Cold Fire

by pelagiczone

Summary

Indra is a half-breed Nord/Dunmer resident of Raven Rock, who doesn't yet know she is the Dragonborn. On her way to search for a ship advertising the promise of adventure, she runs into a mysterious chitin armor-clad man who is being hunted by a powerful and vengeful pirate, and has put all of Raven Rock in danger as a result. Indra's strong sense of duty to protect her home lands her at the centre of a conspiracy against the enigma of a man named Teldryn Sero, and she redirects her energy into finding the information that will prove his innocence.

While searching Skyrim for leads about Teldryn's involvement with the woman hunting him, serendipity strikes as she unexpectedly takes the first step in embracing her Dovah soul. Adventuring with unlikely allies broadens her perspective as the influential Dragonborn, and improves her abilities as a warrior and peacemaker. In a show of gratitude, Teldryn insists on accompanying Indra to not only serve as protection while she navigates the trials of her destiny, but also to partake in excitement and adventure. While they form a close bond in the process, a troubling opportunity from Teldryn's past comes back to haunt him, and he must make a decision.
The first part of this story is the "Teldryn Serious" mod. Undriel created a fantastic story using available dialogue, and I wanted to tell an embellished version as a way of starting up Indra's character arc. This is my first ever fanfic so let me know if I've fucked anything up - grammar, lore, etc.

Warning for mature themes including violence, a bit of gore and sexually explicit content. OH and a shitton of swearing.

Thank you to everybody that has read this work so far, and/or have left feedback in any form. Also a huge thank you to author futsch for her in-depth analysis of the story, and for forcing me to re-think certain components as well as improve clarity.

Update: Sept. 10 2018: I'm writing part 2 now, but I'll periodically work on improving this volume as I feel my writing got super lazy towards the end, and I should also work on being a better descriptive writer.

I've also changed my username to more or less match my tumblr account, as I'm planning on doing some for-fun sketches that I'll continue to insert in the story text.
"Keep your arms up, and your wrists strong, Indra!"

Though I lifted the wooden greatsword high above my head in what I believed was the right position, my efforts were for nothing when my father's own practice sword came crashing down from above, flinging my weapon away from me and knocking me on my arse in the cold ash.

"Oof! Godsfuckingdamnit," I cursed in frustration as I stood up and brushed the dust off my Dunmer outfit, adding to the cloud of silty ground that had billowed up around me in my fall.

"And don't let you mother hear you swear like that," My father scolded, holding back a smile.

Despite his reprimanding words, my father laughed a little at my failure to properly wield a two-handed weapon. I think he found it equally amusing and frustrating that the strong, tall daughter of a Nord had an ability to handle a greatsword that wasn't worth a shit. I had tried, and tried again to be competent with two-handed weapons, but it just wasn't sinking in.

"Can I go back to daggers?" I asked, squinting into the late afternoon sun as I rubbed my sore backside. Feeling thwarted by my own shortcomings was easily remedied by doing what I knew how to do best.

"You've already mastered dual wielding, now you need to work on other skills," My father said with a sigh as he put one hand on his hip, the other holding the handle of the beaten up wooden sword. "Balance is key, you know,"

"Come on, it's been an hour," I replied in protest, "consider it a cooldown. I'll even let you use a shield," I taunted, grinning.

"Gods, you are the most stubborn young woman," My father grumbled in his funny Nord accent, moving his hand from his hip to his head, and running his calloused fingers through his straw-coloured hair. "But, fine. Any practice is good practice, I figure," He said with another sigh. "Let's switch our weapons, then,"

I gleefully ran back to the chest we hauled outside of the bulwark almost every evening, after our daily labours, but before dinner. My father wanted to make sure our minds were clear and our bodies alert while he trained me in all forms of physical combat. Small twin blades and archery came to me with ease, but I had always struggled with larger weapons. Smiling now, I picked up my usual practice daggers. Though they were only made of wood, they had substantial weight and were beautifully carved. I thought it a shame that somebody had thrown these out, along with all the other discarded old blades and wooden swords my father had scraped together over the years. I took my spot on the ash coated berm, opposite my father who had picked up a longsword as well as a small rounded shield. We readied our stance, still smiling.

Clanking his sword against his shield, my father ran at me as he let out a Nord battlecry, readying his arm for the first attack. Large weapons were so easy to dodge - all I had to do was watch my opponents chest, and they telegraphed their next move. This thought briefly flashed
through my mind as I evaded my father's first swing, then twirled around so I was directly behind him. He knew this was coming, and lunged away before I had a chance to poke him in the back.

After we reset several paces from each other, we readied ourselves again, and this time I attacked first, feinting left before I darted right. My plan worked, as I saw my father move his arm to block, I got low to the ground and turned in a circle to come up right beside his right hand, and grabbed his wrist. He kicked my feet out from under me and I landed hard on my back.

"Hey!" I shouted, "I was being nice!"

"Your enemies won't ever be nice, so never hesitate," He replied, helping me back up as I rubbed the back of my head.

I rolled my eyes at him as we walked back to the chest.

"Yeah, no kidding. I learned that pretty quickly down in the mine, you know," I said, brushing myself off again.

The sun was setting as he began putting our practice blades back away into their worn container before he lectured me.

"Draugr are one thing, but living beings are another. They're quicker, and they can sense your intentions. They may also try to trick you. Come," He said, taking one handle on the side of the chest, "let's get home for dinner."

I took the other handle and we began carrying the chest back down the bulwark and into town.

"I think you're being paranoid," I said, slightly out of breath as we trudged through the ash. "I've never met anyone I don't like. Why would I have enemies?"

"You never know, Indra. One day you'll probably meet a nice man, - or woman, whatever - and you'll want to see the world together. It's a dangerous place, so you'll have to be prepared."

I thought about my current partner. I would definitely have to protect his ass. He was a lover, not a fighter.

"I'd personally like to see more of Tamriel," I said, "but I'm not sure if Fevythe feels the same."

"Young love changes rapidly, for better or for worse," My father chuckled. "Either way, if you ever run into any trouble, and I don't just mean dustmen, you'll be ready."

We opened the door to our squat, beige house at the edge of town, and the welcome smell of horker and ash yam stew wafted towards us as we got out of the chill. My mother had left the pot to simmer as she read a tattered book in the small alcove beneath the spiral staircase. We had stuffed a couple pieces of furniture in and around a central patterned carpet from Morrowind, and designated it a living room.

"Food will be done in twenty minutes or so," She said, looking up to me. "I just finished in the bath and made sure the water was still warm, so why don't you go and clean up before your father goes in there and turns the place to ice?" She smiled, her red eyes glowing in the dimly lit space.

My parents were an odd couple - my father was a Nord and my Mother was a Dunmer, yet I
suppose they were oddballs of their own kind to begin with. They had met at the College of Winterhold, where my father excelled at frost destruction in a world where Nords generally abhorred magicka. My mother, adept at fire destruction and alchemy, had traveled from Morrowind to train at the college, knowing full well she would have a hard time fitting in in Skyrim. They enjoyed teasing each other over their drastic differences. While they both taught me what they knew, for whatever reason, lightning destruction came easiest to me. The rest of the schools of magic? Not so much.

I heeded my mother's advice and walked outside to the wooden shack that housed the tub we pumped seawater into. Bathing never left us truly clean as we would later have to brush off the salt that dried on our skin, but it was better than being coated in ash. I took off my dusty clothes and dipped a foot into the slightly murky pool of water. It was warm-ish, so I summoned a flame into my hands and blasted the water until it made my skin as red as a half Dunmer could be. I liked to leave the door open to the shack as I could stare out across the sea while letting the warm water soothe my sore body, and our house was far enough from town and the piers that no one would get a free show unless they already had dubious intentions.

I quickly scrubbed the ash off my skin and out of my coarse hair before I rewarmed the water and climbed out of the tub. Shivering in the cold air of Solstheim, I glanced at my reflection in the small, worn out polished metal mirror as I dried off. Removing the towel from my face, I looked into my own violet eyes. Some friends had the gall to suggest I had made a pact with Nocturnal, and sometimes I played along to freak them out a little. We could tease each other as we did, because we had grown up together and were as thick as thieves. In fact, all the children and grandchildren of the Dunmer refugees that settled in Raven Rock were close. We had to be, seeing as there were so few of us.

As my father took his turn in the bath, my mother had me practice making potions, recalling the effects of each ingredient as I picked them up.

"Ash hopper jelly: fortify light armor, resist shock, restore health, and become weak to frost. I can combine it with snowberries to make a resist shock potion," I stated, mashing the concoction with a bit of water.

"Very good," My mother said, "now another."

"Uhh, I can mix the ashen grass pod with a pearl to-"

"No, wrong. Try again." My mother said, folding her arms. Despite her relatively good nature, my mother's Dunmer severity ran deep.

"Ugh, I'm so tired. Can we just eat now? Why do I have to learn all of these by heart?" I whined. While I appreciated my mother's commitment to ensuring I became a master of alchemy, her criticisms were always difficult to endure.

"You likely won't have books on you when you need to make a life-saving potion on the fly," My mother tsked, "so it's best if you were to memorize them."

We continued drilling ingredients until my father returned. Each day was the same - work, train, study, eat, sleep. My work consisted of whatever needed to be done, whether it was helping my father on the fishing boat (which I despised as the rocking of the sea made me queasy), helping my mother gather alchemy ingredients or ash yams, or hunting just outside of the bulwark for juicy bristlebacks and ash hoppers. When I was allowed some free time, and as long as he wasn't working the mine, Fevythe and I would get together and enjoy each other's company. Tonight was one of those nights.
"I got a pretty good amount of coin for all the ash hoppers I got the other day," I said when we met at the well in the centre of town, after dark. "Want to get something to drink? It is Fredas, after all."

"I could use a drink," Fevythe said, giving me a kiss on the cheek. "I got a pretty good haul myself, thanks to the ebony I dug up this week. And, well, thanks to you originally," He smiled, jabbing me in the ribs with an elbow. He never let me live it down that I had had the balls to check out what was lurking in the previously derelict mine after the Redoran had ignored Gratian's story. Turns out the last miners had been offed by a bunch of creepy half-dead beings called draugr. I smashed the ones that still walked around into dust, and burned the rest of them to ash. The mine was re-opened, and Raven Rock became a little less slummy than it had been before. One thing I never told anyone was that I found a strange sword down there, next to Gratian's missing ancestor who had died in front of some ornate, glowing door. Both the sword and the door gave me the creeps, so I left it all alone.

Hand in hand, we walked down the stairs of the local bar and inn - the Retching Netch - and waved to our friends, the locals. Glover Mallory was there as usual, and he stood up to give me a hug when we got to the bottom of the stairs. He and my family had always been close, and I thought of him as an older relative.

"I've got some more ash hopper shells for you back home, Glover," I said, backing away from his embrace as Fevythe ordered us a bottle of hot mazte.

"I'm going to be in your debt for the rest of my life if you just keep giving me materials, you know," He chuckled.

"Don't worry about it," I said, waving away his concerns. "The jelly is more valuable anyway, and the meat tastes pretty good for a giant bug. I'm happy to give you what I don't sell."

I joined Fevythe at the bar, and we sipped the pungent liquor as we casually chatted with Geldis, the old barkeep. A few hours later, most of the patronage was quite drunk, as were we. We sat down together in a corner, laughing and kissing in the dark.

"Hey," He said, rubbing my leg, "did you want to rent a room?"

"Are you suggesting..." I trailed off. He raised his eyebrows. While we had been close, physically, we hadn't gone quite that far yet. Lack of time and space had been the main factors involved, as it had nothing to do with desire. I felt my cheeks reddening as I smiled. "Sure,"

We approached Geldis, snickering as we did, and handing him some coin. "Can we, uh, rent a room please?" Fevthe asked, barely containing himself. Geldis just took our money, laughed a little and asked us to follow him.

"Enjoy yourselves," He said with a smirk as he closed the door to the room behind him. The fire had been lit for a few hours, and the room was nice and warm. I urged Fevythe's shirt off and buried my face in his chest. I loved the way his scent lingered in his sparse hairs, and I inhaled deeply as I ran my hands over the muscles he had developed from all his work in the mine.

Shortly after, we had both stripped fully down and were lying on the bed together, enjoying the other's warm embrace until I straddled him, wanting to be able to control the pace. He watched with some interest as I tried to guide him in. Despite being post-teen Dunmer, neither of us had ever done this before, and we were both nervous.

"Ow, fuck, dammit," I cursed. It felt like I was being torn open.
"Want to try something different?" Fevythe asked, gently rubbing my arm.

"I don't think that will help," I said flatly, rolling back beside him.

"No, I mean, here," He said, sitting up and moving his head down, between my legs. He had done this before, and I for him, but this time he was merciless with the teasing. Once I was swollen and dripping, he thrust himself in me and it felt completely fine. More than fine. So fine that for the remainder of our relationship, we continued to have each other whenever we could, wherever we could.

Later that night we left the Retching Netch to return to our separate homes, blushing with our residual feelings of our newfound discovery. As we were ascending the stairs, our arms around each other, I noticed a man had appeared at one of the small tables on the upper level of the inn. He was wearing the traditional armor of the Dunmer assassin group, but it was the wrong colour, and I figured Glover must have made that set. I continued to stare over my shoulder at him, long enough to be considered rude, but there was just something odd about him. Though I couldn't see exactly where he directed his gaze, it felt as if he was looking back at me through those strange circular lenses on his helmet.

He would continue to randomly appear in the inn over the next few months, sitting at his table and sipping Sujamma, but never talking to anyone. I briefly considered approaching him to ask who in Oblivion he was, but I got a strange feeling from him. It felt as if I got involved with him in any way, I would learn things I didn't ever want to know.

Several months passed as they usually did. Daily work, seeing Fevythe and getting together with the community to celebrate the odd seasonal event here and there. One night Fevythe and I sat on the pier, our legs swinging beneath the wooden deck, talking about our hopes and dreams as young people do.

"You know, I feel more complete now," He began, looking out at the sea. "With you. I think I know what I want in life."

"I don't," I said somewhat sullenly, looking down at our shoes made of identical material in an identical style. "Well, I think I know what I don’t want."

"What would that be?" asked Fevythe, putting aside his own prior thought.

"To stay here, on Raven Rock, forever. I want to see what else there is to the world."

"Oh," he said quickly, and now I realize, sadly.

"Would you join me? You’re smart and competent. We could go to Blacklight and see our culture in its full glory, or be ignorant tourists in Skyrim. Our families will live for another few centuries, what’s stopping us?"

"Well, I was going to say I want to settle down, with you. Here on Solstheim. We could build a house on the point close to the bay, have a small farm, hunt…start a family. Indra?"

I looked at him with what must have been panic on my face. He looked away from me and mumbled that it would be nice, but only if I wanted it as well. My mouth wouldn’t form words and its silence was met with his mention of how cold it was, followed by a prompt exit from the docks. I looked down. I loved the man, I really did, but how could I agree to living another hundred years as a domesticated woman? It wasn’t my nature. I know now that there are some aspects of one’s personality that we can bend at our will to suit others, out of utility or love, and there are some parts
of us that we just can’t change.

As I ruminated on how best to talk to Fevythe the next day, my eyes caught sight of a piece of paper trapped by the wind on one of the posts supporting the pier. I stood up, my eyes fixated on the note, and slowly walked to the post to retrieve it. While it was tattered and damp, the words were still visible. On it read:

*Do you have a strong sense of adventure? Are you a competent warrior or mage? Does the call of wealth in coin, knowledge and glory beckon you?*

*Then join the Sea Tiger! Ship is at anchor to the Northwest of the bulwark of Raven Rock. Don’t delay, this offer is only on for a limited time!*

It was dated two days ago, would they still be there?

The next morning, I was too ashamed and too nervous to talk to Fevythe, and I ended up spending the day puttering around the house, tidying this and that in anxious restlessness. Towards the end of the day, the tiny house was neater than I had seen it in years and I began to feel cooped up after so many hours of of domestic duties. My mind began to wander to the flyer I had found the day before. Curiosity got the better of me and I left the house and began walking to the edge of the bulwark where the Sea Tiger was said to be waiting. I didn’t see the harm in just inquiring about the roles and responsibilities as a potential new member of the crew.

As I approached the end of the bulwark, I noticed smoke rising from the bay in the distance. Did something happen to the ship? I began to run towards the beach as the smoke grew thicker, I couldn’t see more than ten feet in front of me. Suddenly, I stumbled over something. It was the charred, burnt corpse of a man.

“Augh!” I exclaimed. My shout was met with the sound of a sword being unsheathed, and the silhouette of a man began to emerge from the plumes. All too quickly he appeared in front of me, muted red and yellow chitin armor, holding an ornate, golden sword in one hand and a ball of fire in the other.

“What are you doing here?” he growled.

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Chapter End Notes

I know purple eyes are often overdone as a "look so special" sort of trait, but in my defense it was to make it so that a) it shows a fusing of two races (this sort of thing is going to be a theme) and b) so that she becomes easily recognizable by the general public later...which may not be ideal.

Pics of Indra if you're curious!

Pic 1
Pic 2
Indra's adventure truly begins when she finds out Raven Rock is under attack by mercenaries searching for a wanted criminal with a huge bounty on his live capture. With the desire to protect her home, she agrees to work with both a mercenary leader as well as the captain of the Redoran to try to find the criminal and put both parties at ease. However, when she discovers that the criminal is posing as a Redoran guard, she is on her own in finding the wanted man.

Chapter Notes

This chapter takes place between the initial encounter with Teldryn Sero, to confronting him in the jail (from the mod). I've embellished the dialogue a bit and began Indra's story as an inexperienced but resolute warrior, who has a lot of doubts about her own abilities, but only wants to protect her town.

"I said," continued the man, leaning towards me as he brandished his sword, "what are you gawkin' at?"

Rather than say anything, I pulled out the sheet of paper with the advertisement for the Sea Tiger on it and handed it to him. Smoke continued to billow up around us, and I could see the outlines of several other dead bodies around the beach. My heart was pounding in my throat.

"What is this shit?" He demanded, examining the ratty placard long enough to skim its contents, then crumpling the paper and flinging it into the sea. Seeing the look of bewilderment on my face, he put his hands on his hips and turned towards the shoreline. "No," The mysterious man sighed, "Raven Rock is under attack by hired thugs, not some frolicking treasure hunters, but they must be trying to recruit more members. By force, perhaps." Turning his head back towards me, he silently mulled something over before retrieving a messily folded note from a hidden compartment in his armor. I couldn't read his expression past his lenses and scarf.

"I know who you are, you managed to re-open the mine, which means you're not totally incompetent. Here, I found this note on one of the bodies," He said, grabbing my hand and stuffing the piece of paper into it. "Bring this information to Captain Veleth and I'll take care of any other N'wahs trying to make it into town. Just keep it quiet."

"Who are you?" I asked, recognizing the chitin armor. "Have I seen you before at the Retching Netch?"

"I'm just here to do a job and that's it," The stranger replied slowly, leaning towards me once more as I backed away. "Now be on your way and remember...keep this quiet."

Seeing as I wasn't about to get anything more out of him, I nodded and took off towards
Raven Rock as he turned and continued down the shoreline, away from the city. The sun had almost set, and everyone had either returned to their homes or were at the Retching Netch, save the Redoran patrol that were meant to keep the streets safe at night. A few men wearing yellow bonemold armor wandered the streets looking bored, or stood at their posts and stared off into the sea. Veleth was among them, and I spotted him walking down the main path through town. Before I reached him, I unfolded the note the strange man had thrust on me, and read it. An ominous message had been scrawled in uncouth handwriting:

WAIT AT BLOODSKALL BARROW UNTIL FURTHER ORDERS. I WILL TRY AND INFILTRATE THE CITY UNTIL THE OTHER GROUP MAKES THEIR MOVE.

-RAMODO

I figured that whoever tried to attack Raven Rock must have anchored far north of the bulwark, as I hadn't seen any new ships at port, and that was the way the strange man had started walking when he left me to relay the message to Veleth. Whoever it was, they must have come ashore recently, hid at Bloodskall Barrow and were now making their way into the city. A chilling thought came over me: perhaps they were already in the city. Yet, the man in chitin armor must have stopped a number of them, and this thought was enough to bring me slight relief. I still wondered what the pirates could possibly want in Raven Rock. Nothing of intrigue tended to happen in our quiet hamlet, but now I was on high alert, fully aware that some dangerous presence had seeped into my home. I shuddered at the realization that if I had gone outside the bulwark a few days ago, I may have ended up a prisoner, forced to fight in some unknown cause. Making my way up to Veleth, I steeled myself despite my rapid heartbeat, and confronted him with the small initial pieces of the puzzle I had discovered.

"Captain," I started, "I know about the Sea Tiger, and the danger the mercenaries in its crew pose for Raven Rock."

He gave me a look of mild shock, but composed himself and let out a short breath.

"Right," He said, "have you found something?"

"Dead men Northwest of the bulwark, and this message," I replied, handing over the note.

"This is good. It's a lead," Veleth began, quickly reading over the memo. He looked back at me as he tucked the piece of paper away into his pocket. "I've seen an upsurge in the number of reavers across Solstheim for the past year or so, but they only started attacking the bulwark a few weeks ago," He continued, then paused and looked towards the great stone structure that enclosed our small town. "It's been quiet for the last little while, but I'm not so certain it will stay that way. In my experience, it's usually quietest before the storm. I've recruited as much help as I can; I even asked Geldis to see if one of his old friends would aid this cause."

Geldis...the Retching Netch...

"Wait," I said abruptly, "does he wear chitin armor and have an unusual accent?"

Veleth's acknowledgment of the man in my description was revealed in the way his already highly arched brows raised even further upwards.

"Yes," he said, somewhat surprised. "Teldryn Sero is his name. He's a," He paused, "freelance soldier, very adept at acquiring intelligence and taking care of," another pause, "problems."

"So he's a mercenary that finds and kills people," I stated, and before the captain could
interject, I continued. "I think I met him at the bulwark. He's the one that took care of those men and entrusted me to deliver that information to you." Discovering this connection excited something in me, and I went on. "Listen, Raven Rock is my home and I don't want to see it fall to a destructive outside force. Let me help you get to the root of this problem. I can handle myself, you know that."

"I know, but I've already sent men North to make sure any threats stay outside of the bulwark. I need to keep the rest of my guard on patrol in town." He lowered his voice before continuing. "The residents of Raven Rock don't know about the pirates yet, and I'd like to keep it that way as long as possible," He said, glancing around at the quiet town.

"Then I'll try to figure out who wrote the message, they must be somewhere around here, no?"

Veleth studied me for a moment before sighing in resignation. I had actually wanted to be a Redoran guard at one point, thinking it would bring me more satisfaction than being a jack of all trades, but Glover Mallory talked me out of it. Initially, he said the barracks weren't the place for a lady, and I laughed at this notion. What actually convinced me not to pursue a career in the Redoran was Glover's insistence that patrols and routines were even more boring than freely hunting around the island. Despite my eventual turnaround, Veleth had been made aware of my capabilities as a fighter, and wasn't terribly troubled that I was getting tangled up in his affairs.

"Very well, I could use all the help I can get," He said, studying me again. "I would start by checking some of the abandoned houses on the outskirts of town. If anybody is trying to hide in Raven Rock, that's likely where they would stay. I need to deal with the threat looming beyond the bulwark, so you will be on your own." He paused for a moment as he fidgeted with the hilt of his sword. "Listen, Indra, I know you've been in your fair share of fights before, but this will be different. Bring a proper weapon, and ask Glover to see what he can do about getting you some protective gear."

I nodded quickly in response. I could feel my heart pounding in my chest, turning my stomach slightly queasy.

When I returned home, my parents were upstairs getting ready for bed. I quietly sifted through my father's stash of weapons, finally deciding on a small sword made of steel. I could tell by the hilt that it had originally been quite a bit larger, but the process of grinding it from a rusted knife that could barely cut butter into a proper blade had taken its toll on the material. I then raided my mother's bookshelf of potions and ingredients, grabbing a few small bottles containing solutions that looked like they were intended to restore health and magicka, as well as the components necessary for making my own, and placed them in a rucksack. I slept briefly but deeply, and awoke with the dim sunrise.

The next morning while the city was still asleep, I was at Glover Mallory's house, enthusiastically knocking at the door. After a few moments he appeared, tired and confused.

"Is there some kind of emergency?" He asked, looking down at me and seeing a sword strapped to my waist as well as the quiet excitement in my wide-eyed stare.

"In a manner, yes," I replied, almost in whisper. "Our whole city may be in danger, but I think I have some information that could help stop it. I need armor from you just in case I run into any unsavory characters."

"What?" Glover exclaimed, now fully awake, "What do you know? Do I need to prepare myself for the worst, or what?"
"Shhh, not yet," I replied, waving my arms discreetly in an effort to get the blacksmith to quiet down. "But I would keep an eye out. I believe there's a group of outlaws that are interested in taking over our city, for what reason I don't know. Maybe something to do with the mine?" I posited with a shrug, "Anyway, don't say anything about it yet because I'm tracking down a lead today, and hopefully that will be the end of it. Either way, be ready to help move people outside of the city, or to the Northern Maiden, if need be."

"Alright, I'll keep my eyes peeled," Glover said, shifting his eyes about the centre of town as he opened the door to me. "For now, the only thing I have that would fit you is a set of light chitin armor. Here," He said, inviting me in, "it's in the back. Let me get it."

Glover hunched over a chest and pulled out the brown suit, with its turtle-like plates and lightweight but tough material connecting them.

"Unfortunately, it's made for men-"

"It will fit fine." I said, cutting him off. "I'll take the helmet, too, if I may. I promise I'll give them back in one piece."

All my years of training and hunting had granted me with a body that was lean, powerful and athletic, but not particularly feminine. Clothing made for men tended to fit me better anyway, as I would often tear the sleeves from the bodice of dresses when I reached an arm too far one way or the other. I figured I would take the helmet, not so much for protection, but to conceal my identity wherever possible. I briefly wondered if that's why Teldryn wore his.

"I suppose it's time to start making that custom armor I promised you all those years ago," Glover said, smiling and taking out a few seamstress tools. "I'd better take some updated measurements, then. Give me a few days and I'll have it ready for you. Stay alive until then."

After quickly wrapping a marked rope around my shoulders, waist and hips, Glover bid me farewell and I thanked him, rushing back home shortly thereafter. It was only half past sunrise, and my parents were still asleep. Not wanting to either wake them nor worry them, I left them a note I hoped contained just the right amount of detail that they would understand.

Dear mother, dear father,

You know I can't suppress my need to help our city, and you know I can't seem to avoid the excitement that comes with this duty. Something - somebody - wants to take control of Raven Rock and it's urgent that I act on what information I have found, as soon as possible. I have all that I need, including everything you've taught me. Lock the door, keep a weapon or two nearby, and I will be back soon.

Love,

Indra

I left home and walked past the central market, looking for any guards I could find. No merchants or patrol were to be found there, so I continued on a little further. As I walked past the ancestral tomb, I saw a bonemold-clad Redoran guard exit through the front door, bending slightly at the hip to discreetly glance to his left. He didn't see me approach from the other side. Since when did they patrol inside buildings, I thought to myself.

"Hey!" I called out, and he jumped a little. "Has Veleth briefed you on the current situation in Raven Rock?" He remained silent, then slowly nodded, the square chin of his helmet almost grazing
his breastplate. "Then you should be looking out for threats coming into the city to kill the living, not minding the already dead!" I shouted back in some irritation. He nodded again, and began walking towards the market. Seeing a few other Redoran near the Southern tunnel satisfied my anxiety for having at least some protection nearby in town, and I started off to the abandoned buildings that Veleth suggested I check.

I knew these dilapidated houses to be home to some wanderers and vagabonds, and I put the helm on so they would not recognize me. Since they so far proved to be benign, the Redoran left them alone and Morvayn hadn't ordered them out of the city. Entering the building, I was met with the stench of unwashed bodies, rotting bottles of ale and reconciled desperation.

Through the light cast by a tiny, dirty window, I could see the outline of a few figures sleeping in grungy bedrolls on the floor. I was somewhat relieved to see they were alive as they shot me agitated looks when I created a fire in my left hand to make sure I wasn't about to be ambushed. Nothing but your usual suspects, I thought, as I turned my attention towards the spiral staircase on the other side of the house. When I reached the top of the staircase, I could see the outline of a large man leaning against a wall. My stomach dropped as I shone my light on him.

"Hmph," I heard the Redguard growl. "You're not one of my men, and you don't live here, so what are you doing in this shithole?" He asked. I had never seen this man in Raven Rock before. He was wearing fur-trimmed leather armor decorated with the teeth of various animals, and his face was adorned in yellow war paint. Upon seeing the large sword hung at his waist, I felt my heartbeat rise up into my throat. This must be Ramodo, I thought. Swallowing my fears, I met his ante.

"You got a problem with me being here?" I asked, feigning confidence.

"My problem is I'm too tired to punch your face in" He spat.

"What If I told you I just joined the Sea Tiger and I was looking for orders on how to proceed?"

"I would call you a liar, because all the recent recruits were turned to ash just the other day," He said, pushing himself off the wall to stand up straight. "Why are you really here?"

I felt myself standing up taller as well.

"My home is being threatened, and I intend on defending it. I see a lawbreaker here, and I'm going to assume he has something to do with it." My retort was met with laughter.

"You, some little boy who's barely seen his, what, fourteenth Morning Star?" He jeered, "I see no harm in telling you the truth, then. Yes, I'm part of the crew of the Sea Tiger. We don't intend on hurting anyone in town, we're just here for a criminal, whose bounty is worth more than any treasure we've plundered. He served the Telvanni Wizard and now works as an auxiliary of the Redoran Guard. He's a dangerous rat-faced scum, worth over twenty thousand gold coin. The trick is, we need him alive." Ramodo finished.

"I don't know of any criminals in town that aren't in jail," I mused, "Especially none that know master Neloth. If he's working for the guard, I can ask the captain about any trouble among his men."

"So you're practically useless, then," The Redguard said, crossing his arms. "Get out of my face, and keep your nose out of trouble, if you like being alive. If you catch any wind of him, you know where I am. Maybe I can convince my employer to share some of the gold from his bounty
This changed everything. I left the abandoned house feeling disorientated and unsure of how to proceed. Who was this dangerous criminal hiding among the Redoran? Before I had any time to think more on the issue, I heard a guard yell a warning beside me, and let loose an arrow in the direction of the marketplace. I turned towards the cacophony that was occurring in the middle of town, and began running to aid the guards, the waxy fabric of the chitin armor rubbing against my knees and elbows. Four mercenaries were locked in a battle with the few available Redoran. Fiery explosions from a flame atronach surrounded the chaos, sending clouds of ash into the air as citizens fled for safety.

Approaching the maelstrom at full speed, I unsheathed the small steel sword and targeted a mercenary with his back to me. I collided with his huge figure, but not hard enough to knock him over. I would never stab him in the back, that was one value my father made sure I understood and took to heart. He stumbled and turned towards me as I jaunted towards him, thrusting my sword forward, trying to find some flesh, any flesh.

The only real battles I had been in before were against the undead, disintegrating draugr. They were slow, and I felt no remorse in burning them with magicka or driving a blade into their eye and any other exposed section of decomposing meat. But here in front of me was a real human being, both of us alive, adrenaline pumping through our veins. I managed to jam my slender sword into a small crevice in the shoulder of his armor. He yelled out and fell to one knee, but before I could conjure any magic, he yanked the blade out of his body and threw it to the ground, fire burning in the gaze he now targeted at myself. That glare froze me in my step, and he lunged at me. Suddenly, he was pulled backwards as a flash of yellow ran across the front of his body.

Blood began to pour from a neat slit across his throat as he dropped to the ground. A guard appeared from behind where the mercenary had stood, holding a bloodied golden sword. He said nothing, but nodded to me, then turned and conjured another flame atronach, and disappeared from sight. A note had fallen out of the small pouch attached to the dead man's belt, and I quickly grabbed it as the stench of blood filled the air and the remaining mercenaries were brought down in the middle of the market.

"Damnit," I heard Veleth loudly declare as he removed his helm. "This group must have been the ones that got away from our fight at Frostmoon. Who's alive?"

I looked around and noticed the feet of a fallen guard poking out from behind the town well. Citizens had begun to emerge from various buildings, some rushing out to help heal the wounded, while others began to carry off the bodies. Didn't Ramodo say they didn't want to cause any harm to Raven Rock? My hands were shaking as I unfolded the note, being careful not to touch the blood on it. It read:

_You are to distract them while my agents enter the jail. Try not to get killed. I won't be there to save you._

_-Sigrun_  

I approached Captain Veleth and showed him the note.

"I found a man in the abandoned building," I said as he looked at the message. "He said his mercenaries only wanted to find a criminal, who's hiding somewhere in Raven Rock. Clearly, they don't care what it takes to catch him because he told me they wouldn't do any harm to our city. As angry as I am with Ramodo, maybe if we help this group catch the criminal, they will leave us..."
alone."

"Hm," Veleth said as he scanned the note, "I think that's a wise choice, but it's very strange that a criminal has gone unnoticed in such a small town as Raven Rock."

I lowered my voice before I filled him in on the next piece of information.

"He's hiding among the guards," I said quietly, "I don't know who it is, but apparently there's a huge bounty for his live capture."

Veleth paused to think for a short while.

"If what you say is true, then I can't trust my men to investigate this any further. Are you up to the challenge of getting to the bottom of whatever is going on in our town?"

My heart was still beating out of my chest, and while I hadn't consciously absorbed the grave danger I was willingly subjecting myself to, I took a deep breath and nodded.

"Here, then, this is a key to the bulwark jail," The Captain said, discreetly producing a small skeleton key and handing it to me. "I'm not sure what you will find, but for now anything that can point us in the direction of the wanted man will suffice. If you find someone alive, use whatever measures necessary to either extract more information from them, or bring them to me. If all you find are the dead, well, I hope you're not too superstitious about checking their pockets."

All the guards had been called off their usual postings to deal with the shitshow left in the wake of Sigrun's attack, so I was able to explore the jail on my own accord. There wasn't much crime in Raven Rock, and we only had a single jail cell for overly drunk civilians and the occasional thief. The cell itself was actually not a bad arrangement, probably better than what the homeless living in the abandoned buildings had at their disposal. Funny how that works, I thought as I made my way through every nook and cranny I could possibly find. Eventually, I came across a grate that dropped down into a tunnel beneath a pile of logs I assumed was the only source of heat for the cell. Prying the rusted metal latch outwards, the grate fell open and I realized that the hole it covered was big enough for me to fit into.

"Well, I hope I can find a way back up again," I said to myself as I took that first leap of faith, dropping into the underground tunnel.

Making my way further downwards into the cool, damp abyss, I looked around and saw that the tunnel had been created naturally by the erosion of underground rivers, and was apparently reinforced by columns of stone. After creating a fire and shining my light on what I thought were man-made tunnel supports, I noticed that they were hexagonal, and it was I then that I realized I was completely underneath the bulwark. I wondered who else knew about this labyrinth.

Bits and pieces of Nordic architecture appeared in the walls and through the sand of the floor as I slowly crept further and further from the entrance. I passed by a set of ornate black doors that were embedded into the stone and gave the handles a tug, but they were firmly locked. Finally, the tunnel opened up into a large cavern that appeared to be the remnants of a buried Nordic ruin. I followed the bridge across the pool of water and an Argonian man dressed in leather armor emerged from the darkness.

"It's you!" He exclaimed, unsheathing a sword.

"What?" I asked, stopping and putting up my hands. "Did Sigrun send you?" Upon hearing my voice, he relaxed and put his weapon away.
"Yes, I'm here for the Redoran contract," He answered, "but it was a suicide mission. That man is far too dangerous. We outnumbered him twenty to one, and he still managed to not only take out that group, but also the distraction. I just barely got away, and even if he is wounded, I'm not going to try to retrieve him myself. You do realize you're wearing the same armor as him, don't you? Good way to get a mark on your back, too."

"I know, it's not ideal," I replied, "but I got involved with this issue and needed some form of protection, and this is all I could get. And if you won't face the imposter, I will. He's been a thorn in my side as his presence is threatening the well being of my entire city. Where is he now?"

"Ha!" Cackled the infiltrator, "If I think I don't stand a chance, you'll be gone before you know it. If you have such a strong desire to die, then here, take my spare key. It opens the doors you passed on your way here. I nicked it off him and made a few copies a long time ago, when I first started following him, so I'm not sure how he's been able to get in and out. I locked the door hoping to slow him down, but I'm not sure what good it did." The man handed me an intricate black key and turned around towards the end of the tunnel where he stood.

"You're not coming with me?" I asked, somewhat desperately. "Maybe I can talk some sense into him. He seems intelligent if anything."

"No, forgive me." And with that, the man climbed up a ladder a few steps further from where I stood, ash and light briefly pouring in from the trapdoor as he left. While I was terrified, the only thought that came to mind at the time was "Well, at least I know I have a way out now". That is, if I even made it out, but I didn't let myself think that at the time.

Opening the double doors to what I now know was Glowstone Hall, I was met with a narrow entrance of sandy substrate, more Nordic architectural fragments and a circle containing familiar symbols glowing on the ground just ahead of me. Approaching the circle, I realized it was a fire rune, put there by someone adept in magic and also adept at killing people that tried to infiltrate their hideout. I took a sufficient number of steps backwards, summoned a spear of ice and chucked it at the rune, where it exploded. The sound echoed throughout the walls of the underground structure. If anybody else was here, they knew I was here now, too.

I crouched behind a rock, perfectly still, blood pounding in my ears for what felt like an hour. Not seeing any figures moving in the torch-lit cave, I continued onward until the rocky structure opened up into a vast cavern, then stopped to look around. Directly in front of me, a spiral staircase went up at least fifty feet to a ladder and trapdoor above. To my right and somewhat in the distance, a square stone hut sat with some kind of lever in front it and worn cloth covering what were once windows.

Closest to my position was a dome comprised of more stone, another ancient Nordic design. It appeared to be lit from within, so I figured our criminal hadn't gone too far just yet. It was then that I noticed a burnt corpse lying behind a tall column, partially obscured by the shadows of the structure it lay beside. As my eyes adjusted to the darkness, I saw more and more dead men scattered throughout the cave. Realizing that this was the infiltrators party, I suddenly spoke aloud to no one, trying to convince myself I hadn't made a huge mistake.

"Well, if I go missing, at least there will be a headhunt for the guy, and maybe my family will find my body," I muttered. "Yeah, then Raven Rock will be normal again. Totally normal. This is totally normal..."

I made my way to the entrance of the circular building, and followed the rounded hallway to its core. Inside the hut was what appeared to be someone's home. A Nordic firepit was aflame in the
centre of the room, and beside it on the floor lay a bedroll and knapsack. I couldn't ignore the blood stains that splattered across the stone floor of the entrance, and streaked along the smooth walls in narrow bands. White clay bottles littered the room, some empty and discarded, some standing upright. I picked one up, uncorked it and took a whiff, then a sip. It was Sujamma as expected, but it wasn't just any Sujamma. This was a special brew made only occasionally by Geldis Sadri, and very hard to get a hold of unless you knew Geldis relatively well.

I walked over to the stone table on the other end of the small room where a map of Solstheim was spread across it, and a potion that I hadn't seen before sat atop symbols scrawled in charcoal. I picked it up and swirled it around, it was white and almost glowing...

Peeling my eyes from the mesmerizing liquid, I spied a note with what appeared to be more blood covering half of it. I unfolded the note and found it depicting a sketched portrait of a dark elf, wearing his hair in a mohawk and possessing tattoos that curved around his eyebrows and down to his jaw. His expression was in a scowl and his chin was slightly tucked into the scarf worn around his neck. Words wrapped above and below the image read:

   BY ORDER OF ULFRIC STORMCLOAK, JARL OF WINDHELM

   WANTED

   TELDRYN SERO

   25.000

   SEPTIMS REWARD

And a wax seal, embossed with Ulfric's official sigil.

My hand dropped with the note still in it as I took in this information. Teldryn Sero, the expert guerrilla fighter, friend of Geldis and man who trusted me with sensitive information was the criminal hiding among the Redoran? It didn't make sense. What did he do to warrant such a huge bounty? Murder alone was only one thousand gold...

Before I had a chance to think this over more, a Redoran guard ran into the room, golden sword in one hand and a conjuration spell hovering in the other.

"Don't fight back and I promise I'll kill you quickly!" He yelled.

Wait, that voice.

"What? I'm on your side!" I exclaimed, thinking quickly on my feet.

"You may have everyone fooled, but I see what you're doing here. The call of gold sends you scurrying like a rat," He growled, creeping towards me in a half crouch.

"I'm not one of those mercenaries, I want them gone just as much as you do!" I cried, wondering what his motivation would be for attacking me.

"I've heard this song before, and I'm already tired of it," The guard said, venom dripping from his words.

"Hear me out!" I pleaded, but before I could do or say anything else, he hit me with a paralysis spell. My legs gave out, and I fell to my knees. The guard walked over to me and caught me before I hit the ground. Cradling my head in one hand, he released another wave of paralysis
directly into the base of my neck. As my world began to turn dark, he knelt his helm to mine and in that strange accent hissed in my ear,

"Stop. Prying."

I really thought he was going to kill me.
Initial animosity

Chapter Summary

A small chapter describing background events unknown to Indra, told from the perspective of Teldryn.

Stupid
Grunt

Fucking
Grunt

Girl.

I muttered this phrase more than a few times as I heaved her body from my hideout, all the way through the underground tunnels and up the ladder to the trapdoor that led to the Southern area of the bulwark. What was her reason for getting this caught up in my affairs, and how many more times would I choose to spare her?

"And how in Oblivion is she so damned heavy?!" I said aloud to the plumes of ash that rose up around me as I made the trek North. It wasn't as if she was that big, but dragging her unconscious, armored frame across the distance of Raven Rock really took it out of me. In my defense, I had been in more fights in the past two days than a normal man would see in his lifetime.

First, there was the ill-equipped band of s'wits that came down from Bloodskall Barrow, thinking I wouldn't see them creeping across the open cliffs like that. I remained hidden and when they finally reached the beach, I had the high ground, and blasted them to Oblivion. Then, another detachment went so far as to cause a commotion in the middle of town. They were bold but so inexperienced that the Redoran barely had a difficult time cutting them down. I, however, knew it was all a distraction, seeing as my key to Glowstone Hall had been missing for quite some time. Probably stolen by that filthy argonian fetcher I saw skulking around a few weeks ago. Fortunately I still had the temple key, and it was a more direct route anyway. With the help of invisibility potions, I was able to make my way around Raven Rock without drawing too much suspicion.

Knowing Sigrun's men were going to try to infiltrate my hideout, I set runes all over the cavern and they walked right into my trap. Finishing them off was easy, but choosing to spare that foolish girl that came along a few minutes later was harder. I knew if I killed her, I would land in even more hot water, seeing as there were a number of people that would actually miss her if she were to disappear. I figured I would have to tread carefully around her, as I was not sure how much she knew, or what she had told anyone. Maybe I could convince her to leave Raven Rock.

Making my way across the outskirts of the bulwark, I came across a small camp. The body of
an old miner lay rotting not far off, crushed underneath some boulders in what appeared to be an accident. Deciding this was as good a place as any, I laid her down on the bedroll inside the small leather tent. I removed her helmet to make sure she was still alive and breathing, then curiosity got the better of me and I pulled back one of her eyelids to confirm my suspicions.

"Huh, purple eyes. So I didn't imagine it. What an odd trait."

I then brushed some of her dark hair aside, away from her impish face, to better examine her ears. They were somewhat pointed, but not to the same extent as a full-blooded Mer. Her complexion told a similar story; dark and slightly grey, but with a tinge of redness in her cheeks only displayed by those who have the blood of Men. I presumed that meant she must have some racial mixing in her. What a shame, I thought, as she would have been even more capable as an untainted Dunmer. Some wood remained in the nearby fire pit, and I lit it with a blast of magicka to roast a bit of food before heading out, as I hadn't eaten in almost a day. Chewing the tough boar meat, I looked back at the girl sleeping halfway under the tent and laughed. She was wearing men's armor.

Before leaving her to sleep off the spells, I quickly wrote a letter and tucked it into her hand. I would have to go back into hiding for the time being, while I figured out what Sigrun's next move may be, and how best to eventually get to her.
Adventure Calls

Chapter Summary

Indra awakes after being knocked out by Teldryn, and finds her way back to Raven Rock, where she confronts Geldis. He reveals the dark past shared by he and Mr. Sero, and gives her a clue to a location that may contain information as to why Sigrun is after Teldryn in the first place. As she prepares to set off for Skyrim, Indra finally receives the custom set of armor from Glover, and it is more than she could ever have wished for. As she boards the Northern Maiden, Indra finds she has a companion for the journey.

Chapter Notes

Can you tell my new favourite armor mod is Ryder's Dragonfly Robes :P
Go download it!

Wispy pine branches swayed in the gentle night breeze, their dark green boughs swirling into view as my heavy eyelids fluttered open.

Hastily lurching upwards in surprise and panic, I was overcome by dizziness and a horrible throbbing throughout my head, neck and eyes. I lay back down onto soft leather and looked up at the night sky, then down at the rest of my body which was sprawled over a bedroll, halfway inside a small tent.

As the murky cloak bearing down on my senses slowly released me, I felt something in my hand and uncurled my fingers to find a sheet of paper. Sitting up slowly this time, I opened the message and crawled over to the dying campfire to read it. The strokes were rushed, but almost elegant, revealing penmanship that belonged to someone confident and educated.

I know you're not one of them. Do yourself a favor and just get out of Raven Rock. I have no quarrel with you and it's better for the both of us if you just stay out of this.

Memories of the events that had occurred over the past two days came flooding back to me in rapid, disjointed succession. I sat motionless while I rehashed the details I managed to pull from the swampy depths of my mind. Closing my eyes, I hunched forward and pressed the palms of my hands into my forehead just above my eyes.

"Raven Rock is under attack by mercenaries who are looking for a criminal. That criminal is Teldryn Sero, a friend of Geldis, and he's hiding among the Redoran guard. He's been killing the mercenaries that are after him. They found his hideout and tried to ambush him, but he stopped them. I tracked down the location of his hideout shortly after, and then..." I stated out loud, hoping that by stating what facts I could recall, I would become grounded in reality and order would rise from chaos.
"And then he must have knocked me out and brought me here." I finished, looking around the site.

A peculiar feeling came over me when I realized that he hadn't hurt me, and that he had saved me in the central market. He was a dangerous man, and now, he was trying to remove me from the situation, to what end I did not know. Hands still on my head, I was hit with the realization that my helmet was missing. I scurried back to the tent and frantically felt around the darkness, and soon my fingers made contact with the waxy fabric of the chitin helm. I didn't recall ever taking it off. A pang of unease suddenly hit me. Teldryn removed it. He knew exactly who was investigating him.

Exhaling hard, water vapour rose up around my face and formed ice crystals in my brows and lashes, prompting the realization that I needed to return home. I also needed to have a chat with a certain innkeeper.

The sight of light flickering in the small windows of my house filled me with relief as I groggily ambled down the bulwark and into town, loosely holding the chitin helm. I cautiously opened the door and found my parents crowded around our tiny kitchen table, hands clutched tightly and worry manifesting throughout their bodies. Fevythe was also there, the tension in his body mirroring that of my mother and father.

"Oh thank Azura you're back," My mother gushed as she stood up to greet me, "we knew you weren't among the dead, but we had no idea where you had gone off to."

"I'm sorry for making you worry," I apologized as she hugged me. "I sort of stumbled into this mess and ended up helping Captain Veleth try to get to the source of the problem. Did you know there are underground tunnels running all through Raven Rock?"

"Was that where they were hiding? The people that attacked earlier today?" Fevythe asked, standing up as well.

"Some of them, yes, but the real problem is that there is a criminal pretending to be a Redoran guard," I answered, "That's who they're after. I know who it is, but some parts of the story just aren't making sense," I shook my head. The searing pain in my skull had subsided, but was now replaced with a dull ache.

"So who are the people that are attacking town?" My mother asked.

"Bounty hunters," I replied. "They're going after the Redoran, trying to find the guy, it's just..."

"What?" Fevythe asked gently as my mouth remained slightly open in silent contemplation

"The criminal is a friend of Geldis," I finished, looking around at the shocked expressions on everyone's faces. "What's more, I think Geldis may be protecting the wanted man."

"Why would Geldis have a friend like that?" Fevythe wondered.

"That's what's not making sense. I'm already tangled up enough in this, and I need to find out what's going on, discreetly."

"Indra," My father now spoke up, "we read your letter. We knew adventure would eventually find you, and that you would answer the call. It's been written in the stars since the day you were born. If you feel this is something you have to pursue, we will support you."
Taking a minute to contemplate what he said, snippets of important turning points in my life briefly flashed at the forefront of my thoughts. I supposed I always had been keen for adventure and excitement, but something about his words seemed to convey a message more cryptic than simply the full realization of my personality. I brushed this feeling aside, as I didn't have time nor the mental capacity for sentiment.

"Thank you," I finally said, a bit taken aback by my father's somewhat grandiose proclamation. "There's just one more thing I have to do tonight," I looked at Fevythe. "I promise I'll be back soon, try to get some rest."

Approaching the abandoned house, I put my helm back on before I confronted Ramodo. It was better he thought I was an adolescent boy, as I figured it may work to my advantage later if I wanted to approach him as another persona. He sat on a dirty bedroll drinking from a worn mug, and the bones from his meal had been lazily discarded about the floor. I could hear the rats fighting over the scraps in the shadows.

"You're back," He said, taking another swig of ale, "and still alive I see, which is more than can be said for most of my men. Do you have any news? Did you find anything?"

"I couldn't do anything." I replied, shrugging in helplessness. "Teldryn attacked me before I could try. I know where he is hiding, though,"

"That's nothing I didn't know before," Ramodo picked at another animal bone. "At least you've proven yourself to be trustworthy. My infiltrator told me he saw you down there. I'm just surprised Sero didn't kill you like he did the rest of my men."

"That's because I'm not one of your men!" I exclaimed, "And Teldryn knew that! He knows who I am; do you not realize how much danger I'm putting myself in to help you? And, apparently, thanks to you guys, Raven Rock is also in danger. You owe me some answers for what happened in town!"

"Fine," Ramodo sighed, relinquishing his dominance, "What do you wanna know?"

"Who is Sigrun?" I asked, desperate for more information.

"I can't tell you that," Ramodo crossed his arms.

"Not good enough," I said, "she's your boss, right?"

Ramodo let out a grunt. "Let's just say that as long as she continues to keep me at her side, she can count on my blade to protect her."

"Are you loyal to her, or is she blackmailing you?"

"Maybe you'll find out later."

"Fine," I said, "If you won't tell me, maybe Geldis knows something."

Ramodos eyes widened when I mentioned Sadri's name.

"Are you crazy? You won't walk out of there alive. Geldis is a dangerous man, like Teldryn. Unknowable, unpredictable Dunmer, the both of them."

I was confused. I had grown up knowing Geldis, and considered him a friend to Raven
I was pretty sure he was protecting Teldryn, but I thought there must be something more to the story, as Geldis had never been a threat to anyone. I turned and began to move towards the exit, assuring Ramodo I would find out more.

Clanking down the stairs of the Retching Netch in my rented chitin armor, I found Geldis drying mugs with an old rag.

"Unless you're here for a room, I've got nothing to offer. Last call was half an hour ago." He shouted out to me, not looking up from his cleaning duties.

I removed my helmet and walked up to him. My face was covered in soot and dirt, the braids in my hair were all but undone and I could feel the puffiness of the dark circles that appeared beneath my eyes after I had awoken from a forced sleep.

"By the gods Indra," He said, flipping the rag onto his shoulder, "I take back what I said. You look like you could use a drink."

"We need to talk. Now," I said, my evaluation of the situation's severity coming forth in my tone, and likely apparent in my eyes. "This is about your mercenary friend."

"Umm...okay," He said, glancing around the almost entirely empty bar. "Come with me."

I followed Geldis to an unoccupied room at the back of the inn where he closed the doors and scowled at me. "Is this important?" He asked, folding his arms, "I'm quite busy,"

"Where's Teldryn Sero?" I demanded. His face didn't change at the mention of his friend's name.

"He's in the inn somewhere. Take a look around and I'm sure you'll find him," Geldis replied, calmly lying with ease. The old barkeep had always come off as a bit of a severe man, but he had never been cold towards me.

"That's the wrong answer," I was unable to conceal the hurt and anger in my eyes. "Why are you lying to me?"

"I tend to keep my patrons privacy," Geldis retorted, even more coldly now.

"He's a criminal and a wanted man, with a massive bounty on his head and you're protecting him?" I was confused as to why Geldis was betraying his own town.

"That's crazy!" Geldis replied with a roar. I had never seen him angry before, and it was a scary sight. Lowering his voice, he now leaned towards me, "How dare you make such an accusation!" He hissed.

"Geldis, I know you know him well," I said quietly, simultaneously trying to calm him and get to the bottom of this puzzle. "Velet told me about your relationship, and on top of that I found your Sujamma in a huge cavern underneath the bulwark, right before Teldryn knocked me out."

"He's still in Glowstone Hall?" Geldis groaned, oblivious to the part about Teldryn attacking me. "That S'wit is going to get himself killed in there."

"He's already killed a bunch of mercenaries in there, and he almost killed me!" I exclaimed.

"But he didn't, did he?" Geldis asked rhetorically, relaxing again. "He's a good elf and I trust
him. He got mixed up in the wrong crowd."

"Both of you did, didn't you," I replied, feeling as if I was pressing him for something deeply buried. Something that he had never discussed with anyone for many years. "That's why the mercenaries are afraid of you two...?" I inquired.

"Yes and no," Geldis sighed. "I suppose there's no concealing the truth anymore. We both used to serve the Morag Tong in Morrowind. Teldryn was young at the time, and became disillusioned by the leadership. Despite being just past his adolescent years, he was a skilled warrior and effective killer, and left Blacklight to put those skills to good use for some gold. He became quite the prolific freelance mercenary, picking up all sorts of patrons throughout Skyrim over the course of ten years and making outrageous coin as he did. Despite enjoying the process of making money, he's never been the type to hoard wealth. He sent most of his earnings to his family, and some to me.

"He never told me all the details, but from what I understand, one of the jobs got botched and he made a pretty scary enemy who will cease chasing him until she has her hands on him to make him suffer in more creative ways than Boethiah could imagine. He's been on the move ever since, trying to escape her, never knowing who will be hiding in the shadows with a blade meant for his throat."

After Geldis finished his story, I remained silent to ruminate on what he had said. He had no reason to lie me, and it sounded like he cared deeply for Teldryn. They must have a complicated past, I thought. Whoever was hunting Geldis' friend was doing it for revenge, not money. I almost wanted to suggest that we just let them have Teldryn if it meant Raven Rock would be safe, but I pushed that cruel thought away, wondering why it had ever come to me in the first place. Perhaps the more sinister Daedra were putting ideas in my head.

"So, is the bounty a red herring? Do you believe he's innocent?" I asked, putting the pieces together.

"I think so." Geldis said, "From what he told me, Sigrun is as vengeful as they come, but I still don't know what he did to warrant her wrath. A while ago, I spent several months searching for the Sea Tiger around the Northern coast of Skyrim to try and help clear his name, but she was nowhere to be found. Figuring it was safe in Raven Rock, I invited Teldryn to come stay with me once I decided there was no risk of him being here. Now Sigrun is back again, and I feel like it's only a matter of time before Teldryn's fate is sealed."

"So Sigrun is luring mercenaries with the promise of a share in his fake bounty, when really she wants him alive to take revenge," I concluded. "If he's innocent, then I'm going about this all wrong. I should be trying to find Sigrun, not capture Teldryn. He's a good friend of yours and doesn't deserve to be tormented like this, even if he's made mistakes in the past. I need to know more," I said, turning about in the small room in thought and rubbing the back of my sore neck. Maybe we can find out enough to get one step ahead of her and stop her before she makes her next move."

"For Teldryn's sake, I hope you're right," He said. He seemed genuinely upset. "I took him under my wing after his father was killed during a mission, and he's been like a son to me since then. I just want him to live a relatively normal life like I've been able to. He's too smart for this mercenary nonsense and needs to get out. I think this situation has scared some sense into him, but it's far from over. I'll do my best to protect him while you find out what you can."

"Where do I start looking?" I asked.
"Head for Skyrim," He said, "there's a burnt down farm Southeast of Windhelm, past the working farms. That's where it all began. See what you can find there."

I scowled at Geldis. "Why have you not checked there?"

"Something happened there that Teldryn refuses to talk about. He asked me never to go there, and out of respect I obliged, but this issue has gone too far past promises between friends."

I returned home even more distraught than when I had left that morning. For as long as Teldryn's supposed innocence could not be proven, Raven Rock was in danger. He wouldn't even be able to leave the island; Sigrun knew too much and they would sink the ship he was on, taking countless civilian lives with him. I began removing my armor and laying it out to check it for any damage. I wouldn't return it to Glover without any coin if it had been compromised. As I smoothed out the tough fabric, I heard somebody rousing from a bedroll on the ground near the stairs. Soon after Fevythe appeared from the darkness, and wrapped his arms around me from behind.

"I'm sorry about being insensitive the other day," I blurted out, and he shushed me.

"It's okay, we can talk about that later. Currently...You have too much on your plate. What's going on now, anyway?" He asked quietly, his calm presence soothing me.

"I have to go to Skyrim," I sighed. Fevythe moved his hands to my shoulders and gently turned me around, so that my face was met with the confusion on his. "I think there's information there that will help put an end to these attacks," I continued, looking up at him.

"If it's what you need to do, then go," He said, brushing my messy hair out of my face, "but please be safe."

I smiled. He was always so concerned for the well-being of others. In a way, I felt as if that trait had rubbed off a bit on me in our brief time together, smoothing out what rough edges I had developed in my younger years by being not only an aggressive little girl, but on defensive guard as a half-bred one at that. I didn't realize then how thankful I would be for having him in my life. Draping my arms around his neck, I looked up and kissed him softly, standing on my toes to reach his height. He hugged me tightly, then his hands dropped casually to my waist.

"Come, let's go to sleep. You must be awfully tired," He said, tapping my twice lightly on the behind.

"I am," I yawned, suddenly aware of just how exhausted I was. "Well," I said, making eye contact with Fevythe as I placed a hand on his chest, "not that tired."

He just laughed quietly, took my hand, and led me to his temporary guest bedroom.

Long after the sun had risen the following morning, I explained to my parents what had transpired in the Retching Netch only a few hours earlier. My wild plans were again met with understanding, almost as if I was a squadron leader explaining upcoming maneuvers to be performed by loyal soldiers. I found it odd, as my childhood was rife with strict training in body and mind, facilitated in equal measure by the both of them. A steady routine of study, labour, proper nutrition and sleep, interspersed with small amounts of play, were meant to instill in me a strong sense of discipline. Every mistake or wrongdoing on my part was reason for a lesson, and if I ever complained they made sure I was held accountable. And now I was allowed to run wild in Skyrim?

Putting my feelings of uncertainty about my parents' motives, I walked to Glover's house to
both return the borrowed chitin set and to pry about when my custom armor may be available, vibrating with nervous excitement. When I arrived, he wasn't outside at his anvil, bench or grindstone, so I tried knocking at the door to his house. He appeared shortly after, looking grim, with huge dark circles beneath his eyes.

"B'vek Glover, you look like you haven't slept in days," I said, concerned for his state.

"That's because I haven't slept since the attacks," He groaned. "After you left the other day, I started drafting the base of your custom armor. That was only a few minutes before those mercenaries showed up. When the dust settled, I was so badly shaken I couldn't stop my mind from racing. I started working on your suit, and haven't stopped since."

"Oh, Azura," I put my hands on his shoulders, "take a break. 'Your work reflects your state of mind', as my mother used to say." Glover nodded in tired agreement. "I don't want you to drop dead on my account, and I also don't want to end up dying because your craftsmanship was as shit as your face is right now," I said, unable to hold in a small laugh as I lightly smacked Glover on the arm. "I'll get you some food. Go lie down."

As I headed towards the stall owned and operated by Garyn the ash farmer, I saw Geldis also aiming for the produce stand, and we shared a conspiratorial glance.

"Morning F'lah," Geldis greeted Garyn, as I stood behind him, "got any more of those potatoes imported from Skyrim? I'm thinking about trying to make a brew from them."

"Geldis, you're a madman, and no," Replied Garyn. "However, I think there should be some coming in on the next Northern Maiden shipment later this week."

"Right. And remind me, how often can the ship be found here?" Geldis said casually, as he picked up an ash yam and turned it over in his hands.

"Well, the voyage is only a few days in length, but with any sort of repairs, supply restocking and cargo loading, it can be up to a week and a half to two weeks between Skyrim and Raven Rock. That's why I mainly grow my own food, can't just rely on the Nord imports," The old farmer replied cheerfully.

"Thank you, Garyn," Said Geldis, "I suppose I'll take a few ash yams and some trama root for now."

Thank you, Geldis, I thought. I realized that once the ship showed up later that week, I would have to use that opportunity to get to Skyrim, else I risked wasting more time and putting the lives of Raven Rock citizens in prolonged danger. Particularly those belonging to Teldryn and Geldis.

I bought some ash yams, horker meat, as well as a few carrots and leeks, and let myself back in to Glover's house where he had passed out in a chair by the fireplace. An hour later, he arose to the smell of stew bubbling on the range.

"Catching flies I see," I said, adding a bit more flour to the pot to finish thickening it.

"I feel better already," Glover cheerfully retorted, "your custom set of armor is right over here. Let me show you, I think it's going to be one of my greatest masterpieces yet."

I took a seat on a creaky wooden chair, readying myself for the show. What Glover brought to me, in several pieces, was not at all what I had pictured, but more than exceeded my expectations. The armor itself was more robe-like in appearance, with a high collared neck and fabric that draped down past the waist, where it split into three sections for maneuverability. The breastplate was made...
Lining the inside of the chest and back sections was some kind of grey fur, thick and coarse, with a soft undercoat. Fabric was sewn around the outside of the plates, so dark green it was almost black. I felt the substantial fabric of the skirt and sleeves, it seemed as tough as leather, but was twice as light. The protective plates covered by the unique fabric were also incredibly lightweight and flexible, and seemed impenetrable. The unfinished dark brown boots that accompanied the set also appeared to have been reinforced with plates.

"How did you create such a wondrous thing?" I breathed, completely mesmerized by the craft.

"It's a bit of a long story," Said Glover, helping himself to some stew. "Back in Skyrim, I had a smith friend by the name of Ryder. He was an eccentric type, incredibly creative and intelligent, with an affinity for alchemy. Whenever he made a new piece of equipment, he would attempt to merge some kind of special ingredient into the mix, like stitching leather with the fibres of taproot or melting powdered pearl into iron. Crazy stuff like that. At some point he became obsessed with dragonfly husks, thinking that the chitin that made up their bodies would be incredibly strong if it were spun into some kind of yarn, then woven into fabric.

"He was on the right track, but the dragonfly theory never came to fruition. Chitin plates, on the other hand, can be shaved into a fluff that is compatible with a spinning wheel, as I discovered. When woven into fabric, this yarn forms an incredibly tough composite. I named these robes for him, since he inspired me to use materials found in nature in various ways, and also because he died in the most spectacular explosion I've ever seen. Pretty sure it was his own fault, but gods, you should have seen the colours that came shooting out of his house." Glover explained. He then allowed himself a few moments of thoughtful silence as he reminisced about his insane late friend.

"Speaking of nature knowing what's best, that grey fur is from an ice wolf. The Skaal hunt them up North of here, and nothing will keep you warmer. In the case of the actual armor, the breastplates, cuisses and greaves are all your basic chitin. However, the fabric that makes up the rerebraces and tassets and cover the chitin plates are my special blend of yarn that I worked on for years. I've had all the materials to make this set forever, but it never seemed like the right time to use them until now. It's been coming together incredibly easily. I just need to reinforce everything with some resin and stitch all the pieces together, then it's yours. Oh, there are also some basic plated gauntlets you can put over the leather ones, if need be."

"This is incredible, Glover, I don't know how to thank you enough," I began, shaking my head.

"Don't worry about it," The blacksmith said, waving away my concerns. "You've given me more than it's value in resources over the years, and I've actually had a lot of fun making this, especially once I had you in mind. It's meant to be worn by someone nimble and quick, but resilient. I think you're meant to do great things around here, and I feel like an honorable man presenting this to you. Now, it's not going to let you survive a direct hit to the chest by a battleaxe, like a proper suit of armor would, but with your skill and its lightweight quality, you shouldn't ever have to be in that situation anyway."

When I was a child, Glover would sneak me sweets or the odd piece of scrap material to play with, and I had always felt close to him, as if he were a part of our family. I knew he had enjoyed spoiling me as if I were his own daughter, but this was too much.

He continued to brush off my worries of its value, and I felt there was nothing to do but
change the subject. "I feel like an ingrate for saying this," I started, "but do you think you'll have it done by the end of the week? I'm leaving for Skyrim then."

Glover silently opened his mouth in surprise, but recomposed himself and waved my concerns away. "Yes, of course, it should be done by the day after tomorrow. Thanks for bringing back this old chitin set in one piece."

The rest of the week crawled past uneventfully while I restlessly prepared what I would need for my trip. Between adding new fletching and arrowheads to what relatively straight and undamaged shafts I could find, I gathered up as much gold as I could scrounge together, a map of Skyrim, some jewelry I could sell, alchemy ingredients, preserves, and a waterskin. I had hoped I wouldn't be gone long, seeing as I figured I was only going so far as the farms just outside of Windhelm.

I visited Geldis and we spoke briefly in a back room. He gave me a letter which would allow me hospitality, and no questions asked, at a place called the New Gnisis Cornerclub, in Windhelm. He told me I wouldn't want to stay at Candlehearth Hall, lest I draw any unwanted attention.

When the Northern Maiden appeared at the docks two days later than expected, I rushed to Glover's house and put on my new armor. It fit perfectly. No uncomfortable tugging on various limbs, no tight straps going over my shoulders to dig into my neck; I could barely even tell I was wearing armor at all. Glover also gifted me with two new Elven daggers, which I placed in the sheathes hanging from the thick leather belt around my waist.

My valuables went into the small satchel that hung from the harness, and my rucksack attached to the back section of its leather straps. Before I slung the assembly that contained my simple bow and quiver over my neck, I threw a large hooded cloak that could double as a blanket over my body. Happening to glance upon my reflection in a polished shield on Glover's wall, I was barely able to recognize my own appearance. I turned my attention back to Glover and gave him a hug.

"I-I really can't thank you enough, Glover" I stammered, overwhelmed by the armor's beauty and comfort.

"I'm proud of the young woman you've become," He said, placing a hand on my shoulder. "You'll be prepared for whatever you may encounter in Skyrim. Regardless of what you run into, remember that you're still you, okay?"

The serious nature of his goodbye took me aback a bit, and I could only manage a nod in bemused appreciation. I was only going for a week at the most, yet Glover seemed to think this was going to be some kind of life-changing endeavour.

A few hours later I was bidding farewell to my parents on the docks. The ship was behind schedule and since no cargo from Raven Rock, save two other passengers, were going back to Skyrim, they were eager to set sail that afternoon. I wondered where Fevythe had got to, when I heard someone calling my name from close to town. It was him, running down the pier with a large backpack looming from behind his broad shoulders.

"Indra," He panted, "I've decided I'm coming with you. I do want to see more of the world, and you're the best traveling partner I could ask for."

"That's great, Fevythe!" I exclaimed. "Having you with me will make the trip so much better," I said, noticing something odd projecting from the sides of his pack. "What on Nirn are you
doing with a pickaxe? Are you planning on working while we're there?"

    A shy smile came across his face.

    "Well, I don't own any weapons, and I figured if I had to do any kind of fighting, a pickaxe is
    the only thing I know how to swing," He said sheepishly.

    "Don't worry too much, I've got enough weapons for the two of us," I laughed. "I don't think
    we'll be going into the wilderness anyway."

    He stepped aboard, and a few minutes later we were shoving off into the dark, ash-coated
    waves that lapped gently at the hull.
Past in Present

Chapter Summary

The cellar in the burnt down farm that Geldis asks Indra to investigate was once Teldryn's living space, and she finds more clues that link him to the Free-Winter family. Confronting Brunwulf Free-Winter in Windhelm, he recounts what happened between Teldryn and Voden Free-Winter, many years ago, and explains why Teldryn is being hunted by Sigrun. Their adventure takes Indra, Fevythe and Brunwulf through Skyrim to Robber's Gorge. On their way home through Whiterun, something eerie happens to Indra when they come upon a recently deceased Dragon.

Chapter Notes

I changed a couple of the plot points that were in the mod to simplify it a bit, and for the story be in alignment with what I've recounted already.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

While I was never actually properly sick, I felt seriously queasy for the entire journey from Raven Rock to Skyrim. I envied how easily being at sea came to Fevythe, as he held a stay on the starboard bow, smiling into the cold spray that whipped up each time the ship pitched into another dark wave. Perhaps being on the water was simply an extension of his intrinsic nature; riding the ebb and flow of the currents of life, and enjoying wherever it took him. I had wished I could be more like that, not feeling the need to force my way through every situation. Would it not be so nice to have the ability to take whatever life handed me in stride? His overall constitution was equally enviable from anyone's perspective, much less mine. On the rare chance he fell ill, his symptoms were far less severe than most, and he was back to normal faster than anyone else I knew. He seldom bruised, and minor cuts and scratches seemed to heal at an accelerated rate.

When we finally docked at the small harbour below the city of Windhelm at sundown two days later, I only wanted to get to New Gnisis and fall into a sleep that didn't have me waking up to the motion of every unpredictable yaw. As we made our way through the harbour and up the stairs to the city entrance, the Argonian dockhands gave us passing glances, but what brief eye contact I could manage with them was obstructed by a cold aloofness on their part. I didn't know any of them, so why did they treat me as if I had done them wrong? I could only imagine it had something to do with our complex and dark past, but this was a new era and a new city so it didn't make sense to me. At least, at the time it didn't.

Ambarys greeted us as we walked into the Cornerclub, and had us sit at the single small table on the first floor. Cheerfully offering Fevythe a drink, he seemed a bit apprehensive about how familiar to act around me, and I chalked it up to not looking quite Dunmer enough to fit in at such an establishment. After we had eaten much and drank a little, I showed him the referral from Geldis. Ambarys nodded and took us up to the bunks. The beds were small and worn, and no privacy was to be had, but it was the only place to rent in the Gray Quarter. Most Dunmer traveling through town
felt more welcome there, anyway.

We awoke early the next morning and made our way into the city proper where we stared in awe as we took in our surroundings - huge buildings and massive walls constructed entirely of stone. Curved pillars stood like sentinels at either side of the main gate, which was beautifully ornate and impossibly tall. Looking up, all I could think was how bright the sun shone here; I never knew it could be so intense.

"This really is incredible," Fevythe enthused, shielding his eyes from the sun as he turned in all directions. "It almost makes Raven Rock seem," He paused, "primitive."

"Don't say that," I scolded. "We just have different cultures and values, as well as different resources at our expense. I'm sure the Nords can't build a proper underground bunker nor cultivate special fungi that they turn into houses."

Despite the enjoyment of taking in the view, I was eager to get moving towards the farms outside of Windhelm, and urged Fevythe that we get moving.

"Just a few more minutes," He said, "It's just so different and amazing. I wonder how big the city is?"

"Why don't you spend the day here? I'm not going far and shouldn't be too long. You have a look around and tell me what's good when I get back."

We parted ways and I walked from the main courtyard towards the city gates. I waved at the guards in a request for exit from Windhelm through the edifice of a door, and set off across the bridge.

I could see the farms in the distance, and it was only another half hour before I came upon the first snow-covered field. I wondered how they could possibly grow anything under all that frost, but then I remembered how we were able to force sustenance from the alkaline ash that blanketed Solstheim. Walking past the labourers working the earth, I noticed that most of them were Dunmer, despite all the farm names sounding quite Nord-like, such as "Hollyfrost". I hoped they were paid decent wages, at the very least.

A chill ran through me as I approached the remnants of what was once a large wooden building, sitting halfway up a hill. Snow had all but covered the scorched remnants of planks and pillars, and provided a stark contrast to the black, charred wood beneath. Nothing but wreckage surrounded me, and I went further into the house, towards what was once a bedroom. The chill I had felt earlier seemed to rise up again, and at the same time a blue light began materializing on top of one of the beds. The light gradually took on the shape of a human spectre - a young girl, who knelt on the bed and looked up at me quite serenely. I blinked slowly and furrowed my brow, assuming my eyes were deceiving me after the exhaustion of traveling for so many days.

"Hello," The spirit greeted. I could feel the skin on my back crawling up and down my spine, but I wasn't afraid.

"Hello," I replied.

"I've never seen you around here before," The little ghost said.

"I've never been here before," I answered, "who are you?"

"Tell them he didn't do it." She pleaded.
"Didn't do what? Who is he?"

"I don't know. Somebody in town said he did it."

I wondered if this had something to do with Teldryn.

"I don't understand, can you tell me more?" I asked.

"No." Her expression suddenly turned dark. "I hate her. Everyone hates her."

"I can tell them he didn't do it, but you have to tell me more,"

"Really?" She asked, perking up. "Let me know when you do, and I'll tell papa! We'll all be happy friends again!"

Smiling, she slowly lifted and arm and pointed towards the deepest corner of the house. Before I could say anymore, she began dissolving into ethereal wisps, glimmering and dancing in the wind, then finally faded into the sunshine. The chill lifted, and I was suddenly cognizant of the sun's warmth on my face. I turned and looked where she was pointing, and was met with a trapdoor leading into the cellar.

Holding a flame in my hand, I looked around the basement room. Dried Elves ear and garlic braids hung from the ceiling, vials of potions and old books I didn't recognize, as well as the odd burlap sack lay on wooden shelves. A thick beeswax candle, a skull and some hanging pelts surrounded a map of Skyrim on a table somebody had driven daggers into. It looked as if the person who occupied this abode would return at any minute, but the cobwebs in the corners and the thick layer of dust on every item told otherwise. I moved past a makeshift wall made of stacked crates and found a note sitting on a small table. Oafish writing addressed the letter's recipient, somebody by the name of "TAEL DRIN". I then realized who it was intended for.

MY TRUSTED FELLOW
DUMBER

I WRITE SO YOU UNDERSTAND
HERE IS THE PERFECT FIGHTING TACTIC
I CHOP THE CUNTS IN CLOSE COMBAT
AND THE ARCHER COVERS MY BACK
WE MUST DEPART VERY SOON SO I GOT YOU A BOW TO PRACTICE WITH
I KNOW YOU ARE STILL HEAVILY INJURED BUT IF YOU WERE SKYRIMS ONLY HUNTER ALL HER PEOPLE WOULD DIE OF STARVATION
VODEN FREE-WINTER

A response was written below, and I immediately recognized the handwriting.

My dearest Nord F I E N D,

You WILL respect my combat style, or I won't be responsible for whatever happens next.

TELDRYN SERO
Ah, yes, the sign of a strong male friendship - exchanging pleasantries in a manner that insinuated the other were totally incompetent, and never leaving out the name-calling. However, this still didn't tell me what Teldryn did to justify Sigrun's behaviour.

I continued to explore the dingy cellar bedroom for any other clues, and came upon a previously crumpled note with a wax seal embossed in the lower right hand corner. In official and beautiful calligraphy, the Decree of Release issued by Jarl Hoag stated,

_Having been declared innocent of all crimes, Teldryn Sero is released. The sentence of death is hereby lifted. The bounty has been paid in full by employer Voden Free-Winter, to whom Teldryn Sero is in the service of. Teldryn Sero is now bound to serve his Nord master, Brunwulf Free-Winter is now directly responsible for every crime they shall commit in the Eastmarch Hold._

It was dated the 19th of Sun's Height, 4E 196. Five years ago. Had Teldryn committed a heinous crime?

I headed back to town to look for anybody that could point me in the direction of either Voden, or Brunwulf Free-Winter. Asking the guards at the gate, they told me to look for a large bald, bearded man with a huge grey dog at his side. That was Brunwulf. I spotted the dog first, before its master, who was walking up the steps that led to the Palace of the Kings, and I caught up with him shortly thereafter.

"Hello, excuse me, are you Brunwulf Free-Winter?" I inquired as I jogged up to the man. He was older, likely in his late fifties, wearing studded Nord armor. It had seemed like most of his white hair had migrated from his head to his beard, but he still seemed fit for his age.

"Yes, what do you need?" He answered, shifting on his feet as he turned to face me. "I don't recognize you from the Grey Quarter."

"Oh, I'm just visiting Windhelm. I don't live there," I replied.

"Right, sorry," He said quickly. He seemed somewhat embarrassed at his presumption. "I apologize on behalf of anybody who may have mistreated you here, all outsiders should be welcome regardless of race. Any reason you're looking for me?"

"Yes," I said, somewhat tentatively, "this may seem a bit forward, but could I ask you about the Free-Winter farm?"

"I would ask you to mind your business about it," He said coldly, but changed his tone after a brief sigh. "But, it was long enough ago I suppose."

"Who is Voden Free-Winter?" I asked, "Where is he?"

Brunwulf deflated and a sadness appeared in his eyes as he answered my questions.

"He's my brother. He's dead. How do you know about him, not being from around here?"

"I'm investigating Teldryn Sero," I replied.

The appearance of Teldryn's name in our conversation must have triggered something as Brunwulf crossed his arms in a poor attempt to cover the panic written all over his face.

"Why? Everyone knows he's dead and gone as well."
"Well, he's not," I stated. "He's alive and well and in my hometown, and his presence is causing all sorts of grief because a woman named Sigrun wants him alive."

Brunwulf groaned and looked upwards. "She's back, huh. We would be better off with both of them dead," he said cynically, then looked back at me. "She still wants revenge for the death of my brother, her husband."

"Did Teldryn kill Voden?"

"Gods, no." The old Nord scowled, "They were best of friends, despite having a patron-employee relationship. So much so that Voden invited Teldryn to stay with him and his family at the farm. Teldryn made a good tenant, and was an excellent mentor for their daughter."

Maybe the dangerous man behind the mask wasn't such a fearsome person after all.

"What happened?" I asked.

"Voden and I had been out on a hunting trip, and Sigrun was away at sea. When we returned, bandits were attacking our house and Teldryn was fighting them off." Brunwulf paused slightly before sadly recounting the rest of the story. "When they killed my niece, Teldryn flew into a blind rage, unintentionally burning the house down in his fury. We managed to get most of the filth, but some escaped. Voden left to find Sigrun and bring her home to mourn their daughter."

"Word got out in Windhelm that the farm was burnt down and that a child was dead. When the people found out a dark elf was involved, a witch hunt ensued and Teldryn was arrested. I insisted he was innocent, but it was only my word against dozens of angry, racist Nords. Despite the word of her husband, Sigrun wasn’t convinced that Teldryn wasn’t guilty, saying she never trusted him and that he had gotten close to them, only to let his bandit friends in and steal their wealth."

I felt a wave of anger wash over me as Brunwulf finished his story. Teldryn's innocence was corroborated by both the father and uncle of the dead child, and nobody believed them. What utter madness was this? Only because the accused was a Dunmer?

"If I can prove Teldryn's innocence to Sigrun, won't that stop her?" I pondered.

Brunwulf's expression made it seem as if he were doubtful Sigrun could change. "You can try," he said, "but if I can't convince this city, I wonder what luck you will have with that woman, especially now that her husband is gone, too."

"What happened to your brother?"

"Once Voden paid off his bounty, Teldryn was released from jail and returned to the cellar in the burnt house to recuperate, and also mourn what he considered an adopted niece. Voden wanted nothing more than revenge and once Teldryn was well again, they set off to track down the bandits."

Brunwulf shook his head as he recalled the rage possessing his brother. "Voden was obsessed; he left his wife behind and didn't make contact with her the whole time. I think she reminded him too much of their child. Teldryn stayed loyal at his side until they accomplished their mission. I never saw my brother again. Two years after they left, I received a letter from Teldryn. Here," Brunwulf said, reaching into a small satchel. "I've kept it all these years. He knew he was going to be a scapegoat again after Voden died. I feel bad for the elf, I really do. He's a good man, noble and courageous, yet has fallen victim to unfortunate circumstances time and time again."

Brunwulf took out a small, fraying and yellowed note. The creases were deep, and some of the ink had rubbed off, but I could still read the words. I really did feel terrible after hearing
Brunwulf's story, and it seemed as though he was still holding on to something by keeping this note all these years. While the message had not been signed, I recognized the handwriting.

\begin{quotation}
Brunwulf,

I'm deeply sorry. Voden is dead. We tracked down the bandits he was looking for and there was nothing I could do to stop him, although they got what they deserved. I set fire to the encampment and managed to recover his body. Look for a small circle of stones under the waterfall at Robber's Gorge, and please give him a proper burial. If anyone asks, I died there too. Farewell Serjo, I better leave Skyrim before someone accuses me again.
\end{quotation}

"Have you ever visited his grave?" I asked.

"No," Brunwulf sighed, "I thought that by never seeing that place, I could keep it in my mind that my brother was still alive, wandering Skyrim with his family. I have kept all the thoughts and feelings from the past hidden away all these years, and while I am angry at you for re-opening these wounds, I am grateful. This needs to come to an end, and I need closure. Perhaps it's what Sigrun needs, as well"

I put a hand on his shoulder. "Will you come with me to Robber's Gorge, then?" I asked, my eyes meeting his. "If you can get Voden's body back home maybe that will help settle things with Sigrun, too."

Brunwulf looked pensive for a few moments, but eventually nodded. "Alright. This is something I've needed to do for years, and it's now or never I suppose. How about we set out tomorrow morning. Morthal is the closest town to the gorge, we can take a carriage there and make the rest of the journey on foot. Let us meet at the stables at sunrise."

After bidding Brunwulf farewell, I walked quickly and purposefully towards the marketplace, recharged with the knowledge that this wasn't a dead end and that I could finally really do something about the situation. Buying supplies, I ran into Fevythe, who was even more ecstatic than me.

"Having a good day so far, I take it?" I asked, greeting him with a hug.

"It was amazing! This place is amazing!" He enthused, "Other than the dirty looks from Nords, I've learned so much so far. Some homeless woman taught me how to take someone's valuables without them even noticing, not that I would ever do that, and I visited the court wizard and bought some spell tomes. Check this out!"

He flicked his wrist, and a golden light appeared in one hand. Moving his arm in a fluid, graceful motion, the light expanded and coiled around his body, engulfing him in a comforting, warm glow.

"Oooh," I said, amused by his enthusiasm, and also partially humoring him, "I see you've learned some restoration skill. I was never particularly good at that."

"Wait, there's more!" He exclaimed. He sounded like an advertisement. At that, he stuck out his other hand and bathed me in the same golden light.

"Ahh, that feels nice," I murmured, my whole body relaxing as the soothing warmth surrounded me. "You really picked that up quickly, huh?"

The golden light faded away as he dropped his hands.
"I think I know what I want to do in life," He said, smiling broadly. "Mining is alright, but I think my path is to become a healer."

"It suits you," I laughed, suddenly realizing how it made sense that he had been able to ward off disease and injury his whole life thus far. "Raven Rock could use more Dunmer adept in restoration magic."

I filled him in on the trip to come, and we spent the rest of the afternoon gathering necessary supplies and taking some time to tour Windhelm, becoming immersed in the hubbub of daily life.

That night, before other New Gnisis patrons had come to bed, Fevythe crept up from his single cot and crawled into mine, pressing into me from behind.

"What are you doing?" I hissed, "Someone will hear you!"

"There's no one here, yet," He whispered, "it's been too many days now, I miss you."

He lifted my thin shirt and gently squeezed my breasts as he desperately ground his hardness into my backside, in slow, rhythmic thrusts. I gave in and pulled down my cotton bottoms, lifting my top leg while he reached down and produced his hot, throbbing member. Moaning as my desire caught up to his, I parted my lips and let him in, catching my breath. I could hear his breathing become raspier and I reached down to pleasure myself. It really had been quite a while, and I felt myself tightening up almost immediately. Only a few seconds had passed before I was writhing in climax, and Fevythe, feeling the spasms, muttered an "Oh, fuck," before quickly thrusting deep into me, shifting the bed through his shudders. He reached his hand up to turn my face towards him and kissed me deeply, before smiling mischievously and scurrying away to his own bed.

"Oh, sure, leave me with the mess!" I said in mock anger and turned over to go to sleep as he snickered and moved his blankets aside.

"What are you kids up to?!" I heard a cranky old elf exclaim irately, as he climbed the stairs to the shared bunk room. We just laughed silently as we made eye contact and pulled the covers up to our chins.

Taking a carriage was an exciting and novel experience for both Fevythe and I as we bounced around on the hard, weathered wood, smiling like idiots. Brunwulf regarded us placidly as we made our way along the bumpy path towards Morthal. I was in awe at the beauty of nature in Skyrim. The mountains loomed in the distance, like massive, serene deities. Sparse, tough-looking colourful flowers dotted the grassy fields that made up the countryside. We didn't have this much colour back in Raven Rock; it was all browns, beiges and muted brick-reds, and I couldn't take in enough of the vast array of hues Skyrim had to offer. When the day grew long, we could see a group of people walking our way, far off on the horizon. As we approached them, I saw three men dressed in dark brown and red armor, with shiny steel protective plates, ornate helmets and each carrying a short, sharp sword at his waist. They were marching along with another man who was half a foot taller than them, his sand-coloured hair obscured by filth. The rest of him was equally as dirty, his worn rags that served as clothing were bloodied and hanging on by threads. He wore no shoes, and his hands were tied in front of his body.

"Imperial business, keep to yourself!" One of the armored guards ordered.

As the group of men made their way past our carriage, the despondent gaze of the Nord prisoner met mine. I was reminded of the eyes of an injured bristleback I had found at the bottom of a short cliff before I cut its throat in mercy. Defeated yet defiant, any fight or fear having been
exhausted long before.

I stared at them in pity as they receded into the distance, and Brunwulf let out a sigh.

"I guess they caught another Stormcloak rebel," He said.

"Rebel?" I asked out of genuine confusion. I knew there was a war in Skyrim, but I the story I had heard was that the Nords were trying to defend their homeland from foreign invasion.

"Yes, I am not sure what you know of the current situation, and while really it began a long time ago, the situation in Skyrim reached its lowest point right after the Markarth Incident. Skyrim was under Imperial control, and due to some complicated circumstances, Ulfric ended up killing High King Torygg which then sparked a rebellion. I suppose you could say the Nords were initially only trying to preserve their culture, but Ulfric has gone far past trying to be diplomatic. I don't harbour any negative feelings towards the Empire, I think they really do want to allow everyone to live in peace with each other. But, for some reason, peace has to be established by force, and it's the common people that suffer the most."

"Who, then, is truly at fault?"

Brunwulf folded his arms and stared off into the sunset.

"No one, and everyone. Just like every other war."

I contemplated Brunwulf's wisdom for a long time afterwards. If peace required force, did that mean one side would have to push the other into the shadows, to be all but forgotten except viewed as the enemy by history, so that people in the future would never know what horrors their ancestors had to endure for their way of life? If war affected everyone, did that mean it was truly the nature of Man and Mer?

We arrived in Morthal a day and a half after leaving Windhelm, making camp once along the way. I couldn't understand why someone had decided the middle of a swamp would be a good place to build a town. It was damp and depressing, as were its residents, and smelled vaguely of sulphurous bog water. We resupplied and left that wretched place the same afternoon, figuring we could reach the gorge by midsun the following day.

That night and in the few hours following, we truly got a sense of how wild and dangerous Skyrim could be. All throughout the night, we could hear the howl of the wolves that stalked the entire province, and I swore I could see their eyes through the darkness of the trees around our camp. Brunwulf informed me they were scared of fire, which worked in my favour as an expert in destruction, and I hoped he was right.

Early the next morning, as we made our way towards the river near the gorge, I could hear a grumbling coming from a nearby cave, but thought nothing of it. Suddenly, a huge bear came charging out at us, roaring and standing up on its hind legs. Brunwulf stood his ground, hoping to establish dominance and deter it from coming any closer. It was either hungry, territorial or mad, because it immediately upped his ante and took a swipe at the Nord. Brunwulf moved to one side and began to draw his massive sword, but was too slow and took the full force of the bears claws across his exposed neck. His sword, half unsheathed when this happened, went tumbling down a hill in the process. As he fell to the ground, I began hurling balls of fire at the beast, but this only seemed to enrage it further. As it charged towards me, I grabbed my daggers and readied myself. I dodged the first lunge and looked for an opening. It recomposed itself and lunged again, and I stabbed it in the neck as I moved to the other side. It wasn't like cutting through the tender meat of the bristlebacks as I had anticipated, and the knife stuck in its coarse fur while it shook its head in anger. The third
time it charged at me I held my ground and rammed my metal gauntlet into its mouth, stabbing at its eyes, snout, ears, anywhere.

"Fevythe!" I yelled, and looked to see him frozen in place, eyes wide open. By this time I had managed to blind the bear and it flailed around maniacally, knocking the dagger out of my hand in the process. It shoved me down with its massive paws and weight, blood pouring onto my face. As it opened its mouth I thought my life was over. I heard a dull crack, and it keeled over moments later. Panting, I looked up to see Brunwulf was alive and had driven Fevythe's pickaxe into the skull of the crazed bear. He sat down with a grunt and put a hand on his throat in an attempt to stop the bleeding from the jagged, but thankfully shallow, wound.

"What are you doing, heal him!" I yelled again at Fevythe who was still staring off in a daze, now shaking like a skooma addict going through withdrawal. He appeared to snap out of it a bit at the sound of my voice, and shakily raised his hands to heal Brunwulf, who sighed as he was swallowed up by the warm mist. I pulled out a healing potion from my rucksack and gave it to Brunwulf, who drank it slowly and labouriously. Relief washing over me, the adrenaline finally wore off and I was suddenly aware of how sore I was. The bear's mouth was much wider than my arms and gauntlets, and it had managed to sink its teeth into the leather underneath the plates, puncturing both it and my forearm. My back and chest also hurt from the weight of the creature bearing down on me into the ground. I coughed lightly, and excruciating pain seared through my upper body. Satisfied with Brunwulf's recovery, Fevythe turned his shaky attention to me, and I felt my pain fading away along with my consciousness. When I woke up, Fevythe was at my side, Brunwulf had found our weapons and was in the process of cutting open the bear.

"How long was I out for?" I asked.

"A few minutes," Fevythe replied, "I'm so sorry, I didn't know what to do, I just froze."

"It's okay, I've been there too," I said weakly, reaching a hand out to stroke his arm. "It gets easier."

He smiled thinly, but didn't seem so sure about what I had just said. I coughed again and the pain in my ribs came back, albeit duller than before.

"Ugh, I think something's broken in there," I groaned, reaching for another healing potion.

We ate some of the tough, gamey bear meat for lunch before continuing downwards into the gorge. There was a small island near the only waterfall, and we all agreed it made sense to check it. A large upright stone came into view, and a mound at its base had a ring of mushrooms and nightshade growing in a perfect oval around its circumference.

"This has to be it," Brunwulf said, rushing ahead of Fevythe and I to get to the burial site first. He took out a small shovel and started digging. "I don't really care if I'm defiling his grave, I have to bring him home," He said breathlessly, desperately moving the ground aside as Fevythe and I started to help.

As he unearthed the bones, a few small items were also uncovered. A silver necklace hung from the neck of what was left of the body, and Brunwulf tearily recognized it right away as his brother's. A small box was also in the grave, decomposing, but fulfilling its duty to protect the letter contained within. Voden had written it before he died. He probably knew he was walking to his death, but justice was worth his sacrifice. A true Nord, I suppose.

TO MY BELOVED WIFE SIGRUN WHEREVER YOU MAY BE
I PRAY TO TALOS EVERY NIGHT TO FIND YOU AND AVENGE OUR CHILD

I HAVE WANDERED FOR TWO YEARS TO FIND THOSE FILTHY BASTARDS AND I WILL HAVE MY BLOODY REVENGE

THIS IS THE TIME OF OUR REUNION WHETHER IN VICTORY OR IN DEATH

MAY THE GODS HAVE MERCY ON THEM BECAUSE I SHALL HAVE NONE

Brunwulf's eyes welled with tears, and he wiped them away as he handed me the note.

"Take this home with you, along with his amulet. If Sigrun is near, you will eventually find her and you can show her this evidence. She needs to end this madness and get on with her life, and leave Teldryn alone. You need to hurry," He said, "take the path South of here, it's much safer and you can hire a carriage once you get to Whiterun. Now if you'll excuse me, I'd like time to be alone with my brother."

"What will you do next?" I asked.

"When I am done grieving, I will take his bones to Windhelm and bury him properly, in the crypt," He said, looking down at his brother's remains. "Talos guide him, and you."

The path leading South to Whiterun Hold seemed friendlier as it was much better paved, and there were fewer hills to traverse. It also helped that the fields surrounding it were vast and open, meaning that we weren't in danger of somebody sneaking up on us. Despite this, Fevythe still stared around in agitation, never letting go of his pickaxe and nervously asking questions the whole way.

"What if we run into bandits?" He asked shakily, staring around wide-eyed in fear.

"Then we give them our valuables and gold and be on our way."

"What if there are more bears and wolves?"

"I can deal with the wolves, and there aren't any caves around here so I doubt we'll see another bear."

"What if Stormcloaks attack us?"

"What in Oblivion, man?" I asked, throwing my hands in the air. "We're just travelers from Raven Rock, why would they have any quarrel with us? They're soldiers, not murderers." I thought about the paradoxical nature of what I had just said, but it hadn't registered in Fevythe's racing mind anyway.

"But maybe, since we're Dunmer, they'll think we side with The Empire and take us prisoner! What if."

"Fevythe!" I exclaimed, thoroughly annoyed at this point. "It will be fine! We're almost halfway there and we haven't even seen anything remotely eventful! Speaking of which, we should really make camp soon, it will be dark before long."

I don't think he slept much that night.

Early in the afternoon the next day, I saw a watchtower come into view and looked at our map.
"That must be the Western Watchtower of Whiterun, which means we're almost there!"

"Oh thank the three," Fevythe sighed.

As we approached the structure, I noticed something strange situated on the ground, near its base. Getting closer, I saw that the tower was crumbling, it looked like it had been burned. It was then that I realized that the hulking lump lying beside the tower was some kind of creature. Whatever it was, it was very much dead now. Even though I was confident it no longer lived, I was still filled with dread as its body began to glow orange, yet I couldn't draw myself from it. I was in a trance, pulled ever closer, hypnotized by the glow as it became brighter with every step I took.

Thinking back, I'm fairly sure Fevythe was yelling at me, but at the time nothing else in the world mattered but touching that dragon. The light was suddenly accompanied by an impossibly fast decay of the beast - skin curling into smoke, meat shriveling up and disappearing into nothing. The orange light started to fill with more colour - blue, purple, green, silver. It looked like it was searching for something briefly, before it flew at me, or rather I should say into, and through me. It was hot and cold, and I felt it touch every aspect of who I was, there were no secrets so deep it couldn't reach. Strange words whispered in my ears and filled my head with wisdom and knowledge of the universe that I couldn't understand. It was like nothing I had ever experienced before, and as the energy rushing past me slowly faded and dissipated into the cosmos, I was invincible.

All that was left of the dragon were bones, as Fevythe rushed to me, thinking I had died as well. Seeing I was alive, he recounted what had occurred from his perspective.

"The, thing, it started to sizzle, and I thought it was just on fire, but then it's like the body turned into something else and attacked you! Your eyes were glowing and it was like you were caught in a windstorm, but I couldn't feel a thing. Are you okay?"

Any pain acquired during the tussle with the bear the other day had vanished.

"Yes, I feel fine, more than fine actually. I've never felt better." Why did it feel so familiar?

I looked back at the dragon, and to my horror, saw that the mangled body of a Whiterun guard, along with the partially degraded bones of some other creatures, was caged within the ribs of what remained of the great reptile. The Whiterun guards must have taken the beast down. Incredible, I thought.

We arrived in Whiterun just before dinner time, and headed to the local tavern for food and hospitality. My mind was still buzzing with what happened to me outside of the city. Had others experienced this? Should I say anything, or will they just think I'm crazy? I decided to keep it to myself, and ruminated on possible theories to explain such an anomaly as I finished one bottle of ale after the other. Fevythe had gone to the temple of Kynareth, to see what else he could learn about restoration before we had to leave the next morning. I was deep in a drunk sleep long before he returned that night.

Fevythe and I didn't exchange many words throughout the entire carriage ride back to Windhelm, nor did he say much to me on the Northern Maiden, as we sailed across the passage from Skyrim back to Raven Rock. He seemed somewhat gloomy, perhaps because I had lost my temper with him. It was late when we docked, and we trudged back to my house and fell asleep. The next morning, I told my mother and father about all that we had gone through in Skyrim, save the strange encounter with the dragon.

"Sounds like you had quite the adventure, what do you think of my homeland?" Asked my father.
"It's beautiful, but it's completely out of whack. Everybody hates everybody, and the war is dragging on because they can't establish any sort of diplomacy. I know Raven Rock isn't perfect, but I really think the people in Skyrim will all kill each other before they agree to disagree." I said, then paused briefly before continuing. "Aside from that, there was one more thing that happened, just outside of Whiterun. I don't really know how to describe it, something really strange happened. We went past the Western Watchtower and there was a dead dragon there, I think the Whiterun guards killed it. I thought dragons were just a legend, and even if they did exist, they would have died out ages ago."

My parents sat looking stunned, barely breathing.

"So, we weren't in danger of course, but then when I got close to it, it just sort of turned into what looked a spell, but then I think I absorbed it. I know we don't have many books on dragons, but what do you know? Has this happened to anybody else?"

"Yes," Said my father, so quietly I almost didn't hear him. "Others before you, centuries ago. Those with the same soul as you, the Dragonborn."

Chapter End Notes

Being in Windhelm, the hub of racial strife, I tried to put Indra in situations (now and later) with people treating her differently based on their race and the fact that she is mixed, but doesn't quite look either Nord or Dunmer. I am mixed race myself and have been made to feel uncomfortable about being too much or little of one race or the other, and sort of inserted my own experiences in this narrative.
Indra confronts her parents about the circumstances surrounding her birth, and how the events of that day are linked to what happened in Whiterun. Indra and Fevythe's relationship comes to an end.

"What in Oblivion is 'Dragonborn'? Why have I never read about it?" I asked, dumbfounded.

My father, still a bit pale, took a deep breath in an attempt to calm his nerves before he spoke.

"It's a Nord legend," He said shakily. "The Dragonborn is a living person with the soul of a dragon, said to be able to steal the life force from its fallen kin. We've known of your fate since the day you were born, but we were waiting for the right time to tell you. That's why you've never heard of it until now."

"How did you find out about this? What happened when I was born?" I spoke quickly, my words falling out as my mind raced in curiosity and confusion.

This time, my mother answered, with more confidence in her voice than that of my father.

"I will tell you how this was revealed to us," She said, "we have to go way back in time, back to when your father and I eloped." She sat down, and asked me to do the same.

"We didn't actually come to Raven Rock because I couldn't return to my family's original home of Vvardenfell when we were first married. We settled down in a small village called Kynesgrove, just South of Windhelm. It was peaceful there, and we had a small farm. Life was simple, and we were happy. I became pregnant with you the following fall, and you were born on the second Turdas of Sun's Height. The morning you were born was the beginning of the hottest day in Skyrim I have ever seen. I don't just mean warm for Skyrim, I mean it felt like we were in Elsweyr. The normally hard ground was turning to mud outside and the sky threatened to unleash a flood all day long. We should have understood it then as an omen."

"What kind of an omen?" I asked.

"That I can't say," My mother replied, "but when you were born, the healers didn't think you were going to make it. Your skin was yellow and you were barely breathing. They took turns keeping you under restoration spells, hoping that you would let out a cry, but it seemed as if you just continued to slip away. Later that day, the weather turned, and the temperature swung into the other extreme. The sky turned dark, and it became unbearably cold. That's when it attacked."

"When what attacked?" I interrupted, shifting in my seat.

"The dragon," Continued my father, now sitting down as well.
"It was a horrible thing, half dead it was." He continued, "Skin falling off, only one eye, the bones of the tips of its wing and tail completely visible and bare. It released the essence of winter from its huge mouth, freezing the farms and houses. The people that were able to fight it did, myself included. Our arrows weakened it, but it did not fall." I could see the terror that he had felt on that day reappearing in his eyes. "When we thought all hope was lost, it began to rain heavily, and suddenly the sky opened up and sent down a massive bolt of lightning, directly striking the dragon and killing it. After it died, it started to glow, like the lightning had set it on fire, but then what little flesh was left of it evaporated into a brilliant spectre of colour. It aimed right for our house, and like a strange wind, rushed towards the door." He looked towards my mother, who finished the story.

"I was inside, holding you when this happened," She recalled, "when suddenly a burst of light filled our house. It was more beautiful and more frightening than anything I had ever seen. The colourful beams merged together and aimed right for you, enveloping you in an unworldly glow. Your father came flying through the door right then and saw me cradling you as you absorbed the strange energy. As the light surrounding you faded and returned to normal, redness finally came into your cheeks and you began to cry."

My mother went on. "As we gaped at each other, totally stunned, what we first thought was another lightning strike echoed throughout the sky, but it formed what sounded like strange words, and the ground shook with the force of it. I looked over at your father, and he had turned as white as a ghost." The colour had returned to my father's cheeks, and I saw him smile a little beneath the hand attached to the elbow he now rested on the table.

"I explained to her what this meant," He said, looking up, "that some legends really do exist, and that we would have to make a pilgrimage to High Hrothgar to seek the knowledge of the Greybeards."

"Knowledge? Are they some kind of wizard?" I asked, incredulously. They had never really told me anything about the day I was born, save that it was hotter than it should have been. This is what they would tell me with a shrug, saying not much else of intrigue occurred. When I was young, I envied my friends who all had an interesting tale of struggle and reward associated with their births, their joyful faces mirroring those of the way in which their own parents had recalled that day. Now, I felt a bit bad for my mother and father, that they had gone so long without being able to share what a parent would normally be excited about.

"Sort of," My father laughed. "They practice the magic of dragons, and adhere very rigorously to the traditions surrounding the legacy of the Dragonborn. We made that arduous trek up the seven thousand steps to the summit of the mountain, but when we presented you to them, they told us there was nothing that could be done, seeing as you were only an infant."

"They said that for your protection and the safety of Skyrim, we would need to get away from the province and seek refuge elsewhere. They warned us that otherwise, somebody named Alduin would find you and kill you, and would then have no one to hold him back in his mission to enslave Skyrim. Apparently he was the one that sent that frost dragon in the first place.

"Solstheim seemed like it made the most sense; it had the culture of your mother but was still friendly to Nords, seeing as it was granted to Dunmer refugees by Skyrim," My father said, looking happier now, yet though his eyes contained relief, they were tinged with sorrow. "This is why we've been so hard on you your whole life; we knew you had a massive burden to bear, and we wanted to make sure you were prepared." He stood up and put a hand on my shoulder. "Now the time has arrived, and you are ready to understand more. Come with me."

My mouth was slack and my eyes were wide as I rose from the table, astonished, and
followed my father in a trance-like state. It didn't feel real, and I really thought they were playing an elaborate prank on me. Leaving my mother and a very confused looking Fevythe behind at my house, my father grabbed a shovel and we began walking up, then past, the bulwark. I thought about what he had revealed to me.

"You say I have a massive burden, but wasn't it also a burden to keep that secret all these years?" I asked, still stunned.

He nodded thoughtfully beside me, breathing hard as we briskly hiked up the ashy dunes. "Yes. I'm sorry we had to be so authoritarian towards you, but you've always been so damned stubborn and strong-willed. I think now it will help you persevere, but when you were young and unable to listen to reason, it was difficult."

"Of course it was," I chuckled, "sorry, I honestly don't know why I can't control it. When I know there's something I have to do, I get tunnel vision."

He stopped to put a hand on my shoulder, and looked at me kindly.

"I think it's just who you are," He smiled, "and it's not a bad trait, though it was a pain in my arse when you were a toddler."

I just laughed as we continued to walk North. Shortly thereafter, we came upon a twisted evergreen tree, and my father began to dig at the base of it, eventually hitting what appeared to be a small chest. I helped him uncover it, and we brought it back to the house where he extracted a key I had never seen before to open it. Inside was a strange collection of scrolls, amulets and stone tablets with some kind of odd writing on them. As I put my hands on them, they started to glow, but nothing happened.

"This is what the Greybeards sent us with when we left high Hrothgar, saying you would be able to understand when the time came. They said you must 'master the voice', so I can only guess you will have to return to Skyrim and make the pilgrimage to see them, too."

"Well, the joke's on them, I have no idea what any of this is," I declared, throwing my hands upward. A sudden thought came to me in panic, and I looked up at my parents. "Wait," I said, "other than you and the Greybeards, does anybody else know about this?"

"Glover Mallory knows." My mother said. "He was on the same ship from Windhelm to Raven Rock as us. We were so weary from our pilgrimage and trying to keep you safe, and he took care of us, fetching me water, washing your t'lonya and sharing his food. He and your father started talking about Nord legends, and the strange voice in the sky a month prior. He is an interesting man and quite intelligent, more than he lets on. He has much knowledge of the history of all races and understood what the omens meant.

"He and your father grew close as we settled in Raven Rock, and one year later your father confided in Glover that you were the one the Greybeards had summoned. He's watched you grow up, harbouring this secret all this time, and he's pledged to help you in any way he can. He left a daughter behind in Skyrim, and I think he feels that by looking out for you, bit by bit, it partially absolves him of the guilt he has for not being a part of her life."

So that's why he was like an uncle to me growing up, always coming by the house or letting me watch him at the forge. I briefly wondered who his daughter was, what her life was like in Skyrim, and if I'd ever meet her.

"Other than that, virtually all of Skyrim knows you exist, but they don't know who you are,"
My father continued. "I also have a funny feeling Master Neloth knows, simply because of his prophetic abilities, but as a Dunmer with strong connections to Morrowind, I don't think he particularly cares."

"Well," I said slowly and thoughtfully, "that's a lot to unpack." As superficial as it sounded, those words were all I could manage. It was all so much and so farfetched that I wasn't at the time able to comprehend the behemoth of this revelation. The current dangers of reality suddenly came crashing back into my consciousness and I gave my head a small shake. "I don't have time for fulfilling legends right now," I said, standing up and turning my attention away from the chest, "I need to figure out how to stop the attacks in town."

"Fair enough," Said my father, "you have a big journey ahead of you, so you better finish what you've started here, first."

I nodded, dumped all of my gear save my armor, the daggers, bow and quiver, as well as some potions, and quickly left. As I was heading towards town, I heard Fevythe call out to me.

"Indra," He panted as he caught up to me, "I need to talk to you," He said. His tone was gentle but serious. "The past two weeks were some of the best and worst times I've ever had. What I learned in Windhelm was enlightening, and I finally understand where my life is going."

"Okay, yes, me too, is that all?" I asked impatiently, worried that he was going to essentially propose to me again.

"But I also realized that I'm not cut out for adventure. I'm not a fighter, and I'm not brave like you. If you really are this so-called Dragonborn, I don't think I can help you anymore. All I can do is fulfill my role as a healer around here. I don't want to say you're on your own, but," He looked down for a second, then back up at me. "I don't think I have a place in the excitement of your life."

I thought about what he said, and my heart started to beat uncomfortably hard.

"Does this mean, you don't think we should be together anymore?" I asked quietly. He only looked at me with sad, red eyes.

"I'm sorry, I love you, but..."

I felt my throat tighten.

"Are you sure? Can't you stay here in Raven Rock while I'm off doing whatever it is I have to do?"

Several moments passed before Fevythe was able to answer me. "Indra, that's asking too much of me. It will drive me crazy if you're always away, facing danger, and I'm stuck here waiting for you. Not that I mind being here, but the only way I can do that is if I'm not attached to you, thinking of you all the time you're gone."

"You're right, I'm being selfish." I sighed. "Do you think...that it will always be this way? You don't see a time where both of us will be able to be together again?"

"I can't say, but it sounds like your life is going to take a big turn, while mine will...probably stay pretty consistent. I know you'll be okay though," He pulled me in for a hug. "For the past month or so, it's been me that needed you, not the other way around. I really want this to last, but it's not fair to either of us if we try to force this to continue."

"I want this to last too," I said slowly, resting my chin on his shoulder. "But you're right. I
can't force you to come with me, and I can't force you to wait for me, either." I pulled back from him a little. "Will you heal me when I'm banged up from doing 'Dragonborn' stuff?" I smiled, looking up at him.

"Of course," he smiled back, hugging me tightly and wiping his own eyes with his collar. "I'll always be here for you, no matter what happens."

"So will I."

We stayed embraced for several minutes, Fevythe gently rocking me as his shirt became more soaked through.

"What do you have to do now?" he finally asked.

"I'm not sure," I replied shakily, wiping at my eyes. "I'm going to go talk to Geldis, I think he'll be able to help me figure out how to finish all this."

"Alright." he said quietly, smoothing down my hair as he had done so often before. "Take care of yourself, okay?" He said, gripping my shoulder.

"I will," I replied, "you too."

He nodded, and we kissed for the last time. I took a deep breath and turned towards the Retching Netch, drying the last of the salty dew from my face. My life was changing so quickly, I still hadn't registered what exactly I was meant to do now, and for years to come. Though I wasn't wholly confident in my abilities, I knew I had to follow the path that fate had decided for me, which started with saving Raven Rock.

Chapter End Notes

In case you missed it:

1. "Indra" is the name of the Hindu God of Thunder/Rain and is equivalent to Zeus/Jupiter etc. It's also, by a happy coincidence, the name of a Dunmer woman from a previous Elder Scrolls game (IIRC)

2. Turdas = Thursday, which is named for Thor (Thor's day), and other Latin-based renditions of Thursday are typically named for a God of lightning in some manner.

3. Why was the dragon that Alduin sent half falling apart? Almost as if Alduin resurrected it in a rush, does this mean Alduin came into the world first, or was his counterpart the reason he came into existence (Light/Dark play again)?
A Most Wanted Man

Chapter Summary

With proof of Teldryn’s innocence, Indra demands to help him in order to expedite the process of saving Raven Rock, and seeks the aid of Master Neloth in locating Sigrun. After Indra decides to side with Teldryn, she ends up getting spiraled downwards deeper and deeper into his chaotic world.

Chapter Notes

I tried to use as much of the original dialogue as possible, so I apologize if it seems like some words are coming out of nowhere. Like I mentioned earlier, Undriel only had previously existing dialogue to work with so it’s not as if any of the names from the story were in there. While I inserted the nouns where it made sense, I also didn’t want to completely undermine their work, which is why a lot of the lines are directly from the mod and while they’re correct for the situation, you may need to read between the lines a bit.

As I walked through the lower level of the Retching Netch, I made eye contact with Geldis and discretely jerked my head towards the back. After I had reached the privacy of an unused room, Geldis glanced around the bar and followed me in.

"So, what did you find out?" He asked, once we were out of earshot of the general patronage.

"I found out why Sigrun is after Teldryn." I said, turning around to face Geldis as he closed the door behind him. "He used to work for, and live with, a Nord and his family by the name of Voden Free-Winter. Voden was married to Sigrun, and they had a daughter together. One day, bandits attacked the farm and ended up killing the child in the raid.

"Teldryn was charged with the crime, but Voden bailed him out. The two of them set off to confront the real criminals that were responsible. Voden was consumed with rage and basically killed himself by charging into the encampment. Teldryn managed to convince most of Windhelm that he was dead too, and left Skyrim. Sigrun used her scouts to find out he was still alive, and started hunting him down because she didn't believe he was innocent."

"Ah, I see. I pity Teldryn," Geldis sighed, sitting down at the small table in the chamber and resting his elbows on his knees as he stared at the floor. "He can't seem to outrun misfortune. All his life has just been one hardship after the next. I suppose that's why he's as tough as he is. Anyway," He said, looking back at me, "did you see any sign of the ship in your travels?"

I put my hands on my hips as I thought about the port in Windhelm as well as the coast while we had sailed there. "No, I didn't see anything related to Sigrun around Windhelm, at least. Nothing out in the open sea, either. How is the situation with the pirates now?"
Geldis scratched his chin. "It's been quiet, for now. I think the Redoran has been holding them off, but I believe the pirates are gearing up for the worst. Aside from that, I'm not sure what's been happening in Glowstone Hall."

"We should probably go check on Teldryn, then."

"Alright." Geldis agreed, standing back up again. "If you need to find a way in, there's a massive flag on top of the bulwark that marks the trapdoor leading to the crypt near the hall."

"I think I know the one you're talking about, I'll head there now."

The doors to Glowstone were still unlocked, and I supposed Teldryn had booby-trapped the place again and was simply riding out the storm. Runes were scattered about and I cautiously dodged them as I made my way into the cavern, weapons drawn. My ability to maneuver around the glowing circles was much easier this time around with properly fitting armor. Teldryn wasn't in the stone dome where he had attacked me previously, but the set of stolen Redoran armor he had used for disguise was strewn about his shanty living quarters. I figured impersonation was not necessary, nor beneficial for him at that point.

I checked the other structure situated in the back of the hall, and found him in the compartment furthest from the door. He had removed his helmet, and I could finally see this man I strangely knew so much about, face to face. The wanted poster had done him a decent likeness, at least as far as the tattoos and mohawk went. As I approached him, he rolled his eyes.

"And now you're back," He drawled. "Great, just great." I remembered how he had removed my helmet after he had knocked me out. He had seen me around Raven Rock well before all this happened. To him, I was nothing but a random citizen getting caught up in his chaos.

"I'm trying to help you. What's your problem?" I asked, putting away my daggers and frowning at his reaction.

He just stared back at me with narrowed red eyes under highly arched brows, emulating the same expression on the poster.

"The destruction of our homeland, the exile of our people and the rebuilding of our civilization," He said sarcastically, crossing his arms. I put my hands on my hips and shifted my weight to one foot.

"No shit, huh," I said, meeting his attitude with my own. "Being a dick won't get you anywhere. I want to help you. What should I do next?"

"Run to the horizon before I hunt you down," He said in little more than a mutter, still glaring balefully at me.

"No, will you stop being an ass!" I exclaimed, balling up my fists and stomping my foot. I was becoming increasingly frustrated with this elf.

"Sorry, I've just had a lot of hork-faced cowards coming by as of late. They all like to mock me before they try to kill me. Not so funny after I burn them to a crisp," He said, letting out a joyless laugh as he removed his eyes from mine and looked past me. I couldn't tell if he enjoyed deflecting my concerns, or was just a bit nervous in facing his own mortality.

"You owe me an explanation,"

"Right, it probably won't hurt to tell you. It all started with my last patron, who was a true
"Yes, I know about Voden and the burnt down farm, and how you were framed for all of it," I said impatiently, cutting him off. "Did you even try to stop him? Also, I meant you owe me an explanation for knocking me out when I was trying to help you earlier."

His face turned dark and he scowled at me as he pushed himself off the crates he was leaning against, and began walking towards me in quick, long strides. "I don't need you up in my business," He growled, thrusting a pointed finger under my chin, "you're more of a liability than an asset, and how do you know about the Free-Winters? Of course I did try to stop him, but he had an insatiable bloodlust and was extremely stubborn, he had to fight back! Who told you about him?"

"His brother Brunwulf," I said, backing away from the dark elf. I couldn't figure out why he was being so hostile towards me.

Teldryn let out an irritated groan and rolled his eyes again.

"Geldis put you up to this, didn't he? I told him not to waste anymore of my time, damnit!"

"You're the one that handed me that note from Ramodo in the first place!" I cried in defense of myself.

Teldryn took a deep breath and raised a pointed finger as I braced myself for another verbal assault, but before he was able to come up with a retort, an explosion rocked the cavern.

"What the-" Teldryn growled, shifting his attention away from me and unsheathing his sword as he ran past me and out of the hut. I cautiously followed him a few paces behind. A man dressed in dark chitin armor and a thick leather hood was kneeling on one knee just outside of the hut, hands over his head in terror. The man stood up as Teldryn approached him.

"Crazy N'wah, you tryin' to get someone killed?" The man bellowed, throwing his arms in the air.

"You're the N'wah, Geldis, get out of here!" Teldyrn yelled back, pointing his sword at the barkeep.

Apparently Geldis had been close behind me, eager to check in on his friend. He had donned his old set of Morag Tong armor, and I wondered if that meant he was going to help us settle this matter with Sigrun. The men continued to bicker.

"What in Oblivion you doing with all those runes scattered about?" Geldis asked with much irritation at the recklessness of his old pal.

"The pirates, they just kept coming, I had to keep them at bay somehow," Teldryn replied, his face taut with stress.

"This is a dangerous game you're playing," Geldis warned, "why haven't you left yet?"

Geldis' concern only seemed to only further enrage Teldryn.

"Geldis, are you an S'wit or what? I said get out! You too!" He yelled, pointing at me.

"No," Geldis and I said in unison.

"I will defend my home, and if that means saving you, so be it," I stated.
"I'm not turning my back on the people whose lives are in danger because of you being around here," Geldis added, walking towards his old friend. "Captain Veleth is trying his best, but the Redoran are overwhelmed."

Teldryn rubbed the back of his head as he let his sword arm drop to his side.

"Damn, you're right," He sighed. "This can't go on any longer. I hope everyone in Raven Rock is alright."

"Teldryn," I said, "they're scared. They don't know what's happening in their own town. We need to find Sigrun-"

Before I could say anymore, the sound of heavy footfall trudging through sand drifted into the cave from across the stone floor that spread over the central region of the hall.

"Wait, what was that?" Teldryn whispered, raising his sword as he crept towards the entrance to Glowstone. He had stopped to listen for the footsteps again, just as Ramodo came around the corner, partially obscured by the shadows.

"I knew it!" Teldryn exclaimed. "Come out and face me like a man!"

"Don't say something you'll regret," Warned the massive Redguard, walking into the light of the firepits as another explosion echoed through the hideout behind him. Other mercenaries began carefully filtering into the hall, and I recognized one as the infiltrator.

"Ha, there you are, you drunken bastard!" The Argonian sneered, looking at Geldis, "I knew it was you helping this criminal all along!"

The old assassin was unbothered by this comment. "Sorry, my scaly friend," He said, unsheathing his sword. "You've come to the wrong place."

"Put that down, Geldis!" Teldryn yelled to his friend.

"Oh, sure," Geldis replied snidely, "I'll just wait 'til someone else with a little courage to help you comes along."

Standing slightly behind them both, I cleared my throat and Geldis shot me a look.

"You know what I meant," He grumbled.

Teldryn let out a roar and hurled a flame at Ramodo, where it exploded in his face. The Redguard turned and ran away, howling in his temporary blindness. The infiltrator laughed.

"Are you nuts?!" Exclaimed Geldis, as the mercenaries squabbled among themselves.

"Come on, we can take them," Shouted one of the pirates. "We're not leaving until we came what we came for!"

"If death is what you seek, I'll be happy to oblige!" Teldryn snarled as he charged the men, followed closely by Geldis.

"Ohfuckshitfuck," I heard myself saying under my breath as I unsheathed my daggers and ran into the fray. Unsure of what to do, I readied my stance and waited to be attacked. The infiltrator was suddenly flung towards me after deflecting one of Teldryn's blows, and I held up my hands.

The Argonian fell onto my daggers and proceeded to collapse in a heap at my feet. Shocked,
but alert, I yanked my weapons from his back and turned to the next mercenary, whose blade was locked with Geldis’. I shoved my knife between his ribs, distracting him enough for the barkeep to drive his sword through the man's throat. Teldryn and Geldis had quickly finished off the other two before I had made my way into the fight, but Ramodo was now nowhere to be seen.

"More detachments will likely be coming in soon," I said shakily, still holding a bloodied dagger. "Did you want help keeping them out?"

"Thank you," Teldryn said, wiping the blood off his sword without looking at me, "but you should go tell Captain Veleth about the situation. I'll hold them off here." He began walking back to his hut.

"Wait," I said, "There's something else." I stuck my hand in my satchel and began rifling around before finding what I needed. "Sigrun is after you because she thinks you killed Voden."

Teldryn stopped in his tracks and turned back to me. "What?" He exclaimed, "That bitch! Voden was one of my best friends, and she knew that. How could she?"

"I don't know, she's gone completely mad," I replied, pulling out the letter and amulet, "I think she's been blinded by grief and rage all these years. Here," I continued, handing the items to Teldryn, "I found these on Voden's body where you buried him. If she sees this, maybe she will understand."

"Hm," He said slowly, reading the letter as he wrapped the amulet around his hand. "I didn't realize Voden had this on him when he died. He must have known what was going to happen. Well, it's not much, but I suppose it's worth a shot. Go talk to Veleth and see if he'll send me some men. I'll wait here for the crazy lady and my inevitable doom. Here," He reached into his pocket, "take this key, it opens the trapdoor at the top of the stairs to a faster route. It goes through the tomb, but you already knew that," he murmured knowingly, giving me a wink as he walked back to his hut, smirking.

Geldis noticed I was staring at the bodies of the men we had just killed, and walked up to me from behind, placing a hand on my shoulder.

"Bandits know nothing of pity or mercy. No need to show them any either."

"Thanks, Geldis," I breathed, not looking away, "I'm just not sure if I'll get used to this."
husband. He's the one that was hiding among your guards for safety...but he didn't do it!" I said quickly, waving my hands in front of me after I saw Veleth's lips tighten into a line.

"Huh. I see," He said slowly, scratching his chin. "Why not just give him to her, then? He's just a mercenary, after all."

"What? No! That's too cruel," I said, "and he's a good friend of Geldis'. They have a long history together and he's not a bad person, honestly. We're trying to track Sigrun down to show her proof that he's innocent, and it should be over after that."

"Sigrun?"

"That's the woman after Teldryn,"

"Alright, fine," Veleth sighed, "I'll make sure my men are prepared while you're off on your mission. And don't worry, the Redoran are better than your run-of-the-mill guard. We'll make sure Raven Rock stays safe."

"I hope you're right, Modyn."

I then made my way to the Retching Netch to begin to warn civilians of the potential incoming danger when I noticed a very nervous-looking Dreyla Alor at the bar.

"Did Geldis tell you what's going on?" I asked.

"Only a bit," Dreyla whispered. "Geldis said that his friend had a false bounty on his head, and that he had to go help protect him from those mercenaries that attacked town a while back. I got a bit of a conflicting story from Modyn, though, something about an untrustworthy Redoran guard. He's the one that told me to come work down here, to make sure I was close to others for the next while."

"It's alright, the guy pretending to be a Redoran guard is Geldis' friend, and he isn't dangerous...to us, at least," I said. "However, the woman looking for him is, but we're getting close to ending things with her. Speaking of which, have you seen anyone suspicious around here?"

"An angry-looking, tall blonde woman came in here alone after Geldis left," Dreyla replied. "She had a hood covering most of her face, and she was asking about someone named Teldryn, who I assume is Geldis' friend. I pretended to be surprised, and told her I think he went to Tel Mithryn to stay safe."

"Tel Mithryn?" I asked, curious as to why she would mislead Sigrun in that direction.

"Only a fool would challenge Master Neloth," Dreyla smiled.

"You tricked Sigrun?" I laughed.

"I hope so. Where are Geldis and Teldryn actually hiding?" She looked worried now.

"It's alright. They're underneath the bulwark still," I replied. "Even though Sigrun knows about Teldryn's hideout, I guess he's just been so good at killing her men that she doesn't have any intel anymore."

"Right. That makes sense. Who in Oblivion is this Teldryn person, anyway?"

"He's the one that was sitting upstairs for the past few months. You know, the quiet guy
wearing chitin armor, drinking Sujamma?"

"Oh right, him," Said Dreyla, "yeah, he kind of gave me the creeps."

I had to laugh. "Me too," I said, "He's a bit of a scary guy, but from what I've seen and heard I think he's a good person that just needs to be saved right now."

Milore had begun to approach the bar, and Dreyla and I hastily bid each other farewell.

"Stay safe, Dreyla," I whispered.

"You too," She replied in kind.

_Sigrun is at Tel Mithryn_ I told myself as I left the inn, my heart pounding in excitement and nervousness. This thought wouldn't leave my head as I started to walk back towards Glowstone Hall. *Sigrun is at Tel Mithryn.* She didn't know who I was, and had no reason to attack me if I approached her. I stopped in front of the Ancestral Tomb, my hand reaching for the doorknob. The safety of Raven Rock was reaching a tipping point. Nevermind helping Teldryn fight a bunch of pawns, I _had_ to get to Neloth's tower. I dropped my hand back to my side, and began the hour long trek out to the traditional fungus houses down the coast. Ash spawn be damned, I was going to find Sigrun, and if I could get to her first, maybe the two ex-assassins would never need face her at all.
Indra goes to Tel Mithryn to try and find Sigrun to convince her of Teldryn's innocence, and ends up recruiting Neloth for help in various matters. Teldryn has almost been killed by Sigrun's men when Indra finds him again, and Geldis is nowhere to be seen.

The tower was still standing, but the mercenaries that had tried to attack it were not. Their bodies littered the ash strewn dunes around Tel Mithryn, the fatal injuries on their bodies all clearly having been caused by incredibly powerful magicka, yet no one matching Sigrun's description lay among them. The Telvanni wizard had already departed the scene, and I wondered if he had learned anything more about the situation. Had he seen Sigrun?

Curious, I climbed the fibrous ramp comprised of old mushroom roots up to the rounded door, and entered the tower. I had been to Tel Mithryn once before to learn some basic enchanting from Master Neloth, so I was aware of the strange elevating magic necessary to reach him, but that didn't make it any less alarming. I found Neloth hunched over in his study, whole and fragmented soul gems scattered about the naturally-derived room. Books lay open and piled on top of one another on wooden desks, bottles and ingredients were strewn about on bookshelves, or uncorked and half finished out in the open. I once heard a quote that a busy desk meant a busy mind, and wondered if the person who had said that had Neloth in mind. The wizard seemed quite unfazed by all the action he had recently been involved with.

"Oh, this is about Raven Rock isn't it," He said, looking up from his enchanting experiments to greet me with a halfhearted glance.

"Yes, have you seen a pirate ship?" I asked, "You must have seen something coming in from the sea with your vantage point."

"Not yet," He replied. "But I'm sure I can find it soon enough. Wait, what are you wearing?" He asked, standing upright and turning towards me, frowning.

"It's just a set of light armor custom made by Glover, why?" I said, smoothing down the front of my armor. I had hoped he wasn't about to insist I wear robes. It wasn't as if I was particularly adept in magic, at least not enough to be able to get away with wearing nothing but cloth.

"Well, it's just so drab," He clucked his tongue in criticism of my apparel as he put his hands on his hips.

"What? It's beautiful!" I exclaimed, a little offended that he would question Glover's work.

"No I'm not referring to the craftsmanship, I'm talking about its lack of intrinsic vitality. You know, enchanting, magic that will make it stronger and better. Here, come, take it off and give it to me," Neloth insisted, impatiently reaching a liver-spotted hand towards me.

"Uh, okay," I said, too surprised to be able to think of how to refuse him, and began removing the pieces, one by one.
"Come here," He urged, briskly beckoning me with a bony finger.

He slammed the armor down in the middle of the pentagram on the enchanting table, and forced me to put my hands on either side.

"I've taught you this before," He said, placing his wrinkled and cold hands on mine, "but this time I'm going to show you more powerful magic. We're going to put two enchantments on this."

I turned my head slightly to look at the old wizard. He must know who I am. Why else would he be helping me?

"Focus," He said, his power running through my hands and up the table. The pentagram began glowing as the orb on the skull began swirling with energy. The huge blue soul gem exploded and my armor hummed. He removed his hands and I picked up my belongings.

I turned my gear around in all directions to see what differences were apparent after strong magic had been applied to them. What amazed me most about the culmination of Neloth's handiwork was that the green fabric of the chitin composite made by Glover had become adorned with beautiful vine-like patterns along the edges, throughout the torso and up the collar. I supposed this was the power of extremely proficient enchanting.

He showed me an archery enchantment for my gauntlets and a muffle enchantment for my boots. Putting them back on amused me most, as I jumped up and down as hard as I could, not making a sound.

"Are you quite done?" Inquired Neloth, in a justifiably rude tone. "I need you to give me more information so I can create a portal to the right location. Through my divination I've located a ship to the South, but I am unsure of its crew."

"Right, I'm looking for their boss," I said, re-attaching the last of my equipment. "Can you pinpoint their leader?" I asked.

After brief deliberation, the Telvanni wizard conjured a portal and, without warning, shoved me through it.

The beach Neloth had sent me to was not far from town, and I immediately assumed he hadn't quite identified Sigrun's exact location. My suspicions were confirmed when I followed the blood trail to a dying man clad in thick steel armor, lying next to the shoreline against a rock.

"Oh for Azura's sake, Neloth, this is the wrong boss," I cursed. "I suppose it's partly my fault for not being more specific," I grumbled to myself before turning my attention back towards the mercenary. "Who are you and what are you doing here?" I asked.

"Same thing as the rest of Sigrun's crew," He coughed, blood seeping out from under the helmet. "Got him pretty good. Not sure what you'll find down there." I could hear the demented smile in his words. I figured Sigrun had realized Teldryn wasn't at Tel Mithryn, and had sent men back to the cavern to search for him. Heart racing, I took off in a sprint across the sand and ash. That stupid mercenary better not have gotten himself killed, I thought. I didn't want Geldis to lose a good friend.

I climbed up the bulwark to the trapdoor entrance and quickly dropped down the ladder before rushing towards Glowstone. The bodies of freshly killed pirates had fallen in regular intervals along the tunnel, and as I silently sprinted the short distance underneath the bulwark, I came upon three of the mercenaries slowly creeping towards the stairs leading up to Teldryn's hideout.
They didn't hear me approaching them from behind, and when I saw they were ankle deep in murky water, I let loose a bolt of lightning with all the energy I could muster. Their bodies initially froze, then proceeded to convulse in spasms and they dropped all at once into the flooded tunnel. Sparks continued to flicker off them, and I didn't check to see if they still lived. Whether my decision to ignore them was out of fear, guilt or desperation at finding Geldis' friend I'll never know. I ran up the stone stairs to the small chamber outside the cavern doors. That was where I found Teldryn, breathing heavily, and barely standing.

"Still alive, I see," I said nervously as I walked up to him, my eyes darting about the enclosed space, hyper aware of any movement.

"Gods," He exclaimed, resting a hand on his thigh to support his body. "I can't take this anymore!"

"Where's Geldis?" I asked, looking over the recently deceased, hoping one of the bodies didn't belong to him.

"I'm not sure. He ran off, probably trying to be a hero," Teldryn suddenly gave in to a fit of coughing as he cast a healing spell over himself. I clumsily joined his efforts, my restoration skill lacking compared to his, but still enough to help bring him closer to normalcy.

"And what of Sigrun? Did you see her down here?" I inquired as I pulled out a healing potion from my satchel and handed it over. Teldryn yanked off his helmet and desperately gulped the red liquid, pausing briefly to answer me.

"I didn't see her, but if she keeps this up, I might end up paying off my bounty this time," He laughed weakly.

"Teldryn, you S'wit," I said nervously, continuing to attempt to heal him, "the bounty is fake. You were cleared of all crimes long ago. Sigrun wants you alive."

"That's somehow worse," He said slowly, staring off into an abyss I couldn't see. "Well, if that's the case, I need to get to town to find some other fighters capable of helping out with this situation."

"Ah, so you finally admit you need help?" I asked, putting a hand on one hip. I finally felt as if I was getting an upper hand on this curmudgeon. "Don't worry," I continued, "I'm not leaving you alone again. You're like a beacon for death, and I made a promise to Geldis that I would help you avoid a horrible demise. And I think if I stay near you, Sigrun will come to us. Come on, I'll take you back to the tavern, let's see if Geldis went back there."

"That would be most kind," Teldryn said with a thin smile as he began putting his helmet back on. As we started walking towards Glowstone Hall, I noticed just how exhausted he was.

"Teldryn, we should hurry up," I said, looking around the damp enclosure, listening for any more footsteps. We had to get back to town where it was safe. The Redoran now knew what to be prepared for, and Teldryn was in no shape to do any more fighting.

"I'm going as fast as I can," He grumbled, holding his side and trudging through the wet sand. His breathing was laboured, and he had to stop every few seconds to rest. "I just need some more healing potions and a good night's sleep," He chuckled.

"Dammit. Here," I said, walking towards him and putting his arm around my shoulder. I heard him groan at my insistence on helping him, but he was too tired to fight back. He was only
about half a head taller than me, and I had no trouble helping support him on our walk up to and through the tomb, then across town. On the way, I mentioned that Master Neloth had the ability to peer into the ship's location, and that it would likely be somewhere to the South.

Geldis still hadn't returned to the inn when we arrived, but Captain Veleth and a few of his men were on break from patrol and sat at the various wooden tables around the inn, eating their small meals in grave silence. Seeing Teldryn, Veleth stood up and approached us. Teldryn removed his arm from my shoulder and met with the Captain in the middle of the dining space.

"You out here for a reason?" Veleth started, "Shouldn't you be creeping around the island and assassinating unaware pirates?" He asked with a hint of aggression. I think he had respect for Teldryn's initiative, but was none too impressed by the fact that his presence was the reason our citizens were at risk of violence.

"Did you still want my help? What I know could be of use to you," Teldryn offered, too tired to defend himself.

"Well, perhaps," Veleth said, relaxing a little. "I was going to search for more clues that might lead me to wherever they're coming from. So far it seems like they have been approaching from the North, so I need to direct our efforts in that direction."

"There's nothing beyond the bulwark," Said Teldryn, folding his arms. "I've been out that way already. They were at Bloodskall Barrow initially, but that was only one group. I also checked Bristleback Cavern and all I found were a bunch of pigs. The only other livable caves that are accessible by sea are on the North or East coast. If they do decide to attack by ship, my guess is that they will do so on the Southern coast. If all your men are on foot up North, we won't be prepared."

"We've had two attacks on the bulwark from the North side. If they're coming from that direction, then I need to send my troops that way to protect the town." The previous tension in the Captain's face was making a reappearance.

"Well, isn't that something," Teldryn muttered, turning to me. I saw Veleth's cheeks begin to puff up in irritation.

"What I think he means," I said before Teldryn could get another word out and piss off Veleth even more, "is that those detachments were distractions so that we start moving Northward and miss the attack on the South. Neloth also said he found something in the Southern sea. I think the assault will come from that direction."

"Listen," Veleth said, more sternly now, "I've also got to rely on what I've seen and what my men have reported. If you want to help, then you'd both best do as you're told. Go to Fort Frostmoth and check around there for any signs of an encampment. Otherwise I'm just going to send a foot patrol up that way and you can go back to hiding in the shadows." Teldryn said nothing, but grunted in indignation, and limped away. "Come find me if you decide to reconsider my request!" Veleth shouted after him, then turned on his heel in equal annoyance and walked back to his men.

I frantically looked at Teldryn, then at Veleth, trying to decide who had more sense. Despite wanting to side with the Redoran as I'd pledged my assistance to them, I was wary of Sigrun finding Teldryn first, and I followed him to the back of the room where he relaxed against a wall. He had removed his helmet and was staring fixedly at nothing, apparently absorbed in deep thought. I had a fleeting realization that his profile was quite pleasing to look upon, his fearsome tattoos less noticeable in the fading light, and his hardened expression softened by the warm glow of the inn.
"It's strange to be back after hiding in Glowstone for so long. What happened in Raven Rock while I was gone?" He asked, still staring into nothingness.

"I wouldn't know," I replied, "I was in Skyrim searching for proof of your innocence. Why not work with the guards?"

"They're either walking into a trap, or are on a wild goose chase. Besides, the soldier life isn't for me, and I won't take orders from some green bonehead."

"So you know what to do now?"

"Do I?" Teldryn murmured, now looking at me. "Just barely. For now, it's late and I need rest. We'll meet at sunrise outside the inn and continue our search along the Southern coast. If we can't find anything, we'll go to Master Neloth and see if he can point us in the right direction."

"Alright, I'll see you tomorrow. Do you have enough healing potions? I have a few spares."

"It's alright. I know where Geldis keeps his stash," He said, failing at holding back a smile. He seemed genuinely amused at my concern about him. I nodded and returned home, but not without surveying as much of Raven Rock as I could on my way; looking behind every tree, on top of the bulwark, towards the horizon on the sea, outside of town. Sigrun's presence was now a permanent threat to my town and it was driving me crazy.

Despite being utterly exhausted, I had trouble falling asleep that night. My mind and heart took turns jabbing me awake with either anxiety about my fate as some kind of Nord hero, or the crushing loneliness at the realization that Fevythe would never hold me with my head against his chest, again.

After allowing the events of the day to torment me long enough, I eventually focused on breathing and releasing the feelings of dread. I then replaced them with sound determination for the events to come the following day, and soon fell into a dream world where I was chasing someone I knew and felt I loved, but wherever I went, their steps eluded me.
Another chapter walking through Teldryn's thoughts and feelings and how they have started to evolve and change.

I looked down at the girl supporting my weary body as we slowly trekked back to the temporary safety of the inn. It still didn't make sense that she had decided to help me, and had actually stuck with her promise. She had remained a stranger throughout this entire ordeal, and her charity made me uncomfortable. While she was determined to protect her home, I really thought she was going to end up dead long before now, seeing as she continued to charge head-first into every situation. Did she ever stop to think about the consequences that any of her actions may result in?

It also pissed me off to no end that she knew about my past, while I had nothing on her. Perhaps she would take advantage of this status and extort something from me when this was all over, that's what they usually did. Pretending to be friendly while they learned all my weaknesses, finally using them against me to take whatever it was they could leverage. At least I didn't have many more weaknesses, anymore, and maybe I could charm her into being a faithful ally. As she went on about the magical prowess of the Telvanni Wizard, I was barely listening as I studied her, trying to understand her motivations. She seemed rather excited, and was almost dragging me off my feet as we made our way through the tomb.

Under my arm, I could feel her raw strength, and figured that was part of the reason she had managed to stay alive so far. I was quite impressed by her physicality, but it was too bad she lacked the experience to make proper use of it. I would have loved to have another great fighter like Voden by my side again, the two of us taking out bandit nests or hunting the most fearsome of animals throughout Skyrim, and sharing in the spoils. As she continued to talk, I allowed my mind to drift while I reminisced about the good old days, before everything went wrong. Before my life depended on the actions of some green half-bred girl, at least ten years my junior, if not more. At least she wasn't crazy, like Sigrun.

Fucking Veleth, I thought, lying in a cot in the Retching Netch. Arrogant son of a bitch. He knew that I was on the right track, so why in Oblivion wouldn't he listen to me? I turned over again in frustration, being careful to not roll over onto my partially healed wounds. At least I've still got that strange girl and Geldis on my side, if we could even figure out where he went.

My mind went back to the girl, and how she had stared up at me in earnestness at the inn, those odd violet eyes full of inexperienced fire. I couldn't solidify my opinion on the status of her appearance; she possessed neither the elongated, beautiful features of Mer, nor the coolly elegant traits of the attractive human women I've known in the past. The only thing that came to mind was that she had a face that made me want to protect her. I thought I had long since forgotten those feelings. Perhaps it had something to do with her willingness to help me, like offering me more health potions, for free? Who did that? The thought made me smile, again, for whatever reason. She gave me some amount of hope; another feeling I thought was lost forever to me, but for now I would allow it to push me to find Sigrun and end this madness.
My thoughts wandered to when I lived with the Free-Winters. Showing their daughter how to skin a rabbit, Voden laughing as he prepared our simple, warm meals, Sigrun and I sitting by the fire, planning our next moves. I drifted into a troubled sleep, where I dreamed that I was flying like an eagle, away from my problems.
Indra and Teldryn attempt to track down Sigrun, who is likely hiding out somewhere on Solstheim. Unbeknownst to the two, Geldis had the same plan, and they reconvene along the Southern shore. Finally tracking her down, the trio comes face to face with the pirate captain as Indra tries to persuade Sigrun that Teldryn was not involved in the death of her husband or daughter.

Teldryn and I set off early the next morning to scour the Southern coast in hopes of finding a clue as to the direction in which Sigrun would be moving next. We walked in silence, lest our voices prevented us from becoming attuned to any suspicious sounds. Moreover, I didn't feel as if I had much to say to him, his grim demeanor equally off-putting as it was intimidating. Despite being apprehensive around the strange man, I felt strangely calm in his presence. I knew in my heart he wouldn't hurt me, yet I also knew there was a barrier between us I couldn't, or wouldn't, breach. As we hiked over the top of a small hill, the familiar scent of spilt blood filled the air and we came upon the massacre moments later. The butchered bodies of Redoran guards lay to waste in the narrow inlet, and Geldis was sitting at the edge of the water, looking forlorn.

"Coast has been dangerous lately," He said, not taking his eyes away from the grey sea as we approached with trepidation. "Ramodo's never going to stop, you know, for as long as he's under Sigrun's control. He'll keep sending thugs after you until you kill him, pay him, or you let them take you."

"Oh, no," I breathed, rushing around the dead bodies and taking off their helmets. "I recognize these men," I said, my eyes burning, "they'd be at the Netch every week or so when their patrol was over. Some of them had families," I couldn't control the tears that began welling up in my eyes and falling down my cheeks.

"I know," Geldis said, his mouth drawn in a tight line, "they were my friends, too."

"These damn bandits are worse than the vermin that infest the ash wastes back home," Teldryn exclaimed, stomping down the coast a few steps then taking off his helmet and plunking himself on the cold ground with much exaggeration. Hanging his head in his hands, he let out a groan that seemed to fall between a mixture of anger and remorse. "This is my fault." He said, "This is all my fault. So many of Veleth's men are dead because of me, and there's no way I can get Sigrun's hired thugs to listen to reason. They don't know I'm innocent, and how could I ever convince them given the circumstances?"

"Teldryn," I said, wiping my face as I tried to console him and myself at the same time, "they signed up for this duty. They know protecting civilians comes with a risk, but it's their job. You're a civilian, you know, even if you still consider yourself." I stopped myself from revealing anything more that I knew about him. He turned his head slightly to look at me. "A mercenary," I finished, and he cocked an eyebrow at me.

"Those bastards from Frossel ambushed the guards last night," Geldis said coldly, standing up, "they're tearing the place apart, damnit!" He cursed, raising his voice. "I don't think we have
much choice but to do everything in our power to destroy them," He took a deep breath and closed his eyes for a moment. "Furthermore, the locals are getting cynical about the capability of the Redoran to deal with the threat, and don't think Sigrun won't use that to her advantage to stir up unrest in town. If they decide it's worth it to throw one of their own to the dogs, then Teldryn's screwed."

"I think you're right," I said, crossing my arms and looking across the sea. This had to come to an end, and I had chosen my side, with Geldis. "It's going to be a fight until we get to her. Whether we can convince her of the truth, or we have to kill her will be decided then. What's Frossel?"

"It's the cave they've been hiding out in," Geldis replied, "it's quite far North of here, hidden on the other side of the peninsula. I tracked them down yesterday evening, and remained out of sight until they sent out a group. I followed the group to Fort Frostmoth, which is when they attacked the patrol. By the time I got close enough, it was too late and they were heading towards the bulwark trap door.

"Well, then, it's a good thing Teldryn got out when he did," I said and looked over at him. He was still moping. Turning back to Geldis now I asked, "Is that why you ran off like that?"

"I just didn't think Teldryn was going about it the right way," Geldis said quietly. "He was trying to hit every possible location they could be hiding, and take out whoever was there. I prefer to shadow my enemy and learn their next move," Explained the old Dunmer, his years of experience on his friend coming to light. "We should head there now and see if Sigrun returned."

We didn't notice the slight, hooded Argonian woman who had been following us the entire time.

We continued on mainly in silence, Geldis and I exchanging a few words to navigate, or dole out food on the way, as Teldryn slogged along a few steps behind us. The three of us reached Frossel by nightfall and scaled the cliff that overlooked it. Crawling on our stomachs to the the snowy precipice, we looked down on the bandit camp. Several rowboats were ashore, and a massive bonfire was lit on the beach about one hundred paces away from the mouth of the cave. Close to fifty pirates were drinking and eating, apparently celebrating something, but Sigrun was nowhere to be seen.

"Wow," Said Teldryn with a sneer, "that's a lot of scum."

"Well, we're not going to be able to fight them all," Geldis stated, "we need another option."

"What about that guy?" I asked, pointing at a man stumbling away from the party to take a piss in the woods. Geldis nodded and we crept down the cliff towards him.

I took advantage of my silent step to reach a hand around his mouth as Teldryn shot him with paralysis from a distance, and I caught him before he fell. We dragged him away where we wouldn't be noticed, gagged him and bound his hands and legs. When we were clear of the encampment, I shot him in the neck with a small spark and he came to.

"Where's your boss?" Teldryn demanded, kicking the Argonian in the ribs as Geldis removed the gag.

"Please," The man begged, "he'll have me killed!"

"We're not talking about Ramodo, we want Sigrun," I said.
"Speak, or else," Geldis growled, holding a blade to the pirate's throat.

"Okay! I'll tell you everything," The man sniveled. "I heard her talking with some higher-ups about looking for the man we're after. She said 'a cave can be a dangerous place, don't expect me to save you if you fall in.' Please, that's all I know, I didn't hear anything else about where they were going!"

"What cave?" Teldryn asked, "Frossel?"

"No! I don't know! You have to believe me!" The man pleaded, curling his arms and legs into his body.

"Maybe she was talking about Glowstone? Do you think she'll actually go there?" I pondered.

"She left earlier today," The man blubbered, "if she's going to Glowstone, she'll be almost there already."

"Alright," Geldis said, then swiftly cut the man's throat.

"What on Nirn, man?!" I exclaimed, my breath escaping me. "Why would you do that?"

"We have to get back to Glowstone Hall," Geldis said, wiping off his blade as he stood up. "Let's get moving. Now." He took off at a brisk pace into the woods, back towards the bulwark.

Teldryn just stood and stared at the dead man, blood bubbling from the gash over his windpipe, eyes wide open.

"Death does not diminish," I heard him say quietly.

"Teldryn, I know it's hard coming to terms with taking lives," I said gently, "but we really need to get going." He didn't respond, nor turn around. "Teldryn," I said with a little more force this time. He was still in some strange trance. I ran up to him and grabbed him by the collar. "FOR FUCK'S SAKE TELDRYN GET YOUR SHIT TOGETHER AND LET'S GO!"

He jolted out of his stupor and nodded to me. We took off at a sprint and caught up to Geldis after a minute, the white vapour of our hard breaths illuminated by the old assassin's hovering light. We half-jogged half-walked the trek back to Raven Rock through the wee hours of the night, eventually making it back into town and entering Glowstone Hall through the trapdoor located in the Tomb.

Very slowly and carefully we made our way down the ladder and ramp. Nobody was there. We crept around the cavern, searching the corners for any signs of activity, but we could find nothing. As Teldryn and Geldis scoured the central area of the main floor, I saw a few small drops of blood leading to the stone hut where I had found Teldryn the day before.

"Hey," I said, "I think there's something here." The two men turned and started to catch up to me. I entered the building where the blood spots continued to lead in a clear trail. I then saw it's source - the head of a fallen mercenary I didn't recognize. Suddenly, I heard a snap and thick iron bars had sprung from below the stone to cover the only entrance and exit to the hut. I ran back to the doorway but it was too late. A tall blonde Nord who I could only guess was Sigrun had appeared, and Teldryn and Geldis lay unconscious on the floor. She walked up to them slowly.

"I hate this ash," She sniffed, looking down at the two men pensively as more of her men appeared from the shadows. "It gets into everything." She squatted down above Teldryn's body and
removed his helmet. "You're no better than those thieving reavers, aren't you, Teldryn Sero. Did you really think I wouldn't know you would be coming back here?" She asked, smiling towards a female Argonian wearing a hooded cloak.

"Sigrun!" I yelled, shaking the bars. "He didn't do it! Check his pockets!"

"Who are you?" She glared at me. "Why are you defending this traitorous murderer?"

"He's innocent! I know what happened to Voden! Search him!" I pleaded, desperately hoping Geldis and Teldryn weren't about to be made examples of.

Sigrun looked distrustful, but did as I begged. She pulled out the small box and opened it. I saw her expression change from anger to surprise, then sadness as she pulled out the amulet. As she finished reading the letter, she looked up then threw the items to the floor. "Take them away!" She ordered.

The four meanest-looking mercenaries approached the two men, grabbed them under the arms, and hauled them away, their feet dragging along the floor. She walked up to me, so close I could see the fine lines around her eyes and the few strands of her blonde hair that had begun to grey.

"I don't care if Teldryn is innocent or not," She hissed through the bars, insanity and hurt burning in her eyes. "He should have protected my Angelica, and my Voden." She turned on her heel and followed her men out of the cavern as I continued to kick and punch at the bars, yelling at her to come back. Ramodo remained, looking uncertain. He knelt down and picked up the discarded letter to read it. His face was tense, but neutral.

"Do you understand, now, Ramodo?" I asked, "Sigrun just wants revenge. There's no bounty, only Teldryn."

"Who are you?" The massive Redguard asked, looking up from the paper to frown at me.

"You don't recognize my voice, do you..."

A flash of recognition lit up his face, and Ramodo walked up to me, looking deflated.

"I am only serving Sigrun because she has my sister," He said. "I don't care about the money anymore, and I am sorry for the trouble we've caused your city. Take my axe, and bust open that trapdoor behind the stone chair," He advised, passing me a huge battleaxe through the bars. "I can't unlock the trap, but you should be able to get through the tunnels and back into town."

"Where are you going?" I asked, one hand still clasped desperately around the grate, the other struggling to hold the axe.

"Back to the Sea Tiger," Ramodo replied, looking at me over his shoulder.
Introspection (Teldryn)

Chapter Summary

Indra's concern at taking lives is beginning to rub off on Teldryn, for better or worse.

I was overcome with shame and remorse. I had come to this island thinking Sigrun would not think to check here, and now lives were being lost for what? Some street urchin from Blacklight who had abandoned the Morag Tong? What the girl said was technically correct, that the military had a duty to serve its citizens. Though, am I really a citizen; do I deserve that title? Even the mercenaries were dying at Sigrun's will, because of me. I had never felt guilt about slitting a man's throat before, but suddenly I was aware that these pirates were bore to a mother, that they may even have had a childhood similar to mine. Yet I was here, and they were...

I tried not to dwell on it, but it became increasingly difficult as I stacked up the bodies in my mind, taking a silent inventory. When Sigrun appeared before me, all I could see was Angelica's mother and Voden's wife, a friend, an ally. The hate she directed at me in her gaze told me she didn't feel the same. I knew how loss twisted the world around you into a dark and hopeless place, and my split second hesitation at being stupidly sympathetic gave her the opportunity she needed to launch a powerful paralysis spell at Geldis and I. As Glowstone Hall faded into darkness, what was left of my consciousness drifted to the girl. She was my only hope now.
The Sea Tiger

Chapter Summary

Teldryn's fate is in Indra's hands as she confronts the Sea Tiger and assists the Redoran Guard in halting their attack against Raven Rock. While Geldis rushes to stop the Redoran from attacking the ship that Teldryn is held captive on, Indra infiltrates the Sea Tiger and finds more than just a war ship.

Chapter Notes

I took a generous amount of creative control, so sorry Undriel lol.

Thanks for sticking with it this far. I promise fun things are in store soon!

Ramodo left the cavern, and I looked around for any other possible ways out of the trap. The windows were far too small for me to crawl through, and the iron bars across the door wouldn't budge. I turned around to face the throne-like stone chair. Holding the giant battleaxe in both hands, I looked behind the chair to find the body of a disintegrating Draugr partly covering the trapdoor that the Redguard had known about. I kicked the dustman aside and he crumbled into foul-smelling debris.

Smashing in the wooden covering, I peered down into the tunnel. It appeared to have a stone foundation, as if a secondary structure had been built below. Leaving the battleaxe behind, I jumped through the jagged hole and looked around. The tunnel was barely lit by bio-luminescent plants that grew in the stone and along the ceiling, in the form of some kind of algae or lichen. I followed the narrow hall and it began to open up, but now appeared more refined. The stone was exquisitely carved, and gold-coloured metal gates and decorations had appeared out of the darkness. I had read about this type of architecture before, there was only one civilization capable of building such intricate underground structures - the Dwemer. That also meant some of their steam-powered guardians may be nearby. No sooner had I thought this than a metal ball came rolling off its position on the wall and opened up into a humanoid sentinel that scrolled along on a wheel-like foot. It rushed me with its sword appendage drawn, and I shot it with a bolt of lightning. It stopped, briefly, but came back to what could be described as life, soon after. I remembered that these animunculi were powered by water, and I began to blast it with fire. The pressure of unregulated boiling water combined with the expansion of heated metal caused steam to shoot out from unintended crevices, and it exploded into its metal components.

I bent down and took a closer look at it. It was truly incredible, the technology far exceeding what anybody alive today could create. I wondered what the Dwemer would be capable of in today's society had they still persisted, then remembered the cruelty that accompanied their ingenuity. When I read about the Dwemer and the Falmer, I had almost wept for the fate that befell the Snow Elves. Losing a war with the Nords, they retreated underground to the safety of the Dwemer culture. Humbled by their defeat, they only wanted to live in harmony with their new neighbours, and the
Dwemer, partly out of distrust and partly out of exploitation, had taken advantage of their newfound good nature, enslaving them and twisting them into horrifying blind monsters. Was the disappearance of the Dwemer a result of their evil actions, and was the fate of the Falmer a result of being too ambitious in battle, then too trusting in the shame of defeat? What was to be learned from either of their plights still eluded me and I brushed these thoughts aside as I made my way through the tunnel and down a spiral staircase. I went through the door at the bottom and found myself in a place that looked as if someone had inverted a brightly lit city at night.

The ground and the natural structures that protruded from it were dark, almost black, but the stone roof of the massive cave was aglow with more blooms. Equally bright mushrooms, some as big as houses, grew mysteriously along the ridges of the cavern's cliffs. Through the dim, eerie light I could see a golden gate at the top of a large stone ramp, and I made my way towards it, climbing over hexagonal boulders and occasionally wading through the murky water that pooled throughout the base of the enclosure. Solstheim was the last known resting place of the Snow Elves, and I was ever vigilant for any Falmer that may be lurking in the shadows.

The gate led to an elevating device, driven by more steam and gears and took me to another hallway that appeared to be less utilized. I heard a clanking from the other end of the hall and readied myself. An insect-like robot was welding something on a wall and didn't notice me. I shot it with lightning and fire simultaneously, and it disintegrated, far easier than the humanoid one. The end of the hall was cracked open and led into a tunnel that was big enough for a person to fit through. Throwing a flame down it in an attempt to see the other side, I realized that the end was nowhere in sight. I squeezed myself between the packed loam and began the arduous crawl on my stomach. I came to a fork, and took a chance on the opening that went right. It ended after about a minute of crawling, and I made my way back to the split, re-orienting myself so that I chose the left side route this time. The tunnel came to a few more splits such as the first, and many times I went the wrong way into one dead end after the other.

After coming to the end of the sixth dead end in a row, I stopped crawling, and lay in the darkness. Suddenly, the weight of the world came crashing down on me. Every feeling that I hadn't properly dealt with over the past month caught up to me all at once, and I began to cry, my tears making mud in the soil that had become saturated on my clothing and skin, dripping into my mouth. Face down in the old dirt and roots of a pitch black tunnel, I felt that nothing I was doing had any meaning and that anything I would do in the future would go wrong. Wailing now, the only thought I had was that at least nobody could hear me. This made me laugh a bit and I ceased my blubbering, taking a deep breath and remembering what I was doing here in the first place. Recomposing myself, I realized that there were some things in this world out of my control, but there were other circumstances that I had the ability to define the conclusion of, and finding the end of this godsforsaken tunnel was one of them.

The passage became wider as I made my way through it, first it was large enough to crawl on my knees, then I was able to crouch. When I was able to stand, the tunnel opened up to a ladder and I eagerly climbed it. Feeling my way through tangled, thin roots and clumped dirt at the top, I thrust myself from the abyss and into another short Dwarven hallway. I looked around, and saw a dead body lying down the hall. It had clearly been there for a long time. Turning the man over, I found a bloodstained letter.

bjorn

do not come to this place

i have not much self left
This man had come down here seeking something, and more than likely, he was killed. This fact hit me like a rogue wave of sanity. Any of my own problems could be handled, so long as I was alive and had the will to do so. Looking down the hall, I saw that it angled upwards and terminated at a wooden covering. Coming up to the end of the tunnel, I realized that the wood blocking the exit was just a bookshelf, and I pushed it aside to find I was in somebody's basement. There were few possessions scattered about, among them was an old journal. The name "Hrodulf" was inscribed on the first page. Its contents revealed the diary of a man driven mad by the noises beneath his house, obsessively digging into the ruins, going after the source. I supposed that was him in the tunnel, or was it Bjorn? Did the Dwemer artifacts or a Falmer get him, I shuddered in thought. As I climbed out of the basement through the cellar door, I could see a huge ship on the horizon. Other small ships were closing in around it. That must be the Sea Tiger.

I ran towards the beach and only slowed my step to push a rowboat into the water, launching myself into it with the momentum, dirt falling about the dinghy as I rowed. Paddling out to the scene, I came upon the battle as one of the Redoran cog ships was boarding the smaller mercenary knarr. My entrance obscured by the commotion, I climbed up a line near the rudder of the knarr and made my way into the fight, knocking the pirates overboard with fireballs as they appeared before me. I could see some of them swimming away, while others drowned or were blasted with arrows and magicka by the Redoran. When all had settled, the guards began heaving the bodies on the vessel into the water and I found Geldis standing on the far end of the deck, looking at the gigantic ship not far off.

"Geldis, thank the three, you're alive," I cried, running up to him. "Where's Teldryn?"

"On that ship," He said, nudging his chin towards the caravel known as the Sea Tiger. "They let their guard down and I managed to get away, but they kept more men on him throughout the entire ordeal. He's being held prisoner. What happened to you? You look like an ash guardian."

"I got out of Glowstone through some underground tunnels that were not as nice as the ones under the bulwark. Why isn't that ship attacking us?"

"We managed to take down the sparse number of pirates that were aboard it, but it seems like there were too few of them, assuming that that's the ship presumed to be protecting Sigrun," Geldis replied. "It's likely another one of her tricks."

"And what of the Redoran navy?"

"They plan on destroying the ship soon. Seeing as they're so close to ending it with Sigrun, they're going to sacrifice Teldryn in order to take her down."

I had come too far for this, and I now considered Teldryn a friend, or at the very least, my responsibility.

"What? They can't do that!" I exclaimed.

"I agree," Said Geldis, looking back at me, "and I was thinking of going over there myself, but I'm only going to die with him if I do. There's no time."

"Fuck the Redoran for thinking one of their citizens are expendable," I cursed, "I don't see anyone on board. I'm going over there," I declared, walking towards my rowboat."Can you warn
"Yes. I need to find Master Neloth. He's on the other reinforcement ship from Morrowind over there," He said, pointing to the nearby cog. "He's agreed to use his magic to destroy the Sea Tiger. I'll tell the Redoran guard there's another Raven Rock civilian on board. Once you've got him, give me a signal - shoot a fireball or two skywards and we'll attack it." I nodded in agreement with his plan and turned to leave, but he stopped me mid-stride. "Indra," He called out, and I looked back at him. "Thank you for giving a shit about Teldryn. Not many people have."

A bit taken aback, I managed to give him a single nod, then jumped back into the rowboat, paddling towards the leviathan.

Geldis was right, it was eerily quiet as I approached the side of the hull and stared up at its waterline, high above where I sat. I was climbing over the wooden gunwales just as a small Breton woman dressed in simple robes was doing the same on the other side. I took out my bow and nocked an arrow.

"Whoa, hey, hold up," She called out, holding up her hands in surrender. "I'm just here to take an inventory of damage for Sigrun, I'm no warrior."

I looked around the Sea Tiger. The blood from the dead bodies of pirates chock full of Redoran arrows had turned the deck red.

"Where is she?" I asked, drawing the bow taught.

"She slipped away, a while ago when the chaos first broke out, covered by the Sea Tiger and fog," The Breton said quickly, still holding her hands up. "Took a smaller lifeboat out into the mist, to another ship that I was aboard. I don't think she wanted to be here when the ship got destroyed by the guard."

Coward, I thought. Suddenly, I heard the thumps of fists banging on wood, and voices coming from the doors to the cabin. I lowered my bow.

"That's odd, the only people around here should be the prisoners," The woman said as she took out a set of keys. Upon opening the door, a Khajiit and Argonian man, as well as a Redguard woman came bursting out of the cabin.

"This one thanks you," Said the Khajiit, breathing deeply with relief. "It was quiet for so long, then we heard your voices,"

"She locked us in there!" Exclaimed the Redguard woman. She looked familiar, as if...

"Hey," I said, "Are you Ramodo's sister?"

"If you mean Drassam Ramodo, then yes, I'm his sister Ashanti," She replied, somewhat suspiciously, but wasn't about to confront a crazed-looking, dirt-covered archer.

"Is he still in the cabin?" I asked.

"Yeah, he's down there with the prisoner," She replied, "they're awaiting Sigrun's orders."

"Sigrun is gone," I told her, shaking my head. "She left you all to die on this ship in the Redoran attack. She's totally lost it. I managed to get the guards to hold off on the assault, but we all need to get off this death trap."
"Figures," Ashanti sighed, "go get my brother out, and we'll leave this place."

"I'll have an escape boat ready to go on the starboard side when you get back," said the Argonian.

I entered the cabin and made my way down into its belly. The interior was more complex and winding than I had expected for a seafaring craft, and the prison was hidden among the deepest recesses. Before I shoved open the heavy, chained doors, I took out a dagger in preparation. Walking through the entrance and around the corner to the hay-strewn floor surrounded by reeking cages, I found no one. Was the ship abandoned? Did Sigrun take Teldryn with her? Suddenly, I heard a muffled scream come from another room in the bottom level of the ship, but I hadn't recalled seeing any other areas large enough to host an interrogation chamber. Walking back to the room's narrow entrance, I noticed that the boards on the left side of the wall seemed different, as if they had been added recently. I put my ear to the wall and heard another cry from the other side.

Sliding open the hidden door, I found Ramodo with his back to me, watching Teldryn in chains, being stabbed in the side with a red-hot iron poker by a laughing Orc. He was bleeding from various wounds throughout his torso and legs, his lip was split open and his eyes were both black. All I remember of the next few seconds is Ramodo turning to see me, and after that I only recall looking around the prison, covered in blood, a dead Orismer at my feet. Teldryn would later inform me that I had rushed the Orc, stabbed him once in the back, slit his throat and then stabbed him through the heart in one fluid motion, created by two daggers.

"What the fuck is this?" I heard Ramodo say behind me, and he began to approach us.

"I wouldn't do that," cautioned Teldryn as he ignited a flame in both shackled hands. Despite being beaten close to death, he was still as defiant as ever.

Ramodo ceased his step, but didn't lower his weapon.

"Scared of fire, are you?" I asked, smiling through the blood and filth that covered my face. It felt good to see him afraid and unsure. It felt even better to see the dead Orc on the floor in front of me.

"Boethiah inspire me!" Teldryn yelled as he released the ball of fire from his right hand. It smashed through the window directly behind him and continued its arced path across the sea. Ramodo backed away, then ran out of the room.

"Oh. Shit." I said, looking up at the sky which had begun to turn a deep shade of red. "We're getting out of here, NOW!" I yelled, releasing the shackles that held Teldryn to the wall. He fell forwards onto the floor, and I grabbed him.

"Don't you fucking fight me on this, this time," I yelled as I heaved him up around my shoulder and dragged him to the entrance of the hidden prison as the ship began to get hotter and hotter. Flame atronachs appeared throughout the halls, setting the ship ablaze and blocking our path. Thank Azura Teldryn's Dunmer heritage made him fire resistant, then at least I only had to worry about myself. The smoke grew thicker as the wooden vessel burned, making me cough. Pulling my cloak up around my mouth with my free hand, I knew we wouldn't make it back to the main doors, as everything was on fire now. Through the smoke, I made a beeline to the other end of the lower level and found a large window behind the desk of the office. I looked around frantically, and found a paperweight, then threw it through the window. Letting go of Teldryn, I smashed the remaining glass jutting from the frame, then turned back to him.

"Okay, come on," I said, kneeling with the fingers of both hands interlocked, offering
Teldryn a boost and then hoisting him upwards to the window. After he had secured his hands on the frame, I began pushing him by his arse out of the narrow opening; he using what remaining strength he had to tumble out of the cabin and onto the foredeck. I followed after him, and jumped down onto the deck where the elf was struggling to stand. I had no idea where the rest of the crew was, but I oriented myself, grabbed Teldryn and launched the two of us over the starboard gunwales as the ship began to implode beneath us, the tall mast crashing into the deck.

Landing hard in the water, my hands were torn away from his body. He had fallen unconscious, and I could see his limp figure start to sink to the bottom of the narrow, cold sea. I dove after him, but I was a weak swimmer, and his lean physique sank like a stone. After diving for as long as I could, I was forced to return to the surface. The crew and the lifeboat had appeared beside me, and they helped haul me aboard. I looked down at the water where I had lost my friend, thinking that this was all for nothing. At least we rescued the crew, I thought in an effort to reassure myself - they seemed innocent enough. Suddenly the Argonian oarsman popped up out of the waves with Teldryn in tow. He threw him into the boat before climbing aboard himself.

"Never thought I'd go out of my way to save a Dunmer," He said, punching Teldryn in the solar plexus, forcing what water he had swallowed back out through his hypothermia-tinged mouth. I breathed a sigh of relief and thanked him, then relaxed back into the small boat as we rowed away from the carnage, drifting into a sleep so deep, I didn't notice when I was moved onto land.

I awoke to the sounds of a crackling campfire, voices speaking softly and light rain falling gently on my face. I opened my eyes. It was nighttime now, and the surviving crew of the Sea Tiger was huddled around a fire, quietly talking and eating fish that had been charred on a skewer. Gods, I was sore, I knew that even before I moved a muscle. I raised my head up to see the Breton woman healing Teldryn, who was propped up against some rocks, his shoulders covered by the furs from Ramodo's armor.

"Where are we?" I asked, sitting up in a daze and swallowing the dryness from my mouth. My lungs were heavy with smoke, and I let out a cough as I tried to inhale.

"On an island off the East Coast," Replied the Argonian. "I figured we should lay low for a while, seeing as I don't think the Redoran nor Raven Rock would welcome us back with open arms anytime soon."

I curled my legs to one side as I sat up into a leaning sitting position, rubbing the back of my neck and trying to take in everything that had happened in the past few days. My thoughts were interrupted by a hoarse voice.

"I suppose I should thank you," I heard Teldryn say weakly, and I turned to him.

"Wow, you look like shit," I said, squinting at him in exhaustion. He wore only cotton pants, his body a mess of blackened burns, gashes and welts. His face was so swollen I could barely tell it was him, the only indication that it was indeed who I thought it was the tattoos, the now messy and flattened mohawk, and his drawling voice. He tried to smile but stopped when the pain of his split lip made him recoil.

"I feel like shit, and you don't look too hot yourself, you know. You've still got that Orc's blood crusted around your hairline. Though it could be dirt, I'm not sure, you're a mess," He chuckled, then gave into a fit of coughing. When he stopped, he looked back at me. "You know," He gasped, "I never learned your name."

"Indra," I said, and he nodded. Feeling around my head now, it made me ill knowing that a
dead man's blood had remained on me this long.

"I owe you a thank you too," Teldryn now said to the Argonian.

"Well, if your friend hadn't come along and freed us, we would all be at the bottom of the sea by now, so I was only returning the favour," The boatman replied.

"Wait," I said, looking around, "where's Ashanti?"

Everyone's expression turned stony.

"She's gone. Lost," I heard Drassam say grimly. He was sitting closer to the water, away from the group.

"She took a direct hit from an atronach while we were lowering the lifeboat. She fell overboard and I couldn't get to her in time," The Argonian quietly explained to me.

I stood up, wincing, and went to where Ramodo was hunched over, and sat down beside him.

"I have nothing, anymore," He said, staring down where the cold water met the damp ash. "My sister was the only thing left in the world that actually mattered to me, and Sigrun took that away."

I put a hand on his shoulder. "Then let's find Sigrun, and end this story."

It was early afternoon the following day when we rowed back to the main island. When we arrived, the crew took off on foot, saying they would hold out on Solstheim and eventually hitch a ride back to Skyrim once the situation blew over, and the Redoran had cooled off. They left me with the lifeboat to take Teldryn back to Raven Rock. He slept most of the way there, curled under the furs from Drassam's armor, unintentionally revealing his pain through the spasms in his face. I would wake him periodically to force either some water or a sip of a health potion down his throat. Despite his shivering, I could feel the heat radiating off him and kept him under the only external restoration spell I knew, for as long as possible. Ramodo accompanied us for the trip, and he and I took turns rowing along the shoreline, him doing most of the work as I was exhausted and sore. Debris from the naval battle had begun to wash up along the coast, as well as the odd bloated and greying corpse. Ramodo disembarked early to hide out at Hrodulf's house until I was ready to head to Skyrim to find Sigrun.

The sun was setting as I ran the small boat gently ashore on a silty beach in Raven Rock that evening, and Teldryn came to.

"Can you walk?" I asked, as he blinked around, eyes never fully opening.

"I think so," He replied shakily, and stumbled out of the boat into a single-armed crawl. I picked him up and helped him along the main path through town, then brought him down to the Retching Netch. Geldis had returned to his normal life behind the bar and looked at us incredulously as we limped towards him.

"I thought you were both dead, what happened?" He asked, helping Teldryn to a bed.

"It was an accident, the signal you saw wasn't mine," I replied, grabbing a nearby washcloth and scrubbing my face with it. "Teldryn just got a little excited with his magicka. It's alright though, it was nobody's fault and we ended up making it out in almost one piece."
"What of Sigrun?" Geldis asked, tucking his friend in beneath several fur-lined blankets. Teldryn fell unconscious almost immediately.

"She fled the ship, leaving her crew to die on it," I replied. "She knew the Redoran would eventually give up on Teldryn and go ahead with the attack. She's hiding out in Skyrim somewhere. I'm going to see if Master Neloth can find her, then Ramodo and I are going to kill her," I said confidently. I was plotting someone's death and saying it aloud to the Universe; I never thought I'd see the day.

"I would say I'd come with you, but with Teldryn like that..." He looked at the sleeping man.

"Come with us," I said, "Dreyla can watch the bar again, and I know a great healer that can take care of him. We'll leave tomorrow morning."

Geldis nodded, and I returned home, briefly stopping by at Fevythe's house to let him know he had his first real patient at the Retching Netch.

When I walked through my door, the first thing my father said was, "You look...older." He followed it up with, "But I'm glad you're back. Veleth said you were fine and were just making your way back from another posting. Gods, you're covered in filth."

I laughed. "I feel older," I said, silently thanking Veleth for not only trusting me, but also keeping my family sane. I supposed I also owed him even more gratitude for calling in reinforcements from Morrowind.

"What happened? We saw that massive ship explode; all of Raven Rock was at the shore watching the Redoran guard defend our home, when suddenly the sky turned blood red and the big one went up like a bonfire. Did you have anything to do with that?"

"Just a bit," I replied with a chuckle, "I'm alright though, and I think everything is back to normal now."

"Does that mean you're going to go visit those Greybeards?" Asked my mother, sadness and concern tinged her words.

"Soon," I sighed, removing my equipment, "I just have one more thing to do tomorrow. But I could really use a bath, first."
Broken Oar Grotto

Chapter Summary

With the help of Master Neloth, Indra, Geldis and Ramodo track down Sigrun at the pirate hideout in Broken Oar Grotto.

After putting on my stinking, filthy armor the next morning, I picked up Geldis from the Netch and bid farewell to an exhausted Teldryn who said someone named Fevythe was coming later that day. He asked me who it was, and I told him to just trust his restoration skill, then left shortly thereafter with sera Sadri in tow. I then grabbed Ramodo from the abandoned house and led them both to Tel Mithryn.

"I swear to Azura, Neloth better get it fucking right this time," I muttered. "I appreciate the man's help, but he doesn't give you much of a chance to get a word in, explanation wise, such a presumptuous wizard. He's smart and all, but he needs to just relax sometimes," I was speaking quickly to no one in particular.

"Sounds like you need to relax, too" Geldis chimed in.

"I will, once that bitch is dealt with," I said, more coldly than I anticipated.

We made the walk to the mushroom tower in silence, and floated up to Master Neloth's establishment. Ramodo seemed on edge the entire time, and the first words the wizard spoke to us pushed him over.

"No need to thank me, I'm sure you're overwhelmed with gratitude" Master Neloth called to us in greeting. His arrogance enraged Drassam, who let out a bloodthirsty roar and charged the wizard, but was immediately encased in a shroud of frost by the master. Despite being frozen solid, the Redguard's fury at the death of his sister was still written across his face.

"Ramodo!" I yelled at his still figure, "Neloth was just following orders, don't forget who truly deserves your revenge!" His face began to relax slowly, and I thawed him with a gentle flame.

"You're right," He said, closing his eyes and rubbing his hands for warmth, "I should save this for Sigrun."

"Neloth," I said, turning back to the wizard, "the captain wasn't even on the ship. Can you find her this time?"

"Well now that I actually know who I am looking for, yes. Give me a few minutes." He returned to his private study, leaving the three of us in his home. Figuring we had a bit of time to kill, I approached Neloth's enchanting table and picked up one of the gems scattered about the room. It had a slight smoky aura around it, bigger than some of the other gems in the various piles, but smaller than those belonging to the expensive-looking blue crystals. On top of what he had recently shown me, the master had taught me a few basic enchantments when I had visited him at the encouragement of my mother, about five years ago. Right around the same time Teldryn was being left to rot in a prison cell, I thought.
You have to focus your own energy and knowledge of the magic you wish to incorporate into the piece, I remembered Neloth saying. Lightning magicka had always made its way easily into my body, and I did not fear its direction from others. I placed one of my daggers in the centre of the table, and then set the soul gem into its holder on the skull. Establishing both of my hands on either side of the pentagram, I closed my eyes and released a jolt of lightning from my palms. It ran up the table and into the skull, where the green orb began to glow. The soul gem exploded into shards as the lightning made its way into the blade. I picked it up as it still sparked, and admired the white veins that now made their way up and down the length of the golden metal. I could hear the sweep of robes approaching as Master Neloth came around the corner.

"She's at Broken Oar Grotto in Skyr- what are you doing?" He asked.

"Sorry," I said, grinning and shrugging innocently, the Elven dagger still in one hand.

"Well, at least you were productive," Neloth sighed, "but next time ask permission to use my supplies. Anyway, I will create a portal to her, and leave it open on the other side. It only lasts about an hour, so you better find her quickly if you don't want to have to traverse the North coast of that miserable province."

Neloth summoned a portal, and I could feel the cold rushing in before the snowy cave came swirling into view through the purple and black kaleidoscope.

"Ramodo," I yelled into the wind, after we had stepped through the portal, "do you know anything about this cave?"

"I've been here once," He replied, "it's made up of planks that are supported above the water. It's quite dark and there are a lot of twists and turns, so we should be able to take out the men that are posted around the paths without drawing too much attention. Sigrun will probably be in the makeshift marina."

"This is a stealth mission, then," Geldis stated as we approached the rocky entrance, "whatever you do, don't draw an alarm. The place will be crawling with men, ready to come find us."

The three of us nodded at each other, and quietly made our way into the cave, hiding behind a few stacked crates near the entrance. The cavern was massive, with a canal running through the middle. It twisted around the corner in the distance, obscuring the hideout that Ramodo assured us would be there. There were wooden structures nailed together in slipshod gangplanks and platforms. I could see a man standing at the top of the first scaffold we came to.

"How do we deal with him?" I whispered to my companions, my voice muffled by the slight current in the canal creating small waves that lapped on the rocky shores, echoing through the dome.

"If we hit him from here, he'll fall into the water and cause a commotion," Geldis replied, "but if we wait until he turns around, you could sneak up on him and take him out. Ramodo and I will come up immediately after, and make sure nobody comes around the corner."

My hands had begun to sweat, but I agreed. The lackey eventually turned his attention away from the ramp and I crept towards the planks that led upwards. I waited halfway, looking back at my accomplices. They nodded, indicating that the man was still facing the other way. Now drawing my electrified dagger, I swiftly ascended the remaining section of the wooden structure, grabbing the man and cutting his throat. As I did, I felt the lightning enter his body, freezing his muscles and preventing any noise from his mouth. Perhaps it made him numb to his death, as well. Geldis and
Ramodo quickly and quietly climbed the scaffold and we regrouped behind a stone pillar. We had a much better vantage point from here; we could now see the vastness of the cavern. Suddenly, we heard someone from above us.

"Whoa, what the fuck?" The voice said. We could hear footsteps coming down the stone incline. As the man passed us, Geldis grabbed him into the shadows and finished him off. We scaled the natural formation the man hand descended from, and crossed a bridge a ways down the cliff. The cobbled-together marina came into view, around the corner to the right, at the very end of the cave. Edging along the face of the steep drop to the water, we positioned ourselves across the canyon from the pirate haven, to formulate a plan.

"There are just too many of them," Geldis said, "but if I could create some kind of distraction, do you think you two could handle Sigrun?"

Ramodo and I looked at each other and bobbed our heads in agreement. Geldis crept away and we scaled down the cliff, into a rowboat below. As we sat silently in the rotting, small craft, we keenly watched the figures moving around in the hideout. Sigrun came into view, and Ramodo grabbed my arm. Suddenly, we could hear shouting as the thugs rushed to pick up weapons and ran up the cliff across from where we had descended. Geldis had set several piles of their supplies and loot on fire, and the pirates were frantically attempting to put them out. Seeing his work, Drassam began rowing towards the structure as I readied my bow. Sigrun's attention was towards the commotion, but our movement caught her eye and she turned around to look at us, just as I released an arrow into her exposed wrist, pinning her to the wall behind her. Her men couldn't hear her scream over the chaos resulting from the ever growing flames. I shot another arrow into her opposite wrist, fully immobilizing her. We stepped out of the rowboat and into the shanty where Sigrun stood, bleeding and smiling.

"You killed my sister," Ramodo growled, unsheathing his sword.

"She served me well," Sigrun spat, "unlike you,"

We suddenly heard a splashing sound behind us and turned around to see Geldis climbing out of the water and onto the dock, shivering uncontrollably as he did.

"Just f-fucking d-deal with h-her," He blurted as he heaved his frigid body further into the hideout. He pressed his palms together, and was encased in a shroud of fire shortly thereafter. His Ancestor's Wrath warmed him, but startled Ramodo who backed away, knocking over a table in the process. Lit candles, bottles of booze and papers collided on the ground and went up with a whoosh, catching a rug, then a curtain and soon engulfing the wooden frame of the marina. The Redguard stood motionless, staring wide-eyed into the flames as they licked at his clothing.

"It's too late!" Geldis yelled to me as he produced a bottle of white-ish potion and took a swig, adding his own flames to the growing bonfire with his free hand. "Drink the rest of this!" He demanded. Ramodo was now on fire, flailing about the cabin, spreading the inferno, and the mercenaries were starting to run down the cliff towards the hideout.

"What is it?" I shouted to Geldis as he yanked me towards the water with one hand and continued to set fire to the structure with the other.

"Waterbreathing potion! Our only way out is through the canal!" He shouted over the commotion behind us.

As soon as I downed the fishy-tasting concoction, I felt as if someone had painlessly cut slits in my neck. Putting my hands to my skin in panic, I realized that the gills of an aquatic creature had
formed in newly acquired flaps. Geldis threw me into the water and jumped in after. The cold shocked me and I almost cried out. I looked back. The hideout was completely lost to the blaze. All I could hear before I put my head under the frigid, dark water was Ramodo screaming through his final breaths, and Sigrun's maniacal laughter as she too was lost to the conflagration.

Still holding each other, Geldis and I kicked and paddled to the bottom of the freezing cold channel. He grabbed a small rock in each hand to prevent him from floating back up, and I followed suit. Looking up, we could see the blurred lights of the fires high above the water as we ran along the bottom of the basin towards the mouth of the cave. I could tell the potion was about to wear off as I felt my neck begin to solidify again. Geldis had the same realization and looked at me before dropping the rocks, bending his knees and propelling himself upwards. Following him, I could feel my lungs burning as I desperately kicked towards the surface. My upper stomach began to twitch as if I were about to vomit, and tiny flashes of greyish-white appeared in my peripheries. Just as I thought I was about to pass out, we hit the air, gasping in the smoky air as the cavern around us burned. Still breathing hard, we swam to the edge of the water and hauled ourselves out, trembling with cold, our lips bluer than usual. We ran out of the cave and as we were walking towards Neloth's creation, the spectre of a man suddenly appeared before us. He stood taller than the two of us, and was almost just as wide. What of his face wasn't covered in a beard was plastered in tattoos, and he wore an impressive set of fur-trimmed armor.

"Hah! Thank you!" He bellowed, smiling at us.

Geldis figured out who he was before I did, and answered the vision. "I suppose you're Voden Free-Winter, then," He said, shivering.

The ghost laughed again.

"Why are you thanking us?" I asked, hugging myself. I could barely speak my face was so numb. "We just killed your wife,"

His smile grew even larger as he replied, "I know, and now we can all be together again in Sovngarde." Putting his hands on his hips, he appeared even larger than before. He looked past us for a few moments, before turning his attention back to Geldis and I, bidding us farewell. "Tell Teldryn I miss his rabbit stew," He said with a small chuckle, and with that, he vanished.

Geldis and I looked at each other, both of us likely thinking the same thing - what a crazy family. We then jumped through the portal, just as it was closing.

Crashing back onto the floor of Neloth's house, we sighed in relief, shivering as we began to remove our wet, frozen armor and clothing. The wizard threw a few robes our way and served us some trama root tea as we sat and recovered, our gear set out to dry near a hovering flame created by the master.

When I returned home late that evening, I found a letter addressed to me on the table. "That came for you while you were gone," My mother said. She was sitting by the fireplace, mending the hood of one of her outfits, but turned her attention to me when she saw I was reading it. "A courier came all the way here from Skyrim. Must be important."

There was no seal, no stamp, nothing to indicate who had sent it or even which hold it may have come from. I opened it, and was met with what looked like proper sentences, but they were all in some strange language I had never seen before. It was made up entirely of squares and triangles, some had one or two edges open, and some had a dot in one corner, or along one edge.
"Is this some kind of joke?" I asked, but I didn't feel that was the intention.

"Why? What is it?" My father asked, looking up from his reading.

"I don't know, if it's a message, it's hidden beneath a code," I said, turning the paper over to look at the back of the note. Nothing was written on the other side.

"Strange, but I imagine someone is trying to be discreet about something," He said thoughtfully. "Well, there's probably something in one of our books that can help you figure it out,"

"I thought you said Glover was the only other one who knew about who I was?" I asked, a bit worried about this mysterious letter now.

"Don't forget about the Greybeards," My mother replied. "It could be from them. Better try to decipher it."

"Ugh, maybe tomorrow," I yawned, "I need to get some rest for now." I pulled off my armor, shoved some baked ash yams into my mouth and trudged up the stairs to fall asleep, too exhausted to even think about bathing. Late that night, when the three of us were sound asleep, another note was slipped underneath our door.
When I awoke to the sound of someone moving about my chamber, I was suddenly made aware of the pain my body had endured, and its current after effects. I opened my eyes to see a tall, broad Dunmer man dressed in casual Dunmeris attire unrolling bandages and pouring water into a bowl. I recognized him as the man I'd had often seen Indra wandering about with in Raven Rock.

"Ah, you must be Fevythe I suppose. Must be nice to be the paramour of such a feisty woman, no?" I said in jest, hoping I would get a laugh out of him.

As he began adding a few drops of strong-smelling disinfectant solutions to the water, I caught his eyes looking downwards, then sideways. He opened his mouth but said nothing.

"Oh," I muttered, a bit embarrassed, "I suppose that's not the case anymore, then. Well, you're here to heal me, yes?"

He nodded and walked over to my side. "Where does it hurt?" He asked, gently.

"Ha!" I laughed, then winced. "Everywhere."

"Alright, I'll just start with an overall body treatment, then we'll work on the individual wounds. I can't just heal you all at once, as anything broken may not set properly and you could end up with some pretty mangled scars."

"I don't care about scars," I said, "just don't do anything that would prevent me from any future fighting."

"You're already thinking about that?" He seemed concerned. "You should be focusing on rest, for now. I should also mention I'm pretty new to this, but I've learned the foundations from Danica, and I've been reading up on all the advanced methods."

"You shouldn't have told me that, now I'm going to think you're incompetent," I smiled at him with all the expression I could manage. He smiled back down at me, and got to work.

He started off by placing a partially frozen waterskin covered by a cloth smelling of herbs,
over my eyes. "For the swelling," He said. "Too much pressure around the eyes and head isn't good for your brain."

"My brain's not good for my brain, or my body," I joked and he let out a light chuckle. I enjoyed this man's good nature, it was a refreshing contrast with how severe and intense Indra was. No wonder they didn't last. Unless there was another side of her I hadn't seen yet. Fevythe then unleashed a healing spell over my entire body like a golden blanket, and I relaxed into it. It was as if I was floating in a perfectly warm bath on a sunny day, while beautiful women lightly massaged my sore muscles. As I felt myself drifting asleep, the spell ended and I became alert again, wiping the drool from the side of my mouth.

"I think that's fine for your internal damage, I can't really feel much else," He said, now starting to working his hands over my body, lightly pressing down on various bones to assess their damage, and to check for any fresh blood. This is what he explained to me as he did it, I suppose in an attempt to keep me calm. It worked, as I found his voice was very soothing to listen to. He started at my feet, then moved to examining each leg. Neither had any breaks, only lacerations in the process of healing, along with some ugly looking singed areas of skin, inflicted by the sadistic Orc. I winced a little when he pressed down on the bruises that hadn't quite surfaced yet, and he looked at me intently each time, but was ultimately unworried. Based on the pain in my ribs, I thought at least one of them was broken, but Fevythe was unsure.

"I can't feel anything, but it's possible," He contemplated, palpating his hands along my sides.

"Here," I said, grabbing his hand and placing it over the left part of my chest, near my heart. My eyes were still covered by the pack. "It hurts like a sonofabitch right there. I haven't tried to move so I can't quite pinpoint the exact source of the pain."

I moved my hand away and he began to explore the area between my shoulder and neck, eventually hitting exactly where I thought the pain was coming from. I let out a yelp.

"That's your collarbone, it's definitely broken" He stated, continuing to gently manipulate the area as I grunted in agreement. "Hang on," The golden light appeared again, this time concentrated entirely in one area as he coerced my life force into the break, removing damaged tissue, and quickening the creation of new flesh. He stopped after a few seconds, saying it would be a bad idea to continue any further as the bone wasn't quite in the right place and would have to reset naturally, over time.

Fevythe returned to the table to retrieve something, and returned with the antiseptic water bath, dipping a small towel in it. Before he left the room, he handed me a loincloth and asked me to remove the bloodstained, dirty clothing I was wearing, saying he would be back in a minute. I placed the icepack to the side before I lay back down, a bit chilly now, and called him back in.

The water bath he used to clean me off was warm, and the volatile, but not unpleasant, scent made my eyes water. I could feel the pain subsiding already. After he had sanitized my wounds, he set to applying an herbal ointment, followed by clean bandages.

"I brought these home from the temple of Kynareth in Skyrim," He said as he gently massaged the greasy paste onto my skin. "I don't think you can get the necessary ingredients here. I should learn how to cultivate them myself."

"Were you with Indra in Skyrim?" I inquired, rather curious about the young woman who had gone out of her way to rescue me and hadn't attempted to extort me.

"Yes, it was the first and only trip we ever took together. She's always wanted to see more of
Tamriel, but I'm more of a homebody."

"Is that why she left you?" I asked, rather bluntly.

"Actually," He said quietly, "I broke up with her." I raised my eyebrows.

"Did she punch you after you did?" I joked, but he only let out a single small laugh.

"Other than the time we fought a bear, I've never seen her infamous aggression in person, actually, despite hearing stories about her warrior spirit." He tilted his head as he continued to work. "The only time she's been cross with me was when I was overly worried about getting attacked as we were walking through the Whiterun hold. She was raised in a very strict household and ended up as a rather harsh person, so I can see how you may think she's a bit scary," He said, smiling a little, "but she's actually very affectionate, once you get to know her."

I thought about what he said. "Why did you decide to end it, then?" I asked.

"I don't know if I can say exactly," He replied, the smile now fading, "but, there's no room for someone like me in her life."

I was perplexed by his actions, and simultaneously felt sorry for the man. He seemed like a great catch.

"That's too bad," I said, stroking his arm. He stopped what he was doing for a second to look at me a bit surprised, but resumed wrapping a bandage around my calf promptly thereafter. I had to sit up for him to put the sling around my shoulder, which would hold my arm in a position that facilitated the proper realignment of my collarbone as it healed. After he had wound some long bandages around my chest and waist that served to prevent the arm on my injured side from moving, he sat down close beside me to pin the cloth in place.

"Try not to move too much while it heals, and change your bandages in a few days. I'll leave a bit of ointment with you so you can reapply it later. There," He said, satisfied with his work, and smiled at me, warmth and generosity in his pretty red eyes. He really was a beautiful man, inside and out.

"Thank you Fevythe," I said, reaching my good hand out to his shoulder, "I really appreciate it." I leaned towards him and kissed his cheek.

His face turned an interesting shade of purple as he lightly touched where I had shown my fondness towards him. I moved my hand to the back of his head and began to lean towards him.

He stood up abruptly, knocking the bowl of water to the ground, and began shuffling around awkwardly.

"Uh, you're welcome, uh, I should, get going," He stammered, frantically picking up his healer's belongings and then high tailing it out of the inn room.

"Well," I said to myself, looking around at the mess, "I completely misread that one."
Blame futsch for putting this idea in my head :D
Chapter Summary

Indra seeks the help of ex-Morag Tong member Geldis in deciphering the strange message sent to her from Skyrim. Teldryn sees an opportunity to return to his life of carefree excitement.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

My parents slept in a little longer the following morning as it was Sundas, the day they allowed themselves a small break from their usual labours. I awoke first, so I found the note. The letters A to I were in a grid, J to R in the same grid but with dots, and S to Z were presented in a similar fashion, but arranged in diagonal grids. After throwing on a simple Dunmer outfit, I grabbed the letter delivered by the courier as well as the mysterious note, and went to the Retching Netch, thinking I knew someone who could help me with this. Teldryn was eating breakfast at the bar and chatting with Geldis, who was bent over a washbasin, cleaning one of many dirty mugs that had been left in his wake. Teldryn's face was still swollen, but the fever must have broke as he was inhaling the stew before him, and at the very least he was recognizable now. He was wearing a thin sleeveless undershirt, and I could see that he had bandages around his ribs and one of his arms was in a sling, but other than that he seemed to be in better spirits than I had seem him in before. Fevythe had done a good job. They looked up to greet me.

"Never a dull moment around here," I called out. "Somebody from Skyrim sent me some weird message," I said, slapping down the letter, followed by the note, on the bar in front of the men. "And then this note came last night. Geldis, I figured you would have dealt with some code during your time with the Morag Tong, what do you think?"

He frowned at the letter and note, but was quick to respond.

"Yes, this is a relatively simple code," He replied. "This note you received is the cipher. See here, a full box is an E, whereas a full box with a dot at the bottom is an N. Same thing for the letters arranged in the diagonal grid. Want something to eat before we sort this thing out?"

"That would be great," I replied, my stomach grumbling as I eyed the stew Teldryn was eating. I hadn't had a proper meal in days, and the plain ash yams I had mowed down the previous night really hadn't cut it.

"Coming right up," Geldis said, leaving the bar to walk upstairs to the hearth where his assistant, Drovas, cooked the inn's meals.

"So, Geldis tells me Sigrun is gone," Teldryn said from beside me, still leaning over his food but his face now turned in my direction. "I suppose I need to thank you again."

"Ramodo also needed closure," I replied, "he's the main reason we ended up tracking down Sigrun, although that didn't end well for him, unfortunately." I thought I should have felt some remorse or sadness at Drassam's death, yet I felt nothing.
"Yes, I heard about that too," Teldryn yawned, rolling his head backwards to stretch his neck. "Well, if it makes you feel any better, I've lost many a patron to magicka related accidents."

"How many patrons have you had, exactly?"

"Hm, I can't say for certain. Perhaps around forty or so, if I had to guess."

"Wow," I said, actually quite amazed. I knew he had been employed by Voden for at least a few years, and I wondered how long he had worked for others. "And what's your usual going rate?"

"Five thousand," Teldryn answered, putting down his spoon and leaning on his good hand against the counter. My jaw dropped. No wonder he had pursued mercenary work for so long. "I'm full of surprises, you know," He smiled, his voice more cheerful than I'd ever heard it. "I've got swords, spells and a few other tricks up my sleeve." I didn't realize he had a more lighthearted side, and I figured he was finally relaxed enough to let it show.

"Yes, I know that," I laughed, "I've seen you fight plenty of times, I just can't believe how much you charged. Who has that kind of coin?"

"The kind of people that hire mercenaries," Teldryn replied, "tomb raiders, grave robbers, war chiefs...They've all got plenty of money. You tend to accumulate wealth when you can sell weapons and armor you take by force, without having to pay for raw materials and putting hours into crafting such things. I had to start small, initially, you know just a couple hundred per hire. Then, when I started getting a bit of a reputation for myself, I was able to up the price more and more with every month and every patron," He continued, waving his free hand about as he spoke. "Then, when I got really good, and after I'd gauged my potential employer's reactions, I would remove my helmet as part of the negotiations," He finished, grinning slyly. I just shook my head and laughed as I looked away, though I did have to admit he was quite a handsome, grumpy older man. Geldis had returned with my food, and slid it over to me. I picked up a spoonful and blew on it as we stared down at the message and cipher.

Teldryn had stood up now, and was looking over my shoulder at the paper. He had positioned himself so close to me that I could feel his breath shifting the sensitive strands of hair on the top of my head. The three of us began to work out the puzzle, and read it aloud when we were done.

_Dragonborn, if you want to save Skyrim, meet me at the Sleeping Giant Inn in Riverwood. Ask for the attic room._

The two men looked at me, brows furrowed. Teldryn sat back down.

"Are you sure this message is for you?" Asked Geldis. "You do know what the Dragonborn means, right?"

I felt the pang of nervousness through my stomach as I took a breath, thinking of a way to explain this without causing too much alarm. "Yes, it's for me," I replied. "I only discovered that this is part of who I am a week or so ago when I was in Skyrim. I found a dead dragon and absorbed its soul, I think," I said with uncertainty. "My parents explained the rest when I got home. They found out about this when I was born, after the same thing happened, and the Greybeards summoned me."

"Huh," Said Teldryn, studying me. "Well that would explain why Fevythe ran from you,"

I shot him a nasty look. "What did you two talk about while I was gone?" I asked, scowling at him.
"Well, nothing you don't know about already. Almost nothing," He added, raising his eyebrows. "Anyway, when I was in Skyrim, the Nords were all very excited about the return of their hero. They're all eagerly awaiting your grand homecoming. Are you up to the challenge?" He asked with a smile.

"Well, I kind of have to be," I said and scratched the back of my head as I thought what I might be facing when I traveled to Skyrim. "I also have to make a trip to High Hrothgar to see the Greybeards. I think they want me to do something related to the Dragonborn legacy, but I'm fairly certain saving Skyrim might be more important for now. I hope it's not a trap," I said, shrugging with some apprehension about the whole situation.

"Why, do you think the world-eater is sending you threats by post now?" Geldis asked, barely containing his laughter while Teldryn snickered behind me. I rolled my eyes at him and told the duo I had to get going, to start preparing for my trip.

A few days later, the Northern Maiden had returned to the docks and I was ready to go with all my belongings, plus what the Greybeards had sent with me as an infant. I had packed lightly again, as usual, and by now my parents were used to saying farewell. However, this time I was sure I would be away from them for longer than ever before, not knowing how many months, or even years, it would take to ensure the survival of Skyrim. I promised I would write and visit whenever I could, and received their worried, yet proud, blessings. As I stepped aboard the ship and paid the captain my fare, I heard a familiar voice coming down the pier.

"Indra!" He yelled, and I turned around to see Teldryn hurrying towards me in a limp, left arm still in a sling and donning a fresh set of chitin armor, but this time without the helmet. "I'm coming with you," He said, as he boarded the vessel, his good arm grasping the straps of a rucksack.

I eyed him suspiciously. "Not this shit again," I muttered.

He blurted out a rude "Huh?", and I shook my head in dismissal.

"Oh, nothing," I said. "Any particular reason? I can't pay you."

"No need, no need," He said magnanimously, waving away my comment. "I owe you one, and I figured you could use a skilled fighter for what's to come."

I continued to frown at him with some reservation, cocking one eyebrow as the other remained in a scowl.

"Okay, fine," Teldryn breathed, leaning his head backwards and raising his eyebrows. "I'm just so bored here now that I'm not being hunted by a crazy lady, and I've seen enough of Solstheim to last a lifetime. I'm dying to get back to the excitement of Skyrim," He finished, his accent now more theatrical than intimidating. "Besides, your life sounds like it's got some fun in store and I want a piece of that action."

The hand he held on his hip dropped and the confident smile on his face started to fade as he looked around the ship's deck.

"Too bad there's not another way to get to Skyrim, I hate boats." He said with a frown.

Raising my eyebrows, I genuinely smiled at him for the first time ever, before I threw my arms in the air in united exasperation.

"RIGHT?!"
Chapter End Notes

At the Retching Netch
Indra and Teldryn make their way to Riverwood to find the person who sent the mysterious letter. They layover in Whiterun on the way, where Indra's temper gets her into a bit of trouble. After meeting with Delphine, Teldryn draws a bit too much attention in the Sleeping Giant Inn and Indra and Teldryn are sent to a house that will eventually become their new preferred meeting spot.

Chapter Notes

Indra and Teldryn's relationship is finally starting to develop, and some funny things happen :)

A violent wind was whipping up the heavy snowflakes that fell in appreciable volume when we docked in Windhelm, stinging our faces and forcing us to pull our thin scarves up to our eyes. Teldryn and I didn't speak much during the trip; he preferred to fraternize with the crew and I made myself busy by trying to understand the strange scrolls and running my hands over the engraved stones. Each time I made contact with the chiseled words they would glow, but I couldn't detect any intrinsic energy from myself that would indicate it was some kind of magic I was capable of understanding. Due to the weather, I spent most of the voyage below deck which made me miserable, so I was content with not being obligated to socialize with my newfound body guard anyway, who I was I still a bit apprehensive around. Thankfully storms were relatively unheard of in the narrow passage between Solstheim and Skyrim, and the Northern Maiden's voyage was made even easier by hugging the jagged, dark coastline of Morrowind for much of the journey. When we finally disembarked, the air was noticeably different than Raven Rock - drier somehow, and difficult to breathe.

"Wow, this is awful," I said, tucking my chin into my cloak. "I wish there was a way to just get rid of storms like this, I don't look forward to traveling in such weather."

"Ha!" Teldryn exclaimed, his voice muffled by the fabric over his mouth, "It only gets worse the further North you go. Skyrim isn't exactly renowned as a vacation destination."

"Then it's a good thing we're heading further south," I replied. "I've still got plenty of preserved food. What about you?"

"Are you saying you want to get going today?" Teldryn asked as we walked up the ramp towards Windhelm, passing by the warehouse that was home to the Argonian population.

"I wouldn't mind," I said, "let's hire a carriage. The weather is terrible and you're still injured."

"Don't worry about me, but I agree on the weather. However, at least the snow means we
have access to plenty of fresh water."

"Alright, no need for us to stop off in Windhelm I take it, then?"

"Not for me," Teldryn replied, pulling his scarf further up his face. "Besides, I don't care much for this city and would prefer we didn't linger here much longer."

I nodded in agreement, knowing that he was still a bit nervous about whether or not somebody would recognize him. It had been a long time, but there were likely those that still held out fantasies of revenge.

The storms continued to rage around us for the majority of our trip to the major economic hub, preventing us from having any meaningful conversation. I was impressed by the endurance and resilience of not only the two horses that led the carriage, but also by the driver who never once complained of the cold. They had been born into it, and to be hardened against the bitter climate was part of who they were.

By the time the weather was no longer unbearable, we had already reached the farms surrounding the stone walls that enclosed the large city. It was the second day of our journey, and the sun was setting. I took down the hood of my cloak, finally being able to revel in the fading warmth and beautiful dusk palette of the clear skies. Despite the internal conflict that simmered throughout the province, I was excited to be back, and looking forward to seeing more of my father's great snowy region.

As we walked through the gates towards downtown Whiterun, I noticed some foreign-looking men having an altercation with a city guard, who clearly wanted them out of the hold's capital. I supposed Windhelm wasn't the only intolerant municipality.

"Those men are from Hammerfell," Teldryn said as we walked past. "They're a long way from home, it's odd that they're here. Anyway, you ready to head in for dinner and a proper rest?"

"Yeah, I am, though it doesn't seem like it's the end of the day here," I replied, halfheartedly paying attention to our conversation as I was distracted by the bustle.

Looking around, I hadn't noticed how busy the metropolis was last time I was here; I was simply too preoccupied with my own problems then. Everything in Raven Rock, save the Retching Netch, shut down around 6 o'clock, yet close to eight o'clock here, everyone was still out running errands, the stands in the plaza were still open to last-minute shoppers, and citizens socialized with one another on the streets. While the Dunmer on Solstheim were all relatively friendly with each other, we never spent a particularly long amount of time chatting during the day. There was either simply too much work to do, or the unanimous exhaustion after said work, to allow such pleasantries.

We purchased a hot meal of rabbit in a red wine-based sauce, as well as a room at the Bannered Mare, and this time I had the wherewithal to actually enjoy the surroundings. Teldryn and I relaxed around the firepit with several other characters, most of them locals. I was having a nice chat with a woman named Carlotta about her daughter, when a slight blonde man forced his way onto the bench between us, completely unprompted, and put his arms over our shoulders. Carlotta folded her own, and looked away irately as he spoke to us with a haughty air and a smug smirk plastered across his face.

"Ah, Carlotta," He said, "I haven't seen you around here lately, I've missed you, haven't you missed me?" I could smell the ale on his breath as he leaned into her neck. She recoiled and he pulled back, but not out of a sense of wrongdoing on his part. He then turned to me. "And who might you
be, lovely lady?” He asked, removing the arm around my shoulder in order to take my hand and kiss the top of it. His words reminded me of the syrup we boiled from the sap of the few leafy trees that grew around Solstheim. Exceedingly sweet at first, but with a bitter aftertaste.

"My name's Indra, I'm from Raven Rock," I said, as neutrally as possible.

"Wow, so you're a tourist here, would you like someone to, show you around?" He asked slowly with a wink. I blinked at him, my face totally expressionless.

"No thank you." I said flatly, and turned back towards the fire and my mug of ale. It tasted watery compared to the thick, malty Dunmer drinks I was accustomed to.

Abandoning his efforts with me, he turned back to the poor Imperial woman and continued to harass her. I looked at them from the corner of my eye, unsure of whether or not to say anything. After a few minutes of this, he must have gotten a bit too aggressive and Carlotta had had enough. She tried to stand up, but the man grabbed her by her wrists and pulled her closer to him.

"Stop it, Mikael, you're hurting me," She said.

"You're hurting my feelings," He pouted, continuing to restrain her.

"Okay," I interrupted, turning to them and grabbing Mikael's shoulder, now somewhat annoyed myself, "clearly, she's not interested in you, just leave her alone and try your luck with another girl unfortunate enough to have to deal with you,"

He slurred his speech as he turned hostile towards me. "Piss off, foreigner," He said, "you don't know what we have. It's special. You wouldn't understand, Greyskin," he spat.

I stood up abruptly, knocking the recently acquired mug of ale out of his hand, and glared angrily down at him. The tavern had grown quiet now. I heard someone yell "fight!" from the back of the room, and others joined in.

"Oh, shit," I heard Teldryn mutter, turning away from a conversation a few feet away from me.

The drunk man named Mikael now stood as well.

"Well, clearly you feel the need to defend Carlotta's honour, so let's do this then." The tavern cheered. Nords are crazy, I thought.

Teldryn was standing up at this point too, looking very worried, but relaxed after he realized just how inebriated the man was. Mikael threw the first punch and I easily dodged his poorly targeted swing. I started to have second thoughts, as I was feeling a bit bad about fighting a drunk man. I continued to avoid his attacks, hoping he would just tucker himself out and I could go to bed. I looked past his sweaty person and saw Teldryn sitting on the bench at the fire with his cheek in one hand, watching with amusement and some concern. Blondie started to get winded after several attempts, and rushed me with a pathetic amount of vigor. Wanting to end it, I raised my knee and thrust my foot outwards in a front kick when he was within reach. He let out an "Oof", stumbled backwards and fell to the ground. Satisfied by his lack of motion, I turned around to go up to our rented room.

Just as I had ascended the first step, there was a sudden, huge crash, splinters were flying everywhere and a sharp pain was searing through my head. I heard a ubiquitous "Ooooooh" from the tavern. I turned around and found Mikael was standing, **and the fucking asshole had just smashed a fucking lute over my skull.** That was it, I had **had** it.
"ARE YOU FUCKING SERIOUS?!" I yelled, yanking the busted instrument from around my neck and throwing it to the ground. Teldryn was howling with laughter, almost falling backwards off the bench, while the rest of the patronage eagerly watched in captivation. I guessed that barfights were a bit of a spectator sport for them. Briskly walking up to Mikael, I quickly punched him square in the jaw. He dropped like a sack of potatoes, but it wasn't enough to sate my rage. I picked him up by the hip and draped him over my shoulder. Kicking open the doors to the tavern, I walked outside and threw him in the refuse pile. I returned to the bar and grabbed a bottle of whiskey, then went back outside and poured it on him. The laughter from the entertained tavern guests had become hushed now, and they murmured among themselves. Just as I was summoning a flame into my hand, Teldryn grabbed me by the cloak, dragged me back inside, and up to our room.

"Okay, first rule of fistfights," He explained to me after he had closed the door, "is that you're not allowed the kill the other person. Were you really going to set him on fire?"

"I was seriously considering it," I said, still quite angry.

"Well, focus on burning actual criminals from now on." He said, then relaxed a little. "Though I suppose he did almost deserve it, and I would imagine that it's difficult to control your fury when you have the blood of a dragon running through your veins."

The adrenaline had worn off, and I started to feel some remorse for my actions.

"That's not an excuse," I said, as I began removing my equipment and laying it out on the small table. "And I guess you're right, I should watch my temper, or it will be that Orc on the boat all over again." I had gotten down to the long sleeved shirt that comprised the last layer before my thin underclothes and as I removed it, Teldryn quickly turned around to face the other direction. As I continued to take off my outer pant layer, I gave him a weird look that he didn't see.

"Well, I'm going to bed now," I stated, crawling underneath the rough covers. "I'm wiped out. I'll take this side, hop in on the other whenever you're ready."

"I was planning on just sleeping on the floor," He replied quietly, still facing away from me.

"Why?" I asked, frowning towards him as I raised my hand from beneath the sheets. "You're still injured, the floor is a terrible idea."

"I have a bedroll," He replied, now slowly removing his armor.

"You're a S'wit, the bed is huge. Just sleep there," I yawned obliviously, patting the mattress next to me as I curled up under the covers.

"Indra," He murmured, now facing me, "usually when a heterosexual woman invites a man into a bed, there are certain implications,"

I just turned over and stared at him, totally perplexed. I had shared the odd bed with many a friend and family member before, why was this any different? There was nothing inherently sexual about a bed, only people were sexual under the right circumstances, and we definitely did not have that kind of connection at the time. Though I trusted him, I barely knew the guy, and I was certain he had no interest in someone younger, less experienced and likely more immature than him. I was also certain he was only hanging around me to share in the excitement of knowing the Dragonborn, whatever that would entail. He eventually realized that the look of confusion on my face was genuine, and relented. He slowly and carefully climbed into bed, leaving as much room as possible between us. I could sense how rigidly awkward his body was, but I was too tired to care to imagine what he was thinking.
The next morning I opened my eyes and saw that Teldryn had not moved an inch all night, as he was still facing away from me in a mannequin-like sleeping position. At least he didn't look as tense. Jumping out of bed with excitement for the day, I quickly put on my gear, and Teldryn was soon up and getting ready as well. It seemed as though he had been pretending to be asleep the past few minutes, waiting until I was fully dressed to get out of bed himself.

I bought a loaf of bread and some cheese from Hulda the barmaid, who seemed a little apprehensive around me after the events of last night. Embarrassed, I paid for the whiskey, then thanked her and left the tavern, but not before pulling the thick hood of the cloak over my face first. Walking past the market, I heard a woman gossiping about "some weird dark elf that tried to set a man aflame last night". When I heard this, I put my head down and began to walk even faster. While I may not have been in the wrong initially, the retaliation I subjected the man to was excessive, and I began feeling remorseful again. Making our way through the front gate, we oriented ourselves towards Riverwood and started to walk past the farms that stretched out all around us.

After about half an hour of walking, I saw a strangely dressed man in the distance, fighting what appeared to be tiny creatures that surrounded him. Taking in the proportions of the fence and farm that enclosed them, my mind re-adjusted and I realized that the tiny creatures were actually the men, and they were working together to bring down a giant. Retrieving my bow from the sling on my back, I ran towards them. When I was about fifty feet away, I nocked an arrow and sent it flying. It hit the giant in the leg which only served to further infuriate him, but he turned his attention to me long enough that Teldryn was able to launch a firebolt at his face with his good arm, blinding him. The small woman in the group was then able to scale the giants back and drive a sword into the massive jugular artery of the brute.

"Have you got Bosmer in you as well?" Asked Teldryn as their group met ours.

"Maybe, but I also grew up hunting almost every day," I replied, putting my bow away.

"That was an excellent shot," Praised the woman, "both of you should really consider joining The Companions,"

"Who are the companions?" I asked, and she just laughed.

"I take it you were in Whiterun, and you didn't hear about The Companions? We're a group of warriors and comrades, and we're always looking to recruit," She said.

I perked up at the description, it sounded like a worthwhile endeavour once I was finished with this Dragonborn business.

Seeing the interest in my face, the woman continued. "Those worthy of joining The Companions are not only strong in body, but also in mind and spirit. We seek those that are just and true,"

My thoughts immediately went to the recent times I had lost control in anger, and I felt a pit forming in my stomach. Deflating at her words, I told myself I wasn't a just warrior; I acted out of emotion.

"Thanks," I said, "I'll keep it in mind if I find myself in Whiterun again."

The woman nodded and joined up with her group as they made their way back to the city.

"I would consider signing up," Teldryn cooed, his eyes lingering on the exposed back of the huntress as she walked away.
I was looking for the path and hadn't really noticed the undertone of his statement.

"I think you'd be good at it, but somehow I doubt they pay as well as mercenary work," I said, somewhat distracted.

"Better than what you pay me," He said, grinning mischievously. I rolled my eyes at him as I tromped through the mud of the farm, towards the gravel road.

Teldryn and I made idle chitchat on our walk to the small town, interspersed with some clarifications of how our paths had crossed back on Solstheim.

"How did you know I was the one that cleared out the mine?" I asked as we walked along the even and bright path that hugged the rocky mountainous range of the Whiterun hold, my thumbs dug into the straps of my rucksack.

"Geldis gave me a bit of background on some of the Raven Rock residents," Teldryn replied, "at least for the ones I asked him about."

"I never saw you two talking, and why were you wondering about me?"

"We would chat after the Retching Netch was closed for the night, back when it was safe to stay in a room at the inn," Teldryn replied, looking straight ahead as we walked. "I was just curious, I suppose. I thought you looked like a guard, or mercenary, in training."

"Well, I suppose I was training for something," I laughed, thinking of how well my parents and Glover had prepared me for what I was currently walking towards. "Didn't you get lonely only ever talking to Geldis?" I asked, thinking how I had seen Teldryn sitting by himself on the nights he was at his table.

"Nah, Geldis was all the company I needed at the time, though it is nice being able to openly chat with others again, without fear that they're going to turn on me. What was lurking in the mine, anyway?"

"There was an area past the mine, some kind of ruins I think, and they were filled with a bunch of creepy beings called draugr."

"Ah, yes, what else do you find in those damn crypts but waves and waves of draugr."

"There was something else," I continued, somehow not afraid to tell Teldryn what else I had found down there. I was sure he had experienced many strange things in his time, and I felt he may be able to shed some light. "I found some enchanted looking door, and a big sword nearby. They were both glowing red. Ever seen anything like that?"

"Hm," Teldryn mused, scratching his chin. "Not quite that specifically, but they were probably magically linked somehow. What did you do with the sword?"

"Nothing," I replied, "I just left it there."

"Well that's a shame," Teldryn said, "it was probably worth something."

"Maybe, but it gave me the heebie-jeebies, and I didn't feel like touching it." An evil smile crept across my face before I added another thought. "It was the same feeling I got from you, when you were first hanging around the inn," I said, seeing what kind of reaction I would get out of the elf.
"Ha!" Teldryn laughed, looking at me now, "Well, you were probably right to avoid me then, though I suppose that didn't last for long, eh?"

"Well, I'm glad it eventually worked out," I replied, looking back at the road, "it's kind of nice having some company for the trip." I had started to feel safe with this man, as if he had some inclination to protect me, despite knowing I was probably able to take care of myself for the most part. However, I didn't mention this feeling as I rightly assumed he wasn't one for sentiment.

Riverwood was only a day's walk, and we arrived at sundown to a quiet hamlet. The ambiance was serene and slow moving in comparison to the lively bustle of Whiterun, and the town itself struck me as being harmonious with nature as the man-made structures seemed to blend with the environment. The wispy plants grew untamed around the buildings and the babbling of the nearby rapids could be heard all the way down the main path. I ran my fingers through the tips of the flowering grasses as we walked along the cobblestone road towards the centre of town. The Sleeping Giant Inn was the first door on the left, and we entered to find most of the village's residents mingling and eating after their day's work. I walked up to the bar and inquired about booking a room, and the man working behind it pointed me in the direction of Delphine, a small blonde Breton woman with a severe looking face.

I fidgeted with the sleeves of my robes as I approached her. "Hi, Delphine, I'd like to rent a room here."

"Yes, of course. That will be ten gold," She replied in an automated tone.

"I, uh, would like to rent the attic room," I said quietly. She arched her eyebrows ever so slightly.

She spoke in a low voice, "There's no attic room, but there's one on the right here," leading me through the door. Once we were in, she continued. "Close the door behind you, and follow me. No, not him," She said, indicating Teldryn who was in the process of stepping into the chamber. I shrugged at him apologetically and closed the door in his face, mouthing the word "sorry". Once we were alone, she activated a hidden mechanism and the wardrobe on the far end of the room opened up into a stairwell leading downwards. I followed her into the chamber.

"How can I be sure it's you?" Delphine asked once we were well far away enough from prying ears.

"I have all these things the Greybeards sent with me," I offered, showing her the contents of my bag.

She seemed to relax a bit. "That's a good start. Can you demonstrate your Thu'um?"

"What's a thoom?" I asked, and she stared at me, eyes wide and mouth agape.

Eventually she shook her head and got back to business. "You're going to need to visit those old sages sometime soon I suppose. However, given the dire circumstances and my intelligence reports, I think I can trust you. Do you trust me?"

"I think so," I shrugged, "I don't know what's going on though,"

"The dragons are returning, led by the strongest of them - Alduin, the world-eater," She began, leaning over the table in the middle of the room. "They wish to destroy all of Skyrim and enslave her people. You are the only one that has the ability to defeat Alduin, as you can devour his soul after he is fallen and end his reign, permanently. I don't know who is behind his return, but I
"The Thalmor? Like the Elven council?" I asked.

"It's entirely possible. They have a clear interest in seeing Skyrim fall," She replied. "While I'm not entirely sure of their intentions, I have a plan to access their sensitive information. Elenwen, one of the Thalmor ambassadors, is having a grand party in two weeks, near Solitude. If you can infiltrate the party and take her files, we should be able to learn more and hopefully stop the downfall of this province, and possibly all of Tamriel. I would go myself, but her spies are already suspicious of me."

"Wait, you're sending me into a Thalmor lair?"

"I'm sorry, but it may be the only way. Are you up to the challenge?"

Once again I was being asked to do something dangerous to save a region, but this time was different. This was bigger than just Raven Rock, and one man. I was being called to partake in something much greater than myself and I knew I was obligated to help.

"Yes, I can do it," I finally replied. "They have no idea who I am, as far as I know. Speaking of which, how did you know you could trust me? All I had to offer was that Nordic junk. I could have intercepted that note you sent me."

"I have trusted contacts all over Tamriel,"

"Glover Mallory?" I asked, looking into her eyes. She gave me a hard stare but said nothing more on the matter.

"We will head out tomorrow morning," Delphine stated, looking away from me. "You and your friend can stay here for the night. Does he...?"

"He knows who I am. I trust him," I replied.

Delphine nodded and we climbed the stairs back to the main level, resealing the hidden entrance.

Sitting down and helping myself to the fresh salmon and glazed carrots I had ordered, I looked over to see Teldryn had quickly gotten cozy with one of the Riverwood residents. An elegant woman a few years older than I, with dark brown hair done up in a looped braid and wearing a yellow dress sat with her knees towards him, leaning into every word he said. Two other men sat nearby, looking on with much annoyance, their arms folded and their eyes narrowed at the flirty dark elf. I briefly marveled at how quickly he had wrapped her around his little finger before I turned around to ravage my meal.

After I had finished eating, I looked around and noticed Teldryn and the woman were nowhere to be found. Not only a second after I had this thought, the woman burst into the main hall wearing nothing but a sheet wrapped around her naked body. Looking terribly afraid, she ran up to me, panicking and ushering me towards the other side of the inn.

"Help! Please, help me! It's your friend! I don't know what's happening to him!" Before I could say anything, she grabbed my hand and led me to the second room on the left. Teldryn was lying on his back on the bed in only his cotton underclothes, writhing and hyperventilating like Sheogorath himself had possessed his mind. It looked like he was fighting for his life, and I suddenly realized the source of the problem. The wrist of his non-injured arm had been bound to the bed post with a rope. I ran over to him and quickly cut it off with my dagger. He continued to gasp for breath.
as if his lungs were full of water, and he was starting to turn a darker shade of blue than normal.

"Ah, shit, uhhh," I stammered. I hit him with a calming spell, but it did nothing. I didn't have any potions he could drink or try to absorb. All I could do was sit on the bed and hold him, talking him through it.

"Hey, it's me, I'm here. I saved you, remember? You're fine, there's no more water, there's no more ship, we're in the rowboat now," I said, continuing to comfort him with reassuring words and gently rubbing his arms until his breathing slowed and the blood that had been constricted to his core made a return to his brain.

"I'm going to go," The terrified woman said, grabbing her dress and quietly closing the door behind her.

"What happened to me?" Teldryn asked, once his sanity returned.

"I think having your wrist bound triggered your memories of being tortured on the ship," I postulated, releasing my hold on him.

"It's possible. I mean, I've been interrogated before, but never that badly," He said, sitting up slowly, holding his head. "I guess I haven't come to terms with it yet."

"Well, if you need to talk about it, I'm here for you," I offered.

"It's fine," He muttered coolly, "I'll deal with it myself."

Delphine opened the door a crack and poked her head inside. "You two need to leave, right now!" She hissed. "You're drawing way too much attention, need I not remind you of the Thalmor spies that are all over Skyrim?"

"We would, but we have nowhere to go!" I exclaimed. "Last I checked, camping in town is illegal."

"Fine. Here," She said, rummaging around in her satchel and then tossing me a key. "This is for the house you would have passed on your way here. It's the one with all the junk outside of it, right beside the river."

"Thank you, but who lives there?" I asked.

"The house belongs - belonged - to a friend of mine, but he's, gone now. It's been abandoned ever since. He built it with his own two hands and it's a lovely place, but it reminds me too much of him and I can't bring myself to live there. Besides, I've got the inn to run. Now go, before you cause any more of a ruckus."

I thanked her again and discreetly left the inn with my hood up, waiting outside for Teldryn, who seemed in better spirits when he exited.

"Fucking pirates, now they've ruined kinky sex for me," He said, grinning at me in the dim light of the outdoor sconces. I swore if I was meant to spend any more time with this man, I would eventually roll my eyes so hard I'd be able to see my own brain.

Each of us held a flame as we approached the house, and I read the name given to the establishment as we climbed the creaky wooden steps to the entrance.
"Leaf Rest," I said, running my fingers over the engraved wood. "That's kind of cute. I wonder who Delphine's friend was, they seemed like a pretty good carpenter," I observed as I shone a light around the beautiful outdoor furniture and funny little wooden figures scattered about the well-built veranda.

"Riverwood looks peaceful," I heard Teldryn say thoughtfully, and turned to see him looking out over the water that was illuminated by the full moons. "If I had to settle in Skyrim, this might be the place I'd choose."

"You, settle?" I laughed. "Okay, and I'll just go be a miner for the rest of my life," I teased as I turned the lock in the door. I thought Teldryn would have some kind of witty retort, but he remained silent.

The interior of the house was incredible. The majority of it was built underground to drastically increase the size of the living area. While the layout was a bit odd and it took me about five minutes of stumbling around in candle lit darkness to find the bedroom, it ultimately made sense. The pièce de résistance was the natural hot spring that ran beneath the foundations, and the house had essentially been built around it.

"Wow! Amazing!" I said, lighting the candles around the large bath and then rushing to remove my gear. I waded into the shallow, hot water with my undergarments on, and noticed the beautiful engravings in the stone. "Hey, I think this hot spring is enchanted," I said to Teldryn, who was checking out the nearby steam room. "You should try to sit in here, it will probably help you heal faster."

"Maybe tomorrow," He said, and walked away.

I shrugged and relaxed back into the water. It felt like it had been forever since I had a proper bath, and seeing as Teldryn wasn't coming back, I removed the rest of my thin underclothes. After vigorously scrubbing my skin with a towel and watching the grime wash away, I let myself lie back on the stone seats and eased into peaceful thoughts.

Eventually my mind wandered to Fevythe. I wondered how he was doing, and if he had learned any more restoration spells. Reminiscing about our relationship with joy and some sadness, my thoughts drifted to the physical aspect of our once happy union. I thought about the way he had hungered for me, kneading my body with his massive hands, and how often I wanted him back when it wasn't appropriate; in public, at the bar, in the woods. I used to tease him through his pants, and he'd grumble in frustration, but we'd eventually be able to have each other later in the evening.

Thinking of our encounters, I reached down and began rubbing that sweet spot he used to eagerly lick, and used my other hand to imitate his lustful hold. Just as I had climbed over the edge into ecstasy, I heard a peppy voice.

"I've recon-" was all that came out before I opened my eyes to see Teldryn come around the corner. His face dropped as he did, seeing me stark naked in the bath, a tit in one hand, the other between my legs. I hadn't heard him approaching, his bare footsteps obscured by the running water. Still totally shocked, he turned on his heel and bolted to the bedroll he had set up in one of the offices. I slowly submerged myself into the hotspring, cheeks burning independent of the water temperature. Okay, Mephala, I thought, you can just go ahead and drown me now.

When I woke up the next morning, the memory of what transpired a few hours ago rushed back to me, and I flipped over on my stomach to bury my face into the pillow. I was absolutely dreading having to face Teldryn after making such an ass of myself. He didn't look at me the way he
did other women, and I assumed he didn't see me as someone worthwhile of pursuing, much less a sexual being. He sort of treated me like a younger relative. I crept around as quietly as I could, hoping I could sneak out first and meet up with Delphine a bit earlier than expected. Fate had other plans and I ran into my pseudo-hire in the kitchen, making...a stew for breakfast?

"Well, good morning," He said, stirring the contents of the heavy iron pot. I relaxed. He was totally back to normal. I was reassured that with all the women he'd been with, what happened was no big deal.

I sniffed the air. "What are you making? Smells good," I said, sitting down at the kitchen table.

"Rabbit stew," Teldryn answered. "I caught it this morning. The fresh air is so invigorating here that I woke up early."

"Hey this may sound strange, but," I said, seeing Teldryn's face tense a bit as I spoke, "Voden told me he misses your rabbit stew." He stopped stirring and looked at me, confused. That must not have been what he was expecting me to say. "I ran into him, well, his ghost, after we killed Sigrun," I explained. "He's in Sovngarde with his family now, but I guess he can't replicate your cooking," I said with a nervous laugh.

"Huh," Teldryn said, looking off to my side a bit. He stared far past me as he smiled a little. "He did used to eat a lot of it. I'm glad he got his justice. Thanks for telling me that." Teldryn said, turning back to me. "Oh, and thanks for last night," He added with a wink.

I felt my face burning again. Saying nothing, I stood up and left the house to eat breakfast at The Sleeping Giant.
Chapter Summary

Indra and Teldryn regroup with Delphine and the trio begin the trek to Solitude to prepare to infiltrate Elenwen's party. Teldryn falls ill, and Indra rushes him to Morthal for treatment.

"We'll go to Solitude by foot," Delphine announced as we readied ourselves outside the inn. We looked at her, mouths agape. "We're not taking a carriage because I can't be seen with you in any major hold. We can stop by Rorikstead to the Northwest of here, but that will be the only village we'll pass through."

"How long will it take?" I asked, concerned for Teldryn's injuries.

"About a week, by my estimation. I have a horse that can carry our gear, and if need be, we can take turns riding him."

After saddling and loading Gulch (why do people give horses such names?) with bedrolls, tents, food, water, pots and pans as well as a hatchet, we were heading South to the path that would take us North towards the Reach. Not far into the first leg of our journey, we ran into a group of hunters that were making camp. They stopped us as we approached and I saw Delphine put her hand on the hilt of her short blade.

"Are you going towards North Brittleshin pass?" One of them asked.

Delphine replied, "We're going past it, why?"

"One of our friends hasn't made it back to camp yet. He was chasing a fox and we lost track of him. Do you think you could keep an eye out for him?" The huntress seemed quite distraught.

"That's none of our concern, but if we see him, we'll send him your way," Delphine answered swiftly, and swept past the group. I followed with Teldryn, trotting to keep up with our leader, giving the hunting party an apologetic shrug as I did. Once we were out of their earshot, I approached Delphine.

"Shouldn't we try to look for their friend?" I asked, "He might be injured somewhere."

The Breton woman stopped walking, and whirled around to speak to me.

"Listen, you're the Dragonborn," She said, then looked around warily for a second before continuing. "Your purpose in life is not to carry out the menial tasks of the everyday man, your issues are much bigger, and if it means insulating yourself from the real world to achieve your goals, so be it. You can't just hold the hand of every downtrodden person you come across." She turned and began walking away.

Teldryn came up to me from behind and put his chin over my shoulder. "I suppose I'm the exception,"

"That was different, then," I replied, pulling away so that he wasn't so close to me.
"So you're saying you wouldn't have rescued me if you had known about your status?" He asked, not angrily or with sadness, just curiosity. We began walking again and I couldn't think of an answer. How could I possibly predict what would have happened? "It's alright," Teldryn eventually sighed, "I wouldn't have rescued me either. That aside, how did it take you - how many years exactly - to find out about this?"

"Twenty-two years. My parents didn't want to tell me until they thought the time was right. I think they made the right call; if I had found out when I was younger, I would have just charged into it head first and I may not have been ready."

Teldryn put a hand on my shoulder, the first sign of affection I'd seen from him so far and I turned my head to look at him. "No one is ever ready," He said, and began walking faster to catch up with Delphine, much to her annoyance.

According to the map, we were near Fort Sunguard when we made camp. I set up the small leather tents and bedrolls as Teldryn started a fire and prepared the food, while Delphine fetched some water from a nearby stream. We weren't far from the path, and I could see Gjukar's Monument looming in the distance, now fading into the dimming light. After setting up our sleeping accommodations, I sat down next to the fire and curled my knees to my chest, staring at the flames in thought. Teldryn saw the tension spread across my face and asked me what was on my mind.

"It's just that, it's starting to get real now," I replied, still looking at the fire. "Everyone is counting on me to save this land and her people. They've already faced dragon attacks and a civil war for two decades, and I can't even see into what I'll be doing next week. I really have no idea what to do." He covered the pot with the cast iron lid and sat down next to me.

"Well, all I know is that you'll do anything it takes to solve a problem, so for now, I suppose, just follow directions from those in the know and see where it takes you," He suggested, so casually that it made me feel some relief.

"Thanks," I said. "I hope I can actually make a difference, though." I looked at him, and now he was in contemplation. "What about you?" I asked, "Geldis only told me a bit about you, but it sounds like you've been through a lot."

"You could say that," He began, but he seemed distant. "But don't worry about it, at this point I can handle anything the world throws at me," He said, clearly not wanting to talk about his past pain. I started to feel sorry for him again.

Delphine re-appeared with the water, which we boiled in a second pot over the coals. We ate our meals and drank some tea in silence, filling our waterskins with the remaining sanitized water, then retired for the evening.

Halfway through the next day, we made it to Rorikstead and stopped at Frostfruit Inn for a quick lunch while we reconvened to discuss our future travel plans. As we munched on braised venison, plain boiled potatoes and grilled leeks, Delphine pulled out a map to fill us in on her plans.

"See here, this is the border between Whiterun and the Reach," She began, tracing a finger along a line, near where we were traveling. "The Forsworn often prowl close to the border, so I'd rather we take the route here, that crosses the bridge near Robber's Gorge. From there, we can go North and cross at Dragon Bridge, then Solitude is another half day's walk."

We set out shortly thereafter, and were just past Rebel's Cairn when I noticed Teldryn was having a hard time walking. I stopped Delphine and asked him if he felt well enough to continue traveling.
"I'm fine, really, just a bit sore," He laughed a little, but I could see his was sweating.

"Get up on Gulch, then," Delphine offered, and helped him climb onto the hardy steed. By sundown, just after we had made it across the bridge, he looked even worse. He was pale, by Dunmer standards, and wouldn't stop sweating. Delphine and I decided to stop for the day, and I helped him off the horse. He was burning up, again.

"Take off your armor," I demanded, as Delphine lay out a bedroll and began assembling the tents.

"Aren't you going to buy me dinner, first?" Teldryn chuckled weakly as he continued to shake. If he were not so ill, I would have smacked him. Despite being a pain, he did as I asked, for once, and I searched his body for the source of his ailments as he lay on the bedroll, sweating and shivering. Getting closer to his legs, I smelled the problem before I saw it. One of the deeper wounds covered by a bandage was seeping yellow and red fluid, and had saturated the gauze. I pulled off the pus-soaked cotton and the horror below was revealed. Red spiderweb-like veins were spreading out around the purplish, white-glazed cavity.

"This is really bad," Delphine said, and I glared at her. Restoration magic only worked on fresh wounds. We needed proper medical care.

"He needs to see a healer," I said decisively. "We need to get to Morthal tomorrow. For now..." I took some of our water and a clean rag, and tried to wash the wound as much as possible.

"In my bag, there's some ointment," Teldryn said through chattering teeth. I dug around his satchel and found the small pot of strong-smelling greasy stuff. Taking a deep breath, I dipped my fingers into the salve and began applying it to the wound. He winced but seemed to relax a little after I replaced the gauze, the analgesic effects of the mixture starting to kick in. After forcing him to drink as much of a large healing potion as possible, I covered the foolish mercenary in my cloak and he drifted to sleep while Delphine lit a fire, only for the sole purpose of raising our spirits. We ate bread and some cured meat for dinner, too physically and mentally exhausted to bother cooking anything.

"I'm not going into town with you," Delphine said suddenly.

I nodded. "I figured you wouldn't. If you wait on the other side of the bridge, we'll be as quick as possible." I looked over at Teldryn, the light of the fire was illuminating his face and I could see his eyes darting back and forth under the lids as he continued to shiver. Standing up, I went over to my tent and dismantled it, placing the heavy leather awning over Teldryn's already well-covered body. It still wasn't enough. I grabbed my bedroll and unfurled it next to his. Taking off the torso of my armor so that I was only in a loose long-sleeve shirt, I crawled under the covers with Teldryn and wrapped my arms around him. My parents and I would do this for each other when one of us fell ill, and no blankets were enough to keep out the cold. After a few minutes, his shivering subsided and the warmth of us two quickly had me unconscious.

I woke up drenched in what I assumed was a combination of our sweat the next morning, and hastily put on my armor before the cold morning air got into my bones. Teldryn wasn't shivering anymore, but he looked close to death. His breathing was shallow, and what colour he had in his cheeks the night before was no longer present. I forced him into as much of his armor as possible, one limb at a time, him straining in and out of consciousness as I did. Delphine and I sat him on the horse, and I pulled myself up behind to hold him in place. While I had ridden a silt strider before, I had never been on a horse, but Delphine assured me Gulch had a good temperament and would do as I bid. We parted ways at the bridge, and I urged Gulch into a slow trot as I held the reigns in one hand, and a restoration spell on Teldryn's chest in the other, stabilizing him in the process. Based on the position of the sun, I figured we arrived in Morthal just before three o'clock, and I asked the
nearest person where to find the herbalist.

Lami ushered us into the Thaumaturgist's hut, and helped me drag Teldryn upstairs to a bed. I threw a generous amount of coin at her, and she brought up vials of different potions, salves, and some raw ingredients and got to work. She turned around after half an hour, wiping her hands with a cloth and reassuring me.

"His state is weak, but he's strong, and I'm sure he'll be fine," She smiled. "You can come back tomorrow morning to get him." I thanked her and left to tie up Gulch at the stables, get some dinner, and call it a night.

At the Moorside Inn, the only empty spot I could find was at a bench, beside another traveler wearing steel armor. While we chatted over dinner, he quietly mentioned that he was doing some investigating around town, as there was a suspicious fire that killed a woman and her child, and the widower was shacking up with another woman the very next day. He quickly cut off our conversation as the barmaid approached us. She looked at me, and put a finger under my chin, lifting my face to hers.

"Wow," She said, almost seductively, "look at those eyes. I'll bet you could get men to follow you anywhere with those," I could smell her pungent perfume wafting from her wrists. It smelled like nightshade. She was beautiful, but she made my skin crawl.

After she had walked far enough away, the traveler piped back up again, albeit in a lower voice. "That's the woman the widower is with! I don't trust her at all, something strange is happening. I'm going to investigate the burnt down house tonight, wish me luck." He said, then finished his ale and stood up. I paid for my room with some gold from my dwindling stash and went to bed.

When I entered the Thaumaturgist's hut late the next morning, Lami was weeping quietly behind the counter. My stomach dropped.

"What's wrong? Did something happen?" I asked, panicked.

"No, no your friend is fine. It's my friend Alva, she's...nevermind. Get your mercenary and be on your way." She said, waving me upstairs. Teldryn was still asleep and I waited for him to wake before I reprimanded his lack of communication, and dragged him back to Gulch. On our way out of town, we noticed a crowd of people had gathered around the burnt down house as the guards dragged the body of a woman from the rubble. She looked as if she had died recently.

"I really hate Morthal," Teldryn muttered as we rode past.
Chapter Summary

Another Teldryn-perspective chapter. Bits and pieces of his past float back to haunt him as he drifts in and out of feverish sleep.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Mama, what are you doing?"
"Gathering our things, we're leaving."
"Why are we leaving?"
"They're throwing us out."
"Why? They're our family,"
"No, we're not one of them. We have to go."
"But Serjo said - "
"Teldryn! He doesn't want us here anymore! Oh for Azura's sake, will you stop crying? Don't be a S'wit."

"Teldryn, give me your leg. Here, put it through this...We gotta get to Morthal. B'vek, you're as hot as Azura's left tit,"

Am I sick? That's not good, mother will scold me. It's my fault...
"Haha, that tickles, ha...wait, you're not...AAAAH AAAAAH MAMA!"

"Teldryn, what on Nirn are you screaming about? Stop crying! What is it?"

"It w-was a r-rat. He ate my toe!"

"Let me see that, oh it's just a little nibble. Tsk, that's going to get infected, I know just how careful you are. I can't afford more medicine..."

"Hey, hang on, we're almost there. Stay with me, we're getting you help."

Ha, I'm not going anywhere, I can't go anywhere, I'm supposed to be here. That's how it should be.

"No, hold it like this, no, argh, nevermind. Son, you're just no good with a bow. Well, no matter though, you have other strengths. And remember, what aren't your strengths are your weaknesses, and you must never allow others to see them."
"We made it. You still alive? Lami, help me get him upstairs,"

Oh, my head, my body. Why are there needles stabbing me?

"Geldis, you're back. Where's...where's my father?"

"Teldryn, I'm sorry..."

The dreams subsided as I floated back to reality, and when I opened my eyes, Indra was sitting at the end of the bed. Her arms were crossed, and she wasn't looking at me. I cleared my throat and managed an apprehensive chuckle.

"Did you want me to move over so you can squeeze in? I didn't imagine last night, did I?" I asked, hoping some humor would help loosen her up a little, but she continued to stare towards the wall.

"Why didn't you tell me you were still hurt?" She asked. Looking at her profile, I could see her face was pulled into a scowl, and the coldness in her tone made me feel queasy. Perhaps I cared more about what she thought of me than I let myself think.

"I don't know, didn't think much of it I suppose," I replied in an attempt to be casual about the matter.

"Bullshit." She said, still looking away. "You knew. Why?"

"What does it matter? I'm fine." I said, sitting up in the bed and shuffling backwards so I could lean against the headboard.
"Yes, thanks to Lami," She said, turning towards me, seething. "And thanks to me for dragging your stupid ass here, now tell me, why didn't you say anything?"

"Because I didn't want you to worry about me!" I snapped. For whatever reason, it pissed me off that she cared.

"And how did that work out for you?" She yelled back, arms now flailing in the air or pointing at me with every word she raged. "Next time, drop the pride, and tell me when you need something! You could have ridden Delphine's horse the whole way, we would have understood!" She stood up to leave. "Now we're behind schedule!" She yelled as she stomped out of the room.

I folded my free arm over my sling and looked away. I was angry, but only because I knew she was right. On the other hand, if I were to ask her to make special arrangements for me, that would be showing weakness. I had a creeping feeling that disappointing her felt worse than the possibility of being vulnerable, but I pushed it aside.

No, that's not right, I thought, she'll think even less of me if I complain. Not that she thought much of me to begin with. My suspicions had been confirmed at the Bannered Mare when the possibility of spending a night with her was met with disgust. What else could have been written across her face so plainly? She rejected me again at Leaf Rest, and now she had scolded me like a misbehaving child. Perhaps that's all she saw of me after having to take care of me time and time again, just an overgrown kid.

I tried not to dwell on these thoughts as I got back into my armor, the swelling of the the infected wound completely abolished now and the remnants of the fever apparent in my parched throat. I drank from my waterskin before hauling my gear back on, and joining Indra in front of the hut. We were off to Solitude now, and I swore I wouldn't be a burden to her anymore.

Chapter End Notes

"Thank you for giving a shit about Teldryn, not many people have." -Geldis
Indra, Teldryn and Delphine are on the last leg of their journey to Solitude, when they find a new friend.

"There you are, finally," Delphine said, stepping out from behind a tree. "The swamp East of here is a dangerous place, so we'd better continue going Northwest towards Dragon Bridge. Come on, there are only a few hours of light left."

I dismounted Delphine's horse and made sure Teldryn stayed on him this time as we walked the final few kilometers of the day, through the mist that blew in from the vast bog nearby. As day began to melt into night within the grey, the outline of a small shack appeared from the low lying clouds.

"We could stay there tonight," I offered, but Delphine didn't seem so sure.

"Let's approach with caution, you never know who might be hiding inside." She said.

I followed Delphine through the narrow door frame, her holding a torch while I utilized my magicka, and a horrendous odour seeped out, overpowering us with its stench. Burying our faces in the crooks of our elbows, we heard a low growl come from the other side of the shack and shone our lights toward it. A dead man lay on the bed, rotting in his clothes, and a dog was lying on the floor beside him, ears flattened and teeth bared in our direction.

"Hey, boy, it's okay," I said, pulling out a piece of boar jerky from my bag and tossing it to him. "Here," He sniffed it suspiciously, and despite his initial misgivings, he ate the dried meat while continuing to eye us, hackles raised. Delphine was gathering the few possessions the dead man had left behind, and I found a journal on a small table. The last entry was two weeks ago.

*Well, the Rockjoint will be the end of me. I've had a good life out here, just me and Valor. I hope he finds a new master.*

"Valor," I said, and the dogs ears perked up. "That's you, isn't it buddy?" I asked and he tilted his head slightly. I produced another piece of jerky and fed it to him, this time from my hand. "You're just a poor hungry pup, huh," I said as he licked my fingers of any meat residue. I had earned his trust. We started to walk towards the door. "Your master is no more. Will you come with us?" I asked in a gentle tone, "Come on." He whined and paced between the bed and the door, but eventually followed us out out of the cabin.

"Okay," Said Teldryn from atop the horse, "now I know you're part Bosmer."
Romance is Dead

Chapter Summary

The group arrive in Solitude a few days before the party, but just in time for Vittoria Vici's wedding ceremony. Indra and Teldryn don't have invitations, so they find a good spot to watch the chaos unfurl, and run into an interesting character as they do.

Chapter Notes

Whoops, I accidentally posted this before finishing what I wanted to, but fuck it. Guess I'll make another chapter for Elenwen's party.

Lots of fluff and heart-to-heart interactions in this short chapter.

We made excellent time on our way to Solitude as Teldryn's strength was returning, and he remained mounted on Gulch. Most of the walk since finding Valor had been in silence, much to Delphine's contentment. The few words Teldryn and I had exchanged were brief and superficial, and I supposed I could have handled my reaction to his behaviour a bit better. We made camp beside a stream near Dragon Bridge on our last night, a little earlier than usual seeing as we were now ahead of schedule and only had another half a day of walking.

"Hey, Teldryn, how are you feeling?" I asked as we finished setting up our tents.

He seemed a bit annoyed that I would ask, but he appeared to weigh his thoughts longer than usual this time before speaking.

"I'm honestly a bit sore and tired, but nothing serious. Why?" He asked, a bit defensively.

"I was wondering if you'd be up for killing one of those mudcrabs for dinner while I build a fire," I said, gesturing towards the boulder shaped creatures that scuttled along the shore at the bottom of the ravine.

His face lit up a bit, probably in reassurance that the 'Dragonborn' didn't think him completely incompetent. Casually shrugging in the affirmative, he unsheathed his sword as I began arranging some rocks in a circle for a fire.

Later than evening, Valor was lying beside me and licking the shells of the boiled crustaceans clean as we sat around the fire. I could feel his muscular haunches push into me whenever he turned one way or another to get more meat with his long tongue. Teldryn sat closer to me than previous nights, and appeared to have given up his grudge. When Delphine left to relieve herself a ways from camp, I finally found out what was on the dark elf's mind.

"I thought you were still angry at me," He said quietly.
I shook my head. "No, I actually felt a bit bad for going off on you like that and wasn't sure how to bring it up. I don't hold grudges, I promise."

I could see him nodding slowly in the glow of the fire, almost as if he was unsure of how to process that information. We said little more before retiring for the evening, yet there was no tension in the silence as there had been a day ago. Both of us were now at ease with the other, and I felt a little less nervous about having him around as a bodyguard of sorts.

In the middle of the night, I woke up to find Valor lying on his side directly in front of me, inside my tent. I reached out and scratched his ears, and he slowly raised then lowered his thick tail in a few thumps of calm acknowledgement.

When we arrived at Katla's farm, just outside of Solitude, Delphine announced she would go no further towards the city.

"I have a contact in Solitude that will help you get into the party," She said, tying up Gulch. "Find Malborn the wood elf next Fredas evening at the Winking Skeever, and come back here on Loredas, so we can send you on your way. I suppose you've got a bit of time to kill, so you may as well make yourselves busy in Solitude."

Delphine also agreed to watch Valor while we were in the city, but the dog was accustomed to independence and took off to pursue his own interests while we were away. Despite his wanderlust, our bond dictated that he would find his way back to me when he thought it had been too long. He didn't wish to be alone again.

Teldryn was back to his lighthearted self and held his good arm outstretched towards the city as we ascended the final steps to the gate.

"Solitude is ours for three whole days before you're off to schmooze with a bunch of rich folk," He said cheerfully. "What do you want to do?"

Before I could answer, one of the guards standing at the entrance to the great city directed a question that we were intended to answer.

"You two here for the execution, or the wedding?" He asked, his Nord accent bouncing around in the metal of his helmet.

I looked at Teldryn, and back to the guard.

"We'll be attending the wedding," Teldryn gushed, putting his arm around me. "Together." I pulled away slightly, wondering what had gotten into the typically aloof Dunmer, and discreetly scowled at him.

"Then you better make sure you're dressed more appropriately than that. I assume you're attending the reception as the ceremony is only open to relatives and close friends of the Vici family."

"Yes of course," Teldryn said, feigning confidence, "uh, remind me when that is again?"

The guard tsked. "Gods, you dark elves can't keep anything straight, huh. It's tomorrow afternoon. You better get inside right now, I need to lock the gate."

We thanked the man and entered the city, just as the execution was beginning. All of Solitude had apparently come to see the gruesome event, and the unruly crowd hurled insults at the accused.
A large imperial guard was standing atop a stone platform, beside a man in chains. "Roggvir. You helped Ulfric Stormcloak escape this city after he murdered High King Torygg. By opening that gate for Ulfric you betrayed the people of Solitude," He boomed.

"There was no murder! Ulfric challenged Torygg. He beat the High King in fair combat!" The prisoner cried, but his pleading was only met by jeers and boos from the audience.

"Wait, is that true?" I whispered to Teldryn, but he shushed me.

"Such as our way! Such as the ancient custom of Skyrim, and all Nords!" Roggvir continued to shout, but his words were drowned out by the mob.

"Guard," Said the imperial in command, "prepare the prisoner."

"I don't need your help." Roggvir snarled.

"Very well, Roggvir. Bow your head."

The man laid his head in the divet of the cold block and said his final words, to those who would listen.

"On this day...I go to Sovngarde."

I flinched and looked away as the heavy axe came down, sending Roggvir's head into a basket. Blood spurted from the hole in his neck as the guards dragged the body away. We walked from the grim sentencing towards the Winking Skeever, figuring we could set up a room or two for the week. Only one suite was available due to the wedding, but fortunately it was a large one. We locked our armor away in the chest provided, and went downstairs for food and drink.

I pulled at the fabric of my Dunmer attire as we lazily sauntered down the stairs, towards the bar.

"I think that guard was right," I said, "if we go to a wedding reception we should probably get something nicer. I think I saw a clothing store across the way,"

"Oho, so you will be my date tomorrow then?" Teldryn asked cheekily, lightly elbowing me in the ribs, and I smacked his hand away in mock annoyance.

"I just want to see a wedding that doesn't involve worshiping gods of death or setting things on fire," I exclaimed in defense of myself, but Teldryn's excitement was infectious and I had to smile. "Besides, I bet it's an open bar."

"I mostly enjoy weddings for the women," He said. "Something about romance really gets them going."

"Hey, I thought you were supposed to be my date," I laughed.

He cackled evilly as he pulled out a seat at the small table. Maybe it was possible to get to know him better.

After dinner and a few hours of drink and casual conversation with each other and other patrons, I was about five pints in, Teldryn closer to eight, when one of the college bards appeared in the middle of the inn and offered to play. I shuffled in my chair and turned around to listen to her.

"This is a Nord song that I learned when I was a little girl, I think some of you may know it,"
She said, and the tavern quieted to hear her play.

She began strumming a lute, her fingers moving over the neck without her requiring to look at where she placed them. I was impressed by her skill.

"Our hero, our hero, claims a warrior's heart," She sang. Her voice was sweet and clear.

"Oh that's kinda nice," I slurred to Teldryn, who was raising his eyebrows at me, with a mischievous smile on his face.

"I tell you, I tell you, the Dragonborn comes."

My eyes flew open. I turned back to our table, putting a hand up flat against my face to hide it, and hunching over, making myself as small as possible.

"Oh whatthefuck?" I hissed across the table. Other patrons had begun to drunkenly sing along. Teldryn was laughing at my reaction, and leaned back in his chair.

"What can I say, you give people hope I suppose," He said with a benevolent smile, and raised his flagon to me.

I shook my head and got up, my vision spinning, not only because of the ale, but also as a result of the blood that had begun to drain from my face. This was all too surreal, and despite the numbing effects of inebriation, I started feeling the pit of anxiety welling up again. I stumbled back to our room and lay awake on the bed as thoughts of failure invaded my consciousness. An hour went by before Teldryn came up, fiddling with the doorknob and falling into the frame before he let himself in. I was only half asleep, stress keeping me somewhat alert, and started to wake to his clumsy attempts at being quiet.

First, I could hear him taking off his outer shirt while he stepped all around, unable to stay in one place. He then went flying across the room as he tried to remove his shoes, landing on his back on the small, low table and laughing at himself. He finally managed to get both pieces of his footwear off, and made his way to the bed, but not before telling me how good he was at being discreet.

"Indra...INDRA," He whisper-yelled at me as I squeezed my eyes shut, trying to ignore him.

"INDRA...I DIDN'T LIGHT ANY CANDLES CAUSE I DIDN'T WANT TO DISTURB YOU."

I rolled over and smacked my arm against the mattress.

"BECAUSE THAT WOULD BE, THE BIGGEST DISTURBANCE," I bellowed, now fully awake and fully pissed off at the elf.

Swaying in the darkness, he stared at me, then slowly put a finger to his lips.

"Sssshhhhh." 

At some point during the night, I was awoken by somebody grabbing me from under the hips, raising me onto my hands and knees. I groggily remembered all the times Fevythe used to take me in that position, and started to enjoy the grinding of hardness against my growing wet spot, and I moaned, waking myself up in the process. I then realized it was Teldryn, in his drunken state, probably dreaming about a steamy fling.
"I want you so bad," He growled into my ear.

I was a bit stunned but managed to reply.

"Uh, how about later?" I offered, unsure of what else to say. I thought if I replied with a simple "no", it would only make him try harder. Though I was from a small town, I still had enough experience with male insistence to know better.

"...Okay." Teldryn replied casually.

He released me and flopped onto his side of the bed, immediately resuming his snoring. I crawled back under the covers, heart beating quickly for reasons that I couldn't explain at the time, and fell asleep again. After that moment, I realized I should probably keep my distance, as he was not the right person, and this was not the right time.

Late the next morning, I was stirred awake by the sounds of a dangerous presence in my room. It sounded as if a Dremora had been summoned from Oblivion, and I jumped up with a lightning spell ready to be unleashed. The low, inhuman grumblings were coming from under the bed, and I hung my head over the side to investigate.

It was Teldryn. Likely still drunk, and somehow on the floor now.

"What are you doing on the floor?" I asked, relieved there was nothing I had to fight whilst hungover. Teldryn awoke to my words.

"What am I doing on the floor?" He snorted, looking around sleepily. "Gods, it tastes like Sanguine took a shit in my mouth."

I lay back, figuring he would say something witty about his sexsomnia episode, but he only continued to non-verbally complain about his hangover. He must not have remembered it at all, I thought.

"Thanks for that visual," I said as I rolled myself out of bed again. "Go back to sleep. I'll find us something to wear for this afternoon." I rummaged through Teldryn's belongings for some extra coin to buy his clothing. "You better be back among the living by then."

"Oh, fuck, right. The wedding," He groaned, heaving himself into the bed.

Radiant Raiment had already been open for an hour or two when I dragged my disheveled ass in to peruse among the other, more distinguished, patrons. One of the Altmer shopkeepers made a sound of disgust when she saw me.

"What? Afraid I'll look so good in this the Jarl will ask where I bought it from?" I asked, too hungover to give any shits about what the snob had to say. I found a simple cheap dress for myself, and an equally bland and inexpensive tunic for the less refined of us two.

Upon returning to the inn, I downed mug after mug of water at the bar before going upstairs, bringing bread and a full waterskin with me, which I threw at Teldryn when I entered the room. I looked at the dress, and took out a dagger.

"Fuck these sleeves," I muttered as I severed the coarse stitches holding the three quarter sleeves to the bodice, turning the dress into a shoulderless garment.

"Didn't you just buy that?" Asked Teldryn who was now sipping the water as I stuffed the fabric in with the rest of my belongings. They would make good bandages or rags.
"Better to get that intentionally over with now, rather than unintentionally later. Besides, they restrict my movement," I said, flexing my arms.

"Well, just be sure you don't get confused for a bodyguard," He muttered, breaking off a chunk of the dry loaf.

After a quick lunch downstairs, we joined the mob of people waiting to get into the Temple of the Divines where a very well-dressed young woman turned around and looked at me. She had a large hooked nose and a pretty face.

"I don't believe we've met," She said, shaking my hand. "I like to try to learn all the names of Solitude residents."

"I'm Indra," I said, pulling off the hood of my cloak, "and this is Teldryn my, uh, cousin. We're just passing through for the wedding. Who are you?"

"Ha, you really aren't from around here!" She laughed, "I'm Jarl Elisif. I mainly just wanted to tell you how much I like your outfit. It's so simple yet refined, and you have such great shoulders, you can pull it off so well!"

I stifled a laugh and thanked the young Jarl. "I got it from Radiant Raiment," I informed her, pushing aside my pettiness.

"I'll have to go there sometime soon, then." She smiled and walked away.

"Your cousin, really?" Teldryn whispered to me after Elisif became engaged in conversation with another guest. I shrugged at him, I also wasn't sure why that was the first idea that came to mind.

When we reached the gate to the entrance, the guard demanded we show him our invitations.

"We're just here for the reception," Explained Teldryn.

"Well you're here too early. The ceremony is going to be held in the courtyard in fifteen minutes. Come back in three hours," The guard answered.

We walked away from the temple, wondering how we could kill some more time.

"Wait," Teldryn said suddenly, looking up. "I bet we could see the ceremony from up there," He pointed at a turret in the keep wall. "It's far enough away that there shouldn't be any guards posted."

We climbed the stairs up to the first landing, and sure enough there wasn't anyone around to demand we stop lollygaggin'. I thought I saw the shadow of someone creep out of sight, but figured it was just my imagination. We walked along the rampart and eventually got to a vantage point that looked down on the courtyard, albeit from a distance. Teldryn produced a small bottle of Sujamma from the pouch on the belt under his tunic and uncorked it with his teeth.

"Are you not pickled enough as it is?" I asked as he took a swig.

"It's not even halfway full, here," He said, passing the clay flask to me and I drank from it.

"Here's to rich snobs," I coughed, and held the bottle up to him.

"Wait," He said, "something's wrong." A second after he spoke, we could hear screams from
the ceremony. The bride had collapsed, and guests were frantically trying to escape the courtyard as Solitude guards began clashing with figures that had appeared from the shadows, dressed in black.

"Oh, fuck," Teldryn breathed, "it's the Dark Brotherhood. Let's go!" We ran back along the rampart to the stairwell in the turret. Clutching the bottle of Sujamma as I didn't want to be implicated in anything, I ran slower than usual, bunching my dress in one hand and silently cursing society for imposing such attire on women.

At the same time we made it into the spiral staircase, a small figure wearing dark clothing was descending from the highest point of the turret, a crossbow in one hand. Without thinking, I grabbed him and restrained his arms behind him, dropping the bottle. Teldryn used his good arm to yank the boy's cowl off, and I leaned around him to look at his face.

"Gods, you're what, eleven? What are you doing getting mixed up with the Brotherhood?" Teldryn asked, squatting down to the young assassins height. I could see his profile now past his shaggy brown hair; he had dark eyes that glowered at the Dunmer in front of him with a calm, dark fury.

"You wouldn't understand," He fumed, as he tried to get away from my grip. "They eliminated the hag that tortured me and the other orphans, and then they took me in. They're my family,"

Teldryn looked up at me, neither one of us sure of what to do.

"You want to let him go, don't you?" I asked after several moments, knowing full well he was looking at a mirror reflection of himself from twenty years ago. The elf just stared hard back at me. I knew it wasn't technically the right thing to do, but, after letting out a sigh and looking upwards, hoping I wasn't going to be cursed for this, I eventually released the weird kid, and he silently flew down the rest of the stairs, hopping over the lower ramparts and escaping into the harbour. I had a bad feeling about the boy, but I couldn't have stood knowing he would have been tortured if I had turned him in.

After picking up the pieces of potentially tell-tale clay, we exited the turret to a scene of chaos. People were running past us while dead guards and assassins littered the keep.

"Did you see anything?" A guard demanded of us as we stared around at the slowly dwindling mayhem. We looked at each other and shook our heads. "Better get out of here, then. Not sure if they'll be back."

We agreed to leave the city through the lower gate, Teldryn pulling out a small knife from his belt and I reaching under my dress to unsheathe the electrified dagger strapped to my thigh as we did. The path under the natural land bridge of Solitude was quiet; the Dark Brotherhood assassins had slunk into the shadows whence they came, citizens had retired to their houses to hide, and the guards had all been pulled off their regular patrols for the wedding. So much for their efforts. We walked a ways down the shoreline path in the opposite direction of the harbour, and sat on some rocks overlooking the water.

After several minutes of silence as we mulled over what had happened, Teldryn finally piped up.

"How did you know I wanted to let him go?" He asked.

"Promise you won't be angry with me?" I pleaded, and though he looked at me suspiciously, he nodded. "I know you were in the Morag Tong when you were quite young, and I figured the kid
reminded you of yourself."

To my surprise, he smiled.

"Ha! Not just young," Teldryn chuckled, "I was their youngest recruit ever. I bet Geldis didn't tell you that part."

"No, he didn't. Mind if I ask how you got involved with them?"

Teldryn ran a thumb over his eyebrow in contemplation, but answered my question.

"My mother and I were living on the streets, when the man who would be my step-father found us." He said, looking out into the harbour. "A few years of being homeless had turned me into a pretty vicious little kid, and I think he figured I was groom-able since I was still quite young. He took us in to recruit me, but ended up falling for my mother. She was really beautiful back then, which often worked to our advantage on the streets of Blacklight, but it landed her in trouble at times."

"I'm sorry you had to go through that, it sounds horrible," I said, putting a hand on his back. He tensed a little, but relaxed a second later. "I know I'm prying, but, did you ever know your true father?"

"That's something I don't like to talk about," Teldryn replied, looking back to the water, and I removed my hand before he continued. "I can tell you, however, that my mother is still alive and well and living a pretty lavish lifestyle thanks to all the mercenary money I sent home to her, so my life story isn't all doom and gloom." He looked back at me. "What about you? Any life-changing traumatic events that made you the twisted adult you are today?"

I just laughed. "No, nothing like that. My parents were really strict with me growing up, because, y'know, Nord legend and all that, so I was always training or working," I said, leaning back against the rocks. "We were poor, well, we still are poor, so we never got to travel anywhere or do anything outside of eking out an existence. I guess it was pretty uneventful overall, but we had each other."

"That explains why you're like a drill sergeant, then," Teldryn joked, reaching under his tunic and producing another flask of Sujamma. "What? You didn't think I wouldn't have a back up plan, did you?" He grinned and passed me the bottle.

Shaking my head in amusement, I uncorked the liquor and accepted a drink from the vessel, then stared out over the water at the pale glow of the Northern sunset.

"I wonder why the Dark Brotherhood assassinated the bride today," I pondered aloud.

"Who knows. Could be a political move, could be a jealous lover," Teldryn said, taking the bottle back from me. "The Brotherhood will basically kill anyone for the right price, unlike the Morag Tong, who actually have rules."

"Well, here's to romance, then," I cheered, "it really is dead." Teldryn nodded thoughtfully and lifted the Dunmeris drink in my direction.
Foray Into Politics

Chapter Summary

Indra infiltrates Elenwen's party and makes some potential allies in the process.

Chapter Notes

I changed a number of details about what happened at Elenwen's party because I get soooo booooored re-hashing what you already know. There was a purpose of involving Balgruuf in the story, as it sets up what's to come in the next volume of this series.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A wood elf I had never seen before suddenly appeared in the Winking Skeever on Fredas evening, just as Delphine had said he would. I approached Malborn, and asked him to come up to my room as Teldryn casually created a minor distraction in the centre of the tavern by having some poor, unsuspecting customers take shots of Sujamma.

"I can sneak some equipment into the party for you, but whatever you give me is all you're going to be able to bring in." Malborn said once we were in the privacy of my room. "I don't know who you're going to run into, so I would recommend you prepare yourself." Heeding his advice, I loaded the small man up with with my usual attire, my empty rucksack and some potions I had acquired from Angeline in the few days we had pissed away around Solitude. Days that had been followed up by nights where I had slept in a bedroll on the floor of our room, under the guise of Teldryn having a snoring problem. He didn't believe me, but didn't protest to my decision. After throwing the items in a rucksack he had brought in anticipation, he nodded at me and left the establishment.

I went back downstairs to find Teldryn had escalated his antics, and was now demonstrating his fire resistance by spitting mouthfuls of whiskey through the flame he held in his hand, shooting his fire breath upwards and lighting up the dim room in flashes. The tavern ooh-ed and aah-ed with every plume.

I had gotten used to his less-than-serious nature by now, but it had really thrown me off initially. He was like a cornered animal when I had first met him, anxious, injured and on edge, just like Valor. Now he was actually enjoying himself, and I was beginning to warm up to this new version of Teldryn. As I pondered how he kept so much of himself hidden away, my mind wandered back to when he had unknowingly groped me in his sleep, and a pang of primal desire suddenly shot through me. The creeping tension between my legs was interrupted by applause, and I turned my head to see Teldryn bowing to his audience. He looked up to wave at me and I shifted in my seat, embarrassed at my recent thoughts as I casually waved back.

We met with Delphine the next day, and she handed me an expensive looking pile of clothing, telling me I had to wear it to blend in.
"Where's mine?" Teldryn asked, half-joking. Delphine shot him an angry look.

"Obviously you're not going in there with her, but I suppose you could be her escort," She said. I pointed at him and laughed.

"Alright, if it means I can potentially knock some Thalmor heads, I'll agree to wear a stupid hat," Teldryn said, putting his hands up in surrender. "If I'm to keep a weapon on me, I guess I'll have to standby outside the embassy, no?" Delphine nodded and handed me the invitation, then sent us on our way in a carriage, Teldryn sitting up front with the driver, asking him about the best way to avoid projectile horse crap. I changed out of my Dunmer outfit into the fine clothing on the way there. It was so rigid, stuffy and thick, and I thought the embroidery just looked tacky. I felt like a tit.

Hours later, when I entered the large stone building, Elenwen greeted me.

"And who might you be, then?" She asked coolly, looking down at me from her great height.

"I'm Llenrila Nedandas, the Raven Rock ambassador," I said confidently, having prepared an identity and backstory with Teldryn on the way.

She seemed a bit suspicious. "You seem rather young to be an ambassador," She said, eyeing me.

"I'm actually fifty-four, I just look really young thanks to all the rare herbs from Morrowind," I replied, "If you'll excuse me, I'd like to socialize with the other guests, please."

As I entered the room, I spotted Jarl Elisif and my heart sank. "Indra!" She called out, and I walked up to her, discreetly waving my arms in an effort to hush her.

"My name's not Indra, it's Llenrila. I'm an ambassador from Raven Rock. I was only using that cover name yesterday." She nodded at me knowingly, and asked if I would have a drink with her. I looked towards the bar and saw Malborn working behind the counter. Clever little elf. I told her I would fetch us some wine, and went to talk to my accomplice.

"You need to create a distraction so I can let you behind the bar," He whispered to me as he poured me two glasses of wine.

"How?" I hissed back.

"I don't know, find somebody that looks like they'd want to cause trouble."

I walked back into the party and handed Elisif her wine as I looked around for anybody drunk enough to start a fight. My eyes settled on a disgruntled looking Nord man sitting off to the side.

"Who's that?" I asked Elisif.

"Oh, that's Jarl Balgruuf, from Whiterun. He really despises the Thalmor, so I doubt he's having a good time," She replied. Smiling, she went on, "You know, he's had children from several wives, so I doubt he'd be resistant to a young, single woman like you approaching him." Figuring I could use him to my advantage, I thanked her and pretended as if I was off to seduce the old Jarl.

"I don't like them either," I said, sitting down beside him. He let out a grunt.

"You've got Elven blood yourself, I see, what makes you dislike them so much?" He asked.
"Well, my father is from Skyrim, and I know they want to destroy this province, so you could say I have some loyalty to the Nords despite being part Dunmer."

"Oh, I'm not accusing you of being in cahoots with them just because you're part dark elf," Bulgruuf said, "in fact, my most trusted advisor is a Dunmer herself."

"Who do you side with, then?" I asked, curious about this man's motivations.

He let out a sigh.

"Neither. Ulfric is a bloody savage, and the Imperials will completely dismantle our cultures and traditions. They're both fools," He grumbled. "Skyrim already has a significant population of non-Nords who are assimilating just fine without taking away the Nords' customs. The Thalmor believe themselves above it all and want to get rid of them both. But we sit around and pretend as if they're just another interest group. Hmph. The rewards of tolerance are treachery and betrayal," He finished. I was beginning to really like this guy.

"Hey," I said cautiously, becoming confident that he was trusting of me, "I'm actually here to try to see what the Thalmor's next move is. I have a way in to the rest of the building, but I need someone to cause a distraction so I can do so. Would you be willing to do that for me?"

"Oh, gladly." He said, standing up and downing the rest of his wine in a single gulp, then grabbing my glass immediately afterwards. As he began unleashing a tirade of controversial political views at an impressive volume, I slipped away towards Malborn and made eye contact with Bulgruuf, while holding a finger up to my lips.

The Bosmer opened the door behind the bar and slid in behind me. We went through the kitchen, where he threatened to snitch on the skooma-eating cook if she mentioned my presence. He led me to a chest and I retrieved my equipment.

"Go through the building on the other side of that door and you'll be outside in the courtyard," Malborn quietly instructed. "Elenwen's solar is on the other side of it. Watch out for Rulindil the Altmer sorcerer."

I thanked him and quietly closed the door behind me. Approaching the next door down, I could hear guards talking on the other side. After waiting for their footsteps to recede, I crept through the hall and went outside. I could see a Thalmor agent standing guard at the door of Elenwen's solar. The front of the embassy was in sight to my left, and I tiptoed around the back of the building I had just exited, towards the gate, and began waving desperately at Teldryn who was standing away from the other carriage drivers, picking snowberries from a roadside bush and popping them into his mouth.

"Hey," I hissed to him once I got his attention and he walked up to the tall fence, "I need a distraction. There are too many guards here,"

"Finally, some action," Teldryn grinned, his teeth reddened by the berries, and walked back towards the entrance as I silently got into position across from the solar. Hiding behind a stone wall, I could hear him start to cause a commotion.

"What did you call me?!" He yelled to one of the other carriage drivers, grabbing him by the collar and headbutting the poor lad. This drew the attention of the guards who rushed over to calm him down, and gave me enough time to sneak into the solar.

Once inside, I could hear two men having an argument. One was Rulindil, who reprimanded
his assistant for mucking up his office on the second floor, and threatened to send said subordinate to the basement. Sneaking up to the aforementioned room, I found a few documents and a rusty key on his desk. Flipping through the papers, I figured that the gist of the documents had to do with the return of the dragons, and I threw the folder into my bag.

Wondering what else I could find in the basement, I made my way to the ominous looking downstairs area, and opened the door with the key. Unsurprisingly, but still shockingly, the cellar was a dungeon of sorts, equipped for all methods of inhumane interrogation. Rulindil was alone in the prison/torture chamber, writing at a desk, and I sent an arrow into the back of his neck.

After I picked up the dossiers on Delphine and someone named Esbern, I heard a weak "hello?" from one of the cells. I got up and found a man in chains. Opening the door with Rulindil's key, I freed the man of his shackles and had him help me drag the Altmer's body into the cell, and stripped him of his robes.

"Put these on," I said, handing the relatively clean garments to the man, "I'm not sure who we're going to run into when we try to escape, so try to blend in." I wasn't about to leave the poor sod there.

No sooner had he donned the disguise than two Altmer dressed in Elven armor walked through the other set of doors, with Malborn in tow. I hurriedly closed the cell with me inside, and pressed myself into the corner closest to the cell gate, to stay hidden. The prisoner wore the robes well, but was not quite tall enough to pass as a high elf. He stood with his back towards the guards.

"What do we do with this infiltrator?" Asked one of the Thalmor goons. The impersonator pointed at the cells further along the chamber, and they began dragging the Bosmer spy towards the bloodied rooms, the disguised prisoner ensuring he kept his back to them as they did. He then sat at Rulindil's desk to conceal his height. When they passed by my cell, I unsheathed my daggers and silently swung the gate open, approaching them undetected. I would never get used to the feeling of vertebrae and soft tissue separating, cracking and crunching around my blade, and the whole-body shudder every living being exhibited as their soul left their body.

I heard the Breton man let out a huge sigh of relief as he walked towards us. Malborn's expression turned from concern and fear, to anger.

"I hope you're happy," He hissed, "now the Thalmor will be searching for me for the rest of my life!"

"You're welcome," I replied rudely, but continued with more grace. "Why don't you go to Solstheim? I've never seen any Thalmor there. If you talk to Geldis at-"

"No, I think Windhelm is far enough, and intolerant enough towards the Thalmor. I doubt Brelas will want to leave Skyrim." The wood elf continued to sigh and mutter to himself as the Breton prisoner approached us.

"I saw the guards throwing bodies down that hole, we might be able to find our way out through there," He said, pointing at a trapdoor on the other side of the room that had streaks of blood and other bodily fluids splattered across it.

We opened the trapdoor to the sinister looking cave below the embassy and jumped in, the three of us immediately slipping as we hit solid ground. Our footing had been released by the slimy, half-rotted corpses below. We all groaned in disgust but pushed on, towards the light pouring in from the exit. I saw a figure appearing in the darkness, and stopped the two men, preparing them for a fight.
"Indra, is that you?" The shadow called out.

"Teldryn?" I said, standing up in surprise, "What are you doing down here?"

"I got bored after the guards stopped us from fighting, and you hadn't appeared in a while so I went for a walk and found this cave. Seems rather suspicious, no?"

"No shit, the Thalmor are torturing and killing people and tossing their bodies down here," I said, walking closer towards him.

"Well that would explain why this troll was so fat, then." We could see the outline of the monster appearing in the dim light as we drew closer to where Teldryn stood, lightly kicking the beast he had slain. "Gods," He said, pinching his nose, "you all smell like the inside of a skeever. Anyway, come on. The exit is over here."

Malborn was still moping as we parted ways, despite the thanks the prisoner and I showered on him. He shuffled off into the cold, saying he was going to re-unite with Brelas and convince her to go into hiding together.

"I'm off to Riften now, I suppose," Said the Breton prisoner, "the name's Etienne Rarnis, I hope to see you again...?"

"Indra," I answered, shaking his hand. "Hopefully our paths will cross again, but under better circumstances."

Teldryn and I snuck away on foot in the dark, and arrived at Katla's farm just before sunrise. We collapsed in a pile of hay, where we managed to sleep for three brief hours before I awoke to Valor licking my face. I assume he wanted to make sure I wasn't dead, seeing as I likely looked and smelled like a corpse. After I saw Delphine standing over us, I rolled over and tapped Teldryn on the shoulder as we squinted into the late morning light, groggy, smelly and exhausted.

"What did you find out?" She demanded, and I rolled over to get the files out of my bag while I cleared my throat.

"The Thalmor know just as much as you do about the return of the dragons," I said sleepily, retrieving the papers, "and they're investigating you and someone named Esbern."

Delphine snatched the documents from my hands.

"Esbern is alive?" She cried, frantically flipping through the papers with the most emotion I had seen from her yet. She skimmed his dossier for a few minutes before speaking to us again. "Apparently he may be hiding out in Riften. You need to go there and find out what you can about him. I'm going back to Riverwood; Riften is one of the worst places I could be spotted."

Now accustomed to following the demands of others, I just gave her a thumbs up and rolled back over into the hay. Before I fell asleep again, she gave me one more important piece of information.

"Talk to Brynjolf when you get there, as I have a feeling he will know something about Esbern. He knows about everything that goes on in Riften, especially in the ratway. But whatever you do, don't fall for his charm," She said. I scowled at Delphine as I drifted back asleep. "Oh, one more thing Indra," I opened one eye. "If you find Esbern, tell him to remember the thirtieth of Frostfall."
It was past noon when I stirred again. Teldryn was already up, kneeling on the ground a few feet in front of me, trying to play with Valor, who just stared at him blankly, head slightly cocked to one side.

"Guess we're heading to Riften, huh?" He asked as I sat up and brushed pieces of straw off my shoulders.

"Guess so. I need to get my armor cleaned first, then we can leave." Still a bit grumpy from my inadequate rest, I thought about how much of a pain in the ass it was getting to Solitude in the first place, and made a decision about our next move. "Teldryn," I said firmly, "we're taking a carriage this time, godsfuckingdamnit."

Chapter End Notes

You may have noticed by now that Indra has had it pretty easy overall in Skyrim - and that's the point. Fear not, the next part of this series will be brutal for everyone.
Chapter Summary

A fluff/relationship development chapter. Indra and Teldryn make their way to Riften by carriage and actually get to have an enjoyable time.

The carriage was absolutely crammed with other travelers hoping to stop off at various locations along the lengthy journey from Solitude to Riften. Everyone's belongings packed the bottom of the wagon, and we rested our feet atop the soft leather bundles while Valor squeezed into what small crevices he could, sleeping for the majority of the trip. We were one of the first set of travelers to board the wooden craft and I managed to snag a spot at one end of the bench, but found myself jammed into the wood beside me as Teldryn was pressed further and further my way with the bodies that followed us, and we spent the first day of the trip hip to hip. I wasn't uncomfortable being physically close to him, but I still hadn't broached the subject of what had happened in Solitude.

About halfway through our ride towards the thief-infested town, Teldryn removed his sling and began making small movements through his shoulder.

"I think I'm all healed up," He said, rubbing the palm of his right hand along his collarbone.

"That doesn't mean you should start using it right away, you know," I said, crossing my arms.

"Thanks, mother," He replied sarcastically, "I only use this arm for magicka anyway, I don't think you need to worry." But I did worry, a bit. I knew how far he pushed himself without rest or consideration of the potential long-term damage his defiance caused, but I supposed that was how the world had forced him to adapt.

Our slightly dwindling group made a final stopover in Eastmarch before arriving in Riften, and we made camp amidst the hot steam vents and pools of warm mineral-laden water. Reddish creepcluster sprawled over the green-tinted rocks, and the banks of the pools of water were yellow with sulphur. Large evergreens surrounded us, and they in combination with the warm, humid air, granted us a feeling of protection, yet we all knew wolves still lurked in their depths. After we had set up our tents, made a fire and eaten the contents of one of our meager ration pouches, Teldryn suddenly jumped up and pulled the pants of his armor off, followed soon after by his torso piece, stripping down to a pair of cotton shorts.

"Have you taken leave of your senses?" I cried after him as he jogged away from our firepit in the dwindling light, "It's not that hot here, we're still in Skyrim!"

"I know!" He yelled, his voice fading away as I heard a splash, "I'm just taking up you up on your advice from Leaf Rest! I bet the water will be good for my shoulder. Besides, hunters around here do this all the time!"

"That sounds like a great idea!" I heard one of our fellow travelers shout from a nearby camp. The voice belonged to an old Breton man who whooped as he stripped naked and ran into the warm water. I could now hear other carriage riders bustling in agreement as they also removed their
clothing and followed suit. I laughed and took off my own armor, stashing it under my bedroll and wading into the shallow hotspring in a loose sleeveless top and shorts. The sun was setting when somebody produced a bottle of whiskey, and we passed it around as we let the water ease the tension of traveling, forgetting about the problems of this province and enjoying a small slice of bliss, together. That night was so perfect, the sunset seemed brighter than usual and I was at such peace it almost hurt, yet I wanted it to last.

"See?" I heard a low voice from behind me say, "I'm not always just a grumpy old Dunmer," Teldryn had appeared, and I sank lower in the water, suddenly conscious of the transparency of my underclothes.

"I never said you were," I laughed, "how old are you, anyway?"

"I've barely seen thirty-five autumns, which to Man is old, but to Mer, I'm just a mere child."

I nodded as I wondered how long I would live for, would it be somewhere between Man and Mer?

"Autumn, huh," I said, coming back to the present, "does that mean you were born in the fall?"

"Well, my mother wouldn't let me live down the fact that she had to push me out midway through the miserable season of Sun's Dusk, so as far as I know, yes," Teldryn replied, somewhat bitterly.

"Ah, the Atronach," I crooned in mock sagacity, "seems appropriate considering one of your preferred spells, and also the fact that you only seem to be able to use one hand for magic."

"Funny how that works, eh?" Teldryn agreed, "What about you?"

"Eighth of Sun's Height," I replied, "I think it's a pretty decent time to be born; when I was young, my parents would use my birthday as a reason to do something fun with our close friends, seeing as the weather is only truly agreeable during that season." I smiled at the strangers enjoying themselves as they chatted and drank, cheerfully splashing each other with the soothing spring water. "I'm reminded of it right now, actually,"

"That must have been nice," Teldryn said quietly.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to rub it in your face," I said quickly, looking over at him in some amount of panic.

"No, it's okay, it's not as if I didn't have any happy experiences, it's just..." My sympathetic eyes met his searching ones, and he read my expression. "Nothing," he finished. I let it go. He smiled again, "It's also hilariously fitting that you were born under the sign of the Apprentice, seeing as you don't have a clue as to what the real world is like, or what you're supposed to do, but you charge in head first as if nothing were slowing you down," He said with a small laugh. I splashed him in feigned irritation.

Even though I knew he was right, for some reason the thought of my uncertain future didn't scare me this time. I felt as if my heart was open to the world, and I would embrace whatever it held for me. I could live up to my name, whatever it entailed.

Almost as if he had read my thoughts, Teldryn added, "And it seems like nothing can slow you down. Despite your youth and inexperience, I think you'll be just fine as the legendary, fabled Drago-" He didn't finish the rest of that word as I had firmly clamped a hand around his mouth,
staring at him angrily and creating a small tidal wave with my abrupt motion. Lightly grasping my wrench, he removed my hand with his own and apologized, tapping the side of his nose with a finger.

His gaze dropped from my eyes to the rest of my body, which was now mostly out of the water as I had stood up in my urgency to hush him. My legs straddled his knee as I held my awkward, bent over position, following his quick glance down and back up. After briefly making eye contact again, we both looked away hurriedly, and I dropped back into the water. Thirteen years age difference seemed like a lot back then.

An hour later, the fire was low and Valor was already curled up on my bedroll as we crawled into our tents, still a bit damp from the spring.

"Hey, Teldryn?" I asked, hearing the folds of his bedroll ruffle as he found a comfortable position.

"Yes? Something wrong?"

"No," I began, "I just wanted to say...Goodnight."

There was a small pause before he quietly replied, "Oh, goodnight."
Chapter Summary

The duo confront Brynjolf in an effort to find Esbern. Indra learns more about Teldryn's past.

I always thought Brynjolf was such a fucking dick, so I enacted a bit of revenge here. I know he's handsome and charming but for some reason I always wanted to reach through the screen and slap him.

"You better pay the visitor's tax if you want to get in," Declared one of the guards as we and several other travelers approached the pragmatically hideous Riften gates. The city itself sat at a high point in the Rift, and I found it funny in a way that a town with such an awful reputation was situated in one of the most beautiful regions. The grass was actually green, dare I say lush, and trees of all varieties, some with white trunks and yellow-tinged leaves, were scattered across the rolling hills. Flowers grew alongside the road, and I could see groups of elk trudging across the rocky escarpments. Perhaps it was easier to commit crimes when the weather was nice.

"Oh, piss off Gisslak, as if I wouldn't recognize those scars anywhere," Teldryn scoffed at the man, stepping out from behind me.

The guard removed his helmet in surprise. "Teldryn?" He exclaimed, "I thought you were dead!" He reached out to hug Teldryn as the elf reached back and the men slapped each other on the back in a friendly embrace.

"Takes a lot more than a couple of bandits to get rid of me," Teldryn laughed. "Why on Nirn are you forcing poor travelers to pay a toll? Maven put you up to this, didn't she?" Gisslak appeared a bit apprehensive and glanced around suspiciously before nodding to us. "Of course," Teldryn sighed, now turning back to me. "See, this is why I love Riften, laws need not apply here. Anyway, we'll be going through now, Gisslak, you mooching S'wit," He winked at his old accomplice as we entered the city and began walking towards its core.

"Who is Maven?" I asked innocently as tough-looking men and women trudged past us on our way into the heart of the lawless town. Most of the cities buildings had been established on the second layer of infrastructure, above the canal that ran in a circle around the bottom section of the town. Valor trotted along nearby, sniffing every dirty corner.

"I suppose you could say she runs this city," Teldryn replied.

"Oh, so she's the Jarl?"

Teldryn laughed at my question, but entertained me with a response.

"No, she's the matriarch of an influential family here," He said. "She's a sponsor to both the Thieves Guild as well as the palace, so nobody can give her trouble, in essence."

"Smart woman," I said, to which Teldryn nodded in agreement as we approached the central
"I think we'll find Brynjolf, ah, yes, there he is. Peddling his snake oil as usual." I looked to the central marketplace where Teldryn was pointing, and saw the profile of a tall, handsome redhead holding a bottle high in the air, giving a speech about its divine properties. A few members of the crowd, likely travelers, were enraptured, while the locals told the mesmerizing man to get fucked as they went about their daily business.

"Delphine wasn't kidding when she said Brynjolf is a charming bastard, so watch yourself," Teldryn said quietly into my ear.

"What do you think," I snapped, whirling around, "that I'm some kind of damsel in distress, falling for the first handsome man that blesses me with positive attention?"

Teldryn just shrugged suggestively and began walking away, eyebrows arched in my direction. I discreetly flipped him off with both hands and approached Brynjolf. Two can play this charm game, I thought, and circled around the man from behind. He had taken a pause from his con as some victims began handing him handfuls of Septims. He looked down at me with a confident smile as I approached.

"Never worked an honest day in your life for all that coin, eh, lass?" He asked, condescendingly, eyeing my fine armor. Despite his sleazy and slick demeanor, he was quite a good-looking man, and I couldn't blame any unprepared individuals for being swindled by him. I managed to hold my tongue, and wondered with some annoyance if he was negging me. I played along.

"Why of course not," I said in the most sultry tone I could muster as I lightly fingered the silver chain around his neck, then looked into his eyes. "Everything I own once belonged to someone else."

He smiled down at me. "Then, might I offer you a lucrative position in my company?"

"Who, me?" I giggled, spreading my fingers over my décolletage, "What's the catch?"

Brynjolf let out a laugh. "Quick as a whip, I see. I need you to plant this ring on that Argonian merchant over there," He said, producing an elegant silver ring and taking my hand to give it to me. "I'll create a distraction while you work your magic. Then, the job's yours, just like that." He snapped his fingers.

Smiling, I took the piece from him. As soon as his hand returned to his side, I let my face reveal my true feelings towards him as I turned around and hurled the jewelry as hard as I could in the opposite direction. It sailed over the gangplank balcony and into the polluted channel as Brynjolf watched his scam dissolve before him, mouth agape. In the midst of his distraction, I pulled out my dagger and held it up to his throat before he regained his composure. He let out a smile-less laugh.

"Where's Esbern?" I growled into his ear, but his eyes met with someone behind me as the crowd murmured and dispersed.

"What the fuck are you doing here, Sero?" Brynjolf spat as Teldryn appeared from around the corner.

"You really missed your calling as an actress," He said, putting a hand on my shoulder. He then turned to Brynjolf, "I would suggest you answer her, this one doesn't fuck around," He warned, amusement in his voice.

"You guys know each other?" I asked, then readjusted myself, putting on my best
"That crazy old man is in the ratway vaults, with the other loonies," Brynjolf replied, pausing before looking down at me and adding, "you better watch yourself around here, lass."

I removed the edge of the blade from his neck and Teldryn and I quickly walked away as he yelled after us, "Sero, you sonofawhore! Keep that bitch of yours on a leash!"

We managed to make it down the stairs to the low docks that surrounded the circular waterway below the city, before we burst out laughing.

"That felt AMAZING!" I exclaimed, balling up my fists and holding them beside my head. Teldryn was in tears he was laughing so hard.

"I've never seen anyone fuck with Brynjolf like that, it was glorious," He wheezed. "Did you see his face when you threw the ring? Priceless."

I was breathing heavily with excitement. "I've never got to have this kind of fun growing up in Raven Rock."

Teldryn stood up straight and wiped the side of his eye.

"Well, just make sure you use your newfound powers for good," He laughed, walking closer towards me. My ear-to-ear grin faded slightly as I found myself walking towards him in response, finally feeling genuine camaraderie with my companion as a result of our hijincks. We were almost toe to toe when I pulled back.

"Uh, we should continue looking for Esbern," I coughed.

Teldryn turned his shoulders towards the end of the dock and cleared his throat.

"Right. Well. If he's in the Ratways, we'll want to head that way." He said, pointing towards the walls of the buildings situated underneath Riften.

We entered the dingy, literal hole in the wall that was the entrance to the ratways, and illuminated the grubby tunnels with fire. Teldryn had remembered how to get into the underground passages from the brief time he helped one of the Thieves Guild members enact revenge on a client that hadn't paid up in several years.

"I'm surprised you didn't just join up with them," I said on the topic of his involvement with the Guild. "I thought they were swimming in gold."

"They prefer not to kill their targets if possible," Teldryn replied, "not my style. Besides, Vex, one of the leaders, found out that I had figured out her bathing schedule and had sold the timetable to another guild member who was smitten with her. She only discovered it was me after I had come and gone, but apparently her personality holds up to her name."

"How did you figure that out, you old perv?" I chuckled.

"Oh, it wasn't like that at all," Teldryn said, "I only kept track of the times her hair was damp and she didn't smell like a sewer. Speaking of which..."

The smell hit us at the same time and we both recoiled before attempting to press on, fabric over our mouths and noses. Just after we started to get used to the odour, I heard what sounded like a combination of a scream and a shudder come from Teldryn, who was walking behind me. I spun
around to find him standing on one leg, his hands raised up like he was surrendering to someone, and his shoulders tensed around his ears.

"Did I miss something?" I asked, legitimately worried.

"No, just, there are a lot of rats," He coughed, trying to brush off his outburst. I raised an eyebrow in confusion.

"Okay, weird, but not a threat-" I said, wholly confused.

"I just have a thing about rats." He interrupted.

"Right, homelessness and whatnot, gotcha," I said, turning back around towards and walking through the dark opening. I heard Teldryn sigh.

"We're going to have to go through there," He said, pointing at a door at the bottom of a short flight of stairs.

"Okay, what's the problem?"

"That's where the Thieves Guild likes to hang out," Teldryn replied sullenly.

We walked around the stinking pool of water in the middle of the hideout and up a small rotting plank to what appeared to be a speakeasy, but ended up just being the bar that served the Thieves Guild. As we came around the dimly lit corner into the bar, we ran into a familiar face.

"Oh no, oh no you fuckin' don't," Brynjolf said, getting up from the table he was drinking at and holding up a pointed finger. He had changed into black leather armor and was much more intimidating than before. Pointing at me now, he briskly walked in our direction, clearly quite upset from earlier. "You think after what you did in the marketplace, you expect to just walk through here like nothing happened?"

"Brynjolf, what's your problem?" Asked the man behind the bar.

"This is the little wench that fucked up the Madesi plant!" As I was wondering how he had managed to beat us down here, he grabbed me by the front of my cloak, but just as my feet began to leave the ground, he was stopped by another familiar voice.

"Indra?!" A man cried from the other side of the room, "Is that really you? Hey, Brynjolf, let her go, she's the one that saved me from the Thalmor."

I was released from a threatening embrace into an appreciative one as Brynjolf let me go and Etienne ran over to hug me. From behind Etienne's back, I stuck my tongue out at Brynjolf, who just looked upwards and walked away. No sooner did Etienne welcome me, than did a feisty-looking blonde woman approach us and give Teldryn a huge slap across the face. Mouth agape, he rubbed the offended cheek as he remained stuck in the position he recoiled to, but appeared to accept the assault.

"I know it was you, you rat-faced bastard," She shrieked, winding up her arm for another hit.

Etienne had released me and I grabbed her weaponized limb and enthusiastically and perpetually shook her hand before she could give my hire another wallop.

"You must be Vex, nice to meet you, I'm Teldryn's wife and I'd love it if you didn't kill him
today, okay?" I said quickly, falsely smiling the whole way through. Her eyes widened a bit and she apologized to me, but gave Teldryn another scowl before walking back to the bar.

"What the fuck is going on?!!" Another woman had entered the room. She seemed familiar somehow.

"Don't worry about it Sapphire," Brynjolf said, "these scum were just on their way out," he finished, motioning to us. At the leaders' dismissal, Teldryn grabbed my arm as I flipped Brynjolf off, and we left through the door opposite to the one we had entered in, towards the sewer cells that housed the mentally unwell vagabonds of Riften.

"I don't even know what this guy looks like, is he still sane?" I wondered out loud through the howls and mutters of the various characters that sat and rocked or paced inside their designated blocks.

"That door looks awfully sane," Teldryn said slightly sarcastically as he pointed at a large, multi-locked cell on the highest tier of the vault. "What did you tell Vex was the nature of our relationship back there?"

I cringed into myself a little and pretended not to hear him. I had no idea why I blurted out that false backstory.

"What did you say?" I called back, my words a little bit too overemphasized. "Oh nevermind, let's go find Esbern," I said quickly, jogging towards the stairs that led upwards.

When I knocked on the door, a peephole opened and a small old man told me to get lost.

"Esbern, I know it's you," I said in a sing-song voice.

"He's dead, go away, he's dead," Esbern shouted back, shutting the small slat.

I sighed. "Delphine wants you to remember, uh, the thirteenth of Frostfall or something,"

The hatch slid open again. "The thirtieth of Frostfall?" Esbern asked, "Why didn't you say so! Give me a minute here,"

Teldryn groaned with impatience as Esbern began releasing the exorbitant number of locks on his personal prison cell. We could hear the strange sounds from the guests down below getting louder and more agitated. Suddenly, a voice that didn't belong to one of the destitute sounded out.

"There they are! Get them!" A robed Thalmor agent yelled, pointing at us. He had tracked us down, apparently following the dossier lead, and began summoning lightning into his hands as another Altmer dressed in Elven armor unsheathed his blade and ran at us. Teldryn drew his sword and conjured a flame atronach, which set to blasting the wizard with fire as I readied myself. The armored guard clashed with Teldryn as the mage split his time between the atronach and myself. He redirected a firebolt from the atronach at me, and I was knocked to the ground.

Teldryn's atronach continued to unleash a barrage of fire and gave me enough time to stand up. Winded and dizzy, I found my footing and painfully began to heave my body to a standing position, and as I did, the mage summoned a huge bolt of lightning which he launched at me. I managed to get my hand up in time and absorbed the lightning, letting it swirl around inside of me. Groaning and straining, I lifted my arms and re-directed the bolt back at the mage, adding in some of my own electric magicka. He fell to one knee at the same time I did, his own mana energy blocked, I in pain and exhaustion. Teldryn had struck down the gilded guard who now lay at the bottom of the vault, and ran up to the hooded Altmer, decapitating the terrified mage with one fell swoop.
Esbern had emerged from his room as I was standing up, holding my side, and gasping for air.

"Oh dear, they've found me," He said, fidgeting in anxiety, "it's time to get going then!" He then frantically ran around his depressing abode, collecting this and that, muttering to himself.

We exited the ratway vaults through the same way we entered; via the Ragged Flagon. Running past Brynjolf and the other confused-looking thieves with a cheery "'Scuse us!", we then left the town of Riften through the main gates, with Valor panting in excitement alongside my limping stride. Paying the carriage driver triple to ride through the night to Whiterun, we slept as much as we could before disembarking, and then beginning our day-long walk to Riverwood. We kept Esbern’s face hidden throughout the entire journey. Though most thought him dead, we weren't about to take any chances.
Indra and Teldryn bring Esbern back to Riverwood to reconvene with Delphine and prepare for the trip to the Karthspire.

When we arrived in Riverwood near dinner time, Teldryn took Esbern to Leaf Rest while I discreetly pulled Delphine from the Sleeping Giant Inn and brought her back to the house. As we entered, Esbern pulled off his hood and turned around to greet his old friend.

"Esbern!" Delphine cried, running up to the old man and hugging him. I hadn't realized she could be so amiable with those she considered close.

"Ah Delphine," Esbern sighed, "it's so good to see you again. I'm sorry I had to disappear for so long. Thank you for keeping the house in such good shape."

"It's alright," Delphine replied, pulling away from their embrace and wiping the side of her eye, "you had to do it to survive, I understand. And, I honestly haven't been here much, though I've opened it up for the Dragonborn and her companion to stay at when she's in town."

"Ah, very good," Esbern said with a smile, looking at me. "Now I see why you sought me out, and why you withheld on that information until we were in private."

"Yes, I'm sorry I didn't tell you when we found you," I replied, "it's just that Delphine is worried about the Thalmor getting word of who I am and finding out I'm involved with you two."

"Of course, that's a valid concern," Esbern mused, and turned his attention to Teldryn. "Now, who are you, and why are you helping the Dragonborn?" He asked.

"Teldryn Sero, blade for hire," The elf replied, shaking Esbern's hand, "I'm only here for protection."

"So, you're just a mercenary, then," The Nord said, eyeing Teldryn a little suspiciously.

"That's true," I piped up, "but it's not the reason he's helping me. I got him out of some trouble in Raven Rock, and I think he feels indebted to me, or something?" I said, shrugging and smiling towards Teldryn, who cocked an eyebrow at me in amused irritation.

"I'm here to help keep her safe," Teldryn said, looking back at Esbern.

"Ha! From what I've seen, it's been the other way around," Delphine laughed, "I don't think the Dragonborn here needs much protection."

"Well, we can never be too careful, right?" Esbern said, noticing the look of shameful annoyance on Teldryn's face. "Anyway, what have you found out, Delphine?"

"Right, well, the dossiers that Indra recovered point in the direction of a cave in the Reach. I think we should start searching there."
"Very well," Esbern said, "let's use tomorrow to ready ourselves, and then head out the day after. I can't wait to sleep in my own bed again."

The next day, Esbern remained hidden at Leaf Rest, while Delphine resumed her work in the inn so as to not arouse any suspicion, and Teldryn and I went our separate ways to gather our own supplies for the upcoming trip. As Teldryn headed for the blacksmith, I was walking towards the general trader when I saw a Bosmer man sitting by the water, looking quite upset. I recognized him as one of the two men that had looked at Teldryn with contempt and jealousy when the charming dark elf was flirting with that woman, back when we had been here the first time around. I had hoped Teldryn's strange reaction to their encounter hadn't done something to affect the woman, and I approached him.

"Something wrong?" I asked, bending at the hip to get a better look at the man.

"Oh," He said, surprised somebody had entertained his misery, "yes, I suppose so. I'm interested in a woman, but so is another man, and she can't decide which of us she prefers."

"Ah, I see," I said, wholly uninterested in helping solve the issue of a love triangle. "Well, that sucks, good luck to you I guess,"

"Wait," The man called out before I had a chance to leave, "give this letter to Camilla Valerius," he said, standing up and handing me a note. "Maybe it will help sway her decision in my favour."

"Okay, then," I said, taking the message. "Godsdamnit," I muttered as I started walking away, "I really don't give a shit."

As luck, or fate, would have it, I ended up running into Camilla in the Riverwood Trader, and she was exactly who I thought she would be. She was arguing about something with her brother, the merchant, when I entered. I stood on in silence as they bickered, and took the note out to read it.

"Dear Camilla,

I don't believe we were meant to be together, for you are as ugly as a horker and your breath smells like a troll's armpit.

Best,

Sven"

Are you fucking kidding me, I thought as I closed my eyes and shook my head. The siblings had noticed I was standing in their store, and pretended nothing had happened.

"Welcome!" The man named Lucan said, "can I help you with anything?"

"In a second," I replied, then turned to the woman, "you're Camilla, right?" I asked.

"Yes," She replied, then her eyes widened in recognition. "Oh, I remember you! Is your friend back to normal?"

"I don't think he'll ever be truly norm-" I laughed, thinking of Teldryn's wild side, then caught myself. "I meant, yeah, he's fine. Actually I was here to ask you something."

"Oh, that's good he's better. What about?"
"Are you involved with some guy named Sven, or a Bosmer fellow?" I asked.

"Well, not officially," She said, smiling and twirling her hair around a finger. "They're both just so handsome and charming, I can't decide which one I want to be with. Sven is a romantic bard, and Faendal is a strong, hard-working man. Since I can't make up my mind, I just see both of them on and off."

"Uh, okay," I replied. That seemed like a lot of work. "If you had to decide on one, who would you choose?"

"Oh, I don't know," She laughed, "I couldn't make a choice. Speaking of handsome men, is your friend around again?" She asked.

"Oh you mean Teldryn?" I asked, "Yeah, he's around here somewhere."

"Excellent," Camilla smiled, "perhaps we can pick up where we left off, if you know what I mean," she said suggestively. "You don't mind, do you?"

"No, that's fine," I replied, but I felt my stomach drop a little with my answer. I distracted myself by buying a few supplies, then headed off to see Sven, feeling like I should probably fill him in on what was going on. If he was a bard, then he'd likely be working at the inn.

I found the blond man tuning his lute at a bench, and I dropped the letter in front of him.

"What in Oblivion is this?" He asked, looking up at me.

"Since both you and Faendal want Camilla, he's trying to smear your name to win over Camilla."

"What!" Sven cried, "That ass. Here," He said, quickly scribbling something on a spare piece of paper, "give this to Camilla."

As the bard turned back to his lute in a huff, I read the letter.

_Dear Camilla,

I fear our time as lovers must draw to an end, as I find you as repulsive as a horse's ass. You possess all the charm and grace of a cow plop, and I would not ever be your husband. _

_Regards,_

_Faendal_

I had a fleeting desire to get the men to come face to face with each other, only because I wanted to smack their heads together to release the illusion shitspell that was possessing their minds. Instead, I turned around and got back to preparing for the trip.
"You've never worked with this kind of armor, I take it?" I asked the small-town blacksmith as he turned my chitin armor over in his hands.

"You're right, I haven't," He replied, "but it's not that much different than your regular plated light armor. It's still in pretty good shape, and there's only a bit of wear. I'll have it done in an hour or so."

"Alright," I said, leaning up against one of the wooden pillars that supported the roof over the forge. I didn't have much else to do, so I figured I could relax for a little while. It had been such a long time since I had truly felt at ease with the world, and the genuine happiness I felt at that moment translated into what was probably a dopey smile, though fortunately no one was around to see me so slack. Or perhaps it was just the effects of the town of Riverwood.

As I looked back towards the town, I saw the door of the Riverwood Trader swing open, and Indra hurriedly walk out, then proceed to stomp in the direction of the inn. I wondered what she had gotten up to, and why she was in such a rush. I don't think she knew what a leisurely pace was.

I spent the rest of the day collecting a few mushrooms, flowers and plants on the outskirts of town, and fishing in the small stream. While I wasn't particularly adept in alchemy, I knew Indra would be able to figure out how to turn these ingredients into useful potions. Funny that she was just fine at following alchemic recipes, yet her cooking wasn't worth a damn. I also knew that the fish wouldn't last for the trip, but I thought it would be nice for the four of us to have a quiet meal at Leaf Rest. What had happened last time in Riverwood drew a bit more attention than I think Delphine would have preferred, and I still felt a bit guilty for potentially putting her or the Dragonborn in any amount of danger.

I also still hadn't figured out what had happened to me, exactly, and it worried me knowing that I might be that vulnerable, again. The feeling had come on suddenly, as if the room around me were melting, and I was falling into another dimension. Before I knew it, my heart was beating too hard for my lungs to catch up, and my arms and legs had gone numb. I simultaneously felt like vomiting, but somehow knew that wouldn't happen. I think Indra was onto something when she mentioned the Sea Tiger, but I still didn't know what I needed to do to stop it from happening again. Perhaps if I forgot that any of those years and months had ever happened, I wouldn't be prone to such...distress.

When I returned to Leaf Rest a few hours later with some fresh salmon, ingredients, and my repaired armor, I found Esbern hunched over some papers in his study, but Indra and Delphine were nowhere to be found.

"Where are the girls?" I called out as I plopped my haul down onto the kitchen table.

"Eh? Oh, I don't know," Esbern replied, clearly still distracted by his work. "Delphine's
probably still working, and I imagine Indra has plenty to do elsewhere."

"Alright, I'll go talk to Delphine to see if she'll come back here for some dinner. Speaking of which, could you light a fire while I go find them?"

Esbern grunted a 'yes, sure', and I left the house to go to the inn. The town had quieted down as the sun began to set, and the noise of the rapids was even more soothing now than earlier when I sat by the stream in contemplation.

Delphine was still working, as Esbern had suggested, but the Dragonborn wasn't around. I approached the bar where the Breton woman stood.

"Have you seen Indra?" I asked, leaning over the counter.

"Not since earlier today," Delphine replied. "She came in briefly to talk to Sven, then left. Not sure where she went, but I'm sure she's fine, if you're worried about her."

"Oh, no, I'm not worried," I said, "it's just that I caught some fish and I figured the four of us could eat at home. I don't want to inadvertently cause a scene like last time."

"Ah, that's very kind of you," Delphine said as she counted out some money. "I won't be done here until a bit later, but I'll send Indra your way if I see her."

Just then, the Imperial woman I had a brief fling with the last time I was here came up to me at the bar. The same two men that had been glaring at us the last time we were here were doing exactly the same thing, again.

"Teldryn," She lightly put a hand on my arm, "it's so nice you're back. What are your plans for tonight?" she asked, looking up at me. I could feel Delphine staring daggers at me from behind the bar.

"Well, I was just going to have a quiet dinner at home," I replied. I had just used the word "home". Huh. But it was natural, I suppose, nowhere else before had ever felt truly like home. Well, except that once place...

"Would you be up for having something to drink with me instead?" Camilla asked, stepping closer to me and smiling. It was tempting, but...

"No, thank you," I replied, putting my hands on her arms and pushing her away slightly. I genuinely wasn't up for flirting and casual sex tonight, there was just too much coming up in the next while. Or at least I thought that's what was making me say no. The two ogling men had started to come closer to us, looking as threatening as a tiny Bosmer and prettyboy Nord could. Were they planning on trying to fight me?

Suddenly, Indra burst through the front door of the inn, waving two pieces of paper around in the air in either hand as she came up to the four of us, yelling about something.

"Hey, you dickholes!" She shouted, walking quickly towards the bar, "what in fucking Oblivion are you trying to do? Camilla, do you know these two guys are trying to sabotage the other's efforts in pursuing you? Look at these stupid fucking letters," she said, shoving the pieces of paper towards the Imperial woman who frowned as she skimmed over the notes.

"What? I don't understand, why are you guys being so cruel?" Camilla asked, looking down at the messages. As she turned her attention back to the men, I read the letters over her shoulder and nearly choked from trying to stifle my laughter.
"You won't make up your mind about who you prefer, so I was trying to make you see than Sven doesn't care for you as much as I do!" Faendal cried.

"What? That's not true!" Sven exclaimed, "Camilla, I love you more than Faendal ever could. You know that!"

"I...I can't decide," Camilla said, looking flustered.

"Come on, Camilla," Faendal insisted.

"It's been like this since we all played together as children," Sven said.

"Wait, what?" Indra asked, "You guys have known each other for that long?"

"Yes," Faendal replied, "Sven and I used to be good friends, but then we started competing for Camilla, and, well..."

"You guys sacrificed your friendship over a love interest?!" Indra exclaimed, throwing her arms in the air again.

"It wasn't on purpose," Sven replied with a sigh.

"Besides, she's worth it," Faendal added.

"I wouldn't be so sure about that," I piped up with a smile, holding a finger upwards as I hoped to ease the tension with a joke.

"YOU STAY OUT OF THIS!" The four of them yelled at me at the same time. I held up my hands in surrender.

"Look," Indra said, putting her hands on her hips as she prepared to lecture the three, "I don't really give a shit about your issues, but I can tell you this. First of all, you have to ask yourselves if it's really worth it to give up someone you consider a good friend in the interest of having a chance with someone you can't be sure of will care about you the same way your friend would. Secondly, it's not truly love if you're willing to stomp on somebody else in order to get what you want. My parents taught me that love is something sacred, and if you're being nefarious in your approach to acquiring it, you're doing it wrong."

"That's so sweet," Camilla said, "I think you're right. These guys need to ease off."

"AND YOU," Indra continued, pointing at the woman, "stop stringing these poor men along! They're clearly romantics at heart, and deserve someone willing to put in the same amount of effort that they are!"

"Not like she ever strung your friend along," Faendal grumbled, crossing his arms and glowering at me.

"No, she didn't," Indra replied, "which probably means she knows what she wants, and it's not either of you two. Gods, you guys are so dumb, I'm going home, gonna drink an entire flask of Sujamma to myself, fucking small town bullshit, I thought I was getting away from all this..." She continued to mutter as she stomped away and out of the inn. I had to laugh a little.

"I'll see you at home, Delphine," I said, leaving the bar. "You three should get out and see the real world," I waved to the trio as I left the inn.
Back at Leaf Rest, Indra was removing her armor beside the bedroll near Esbern's bed as I walked up to her. As she pulled the long sleeve undershirt over her head, the layer below rolled up so far I could see the strong definition of her stomach and the muscles that ran over her ribs; almost the bottom of a breast... I didn't feel like looking away, and I think Indra was still too vexed to even care if I was or not.

"So, that was fun, huh?" I asked in mock cheerfulness.

"If that's your idea of fun," She replied, arching her eyebrows sarcastically as she placed the pieces of her reinforced robes on a desk. "Did you go to the inn to try your luck with Camillia again?" She asked.

"Am I detecting a hint of jealousy?" I smiled. She stopped putting on her Dunmer trousers to give me a death glare. "And no, I was looking for you. Where did you go off to?"

"I was in the woods, collecting alchemy ingredients for the past few hours," She replied. "Earlier in the day, I found out about the love triangle thing, and, as I was picking flowers, the more I thought about it, the angrier I got, so I went back into town to give those three idiots a piece of my mind."

"I thought picking flowers was supposed to be relaxing," I said, walking closer to her. "And what was that speech about love being sacred and whatnot?" I asked, smirking a little. This girl had struck me as being overly pragmatic and maybe even a bit cold, but to think she had a more romantic side was amusing. Perhaps Fevythe was right.

"Oh, Azura help me," She muttered. "I just don't think people should mess with other people's feelings intentionally, you know?"

"Just unintentionally, then," I replied.

"That's nobody's fault in that case," She shrugged, fidgeting with the string on her pants.

"Perhaps you're messing with my feelings," Is what I wanted to say, but I didn't. I only stepped a bit closer to her, and she looked back at me. There was something else in her intense violet stare.

"Hey, the fire is nice and hot," Esbern called out from around the corner. The two of us turned in different directions, pulling away from our conversation.

"Alright, thanks Esbern, I'll come cook the fish in a minute," I replied. "Hey," I said, turning back to Indra and grinning evilly, "fancy a bath after dinner?"

"Oh gods," She groaned, putting her hands in front of her quickly reddening face, "I thought you had let that go."

I just laughed and shook my head, then took off for the kitchen, leaving a highly embarrassed Indra behind, and re-adjusting my quickly forming erection once I was out of sight from her.
As we made the two-day trek to the Karthspire, Esbern regaled us with tales of Dragonborn heroes of the past, as well as those who had served them or contended with them. The paths we took zigzagged up and through the mountainous range, surrounded by rocky outcrops that matched the grey sky above us. Along with the magnificent view that stretched out all around us, the energizing fresh air made the trip even more enjoyable.

"The very first person to have been blessed by Akatosh was St. Alessia," The old Nord said as we walked along a dusty path strewn with scraggly junipers. I could hear Teldryn humming idly behind me as he often did, picking berries from the trees and throwing them in a small pouch, no doubt to flavour some food or drink that I would be surprised by later. "She led a rebellion against her slaving oppressors, and was even sainted by Shezzar, or Lorkhan, as you likely know him. Though, despite the fact that she had the blood of dragons, she was not able to absorb the souls of dragons."

"Really?" I asked, surprised. "I thought all Dragonborn had that innate ability,"

"Not necessarily," The old Nord replied, "there have been many variants of what we call the Dragonborn, and they have all been different in both their intrinsic abilities as well as their impact on the mortal world."

"Like who?"

"Well, I suppose Tiber Septim is the most famous of all the Dragonborn. Not only did he have great magical prowess, he was also a fantastic military conqueror, and united all of Tamriel. You may know him as Talos, now."

"Oh, yeah, the guy that the Nords love to lick the boots of," I muttered, still bitter about how his worship played a part in dividing this land.

"Well," Laughed Esbern, "don't be too quick to judge. You and Talos have a lot in common, you know."

"We may share a soul, or part of the soul of Akatosh, but I doubt I'm going to be involved in military conquest," I said. "I just want to get rid of Alduin and go home."

"Me too, Dragonborn," Esbern replied.

When we approached the cave that led to the temple, we were struck with the realization that perhaps part of the reason nobody had attempted to infiltrate or excavate the haven in recent years had to do with the copious number of Forsworn that made the outside of the cavern their home. Delphine was an excellent bladeswoman, and Esbern hadn't forgotten his magical prowess, and along with Teldryn and I, we found the means necessary for bypassing their encampment. Unfortunately, these means were nothing short of violent, but violence had become the status quo in my life, and I was becoming numb to its presence. Valor had adapted quicker than myself to this new lifestyle, ripping out the throats of unsuspecting men and women who dared raise a hand to him.

The grand structure of the temple had been carved into the core of the rocky mountains that
the Reach was well known for, the impressive entrance rife with puzzles and passages intended only for those with attention to detail. We finally came upon a sealed edifice located outdoors, at the highest point of Karthspire, and on it was the impression of a man's face. The sun had set by the time we reached the temple proper, and we began to produce various sources of light to look around at the courtyard.

"This is Reman Cyrodiil," Esbern stated, holding up a torch to the gigantic sculpture that I was looking up at with awe. Something about his face revealed an ancestry that was not quite human and not quite elf, yet not Khajiit or Argonian.

"Is that who the province is named for?" I asked, wondering what sort of incredible feats this man must have performed to have a region in his name.

"No, actually, "Esbern said, "he adopted the Ayleid surname Cyrod, for the province. He was the greatest hero to the Akaviri trouble, and also a Dragonborn, like you."

I began feeling insignificant again, but my thoughts on the unlikelihood of myself every leaving any kind of legacy behind were interrupted by Esbern's request for my blood.

"Wait, what?" I asked, thinking I didn't hear him right.

"I said, this is a bloodseal, and can only be opened by the blood of a Dragonborn. If you truly are what you say, then we will be able to access the temple." He replied, in a very matter-of-fact tone.

I walked over to where Esbern, Delphine and Teldryn stood, waiting and watching with anticipation. Kneeling at the centre of the spiral rock, I produced one of my daggers and, taking a deep breath, made a fine slice through the palm of my left hand, squeezing my blood onto the seal while Valor whined. Nothing happened. As I looked up to my three companions, panic and confusion starting to take a hold of me, the rock below me suddenly began to glow. Everyone looked at Reman's monument at the sound of stone grinding on stone and saw that it had swung backwards to reveal a hidden entrance. I stood up as Delphine and Esbern walked towards the temple, and Teldryn grabbed my hand, healing it and looking at me with amused disbelief.

"So, it is true. I sort of thought you were bullshitting me this whole time," He murmured.

"Well," I laughed, enjoying the vitality from his spell, "you haven't seen me inhale the soul of a dead dragon yet, so I guess this is all I can offer for now."

He unexpectedly produced an incredibly calm, warm smile before he spoke.

"There's plenty of time for that. I'm not going anywhere," He said quietly. His words and expression took me aback, and I just stared at him, unsure of what to make of his declaration of commitment. I looked back down to my hand, and realized his healing spell felt different than when Fevythe had healed me. Fevythe's restoration was warm and gentle, like the sand of a sunny beach, a cozy blanket, or a warm bath. The energy I felt from Teldryn was more intense, but deeper and farther-reaching, like the heat that radiated from white-hot coals, the strong wind that rippled the grasses of a vast field, or the pull of the tide under the moons.

"Indra," Delphine called out to me, and I snapped back to reality. "You should have the honour of being the first one to step into Sky Haven Temple," I saw a slight smile make its appearance on her face. "Dragonborn," She said.

I walked into the temple, and all at once the torches held within sconces that lined the walls
began lighting in succession from the entrance, all the way to the middle of the cathedral, allowing us to fully glean just how large the structure was.

"Would you look at that," Esbern said, now walking past me towards the large, black wall that was clearly the centrepiece of the temple, the rest of us in tow. "This is a story, no, it's history," He said, slowly working his torch over the contents of the engraved shale. Several minutes passed before he spoke again. "Yes, this is how Alduin was defeated in the past. See, here, the ancient Nords used the voice of the dragons to defeat him."

"How did they learn how to speak like dragons?" I asked, utterly confused. I thought dragons used fire and frost to tear apart their enemies.

Delphine replied, "That is something only the Greybeards can teach you. I think it's time you made the pilgrimage to High Hrothgar, and learn the power of the Thu'um."

"Will you please explain exactly what a Thu'um is, now?" I asked, still unsure about what I was supposed to be doing, and all the damn jargon wasn't making it any easier. "I thought dragons just summoned magicka from their mouths, or something."

"In a sense," Esbern said, "but they do so by using their own language. When dragons release a spell, really they're talking in their own language. You're going to have to learn the language in order to be able to speak as they do."

"This has something to do with having dragon blood, I assume?" I asked.

"Yes," Delphine replied, "you'll be able to learn the power of the voice much easier than others, but regular mortals are able to learn it as well. Like Ulfric Stormcloak," She said, and paused to gauge my reaction. Ulfric Stormcloak, the leader of the rebellion? How did he learn to speak like a dragon? Did he also have some strange connection with them? "It was Kynareth that was said to grant men with the ability to use the Thu'um, originally," Delphine continued after seeing me scowling in further confusion. "She was also the first one to go along with Shor's plans to create life on Nirn."

"Ha," Teldryn scoffed from behind us, amused by all the folklore, "you Nords and your convoluted stories. The Dunmer interactions with the gods are much more straightforward. Besides, we don't have as many to worry about."

"I think you just have your own versions of the same gods," Esbern said wisely. "Anyway, we should head to bed. You've got a long journey ahead of you, and Delphine and I need to figure out the best way to deal with Alduin's resurrected friends."

"So, let me get this right, we now have to go all the way back past Whiterun, around the fucking mountain and then up the fucking mountain?" Teldryn cursed as we ambled back down the Karthspire and out into the Reach the following morning.

"At least Delphine is letting us take Gulch," I offered as I untied the hardy steed from his post. We had loaded him up with the gear necessary for the hopefully uneventful ride to the small town of Ivarstead, before hiking up High Hrothgar.

"Well, we let them have Valor, for now, so I suppose it's a fair trade. I get to ride in the back this time," Teldryn said as he hopped up on the light brown mount, opening his hands before him and allowing me to take my position directly behind the horn of the saddle. He reached underneath my arms to grab the reigns as I steadied myself for the trip.
We made excellent time on Gulch and arrived in Ivarstead in only a day and a half. After we dismounted the tired, loyal animal and paid the stable boy to watch him for a few days, both Teldryn and I hobbled away from the horses, our backsides and inner thighs in excruciating pain.

"I need a break before we climb a mountain," I stated, rubbing my sore legs.

Teldryn held up his coin pouch and shook it, the few pieces of gold jangling around depressingly. "We also need to find some more coin. Our stash is getting excessively low."

"Enough for a night at least?" I asked, desperately in need of a bed and some food. Teldryn nodded, and we waddled into the Vilemyr inn.

Teldryn approached the bar. "May I get a room-

"Two rooms, please," I interrupted. He looked at me and I shrugged. "It's cheap here. We haven't slept in a proper bed in several weeks and I figured having some space to sprawl would be nice." I still hadn't told him about what happened in Solitude, and I just didn't want to complicate our relationship. At the time, I didn't realize that other feelings were holding me back, and I eventually regretted that I had been so aloof. If only I had shown him affection and desire, just a bit earlier.

I also wanted a bit of privacy to write home. That night, I pinned the letter to a missive board, indicating that my parents would pay the courier when they arrived in Raven Rock. I correctly assumed I wouldn't have time to wait around to pay the messenger myself.

Mist rose off the nearby stream as golden sunlight bathed the wide, dewy blades of grass. It was just past dawn now, and we stood outside the inn, admiring the quiet town.

"How do you propose we get our hands on more Septims?" I asked the sleepy Dunmer standing beside me.

Teldryn stretched his arms upwards and inhaled the morning air. "There are two ways to make coin. Honest work, and I'm including mercenary work under that definition, or theft. What do you feel like?"

"I don't want to take money from hard working folks," I said, a bit annoyed he would suggest something so crass.

"Well, what about the folks that are hardly working?" He grinned, motioning at a town guard who sat yawning and scratching his arse. "Go distract him, and I'll make off with his pouch."

I walked up to the guard as I saw Teldryn slink away behind the building near the tired watchman.

"So, get many bears around here?" I asked him, quite innocently.

"What? Why would you want to know that?" He asked, annoyed by my disturbance.

"I just saw a lot of beehives and wondered if it attracted the bears. I hear they love honey," I replied and I saw Teldryn creep out from behind the stone wall and approach the guard.

"That is true, but it's also a gross generalization. Bears will seek out beehives to consume not only the honey, but also the insects and their larvae as a source of substance. Furthermore, the main staples of the black bear diet are comprised of nuts, berries, salmon, small prey-" He continued to list off various woodland foods as I saw my accomplice snag the pouch. I nodded enthusiastically at the
strangely well-educated man as I backed away, thanking him for his insight.

Teldryn and I reunited near an old shack on the other side of the river. He smiled, holding up the guards stipend. "It's not much, but it will buy us some more food at the very least."

"Good job. I think we have enough rations to get up the mountain, at least. Hopefully the Greybeards don't mind feeding us. You ready for a little climb up a hill?"

A few devout individuals had scaled the first leg of the seven thousand steps, but as we climbed further towards the top of the mountain and the temperature plummeted, not even the most pious Nords were anywhere to be found. Various muffled complaints came from behind Teldryn's scarf as we continued to trudge through the ankle-deep snow.

"I'm too old for this shit..."

"All this walking..."

As the sunlight started to fade, we realized that we were nowhere near the top of the mountain and that we would have to set up camp somewhere along the mountainside. I started taking out my tent, but Teldryn stopped me.

"Do you really think that's going to stay put where you pitch it?" He asked, putting his hands on his hips. I swore I could see his snarky smile underneath his rough scarf.

"What, do you think I'm going to get blown off the side of the mountain or something?" I asked, annoyed at his apparent condescension.

"Well, it's a real possibility you know. Here, help me melt a dugout into the snowdrift here. I haven't seen any caves nearby, and this is the safest way to stay warm for the night."

"Huh, I hadn't heard of doing such a thing," I said, adding my flames to his as we worked to making a cavern big enough for two people.

"Here, shape it so that the entrance is lower down, and it opens upwards."

The small shelter was dark and cool, but quickly warmed up with the two of us huddled inside of it, each of us producing a small flame with our hands as we shuffled into our bedrolls, fully clothed.

"Where would you be if you didn't have me around, huh?" Teldryn gibed as he reached into his rucksack for some venison jerky and bread and handed some to me.

"Freezing, I guess," I said as I chewed the jerky, acknowledging that this was actually a pretty good idea. "Wait, a minute, where would you be without me?" I laughed, jabbing the elf in the ribs with my elbow.

"Wandering Nirn as a spirit, I suppose. Following you around and cursing you for not helping me," Teldryn said, wiggling his fingers. "Fuck yoooouuuuuu Innnndrraaa" He howled, pretending to be a ghost. I actually had to laugh at that one.

"Well, as long as you didn't drunkenly wake me in the middle of the night, I suppose I could tolerate it," I said, still smiling a little.

"What? When did I do that? Solitude?"
"Ha, you don't remember?" I asked, and Teldryn shook his head. "Yeah you busted into our room and you were trying to get changed, but you kept falling all over the place."

"Well that explains why I was so sore the morning after,"

"Then you woke me up to tell me you didn't light any candles because you didn't want to disturb me," I said sardonically, giving him a look of mock dissatisfaction, but I wasn't sure if he could see me in the dim light.

Teldryn just started chuckling. "Wow, I'm hilarious when I'm drunk," He said, and I could feel my bedroll shaking as he continued to escalate from titters to full out laughter. "Is that all I did?" He asked. I paused for a bit before answering.

"Yeah, that was all," I replied. "Anyway, let's get to sleep, I'm not sure how much further we have to go tomorrow."

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Chapter End Notes

Teldryn's traveling catchphrase
The tall roof of High Hrothgar appeared out of the blizzard near sundown, and we couldn't get to the heavy, embedded doors fast enough. We stepped into the vast, dimly-lit cathedral, and discovered it was not much warmer than the mountain, but at least there was no wind inside. As we brushed the snow from our hoods and arms, our eyes adjusting to the low light, a voice greeted us from the darkness.

"Welcome Dragonborn, it's been a long time," I heard him say.

"How did you know it was me?" I asked, quite impressed by the sharp wits of the old man who began to emerge from the darkness.

"We have awaited your return since the day your parents brought you to us. Not to mention, your eyes were a dead giveaway" The Greybeard smiled behind the shadow of his cloak. "My name is Arngeir, and I have the honour of instructing you in the way of the voice."

I bowed awkwardly to the man, and began unclasping my bag and sleeping roll from my back.

"We will show you to your quarters, then we will get started with the first lessons," He said, leading me by the shoulder further into the massive temple. "Your friend may stay here as well. I sense that you have a strong connection."

Teldryn and I glanced at each other briefly before following the old mage through the echoing corridors of High Hrothgar to a room full of small cots.

"For the time you will spend with us, you will be one of us. You will sleep, eat and meditate with us, and you will wear our sacred attire," Arngeir said, producing two sets of grey clothing.

What did I get myself into, I wondered, placing my gear beside an unused bed and removing my armor in the chilly air.

"You, too, elf," Arngeir said to Teldryn who shot me a panicked look. I shrugged and continued to put on the heavy grey robes.

The next morning, we returned to the main hall where the other Greybeards had now crowded around the stone floor illuminated by a skylight. Though the light was dull, I could see the flecks of dust that hovered in its beam.

"You have had many years to prepare," Arngeir began, "I assume you know how to shout, then?"

"I guess so," I said, unsure of what yelling had to do with anything.

"Please, then, demonstrate for us."

"Uh, okay," I said with uncertainty as I looked around at the eager faces of the devout old men. Did they really want me to just ...

I took a deep breath.
"AAAAAHHHH"

The silence that followed the echoes of my idiocy was like nothing I had ever heard before. Faces of anticipation had turned to shock, and nobody moved a muscle. The stillness was broken by a choking sound to my right and back. I turned around to see Teldryn was now having a conniption. Trying not to laugh loudly had forced him to double over and hold the wall in his inability to take a proper breath. I'm pretty sure I heard him cough a "hahahaohgodysouswithahaha" through his fit.

"Are you mocking us?" Demanded Arngeir, and I turned back to apologize.

"I honestly don't know what you want me to do!" I exclaimed, feeling stupid and flustered and annoyed. "I thought that just by being Dragonborn, there was something special about my voice!"

Argneir sighed in exasperation, but had the grace to offer an explanation. Bless that man's forgiving nature.

"A shout is using your Thu'um, that is, the voice of the dragons."

"If I have dragon blood in me, doesn't that make my voice the voice of dragons?" I asked, still confused.

I saw one of the other Greybeards slap his hand over his eyes and forehead.

"No, Indra, you need to speak in the language of dragons," Arngeir replied. "I am aware that you've already absorbed a dragon soul, and so you should have the ability to understand at least one word of the dragon language."

"What? I've never heard the dragon language before," I said.

"Here," Arngeir said, walking towards me. "One way to understand a shout is to experience the word firsthand." He took my arm and led me to the centre of the floor, beneath the sunlight. "If you are indeed Dragonborn, then you should have no problem withstanding the force of a shout that would tear through a regular man."

I stood nervously in the middle of the circle of Greybeards as Argneir made his way to the circumference. Teldryn had stopped laughing. Without warning, Arngeir and the other Greybeards released a barrage of strange words that rocked through the temple and almost knocked me off balance. It was as if my lungs were rattling around in my ribcage, and I covered my ears as they continued their assault in an effort to help drown it out, but the words continued to pummel me through my core. Eventually the sages stopped, and I opened my eyes.

This time, the Greybeards looked pleased.

"Do you understand, now?" Arngeir asked.

"...No..." I said flatly. What had I just experienced?

"Did you hear the words - FUS RO DAH?"

"I think so..." I said, somewhat unsure.

"Now, speak those words, putting what you just felt into your voice. It's no different than putting your magicka into the movement of your hands to create a spell. Ah, wait," Arngeir said as I started opening my mouth, "turn the other way, first, please."
Frowning at the Greybeard in doubt, I did as he asked and turned towards the other end of the temple, facing away from the Greybeards and Teldryn. What had I felt? It was something deep in my core. It felt like looking at an ancient relic during a windstorm, or pushing a boulder down a steep hill. I took a deep breath, trying to focus those feelings in my chest.

_FUS...RO DAH_

"Oh, holy shit," I said, as metal vases fell over, stone benches rattled and the walls shook with the force of nothing more than words that had escaped my mouth. "You weren't kidding, huh?" I breathed, looking back at the old sages.

"Despite your ignorance and inexperience," Arngeir said approaching me and laying a gentle hand on my shoulder, "you do possess the blood of a dragon, and now we must get to work if you ever want to live up to the legacies of those that came before you. It's time for you to truly learn the power of what it means to be Dragonborn." He smiled and turned to join the rest of the old men who had begun to resume their previous activities.

I frantically felt around my body, over and under the robes. Seeing as I was still in one piece, a new feeling washed over me. It was refreshing, as if I had awoken from an invigorating sleep. I looked over and saw Teldryn smiling at me. Whether he was amused or proud, I still can't say for sure. Perhaps both.

I spent the next week with Arngeir and the other Greybeards as they attacked me with various shouts, forcing me to endure the Thu'um before I was allowed to understand and learn it, yet being generous with the intrinsic knowledge they shared. They then showed me how to feel the energy of the words of the dragon language that were engraved in the stone tablets I brought with me, into something tangible I could produce with my own mouth. I finally understood the words on the strange plaques that had been sent with me as an infant, and learned that the amulets were ingrained with a power that was meant to enhance my abilities to speak as a dragon.

Teldryn seemed quite interested in my lessons at first, but eventually the novelty wore off and he left to peruse the old books scattered about the building, or work on his own magicka skill. One night, I found him sitting on a stone chair in a secluded hall, reading _The Book of the Dragonborn_ quietly by candlelight.

"You never told me your past lives were so interesting," He said, not looking up as I approached him.

"Does it bother you? If you decide to keep helping me, things will only get more deranged. I eventually have to fight the strongest dragon out there, and if you're with me..."

"I told you already, I'm not going anywhere." He closed the book and looked up at me.

"Why? I think you've more than fulfilled your debt to me." I walked closer to him.

There are a number of reasons. One, this is the most fun I've had in years, two, where else would I go?"

"That's only two reasons. Is there anything else?" I asked, sitting down beside him. I didn't know exactly what I was after, perhaps I only needed confirmation that he actually cared about me as a person, not just the Dragonborn, or the person that rescued him back on Solstheim. Most of all, not just somebody that had no choice but to be a servant and mistress to chaos.

He turned to me. "Perhaps," He said quietly, almost in a whisper. "What are your reasons for
keeping me around?"

I thought he wanted me to tell him it was because he was strong, efficient, clever, resourceful...Which I did. Were these not compliments? If they were, then why did he lean away from me after I showered him with with my acknowledgement of his virtues?

"You've just got such a good grasp of the world," I went on, "why would I not want you around? You've taught me so much already."

He hung his head in a quick bob, and smiled. "Thank you. I appreciate that." He stood up and bid me goodnight, then walked away without looking back.

Almost a week and a half had passed before I mustered up the courage to tell the Greybeards why I was really in High Hrothgar in the first place. It wasn't so much out of worship for the dragons and their voices, but a more pragmatic mission.

"Arngeir, I have something I need to tell you," I said as I approached the master during one of his meditation sessions. Despite his lack of acknowledgement, I continued. "Alduin has returned, and as the Dragonborn, I need to stop him. The ancient Nords used a shout to defeat him, and I think I need to learn it."

He stood from his kneeling position to address my concerns.

"And abuse the power of the voice? You've been influenced by Delphine, I assume," He said, frowning at me.

The expression on my face revealed everything to him.

"The Thu'um of dragons is not to be tainted by the worldly ambitions of man," He said, waving me away. "I forbid it."

He had raised his voice, which drew the attention of another Greybeard. Master Bolli had neared us and now confronted Arngeir in the language of Dovah. They debated back and forth in dragon tongue, dirt and small rocks of the temple falling about as their words agitated the stone. I managed to pick up a word or two.

Arngeir bowed his head and turned to me. "Master Bolli is correct. This is not for me to decide."

"Then who would make such a decision?" I asked, "I thought you guys were the authority on all things dragons and Dragonborn."

"There is one that leads us, that knows more than any of us ever could. It should be his decision to make, and you must solicit his wisdom if you wish to proceed," Arngeir replied.

"Why haven't I met this guy?"

"He doesn't live here. He lives at the top of the mountain, at the Throat of the World. Come, there is one more shout we must teach you if you wish to climb the rest of this treacherous mountain."

"Alright, let me just let Teldryn know and we-"

"No," Arngeir said firmly, "this is something you have to do alone."
After bestowing me with the gift of being able to clear the skies of winds and storms, I was sent to scale the remainder of the summit to Paarthurnax's abode, alone, equipped with nothing but my voice.

Back in High Hrothgar...

After Indra left to go further up that miserable mountain, I sat in the temple and ruminated on what she had said to me the previous night. While I was flattered by her compliments on my capabilities, ultimately her affirmations of my character just made me feel...nothing. I was fully aware of how well I navigated the world, many others before her had also made the same observations. It was like telling a pretty girl she was pretty; true, but ultimately pointless and superficial.

What I had wanted to hear was that she accepted me, because, well, I accepted her. It didn't feel like she was exploiting me. Traveling with her was like being with Voden again, where we could alternate between the gravity of battle and blitheness of downtime.

However, this time it was something I knew I could do for the rest of my life. Of course our lives were going to get more deranged, that was the point of all this. I was happy to welcome more excitement, and the thought of wreaking havoc across Tamriel with a passionate, fearless, attractive woman made me genuinely enthusiastic about the future, for once! For once, somebody helped me, and didn't ask for anything in return, and if that's not true friendship, then what was? I kicked myself for not just telling her that when she asked why I still hung around, but, I would probably end up scaring her, again. Would my usefulness to her eventually wear out, as it did with almost every other friend, employer, and family member?

I tried not to think more on the matter and made myself busy, helping sweep the halls of the temple as I periodically looked out the window to see if the little dragon had returned yet. The hours before she returned crawled by so slowly, it felt as if two days had passed. The Greybeards were not interested in banter, and they certainly didn't want to hear about the odd quirks of my former patrons. I was just finishing shaving my head when the doors that opened to the courtyard of High Hrothgar opened and Indra burst in, a violent gust of snow following her. Walking quickly to our cots, she began throwing off the borrowed robes, stripping down to her underclothes before she made it to her equipment stashed under her bed.

She was lacing up the front of her robes when she looked at me resolutely. "Go get changed. We're going to the College of Winterhold." I smiled. It was time for some more excitement.
"Gods, I'm never climbing a mountain again," Teldryn said, pulling his scarf from his face to his neck as we made the final descent down High Hrothgar and back into Ivarstead. The air was considerably more pleasant and humid, and even the afternoon sun seemed warmer than only a few minutes prior.

"What, do your knees hurt, old man?" I asked, though I was quite exhausted myself.

"Very funny. I'll have you know I'm in great shape for my age, which isn't even that old, mind you. I just don't like that much snow. There wasn't any snow where I grew up in Blacklight, and I swear to Azura I'm still not used to it."

"Really? I thought Blacklight was pretty far North,"

"It is, but the climate is different due to the mountain ranges that encircle Skyrim. You know those mountains are the reason Skyrim gets its name, right?"

"Oh," I said, blinking in realization. How I hadn't figured that out eluded me. "That would make sense. Anyway, we still don't have that much coin, and we're going to need some if we're going all the way to Winterhold. Think we could find some work here? Petty theft may not cut it, and it's kind of risky."

"Oh you're no fun," Teldryn said, pouting. "Fine, let's see if the barkeep can point us in the right direction."

After bugging Wilhelm at the Vilemyr inn, we learned that the only real way to earn some coin in the small town of Ivarstead was either hunting bears, chopping wood or farming. None of these seemed to appeal to Teldryn, who impatiently waited for the barkeep to stop talking before he pressed the man for more information.

"Come on," He said, "there must be more going on around here."

"Well, there may be," Wilhelm replied, "but you're going to think I'm mad."

"Try me," Teldryn said, leaning against the counter.

"Alright. I think the Nordic ruins Southeast of here may be haunted. I swear there's a ghost that torments our town, but nobody's been able to prove it, and no one has been brave enough to check it out."

"Well, sign me up!" Teldryn said, standing up straight. "I believe you. How much will you pay us for taking care of the problem?"

"I really can't pay you much, especially for the danger you may be putting yourselves in," Wilhelm replied, wringing his hands. "However, I could give you an item that you could sell elsewhere for a pretty Septim."

"Good enough," Teldryn said enthusiastically, "we'll be on our way, then."
Dusk was approaching as we walked through the quiet town towards the barrow. I could hear hens clucking in the small coops in the nearby farm as they pruned themselves before retiring for the night, as well as the buzzing insects that had started to hum near the water. The ruins were visible from the edge of town, and loomed in the distance on the rapidly dimming horizon.

"Are you sure it's a good idea to investigate the presence of a ghost at night?" I asked.

"Why, you scared?" Teldryn asked with a small chuckle.

"No, you ass," I replied, punching him in the back as he walked in front of me. "If the ghost is annoying the townsfolk at night, will it even be home now?"

"Doesn't hurt to check. I think this is the place," He said as we came upon the rounded stone structure. "Let's go inside."

The architecture of the barrow was similar to what I had seen back on Solstheim, underneath the bulwark, but it was far more intact and intricate. As we crept down a small, dark hallway, I thought I could hear footsteps in the distance that overrode our own near silent ones. Teldryn, despite wearing armor, was actually quite quiet when he wanted to be.

"Hey," I whispered, "do ghosts make any noise?"

"No, Indra, they don't, that's literally the definition of a ghost, they are silent as-"

"Okay, okay," I hissed, "I just thought I heard something up ahead."

We rounded the corner of a small alcove, and were suddenly face to face with the spectre of a Bosmer man, but we were separated by a metal grate.

"Leave this place!" The ghost cried, and turned around into the chamber where he was being contained, disappearing from our view. Teldryn and I looked at each other, something seemed...off. I had seen the real ghost of Voden, and this man didn't give me the same feeling.

"Well, there's our ghost," Teldryn said, putting a hand on one hip. "Hey! Ghost! Come back here!" He yelled. His request was met by silence. "Stop annoying people in town!"

"Let's see if we can get back there," I suggested.

Opening the grate involved pulling a series of levers in the right order, but when we entered the room, the ghost was nowhere to be found.

We made our way further into the crypt, and eventually came upon a locked door. Teldryn produced two slim rods of metal and began sticking them into the keyhole, crouching down to get into a better position for the fine coordination required for such a task.

"What are you doing?" I asked, bending over to get a closer look, my face directly beside Teldryn's.

"You've never picked a lock before, I take it," He replied, frowning at his hands in concentration.

"No, I'm not a criminal," I said crossly, folding my arms.

"Neither am I, you know that, it's just a useful life skill," Teldryn said, looking towards me, and I turned my head to face him, almost nose to nose. "Here," He said, turning his attention back
towards the lock. "This piece releases the pressure of the mechanism that holds the lock in place. Once that's done, this second piece turns the lock itself. Give it a try, I'll help you." He moved away from the door, holding the lockpicks in place for me.

"Okay," I said, taking the metal in my fingertips and squatting in front of the keyhole. I began probing around the inside of the lock, feeling the metal directly above the hole. Eventually, I felt it release upwards.

"Good," Teldryn said, "now put the other piece in, and gently turn it." I followed his instructions, moving the second lockpick ever so slightly. "Here, you need just a bit more force than that," The elf offered, kneeling behind me and putting his hands on mine, then turning the piece of metal a bit harder. He was looking over my shoulder, and I could feel him breathing on my neck. It was quite distracting...Suddenly, the lock clicked, and the door swung open. I turned my head to look at Teldryn, smiling with the satisfaction of learning something new.

"See?" He said, the both of us still kneeling on the floor. "Not that hard. You'll be robbing houses in no time,"

"I don't know about that," I laughed, "but at least robbing the dead will be that much easier."

"They probably have more money, anyway," Teldryn said. "People are funny that way,"

"They are," I said slowly, not wanting to move. As I was studying the strange expression in his eyes, he moved one hand resting on his thigh towards my face, brushing away the messy strands of hair that had escaped my braids. Just as a wave of warmth coursed through me, the throaty retching sound of a draugr jarred us out of whatever was about to happen.

"Good, I was itching for a fight," Teldryn smiled, standing up and unsheathing his sword. I took out my daggers, and we started down the hall where the sound came from. When we found the dustman lumbering towards us, I had an idea.

"Wait, I want to try something," I said, holding Teldryn back with one hand.

YOL...TOOR SHUL I shouted, blasting a plume of fire down the hall, lighting up the dark enclosure as it swirled towards the draugr. The undead being disintegrated into a pile of debris and broken armor in front of us.

"See? How much easier was that?" I asked, rifling through the warm ash for any treasures the nasty creature may have had on him.

"Well that was neat and all, but I really wanted to fight something," Teldryn complained, examining the ancient blade the draugr dropped. Just then, we could hear the mutterings of somebody likely speaking to themselves, directly up ahead.

"Maybe you'll be able to punch a ghost soon," I said as we walked towards where the sound was coming from. As we entered another room, the spectre we had seen earlier was wandering about, talking to nobody. When he caught sight of us, he immediately turned hostile and ran at us, weapon drawn. Teldryn held up his own sword and shoved it into the being who had run at him flailing in madness, and he collapsed in a heap, no longer a ghostly presence but very much a freshly killed, normal Bosmer.

"That's one of the stranger things I've ever seen," Teldryn said, bending over to look at the man as my eyes settled on a leather bound journal sitting on a stone tabletop. I walked over to the
desk and picked it up, skimming the contents.

"Well, this guy was up to some pretty strange stuff," I said, continuing to read the journal. "Apparently he was using some kind of potion to make himself look like a ghost, but the real reason he was down here was for some kind of treasure."

"Hmm, treasure, eh?" Teldryn said, looking around the room. "I don't see anything of much value here, but I did notice a set of doors right before we heard this guy's mutterings, perhaps there's something back there."

"Why don't we check it out, and then head back to the inn?" I suggested. "At least we can tell Wilhelm what all the fuss was about."

Leaving the dead Bosmer to rot in the ruins, we retraced our steps and found the booby-trapped door, which I was able to release with the newfound skills Teldryn had taught me. Opening the door revealed an extensive hallway terminating in a dead end that was engraved with the depictions of three animals.

"What do the animal symbols mean?" I asked, running my hand over the wall.

"Each of the animals represents one of the Nord deities," Teldryn replied, pushing his fingers into the crevices in an attempt to try and find a hidden mechanism. "Voden told me about them, though I don't recall what most of them meant. Anyway, I think this is a door of some kind, but I don't see how it opens. I've never actually been in a tomb like this before."

I pressed on the centre of the moth, and the curved tier it was on suddenly sunk into the wall, and rotated, revealing a different animal.

"I think this is how it works," I said, "but how are we supposed to know the right order?"

"Something tells me there's a missing piece to all this," Teldryn murmured, studying the sharp holes in the pattern below the animal symbols. "Damn! I was looking forward to getting my hands on something valuable. Well, let's get back to town and tell Wilhelm what we found, at the very least."

The innkeeper thanked us for our troubles, and apologized again for not being able to give us more than a sculpture in the form of a dragon's claw. Teldryn took it, frowning a little in some doubt at its worth.

"Hm, doesn't seem like much," He muttered, examining it. A quiet excitement then made its appearance on his face. "We need to get back to the barrow," He said, his eyes suddenly wide.

As soon as we had exited the inn, Teldryn conjured a candlelight spell and took off in a sprint towards the ruins. After a moment of surprise, I forced my tired legs to catch up with him.

"Can this not wait until tomorrow?!" I huffed, a few paces behind him and struggling to keep up. I silently cursed myself for making fun of his age earlier in the day.

"You're going to want to see this!" He panted back, still clearly excited.

We ran into the barrow, and headed straight for the ornate door, where Teldryn whipped out the claw, looked at it briefly and began pushing the animal totems, followed by inserting the tips of
the claws into the holes beneath the arcs. As he did, the entire wall began to move, sending clouds of ancient dust out of the way as it ground into the stone at our feet.

"How did you know to do that?" I asked, still out of breath.

"Look," He replied, holding up the claw, "the animals are the same as on the wall, it's the puzzle's solution. Now, let's get going. Despite the foul beings that I assume infest this place, I'm sure we'll find plenty of wealth to make it worth our time."

Aside from the draugr, the rest of the Nordic ruins were rife with traps and puzzles, designed to keep looters out as best as possible. These contraptions were something I hadn't come across on Solstheim, and I commented about the animal symbols that were engraved on many a pillar.

"Snake, eagle, whale," I said thoughtfully, looking at the pillars in a room with two doors. "I've never seen a whale in the sea of ghosts."

"Neither have I. Ah, there it is," Teldryn said, pulling a lever to open a gate. "I don't think Nords are particularly intelligent, these puzzles are always incredibly easy." Upon seeing the look on my face, he followed up his previous comment with, "right, sorry."

We made our way further and further into the crypt, eventually arriving in a grand room with a bridge on the other side, well-guarded with more draugr. Teldryn's atronach hurled firebolts at the undead as I fired arrows at the ones the dark elf wasn't active engaged in swordplay with. After lowering the bridge, we finally made it to what all the fuss was about - a single booby-trapped chest.

As Teldryn began working to unlock it, a strange feeling came over me as I looked over the ledge of the raised platform we were situated on.

"I think there's something important down there," I said, walking towards a stairwell.

"This right here is the most important thing down here, I can assure you," Teldryn replied, still working away at the lock.

"No, I can feel something else here,"

"Very empirical of you. Ah, there we go. Oh yes, that's quite the haul," Teldryn began announcing the contents of the chest, stuffing the items in his rucksack as he pulled them out one by one, but I wasn't paying much attention to him. I continued to walk towards the curved stone wall, recognizing the writing as I did. As I drew near, the words reached out to me as they had in High Hrothgar, and for once I was able to understand something related to my birthright without the help of another. By the time the words had sunk in, Teldryn was standing beside me.

"Kyne," I said, feeling the peace flow through me.

"Huh?" The elf grumbled. "Oh, right, more Dragonborn stuff I take it. Anyway, there was a shitton of gold in that chest, not to mention a bunch of gemstones, soul gems, and this necklace."

"Oh, that's garish," I said, looking at the amulet. It was made of a thick, beaded cord with animal teeth that hung off it, the central pendant a rectangular golden token.

"How could you," Teldryn gasped, "I procured this specifically with you in mind, here," He proceeded to grab my arm, whirling me around so that I was facing away from him, then placed the ugly necklace over my head in a gesture of mock romance.
"You shouldn't have," I drawled, though I felt different wearing it. It was likely enchanted, though I had no idea with what.

"You can keep it," Teldryn laughed, "we've got more than enough coin now. Let's head back to town and get some rest before we go North."

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Chapter End Notes

TBH this was a bit of a filler/development chapter, but there was a reason for including it which will make sense in a while. Like a pretty long while...like two volumes from now while lol. I know Kyne's token isn't found in the barrow, but it's again another set-up piece.
Chapter Summary

Indra and Teldryn make the trek to the College of Winterhold in pursuit of an Elder Scroll, where they run into an old friend.

"So, an Elder Scroll is like a time portal that you can look into and see what happened in the past, but it's in the form of a book?" Teldryn asked, leaning back in his chair, one legged casually crossed over the other. The combination of the warm dining room of the inn, the soothing dim candlelight and the food and drink had made me sleepy and unable to focus on the task at hand.

"Sort of. I think so? I don't know," I scrunched up my face and looked back at the mug of ale on the table in front of me. We had reached Windhelm in a few short days after making the climb back down High Hrothgar, and now sat in Candlehearth Hall, much to the ire of some guests. I figured Teldryn was no longer nervous about being recognized in this city, or if he was, perhaps he had faith that I would defend him on the subject.

"Your wisdom never ceases to amaze me," Teldryn drawled as he rolled a gold Septim along his knuckles, one of many we had taken from Shroud Hearth Barrow. I could see the corners of his mouth turn upwards in a slight smile.

"Oh, piss off," I laughed, rolling my eyes at him and snatching the coin from him, my fingers inadvertently brushing against the top of his hand. He just chuckled and took out another coin and resumed his parlor tricks. His sarcasm and general disregard for normalcy was no longer a nuisance to me, and I didn't even feel a twinge of annoyance when he dropped shady comments such as that one. In fact, it was his general tomfoolery that had allowed me to lower my inhibitions and start to become a somewhat fun version of myself. I hadn't thought it possible until I messed with Brynjolf back in Riften. I wondered if any of my less eccentric personality had influenced his thoughts or feelings.

"Why are you staring at me like that?" He asked, bringing my attention back to reality. He had stopped rolling the coin and was now eyeing me suspiciously.

I shook my head, suddenly realizing I was probably smiling at him like a crazy person.

"Nothing," I said, "I'm just tired. Let's get to sleep. We should be able to make it to Winterhold by tomorrow afternoon."

When we approached the college, an Altmer woman was standing at the main gate, welcoming those who wished to enter the school.

"Hello," She said, some reservation in her greeting, "can I help you?"

"Maybe," I said, equally as aloof. The only other Altmer I had dealt with so far were the Thalmor, and her apparent apprehension at my presence immediately put me on edge. "We want to get to the college."
"Oh, excellent," She said, her eyes lighting up a little. "May I ask, for what purpose?"

"Why are you being so suspicious of us?" I snapped, frowning at her.

"We just wanted to see what books were available here," Teldryn said, putting a hand on my arm.

"Sorry for being so wary of you," The woman replied, "it's just that a lot of people really aren't happy with the history of the college, and often come here just to walk in and verbally assault us all,"

"Well, we only want to inquire about some ancient magic related issues," Teldryn replied.

"Alright, I believe you," The Altmer said, "but just to make sure, could you both please demonstrate some magicka for me?"

I crossed my arms and rolled my eyes. "Really?" I asked. She looked a little taken aback.

"Not a problem," Teldryn said, gripping my arm now. "What would you like to see?"

"Anything is fine, as long as it's relatively advanced."

Teldryn conjured an atronach as expected, and I summoned a lightning storm and focused it on the rocks below where we stood, shrapnel exploding off the side of the cliff. I knew going as far as casting a master spell was excessive, but I kind of wanted to scare her a bit.

"That's great," She said after seeing our spells in action. "My name is Faralda, and I'm one of the instructors here. Come, follow me, and I'll take you to the college."

Teldryn nudged me and gave me a questioning look as we followed Faralda across the bridge, and I realized that I needed to let go of any preconceived notions I had about her. She hadn't been rude, and only seemed interested in the pursuit of magicka knowledge. I was no better than the mob of Nords that had thrown my companion in prison if I continued to hold any form of prejudice towards the Altmer. As we walked through the main gates of the magnificent college, I heard Teldryn quietly start to make a comment about the campus, and braced myself for a smartass remark. He delivered, as expected.

"Wow, so this is the fabled college of Winterhold?" He asked rhetorically, then, in his best village idiot impression, followed with a low, "uh-may-zing".

I discreetly kicked him in the calf, but couldn't stop myself from snickering along. The old me would have been furious that he dared disrespect a historical monument.

"Indra?" I heard a voice call to me, and I turned around to see who here could possibly know my name.

"Fevythe?!" I exclaimed, running up to him and jumping into his arms in a warm embrace. We caught ourselves at the same time and backed away from our hug, slightly embarrassed.

As we studied each other, I saw Fevythe's gaze look past mine, and he suddenly turned a deep shade of purple. Teldryn approached us with what I can only describe as a triumphant smile, and Fevythe began to shuffle so he was standing slightly behind me, staring at his feet the whole time.

I looked at Fevythe, then at Teldryn, and back to Fevythe.
"Why are you acting like a young maiden in love?!" I demanded, but he said nothing as Teldryn continued to non-verbally gloat about something I didn't know about at the time. "That aside," I continued, "what are you doing here?"

Fevythe came back to his senses, but still couldn't look Teldryn in the eye.

"I enrolled a week or so after you left Raven Rock," he replied. "I wanted to improve my healing skills, and also learn how to grow as many beneficial plants as possible. I took a ship all the way to Winterhold and have been here ever since. I've learned so much already!"

"That's really good for you," I said, and I meant it. I was genuinely happy for him, and glad that he had taken it on himself to brave the trip to Winterhold to pursue his passions.

As we continued to chat, a young Breton woman wearing black robes with red accents approached our group. I was immediately overwhelmed by her beauty, and stood staring at her, mouth agape. I looked over at Teldryn, and he was doing the same. Her long, silky black hair was slightly curled at the ends, and framed a perfect oval face with bright green eyes that resembled those of a cat. She had light freckles that ran across the bridge of her button nose which sat above the defined lips of a pleasantly curved mouth.

"Oh, hi, Vivlyn. These are my friends Indra and Teldryn, they're from Raven Rock," Fevythe said, so casually I couldn't believe it.

"Hello!" She smiled. She was friendly too? "It's so nice to finally get to meet someone from Fevythe's home town. I'd love to stay and chat, but I'm on my way to investigate some strange magical disturbance with Tolfdir. I hope to see you again sometime! Hey, Fevythe," She added, "could you give me a hand selecting some good plants for health and magicka potions?"

"For sure, let me just catch up with these guys first."

She smiled and nodded, walking away towards an older man who stood waiting for her.

"Don't let us impose on your life," I said, holding up my hands.

"Oh, it's okay. Vivlyn won't mind if I chat a while. What are you doing up here?"

I lowered my voice before I spoke. "Dragonborn stuff," I replied. "I need to find a really rare...academic item,"

"You'll want to talk to Urag in the Arcaneum, then," Fevythe offered, "he knows so much about Nirm and legends and magic. He's truly incredible." I thanked him, then urged him to go help the two mages prepare for their trip.

"I'm surprised you didn't propose to that Breton girl on the spot," I joked to Teldryn as we started to walk towards the main hall. "She's gorgeous!"

"Don't think I didn't consider it," he laughed, "but you'd have to be blind to not realize she only has eyes for your old flame."

I turned around to look at them. Teldryn was right. The way she was smiling at him, lightly touching his arm as he obliviously pointed around at various plants in the garden of magical flora. Sadness suddenly cut through my heart, but I was also overwhelmed with joy. Fevythe deserved nothing but the best, and at the same time, I realized I needed to let him go. Our life together was over, and it would never be as it was, again. If I ever found myself with anybody else, they would have to be someone that could keep up with me, who wouldn't be afraid of what my life had in store.
"Someone like Teldryn..."

I stopped walking. I was such a fucking S'wit. Fate had handed me the perfect partner on a silver platter, but I couldn't see past my own expectations and hangups. I smacked my forehead with an open palm.

"What?" Teldryn asked, turning to me, "Did you leave the oven lit, or forget your petticoats on the drying line?"

It was too late now. I had brushed him off far too many times. I had scolded him like a child.

"Teldryn..." I said apprehensively, my heart thumping at an accelerated pace, making my palms sweat and my stomach pleasantly ill. He looked at me, confused as to why I had suddenly become sombre, but I continued to speak. "When I was about to rescue you from the Sea Tiger, Geldis thanked me for giving a shit about you, because apparently not many people have," I said, still somewhat nervous.

"Wow, thanks Geldis," He said, rolling his eyes. "Where did this come from all of a sudden?"

"I just wanted to tell you, that, I do actually give a shit about you," I blurted, the words coming out on their own as my mind filled with epiphanies that barely kept up with what I spoke. "I wasn't just saving you for the sake of Raven Rock," I said, "after I got to know you, I wanted to help you, and I'm glad that I did,"

He blinked quickly in sustained confusion. Several moments passed before he was able to formulate words again. "I'm glad that you did, too," He said, then cleared his throat. His posture relaxed, and he regained his composure. "Of course I'm happy, I'm alive thanks to you. Not only that, I managed to fall into the lap of the most interesting person in all of Nirn," He said with a casual smile that I didn't return.

"Have you only stuck around as long as you have because I'm the Dragonborn?" I asked, not caring if anybody heard me this time.

Teldryn couldn't think of an answer, his mouth stuck open in wordless silence.

"Nevermind," I muttered, looking at the ground and walking to the main doors.

"Obviously I don't have an Elder Scroll," Urag said, eyeing me suspiciously, "but, I can tell you that the last known man working on such a topic used to be here before he went mad. He then isolated himself in a cave in the ice fields north of here- BE CAREFUL WITH THAT!" The Orc suddenly yelled at Teldryn, who had been casually tossing a bag of enchanting dust up and back into his hand, and now dropped it in surprise. It opened with a magical poof and dumped its contents all over a desk in the middle of the Arcaneum. Urag stood up and grabbed the dark elf by the collar, telling us it was time to leave. He had no intentions of entertaining anybody that disrespected his workplace in any manner.

Students and faculty alike were sprinting from the main hall through the front gate when we reached the bottom of the stairs. We looked through the doors and saw more mages looking upwards as they conjured atronachs and let loose fire and ice, stopping occasionally to hide behind the stone pillars around the courtyard.

That's when I heard it, the otherworldly scream that sounded like metal grinding against stone, and a fiery explosion rained down on the college as everyone fled for protection. Teldryn had
already begun rushing outside and I followed closely behind, taking out my bow. This one looked similar to the dead dragon in Whiterun; greenish brown scales, red eyes, massive black claws on its feet and wings.

I began firing arrows at the beast as it stumbled around the courtyard, smashing stone benches and trampling the gardens. After becoming frustrated with the attacks from all sides, it lifted back into the air, leaving us to cover our eyes from the debris that flew at us from the gust created in its wake.

I could see Fevythe running around and healing the injured. The Breton woman and elderly Nord man had not left yet, and Vivlyn was an impressive sight; she switched between conjuration and destruction to restoration and back, unleashing spell after spell.

The dragon flew in another circle around the college and landed back in the courtyard, knocking everyone off balance with the force of its mass. The mages had come together to launch a simultaneous attack, but they needed an opening. I decided to try something new. Running around the courtyard so I could see the face of the dragon, I readied myself. It looked at me, almost as if it knew who I was. I saw it begin to inhale, inviting me to participate in a debate. I spoke first, as clearly and powerfully as possible.

*FUS ... RO DAH*

It recoiled, the fire from its voice shooting upwards without harming those on the ground.

"NOW!" I heard Vivlyn yell. Everyone launched their most competent attack at the beast. I could see Teldryn's atronach wind up a firebolt as he shot the creature with flames. Dropping my bow, I added my lightning and after a few seconds, the dragon collapsed in a heap in the middle of the college, its huge red eyes still open. It began to glow.

"Oh, no," I muttered to myself, hurriedly picking up my bow and scrambling to get far away from my disintegrating kin, but it was too late. The same strange energy poured through my back as I stood facing away from it, completely frozen.

The dragon had evaporated and everyone began pointing and murmuring to each other. It was fortunate in a sense that my first public appearance as Dragonborn was in front of a group of academics; they did not yell, bow down to me or faint, they only quietly discussed the potential meaning and ramifications of what had just happened. I stared around at the curious crowd as they began to draw closer. I had to say something.

"I-" The word squeaked out, and I cleared my throat. Teldryn stood behind me and put a hand on my shoulder. This time, I spoke clearly.

"You may have heard of an old Nord legend that says there is a living person who has the blood of a dragon," I began, somewhat shakily. "It's no legend. The dragons are returning to Skyrim, guided by their leader, and they wish to enslave you all. I'm...I'm doing what I can to figure out how to get rid of him, but until then, you'll need to be prepared for more attacks like this one. Please...please tell your loved ones, friends, passers-by, anyone, that there is still hope left in the world, and that this too will pass," I swallowed then looked around at the mages as they contemplated what I had said.

"I'll help you with whatever I can." I heard Urag say from behind me as he walked away from the main hall. "I'm sorry for doubting you, Dragonborn."

He held out a small turquoise and gold cube, and handed it to me.
"This was entrusted to me by Septimus Signus," He said. "All I know is that you need to go to a place called Alftand. Look there for the Elder Scroll you seek."

We rode Gulch from Windhelm to Riverwood to regroup at Leaf Rest and try to see if Esbern's collection of maps had any indication of a place called "Alftand".

Teldryn said next to nothing to me while we camped on the way back to the cozy house. I figured I had scared him off by insisting he tell me why he wanted to remain by my side. He was like an eagle after all, always flying from one place to the next, and I had no right to try to pin him down. Once the fight with Alduin was over, if I survived, our partnership would be over.

After I dropped my gear beside Esbern's bed, I wandered through the halls and found Teldryn sitting on the floor by the kitchen hearth, the recently lit fire still weakly orange.

"You know," He said, not looking up at me, "even though I've seen you kill a huge Orc in a blind rage, clear a path through mountainous fog with your breath, and absorb a dead dragon's soul, all I can see is the young girl who was a huge pain in my ass back on Solstheim." He started to smile, still looking into the flames, and I sat down beside him. He sighed. "What I'm trying to say, is that even if you're the Dragonborn, that doesn't change anything between us, because I knew you before you had to take on this burden," He turned his head to me. "Does that answer your question as to why I keep hanging arou-"

I didn't let him finish as I lunged forwards, wrapping my arms around his dark shoulders, and kissing his tattooed, purple lips.
The thought that I had once considered Indra frigid became laughable following the events at Leaf Rest. After she made the first move, I began kissing her in return, wrapping my hand around the back of her neck and lightly grasping her hair. Every now and again, she would pull her tongue from mine and lightly bite one of my lips. Each time, it sent a shiver down my body and I felt my cock twitch as I groaned in shock and desire. She suddenly pushed me onto my back, straddling me and gently nibbling my neck and ears as she ground her hips against mine, hovering slightly above me. Typically, this extent of straightforward assertiveness only came from men, and I was a bit taken aback.

"Ah, so you do like me, then, huh?" I asked, running my hands up and down her midsection. "I wasn't sure." We were both down to our light cotton underclothes, and the thin fabric did nothing to hide the feeling of her lips spreading over my full erection, sliding up and down its length every time she rocked back and forth.

"Did you not get that from what I said to you at the college?" She asked, running her hand through my hair as her face nuzzled into my neck. Her breath was slightly ragged now.

"Well, I knew you at least didn't want me to die anytime soon," I said, laughing a little.

"Teldryn, not now," Indra muttered, grabbing a handful of my mohawk and pulling just hard enough to warn me to stop joking around too much. She took everything so seriously.

"Alright, I'm sorry," I said, placing two fingers on her jaw and moving her face towards mine. "I like you too," I said quietly, leaning up for another kiss as she pushed her hips down onto me again.

While I relished her fiery enthusiasm, I wanted to control the pace a little myself. I moved my
hands from her waist downwards and grabbed her ass with two hands, rolling her underneath me and firmly thrusting my pelvis against hers. She arched her back and moaned, wrapping her legs around my back and we moved together as I continued to kiss her, leaving marks on her neck.

I moved my hands to my sides and pushed myself up, away from her face. She relaxed her legs as I moved my head towards her stomach, lightly grazing exposed skin with my lips and shimmied her cotton pants off far enough for me to press my tongue against her wet and pleasantly fragrant mound. She looked down at me with those intense violet eyes as I started low, and licked my way up to that firm little pearl, and began teasing it, flicking it over and over with the tip of my tongue. I alternated with the periodic full tongue lap across the rest of her swollen lips as she breathed heavily and let out soft moans. I loved doing this to women, they were so cute when they squirmed in pleasure, and they never tried to take more than I offered, as men often did. It was even more satisfying knowing how stern Indra was outside of the situation, but now she had completely surrendered to me. She had thrown her head backwards and began shaking as I continued the assault. I could feel her muscle contractions along my mouth and jaw, and as she cried out, I was suddenly...soaked?

"Oh shit," She panted, "I'm so sorry. That's only happened, like, twice,"

I just stared at her and pulled the bottom of my shirt up to wipe my face.

"I didn't think that was a real thing," I said breathlessly, even more turned on now than a few seconds ago. She turned an adorable shade of maroon. "No, don't be sorry," I smiled, "I love new experiences,"

She was suddenly a bit sheepish as I urged her top off, taking a firm breast in each hand and lightly pinching her nipples as she ran her own hands up and down my back, occasionally digging in her short nails when I kneaded her a little too hard. I removed my shirt and she reached up to lightly massage the muscles around my neck. Suddenly, she firmly wrapped a hand around my throat and gave me a deliciously evil smile as she simultaneously rubbed her other thumb along the ridges of my hard tip and my breath hitched in surprise.

"Come on," Indra said, her eyes half closed as she blushed up at me, "don't keep me waiting."

"Yes, patron," I laughed, untying the drawstring of my shorts.

Without much elegance, I pulled down my own pants just far enough to free my desperate cock as she completely removed her own bottoms. I held her under the small of her back, and as I thrust inside of her for the first time, she caught her breath and looked back at me, enveloping my body in her muscular legs and arms as I planted kisses on her cheekbones, jaw and neck. After a minute of closeness, she suddenly pushed me by my chest away, then yanked herself from our embrace. She rolled over onto her hands and knees, smiling at me as she raised her ass up, and then backed into me, hips swaying as she got into position. I put a hand on her flank and guided myself back into her velvety warmth.

"Got bored of seeing my face?" I asked, starting to thrust slowly. This method never let me last long, it was always much too overstimulating, with anybody.

"Ha," Indra panted, pushing back into me, "no, I just really like it like this,"

"Hm, me too,"

I found myself thrusting harder and harder from behind, spreading her cheeks with my hands.
The thought of doing exactly this had passed through my mind on a number of occasions, and now that I finally had what I wanted, I started to get a bit carried away. Indra had put her head down in submission, and began letting out a high pitched moan or yelp with every thrust.

"Oh, you're a screamer, huh?" I growled, slightly out of breath now. I took a handful of her hair, and gently pulled back her head so I could see a bit of her face.

"I'm-" *Gasp* "I'm sorry. I can't help it. It feels so good. I've wanted this for so long," Her words sent me over the edge, and she muttered an "oh, fuck!" as I painfully stretched her with each pulse of my throbbing come, moaning hard into the back of her neck.

I rolled onto the floor beside her as she slowly extended her legs out to lie flat against the warm hardwood planks, both of us gasping for air, but reaching for each other.

"Ah, my fuckin' knees," I complained, rubbing the sore spots as I turned to Indra, who had started to curl up against my chest, and I put an arm around her. "What did you say about wanting that for a long time?" I asked cheekily, still breathing hard.

She turned purplish-red again and laughed a bit before she spoke. "Remember when we were sharing that bed in Solitude, and you got really drunk?"

"When I demonstrated my abilities as a true master of stealth?" I replied.

"Yes, then. I didn't tell you the rest of what happened. Halfway through the night you rolled over and lifted me up into that position and sort of dry humped me, muttering about wanting me. I kept thinking about it afterwards, wondering what it would be like,"

"Shit, my apologies," I replied, "I don't have any recollection of that and it's never happened before. Well, not that I know of at least."

"It's okay, you let go after I asked you to, like a perfect gentleman," She said, then lifted her shoulders up and leaned her head over my face, kissing me softly. "Actually," She continued with a smile, "I said to you 'how about later' and, well, here we are."

"I also have a confession," I declared. "That morning after I accidentally caught you in the bath over there," I nudged towards the hotspring, and Indra hid her face in her hands. I gently pulled them back to see her reddening cheeks, it was a bit too fun to lightly torture her like that. "I wasn't up early because of the fresh air. I was up because I was so damned horny. I think I got myself off three or four times between when I went to bed and when I saw you in the kitchen the next morning."

"It was just so genuine, you were really enjoying yourself and I found your enthusiasm...invigorating. I wasn't joking when I thanked you. I was sort of hoping you'd take my comment as an invitation, but I was also under the impression you didn't feel that way about me at all."

The redness in her cheeks faded, as did her smile. "To be honest, I didn't, at the time. I thought you were kind of a scary person and I figured you didn't have any interest in me, sexually. I warmed up to you after I saw more of your true self in Solitude." She smiled evily again and began to get up, taking my hand in hers. "Now that things are different, would you like to recreate our first night here?" She asked, and I grinned as I followed her to the bathing room.

The next morning I sat up in the comfortable, wide bed and looked down at my sleepy dragon. Her dark, coarse shoulder length hair, now slightly lightened by the sun, was out of its usual
braids and flowed over the pillow. She held her arms up and almost over her head, as if she was surrendering to someone. Her small mouth was slightly open underneath her somewhat bulbous nose. I found her to be such an oddball; so serious and tough, yet somehow simultaneously too sweet for this world.

I quietly put on my beige Dunmer attire and walked outside to get some fresh air. It seemed as if the whole house smelled of our acts. I hoped Esbern wasn't coming back anytime soon. My thoughts were interrupted by a courier running up to me.

"You Teldryn?" He asked and I nodded. "Do you have any idea how hard it was to track you down? They told me you'd be in Raven Rock, but your friend there said you were in Skyrim. Fortunately your companion wrote home about where you stayed over sometimes, so I was finally able to figure out where to go." He handed me the post. "At least this message was fully paid for, with a bonus, in advance."

Who would prepay for a letter they were sending to me? I thanked the man and received the heavy message from him.

Opening the envelope, I took out the weighty paper and squinted to see the seal. I immediately recognized the insect insignia, and my hands started to shake as I opened the letter. I must have read it over and over at least ten times, not being able to believe the words that were written. My heart started beating faster, and I became giddy with excitement. Suddenly, I thought of what this meant for my commitment to Indra. I took a deep breath and made the first poor decision of many to come.

She would never see this letter.
Layers

Chapter Summary

Indra and Teldryn locate the Elder Scroll.

Chapter Notes

Also, you may have noticed I'm trying to expedite the process of getting through the main storyline because, while these events need to be told, I'm super pumped for the next volume of this series and am sort of looking forward to finishing this one, just so I can start writing part 2. I promise I'll get back to this story and improve it.

I guided Teldryn down the hall and led him into the hotspring, where I stopped and turned around, wrapping my arms around his neck, pressing my lips against his. Despite the pleasure he had given me not only ten minutes ago, I wanted more of him, and I wanted to reciprocate. I slowly released him and backed away to the stone bench where it all started. Sitting down, I lay back and extended my legs, pointing my toes and reaching my left arm behind my head, holding the metal grate of the enclosure. I began running my middle finger up and down the length of my slit, closing my eyes and pretending he wasn't there.

"Need some help with that?" I heard him ask, and I opened my eyes to see him approaching, growing more erect as he drew closer.

"Maybe," I said slowly, "but the only thing that gets me off is having my mouth wrapped around a nice hard cock. Think you can manage that?" I said, somehow keeping an almost completely straight face.

He smiled and stood in front of me, grasping my hair in one hand and offering his now full erection in the other.

"Will this do?" He asked quietly, equally amused. I gave him a smirk before I began to lick the underside of his swollen tip, lightly running my fingers down his shaft and cupping his sack every couple of strokes until he was groaning in frustration.

I then teased him with almost painfully hard suction around his tip, looking up at his half-closed, red eyes, as he moaned and sucked in air between his gritted teeth. I took him fully into my mouth and slowly started bobbing my head, gradually letting my throat adjust to his presence. He noticed when I was comfortable enough, and began thrusting his hips against my face, still holding my hair. I continued to finger myself as he used my mouth for his own pleasure, and I became more and more turned on the harder he pushed.

"I thought you were so young and innocent, I didn't realize you were this...corrupt," Teldryn murmured, his grip in my hair becoming tighter. His words and the way he growled at me in
satisfaction sent a shock through my core. Suddenly, I was coming hard in the way that I was used
 to, my moans muffled by his cock sliding in and out of the back of my throat hard enough now that I
 started tearing up a little. The additional sensations of vibration must have driven him over
 unexpectedly, as he hastily pulled out of my mouth. Before he could aim elsewhere, he released the
 majority of his load all over me. The first spurt went directly into my eye, the next on my mouth and
 half of the third on my chest. He squeezed out the last few drops as he put a hand on my shoulder for
 balance, buckling slightly, then opened his eyes.

 "Shit, sorry," He panted, sloshing over to the entrance to grab a towel. I just looked at his
 bare ass and started laughing, washing the stuff off in the water. He turned around to see my
 amusement, and then found himself also acknowledging the absurdity of the situation, sharing in my
 entertainment. Still chuckling, he sat down beside me and put an arm around my waist as I leaned my
 head on his shoulder.

 "That was fun, thanks," He said quietly, starting to drift asleep.

 "Well, I owed you one," I replied in jest.

 "I think I've still got one up on you, but I'll pay you back tomorrow," Teldryn yawned. "Let's
 have a proper bath and head to bed."

 I was disturbed by something jolting me in the middle of the night, and woke up to Teldryn
 spastically moving an arm or leg, as he whimpered "No, stop," in bursts. It sounded as if he was
 dreaming of being back on the Sea Tiger. I turned to face him and wrapped my arms around his
torso, like I had done when he was in fever and chills near Morthal. He let out another "No," but
 began to relax back into a normal sleep.

 The next morning I rolled over and patted my hand around the other side of the mattress.
 Realizing it was empty, I opened my eyes and pushed myself out of bed. I had finally gotten a good
 night's rest for the first time in weeks. Padding down the small hallways, I eventually found Teldryn
 in the kitchen, sitting at a chair. He seemed nervous.

 "You alright?" I asked, worried he regretted what had happened between us.

 "Just a few things on my mind," He said, sounding normal. He stood up and walked over to
 me. "Nothing to do with our next move."

 As he kissed my forehead, I wrapped my arms around his waist, under his arms. I thought his
 odd demeanor had something to do with the nightmares from a few hours ago, and let it go. He then
 offered to grab some necessities from the Riverwood trader and make us a late breakfast as I scoured
 the contents of the storage containers scattered about the various rooms of Esbern's abode. I took a
 break from the monumental task to braid my hair into its usual style: one embedded braid on top, and
 two loose braids on either side of my ears. Not wanting to continue searching, I picked up the
 Greybeards' scrolls and began reading through the dovah language, finally understanding the
 sentences by piecing together the words that I had picked up. After completing what I felt was
 enough lexicon practice, I turned back to Esbern's papers.

 Eventually I found a dusty stack of large sheets of parchment. Among the files were rolled up
 maps of various provinces including Morrowind and Elsweyr. I found a map of a region I had never
 seen before, but after studying the various locations, I saw the name Alftand pop up. This wasn't
 Skyrim, so where in Oblivion was I supposed to go?

 I brought this mixed news to Teldryn, who was chopping carrots at a counter.
"I have good news and bad news," I stated, loosely holding the map. "I found Alftand, but it's not in Skyrim. Look," I held out the sheet.

He scowled at the map for several moments before asking me to retrieve a map of Skyrim. When I returned to him, he took both sheets of paper and lay them flat up against a window, adjusting the overlaying map of Skyrim to fit the odd one. Suddenly, his efforts became clear to me as I realized the strange geography of the unknown map lined up perfectly with a good portion of Skyrim.

"I thought the name sounded familiar," Teldryn said, making the final small adjustments to the map alignments. "I read about this in one of the Dwemer Inquiries volumes that focused on Vvardenfell and Red Mountain. This is a map of another world that sprawls beneath our own," He turned to look at me, "It's called Blackreach."

"Wait," I said, "I found myself in an underground cavern in Solstheim, when I was escaping Glowstone. I know that it was where the Falmer were last seen, but I didn't realize there was more to it."

"As far as I understand, it stretches across all of Tamriel, perhaps even Nirn." Teldryn turned back to the maps and asked me to hand him a piece of charcoal. "Here," He said, marking the spot on Skyrim directly above Alftand, "this is where we have to go. I'd suggest we bring a few more layers of clothing for this trek."

"Alright, if we pack today, then we can leave tomorrow, right?" I yawned.

"I could use another day of rest, and some time to prepare would also be good." Teldryn replied. "Besides, that gives us more time to make use of a proper bed," He smiled, taking my hand.

"Hey, I thought you were making us food," I laughed.

"That can wait," He replied, standing behind me and guiding me with his hands around my waist as he ushered me down the stairs.

"Alright, just don't burn anything. And stop poking me in the back!"

Chapter End Notes

Even though I enjoy writing dirty scenes, I also wanted to contrast it against the actual meaningful bond they share (that Teldryn may or may not take for granted), which I guess is also recapitulated in uninhibited sex.
Chapter Summary

Teldryn is anxious about the letter he received.

Other than our trip up the mountain, the journey towards Alftand was by far one of the most miserable treks Indra and I had done together. Perhaps what made it more so were the damn words on that letter, driving me crazy with their promises. Fortunately we had little else to do but trudge through the snow, shielding ourselves against the raging blizzards, or finding a cave or a snowdrift to dig for shelter, and I could let my mind wander. Why now? Why, when my life was going relatively well, did the opportunity for my life to be even better, arise?

Each night after Indra went to sleep, I stayed up, looking at the paper I had folded and unfolded at least twenty times by now. It was everything I had ever wanted, it would make everything right again. Though I had forgiven them, I had not forgotten, and it pained me every day knowing how easily they turned their back on their own family. It was their fault my mother and I had become homeless. Their fault I had been indoctrinated into the Morag Tong, their fault I had become a killer for a living, and their fault for sending my life into a place where, when I finally had peace, it was ripped out from me, again. Though, I suppose, in the end, it was truly my fault, and the fault of my mother.

I looked down at Indra, sleeping in the light of the fire we had built in the dank, cold cave near the river. Her being in my life represented adventure, excitement, the unknown; but what about creating roots, where did that come in with her? Settling down? She was young still, and likely had many years left of Dragonborn missions left before she even thought of such things. That is, if her life would ever even give her a chance to rest. I had seen enough of Nirn, and yearned to be home again, or at least somewhere I could call home, for real, forever. I leaned over and kissed Indra's forehead, and she stirred awake. I put the note away.

"Hm, what are you up to?" She asked, stretching her arms out from under her bedroll.

"Nothing, just having trouble sleeping," I replied, lying down and then rolling over in my own bedroll to wrap my arm around her hips.

"Something on your mind?" She yawned, searching my eyes for a clue.

"Just thinking about home, is all," I said. It wasn't a complete lie.

"Will you ever tell me about your childhood?" Indra asked, rolling over to face me.

"One day, perhaps," I replied. Whether she ever found out or not would be determined by the choices I would make in the future. Could I tell her, now, what could happen, what my plans may be? Or would that just distract her from her mission of saving the world? When I thought of it that way, my problems seemed insignificant in comparison. I wouldn't bother her with my inconsequential matters. Besides, it would make it that much easier in the future.

"Alright, I can wait," She said, shuffling closer towards me to give me a brief kiss. I pulled
her back in for more, and reached into her bedroll to start lifting off her shirt. For the time being I was her helper, her travel companion, her teammate. It wasn't as if I never had this kind of relationship with previous patrons, and my time with them would also eventually come to an end, whether with their death, or at my dismissal. So it went, and so it goes, though the sex was always a nice bonus. Yet this felt different, somehow...

I looked down at Indra shivering slightly in the cold, her purplish nipples hard in the light of the campfire. I removed my own shirt and covered her with my body, and both of us sighed with our shared warmth. She shimmied her own pants down and off, and I pushed myself into her, despite our lack of foreplay. She inhaled sharply.

"Sorry, wasn't ready for me, I take it?" I said, slowly working my length in.

"You owe me after this, then," She replied, her laugh turning to a moan as I started moving between her legs, also smiling. She pulled me close to her, and kissed my neck. "But it's alright," She breathed into my ear, "you always feel so good as it is,"

I just kissed her cheek and wrapped my arms underneath her back.
**Blackreach**

Chapter Summary

Indra and Teldryn travel to Alftand to find the Elder Scroll, and bring it back to the Throat of the World. Teldryn meets Paarthurnax, who senses something nefarious in the elf. Jarl Balgruuf agrees to set a trap for Odahviing, with the promise that the Dragonborn will assist Whiterun in the civil war. Esbern and Delphine also have a few stipulations of their own.

Covered from head to toe, we walked up through the snowy pass, holding Gulch's reins as he carried our gear. We had decided to abandon riding him any further due to the unpredictable terrain and blinding snow. The trek here was by far one of the most difficult we had made as the climate here forced us to either stay in rank caves or carve out our own shelter in the snowdrifts.

"There's nothing here!" I exclaimed, looking around at the barren snowfield.

"We're not quite there yet!" Teldryn yelled back through the gusts as he pulled out the map. He pointed to the sheet of parchment, then off into the distance. "It should be over there!"

I couldn't see five paces in front of me, and trying to find some kind of hidden passage to an underground world seemed futile. The storm reminded me of my climb to the Throat of the World, and a new thought came to me. If I was able to clear the weather that came down the mountain, then why not the weather that came down from the sky? I stopped walking and pulled down my scarf as I looked upwards. Teldryn stopped and narrowed his red eyes at me in confusion.

**LOK ... VAH KOOR**

The snow began to gradually let up, bit by bit, until only a few large flakes drifted downwards, zigzagging across the now brightly lit day. I smiled like an idiot and pointed up at the sky, then back at myself. Teldryn just laughed and turned around to find we had arrived at what appeared to be a town built into the cliffs of ice.

"How did you know about Blackreach?" I asked Teldryn as we made our way deeper and deeper through the ice tunnels towards the unknown.

"I told you, I read about it. I did receive an education before I was on the street, as well as after. A group of trained assassins aren't necessarily ignorant."

"Quite the opposite, I would imagine, seeing as the Morag Tong only deals with political issues, no?"

We had exited the glacial caves and were now walking through tunnels that were of Dwemer construction. Blackreach must be close by, I thought.

"I suppose that's true. Wait, what was that?" Teldryn crouched at the sound of a clanking in the nearby spacious room, and I followed suit.
"It's probably one of the Dwemer metal creatures," I whispered, "they don't like fire or sparks."

We stealthily rounded the corner and another sound came into the mix. It was a grumbling, like someone clearing their throat, but as if it were directed at another person. We then saw the source of the noise; a steam powered sentinel was fighting what appeared to be a hunched over man. Taking in the feral movements and guttural squawks of the humanoid, we realized it was a Falmer. The fight ended in a draw as the Dwarven creation stabbed the Falmer through the heart, just as the twisted elf smashed the guardian's central core piece to bits.

"To think the Falmer are loosely related to the Dunmer sends shivers down my spine," Teldryn said quietly as we walked past the two dead beings and through the door that lead us to an amalgamation between the dark cavern I recognized from Solstheim, and the Dwemer architecture. The gate had been opened, and two of the largest steam powered guardians I had ever seen lay in heaps of scrap metal on the platform across where we entered. We could hear raspy breathing as we neared a strange podium, with colours that matched those of the cube Urag handed to me. We found that source of the noise; a heavily armored Redguard woman lay bleeding to death on the other side of one of the many columns that surrounded the podium.

"Leave this place," She gasped, "while it holds great treasures, it is also filled with nightmares."

I knelt in front of her, retrieving a flask from my satchel, but Teldryn stopped my hand, saying she was too far past saving. "What nightmares?", I asked, "The Falmer?"

She looked at me desperately, "Find the tower," was all she could utter before she became still, her eyes still open. Her hand relaxed and a small golden sphere rolled out of it. Teldryn picked up the sphere and looked at it thoughtfully. He stood up and looked at the podium, then placed the sphere in an impression. We could suddenly hear the sounds of machinery below us coming to life, and the stone blocks of the floor around the podium began dropping, revealing a spiral staircase leading downwards. At the bottom of the stairs was a golden door, and we pushed it open into Blackreach.

We stood atop a stone platform and looked out across the turquoise illuminations of the vast underground world. The air was warm and moist, and it was so quiet, but not peacefully quiet. It felt like being suffocated underneath a blanket. My claustrophobia was enhanced by the strange white flecks that lightly hovered in the air. They looked like the ash created by embers of a fire, but never seemed to land on us.

"I don't see a tower," Teldryn said, squinting into the darkness.

"What is that orb over there?" I asked, pointing at what looked to be an oversized lamp in the middle of what appeared to be a stone fortress, at least a kilometre in the distance. "It seems important."

We slowly crept towards the large centrepiece, ever alert for feral elves and Dwarven animunculi. After we had climbed the stairs to the middle of the fortress, directly below the orb, a door opened and a crowd of people poured out. They were filthy and wild, wearing tattered clothing and wielding strange weapons.

"Who are you?" I asked, holding up my hands in peace.

"We serve the Falmer," One of them rasped, "and if you're here to harvest their ears, you're going to have to get through us first,"
"What? We don't want their ears, and we won't hurt you or them, I promise," I said, "I only want to find a tower,"

The vagabond relaxed a little at my words, but still seemed suspicious of me. "If you're referring to the Tower of Mzark," She stated, pointing in the direction of two waterfalls, "no one has entered that place in centuries."

"I'm going to try," I offered, a bit troubled by this new information. "I'm only trying to help the world above. I mean you no harm, I swear it,"

She seemed confused, but spoke. "The only other people that have come down here are only interested in killing the Falmer and taking bits and pieces of them. The poor snow elves have been through enough, and deserve protection," I nodded in agreement. "Take this charm; the Falmer will not attack you if you hold it. I can't say the same for the Dwarven monstrosities though," She laughed hoarsely, "and if we get any word that you lay a hand on a Falmer, know that it will mean your end."

Walking away with the strange string of bones and curled black leather, I looked at Teldryn as we shared the same thought: there were some people mad enough to serve such a vile race as the Falmer. Yet, perhaps, they may also have been some of the most empathetic people I have ever come across.

We reached Mzark and found that the traps set within its halls had remained untouched for millennia, dust collecting on the rusty metal. The only set of doors opened to a magnificent chamber with hovering plates that were the same shade of turquoise as the cube. A line of podiums similar to that which opened the staircase to Blackreach sat atop a stone platform, and an identical cube to the one I held was in an impression on one side, leaving the other impression the cube in my possession. The podium lit up, and pressing the buttons changed the alignment of the large translucent plates.

After I spent several minutes haphazardly pushing buttons in any sequence, trying to see what each of them did, Teldryn eventually lost his patience and moved me aside to solve it himself. He had been watching the directions in which they shifted, and figured out how to align them just so, so that the light pouring in lined up with the gems embedded into the ground, and the strange tube in the middle opened up, revealing its contents, ancient air seeping out of its enclosure with a small hiss.

"Well, it's a huge important-looking scroll," Teldryn said flatly, "I suppose that's what we're after?"

I just shrugged. "I hope so, because we're taking it with us," I said, figuring there wasn't much else to deal with down here.

"Now that we have this, where do we go?" Teldryn asked as we rode the lift back to the surface.

"Back to High Hrothgar, I'm afraid," I replied morosely, fully aware of what Teldryn's reaction would be. He let out an exaggerated groan as he looked upwards, bending his knees and drooping his arms like a moody teenager. Despite feeling exactly the same way, I was a bit annoyed as I adjusted the stupidly heavy document on my back. "Hey, I don't like it either, but I told you already, if you don't want to keep doing this, you're free to go anytime," I said, crossing my arms.

He stood up straight and walked towards me, holding back a smile.

"It's alright," He said, unfolding my arms and taking my hands in his, "like I said, this is the
best adventure I've had in years, and I plan on seeing your tasks through to the end," I detected a hint of sadness behind the smile which followed his words, but I assumed it was because he was thinking of the future, and was concerned about becoming bored with me after all this. Despite this quirk, he leaned forwards and kissed me deeply. We were interrupted by the bright light that shone in through the gate exiting the lift. After we reconvened with Gulch, we began riding back to Ivarstead, where I sat in the front as usual, clutching the Elder Scroll to my body throughout the whole trip as Teldryn helped keep me balanced from behind.

While we made camp at the southernmost region of the Pale that night, I thought about the woman we came across. Teldryn was setting up his own tent beside me, coughing occasionally. Perhaps he had caught a slight cold from the weather.

"Why do you think that Redguard was searching for the Elder Scroll?" I asked.

"It's probably quite valuable," Teldryn replied, "some treasure hunters will go to great lengths to get their hands on something that will guarantee they're set for life."

"Seems like a big gamble," I said, "I think I'd rather have a steady source of pay than trying to win some kind of lottery,"

"I think desperation makes people act illogically," Teldryn replied. "Anyway, let's get to bed. We've got out work cut out for us."

After some deliberation, we decided it would be best to take Gulch with us up the mountain this time, as carrying the Elder Scroll was not a particularly welcoming idea for either of us. Despite having a horse to relieve us of our physical burdens, this did not hasten our progress up the mountain, as we were required to tread carefully and lead the stallion through secure footing, then keep him out of the wind at night. We managed to reach the temple without any event, but also without any physical contact between Teldryn and myself.

"May I come with you all the way up the mountain this time?" Teldryn asked as we set our belongings down in High Hrothgar, preparing to stay the night.

"That's not for me to decide, you'll have to ask Arngeir," I said, changing from my armor into the Dunmer outfit I always kept on hand.

"Let's go find him then, shall we?"

We didn't manage to make contact with the Greybeards until dinner time, when we gathered around a large stone table with the High Hrothgar residents to eat a simple plain meal. After we had finished and helped clean up, we approached Arngeir with this inquiry. He was sitting by a fire and let out an exasperated sigh before taking some time to think. Eventually, he turned to us.

"I sensed you had a strong connection with the Dragonborn when you both first arrived here, and it seems as though that connection is even stronger than ever, for whatever reason I do not know," The old Greybeard said as we did our best to not laugh. "I believe you have an important role to play in the life of this woman who has the burden of being kin to the ancient ones," He continued, and Teldryn's face tensed. "So, I will allow it. But don't blame me if Paarthurnax disagrees."

Arngeir rose from his chair and bid us goodnight, then slowly walked away, down the corridor to the stone beds to turn in for the night with the other Greybeards who were already asleep, I thought about what Teldryn's facial expression meant. Was he that afraid of commitment? My
thoughts were interrupted by the elf grabbing my hand and leading me to a dark corner, holding the back of my head as he aggressively kissed me in the shadows.

"What are you doing?" I whispered, looking around anxiously, "I'm pretty sure this is against High Hrothgar rules,"

Teldryn grinned through the dim light. "As if you were always one to follow rules," He said, "besides, how many people do you think have been able to do this, this high up?"

"I just think you don't want to hurt your knees on those stone beds," I laughed.

My quiet snickers turned to shudders as he slid a hand under my shirt and gently thumbed a nipple which hardened under his touch. He forced one of his legs between mine, pushing his length into my hip as his mouth met mine. Picking me up by the thighs and using the wall for support, he thrust into me and we quietly moved together, our lips remaining pressed together the whole time, lest we made any noise. Even if we did have to go our own separate ways eventually, at least we could enjoy this time, for now.

"You didn't tell me the leader of the Greybeards was a bloody dragon!" Teldryn hissed as Paarthurnax landed on the rocky outcrops at the Throat of the World.

"Whoops, yeah, I might have left out that detail," I whispered back. "Sorry," I shrugged.

"Drem yol lok, dovahkiin. Wo los this?" (Greetings, Dragonborn. Who is this?)

"A friend, he's been loyal and helpful, and I trust him enough to have brought him here."

The wise old dragon studied Teldryn through one of his large, clouded eyes. He then turned his full attention to the dark elf.

"Hi. Hi kos deeply troublaan. What kos hi hiding?" (You. You are deeply troubled. What are you hiding?)

"He says you are troubled and that you're hiding something," I said. Teldryn looked panicked, but I replied for him, assuming I knew the problem. "He has family issues that still bother him," I stated, looking at Teldryn somewhat apologetically. "He's been through a lot of other shit as well, I suppose."

"Hm, tol aal kos ful, Nuz am zu'u correct wah assume hi dreh Ni intend Nau betraying fin dovahkiin?" (Hm, that may be so, but am I correct to assume you do not intend on betraying the Dragonborn? )

"Of course not!" I exclaimed, thinking of how much the man had done for me already, and how earnest his words of commitment were. "That's not even up for debate. Here," I said, taking the heavy scroll from my back, "is what we need."

"Geh. Hi must read thdro artifact het. Kos wary though, fin possibility do going mad los real." (Yes. You must read this artifact here. Be wary though, the possibility of going mad is real.)

I took a deep breath and opened the scroll.

When I came to, I was aware of a cacophony of noise that had infested the otherwise peaceful peak of the Throat of the World. Paarthurnax and another dragon were shouting at each
other through the clouds, Teldryn was yanking my arm and dragging me to safety behind some rocks as his atronach threw firebolts at the sky.

"What's going on?!" I cried, frantically looking upwards.

"I don't know, but after you read the scroll, that huge black dragon appeared and tried to attack you. The other dragon has been holding him off!" Teldryn replied, conjuring another firebolt.

Shit. Shit shit shit. That must be Alduin, I thought.

"Stay hidden," I said to Teldryn, "I mean it, this isn't just some small monster."

I ran out into the open and could hear Paarthurnax yelling at me to use what I had learned from reading the Elder Scroll to stop Alduin. I looked up at the great black beast and...

**JOOR ... ZAH FRUL**

When Alduin landed, it was like looking at chaos and darkness and evil all at once. If I killed him and absorbed his soul, all that would become part of me, too. I dodged his attacks as best I could, running from one rock to the other as he rained down explosions and rocks and fire. Teldryn conjured atronach after atronach that unleashed flame spells, barely hurting the beast. Paarthurnax and I used the power of our Thu'um over and over, but he still stood, and managed to lash out at me with his tail, sending me into a group of jagged rocks. Realizing I wasn't getting up and sensing Alduin was getting weak, Teldryn disobeyed my requests and ran from his cover position. Just before Alduin could turn and grasp him in his teeth, the crazy elf stuck his sword directly into the dragon's neck. The great black dragon stopped moving and dropped his head. Was he dead? It seemed so, but soon he came to and merely shook his huge, horned skull, and proceeded to fly away as if nothing had happened.

"Where did he go?" I asked Paarthurnax, groaning as I rubbed the back of my head, struggling to stand up. Teldryn seemed concerned about my injuries for once, and helped me up.

"Sovngarde," Parthurnax replied. "Rok fen feast Nau fin soulle do fin dilon. Perhaps, if hi can tempt gein do ok allidro voth hin zul, fin od ah fen take hi wah rok" (Sovngarde. He will feast on the souls of the dead. Perhaps, if you can tempt one of his allies with your voice, the snow hunter will take you to him.)

"Then we'll head back to High Hrothgar to learn how to do that. Thank you, Paarthurnax," I said, the feeling of desperately needing to fulfill my duty overpowering the searing headache.

"Kos careful, ahrk tinyaak vahzah, leh odahviing believdro hin zul beneath alduin." (Be careful, and speak true, lest Odahviing believes your voice beneath Alduin.)
Arngeir seemed worried about teaching me how to call Odahviing, yet also considered it to be one of the purest of the Thu'um; a dragon speaking to another dragon, and was thus otherwise happy to oblige. We took the conflicting news about Alduin back to Sky Haven Temple, where Delphine and Esbern still remained, working on how best to eliminate the remaining dragon threats.

"I learned dragonrend," I declared with excitement as I approached the two, "but Alduin got away. He went back to Sovngarde to recuperate. The only way to get there is for one of his accomplices to fly me there, but how can I talk to him long enough to convince him?"

"You know," Esbern said thoughtfully, "Dragonsreach was built with the purpose of trapping dragons in the great balcony. I doubt that infrastructure has been dismantled, but you will need to convince the Jarl that your intention is worthwhile." He stood up. "We will accompany you to Whiterun to help you convince Balgruuf, but there is one stipulation."

"What would that be?" I asked, happy to help with whatever it was they needed.

"You must kill Paarthurnax."

I was shocked. The old dragon had been nothing but helpful, and had agreed with me that this world should stand.

"Why? He's on our side."

Esbern shook his head. "You may not know this, but Paarthurnax once served Alduin directly. He committed horrible atrocities in previous wars, and must face justice."

I needed time to consider what this meant, but agreed to take on the task, for the time being.

"Another thing," Delphine now spoke up, "we are working on reforming the ancient secret group that has served to destroy the dragon menace throughout history. The Blades will work here, in Sky Haven Temple, and I need you to send me any recruits you deem worthy. If you can agree to this, I will also come with you to Whiterun."

Figuring that was easy enough, I nodded in accordance with this caveat as Delphine and Esbern walked to their separate bedrooms.

"Teldryn," I turned to the dark elf, who was absorbed in thought. "Would you like to join The Blades?" I asked, somewhat humorously.

He waved away my offer. "No, I'm sorry. Honour and glory isn't my preferred method of payment."

"I haven't paid you, either," I laughed.

His voice took on a serious tone when he replied, "You've given me much more than monetary wealth."

"What are you talking about?" I asked, "Are you calling me a prostitute?"

"Azura, no. I meant friendship," He replied, laughing a little now.
"I think we're a little beyond just being friends," I smiled.

"I mean," He sighed, "you've shown me what it truly means to care about someone other than yourself. I had forgotten what that was like."

"I was only helping you," I replied, walking up to him and wrapping my arms around him in a warm embrace.

"I know, but it means a lot." He said quietly, putting his chin over my shoulder. At the time, I couldn't figure out what had gotten into him, as he wasn't one for outward feelings, sentiment or nostalgia.

Jarl Balgruuf recognized me when I approached him, but his face turned dark when I revealed my birthright.

"Do you know how many freeloaders have come in here saying they're the Dragonborn, and demanding coin or royal protection in exchange for their service?" He asked angrily.

Esbern was the first to defend me. "She speaks the truth, and together we are what is left of the organization of The Blades. The threat of dragon attacks is present all throughout Skyrim, and Whiterun is no exception."

"It's true, my Jarl," Irileth spoke up now. "As you know, we defeated a dragon at the Western Watchtower. Who's to say they won't attack the city directly?"

Balgruuf's face tensed as he considered this information. "How do I know you are who you say you are?"

"I could give you a demonstration," I offered and Balgruuf nodded.

Not wanting to destroy too much, I looked up at the chandeliers and let loose the first word of unrelenting force. Despite how much of the Thu'um I attempted to reign in, I still managed to send the metal structures flying in their hangers, extinguishing the flames and scaring everyone in the palace.

"What are you doing here, then?" Balgruuf asked as the guards settled back down again.

I took a deep breath before revealing the plan. "I need to trap a dragon in the balcony. After all, it was designed for that, wasn't it?"

"Why in Oblivion would you want to do that?!" Balgruuf cried, his eyes widening in surprise.

"If I'm going to defeat Alduin, I need a dragon to take me to him."

To my surprise, Balgruuf nodded, fully aware and respectful of the Nord legends. He stroked his beard in consideration before replying.

"I could let you do that," He said slowly, "but there's a great risk to my people involved. My stance on the war is currently neutral, and if I slip up, either the Imperials or Stormcloaks will rush in to take Whiterun for their own." I understood his position, and deflated at his words. "However," He continued, "if you could promise me that you will serve and protect Whiterun in the oncoming war efforts, I will allow you to use the balcony."
Having no stake in the political crisis as of yet, I agreed to his demands.

"If I were to call the dragon now, would you be prepared?" I asked, ready to get the plans underway. I was as prepared as I ever could be; I had my weapons, some potions, Dragonrend and other shouts...What else did I need to know?

Irileth spoke up. "I need to rally my men, but we have just as many soldiers as we did when we took down the dragon at the watch tower."

Everybody in the room stood and began moving towards the balcony. Irileth was shouting to her men as Delphine and Esbern nodded to each other and joined Balgruuf. Teldryn stopped me as The Blades and a handful of Whiterun guards filtered through the great doors.

"Are you sure about this?" He asked, concern in his face and words. "There's no going back once you get on that dragon, if he agrees with you."

I smiled. "You told me once that nobody is ever ready," I said, taking the hand he held on my shoulder. "But I've unknowingly trained my whole life for this, and I'm as sure as I ever could be."

"What if you die?"

I chuckled nervously, "Then you won't have to be upset for long, because the world will be over soon enough."

He didn't laugh. "It's not funny,"

"Teldryn, I'll be fine." I reached up to kiss him. "I'll see you on the other side either way, right?"

He hesitated, but nodded.

Slowly releasing his hand, I walked to the edge of the balcony and looked up into the sky. I turned around once more to look at Teldryn. We had come so far together, and I looked forward to his company after this was all over. I would defeat Alduin, not just for the world, but for us. Taking in a deep breath, I called the Hunter.

_OD ... AH VIING_
Farewell

As Indra, Teldryn, Irileth, Balgruuf and an assortment of guards stood along the massive balcony, weapons drawn, their ears attuned to the howling wind outside, a screeching cry could be heard throughout the skies before they were able to see its source. Over the horizon, the figure of the great red-winged beast appeared as promised, his silhouette rapidly drawing ever closer.

"Which gein do hi summonne zu'u?" He yelled, scanning the large group of tiny mortals as he flew by, moving his great neck about, trying to identify which of them dared to be so bold.

"Zu'u dreh, fin Dovahkiin!" Indra yelled back, running from cover to confront the dragon.

"Ahrk what makdro hi believe hi kos bahlaan wah call fin od viing ah?" Odahviing cried, soaring higher again, but not out of range.

JOOR...ZAH FRUL

The red dragon let out a cry of surprise as the wind beneath his wings suddenly turned to stone, and he came tumbling down onto the balcony, but was nowhere near defeated. Teldryn, having lost his sword in Alduin's neck, only had his magicka to help bring this creature to submission, and blasted the beast with flames. At the advice of Paarthurnax, he worked alongside the guards, knowing it meant Indra would ride off into Oblivion, and probably die in the process, though he tried to push these thoughts from his mind.

Indra ran to the back of the balcony as Odahviing began charging towards her, clearly angry at her impudence.

"Ha! zu'u see hi siiv something thought lingrah gone," He growled, one taloned wing crashing down in front of the other as he crawled further into the balcony.

"Geh, ahrk dragonrend fen viik hi ahrk alduin," Indra replied.

The guards standing by now pulled the levers, springing the trap on the enraged beast. A wooden yoke fell onto his neck, rendering him immobile. Though his head and jaws remained free to shout and lash out, he did not, as the overwhelming agony of shame clouded the clarity of the words, and stayed his tongue.

"My...eagerness to meet you in battle was my...undoing, Dovahkiin. You went through a great trouble to put me in this humiliating position," The dragon said quietly.

"I need to find Alduin," Indra replied, walking closer to Odahviing. "Are you still loyal to him?"

The hunter took his time considering this question before he was ready with an answer. Even the most fearsome and war-hungry of the dragons were still not ones to blindly believe the world around them, nor take anything at face value.

"Many of us have begun to question Alduin's lordship, whether his Thu'um was truly the strongest. Among ourselves, of course. Mu ni meyye. None were yet ready to openly defy him. One reason I came was to test the power of your Thu'um. I see now that the world-eater has a great adversary."
"Is it true he's hiding in Sovngarde?"

"Geh, I suppose Paarthurnax told you where our leader slunk away to. He resides in the Nord land of the dead, growing stronger as he devours the sillesejour. Mortals can enter Sovngarde through the portal in Skuldafn," Odahviing said, his eyes narrowing, knowing his words were meant to tantalize the young Dragonborn.

"I need to go there, tell me where that is," Indra said, desperate for information and the next steps she would have to take, as always.

"Hm, you have the Thu'um of a dovah, but without the wings of one, you will never set foot in Skuldafn. Of course, I could fly you, and only you, to the place where the living cross into the palace of death. But not while imprisoned like this. If you let me go, and you defeat Alduin, I will serve you."

Indra stood in contemplation as she stared back at Odahviing, thinking long and hard as Teldryn leaned up against a pillar, watching eagerly from a distance. All at once, his patron turned from the dragon and ran up the stairs leading to the trap's mechanism controls, where a guard was posted. He could see her arms flailing about as she clearly was arguing with the man, trying to persuade him to do something. After several minutes of back and forth that he could not hear, the guard pulled the lever, releasing the dragon who stretched and began to saunter back to the edge of the balcony. Teldryn stood up straight in surprise, readying his hands with more magicka.

"What are you doing?!" Irileth cried, running to meet Indra as she reached the bottom of the stairs.

"Tell your men to stand down," The Dragonborn replied, "he's going to take me to Alduin." As the Dunmer housecarl strode away, shouting commands to the Whiterun guards, Indra walked over to the man who had come so far with her. The man who was once nothing but a stranger causing problems in her home, their paths crossing by chance. "I have to go now, and I have to go alone," She said, holding a hand to his cheek, and he touched it with his own.

"Right, of course you do," Teldryn replied. "When it comes to the worst possible enemy, I can't follow you," He said sadly, though part of him was relieved.

"I think it's for the best," She said, "if you got trapped in Sovngarde..."

"Ha!" He laughed, "I doubt they'd let me stay. The Nords would probably throw me back to Nirn before they'd let a Dunmer into their afterlife."

"You know what I meant," Indra smiled, pulling him in for a hug. "I shouldn't keep Odahviing waiting." She looked over her shoulder.

"Go on, then, leave me here," Teldryn said casually, trying not to reveal his distress. He placed two fingers on her jaw and turned her face back to him, kissing her goodbye. Many other patrons had been sent off in the same manner, and none of them came back, either because they were dead, or they did not seek him out again.

"I'll see you soon," Indra said, patting Teldryn on the shoulders then turning and walking to the edge of the balcony where Odahviing awaited her. She mounted the dragon, and lifted an arm to wave to her friend as the dragon beat his great wings and took off into the cold, grey air.

Teldryn waited until they were far from sight before he left Dragonsreach through the front doors. As he reached the exterior of the Whiterun gates, he stopped and looked back for the last time.
"I'm sorry, Indra," He said quietly to no one.

He then made what we could eventually come to realize was another poor decision. He turned around and hired a carriage to Windhelm.

Translations

Which gein do hi summonne zu'u? "Which one of you summons me?"

Zu'u dreh, fin Dovahkiin "I do, the Dragonborn!"

Ahrk what makdro hi believe hi kos bahlaan wah call fin od viing ah? "And what makes you believe you are worthy to call the snow wing hunter?"

Ha! zu'u see hi siiv something thought lingrah gone, "Ha! I see you found something thought long gone,"

Geh, ahrk dragonrend fen viik hi ahrk alduin,, "Yes, and Dragonrend will defeat you and Alduin,"
Epilogue

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

For the months that followed the events in Sovngarde, every time a door opened and a new person walked in, every time I heard someone laugh in an unusual accent, every time I visited an inn, all I could think was that I would see his face again. He left me, without a trace, without a proper goodbye. No reason given, not even because I was going to be a bore after my duties as Dragonborn were fulfilled. A negative reason was at least closure, but this? This was just cruel. How had I been so blindly trustful of him? If there was something important he needed to do, why couldn't he have told me? I would have helped...

I didn't have much time to think about our relationship, anyway, as I was immediately plunged into the politics of a civil war when I returned. Tullis and Ulfric both knew the Dragonborn had returned, and both knew their victory would be secured if they had me on their side. The people would rally behind the savior of their province, would they not? What if that embodiment of light and good had other plans? The end result of the events that followed the fulfillment of my birthright was the stripping away of any shred of innocence I had left, and most of it was because of my own doing.

Chapter End Notes

If you've made it this far, thank you for reading! Thanks to JudithD, ZenCaia, Amyliana, Yulina, Sejuani, JoJoOhNoNo, Lizzrdd, and futsch as well as a bunch of guests for leaving kudos!

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