Maker than in her specifically, she hoped.
For her own faith, she didn’t know. There were times when they are riding, or walking, or doing random things that she would find herself looking upwards and wondering. She must have believed in something, right?

And yet the words of the Chant of Light sparked no memories, besides those from her brief and boring lessons or from the services she had to sit through. But there was no greater weight to them. Not for her. Not like when Cassandra or Evie said the words. When they said them, they rang with meaning, meaning that didn’t resonate within her.

Cat found herself shuffled into town, her party splitting off to take care of things, set packs down and such. She stuck close to Kaaras’s side, as he rattled off orders to the other guards, to secure her cabin, to check in with Rylen, and other things that Cat just tuned out as the weight of heavy introspection took over.

She found herself fading out further into her own mind, that creeping doubt and the pressure rising up to shut her off from what was happening around her. Distractions crumbling from the insistent anxiety that refused to be shoved aside.

They entered the Chantry, into shadows, Leliana, Josephine, and Cullen meeting them, though it was only Cassandra and Kaaras with her by then. They started talking around her, but she struggled to focus. That crushing pressure still present, those thoughts cycling about whether this was all just some strange mistake that she was benefiting from. If that was true, what would they do when they found out? If she wasn’t the Herald, she wouldn’t need guards, wouldn’t need to meet with the leaders of the inquisition. Would she have a place in the Inquisition? A child that survived a disaster by random chance, everyone who blessed her now cursing the lies…

Cat ground her teeth, breathing deep, eyes flicking around, picking out things in the room. A lantern, a book, counting the stones in the wall, emptying her thoughts. She didn’t know why, but it was calming, and she picked up on the conversation around her, grasping for the threads of distraction to spin a cloak of protection from her self-doubt and unanswerable fears.

“Or you could stop bickering and make a decision.” Kaaras said.

“I agree.” Cassandra seconded. What they were discussing, Cat wouldn’t be able to say. But Kaaras and the Seeker were in agreement, it seemed.

“We shouldn’t discount Redcliffe. The mages may be worth the risk.” Josephine said, catching Cat’s eye and sending a smile her way, her amber brown eyes worried, watching the girl.

I guess I was out of it, someone was bond to pick up on it. At least it is Lady Josephine. I wonder if my ears gave away something?

“They are powerful, Ambassador, but more desperate than you realize.” Cassandra cautioned.

*But are the templars any less so?*

“You think the invitation could be some kind of trap?” Kaaras asked, his head just tilting in consideration.

“If some among the rebel mages were responsible for what happened at the Conclave…” Cassandra started.

“The same could be said about the templars.” Josephine countered.

*Exactly. And I don’t think Grand Enchanter Fiona had anything to do with it. Or at least I hope…*
“True enough. Right now, I’m not certain we have enough influence to approach the Order safely.” Cullen cautioned, being a voice of realism, though strained and tired.

“Then the Inquisition needs agents in more places.” Cassandra said.

“In the meantime, we should consider other options.” Josephine said, reaching out her hand to Cat, seeing more than Cat wished her to, though the action and observation were tempered with deep care and concern. “Lady Cat, would you care to take tea in my office?”

“I would like that, Lady Josephine.” Cat curtseyed, showing off her skills and trying to distract from the fact that she hadn’t heard half or more of the conversation and her heart rate was still erratic and rapid, thumping loudly in her ears.

Josephine took her hand and together they walked to the office, leaving the others to their own devices.

Once the door closed behind them, Josephine asked with a soft voice. “Is everything alright?”

Cat opened her mouth to brush the question off, but under the gaze of her friend, she closed it again. A moment passed. Maybe several as she agonized about saying anything, the words lead on her tongue, a deep need to keep everything buried deep, where no one, not even she could find them. But that wouldn’t change the dread that pooled in her stomach.

Lady Josephine was intelligent and kind, if anyone could help her, surely she could… “I’m just… a bit uncertain about being the Herald. Unsure having so many people believing in me. What if I can’t perform the miracles they want, that they need me to? I don’t want to disappoint them. And if I’m not what they think I am, what will I do? Would the Inquisition even want me? Where would I go?” Once the words started, the spilled out fast, worries said aloud making them more real. Cat could feel her ears twitching, her breaths coming faster.

“Lady Cat,” Josephine said, crouching down to her level, her skirt rustling, setting her hand on Cat’s arm, rubbing warmth and comfort. “We only want you to do what you can, we will not ask more than that. We trust in the Maker and Andraste to guide us beyond what we are capable. And you are not alone. You will not face anything alone. We will take care of you. If it turns out that Andraste did not send you, you will still have a place. There are many who would take you in and give you a home, myself among them.”

Her words were like a balm, soothing the anxiety, letting a bit of peace settle in its place, if only for a while. The meaning of the words, what Josephine so easily offered, led Cat to tears and she sank into the Ambassador’s arms, the relief palpable.

“Thank you.” Cat whispered. “Thank you so much.”

“You are very welcome.” Josephine said softly, her hand caressing the girl’s hair.

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After a lovely tea party with Josephine and after the tears had passed, Cat left. Doll retrieved from the ambassador and her earlier panic waylaid by little biscuits and soft conversation, promises and assurances given that she didn’t know she desperately needed. The weight in her belly was not completely gone, but it was manageable again, pushed to the background.

Josephine asked her all about the capitol and especially the salon, not mentioning Cat’s outpouring of emotions and doubts. She was impressed, or at least said she was, of how Cat handled herself.
Josephine also oo-ed and aah-ed over the blue and gold scarf Cat got for her, immediately putting it on and thanking her. Josephine was often cold when she left her office, so she said it was the perfect gift.

Afterwards, Cat rejoined Kaaras, feeling lighter than she had. They didn’t get far from the Chantry before Leliana waved them over to her tent. The ravens cawed, big, black feathered wings flapping.

“What do you need, Leliana?” Cat asked, bouncing up, her eyes flitting to the birds. Their eyes were dark, almost red in tint, which one would think would make them look menacing, but Cat just thought they were cute. Okay, they were menacing. Menacing AND cute. Cat wanted to pet their heads, but she didn’t know if she was supposed to and she wasn’t sure if she should ask.

“There was another matter I wanted to discuss. Several months ago, the Grey Wardens of Ferelden vanished. I sent word to those in Orlais, but they have also disappeared. Ordinarily, I wouldn’t even consider the idea they’re involved in all this, but the timing is…curious.” Leliana said.

Grey wardens missing…that cannot be good. And…I think I know more, but what?

“That does sound odd, I agree.” Kaaras assented.

“The others have disregarded my suspicion, but I cannot ignore it. Two days ago, my agents in the Hinterlands heard news of a Grey Warden by the name of Blackwall. If your group visits the Hinterlands again, please seek him out. Perhaps he can put my mind at ease.”

Cat realized that this meeting was more for Kaaras than her. Which, made sense. So, she let her eyes wander again to the ravens.

“What if he doesn’t have answers?”

“Then there may be more going on than we thought.” With those foreboding words, Leliana nodded to them and returned to her work, any chance to ask about the ravens passing. Cat would try again…some other time.

Maybe when I give her the scarf…

“Where do you want to go next?” Kaaras asked, as they stepped out of the tent.

“I have gifts to give!” Cat replied. “People to see!”

And things not to think about!

“Alright, Little Bit, let’s go.” Kaaras took her hand, letting her lead the way through the settlement.

**

He shifted on his feet, his armor clinking together as he rolled his shoulders. He had been sent to deliver an invitation and yet no one was willing to talk to him. One person directing him to the practice fields, another to what ended up being an empty tent. And those were just the people who actually acknowledged him after they learned he was a mercenary, not a new volunteer.

He finally stood by the Chantry, hoping to catch someone’s eye, get someone to send his message on to the leaders. Or even someone important’s secretary or something. A Chantry sister had shooed him out of the Chantry itself when he tried lingering inside. Well, once he made it clear he wasn’t there for services. Or it might have been the Tevinter accent, southerners were funny that way.
He did not want to tell Chief that he failed. The Chief would razz him for it. Not to mention the rest of the Chargers…

“Hello!” Called out a little bright voice. Krem turned to find a small elven girl, trailed by an adult elven mage, perhaps her father, or more likely brother since he didn’t seem that old, though it was hard to tell with elves. After all, Skinner said she was a different age every year, leaving her age between 20 to 55, and Dalish was no better.

This pair was likely refugees, fleeing the conflict in the Hinterlands. There were a few families around Haven, he had seen some kids playing in the tents surrounding the village on his way in. Though, these two did seem better dressed than many he saw in the camps.

“Good day, Miss.” Krem said politely as the pair passed.

Maybe if I try the tavern…

The girl started to skip into the Chantry, but she abruptly stopped, tilting her head. Spinning back towards Krem, she smiled up at him.

“Hi, what are you doing here?” She asked.

The male elf laughed lightly. “Little Bit, he is allowed to be here, I’m sure.”

“I know that, but I think he wants to talk to me.” She said, sticking her tongue out at the other elf. She turned her eyes back to him, looking closely.

Krem smiled at her antics. “Miss, I wouldn’t mind speaking with you. I’m waiting to talk to someone in charge. I’ve got a message for the Inquisition, but I’m having a hard time getting anyone to talk to me.”

“Well, you can tell me. I know all the important people.” The girl said, an impish smile on her face, rocking back on her heels. “Well, maybe start with your name.”

Krem looked to the man, Dalish, Krem thought, from the tattoo on his face, but the man just shrugged, as if to put it on Krem whether to believe the girl’s claim or not.

Krem sighed internally, then decided to humor the girl. It wasn’t secret information and perhaps someone walking by would overhear and he could talk to someone who could actually act on the message.

He stood straight up. “Cremisius Aclassi, with the Bull’s Chargers mercenary company. We mostly work out of Orlais and Nevarra. We got word of some Tevinter mercenaries gathering out on the Storm Coast. My company Commander, Iron Bull, offers an information free of charge to the Inquisition. If they’d like to see what the Bull’s Chargers can do for the Inquisition, meet us there and watch us work.” He had practiced the words on the journey here, quick and efficient.

The girl considered the information, before reaching out her hand in front of her, big smile across her face. Krem took her hand in his, as she said, “My name is Cat Bell, Herald of the Inquisition. I would be more than happy to pass your message on, just a few more questions please.”

The Herald? Bull said the purported Herald, the survivor of the Conclave disaster was a young girl or even a Qunari, the rumors weren’t clear, but Krem was thinking a teenager, not a little kid if the former rumors were the true ones.

“No introduction for me?” The other elf asked, mock hurt in his voice.
“You have been rude today, so I wouldn’t think Krem would like to make your acquaintance.”

“Krem, huh? Giving him a nickname seconds after being introduced. Seems like you are the rude one.” The man teased.

Wait, how did she know…?

“I’ll introduce myself then. Mahonan Lavellan, First of Clan Lavellan and currently bereaved guard to this one here.”

“You can ignore him if you want. Now, what makes the Chargers special?”

“Ah…well.” Krem refocused, away from the fact that this girl just knew his nickname or he guessed it wasn’t that great a leap from his full name. “We’re loyal, we’re tough, and we don’t break contracts. They could ask around Val Royeaux. We’ve got references.” The girl made a face at the mention of Val Royeaux.

“Leliana and Josephine will check the references, I’m sure. Hmm. What about Iron Bull. What can you tell me about him?”

“He’s one of those Qunari. The big guys with the horns?” The girl nodded in understanding, her eyes lighting up a bit, an unusual response in Krem’s experience. “He leads from the front, he pays well, and he’s a lot smarter than the last bas- the last commander I worked for. Best of all, he’s professional. We accept contracts with whoever makes the first real offer. You’re the first time he’s gone out of his way to pick a side.”

“If business is so good, why come to us with this information?” Lavellan asked.

“Iron Bull wants to work for the Inquisition. He thinks you’re doing good work.” Krem answered honestly. There really was no reason to lie.

“Awesome! I look forward to meeting him and your company!” The girl said. “Now, let me escort you to Lady Josephine. I’m sure she will want to know.” The girl, Cat, offered her hand to him. He took it gingerly and she tugged him towards the Chantry. “Josephine should be in the war room or in her office. After you talk to her, we can go to the tavern and you can get something to eat or just rest and stuff.” The other one, Mahonan, just shrugged with a smirk at Krem’s questioning look and walked with them into the building.

**

Sera arrived a couple of days after the Inquisitor’s party to the village. Or was it a hamlet? What was the difference? She didn’t know, never been somewhere so tiny before, well at least not for long. Even with the tents surrounding the…village. That would work. Even with the tents, there couldn’t be more than a few hundred people here and a bunch of them looked like refugee types, not soldiers like she expected.

Sera would have been there around the same time the Herald did, but she got a tip from a Jenny while she was in Jadar. Bit of mischief later and she was on her way. Up a freaking mountain, in the snow. With that big thing in the sky. When she had gotten close enough to see it, glowing up there in on the horizon, she about turned back for the city.

But, she said she would be here and the Jennies needed someone up here. It was just rotten luck that it was her. Or maybe good, luck was weird that way.

Before she checked out the village up close, she snuck up to the Breach. There were a few guard
types, but they didn’t see her. Getting closer to it made her feel weird, skin all prickled up like, which she didn’t like at all. She found a perch up on some rubble and she launched an arrow at the thing, see how that made it feel. But the arrow didn’t come back, just disappeared into the freaking sky.

Gave her the willies. Hoped the “Inquisition” can really close the cursed thing.

By the time she got back to the village, the sun was going down. Didn’t take long for her to find the Tavern, just followed the noise, the familiar sounds of laughter, chatter, and music, the smell of ale and bar food. The place was packed, warm from the press of bodies and the fire. Soldiers and scouts, servers jostling through the crowd.

It was just the kind of place to forget about the weird thing in the sky.

Sera pushed her way through, finding a low corner shelf to hop up on, snatching some food here and there, earning a few dirty looks.

Sera got a look at the minstrel and she seemed awfully familiar. Think she used to hang around Val Royeaux. Didn’t know the Inquisition was recruiting musicians. Unless she was a bard. Frick, she was probably a bard.

Found the Herald, too, sitting at a table with the big muscle-y one and a few others. The Herald looked like just a little kid. Arse buckets, she was just a kid. A little kid with pointed ears and an open grin. And apparently a glowing hand that was going to save the world or some shite.

Sera must have been thinking too much, because the little Herald was suddenly there, waving to her.

“You made it!” The girl said, that big grin greeting Sera.

“Yup, wasn’t hard.” Sera said, nonchalantly. “So, this is it, huh?”

“Yes?” Cat said, inching closer. “You mean the Inquisition?”

“It’s just, I thought it’d be bigger. Pfft, that would’ve been hilarious if-” A bunch of soldiers let up a cheer behind them, cutting off what Sera was saying. “Anyways, stopping wars should earn more sovereigns than this. Need things back to normal, for coins to be flowing again. Another reason the templars and mages need to be sat down.”

“I wish it was that simple.” Cat said, bracing herself and sitting next to Sera. The shelf should hold, right?

“Well, yeah, the sky has a hole in it. Nothing simple about that. But I can’t put an arrow in that. Well, I have. Doesn’t come down. That’s…weird. And that’s the point, right? It’s weird and right there, but they still want to punch each other. They’re too busy to look up where the real questions are.”

“I think everyone’s just desperate, they can’t prioritize, cause their whole world is crumbling around them, so it almost makes sense that the sky would be breaking at the same time, you know?”

Sera didn’t know how to respond to that. Was a big thought for a kid to have, yet kids saw things true, didn’t they? Whenever adults try to hide things, like as not the kids know anyways, but learn to listen close and remember, seeing more than they are supposed to.
“But we have to make them see. See that we are stronger together. That there is a better way.” Cat said. With a twitch of a smile, she added, “Obviously I should make all the decisions. I’m very wise and powerful, you know.” Cat said with a wink and wiggling her fingers of her left hand, bits of lined glowing green running across her palm.

Sera laughed, bumping her shoulder, or well, her arm against the Herald’s shoulder, a little uneasy at the weird magic-y stuff that must be in her hand. It better not be contagious. But the girl’s humor was good, normal. “You’re a bit daft, yeah? Most people get special, they lose their snerk. Can’t see how stupid it all is. I think I’ll like you, Lady Herald. Maybe you are a little touched, yeah?”

Cat crinkled her nose. “Maybe a little, yeah.” After a moment, she added. “I’m glad you joined, Sera.”

Sera made a non-committed noise, still undecided about that, which might not have reached Cat through the din of the tavern.

“Oh, I almost forgot!” The Herald jumped down, running over to the table. Sera found the big one watching her, protective and all. A moment later, the girl was back, something behind her back. “Here, kind of a welcome present, I guess.” The girl pulled out a flower, a sunflower. When Sera took it, she found it wasn’t real, not magic, but made of cloth.

It was delicate, bright, a bit of pretty to carry ‘round.

“Thanks.” Sera said, a little awkward. Didn’t know why the girl with the weird blessed hand and snerk was giving her a thing. “So, who around here needs taken down a peg or two, hmm?”

“What do you mean?”

“You know, who needs a good prank to show that they aren’t so high and mighty and all that.”

“Well, I don’t know.” Cat said, thinking. “Maybe the Commander…no, not him, I’m trying to befriend him and I don’t think a prank would help…maybe Segritt? Flissa or Lena might know better than me.”

“I’ll sniff around and see. Got to shake things up once and while.”

“Can I help?” Cat asked. “With whatever you decide?”

Sera considered, the decision made when she saw the mischief play across the kid’s eyes. It was a look she was familiar with. Weird hand or not, mischief was mischief, right? “Sure, why not? Lots of pranks need a second person to get right.”

“Awesome!” Cat said, wide grin back. “If we need a third, Mahonan would probably help.”

Didn’t know who that was, was that the other elf? Lots of them about. As plans filtered in the background, she changed the subject. “Chasing the Lord Seeker, I hear? Anyone who thinks they need “Lord” in front of their name, that’s bad. Bet he’s got a portrait taller than he is. That’s your first clue to a total arse. Fact!” Sera heard what happened in the capitol, and he was definitely an arse.

Cat giggled. “So, if the portrait is smaller than him, does that make him a half-arse?”

Sera laughed. “Got to be something like that, right? The bigger the picture of them, the bigger arse they are.”
And so the night went. Some more laughter, food, and plotting. This might not be so bad, yeah?

**

The pain was bad today. A steady ache that threatened to cloud his ability to function, worst in his head, but the feeling coursed through his whole body. Like he could feel all the places his body was missing the lyrium that he had taken for 10 years.

Sometimes exercise helped, sometimes a hot drink, quiet.

But today was going to be bad, he could feel it. The addiction that he fell into, rushed into to numb the nightmares, had its claws deep in him. If he thought the nightmares before the lyrium were bad, they had nothing on the ones that now plagued him, with no relief in sight.

It was the middle of the day and he was on edge. He knew he was snappish, but he tried to keep the worst of his bad mood to himself, tried not to be too short with the messengers. Although, he might have been a little rough on the recruits training this morning. It didn’t help that each clash of steel against steel sent ripples of pain through his head.

He forced himself to take a moment, sitting at his desk, flipping through reports. The tent filtered out some of the noise, let him catch his breath.

He managed a bite to eat, drank some water, and it seemed to ease things a bit. He allowed himself to rest his eyes, just for a second. Took a deep breath and then opened them. His eyes fell to the gift he received from the Herald, a red scarf, brought back from the capital.

She had brought it to him the other day, all bright smiles. Asking him about the Lord Seeker and the templars. Chatting about this and that, in some attempt to get to know him.

She probably meant well, she was just a child, after all. But a mage child, who knew things that she had no way of knowing. It was disconcerting. At times, he could forget that, but then he would meet her gaze and there would be this knowing to her eyes.

It was easier when he was just in the role of Commander, when they had meetings about the Inquisition. When others were around to distract the girl and well, him.

Even when he was in charge of instructing her how to ride, he was careful not to touch her. After that last time, he couldn’t risk her seeing more. Whether he was protecting her or him, he wasn’t sure himself. Both probably.

This line of thought was getting him nowhere. Rubbing his temple, he looked at the scarf again. He hadn’t touched it since he got it.

Which was ridiculous. It wasn’t cursed.

Standing up slowly, fighting the throbbing pain, he wrapped the scarf around his neck, and then stepped back out into the cold. Things needed to be done and the Inquisition wasn’t going to wait for him to be healed.

**

“I still don’t understand how drakes take that hand.” Cassandra said.

“…hmm. Maybe we should start you on Shepherd’s Six.” Varric replied.
“Isn’t that a children’s game?”

“Yeah.” Varric said as he shuffled the deck.

Cassandra narrowed her eyes at him. “Deal again, dwarf.”

Cat sat beside Kaaras, watching them play. Varric had convinced Cassandra to join the game he had started with Sera, Kaaras, and Rylen. Sera had flitted off after a few hands, stopping to whisper a promise that they would get into mischief soon, too much energy to sit for the game any longer. Cullen stopped by at one point to have a word with Cassandra. Cat invited him to join, but he declined. He looked more weary than usual, but she was happy to see him wearing her scarf. That was progress.

Many of her friends wore their gifts around, and people like Harritt and Adan prominently displayed the sunflowers she got them, the former attaching it to his work apron, like a boutonniere.

Cat had been watching them play, trying to pick up how it was played. A couple times, Varric had explained some rule to the Seeker, which helped. She felt she had a rough idea of what was going on.

She was also pretty sure Varric was cheating. Though he did it so smoothly, like it was just another part of the game, something done with the expectation that everyone would be doing it.

In a couple of days, they would venture out to the Storm Coast, to seek out the Wardens and ‘interview’ Iron Bull and his company. There was talk of leaving her behind, to study and meet with important visiting people, Cassandra leading a small group out there. But Cat had the feeling she would be more useful out there with them, that she was supposed to go with them. Josephine was the one who questioned that plan the most, but Leliana was surprisingly supportive of her going, perhaps trusting her feeling. Cullen seemed indifferent to her actions, but he was not as vocal during the meeting today. Cat wondered if he was ill, but since no one else brought it up, she didn’t want to make a scene by mentioning it.

Kaaras was playing well, if a little casually. He mentioned that they would often play card games on the road, a way to unwind at the end of the day, sometimes for money, sometimes to shifts in the nightwatch.

Rylan was seriously playing, an okay player, taking a hand here or there. He kept trying to catch Varric at cheating, but wasn’t quick enough. Cat found out his accent was thicker when he swore, though he tried to do so discreetly, since Cat was present.

And then Cassandra, well, Cat thought she saw Varric cheat for Cassandra once, just so she could take a hand. Which was kind of nice, though she would never tell the Seeker. Her reaction would probably be just to leave the game entirely.

It was pleasant. Warm, with friends around. Music playing. She could pretend that there was nothing outside that door this way. She still struggled with the role she was to play in all this, had played, sometimes panicking when she was alone with her thoughts, that same tight feeling of dread overcoming.

At the meeting, she had learned that Leliana had ‘leaked’ the rumor that the Herald was a qunari to two of her contacts, with some variance, because there was doubts about their loyalty. Since the rumor had been spread, in both variations, she had her answer. And the confusion about the identity of the Herald could be an added layer of protection. Though Cat didn’t like the idea of
Kaaras becoming a bigger target than he already was.

Malika and Mahonan joined the game later on. Mahonan was terrible, clearly not understanding how it was played, but refusing to ask anyone the rules. Malika, on the other hand, rivaled Varric in skill, probably cheating just as well. Maybe it was a rogue thing. She would have to see how well Evie played.

But then Sera wasn’t that good…maybe it was a dwarven tradition? But that seemed kinda racist….

“What are you thinking about?”

“The game, Papa Varric. I think I’ve got it now.” Cat replied.

“Oh, think you can play?” Varric said. “I’ll deal you in then.”

“Varric, really, this is not a game for a child!” Cassandra protested.

“She has been watching us play, in a tavern. What would it hurt for her to learn?” Varric challenged, teasingly.

Cat grinned, taking her cards. “It’s just a game, Seeker Cassandra.”

She just sighed, giving in. Cat scooched closer, whispering to Varric. “Are you going to teach me to cheat?”

He laughed and then replied with a wink. “Learn the to play first, then I’ll teach you the tricks.”

**

Cat spend her nights dreaming, safe now they were back in Haven, learning and playing under the watchful eyes of Solas and Mahonan. Mahonan didn’t stay in her cabin now, trusting that she was safe enough in the Fade, well safe enough that he did not need to be physically there with her.

Joy and Curiosity were fun and knowledgeable companions. Cat sometimes had to pick apart what they said to understand them, but it was worth it. Their views on the world were interesting, their understanding of the Fade told in feelings and impressions, strange metaphors and even stranger or maybe older allusions. It was like piecing together a puzzle with no guide.

The more time she spent with them, the more certain she was that Curiosity was rather young and Joy much older. Though it was all relative. Curiosity might well be a thousand years old and still be considered young, for time seemed more nebulous and immaterial in the Fade, like the passing of seasons had built up into patterns that truly never changed. The Fade version of Haven could be in Winter and Summer within the same moment. Both were valid and equally true. It was easiest to process by just excepting it as it was and what it could be, instead of trying to force it to make said logical sense. It was less of a headache that way.

When Cat tried to explain the logic to her two elven guardians, Mahonan seemed to have trouble following her logic, while Solas looked thoughtful, letting her words settle. She did know that the older elf was pleased with her progress and her own openness to learning, asking questions and for her impressions, enjoying her perspective, guiding her to ask more questions herself and to experiment.

Perhaps she could understand the Fade easier than Mahonan, because she didn’t have any real preconceived notions about what it should be and how things should work. It was the real world,
but not, yet at the same time yes, just shades of things and events and thoughts and memories and magic. A physical world that was more malleable than the waking world, more transitional, and one that allowed for intangible visits.

Curiosity had proposed a few ideas for how she might be able to practice and actually control her visions, which she planned to try, once she was in the waking world. Her visions made her useful, helpful, to the Inquisition, if unreliable. If she could control them, learned to summon them on command, how much more would she be able to do?

And if she could control her visions, maybe her past would be clearer, too.

Solas had a bunch of research notes and books to follow up on, things he learned in Val Royeaux, that might provide answers to her abilities. He had read about a way to lock memories, so a variant on the process might be the route of her lost past. It was very complicated, but she was glad Solas was searching for answers. She had this deep feeling that if anyone could find the answer, he would be the one. Though, strangely, she worried less about the past, her past, than the future and her role in it.

“How far can one travel in the Fade? Are you restricted by distance or just imagination?” Cat asked, laying out on the ground beside her spirit friends.

“I can go wherever I wish, though some places take longer to get to or some places are hidden or powerful others guard them, which can make them further away or blocked. Or some places have been forgotten and faded, those are really hard to get to.” Curiosity said, their cat tail twitching around. “Is it not the same in your world?”

“I guess it is.” Cat said after a minute. “Distance is pretty much the same throughout the world, but then it isn’t too. Like, if you are on a road, you can travel faster than through a forest. And if you travel over sea, the time it takes would depend on the tides and weather and whether you meet pirates.”

“Where do you most want to travel?” Joy asked, continuing their habit of prompting conversation towards things that Cat enjoyed.

“In the Fade or in the Waking?”

“Either, both?” Joy had more trouble remembering that the Fade and the Waking were different, which makes Cat wonder if once the Fade and Waking were closer, if perhaps the veil was not always there. She hadn’t asked anyone yet, wanting to work the theory around in her head first a bit more. It might have been ages ago since it was so, meaning that Joy is truly old.

“Hmm. I think I would like to see Antiva. It sounds nice. Josephine said I could visit with her someday, once the Breach is closed. And for the Fade, there are some places Solas has mentioned that seem cool. I think I would like to explore an ancient ruin, see how the physical place in the Waking compares to the Fade versions. Or maybe some big city that has existed for thousands of years. It might be interesting to see how many layers of the Fade exist, like rings in an old tree.”

“That sounds lovely.” Joy sighed, content.

Cat smiled and then felt the twinge she came to know as the signs of her waking. “See you soon, friends.” She said, before being pulled away, her eyes opening to her cabin and the early morning light.

**
It was...quaint. Rustic. The village of Haven and the sprawling mass of tents that would become the core of the new Inquisition.

Vivienne arrived in a carriage, using her connections to procure a seat with a small group of nobles set on travelling to see the Breach for themselves. It was better than riding a horse the whole way there or sitting on a cart, but the nobles in question had little influence and even less conversational skills.

She knew how to ride, of course, she would occasionally ride with Bastian when she was at his estate, but it was never far and over even ground.

So, boorish conversation aside, the carriage was the best option.

She had carefully packed for this trip, taking only her most essential books, allowing herself only a few luxury items. From the description she had, she knew she would have to rough it. But someone had to be a voice for the loyal mages, and she did not trust the task to anyone else. She was the only loyal First Enchanter left, the others foolishly running off in rebellion with no plan and little if any outside support, fracturing the Circles apart into chaos. How they thought that all mages would bind together, when there were already several factions within their numbers, she didn’t know.

Grand Enchanter Fiona should have known better. It was not the time for a rebellion, which should have been obvious. That she didn’t means she should have retired years ago.

The village was bustling at least, soldiers, some bearing templar insignia, mages, refugees, and merchants. She strained to see the ruins of the temple, where she had almost attended. The opportunity was there, the Empress considered sending her to advise Divine Justinia. If Vivienne had, she might have perished as well. That she had not been there, might have been taken as a sign of some plan for her, but more likely, it was luck. And she did not intend to waste the chance she had.

The carriage stopped in front of the wooden gates, the footman opening the door promptly.

Vivienne disembarked first, her heeled boots hitting the frozen ground. She wore no coat, the cold familiar, her magic reacting instinctively, thrumming under her skin, tight and controlled. Ice magic had served her well over the years, easier to cast in cold weather and her affinity for it meant the temperature seldom deterred her. Her legs were cramped, her back sore from the rough journey up the mountain, even with the cushioned seats. She would rub some ointment on them later, but she stood tall now, forbidding herself from showing a hint of discomfort or, worse, weakness. She smoothed her clothing, setting herself to rights. She held a small bag, her more personal items, as well as her staff, and nodded to the footman before stepping away to get a proper look at the settlement.

The buildings were rudimentary, but serviceable. They would need to sure up the infrastructure if this was to be the heart of the Inquisition. If they were to persuade nobles to their cause, they need to look more than a slapdash tent city. And Spring would be here soon, even here in the mountains, and the paths would become muddy and entrenched. The winter gave them that advantage at least.

Vivienne spared a glance to her travelling companions. They would no doubt be complaining about the conditions later. Not directly of course, but it would be a series of tedious conversations.

Standing tall, in front of the gates, no one bothered her. Her bearing and outfit telling everyone what they needed to know. Waiting for the others, she let her thoughts return to an issue of great concern.
It had been many years since Vivienne had trained an apprentice, but she was sure she was up to the challenge. The Herald was young, and nothing was more deadly to a young mage than a lack of knowledge. The girl had comported herself well at the Salon, but Vivienne did not have opportunity to test her arcane control.

The girl was not a circle mage, this Vivienne was certain of. Though she may not have had her magic long, perhaps manifesting after the rebellion had started, leaving no Circle for her to go to, an intolerable situation that would only get worse the longer this went on.

It was her duty to see the child was properly prepared. She was already outlining the child’s education when she was interrupted by a familiar voice.

“Madame Vivienne, delightful to see you again.”

“And you, Lady Trevelyan.” Vivienne replied, nodding to the noblewoman before her. Though she wore dark brown leather armor accented with blue instead of formal attire, her air and manner left no doubt this was the same woman who attended her salon.

“How was your trip?” Lady Trevelyan asked politely.

“Well enough.” Vivienne said, taking the chance to build a connection with the woman close to the Herald, she added. “The company was…stimulating.” The woman nodded her understanding, face giving nothing away, though she had to pick up the subtext to her words.

Turning to greet the minor nobles now fluttering uselessly around the carriage, Lady Trevelyan said. “If you would follow me, madams and monsieurs. Ambassador Montilyet has refreshments set up for you in the Chantry.”

“Oh, will the Herald be joining us?” One of the insipid ladies asked, Vivienne couldn’t be bothered to remember which one she was.

“Unfortunately, no, my lady. The Herald left yesterday on business.”

*That is a problem. Well, one must adapt.*

With a few more tittering questions and comments, they walked en masse to the Chantry.

*I will prepare a curriculum for the Herald’s return. Or else I will join the Herald at the first opportunity.*

Thus resolved, she strode boldly onward.
Chapter Summary

Cat and her party reach the storm coast, encountering the Chargers, Bull, and dealing with the Blades.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

It hadn’t stopped raining since they arrived here. There was a constant misting, if not a full-on storm every day. The scouts were getting used to damp clothing and cloudy skies, constant puddles in the tents and dark nights with only a rare star visible in the sky.

The terrain was rocky and wet, a precarious combination for even the fleet footed. One of her scouts was laid up with a twisted ankle. And that didn’t even account for the bandits that seemed to appear out of thin air, their clothing better suited to the environ and with a better grasp of the terrain.

Progress in their search for any Grey Wardens was frustratingly slow, almost a nonstarter. Any time they moved down the coast, they met resistance, fighting for an inch. They had to find a way to deal with the bandits.

“Harding! Herald’s party was spotted, be here in a few minutes.”

Maker, they should have known hours before, sent some scouts as an escort. Harding studied the map, what little progress they’ve made, rubbing her temple. Blast it. Shaking her head, she exited the tent, straightening, refocusing. She saw the horns first, the tall warrior who was one of the Herald’s guard. Harding stepped forward, meeting the party in the middle of their camp.

“Your Worship! For what it’s worth, welcome to the Storm Coast. I would have sent word sooner, but our efforts have been… delayed.” Harding said. Wanting to keep things polite, but, it was hard to sugar-coat the reality here.

The Herald’s party was drenched, most of them Harding recognized, except for a slight elven woman with a bow. Seeker Pentaghast, Varric Tethras, Solas the mage, Kaaras Adaar, and the blonde elf. Strange that the other guards weren’t with her.

“How so, Lace?” The Herald asked. The girl was in good spirits, despite the circumstances. Harding gave her a tentative smile at the girl, remembering a conversation they had in the Hinterlands. What she would give to be back in the dry farmlands...

“There’s a group of bandits operating in the area. They know the terrain, and our small party has had trouble going up against them. Some of our soldiers went to speak with their leader. Haven’t heard back, though.” And Harding was worried and she was giving her honest report. She had sent Piotr with the group and he was good, he should have reported back by now. Worried, too, having the Herald here when they didn’t have a strong position.

“We’ll search for them while were out there.” Cat said, shaking her head, sending water droplets
onto her companions, making the blonde elf beside her laugh. “And you can call me Cat, remember.”

“Thank you, your worship-Cat.” She still worried about the girl, but she wasn’t alone. The Seeker alone was intimidating and maybe the bandits would think twice before attacking the qunari. “That’s a relief. The soldiers didn’t have an exact location for the bandits, but they were starting their search farther down the beach. With all this fuss, we haven’t been able to conduct a proper search for the wardens, either, unfortunately.”

“Understandable.” Adaar said. “We’ll see if there is any sign of the wardens, too.” He understood how things were, being a mercenary. His gaze held no judgement, just weighing the situation. Maker knows they could use all the help they could get.

“Have you had contact with a mercenary group?” Seeker Pentaghast asked. “We are supposed to observe them.” The Seeker was stoically weathering the damp conditions, though it had to be uncomfortable in armor in the rain. Not that Harding was going to bring it up.

“We briefly talked with them. They are camping off the beach south of here. They said they were waiting for a Tevinter ship.” Harding said. They had contact, but were keeping their distance. Too unknown and the mercenary group had them outnumbered, not that Harding let them know it. She was still waiting for a report from Sister Nightingale about them. Well, maybe the Herald’s party was the answer she was waiting for.

“We will seek them out first, then.” The Seeker said. As the party prepared to leave and continue on, Harding wished them well, adding a few extra warnings.

“Well, good luck, and enjoy the sea air. I hear it’s good for the soul.” Got to try and be optimistic, at least a little.

“Take care, Lace. We’ll see you this evening.” Cat said with a wave, following after her guards.

Harding nodded and watched them leave, letting out a breath and sending a quick prayer for safety for the Herald and her scouts, something she found herself doing more since this all started. Once the Herald was out of sight, Harding turned back. There was work to be done.

With any luck, Piotr and the soldiers would be back that evening, too.

**

Leaving the camp, Kaaras took point for their group, letting the others fan out around Little Bit. Cadash was scouting, as usual, though she was slower in the mud and rain, which she was being mostly silently pissy about. If she could stab the rain, Kaaras had no doubt she would.

The new recruit, Sera, was keeping Cat entertained, with her swearing and observations, needling the Seeker and Solas, and ribbing Varric. It certainly made things lively and Cat was playing peacemaker when she wasn’t joining in with the other elf’s antics.

Their group had made a quick journey to the Coast, leaving their horses at the last major camp, not wanting to risk them when they heard reports of bandits on the Coast.

Trevelyan and Lavellan had stayed behind in Haven. The former staying to greet a group of Free Marcher nobles coming in and the later staying to play peace-maker between some of the mages and templars, seen as an outside party, being Dalish and all. Since he was the First of his Clan, the templars were willing to treat him like a senior enchanter, as something familiar. So, they were two guards down, better utilized at the base, but the others in the group were picking up the slack.
They had heard the waves before they saw them, the crashing carrying through the mountainous terrain, distorting the distance they would have to travel. Kaaras had done a job out here once, turned out to be a black market meet up. It paid well at least. Though he remembers it being miserably wet then too.

He flexed a bit, shifting uncomfortably in his armor. Not the worst inconvenience, but he would be glad to move back into dryer climes. He didn’t complain about it, not like Varric had been. You would think the weather was singling out Varric in particular, the way he had been carrying on. The dwarf did try to take on a more positive tone when talking directly to Cat, but really only then. The Seeker had snapped at him already to shut up. Now she didn’t complain. She understood there was nothing to be done about it, they needed to be here and so they had to deal with the rain and mud.

On the way down from the camp, they had spotted another ocularum. Cat wanted to check it out later, Solas seconding her curiosity. If things went well, they should have time.

Walking up the beach, they saw flashes of magic before the conflict itself. A skirmish, close to 100 people. Mostly archers and swordsmen, but a few mages were making themselves known. After a moment, Kaaras could pick out the sides. The Tevinter side had uniforms of sorts, robes and tunics in white and red, marking them as easy targets. The mercenary band was recognizable in the fact that no one had matching armor. Then, of course, only the most pretentious mercenary groups had a set uniform.

Kaaras was careful to keep their small group out of it. The Seeker stood at the ready to block any attack with her shield, Varric casually holding Bianca ready. But this wasn’t their fight, this was an interview of sorts. If the Chargers couldn’t handle this fight, they wouldn’t be worth it.

Iron Bull was a force. As the only of his kin in the skirmish, Kaaras reasonably assumed it was him. The man wielded a giant double-bladed axe, crashing through the Tevinter ranks. Coordinating well with his company around him. It was bloody, messy, but effective work.

Kaaras knew of the Chargers of course, just part of the business to know the competition. The Valos-kas lost a contract to them once, on the border between Nevarra and the Free Marches, which Shokrakar fumed about at the time. Kaaras had never met them though. What he saw here led him to believe they earned their reputation.

Cat was half-watching what was happening, wincing now and then, twitching a bit. Before Kaaras could do anything, Sera was crouching beside the girl, whispering something that had the girl nodding in reply. Sera stood back up, bow ready, bumping Cat with her hip, which prompted a smile. Kaaras checked, and Solas was also tensed and ready, his eyes flicking between the action and the girl, a faint green shimmer to his right hand. Malika wasn’t in sight, but that was how she liked it, probably close by, keeping watch. Though, even Kaaras had to wonder how she kept hidden in the open beach.

And the skirmish was winding down. With the Chargers victorious, the final mage cut down. Efficient and, from the looks of it, most of the Chargers still stood. Impressive.

After a beat, making sure there was no surprises, Kaaras signaled for the group to move closer. It was time to make contact.

“Chargers, stand down. Krem! How’d we do?” Iron Bull called out, hooking his ax onto his back. The qunari stood an inch or two taller than Kaaras, with horns that jutted out horizontally from his head, massive things that were almost as broad as his shoulders. He wore no armor over his chest, exposing even more crisscrossing scars. An eyepatch covered his left eye, a stubbly beard over his
lower face. He was powerful and he knew it, confidence radiating off of him.

“Five or six wounded, chief. No dead.” A man, presumably Krem, called back. The uninjured were moving bodies. Normally, you would set a pyre, burn the bodies, but in this weather, a grave would be better, even though it was more dangerous. Kaaras had heard some strange things about blood mage corpses that he didn’t want to witness firsthand.

Iron Bull nodded, clapping his hands. “That’s what I like to hear. Let the throatcutters finish up, then break out the casks.” Turning to the approaching party, he addressed them, his single eye evaluating them, focusing back on Kaaras. “So, you’re with the Inquisition, huh? Glad you could make it. Come on, have a seat. Drinks are coming.”

Iron Bull motioned them over to a section of the beach free of bodies and blood, a large driftwood tree and some larger stones scattered around. In a move to set them at ease, Iron Bull sat first, casual, relaxed, disarming. It was a move Kaaras himself used when dealing with a skittish client.

Kaaras signaled for the others to help, talk to the Chargers, while they talked with Bull. Only Sera made a face before wandering off. “Iron Bull, I presume?” Kaaras asked, staying standing, behind the rock Cat perched herself on. The girl was decidedly not looking at the Chargers working, watching the qunari man with interest.

“I didn’t have the pleasure, myself. I’m Kaaras Adaar.” Kaaras said, nodding to the man. He heard about Krem, of course, Cat talked about him after he left and Lavellan added his thoughts. He was in full plate armor, a sword and shield fighter. Kaaras had not noticed him in the fight, but that Iron Bull chose him as his second spoke to his skill.

“Good to see you again and nice to meet you.” Krem said, nodding to those familiar and new to him at once. Cat gave him a tiny excited wave, which he returned, before continuing on to business. “Throatcutters are done, chief.”

“Already? Have ‘em check again. I don’t’ want any of those Tevinter bastards getting away. No offence, Krem.”

Krem snorted. “None taken. Least a bastard knows who his mother was. Puts him one up on you qunari, right?” The banter was casual, friendly, even with the sentiments behind them. Hm, was Iron Bull a recent Tal-vasoth?

“How much is that going to cost us, exactly?” Kaaras knew what a crew like this would cost, he was part of one. He wanted to make sure the Chargers weren’t going to overcharge because of the situation and the state of the Inquisition.

“It wouldn’t cost you anything personally, unless you wanna buy drinks later. Your ambassador—what’s her name-Josephine? We’d go through her and get payment set up. The gold will take care of itself. Don’t worry about that. All that matters is we’re worth it.”

Kaaras doubted that, but if he was dealing with Lady Montilyet, he wouldn’t be able to cheat them. “Maybe I will.” Kaaras said. “The Chargers seem like a solid company, almost as good as the Valo-kas.”
Bull laughed at that, slapping his knee. “They are. But you’re not just getting the boys. You’re getting me. You need a frontline shield, I’m your man. Whatever it is—demons, dragons? The bigger the better.” Bull looked the two of them over, looking down at Cat, who had been quiet up until then, just watching and listening. “I’d offer to be a bodyguard, but it looks like you have that covered.”

“Thank you, I do.” Cat said, smiling up at Kaaras quick. “Oh, I’m Cat Bell, by the way. Well, Krem probably already told you that, but I still should have introduced myself earlier, but I was… distracted.” Cat said, ducking her head a bit.

“Figured that out, yeah, nice to meet you.” Bull said, reaching out to shake her hand. She took it, looking hopeful. Bull pulled back, shaking his hand, teasing.

“Quite a grip you have for a little elfling.” After that, he stood, paced away a little. “And there’s one other thing. Might be useful, might piss you off.” Bull directed this towards Kaaras. “Ever heard of the Ben-Hassrath?”

“Of course.” Kaaras replied, instantly suspicious where this was leading.

“Well, I haven’t.” Cat said, looking between the two of them. “What’s the Ben-Hassra?”

“Ben-Hassrath. It’s a Qunari order. They handle information, loyalty, security, all of it. Spies, basically. Or, well, we’re spies.” The words were barely out of his mouth before Kaaras had his great sword draw and positioned himself between Cat and Bull, if that was his name. Kaaras knew all about the Ben-fucking-Hassrath. His own mother was one, once, and she made it clear that you never ever trust one and you never let one take you alive.

Bull was taking this development with cool ease, raising his hands up, defensively. Kaaras could hear some shouts, Bull’s people or his, it didn’t matter. The true threat was in front of him.

They starred at each other, Kaaras weighing whether it was worth the possible information to leave him alive. Not like they could really trust what he told them.

“Kaaras?” Cat’s voice broke through, her hand coming to rest on his leg. No, information was better. Ben-Hassrath or not, Kaaras couldn’t take out the entire mercenary company. But that didn’t mean he was going to let his guard down.

“Why are you telling us this? Why seek us out?” Kaaras asked, tramping down the rage that threatened to rise, the internal voice yelling at him to strike or flee, get Cat as far from here as he can.

Bull spoke calmly, casually, as if he didn’t have a sword pointed at him. “The Ben-Hassrath are concerned about the Breach. Magic out of control like that could cause trouble everywhere. I’ve been ordered to join the Inquisition, get close to the people in charge, and send reports on what’s happening. But I also get reports from Ben-Hassrath agents all over Orlais. You sign me on, I’ll share them with your people.” Seeing that Kaaras was not swayed, he continued. “Whatever happened at that conclave thing, it’s bad. Someone needs to get that breach closed. So whatever I am, I’m on your side.”

“You expect us to just trust you?!”

“Kaaras, he didn’t have to tell us.” Cat interjected, “Please, can you lower your sword? The Seeker is having trouble keeping Krem and the others from joining us.” Kaaras spared a glance, seeing Seeker Pentaghast holding them back for now, Varric, Solas, and Sera flanking her, but the
situation was tense. One wrong move and they wouldn’t make it out of here.

Fuck.

**

Cat stared up at Kaaras, uncertain what had happened. Everything was going well, Bull and Kaaras seemed to be connecting over mercenary work, and then Bull mentioned the Ben-Hass something and now they were here.

Cat let out a breath she hadn’t known she was holding when Kaaras lowered his weapon, though his gaze didn’t leave Bull’s, more anger than Cat was used to seeing in his face. He didn’t sheath his sword, but kept it pointed to the ground, his whole body tensed. Bull waved off his people, easing the growing tension on the beach.

“You mentioned reports?” Cat asked, trying to move things along. She couldn’t see Bull as a threat. Her visions weren’t warning her of anything and while they weren’t perfect, surely they would have triggered if Bull was as big an issue as Kaaras seemed to think.

And yet, she trusted Kaaras, so he must know more than she did, so she would tread carefully.

“Yeah, enemy movements, suspicious activity, intriguing gossip. It’s a bit of everything. Alone, they’re not much. But if your spymaster is worth a damn, she’ll put ‘em to good use.” Bull said, talking to Cat, a non-threatening grin on his face.

“She?” Kaaras questioned, narrowing his eyes.

“I did a little research. Plus, I’ve always had a weakness for redheads.” Kaaras scoffed at his words.

Cat had this flash of a mental image of Bull flirting with Leliana…he would be lucky to survive. Or maybe she would be into it, Cat had no idea what the Spymaster’s type is.

“Okay, well.” Cat anxiously looked between the two tall men. “Kaaras, can I talk to you a minute?”

“All right.” Kaaras said, stepping back from Bull. He didn’t say anything, but it was clear he was keeping Bull in his sights.

“Why is the Ben-Hassra so bad?” Cat whispered.

Kaaras tensed again as she said the name, it must be bad. “The Ben-Hassrath are liars and enforcers. They work for the Qun and only the Qun.”

“Um, what’s the Qun?”

Kaaras shook his head, “A culture, a religion, a people, a government, all at once. Powerful and irreverent of what people want.” Such a simple statement, yet the venom in his voice made it an unflattering thing. Cat rubbed her arm, uncomfortable and floundering to know what to do.

“I could try to get a read on him, I’ve been trying some new techniques with Solas to control my visions and insights.” Cat offered.

“No. I will not let you that close to him.” His voice was sharp.

“Kaaras, please? We need to know, right? And if he is a spy for some far off government, wouldn’t
it be better to have him where he could be watched? Leliana’s people could monitor him. And… and…” Cat was running out of ideas. Perhaps it was because she liked Krem, she got a good feeling about him. And he can’t work for someone bad, right?

Kaaras’s nostrils flared, his grip on his sword shifting. Cat could see the wheels turning, the conflict as he considered the role they had for the Inquisition versus his personal feelings, Cat’s suggestion versus his instincts. “Solas will be right beside you, as will I. If I say to retreat, you will retreat. Understood?”

“Yes, Kaaras.” Cat replied, meekly.

Kaaras called Solas over and quickly explained the situation. Together, they returned to Bull, who was waiting relatively patiently, though he now had a mug of beer in hand, which he saluted them with as they approached.

“So, have you decided?” He asked.

“Um, not yet. Can I… um… could I hold your hand for a minute?” Cat asked, starting to blush when she realized how ridiculous the question was.

Bull raised his eyebrow, “Can I ask why?”

“Um, well, I can sometimes see visions? So, this could verify your intent? Please? If you are comfortable with it, that is.”

Cat couldn’t read Bull’s reaction, if he had one. “Sure, kid.” He held out his hand.

“Remember, focus through your magic, through the fade, like we talked about. Reach out for him through it.” Solas coached. He wasn’t wild about them testing her ability in this way, but he also couldn’t keep his fascination and curiosity out of his voice. “Like in the dreams, feel out for his aura.”

“Wait, what are you-”

Cat shut out the voices, breathing in and out, pulling on her magic, fingers tingling and gripping tight to Bull. They had talked about this, taking advice from her spirit friends, but not actually trying it yet. She inhaled and felt something slip, like a curtain being flung open.

She was flooded with images, not the controlled visions that came to her, nor even like when she tried to prove herself to Cullen. This was a tidal wave of thoughts and feelings and flashes of scenes with no context or time. It was more like when Solas shared about dreaming at Ostagar, but even wilder, her mind could only process fleeting moments and they weren’t bound by one place.

A young qunari standing before an adult.

A fight.

Laughter in a tavern.

Love.

Purpose.


Fear. Boundless fear. Crushing, gripping, choking. He couldn’t breathe, his heart beating so fast,
her heart beating so fast.

Cat gasped, spiraling back, grabbing her head, but the images kept coming. The sights, smells, and feelings, like spiders crawling up.

Running she was running through a jungle. She had to be faster, to outrace the madness. Faster, faster, blood on her hands, in her mouth.

Her mouth…his mouth?

Stop.

A voice cut through the chaos, pulling her back to reality, like breaking the surface of the water.

She felt the sand under her palms, under her knees, small pebbles digging into her skin. Tasted salt on her lips. People were shouting, but there was a pressure on her back, a soothing voice. Solas. She breathed in and out, almost gasping, her heart was racing, chasing the visions.

The world came back into focus. She turned her head, Solas crouched beside her.

“Breath, da’len.” Solas said, his brow creased in worry.

“That…was different.” She stuttered out.

“Little Bit, are you alright?” Kaaras was back. Standing oh so very high above her. The other voices around her had quieted.

“I think so…” She pushed herself up, stumbling a little, Solas steadying her. “It worked…technically.” She looked around. Sera had her bow out, with a look of apprehension and fear. Varric was nearby, Bianca ready. The Seeker was there too, as was Malika. When did Malika get here?

Bull was pulled back from their group, with some of his chargers. He looked, perturbed. A look he quickly masked when he saw Cat looking.

Her thoughts were jumbled, she wasn’t sure what she had seen. But, there was a moment, early on, where she saw Bull with his Chargers, felt the love that was there. He wasn’t just a spy, he couldn’t be. And Cat felt she should trust him that far. Give him a chance.

The later things…she didn’t know, she didn’t even know when they happened, if they had happened yet.

Shaking off Solas, standing up tall, glancing at Kaaras, she called out in a shaking voice that became stronger as she spoke. “The Iron Bull, we would like to accept the Chargers offer. We’ll see what you can do in Haven.” Kaaras cursed behind her.

Bull stared at her for a minute, before a slow grin grew. “Excellent. Krem, tell the men to finish drinking on the road. The chargers just got hired!”

“Chief?” Krem was pointedly gesturing towards Cat. It had to be weird to witness, what she did and how she reacted.

Bull shrugged.

Krem shook his head. “We opened the casks…with axes.”
“Find some way to seal them. You’re Tevinter, right? Try blood magic.” Bull said.

“Chargers! Pack-up!” Bull shouted out. “We’ll meet you back at Haven.” Before he left, he shared another look with Cat. “I’ll have some questions about all…that.”

Cat nodded. “I’ll tell you what I can.”

Bull nodded and joined his men, a look of confident contentment on his face, anything else he might of felt about it all was hidden.

“Cat, I wish you had consulted with us before making that decision.” Kaaras’s voice was tight. Cat turned, looking at him sheepishly. He was trying very hard not to be angry.

“What the fuck was that?” Sera said, eyeing Cat. “You got weird. Or…weirder. Didn’t think that was possible.” She whispered under her breath. “What the actual fuck.”

“I would also like to know what transpired.” Cassandra said.

“I saw…a lot. Too much. Like a flood of information.” Cat touched her temple. “I think I need more practice, more control before I try that again.”

“You had us worried, kid.” Varric said.

“It was freaky shit, for sure.” Malika drawled, slipping her knives away.

“Cadash, can you follow them? Track them and make sure they don’t get side-tracked on their way to Haven?” Kaaras asked, redirecting his anger to action.

“Can we afford to lose our scout?” Cassandra asked.

“Can we afford to not have Iron Bull watched?” Kaaras challenged.

“Very well. If you think it best.” Cassandra said, though it was clear she disagreed.

“Can you follow them stealthily?”

Malika scoffed. “Of course. They will never know I’m there.”

“Do it.” He ordered.

Malika nodded. She cast one more look at Cat before turning, giving them a half-assed wave, and quickly fading into the grey terrain.

Cat kept watching Kaaras, trying to gage just how upset he was. It was impulsive, she knew that, but she had to follow the feelings and she felt so drained after being overwhelmed.

“So, what next?” Varric asked.

“The Herald wished to see the ocularum, now is as good a time as any.” Solas said, giving them a distraction. He set a hand on Cat’s shoulder, trying to comfort her.

“Are you well, Herald?” Cassandra asked.

“Well enough.” Cat said, pushing aside her discomfort. It was a small lie. And they had things to do here. They still needed to look for the scouts.
Varric started to challenge her lie, but she gave him a pleading look which had him sighing. “Back up the hill we go, then. Wonderful.”

They trudged up together. Cat had to fight off a looming feeling of dread, something wasn’t right, wouldn’t be right, but she didn’t know what it was. Sera, who had been so close to her on the way here, kept to the other side of Kaaras, like he would shield her from the weirdness. She wouldn’t meet Cat’s eyes and she was strangely silent.

*I’ll talk to her later. It will be fine. Everything will be fine.*

Cat almost believed the lies she told herself.

**

Cassandra rolled her shoulders, counting the ways this could go wrong. But there seemed no other path for them to take, not one that didn’t end with more of their people dead.

Yesterday, after the absurd interaction on the beach and detour to inspect the ocularum, they had sought out the lost scouts.

They found what remained of the scouts in a hollowed-out house. The Herald had shut down after that, muttering it was her fault, wrapping her arms around her small frame.

Sera was the one who found the note, Solas who suggested it might be a solution. A special crest that would give them passage, a challenge, limited bloodshed. Not ideal, but certainly more honorable than the random slaughter they found here.

They noted the location of the scout’s bodies, they would make sure they had a proper burial later, let the families know what happened to them. Hopefully, they would be the last of their people to die from the bandits, or the Blades of Hessarian, as they called themselves, though Hessarian’s Blade is supposed to represent mercy, not this banditry and chaos.

Cassandra had heard of them, of course, but they were thought to be legends or fringe cultists that fell out of record before the end of the Exalted Age. There was much she had learned as a Seeker of Truth and even more so when she became the Right Hand of the Divine. But this faction had passed their notice, secretive and pocketed in the mountainous Ferelden coast.

Kaaras carried the Herald back to camp, the girl silently crying on his shoulder. Varric and Solas spoke words of comfort to the girl, but to little effect. Before the girl fell asleep, Cassandra heard her whisper, “I should have been able to stop it, why couldn’t I stop it?”

Cassandra didn’t know how to comfort the girl, who placed the weight of the world on her shoulders.

Well, they had.

Cassandra was regretting their brash choice. Forcing the girl into this position. Maker, what had they been thinking? They were lucky that the girl was holding up as well as she was. It would be a miracle if she survived unscarred, and not just physically.

_Sweet Andraste, please let this be the right path._

And Adaar. His reaction to the Qunari mercenary was uncharacteristic for him and she had not had time to talk with him about it. He decided to dispatch Cadash to follow the Chargers and she knew he must have good reasons, yet it left them with one less guard for the Herald. Cassandra resolved
to pick up the slack, to be even more vigilant in shielding the girl, in whatever way she could.

Their group approached the encampment. Sera and Varric had reported that they were being watched on the path, a fact none of them were happy with, though it was expected. The fenced encampment was camouflaged, the wood coated with lichen, blending it into the landscape.

The make-shift medallion felt awkward around her neck, kept outside her armor to be visible. Mercy’s Crest, it was called. The guards at the gate whispered about the challenge, eyes hopeful.

They entered unaccosted, the Herald kept to the middle of their group, Cassandra at the lead. Tens of faces stared at them, judging the challenger and her companions, silent and heavy.

“You are the Herald of Andraste?” The man asked, disbelief evident in his condescending sneer, looking at Cat. The girl shifted under his gaze, but met his look, saying softly, but clearly.

“I am called the Herald of Andraste, yes.”

“So, you would challenge the Blades of Hessarian?” The man laughed.

“No, I am the Herald’s champion.” Cassandra said. “I fight for her.” She wore the crest, it should have been clear, but this man was smug, playing with them, confident in his position and power. It made Cassandra grind her teeth. How many had she known like this one, arrogant and cruel.

“She will not fight for herself?” He asked.

“You would fight a child?” Cassandra challenged, outraged at the absurdity.

“Supposed to be blessed by Andraste, isn’t she? If Andraste guides her, no one could stand against her.” The man challenged. “Unless the tales are lies, of course.”

“You will have to do with me.” Cassandra said. “This conflict between our peoples cannot continue. You have taken the lives of our scouts, so I challenge your leadership on behalf of the Herald and the Inquisition.”

The man let out a cry, charging forward before Cassandra had even drew her blade. Shield already in hand, she deflected the blow, twisting around and away from him. So, his honor was limited. Unsurprising.

Cassandra trusted the others to keep back, to keep the Herald safe, to guard her back. Her focus was on this fool.

Even though he was a fool, Cassandra refused to underestimate him. He obviously held this position through fear and might, so she would fight carefully, harry him, wear him down.

Plan in place, it should have been simple.

But then he called the dogs.

Two full grown and armored mabaris, snapping at her sides, herding her in.

“Are you so without honor you cannot fight for yourself?!” Cassandra yelled, slashing down at the mabari to her left. She left the air around her vibrate, faintly, an energy that wrapped around her. A magical barrier. She turned her head, quickly, saw the Herald’s face flush with concentration and concern, hand outstretched.

“They are merely extension of my power, weapons that obey my word.” The man smirked.
There was a yelp, one of the dogs limping away with a limb almost removed.

“Hey!” The leader shouted.

“Whoops, my sword slipped.” Adaar deadpanned, said sword now resting in front of him. When the other mabari charged at her again, it veered away with a bolt in its neck, pawing at it.

“Funny, I slipped, too.” Varric said. “Hair-trigger, you know.”

Odds evened out again, Cassandra rushed the leader, striking low, shield raised to block his own attack. She sidestepped around him, swinging at the injured mabari as she did, before attacking the man again and again. She fought fiercely and honorably, even if he would not.

Time passed quickly, motions blurring into one another as she fought him. The mabaris fell and their master soon after, leaving Cassandra sweating and sour. The mabari were blame-less, just victims of their cruel master.

She faced her party and the Blades, waiting to see what would happen. Kaaras and Varric interfered, yes, but their leader brought in dogs. A single man approached, bowing his head slightly, unarmed. Not to Cassandra, no, to the Herald.

“Your Worship, the Blades of Hessarian are at your service. If you want eyes on the coast, here we are.”

“You and your blades are loyal to the Inquisition.” Kaaras asked, a good question.

“We’re loyal to the Herald. I suppose that’s the same thing.”

“You do not care that I killed him, then?” Cassandra asked.

“The man was a bastard. You’re not the first to stand up to him. You’re just the first to win and we’re happy with that. Besides, I would rather swear my life to the Herald of Andraste.” The man said. “You are her champion and you won. Therefore, our allegiance goes to her and trust that Andraste’s hand is with her.”

Seeing no threat, no antagonism, Cassandra sheathed her sword. “Very well.” The other Blades slowly approached, many saluting to the Herald, nodding to Cassandra. They seemed pleased by the turn of events, though the Herald looked uncomfortable, but she tried to be gracious.

Leliana and Cullen would no doubt be pleased, having people on the coast. And Harding, she had been distraught over the loss of her scouts, but this at least would ensure they would face no more resistance from the ‘bandits.’ Hopefully, the other scouts would be able to accept the Blades of Hessarian or at least have a working relationship.

Now they just had to find some trace of the Wardens and they could move on. The Coast had not proved kind to the Herald and Cassandra was eager to leave it.

**

It was awful here. Rocky, hilly, and wet. Nothing redeemable, as far as he was concerned. Trampling through the stormy landscape in search of Grey Wardens. Nonsense it was.

Their group was tense. Cat hadn’t smiled or laughed since they had found the dead scouts, just accepting things with this grim and silent face, barely speaking, even when spoken to.
Kaaras wasn’t much better than the kid and the Seeker was being stoic. Chuckles, besides a few observations, had also been quiet. Varric wanted to break-up the tension, was almost desperate to get a positive reaction from the kid, even from the others.

“So here we are, elf, cleaning up another human mess.” Varric said to Solas, who walked beside him. Cat and Cassandra walked in front of them, with Kaaras just before them.

“What would the Inquisition do without our stabilizing influence, Master Tethras?” Solas replied, playing along.

“I assume they’d just start burning things.” Varric said sagely.

“That does sound like most humans I know.” Solas mused.

“If you gentlemen are quite finished?” Cassandra sighed in exasperation in front of them, shooting them a look.

“Now, now, don’t get touchy. We're just here to lend you simple humans our help.” Varric said, cheekily.

“Before you cause everything to explode.” Solas quipped.

“Again.” Varric added.

Cat giggled, actually giggled, as Cassandra sighed again. It was very brief and not as full as usual, but it was a start. Kaaras looked back at them, pausing, even he had to realize this was a good thing, no matter how stressed he was about the Ben-Hassrath agent. Varric didn’t fully understand it, met one before and she was okay. Well, she lied to them and tried to screw them over, but she was nice about it.

“Now to be fair, Varric, Solas, the Seeker would be one of the humans to help put out the fire.” Kaaras said straight, but Varric could see the edge of his mouth twitching, he was fighting back a grin, for sure. He turned back and continued leading them forward.

They lapsed into silence again, but it was less oppressive, lighter. Cat put her hand in Varric’s, leaning on him as they walked.

Sera took over scouting for them, after Malika left. She was weird around the kid…Varric really needed to come up with a better nickname for her.

_Hm…what name would fit?_

“Hey, Sunflower.” He elbowed Cat. “You’re going to tip me over.”

“Sunflower?”

“I think it fits.” Varric said. “Don’t like it?”

“Huh…could be worse.” Cat said, but she had a bit of a grin. “After all, you called Anders Blondie. I would hate to be Blackie.”

“Hmm, Blackie could work.” Varric pondered aloud.

Cat looked at him with narrowed eyes. “Don’t you dare!”

It would almost be worth it to switch…but Sunflower worked so well. Bright, fragile, and sunny.
Sunflower fit perfectly, he wasn’t sure how he hadn’t thought of it before.

“Alright, I guess I’ll stick with Sunflower.”

Anything else was cut off when they heard a roar. A dragon’s roar, followed by something else bellowing in response.

“What was THAT!?” Cat asked, a mixture of fear and excitement in her voice.

“A dragon.” The Seeker said, resigned.

“And a giant.” Kaaras said, unsheathing his sword. “Step carefully now.”

Varric readied Bianca, sliding the crossbow over his shoulder in a fluid motion. Cat was tensed again beside him, her staff in hand. But there was a fire in her eyes, a wonder at the possibility of a dragon or maybe the giant, or both.

*Oh, this should be good. Just what we needed.*

Chapter End Notes

We have an Iron Bull! Yeah (sorry Kaaras!)! Everything is totally fine, everyone gets along (haha...). Well, it will be fine eventually!

Next, back to the Hinterlands! We have a Blackwall to find and mages to meet!

Thank you again for reading and to everyone who has left comments/kudos!
Hinterlands again

Chapter Summary

Cat Bell and Party return to the Hinterlands. An ally to recruit, people to meet, things to be revealed. More questions about the Herald's abilities and a strangeness surrounding the village of Redcliffe.

Chapter Notes

I switch back and forth between perspective a lot in this chapter, mainly between Vivienne and Cat, with a bit of Mahonan Lavellan, Blackwall, Dorian, and Solas POV thrown in. Enjoy!

Mahonan rode beside the Madame de Fer. Elgara was getting used to him, responding well to his instructions and he in turn was becoming more comfortable riding a horse.

Vivienne rode Evie’s horse, Lady, after insisting that she accompany him to meet up with the Herald’s group. Evie herself was stuck in Haven. Another group of nobles showed up, unexpectedly, and Lady Josephine had her hands full trying to manage them all, with all the bickering and useless fawning. It was baffling to witness.

Better Evie than him, really.

The Inquisition was trying to build cabins as quickly as they could in Haven, not only for the nobles, but for the growing forces. It was a balance between that and training, providing for the refugees and those seeking answers. So many of the recruits had barely ever held a weapon before and there were many non-combatants in residence, their numbers seeming to multiple overnight.

The Lady Vivienne had asked Mahonan a number of questions about his training, his background, magical theory and such along their journey together. He was hesitant at first, but his natural curiosity got the better of him. Soon they were discussing points of theory, finding common ground.

“Are there many mages among the Dalish?” Lady Vivienne asked.

“It depends. Some clans have more than others. There are only a handful in Clan Lavellan. We sometimes send our young mages to other clans, those who need a first, someone to become the Keeper. Of course, I have heard that it is different outside of the Free Marches and Northern Thedas. We all train under the keeper and then they choose one of us to be their first and second, to learn more and prepare to take over as Keeper ourselves one day.”

“You are like an apprentice to your Keeper, then?” Vivienne asked.

“You could say that, it is not an incorrect comparison. Although, she does not only teach us magic,
but also traditions, stories, how to be a leader, how to arbitrate disputes, and so on.”

They got on well enough, that is, until Vivienne slipped in her intent to train Cat in magic. The implication was that she could do so properly, compared to how she was currently being trained.

Things got a little sour after that.

*As if I am incapable of teaching her, because I didn’t go to a circle! Mythal’enaste!*  

As agitated as he was, he had to admit Vivienne was better at coordinating with the Templars, she knew how to talk to them and they respected her, trusted her even. They had made do with Mahonan and he had tried, but it was so foreign to him. It didn’t help that all the Templars were human, well maybe some elf-blooded, but certainly no Dalish among them. They showed him more respect and diffidence than the other mages in Haven, that was certain. Never once yelled at him or challenged him outright.

After a few days, he was pretty sure a few complained to the commander, but well, they asked some rather ridiculous things at times. They wanted to actually have all the mages in a few tents and post templar guards. Ridiculous. Fen’harel’s ass, the Inquisition was not the Circle. You would think they would be more accepting of mages, since their Herald was one.

When Vivienne showed up, they differed to her. She quickly took over the duties Mahonan had been given and honestly, he was glad to be rid of them. It was better to hide in the apothecary cabin with Adan, doing something useful and snarking with the man than whatever it was the templars were trying to do with the mages. The man was grouchy, sarcastic almost to a fault, but he knew his craft well and he tolerated Mahonan’s presence without too much grumbling. Mahonan would swear he caught Adan actually smiling a few times.

At least on this journey, Mahonan managed to not get them lost, thankfully. He would not want to have that conversation with Vivienne. Though, he had to admit to himself that it had more to do with the clear path than his navigational skills.

Reaching the Inquisition camp in the Hinterlands was a blessing. Other people to buffer the awkward conversation. Some scouts took the horses leads, leaving them to get settled and check in. Little Bit and the others hadn’t arrived yet, but were expected before the day ended.

Cat had recruited Vivienne, yes, but Mahonan still wondered how she would react to the First Enchanter as a teacher. It would be a very different experience than she had with him and Solas.

Time would tell, he supposed.

Evening came fast and it wasn’t long before Mahonan was greeted with a hug wrapped around his middle, squeezing him tight.

“Da’len, did you miss me?” He laughed, returning her hug.

“Maybe.”

“I think you grew since I last saw you.” Mahonan teased, standing up straight and dramatically measuring her against his own height. “Yup, at least a hair taller.”

Cat grinned at him. “Maybe you shrunk.”

He just laughed. “Missed you, too, Little Bit.”
He ran them through the drills again. Barking out orders. Block, strike, pivot. Watch your back, watch out for your comrades. The three young men did their best, but these country farmers had never held a sword before, it was clear. And why would they?

“Remember how to carry your shields! You’re not hiding, you’re holding. Otherwise it’s useless!” They had come a long way since he had them pick up the shields. They wouldn’t be defenseless now.

“Warden Blackwall?” A feminine voice called out to him.

It still shocked him sometimes, being called Blackwall. It seemed like a lifetime since he had another name instead of this borrowed charge, this armor of another man’s legacy that he was desperately trying to honor.

He turned quickly, more in reaction to the voice, than the particular call of his name. Though how someone knew of him was another question. He found a small group approaching. A curious group. A group of three armed and armored women and a child.

“You’re not—how do you know my name?” He rushed up to them, looking between the adults and the girl, a little slip of a thing. “Who sent…” His thoughts were racing, but any conclusions had to wait when he saw the archer leaning out from behind the tree. He moved reflexively, shouting a warning, shield covering the girl in time to block the arrow that would have hit her. She let out a yelp in surprise, ducking down, eyes wide in fear.

Anger rose, they would target a child?

“Get her out of here!” He yelled at the newcomers, moving to be between the child and the bandits. “We’ll deal with these idiots! Conscripts! Here they come!”

It was over quicker than he thought. The others not retreating, but joining the fray. The one was a warrior, a tall dark-haired woman who moved with skill that much rivaled his own. The dwarven woman moved quicker, blades striking, it was hard to keep her in sight, only coming into focus when she pulled her dagger from the body she just felled.

The other adult in the party, a mage, fought gracefully at a distance, sending ice to freeze the bandits and slow them, making quick work for the others. Once, he saw her craft a glowing blade, blocking an attack from a bandit that got to close to her and the girl.

And the girl, she was casting something. A barrier if he had to guess. There were a few strikes that seemed to ricochet off something invisible. It had been years since he had fought with mages.

And the recruits did well, blocked more than they hit, but they stayed safe, alive. The best he could hope for, given the situation.

And then it was over, bodies across the ground.

A waste.

“Sorry Bastards.” He said to himself. “Good work, conscripts, even if this shouldn’t have happened. They could’ve—well, thieves are made, not born. Take back what they stole. Go back to your families. You saved yourselves.” He ordered. Watching them leave, patting each other on the back, looking confident.
He had to address the strangers now. Formidable. Maker knows what they wanted with him or how they even knew about him.

“You’re not farmers. Why do you know my name? Who are you? Is there a reason you are bringing a child into a war zone?” Blackwall asked.

“Hi! I’m Cat Bell! You are Warden Blackwall, yes?” The girl said, giving him a smile while brushing a stray lock from her face. She was so small, couldn’t be more than 10 years old, if that, with elven ears and bright green eyes. The others stood around her, protectively.

“I am. But why are you looking for me?”

“We’re Inquisition, trying to find out why the Wardens disappeared and if it had anything to do with the Divine’s murder.” The dark-haired woman said. She hesitated a moment, before adding, motioning to the girl. “This is the Herald of Andraste. We appreciate your action in shielding her.”

“Herald of Andraste? Maker’s Balls, the Wardens and the Divine? That can’t—no, you’re asking, so you don’t really know. First off, I didn’t know they disappeared. But we do that, right? No more Blight, job done, wardens are the first thing forgotten. But one thing I’ll tell you: no warden killed the Divine. Our purpose isn’t political.” He tried to keep his voice certain, sure, not letting his ignorance show. There was a reason he kept to himself. “And Herald of Andraste? Heard rumors about them, but well, did not expect them to be the little lady.”

“No one is accusing the Wardens, my dear.” The mage woman spoke up, her diction crisp. She was stunning to look at, a fine, elegant lady in the Ferelden countryside. “We are seeking information. You are the only warden to be found. Pray tell, where are the other?”

*Shit.*

“I haven’t seen any wardens for months. I travel alone, recruiting. Not much interest because the Archdemon is a decade dead, and no need to conscript because there’s no Blight coming. Treaties give wardens the right to take what we need. Who we need. These idiots forced this fight, so I ‘conscripted’ their victims. They had to do what I said, so I told them to stand. Next time, they won’t need me. Grey wardens can inspire, make you better than you think you are.”

How true those words were, ones that directed his every day, his every action. Maybe someday he would be worthy to bear the name he took, could say he truly honored the man who inspired him, did more good than harm with his sorry life.

“Any idea where the other wardens are?” The dwarven woman spoke up, her tone as sharp as her knives.

“Maybe they returned to our stronghold at Weisshaupt? That’s in the Anderfels, a long way north. I don’t really know. Can’t imagine why they’d all disappear at once, let alone where they’d disappear to.” Blackwall guessed. He only had what little the real Blackwall had told him and rumors and legends to go on. Probably little better than they already had.

The dwarven woman snorted. “He’s useless, let’s get going.” She just turned and started to walk away.

Well, he was useless when compared to a real warden, wasn’t he?

“Wait, Sir, ah, Warden?” The girl Herald said. “Since you are out here alone and in the dark as much as us, would you consider joining the Inquisition? At least until we find the other Wardens? I know you have important work recruiting and such, but we would value a warden’s perspective.”
She looked up at him with such an earnest face. An innocent. A small child. Asking for his help. Him. The disgrace that he was.

And yet, would this be a way to his redemption?

“The Divine is dead, and the sky is torn. Events like these, thinking we’re absent is almost as bad as thinking we’re involved. If you’re trying to put things right, maybe you need a warden. Maybe you need me.” He said the last part to himself. Perhaps he could do good with the Inquisition, better than on his own. “I would join you. We both need to know what’s going on, and perhaps I’ve been keeping to myself for too long. This warden walks with the Inquisition.”

He bowed to the girl, her kind eyes bright, hopeful, cheered from his words. If she knew who he really was, what he was, could she look at him like that?

Like he was worth something.

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Vivienne walked confidently over the rough path, though stepping carefully. It would not do to twist her ankle, not when they were on their way to Redcliffe to meet with the rebel mages.

A foolish thing, of course. Would Fiona be more open to reason now than when she declared the Circles disbanded?

Unlikely.

At least she was here to help steer this endeavor, to keep the Grand Enchanter in check, and to guide the Inquisition from making any foolhardy decisions that would leave them as outcasts to the rest of Thedas.

The Herald, she had found, was capable for one so new to her magic. She had a basic grasp of her abilities and the elven apostate was keeping a guard against demons, which was of mixed comfort.

Solas was an unknown, but he had survived this long, so he knew a few things at least. The girl obviously looked up to him, as friend and teacher, deferring to him when she had a magical question or observation. Vivienne would have to work to cultivate the girl’s trust and talents. The Herald needed a proper education, not a slap-dash teaching from a wandering mage of questionable qualification.

The girl seemed to hold an infinite capacity for optimism, seeking out the good in every person and situation. How naïve and yet, Vivienne had no wish to outright crush that hopeful youthful ignorance, but to instruct caution and realism gently. The world was full of wolves and the Herald could not remain a lamb to be snapped up in their jaws.

Such thoughts were best left to a later date, for they heard shouts and Vivienne suppressed a shiver at the feeling in the air. Magic heavy, tingling, brushing against her own magic.

“I want a constant watch on that damned thing! Sound the alarm at the first sign of demons!” Someone shouted.

Then it became clear. A flickering green tear, the Breach in miniature, a magical tear that sent ripples through the ether.

“We will have to close the rift before we can enter Redcliffe.” Seeker Cassandra said, drawing her sword.
“Bianca’s ready.” The dwarf, Varric said. Bianca was his crossbow apparently. It seemed an unnecessary thing, to name one’s weapon.

“Da’len, stay close.” Solas told the girl.

This should prove enlightening, seeing the mark in action and witnessing a rift up close. Vivienne prepared herself, letting her magic flow to the surface, when normally she kept it tightly controlled and coiled. She felt it as flecks of ice shimmered off her hands, her grip kept to her staff, letting the imbued magic connect with her own.

Approaching the rift, it suddenly crackled, glowing brighter, a high-pitched noise emanating from it, long tendrils of energy reaching out from it.

The moment the first demon appeared, Vivienne steeled herself and flicked ice sharp as daggers at its form.

No demon would take her today.

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With one final pulse, the rift snapped shut, the green slit disappearing as Cat panted from the effort.

This rift was weird, something was off, very off.

It left her feeling a little light-headed. Her magic felt different here and that feeling didn’t seem to fade away with the rift.

“That was weird right? Well, weirder than the other rifts.” Cat asked, looking to her companions. She wasn’t the only one who noticed, right?

“We don’t know what these rifts can do. That one appeared to alter the time around it.” Cassandra said.

Ah, that was it, wasn’t it? How at times the demons seemed to move too fast or to slow. What could cause such a thing?

“Maybe the mages in Redcliffe know why this rift was weird.” Cat said, she shook her hand out a little, the lingering tingle prickling her palm.

They were allowed into Redcliffe, the threat gone for now. They waited a few moments for the gate to be raised.

An Inquisition scout ran up to them to report, talking mainly to Cassandra. Cat leaned on her staff and tried to focus on the weird feeling she had, it persistent, like bees buzzing in her ears, but she couldn’t see them.

“No one, not even the Grand Enchanter?” Cassandra asked, perplexed by what the scout said.

The scout shrugged. “If she was, she hasn’t told anyone.”

“Perhaps she forgot, the poor dear.” Vivienne said. Lady Vivienne looked unruffled by the rift.

“We have arranged use of the tavern for negotiations.” The scout finished his report, before saluting and running off, motioning another man forward.
“This is very peculiar.” Cassandra said.

This man, an elven mage, approached them. “Agents of the Inquisition, my apologies! Magister Alexius is in charge now, but hasn’t yet arrived. He’s expected shortly. You can speak with the Former Grand Enchanter in the meantime.” He was apologetic, a tense smile on his face.

“Very well. Can she meet us at the tavern?” Cassandra asked.

“Yes, I will let her know.” The man said, before he too left them.

And we didn’t get the scout or the mage’s name.

“The veil is weaker here than in Haven. And not merely weak, but altered in a way I have not seen.” Solas said.

“We should speak to the grand enchanter.” Cassandra affirmed.

“Stealth and the others are going to be disappointed. They went off chasing rumors of Tevinters in the region and here they are!” Varric said with a rueful laugh.

“Quite. And one would think the rebellion couldn’t make any worse decisions.” Vivienne scoffed.

They finally entered the sprawling village. They passed by scouts, refugees, villagers, and no small number of mages. People of all ages, elven and human mostly, but a couple dwarves here and there. Most of the mages still wore robes, but they were easy to pick out, as most carried staffs or well, just had a look of someone who wasn’t used to rural life.

Cat could pick up snippets of conversations, about dreams, rumors of the Breach, talks about the dead rising in the past. The tension was near palpable. Like Haven, there were tents set up around the village, to accommodate the mages and refugees, the sudden influx demanding temporary solutions. At least it was warm, so they didn’t have to worry about the cold and snow.

They almost walked past a small group of mages, but the one mage looked familiar. It took Cat a moment to place them, but then it was clear. It was the mage leader from the cave. Not an event Cat wished to dwell on, especially now when they had such important work to do, but it was good to see them safe.

They noticed her, too. Bowing their head slightly in respect, they approached. Varric stood with her, carefully watching what was happening, but giving her some space. The others were talking amongst themselves. Vivienne arched her brow at this new mage, but remained in her discussion. They were debating whether they should go directly to the tavern or speak with some other people first, keep the First Enchanter waiting, so they didn’t seem too eager.

“Herald. Welcome to Redcliffe.” Their long reddish hair was tied back, staff used as a walking stick. They crouched down, to look her in the eye with their bright blue ones. “It is good to see you well.”

“Thank you. Did the other mages get settled here?” Cat asked.

“We got settled well enough, the other mages have begrudgingly accepted us into their ranks. We had not planned to tie ourselves to Tevinter. It feels like we have just exchanged one pair of shackles for another.” They said. Their face was lean, worn. They couldn’t be older than 30, and yet their bearing, their eyes, made them seem much older. “Nonetheless, I would thank you for the opportunity you granted us, to make our way here.”
“We just heard about that. We are going to see what we can do.” Cat said. “And of course, you are welcome.” In a softer voice, she added. “I didn’t wish anymore to die that day.”

He nodded, then shifted his attention to Varric. “And you, sir. I see you have recovered from your injuries.”

“I’m not dead yet.” Varric replied, casually.

“I…um, I never got your name.” Cat asked, awkwardly.

They sighed, “Of course, with things how they went the last time we met.” They straightened. “My name is Asher Amell.” They hold out their hand.

“Cat Bell.” She replied, shaking their hand.

“Well met.” They gave her a small smile, before their resting tired face returned. “Tread carefully while you are here. Tevinter mages have very sharp claws.”

“I will.” Cat said, her brow furrowing. The mage nodded to her, then to Varric, before returning to their campsite.

“That wasn’t ominous at all.” Varric said. “And Amell, hm…no, it couldn’t be, right?” He mumbled to himself.

“Nope, not ominous at all.” Cat said, resigned, rubbing at her left palm. The last name was familiar, of course, perhaps some distant relative of the Hawke’s. Cat had no way of knowing if it was a common name.

She now had more apprehensions and the weirdness was still in the air, leaving her with more questions.

Hopefully they could get answers.

**

Their group decided to talk with some people around the village, before meeting with the Grand Enchanter. A sensible course of action. They were not at Fiona’s beck and call, even less now that she had aligned the rebel mages with Tevinter.

*What was she thinking?*

She wasn’t thinking. That much was clear.

They had talked with a number of mages around the village, as well as a few villagers. Vivienne was not surprised that there was not a consensus among the mages about what happened. She was surprised, however, by how many loyal mages there were, dragged along in this folly, not realizing that there were others of their mind left in Thedas.

Varric was talking with a dwarven merchant by the docks and the Herald was gathering bits of spindleweed for the local healer, Solas helping her learn to cut them correctly. He was doing a serviceable job. Vivienne refused to enter the muck, she would not meet Fiona with mud splattered across her clothing, though Vivienne said a word of advice here or there.

Vivienne preferred her potion ingredients in her lab or in the greenhouse, where they could be kept tidy and neat.
Seeker Pentaghast was standing watch, keeping an eye out for trouble. She was quite diligent in her protection of the Herald.

Having a moment to think. Vivienne had to wonder about the time distortions they encountered, if that is what they were. Certainly no one had studied these rifts enough to know the full extent of their power, their danger. Vivienne herself was torn between academic interest and realistic caution. They were an unknown, as of yet, a random phenomenon brought about by the Breach.

Perhaps it was the concentration of mages here, that weakened the veil and made the rifts more unstable. Too much magical energy focused in one location. It would bear some thought.

“Papa Varric, can you open this door?” The Herald asked. Her hand rested on a wooden door to a cabin, towards the end of the docks. Her brows were bunched together, a slight grimace on her face.

“Sure, Sunflower.” Varric said.

Now they were breaking into cabins. Wonderful.

Vivienne resisted the urge to voice her displeasure. Varric had the door unlocked before anyone could say much of anything. She was surprised the Seeker didn’t make a comment.

They entered the cabin and Vivienne had to brush off the sensation of being watched aside, like a prickling at the back of her skull, an unintelligible whisper to her ear.

Nothing seemed amiss, until they rounded the corner of the room, to see rows of skulls on shelves, many with crystals affixed in some way. It was disconcerting under their dead gaze.

The Herald made no further move, just staring at the skulls.

These must be the ocularum Lavellan had mentioned.

Solas brought out some notes from a nearby desk, handing them to Cassandra. She quickly read through them, her grip tightening to crumble the paper as she read.

“Every ocularum is made from the skull of a tranquil?” Cassandra finally said. The words hit Vivienne as hard as a slap.

No, they couldn’t be…she was quickly estimating how many, just how many skulls there were in this room.

“I had hoped they were safe with the rebel mages. I see that I was mistaken.” Vivienne said, fighting to keep her emotions in check. Rage, anger, regret. Maker, so many lives lost. She felt the prickle of ice on her fingertips, a sign her control was fraying, reacting to her strong feelings. She breathed in and reined it back in.

“I figured they’d fled with the rebel mages. Poor bastards.” Varric said, shaking his head and setting his hand on the Herald’s back.

“I had wondered where they had gone. I should have looked harder.” Cassandra said.

As should I. A thread I didn’t keep track of and now the thread has been cut. And for what purpose?

“The Venatori created the oculara to search for something.” Vivienne said, trying to focus on the
facts. Becoming upset would not bring back the dead, would not right this atrocity and slaughter.

“Something like those old shards, presumably.” Solas commented.

“They were…all killed? The ocularum aren’t just skulls from people who died, they were killed for
this?” The Herald asked. Her voice was begging for someone to tell her she was wrong.

“It would seem that way, da’len.” Solas said, not unkindly.

“I…” The girl looked at the skulls, her eyes sad, blinking away tears. “I want to go now.”

“Right, come on, Sunflower.” Varric said, gently prodding her out.

Vivienne was the last out, closing the door behind her, on this morbid crypt of horrors and misused
magic. This could not stand, would not stand.

Someone would answer for this.

**

They took a rambling path to the tavern, they were all processing what they found in that cabin. It
was not a vision that lead her to it, no, it was the strange feeling, a whispering. For that matter, she
hadn’t had any visions or feelings, not like usual, not since they entered Redcliffe.

And all those skulls, just in the cabin. How many ocularum were scattered across the country?
They found one on the coast.

They needed to do something about them. Find a way to put them to rest.

Cat shivered.

They couldn’t do anything right now, they had to focus on the Breach. But after, if she had any
influence, they would do something.

Part of her just wanted to fireball the whole cabin.

They made it to the tavern. Cat felt even more out of her depth than usual. That strange feeling, her
palm almost itching, let her unbalanced, uncertain what to think and what to do.

But they had to meet with Fiona, they needed to know what was going on.

The tavern was dark inside, low lighting even in the middle of the day. There were people inside,
mages and villagers, but one end of the room was cleared.

Fiona stood there, with a few of her people.

“Welcome, agents of the Inquisition.” Fiona said, her eyes lingering on Cat before focusing on the
mage beside her. “First Enchanter Vivienne.”

“My dear Fiona. It’s been so long since we last spoke. You look dreadful! Are you sleeping well?”
Vivienne replied.

Vivienne did not hide the fact that she did not like Fiona or her decision. But she was correct, the
grand enchanter looked exhausted.

Fiona ignored the question in favor of getting to the point. “What has brought you to Redcliffe?”
“Because you invited us? Back in Val Royeaux?” Cat said. She had invited them, very clearly.

“You must be mistaken. I haven’t been to Val Royeaux since before the Conclave.” Fiona said. There was no doubt in her voice, she was truly baffled by Cat’s statement.

“If you did not invite us, then who was it? They both looked and sounded like you.” Cassandra said.

“I…I don’t know. Now that you say it, I feel strange…whoever…or whatever brought you her, the situation has changed.” Fiona rubbed her temple. “The Free Mages have already…pledged themselves to the service of the Tevinter Imperium.”

She did not sound happy at the decision, more resigned, accepting but not content.

“Fiona dear, your dementia is showing.” Vivienne snipped.

“An alliance with Tevinter? Do you not fear all of Thedas turning against you?” Cassandra asked.

“I understand that you are afraid, but you deserve better than slavery to Tevinter.” Solas said.

“As one indentured to a magister, I no longer have the authority to negotiate with you.” Fiona said.

“I…do not think that was a wise decision.” Cat said. She had no supernatural reason for her reply, but just her own intuition. Her companions’ reactions added to her certainty that this could not be the correct choice.

“All hope of peace died with Justinia.” Fiona said. “This…bargain with Tevinter would not have been my first choice, but we had no choice. We are losing this war. I needed to save as many of my people as I could.”

So it was desperation. Cat did not know what she would have done, but could she really fault the Grand Enchanter for taking a chance for her people? Though it still didn’t answer the question of who or what they met in Val Royeaux. Cat would swear it was Fiona, and yet why would Fiona lie? What would she gain?

They conversation was cut-off, as more joined their group.

“Welcome, my friends! I apologize for not greeting you earlier.” The man said. He was in a half robe of red and gold, with pointed bits of fabric that flared out. It was kind of a mix between armor and mage robes. He was older, perhaps in his fifties or sixties, lines deep across his face, lines that deepened when he smiled.

And though this was supposed to be serious, a very important meeting, Cat had to stifle a laugh at his outfit. It just looked…so silly. With everything else from today, the tranquil skulls, the ominous warnings, she just was not expecting a Tevinter Magister to be wearing…that. She coughed into her hand, trying to be subtle, but Varric was smirking at her.

“Agents of the Inquisition, allow me to introduce Magister Gereon Alexius.” Fiona said.

“The southern mages are under my command. And you are the survivor, yes? The one from the Fade? Interesting.” Magister Alexius said, looking directly at Cat. She no longer felt the need to laugh, as she felt like she was a specimen being examined.

Okay, well, she still had a bit of an urge. His hood was just so ridiculous. What purpose did it serve?
Well, Fiona really has lost whatever wisdom she had.

Their situation was already precarious, and she had now signed them directly into the fire of judgement and public outrage. Mages were feared, yes, but Tevinter mages caused terror in the minds of Thedosian people, they were the ones that stole your children for blood magic and worshiped in heretical chantries.

The mages would be lucky to make it to Tevinter alive.

Any discussion of an alliance was squashed when the magister’s son fell faint. The man could not leap to his son’s aid quickly enough, ignoring anyone else.

A dedicated father, but it speaks to a lingering illness. Something that not even the mages of Tevinter could counter.

The Herald, besides a brief misstep at the beginning of their meeting, handled things well. She listened, letting them ask most of the questions, but interjecting here and there with well-formed questions. She really was a very quick-witted girl.

And then there was the note, the warning and invitation. Seeker Cassandra was not in favor of following up with the note and Vivienne would admit her own trepidation. But, the possibility of frayed ties within the ranks of the Tevinter mages was a tempting one. Taking advantage of such opportunities was part of the reason Vivienne had the standing that she did.

They decided it was worth the risk to go to the Chantry. They would be cautious.

Before they could leave the tavern, a man stopped them. As soon as he spoke, Vivienne understood not who, but what he was. A tranquil mage. So, not all of them had been killed, that was a small comfort.

“Magister Alexius wishes only mages to remain in Redcliffe. He will approve of you. He does not approve of me. Many villagers have already left to escape his ire.” He said.

“Why doesn’t he approve of you?” The Herald asked.

“He does not like to be reminded of what mages can become. He says all Tranquil must leave Redcliffe, but who would take us in?” Who indeed? And yet, curious, that the Magister would order them away, when the Tevinter mages had a dark use for them. What was his game?

“You are?” The girl started, she stood taller, her face a mix of panic and determination. “The Inquisition will take in any and all Tranquil. Can you gather those that are here, those who want to go and have them go to the crossroads? The Inquisition has a camp there.”

“I am an alchemist. If the magister will not have me here, I would offer my services to the Inquisition. While one lives, it is good to believe there is still a use for one’s talents.” He said.

“Yes, I will make the offer to the others.”

A brash decision, yet one Vivienne could find no fault with. A compassionate offer, one that if anyone had a problem with, Vivienne would fight for. The remaining tranquil could not stay here.

**

Cat felt lighter, knowing the tranquil would be joining the Inquisition. This was action she could
take, instead of starring into dead eyes.

The others seemed to support her offer, Varric had given Clemence, that was the tranquil mage’s name, direction and instruction for when they got the Crossroads, who to talk to and such.

They were headed for the Chantry, but on the way, Cat saw the mage that met them at the gates. He looked surprised to see the group.

“You’re from the Inquisition. I didn’t think you’d still be here.” He said. He had shaggy brown hair and he wore robes. He didn’t seem all that old, maybe around 20. “Were you really looking to ally with us?”

“Perhaps.” Cat said. “We were considering the possibility.”

“I can’t believe it. Everyone blames us. The Templars left the Chantry, too. That’s worse, isn’t it? They took an oath. Yet everyone calls it the ‘Mage Rebellion.’ We’re the ones they hate. What choice did we have? Stay and be slaves?” He ranted, understandably really.

The more Cat heard from various mages, the different perspectives, the more complicated the whole thing was. It wasn’t an easy answer to it. Not one she could see anyways.

“There are better ways than war to effect change.” Vivienne cautioned.

“Sometimes to achieve the world one desires, one must take regrettable measures.” Solas added.

Even among her companions there was diverse thought. Who was right? Could they all be right, in a way?

“I hope you can do something. Trying ourselves to Tevinter…? That can’t be the right way to end this.” He said.

It couldn’t, could it?

“You don’t approve of the Grand Enchanter’s decision, then?” Varric asked.

“I was there when we voted to leave the circle. She really seemed to care what we wanted. She was ready to rebel, but she wasn’t going to unless it was the will of all mages. It’s hard to believe she’d go behind our backs and sell us to the magisters.” He said.

“We never did get your name.” Cat said.

“Oh, I’m Lysas.”

“I’m Cat Bell.” She said. “Nice to meet you.”

“Were you at one of the circles?” Lysas asked.

“No, I…” Cat didn’t think she was. “No, I recently got my magic.” After a pause, trying to keep things positive. “And this nifty mark on my hand.”

“I came into my magic when I was nine years old. Templars came into the Alienage and took me to the Circle.” Lysas got a faraway look, the memories leading him. “They didn’t even let me say goodbye. It’s not right. I studied hard, I passed my Harrowing, I sing the Chant. But I’ll be locked up for the rest of my life.” Focusing back on their group, on Cat, he apologized. “Sorry, you didn’t need to know that.”
“It’s alright.” Cat said. “Um, I don’t know how binding the agreement was nor if it accounts for every mage, but, um.” She looked at her other companions. “If you happened to find your way to an Inquisition camp, I’m sure you would be welcome.”

Lysas smiled at her offer. “I thank you, but I will stay with the mages here. As uncertain as the future is for us, I cannot abandon them.”

“Oh, okay.” Cat said. He looked so down, she had to offer. “Would you mind if I gave you a hug?”

That prompted a fuller smile and he responded by opening his arms. She gave him a gentle hug. “Things will work out.” She said.

“Thank you.” Lysas said, patting her on the back. “At least one of us is confident in that.”

Cat pulled back and gave him another smile.

“Herald, we should be on our way.” Cassandra said.

“Right. Take care, Lysas. With any luck, we will meet again.” Cat said, waving to him and trying to look encouraging.

“You as well, Cat.” He returned her wave.

“You trying to befriend the entire mage rebellion, Sunflower?” Varric teasingly asked.

“Maybe. Couldn’t hurt, could it?” Cat said.

Now they just had to meet Felix in the Chantry.

And hopefully it wasn’t a trap.

**

It was fascinating really. When Dorian had asked Felix to arrange a meeting with the Herald, he had no idea there would be a dormant rift inside. Though, it did explain why the Chantry was empty and the locals avoided it.

He had not intended to activate the thing, but curiosity and boredom got the better of him. He could only read the same Chantry pamphlet so many times before the green glow of the rift became too appealing, like a siren’s song for intellectually curious mages.

So here he was, the rift open, fighting off demons like it was an evening at one of the livelier parties in Minrathous. Nothing he couldn’t handle.

And then the blasted thing spit more demons out.

Dorian shot lightning at them, stepping back, but hitting the edge of a fallen pew bench. Looks like he would have to be more…physical.

His staff was made for such a purpose and he found himself hitting them with it as much as with his magic.

He knew keeping in peak physical condition would come in handy. Well, beyond the aesthetic reasons, of course.

This interlude was growing tedious. His outfit did not need the addition of demon ichor and the rift
was decidedly less interesting when it merely produced demons to attack him.

Just when he thought he might actually have to flee, the Chantry doors creaked open, sending light into the place and illuminating the fight he was now engaged in.

After hitting back the demon he fought, he turned, greeting the Inquisition party with a smile. “Good! You’re finally here! Now help me close this, would you?”

**

The rift collapsed in a flash, the green disappearing as mysteriously as it appeared.

Marvelous!

Dorian faced the party, still surprised to see that it was a young elven girl who wielded this mark that controlled the rifts.

“Fascinating. How does that work, exactly?” Dorian laughed, curiosity after curiosity. “You don’t even know, do you? Just wiggle your fingers, and boom! Rift closes.”

“It is a little more work than that, but yes?” The girl said, rubbing at her left palm. It did seem to strain her, closing the rift.

“Who are you?” The warrior woman asked, her weapon still raised.

“Ah, getting ahead of myself again, I see.” He bowed. Before he could introduce himself, the girl spoke up.

“He is Dorian of House Pavus, most recently of Minrathous.” Her head was quirked. She had taken the words right from his mouth, quite literally.

“Correct. How do you do?” He said with a bow. “And how, may I ask, did you know that?”

“I know a lot of things.” The girl said with a shrug and a smirk.

Another ability from the mark perhaps? Now my interest is further piqued. What other mysteries could it be the key to?

“Another Tevinter. Be cautious with this one.” The warrior spoke again.

“Suspicious friends you have here,” Dorian said. “Magister Alexius was once my mentor, so my assistance should be valuable—as I’m sure you can imagine.”

He just had to convince the suspicious southerners of that fact.

**

Cat insisted they keep busy. She had a list of things she wanted to accomplish before sundown.

Solas knew it was in part a distraction from thinking about what the majority of their party was doing, but he and Varric indulged her, nonetheless.

Adaar took the bulk of the Herald’s group to clear out the fortress that the bandits had claimed to the south west. Despite Cat’s protests, no one would agree with her that she should be there, so Varric and he volunteered to stay with her.
They did not wish a repeat of the cave incident and since she had no visions prompting her presence, the others went ahead without her.

And she was worried, but she tried to hide it, to remain optimistic, rambling about this and that, before telling Solas about some things she experienced while they were in Redcliffe.

“So, yeah, my ability to know things or see visions or whatever it is, was really weird in Redcliffe. Until I closed the rift in the Chantry, I didn’t have anything. And my palm felt stranger than usual and, like, there was something wrong or off.”

“Hm, that is curious, da’len. Do you still feel strange?” Solas asked. The questions around the girl and her abilities grew the more he learned of them. How did the explosion cause this ability? How did his orb play into it? Was it something unique to her? Did a spirit have some connection to it? Somehow able to remain hidden from Solas’s investigation? And they how did it connect with her memory lose? Did the weaken and distorted veil in Redcliffe interact with the mark strangely?

“No. After we left, the feeling faded. I haven’t had very many visions, but, then, we aren’t really doing much.” She said, kicking at some dirt.

“Da’len, gathering herbs for Apothecary Adan is important.” Solas chided, but with a smile.

“I know…” She whined.

“And you wished to take a blood lotus to the lake, like in the story.” Solas reminded her.

“Okay…” She wasn’t convinced, but she was distracted by some more herbs.

“You know what I like about you, Chuckles? Your boundless optimism.” Varric said, walking beside them. He was not gathering herbs, but he complained and made comments.

“It's comforting that whatever qualities I lack, you'll invent for me, Varric.” Solas said.

“No, really. Why else would an elven apostate help crazy Chantry folk close a hole in the sky?” Varric wore an elderflower in his hair, a gift from the Herald. Solas had one in his pocket.

“When you put it like that, I must concede your point.” He had his reasons, but he would not share those.

“They aren’t crazy, Varric. Cassandra and Leliana seem very sane and responsible.” Cat said, popping out from a bush she had crawled under to get a handful of crystal grace that had grown between the trees and bushes. She had twigs and leaves stuck all about in her hair, bits of dirt smeared across her face.

“We’ll go with that, sure, Sunflower.”

She narrowed her eyes at him “…I can tell you are humoring me, Papa Varric.”

Solas had to laugh. “You forget how observant she is.”

“I haven’t forgotten, Chuckles.” Varric replied. “Now, how much longer on the herbs?”

“It would go faster if you helped.” Cat said, hand on her hips, still full of the bespoke herbs.

“I am providing the valuable service of guard.”

“Uh-ha.” She said. “Are you guarding us from the rams? I think you scared away at least 20 of
them. Or maybe the fennecs."

“I am wounded truly.”

Cat just laughed and wandered towards another patch of elfroot.

The mysteries around the girl would become clear in time, Solas just had to puzzle them out.

Chapter End Notes

Apologies for any errors, I was just so excited to get this chapter out there! I got to write Vivienne and Dorian!
And yeah, I crossed the 100,000 word mark! Thank you to everyone who has read, left kudos and comments! Thanks for sticking around to read my take on DAI!
Haven Interludes

Chapter Summary

Some short POVs around Haven, as decisions about allies are made.

They were back in Haven, reporting back on what happened on the Storm Coast and in the Hinterlands, with some new allies and the question of needing to decide who to ally with. The mages were sworn to the Tevinter magister, apparently extremists, but the Templars were far off, and the Lord Seeker was not a promising lead either.

Neither looked to be great options, but they needed one of them to close the Breach.

Hopefully one of them actually would.

Cat still felt the eyes that would follow her, whenever she walked around Haven, heard the whispered blessings, still felt the weight of them. She tried to hold her head up, to at least look like someone who deserved the attention.

They had brought a rather big bundle of herbs from their travels. Elfroot, spindleweed, blood lotus, embrium, and even some Crystal Grace. Cat carried the bundle with Mahonan trailing beside her. He offered to help, but she was determined to carry it herself to Adan’s cabin.

It wasn’t heavy, just awkward, the herbs laid out in rows and separated with burlap so that they could dry.

She tried to open the cabin door herself, but finally gave in. “Mahonan, would you get the door?”

“Oh, what was that, Little Bit? Do you need my help?”

“Please?”

He laughed. “Of course.”

Inside, they found Adan hard at work, crushing something in a pestle.

“Hello, Adan! We come bearing gifts!” Cat announced.

“Look at that, you managed to survive.” He said over his shoulder, focusing on his task. “What’ve you got?”

Cat flopped the burlap bundle down on the floor near him, spreading out her arms like she was presenting it. “Ta-da! Herbs fresh-ish from the Storm Coast and the Hinterlands!”

“Picked all of those yourself, did you?”

“Well, a lot of them. Solas helped. A few of the scouts picked a few.”

Adan paused what he was doing, kneeling down to take a closer look. Pulling out some elfroot, he sniffed it, rubbing it between his fingers. “I guess this will work.”
Cat tried not to look disappointed, but it was difficult.

Adan stood up and patted her shoulder, chuckling. “Not bad, Herald.”

Cat brightened at his words, smiling up at him. “You’re welcome, Adan!”

“Now get out of my way, unless you are here to work.” He gruffly. But Cat saw that he still kept the flower she got him, up on a shelf above his workstation.

“Not today. I’m watching this one.” Mahonan said. “No doubt you missed my winning personality.”

“Like a black eye.” Adan replied.

“Whatever you say, Adan.” Mahonan laughed. “We’ll get out of your hair.” Mahonan was smirking, staring at the man’s bald head.

“Out!”

“Come on, Mahonan, before you get us both into trouble.” Cat said, pulling her trouble-making friend towards the door. “And it’s mean to make fun of people’s hair.”

*I need to find Evie and Josephine.*

**

Cat was dancing with the spirits, playing in the snow one minute then fields of wildflowers in another. She accepted things in the Fade so quickly, willing to learn and curious about all he would tell her.

Could tell her.

There were moments, in the Fade, watching over her, that Solas believed the world was good, that if it could produce one such as this, it must be.

It made him question his plans, but no one person could make up for the world as it was.

Cat wanted to understand her visions more, test her abilities. Even after being overwhelmed on the Coast, she still wanted to try. She shared her feelings, thoughts about what she experienced freely, trusting him and the spirits with it all.

It was humbling.

But he didn’t have all night to watch her. He needed to meet with his other friends, to consult with Wisdom and the older spirits.

Mahonan agreed to watch her, he was even joining the dance. His trepidation had waned after several nights here in the Fade, whatever learned fear he had of it slipping when confronted with the reality he experienced with the da’len.

Among that group, a trained Dalish mage and two spirits, there was little chance of something more powerful and dangerous finding them, this close to the Breach.

She would be safe.

Sparing a last glance at the group, Solas walked through the Fade, into familiar paths.
There was much to do and morning would come all too soon.

**

Varric had a make-shift desk set up outside his tent, rough-hewn wood on top of crates, but it worked for their purposes.

Sunflower was pouring over the book he had for her, studying the letters and copying them on some loose paper. They were hesitant, carefully drawn to accurately get each detail. She was making good progress, picking it up faster once she got the letters down. Her sentences were getting more complex and she was probably better than she gave herself credit, she just needed the confidence.

“Varric, is this word wyvern?” Cat asked, pointing to the word.

“Yup. It is. Good catch.” The book in question was the Tale of the Champions, which Varric had finished telling her the story of on the way back to Haven.

She sighed. “Why do the w, y, and v have to be so similar? And then all scrunched together?”

“It’s more fun that way.” He said, laughing.

“So you say.” Cat grumbled.

“So, have you written in your journal yet?” He asked.

“Not yet. My writing isn’t good enough.” She said.

“It doesn’t have to be perfect. And hey, you could write in that chicken scratch language you know. That way no one else could read it.”

“It isn’t chicken scratch.” Cat sighed. “I wish I knew what language it is. No one even recognizes the script.”

“Maybe it is a secret language.” Varric offered. “Maybe you are actually a famous spy.”

Cat smiled at him. “Really? What would my secret spy name be?”

“Sunflower.”

“That’s your nickname for me, not a codename! What kind of spy would be called Sunflower?”

“Well, no one would suspect it. Very handy for a spy.”

“I guess Leliana goes by Sister Nightingale and that isn’t intimidating sounding.” Cat considered. Varric disagreed with that statement, but let her continue musing. Perhaps he could no longer separate the reputation from the title. “I still think it should be something cooler, like Kid Midnight. No wait, the Raven.”

“Want me to start calling you the raven?”

“No! That would give it away!” She said, looking down at her papers. “And hey, stop distracting me! I’m learning here!”

“Sorry, sorry!” He chuckled.
She was doing alright.

Varric looked at the Breach, that weird-ass thing in the sky, then back at the girl hunched over her letters.

Shit. He hoped she would be able to stay alright.

**

“My dear, please keep your chin up, not pointed down at the ground.” Vivienne instructed.

“Yes, Lady Vivienne.” Cat said with a sigh. It was her first lesson with the Madame de Fer and it was not going well. She was trying to teach Cat to cast Winter’s Grasp, a simple spell, but one that was alluding Cat. Spells that were spirit or fire based came easier, more natural, whereas, her attempts at storm or winter spells had thus far yielded naught but frustration.

But Vivienne was adamant that she could do it.

Vivienne taught her movements, words to help, strict steps to the spell. Cat just felt silly doing it.

It didn’t help that she had an audience. Not an active one, Cullen saw to that, yelling at the scouts and recruits who lingered to get on with their work. But every passing messenger, villager, and soldier was watching, even the Commander sometimes stopped briefly to watch. Vivienne wanted their lesson here on the training field, a little way from the soldiers training, but still within the public eye.

They had started with the spells she knew and then moved to one she didn’t.

“One must focus on the magic, bend it to you and create the desired effect, in perfect precision.” Vivienne said. “How do you call forth fire?”

Cat considered. Fire was just there, like it was her magic, an integral part of it. “It just is my magic. It feels like fire.”

“Very well, then.” Vivienne said. “This can help newer mages find the path. Take your magic and imagine the fire turning to ice, from hot to cold. It is not the best way, but try it.”

Cat sighed, but did as Vivienne bid, closing her eyes and focusing on the magic. Feeling the fire, just under the surface, something that in theory was hot, but just felt pleasantly warm. Concentrating, no ice was summoned, but the flames did feel cold.

Cat opened her eyes and told Vivienne. The woman considered, before opening her hand palm up to Cat. “Place your hand on top of mine and try again, my dear.”

Cat nodded. Vivienne’s hand was cold, startlingly so. Cat’s eyes lids opened quickly again, before hurriedly squeezing them closed. She focused, pulling on the now cooled flames of her magic. As she did, Vivienne’s hand grew colder, her magic brushing against Cat’s flames. It was gentle, but insistent. Feeling for the difference, reaching out to touch it with her own magic, something clicked. The fire shifted and Cat answered Vivienne’s magic with her own wintery touch.

Opening her eyes, her hand had little bits of frost, barely there, but it counted.

“I did it!” Cat said, looking up at Vivienne.

“A celebration is a bit premature. But you are on the right path.” Vivienne conceded, granting her a
subtle approving nod. “Now, since you have the thread, try the incantation again.”

Cat held back her sigh and got into position.

She was making progress.

Slowly, but surely.

**

The Herald rode her horse around the pen. Her seat was solid and she was comfortable with most basic maneuvers. Cullen was currently teaching her to get her horse to sidestep.

Dennet trained his horses well, his reputation was well deserved, so the mare was capable. It was just a matter of the Herald signaling her steed properly.

“You need to use your legs, you can’t rely on the reins.” Cullen instructed.

“I’m trying, Cullen!” She shouted from the far side of the pen. He watched her make another pass and try to signal again, pressing her right calf against her mare’s side, pulling the reins just slightly back.

The mare half stepped to the left, before shaking her head with a snort and trotting on.

“Better. Take another pass.”

He leaned against the fence. Cullen really should delegate this responsibility. There were others just as or even better suited to the role, but when he suggested it to Leliana, she vetoed it, saying it would be good for him and the Herald to bond.

There really were other things he should be doing.

Another pass and this time, the blue roan mare took several steps to the left, crossing elegantly before continuing on.

It would do.

“Allright. That is enough for the day.”

“Okay, Commander.” The girl said, she trotted the mare over and brought her to a halt near him, slipping off her back and softly dropping to the ground.

He hesitated before leaving, when just moments ago he wished to be elsewhere. He knew Garwin could take care of things from here, but it seemed wrong to just leave things like this. “Good work, Herald.” He finally said.

She turned from stroking her mare’s nose, to smile at him. “Thank you for the lesson.”

Cullen nodded to her, uncertain what else to do, so he turned and escaped to his tent.

The headaches were mild today, thank the Maker for small mercies.

It was hours later, while he was finishing some reports, when there was a hesitant knock on the post of his tent. Cullen looked up and saw the Herald, timidly waiting to be acknowledged.

“Yes, Herald?”
“I need to talk to you.”

“Where is your guard?” He asked, standing. He had no great wish to be alone with her. Irrational, perhaps, but old wounds heal slowly, learned fears linger.

“Um, around.” She waved her hand vaguely in the direction of the forge, before grimacing, her ears twitching. “Okay, I ran over here without telling him, but I had a vision and I needed to speak with you.”

Dread. He was feeling dread.

*What had she seen this time? Something from Kirkwall? More at Kinloch? Maker...*

“It’s about the Templars at Therinfal Redoubt.”

*Oh.*

“What is it?” He was thrown, but quickly refocused.

“The Templars are in danger. Something isn’t right.” She said. “I…I know we are leaning towards approaching the mages. Gathering and traveling with the nobles, just to get the Lord Seeker’s attention would take too long. But…there is something very wrong. I’m afraid if we do nothing, something horrible is going to happen.”

“What will happen?” Cullen asked, his hand tightening over the pommel of his sword in reflex.

“I don’t know. I have been meditating, trying to summon visions and this afternoon, well, I saw the keep, or at least I think it was. I saw templars there, but some of them were wrong. I don’t know how else to explain it.” She had this faraway look, like she was trying to see the keep from here. “But many of them weren’t wrong, they still had a chance.” The girl shivered. “The worst was the Lord Seeker.”

The girl’s visions had been startlingly accurate thus far, uncomfortably so. She could mark out locations on maps, know things about people she had never met. Could he ignore her warnings?

*No, he couldn’t.*

“I will make some inquiries about the situation.” Cullen said.

“Could you warn them? Ser Barris, I think that was his name, the Templar who was sympathetic to us in Val Royeaux, you could check with Cassandra about that.” She rubbed her arm. “Tell them to get out of there? I don’t even know if he would listen, but we have to try.”

“We could warn them.” Cullen started, thinking it over. “But it is unlikely that he or any of the Templars will listen to us with no evidence. It will just appear we are trying to underhandedly recruit some of the templars out from under the Lord Seeker, spread division among their ranks.” Cullen said, rubbing his temples. He tried to imagine how he would have responded if someone had warned him against Meredith…He would have scoffed and thrown the message out.

“Then tell him we don’t care where they go, they just need to get away from there!” Cat’s voice was tinged with panic. “I’m afraid if they don’t…they are all going to die.” The last words were whispered out as she hugged herself.

“Herald.” Cullen paused. He had to set aside his misgivings, if even for a moment, so he could comfort the girl, obviously in distress. He wasn’t trained to comfort children and it had been years
since he had to care for his younger siblings. “Hope is not lost yet.” He awkwardly patted her shoulder, still hesitant to make physical contact with her. “We might still choose to approach the Templars and find out the cause of the threat you sensed. I will explore other options, should we not.”

The girl seemed reassured by his words, her eyes reflecting a soul that seemed older than her years, heavy and strained. “Alright. I trust you, Commander Cullen. Thank you for listening to me. I hope you can convince them.” She said, before ducking back out of his tent.

Another problem with no clear solution. Cullen still cared what happened to the Order. How could he not, when they had been home and family and purpose for so much of his life? Yet now the Herald was having dire visions of undetermined doom for the Templars that remained.

He rubbed his temple, taking a deep breath, before exiting his tent to look for the Knight-Captain.

“Rylen!”

“Aye, Commander?” He called back, from his place among the recruits.

“I need your opinion on something.” Cullen said when he came near. “And, can you get one of the templars that survived the Conclave? Their perspective may be needed.”

“Alright, Sir.” Rylen said. “Lysette would probably be willing.”

“Get her, please.”

Rylen saluted, before leaving to retrieve Lysette.

Perhaps together, they could figure out a way to convince the Templars that they were in danger from their commanders.

*Maker help them.*

**

Bull and some of his Chargers had claimed a corner of the tavern. It was tight, but lively. The Inquisition had grown enough that some tables had been set up outside for overflow, but Krem had claimed a table inside.

Just a single table, so most of the boys were outside. The Chargers could almost fill this tavern themselves. They had, in fact, the afternoon they had arrived.

The Herald, or more accurately, Varric had a table reserved by the fire. Their group was playing cards, even the little one. Her tiny hands held her cards, barely. And from the reactions, she wasn’t doing too bad.

Iron Bull was content to watch for now, didn’t want to ruffle anyone’s feathers yet and Kaaras Adaar was with them.

Lots of Vashoth didn’t like the Qun, but with Adaar, it seemed personal. There was a story there, Bull was sure. Usually was with people, everyone had a past. Shit, on the coast, Bull wasn’t sure Adaar wouldn’t take him on right there on the beach. Would have been messy, but anyone’s guess who would have won that particular battle. Maybe they could spar sometimes, work out a bit of tension…
Bull took another half drink from his tankard. The ale was piss-poor, but it was what they had. Not the worst he ever drank, but far from the best.

And then there was the red-haired dwarf that followed him from the Coast. Not that he actually saw her, unless she meant him to. Didn’t even know it was her until they reached Haven. Just a sense that someone was watching, a feeling he learned to trust.

Cadash, he found out her name, sat at the Herald’s table, but even playing cards, he knew she was watching. Red hair, daggers, quick eyes, and steady hands. She would make a good Ben-Hassrath agent.

“Chief, you’re quiet tonight.” Krem said, standing with his back to the wall, on Bull’s left. Bull had to turn his head to see him. Krem thought he was being sneaky, but Bull knew he was covering his blind spot. His lieutenant felt he owned Bull a debt for the eye he lost.

He didn’t, but Bull let him think he was being sly. Kept him happy.

“Just thinking, Krem-puff.”

“Got company coming over, chief.” Krem said, motioning with his mug.

Bull turned back around and found the Herald approaching, hands behind her back and an inquisitive look in her eyes. Barely reached his knee when he stood, she was so tiny. Never really was sure what to do with kids, wasn’t his job, his role.

And then there was that weird shit that happened on the beach that didn’t make any sense.

“Hiyah, Bull. Krem, how’s it going?”

“Fine, fine. Boys’ve got drinks and we have a job.” Bull said.

“Glad to hear it.” She was curious, her eyes flicking between the Chargers around the table. “Are you going to introduce me?”

“Sure. We’ve got Rocky and Skinner there. And over there is Stitches, Dalish, and Grim.” Each Charger raised their cup when named. “Crazy bunch of assholes, but they’re mine.”

“It is nice to meet you all!” The girl said, raising her voice to be heard.

“A little one, aren’t you?” Skinner said.

“Just a wee da’len, you are.” Dalish cooed. “A little mageling.”

“I am, I guess.” Cat said, a little shyly.

Dalish and Skinner drew her in closer and talked with her. Dalish convincing her with a wink that she herself wasn’t a mage, which made the Herald laugh. Skinner started to tell her an joke, probably inappropriate, but ah, what did he know?

Bull felt his presence before he heard him, his fellow Qunari sidling up, Krem tensing beside him.

“What are you doing here, Bull.” Adaar asked. He knew he didn’t mean the tavern and he wasn’t going to beat around the bush.

Bull gave him a disarming smile. “I’m not here to cause trouble for the Inquisition, nor for the kid. Just here to watch and report back. And hit things.”
“Fine.” It clearly wasn’t. Adaar stared at him, warning him. “Tread carefully. If the Herald comes to any harm because of you or your work with the Ben-Hassrath, you will answer to me.”

“Understood.” A truce of sorts.

“Little bit, c’mon. Time for bed.” Adaar called to the Herald.

“But Kaaras! They were going to teach me the Chargers song!” She pleaded with him. He apparently was defenseless against her.

“Alright, but bed after that.”

“Of course, Kaaras!” She smiled, turning back to the two elves and Stitches, who had joined them.

“Best way to learn it is just to sing it.” Krem said, raising his cup and started the anthem.

“No one can beat the Chargers 'cause we'll hit you where it hurts. Unless you know a tavern with loose cards and looser skirts!”

It was pitchy, bawdy, and loud, the boys outside picking up the song as well.

“For every bloody battlefield, we'll gladly raise a cup. No matter what tomorrow holds, our horns be pointing up!”

They let out a cheer at the final word, everyone raising a cup.

His crazy bunch of assholes.

**

Why did one of the holiest sites in Thedas have to be up a frozen mountain in the middle of nowhere?

Dorian cursed to himself. It was summer, yet halfway up, he ran into snow. It is pretty in theory, but Dorian would never be fond of it, the white clumpy stuff that left ones’ shoes wet and cold.

Miserable.

As he followed after the messenger Alexius sent out, after Felix tipped him to it, he grew from dislike to outright hatred of the frozen stuff.

Felix…he did worry about his old friend. Joke as he might, Felix was ill, the kind of ill you don’t recover from.

Dorian pulled his cloak closer, again, pressing on. He had to be getting closer.

A few hours later, what seemed like an eternity, he saw the lights which marked the border of Haven.

It was a squalid thing. Tents and shanty cabins. Less than a thousand people and even from here, he could see that many were not soldiers.

This was the mighty Inquisition?

Well, no matter. Alexius was concerned with them and they did hold power, fledgling though it
might be.

Walking through the settlement proved a trying experience. He was met with stares, or rather glares.

Charming really, made one feel very welcome.

But no one outright stopped him.

Now, he just needed to come up with an appropriately dramatic entrance. How else would he convince them that he was invaluable to their cause?

**

Solas watched from afar. Vivienne was teaching the Herald again today and she insisted on her training happening in the field, where others could see her.

“They will fear the magic less if they see it controlled, not hidden away.” She advised.

Not an unreasonable sentiment, but Cat preferred her training away from prying eyes and Solas was of the mind that her wishes should be followed in this.

They had argued, briefly, about who should be in charge of the Herald’s magical education, but the girl decided for them, when she suggested she could learn from them both. Neither he nor Vivienne were perfectly happy with it, but how could they argue that point?

Therefore, they had a tentative agreement to share the responsibility.

Solas found he felt possessive around the girl and he had to stop and force himself to consider if it was for her welfare, that she not be limited to the teachings of a Circle mage, or if it was more about keeping control of the mark on her hand.

Fenedhis! He could not say either way and that left him cross with himself. His greater goal required the mark, at least until he could retrieve his orb. But was he really so callous that he cared not for the girl whose life he had unknowingly ruined?

Guilt prickled at his conscience, surprising almost that he could feel more guilt than he already did, for what he had enabled the world to become.

Perhaps it was both then. Care and control combined.

Not the most flattering conclusion, but most likely an honest one.

Out on the field, Cat was actually making headway with the frost spell, under Vivienne’s tutelage, better than either he or Mahonan had been able to accomplish. It had been literal ages since he had studied that branch of magic in any real depth, so it shouldn’t shock him that another would be more suited to the task.

But the fact still rankled.

It hurt his pride, for all the irony that entailed.

**

Leliana checked the maps again, making sure every detail was correct. That all her contingencies were in place, meticulously marking off each one mentally.
Things were moving quickly. Their numbers growing and the chance to close the Breach becoming an actual possibility.

The Iron Bull and the Chargers were a blessing, having an influx of almost 50 trained mercenaries to bolster their ranks. Already they were accepted in Haven, gossip flying about how polite they were, Bull himself drawing more than one interested glance. Well, several more than just glances. If the situation was different, she might have been one of them.

But she didn’t have time for such things nor did she fully trust him. His Ben-Hassrath reports were interesting, but Leliana was still verifying how accurate they were. She would wait to make her decision about their usefulness until then.

The other new recruit, ‘Warden Blackwall,’ so he called himself. He was a mystery.

He wasn’t actually a Grey Warden, of course, that much was evident from the clear and healthy look to his skin, something no Warden of such advanced years of service would bear, and the brief talk Leliana had with him when he arrived.

But, he seemed a good man, if not an honest one.

She would let it be for now.

They had sought him out, after all, the Herald herself had asked him to join the Inquisition. He did not seem the kind of man to be able nor inclined to pull off the elaborate manipulations needed for that to have been his plan. Cassandra reported he was good with a sword, and warden or not, even saying that they had a warden would help the Inquisition’s reputation.

Only wardens would likely prove him false and they had all disappeared. Even Tabris and her recruits. Leliana was still uncertain if it was related, her friend had started her own mission before the other wardens started disappearing.

Whether they made use of the Warden treaties were another matter, one that Leliana still weighed in her mind, the chances of their deception coming to light. It might be worth the risk.

And then there were the mages and the strange magics that hovered over Redcliffe.

They had decided just this morning to accept the Magister’s invitation, with some revisions of their own. They would not walk blindly into a trap, not when they had an ace up their sleeve.

It was over ten years ago, since Leliana had followed her friend through the tunnels at Redcliffe, when the dead had risen up in a tragedy of poor choices and good intentions. It seemed longer sometimes.

“Um, excuse me, Leliana, do you have a moment?” The Herald asked, breaking Leliana from her reminiscence.

“Of course, Herald. What do you need?” Her guard had not accompanied her inside, so just the girl stood by the table, rocking back on her heels and looking up at Leliana nervously.

“Well, I’ve had a vision, of sorts.” She started. “It isn’t very clear, but I think there is going to be an attack on Haven. At some point.”

“What kind of attack?”

“A big one? As in the entire settlement is destroyed kind of attack.” Cat said.
“What did you see specifically?”

“I saw an army marching over the mountain, heard the roar of a dragon, and then everything went white and then dark.” She said. “I know it’s not much to go on, but I had to tell you.”

“No, you were right to bring this to me.” Leliana leaned back against her desk, hands to her chin, considering. “Was the Breach still in the sky?”

“I…no, it wasn’t.” Cat said, suddenly brighter. “The Breach was gone! That means we can seal it! And the danger is far off!”

Perhaps.

“Are there any other details you can remember, even a small thing?” Leliana prompted. If an attack was coming, all information was of paramount importance. Anything to indicate a timeline or the party responsible, so they could prepare.

Cat chewed her lip, pulling out a journal, opening it and reading. “I tasted iron, blood. I felt the ground shake. I saw something briefly glowing red. Running through Haven, buildings on fire.”

“Anything else?” Leliana tried to read the page upside down, but the words were illegible to her.

“I don’t think so, it was very quick. I hadn’t thought about the Breach, I was so focused on everything else, but it definitely wasn’t there.” Cat said. “Do we have a plan to escape, if needed? It…was a really big army.”

Perhaps Leliana was too quick to trust the Herald’s visions. And yet, she traveled with the Warden all those years ago because of her own vision. She did believe that the Maker could speak to those that were willing to listen.

“We will make arrangements. My scouts will search out for this army and who might be leading it.” Leliana said, a dozen plans already spinning in her head, messages to send, contacts to speak with. They would need to have escape routes in place, in case they cannot prevent an attack.

“I’ll just go then.”

“Wait.” Leliana almost forgot she was still there. “Thank you for telling me, Herald. This information will likely save many lives.”

The Herald looked nervously optimistic. “Of course, Leliana. I thought you would be the best one to tell.” She shifted. “I’m trying to get better at controlling my visions. Hopefully I will have more information for you soon.”

“Whatever information you can provide, we will use.” Leliana said briskly. She watches the girl leave, out of the corner of her vision.

So small.

So young.

Was she ever truly that young herself? Andraste, it was so long ago, a lifetime away from where she was now.

But such musings would be for naught. They had been given an opportunity and Leliana would take every advantage of it.
In Hushed Whispers

Chapter Summary

Cat and Dorian are thrown into the dark future, uncovering the horrors to come if they fail.

Chapter Notes

Warning: This chapter has graphic depictions of blood and horrific things and mentions of traumatic events. Just a heads-up, there isn't much fluff to be found in this one.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Bloomingtide 17th

Dear Journal.

We are camped with the Inquisition scouts near the crossroads. Everything is set up. Kaaras, Solas, Varric, and Cassandra will go with me as a distraction. The others are going with Dorian through the tunnels, to surprise the Magister.

I like Dorian and I think we can trust him. Just a feeling, really. The others are wary around him, not sure of his allegiances, so we will see.

But I have this feeling that something is wrong. I haven’t had a vision, but I am so nervous. Trepidatious (I think that’s the word), like I’ve taken a breath and can’t let it out, waiting for something to happen.

I’m going to take some healing potions with me tomorrow, just in case.

**

Dorian kept his confident smile, appearing unflappable, the years made it easy to plaster it on and pretend that he knew what he was doing and had some control of the situation.

Which of course was a lie.

He had tumbled through a time portal, which was terribly exciting, sending his mind rocketing through possibilities of just how Alexius got it to work.

What was not exciting was the tacky decorations that went beyond the obnoxious large dogs into gothic red lyrium spires that even the most pretentious magisters would reject as overdone.

The armed guards were just a lovely touch as well, though they were equally surprised and Dorian was able to end things quickly, not even mussing his clothing.
And then, of course, there was the child. The Herald of Andraste. Who now stood shaking in knee-deep water, clutching her staff wide-eyed and confused. Eyes that now looked to Dorian for answers. Maybe she would be convinced by his smile.

“Where...are we?” The girl asked.

“It’s not simply where-it’s when! Alexius used the amulet as a focus. It moved us through time!” Dorian explained. Well, sort of, he didn’t usually talk to children. He didn’t have any younger siblings – it was a miracle he was conceived, considering his parents hated each other. And his social circles did not include any children, maybe a rare teenage apprentice. Even the slave children were kept out of sight.

“Through time? Magister Alexius can do that?”

Children were basically just small adults, right?

“Normally I would say no. Obviously Alexius had taken his research to exciting new heights. We’ve seen his temporal rifts before. This time we simply...passed through one. Let’s look around, see where the rift took us. Then we can figure out how to get back...if we can.”

“Why would Alexius send us through time?” A good question. The girl was quick, focusing on the important things. That was a relief.

“I believe his original plan was to remove you from time completely. If that happened, you would never have been at the Temple of Sacred Ashes or mangled his Elder One’s plan. I think our surprise in the castle hall made him reckless. He tossed us into the rift before he was ready. I countered it, the magic went wild, and here we are.” Simplified, but basically what happened. He would need a chalkboard and a few reference books to explain his theory on what happened in more detail. Another time. “Make sense?” Dorian asked.

“I guess...it is a lot to process.”

“I don’t even want to think about what this will do to the fabric of the world.” Dorian continued, almost mumbling to himself. “We didn’t ‘travel’ through time so much as punch a hole through it and toss it in the privy.” Seeing the girl’s concerned face, he added, confident smile in place. “But don’t worry. I’m here. I’ll protect you.” She offered him a small smile at his words, before furrowing her brow again.

“What about the others that were with us? Would they have come through, too?”

Dorian considered. “I doubt it was large enough to bring the whole room through. Alexius wouldn’t risk catching himself or Felix in it. They’re probably still where, and when, we left them. In some sense, anyway.”

“Then we get back to them.” The Herald said, nodding. She looked around, eyes taking in the spires of red lyrium. Looking closer, they found some picks and large buckets, dropped by the Venatori they had surprised. “Are they...mining this?”

“That would explain why they were in an empty cell to greet us.” Dorian said.

“That’s...bad. Very bad. There is so much of it.”

Dorian studied the spire nearest them, a few chunks had already been picked off. If he tilted his head and kind of squinted, it almost looked like there was a face in the lyrium...was that a hand there. Why would it...?
“We shouldn’t linger around the red lyrium, Dorian.” The girl said, tugging at his sleeve with a worried look.

“Right. Let’s be off then.” Strange lyrium shards aside, they did have a priority to get back to their own time.

They picked their way through the rubble, giving as wide a berth as possible to the red lyrium. They trudged through water, passing more and more spires, the only sound besides the noise they were making was the streams of water splashing down from cracked holes in the foundation of the prison ceiling. Otherwise, it was eerily quiet.

Dorian would think they would have some prisoners, but perhaps they had been moved, once the cells started growing lyrium? Just how far into the future had they been sent?

They found some stairs and started their ascent upwards, leaving the flooded floor behind. They seem to have landed on the lowest level, deep within the keep. Why the portal spit them out there specifically, Dorian could only guess. Perhaps when he interrupted it…

“What’s that?” The girl asked, tilting her head, listening.

“What? I don’t hear anything.”

“It’s coming from up ahead. I think someone is talking. We should be careful.”

They didn’t go too much further and then Dorian heard it, too. A chanting of sorts, the words getting clearer as they moved closer. A single voice repeating.

“Andraste blessed me, Andraste blessed me…”

“My tears are my sins, my sins, my sins…” The chanting was low, almost stuttered. They rounded a corner and they saw him, the poor bastard, rocking back and forth in a cell, surrounded by red lyrium. His skin was tinted red, like the lyrium was in his blood, making his body almost glow.

“Lysas?! What did they do to you?” The girl cried out and ran up to the cell, reaching out for the man. But his eyes were glazed.

“Andraste guide me, Andraste guide me…”

“Lysas?”

“Andraste blessed me, Andraste blessed me…”

“I don’t think he can hear you, not anymore.” Dorian said. Whoever this fellow was, the girl knew him. Unfortunate, really. For her to see him like this.

“We…we have to get him out!” The girl pleaded.

“Herald, we can’t take him with us.” Dorian said, not unkindly. They couldn’t drag a catatonic chanting elf with them, not if they wanted to survive this. Who knows what else they would encounter on their journey? “If we are successful, he will never be in this cell. Remember that.”

“But…” She was struggling, but she finally nodded, her small hands gripping the bars to the elf’s cell. “I understand.” Before they moved on, she said one last thing to Lysas. “I’ll make sure this doesn’t happen, I promise, Lysas.”

The elf just droned on, oblivious to them, something broken deep, corrupted. Just how was the red
lyrium affecting him? Was it a poison? The proximity making him ill? Affecting his mind? If this was the affect, no wonder they moved most of the prisoners from here. Unless they hadn’t moved the prisoners…no, that couldn’t be it, right?

“Let’s go.” The girl said, shaking Dorian from his thoughts, she was turned away from Dorian, back straight, but he could see her wiping her eyes with her sleeve.

Dorian patted her shoulder. Not sure what else he could do for her.

And he had a sinking feeling it was just going to get worse.

**

Dorian was right.

Of course he was.

The pieces all fell into place when they found the former grand enchanter leaning against the wall of a cell, her lower body engulfed in lyrium. Or rather transformed. Mutated. Used as a distorted garden to harvest the tainted lyrium for who knows what purpose. Something dastardly and ill-conceived, no doubt.

Maker, all those spires they passed were once people…there must have been hundreds of them!

The girl was hanging on, keeping her head up, somehow. It was all Dorian could do to keep from throwing his hands up and screaming, each block of red glowing crystal they passed adding to the horror they faced.

It was easier, in a way, to stay focused when he had an audience. Mustn’t fall to pieces when others were watching, especially a child, he had a reputation to maintain. How Alexius factored into this all…

If it wasn’t for the iron grip the Herald had on her staff, Dorian was sure she would be shaking, after the grim visage of the woman they left behind.

They knew the date, at least. Harvestmere 9:42 Dragon, over a year in the future from where they started.

They needed to find the Spymaster, at Fiona’s insistence, but this place was a maze, some stairways and corridors blocked by Red Lyrium or collapsed completely. They had had to backtrack a few times, encounter another couple of Venatori.

They needed to hurry, before someone realized the guards had disappeared.

Down again, they found themselves in another cell block. Seemed like a dead end, but a voice called out to them. The girl ran before Dorian could even place who the voice belonged to.

“Varric!”

“Andraste’s sacred knickers. You’re alive?” The dwarf, as Dorian could now see, asked, incredulously, reaching out from his cell like he was hallucinating. “How did you escape?”

“We didn’t escape. Alexius sent us into the future.” Dorian explained.

“Sunflower, everything that happens to you is weird. I guess I shouldn’t be surprised.” The dwarf’s voice had a tinny quality to it, no wonder Dorian didn’t recognize it right away.
“Papa Varric…you don’t look so good.” The girl said, her hands gripping onto Varric’s. And he didn’t. He looked like that Lysas fellow, minus the catatonic stare, red shimmering off his body, whatever the transformation process was, it was obviously well along.

“Bite your tongue. I look damn good for a dead man.” Varric said.

“You aren’t dead!” The girl cried.

“The not-dying version of this red lyrium stuff? Way worse. Just saying.” Varric said, reaching his hand up to pat the girl on the head and letting out a rueful laugh. “Sorry, Sunflower.”

“We get to Alexius, and I just might be able to send us back to our own time. Simple, really.” Dorian said. As the man said, in this time, he was as good as dead. They all were, probably, if they didn’t fix this.

“That…may not be as easy as you think.” Varric said. “Alexius is just a servant. His ‘Elder One’ assassinated the empress and led a demon army in a huge invasion of the south. The Elder One rules everything. What’s left of it, anyway. Alexius…is really not the one you need to worry about.”

Perhaps not so simple, then.

“Whoever it is that we worry about, we need to get you out of this cell. Do you know where the key is?” The Herald asked.

“Guards have the keys with them. But, see that chest over there? They put my things in it. My lockpicks should still work.” Varric advised, pointing to a beat-up chest near the door.

It wasn’t even locked, so the girl retrieved the dwarf’s things and quickly enough, he was free. Well, free from the cell at least. The girl made to throw her arms around him, but Varric stopped her. “Not a good idea. I know there’s red lyrium all around, but it’s better if we try to limit your exposure.”

“Alright…”

“Chuckles and the Seeker are still here, I think.”

“They are?! Where?”

“Another cell block, let’s go.”

Geared up, they set out down the hall to another group of rooms.

Entering the cell block, they heard a woman praying.

“The light shall lead her safely through the paths of this world and into the next, for she who trust in the Maker, fire is her water.”

In a startled reply, two voices responded to their party, or rather more accurately, to the girl.

“You’re alive? We saw you die!” The elven mage exclaimed.

“You’ve returned to us! Can it be? Has Andraste given us another chance?” The Seeker shouted.

“Maker forgive me, I failed you, I failed everyone. The end must truly be upon us if the dead return to life.”
“I didn’t die…Dorian and I…we just…um…” The Herald looked at him to fill in the blanks.

“The spell Alexius cast displaced us in time. We weren’t killed. In fact, we just got here, so to speak.” Dorian said. Varric was already working on unlocking the cell doors.

“Can you reverse the process? You could return and obviate the events of the last year. It may not be too late…” Solas said.

“Go back in time? Then…can you make it so that none of this ever took place?” Cassandra responded, a clarity entering her gaze, over the red haze.

“According to Dorian, yes.” The Herald said. Not the most confident statement, but it would do. Dorian was making it up as he went along, hoping the amulet still existed and that he could figure it out…what was he thinking, of course he could figure it out!

“None of this will happen. Andraste please let this be true.” The Seeker said, now freed from her cell, Varric was quicker getting Solas’s cell unlocked.

“You both are infected with red lyrium, too, then.” Cat asked in a whisper with sad eyes.

“We are dying, da’len. But no matter. If this can be undone, they can all be saved! This world is an abomination. It must never come to pass.” Solas said, before stepping out of the cell, nodding to the dwarf in thanks.

“Yeah, yeah. We’re a bunch of optimists. Saving the world should be easy, right?” Varric said.

“The guards have said that Magister Alexius barricaded himself in the throne room.” Cassandra told them. She had retrieved her weapons and armor from another chest, she was strapping on her breastplate, renewed hope giving her strength, even as her body was eroding into something else.

Solas nodded, picking up his staff, which had been left hanging on the wall. “If this madness is to be undone, we must focus on Alexius.”

“Well, the Gang’s all back together. What could go wrong now?” Varric said, cheerfully.

_Ha! So many things…_

**

They found Leliana in a room, a horrible, horrible room, across from another one where they had fought off Venatori, too late to help the Mother they were torturing. They had been so close to saving her, they heard her last screams.

The room Leliana was in smelled like blood and decay, there were knives and chains, racks and all manner of things Cat didn’t want to think about.

There was nothing good here.

Leliana was a sunken in version of herself, the tip of her nose gone, her skin greying, her voice rougher, like it had been scraped raw from screaming. She was just in her smallclothes when they found her, her wrists clasped in shackles, dangling from the ceiling, angry cuts across her body that wept bloody trails down her withered skin.

And she was pure bitter resolve, shrugging off all concern, gathering her things from a chest, refusing to answer their questions and snapping at Dorian. She had killed her tormenter when they
had entered the room, broke his neck with her legs when he had turned to face the intruders. How
she had the strength to do it, Cat didn’t know, but that she was so changed, left Cat distraught,
uncertain what to do. She couldn’t imagine what Leliana had gone through, didn’t want to.

Cat had to turn away, eyes seeking anything to focus on that wasn’t this torture chamber of horrors.
Her gaze fell on a large skull set up above a desk…not just any skull, a skull with curled black
horns, almost ram-like…horns she knew well.

“Kaaras…” She gasped out the name, hands trembling to cover her mouth, chipped fingernails
digging into her skin. She couldn’t look away from the empty sockets that once held her friend’s
golden eyes. What had they done to him? How could this be real?

But it was real, so horrifyingly real that she dropped to her knees and started retching, it was finally
too much, too much darkness and evil. Her friends were dead or dying, broken in spirit, mind, and
body.

Cat had had no visions, no impressions since they fell through the portal. Whether that was a
blessing or not, she didn’t know. The reality was harsh enough, if she started seeing visions of what
happened, she would go mad, she just knew she would.

Before the portal had opened, Cat had gotten the sense, like someone warning her, pleading with
her, to stay strong. Perhaps it was just wishful thinking. But she desperately wished for a sign, a
reassurance that everything was going to work out, that this future wouldn’t have to be, that Dorian
could reverse it.

“Shit, I didn’t know what had happened to him. I’m sorry, Sunflower.” Varric said. He patted her
shoulder, not daring to get closer. His voice had a weird echoing quality, like it was distorted. All
her companions who bore the lyrium poisoning shared this quality.

“Da’len, look away.” Solas advised.

“Herald, please.” Cassandra bid her to exit the room, but Cat felt the vacant dead stare of her fallen
guardian follow her out of the room. She wanted to blot out all memories of what she had seen in
there, scrub it away clean. But the more she wanted it gone, the more the images surfaced, taunting
her.

She had asked if they knew what happened to the Inquisition, to her friends. They had shared
glances, but refused to answer her, Solas cautioning that the knowledge would do no good. Now…
she understood. If this is what happened to Kaaras, to Leliana…she didn’t want to think about what
the others had gone through.

Their group started onward, Cat shuffling in besides Dorian. She was so used to being with the
others, being able to lean on them, but they kept their distance, red-rimmed eyes sad and heavy.
Leliana was hardened, no spark of kindness, of light left, she just shouldered her quiver and
pressed-on.

“Dorian?”

“Yes, what can I do for you?” He asked brightly. He was a light in the darkness, a candle of hope, a
spark against the terror.

“…can I hold your hand, please?” His smile faltered, she thought the question might have caught
him unawares.

“Of course, Herald.” He held out his hand and Cat gently grasped it, giving him a shaky smile of
her own. His palm was warm and soft, an anchor against everything else.

Maybe he would take some comfort from her, too.

**

It was a mess.

Kaffas.

“He lost Felix long ago and didn’t even notice. Oh, Alexius…” Dorian said, looking down at the remains of his mentor. He must have lost his grip on reality months ago, living off of tattered false hope, magic, and paranoia. Felix wasn’t even Felix anymore, just a walking corpse that Alexius couldn’t let go of.

“It will be okay, Dorian. We’ll make it right.” The Herald, Cat, said. Here he was mourning a friend who might still be saved, while the girl comforted him, after all she had seen, all that had happened to her.

They were all injured, the healing potions the girl had used up before they had reached Alexius, dealing with demons, rifts in the shattered veil, and Venatori. The others they had gathered, they were prepared to die, accepting it with grace, with a clear focus that their lives might grant Thedas another chance.

“I suppose that’s true.” Dorian said, patted down Alexius for what they sought. He found it, such a little thing. “This is the same amulet he used before. I think it’s the same one we made in Minrathous. That’s a relief.” As he ran his thumb over it, his confidence grew. “Give me an hour to work out the spell he used, and I should be able to reopen the rift.”

“An hour? That’s impossible! You must go now!” Leliana exclaimed. Her words were portents, it would seem, as a dragon roared above them, shaking the foundation of the keep and sending bits of stone skittering.

“The Elder One.” Leliana said, resigned.

“You cannot stay here.” Solas said, his eyes burning with purpose, looking to the Herald. Varric and Seeker Pentaghast shared a look, nodding to each other.

“We will hold the outer door. When they get past us, it will be your turn, Leliana.” Cassandra said, unsheathing her sword and readying her shield.

“What?! No! There had to be something else we can do!” The Herald cried.

“Look at us. We’re already dead. The only way we live is if this day never comes.” Leliana stated. Then staring down Dorian, she added. “Cast your spell. You have as much time as I have arrows.”

Each of the three bid the Herald good bye, with a wave or a salute. The girl choked back a sob and raised her hand as well.

“See you soon, Sunflower.” Varric said, as the large enchanted door swung shut.

Kaffas. He could not waste their sacrifice.

**

Time seemed to drag on, each moment an eternity. Leliana stood vigil before the door, the last
barrier between them. Dorian was working furiously with the amulet, muttering and sending off spurts of magic.

If Cat could, she would help, but she feared distracting him more, so she was stuck, watching and waiting. She was injured, but it seemed unimportant, the pain a faraway thing as she worried.

The journey to get to this room was hard, watching her friends take hit after hit for her, using their bodies as shields. She tried to keep everyone under barriers, but the rifts produced so many demons, something about how when the veil was shattered, but not fully dissipated, made the rifts stronger. Solas started to explain and then trailed off, as if he didn’t have the energy, or the will to continue. This more than the red pallor signaled how back the Red Lyrium was.

Cat had to use more offensive spells than she ever had before, sending fireballs and winter’s grasp as much as barriers. Once, in the thick of things, three demons managed to get around her, her companions pressed back in their own battles. She panicked, one of the demon’s swipes catching the side of her head before she ducked down and screamed, sending a shock through the fade.

It was an instinctive use of the spirit spell, Mindblast, Solas said. It worked to fling the demons back and give Cassandra and Dorian a chance to redirect the demon’s attention and finish them off. She had to be careful with that one, though, because it would affect friend as well as foe around her.

Cat could hear the sounds of the fighting on the other side of the door, muffled, but there. Demon screeches and the clanging of steel. Solas, Cassandra, and Varric were out there alone, buying them time to escape.

“Kaffas.” Dorian muttered. Cat glanced back to see the amulet suspended between Dorian’s hands, faltering as if the magic wasn’t quite catching. He had sweat across his brow, his concentration hyper-focused on the task.

A loud roar made Cat whip her head back to the door, seeing something impact against it, the stone bowing inward.

“Though Darkness closes, I am shielded by flame.” Leliana recited, drawing her bow. Cat held her breath as the door crashed open under the next assault.

Cassandra was thrown in, her body rolling, her sword lost, but her shield still on her arm. She didn’t get back up and Cat could see that her eyes stared lifelessly upwards.

Cat wished she knew a blessing for her, wished she had paid more attention.

Her eyes went back to the door, Leliana’s arrows dropping Venatori and demons, but there were so many of them. Cat wanted to look away, but she kept seeing more details, each burned into her mind.

Varric’s body was impaled on the door, a spear right through his chest, Bianca long gone. Solas wasn’t in sight, but she could see his broken staff, the distinctive top lying on the floor.

They were all gone. They all died for her.

“Andraste guide me. Maker, take me to your side.” With every arrow, every movement, Leliana continued her prays, the lines flowing as she dodged and attacked. Out of arrows, she used her bow as a staff, hitting and tripping them up, until it broke and she pulled a dagger, slashing, using any advantage she had.
But she was one woman against a horde.

A large Venatori caught Leliana’s struggling body in a vice-like grip, picking her off the ground.

_I have to do something!_

Dorian’s hand clamped on her shoulder, keeping her from running to stop them, to save Leliana.

“You move and we all die!” He shouted, the portal crackling behind them.

Cat let Dorian pull her back, but her eyes stayed on Leliana, who offered her a smile, the first she had seen on the spymaster since they found her, her eyes flickering with hope, before a demon raked their talon’s through her abdomen and the fire in her eyes flickered out.

That was the last thing Cat saw before the portal closed around her.

**

The shockwave from the first portal had sent Cassandra to her knees. At least that is what it looked like, opening in a swirling mass of magic and dragging the Herald and the Tevinter mage through it.

Gone in a second. Before she could react.

Kaaras was yelling at the Magister, drawing his sword, as Cassandra herself drew hers, only her years of training keeping her from shaking.

_Maker help them, the Herald…she was gone. Andraste, no…_

The answer to her unspoken prayer came immediately, another portal forming, spitting out the Herald and mage, though worse for wear. Cloths torn and bloodied. The Herald was clutching at her side, a black eye forming, her right ear clipped and bleeding. The Tevinter mage was carrying a burn across his arm, his appearance decidedly disheveled, his light-colored clothing painted in reds, greys, and blacks.

_Maker, what had happened?_

Cassandra’s grip tightened on her pommel, as Dorian grinned widely and said to the Magister. “You’ll have to do better than that.”

The Magister crumpled at that, all bluster and confidence gone as he fell to his knees.

“You need to surrender.” The Herald said, her voice shaky, dazed, but her eyes boring into the Magister’s, a steel to them. Kaaras was already there beside her, his sword pointed at the magister, not trusting the Herald that close to him.

“There is no point extending this charade. Felix…” Alexius said, reaching for his son.

“It’s going to be all right, Father.” Felix said, taking his father’s hand.

“You’ll die.” The man cried, in a tortured voice. Cassandra felt a drop of sympathy for the man, pressed to extremes for his son. It did not excuse his actions, but at least explained them.

“Everyone dies.” Felix said.

Cassandra signaled to some of the scouts and they took Alexius into custody.
“Well, I’m glad that’s over with!” Dorian said, with more cheerfulness than the situation warranted. Though it was a sentiment Cassandra shared. Whatever this was, it was over.

Any retort they might have had for him was broken by the sound of marching, the distinctive, repetitive clink of metal against metal heralding the entrance of the royal Ferelden guard and right behind them, Queen Anora Theirin.

“Grand Enchanter Fiona.” The Queen said, voice clipped and accusing. She was adorned in Ferelden finery, armor part of the ensemble, a simple circlet over her golden hair. She was unarmed, but that didn’t make her any less imposing.

“Queen Anora!” The Grand Enchanter said, wincing and approaching her hesitantly.

“When I granted your mages sanctuary, I thought it was understood that they would not force my people from their homes.”

“Your majesty, let me assure you, we never intended any of this…” Fiona tried to explain.

“Your intentions ceased to matter when my people were threatened. I am rescinding my offer of sanctuary. You and your followers will leave Ferelden at once.” Anora declared.

“But…we have hundreds who need protection! Where will we go?” Fiona asked.

“The Inquisition still needs mages. You could join us. That’s…why we came here.” The Herald said, her voice tired, but she walked forward, to stand between the Queen and Grand Enchanter, Adaar an imposing shadow behind her.

“And what are the terms of this arrangement?” Fiona asked, to their group.

“Hopefuly better than what Alexius gave you. The Inquisition is better than that, yes?” Dorian said, tilting his head as he posed the question.

“They have lost all possible supporters. The Inquisition is their only remaining chance for freedom.” Solas responded. Not an answer, an observation.

“I’ve known a lot of mages. They can be loyal friends if you let them. Friends who make bad decisions, but still, loyal.” Varric added.

“I would conscript them. They’ve proven what they’ll do, given too much freedom.” Cassandra said. Far too much chaos, when they needed order.

“It seems we have little choice but to accept whatever you offer.” Fiona said, resigned to the fate that they would decide, taking Cassandra’s word as the decisive one.

The Herald looked to Cassandra, her gaze questioning, weighing, she looked far older than the child she was, she spoke with clear conviction, standing tall. “We cannot conscript them, Cassandra. We cannot chain them to us, the children and old and ill along with the trained mages. We would be no better than the Tevinter Magister, gaining their support while binding them in their desperation. We cannot do that.” The girl’s eyes were pleading for Cassandra to understand and while Cassandra did not agree, she could see the Herald’s side of things. Still, they would be better than the Tevinter alliance, surely.

The girl turned to Fiona. “Join us as allies. Join willingly. As the Herald of Andraste, I make this offer to the mages.” Cassandra groaned internally. The Herald used her title for no small matters.
“A generous offer. But will the rest of the Inquisition honor it?” Fiona asked, pointedly looking at Cassandra.

“The Inquisition is honorable. If you accept, it will be honored. The Breach must be closed and we need the mages to close it.” The girl said, looking to Cassandra to disagree.

Cassandra did, but the offer had been made. She would stand by it, for the sake of unity.

“Whether you accept the Inquisition’s alliance or not, you will leave my kingdom.” Queen Anora interjected. “I will stay to be certain you do.”

“We accept. It would be madness not to. I will gather my people and ready them for the journey to Haven.” Fiona said, bowing to them. “The Breach will be closed. You will not regret giving us this chance.”

Maker I pray we don’t.

**

Little Bit hadn’t stopped touching them, talking with them, sending glances their ways. She seemed to be making sure they were real, that they were really there.

In particular, she kept looking at his horns.

A healer had looked after her wounds, binding up her side and telling her to rest. Cat would have a scar on her ear, a little notch as a reminder of whatever happened.

Cat wouldn’t talk about what happened, where she and the mage went. But more than once, Kaaras had caught her looking at one of them with tears in her eyes.

Once back at camp, she crawled up in his lap and hugged him, with all the strength she had in her, burying her face in his chest.

It was a good thing the Magister had been given over to the Queen. Otherwise, he might not have made it out of Redcliffe alive, for what he put Cat through.

She was scarred, in more ways then one, Dorian saying something about being thrown forward in time, into a dark future.

Kaaras wrapped her up in his armed, leaning down to rest his chin on her head.

He would not fail her again. He was her shield, from whatever may come. By whatever beings or gods he had to swear by, he would NOT fail her.

Chapter End Notes

Oof, that was an angsty chapter to write. I still hope you enjoyed it and rest assured, there is fluff coming, I promise!

On another note, please check out this fanart of Cat! https://chaotic-good-hawke.tumblr.com/post/190135340348/kumaronoa-chaotic-good-hawke-cat-bell
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!