**You call this fun?!**

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Mature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Archive Warning:</td>
<td>Choose Not To Use Archive Warnings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category:</td>
<td>F/M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fandom:</td>
<td>Dragon Age - All Media Types</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship:</td>
<td>Male Hawke/Original Female Character(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character:</td>
<td>Zevran Arainai, Male Warden (Dragon Age), Alistair (Dragon Age), Morrigan (Dragon Age), Leliana (Dragon Age), Flemeth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**You call this fun?!**

by [Grey_Huntress_Warden](http://archiveofourown.org)

**Summary**

Catarina Lewis' life was never easy, so she decided to simply coast on indecision, until the day she found herself in Thedas. Now she is making choices by the seat of her pants, being swept into adventure after crazy adventure with friends who make life and death into a daily game. The more she learns, the less certain she is of what she wants. Her knowledge of Thedas may come in handy, but if she wants to avoid being accused as some sort of oracle or demon, she'll need to watch what she says- or simply tell the truth. Neither option sounds fun.
A Timely Distraction

He continued to wander around town, because there was no other way he could think of to rid his mind of his accursed thoughts. No matter how he tried to distract himself, what he had done would return with a vengeance, and he would shut down. He couldn’t comprehend why he would act this way; why his body would seize up with pain and he would lose whatever he had managed to eat since the last time. He was an assassin for the Maker’s sake. He did not feel bad, or guilty when he ended a life, it was simply his job; his way to earn food and shelter.

Ah, but that wasn’t the issue this time was it? his inner voice reminded him. She was not your target, not the reason you were sent on this job. He grimaced at himself, as he continued to walk along the cobbled streets, not noticing those around him, yet aware of his surroundings all the same.

You were wrong about her, his mind told him, as if he didn’t already know. You couldn’t wait to betray one of those closest to you. He saw again in his mind, the look of pain and anguish on her face as he came in for the kill. He stopped and supported himself with a hand on the nearby building.

It had been weeks ago, and yet still as fresh in his mind as the day it happened. One of his lovers-Rinna- had betrayed them, himself and Talisen, and set them up to take the fall for failing to kill their mark. They had done what any respectable assassins would do, and gone for her head before she could. Impulsive, brash, and foolish his mind reminded him. And yet you wouldn’t listen. This woman whom you supposedly loved, told you the truth, and you laughed, and then killed her.

Brasca, stop reminding me! he thought back. It was not lost on him that he was arguing with himself, in his own mind. It happened regularly these past few weeks, and if he was being honest, more frequently with each day that passed. This argument was one that he could never win. All it accomplished was to remind him of his failures, and it was slowly driving him mad. Talisen tried to help at first, but how could he, when he felt no remorse at all, and therefore couldn’t understand? Days, then weeks had passed as he sunk further and further into despair. No matter how he tried, he could not get the events of that fateful day out of his mind. To make matters worse, his own mind now betrayed him constantly as it just had, bringing his hopeless thoughts up with regularity. He had never gone insane himself, but imagined that this would be how it happened.

How far I have fallen, he thought. The mighty Zevran, part of the Antivan Crows, brought down by a death that he had caused. He wished he was dead, for if he was, he wouldn’t have to feel this way anymore. Of course, it wasn’t as simple as killing himself. He had his pride after all, and though he wasn’t sure he believed in the Maker, he had been taught that suicide was unforgivable. True, that may have been more about the Crow’s reputation than sin, but better safe than sorry. If it was his choice, he would go down in battle- it was the least he could do, to feel the pain and anguish of his own death, to help compensate for hers.

That’s it! he thought. It wasn’t the best plan, but it was a plan at least! Finding a fight that could kill me would not be easy, because I am pretty awesome. It may take time, but I will succeed. I will not continue to feel this way any longer. With that decision made, he stood up straight, and continued walking through the town, though with more purpose in his steps than before.

A scream rang out nearby, and though he normally would have ignored it, he found himself veering from his path to follow the sound. If he was going to find this legendary fight that would claim his life, he had to be prepared at any time and in any place.

He came to the mouth of an alley where a woman was being stalked by a large man, while several of his friends created a wall from which she could not escape. There was something strange about this
woman, though she was very lovely. He couldn’t quite put his finger on it, and brought his hand up
to stroke his chin as he studied her. Her fair skin proved that she was no native to this land, and the
creaminess of her skin proved she was no servant. However the smattering of freckles across her
nose and cheeks and her manner of dress made him doubt she was a noble.

“Ah, a mystery woman, always my favorite type,” he said without thinking. All of the men froze,
and turned to look at him.

“Be on your way, friend. There is nothing for you here but death,” the large man who was obviously
the leader of the group said. He held the woman with one arm, the other hand placed over her mouth
so she couldn’t scream again. Zevran looked in her eyes, surprised and highly amused to see anger
instead of fear as he expected.

“Truly?” he replied to the man. “Just what I was looking for!”

All the men looked at him in confusion, and he couldn’t blame them. What manner of man went
looking for death after all?

“You may think yourself brave, but your bravery will get you killed. Leave now, or die, I will not
warn you again,” the large man said.

“I am counting on it,” Zevran said with a smirk as he pulled his daggers out of the sheaths from
behind his back.

The large man scowled, as he put his hand around the woman’s throat. “Do not move,” he ordered
her, and threw her so that she fell down behind him. “Get him, and make it quick,” he told his
friends, “We’ve got more important things to get back to.”

Zevran smirked. “No my good man, there is nothing more important than myself.” He waited as the
men began to close in around him, before smiling. Perhaps his skill would be enough against seven
opponents and perhaps not. One thing was sure however, if he was to die, he would not be dying
alone.

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True, Ugly Brute (as she had dubbed him) had told her not to move, however she never was good at
taking orders. She had woken to find herself somewhere she didn’t recognize, and had been
wandering around this strange town before being accosted and dragged into an alley by no less than
eight men, who looked (and smelled!) like they had never heard of a shower. She moved slowly, so
as not to gain attention to herself as she inched backwards and got to her feet. Once she was
crouched, and ready to run for it, she looked up at her would-be rescuer, thankful he was such a
great distraction, and hoping he was okay.

What she saw, stopped her in her tracks. As her eyes followed the quick and seemingly effortless
movements of the man, it dawned on her. She was dreaming! It was so absurd that she giggled, and
quickly put her hand over her mouth to stop the noise. It had been a long time since she had watched
Lord of the Rings, but here was Legolas, defending her from evil men. Although… he looked
different. Her mind most likely changed his features, since she wasn’t really into Orlando Bloom.

As she studied the man… no, she corrected herself, the elf… she congratulated her mind for a job
well done. She didn’t recognize him as another actor, but dang! He was smokin’ hot! His long blond,
almost white hair pulled back from his face at his temples, the high slashing cheekbones, the ears…
not to mention the skin-tight armor, and all the rippling muscles. *Oh yeah, good job brain!* she told herself.

She continued to watch in awe, as he jumped, kicked, rolled and punched the men around him, without taking a single hit in return. His daggers were flying as he stabbed and sliced, hitting vital places while not even looking. As suddenly as it had begun, the fight was over, and he was the only one standing. He sheathed his daggers slowly, and turned to face her. She noticed too late, that he was looking not at her, but behind her.

**Ugly Brute** grabbed her again, hooking his arm around her throat. She was certain it was him, because his odor made her skin crawl and she felt like vomiting. She was extremely angry to find herself caught and used as some sort of hostage, and she was not having another minute of it!

Bringing her foot up, she brought her heel down on his instep, and without waiting for a response, she bit down hard on his nasty, hairy arm. She could hear his yell, though it sounded far away and smiled knowing she was bringing him pain.

“*You stupid bitch!*” He screamed, and turned her by her shoulder while bringing back his arm to punch her in the face. She moved quickly, bringing her knee up as hard as she could between his legs. He yanked her down by her hair as he collapsed and began rocking on his back while cradling his genitals. She glanced around and picked up a cobblestone laying near her on the street.

“The name’s not bitch, it’s Rina!” she yelled and plowed the rock like a fist into his face, hearing the crunching sound as his nose broke. “*That’s right!*” she yelled as she dropped the stone, and stood up. She turned to walk away, and rammed face first into **ugly junior**, one of **Ugly Brute**’s friends. He grabbed her head and slammed her into the wall. The last thing she saw was the blue of the sky before everything went black.

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He winced as her head cracked as it met the wall. He turned to the hairy man that had accosted her and smiled.

“It seems I must hurt you some more then, yes?” he said as he reached behind his back to draw out his daggers. The hairy man looked scared, instantly regretting his decision to rejoin the fight. He looked left then right, searching for an escape. **Zevran** laughed and gestured to a stack of crates behind the man. The hairy man seized the opportunity and climbed the crates without thought, almost reaching the top before the crates collapsed and sent him crashing back down. The elf laughed again, after watching the man knock himself out in his haste to get away.

He turned and looked at the woman. She was definitely a mystery. He had been amused and impressed as she had taken out the leader of the gang, and felt slightly responsible for her predicament - though she should not have let her guard down. He thought for a minute before stooping down, gathering her up and carrying her over his shoulder as he headed home. She must be worth something to someone, and would make a good distraction while he waited to collect.

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“So, you don’t know anything? Where am I supposed to start looking, in some random alley?”

“I told you what I know, if you can’t do it, just say so.”
“Oh, I can do it. I just don’t know why you make things so difficult!”

Rina could hear the voices speaking to each other, though their conversation meant little to her. Right now she was more focused on the intense pain on the side of her head. Slowly, the memories of the day came back to her, though she tried not to focus too much, as it only increased the throbbing in her skull. She heard the door slam, and winced uncontrollably at the stab of pain caused by the sound.

“Ah, you are finally awake,” a soft voice crooned near her. “I was beginning to worry that the damage was more significant than I originally thought.”

Rina grimaced, and cracked one eye open, then quickly shut it as the world spun. After some time, she was able to fully open her eyes and slowly sit up.

“Here.” She looked up to see Hot Stuff (as she had dubbed him earlier) holding out some sort of leaf to her. She took it and continued looking at it as she held it, wondering what its purpose was, and what he wanted her to do with it.

His left brow rose in question as he watched her play with the pain killer. “It will do you more good in your mouth than in your hand.” He commented, amused.

“Oh, right.” She played it off, and quickly popped the leaf into her mouth and began to chew it. “Uh, thanks. It’s great.” She said between her teeth. Actually it was vile, but she didn't want to insult him. She froze as he burst out laughing. “What?” she asked.

“I’ve never witnessed someone chew the tannen leaf before,” He replied. Most simply place it under their tongue.” He roared again with laughter as her face went red. “Obviously you are not familiar with it,” he commented once he had calmed down, though his grin still remained. Rina found herself smiling back, as she moved the lump of chewed vegetation under her tongue. She continued to look at Hot Stuff, enjoying the view he provided her, her eyes roaming down and returning to his, to see a wicked looking smirk on his face that only added to his appeal.

“See something you like my dearest?” He asked. “I’d be more than happy to show you more…” His voice dropped into a husky tone that had Rina practically swooning.

“Oh, sorry about that,” she started as he leaned against the wall with a shrug, though his smirk stayed in place. “I’m just trying to figure out where I am, and how I got here. Everything is quite jumbled in my head just now.”

“I’m certain,” he replied. “You are my guest, here in my home.”

“You do not know?” She asked.

“Um, sorry about that,” he started as he leaned against the wall with a shrug, though his smirk stayed in place. “I’m just trying to figure out where I am, and how I got here. Everything is quite jumbled in my head just now.”

“I’m certain,” he replied. “You are my guest, here in my home.”

“And you are…” She asked.

“You do not know? I thought all the beautiful women in Antiva knew of me.” He continued to smirk as he stood straight and executed a bow with great flourish. “Zevran Arainai, at your service.”
Rina rolled her eyes with a sigh. It was painfully (literally) clear that she was not having some sort of dream due to the dull ache in her head. With a start she realized that whatever he had given her was some sort of pain killer, and it was amazingly effective. The intense throbbing from minutes ago was now a constant ache that was much more manageable. Even so, no matter how hot this guy was, she didn’t need a bedtime story, or some guy acting out his role playing fantasies with her. Although her mind threw questions out like, how do you explain everything that has happened then? and hello, what about his ears? and her personal favorite, who cares, he’s gorgeous!; she ignored them all in favor of reality.

“Riiiight….” She drawled out. “And I bet you’re an assassin, part of the Crows too.” Her words were practically dripping with sarcasm, though she noticed he perked up.

“So you have heard of me!” He pointed to her, almost like an accusation.

“Oh huh,” she continued. “Sorry, but I’m not buying it. The Crows aren’t real, Zevran isn’t real. Either you’re some freaky creep in a really good costume, or I’m somehow still dreaming.” She noticed as she spoke that his smile became a frown, and then a sneer at her words.

He walked slowly towards her. “I suppose,” He spoke nonchalantly, but his eyes were zeroed in on hers. “that to the common people, stories of me or the Crows can seem like a dream or a nightmare depending on your point of view. But, I assure you,” he advanced on her quickly and before she could blink, his dagger was at her cheek. “It is true.”

At this point, Rina could feel herself shaking. She knew her eyes must be wide open, but she couldn’t blink, for fear that he would do something. This was not the Zevran she knew, he wasn’t fun and flirty. He was dangerous. And, she thought, looks like he will enjoy hurting me. His grin had a mean tint, that grew bigger as her fear became more apparent.

“Now that we understand each other, my little dove, who are you?” He asked.

“R-Rina” She squeaked.

“Hmm, so I did hear that correctly.” He continued under his breath, “I am happy I am not crazy like I thought…”

“What?” She asked.

“Nothing.” His serene face instantly took back the menacing sneer. “Now is the time to prove your worth.”

“What are you talking about?” she asked.

“It is simple. Either you help us, and we get a ransom from your family and you go home safe and sound, or we take you to Lady Jasmine at the whorehouse who will pay your ransom and give you a new home and career.” He chuckled as he saw her expression. “I did save your life after all… I should be compensated for my… services,” he added.

“Sounds to me like you are the one who belongs in a whorehouse!” She lashed out, her anger and her fear warring within her.

He smirked at her again, and she thought of it as his default expression. “What a quick and clever
tongue you have. I hope it is clever at more than words.”

“Ugh,” she said disgusted. “Does your Casanova routine ever work?”

“Casanova?”

“The infamous lover?”

He chuckled, “Already you compare me to this infamous lover? I must have made a very good impression.” She almost laughed at his innuendo, but didn’t want to egg him on further.

“Look, uh…” she began.

“Zevran,” he helpfully supplied.

“Right, Zevran. Look, I just don’t believe you. Zevran isn’t real. I’m obviously having a really long, involved dream…” she trailed off, trying to make sense of it all.

“Not just an infamous lover, but being in my presence is like a dream come true, yes?” he asked. Her eyes snapped wide again as she felt his finger sliding down her cheek. Somehow without her noticing, his dagger was replaced by his hand, and she hadn’t even seen him move! She automatically recoiled back, moving so that he no longer touched her so that she could think again.

“Do I make you nervous, little dove?” His voice, low and soft made her spine snap straight.

“It’s Rina,” she said in a commanding tone.

He shook his head, appearing to have thought about using her actual name and dismissing the notion. “Little Dove is more fitting. Beautiful and aloof, nervous and shaking when nearby a,” his voice lowered even more as his lips skimmed her ear, “predator.”

Rina shivered. When did he get so close? Her eyes closed as she felt him tracing her collarbone with a finger. Think Rina! Think! she told herself. She still couldn’t believe this was real, but it surely felt real. So, assuming it was… what did she know about Zevran?

“Um… an Antivan Crow…” she mumbled.

“hmm?”

“...partnered with Taliesen and… Rinna.”

Her eyes opened as she felt his hand around her throat. There was no pressure applied, but she could feel the threat, as well as see it on his face.

“And?” he asked menacingly.

She continued before she thought it through. “He wanted to die, so he took the contract on the Grey Wardens,” she finished softly. The dagger was back on her cheek before she could blink.

“And now, you will tell me how you came by this knowledge,?” His hand tightened once around her throat to emphasize his point. “It would be very bad for you if you were to lie to me,” he said.

Should I tell him? she asked herself. The steely anger in his eyes left her no choice, so she decided to try the super condensed version.

“Okay,” she sighed, “but you won’t believe me.”
“Try me.”

“I’m not from here,” she began.

“Antiva? That is quite obvious,” he interrupted.

“Wait, we’re in Antiva?” she asked, brightening. “Hmm, it’s warmer than I thought it would be.”

The noise he made sounded like some sort of growl. “And what do you mean, obvious?!” she demanded.

He snarled, “I asked you a question. Either answer it, or die, your choice.”

“Okay, okay, jeez. Freak out much?” she complained. As he lifted his dagger, she hurried to continue. “I don’t know how I got here. Last night, I went to bed at home. Today, I woke up in a street, in different clothes.”

“That explains nothing.” He adjusted his grip on his dagger.

“I’m getting there!” she said sharply. “Back home, I heard a story. It was an epic adventure, full of danger, battle, romance, you name it.” She spoke quickly at his pointed look. “There were many characters in this story, but one of them was an assassin.”

He gave no reaction.

“He was an Antivan Crow.”

No reaction.

“Named Zevran Arainai.”

He paused and said, “I don’t believe you.”

“I knew you wouldn’t,” she replied calmly.

“Then why tell me this… this fabrication?” he demanded.

She looked him in the eye and said, “because you told me not to lie.”

There was silence as they stared at each other, before Zevran finally spoke. “And in this… story, I take a contract to kill a Grey Warden?”

“Two actually,” she answered.

His eyes widened. “Two legendary warriors, against myself?” he asked.

“Well, yes,” she answered. “In the story, you were determined to die in battle, in a blaze of glory, as it were.”

“Hmph,” he grunted. “With such a clever tongue, I am surprised you could not give me a better story than that.” She looked fearfully at his dagger as he raised his arm and drew it back. “Whorehouse it is then,” he stated as he sheathed his dagger behind him. He noticed the look on her face, “Don’t look so relieved,” he smiled as she looked confused. “Soon enough, I’m sure you’ll wish I had killed you.”

Before she could retaliate, the door opened behind them, and Taliesen walked in speaking.
“Zev, you’ll never believe what Anerio told me… oh!” he stopped as he looked at Rina. “So, our lovely lady has awoken at last.” He looked back to Zevran, “are we writing a note, or taking a trip to see Lady Jasmine?” he asked.

“Jasmine,” Zevran answered.

“Oh…” he smirked coldly at Rina. “That’s too bad, for you anyway. I’ll be sure to come visit whenever I can darling.”

Rina never was adept at keeping her emotions off her face, and Zevran smirked at her as well when he saw the utter disgust written there. He decided to change the subject.

“What were you saying earlier Tali?” he asked. “Something about Anerio?”

Taliesen's attention returned to Zevran, and Rina breathed a silent sigh of relief. The guy was a sleaze ball.

“You’ll never believe it, Zev,” Taliesen said. “House Arainai accepted a contract for some Grey Wardens!”

Zevran felt his blood chill as he stood in shock. He turned his head to look at Rina, though he didn’t say a thing.

Taliesen's eyes narrowed in concern and mistrust. “What’s going on?” he asked.

“Grey Wardens.” Zevran addressed Taliesen again. “Are you sure?”

“That’s what Anerio says.” Taliesen looked back at Rina again, trying to understand the underlying tension in the room. “He says no one is stupid enough to accept it though. I think the guildmaster is simply trying to rise up in esteem by biting off more than he can chew.”

Rina stayed still and silent, unsure of what would happen next. She couldn’t understand this Zevran before now, and she was unnerved by his silence.

“Come on,” Zevran started guiding Rina across the room, though it was obvious he was speaking to Taliesen.

“What? Where?” Taliesen replied. “I want to try our new acquisition before we sell her off, so we know how much to ask for,” he eyed Rina with a sleazy grin on his face.

“She’ll be fine here while we find out about the contract,” Zevran replied.

“Are you crazy?” Taliesen asked before Zevran had him by the throat.

“What did you just call me?!” he demanded. Taliesen grabbed him in return by the nape of the neck seemingly used to Zevran’s treatment.

He spoke calmly, though his face was thunderous. “Zev, don’t act recklessly. We can’t afford to draw attention to ourselves,” he voice became quieter, and Rina had to strain to hear him. “They may decide to give us this contract because of what happened on our last one.”

Zevran winced, and his face showed the pain and regret that came crashing back on him. He took his hand from Taliesen's throat and cupped his cheek with his palm.

“I need to know Tali,” he spoke, the emotion coming through. “It’s important.”
Taliesen gazed into his eyes for a minute, before sighing. “Fine,” he said. “But let’s keep in the background, okay?”

“But of course.”

Taliesen came over and grabbed Rina’s arm and pushed her into a side room, that she honestly thought had been a closet. She heard the door lock after he had closed it in her face.

“Stay put sweetheart,” she heard Taliesen call to her. “We’ll get to know each other better soon enough.”

Finding herself alone for the first time, Rina looked around the tiny room. There wasn’t much. A chair, and some sort of pot in the corner. As she got nearer to peer into it, she realized by the faint smell that it was a chamber pot. And of course, as soon as she thought about it, she realized she would need to use it, and soon.

Having gotten that out of the way, she thanked her lucky stars that she didn’t have to use it in front of either of the men. There was only so much her mind could take at this point. Her bathroom woes were quickly replaced by everything she had experienced today, from the Ugly Brute and his gang, to Zevran’s flirt or be killed attitude, to Taliesen’s not so veiled rape references. She started feeling queasy. *This can’t be real… right?* she thought. She reached up and slapped her cheek hard. Nothing changed, so she tried again. And again. Finally, she hit her head against the wall, which only made her headache return. She turned around and leaned back against the wall. No matter how many times she tried to deny it, the reality of her situation could not be pushed aside any longer. She slowly slid to the floor as her knees buckled. Bringing her knees to her chest, she laid her head on her knees, closed her eyes and wished she were home.
Rina sat up suddenly, panting. She quickly glanced all around her, trying desperately to find the source of her fear, but everything looked normal. She picked up the controller to her PlayStation and focused on the TV. She could see her character standing in the corner of a room, facing the wall. She couldn’t help but laugh as she realized that she had fallen asleep while playing Dragon Age, again. She continued to giggle, relieved, as she thought of the dream she had conjured due to her obsession with the games. Getting all the achievements wasn’t enough, no, she wanted to experience everything with every character, with every configuration of her party. At this point, she knew the games so well, she no longer needed to look at the map or the quest list.

She turned her head, as the door opened and Steven, her husband, walked in. He glanced in her direction, and continued in without saying anything. She hung her head down. She had been putting this off for long enough. “Look, Steve,” she called out. “Maybe… maybe we should talk.”

He turned back to look at her. “What?”

“Heh, heh,” she began. “We hardly talk anymore, you completely ignore me most of the time. I don’t know how to fix this without you talking to me!” She pleaded with him, as she couldn’t live like this anymore. They were barely roommates, when they were supposed to be spouses. “Please, talk to me. What’s going on?”

He looked at her dispassionately, and spoke in monotone. “I’ve been rethinking my life choices that I’ve made for the last six years.”

“Six…” her heart lurched. That’s how long he’s known her. “So?” she asked, not really certain she wanted to know.

He looked away and sighed, “so, I don’t want to be married anymore.”

Rina sat up suddenly, panting. She quickly glanced left and right, noticing there was nothing in the small room to cause her heart to be racing. It took a moment to realize that she was in the room where Taliesen and Zevran had placed her, which meant… she had been dreaming. It took a few minutes, and a couple of slaps and pinches before she decided she was now awake. Unless it was a dream within a dream… No, she laughed at herself. Because THAT would be ridiculous.

It was odd, during the dream, she had been so shocked, like she hadn’t known it was coming. She somehow couldn’t remember all the time that had passed, how she had turned her life around, and realized how unhappy she truly had been. Once she woke up, all her memories returned, and she was no longer upset. Perhaps it was less a dream, and more of a reliving of the past. Either way, not something she really wanted to dwell on. She was more concerned with how to get out of here, and back home.

She stilled as she heard voices, but no one came to the room she was in. She stood slowly and walked quietly to the door, placing her ear on the wood. The voices became somewhat clearer, though she wasn’t sure if it was because of her new position, or because they were getting louder and louder.

“This … insane Zev! How … do this? We have … no chance against … -ardens!” she couldn’t make out everything Taliesen was saying, but she thought she could guess the meaning clearly.

“You can’t … stand!” Zevran shouted. “… is no we! I must … this, and you … stop me … want to
“I can’t … help you … this. You … own now … won’t … by and watch … destroy …”

Rina could hear how emotional the conversation was becoming, and felt like some sort of intruder. She lifted her head, and went back to her position against the wall.

It didn’t take long until she heard rummaging, and finally the slamming of a door. A few moments later, the door to her room was unlocked, and swung open to reveal Zevran.

“Come on out then, it seems luck favors you today little dove.” He calmly said without looking at her. “You are free to go. I won’t be taking you to see Jasmine today.”

Rina clenched her fingers together, unnerved by the sadness on his face. “Are … are you, all right?” she asked hesitantly.

“Not really, no,” he said honestly, surprising her and himself. He quickly put his defenses back up. “Do not worry little dove, I may be down for a moment, but you will be pleased to know I will be back up in no time,” giving his eyebrow a wiggle as he said “up.”

Rina rolled her eyes. “And, the moment’s gone, well done,” she teased him. She was glad for the sudden change in demeanor, as she didn’t want him to know how much she wanted to reach out to him in that moment.

“Well,” he said, “if we are not having a moment, then I must prepare for my journey to Ferelden. I have a contract to execute, as it were.” He guided her towards the door and opened it for her. “It was a pleasure to meet you little dove. I wish you well.” He gave a small bow, and gestured towards the open door.

Rina hesitated. She knew she had been lucky earlier that day with his timely rescue, and she knew good luck never held out for long. She didn’t know why, but she needed to get to Ferelden. True, she really wanted to meet the wardens, perhaps even the entire party before she found some way to get home. But really, she didn’t see how she could survive a day in Antiva alone.

“Actually…” she stopped at the smirk on his face. “Oh?” his brow quirked up. “We are having a moment? How delicious…” he said as if savoring the word, as he began to close the door.

“No, that’s not what I meant!” she exclaimed

“Oh.” The disappointment seemed genuine, as he opened the door fully again. “Then I am truly sorry to see you go, but most assuredly, I will enjoy watching you leave.” He eyed her up and down, making her feel like covering herself even though she was fully dressed.


“Denerim?” he asked, suddenly serious, his face like a mask. “Why would I go there? Why would you?”

“But don’t you have to meet your contact there? I thought…” she trailed off as she realized her mistake. She wasn’t supposed to know the particulars. “Uh, I mean the wardens are in Ferelden, so it seems the logical -” She hesitated again, but settled on the truth. “I already told you. Before,” she added, watching him flinch in remembrance.

“A story, from your homeland,” he said dubiously. “Answer me this then, can you see the future?”
“Hell no,” she crossed her arms and rolled her eyes. “Don’t be ridiculous.”

“I? I am not the one being ridiculous,” he said accusingly. He stepped closer, into her personal space and asked, “Why?”

She could pretend to not understand, but really, what would be the point? She was asking for a favor, she shouldn’t antagonize him. “There’s someone in Fereldan, a powerful witch, who may be the only one who can help me get home.” His eyebrow quirked up, but he said nothing. “And… the wardens know where she is,” she finished.

“And if I kill the wardens?” he asked.

“She can shape shift into a dragon. If the wardens aren’t tough enough to kill you, I’m sure she would be happy to,” she deadpanned and he roared with laughter.

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It took a lot more convincing, and finally some begging before he agreed to take her along. He could see her suspicion once he agreed, but in all honesty he had simply wanted to see her beg, and quite the sight it was. It definitely grated her pride, and he could see it in the way her teeth and fists were clenched, but she did so nonetheless. He didn’t dwell on his feelings, as he didn’t quite understand them, but he knew he couldn’t simply leave her to the wolves, or well, Crows.

He booked passage on a merchant ship traveling to Denerim and after packing essentials for them both, he handed her a pack and took off for the docks. He would use this week aboard the vessel to hammer out his plan of attack for the wardens. They were obviously clever, if the man that was essentially ruling the kingdom was unable to find and kill them.

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Zevran turned and looked at Rina as they set foot about dry land again.

“You look dreadful my dear,” he said chuckling.

“No thanks to you!” she hissed back. True enough, once she had told him her plans to accompany him, he had spent most of the voyage training her to be more aware of her surroundings. He hadn’t let her sleep for more than a couple hours at a time before scaring her awake with some tactic or trap. He jumped out of so many corners around the ship that she had come to expect him everywhere.

“That’s true…” he purred at her. She stopped and stared at him, wary. He laughed, “and now you will not be caught unawares, will you?” he asked.

“No,” she answered, glad that there was actually a reason for the torture of the last several days, more than simply to torment her.

She hooked her arm in his, and let him guide her, as she was exhausted. When they finally made it to their destination, she was hardly surprised to see the Pearl.

He looked over, ready to make some sort of apology for the need to bring her here, but stopped when he saw the smile on her face and awe in her eyes. It made him smile as well, taking in the child-like wonder on her face.
He leaned over to speak in her ear, “So, you want to… go in?” He noticed her shiver before she turned her head.

“Can we?” she asked eagerly.

He smiled at her excitement, “Really? What could we possibly do, together, inside a brothel?” He grinned as her face fell into a sneer at his question.

“Ugh, why do I even try?” she muttered. He didn’t answer, simply lead her inside.
Zevran was quick, she had to admit. By the next morning, they were leaving Denerim, back onto the road and heading east. Before they left, he had given instructions to all the mercenaries he had hired the previous day, and they had all been sent on different paths in order to find where the wardens were traveling.

Rina was just happy that he hadn’t kept any mercenaries to travel with the two of them, because they all gave her the creeps. Most of them leered at her in a way that made her uncomfortable, but there were also a few that sneered at her because of the way Zevran flirted with her. It wasn’t like she asked him to always be touching her in some way, just the opposite! He seemed to instinctively know her boundaries, and he never crossed them, but he was always close. Either taking her hand or arm in his as they walked, or tucking her hair behind her ear when it got in her face.

She was having such a good time with him, that the days of walking went by quickly. She had surprised him with her knowledge of how to clean and cook the game he caught, and had told him a little about Steven- how she had tried to do the things he enjoyed, like hunting and fishing. How she had wanted to make him proud of her and kept it up until she could do it right.

He peppered her with questions about the “man who must have been blessed by the Maker to have had her,” but she evaded them as best she could, simply saying he was someone she was once involved with, and left it at that.

He once asked about her prowess at hunting, and she told him about her lack of skill with the bow Steven had given her. They laughed as she regaled him with stories of her ineptitude with the weapon, and how Steven had finally admitted defeat and gotten her a crossbow. She wasn’t much better with that, but at least she could sporadically catch some game.

She tried once to bring up the idea that killing the wardens wasn’t his only option, but he became angry and refused to speak to her for several hours. He was stubborn, but then again, so was she. She considered him a friend by this point, and was worried that the wardens may not decide to spare him. She started listing the pros and cons of killing the wardens versus joining them, and she did so out loud to ensure that he heard. He didn’t comment, and she could only hope that it gave him something to think about.

All too soon, the mercenaries rejoined them, and Zevran’s plan was revealed. He explained what he wanted to accomplish, and where, in order to avoid unnecessary death. Though they didn’t care about that, in order to get paid, they followed his instructions. Based on the warden’s location, it was decided to travel quickly towards Lake Calanhad and set up the ambush.

Rina struggled to keep up as they traveled throughout most of the night in order to get there quickly. Though he wasn’t sympathetic to her complaining, Zevran slowed their pace. She ignored the complaints and glares from the mercenaries, but when the blond woman came to threaten her life if they weren’t there in time for them to set up the ambush properly, she grew slightly concerned. The details of how she would be killed provided sufficient motivation for her to push herself. No one wants to be burnt alive after all.

She also noticed that they closer they got to their destination, the more aloof Zevran became. The two women with the group were more than happy to distract him, which left Rina walking alone, and avoiding everyone else. She couldn’t understand what was going on with him, but could hardly find out with the two “ladies” hanging off him.
After what seemed like days of walking, they finally stopped. Rina immediately collapsed to the ground to rest, pain radiating in her shins. She sat there rubbing her legs for some time, trying to get rid of the stabbing pain when Zevran knelt in front of her and grabbed her leg.

“What are you doing?!” she asked him, trying to pull her leg back to herself.

“If you want to get rid of the pain, I can help you,” he answered quietly. He looked at her with a slight smirk on his face, but still gently as he put pressure on her shin with his thumb, moving it up and down the pain affected area.

Rina let out a sigh of relief. While not gone, the impromptu massage was doing wonders for the pain. She smiled at him, and noticing movement behind him, saw the blond woman that threatened her glaring daggers.

“Ah, thanks Zevran, it feels much better now,” she said, and pulled her leg again. This time he let her, with a questioning look.

“I know I excel at the massage, but I’m sure even my magic fingers cannot heal pain so quickly,” he said.

With another look behind him, Rina sat cross-legged to ensure he couldn’t grab her leg again. She tried to keep her face straight, but the woman was holding fire in her hand now. She had to do what she could to let her know that she had no intentions when it came to Zevran.

“I see,” he said, and got up and went to speak to the others.

Rina took a deep breath, and closing her eyes, released it. Yes, she considered him a friend, and didn’t like the look he just gave her, but it wasn’t worth being hurt or even killed because someone else thought they were romantically involved. She waited until they had a fire going, before getting up to join them. She sat as far from Zevran as she could, sitting against a tree stump in front of the flames. She fell asleep before they even had tents erected.

She awoke with the stiffest neck she’d ever had. Sleeping while sitting up caused all sorts of stiffness throughout her entire body. Looking around as best she could, she could sense something was off, but wasn’t sure what it was. She stood and stretched, loosening her muscles. She stopped as she noticed how quiet everyone was. That was the same moment she realized that she was actually alone.

Rina’s strides ate up the path as she stormed after her traveling companions. She could easily believe that the mercs would leave her behind, but how could Zevran have been okay with this? She steamed about him, his mercenaries, and her situation in general as she continued walking.

She tried to scream as she was suddenly grabbed, but quick as a whip, a large hand covered her mouth. Her eyes widened as she could tell whoever held her, was not Zevran. She pushed and elbowed, trying to get away before whoever held her hooked an arm around her waist, pinning her arms down in the process.

“Well.. look what I caught,” a voice said quietly. She froze as she recognized him as one of the mercs that was constantly leering at her. She tried threatening him to let her go before Zevran killed him, but it didn’t have the impact she was trying for with his hand still over her mouth. It seemed that her could guess her intent, as he laughed mockingly at her.

“No one around, just the two of us,” he told her. She knew she needed to fight. She couldn’t afford
to freeze up any longer. Feeling his arm move from her waist and grab her breast threw her into action. She grabbed his hand and bit down as hard as she could. He yelped, and tried to pull her off by her hair, but she held on. He finally reached back and backhanded her on the cheek, and she flew back a few paces and rolled a bit as she landed.

She was dazed, but her mind screamed at her to run, get away as fast as she could! She stood shakily, and ran through the trees. She had no idea which direction she was heading, just knew that she needed to get away! She hit several trees, tripped over branches and bushes, but managed to somehow keep on her feet. As she ran, she somehow came back to the path, which helped her move a little faster.

She ran, though she was tiring quickly, and ran right into someone’s arms. She couldn’t think, she couldn’t fight so she screamed as loudly as she could.

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Zevran couldn’t believe it. He had left Rina sleeping back at camp. When Selene had suggested it, he was quick to refuse, however the more he had thought about it, the idea had merit. It would keep her safe, and would keep her from trying to stop him, for he was sure that was her intention. But now, right as Selene was about to run forward to entice the wardens into their trap, she came barreling out of the trees and straight into the warden’s arms screaming at the top of her lungs.

He watched as she recoiled back away from the man in armor, realizing the predicament she was in.

“I’ll kill her,” he heard Selene hiss out next to him.

“It can still work,” he said. “She’ll bring them into the trap unwittingly.”

“Hanric was supposed to keep her occupied,” she seethed quietly.

“What?” he turned to look at her, and noticed that she paled slightly.

“Nothing,” she answered. His eyes narrowed, as he understood that his mercs had made plans without his knowledge involving Rina. They would definitely discuss this after the battle.

Zevran and Selene watched as Rina was walking backwards, looking wildly around for something, though they weren’t sure if her instinct was flight or fight. The warden’s group was slowly advancing on her, with the armored man in the lead, though he had his hands up as if trying to calm and assure her that he meant no harm.

Zevran smiled, the plan was shot, but Rina was accomplishing the mission. Just a few more meters and they would be able to spring their trap. As if she knew this as well, she stopped retreating and held her palm out to the group in a stop gesture.

He couldn’t hear what she was saying, but knew it couldn’t be good.

“That’s it!” Selene hissed. “If we fell the tree now, we won’t trap them all, but it’s all we’ve got!”

“No,” he said, not taking his eyes off Rina. “If we trap them now, they’ll kill her.”

“Then she dies,” she answered, running out of their hiding place and giving the signal to the men to drop the tree.

“No!” Zevran roared at her back. He ran after her, seeing her beginning to conjure a fireball in her hand. He wouldn’t be able to catch her in time, but raced anyway desperate to stop her.
He wasn’t sure what happened, but would describe it as some sort of shock wave. It barely grazed him, but left him feeling drained. He saw both Rina and Selene collapse, being directly in it’s path. As he reached Selene he looked to Rina and saw that she was unconscious. Selene however was awake, though she looked injured, or deeply ill.

“You tried to kill her,” he stated without emotion.

“I… tried to accomplish the mission,” she had a hard time getting the words out, but he understood her. “She was simply in the way.”

“And I told you she was not to be harmed,” he scowled at her. “You know the consequences.” He crouched down, pulling out his dagger. She screamed as best as she could, though not well. He stabbed her chest and angled his dagger up to pierce her heart, twisting it as he did. Then quickly pulled it out again, letting her fall back to the ground in the same move.

He heard the gasps at the same time, from both the warden’s group as well as the mercs. Several mercs began shouting and rushing into the clearing to fight, while the wardens tried to speak, and ended up pulling out their weapons to defend themselves. He shook his head as he looked at Rina, and wondered how the day had gone sideways, while realizing he was looking at the answer.
Rina opened her eyes, afraid of what she would see. She was in her apartment, but that only scared her more. It couldn’t have been a dream, right? Maybe she was dreaming now. Things were confusing without adding all the emotion into it.

The horrible blond mage had been running towards her, making a fireball, and Zev had been right behind her. Was it stupid of her to wish he had been trying to save her? Yes, but it was true.

Music blared from in front of her, and she picked up her phone as if it was an alien object. Everything had been happening so fast, she hadn’t even missed it. Her best friend Shanell was calling, so she hit talk.

“Hey girl, what’s up?” she asked.

“Rina?” she heard back. “Where the hell are you?”

“Um, at home?” she responded, worried about having actually been gone all this time. Was she actually home now?

“Rina.” Shanell’s voice was full of disappointment. “You said you were coming out tonight with us, remember? You’ll never get over him if you don’t get out there!”

“Oh, right. Sorry, I… forgot,” she finished lamely. She remembered this conversation. A few days after, Shanell had come over with the idea to help her make a plan, setting goals for herself, trying to get her life in order, and Rina refused.

“Forget?” Rina could hear the incredulity through the phone. She leaned back on the couch and closed her eyes. And her friend’s voice became muffled… and lower… until she couldn’t make anything out any longer.

“…you hear me? I swear, I thought she was waking.”

“Wait, Dog. Don’t just…ugh.”

Rina opened her eyes, as her face was covered in slobber. There was an absolutely huge dog standing over her, and bathing her face with its tongue. She pushed the dog as she turned her head, trying to halt the impromptu bath. Using the sleeve of her shirt, she wiped at her face as she listened to the voices around her.

“Sorry about that… he’s not exactly trained you see.”

“Could be worse, could’ve bitten her nose off instead.”

“Oh, you poor thing! Let me help you with that.”

“Thank you,” she finally replied, grateful to have the help. It felt like she was just rubbing the saliva around instead of removing it. She put her arm down and turned her face in the direction of the voice, keeping her eyes closed. In a moment, someone was holding her head steady and wiping her face with a cloth.
Rina wasn’t sure what was going to happen at this point, but she knew who was around her. In fact, she knew most of them better than perhaps they knew each other. Once the person helping her was finished, she opened her eyes, and looked straight at Leliana.

“Thanks,” she said, trying to remain calm. She glanced around at the six of them. Leliana and Alistair in front of her, a dwarf holding onto the dog’s collar to her left (she assumed he must be the other warden), Morrigan several feet behind looking cross, and Oghren and Sten to her right, standing over someone.

She looked forward again to see Alistair’s hand in front of her, and she shied back from it. No, she knew he wouldn’t hurt her or anything, but she wasn’t ready to move yet. He stayed there for a moment before looking at his hand to see if there was something on it, and finding nothing, wiping it on his armor anyway. He stepped back, and spoke softly. “I’m very sorry for the smite, but I saw the mage behind you and just acted out of instinct.”

There was an awkward pause as she didn't respond, and Rina bit her lip, not trusting herself to speak- worried she may say something that would be hard to explain. The dwarf she didn’t recognize came towards her, taking Alistair’s place and crouched in front of her.

“What’s your name, doll face?” he asked.

She felt herself make a questioning look before she could think of what she was doing, so she rolled with it. “Catarina,” she replied.

“Well, Catarina” he said, “what I’m curious to know is, were you with these mercenaries?”

She couldn't think of anything on the spur of the moment, so she opted for the truth. “Sort of,” she answered hesitantly.

She heard Leliana giggle as Alistair demanded, “How can you sort of be with a band of mercenaries trying to kill people?!”

“He’s got a good point Cat,” the dwarf warden told her with a smirk.

“What’s your name?” she asked him.

“Why?” he asked back, obviously amused.

“Because I don’t like referring to you as the dwarf in my head,” she answered. She was surprised when several of them laughed, though she had been serious.

“As long as you refer to me as the sexy dwarf, it’s all right” Oghren added.

“Duran,” he answered her. “Though several of my companions here think it is Warden.”


“Hmm… nope,” he said. “I like Cat better.”

“Okay…” she trailed it off so it sounded much longer a word than it was. She had no real preference, it was her friends back home that stuck with Rina. She took a moment as several things ran through her mind. Based on the way Duran carries himself, the carefully braided beard, and the elaborate facial tattoos, I'm guessing he is Duran Aeducan. And since Oghren was here, that meant they had already been to Orzammar. I wonder whom he had chosen to support as king... and where they were heading next. Oh, and where would Zev fit into... Zevran!!
“Duran? Have you seen my friend Zev? The blond elf?” She asked quickly, as she started to try to stand up. She still felt pretty dizzy and it wasn’t easy.

“This elf?” she turned to Oghren as he spoke and saw that he and Sten were in fact standing over Zev, who was tied up and looked unconscious, or dead. She hurried over as best she could, only tripping once, and knelt at his side.

*Oh, thank goodness* she said to herself quietly when she discovered he was still alive.

“And this is where I need an explanation Cat,” Duran said. She turned back and saw that all of them were flanking her, standing beside Duran, following his lead. A few had hands on their weapons, as if expecting her to try to harm them, but they were all deadly serious now, not one of them smiling any longer.

She turned back to Zev and shook her head. “I can’t,” she said quietly, and by the lack of response, none of them heard her. She looked down at Zev again. *What would he do, if she told them of his plan? Did he even want to join them, or had she ruined that? He was different than she remembered from the games, having a harder edge. Was the same true for all the companions? Would they kill him once she explained?*

“I can’t,” she said again, more clearly. “It’s not my story to tell, it’s Zev’s.” She hoped that she had at least bought some time for him to wake up.

“Cat…” Duran’s voice told her to look at him, so she did. He held her gaze for some time, then nodded. “Okay, we’ll camp here, and wait to hear his explanation.” he said.

“What?! “Warden…” Several companions spoke at once, but he stopped them all with a look, that belied his royal heritage. They all began unpacking tents, and leaving the path to clear a place to have a fire. She watched in awe, as no one needed to speak, they all just did what needed to be done.

Rina wondered if they had daily assignments, or if they simply just did whatever chore they wanted. She guessed the former, as if everyone did what they wanted, they might all pick the same chore one day. The mental picture of all six of them coming back to camp with firewood and no other tasks done made her giggle. She stopped abruptly as she saw several of them giving her questioning looks, some bordering on suspicion. She hoped Zev would wake up soon.

The wait was longer than she hoped, but since Leliana was talking to her, she didn’t really notice. She knew better than to say much, since Leliana was a bard and all, but she found her defenses coming down the longer they spoke. She knew she was being manipulated, but it was so nice talking to another female about inconsequential things. Since she and Zev hadn’t come up with any sort of story, she simply stayed silent whenever questions about him, or her, or their travels, or homelands came up.

Finally, she heard Zevran groaning, and instead of coming closer, she actually stepped aside so that Duran and his companions could speak with him. She got a few looks for it, but she wasn’t ready for his anger at having her disrupt his plan. She smiled as she thought of his line, “I thought I’d wake up dead” but was shocked when she heard something quite different.

“Catarina? What have you done to her? I’ll kill you!” he yelled as he struggled against his bonds. She peeked her head around Sten, surprised to hear her name.

“We’ve not harmed her, friend,” Duran began. “She asked us to wait for any questions until you woke, and we’ve honored that request.” he finished, his words soft but strong.
Zevran had been listening, but he searched around and continued to struggle until he saw her face peering at him from around a huge warrior. He closed his eyes and took several deep breaths to calm himself. He still didn’t understand why, since everything today had gone belly up, but she was safe, so he felt everything was good. It made no sense, but he didn’t want to dwell on it now. He reopened his eyes and looked at the group before him, zeroing in on the noble dwarf in front of him.

“You are the warden, no?” he asked.

“I am one of the wardens, yes,” Duran answered. “And you are?” he asked in return.

“Zevran Arainai, a Crow. You, my friend, are mighty hard to kill. Though, to be fair, my ambush didn’t go off quite like I had planned,” he smirked at the group, wondering why he felt to give away so much information.

“A Crow? Cat?” Duran asked her, looking confused.

“I can answer that,” Leliana interrupted before she could answer. “Crows are a guild of assassins from the land of Antiva. They have quite the reputation for both success, and privacy for those employing them, even withstanding torture without divulging information.” They all turned back to look at Zevran.

“Well then, I suppose questioning may be pointless,” Alistair commented.

“The woman looks like she will not withstand torture,” Sten said stoically.

“Sten!” Leliana gasped in shock, as Rina backed away from him.

“Cat.” Duran called her over as he sat in front of Zevran, patting the ground next to him as an invitation for her to sit.

“Cat?” Zevran asked as she did so.

“He liked it better than Rina, apparently,” she answered and he nodded as if that explanation made total sense.

“I prefer to call her Little Dove, myself” Zevran said, and Duran looked thoughtful, before nodding in agreement.

“Also better, but I’ll stick with Cat,” he replied. “But, back to business. Cat told us that she was sort of” he used finger quotes, “with the mercenaries that attacked us. And based on what you’ve said, you were leading them. However, I also saw you kill one, so…” He looked at Zevran pointedly. “I’d like an explanation now.”

"And I'd like an explanation of the mark on her cheek," Zevran growled out as he finally saw her up close. Cat put a hand up to her face, having forgotten until now that that merc had backhanded her.

"Oh, that wasn't them," she said, trying to calm Zev down. "It's from before." He eyed her for a moment, before turning back to Duran.

"Very well, I will explain then," he said, and proceeded to do so.

Cat listened, smiling to herself as she thought of her new nickname. Even she liked it better. It seemed like Zevran’s explanation was very similar to his in game dialogue, though she was surprised that it was Duran’s idea that he come with them in order to protect him from the retribution of the crows. In fact, the more she saw Zev and Duran banter back and forth, the more amused she became,
until she was giggling. The two of them stopped their talk to look at her. In fact, everyone was looking at her.

“What’s funny, Little Dove?” Zev asked.

“I’m sorry,” she started, trying to contain her laughter. “It’s just that I always heard that dwarves and elves hated each other, but with you two…” she burst into giggles again. They all continued to stare at her, until Leliana started giggling too. Then Alistair began chuckling, and Oghren laughed out loud. Duran and Zevran joined in as well, while Morrigan and Sten looked at them like they were fools.

“Come on,” Duran said as he cut Zev’s bonds with his dagger. “Let’s have some dinner and we’ll talk some more.”

Zevran stood, rubbing his wrists. “Warden,” he said suddenly serious. Duran nodded at him to continue. “I would give you my allegiance, however before you accept it, I must let you know that I have sworn to see the Little Dove to safety from the blight. Perhaps that is by traveling with your group, or we can see her to somewhere safe on our travels, but” he said stubbornly, “we are a pair. Where I go, so does she until that promise is fulfilled.”

“Cat?” Duran asked, and she could only nod, as she tried to keep the tears from falling. This came out of nowhere, but Zev was ensuring that she was kept safe. She had never had anyone do something like this for her before, putting her needs before their own.

Duran nodded as well. “Then welcome aboard, let’s eat!”

Cat could hear a few of them argue with him as they walked over to the campfire, and caught the end of Morrigan’s comment, and Zevran’s cheeky response. She glanced down at the huge dog who had remained with her, giving his head a scratch.

“Happy to be here,” she said softly, surprised when she realized it was the absolute truth. She laughed as the dog barked at her, and started following the group. “I’m hungry too boy, let’s go!”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for the kudos! These chapters are harder to get through as I wanted to get to quests, and other fun stuff :) Thanks for your patience, and for reading!
Travel and random encounters

Cat smiled as she sat near the fire. This was probably even better than the best case scenario she had played in her head, with Zev being accepted by the Warden. Duran she corrected herself. He really didn’t like being referred to as Warden, though that didn’t stop the others.

While eating dinner, Duran had introduced the rest of the party to them, and similarly introduced the two newcomers to everyone else. She did her best to keep a straight face, but it was so odd and yet thrilling to meet these people whom she knew so well. The fact that they were real people- the other option being that she was totally insane- was amazing to her.

She knew however, that while she felt a closeness and friendship with them, they had no such feelings for her. As far as everyone else was concerned, they had all just met and therefore knew next to nothing about each other. She would have to build the relationships like anyone else, building trust. If only they were all as easy as Dog- yes, Duran had cleverly named the dog, the apt name of Dog.

“That should work, sorry it’s not very big,” Alistair said as he came back to the fire. “It was lucky we had some extra canvas so that we could give you a tent.”

“It is appreciated,” Zevran replied as Cat walked over to view the new structure.

“You’re right though, it is small,” she said, thinking logistically. “We’d practically be on top of each other.”

She turned back as she heard the muffled laughter, and saw that Alistair had gone bright red.

“Is that all it takes?” Zev mused aloud. “If so, I would have conveniently forgotten your tent at the start of our journey.” He laughed louder as he took in her confused expression.

“You don’t have to share with him toots,” Oghren offered. “There’s plenty of room in ours, right between the Warden and me.”

The light finally dawned as Cat realized that she wasn’t meant to share with Zev, and she blushed. “Sorry, I just assumed…” she trailed off as they laughed even louder.

Leliana came to her rescue, and taking her arm to lead her to the women’s tent. “Don’t mind them,” she soothed. “They are just having a little fun, no?” Which made Cat blush again, and shake her head and Leliana giggled as she showed Cat to their tent.

The next day began much as the last had ended, with the party around the campfire, enjoying a meal. Cat ate quickly, and started breaking down the camp as Zev had shown her previously. She desperately wanted to be helpful, knowing that she was currently the weakest link, but she was confident in her ability to adapt.

“You don’t need to do that my lady,” she heard behind her and turned around, looking left and right and finally looking behind her. “Um, I was actually speaking to you, Lady Catarina,” Alistair commented looking embarrassed.

“Warden Alistair, I’m not even close to being a lady, and please call me Cat.” she replied.

“Alright, but then you must call me Alistair,” he returned with a small smile. “We’re actually not big
on titles and such, but I didn’t want to offend in any way.”

“No offense taken,” she said continuing to fold up the canvas.

“Here, I’ll take care of that,” he said, coming forward and taking the canvas from her.

Cat frowned. She was obviously doing something wrong, but she wasn’t quite sure what the right way to fold canvas was. She turned, looking for something else to assist with, and saw that the fire pit had not yet been put out. She headed over, and using a small spade that sat nearby, started shoveling dirt onto the embers.

“Oh, don’t worry about that, I’ve got it handled,” Alistair said coming up to her again. He held out his hand, and she gave up the spade.

Zero for two, she thought. There had to be something she could do to help. She looked around again, but was stopped as Zevran walked up to her.

“Little Dove, there you are,” he said. “The Warden has given us time to go back to our old campsite and collect our packs before we all head out.”

“Oh,” she replied. “I completely forgot about them!”

“Well, we did have a few packs of supplies between us and the mercenaries, which I said would help us to not be a burden on our new companions,” he explained to her. “So come, let us hurry before we are left behind, yes?”

She followed as he stepped out into the woods, immensely glad that the trip was not dependent on her knowing the way. She had followed the merc’s trail yesterday, not paying attention, and then had simply run off so she had no idea where their last camp was located.

After a few minutes, Zevran took her arm in his and spoke, “So, Little Dove, I noticed that you seemed very at ease with our new situation.”

“Um, yes? That wasn’t exactly a question you know.” she replied, matching his pace.

“No, more an observation,” he replied. “It just seems odd to be so at ease with people you have never met before.”

“True, I suppose it would seem odd.” she commented, thinking how best to explain. It seemed he simply wouldn’t believe her when she flat out told him the truth, but what else could she say?

He looked over at her, expecting to receive some sort of explanation, but saw that she was lost in thought. Before he could question her further, they stepped into the campsite. They worked together to quickly repack any helpful belongings in the merc’s packs and shouldered them with their own packs and started heading back.

“So” she asked, “what do we do if they have left us?”

“They have not,” he replied.

“You sound sure of yourself,” she observed.

“Yes” he answered. Glancing at her, he decided to try a different tactic. “So, the Warden said something last night about using treaties to gain allies,” she hmm’d in response so he continued. “I wonder where we still have to travel?”
“I’m not sure,” she replied, still somewhat in her own thoughts. “But I’m glad they have already been to Orzammar. I don’t fancy going to the Deep Roads.”

She glanced over at him, as he was uncharacteristically silent, only to see him giving her a look that translated into “duh”. “What is that look for?” she asked him.

“I’m sure you noticed,” he drawled, “that there are two dwarves in the group? Of course they’ve been to Orzammar.”

“Oh, right.” she said, grateful that there was such an easy explanation for her comment. She really needed to start paying better attention to what she was saying!

Once they returned to the group, they looked ready to leave, however Duran and Dog were missing. After a few moments they came into the clearing, and they all headed out. Duran led them onward, and Cat found herself somewhere in the middle of the pack. Throughout the day, they switched places and Cat was able to speak to everyone at some point, though a few of them chose not to speak back.

She also found herself supremely grateful for traveling with Zev before joining with the wardens. She was able to keep up with the group, and not be a burden, except to Alistair. He continuously stopped her from trying to be helpful, and she made it her new goal to learn their ways of setting and breaking down camp so that they would let her help.

After a few days of travel, she determined that Zev and Duran were destined to be friends. It seemed that they took to each other in no time, and were soon able to communicate through simple signals and gestures which often left everyone else in the dark.

Cat found herself observing more than anything else, because she truly enjoyed all the talk around her. Duran and Zev’s competing, Oghren and Morrigan tormenting Alistair, Even Leliana and Sten’s cyclical conversations that never seemed to go anywhere, she enjoyed them all. Every now and then, Zev would pull her into something, but more often than not, she was able to simply revel in being around others without any expectations.

Zev put his hand out, stopping her forward progress. She looked at him in question, and he put his finger to his lips in a sign for quiet. She held still, looking around and listening as hard as she could. Zev took off silently, melting into the shadows of the nearby trees, while Alistair, Sten and Oghren help their weapons out at the ready, their backs to the ranged fighters and Cat.

She heard roars and yells as several men came running at them from the trees, and their warriors responded in kind. Her protection fell away, as they pushed forward to meet those that attacked them. She unsheathed her daggers, though she was not able to use them with much success, but knew that it was better than nothing.

Cat continued to look around, watching for those that may get past Zevran. She caught movement to her left, and without thinking, tackled a man to the ground who was about to back stab Duran. She was straddled on top of him, grappling for the dagger he held trying to avoid being sliced apart when Duran brought a dagger down across his throat. Cat fell over panting heavily, watching as Duran took off.

“Stay down!” he ordered to her before he was out of her sight. She couldn’t simply lay there however, so she started crawling over to where Leliana and Morrigan were standing. As she moved, she came across a crossbow and recognized it as Duran’s. He must have dropped it in order to use his daggers. She looked up as she heard a scream, and saw Leliana using her bow to fend off an attacker, Morrigan bent over, looking like she was going to be sick. Without consideration, Cat
loaded the crossbow, and lifting it up, took aim and fired.

Leliana was startled as suddenly a bolt appeared from the man’s eye, and he crumpled to the ground. She turned around in surprise and alarm, to find Cat holding the Warden’s crossbow, looking pale. She continued to hold it up, though it was empty and Leliana wondered if she had been frozen by the mercenaries’ mage until she saw it start to shake.

Cat wasn’t sure what was happening, but Leliana was helping her to sit, so she hoped that meant the fighting was over. She looked over as Leliana put the crossbow down, and felt odd as she remembered she had just killed someone. She was upset, though it was because she wasn’t upset about killing that man. *Shouldn’t she be freaking out?* But she wasn’t, and that was the most upsetting part of all. Dog came to sit beside her, and she put her arm around his neck, which made her feel better.

She watched as the others looted the bodies, and piled them to be burned. Zev walked over, doing a quick examination, and determined her capable of continuing on. They started walking away, while Morrigan turned and threw a fireball at the pile of corpses.

After a few minutes Cat asked, “Is this something that happens often?” It seemed to break the silence, as the others smiled, or smirked.

“It happens more than I would like,” Leliana responded with a wink. “But that is to be expected when there is such a large bounty on the Warden’s heads.”

“Sure, blame the wardens,” Alistair quipped. “All we did was survive after all.”

“Cat.” Duran’s voice was oddly serious amid the playful toned of the others.

“Yes Duran?” she asked.

“You know how to shoot, yet you are carrying around daggers.”

“Ah” Zevran interrupted. “That is my fault Warden. I gave Little Dove the daggers until we could acquire a crossbow.” He pulled a face at Cat, “For she cannot use a short or long bow either.” Duran looked at her incredulously, and she felt the need to defend herself.

“Well, yes, but back home I didn’t need weapons, so I haven’t built up the strength to hold the bowstring back while aiming,” she said. This comment had everyone eyeing her.

“So you are some kind of noble lady then,” Leliana remarked.

“What? No, I’m not.” she replied.

“But, then how are you not needing weapons?” Morrigan asked. “Even farmers or city folk need a weapon, if not for protection, then for hunting.”

“Women have no need for weapons or fighting under the Qun,” Sten commented, which had everyone turn to look at him, and then back to Cat speculatively.

“No,” she said. “I’m not part of the Qun.” She could have sworn Sten looked a little disappointed, but she was probably just seeing things. “Though, my land has something a little similar. We have soldiers who protect our land, who do the fighting for us,” she said. “And as for hunting, that’s how I learned to shoot a crossbow.”

Her answers seemed to appease some, but she saw both Morrigan and Leliana ready to ask more
questions when Duran spoke up again.

“Then, we’ll have to find you a crossbow,” he said. “I’m not too keen on sharing.”

“Yes,” she teased. “I’ve noticed you and your crossbow have a special bond.”

“That’s putting it mildly,” Oghren muttered.

“I can always stop my cover fire if there is a problem,” Duran quipped back, and had Oghren commenting about “not being hasty”.

“So,” Zevran began as he matched pace with Duran. “How much further until we reach our destination?”

Duran paused in thought, “I’d guess another half a day at most before we reach Lake Calanhad.”

“Lake Calanhad??” Cat squeaked, having Zevran eye her carefully.

“Yes,” Alistair broke in. “We’re going to petition the mages in the circle for help.”

“Oh??” Zev asked, still unsure of what had been said to upset her so.

“The Arl of Redcliff’s son is possessed by a demon,” Duran stated frowning. “We need his assistance, and we are not willing to sacrifice a child to meet our own needs.”

“I still say this is unnecessary.” Morrigan stated, while Sten nodded along. “The child invited the demon in, and besides that, the mother was willing to sacrifice herself. We could have been finished with this and moving on to the next ally by this time.”

It seemed like this was an old argument, and both warden’s faces became hard and unyielding. “This is not up for debate Morrigan,” Duran stated, his comment signaling the end of conversation.

“Well then,” Zevran stated with a smirk. “On to the mages.” He watched Cat throughout the conversation, knowing that something was wrong, and determined to discover the source.
The Circle Tower

Cat looked around, heart pounding, as she took in the view from the row boat. It was really creepy, from the fog over the water, to the unnatural silence of her companions. Somehow, she was on her way to the circle tower. She had tried to stay behind with Dog and Morrigan, who refused to have any contact with the circle mages. She had tried to stay with Leliana, who would play her lute in the inn and make money while also gathering information, and when that failed, she finally tried to stay with Sten - who had flat out refused.

She couldn’t come up with a good reason to stay behind, but even if she had, Zevran would have stayed as well. She couldn’t keep a fighter from the group when she knew what they would face in the tower. Just that small act could result in horrendous consequences. And so, here she was.

Cat had contemplated just telling them what was actually happening so that Duran would keep his entire group with him, but when she thought of how that conversation might go, it always ended with her being given to the templars or killed outright. Neither option really suited her.

And so, she kept quiet. Once they got to the tower Duran would have Wynne to join his party so she figured they would be all right. So, she shouldn’t be scared, and yet she was. There was a deep fear coursing through her, that she didn’t really understand. What exactly am I afraid of?

As if he could read her mind, Zevran leaned close and said quietly, “Do not worry my little dove, I will not let the mages harm you.”

It was meant to be reassuring, however she simply gave him a confused look. The mages? They were all trapped inside the tower, fighting for their lives...

“Or the templars,” he added. Fear swiftly replaced confusion in her eyes before she could look away. So that is the issue, he thought.

“Thank you” she said quietly. “I’m sure everything will be fine.” Her hands belied her words as he took notice of how she clenched and straightened her fingers around each other. She was a bundle of nerves, and even though he did not understand her fear, he would keep his oath and ensure nothing harmed her.

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After what seemed like an eternity, they finally made it to the circle tower and were escorted inside. The party stopped and stared at the organized chaos that they found, templars rushing to and fro within the large chamber. Duran took the lead, quickly walking up to the stoic man that stood still in the center of the madness.

Cat listened as they were informed of the state of the tower and its mages. It sounded just as she expected, and that took a small part of her fear away. With the changes that she had experienced thus far, she worried about what else her presence may have brought about.

She snapped back to focus as she was steered with their group slightly away from the templars.

“So, what do you think Alistair?” Duran asked quietly.

“It’s difficult to say,” Alistair replied. “I’m sure we could handle the demons well enough, but who knows what else we could face? Blood mages, and abominations… could be trickier, but on the other hand if we don’t help them we are sealing Conner’s fate.”
“I thought much the same. Oghren?”

“Bah, a fight’s a fight. Just point me in the right direction.” he stated while looking around.

“Zevran?” he asked.

“I am fine whatever you may decide, however I cannot leave Cat here.”

They all looked at Zevran in surprise, then three of them looked at Cat.

“Why not?” Alistair asked.

“Zevran,” he stated. “I’ll be fine here,” she said in a rush. “Alistair’s right. I’ll be perfectly safe, though I wish I was a stronger fighter, so that I could help you.” she added, looking at the wardens.

All four males smiled back at her. “You’ll be strong soon enough toots,” Oghren said. “Enjoy sitting out while you can,” and with that, he pulled out his great axe and started walking for the door, with the rest of them following behind.

“You don’t have to be brave,” Zevran said quietly. “I can stay here with you, they will be fine without.”

“NO” she interrupted him, quietly yet with force. He simply raised an eyebrow, though she didn’t notice as she was looking at her feet while they approached the door. She looked at each of her companions in turn, noticing Oghren preparing for a fight, Alistair and Duran speaking with the templar commander - though she couldn’t remember his name to save her life- and finally she turned her eyes to Zevran and found his eyes meeting hers.

She knew he needed to go, and yet a part of her wanted him to stay. He had helped keep her alive thus far, and she was afraid of being alone now. All these thoughts ran through her head as they continued to gaze at each other, waiting for the other to speak.

Cat noticed that the doors were being opened, and the others were walking towards them. Then Zevran turned to join them, and without thinking she grabbed his arm turning him back towards her and threw her arms around his neck and squeezed.

Zevran’s eyes grew wide in surprise, not expecting this reaction from her. His features softened into a smile as he put his own arms around her, realizing that she was worried she may never see him again.

“Please be careful!” she spoke softly into his collar. “Don’t act reckless and just charge in. Follow Duran’s lead, and help watch the others’ backs as well.” She began speaking faster, the words jumbling together, and his smile changed to a smirk as he noticed his companions’ stares. “Watch out for blood mages, and be sure to take Wynne along, and keep back from abominations they tend to blow up when they are destroyed and-”

“I get the idea my dove,” he interrupted her pulling her away and placed a chaste kiss on her forehead. “Do not fret for us. We will keep each other healthy and whole and return to you post haste.” His hand cupped her cheek and he looked into her eyes, “besides, I want to finish this…” he said lowly and she shivered.

“Ugh, Zev!” she pushed back from him, but she was smiling. “Just go already!”

He gave her a last smirk, and turned to join his companions. He had enjoyed the hug, the feeling of
closeness, though oddly not in a romantic way. But he had needed to see her smile, and to rid her eyes of fear before leaving. Flirting with her seemed to always end with that result, so he considered the toughest part of this mission a success.

Cat watched them head through the doors, none of them looking back as the doors shut behind them. Now, all she could do was wait. Wait and worry.

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“Hold on a moment please,” Zevran interrupted the Warden as he spoke with the elderly mage. “What did you say your name was?”

“Wynne. Why do you ask? Have we met before?” She asked him in return, looking him up and down, trying to see if he was familiar.

“No, I do not believe so,” he answered. “Have you ever met a young woman by the name of Catarina Lewis?” he questioned.

“Hmm, no, that name does not sound familiar” she responded with a frown.

“Interesting,” he said. “Continue please, I am sorry for the interruption.” Duran and Wynne both gave him questioning glances before resuming their conversation. In a few moments, Duran joined him where he stood with Alistair and Oghren.

“It seems she won’t take no for an answer,” Duran told them. “If we want to get through her barrier, we have to take her along.”

“Surely it couldn’t hurt to have a mage along,” Alistair commented. “True we don’t know her, but she obviously wants to help get the tower back under control.”

“True…” Duran turned to Zevran. “Mind letting me know what all that was about?” he asked.

Zevran contemplated, then decided to go ahead and share. After all, he had pledged himself to the Warden as well, had he not? “Our lovely dove had been giving me some last minute instructions before we left,” he said. When they only stared at him he added, “you know, don’t get killed, watch out for blood mages and abominations. That sort of thing.”

“And?” Duran questioned, glancing back at the mages huddled across the hall.

“And in the middle of all this, she said something that I didn’t understand until now.” He paused for effect since he had a rapt audience. “She said, to be sure to take Wynne with us” he stated emphasizing her name quietly. “I thought perhaps I had not heard the lady mage correctly, so I needed to verify her name.”

The looks on the others’ faces are how his own must have been when Cat first told him something she should not have known. Confusion and mistrust with a bit of awe he could see well on their faces. He chuckled as Oghren still looked confused, Alistair concerned and Duran in awe.

“I had the same reaction the first time it happened to me as well, my friends,” he stated. “But I will let her tell you the tale behind the mystery. For now, I suggest we follow the advice, and let the lady join us.”

“You want her to join us simply because Cat told you to?” Alistair asked suspiciously. “Doesn’t that
seem, I don’t know, crazy?” he asked Duran

Zevran laughed loudly this time. “You are reading this wrong Alistair” he said trying to make the younger man understand. “She was simply giving advice, and I think it is sound.”

Alistair narrowed his eyes at Zevran. “That looked like more than advice from where I was standing…” he trailed off crossly, causing Zevran to chuckle again.

“Again, you read it wrong!” he stated, feeling that he had better clear this up for Cat. He knew she had not meant it to seem as if they were together, even though others would assume it was so. “That is merely tradition in her land, to give good luck before battle.”

“Oh…” Alistair replied softly looking chagrined.

“Well then,” Duran stated. “Let us get going.” He turned to speak to the mages, and the others followed him. Zevran caught the soft comment Alistair gave to Oghren, which made him smirk.

“But, then why didn’t we get good luck battle hugs?”
Cat had been pacing for what seemed like hours now. At first, she had been content to wait, and had simply found a spot against a wall to sit. She had even tried to take a nap, but that had been impossible for she was too wound up. She had tried to remember all the things that awaited her friends in the circle tower, but gave that up early on, as it only made her anxiety worse.

After a time, she had gone over to the man she knew to be the quartermaster, and had perused his wares. She had even found a small crossbow, which he called a trainer, but felt confident that its small size would be perfect for her. She had him keep it aside for her, promising payment once her party returned.

After that, she had begun her pacing. Back and forth, back and forth. It kept her moving, though it did nothing to distract her thoughts. She heard something in the room around her, and stopped pacing to focus once she heard the muffled laughter. It did not sound pleasant, more like these men were laughing at her.

“Pardon me?” she said in a polite tone. “I didn’t catch what was said.”

A templar stepped forward, a cross between a sneer and a smirk written on his face.

“I said, your rabbit is already dead, but you shouldn’t worry. There are plenty of men here that can console you,” he said with a glint in his eye and his hand outstretched.

Cat recoiled in disgust. “Not likely,” she said speaking in her most superior voice to dissuade him. “And he’s an elf not a rabbit, and a friend, not whatever you’re thinking.” She turned away from him in a huff, while he and his friends cackled behind her.

“Sure, my lady, I could tell you was very friendly with your “elf” earlier.” She could practically see the finger quotes in her mind when he said elf.

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Time moved forward, and everywhere Cat turned, this type of racist and crude talk followed her. She avoided all those who spoke that way, and while she didn’t know how long she had been suffering through it, she knew she was at the end of her rope. She made her way back to the quartermaster, and asked about the crossbow again.

“I’ve saved it for you, my lady, but your friends aren’t back with payment as yet,” he responded, looking confused.

“I know,” she sighed. “I’m going in after them.”

“What? But my lady, it’s not safe—”

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**Chapter Notes**

Due to a very nice comment, and the fact that I’m kind of on a roll with this, have another chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
“Which is exactly why I need this weapon,” she said quickly before he could continue. “I am certain that they are fine, but I simply cannot wait any longer.” She said it with finality, hoping that he would not continue to argue with her.

“Perhaps, something as collateral?” he asked tentatively.

“Ah, yes” she patted her pockets, thinking that she had nothing, before remembering her necklace. It was a gift she bought for herself before her divorce, when Steven had forgotten her birthday. She kept it on as a reminder that even when others disappoint, she could always rely on herself. “Will this do?” she asked unclasping the necklace and re-clasping it before handing it to him.

“I- I can’t take this my lady, it is too fine” he stammered, looking at the jewelry with wide eyes.

Cat smiled, “I will come to reclaim it, so you need only hold onto it for me,” she said. “But for now, a weapon is needed more than jewelry.”

“Oh course, my lady,” He set her necklace gently down inside a box, and then began handing her items. First a quiver, which she slung over her head to hang across her body, then bolts to fill it, and finally the crossbow.

Once geared up, Cat smiled at him, and thanked him for his help. She marched over to the Knight Commander.

“Commander… Greagoir!” she said as she suddenly remembered his name.

“Yes?” He turned to look at her.

“I need to go through the door sir, I need to help my friends.” she said, almost pleadingly.

“I cannot in good conscience let you do that my lady,” he replied. “It is far too dangerous.”

“I can understand your reservations Ser,” she took a deep breath. “But if anything happens to them, I will never be able to forgive myself for staying here, safe, while they are risking their lives. I’ve given them enough of a head start, and now I will be following after them.” She was done with waiting, and she was going to go, no matter what these templars said and she let him know it, albeit in a really polite way.

She wouldn’t call it a smile, but she did see the corners of his mouth slightly turn up. “I can understand how you feel,” he stated softly. “I too, would choose to be with friends facing horrors than staying safely behind.” His gaze turned firm again, as did his voice. “However, it will be the same as for your companions, I will not open the door again unless the First Enchanter were to tell me that it is safe to do so.”

Cat nodded as he said this, “I understand Ser, and I thank you!” She turned directly around and headed toward the huge doors, smiling as she heard him call, “Let her through” and slipping inside once the doors were open enough for her to fit.

Her eyes took a moment to adjust to the slightly dimmer room, and she continued forward through a hallway and finally into a large room. She looked around, noticing the shimmering barrier erected across the doorway in the left corner of the room. She heard several gasps from her right, and turned toward the sound, seeing several women and younger children gaping at her.

“They let you in..?” one of them asked, though she wasn’t certain if it was directed at her, or simply
“I’m looking for my friends” she said in response. “A man, two dwarves and an elf that came through here a few hours ago?”

“Yes,” a woman answered stepping forward. Cat recognized her as the mage that tried to stop Wynne from going, than tried to join her. “They came through, and Wynne escorted them through to the tower.”

“And then put the barrier back in place?” Cat asked, although it was obvious.

“Yes,” she answered ruefully. “I’m sure to keep us here and safe, so that we couldn’t join them later.”

“Sounds familiar,” Cat responded with a smile. “I just got through my own” she said, gesturing with her thumb at the massive doors behind her. She then nodded, and introduced herself. “I’m Cat,” she said.

“Petra” the mage responded. “A pleasure.”

“Likewise,” Cat stated. “Now, any idea on how I can get through this?” nodding toward the barrier.

“Unfortunately, no.” Petra said. “It will only dissipate once Wynne releases the spell, or if something were to happen to her, or her mana- “

They both turned at the interruption as the shimmering barrier dissolved into sparkles that faded from existence. Cat couldn’t help but think of how pretty it was, before realizing both that her way was clear, and what that could mean for her friends.

“That’s probably not a good sign,” Petra said quietly.

“No, but at least the way is clear. I’m going to go help my friends.” She turned to Petra. “I’m not going to force you to stay, but with the barrier gone, they may need your protection,” she said nodding to the other mages.

“That’s true.” She looked around in thought before releasing a sigh. “I should stay and protect them, though I do want to go with you.” she said to Cat. “Before you go however, we can give you a few potions that we scavenged on our way here. We thought we may need them but I fear your friends may need them more.”

“That’s very generous of you,” Cat remarked, turning so that Petra could help put the pack with potions on her back.

“If it will help Wynne in any way, then it will be worth it,” she responded. “Maker guide you Cat.”

“Thank you again Petra,” and with that, Cat walked onward through the doorway into the tower.

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Cat was secretly glad that Duran was such a completionist, though he probably didn’t even think about. He was one that never left an enemy alive, or a room unsearched. She stayed on guard with her crossbow loaded, but the worst she was finding was corpses and blood. Not that she was
immune to such things, but found it better than the alternative of living people or demons to fight.

She continued through the tower in a straight path, not stopping to search as her friends had done. She was surprised that the layout was almost exactly as she remembered it, though the rooms and staircases were all bigger than the game had shown, and much more furnished, though that was expected with all the mages and templars living here. They could hardly function without places to sit.

She stopped momentarily as she reached another staircase, peering to her right, and noticing the office belonging to the First Enchanter. Stepping inside the office, she marveled at his personal library, though she was disheartened to find that she couldn’t read the writing on the spines. That did not bode well for her future, but she put it from her mind.

Just for fun, she moved to the chest in the left corner of the room, noticing that it was closed, but unlocked. She lifted the lid and peered inside, wondering if they had left anything in it to cover the theft of the grimoire. She frowned as she noticed the black book was the only item in the chest.

Cat thought for a moment, then reached down and picked up the book. She leafed through it, noting some small illustrations in the margins here and there. Though she couldn’t read it, she felt sure that this was the grimoire that Morrigan wanted. Perhaps she hadn’t said anything to Duran about it, or she had… and he had purposefully left it? She wasn’t sure what to think, but decided to take the book along.

She took the time to ensure it was protectively wrapped in parchment that she found in the desk, and nestled it in the pack Petra had given her. Then picking up her crossbow, she continued out of the office and up the stairs.

The third floor was much of the same, and Cat continued at a hurried but watchful pace. It seemed as though her companions had been pretty thorough, and while she was eager to meet up with them, she also felt something akin to Indiana Jones, searching for lost treasure.

She reached the top of the stairs on the fourth floor, continuing on. Right then is when she mentally hit herself for not going through the quest beforehand. True, she hadn’t wanted to think about all the things her friends would be facing, but now she was walking blindly as she couldn’t remember what was upcoming.

She stopped in the open archway, peering inside the central room and gasping as she saw her companions dead on the floor. She ran over to the nearest, Oghren, and checked for a pulse. Finding one, she let out a huge sigh of relief before turning to Alistair and checking his. They were alive!

But, why would they…

It hit her at the same time- figuratively as she recalled the sloth demon, and literally as she looked up to see the sloth demon reaching out to her before everything went black.

Chapter End Notes

I realize that Wynne didn't put another barrier in place after leaving, but it worked well for my story, so I added it. Thanks for reading!
Cat slowly woke up, hearing some excited voices in the other room. She sat up and rubbed the sleep from her eyes, opening them to find she was sleeping on the couch, in her parent’s house.

“Merry Christmas!” Her mom called as she sailed by into the kitchen.

“Right, Christmas…” Cat couldn’t help but feel somewhat out of place, but shrugged it off. She had the craziest dream after all, so vivid and exhausting.

“Better hurry up sleepyhead!” she heard her mom call again. “Steven said he was coming early, right?” Cat jumped up from the couch at that, *she’d better get herself looking presentable!* She cleaned up her impromptu bedding and headed for the bathroom.

She quickly made herself ready for the day, though she continued to have a nagging feeling that something was not right. *She should be ecstatic! This was the day Steven had proposed to her after all, and…* she stopped as she realized what had just gone through her head. *HAD proposed, now why had she thought that? She meant WILL propose, right?*

She went into the kitchen, still feeling odd and uncertain. As she helped her mom prepare breakfast, she could swear she felt eyes on her, and even looked around a few times to ensure there were not.

“You okay honey?” her mom asked.

“I think so, just feeling a little off I guess.” Cat replied.

“Well, the obvious cure is to open some presents!” Her mom exclaimed, and pulled her into the living room.

Cat smiled as she saw her dad, digging into his stocking for the chocolate orange that was there every year. He claimed it was his first breakfast each year, and it always brought a smile to her face.

“Hey sweetie,” her mom said to her dad. “Find Rina a present to open, will you?” She left to go check the food, and Cat found herself feeling odd again.

“Rina?” she questioned.

“That’s your name, isn’t it?” her dad chuckled at her. “Or has that changed since last night?”

“Right. I mean, no, it hasn’t changed. Sorry,” she said as she went over to sit by him. “Just a strange dream, where everyone was calling me Cat” she said.

“Ha ha!” Her dad laughed. “Well in that case, I’ll call you Kitty-Cat.”

“Ugh, no thanks” she said with a smile. He was always teasing her. She leaned into him and cuddled. *It had felt like forever since she had a good cuddle!*

The doorbell rang, and her dad gave her a nudge. “I think you’d better get it” he said with a wink.

The smile she had, fell as she opened the door to reveal Steven.

“Hey babe, I’ve missed you!” He said, as he pulled her into a hug and kiss. She smiled uncertainly up at him as he shrugged out of his jacket and put his arm around her, holding her close. “You okay?” he asked.
“Um, yeah” she answered, though she was far from it. She felt as if maybe she was going crazy. Every part of her screamed to get away from him, but she couldn’t figure out why. This was the guy she was madly in love with, right? The feeling wouldn’t go away however, and the more she examined it, the more she realized it wasn’t fear, it was disgust mixed with sadness. But why??

They walked into the kitchen, to find her mom and dad, but also her brother and sister, their spouses and kids. She watched as Steven made his way around, giving hugs and kissing cheeks. It gave her the oddest feeling, as if now she was dreaming. Steven hated hugging, or displays of affection of any kind, in fact. She had felt betrayed that she hadn’t found that out until after the wedding…

Cat stopped again. Something was wrong, and she could no longer ignore it. She returned to the living room, hoping that the quiet would help her think. What was the last thing she remembered, before waking up this morning?

“I traded my necklace for a crossbow,” she murmured to herself. “The circle tower? But that was a dream?”

“Glad I didn’t have to intervene on this one.”

Cat whirled around, and saw a very short man in what looked like armor standing in front of her fireplace gazing at the Christmas tree.

“How?!” she asked, flabbergasted. “It wasn’t a dream? You and Zev and Alistair and everyone?”

“Nope,” he said smiling at her, though it quickly turned upside down. “Mind telling me how the sloth demon got a hold of you, when you are back with the templars?”

“Uh, no not really,” she stammered back.

“Rina? Love?” Steven came into the room, startled to find her not alone. “Who’s this?” he asked.

“Like you don’t know,” she said, her eyes narrowed and angry as she realized what this meant for her “family”.

“Great news, I asked your dad, and he gave us his blessings,” he continued as if she hadn’t said anything. “We’re getting married!” he exclaimed pulling her into a hug that felt suffocating.

She squirmed until she had some leverage, and pushed him away. “No means no!” She heard a chuckle and turned to smile at Duran. She turned back just in time to avoid another death grip hug from demon Steven. “I wish you, those mercenaries, and the freaking templars would understand! I’m not interested!!” She punctuated her final word with another shove, pushing demon Steven further away.

“Wait, what?!?” Duran yelled as he rushed forwards to take care of the man turned demon.

“What?” Cat asked confused. “There may be more in the kitchen!” she called as she searched for a weapon, finding her crossbow under the tree. “Merry Christmas to me!” she said, before giving herself a face palm. “That was awful” she muttered. “Good thing no one heard it.”

“Heard what?” Duran asked as he came back from the other room.

“Nothing!” she said quickly, as she felt herself being moved and everything around her disappeared.
It seemed to happen quickly, but it was still disconcerting to disappear from one area, and reappear in another. She saw Oghren, Alistair, Zevran and Wynne in front of her, though their backs were to her as they were focused on Duran standing in front of them.

“You made it back, is everything all right?” Wynne asked.

“Yes,” he answered. “It appears I had merely forgotten someone,” he drawled nodding towards Cat. They all looked behind them, and she received four shocked stares and one smirk.

“Hi guys,” Cat said waving, then winced as the yelling started. Alistair sounded appalled, Zevran was concerned and then furious, Oghren was happily greeting her like long lost cousins, and Wynne looked confused.

It didn’t last long, as the sloth demon’s voice overpowered theirs, and they all went silent.

Duran didn’t even converse with it, he simply gave out instructions “Cat, stay back with Wynne, the rest of you, let’s kill this thing.” Then with a shout, he raised his arms and transformed into his Golem form.

Cat ran back with Wynne, though she couldn’t stop staring at Duran. The golem form was amazing, but that wasn’t all. As the sloth demon took other forms, Duran changed as well, keeping the demon in place for the others to hack and slash at.

Cat was slow on the uptake, but quickly raised her crossbow and began firing at the demon’s face. The smaller crossbow may have not done as much damage, but she was able to fire it quickly and accurately, and reload within an acceptable space of time. She finally felt like she was contributing.

After a time the demon finally fell and Cat felt like cheering, but before she could, everything went white. She knew she was lying down and she was glad, because she felt exhausted. She could feel the cold stone floor on her face, and simply laid there resting as she wasn’t quite ready to open her eyes. *Who knew that fighting in the fade could take so much energy!*

She heard some muffled laughter, and decided she’d better find out what was going on. Her eyes flew open as the ground moaned and moved, taking her with it! She was rolled onto her back, and found herself draped across Alistair’s legs.

She immediately turned red, and looked up to see that Alistair was also. Her mouth opened and closed, then opened again as she tried to apologize, but nothing would come out.

Zevran, though still chuckling at their discomfort, helped her extract herself from Alistair’s lap. “Not only finding us, but falling head over heels as it were,” he teased her, watching the blush extend to her neck and ears.

“Oh my gosh, I’m so sorry!” she managed to eke out. “I thought at first you all were dead, and I ran in to check your pulses, and I was checking Alistair’s when the sloth demon got me… I must have fallen right on top of you,” She looked at Alistair, but found that he was looking anywhere else. “I’m really sorry.”

“No harm done toots, I keep telling him to get a girl on top of him, ha ha!” Oghren belched out, and Alistair turned an even darker shade.

But then Alistair spoke up. “I’d like to know what Cat is doing here,” he said in a rush. She whirled on him, and he gave her a sheepish look. *Throwing her to the wolves like that… she would definitely*
“I would like to know that as well,” Zevran said icily to Cat and she hung her head. “It was extremely reckless, just like the trap for the wardens!”

“Wha-?” Wynne gasped.

“You cannot keep doing this, you promised you would be more careful!” he continued as if Wynne hadn’t interrupted.

Cat’s head came back up slowly, eyes glittering dangerously. She had finally had enough. She didn’t like to lose her temper, but she would not be blamed for others’ mistakes.

“First off, I didn’t do it on purpose. I am not reckless, I am simply pushed farther than I am willing to take!” Her voice didn’t raise in volume, but they could all hear the strength behind her words.

“Pushed.” Zevran said disbelievingly. Duran had to admit, as he stood back to enjoy the show, that Zevran had guts. It was obvious that Cat was angry, yet he continued to rile her even further.

“Yes pushed,” she snarled. “I’m sorry that your precious trap was ruined, but I’m not going to sit there and get hit and groped by a disgusting man.” She started pacing in her anger, "Then the templars, treating me like some kind of whore-”

“GROPED??”

“WHORE??”

She wasn’t exactly sure who had yelled what, but all four males looked at her with fury on their faces, and it was so intense, she took a step back. The action snapped them out of it, though the anger remained.

Zevran stepped forward, hand outstretched for hers, and she placed hers in his. He spoke softly, but she could tell he was still angry. “One of the mercenaries I hired… tried to…”

“Yes,” she replied just as softly. “But I got away, and I am fine. But that is why I was running, I just didn’t know that it was the direction of the trap. I’m sorry.”

“That mark on your face,” he replied, "wasn’t from a tree.” She smiled sheepishly. “Then they are lucky that we killed them before I knew,” he growled. “Now, I must apologize, but you have to admit things have turned out for the better, have they not?” he asked with a small smile.

“I think so,” she said with a squeeze she pulled back her hand.

“About those templars,” Alistair began.

“It’s nothing, just crude offers since they believed all my companions to be dead” Cat said, turning to the rest of the group. “I finally couldn’t take it anymore. I didn’t think you were dead, but I knew I’d rather be facing death with you, than staying safely alone.”

“I appreciate the sentiment Cat,” Duran spoke up. “But you can’t blame us for wanting to keep you safe.”

“No,” she replied. “I can’t. And to be honest, I’m glad I didn’t have to fight all of that” pointing to the stairs down.

“But now, we have battle stories to share!” Zevran added, coming up and putting his arm around her.
“As well as wounds that need kisses-”

“Ugh! Zev!” She pushed him away from her, trying to keep from smiling. “Not a chance!”

“Aw... but I didn't even get a good luck battle hug!” Alistair whined.

“Good luck battle hug?” Cat looked to him, sure she hadn’t heard him correctly.

“Yes, remember my dove?” Zevran interjected. “Hugs before battle to ensure good luck, like you gave to me before we parted?”

Cat grinned as she understood what he had done, “I like hugs, so hugs are ongoing,” she said with a grin, and received several back in return.

“Battle hugs?” Cat heard Wynne mutter.
The group stayed and rested, but only for a short time as they knew they needed to continue on to save the First Enchanter. Wynne was the driving force, with Cat helping though she didn’t share why she was pushing them. Every so often she caught Duran looking at her questioningly, and she knew her time of silence was coming to an end.

As they reached the room where Cullen was imprisoned, Cat pulled Duran aside.

“I’d like to stay here with him,” she said, nodding towards Cullen. “Perhaps I can give him hope that his suffering is almost over.”

“That’s fine with me,” Duran said. “But what’s the real reason?”

Cat smiled an embarrassed smile. “I may be more of a hindrance than a help for this one,” she said quietly. “I’m not quite ready for abominations and pride demons.” With that, she turned to let the others know that she would be staying behind.

They all accepted readily, and headed towards the stairs to the Harrowing Chamber, Duran giving Cat a last glance.

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“Still here?” Cat heard Cullen ask himself quietly. “What form have you taken now demon? You will not tempt me with beauty, I will overcome!” His voice growing stronger as he gave himself courage.

“Hello,” Cat said quietly, as she sat down on the floor in front of the cage of light, facing him. “I know it seems like demons and visions or whatever, but we are actually here to destroy those.” She settled in, getting as comfortable as she could. “I know things have been horrible for you, but once my friends kill Uldred, you will be free again.”

“No more!” Cullen whined, squeezing his eyes shut, and massaging his temples with his fingers. “I cannot chance to hope, I cannot take the disappointment when it is revealed to be false!” he moaned.

Cat wasn’t sure how she could help, she seemed to be making it worse. So she did what she always did when trying to calm her nephews down; she sang. Granted, she felt silly singing children’s songs to a templar warrior, but she figured if it worked for a three year old, it should work for him too. Especially when keeping the melody quiet and the rhythm slow.

Cullen froze as he heard her begin to sing, trying to keep the foul words away, but found himself slowly relaxing. Was she singing about a star? This was unlike anything the demon had done before. He stiffened again in worry before realizing something. He had never heard this song before, which
meant that the demon could not have pulled it from his mind to torment him. All too soon, she was finished and went silent.

“Again, please,” he asked, practically begging. Cat opened her eyes, and saw that Cullen was much calmer, looking almost relaxed.

Perhaps she was helping after all. So she began again, “Twinkle twinkle little star…”

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It seemed like an eternity, but the cage holding Cullen eventually dispersed, and she crawled forward to him. She stopped before touching him however, as that could be disastrous.

“Are you… okay?” she asked. “You are free now.” She let the words hang in the air, watching him, worried he may not be truly calm. He opened his eyes slowly, and she gazed into them and smiled warmly.

“You are… real?” he asked. “I thought I was dreaming,” his voice slightly slurred as he was exhausted.

“Not this time,” she replied softly. “The nightmare is finally over,” she was sorry as soon as she said that, as he stiffened in response. She scooted back slowly, wanting to give him room and knowing that anything could set him off. They both looked up to the stairs as the door opened, and her friends emerged, followed by several others she didn’t recognize supporting First Enchanter Irving.

“You were successful,” she said, though she kept her eyes on Cullen.

“Yes,” Zevran came up behind her. “The abominations have been purged.”

“There is no way of-” Cullen began, stiffening again.

“Would you like to join us?” Cat asked loudly, interrupting Cullen’s tirade. “We are heading back to the templars, and we can assist you if you’ll allow it,” she added motioning to herself and Zevran.

“T- the templars?” he asked, confused and hopeful at once.

“Yes, let us help you, Ser,” she replied.

“All… all right,” he said. “Can you sing some more?” he asked, and Cat flushed as Zevran smirked at her, delighted with this new knowledge.

“Perhaps later, but let’s just focus on walking right now, okay?” she answered, knowing she would never be able to sing while helping him down the multiple staircases.

Cullen and Zevran both gave her pouting looks, and she almost burst into laughter at the sight. “Come on boys, let’s get downstairs,” she said moving to Cullen’s left side, and placing his arm over her shoulders, while Zevran took his right side. Slowly, they helped him walk and they descended through the tower until they were finally at the great doors.

The others had been quicker, so that the doors were already open when they got there, and a few templars ran over to take Cullen from them, and help him to a cot. One templar even stopped them to thank them, and Cat recognized him as one of those that had given her the most trouble earlier.
Cat took a moment to stretch her sore arms and back, noticing that Duran was in a conversation with Greagoir and Irving. She figured they would be leaving soon for Redcliff, with mages coming to join them soon after.

Zevran came up and put his arm around her shoulders, and asked conspiratorially, “Now, Little Dove, point out these crude templars for me, if you would be so kind.”

Cat laughed, and moving away patted his arm in sympathy. “Not this time,” she said. “But you can come with me to the quartermaster. I need to pay him for my new weapon, and reclaim something of mine.”

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Many hours later, and one more boat ride across the lake, Cat found herself in camp with the entire party in front of a large fire. She breathed a huge sigh of relief, finally able to truly relax now that they were out of the tower, and away from the templars.

“I still can’t believe I missed all the excitement!” Leliana said as she prepared dinner over the fire.

“I can’t believe you actually helped those… sheep” Morrigan sneered in reply, “It would have been much better to simply leave them to their fate.”

“And how glad I am, that you are not in charge Morrigan” Wynne said as she walked up to sit next to Cat. “I much prefer being alive and not possessed after all” she quipped with a wink at Cat and Leliana.

Morrigan gave a sound of disgust, and turned away. Cat remembering suddenly the book in her pack, called out. “Morrigan, hold on, I have something for you!”

Morrigan turned back, impatient and cross but Cat could see the curiosity in her eyes as well. She opened her pack and walking over, handed Morrigan the wrapped book. “I hope I grabbed the right one,” she said as she walked back to the fire.

Morrigan opened the parchment, and looked at the tome in surprise. “Mother’s grimoire? But, how-how did you know? I did not have a chance to speak of it to the Warden.” Cat was surprised to see Morrigan so flustered, and it in turn made her flush.

“Well, I just found what looked like a book of magic, so I grabbed it for you,” she said trying to play it off, but seeing Morrigan focus harder on her.

“You grabbed a random tome that had to have been somewhere locked away, and thought, a woman I have hardly spoken to would like that?” she asked incredulously.

“Well, when you put it like that…” Cat trailed off, uncertain of what to say. She hadn’t thought about the repercussions, only that Morrigan wanted the grimoire.

“I think I can answer that,” Duran interrupted, and everyone turned to face him with looks ranging from confusion (Morrigan) to dread (Cat).
“It’s simple really,” he continued. “Cat knows much more than she has told us.”

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Cat looked at Duran, her heart beating erratically, unsure of how to proceed. To have survived through the tower, to now be left behind, or worse have Sten kill her? Zevran didn’t believe her, why would any of the others?

“It’s all right Little Dove, just tell them what you told me,” Zevran said behind her quietly. Raising his voice he addressed the group. “You may not believe what you will hear my friends, but I assure you, it is the truth.” He then sat down and gave Cat a go ahead gesture with his hand.

Cat stared at Zevran, a guarded expression on her face. *This was new. Did that mean he believed her now? What had changed his mind? And, if he did believe her, would the others?*

Cat looked around again, too nervous to say anything, mouth opening slightly but no sound coming forth. Duran took pity on her, and tried to start the conversation.

“I mean, it’s pretty obvious Cat,” he began. “Firstly, we’ve never had to explain anything to you, not about who we are, or where we are going. You don’t ask any questions, you just already understand what’s going on.

“Second, you knew about Wynne before we had even entered the tower,” the others including Wynne all looked at her in surprise “and you knew which book in an entire tower full of magic books was Morrigan’s mother’s.” Duran’s grin grew as he spoke, seeing the increasing look of angst on Cat’s face. He gave a nod to Zevran, passing the conversation on to him.

“She also knew about the contract for your heads before it was announced to the Crows,” Zevran added helpfully, and had Cat glaring at him.

“How?” Wynne asked. “How is this possible?”

“You must have been touched by the Maker,” Leliana said reverently. “A kind of Oracle sent to help us!”

“What?” Cat gasped, “No. No no no. That’s not it at all.” She kept shaking her head, hoping to dissuade everyone to forget that Leliana had said something so ridiculous.

“Then explain,” Morrigan demanded.

Cat sighed, knowing there was nothing else she could do at this point. She turned to Zevran and begged quietly, “Just don’t let them kill me, okay?” before turning back to the group and starting. She kept her eyes down at her hands, as she didn’t think she could say it all if she looked at them. “Like I told Zevran, I’m not from Thedas…”

“How can you not-”

“Let her get it all out, Morrigan” Duran interrupted. “Then you can ask questions.” He ignored the scowl she sent his way, and nodded to Cat to continue.

“In my homeland, there is an epic tale of adventure, humor, romance, what have you. It is the best
story I have ever heard, for many reasons.” Cat took a deep breath, and continued before she lost her
nerve. “There were many characters, but it began with a man named Duncan,” she paused as she
heard Alistair’s sound of surprise. “He had been recruiting for the Wardens and planned to travel to
many different places. Highever, Orzammar, the Circle Tower, the Alienage, even to the Dalish.

“He didn’t have enough time, so he took his newest recruit to Ostagar, where the King’s army was
gathering.” She noticed that everyone was focused on her, enthralled in what she was saying.

“The army went out to fight the darkspawn, but due to a horrendous act, their plan was never
fulfilled and most of the wardens, the King and even Duncan lost their lives. The remaining wardens
were saved, and set out to gather a new army to fight the blight. They travelled to many places,
gathering allies of dwarves, elves, men and even a qunari to join their cause. Mages, rogues and
warriors, even an assassin,” she smiled at Zevran and he smirked back, “joined together to destroy
the scourge upon their homeland.”

“Is..” Cat stopped her tale as she could smell something. “Is something burning Leliana?”

“Oh!” Leliana moved forward to take the overcooked ram off the fire. “Sorry everyone,” she said,
looking at her failed dinner.

“It is still better than Alistair’s” Sten murmured.

“Hey!” Alistair griped, while the others snickered.

“Let me see if I am understanding correctly,” Morrigan began coming back to topic. “You have
somehow been told the story of the blight, of all of us, before it has happened? And you somehow
travelled here, to Thedas, and became part of this same story?” She rolled her eyes. “You do know
how preposterous that sounds, yes?”

“If I may add something,” Zevran said before Cat could reply. “When I first met the little dove, she
told me that I was not real.” He smirked at the memory.

Several looked to Cat for confirmation. “That- that’s true,” she admitted. “I imagine it would be
something akin to waking up one day, and being introduced to Calenhad,” she turned to Duran, “or
Endrin Stonehammer,” she said. “It took some time for me to believe I was actually here.”

“So,” Wynne ventured, as the others began plating out their dinner. “If you know this story, you
know how it ends?”

Everyone stared back at Cat at this. “Well, yes and no,” she answered. She took in the disappointed
looks and scowls. “I mean, I know that it ends with the archdemon defeated.” She saw a few hopeful
looks return. “However, I don’t know who kills it, or how. One thing you need to understand about
this story, is that there are many versions.”

“Many versions?” She didn’t even know who asked that.

“Yes, because of choices made,” she said. “One time, the story started with Duncan recruiting first in
Highever. Another time, he started in Orzammar. Each time he recruited someone into the Wardens
and they became one of the two surviving Wardens that ended the blight.”

“So because Duncan started in Orzammar, it’s me,” Duran said, glaring at his food.

“Yes,” Cat responded hesitantly, not willing to talk about other options in the game. “I have heard
many different versions, so I cannot know what happens here. Some things were the same each time,
such as the companions that joined— all of you,” she nodded at Wynne. “And the blight was ended in each one,” she added seeing Alistair with a hopeful look on his face.

“That’s good news for us then,” Duran quipped. “Be sure to share any other good news you can remember.”

“Wait, you… you believe me?” Cat asked, astonished. The others stopped their eating to look at Duran.

“I don’t think you are lying, even though I don’t understand it all, and it seems pretty far-fetched” he replied. “Probably wise not to mention it to anyone else though,” he said with a smirk.

With that, everyone was quiet, and continued to eat, or started new conversations. Cat watched as Morrigan went to her tent with her food and new grimoire.

Leliana called out to her, “Cat, if you want to eat, you should hurry! The wardens are coming back for more!”

That snapped her back to reality, because she was starving. “Don’t even think about it Alistair!” she said fiercely.

She grinned at the astonished look Alistair sported.

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After dinner, Cat was staring into the fire, lost in thought when Leliana came and sat down beside her.

“I’ve been thinking,” she began and Cat looked up. “And I have a few questions, if you will indulge me.”

“Go ahead, though I cannot promise any answers,” Cat replied.

“Fair enough,” Leliana consented. “Firstly, if you are not from Thedas, how did you come to be here? And will you be returning home?”

Cat gave an uneasy smile. “I’m not sure, to both” she said, then elaborated. “The last thing I remembered, was going to bed in my pajamas at home. When I woke, I was fully dressed and found myself in a strange place, finding out later that it was Antiva.” She frowned as she continued. “I don’t know how I even got here, or where here is in relation to home, so I have no idea how I would get back, or even if I could.”

“Oh,” Leliana breathed out softly. “I am so sorry for you, though I cannot help but be glad that you are here.” Cat looked up questioning, and Leliana giggled. “Is that so hard to believe? That we have enjoyed having you along with us?” she asked.

“Actually, yes,” Cat admitted with a smile.

“Well, it shouldn’t!” Leliana stated, then lowered her voice so only Cat could hear. “Especially the Warden, he has always seemed so burdened. True, there is a heavy burden on his shoulders, but he has seemed lighter since you and Zevran have joined us.”

Cat smiled. “Yeah, Zevran has that effect on people,” she said.
Leliana giggled. “Yes, he does,” she agreed. “But not only that, if you haven’t noticed, our wardens have a bit of an issue when it comes to helping people.”

“An issue?” Cat asked, curious.

Leliana’s smile softened. “They want to help everyone,” she said. “And it eats at them when they cannot. Helping you, has eased that burden somewhat as well, and I thank you for it. Part of me feels that perhaps you have been sent to us.”

“I… I don’t know what to say,” Cat stammered.

“There is no need to say anything my friend, it is simply a thought,” Leliana replied. “Now, secondly,” she said leaning back and speaking more clearly, “if you are not sure how long you will be staying here with us, we should give you some sort of back story. Otherwise, when you are questioned as you travel, your answers will not satisfy. That could lead to trouble in the future.”

“Very true,” said a voice behind her.

“Zev!” Cat gasped as he had snuck up on her again. “Don’t do that!” she punctuated this with a slap on his shoulder, as he chuckled.

“It appears we must revisit some lessons,” he drawled and had Cat groaning as she remembered their travels to Fereldan.

“I have to be on guard in camp?” she asked dramatically.

“Always be aware, Little Dove. Always,” he replied as he sat down facing her, next to Leliana.

“As I was saying,” Leliana continued with a grin. “I’m thinking perhaps your home was destroyed by the blight, or maybe you are the daughter of a noble who has run away—”

“Why a noble?” Cat interrupted with a frown. “Everyone assumes that, and I don’t get it. Do I act rich and snooty?” she asked irritatingly.

“No my dove,” Zevran answered. “It is more how you look than how you act.”

“How I look?” she asked. “I look just like everyone else here,” she said, looking down at herself. “I mean, these are common clothes aren’t they?” she asked. She had simply taken the clothes Zevran had procured for her in Denerim, and hadn’t thought that they may make her look noble.

“Yes” Leliana agreed. “But it is not just how your wear the clothes, it is also your hair. It is longer than most commoners, well past your shoulders and so thick and dark with streaks of sunlight” she gushed. “Your skin is smooth, and your hands are not calloused,” Leliana grabbed her hand, and Cat could feel the deep callouses she sported in comparison to her own hands.

“Not to mention, you are very healthy,” Zevran added with a large smirk. “The clothes simply show it. It is no wonder you gain attention every where we go.”

“What? Healthy…” Cast gasped as she understood. “Did you just call me… fat?!” her hand covered her heart as she practically swooned. This was not happening.

“Fat?” Zevran asked Leliana.

“No Cat,” Leliana tried to calm her. “He is saying your body is pleasing to look at.”

“What? Oh…” Cat flushed though she was relieved, then glared at Zevran. “For future reference, a
better term is curvy,” she said making an hourglass shape with her hands.

Zevran grinned at her. “I will be sure to not make the mistake again, darling” he purred. “Your curvy-ness is VERY pleasing… just so you are aware.”

Cat tried to stay calm, but she felt her face flame red, again. “I’d prefer to not gain any attention, if that is possible,” she told Leliana, ignoring Zevran as best she could.

“We will have to go shopping,” Leliana’s eyes lit up as she said it. “But I am certain we will find clothes that will help you to appear more common, if that is what you would like.”

“Yes please,” Cat urged, glaring back at Zevran as he continued to chuckle.

“My dove, I so enjoy the lovely flush you get when I tease you,” he said smoothly. “But I think I should retire.” He gave her a wicked looking smirk before saying innocently, "would you perhaps, sing me to sleep?"

Cat winced as Leliana grinned at her. She watched Zevran chuckle as he started walking away, and before she could blink she had pulled off her tennis shoe, and thrown it at his back. She gave him a smirk of her own, when he turned back, rubbing his shoulder where it had struck him.
The trip to Redcliff was long, and Cat could easily believe why it took almost a year for the wardens to gather their allies. Travel times were nothing to joke about and the load screen she used to complain about taking too long, was nothing compared to the real thing. For two weeks they walked, starting when the sun rose, and stopping only when dusk settled in.

Duran led them at an intense pace that she wasn’t used to, but they could all see his desire to hurry back to Redcliff, so they didn’t complain. For the first few days, Cat wasn’t sure she would make it, but Wynne had helped heal her sore muscles and blistered feet each evening.

Despite the endless walking, Cat enjoyed herself immensely. As they walked together, they spent most of the time talking. Everyone was so curious about her home and everything about it that she finally declared that she would get to ask a question for every one she answered.

She thought she had known them pretty well and for some, it was mostly true. What she hadn’t expected were all the small things that simply couldn’t be put into the game. She discovered Wynne’s love of scary stories, Zevran’s ability to juggle, Oghren’s spot on imitations, and even absurd things like Alistair being able to wiggle his ears.

After training, the evenings became a time for them to show off for each other, and she eventually convinced Morrigan to show them her ability to transform into an animal, which gave way to awed voices, and ended by Dog chasing her excitedly.

She even enjoying the training. Though it was mostly for her benefit, the others participated as well. Watching them spar with each other was always fun, but she also liked when they taught her new things. She learned from each of them, how to read the moves of fighters of their specific type and style, how to spot openings, and how to inflict the most damage.

Of course there were things that she didn’t like, the lack of bathing everyday was first and foremost. Digging a hole to use as a bathroom ran a pretty close second. Cat missed a lot of the modern conveniences that she had always taken for granted, but their importance waned as each day passed.

“I believe it is my turn for a question, is it not?” Leliana asked her, pulling her from her reminiscent thoughts.

“Sure Leli,” she answered. She had decided that that they all needed nicknames like she had, but Leliana and Alistair were the only ones who accepted theirs. Once she had tried calling Oghren “Oggie” which ended in an insulted dwarf that ignored her for hours afterward. “Ask away,” she said.

“I want to know about this Steven,” Leliana said, causing Cat to wince.

“Steven? Why?” Cat asked.

“Well, you have mentioned him several times, along with your family, but I am certain he is not
related to you, by what you have said,” she accentuated this with a wink.

She knew it would come up sooner or later, so Cat figured she might as well get it over with. “Well, that’s true. We were married,” she said nonchalantly.

“Ooh, do tell!” Leliana linked her arm in Cat’s as they walked along.

Cat glanced around, noticing that while no one else looked their way, all of their previous conversations had stopped.

“There’s not much to tell, Leli,” she said at last. “We met, fell in love, and were married.”

“How long?” she asked. Cat sighed internally. She should have known Leliana wouldn’t let it go at that.

“Five years,” she replied.

“You must have married very young,” Wynne remarked.

Cat turned to her in surprise. “When I was 19,” she said. “It that young compared to women here?” she asked.

“No,” Leliana said, and Wynne shot back with “but you barely look 20 now!”

Cat rolled her eyes, “I’m 25, actually. Most people assume I am younger. I think it’s the freckles,” she said with a grimace.

“That does not add up,” Morrigan chimed in with a frown on her face. “If you have been married for five years, then you are 24 years old.”

Cat sighed loudly this time. She had been dreading this. “I was married for five years,” she said nodding. “Then we divorced.”

“Divorced?” a few of them asked at once.

“Yes,” she replied. “Meaning we are no longer married.”

Leliana looked shocked, and Morrigan thoughtful, but it was Wynne that spoke. “In your land, people can decide to undo their marriage?”

“Yes,” she replied. “Steven decided that he no longer wanted to be married, though to be honest, we were unhappy for some time before that,” she explained.

“The man is obviously a fool, or perhaps deranged,” Zevran offered from behind her.

“I have never heard of such a thing,” Leliana said quietly.

“A man who does not fulfill his oaths has no honor, and deserves death” Sten added suddenly.

Everyone stopped and stared at Sten, disbelievingly.

Cat smiled. It gave her the best feeling in the world; not what he had said, but that HE had said it. Maybe he was finally warming up to her.

Duran cleared his throat, causing everyone to look at him. He looked at Cat and asked, “This is the man the demon was impersonating in the fade?”
“Yes,” she replied.

He nodded. “Thought he was a nug-humper then, haven’t changed my mind” he said. No one spoke for a moment, and Duran turned and started walking again. Then Oghren began laughing loudly, and they all joined in.

“Good one!” Alistair hooted. Zevran went so far as to hurry forward to join Duran in the front and pat him on the back.

Cat just grinned. Dwarven curses aside, this had been far easier to talk of then ever before. It seemed having friends who sided with her unconditionally made all the difference in the world.

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A few days passed, and the weary group entered Redcliff. They made their way to the castle where they informed Connor’s uncle, Bann Teagan, that the mages from the Circle were on their way to help remove the demon from his nephew.

Teagan and Lady Isolde, Connor’s mother, were thrilled at the news and offered the group rooms and food while they waited.

After another day of waiting, Cat wanted to go explore the village, and she had a good idea of who wanted out of the castle just as much as she did.

“Hey Al!” She called out, ending her search as she found him out by the stables.

“Hello Cat,” he replied. “What can I do for you?”

“I find myself in need of a guide,” she said. His brow rose in question, so she explained. “I’d like to go to the town” she said. “You know, check in on the people, see how they are coming along… see if anyone needs help,” she added knowing that would be what he wanted to do.

“I… but- “ He seemed torn in indecision.

“But what if the mages arrive, and we aren’t here?” he asked her.

“I imagine they will start to prepare for whatever they are going to do,” she answered. “We will only be gone a few hours, so I doubt they will be able to start without us.” She knew he considered Arl Eamon, Isolde and Conner as family of some sort, and would want to be there for them.

He thought it over for a time, and Cat wondered if he would refuse. Finally he nodded. “Okay then, but only a few hours, right?” he asked.

“Absolutely!” she agreed cheerfully. “Let’s go!”

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It took a bit longer to get going, as Alistair decided to ask for a horse. However, Cat was grateful he did when it was a much further walk than she assumed. The game had made everything seem so close, and she shouldn’t still be surprised at this point.

Once they made it into town, Cat let Alistair decide where to go, as he had been here before. She knew that they had fought a hard fight against some walking corpses that the demon inside Conner
had created, and that many people had died before the wardens had shown up to help. She had no specific destination in mind, just wanted to see everything.

They spent their time greeting villagers, helping where they could, and receiving gratitude that they promised to pass on to the rest of the group. Alistair also showed her around the chantry, answering questions that she posed about the religion.

“It seems like the people are rebuilding, though the town is still in rough shape,” she commented as they left the chantry.

“Yes, they’ve been so kind with their gratitude though really, they saved themselves,” he mused. “We helped, but I don’t know that we could have done what we did without all the extra help.”

Cat smiled, “Extra help?” she asked.

He smiled ruefully in return. “I’m sure you already know,” he teased. “But yes, there were a few others in town that fought with us. Some knights of the Arl, the townspeople, a dwarf, and even the tavern owner.”

Cat’s eyes brightened as she remembered. “Dwyn!” she said excitedly.

“What?” he asked.

“So, Al” she smirked. “How much money do you have on you?”

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“I still don’t understand why we had to buy Sten a new sword.” Alistair said the confusion evident in his voice.

“Shh!” Cat glared, then looked around to be sure they weren’t overheard. “Keep it down, it’s a surprise!” she whispered. They continue walking toward the castle. “Now, do you want to give it to him, or should we find Duran?” she asked.

“Definitely Duran,” he answered. “I can see it now. "Surprise Sten, have a new sword." Then he picks it up and challenges me to a duel.”

Cat giggled. “That actually sounds pretty accurate for Sten,” she conceded. “Though with this sword, you may be surprised.”

Alistair grabbed her arm pulling them to a stop, and eyeing her carefully. “This isn’t just any sword, is it?” he asked seriously.

“No,” she said. “You would have found it eventually, but I wanted to save you the trip to Orzammar, where you would have found out that it was actually here.”

“If that’s true, then you’re forgiven for not telling me about this sooner,” he responded in awe. “But why not give it to Sten yourself?”

“Well, technically, you bought it, not me.” His gaze narrowed, and she knew he wouldn’t accept her answer.

“Al, you remember what Sten was doing when you met him?” she asked.
“Of course, he was in cage in Lothering,” he replied.

“Why?”

“Because he had killed a family,” he answered, still not understanding where she was going with this.

“Why did he kill them?” she asked quietly.

“Because…” he stopped to think. “Oh, because they couldn’t tell him where his sword... was…” He looked at her incredulously. “This, is THAT sword?”

Cat nodded. “And so, I can’t be the one to give it to him,” she said. “Whoever gives him back his sword will be, like, a hero to him.”

“Whoa,” he breathed out, looking at the sword in an entirely different way. “Well that settles it. We need to find Duran.” He started walking again, and she quickly caught up as they entered the castle. “I’m just not cut out to be Sten’s hero.”

Cat smiled as she looked at Alistair. How little did he know… “Just so you know Al,” she said, causing him to look over, “you’re already a hero.”

Alistair didn’t respond with words, but his blush said everything.
Denerim

Chapter Notes

Many thanks to all those who have given kudos, commented, or subscribed. I honestly didn't think anyone would even read this, so it's so cool! I'm in awe!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Once their group finally left Redcliff behind, Cat couldn’t help but be relieved. Everything had gone mostly as expected. The mages from the Tower had arrived, Wynne had been sent into the Fade, and Connor was freed from the demon’s grasp.

Bann Teagan had pleaded with the wardens willingness to assist them in finding Andraste’s ashes, the last hope and miracle cure in waking Arl Eamon. The Arl’s knights had given them everything that had been found in their search for the ashes, and that meant the wardens’ next stop was Denerim.

The unexpected part had been last night, as a feast was thrown in their honor. Leliana had shown up at her room with a dress for Cat to wear, and insisted on helping her look “like a lady”. Cat grimaced as she remembered all of her awkward posturing, as she had had no idea how to conduct herself. Bann Teagan had been kind, however his compliments were lost on Cat and she found herself confused more than not. Alistair gawked and turned red whenever she tried to speak to him, and after speaking to Oghren, she blushed so brightly that she avoided him the rest of the evening.

Zevran hadn’t been much better, acting somehow like a jealous lover and an overprotective brother at the same time, giving her moments of complete exasperation.

Later, after several failed attempts to sneak out, Cat had finally inched her way to the door. Leliana, who had brought her back into the thick of things each time, was on the opposite side of the room and Cat grinned as she eased out into the hallway.

She had made it halfway down the hall when she felt a tug on the back of her dress so strong that she was halted where she stood. She turned her head to see Dog had a mouthful of fabric, and was using his “sad puppy” eyes on her.

She tried asking, she tried bribing, she even tried begging him to let her go but he just huffed at her and started dragging her back to the party. She keep walking in the opposite direction, thinking that if the dress ripped it would solve all her problems since Leliana wouldn’t keep her there with her dress in that condition.

She couldn't believe the fabric held together, but she lost their tug of war and was pulled back through the door before she knew it. Everyone got a hearty laugh seeing a red faced Cat dragged in by the war hound. She knew she had been bested when Leliana had walked up with a treat and a smirk, patting him and saying “Good Dog.”

The following morning, they were back on the road, and Cat couldn’t have been happier.
She placed herself in the front with Duran and Zevran, enjoying their banter. For a time they walked in silence, but she found it to be comfortable rather than awkward.

“What’s that look?” she heard Alistair ask. “You look like the cat that swallowed the pigeon.”

“Canary.” Wynne replied.

“What?”

“It’s the cat that swallowed the canary, not pigeon,” she explained.

“I once had a very large cat,” Alistair replied dryly, causing several snickers of laughter. “But, that’s not my point. Why are you smirking at me?” he asked.

“I saw you,” Wynne teased. “You seemed in quite a trance, staring up ahead…”

“Well, yes. I look ahead to see where they are leading us” he replied. Cat looked over at Duran with a questioning look only to receive a smirk in return that she didn’t understand, but she wasn’t surprised. She and Alistair were always the last to get the jokes.

“Oh?” Wynne continued. “And where exactly were her swaying hips leading you, hmm?”

Cat joined in giggling softly at Alistair’s misfortune as he tried to talk his way out of it.

“No, no. I wasn’t looking at her… hind-quarters…”

“Of course,” Wynne replied.

“I may have gazed… er, glanced! In that direction, maybe. But, I wasn’t staring! Or even seeing anything… even,” he said, giving up.

“Mm-hmm,” Wynne agreed sarcastically.

“I hate you,” Alistair muttered, barely heard over the soft laughter.

“You do realize,” Zevran said as he looked over to a giggling Cat, “that said swaying hips are in fact, yours?”

Cat stopped laughing, and turning, gave Alistair a highly offended look. The group’s laughter was even louder, as it was difficult to tell who turned a brighter red.

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Three weeks later, they walked into Denerim. Their eclectic group drew stares, but were left alone as they made their way to the nearest tavern to get directions.

“Can you not simply tell us where to go from here?” Morrigan said disdainfully to Cat.

“The story didn’t come equipped with a map, Morrigan,” she sniped back while thinking, as far as you know.

“Ugh” Morrigan’s trademark noise of disgust made Cat smile.
“But, knowing our luck, it’s probably that one across the street, eh Leli?” Cat said to Leliana.

Leliana giggled as the wardens returned outside. “Apparently, it’s that one, right across the street” Alistair said. His words were met with stares of disbelief. “What did I say?” he asked Duran.

They made their way over and knocked on the door. Cat immediately frowned at the young man who answered, introducing himself as Weylon. He noticed her animosity and was taken aback, then somewhat frightened by her demeanor. Duran questioned him about Brother Genitivi and caught him lying to them, forcing the younger man to attack.

Zevran took the opportunity to stun the fake Weylon, and Sten caught him as he fell over. Cat hurriedly ushered everyone inside, trying to avoid anyone’s notice. By the time she closed the door behind them, the man was dead with Duran cleaning his dagger before re-sheathing it.

Cat pointed towards the back bedroom, and Zevran went with Duran to investigate. Morrigan and Wynne began perusing the shelves of books, while Oghren and Alistair raided the kitchen.

Cat watched as Dog paced in front of her, looking bored. She nudged Leliana, “Hey Dog,” she said, getting his attention. “See anything interesting?” They giggled as Dog perked up, and with a bark ran into another room, shortly returning with something in his mouth.

“Well, let’s see it,” Cat said with a smile pulling the item from Dog and holding it up.

“Is that… someone’s small clothes?” Leliana asked with a giggle.

“Yes,” Cat drawled. “A lady's small clothes.” She winked at Leliana and said “Wonder where these were hiding, in the chantry scholar’s house?”

Everyone was now watching them in interest as Morrigan stalked up to Cat and snatched it from her. Holding it out and creating a flame, she burned it to ash in her hand. Shaking the dust off, she then sniffed in disdain at them, and stormed out of the house.

Cat looked around at her friends with a smile as they all burst out laughing. Dog received many an extra treat that day.

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“All right,” Duran said as they sat around the tables in the Gnawed Noble Tavern. “I think the best way to do this is to split up.” He held up his hand at Alistair’s protest. “There is much to accomplish, and we can finish more quickly this way,” he said.

He paused, but receiving no argument, he continued. “Alistair, you, Wynne and Dog will help Sergeant Kylon. He has several tasks to help make the city safer for the citizens. Once you’re done with that, you should have time to look up your sister.” Alistair smiled, Wynne nodded, and Dog gave a bark in agreement.

“Leliana,” Duran continued, turning to the bard. “You, Sten, Oghren and Morrigan will track down this Marjolaine. Scout out the situation first, but if you can end it, go ahead. We can always return with you later if you four are not enough. After that, try to handle some of these tasks we received from the Blackstone Irregulars.” Leliana looked nervous, but determined, and the four of them nodded their understanding as well.

“Zev, you and I will take Cat with us,” Duran said, causing Cat to look at him uncertainly. “We
received information on a few lucrative jobs in the area, that are also perfect for Cat to test her skills on” he continued, to her dismay. “Don’t give me that look Cat,” he said to her. “We’re going along to make sure nothing goes awry.” She nodded, though she didn’t feel any better about it.

Having gotten their assignments, the group went their separate ways, agreeing to meet back at the tavern in time for dinner.

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“It’s your turn Little Dove, are you prepared?” Zevran asked Cat.

“If I say no, can we skip my turn?” she asked, and they both smirked at her.

“I suppose, if you are afraid…” Zevran started.

“Oh, I know what you are doing, and I’m really not happy that it is working,” she said as she glared her worst glare at him.

“You can do this Cat,” Duran said. “Now, what’s your plan?”

“Hmm…” she thought. “Since my pick pocketing is mediocre at best, I don’t think I can do what you both would and simply take it off her. Maybe if it was something small, but not a sword,” Duran nodded, but said nothing, letting her work it out, like he was her stealing coach or something.

“Couldry told us she is somewhat of a hypochondriac,” Zevran added helpfully.

“That might work,” she mused. “I could give her some reason to take off her armor, which would make it easy to swipe the sword.”

She looked at them for approval, but couldn’t read their expressions. “You’ll make sure and intervene if it all goes sideways, right?” she asked, uncertainly.

They glanced at each other then turned back to her. “No,” they said in unison.

“What?” She looked back and forth between them. “Why not?”

“We won’t always be there,” Duran started. “We’ll keep you from being killed or hauled off to prison,” Zevran added. “But you need to see this through, no matter what may happen” Duran finished.

Cat frowned at them. “I knew you had some epic sort of bromance developing, but I never expected you to finish each others’ sentences,” she groused.

They glanced at each other again, before turning to her with twin grins. “That wasn’t meant as a compliment!” she said, though she couldn’t help but laugh.

---

Cat could never claim to be a rogue, now that she had seen Duran and Zevran in action, but she was pleased with her contributions. She had easily stolen the decorative sword from Ser Nancine while pretending to work at the Wonders of Thedas shop, once she had convinced the woman to try on several dresses.
She had also been an instrumental distraction for a Seneshal’s guards, allowing Zevran to sneak in and steal a crown that was in the Seneshal’s care. However, she was the most proud of successfully sneaking into a seemingly abandoned warehouse. Though she had been caught, she managed to convince the guards that she was an innocent woman that had simply gotten lost. Her “coaches” had taken out the guards, then lavished her with praise. Having finished the jobs, Duran and Zevran had led her into a small armor shop in the market district.

While Duran spoke with Wade and Herren, Cat was fangirling. She was wondering what Duran was ordering from the "best armorer of exotic materials in Thedas”.

“Alright Cat, we will come back to pick you up once you’re done,” Duran told her.

“Wait, what?” she asked. “Why?”

“You were not listening again, were you my dove?” Zevran asked, “Caught unaware, how disappointing,” he said making a tutting sound with his tongue.

“Whatever, Zev” she said, rolling her eyes. “Why?” she asked Duran again.

“Master Wade will measure you for some simple armor,” he replied. “We have plenty of materials, and with you doing more fighting we need to see that you’re protected.”

“Wow, thanks Duran,” she said excitedly. “My first armor!” She stopped and gave them a questioning glance. “And where are you going to be while I am getting measured?” she asked.

The only answer she got was twin smirks.

Chapter End Notes

The swaying hips banter has always been one of my favorites, so I just had to add it in. :)

:(
“You are remarkably quiet, Warden.”

Duran glanced at Zevran. “I’m thinking,” he responded.

The pair was slowly making their way back to the armorer, their time away not quite what they were expecting.

“I must admit, I am surprised,” Duran finally spoke. “I assumed you wanted to keep Cat closer, not send her away.”

“It isn’t like that,” Zevran protested. “I am not wanting to send her away, I am simply trying to keep her safe.”

“I see,” Duran replied, and they both fell silent as they walked.

After a time, Duran spoke, “How do you think she will react to this?”

Zevran smirked, though it was tinged with sadness. “I’m not entirely sure,” he responded. “I’m more worried about how all the others will react.”

---

Cat wasn’t sure what had happened in the last several hours, but everyone was acting strangely. They had met up with their group at the tavern, and had gotten their reports. While successful, both Alistair and Leliana were morose over the outcomes of their individual tasks.

She supposed their lack of cheer could explain the overall mood, however even Duran and Zevran seemed glum which was unusual. She tried talking them out of it, to no avail, and soon just grew silent. After all, everyone was allowed to have bad days, and she had had her share. She just wished she could help cheer everyone up.

The following morning Cat saw she was the last to arrive for breakfast. As she drew close, her friends stopped talking which immediately put her on edge. She stood to the side of the group, inwardly debating between demanding they talk and staying silent. The awkward tension was surrounding them all, and she finally burst.

“All right, what is going on?” she demanded. “You all are acting very strange.” She looked around at them seeing guilt and sadness which confused her.

“It’s nothing Cat,” Leliana said quietly, causing Cat’s ire to spike. “Baloney!” Cat’s voice hardened. She heard Dog whine softly, as Leliana winced. *Something was wrong, but I shouldn’t take it out on her,* Cat thought. “Look, I’m sorry, Leli.” she said. She looked around at the others. *Perhaps she had offended someone, or caused a problem somehow.* “If I have done something…”

She was met with silence. Morrigan, rolling her eyes, gave her ever present “ugh” sound and walked over to Cat.

“They have found a way to send you from the blight’s path,” she informed Cat. “And now they are
too upset to tell you so.”

Cat reeled back in shock, as everyone began talking and arguing at once. Morrigan smirked and returned to her seat as a few of the others berated her for her callousness.

Cat held up her hand, in a gesture for them to stop, and after a few moments they were quiet. “You’re sending me away?” she asked quietly, eyes on Duran. Zevran cleared his throat and she turned to him.

“That is what I promised you,” he said. “To get you to safety.”

“Well yes,” Cat replied, “but…” she bit her lip because she absolutely refused to cry. “But I thought… I mean, I was getting better, I thought I could help.”

Alistair stood to get her a chair, and guided her to it, helping her sit.

“It’s not that we want you to leave Cat,” he told her. “But all of us agree, that we want you to be safe.”

“Really?” she asked, “all of you?” She looked around to see them all nodding, some more emphatically than others, but all of them were nodding. “Wow, that’s probably the first time you all have agreed on anything!” she laughed seeing the refusal on their faces turn to acceptance as they realized it was true.

Cat sat in thought. *She didn’t want to leave, but so many things could go wrong if she stayed.* She took a moment before asking, “Not that I’m agreeing to this, but how would it happen exactly?”

“Zev has a friend who is a captain, and she’s setting sail to get away from the blight.” He paused as Cat looked incredulously at Zevran. He continued, “We’re pretty sure we can book you passage…” Duran trailed off, unsure what was going on between them.

“You want to send me off with Isabela?” Cat asked in disbelief.

“Why am I not surprised that you know of her, little dove?” Zevran chuckled. “But yes,” he answered her. “She is escaping the blight, she will be able to keep you safe, and she owes me a favor.” He grinned at her, though the smile didn’t reach his eyes. “It will be a grand adventure, I’m sure.”

“I’m sure,” she parroted back to him, again lost in thought. “Okay,” she decided. “I’ll meet her, but if I don’t like her, I’m not going.”

“Well of course not!” Leliana stated.

“You don’t have to,” Alistair agreed.

“Let’s get this over with,” Oghren said in a bored tone.

“Yes, we’ll head to the brothel.” Duran said with a grin.


“What?” Alistair exclaimed in a high voice. Then realizing his voice was confirmation, lowered his tone and asked, “Why would you say that, to me?”

“Heh, I can smell purity a mile away. It’s a gift.” Oghren’s face fell. “Though, not as great as you
might think.”

“That’s too bad…” Alistair said, rolling his eyes.

“Wish I could smell cheese instead…” Oghren muttered.

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Cat walked arm in arm with Zevran, and the others were content to give them space. She wasn’t sure what to say, or even how to handle this. Its true that they hadn’t known each other very long, but he had saved her life more than once. And the close proximity, spending everyday together with the group had forged some sort of relationship, though she couldn’t really define it.

She could tell that he would be fine without her. Of course, she knew that already, but it was nice to see the friendship that he shared with Duran, and even the small ways that the others showed that they trusted and cared for him.

“Zev,” she started, bringing his attention to her. “If this goes the way you are hoping, then I may never see you again.”

“That is true little dove,” he replied. “Although, there is no guarantee of this. After all that has happened, it is hard to not believe in the impossible.” She smiled, remembering their journey to this point. She would not have believed it herself if she hadn’t been witness to it.

“I have pledged myself to the Warden,” Zev continued. “Otherwise I would accompany you myself. But I believe this to be the best way for you to be safe, and Isabela is trustworthy, for the most part.”

Cat found it hard to speak, and so they continued on in silence. As they came up to the Pearl, Zevran reached forward to open the door, and said quietly, “Just give it chance, all right? We all desire your safety most of all,” then ushered her inside.

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He must have spoken with the others previously, for only Duran, Oghren and Alistair had accompanied them across town, and the three of them went to the bar upon entering the establishment. Zevran escorted Cat over to the opposite corner of the room, where she recognized Isabela sitting with only a bottle for company.

Isabela wasn’t quite as Cat had pictured, for she was wearing armor instead of just a tunic. Though she showed as much skin as she was able, and Cat wondered if the armor served to protect anything, or was simply for show. However, she did wear a bandanna, keeping her long hair away from her face, and Cat was a little envious of the myriad of twists and braids that she had in her hair. *It's like a mix of braids and dreadlocks, and it's beautiful,* she thought.

They came near the table, and Isabela looked up with a smirk.

“Well… hello there kitten. Zev what have you brought me?”

“Hello Isabela. And my name is Catarina.” Cat spoke before Zevran could, as she wasn’t patient enough for the flirting, and wanted to get this over with.

Isabela gave Zevran a knowing look. “You were right, she *is* feisty, and I like it.” She gestured for the two of them to join her, and they sat across from her.
“I hear you are looking to escape the blight, and I can help. It’s the least I can do for a friend.” She gave Zevran a wink and a smile. “And I owe him, of course.”

“I’d say that Zev is looking for me to escape,” Cat replied. She could see Zevran glance at her, though she kept her eyes on Isabela. “I imagine it can be difficult to battle darkspawn with a distraction such as myself around.”

“Little dove, you are not a distraction,” Zevran began, but Cat waved him off.

“Zev, you should go get a drink. Let Isabela and I get to know each other.” She glanced at him briefly, not wanting him to see her nervousness.

“But my dove-”

“No, go on Zev, leave us to our girl talk,” Isabela added. They watched as he got slowly to his feet and walked away. Isabela smirked. “I have seen him wrap plenty of women around his nimble fingers, but I never thought I would see it the other way around.”

“He’s my friend, though I think he feels as if he is responsible for me,” Cat replied. At Isabela’s look, she pushed forward. ‘I’ll be honest with you, I don’t want to go. However, my friends are concerned with keeping me safe. I am no warrior, though I can take care of myself. But, if something were to happen to one of them because of me, I would never forgive myself.” Cat steeled herself, noting Isabela waiting for her to get it all out. “If it will put their minds at ease, then I’ll go.”

“Well, kitten, that’s very noble-”

“But,” Cat interrupted. “I have conditions,” Isabela smirked at her again, but she continued. “I do not sleep with those I travel with, I earn my keep, and I will need to be taught how to sail so that I can be a part of the crew, not just a guest. Fair, Issy?”

Isabela looked startled for a moment at the nickname, then realizing that it was in response of calling her kitten, smirked. It seemed that Zev hadn’t been very forthcoming when he spoke of this girl. Isabela had been ready to take her along, simply to pay her debt, but now that she had met her, she was intrigued.

“Rules are made to be broken, dovey,” Isabela gave her best seductive smile.

Cat’s face became as stone. “Do not call me that.”

Isabela’s eyebrow rose. “More than a simple nickname, hmm? Or perhaps one that only he can use? I’d say you’re halfway in love with him already.”

“I’ve been in love, it’s not for me,” Cat spoke back with no emotion. “Do we have a deal?”

Isabela took another moment, as she was no fool. There was something she was missing, but she always went with her gut, and it was telling her to take this girl along. “Welcome aboard. We leave tomorrow, at noon.”

Cat nodded, and stood. She made her way back to her friends, and let them know she was heading back to the tavern. Alistair jumped at the chance to escort her, and she could tell he was not having a good time, so she agreed, bidding farewell to the others.

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They were quiet for a time, as Cat was trying to think of what, if anything, she should tell her friends
before she left. *Was there anything that she should try to prevent? Perhaps tell them about Haven, or the High Dragon? Or maybe let Duran know about Soldier’s Peak, or even Shale?*

“So… you didn’t like her, right?”

It took her a moment to realize what his question was. “Not really,” she answered. She missed the excited look on his face and added, “but I’m sure she will grow on me.” Cat’s thoughts took a turn as she realized what kind of message she was sending, especially to Alistair. *She had better fix it, and quick.*

She turned to him, noting his crestfallen expression with confusion and said, “Al, I don’t want you to get the wrong impression of me. I mean… I’m not trying to be a hypocrite, it’s just that I don’t want to disappoint you.”

“Um, okay?” Alistair replied, unsure of what she was saying.

“What I mean is, I am a firm believer of following your heart. Of not just doing what others tell you is right or wrong.”

Alistair grinned, his crestfallen expression a memory. “That’s a good thing, right?”

Cat laughed, “Well, I think so.” They fell back into silence as they rounded the corner to the marketplace. Cat looked around, thinking that perhaps shopping with Leli would be fun later. They drew near the tavern, walking along the side of the building.

“Wait… Cat,” Alistair spoke, holding onto her arm to pull her to a stop.

“Yes?” she asked, turning to face him.

“I… I just wanted…” he stepped close, and leaning down, put his lips on hers.

Cat froze, eyes widening in surprise. She couldn’t think so she simply stood there, as he ended the kiss and leaned back, his face a bright shade of pink. It had reminded her of her first kiss, awkward but sweet.

“I’m sorry… I just, know you’re leaving and I’ve been wanting to, and well…” he rambled.

“No, it’s okay,” she said, putting her hand on his arm. “It’s just really bad timing.”

“Yeah,” he hung his head. “That’s what everyone has been telling me.”

Everyone? she thought.

“But then you said not to listen to what others told you… so I thought…” he took in her confused expression, “and that’s not what you were… Maker, I’m an idiot.”

Cat’s brain finally put the pieces together, and she realized how he took what she had been saying. “No, of course you’re not,” she said gently.

“Then, if that’s not what you were talking about, well… well what were you talking about?” he asked. He realized that they were standing a bit close, and took a step back, however she simply stepped forward, and he gazed down at her.

“Al, you are my friend, and I care about you. Maybe in another life, it could have been something, but you have your duty and I have mine.” He nodded, as he could understand that. Duty always took precedence over things that he wanted.
“I’m leaving tomorrow, so I just wanted to tell you, to make your own decisions, especially when it comes to what you want out of life. Do not let others decide your fate.”

“Oh, I get it,” he said as her earlier words came back to him. “And you are a hypocrite for letting us decide to send you away.” He cupped her cheek with his hand. “Cat, if you don’t want to go…”

“No, I don’t want to,” she agreed. “But I’m not a fighter, not like the rest of you. I’m a liability. And as much as I want to stay, I want to give you guys every advantage to succeed. So, I’m going to go.” She reached up to her cheek and covered his hand with her own. “For whatever it’s worth, you’re going to make some girl really happy one day.” With that, she continued into the tavern, and Alistair stood against the building with a sad smile on his face.

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“Sten, I need your help.” Cat had finally found the warrior she had been searching for. In order for her to put her new plan into action, she needed someone to accompany her that wouldn’t ask too many questions. “I need to go to the marketplace, they will be closing soon, and I shouldn’t go alone.”

Sten eyed her critically. “Tiny woman, we have everything we need here, there is no reason to go to the market.”

“Please Sten, I’m leaving tomorrow, and I need a few things.”

“It is not necessary.”

Desperate times, desperate measures. “I’ll buy you some cookies!”

“We must hurry then, they will be closing soon.” Cat grinned at his abrupt change of mind, and hurried out the door with Sten at her back.

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The next morning Cat could hardly wait to see her friends. This was her last morning with them, which made her stomach clench, but she was also thrilled to surprise them. She took the time to pack up her belongings, hardly believing that she had accumulated so many things since arriving in Thedas.

She now had several changes of clothing, her new drake skin armor, her crossbow and bolts, several days of rations, her tent and bedroll, three pairs of shoes… she counted it all off in her head as she packed. Once she was done, she realized she would need to solicit help to get it all outside.

She opened her door, and found Zevran in front of her, his fist poised in the air to knock.

“Good timing Zev, I was just wondering how to get all these bags out of here by myself,” she said with a smile.

“My dove, I thought we agreed to keep your belongings at most to two bags, how will you carry all this when on your own?” She thought he would smirk at her, but he just looked concerned.
“Don’t worry, I’m only taking two of them, the others are for everyone else,” she said flippantly. She had decided that she would make this as easy on everyone else as she could, so she had to keep a smile on her face.

Zevran picked up her pack and bedroll. “Come then, the others have already eaten, but are waiting for you.” Cat smiled, and picked up the remaining bags then followed Zevran out to the common room. She stopped at the empty seat at the table, and placed her bags in the chair instead of sitting.

“What’s in the bags, you’re not taking all the food with you, are you?” Alistair joked. Cat smiled, as it seemed he had the same idea she did.

“Not everything,” she teased. “Just the cheese,” laughing at both her joke, and the scandalized look Alistair sported.

“Everyone?” she asked to gather attention, but realized she needn’t have bothered. They were as focused on her, as she was on them. “I know that once the blight has been stopped, you all will go your separate ways and I may not see you again. So, I got you all something to remember me by,” she said.

“Oh! You didn’t have to!”

“As if we could forget you!”

“Wait, who were you again?”

“Alistair has already begun mourning…”

“Hey!”

Cat grinned as she walked around the table, listening to their banter and handing out presents. It had been a simple thought, remembering the Feast Day presents, but a little trickier to remember what each person had received. She had had to stay up late to put together an Alistair doll, and the grey warden puppet as well.

“Duran, yours is outside, so c’mon.” Cat pulled on his arm. “We’ll be back, enjoy your gifts!” she said, pulling Duran along with her as she headed to the door.

It had been much harder to find the perfect present for Duran, as she didn’t know nearly enough about him, but she thought she had found just the thing. She pulled him over to the nearby market stall, and hoped that this was going to be as good as she thought.

“My lady, you’ve returned…” the dwarf in front of them said as he recognized her from the previous evening. Shifting his gaze to Duran, his eyes widened and he paled. “My…. my Lord? Is it really you?”

Cat watched Duran’s face light up, and Gorim stepped forward to shake his hand, but Duran simply wrapped his arms around him, then held him out at arm’s length. They began talking rapidly, asking questions, telling each other of their survival, and new people in their lives. Cat grinned, so happy that the surprise was a good one and turning, walked back to the tavern.

Duran spoke of his companions, and remembering Cat, turned to thank her. He saw her turn the corner back to the tavern, and thought how rich his new life as a nobody was compared to his previous life as a prince. He turned back to his friend, and continued his tale.

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Cat had told herself not to cry, and had held out as long as she could, but tears had escaped as she bid each of her companions farewell. They would be leaving Denerim as well, and were preparing to continue on in their quests. Zevran walked Cat down to the docks, insisting that he must see her board the boat personally, for his own peace of mind. Cat didn’t care, that put one goodbye off, even if only for a little while.

“You know, little dove, you never finished your story,” Zevran commented, grabbing her hand in his. She tilted her head in question. “The epic one, about the Wardens,” he continued. “I believe there was a devastatingly handsome assassin in it.”

Cat grinned, “That’s true, I haven’t,” she said, then turned serious. “Would you really want to hear the rest?” she asked him.

He thought for a moment, then shook his head. “On second thought, no. I am quite enjoying the freedom of deciding my own fate for a change.”

“Good!” she nodded to emphasize her point. “Keep it that way, and perhaps in the future we will see each other again.” She hoped so, if everything stuck to the story she knew, they would both be in Kirkwall at some point.

He glanced her way incredulously, “Just how long is this tale?” he asked.

“Who knows?” she answered, shrugging her shoulders. He forgot his retort as he saw that they had arrived at the docks. Isabela came up, giving Cat directions and instructions, then Cat turned to him.

Cat didn’t care that he was some scary assassin, he was her friend. She threw her arms around him, giving him a huge hug. It was hard to let go, but she finally did, then stretched up to kiss his cheek. “Take care of yourself, and the others too, okay?” she asked.

Zevran nodded once, “Farewell, my little dove,” he said softly.

Isabela stood beside him, watching as Cat boarded the Siren’s Call, tripping on the gangplank and laughing at herself. He smirked and chuckled to himself, as he recalled how clumsy she could be.

“Don’t worry Zev,” he heard Isabela say. “I’ll watch out for her.”

His eyes never left Cat, as she turned back to wave to him. He lifted his arm, in a silent farewell, and said, “See that you do.” He turned to leave, and paused. “And Isabela… thank you.”
Captain Isabela ran a tight ship, if she did say so herself. She walked the deck, checking and double checking the work of her crew, ensuring that everything was up to her expectations. She smiled as she finished her walk, noting that though it had been rough at the beginning, her crew was now one of the finest in all the waters of Thedas.

Noting the position of the sun, she walked over to the port side and saw Catarina climbing aboard. Since the very beginning of their voyage, Catarina had been obsessed with the idea that the ship would sink, and she felt she must be prepared to swim for her life. Isabela didn’t agree, and could have simply ignored her, but had decided to give her time early each morning when the sails were furled to practice.

She had assumed that after one minute in the frigid water, the girl would come straight back and never go again, but she had been wrong. Every morning without fail, she had taken a rope, tied it around herself and jumped into the water, keeping pace with the ship as best she could. Several crew men had taken it upon themselves to watch out for her, pulling her in if necessary due to cramp or bad weather.

Of course, Isabela mused, there were those like herself, who simply enjoyed the sight of a pretty girl in her small clothes, but Catarina didn’t seem to care. Isabela had to admit that her first impression had been way off. She was blaming that on Zev, however. The elf had told her to watch the girl like a hawk, as she was constantly getting into trouble and unable to take care of herself. In fact, when she had seen the girl trip over her own feet as she boarded the ship, she had decided to simply put her in a crew member’s care.

Since that day, Isabela had had all preconceived notions torn to shreds as Catarina never once acted as expected. First with the swimming, then the insistence on learning about each crew member and their duties. Then the ship itself, the rigging, the terminology… Isabela smirked to herself as she thought of how quickly the girl was endearing herself to the crew.

She watched her own thoughts in action as a few men stepped forward to help Catarina onto the ship, and another wrapped a blanket around her. She observed the looks and smiles that passed between them, and turned to walk back to her cabin. She had never had a loving family, but thought that the looks she had seen were something akin to that and she needed to get away before she found herself joining in.

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“You have got to be kidding me!” Duran said under his breath. Zevran looked over with a smirk, enjoying the exasperation and horror on his friend’s face.

The entire group was huddled together, just outside the door, staring up at the high dragon with fear and awe. After all the fighting to simply reach this point, they were not at their best. And now they had to face a high dragon?

“Think of it as practice, no? For the archdemon?” Zevran commented, gaining cold glances from both of the wardens. “What?” he asked innocently. “What did I say?”
“Perhaps we can simply sneak past,” Leliana said quietly. “It is asleep, and we are small in comparison.” She glanced up to the dragon and back down to the path. “Just a few at a time, maybe?”

“Not a bad idea,” Wynne answered, as she too viewed the path ahead. “If it does come to attack us, we can surround it.”

“Perhaps you sneaky types should try first,” Alistair said, still looking at the dragon. “I feel my armor may be too loud.”

Duran looked thoughtful, but decided he was right. In fact all the warriors should stay behind, they were hardly light on their feet, and Shale was worst of all. Intimidating yes, quiet… no.

“All right then, Zev, Leli, Wynne. You’re with me. The rest of you, keep an eye on that dragon. Try to distract it if it wakes, to give us time to make it to the temple.” He looked around to see them all nodding. Those that were leaving, left packs and any items that would cause unnecessary noise behind, then ventured out along the snowy path.

“You seemed surprised to see the dragon, my friend. Did the little dove not tell you anything of import then?” Zevran whispered as they snuck along.

“She told me some things that made no sense, but she said they would in time,” Duran replied. “A heads up about a high dragon and a cave full of dragon worshipers would have been nice though.”

They grinned at each other, and could see Leliana’s shoulders moving in a silent giggle. Wynne turned to give them a wry smile as well, and Zevran could see that they were all remembering their companion.

“How about the time she ran right into that cave to get out of the rain?” Wynne whispered with a chuckle.

“Ugh, giant spider guts never come out of clothes, no matter how many washes!” Duran whispered dramatically. Zevran was caught by surprise and let out a snort.

The group froze, and looked up, worry etched on each face. The dragon shifted, but stayed asleep. With a sigh of relief, they continued their journey, though first giving Zevran a cold look, to which he replied with a shrug of his shoulders.

“I blame the Warden,” he muttered.

Duran smiled, “I’m not the one who let her discover giant spiders for herself,” he replied. Zevran smiled at the memory. The dove had certainly given him hell that day. Odd, that it was her ire that he missed the most.

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Isabela met with her crew, as always, at dinnertime.

“Fellows! It seems to me that our newest acquisition,” she paused as Catarina started choking on whatever she had been eating. Those on either side of her pounded on her back, and she coughed.

“Excuse me?”
Isabela ignored her and continued on. “Right. Our newest addition, has need of some of our expert training. And so,” she pitched her voice louder to be heard over the chatter, “we shall start in the morning, at full sail.” She smirked as she took in the gleeful faces of her crew, and Catarina’s frown. “Better place your bets lads.”

Cat watched Isabela saunter out of the room. She had been systematically befriending everyone on the ship, and Isabela was turning out to be the hardest nut to crack. At first she had thought that being friends with Isabela would be easy, and getting the hulking men would be more difficult, but it was the other way around.

In fact, it seemed as if Isabela was completely ignoring her, which went against everything Cat had planned. The longer she stayed in Thedas, the more she forgot about Earth. Her family, her life… True, she hadn’t been doing much with that life since her divorce. She had wondered several times if anyone even noticed that she was gone.

When her plans fell apart, she fell apart. Though she didn’t really miss Steven, and she knew they were both happier apart, everything she had dreamed, everything she had worked for was gone, and she hadn’t known what to do with herself.

Now, here she was again. In a much more dangerous situation, and without concrete plans, sure, but life was moving on and she felt unable to catch up. She quickly finished eating, and headed outside. She needed to be alone.

Isabela looked over at the noise that interrupted her solitude. She stepped back into the shadows as Catarina came forward to the railing. She really was a pretty thing, full of contradictions. The womanly curves, and blunt demeanor combined with her creamy skin and girlish freckles. The wild, dark hair that she constantly tamed by keeping it braided over her shoulder. Isabela originally thought that she was some noble woman running away from her life of privilege, but the more time went by, the more she saw a girl, running from life in general.

At first she had contemplated simply seducing the girl, but Catarina had bonded with her crew, and the lost look in her eyes had Isabela keeping her distance. This girl was a complication, and Isabela preferred things simple.

Cat heard a noise and whirling around, asked “Who’s there?”. Silence greeted her, then Isabela stepped out of the shadows. Cat sighed in relief, and turned back to the water. Neither of them spoke as they stood side by side, leaning on the railing and looking out at the night sky.

“Do I offend you, Captain?” Cat blurted out.

Isabela turned with a smirk. “Not at all sweetheart, what makes you ask?”

“It just… I mean, you… well you know…” Cat stammered. “You’re not what I expected I suppose.”

Isabela let out a full belly laugh, and Cat stood there perplexed. “I’m just what I appear to be. A pirate captain, who enjoys her freedom and does as she pleases.” She looked Cat up and down then asked, “And what are you?”

Cat opened her mouth to respond, then closed it again. There was a pause before she finally replied, “I don’t know… and that scares me.”

“I won’t sugar coat it, I can’t help there, that’s all on you. But, me and my crew can teach you how to fight and how to sail, and give you time to figure it out.”

“I can’t ask for more than that,” Cat responded, looking out at the sky. The stars were beautiful, and
looked so foreign. She had been drifting for so long now, wasn’t it time to make some decisions? So many awful things were going to happen, and she knew about them. Some of them needed to play out, but perhaps with some planning the main crisis’s could be averted?

“Make a decision Cat” she told herself. She turned back to Isabela and stuck out her hand.

“I’m in.”

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“I can’t believe we’ve done it.”

“Don’t get ahead of yourself Leliana, there are still many things to accomplish.” Duran said, looking over his shoulder at the archer.

“I know you’re right Duran,” Alistair added. “But the fact that we’ve actually been able to amass an army, is quite an achievement. Especially for the two newest members of the Grey Wardens. I don’t know that I believed we could do it back at the beginning.”

“We’ve as good as won, Warden.” Oghren joined the conversation, though he was still looking around for any other attackers as they made their way back to Arl Eamon’s estate. “We got rid of Howe, the rutting traitor, and rescued the Queen.”

“True enough, my smelly friend,” Zevran replied. “Loghain has no idea what we have in store at the Landsmeet,” he turned to give Duran a look, “especially since the Arl plans to announce a new ruler of Fereldan.”

Several of the party turned to look at Alistair at this comment, and he looked as if he was going to be sick. “I told him it’s a bad idea, but he just won’t listen!” Alistair looked pleadingly at his companions, “You should all tell him it’s a bad idea. I can’t even lead the ten of us, how could I possibly lead a country!”

“Calm down Alistair,” Leliana soothed. “Your voice is going higher than even Dog can hear,” she said, and the others chuckled.

“Come on, everyone, let’s get back to the estate” Duran said, and all other banter stopped as they made their way through the city.

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“I’m not going to like this, am I?”

“Morrigan knew it all, about the joining, the taint, even that a Grey Warden must die in order to kill the Archdemon.” Duran saw the panicked look on Alistair’s face that must have matched his own. If Duncan had taught him anything before his death, it was the need for secrecy.

“How did she know?”

“I think from her mother, but that’s not the point. She says that we need not lose someone. There is a ritual that can be done, that would prevent the Grey Warden from dying.”
“And the consequences of this path?” Alistair asked skeptically.

“I’m not sure,” Duran replied. “Though Cat did tell me, that either way would be fine. She told me to make my own decision, even though I asked for clarification, she just smiled. I know it’s my choice, but I could really use your advice.”

“Advice? From me? Wow… that’s a first.”

“Be serious man.”

“Fine. I think that if there isn’t anything insane Morrigan is asking of you for this, then it’s a good idea. There are a lot of good that you and I can still do in the order, and even with the Archdemon dead, there will always darkspawn.”

Duran looked at his fellow warden. “Thank you Alistair.”

Alistair looked at his friend, and decided to continue. “And since we’re on this subject, Cat also said something similar to me. Not to let others decide my fate, that I could do or be what I wanted.” He wasn’t sure if Duran would help him, but he had to try. “Duran, I … I don’t want to be king. I want to stay a Grey Warden, that is, if I survive.”

“You talk of doing good,” Duran replied, “do you know how much more good you can do as king?”

“Yes, but there is so much more harm I can do, if I mess up.”

“You have advisors and such to help with that.”

“True, however, I don’t want it.”

Duran looked Alistair over, and seeing that he was being serious, was taken aback. Alistair was never serious, and used humor in any and all situations.

“This obviously means a lot to you, and Anora has been pestering me to support her candidacy for remaining the monarch.” Alistair nodded. “If that is what you really want, I will make a deal with her,” he said, and Alistair looked relieved. “Of course, we’ll need to ensure that she doesn’t try to have you killed, perhaps swearing fealty at the Landsmeet or something will suffice.”

“Whatever it takes,” Alistair replied with a smile. “She can have it.”

“Very well my friend, it seems that both of us are stepping off the chosen path. I’d better go talk to Morrigan. I’ll see you in the morning for the Landsmeet.”

“Thank you, and good luck… my friend.”
Cat climbed up the rope ladder, shivering in the early morning chill. Swimming early each morning was not her favorite activity, but she could find the good if she looked hard. She had to just keep reminding herself that this was to help her survive once they reached Kirkwall.

Every now and then, some of the crew would join her, though she assumed that was just a ploy to try to get their hands on a half naked, wet female, and she never gave them the chance. Arvid, one of the deck hands, was the only one who swam with her with any regularity, and the both of them were getting much better.

After stepping over the railing, she was surprised to find that no one was in sight, and her clothes and towel were also gone. She rolled her eyes, and started to head to the captain’s cabin. Isabela had simply informed her to move her things in one day, after they had been at sea for three weeks. She had winked at Cat and said it was best to “remove temptation”. It had taken longer than she wanted to admit to figure out what Isabela had meant.

Cat was pulled to a stop, a hand grabbing her right arm. She quickly spun to her left, bringing her left arm up to elbow her attacker. She looked around, as her arm was blocked and saw nothing that could help her. Making a quick decision, she bent forward putting her left hand on the deck, and kicked up with her feet. She grabbed around the attacker’s neck and shifting her body weight, reached out and hit the man behind his knee.

She was just as surprised as he when his leg folded in, and he toppled to the ground, taking her along. She quickly sat atop him, putting her hands on his face with her thumbs above his eyes, ready to put them out if needed. Then she paused to assess the situation.

If there was one thing these raiders were teaching her, it was to strike quickly and not to stop until she had control. The second lesson, there was no such thing as fighting dirty.

Cat sat there tensed, as the remaining crew stepped out applauding. Isabela helped her stand, and shouted out, “All those who bet against Cat, pay up!” Cat could hear the victory cheers as well as the grumbling from those that had lost.

She stood upright and rolled her neck and shoulders, trying to calm the tenseness in her muscles. “Just how many of these tests am I going to get?” she asked, complaining.

“This wasn’t a test darling,” Isabela replied. “Now we’re just keeping you sharp.”

“Well, be a darling and wait until I’m dressed in the future, would you?” Cat asked with a roll of her eyes.

“But this is my favorite outfit of yours,” Isabela smirked.

“I don’t doubt that,” Cat said as she walked off. She was really enjoying the friendship she was developing with the captain, and found herself wanting to channel her inner Isabela more often than not.

After cleaning up, Cat headed back to the deck. She had her hair in her hands, braiding it as she walked up the stairs, and stopped as she reached the top step.

“What’s wrong?” she asked. Everyone was still, staring out into the water. Big Tom, the first mate, was standing by the captain and he waved her over. As she neared, she finished her braid, and
flicked her hair over her shoulder, looking out beyond the ship. She turned in a small circle. There were ships all around them. They were surrounded.

“It’s the Felicisima Armada, I think,” he told her quietly. “That’s the flags they’re flying anyway. They must want something, otherwise they’d just attack.”

“But aren’t we part of the Armada?” she asked back, just as quietly.

“We’ve been working for them, aye” he responded, glancing at their captain who was unusually quiet. “Our last job didn’t go exactly according to plan though.”

Cat wracked her brain, but didn’t know enough about Isabela’s history to know exactly what was happening. So she stood there with the crew watching as a single ship came towards them. She supposed the others stayed back within cannon range in case anything went wrong.

“Velasco,” Isabela murmured with a disgusted look on her face. She turned to look at Cat. “Stay behind Big Tom, and don’t do anything to draw attention to yourself.” Cat started to protest, but the look in the captain’s eyes stopped her. “Velasco is not someone you want to tangle with just yet,” she said. “Someday, but not yet,” she added with a wink, causing Cat to smile as she side stepped behind Big Tom.

“I’ll be boarding that ship,” Isabela spoke up, so that her crew could all hear her. It said something about the atmosphere, that there were no objections but she wanted to put them at ease anyway. “Castillon obviously wants to speak about the last job before giving us any more. Be patient, and wait for my return, I’ll be very upset if anyone were to get killed today.”

Isabela looked around at her crew, seeing the nodding heads and looks of unease. They had never experienced something like this before, but she was sure she could handle it. Castillon was not one to throw tantrums, he used all of his tools to their limits. All she had to do was prove that they were still useful.

She stopped as she noticed the odd look on Cat’s face, one of acceptance, and encouragement. Isabela wondered how she, out of everyone could know how bad this was going to be. But she smiled back, needing that vote of confidence right now.

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Alistair panted, as they had killed all the darkspawn in the vicinity and had earned a slight rest. This battle was quickly becoming worse than even his imagination could conjure. Stories of war were always filled with heroes and villains, glory and sacrifice, and had not prepared him for what it truly was… death.

True, there were heroes, strong men and women who fought with all they had, gaining glory or sacrificing all in order to save their families, their country. But at this moment, all he could see was the death. Death of the potential as well as the death of the people.

He hefted his shield back up, and called for his companions. He checked with each of them, Wynne, Oghren, Leliana and Shale ensuring that they could continue. They had found and killed the darkspawn general that had been plaguing Denerim’s marketplace, and now needed to meet back up with Duran and his group.

A loud screeching sounded nearby, making Alistair wish his hands were free so that he could cover his ears. He winced then straightened, as he saw the Archdemon fly overhead. He heard Leliana and
Wynne gasped, and Oghren cheered as the dragon went careening down atop Fort Drakon. He noticed as the women had, the small figure that fell hundreds of feet from the dragon. Another death, full of glory and sacrifice.

“We have to make it worth it,” he said to himself.

“Alistair?” Wynne asked, coming forward to put her hand on his arm, and checking to see if he was all right.

He looked at his friends, and said louder with determination, “Someone just gave everything to get that dragon down. Let’s make sure their sacrifice was worth it!”

He saw his determination burning in their eyes, and his confidence soared. He nodded, and led them through the streets, onward toward Fort Drakon.

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Duran opened his eyes slowly, as he wasn’t sure what he would see. A bright light? His ancestors that went before him?

“Duran? Can you hear me?”

He recognized that voice, but that shouldn’t be possible. That meant… it meant that Morrigan had been right. He opened his eyes fully, staring at Alistair.

“You… you’re alive. You’re okay?” At Alistair’s words, several other faces appeared above him, looking relieved.

“We thought you had left us Warden,” Leliana said with a smile, a tear running down her face. Wynne gave her shoulder a squeeze before kneeling next to him, and checking him for injuries.

“It seems even my best efforts were not successful,” he teased, wanting to make his friends smile, needing to lighten the mood around him.

Zevran smirked, and understanding his friend, added “Or perhaps the void didn’t want you and simply spat you back out.” Duran chuckled as he sat up, and his companions joined in. Seeing his master sit up, Dog jumped in with no remorse, causing all sorts of cursing and laughter.

“My friends, I must ask something of you,” Duran said once Dog had settled down and he had stood. They all looked to him, and he looked around to ensure they were relatively alone. “I’m not sure how I am still here,” he began. “Riordan told us that the warden who gives the final blow would not survive.”

They looked surprised, and a few looked to Alistair for confirmation and he nodded. “When this gets out, we will have a lot of wardens here asking questions.”

Duran paused, and waited for his friends to look back at him. “That’s why I must ask that this not get out,” he said. “We are the only ones to know what truly happened, but I would ask that you support us in telling the world that Riordan slew the Archdemon.”

“Where is Riordan?” Wynne asked. “We haven’t seen him since we split up.”

“He fell,” Zevran answered solemnly. “bringing down the dragon.”
“That was him?” Alistair gaped. “We saw someone fall from the dragon, I had no idea it was Riordan.”

“Yes,” Duran stated. “So, in truth he did bring down the Archdemon. I am asking that we stick to that. Can you all do that?”

He was met with nods and comments such as “of course Warden,” and “whatever you need of me”. He was humbled at the faith and friendship that they shared with each other. After nearly a year of traveling, he was saddened knowing their time together was nearly up and they would soon be parting.

“Thank you, my friends,” he said. They all stood there together, and he thought of those that were missing. Having them there would be the only way to make that moment better. He waited a few minutes, giving all of them the time they needed, then he spoke. “It seems that our allies are starting the celebrations. Shall we join them?”

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Cat noticed the heavily bearded man that was eyeing her from the ship that was moored to the Siren’s Call. She debated just returning below decks, but that felt like running away. If she had learned anything over the past few months, it was that she was done running.

So she stood her ground, giving him a glare, and turning to speak to Arvid. They spoke of nothing of consequence, each knowing that the other was simply passing time while waiting for their captain.

After a time, Isabela emerged from the cabin looking annoyed but unharmed. Cat could feel everyone around her relax as they saw their captain. She watched as Isabela was stopped by Velasco. Isabela gave her a glance before responding, then turned to return to her ship.

Velasco tried to stop her, but Isabela side stepped his hand. She gave some degrading remarks, if Cat was reading her expression correctly. Velasco’s face grew angry and he was held back by a fellow crew member as Isabela walked away.

As Isabela came aboard the Siren’s Call, her crew instinctively stepped closer, Cat included. They waited and watched as the ships that surrounded them left, and no one spoke, waiting for their captain. Isabela simply watched until the ships were barely seen on the horizon, then let out a sigh and she released all the tension she had been holding.

“We have a new job, fellows,” she said. Cat could tell she was trying to make it sound like a good thing, but it obviously was not.

“What’s our heading, cap’n?” Big Tom asked.

“Orlais,” Isabela replied. Big Tom’s eyebrow winged up in surprise, and he turned to the crew.

“You heard the Cap’n! Unfurl the sails! Get moving you lazy good fer nothin’!”

Isabela smirked at her first mate, gratitude shining in her eyes. She gestured for Cat to follow her, and they headed to their cabin.

“Oralis was never my destination, so it will be a short stop to pick something up for Castillon,” she told Cat. “However, you are free to make your own decision, and if you want to stay there-”
Cat cut her off with a wave of her hand. “No need,” she stated. “Orlais is no place for me. I’ll be staying, for now… if that’s okay,” she added.

Isabela laughed. “You almost had me convinced you were a raider, until that last part,” she said. “But you’re coming along.”

Cat grinned back. “I’m working on it,” she said. “So, we just need to get something for Castillon?” She wasn’t ready to share that she already knew what it was, and had in fact spent a long time wondering if she should convince Isabela of all the trouble stealing this particular item would cause. In the end, she thought of how different Kirkwall would be if the Qunari never landed there.

Isabela probably would never be in Kirkwall either, and that would be a loss for Hawke and her future companions. She finally decided that if she couldn’t decide one way or the other, then the story should remain as it was. Erring on the side of caution, as it were.


“To the right people it is,” Isabela replied opening the door and letting Cat walk through. She closed the door behind herself, and crossed her arms pinning Cat with a glare. “The crew doesn’t need to know the particulars. We will go to Orlais, and we will get the book, and return immediately to the ship. With any luck, no one will even know who took it, and the less people who know, the better.”

“All right,” Cat replied.

“If I don’t do this, we’re all dead.” Isabela voice was grave, looking at Cat like she expected her to run away.

“Then we’ll do it,” Cat answered. “I can’t just let my friends die.”

Isabela looked skeptical. “Friends or no, we’d understand if you want out.”

Cat smirked, “I already told you, Isabela. I’m in.”

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Duran enjoyed a good party, and always had. The pomp and circumstance before the party however, he dreaded. The long boring speeches, the way the nobles patted each others’ backs as if they had won the victory themselves, it bored him to tears. If there was one good thing about being a Grey Warden, it was that he no longer had to participate in the politics of a nation.

In fact, when he had been exiled and sent to the Deep Roads, he had been more upset about what his father thought of him, then about losing his title. Even now, though Bhelen had restored his family name upon him, the best part of returning to Orzammar had been when he had learned of his father’s change of heart.

He stood on the balcony, overlooking the ruins of the city around him. It had been a victory, and the newly appointed Queen had given Rendon Howe’s lands and titles to the Grey Wardens. He had been named the Warden Commander of Fereldan, and Alistair the Constable of the Grey.

None of these things made him happy however, as one by one, his companions had come to him and given their farewells. They all had important tasks to see to, and he couldn’t begrudge them that, he just wasn’t ready for them to go.
“Warden?” Duran turned at the voice, and his heart sank and Zevran stepped forward to stand next to him. He turned back around, not wanting to hear another goodbye.

Zevran didn’t require an explanation, he felt the same way. He had never had a friend such as Duran. Not even Taliesien and Rinna had understood him as Duran did.

“I swore you my allegiance, Warden, if you do not want me to go…”

Duran turned, and smirked at his friend. “No way you’re going to put this on me, Zev.”

“Ah, you see right through me as always, amico mio.”

“So, what are your plans?”

Zevran took a moment to situate himself, leaning back on the railing with his arms resting on it at his sides. “The Crows will find me eventually, I think I shall find them first. There are a select few that I wish to speak with… personally.”

Duran grinned. “Be sure to say hello for me,” he said. “Though you may want to invest in some new armor, yours was fairly tattered if I recall.”

Zevran laughed, “True, true! Those ogres pack quite the punch, yes?” He smiled as he thought of new armor. “Perhaps my new armor will help me blend into the shadows. I find the idea of frightening the Crows before I kill them quite delightful.”

“Only you, Zev,” Duran said with a shake of his head and a laugh. He stood straight and faced his friend. “It has been an honor, and my utmost privilege to have you with me Zevran.”

Zevran froze. No one had ever given him such praise before, had ever seen him as anything but the son of a whore. Well, besides Catarina. He had always wondered how she had seen such good in him, and now the Warden had seen it as well. Perhaps… there was something good in him after all.

“The honor, my friend has been mine,” he said with a smirk. “Did you hear that Leliana will be returning to the chantry?”

Duran wondered why the subject change, but nodded. “Yes, something about leading an expedition to the temple for Andraste’s ashes?”

“Indeed,” Zevran nodded. “We agreed to keep in touch, to call on each other if needed. I cannot say where my travels may take me, nor can you. But Leliana will remain with the chantry I have no doubt. I will keep her apprised of my movements, so that if you ever have need of me you can call on me and I will answer.”

“Thank you my friend.” Duran held out his arm, and Zevran grasped it.

“I did not think to ever have a friend,” Zev mused. “Farewell, Warden. Until we meet again.”
Stealing a Tome

According to Isabela’s maps, they had been sailing in the Amaranthine Ocean, and had nearly made it to Llomerryn before encountering Castillon. Now they were on their way to Orlais. Isabela had the crew stop for a brief shore leave in Ostwick, for resupplying. It was there that Cat heard that the blight in Ferelden was over, that the Archdemon had been slain by the Grey Wardens. She spent the rest of that day alone, wondering about her friends, and how their travels had to have changed them.

She was almost tempted to have Isabela detour to Amaranthine so that she could try to find Duran again, but decided against it quickly. All of the problems that arose in ‘Awakening’ were not something she wanted to mess with. As much as she wanted to meet Nathaniel, and Anders (pre-Justice), there was no guarantee that she’d actually be able to help, or even find them before getting herself killed.

Besides all of that, she couldn’t just leave Isabela now.

For several days, they brainstormed ways to get in and out of the meeting place with the tome and without being seen. Castillon had been surprisingly informed, knowing not only where the meeting between Empress Celine’s ambassador and the Arishok would take place, but when, and those that may also be trying to interfere.

Isabela was most concerned about the Tevinters, insisting that mages would be much harder to deal with than the Qunari or Orlesian soldiers. Both agreed the tome would be easier to steal if they made it there before the Qunari arrived, so they pushed the crew, and sailed from sun up to late into the evening each day.

As they moved closer to Orlais, Cat spent even more time with her crossbow then she did before, to the point that the crew begged her to stop. Though her shots hardly missed the target, the few times she had caused more than one minor panic.

Isabela spent time each day grilling her first and second mates, ensuring that they knew what to do in every possible situation. Her distress was obvious, and the crew became more and more tense, the closer the ship came to its destination.

When they finally docked in Cumberland, Isabela and Cat disembarked, and Isabela turned to Big Tom.

“‘Aye Cap’n, everyone back by sunset, and ready to depart at a moment’s notice after that,” he said before she could ask again.

Isabela looked at her first mate, then at her ship and sighed in relief. “Good. You’ve got the ship Big Tom. I want to know of anyone who doesn’t follow orders when I get back.”

“Aye Cap’n,” he said with a teasing salute and smile, as they both knew he would handle anyone who stepped out of line, if the rest of the crew didn’t beat him to it. “Safe harbor,” he added and went to give instructions to the crew.

“Are you ready?”

“Yes Captain” Cat replied.

Isabela scoffed at the title. “You haven’t called me that since you first came aboard.”
“That’s true, I hadn’t really thought about it” Cat said. “Would you prefer if I did?”

“It doesn’t matter to me,” was the reply.

“Issy it is then,” Cat teased, but when she saw Isabela smile, she decided to stick with her impromptu nickname.


“Right behind you.”

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Duran was seriously regretting his decision to send Alistair to Soldier’s Peak. The time they saved in travel did not seem worth it at this point.

“Commander?”

Duran looked at Seneschal Varel questioningly, with no small amount of resignation. Ever since arriving, it had been problem after problem. And once again, Cat’s random comments had suddenly made sense, and as Duran found, were endlessly frustrating.

“Remember to recruit Anders, the mage. And please kill both the Architect and the Mother, though I imagine you’ll feel the same once you meet them.”

That was fine and all, but what about everything else?! He now had a Howe, an increasingly drunk Oghren, a hostile elven mage, a member of the Legion of the Dead, and a dead, possessed body following him around, along with Anders. What he wouldn’t give for the good old days of Qunari and assassins.

Though, to be fair, it wasn’t all bad. Anders was a pretty funny guy, for a human. And Nathaniel was probably a better archer than he was, though he would never admit it out loud. But, where his previous companions had followed his lead, this group insisted on arguing about every course of action.

“Ahem”

Duran looked at Varel again, realizing that he had missed everything the man had said. “I’m sorry Varel, what was that again?”

“Commander! Warden Commander!”

Duran and Varel turned to the soldier running towards them. “Yes?” the Seneschal asked.

“The darkspawn sir, they’re marching on Amaranthine!”

“Commander, by the time we marshal our forces, we will be too late to intercept them,” Varel said quietly.

“My companions and I can head them off,” Duran said quickly as he began gathering his gear. “Get them in here, quickly!”
Duran paced and plotted, gathering anything he or his companions might need in the fight to come. He sent a runner to the stables to have horses saddled. He was about to leave without them when his companions came into the throne room pulling on the last of their armor and weapons.

“Velanna, Oghren, Sigrun, you will remain here, and guard the keep. We have more wardens on the way from Soldier’s Peak, and if they arrive before we return, then you can meet up with us. Otherwise, keep watch, and ensure the soldiers do as well.”

“But Commander!”

“Yes Commander”

“Thank you Sigrun, and no buts Velanna.” He turned to Oghren, “You’re suspiciously quiet.”

“I’ll do my duty, Warden.” he said, though he looked somehow pleased and disappointed at the outcome.

“Very well. Anders, Nathaniel, Justice, with me. We’re riding to Amaranthine in all haste, the darkspawn are marching on the city. Move out!”

The three of them followed Duran out to the stables, where they mounted their horses, with Duran sitting behind Justice. They rode as quickly as they were able, each of them knowing what would await them if they were too late.

* * * * *

After a fierce battle, Duran simply sat on the ground, his head in his hands. It always came back to him, to his decisions. He thought of the Mother, and the army she sent to the keep. His people were probably dead now, because he couldn’t turn away from the innocent people in the city. He had left his wardens, his soldiers to die.

“Don’t blame yourself Commander, we all wanted to help defend the city,” Nathaniel said as he sat beside him. “I’m sorry that we give you such grief. But I wanted you to know, I truly appreciate you bringing me along. I was able to save my sister, and her family. Had we not been here, they would have died today.”

“The keep was full of wardens and soldiers, Commander,” Anders added sitting on Duran’s other side. “These people were defenseless. You made the right call.”

“Thank you, but that doesn’t make it easier to swallow.”

“Perhaps meting justice to those who attacked us will help,” Justice spoke up from his vigil by the gate.

“You mean revenge?” Anders asked. “That sounds like a good plan to me.”

“Not revenge, justice. We do not kill them to make ourselves feel better, we punish them for their actions.”

“Seems the same to me, but whatever works for you,” Anders said under his breath.

“Either way, I’m about done with this Mother, er, thing.” Nathaniel said.

“Yes,” Duran agreed as he stood. “Let’s take care of this once and for all.”
Zevran walked out of the armorer’s with a wicked smile on his face, thinking of Eoman. The guildmaster would undoubtedly see the irony in his new armor, and he intended for Eoman Arainai to see him before dying. Killing Eoman was not enough, all of House Arainai would feel terror, pain and betrayal. For Taliesen, for Rinna, and for himself.

He knew that that wouldn’t be enough. Others would rise where they had fell, and the Crows wouldn’t bat an eye at the loss. No, he needed to do much more than that… but it was a good starting point.

He headed back to his room. There was still time before nightfall, when his work would begin. Time enough to pen a few letters, as he was missing his friends. He smirked, thinking of the odd group that he considered his new family. They were all fighting still, fighting to make their home a better place. How could he do anything less?

Cat stuck close to Isabela, keeping an eye out for anything suspicious. Isabela had stolen some simple clothes, and they had styled Cat’s hair to appear as an ordinary village woman so that no one would take notice of her, while she would be able to keep a lookout.

“I don’t understand why I can’t simply go inside the chantry,” Cat said quietly. “I would be able to create a distraction if something were to happen.”

“And you’d be stuck in there for hours,” Isabela replied. “Have you never been to a chantry before?” she asked with a glance at Cat. “The initiates swarm you, preaching at you as if their afterlife depended on it. Trying to make a getaway would cause more attention than any distraction could.”

Cat nodded. Isabela had explained it before, but she wanted to try once more. She hated that everything was on Isabela’s shoulders, but it seemed the captain preferred it that way. “Can you give me the signal again?” she asked, and Isabela gave a bird-like whistle.

“And yours?” Isabela asked. Then laughed as Cat made a cooing sound, that sounded more like a growl.

Cat grimaced. Why did her dove impression sound like a wookie? “Well, at least you won’t mistake it for anything else,” she said.

“That’s the truth,” Isabela said with a smirk. They came to the Chantry grounds, and clasped arms briefly before splitting up. Isabela headed to the back of the building and Cat found a tree to climb, on the side that gave her a view of the entrance. They were as ready as they would ever be.

Cat remained vigilant, trying to stretch without alerting others to her presence. Her limbs were starting to feel numb, but she ordered herself to ignore the feeling. Isabela had warned her that it may take hours before she emerged, depending on what she found inside.
She saw a group of people enter the chantry, taking note of their expensive looking dress. It was difficult to tell, as they could represent either party of the transfer, but she was sure they were not simply residents of the city. She debated with herself, then gave her “bird” call.

She waited, worried. After a few minutes she heard the whistle, and ensuring that no one would notice, climbed out of the tree and began walking back towards the docks. Isabela said she would catch up to Cat in town, as she didn’t want Cat to be incriminated in the theft.

Cat however, couldn’t keep walking. She made it to the nearest building, then turned the corner of it, and looked back to watch for her friend.

It didn’t take long, though she didn’t see Isabela. The same group she had seen enter the Chantry, quickly exited, looking in every direction.

“Raider Queen! I know you are out there! Give me the tome!” The man who appeared to be in charge shouted, and they all continued to search the area. Cat ducked back behind the building. Isabela would kill her if she was seen. She’d have to go around the opposite side of the building and make her way back to the docks quickly.

“Tevinters!” The shout rang out from the direction of the town, and Cat froze as several Qunari soldiers marched towards the chantry. “Where is the tome? You will pay for this with your lives!” The demands came fast and harsh, each faction yelling at the other. Cat heard the ring of weapons being unsheathed, and knew it was time for her to move.

She walked quickly, looking back with a fearful expression on her face several times. Partly because she was nervous, but also to help her blend in with the other townspeople. She looked ahead for groups of people to join, then darting to the next. She had no idea where Isabela was, but her best bet was to make it to the Siren’s Call as fast as she could without being noticed.

She reached the docks, but froze as she saw all the ships in the harbor. The huge dreadnought was daunting, and she couldn’t guess at the number of Qunari she saw on the deck, let alone below.

“There you are, you tricky minx!” Cat gasped, as she was pushed against the wall, and Isabela’s hand covered her mouth before she could shout. The look in her eyes was grave, and she lowered her hand while she whispered hasty instructions.

“I’m the pirate, you’re my wench. We’re going aboard so you can inspect my ship, got it?” With that she said loudly, “Of course you can get a tour of the ship sweetness.” She put her face to Cat’s neck, and reached up to pull her hair down from its bun. “You’re going to have to look more the part, Kitty,” she whispered. “Let’s go!”

Cat quickly reached up and adjusted her clothing, rolling the top of her pants down and her shirt up to reveal her stomach, and pulled the buttons at the top to show her cleavage. With her hair down and wild, she was sure she looked a mess, but it undoubtedly helped to hide her face. If anyone took notice of her, they would simply remember the skin she showed, rather than who she was.

They walked to the ship as if they didn’t have a care, Cat tucked under Isabela’s arm and Isabela’s hand on her back, with a few gropes here and there. Cat giggled and stayed glued to her, the tome hidden between them, hoping that it wouldn’t fall and give them away.

As they boarded, Isabela called out to the crew. “Set sail boys, I got what I came for!” Then turned her face to Cat again, her hand rubbing her back.
“Keep it up Kitty,” she whispered in her ear. “We’ve almost made it.”

Cat tried to keep up the act, though Isabela was the only reason she was successful. She guided Cat to the captain’s cabin, and gave her crew a wink then shut the door at their cheering and laughter.

Once inside, they separated, each trying to calm their racing hearts. Isabela looked up with a glare. “I’m not going to ask why you arrived at the docks after I did, but you’re lucky. I was about to leave without you.”

Cat swallowed as her throat went dry. “I’m sorry-”

Isabela interrupted her with a raised hand. “You don’t follow the plan, you deserve it. Remember that.”

Cat looked at the floor, reaching up to fix her clothes. She wasn’t sure how to respond. She looked back up to see Isabela grinning at a large book in her hands.

“We did it, I can’t believe it.”

“You did it, Captain.”

“Captain, huh?” She smirked at Cat, and softened into a genuine smile. She gave her arm a pat as she took the tome to her desk and set it inside a large lock box. “No swimming tomorrow,” she said. “We’re going to put as much distance between this place as we can.” Weary from their excursion, both women went to their beds and flopped down to rest.

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“Cap’n? We’ve got trouble,” Big Tom’s voice came through from outside the door a few hours later. Cat sat up as Isabela rose and strode over to open the door.

“What is it?” she asked.

He pointed back westward. “We’re being followed.”

Cat followed them outside as Isabela swore. She looked out at the water, seeing dozens of specks that were ships behind them, including a large one that must be the dreadnought. True they had a lead, but she could see the dreadnought cutting through the water, and cutting that lead with each passing minute.

“They’ll be within cannon range in about thirty minutes or so Cap’n” Tom stated, causing Isabela’s eyes to widen.

“We can’t fight against that thing,” she muttered to herself.

“Cap’n?”

Isabela walked away, moving around the ship, taking in everything around her. She walked over to the navigator’s table, and studied the maps, then began pacing in front of the table, occasionally glancing back at the ships.

“Continue on your current heading,” she finally said. Big Tom looked concerned, and hesitantly looked forward, then back at the ships. “Speak your mind Big Tom,” Isabela said.
“Cap’n, the clouds to the East… there’s a large storm.” Cat looked where he pointed, and saw a bolt of lightning crash down from black clouds far ahead of them.

Isabela stood with her arms crossed. She nodded as he spoke, then replied. “We can’t outrun them Tom, that storm is our only chance.”

Big Tom stared for a moment, then answered. “Aye Cap’n.” He turned and yelled instructions to the crew. Several men ran around to secure rigging and crates, both on deck and below.

Isabela turned and looked at Cat. “Get ready Cat,” she said solemnly. “We’ll reach that storm in about thirty minutes. Anything can happen, but we should prepare for the worst.”

“Aye Captain,” Cat replied.

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Alistair glanced around as he and his recruits rode into Vigil’s Keep… or what was left of it. They had heard about the battle that was fought here at the last homestead, and had hurriedly pushed on. It wasn’t quite as bad as he had feared, and it seemed that rebuilding had already begun.

Duran came out to greet him, with a dark haired man at his side. Dismounting, Alistair came forward and clasped arms with him, and gave him a playful punch on the shoulder.

“I hear you had all the fun while I spent the last several weeks on a horse,” he gave Duran his best grimace, gaining a laugh in return.

“Alistair, this is Nathaniel, one of our newest brothers in arms. Nathaniel, this is Alistair, Fereldan’s Constable of the Grey.”

“Ugh. Duran, you know I despise titles,” Alistair complained as Nathaniel stood at attention and gave him a salute. “At ease Nathaniel, here we prefer more of a family, and less of rank and file.” He turned back to Duran with a smirk. “Warden Commander, these are recruits I’ve managed to find in my travels,” he said, gesturing to the dozen men behind him. “I’m am sorry to also bring bad news,” he continued. “On our way here, we came across a site of a massacre. There were several bodies clothed in Warden heraldry, so we brought them along.”

Duran and Nathaniel moved quickly to the wagon that Alistair pointed at. Lifting the canvas, they studied the faces of the men that had been missing for the past week.

“Are they ours?” Alistair asked.

“Yes,” Duran replied. “Was this all of them?”

“I saw no signs of any others,” Alistair replied with confusion. “Why do you ask?”

“Nathaniel?” Duran questioned, hoping he was wrong.

“They are not here. There is no sign of either Justice or Anders, Commander,” Nathaniel reported.
Crashing at Kirkwall

Chapter Notes

Had a couple of vacation days, so I got some writing done. I'm really happy with how the story is going, so I posted an extra chapter! Enjoy

Later on, Cat would tell many stories about the storm they were in, but none of them ever came close to the truth. The storm was easily the worst she had ever experienced, and the word storm was not enough to describe the huge gales of wind, choppy waves, and water that ran across the deck with every tilt of the ship.

Added to that, the Siren’s call was missing huge chunks of her deck, her rigging, and her crew. The Qunari dreadnought was the only ship to have followed them into the storm, and just as they entered the chaos, they sustained heavy damage from cannon fire.

The Qunari obviously weren’t trying to sink them, otherwise they would have had no chance of survival. In order to reclaim their tome in the inclement weather, they had to catch the Siren’s Call, not destroy it. However, as long as they were still sailing, the cannon fire was considered warning shots.

The persistent attacks were taking their toll on the damaged ship, and its crew. Smoke billowed from the fires that seemed to spontaneously erupt around the ship, hindering visibility, and breathable air. Cat could hear the coughing of her companions, though she could not see them.

“Land! Land ho!”

Cat looked around, looking for a break in the smoke and water, trying to find anyone. She heard the boom again of the cannon, and moved as quickly as she could to what she thought was the mast. She found herself outside the captain’s cabin, and making a quick decision, felt around to find the door and rushed inside.

Her eyes watering, she took a moment before she could see, and noticed Isabela putting the lock box inside a pack and putting it on her shoulders. She looked up, noticing Cat. “Grab anything you can’t leave behind! We’re angling for the shore and we’ll have to run for it!” she yelled to Cat above the sounds of storm and battle.

Cat nodded, grabbing the pack that she had put together earlier. She didn’t have much she couldn’t leave, but there were a few things from friends, as well as some clothes, what little money she had, and weapons in her bag. Surviving this just to starve to death made no sense to her.

The two women headed back out of the cabin, and looked around the deck as best they could. They began inching in the direction of the bow, avoiding holes in the deck, and checking the men they found laying down. Cat found she couldn’t find words to say, as they found no one alive.

Suddenly the Siren’s Call lurched to the side with a large cracking sound.

“Move!” Isabela yelled, pulling Cat along, and barely avoiding the damage as a large crack made its way across the deck, and the the ship began to separate into two pieces. Isabela and Cat made it to
the railing, and looked in horror at the large rock they were about to crash into.

“Abandon ship! Abandon ship!” Isabela dragged Cat along the railing as she screamed the warning out. Cat joined her, hearing the sound of pounding feet, yelling and screaming, and felt confident that some of the crew had heard them.

“You saw the rock?” Isabela yelled in Cat’s face, holding her shoulders to get her attention. Cat nodded in exaggerated motions so that she was understood. Isabela leaned closer so she didn’t have to yell as loud. “Head that way towards the shore! If we get separated we’ll meet at the shore!”

Before Cat could nod again, Isabela had taken her hand and pulled Cat with her as she jumped off the side of the ship into the churning water.

Cat felt the embrace of the water as a punch, and struggled upwards to breathe. She had lost her grip on Isabela as soon as they hit the water, and as her head popped above the water, she gulped in air and screamed her name.

The waves overpowered her and she found herself without air underwater again, and pushed with all her strength up, up to the sky. Everything was dark, and she had no idea if she was swimming in the right direction, it was all she could do to continue to move. She focused on making it back up to the surface each time she was submerged.

It felt like an infinite amount of time passed when she felt her leg brush something. She took as much air as she could before she was submerged again, and reached down.

Her hands grabbed sand, and she started clawing with her hands, dragging herself underwater towards the shore. Once she came back up for air, Cat pushed her legs down, and was elated that she was able to stand. Her strength was waning, and she pushed forward, knowing she had to make it to shore, had to hide.

Cat almost made it out of the water before her legs gave out, and she fell into the shallows. She pushed up to sit, panting and struggling to stay upright, her limbs giving up and she sat in the water, unable to do anything else.

She looked up at the light she noticed, and saw that the Siren’s Call was fully ablaze now, giving some visibility to her, but covering the sky behind it in thick clouds of smoke. She forced herself to look around, eventually finding what looked like a cave.

Cat didn’t think it was possible for her to stand, but after yelling at herself enough, she was able to make her way to the cave. She made it perhaps a few feet inside before she collapsed again, unable to keep going. She gave up her fight, and closed her eyes.

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Quite frankly, Cat was surprised to see the cave walls when she finally opened her eyes. Light was streaming in, and she squinted until her eyes adjusted. She continued to lay where she was, and eventually gave herself to the count of three to move.

One…two…three.

Nothing happened, and Cat didn’t feel bad about it either. After a few more counts to three, Cat was able to roll herself over, and up to her knees. A sharp pain on her thigh made her look down. Seeing the tear in her pants, and the dried blood on her clothes, she poked around the wound trying to determine the severity. It stayed closed, and she took that for a good sign, and decided to continue. She then made it to her feet with the help of the cave walls.
She slowly made her way to the entrance, and peeked out, shading her eyes from the sunlight.

It looked somehow familiar, and she assumed that she was somewhere on the Wounded Coast. She looked out to the water, unable to find the wreckage of the Siren’s Call, but was shocked to see the wreck of the dreadnought.

She had always assumed that the Qunari used it as an excuse to stay in Kirkwall to find the thief of their relic, but there was no mistaking that their ship was wrecked. It looked like it was wrapped around one of the huge boulders that stood up from the water, and it was more than halfway underwater. She figured it was probably sitting on the seabed.

She looked around the shoreline. She didn’t see anyone, no Qunari, no pirates, no Isabela. If anyone was nearby however, calling out for the captain could bring her unwanted attention.

Decision made, Cat started to walk, well limp really, keeping to whatever hiding spots she could find and making her warped bird call every few minutes. She took rests when she needed, but continued on. The shoreline soon became a path, and she made her way onto it.

Cat continued to walk, her wound burning, but she ignored it and eventually forgot about it. She continued to try her bird call, knowing how awful it sounded, since she couldn’t whistle. She cheered herself up with the knowledge that Isabela could never mistake it for a real bird.

She began to hear the noises of the city, though they weren’t loud, but it served to give her the energy to continue. As she got closer, she could see she was nearing the docks. She grew concerned as she couldn’t see any Qunari. Where could hundreds of soldiers be? Didn’t the city give them space here in the docks?

She heard a noise to her left, and spun. A grin spread across her face as she saw Isabela coming towards her.

“Issy, you’re all right,” she said, relief evident in her voice.

“And you’re the luckiest girl in Thedas,” Isabela replied. “I think I need to keep you around and maybe that luck will rub off on me.”

“Lucky? Are you serious?” Cat gestured to herself, as she looked exactly like she had slept in a cave, where Isabela looked about the same, though a little tired- and without a pack.

“I’ve been hiding here for hours,” Isabela explained. “because the Qunari were here. Then, they all move into the city, and I’m getting ready to sneak in when I hear that noise you call a bird call. How else would you describe it?” she asked Cat with a smirk.

“Let’s just get in there, while we can,” Cat grumbled.

“All right Kitty, no need to be sour.” They moved towards the docks and Isabela explained to Cat where they were headed, so they could act as if they belonged there. In the middle of explaining, Isabela stopped.

“See that man there, the bald one?”

“Yes…?”

“I know him. He can help us,” Isabela said. “New plan!” She said energetically, pulling Cat along at a faster pace. “See what I mean, lucky!”
Isabela’s friend was a former raider named Martin, and Cat felt bad for not having recognized him. The huge scar across his throat was not something she thought she would ever be able to forget.

Martin was more than willing to help them, in exchange for help in return. He had sunk all the money he had in bringing poisons to Kirkwall to resell, and now his cargo had been stolen. Isabela promised assistance, though she did say it may take some time.

Martin took them to Lowtown, or as Cat thought, the poor side of town. He took them to a shady looking man, who then escorted them to a one room hovel just outside the alienage. Martin paid him for three days stay, and Cat and Isabela assured him they would pay him from that point on.

Martin told them he was staying at a tavern called The Hanged Man, a few streets over, and asked that they come to him as soon as they had any information on his cargo. Then he left, leaving the women alone to assess their new situation.

“Shall we explore?” Isabela asked.

Cat gave Isabela an answer that needed no words. She cocked her hip, put her hand on her waist and gave her a big smirk.

Isabela woke the next morning, and dressed, deciding to return back to Cat. She would definitely return however, the Blooming Rose was her new favorite place! She walked along in the early morning light, thinking. She knew she should talk to Cat about the relic, how it was gone when she had finally come to, but she just couldn’t.

“Besides,” she thought. “Cat always seems to understand, even when I don’t explain things. It’s what I like most about her.”

Isabela knew that they were different. Cat tried to make something of herself, always thinking ahead and planning new ways to be better. Isabela didn’t think past the moment, and simply took what she wanted when she wanted. But, Cat never judged her, and that meant everything.

So, Isabela would have to keep some things from Cat. But, it would mean that Cat wasn’t involved, and safe, just as she had promised Zevran. She may be a good for nothing pirate, but she kept her promises to friends.

Isabela stopped at a market stall, buying a few things for breakfast with the money she had ”found” lying in some nobleman’s pocket last night. She knew Cat would be hungry, as she hadn’t eaten anything yesterday. She probably should have forced her to eat sooner, but Cat had told her about the Rose, and well…

Isabela walked into their lovely abode, and turned to the cot on the right. Cat was still asleep, though she wasn’t sleeping peacefully. She was tossing and turning, and groaning. Isabela put her packages down and went to her side, grabbing her shoulder, and shaking her awake.
Cat mumbled something, and Isabela tried again. Cat opened her eyes slowly.

“Issy?”

“Hey Kitty, you don’t look so good.”

“Feel awful, it’s burning.”

“What’s burning?”

“My leg, it’s on fire.”

“Show me,” Isabela demanded, and was shocked to see the infected cut on Cat’s thigh. It was disgusting, mottled and red with something oozing out of it. She looked away before she retched.

“We need to get you to a healer Cat” she said seriously. “I’ll go ask around, maybe there’s one in the alienage.”

“No…”

“Cat, you have to see a healer.”

“I know” she mumbled, then continued a little clearer. “I heard something yesterday, about a healer. A clinic, in the under city,”

“Darktown? All right then, let’s go. Can you make it?”

Cat smirked as best she could, though to Isabela, it was more of a grimace.

“Of course I can.”

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It took longer than either of them had planned, though they were only stopped once by thugs trying to rob them. They tried asking directions, without luck, and finally came upon the clinic with the lit lantern hanging outside. At that point, Cat’s leg had already given out, and Isabela had her arm strung over her shoulders, carrying most of her weight.

Isabela opened the door and with difficulty dragged Cat inside. Neither of them had truly recovered from their ordeal, and it was made obvious by their hike through Darktown.

“Hello? I need a healer!” Isabela called as they struggled inside.

“I’m here, what’s the problem?” A blonde man came up and helped her get Cat to a cot. Cat sat, then hissed in pain as Isabela brought her legs up to lay on the cot.

Isabela grabbed for the top of Cat’s pants, and Cat batted her hands away. She went again, and the two of them wrestled for a moment, much to the man’s amusement.

“Stop it!”

“He needs to see the wound, so the pants have to go!”

“If it helps,” he said calmly. “I am a healer, and I will need to see the wound in order to help. Nothing more.”
Cat looked up at Anders. He seemed tired, but more healthy than she was expecting. Perhaps he had been getting enough to eat so far. And he really was wearing feathers as a jacket. And the thought of taking her pants off made her cringe.

“I can get a blanket for you, and turn my back until you are ready?” he asked, and she nodded. His bedside manner was spot on, and she found herself relaxing. Her previous doctors had all been old men or women, not a man slightly older than herself who looked like he could be a rock star. The shoulder length hair and the stubble really worked for him, and the earring was just icing on the top.

He did just as he said, and handed her a lap blanket and turned away. She gestured to Isabela to help her, and she lifted her hips off the table as Isabela gently removed her pants.

“This wasn’t how I thought I’d finally get your pants off Kitty,” Isabela said with a wink and Cat rolled her eyes. She heard Anders stifling a cough, and gave Isabela a glare. She replied with a laugh, and turned Anders around with a hand on his shoulder.

“I don’t think I can look at it a second time. I’ll come back in awhile to escort her back.” With that, she strode out of the clinic, leaving Cat alone… with Anders.

“Well,” he said. “Let’s see this… oh.” He peered at her thigh, bringing his hands up to turn her leg. “It looks infected. How long ago did this happen?”

“Um, two days ago?”

“And how did you get it?”

“I’m not exactly sure.”

His eyebrow winged up in question. “Okay, then where were you when it happened?”

“Out by the coast. I noticed it after it had already congealed. It didn’t reopen when I moved around, so I thought it was okay. There’s probably something in it that’s festering.”

Cat wasn’t sure why, but Anders was giving her a strange look. “That sounds probable,” he replied. “We’re going to have to open it to clean it out. It may sting a bit.”

Cat readied herself. She wasn’t a fan of pain, but her tolerance was fairly high. Anders went to fetch some cloth and coming back, handed it to her. He stood over her, with his hands out above her leg. His hands began glowing, a blue tint to the glow, and he slowly moved them down and out, coming close but never actually touching her.

She understood the cloth, as the wound began to weep. First pus, then blood came out slowly and she used the cloth to wipe it up. This continued for a few minutes, and with each cleaning, she had more things on the cloth. Grit, dirt and even a thread also came up and she realized that in her haste, she had left a dirty wound to heal.

After he was satisfied, his magic changed, though it looked the same, she could feel her leg tingling, and watched in fascination as the wound was closed.

“It may still be tender for a day or two, so you should keep off it if possible.” Cat looked up at him, awe on her face. He smiled at her, and she was reminded of Wynne. She had smiled at Cat like that as well, every time she had used her magic in front of Cat.

“Thank you Anders,” Cat said quietly.
Anders stiffened, and he looked at her suspiciously. “How do you know my name?” he asked. She looked back at him, to see him holding a staff, his hand outstretched. Cat froze. It was akin to having a gun pointed at you, and it frightened her.

“Um, the store keeper, Lirene? That’s how I heard about the clinic.” She said quickly, doubting, but hoping that it would work.

He relaxed, “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to frighten you. I’ll have to talk with her about that, I’d rather keep myself anonymous.”

Cat nodded, and worked on putting her pants back on under the blanket. She finally gave up and swinging her legs over, stood up. “I’m sorry, I don’t have any money,” she said yanking them back up.

He looked up to her. “It’s fine, I’m just glad I could help.”

“No” she said, and he looked surprised. “It’s not fine. You helped me, and you didn’t have to.” She glanced around, noticing a dozen things that he needed. “I’ll get paid soon,” she lied. “And I’ll pay you double since I couldn’t pay today.”

“Really, there’s no need-”

“There is every need” she interrupted firmly. With a pause, she decided it was time to go. “Thanks again, uh, sir.” She got a confused look and determined to find out how to address others here, or she would get herself into trouble. She slammed her feet in her boots and headed out the door before he could say more.
We're friends, aren't we?

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everyone for your kudos and comments! I've reached over 100 kudos and I couldn't be happier! I'll probably end up giving another mid week update just because I'm so happy. But here's our regular Sunday update, just a few hours early, because why not? It's the first glimpse of Hawke after all!

To be honest, Cat hadn't thought that it would work. She had gone with Isabela a few times into the Blooming Rose, and while it was uncomfortable to be constantly offered a job there, she had met a lot of fun people.

She supposed it had to take a special kind of person to not only sell themselves, but to keep a sense of humor about it. Cat knew she could never do it, and she admired a few of those that she had met.

It had started when some of them would join Cat and Isabela at their table in the common room, enjoying a moment of peace and drink before being called back to work. She heard much more than she wanted to about some of the people in the room, but she had also heard complaints about certain aspects of the job, including the state of their rooms.

It hadn’t taken long for Cat to pitch a job idea to Madam Lisene, though she hadn’t had high hopes. But, Lisene cared a lot for the health and well being of her people, which had been a surprise, but had made sense later once she thought about it. Her people were her livelihood, and some had probably been with her for years.

So now, she was the unofficial caretaker, because she refused to be called a maid, but basically she came in and cleaned up after the party had died down. She had much higher standards than the previous people, and the employees had convinced Lisene to keep Cat after only two days into her trial period. After a week, Cat realized that this was a great job. Only a few hours a night, and she was paid better than most refugees were faring. Plus, Isabela was happier as she was no longer kicked out when she was waiting for Cat.

Isabela continued to pickpocket for her share of the expenses. She would often disappear during the day, but would inevitably show up to walk Cat either to or from work. Some nights she would stay in the Rose longer than Cat would.

Cat also got a taste of Isabela’s flair for story telling. Each day someone would ask about her “noble husband who abandoned her” or her “family that was wiped out by the blight”. Once she was startled by a proposition from an elf, saying he could help her forget her elven lover that had used her and left her stranded in Ferelden.

Trying to explain the truth had never worked, and Cat finally decided to just go with it. No one cared to know the true story anyhow, and it became easier to just ignore what others thought.

It was a stroke of genius one day when she denied the noble husband and told a worker named Idunna that she was abandoned and simply trying to make something of herself. After that, Idunna spent her free time helping Cat with learning everything she needed to know about society. What to address others, when to use serah or messere, what areas to avoid in order to dodge the coterie or
Idunna was a wealth of knowledge, and Cat was surprised but happy that they quickly became friends.

The following week after she had gotten paid, Cat had gone back to Anders’ clinic and given him the money she had promised. He had gaped at her, not expecting her to return. He even tried to refuse the money, saying that he couldn’t take stolen money.

“It’s not stolen, I earned it,” she told him, insulted. “I have a job, I don’t need to steal.”

“You have a job?” he asked, surprised yet again.

“Yes. I work at the Rose,” she said, taking his hand, and placing the money in it. He was looking at her wide eyed, and it was a little unnerving.

“I’m sorry,” he said.

“Why?” she asked. “It’s a good place and the people are nice. It could be worse.” She looked around and then focused back on him. “Oh, and I wanted to get something for a friend, something to help with, um… feeling clean, between customers, or something.”

Anders looked at her, seeing the blooming blush on her cheeks. He felt sorrow at the thought of this innocent girl forced to sell herself at the Rose, but understood the lure of the money she would undoubtedly be making. She probably had people lining up to be with her.

“I’m sure I can get you something, but it will take an hour or so. Did you want to wait?”

“I have a bit more shopping to do, but I can come back in about an hour?”

“That’s fine,” he replied.

Cat headed back up to Lowtown. She wasn’t sure why, but she always seemed to make Anders sad. Maybe it was just his situation? Perhaps he hadn’t been eating? She gave it some thought and headed towards Lirene’s store. Anders obviously didn’t like her to bring money herself, and maybe he didn’t like accepting charity. But, if she donated through Lirene, he wouldn’t know where it came from, and might accept it.

Cat spent most of an hour with Lirene, first convincing her of her intentions, then ensuring they had an agreement. Lirene wasn’t keen on being told where donations would go, but Cat bypassed that by promising to purchase the goods she needed at her store. In return, everything that she brought specifically for the clinic would make its way to Anders as his supplies.

She returned to the clinic to pick up her order, and pay the healer for his work. He handed her a crate full of bottles, with written instructions for their uses.

“This is much more than I asked for, did I pay enough?” she asked him.

“Oh yes, this is more than enough. Most of these tonics use simple ingredients,” he replied. “Please, just promise me you’ll be careful.”

Cat looked at the box and nodded. “I’ll be sure to read the instructions carefully.”

“That’s not exactly what I -“

Anders was interrupted as a couple came bursting in, the man carrying a young child that looked unconscious. Anders was in healer mode, and Cat was forgotten, so she slipped out the door without
Later that night, as she was changing bed linens, Idunna walked into the room, bathed and ready for sleep. Cat pointed out the crate of tonics, and Idunna gleefully browsed through them, before coming up behind Cat and giving her a hug.

“Yes, thank you so much! I hope you don’t mind if I share them, everyone will want some!”

“Not at all, the healer said the ingredients were fairly simple, so we can always order more,” Cat replied. “Just let me know when we are running low.”

Isabela sauntered into the Rose, her thoughts dismal. *This chase was turning up nothing! There isn’t one clue as to who took the relic, and those Qunari aren’t leaving either.*

She had hired a few local men that claimed they could find anything, but so far there was nothing to find. It was aggravating, and she was about fed up. She walked over to the bar, and was told that Cat was almost done.

She smirked to herself, everyone here knew that she was looking out for Cat. She hoped that that wouldn’t come back to bite her.

“Hey Issy,” Cat said as she walked up behind her. “missed you earlier.”

“Sorry Kitty, business.”

“Right.”

Isabela winced, though Cat had been nothing but trusting, she still felt guilty that she hadn’t shared what was happening.

“Shall we go, or are you staying?” Cat asked.

“No, let’s go.”

The two women walked out of the Rose together, not worried at all of the hour. Most were in bed, and the sun was getting ready to rise.

“Can you believe about the Chantry?” Cat said, and Isabela sent her a questioning glance. “Did you not hear?” she asked.

“No,” was the reply. “But you know how I don’t care a fig about the chantry.”

“No, no” Cat laughed. “Apparently there was a fight in the chantry last night.”

“Oh really? Sister so-and-so borrowed robes without permission? Was there slapping?”

Cat laughed loudly, before placing her hand over her mouth to stay quiet. “No silly, an actual fight, though I would go to the chantry if there were slapping fights.” They grinned at each other.

“So what happened?”
“Well, there was some sort of ruckus, but not much is known. Everyone is saying it was mages, as this morning there was a mage and several templars found dead.”

“Hmm, definitely sounds like mages,” Isabela shook her head as they rounded a turn that took them from Hightown into Lowtown. “The templars are sure to crack down on the mages again.”

“Yeah, Idunna was really worried.” Cat lowered her voice. “She has friends that are apostates.” No matter the hour, ears were everywhere.

“Well, good thing we don’t have any mages for friends,” Isabela spoke up. She gave Cat a wink, and they chuckled together.

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Cat headed back to Lirene’s shop. Isabela hated coming in here, as it reminded her of how bad life could get, so they agreed to meet up later for a late lunch. Cat had smirked and said, “That’s Issy speak for drinking,” to which Isabela replied, “Of course it is!”.

“‘ello Miss Katrina!”

Cat turned to Ellen, a young girl that was helping buy food for her family by keeping Lirene’s shop clean.

“Hello Ellen, and didn’t I tell you to call me Cat?” she said with a smile.

“Mama told me I shouldn’t,” was the reply.

“Well, you tell your mama that I absolutely insist!” Cat said with a pat on the girls arm. She couldn’t hear her name wrong anymore, anyway.

Cat walked over to Lirene, handing a pouch of coins to the shop keep, and hearing about the last delivery of supplies to the clinic.

“He is really curious about these supplies, but more grateful really. He said to tell those that donate about how many people he is able to help. I didn’t tell him that all the donations are from one person.”

“Thank you Lirene. He seems to accept if it is donations, but not when I just try to give him money,” she said with a smile. “I really appreciate you being a go between.”

“I enjoy it,” she replied. “I’m able to send people to him without worry now, though there have been some lately that don’t seem to need a healer. I worry about the templars finding him.”

Cat thought back to the news of dead templars in the chantry. She knew it meant that Anders had met Hawke, but didn’t realize that meant Lirene had met them as well. And… she was curious.

“What do you mean?” Cat asked, trying to seem nonchalant.

“A few days ago, a group that looked like fighters came in looking for him,” Lirene said in a low voice. “They were quite insistent in finding him.”

“And?” Cat asked.

“And… I told them. They promised they didn’t want to hurt him. I guess I just assumed that they had
a friend that was wounded. I hope I didn’t cause him trouble.”

“I’m sure you didn’t Lirene.” Cat said soothingly. “He’s strong, and can take of himself, he’s a Grey Warden after all.

“He told you too?” Lirene looked shockingly at Cat.

“Well, sort of. I kind of overheard it…” Cat had to admit, she was getting better at lying as long as it was partly true. Lirene nodded. “I’d better head out. Thanks again Lirene, I’ll see you next week?” She stayed long enough to see her nod, then quickly headed out of the store.

Cat headed towards the market stalls. She knew she wouldn’t get food once she met up with Isabela, and decided to buy something before meeting her. She headed for her favorite stall, full of pastries.

Cat chose a couple of meat pies, which were pretty much like chicken pot pies back home. On impulse she added a couple of scones, which made her smile like a kid at Christmas. She didn’t usually let herself indulge, as she was determined to get out of the hovel they were living in.

Cat walked out of the marketplace and towards the stairs. She looked up and saw a group of people heading towards her, though they were talking among themselves. Cat’s eyes widened as she recognized them, and as she climbed the stairs, she made her way to the side to be further away from them.

There was Aveline, a tall red head in a guard’s uniform. Varric, the dwarf with no beard, and they were not kidding about chest hair, she could see it from here. Two men that had to be Carver and… Hawke. Cat wondered what his first name was, even as she took in the handle behind his back.

It could be for a sword, she knew, but the man wasn’t wearing armor. A few pieces here and there to protect vital organs, sure, but nowhere near what Aveline was wearing. He also looked a lot like Carver, but with a squarer jaw, and what looked like a beard growing in. Plenty of stubble, and she had to admit, it was appealing on him.

She continued walking, avoiding looking at them again, making her way up to meet with Isabela. Since she didn’t look, she didn’t notice the speculative looks that she received in return. Appreciative looks from the the two men, and a curious look from a dwarf.

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“Martin asked me to meet him, and I have some business there later, so we’ll just drink there.”

“The Hanged Man? Isabela are you sure? I’ve heard it’s a dive.”

“I’m not sure what that means, but it sounds like my kind of place. Let’s go.”

Cat wanted to continue to protest, though she knew it would only make Isabela want to go more. So she simply grumbled as she followed her friend.

“Don’t be salty, Cat,” Isabela laughed. Ever since hearing it from Cat, it had become her favorite play on words. Well, after any innuendo ever, anyway.

Cat didn’t answer, as she was staring at Isabela. She came to a stop and continued to stare, making
Isabela eye her oddly. There was something off.

“What’s wrong?” Cat asked.

“What? Nothing.”

“Issy… what’s wrong?”

Isabela heaved a sigh, and walked over to a crate to sit. “Can’t ever get past you, can I?”

“I should hope you wouldn’t want to.”

Isabela sighed again, squashing the guilty feeling that was springing up. “When we split up earlier, I ran into an old acquaintance. An enforcer for Castillon named Hayder.”

Cat reached out and grabbed her hand, giving it a squeeze.

“Castillon wants the relic, and I… I don’t have it. I went ahead and set up a duel with Hayder for tonight, but… I don’t think he’ll honor it. More than likely, he’ll have several people with him, and I’ll be killed, or worse.”

“So, what’s the plan?” Isabela looked up at Cat and saw she was serious.

“I’ll never understand why you stay by me.”

“And I’ll never understand why you took me on your ship. Guess we’re even.”

“I thought perhaps you could have your crossbow with you, and help keep them honest.”

Cat thought it was a sound plan, but if there were more than a few, it could be problematic. “I’d be happy to, though we may want to think of enlisting more help. We don’t know how many we’re up against, so, better safe than sorry.”

“In most cases, I’d think sorry was more fun, but not this time. You’re probably right.” Isabela stood. “We’ll keep a look out, but I don’t want to take along just anyone.” She pulled on Cat’s hand and got her standing. “Come on, I really need a drink now.”
Isabela guided Cat to a table in the corner, and took the seat facing out into the room. The waitress came up and Cat ordered Isabela a bottle of the lower quality liquor.

“One good thing about you Issy, you’re not picky about what you drink,” Cat teased.

“Too true Kitty, being drunk is the fun part, besides, after the first few shots I can’t taste anything.”

They laughed, and Cat unwrapped her food packages, giving one of the meat pies to Isabela, and ignoring the look she received.

“You know, I’m supposed to take care of you, not the other way around.”

Cat ignored the comment, and started to eat her lunch. Isabela joined in, though she looked contemplative.

“I think your idea was a good one,” Isabela finally said. “I think I’ll have others help me tonight, and you can sit this one out.”

“Wut?” Cat asked, mouth full of food.

“I promised to keep you safe, and I can’t do that if I’m dead,” Isabela said then added, “or if you are.”

Cat swallowed her food, and tried to swallow her frustration with it. “You know, it’s really annoying” she said, heating up as she spoke, “having everyone think I need protecting all the time. What were all the lessons for, if you’re still protecting me?”

“In case something happens and I can’t be there,” Isabela replied.

Cat glared sullenly. “I’m surprised you let me walk around town or stay at the Rose by myself,” she said. Her gaze turned suspicious as Isabela looked uncomfortable.

Isabela suddenly stood. “There are the fellows I was looking for, this will only take a minute,” she said as three men walked up to the bar.

“Famous last words,” Cat replied as Isabela stood to greet them. Cat finished her meal and her dessert, as Isabela found out that Lucky and his friends had found nothing about the relic. He then demanded payment for their services to which she scoffed and refused. When things escalated, Cat continued to sit there, as Isabela fought off the three men, and sent them running.

“A fight breaks out, and you just sit there? Thought I trained you better than that,” Isabela said as she sat back down.

“Well, I figured you wanted me to stay safe, so I let you handle it,” Cat said sourly.

Isabela laughed. She really enjoyed Cat when she was pissy. “Kitty, don’t be like that, I just don’t know what I’d do without you.”

“Bring someone home every night no doubt” Cat replied with a deadpan expression.

Isabela’s laughter rang out again. “You know me so well!”
Isabela leaned closer, and said quietly. “There’s a group watching us, several men, a dwarf and a woman.”

Cat hesitated, as she was hoping to not be a part of this meeting. She sighed and replied, “You may as well invite them over. Perhaps they’ll be the help we’re looking for.”

Isabela waved them over, and Hawke sauntered up. “That was quite the show. Would you care to join us?”

Isabela rose immediately, grabbing her bottle, though she didn’t walk over until Cat followed. Cat looked at the group sitting at the table, and chose the seat farthest from Varric, which put her next to Aveline and across from Anders.

“It’s you!” Anders looked at her in surprise and with a smile, and the rest of the group turned to look at them.

“Yes, it’s me,” she replied, and her cheeks heated. Why was she blushing? “Anders helped heal a nasty wound I had a couple of weeks ago,” she said louder to address the group.

“I didn’t even recognize you.” Isabela said to Anders with a smirk, then proceeded into introductions for herself. Cat coughed loudly as Isabela started about her, and Isabela simply said she had picked up Cat in Fereldan, and left it at that.

Varric took on introductions for his friends, and Cat found out that Hawke’s name was indeed Garrett. As she looked at him, she could see the beginnings of the character from the game. This Garrett was younger, and looked to be at the first stage of growing his beard. It was strange how similar he and Carver looked, although she shouldn’t be surprised. They were brothers after all, but there were three distinct differences that she could see.

One, Garrett was scruffy, while Carver was clean shaven. Two, Garrett had amber eyes while Carver’s were blue, and three- Carver had his signature scowl, while Garrett wore a smirk. She smiled to herself as she recalled the men she had traveled with that constantly wore smirks. She felt a nudge from her left, and realized that she had zoned out, again. Aveline had nudged her, so she turned to her.

“I’m sorry, what?”

Aveline smiled and gestured with her head towards Anders. Cat looked to him with a questioning expression.

“I said, are you going to tell us your name? Isabela called you Kitty, and I wasn’t sure if that was some sort of nickname?”

Cat flushed. “Actually it’s Catarina, though my friends called me Cat. Isabela just likes to be different from everyone else.”

Isabela came to the rescue, “It’s true, I am one of a kind!” and then began to talk to Garrett about the duel later that evening, and offering pay for their assistance. Once they agreed to terms and Isabela gave the meeting point, she stood and walked to Cat, dragging her up and away.

“Until tonight!” Isabela called as they walked out of the tavern.

* * * * *
The group was a little shocked at the quick exit, but Varric just smiled.

“So, what do you think Hawke? I hear she’s hardly ever serious, but from what I’ve found, she can fight better than most, and is a talented pickpocket.”

Garrett mused, scratching the stubble on his chin. “I don’t foresee a problem with her, and if she’s as good as she seems, having a dagger wielder will come in handy. What’s with the other one, Catarina?”

“I had no idea there were two of them, but I’m sure I can find out,” Varric replied confidently. “What do you know Blondie?”

Anders glanced at them, confused and unsure of what to say. He was feeling strangely protective, and there was a sense of familiarity with Cat. But... no. She couldn’t be the same one... right?

“Anders?” Garrett asked.

He looked up, into the face of the man who had helped him with no expectations or qualms. He was a good man, Anders was sure. “She told me she works at the Blooming Rose.” All of them looked at him as though he were crazy.

“You’re saying that shy, innocent girl works at the brothel?” Aveline said incredulously.

“That’s what she said,” Anders replied. “And she has come to me each week for tonics and medicines, specific for that kind of... thing.”

“With that blushing virgin routine, she must make a fortune,” Carver said, and Anders glared at him.

“Don’t ever say that again,” he growled.

“Okay, okay.” Garrett placed a hand on Anders’ shoulder, and gave Carver a scolding look. “Either way, it gives somewhere for Varric to start, or we can simply ask Isabela later.”

“You don’t think Cat will be coming?” Anders asked, turning to Garrett.

“It sounds like she may be at work,” Garrett replied with a smirk.

* * * * *

“You seem happier now than you did before,” Cat commented.

“Now that I may survive the night, yes, I am happier,” Isabela replied. “Hayder isn’t one to play fair, but with that group behind us, there’s no way he’ll try anything. More than likely he’ll have his group attack, and we’ll end up fighting them all.”

“Well, they looked like they can handle themselves.” Cat commented.

“Oh I’m sure that Hawke can handle just about anything he wants,” she replied with a smirk.

“And how did I not guess that was what you were thinking?” Cat asked with a smile. “Should I plan on sleeping at the Rose tonight? I’m sure Idunna can find me a couch or something.”
“You know me, I never say never,” she winked at Cat. “But… he seemed more the slow and patient type, like a jungle cat… stalking its prey.” Isabela’s voice went low and her words were slow as she spoke, and she gave a mock shiver. “The younger one looked ready to pounce, if you’re interested?”

“Please,” Cat replied dryly. “I’d let you pounce on me before I’d let him.”

“Good to know where I stand.”

“Anyway,” Cat said to change the topic. “So tonight, do you think I should leave sooner and set myself up high before you go? They may be watching for us.”

Isabela contemplated the alternatives. “It’s not a bad idea, though I’m not sure if it will be necessary for you to even be there.”

“I’m going, so don’t even start that. Besides, it can’t hurt to have someone they don’t know about,” Cat said. “If it turns out I’m not needed, then I’ll just keep a lookout. Once we’re done, I’ll head to the Rose. I’ll plan on staying there unless I see you when I’m done.”

“Okay Kitty, have it your way.” Isabela stopped and turned Cat to face her, looking her in the eyes. “But no taking chances. You are up on the rooftop, as a lookout. Don’t alert anyone to your presence, not even Hawke’s group. Agreed?”

Cat hardly ever saw Isabela serious, and it still took her by surprise. “You’ll let me go off with complete strangers for sex, but not let me be seen in a fight? You know how contradictory that is, right?”

“Yes.”

“Fine. Agreed.”

“Good.” Isabela became carefree immediately. “Now let’s go celebrate before we have to be there!”

“Issy, that’s like five hours away.”

“Hmm, we’ll have to drink fast then,” she said, and pulled Cat along at a quickening pace.

* * * *

Cat begged off celebrating with Isabela, and wandered back towards home. It should prove to be an interesting night, and if life were anything like the game, Isabela would decide to spend time helping Hawke, and eventually become a part of their group.

But what if she didn’t? Cat asked herself. What if because of you, Issy felt that she couldn’t join them? Perhaps she wouldn’t need to feel safer by being in a bigger group, or even that they wouldn’t be able to help her find the relic? They hadn’t spoken of any of this, hadn’t made plans at all… But Issy needed Hawke, and they needed her, they just didn’t know it yet.

Cat determined she might have to step in at some point tonight, if Isabela didn’t join with them as she hoped. Trying to find and talk to her now, would be a waste of time, so Cat wandered around the marketplace. She’d need a few extra things if she was going to be running across rooftops. She had spent a lot of time running and jumping from rail to crate and back again on the ship, with the waves
causing movement and helping her to gain a more surefooted step. She figured this would be similar enough.

She laughed inwardly about it, but decided to buy a black scarf to cover her head and face. Most wouldn’t know her, even if they saw her, but she thought it may give Issy some peace of mind if she was seen.

She spent much longer shopping then she had planned to, though she didn’t purchase much. She took the time to visit Lirene’s shop, as well as visiting the market in the alienage before heading home. She felt as if she was helping the economy there by buying things in the alienage, and hoped that she was creating some good will with the elves.

She got changed and strapped on her crossbow and quiver, and headed into Hightown. She was still a little early, so she stopped into the Rose, to let them know she may be later this evening than normal.

As she entered, Viveka motioned her over to the ledger, where she was standing. “Someone was asking about you earlier,” she said quietly. “Tried to schedule time with you, so I referred them to Madam.”

“Schedule time… with me?” I asked, almost at a whisper. “You didn’t tell them I don’t take clients?”

“Madam likes to know when the help get requested. Helps her decide who to promote in the future,” Viveka said with a shrug.

“Okay, thanks,” Cat replied, unsure of what this meant. When she and Isabela first came here, she had been mistaken for one of the girls, but that hadn’t happened in weeks. In fact, most of the regulars helped dissuade others from trying.

Cat walked over to Madam, and cleared her throat. “Um, Madam? Viveka was saying that I had been requested?”

Madam Lisene huffed. “Oh Viveka, that busybody,” she patted Cat’s arm gently. “Don’t worry dear, I told them that you only take specific clientele, and only the very best of customers,” she had a gleam in her eye and gave Cat a wink.

“But…” Cat started, worried at what she was hearing.

“Oh, I know dear, stop fretting. But if they really want you, they will spend much more here, and only then find out you do not take customers.” She giggled and rubbed her hands together. “I’ll still make plenty of money” she winked at Cat again. “Although, if you do change your mind, be sure to let me know. We can make each other rich!”

“I won’t, but I’ll keep that in mind.” Cat replied. “I just came in to tell you that I may be later tonight than normal, Issy needs me until later this evening.”

“Not a problem love. Everyone has been so much happier since you joined us, and the clients never had it so good. Hiring you was one of the best decisions I’ve made.” She looked left and right, then said quietly. “Now, if anyone asks, you work here at the Rose, all right? Madam’s special customers only, yes?”

Cat laughed at the absurdity of the whole situation. “Not a problem, as long as you don’t actually have any special customers.”

Madam grinned, and shooed Cat away. “Since you are helping me make extra tonight, take the night
off love. Hurry, before I realize what I am saying, and change my mind.”

Cat wasted no time, and turned and hurried back out the door. This was one thing she hadn’t expected, and since nothing was actually asked of her, she could handle it. She headed out of the Rose, and started looking for a good spot to camp out on the rooftop overlooking the courtyard in front of the Vicount’s Keep.
Thanks for the comments, they are really fun to read! While there seems to be a consensus that Carver was perhaps the one to request Cat at the Rose, I'm sorry to inform that that isn't the case, though it is funny! XD

Hopefully this chapter is fun, I tried to give Cat a little more action this time around. She's truly capable of taking care of herself, even if Issy isn't keen on it.

Enjoy!

Cat sat on the roof, enjoying the last of her apple when she saw Isabela enter the courtyard. She smirked and let out her bird call- which remarkably was sounding more and more like a dove- seeing Isabela grin and return with a whistle of her own, though she didn’t look around. It was barely dusk, and Cat assumed that they still had a few hours to wait, so she got comfortable but stayed alert.

While she could rely on what she knew from the game about people or places, she knew timing was not something she could trust. Who knew if Hawke’s group would even show up before Hayder’s thugs found them. She watched Isabela as she wandered around the courtyard. To any passersby, she looked bored, but Cat knew how ready she was for this. Isabela always enjoyed a good fight, and now that she had backup, it was no longer a threat of death, but fun. Cat couldn’t understand how she found it fun, but she supposed that back home she would be comparable to an adrenaline junkie.

Cat continued to watch Isabela as the time went by. The sun finally set, and night crept in as Cat repositioned herself again. Her legs tingled as she moved, and she berated herself for letting them go numb. She saw Hawke and his entourage enter the courtyard, speaking to Isabela. Looking around, she noticed the group of mercenaries coming towards them, and went to give a warning when they took off running towards her group. It didn’t take long for them to engage each other, and Isabela was quick to down the first archer. Aveline and Carver, together, went after the woman with a large great axe, leaving the other four men with bows to Hawke, Varric and Anders.

Cat raised her crossbow, lining an archer in her sights but before she could fire, the man fell over with a bolt in his forehead. She moved on, looking for another target. Her crossbow, and her jaw lowered as lightning surged out of Hawke’s staff striking the first and traveling to the second and third man in turn. She watched in awe as the men stiffened and convulsed as the lightning traveled through their bodies.

Varric shot several bolts in quick succession, Anders froze a man where he stood and Hawke shattered him into pieces, while Isabela jumped from behind the last man sinking her daggers into his neck. With a flick of her wrists, the daggers thrust outward, and the man fell to the ground, dead. The group began searching the fallen bodies, and Cat just sat there. It wasn’t like she hadn’t seen magic before, but this was a first. What was it called? Oh, chain lightning! She studied them with a smile. Is it bad that I want to see that again?

The group took off with Isabela in the lead, and Cat scrambled to follow them. She grabbed her bag, throwing it over her shoulder, and picked up her crossbow. She scurried over the rooftop, grateful that all the buildings in this area seemed to share one giant roof.
She glanced around as she picked her way towards the chantry, noticing that they were already there, Isabela holding the door for the others to enter. Isabela gave a whistle, and Cat stopped in order to respond. Isabela held out her hand in a “stay” gesture, then continued on inside.

Cat rolled her eyes, but continued to scan the area for anyone nearing the chantry. It was true, the group was formidable and she hadn’t been needed. All her time with Isabela she had always been part of the team, and now she felt left behind… something she hadn’t expected. This realization had her shaking her head with a quiet laugh. If Zev could see me now. Or any of them, what would they think? She had been so timid, so against the idea of fighting. Now here she was, sulking for being left out of a fight. Although, with all the crap Hawke gets himself into, it may be good to stay on the sidelines…

Cat snapped herself back to the present, realizing that she was neglecting her duties as lookout. She continued to wait, though the minutes seemed as long as hours. By the time they came back out, Cat had been ready to go in after them. The group wasted no time coming down the stairs of the chantry and turning right, which had Cat confused. Perhaps they were going to split up later, once they were away from the bodies… but they were heading to Lowtown, so why was Isabela going with them? Their plan had been to meet back at the Rose, in fact Isabela had been commenting about the celebration she was planning for herself. There had been no mention of staying with Hawke, or returning home. Her part of the plan was to watch Isabela’s back, so she continued to follow the group as they made their way down to Lowtown.

It wasn’t as easy to follow them as before, the roof tops were a jumble of shapes and sizes, and Cat found herself lagging further and further behind. She thought the best place to catch up would be the marketplace, so she took an alternate route, hoping to make up lost time. She barely caught a glimpse of them leaving the market just as she entered, and she hurried to keep pace. As they neared her home, Cat stopped to catch her breath. She crouched on the rooftop, confused and panting. There was nowhere else to go this direction, unless they were heading for the alienage, and that was hardly likely. She watched as they strode directly into the alienage, and she thought that perhaps Merrill was waiting for them. She stood upright, ready to follow when a noise made her crouch again to stay hidden.

Cat eyed the armored group following stealthily into the alienage, wondering who they were. There was a woman with an unfortunate bowl style haircut that seemed to be leading them, and the rest of them all wore helmets that gave the appearance of creepy looking masks. She looked around, but didn’t see a way toward the alienage by way of the rooftops without backtracking, and she didn’t think she’d have the time. Cat climbed down, utilizing a window ledge, being as quiet as she could. A shout broke the quiet, and she could hear voices as she crept forward towards the entrance to the alienage.

“-ordered to kill whoever entered the house.”

Realization dawned as the fighting broke out, and Cat looked for an escape route just as she was grabbed from behind.

“Drop it,” a harsh voice said. “Now.” She hesitated, but as she felt the point of the dagger at her side, she let her crossbow fall to the ground. “Good. Now, move.”

She let the man lead her forward to the middle of the stairs leading down into the courtyard. Cat smirked as she noticed Hawke’s companions had teamed up to finish the last of the slavers, while Isabela was already looting bodies.

The man behind her started yelling, though she couldn’t really understand him. He was yelling directly in her ear, and she tilted her head to try to get some distance. He jabbed her with his dagger,
and she grunted in pain as well as disgust.

She and her captor both looked over as another armored solider limped towards them. He managed to say “Captain…” before falling at their feet.

“Your men are dead, and your trap has failed.”

_Holy crap, it’s Fenris._ Everyone she had met to this point had looked the same as in the game, just better. Fenris was no exception, and Cat couldn’t help comparing him to Zevran. It must be an elf thing, because there was something ethereal about them both.

Even though he was a warrior, Fenris moved with the same grace that Zevran often displayed. The difference she noted, Zevran was constantly moving and changing directions both in his movement and his speech, while Fenris seemed to focus on his target and go straight at it, without any hesitation, extra steps or words. And as Isabela had said, or would say at some point, the elves did have very pretty eyes.

Cat paid for zoning out, as she was pushed to the ground scraping several pieces of herself against the stone and hitting her head. She sat up, dizzy, in time to watch Fenris’ lyrium tattoos light up, and for Fenris to reach into the captain’s chest and squash his heart within his fingers.

She looked up in shock, seeing Fenris’ hand in front of her, and dumbly stared at it. He apologized, and walked behind her, lifting her up with ease to stand on her feet. He held onto her arm to keep her steady.

“Are you all right?”

“I think so,” she glanced up into his face. “Thank you.”

“It is I who should thank you,” he replied, still looking her over for injury, and completely ignoring the others at the base of the stairs. “You provided quite the distraction.”

“Oh,” Cat said quietly as her face went red. She was suddenly very glad she was still wearing her scarf around her face. “Um, you’re welcome?”

He gave a quiet chuckle, and turned to the others, letting go of her arm. As they conversed, Cat picked up her crossbow, finally unloading it and storing it on her back. She was basically hidden around the corner, and glanced back to see them all still involved with their conversation except for Isabela who was eyeing her, so she took off.

“Hey, wait!” someone called after her.

The look from Isabela had told her enough, and she knew she needed to get back out of sight. She took a few random turns, heading nowhere in particular, finally finding a few strategic crates that helped her get back to the roofs.

She circled back around, and gave a whistle to Isabela. She didn’t hear a reply, but didn’t expect to. If she replied while with the group, they would easily guess who Cat really was, and while she didn’t care, Isabela did.

Knowing Fenris’ desire to confront his former master, there was no way they wouldn’t be heading there immediately, so Cat started back towards Hightown. It was much larger than in the game, so she didn’t know exactly where to go. She would have to wait near the entrance and follow them from there.
The waiting was most definitely the worst part, and while Cat didn’t necessarily want to fight for her life, anything would be better than the waiting. She sat, watching the dark mansion the group had entered, completely bored. Next time Isabela suggested she be the lookout, she would completely refuse.

“There was a group of ‘em, I saw ‘em go in.”

“This was going to be our new hideout, and they just took it?”

“That’s right, why’d you think I went to get everyone?”

Cat glanced down, seeing several shadows, but no people. They must have been sneaking towards the mansion, trying to stay hidden. There was no way they were speaking of anyone else, so she readied her weapon. She wasn’t about to let anyone surprise her… friends, she supposed. Acquaintances? Whatever. The point was, she wasn’t letting them in. She took out several bolts, and laid down on her front, placing the bolts carefully so they wouldn’t roll away. It was an awkward angle, and she needed to be able to reload without much movement in order to keep her camouflage.

As the first came into view, she took in the uniform, hesitating. She remembered their earlier conversation, deciding that if they were truly guards, then they were corrupt, and she took aim and fired. As soon as the bolt left the bow, she had the next one ready to load. She had the bolt in place as she heard the scream from below, and she stayed as close to the roof as possible, slowly pulling back the string to load the next bolt. She had her chin resting on the roof, and her head tilted sideways making it difficult, but she succeeded.

Aiming with her head sideways was a new experience as well, so she took her time. She wouldn’t get more than one or two more shots before she was discovered, so they needed to count. Cat aimed again, smiling as her targets stood still, looking around for the threat. She fired, and another one fell.

She stayed still, listening to see if they had noticed where the bolts were coming from. It appears that they are either not very smart, or not paying attention. She was able to kill two more with this method, though it took longer in between each shot, as they began hiding behind the buildings.

“There you are!”

She rolled to her right, avoiding an axe in her back. Guess I fell for that one, but one semi-smart guy out of who knows how many is still pretty pathetic. Plus, he could have gotten me if he had kept his mouth shut. Cat got up and ran, giving herself time to grab another bolt and reload. Then, turning back to the man pursuing her, she dodged his swing with a roll, and came up firing. Her bolt caught him in the chest and he fell, rolling off the roof with a cry, that was silenced with a thud.

Cat wasn’t sure how many more there were, so she needed to get on the ground. She snuck back, past her original position. She assumed the man had climbed up where she had planned on climbing down, so she loaded her bow and crept forward. She came to the pillar that looked thin enough to shimmy down, and she scanned around the area, even lowering her head over the edge of the roof to look underneath. She put her pack and bow on her back and put on her gloves.

Cat climbed quietly over the side, and using her gloved hands and the sides of her boots, slid quickly down the pillar. She landed in a crouch, moving fast into the shadows. There was no movement, no sound, but her gut was telling her it wasn’t over.
She moved slowly and deliberately, keeping the sound of her steps to a minimum as she made her way back to the mansion’s entrance. She waited nearby for several minutes without incident.

Cat felt it, on the back of her neck, like an annoying fly that wouldn’t let her alone. Someone was watching for her, and if she kept waiting for them to make the first move, Hawke’s group could come out and be taken by surprise. Someone could be hurt, so she decided to try to draw them out. She set her pack and crossbow down, and pulled out a dagger, holding it next to her to keep it hidden. She knew Isabela would be angry with her for this, but she was feeling somewhat reckless. She tightened the scarf, so her peripheral vision was no longer obstructed, and headed straight for the mansion’s door.

The footsteps behind her gave away their position, and she turned, flinging the dagger as she did. She looked at the two figures, her dagger buried in the stomach of the smaller one, as he fell to the ground. Now there was one left, and he was much bigger than her, and coming right for her.

Cat smiled. Isabela liked men on the bigger side, and nearly everyone aboard the Siren’s Call that had trained her were just as big if not bigger than this man. He came at her with his greatsword out and swinging as she went to the side his sword was on, going low as the sword went over her head. She swept her leg out and he steadied himself as he thought she would try to sweep him off his feet, but her leg connected behind his knees, and he stumbled.

Cat jumped on his back, grabbing around his neck and wrapping her legs around his chest. She released her hands and reared back, bringing her open palms to either side of his head, slapping his ears simultaneously. He roared in frustration, his equilibrium affected and she pulled at his neck again, then releasing her legs and kicking behind his knees again with each foot as she dropped her hold on him completely.

He was leaning forward against her pull on his neck, and the strike to his knees with the weight suddenly gone had him overbalanced and crashing forward. Cat went in for the kill, pulling another dagger from her boot and stabbing directly into his kidney, twisting and yanking out her dagger, then kicking him forward, face down on the ground.

The sound of clapping had her whirling around, and she faced Hawke— who was applauding— and his friends, most of whom had looks of shock on their faces. Isabela stayed in the back, her expression unreadable and Cat rolled her eyes, glad she had left the scarf on.

She leaned forward, wiping her dagger on the man’s clothes before stashing it back in her boot, and headed to his smaller friend to retrieve her other one.

“Why are you following me?” Fenris growled out at her, and she turned to look at him in confusion. She shook her head and continued in her task.

“Following us then?” Varric asked, and she ignored him. She quickly sheathed her dagger at her side, and walked to her crossbow putting her pack and weapon on her back, then facing the others with her hands on her hips.

“Did you kill them all yourself? Must have something against the guard?” This time it was Carver who questioned her, and she didn’t reply, but wondered what kind of man Garrett was, that he had yet to say a word, just simply watched her.

“No, they look similar, but they are not part of the guard.” Aveline stated.

“Oh good,” Isabela said, moving to the first body. “That means looting.” She started commenting on each thing she found, and Cat waited. It was something Isabela had taught her before she was
deemed ready to fight. Isabela would get their attention, and Cat would run.

“Ooh! Look at this Hawke!”

Cat seized the moment, as everyone’s head turned to see what Isabela had found. She turned and ran as fast as she could.

“Seriously?!” she heard Carver exclaim.

* * * * *

Varric started chuckling as the woman took off, the exasperation in Carver’s voice breaking his control. Why didn’t anyone else see the humor here? he asked himself. Isabela looked angry, continuing to loot the fallen “pretender” guards with the help of Aveline, and Anders took Carver aside to sit down and heal his wounds.

Varric stayed where he was, leaning against the wall, listening to Fenris question Hawke accusingly. The former slave had just a bit of anger towards mages, but Hawke was able to not only talk him down, but get him to agree to help with the expedition. Varric couldn’t claim to know the future, but he knew Hawke was going to be a big part of his from now on.

In just a few short days, Hawke had managed to join together a group of warriors, rogues and mages whose skills were as diverse as they were. Varric no longer had any qualms about going to the Deep Roads, as long as these people came along.

Varric glanced to his side as Isabela came to stand next to him. “So Rivaini,” he said, then paused. “You are from Rivain, aren’t you?” She glanced at him with a nod and he continued. “Care to give me the specifics about that job you were mentioning? About the missing cargo?”

Isabela explained the particulars, finishing just as Fenris and Hawke did. She straightened up, getting his attention. “Well Hawke, it’s been fun.”

“We’re heading the same way, we can see you home,” he said.

“Aw, such a gentleman, but I make it a point to walk home with Cat whenever I can.”

“I didn’t think she would need a protector, seeing how often she goes to Darktown,” Varric threw in.

“Where do you get that? We’ve only gone to Darktown once.”

“Uh-huh, my mistake.” Varric gave her a sly smile, which she immediately distrusted. “Where do you walk home from, at this time of night?” he asked with a smirk.

Isabela simply smirked back. He was good at charming out answers, but she wasn’t one to give information away for nothing, especially about herself or her crew. She glanced at the others, noticing how they all were waiting for her response. Interesting.

She began to walk away, throwing a flirty wink at Fenris, and making sure to brush Hawke’s arm as she passed. “Offer stands, anytime,” she told Hawke, and she sauntered away.

“Hanged Man, tomorrow at mid day for the next job!” He called after her, and she gave a little wave to indicate she had heard.

“And now we’re bringing the pirate along?” Aveline asked. “We can’t possibly trust her.”
“Definitely,” Hawke replied, though Aveline was unsure which part he was answering. “But you have to admit, she keeps things entertaining.”

“Ugh,” Aveline responded in disgust. “May as well go to the brothel if that’s what you’re looking for.”

“Haven’t ruled that out yet,” he said with a smirk.
Thanks for your patience, I was on vacation, and last minute decided to leave my laptop at home. Sad that I couldn't write or post, but it was great to have time away from everything! I'll post an extra chapter, to make up for it!

Cat went straight for the Rose as she ran, knowing she could hide easily there. She may have had the night off, but no one else knew that, and that’s where Isabela was going to come for her. Before turning the final corner, she yanked the scarf off her head and stuffed it in her pack stopping to listen for anyone trailing her.

Upon entering, she nodded at Viveka, and asked after Idunna. She had finished for the night, so Cat hurried up to her room.

“Oh, Cat! I didn’t think I’d see you tonight.”

“Why not?” Cat asked.

“Well, it’s much later than normal, isn’t it?” Idunna replied. “But no matter. I was just going to let you know that we are running low on tonics. Everyone contributed this time,” she said as she handed Cat a pouch full of coin.

“Oh, great. I’ll get an order in tomorrow,” Cat said as she sat heavily on a chair. She was finally able to fully relax, and she was ready to crash.

“Is that… blood?” Cat glanced at Idunna, noting her gaze at Cat’s side.

“Yeah, though it was just a scratch. Some idiot thought he could rob me earlier.” Cat took in Idunna’s horrified expression, knowing exactly what to say as a distraction. “Then this incredibly handsome elf saved me, though I did get scraped up a bit.” Cat held out her arm, showing off the large scrape down the side from falling to the ground.

“Incredibly handsome you say? Tell me more!”

Cat grinned, her injuries forgotten as she described her “hero”, giving him attributes of both Fenris and Zevran to entertain her. She continued to gossip with Idunna as she cleaned herself up until Isabela showed up to walk her home.

“No luck with Hawke?” Cat teased as they headed home. When she didn’t get an answer, she looked at her friend. “Issy? You okay?”

“Kitty, you weren’t supposed to be seen.”

“An unknown woman was seen, not me.” Cat pointed out, unsure what had Isabela so serious. It always put her on edge when her friend wasn’t smirking.

Isabela rolled her eyes. “Fair point.” She was quiet for a moment, then asked, “Just how many times have you gone to Darktown?”
Cat looked at her, confused. “A few times, I get the tonics from Anders’ clinic for Idunna and the others.”

“You do realize that’s its called the UNDERCITY for a reason?” Isabela said slowly, as if she was talking to a child.

Cat understood now, and tried to keep her temper in check. “And you realize that you trained me to be able to take care of myself, yes? I can’t keep having this same fight Issy. Either you trust me, or you don’t.”

Cat meant one thing, but Isabela’s thoughts went to the relic. She did trust Cat, but… Isabela stopped suddenly, and sighed. Cat stopped as well, turning to face her.

“Cat…”

“Whoa, it’s really serious, you’re calling me by my name,” Cat said only halfway teasing.

“Look, I do trust you.” Isabela ignored the comment, but since she hadn’t been able to say what she wanted to, she changed tactics. “But I’d prefer to be there, you know to watch your back. You’ve had mine, and… well… we’re in this together, right?”

“Right.” Cat felt she was missing something, but this was more than she was expecting, so she’d take it. “Okay then, I’ll let you know when I need to go to Darktown. Deal?”

“Deal.”

“Oh, and Issy?”

“Yeah?”

“I need to go to Darktown.”

Isabela laughed. It seemed like she was rubbing off on Cat, as she was much more snarky than she used to be. “Very well, but we’ve got to go in the morning. We’re meeting Hawke at the Hanged Man at midday.”

“WE are?”

“We’re a team, right? So we both have to go.” Cat’s grin helped squash the guilt of continuing to keep secrets. Cat already knew too much about the relic as it was, in fact she was surprised Cat hadn’t already guessed. If Isabela wanted to protect her, she’d need to keep her in the dark.

They continued on towards home, Isabela inquiring about work.

“Actually, I had the night off,” Cat told her. Isabela gave her a questioning look and she explained about her conversation earlier with Madam Lisene. “So,” she finished. “We now have to tell people that ask that I, you know, work there.”

Isabela smirked. “I’ve already been doing that Kitty, though it’s good that I don’t have to say it behind your back anymore.”

“It’s so absurd, no one would believe it,” Cat replied.

“I think you’ll be surprised by how many will want to believe it, Kitty.”
“Kitty, quit sulking.”

Cat glared at Isabela, and continued to walk towards Anders’ clinic.

“I’m not sulking. I just don’t understand why I can’t have my crossbow. They barely saw me with it! I mean, who cares if they know I was there last night?”

“I care,” Isabela said with finality. She thought of a surefire way to get Cat on board. “Besides,” she added. “Your knife skills need work.”

“What?!” Cat demanded, fuming. “Argh! I know what you’re doing, and I’m so angry that it’s working!” She fumed silently for a few more moments then said, “Fine! But only to prove you wrong about my skills.”

“Of course,” Isabela drawled with a smirk.

Cat continued on to the clinic, greeting Anders and ordering several weeks worth of toiletries- as she had dubbed them. She could probably make a fair amount of money if she charged the others, but she was paid well enough already and she wanted her friends to be as safe and as healthy as they could be.

After Anders discovered they were heading to the Hanged Man he decided to walk with them, so the three of them made their way out of Darktown.

“See Issy? Safe as can be,” Cat remarked, still somewhat annoyed at Isabela’s protective behavior.

“Did you just call Darktown safe?” Anders asked incredulously.

“Don’t be daft,” Cat replied. “I’m simply saying that I can travel safely there and back without needing someone to protect me.”

Isabela was surprisingly quiet, and Cat decided not to push the point. That is, until Anders kept talking.

“You’ve been coming to Darktown by yourself?!” He stared at Cat with his mouth agape, then turned to Isabela. “And you let her?”

“Excuse me?!” Cat demanded, before Isabela could respond. “LET her? No one LETS me do anything.”

Anders was not slow, and easily realized the mess he just created. He glanced at Isabela, but she simply smirked and gave a wave of her hand in a “it’s all yours” gesture. He cleared his throat, worried about how he might fix this.

“Of course not, that… that’s not what I meant, of course.”

Cat’s eyes narrowed dangerously. She could see how nervous he was, but she had no doubt that he had meant exactly what he had said. However, if he apologized, she wouldn’t be able to stay mad. And she had quite a bit of energy to get rid of, so she’d let him worry while she got it out of her system.

“C’mon. Let’s just get there already,” she said as she pushed forward.
“Right! I could use a drink,” Isabela commented.

Anders couldn’t decipher the looks from either woman, so he simply followed after them, working out how to apologize under his breath.

* * * * *

Meeting with the group did nothing to improve Cat’s mood. Hawke asked why she was there, and after being informed by Isabela that they were a team, shrugged then ignored her. It wasn’t that she expected to be welcomed with open arms, but still. Carver was sending looks her way that she didn’t want to think about, and Aveline was looking at her like she was a bug. *What exactly happened since I saw them last?* she thought.

Hawke talked about inconsequential things with Varric, while waiting for Fenris to arrive. Varric tried to pull Isabela and Cat into the conversation without any luck, and once they all were seated, Cat realized that they had been boxed in by the other group. She and Isabela were seated against the wall, with Hawke’s companions all around them. She traded looks with Isabela, and got a silent response to let it play out. She put her best poker face on, and waited.

“I have some questions,” Hawke began, looking at the pair of them. Cat had to severely restrain herself from making a snide remark, as she had already thought of three of them. She felt Isabela’s hand on her leg, and stayed quiet.

“I suppose I did offer you an explanation,” Isabela replied.

“That you did. I merely want to know more about you, so I’ll know if I can trust you.”

“Fair enough, though if I don’t want to answer, I won’t.”

“Fair enough.”

Cat rolled her eyes at the two of them. Again, several smart remarks came to mind involving measuring… things… but she knew they wouldn’t be appreciated.

Hawke probably figured he started with the easy question first, though it was actually the most difficult. “Who is Castillon, and why is he after you?”

Cat and Isabela both sighed. “Short version?” Isabela said. “A powerful man with ties to the Felisicima Armada. I botched a job—” she paused as Cat interrupted with a disgusted noise, then continued. “and in order to even things out, I have to get him the relic. Honestly, it would be easier to kill me, but Castillon isn’t that merciful. Plus, I like living.”

“That guy here in the Hanged Man, he was helping you look for the relic?”

“Yes,” Cat answered. She was tired of feeling left out. “They insisted they could get information on it. They lied.”

Hawke glanced her way, then turned back to Isabela. “What exactly is this relic?”

Isabela didn’t glance at Cat, though she wanted to. “I don’t really know. It’s valuable, and Castillon wants it.”
Cat held on to her poker face. If she didn’t already know what Isabela was going to say, that wouldn’t have been possible. She could feel the stares from the group around her.

Hawke paused as well, looking between them several moments before continuing. “You were shipwrecked?”

If his plan was to throw off their guard, it worked. The shipwreck was something that neither woman thought of, let alone spoke of. It was all horrible memories, and horrible loss. Cat didn’t think she could even talk about it now, and they both sat silently.

“There was a storm,” Isabela began quietly. “My ship… ran aground on some reefs near the city. Cat and I- “ she stopped as her voice broke, and looking at her, Cat continued.

“We managed to make it to shore. Most of the others, weren’t that lucky.” She placed a hand on Isabela’s thigh, hoping to provide comfort without letting the others see. Isabela hated looking vulnerable in front of others. She looked around the table. Though everyone was content to let Hawke take the lead, they were all leaning in, catching every word.

Cat tried to stop the tear, but her mind brought face after face, memories of those that had helped her, had taught her, had given their all and had been lost. She reached up to wipe it away, and the movement was noticed by everyone, including Isabela.

“Balls. I’m sorry Kitty,”

Cat smiled back at her, letting her know it wasn’t her fault, though Isabela would always blame herself.

The silence, or perhaps the tear was uncomfortable for Aveline, and she asked, “I thought I heard something about freeing slaves?”

Cat knew Isabela didn’t want to talk about it, yet she did anyway, probably anything to stop thinking of the shipwreck.

“The botched job. I was hired by Castillon to escort a cargo ship,” Isabela said. “About halfway through I boarded the ship only to find the cargo were people- hundreds of men, elves, even children. They had paid Castillon to get away from the blight. He took their money, and sold them into slavery. I let them go.” She chuckled, “I can see from your face that you weren’t expecting that, were you?”

Aveline shrugged, and Cat grinned at her. She got a small smile in return, and took that as a good sign.

“Okay.” Hawke said. “I’ll let you know when I need you in the future. You’re free to accept or decline any job, though not after we’re already in it. Varric gave me the details of the missing cargo for your friend, and I’ve added it to the schedule.”

“Schedule?” Cat and Isabela asked together.

“Hawke is very… organized.” Varric said diplomatically.

“He’s a control freak,” Carver muttered, his face lighting up when he heard Cat’s giggle.

“Should be interesting.” Cat said. “Issy likes to be in control too.”

Isabela stood, and simply stepped across the table to head toward the bar. “That’s NOT true. I just
prefer being on top,” she said to Cat with a wink and sauntered off to get another drink. Cat noticed that all the men had turned slightly, to watch her exit, and her eyes met Aveline’s. They both gave an eye roll, then smiled at each other.

“I must admit, I thought you were like Isabela when we first met, Cat,” Aveline said.

Cat laughed loudly, “Oh no. Issy’s one of a kind.”

“Well, either way, I apologize for my assumptions.”

“No problem Aveline.”

“If… that is, I can help get you a position in the guard, if you are wanting different employment.”

“That’s kind of you,” Cat beamed. “But I have a great job.”

“Yes, Madam’s special customers only,” Isabela added as she returned.

Cat noticed the looks from the others, and felt the need to defend herself. “It’s a great job! Good pay, few hours.” She could tell that they weren’t convinced, so she simply muttered under her breath, then raised her voice with a change of topic. “So Hawke, what’s next on the schedule?”

There were several groans, and shaking heads, but Hawke’s face lit up. “Well, we have several rumors to gain more information on, but the most pressing items are a trap laid for a member of the guard that we need to stop, and a delivery to a group of dalish elves.”

Cat’s heart rate skyrocketed as she took that in.

“Dalish elves?” she asked.

“Yes, we have an amulet we need to bring to them, to repay an old debt.”

“Looks like we’re in,” Isabela stated. “When is it?”

“Tonight at dusk, we’ll meet here. The day after we’ll head out to the elves, unless something else comes up.”

Cat wasn’t sure why Isabela was so keen to agree to this, but her mind and pulse were going a mile a minute. She might actually figure out how she got here, and more importantly, how to get home. Now she only needed to figure out how to get Flemeth to help her.
Varric watched as Cat and Isabela left, the latter fixing herself a position at the bar, and the former leaving the building. He glanced at Hawke, who seemed to be deep in thought. It was one of his finer qualities, that he didn’t do everything on impulse like his brother, but sometimes he thought that Hawke thought too much.

“Seems their story checks out with what we’ve heard,” he stated, getting Hawke’s attention.

“True,” Hawke responded. “They’re still hiding something, but I suppose even the great Varric Tethras can’t find ALL their secrets.”

“Hawke, you wound me,” Varric said with a hand on his heart, closing his eyes dramatically. He opened them again once he heard Hawke’s deep chuckle.

“Good thing you don’t have to trust someone completely in order to fight with them, otherwise it would just be me and Aveline.”

Varric smirked, and nodded his head while Aveline clapped Hawke on the shoulder to give her farewells, leaving with “No Hawke, just you.” Carver, finally realizing what the comment meant, stood also, grumbling under his breath and walking out behind her.

Hawke looked at the warrior and mage that were still there, noticing the tension, and hoping they would be able to work together well enough to accomplish their goals. He thought he would either need to use them separately, or keep them together until they were comfortable with each other. He decided he’d have to wait and see.

“I should go as well Hawke,” Anders said as he stood. “I need to spend some time in my clinic to make up for being gone tomorrow. Do you need me to join you for tonight’s job?”

“If you can, I would appreciate it,” Hawke replied, looking to Fenris and adding “both of you. I don’t know that there will be much fighting, but you never know who we may come across in this city.”

“Very well,” Fenris replied as he also stood. Saying nothing further, he started walking to the door.

Anders gave his back a withering look, then turned to Hawke. “I’ll see you tonight then. Farewell.”

Varric and Hawke both raised a hand in farewell, but continued to sit, as Anders followed Fenris out the door. “You do realize that none of them paid,” Hawke said.

“Not surprising in the least,” Varric replied. “You’re gathering quite the group Hawke. At the very least, it will be entertaining to watch.”

“Definitely not your typical crew,” Hawke replied with a smirk. “A few more jobs, and we’ll have
the gold we need for the expedition.” He paused, thinking, then added, “by then, we should know who we can trust to bring along.”

Varric could see that Hawke was becoming lost in thought, so he settled in his chair and waved over a contact that was waiting for him. After all, with what Hawke had said, his reputation was on the line.

* * * * *

At home, Cat gathered some coin and headed for the market. She could only guess at what they needed for the trip to Sundermount, and decided to purchase some supplies. More than likely it would not be a single day’s adventure, so as she walked, she made a mental list of what they might need.

She decided against a tent, but did purchase a couple of blankets, some food rations and flint and steel for starting a fire. True, there were mages in their group, but she didn’t want to assume anything. Morrigan had always refused to light the camp fire with magic, and who knew if Hawke or Anders would do the same? She doubted it, but better prepared, then sorry.

She continued to wander, checking items off her mental list when she was stopped suddenly as she walked straight into what felt like a wall. Shaking her head to clear it, she looked up.

“Fenris?”

“You should be more aware of your surroundings.”

Cat wasn’t sure what was happening, but Fenris was standing in front of her, his huge sword on his back, his arms crossed and glaring at her. She was starting to think it was his default expression, which was strange because he had been very nice when he saved her from the slavers.

“Sorry about that, I was lost in thought,” she said pleasantly.

He didn’t respond, just continued to stare at her, and she was very unnerved. He took a step closer, and she instinctively stepped back. He stepped closer again, and grabbed her arm to keep her from retreating again.

“I want to speak to you,” he said.

Before she could respond, they heard someone say, “Hey! What are you doing to her?” and Anders came rushing up to them, pulling Fenris’ arm away, and stepping in between them.

“Talking. This doesn’t concern you, mage.”

Cat knew how he felt about mages, but the venom in his voice as he said mage was still surprising. Anders didn’t like it either, as his eyes narrowed.

“Perhaps she doesn’t want to talk to you,” he replied with anger.

Cat moved around him, putting her hands out to each of them. “Whoa guys, no reason to have a fight here. Anders,” she said patting his shoulder, “thank you for the rescue, but I’m fine. Fenris and I are simply talking. Fenris,” she said looking to him now, “next time just ask to speak to me, there’s no
reason to grab me.”

Fenris glared at Anders, who stood a little taller and didn’t try to hide his smirk, then turned back to Cat. “I did. And I grabbed you,” Cat rolled her eyes at the sarcasm, “so you wouldn’t trip over that.” He didn’t point, but gestured down to her left with a nod of his head.

Cat turned to look down, seeing a small stack of baskets spilling out from a merchant’s stall. She felt stupid now, and tried not to be too embarrassed about it.

“My apologies,” she said, noting the hint of surprise that had Fenris’ eyes widening slightly. “What did you want to speak about?”

Fenris glared at Anders, and Anders simply stayed put. Cat however, was looking at him with a smile, her head tilted a little to the side in question. He supposed if she wanted to ignore the mage, he could do so as well… easily in fact.

“I want to know why you were following us from the rooftops last night.”

Cat froze. _Issy is going to KILL me!_ She thought frantically for a response, as Fenris looked at her, and Anders gaped at her.

“Cat, was that really you?” Anders asked quietly.

“No, no. Of course not.” She took in their sceptical looks, knowing they knew she was lying. “Okay, maybe. But you can’t tell anyone! Issy will freak out, and she won’t let me come with you guys anymore!”

She knew she was panicking, but seeing both males bring their hands up in a calming gesture made her realize just how panicked she must be sounding. It almost made her smile to see how similar they acted, though they wouldn’t appreciate the comparison.

Cat took a few deep breaths, calming herself, and began again, speaking directly to Fenris since he had asked. “Isabela told me about the duel, and while she didn’t want me fighting directly, she had me on the rooftop as a lookout. I followed everyone from the courtyard, to the chantry, then to the alienage.” She paused, as she noticed Anders nodding.

“Continue,” Fenris said, though to Cat it sounded more like an order.

“I didn’t want to be in the open on the wall, so I climbed down to look into the alienage. Then the guy with the dagger found me, then you showed up.”

“What I don’t understand, is why you ran away?” Anders commented, causing both Fenris and Cat to look at him, as if they forgot he was there.

“It was the one thing I promised Issy. She didn’t want Hawke to know I was there, because… well I’m not sure why exactly, but I promised.”

“Yet now…”

“Yeah, well, we had a long talk about it, and she’s relented a little bit, but she’s still very protective. I don’t get it, but-“

“I do.”

Cat looked back at Anders. “What?”
“I get it. Something about you, it makes me feel protective too. Maybe it’s your innocence.”

“My what?” Cat looked confused, and glanced back to Fenris, as if he could explain it to her. When he merely shrugged, she turned back to Anders. “I’m not innocent.”

“Well, yes… I mean, no. I’m not saying that, I’m just saying…” He rubbed his face with his hands, then glared at Fenris, who was enjoying his discomfort far too much. “Don’t act like you’re not the same,” he growled at Fenris, getting only a raised brow in reply.

“Whatever,” he continued. “I have to get back to my clinic. Cat, you sure you’re okay here?”

Cat could practically hear the “with him?” that Anders was implying. “Yes, I’m fine. Thanks Anders.”

“Very well,” he replied, and turned around to head off to Darktown.

“Wait!” Cat called after him, and he turned. “You’ll keep this a secret, right?”

“Oh of course. You can trust me.” He turned back and continued out of sight.

Wow, Cat thought. *They really did take an instant dislike to each other.* Cat looked up at Fenris. *He was so hard to read, what is he thinking?* “So… you don’t think I’m innocent, do you?”

“I watched you kill several men last night,” he replied, which had her considering, then nodding.

“Fair point.”

They continued to stand there, the silence stretching on, and Cat began to feel awkward. “Well then, I’d better be going.”

“There was one more thing.”

She had started turning to walk away, and he continued with her, outpacing her stride, and pushing her along with his hand at her back. “Yes?” she asked, wondering what else he could possibly ask. He waited until they had turned the corner, and she looked around confused, as they were now in a small secluded alleyway. Before she could ask what they were doing here, he finally answered her question.

“I don’t know who you are, or who you are working for.” His lyrium tattoos lit up, and he brought his hand in front of her chest, the threat very clear. “I do not yet know your intentions, but if you mean us harm, I will not hesitate to kill you.” He suddenly let her go and walked away, leaving her shaking and trembling against the wall.

Cat gulped. *Oh, crap. Why was it always the extremely deadly elves?*

* * * *

Later that night, Cat assisted in defeating the guild that had cornered guardsman Donnie, and she and Isabela tagged along as the group went after a gang that were trying to dominate the streets.

“I’d better head to work,” Cat said quietly to Isabela, while the group was looting the fallen.
“Hawke!” Isabela called. “Gotta run. Meeting tomorrow outside the city, right?”

Hawke walked over to speak to them. “Change of plans, actually. We’ve got to take these papers to the Vicount as evidence against the guard captain.”

“Hard pass on that,” Isabela said. “the day after, then?”

“Well…” Hawke mused as he stroked his chin. “How about this? You two come tomorrow, and after, we’ll go to the docks for your missing cargo? A couple of the others can’t make it tomorrow, and I could use some back up.”

Cat and Isabela looked at each other, their expressions speaking for them. Hawke watched, amused, as they seemed to go back and forth.

“Very well,” Cat said finally. “Count us in.”

“Excellent. Tomorrow morning at the Keep.”

“See you then!” Isabela called as they walked away.

The group watched as they left, and Fenris turned to Hawke. “I will accompany you tomorrow as well,” he said.

“What? I thought you had something else to do.” Hawke replied, confused.

“I’ve changed my mind.”

Hawke watched in confusion as Fenris left, then simply shook his head. He didn’t think he would ever understand that elf.

“Yeah,” Carver said as he came up to Garrett, “I think I’ll tag along. I’d hate for something to happen to them… er, you! You know, if I weren’t around.”

“Mm-hmm,” Hawke replied sarcastically.

“Junior here has a good thought, maybe I should be there too,” Varric chimed in.

“Let me get this straight,” Garrett pinched the bridge of his nose, trying not to laugh. “I rearrange the schedule, so that we can do their job, because you fools all HAD to have the day off. Now that the pretty girls are coming, you all suddenly can make it!?"

“Not all the pretty girls…” Donnic said quietly.

“Wait, you don’t think that’s why Fenris is coming, do you?” Anders asked, eyes flashing. “He touches them, and Maker only knows what will happen.” All eyes went to Anders. “What?” he asked.

* * * *

Cat walked into the Rose, a grin on her face. Everything was happening so fast, she could hardly believe it. When she left Ferelden with Isabela, she knew there was a possibility that she would make it to Kirkwall, and even that she would meet Hawke, but things were so far beyond what she had imagined!

“I’ll wait for you here, Kitty.”
“Okay, I shouldn’t be long, looks like a slow night.”

Cat went straight to work, gathering up linens, cleaning the rooms. She had been doing this long enough to have an efficient routine down pat. Once finished hanging the wet linens in the large dining room around the fire, she headed to Idunna’s room.

“Idunna?” Cat called as she knocked.

“Down here, Cat!”

She looked over the balcony to see Idunna along with Serendipity, and a few others playing cards with Isabela. She walked downstairs to join them, going to Idunna and placing a bag of coins in front of her.

“What’s this?”

“You gave me far too much for the toiletries, this is what was left over.”

“Silly, the leftover was for you. You have to charge for the transport and delivery.”

“What? No. I don’t mind getting them. And this is twice as much as the cost.”

“Well that’s too bad, because I already told everyone what your cut is, so you’ll just have to deal with it. I’m sure you could join us, I’d be happy to win the money back.”

Cat smiled, and Idunna gave a small half smile in return. “If you’re sure…”

“Of course I’m sure. We’re still paying less than we used to, and the quality is far superior. I’m sure we’ll have several others wanting to join in soon.”

“All right then, thanks.” Idunna waved off her gratitude, returning to the game. Cat watched for a few moments, surprised. She had assumed that Idunna was more of a loner, but here she was. Everything was like the Dragon Age games that she knew, yet tweaked, and it still gave her a shock at times.

“Issy? We should head home, since we have to be up early for Hawke.” Isabela groaned, and Serendipity let out a chuckle.

“Guess you’ll have to try to win it back next time sweetie,” Serendipity said to Isabela.

“Make sure you bring extra, because I’ll clean house,” Isabela replied, standing up and throwing down her cards. “Night ladies!” She and Cat called out as the left.

They walked a short ways in silence, then Isabela said, “Seems I’m not the only one looking out for you.”

Cat looked at her with a soft smile. “That’s true.”

“How much did you make?”

“About two sovereigns.”

“What? Really?”

“Yeah, I can’t believe she didn’t just keep it.”
“Like I said, looking out for you.”

“Yeah… but why?”

“Why what?”

“Why does everyone want to look out for me?” Isabela started to speak but Cat rushed on. “Seriously, Issy. First Zev, and Duran and Alistair and all of them. I get that, I couldn’t protect myself. Then you, and the boys… you helped me, looked after me, taught me.” She paused, trying to collect her thoughts. “But why here? I can protect myself, I’m not some clueless little girl anymore. Why do they look out for me?”

“I take it this is bigger than just Idunna, huh?”

“Yeah, I guess. Anders said something about feeling protective, and hinted that Fenris was the same. Though I doubt that part, since he threatened to kill me.”

“Okay, we are definitely coming back to that. As to the rest? I’m not sure. There’s something about you. For me? You’re my friend, my crew. It’s my job as captain to look out for you. For others? Well…”

“Let me guess, my innocence?”

Isabela snorted. “What innocence?”

“Thank you!”

“It’s along those lines, though. I’d call it your trusting nature. The problem is Kitty, you see the good in everyone.” Cat started to disagree, but Isabela held up her hand. “Yes, I know, when someone is bad, or doing something wrong, you have no problem kicking butt. But…” she added with a wink, “everyone is not always good or evil, and there are people that would take advantage of your nature.”

Cat walked along, unable to truly disagree anymore.

“But, it’s also a good thing. People care about you, because you care about them. You don’t care if they are mage or templar, priest or whore. You like people for who they are. And while that may seem normal to you, that is most definitely NOT normal here. It makes you stand out, and it could lead others to harm you. So that’s why your friends protect you.”

“Hmm.” Cat made a thoughtful noise to let Isabela know she heard. She was actually shocked to get a straightforward answer, but now that she thought about it, it made sense. “Fenris’ words make more sense now.”

“Yeah, about that.”

“Don’t worry, it was nothing. He basically said he couldn’t get a read on me, and if I hurt his friends, he’d kill me.” She smirked at Isabela. “Can’t really blame him for doing the same thing you would do for me, right?”

Isabela smirked back. “Of course I can, Kitty. Women’s prerogative after all.”
Finders Keepers

The next morning came sooner than Cat wanted, and she and Isabela continuously yawned as they waited in front of the Viscount’s Keep for Hawke.

“Why’d we agree to this again?” Cat asked sleepily.

“Because afterwards, we’re going to find your stolen cargo.”

Cat jumped, the deep voice startling her.

“Long night?” Garrett continued with a grin. Cat eyes narrowed as she took in the smiles on everyone’s faces. Well, except for Fenris.

“It was very, lucrative,” Isabela drawled, and Cat gave her a withering look. She just loved to get her riled up, so Cat played her best defense.

She flipped her braid over her shoulder, and started walking to the Keep. “It’s all about the Benjamins, after all.”

Cat giggled as she walked, knowing that everyone would undoubtedly be trying to figure that one out. It was also the perfect comeback for Isabela, as she hated being left out of the joke.

“Who is Benjamin?” she heard Carver ask Isabela, and she stifled another laugh.

A couple of boring hours later, the guard captain- or rather, former guard captain- was taken to the prison, and Aveline was given the position. Although there was training and other such formalities, everyone gave her pats on the back, and congratulations. Aveline tried to remain stoic, but Cat could see the slight hint of pink on her cheeks, and knew that this was a big deal for her.

“Oy! Hawke!” Isabela called out, ruining the moment, most likely on purpose. “You said we were going to the docks, right?”

“That’s true, I did. Aveline, I’m sure you’ve got things to do here?” She nodded. “Very well, we’d better take our leave.”

With that, Hawke’s group, minus Aveline, made their way out the door and back onto the streets.

“Whew, thought I’d never escape,” Isabela said to Hawke.

“It wouldn’t have hurt to let her have her moment to shine,” Cat said with a eye roll. “That’s what friends do after all.”

“What friend?” Isabela countered. “Kitty, I promise if you ever become guard captain, I’ll let you shine all day long, all right?”

Hawke snorted. “When mabari fly.”

Cat gave him a sideways look, with a single eyebrow raised. She kept it up until he began to look uncomfortable. “I’d prove you wrong, but I have no desire to be a guard, let alone guard captain.”

“Really?” Varric asked from behind her. “And what DO you desire, as it were?”

Cat tried for oh, thirty seconds, but she just had to say it. “Why YOU, Varric, of course.”

Everyone was quiet, until Cat couldn’t hold it in any longer, and a giggle escaped. Then Isabela’s
full-body laugh boomed out, and Hawke and Carver joined in. Cat thought she saw the corner of Fenris’ mouth twitch upwards, but she may have been mistaken. Varric however, was smirking.

“You could do much worse than a handsome dwarf, Miss Catarina, I assure you,” He walked past her, and added quietly, “and you can’t dodge my questions forever.”

The group continued to chat among themselves, and Cat walked next to Fenris, mainly because he was up in front, and Isabela was being kind and keeping Carver preoccupied in the back. They were almost out of Hightown when a couple of guards passed them, and a man came chasing after them.

“So you won’t do anything! She didn’t run away, something HAPPENED TO HER!!”

Cat didn’t think, she just stopped, and reached out, grabbing Fenris’ arm. Hawke, who was behind them, stopped as well, noting her action and his reaction. Cat seemed oblivious, but Fenris seemed ready to attack, then noting her attention elsewhere, was able to calm himself. Hawke watched as Fenris tried to reclaim his arm, without success, so he stepped up to help.

“Cat? What’s the problem?” Hawke asked, as he stepped up to her other side. He followed her gaze, noting the man who was yelling was coming straight for them. “Whoa friend,” he said as he put his hand up to stop the man. “What’s the problem?”

Cat listened dispassionately, hearing about Ninette, and how she had gone missing. She felt nothing for the man in front of her, and when he mentioned how his wife spent time with whores, her head snapped up. “Perhaps, if you treated your wife as a person, and not a bauble, she would not seek friendship elsewhere.”

“Friendship? Are you stupid?” The man said derisively. “One does not spend time with a whore to be their friend.”

Cat stared seeing red, and reached out to do something- punch him, gouge his eyes out, she didn’t know for sure. However Isabela was standing in front of her, and Fenris was gripping her arm.

“You’ve got five seconds before I let my friend disembowel you, you piece of slime.” Isabela said flatly. Hawke could see this was turning into a “situation” and pulled the man away from the group.

Isabela glared after them for a moment, before turning around to help Cat calm down. She was too late, as Cat had gone from livid to morose quicker than she could blink.

“Kitty?”

Cat looked up, meeting Isabela’s eyes. “I didn’t even get to meet her, and now she’s dead.”

“Try not to think of the worst case scenario, Cat. She may actually have left the bastard.” Varric pointed out.

“Right, of course.” Cat replied.

Hawke reappeared that moment, explaining that the man didn’t actually have any evidence that his wife was missing, and agreed with the guard that she had most likely simply left him. Cat knew better, but nodded anyway. The group continued towards the docks, and Cat noted that Varric handed Hawke a flyer about a reward for the return of the Viscount’s missing son. “Docks first,” Hawke said, and handed it back to Varric.
“Martin gave us all the info we need about the cargo, now we just need to talk to the Harbormaster about where his crates are.” Isabela informed Hawke, as they walked over to the Harbormaster’s office.

Cat was bringing up the rear this time, Carver next to her. He was talking about some sort of fight they had been in, and she was having a hard time not feeling bad for him. It would be difficult having Garrett as an older sibling after all, especially when trying to compare yourself to him. He was a natural leader, full of charm and charisma when he wanted to, and causing fear when he chose. Carver, for all he tried, was a good fighter, and a nice guy… but he wasn’t Garrett. Cat wondered if he even really wanted to be, or if he just thought he needed to compete.

After Isabela “charmed” the Harbormaster’s assistant into disclosing the cargo’s whereabouts, the group headed to the far east side of the docks, near the warehouse district. Cat felt uneasy passing by the Qunari compound, but renewed her conversation with Carver as a distraction. The Qunari warriors were very observant, and she didn’t want to actually look nervous, even if she felt that way.

The hustle of the crowds dwindled as they continued to make their way to the warehouse. Cat looked around, taking in the area. It was strange to her, that the bad side of town actually looked bad. The buildings here weren’t crumbling apart or falling down, but everything looked as if it wasn’t taken care of. It was interesting how similar the two worlds were, in the little things.

“Excuse me”

Cat looked to where the unfamiliar voice had sounded, her hand automatically going to her back, although her crossbow wasn’t there of course. She looked at the armored dwarf behind her, turning to face him. She noted that there were several more dwarves about ten feet behind him, and while they were all armored, they were not holding weapons. She glanced over her shoulder to see her group was far ahead. She must have fallen behind as she was taking in the scenery. Stupid move Cat, she berated herself.

“Yes?” she finally responded to the dwarf, pasting a smile on her face. She heard a yell behind her, and turned to hold up her hands as Carver came barreling over, maul in hand. The others followed, and Cat noted with a smirk that the rest of them walked over, no worry showing in their faces.

“My name is Sutton,” the dwarf continued, speaking louder so that everyone could hear. “We are escorting our lord to his ship, but the Carta has laid a trap for us. We do not have enough men to push through their ranks, and I worry for my lord’s safety. Please, can you help us?”

Cat knew better than to answer for the entire group, so she did as everyone else and looked at Hawke.

“Who is your lord?” Hawke asked.

“Lord Renvil Harrowmont,” Sutton replied.

Hawke looked at Varric, who nodded. “I don’t know him personally, but I know of the family.”

“Very well, we will help you,” Hawke said.

“Thank you, thank you!” Sutton’s face was still a stern warrior’s face, but his eyes conveyed the gratitude he felt. “We will go get our lord, and meet you back here, then we must escort him to his ship, over at the dock there,” he said pointing.
Cat watched as the group hurried off. Everyone moved over towards the wall, taking positions leaning against it while they waited, but Cat was pacing. Duran had told them that even though Bhelen had betrayed him, and killed their brother, Duran had chosen him as king because he would bring the much needed change to Orzammar. He had told them of the strict agreement Duran had made with Bhelen, including how he was not to take revenge on the Harrowmont family. Cat wasn’t surprised to hear that Bhelen was a liar, but now she wondered if she should try to let Duran know. “Stupid Bhelen, with his stupid… face.” Cat was annoyed that she couldn’t even think of a good insult, but she didn’t want to insult Duran at the same time. The others looked at her in confusion, not understanding why she was upset.

“Catarina, do you know the king of Orzammar?” Varric asked, eyes lit in curiosity.

Cat froze in her tracks. At least about this, she could be honest. “No.”

“So, you’re just well versed in dwarven politics?

“Not really.” Cat racked her brain, looking around for the dwarves to return as a distraction, but saw nothing. An idea popped into her head, so she ran with it. “You know Varric, I’m a little surprised that you use my full name, when everyone else has a nickname.”

Varric smirked at her, knowing full well what she was doing. “Haven’t thought of a good one yet. Besides, I use Hawke’s name.”

“Sorry, still counts as a nickname since we have more than one Hawke. And do you even know Hawke’s name?”

Hawke took this moment to butt in, asking “Do you?” to Cat.

“Of course,” she said, glancing at him, and then back to Varric. She smirked at the dwarf and said innocently, “It’s Gary.”

“No, no, Cat. That’s not right.” Varric replied, hiding his own smile. “It’s obviously Gehrad.”

“That’s can’t be right Varric,” Cat said “It’s Gavin, or was it Grover?” They heard Hawke’s noise of protest, and turned to look at him. The shocked look of insult on his face was enough to break the hold Cat had on her laughter, and it spilled out of her mouth. Isabela and Carver were quick to join, and Cat couldn’t tell if Fenris enjoyed the joke as he was facing away from them on lookout.

“Hawke,” Fenris said, breaking the moment and putting everyone on guard. There were a dozen dwarves heading towards them from all directions, easily surrounding them.

“Carta,” Varric said quietly to Hawke, and all hands went directly to weapon hilts.

“Easy, friend.” The dwarf in charge spoke to Hawke. “We simply came with a proposition.”

“And that is?” Hawke asked, crossing his arms in front of him.

“We’re getting paid handsomely for the noble bastard’s head, and if you help us get him, we’ll share the spoils.” Cat made a disgusted sound, and he turned to look at her, then back to Hawke. “How does five sovereigns sound?”

Cat knew she wouldn’t be a part of helping the carta, but she actually wondered what Hawke would say. Was he actually a good man, or was he just taking any job for the money?

Hawke glanced back at his group, taking in their thoughts on the matter. Cat, being in the front,
simply saw him look at her, and shook her head, while pleading with her eyes.

“Sorry,” Hawke said, not sounding sorry at all. “We’re here to save him, not kill him.

“Bad move. Kill them!”

Cat grabbed her daggers, blocking a stab from a dwarf that appeared in front of her. But before she could counter attack, Isabela appeared as if from a shadow, and stabbed both of her daggers into the dwarf’s back, twisting and pulling them back out quickly.

“Issy! I’ve got this!”

Isabela simply smirked, and thrust her daggers behind her, while keeping her eyes on Cat. Cat looked as a dwarf lost his stealth cover as he fell to the ground, and Isabela flicked her wrists to get rid of the excess blood on her knives.

Cat tried not to smile, then outright frowned as a shimmering barrier came around her. She glared over at Hawke, because she was well aware of this type of magic. In her first few months, Wynne was constantly putting barriers around her to protect her from the fighting. While she had appreciated it then, now it seemed almost like an insult, that she was the weak link in their group. Cat swallowed her anger, scanning for a target. She raced over to put herself at Carver’s back, since he was too busy yelling to notice the dwarf coming at his flank.

Cat did a slide tackle, knocking the dwarf off his feet, only to have Isabela crouch down and slit his throat.

“Issy! Stop stealing my kills.” Cat rounded on her, noted her smirk was still in place.

“I didn’t see your name on them,” Isabela replied.

“Thank you friends.” The new voice stopped argument, though Cat knew she was not finished ranting. Her adrenaline was up, and she hadn’t done anything besides tackle a dwarf.

Hawke spoke with Renvil Harrowmont, and the group watched as the dwarves ran for their ship, quickly setting sail.

Hawke led his group back towards the warehouse, listening to Cat berate Isabela, smiling, until she turned her wrath on him.

“And you, Garrett Hawke! What was the meaning of that barrier!”

He had only thought to give her some added protection, but was wise enough not to say so. “Oh, so you DO know my name!”

“Ugh!” Cat grumbled in annoyance as the group came to a stop. Hawke peeked around the corner.

“Five men, all guarding a warehouse? Very odd. This cargo must be something good.”

“Just five? I’ll handle them,” Fenris stated.

“No,” Isabela said. “Kitty’s got this.”

“What?” Cat and Hawke asked together.

“Show them what you can do Kitty,” Isabela replied. Cat thought for a moment, remembering how it was done in the game, and her mouth twisted in to an evil looking smile before she trotted away from
the warehouse.

“Are you sure about this?” Hawke asked quietly.

“Yes,” Isabela replied. “While I enjoy stealing her kills and riling her up, you need to know what she’s capable of. I don’t want you to underestimate her.”

They watched as Cat came running past them, heading straight for the guards.

“Whoa there!”

“Stop!”

Cat stopped quickly, holding a hand to her chest and panting, more than was actually needed. The men looked at her suspiciously, and she concentrated to keep from grinning. This was actually going to be a lot of fun!

“Fire! There’s a fire! Around the corner at the dock!”

“What?” a man asked. “I don’t see anything.”

“Please! Help them!” Cat put a terrified note in her voice, grabbing onto the nearest man, and covering her face with her other hand. “Can’t you hear the screaming?” She fell to her knees and started rocking back and forth and sobbing, covering her eyes so that they couldn’t see her lack of tears.

She could hear the indecision in their voices as they debated, until finally one man said, “We’d better check it out.” She glanced through her fingers, noted that they didn’t even leave one man behind to watch her. She stood up, and made a cooing sound, her bird call sounding much more like a dove than a wookie these days.

Less than a minute later, her group came into view, Isabela in the lead.

“Nice work,” Varric said. “they had no idea what hit them.”

“You should have just killed them, it would have been faster,” Fenris said as he walked past her.

“But not as fun,” she replied.

They made their way into the warehouse, killing the few that were guarding, and finding Martin’s cargo of poisons. Isabela was tempted to keep a little for herself, but Cat reminded her of how Martin had helped them, and she kept her hands to herself after that. “I don’t need a conscience,” Isabela told her as they were leaving.

Cat smirked. “Perhaps when you stop stealing my kills, I’ll stop stealing your buzz.”

Isabela laughed and put her arm over Cat’s shoulder. “Oh, and by the way,” Isabela murmured in her ear. “Who’s Benjamin?”
“Do you know where you’re going?” Isabela asked, complaining as they trekked further away from the city. Cat was glad that Isabela had asked, because she was wondering the same thing.

“Of course not, we’re looking for someone who was kidnapped. The kidnappers didn’t leave us a map,” Carver replied sourly. “I’m following the tracks.”

“What tracks?” Cat asked curiously. It couldn’t hurt to learn about tracking after all.

Carver’s frown disappeared as he gestured Cat forward. He began explaining what he saw on the ground, and how to interpret both the tracks and any disturbed foliage. Cat’s curiosity waned as Carver grabbed her hand to pull her along, so she pulled free.

“What’s that track?” she asked pointing, grateful for the distraction.

Carver glanced down, and immediately back to Cat. “Spider,” he said. “Cat, what is-”

“Spider? As in the giant kind?” Cat demanded, cutting off whatever Carver had been about to ask. “I’m out of here.”

Carver smirked at her, which only caused her irritation to grow. “Are you scared of spiders Cat? I’d protect you, you know.” Cat rolled her eyes, as she turned to look around them. No one else looked worried, so she tried to calm down.

“I’m sensing a story…” Varric drawled.

Cat mused, and decided to share. It would help distract her from thinking about spiders. She didn’t have to give details of the people involved, and it would be smart to not be so mysterious all the time in front of Varric, who literally found out secrets as a career.

“Oh it is. Would you like to hear it?” She asked, smiling at the look of shock that crossed Varric’s features before he grinned at her.

“Absolutely.”

“Well,” Cat began, as she gestured for everyone to continue walking, and she waited a moment before slipping back in at the middle of the group. Everyone could hear her better from here, but really she just didn’t want to be on the outside in case spiders did show up suddenly. “The first time I saw a giant spider, I was in Ferelden. One of my traveling companions and I were annoyed at each other.”

“Really, why?” Varric asked.

“Why is that important?” Cat replied.

“For context.”

“That’s not the point of the story, Varric, so I’ll just say he was very overprotective, like a certain pirate.” Cat frowned at him. Give him an inch, he’ll try to take a mile...

“Anyway,” Cat continued, “It started raining, and eventually it was raining so hard that we couldn’t keep traveling. We had a wagon with us, and it kept getting stuck, so we decided to find some shelter. My companion was ranting about how I was going to catch my death and so on, even trying
to get the mage in our party to create a barrier over me so I would stay dry.”

“And the mage said…?”

“She vehemently disagreed, and threatened to remove his teeth and wear them as a necklace if he asked again,” Cat said with a laugh. For as scary as she was, Morrigan could come up with the most intriguing threats.

“I’ll have to remember that one,” Hawke said with a smile.

“Yes, well, he stopped asking, but he wouldn’t let up about it, until finally I snapped at him. I told him I didn’t need his protection and I could find my own shelter, and I didn’t want to hear another word about it. He didn’t say a word, even when we found a cave and I ran in without letting the fighters check it out first.”

“Oh,” everyone said in sympathy.

“Yeah, that’s where I met my first giant spider, and I’ll be glad to never see another one.”

“So did he end up saving you from the spiders?” Isabela asked with a wink.

“Yes, he did. He asked for a kiss for his bravery, but I was so upset I ended up slapping him, and then yelled about how he could have let me go in there by myself.” Cat remembered with a laugh. “Good thing he swore an oath to protect me, otherwise he probably would have killed me, for all I put him through.”

“Ooh?” Varric questioned. “He swore an oath to protect you?”

Cat joined Isabela, who was laughing loudly now. “Everything makes so much sense now!” Isabela said in between peals of laughter.

“No, not really,” Varric grumbled. “If he swore to protect you, where is he? Did he die saving you from some horrid beast? That would make a really good ending to the story.”

“No, he’s not dead, at least, he wasn’t when I left Ferelden. Who knows?” Cat explained.

“Spiders!”

The shout went out, and Cat shuddered. “Crap!” she muttered, looking around wildly. She jumped as a spider scurried over from the side, coming straight for her. She wished momentarily for her crossbow, but took a step and leaped just as the spider went to strike her. She landed awkwardly on it’s back, and she dug her daggers into it’s head.

“Ugh! Oh, disgusting!”

“Cat! Just kill it! We don’t need the commentary!” Isabela called out to her.

“Shut it Issy!” Cat yelled back. True, everyone else had killed multiple spiders while she had only taken one. She rolled off the spider as it dropped to the ground, and shook herself, trying to get rid of the gross feeling of spider fur. “Blech!” She saw the last spider going towards Varric, so she ran forward, only to have the spider explode. Right in her face.

Hawke smirked as the spider exploded from the inside out, and was about to yell out to Varric about owing him, when he saw Cat, standing frozen. She was next to his kill, and she was absolutely covered in spider guts. She turned her head, and Hawke felt fear for the first time since he was a little
boy. She looked like she was going to murder him.

“Uh, sorry about that Cat…” He didn’t finish as she held up her hand. She started towards him, and he backed away.

“Get him Kitty!” Isabela cheered her on, but Cat gave no notice, just slowly stalked him, her eyes honed in, and Hawke felt trapped like a cornered animal. He abruptly stopped when his back met a wall of rock, and Cat came face to face with him, and smiled sweetly.

Hawke was dumbfounded, what was she smiling for?

“Thank you Garrett,” Cat said softly. “You saved me from that big… bad… spider.” Cat’s voice dropped seductively, and Hawke’s gaze dropped to her mouth. “I just have to reward you,” she added, and Hawke was no longer afraid.

Cat’s arms twined around Hawke’s neck, and she could see his eyes darken and become unfocused. Then she struck, rubbing her face and hair to his, then turning and rubbing spider guts all over him, before she stepped back.

She could her their companions howling with laughter, and she gave Hawke a wicked grin. He looked like a sad deer caught in headlights, just standing there, covered in spider entrails with a disgusted look on his face.

“Seems we rescued someone from those spiders, you should probably go talk to them,” Cat informed him, and then sauntered off. Hawke steeled himself, wiping the gunk off his face and looking for a clean spot on his clothes to wipe his hand.

He stepped up to the dwarf and men that were huddled near a fire pit, ignoring the looks he was getting in return. “Seems we happened by at the right time,” he began.

Cat stepped over to Isabela, and asked for a spare cloth to wipe her face. “Sorry Kitty, though I know you don’t actually expect me to carry extra linen around.”

“True, but it didn’t hurt to ask.”

Varric stepped up, and handed Cat a handkerchief. “That was some show,” he said.

“Thanks,” she replied. Gesturing to the cloth she asked, “you sure you don’t mind?”

“Nah, it’ll wash out. Go ahead.”

“Thanks.” Cat used every inch, getting at least her face and hands clean. She stowed the handkerchief in her own pocket, determined to wash it before returning it.

“Well, let’s head out,” Hawke said, returning to the group. “We have a boy to find.”

“You were chatting for awhile, did they want something?” Varric asked as the group continued on, down towards the coast.

“Yeah, the dwarf wanted to hire us, but it seemed pretty sketchy. Wanted us to kill Qunari deserters, in the hope that the Arishok would sell him some powder. Didn’t sound like a solid plan.”

“It is not.” Fenris added, speaking for the first time that day. Hawke learned quickly to pay attention when Fenris spoke, as he only did so when he deemed it important. “The Qunari do not sell their weapons.”
“As I thought,” Hawke replied. He glanced back at Cat. “I really am sorry about that,” he said, and Cat laughed.

“No worries, these things happen. Just know, I’ll always get my revenge when they do!”

“So noted,” he replied with a nod, a smile back on his face.

Cat followed along, keeping to herself as the group finally came across the Viscount’s son. Some bounty hunters had already laid claim, but Seamus asked Hawke to rescue him from them. It lasted several hours, as the bounty hunters kept coming in waves to try to take back Seamus so they could claim the reward, and Cat took the opportunity to jump into the ocean. Being in wet clothes was nothing compared to spider guts, and she figured she would dry off before they made it back to Hightown.

She was correct in her assessment, as after they dropped off Seamus with his father and collected the reward, Hawke decided to go home to change. Cat offered that she and Isabela go to the Rose and ask about the missing woman, Ninette. Hawke agreed, and they decided to meet at the Hanged Man afterwards. Before they could turn around, Varric declared he would be accompanying them.

It wasn’t that Cat didn’t like Varric, or didn’t want him around… but it was much easier when he wasn’t. Now she had to be on guard, and make sure to watch what she said. But she just smiled, and agreed, and the three of them headed off to the Blooming Rose.

“Issy, no wandering off, we’re here on business after all.”

Isabela just grumbled, even as she gave Cat a wink. Isabela liked to have fun, but she always got the job done, Cat knew she just preferred to combine the two. Making their way inside, Cat stopped to speak to Viveka. “I need to talk to Jethann, do you know if he’s busy?”

“Hmm,” she said, looking in her ledger. “No, today is his rest day, so he should be free.”

“Thanks,” Cat replied, heading up the stairs.

“You, ah, know who we need to talk to?” Varric asked, and Cat felt like face palming.

“Jethann knows everyone, so he’ll be a big help,” Cat replied, quickly thinking of a reason.

She strode forward, knocking on his door.

“Oh, hey Cat. It’s my rest day, so I don’t have anything. But it’s really early for you—”

“Jethann,” Cat interrupted before he could say more. “These are some friends of mine. We’re looking for a woman named Ninette, and thought you may know who she was seeing?”

“Ninette? Again? Something must have happened…”

“Can we come in and talk?” Cat asked, and Jethan straightened up.

“Of course,” he stepped back, allowing the three of them in, giving both Isabela and Varric a flirty welcome.

“Oh, I like him,” Isabela purred. “He’s fun.”

“What can I say?” Jethann said, holding his arms out. “If you enjoy what you do, you never truly,” he made an obscene gesture, “work.”
Cat rolled her eyes. “Jethann, we’re here about Ninette.”

“Oh, right.” Jethann straightened and spoke to Cat without any flirting. “I heard she finally ran away from her husband. Good! He didn’t deserve her, and he treated her like a doll you leave on the shelf. She was so miserable.”

“So she did come here?” Cat asked.

“Yes, she was so much fun. Always wanting to try new things, talking about the new places she visited. I told her to be careful, but she was enjoying the freedom, and I couldn’t blame her. She started going to Lowtown, she said the shops were better there, not so pretentious… her words.”

“So, Cat,” Varric started, and Cat tensed. “Why don’t you stay here on your time off?”

“Why would she?” Jethann asked, confused before Cat could say anything.

“Well, she works here, I just assumed…”

Jethann burst out laughing. “Our little Cat, working here? Only in our dreams, sir.”

Cat turned to Varric, “Wait, you think, I’m one of the workers??”

“Well, yes?” Varric added, looking confused. “You said you worked here, what else am I supposed to think?”

Cat turned to Isabela, eyes wide. “He thinks I work here.”

“Well, technically Kitty, you do.” Isabela’s grin made Cat sneer.

“Don’t give me that.” She whirled back to Varric. “Wait, so everyone thinks I’m a whore?”

“Hey, you say that like it’s a bad thing.” Jethann said, while he got sat down on his bed, getting comfortable. Things were definitely getting interesting.

“Of course not, but these are supposedly people that are my friends! If I said I worked at the Keep, would you assume I’m the Viscount?!”

“No, but it’s not like you’ve elaborated. So tell me, what do you do then?”

“I take care of them.” Cat said, pointing to Jethann. “I clean, do laundry, get tonics, whatever I need to, to make sure they stay healthy and safe.”

“And, she’s fabulous!” Jethann agreed. “I shudder to think about how things used to be.”

“Yes, well, now I’m in trouble!” Cat said, pacing back and forth. “Madame Lusine asked me recently to pretend I do work here, so she could make money sending customers to others that ask for me.”

Varric started laughing at that, and Jethann sat up, worried. “Oh no, if I caused Madame to lose money, I’ll be demoted. I’ll have to go back downstairs!” he continued to worry, coming up with worse and worse punishments.

“It will be fine!” Isabela shouted, causing the other three to stop what they were doing and look at her. “No one has to know, and Varric can keep a secret, I’m sure.”

Varric caught on, and did a little bow to Cat, “I promise on my life, no one shall hear it from me.
Though I do suggest you actually tell your friends.”

“Hmph, some friends.” Cat had a thought pop into her head. “A lot of conversations make much more sense now…” she murmured, blushing furiously. All this time, Aveline, Anders, Carver… Garrett. They all assumed she was for sale.

“I… need some air,” Cat said, going to the door, and striding out. Varric and Isabela went to follow.

“Wait!” Jethann called and they turned back. “You should know, there was a templar here asking about Ninette, though she wasn’t a mage, so I am not sure why. He said he was headed to Darktown.”

* * * * *

Varric and Isabela just followed after Cat, there was no reasoning with her now- she was a woman on a mission.

“Anders! I need your help!” Cat called as she opened the door to the clinic. The lantern wasn’t lit, but she hoped he was home.

“Cat?” Anders asked as he stood up form the desk in the corner. “Are you okay?” He rushed over, grabbing her shoulders, and looking everywhere for an injury. “Where does it hurt? What happened?”

“Oh, sorry. I’m not hurt. I just need to save someone from some bandits, here in Darktown, and I don’t have time to get Hawke. Will you come?”

“Oh, I think it would be better to wait for Hawke, don’t you?” Anders said gently.

“Okay,” Cat smiled, patting his shoulder. “Thanks anyway.” She turned around, and started to leave, but was stopped by Isabela, who looked over at Anders.

“She’s determined to go anyway, so it’s either your help, or none.” Anders looked between them, noting that Cat was not returning his gaze, and sighed.

“I’ll get my staff.”

They had hardly walked far, when they heard the noises of fighting. Cat ran in, attacking the first man she came to, and the others quickly followed. The fight was over quickly, and Cat moved over to the man kneeling on the ground, panting heavily.

“Are you alright?” He nodded, though looked like he needed a moment before he could speak.

Anders stalked up, grabbing Cat’s arm and spinning her to face him. “You neglected to tell me I was coming to save a templar!” he hissed at her. “Now he knows where I am!”

“It’s fine Anders,” she said calmly, putting her hand to his cheek. There were cracks of blue light that she tried to cover, and the contact had him calming without realizing it. She spoke softly, so that Emeric couldn’t hear her. “He’s pretty out of it, and old enough that he won’t remember the fight. If he remembers magic at all, he’ll assume it was from the carta members, not us. Besides, he doesn’t know who we are.” She gave his shoulder a pat, and turned back to the templar.

“I thank you Serah,” he said, though he made no move to get up. “This fight has proven that I cannot continue my investigation.”
“You were investigating Ninette’s disappearance?”

“Yes,” he nodded, “as well as two other women. Everyone tells me I am wasting my time, but my heart tells me there is a connection. But it seems I cannot continue.”

“We are also looking for Ninette, perhaps we can take over?” Cat ventured.

“If you would like, then here is all I have discovered,” he said, handing Cat several pages of paper that looked like hand written notes. “I am going home.” He stood and made his way slowly out of Darktown.

“Come on,” Varric said, touching Cat’s arm. “We’d better go meet up with Hawke, and let him know about this.”

“Okay Varric.”
Shepherding Wolves

When Cat, Isabela, Varric and Anders arrived at the Hanged Man, they found the rest of their group in the middle of dinner.

“Hawke, I’m so hurt you didn’t wait for me,” Isabela said sadly as she sat next to him.

“Why?” he asked with a smirk. “Because now you can’t add your meal to my tab?”

“Oh Hawke, don’t be so cynical.” Cat added, winking at Isabela. “She’ll easily add her food to your tab anyway.” Isabela simply shrugged daintily and Hawke sighed in resignation, waving Norah over.

“Looks like I’ll need to add another four bowls,” he said, ignoring Anders’ protesting. Varric sat himself in his usual spot at the head of the table, with Hawke on his right, and Aveline on his left. Cat had begun to think of these as their spots, and wouldn’t sit there even if one of them were missing.

Fenris usually sat on Hawke’s right, with Carver next to Aveline, though they sometimes changed seats depending on who was there when they came in, and who joined up later. Cat would take whatever was available, but Isabela would always go to Hawke’s left side. At first he was stubborn about it, but once she demonstrated she would sit in his lap, he now would scoot over and make room, causing those next to him to move down as well.

Cat and Anders were standing near Aveline and Carver, so Cat skirted quickly around the table to sit next to Fenris. It usually came down to a choice of sitting by Fenris or Carver, and Fenris always won. She almost felt bad about it, since Carver never did anything that she could qualify as creepy or disrespectful… but each time she did the same, making Anders sit next to Carver. But that meant that she and Anders were usually across from each other, and far enough from Hawke and Varric to have their own conversations.

The more she got to know Anders, the more she felt a connection with him. It was almost like having her brother with her, but a brother who understood her just a little bit better. She wondered momentarily how her family was doing, then shook herself from her memories, before they became painful.

“Are you all right?” Fenris asked beside her. It took a moment to realize he was speaking to her, as he merely glanced her way, but didn’t even turn his head to look at her.

“Yes, thank you,” she replied. “We got some information on the missing woman, but it seems that the templar who was investigating thinks that there are other disappearances that may be connected.”

“Hmm, that does not bode well.” Fenris kept eating, his voice nor features changing in the slightest. She almost wanted to tell a joke, to see if she could break through his stoic expression, but she couldn’t think of a good one, and thought it was hardly the time.

“Cat?” Varric said. “You want to tell Hawke what we found?”

“You go ahead Varric, I’m going to eat. But I’ll be sure to correct anything you get wrong,” she said with a smirk.

“Critics everywhere,” Varric teasingly grumbled. “All right Hawke, here’s what happened.”

Cat listened to Varric retell their short adventure from the Rose to Darktown, noticing that he omitted
not only their conversation about her job, but also their argument about whether or not they should go to Darktown without Hawke. She gave him a grateful smile as he finished, and he gave a small nod in return.

“Sounds like this foundry is the only lead the templar was able to come up with?” Hawke asked us all.

“Looks that way, though there isn’t much evidence as to why,” Aveline replied, scanning through the notes. “It’s almost as if it’s just a hunch. He thought he saw one of the women go in the foundry, though even in his own words, he isn’t certain.”

Cat gave Isabela a pointed look, and she joined in. “It couldn’t hurt to check it out then. It would be pretty obvious if someone was staying there with kidnapped women,” Isabela said.

“True,” Hawke replied. He thought for a few more minutes, then said, “Okay, we’ll do that tonight. We can head to Sundermount tomorrow morning.”

Cat breathed a sigh of relief, grateful that this wasn’t going to be overlooked. Anders patted her hand on the table, and gave a smile. “Don’t worry Cat, we’ll find them.” Cat tried to smile in return, but was sure she didn’t quite succeed. She was worried, just about a different woman than he thought. Cat glanced over at Hawke, and then at Carver. If there was one thing she had to try and change, it was Leandra’s fate.

* * * * *

It was fully dark by the time they left the Hanged Man. Aveline had guard duty so she left, wishing them luck, and Maker’s blessings. Cat smirked, as a memory of her Ferelden friends came to mind. Leliana nagged so much about not using the Maker in their curses, that even Alistair had begun to copy Duran and Oghren’s curses using “Ancestors.” Hearing Alistair mutter “Ancestors’ hairy knuckles!” was something she could never forget, and still made her laugh.

Of course, as Cat remembered that, she started laughing, and tried to pass it off as a cough. Anders and Hawke gave her strange looks, and Isabela just grinned. Cat wasn’t going to try to explain, so just kept up the pretense of coughing, patting her chest. “Oh, sorry about that,” Cat said lamely.

“Let’s get going,” Hawke said, ignoring her, and they all started off. The streets were quiet now that Hawke had gotten rid of several of the street gangs, and it was a nice night, albeit quiet.

As they neared the foundry, they came across a woman who looked like a chantry priest speaking with a mercenary. She let him lead her into an alley, to speak about payment, and we all looked at each other in disbelief.

“She is foolish,” Fenris said.

“That’s obvious,” Anders retorted. “Can we save such people from themselves? Or more appropriately, should we?” he asked Hawke.

“We’d better help her,” Hawke said, pulling out his staff. “She is obviously ignorant of Lowtown’s nature.”

“She’s fine,” Cat muttered as she glanced back at the foundry's courtyard. It had definitely looked like Sister Petrice, so she wasn’t very gung-ho about helping.
“C’mon Kitty,” Isabela said with a shoulder nudge. “Fighting mercs is the best, because no one cares when they die.”

“Technically we’re mercs Issy,” Cat replied. “I would care if we died.”

“If we died, you’d be with the Maker, and wouldn’t even think about all of us.”

“Wait, in this scenario I’m the one going up, and you all are going down?” Cat said with a grin.

“No, you’d be in hell with all of us,” Carver snarked. Cat glanced over, giving him a look.

“What are you trying to say Carver?” she asked sweetly. He tried to answer several times, but changed his mind each time and closed his mouth again. “As I thought,” Cat said.

“Let's go... quietly,” Hawke said. They were close to their target, so everyone readied their weapons. Cat looked around the others to see what they were up against, and saw several mercs all standing together while their leader spoke to the sister several feet away.

“Just throw a fireball or something,” Isabela whispered. “They gathered together so nicely after all.”

Hawke started to shush her, but saw that she was right. He could easily dispatch almost of them with one shot. He gestured them back and released his mana, gathering it into his palm, adding the heat so that the ball burst into flame. He released more mana, so that it would continue to grow as he hurled it, becoming large enough to encompass the five men, but not large enough to hurt the sister.

Cat watched with a smile as the blue orb suspended above Hawke’s palm became orange and red, then flaming fire, circling rapidly in the air. He moved his arm back slightly, then pushed forward. If he had been throwing a baseball, the ball would have probably dropped a foot in front of him. But the ball of fire sailed over twenty feet, growing as it went until it crashed into the unaware men, who were suddenly ablaze. Their screams didn’t last for long, as the fire engulfed them and receded, finally dying out with all five men charred and prone on the ground. She looked back at Hawke, impressed.

Hawke felt her eyes, and turned to see Cat looking at him, or rather, the staff. There was wonder in her gaze, and she was biting her bottom lip, probably in an effort to stay quiet, and he thought again how innocent she seemed in these moments. He knew she was anything but, however he felt himself wanting to show her more magic, to see that look again. She looked away, and he shook his head.

Get a grip Garrett, he told himself. Don’t even go there. He squared his shoulders, and surged forward, eager to finish what he started.

* * * * *

“But we were going to the foundry!” Cat seethed. They were grouped together, Sister Petrice and her templar in the other room waiting to hear the answer to their proposition.

“Cat, there is nothing to suggest that there is actually anything or anyone at that foundry. It will still be there in a few days.”

“What?!”

“Well, we have Sundermount on the schedule for tomorrow… I guess I could rework some things.” Hawke trailed off. “This will probably take until the morning anyway…”

Cat watched in disbelief as Hawke paced around their group, worrying about his schedules. She gave Isabela a questioning look and gestured towards the door, and after a moment received a nod.
“All right then Hawke, you let us know when you’re heading to the foundry then,” Isabela said, and she and Cat began to walk out.

“Wait, wait.” Hawke rushed over to block their path. “Is it always going to be some sort of deal with you two?” he muttered, though they simply looked at him, unmoved.

“No, this is about you only changing your precious schedule when it suits you,” Cat replied, trying to keep her annoyance in check. She really didn’t want to start ranting, because who knew what she would say.

“That’s not what this is.” Hawke snapped, obviously annoyed himself.

“We have to help him Cat,” Anders added, trying to make her see their point of view. “As a mage, it’s our responsibility to help each other, because Maker knows no one else will.”

“I get that Anders-”

A snort from Hawke had Cat stopping mid sentence, and glancing over at him. She tried a deep breath herself, but she knew it wouldn’t really help.

“You are not a mage, you couldn’t possibly understand what it is like,” Hawke snapped at her. “You are like a child, seeing the wonders of magic for the first time. You have no idea what true horrors every mage has to contend with.”

Cat look down at her arm, seeing Isabela’s hand gripping her, and following the arm up to her face. Looking in her eyes, Isabela could see that Cat’s temper had snapped, and she released her.

“You don’t know what you’re talking about.” Cat’s voice was icy and quiet, and Anders found himself giving a shudder at the coldness he felt. He tried to diffuse the situation, and took a step forward, but before he could say anything, Cat’s gaze snapped to him, and though he searched for words, he had none. “You may be a mage, but you don’t know Qunari. THAT mage,” she said as she pointed into the other room, “would kill himself before being free.”

“That’s absurd!” Hawke replied, his annoyance building as well, though his voice was hot and bright as his fire had been. He looked back as Anders gripped his shoulder, then looked around at the rest of his friends. He could feel their disapproval, though they said nothing. He sighed, letting go of his anger.

Hawke gave a nod, and Anders stepped back. Hawke looked between Cat and Isabela, and sighed again. “Perhaps, we can make a compromise,” he said, voice dropped back to normal.

Cat was envious of how he was able to reign in his anger, and though she wasn’t able to let go completely, she tried to speak normally. “How?” she asked tightly.

“We do this, because it is time sensitive, but we go to the foundry tomorrow once we return to the city.”

“In the daytime?” Isabela clarified.

“Yes.”

“Everyone.” Cat added, and Hawke looked at her questioningly, before looking to his other companions. They all gave assenting nods, so he turned back and agreed.

Cat and Isabela looked at each other, communicating silently, and Hawke determined he needed to
learn to read their signals to each other. It would help him immensely if he could understand their silent “talks”.

“Fine.” Cat said.

“We’re in.” Isabela added, and the two of them turned to head back into the room with the sister and templar.

Hawke let out the breath he didn’t realize he was holding. He wondered when these two women would start following him as their leader like the rest of the group. He was realizing that getting them to that point would be more difficult than all the others combined.

* * * * *

“This place is disgusting,” Cat said as she looked around for a place to sit.

“We are in the sewers Cat,” Anders replied. He continued to gather whatever he could from the supplies of the men who had tried to kill them. How men could choose to live down here, Cat could only guess.

After a time, Anders found enough to make a makeshift camp, including a fire, and the group took places around it. Cat looked over at Hawke, who was still trying to have a conversation with the Quanri mage that they were taking out of the city. She wondered if she should ask specific questions in order for Fenris to explain more about the Qun to Hawke. He obviously did not know about their culture, as he continued to ask the mage what he would like to do.

Cat could tell that Hawke was getting frustrated, and decided to help, to make up for their argument earlier. “Ketojan! Come sit here,” she called out. Hawke looked gobsmacked, as the mage immediately did as she said, and Cat pasted a surprised look on her face.

“Wow, didn’t think that would work,” she said.

“Indeed,” Fenris replied, which had her looking around the fire for a place to settle, rather than meeting his gaze. She found a relatively clean place near Anders, and sat down, leaning back against the wall.

“So what’s our next move?” Anders asked Hawke as he came to settle near the fire.

Hawke wanted to ask Cat about what just happened, but saw that she had her eyes closed. He looked at Anders and replied, “I think we should get some sleep. We’re almost to the edge of the city, and it would be wiser to leave at daybreak.”

“Good idea,” Isabela said as she settled down next to Hawke.

“Do you know what that was about?” he asked her, nodding to Cat. “Why did he listen to her?”

“I couldn’t tell you why Qunari do anything,” Isabela replied with a smirk.

“Because it was an order,” Fenris said, not waiting to be asked. “The mage has always been led.”
“But you were a slave,” Hawke said, confused. “And you were able to change once you were free.”

“It is not the same...” Fenris said, staring into the fire. Everyone was quiet, contemplating the situation they were in.

“But,” Varric broke the silence. “Doesn’t every slave want to be free?”

“Unfortunately that is not always the case,” Fenris said, though he didn’t elaborate.

“Is she okay?” Carver asked suddenly eyes focused on Cat. They all turned to her, watching as she rolled left then right, mumbling something that they couldn’t hear.

“I think she’s asleep,” Anders said. He held out his hand, it glowing as he released his mana to try to help deepen her sleep. As soon as he touched her, she froze and began to scream.
Shepherding Wolves and a Qunari or two

Chapter Notes

Thank you everyone for the comments and kudos. I wanted to give a bonus chapter this week, and ended up with overtime at work, and no time for writing. So I am sorry, but hopefully this longer chapter makes up for it. I absolutely love the comments, ideas, and questions you all share with me! So thank you again!!!

Cat wandered through the endless-seeming rooms and tunnels, trying to find a way out. There was hardly any light, and she had seen several traps that had already been sprung. She moved slowly, trying to remain silent as she crept along, trying not to tremble.

She couldn’t stop the feeling of dread, it settled on her like a cloak, and she couldn’t shake it no matter what she told herself. Coming out of the corridor, the room opened into a large single space, slightly lighter than where she had been. She stopped and looked around, noting several pieces of furniture- a bed, an armoire, a small table and bookshelf placed in the middle of the space, as if someone had made this place their home.

As she continued to look around, she saw another hallway on the left side of the room, so she moved over to the staircase on her right, slowly making her way down. She skirted around the furniture, not wanting to disturb any traps that may still be in place. As she passed the bookshelf, she noticed a picture frame on top of it, and glanced at it. She took another step, then paused, stepping back to look again. It couldn’t have been…

But it was. She remembered when it was taken. She and Steven had gone to the neighborhood park, and played with her nieces- swinging, sliding, monkey bars… And she had jumped out of a swing, landing right in Steven’s arms, and looked up at him so completely in love and her sister had snapped the picture. It had always been one of Steven’s favorites.

Cat was trembling now, as her mind tried to understand what was happening. Why would this picture be here? And where was here??

She looked ahead, and putting the picture down walked slowly towards the doorway carved into the wall. She tried to calm herself, counting to herself as she took deep breaths, holding her breath longer each time before letting it back out. She slowly made her way into the tunnel. Step by step she inched forward, sticking close to the wall and pausing every now and then to listen. She could hear her heartbeat, pounding as if it was trying to escape her chest.

She came to another room, though it was much dimmer than the last, and she couldn’t make out what was in it. She went to the staircase, easing down them slowly and stopping when she heard something. It sounded like someone was speaking, though it was too soft to make out.

Cat decided to keep going, wishing she had some type of weapon, feeling utterly helpless. She didn’t like being scared, and she hated feeling helpless! She continued on, her steps so slow that it seemed to take hours to finally make it across the room.

She could hear the voice better now, though still could not understand what the man was saying. She stopped where she was, looking around and covering her mouth as she gasped. She finally
recognized this place, the room where the necromancer was trying to recreate his dead wife!

“Your friends were so loyal, but they were wrong to try to keep us apart my love.”

Cat listened intently, confused at the change of dialogue, inching closer to try to understand.

“You’ll never leave me again. We will be together always.”

Cat’s mind was reeling. That voice sounded so familiar… She stopped as her foot hit something, and she looked down.

Her hand rushed to cover her mouth again, this time to keep from screaming, tears pooling in her eyes as she looked at Isabela’s pale face, her eyes open and unseeing. Cat looked away, trying to stay quiet as she sobbed, and gasped again and again as she saw each of the others. She closed her eyes as she swayed on her feet, and when she opened them, she saw Steven, dressed in robes looking like a maniac holding onto Hawke’s hair. Hawke was on his knees, his face bloody, obviously injured and unable to move. Cat realized she was suddenly sitting, and she looked around in terror, her hand flying to her chest, trying to breathe.

Her eyes widened as she felt something on her neck, and using both hands, she could feel the stitches all around her neck. Hawke coughed, his breathing labored as he choked on his own blood, and Cat threw her hands out, though she couldn’t get up. She noticed the manacles on her wrists, and saw the stitches in her skin around her wrists and up her arms. Her face contorted in horror as she looked at Hawke, then up to Steven, seeing his evil grin and the large knife he brought around to Hawke’s neck.

“They will not bother us again.”

Cat’s eyes flew open, and she struggled as something held her down. There was something over her mouth, and her screams were muffled. She bucked as hard as she could, but she could barely move.

“Catarina, wake up!”

The voice was a growl, and she could feel the breath of it on her face. As the words sunk in however, she paused in her struggle, and tried to focus on the face above her though it was difficult.

“Let me go Hawke! Fenris, I swear I’ll kill you if you hurt her!!” A voice yelled from her left. Cat turned her face as best she could, seeing Isabela struggling against Hawke’s hold, and that did more to calm her than anything else could. Her eyes stung as tears welled, and her body shook as she sobbed.

Seeing that Cat had stopped struggling, Fenris released her, and picked her up about to pass her off to the mage who was waiting for her. Cat wouldn’t go however, holding tightly to him as she trembled, crying into his chest. He looked helplessly up at Hawke, who released Isabela, and Fenris braced for her wrath.

Isabela paused as she got to Cat, reaching out gently and stroking her head.

“Kitty?” She asked quietly, and the men all sank back to the ground. Fenris gestured for her to take Cat from him, but she merely smirked at him, and he settled back against the wall, letting his arms fall beside him. Cat stayed where she was, holding onto his armor, though her tears are starting to dry. She finally looks up at Isabela, and reaches out to hug her, leaving Fenris’ lap.
Fenris glanced down at his wet armor, and gave Hawke a rueful look. Hawke, though still shaken, tried to help. “Cat, uh, you okay?”

Cat looked up, and saw each of them looking at her in concern. “I’m so sorry everyone, it was terrible. I was so scared.”

“What was it?” Varric asks, and Isabela glared at him.

“No, I should probably tell it. It’ll help make it feel less real.” Cat started at the beginning, trying to convey the feelings of terror and dread, though she doubted anything could really describe it. She told it all, only omitting Steven from her story.

“Whoa, this one guy killed us all?” Varric asked. “You’ve got quite the imagination there Cat.”

“He wasn’t a guy Varric, he was a necromancer who was also a blood mage,” Cat replied testily. “He used his blood, then each of your lives to power his spells against the rest.”

“That’s a scary thought,” Carver said.

“Yet it is only the beginning of what mages are capable of,” Fenris replied. After seeing a glare from Hawke he added, “if they do not control themselves.”

“And you were following us the whole time, but then were actually his creation?” Hawke asked, trying to understand. “And we were there to rescue you?” Cat nodded.

“What I don’t understand is why we couldn’t wake her,” Isabela said looking over at Anders, who looked guilty.

“What?” Cat asked, looking between them.

“I’m sorry Cat, really. You were tossing and turning, so I was using my magic to put you more deeply asleep. That was right when you started screaming.”

“So you just continued to scream and scream, but no matter what we did, we couldn’t wake you.” Isabela looked accusingly at Anders, and he looked so depressed, Cat couldn’t help but soothe him.

“It’s okay Anders, you couldn’t know I was having a nightmare,” Cat said gently. “Thank you for trying to help.”

He just stared at the ground, and Cat knew she wouldn’t be able to simply wipe away his feelings. She went over and gave him a small hug, and whispered, “It’s okay, I’m fine.” then stood back and said to everyone, “Should we get going? I could use some sunshine.”

* * * *

Isabela could tell that Cat was not fine, in fact, Cat was the only one who believed that she was. Everyone else could see the way she kept looking over her shoulder, flinching or jumping at every sound. But it was more than that, that had Isabela concerned. She couldn’t decipher the look in Cat’s eyes, and that was the bigger concern.

While Cat had her own share of secrets, she was somehow at the same time very open. She didn’t hide her expressions well, and it was easy to see when she was happy, sad, annoyed, frustrated, or pissed off. The fact that Isabela could see fear wasn’t troubling, it was that she could see something
else that she couldn’t read.

Isabela shared a look with Varric, both of them seeing the concern in the others eyes. She looked forward again, noting that Hawke and Ketojan were getting further ahead. Her eyes narrowed in frustration. She knew Hawke could tell that Cat was having problems, but once she said she was fine, he acted as though nothing had happened. The man was a constant frustration- his attention to detail and awareness of what went on around him was an enviable skill, yet he could be so willfully obtuse.

As Isabela looked back at Cat again, she decided that her friend needed her, and she came to a stop, ignoring the looks from Varric and Anders, and gesturing Carver and Fenris forward past her. “Keep going, I’m going to talk to Kitty for a moment. We’ll catch up.”

Cat seemed to be in her own little world, and when Isabela put a hand on her shoulder, she flinched. “Oh! Sorry Issy. Guess I’m a little jumpy.”

“More than a little. Kitty, what is going on? This is not just a bad dream.”

Cat sighed, rubbing at her neck trying to get rid of the stiffness she was still feeling. She looked around, noting that they were alone.

“I sent them ahead,” Isabela said, “now, are you going to tell me what’s wrong?”

“Issy, there are things… that I haven’t told you, because honestly, it’s complicated. I’m not sure that you’d actually want to know.”

Isabela crossed her arms, and looked intently at Cat. “Does this have something to do with how you know things you shouldn’t?”

Cat’s mouth fell open. “Uh… yeah, I guess?”

“Okay, you’re right, I don’t really want to know, I want to keep things simple.” Isabela sighed hugely, then squeezing Cat’s shoulder, gave a smirk. “But, you’re my friend, so if it’ll help, then I’ll listen.”

Cat smiled back, glad to have such a friend. “I appreciate it, but I’d rather not get into all of that.” She laughed a little under her breath. “But, whenever you decide you want to know, I’ll tell you.”

“I’ll keep that in mind,” Isabela replied.

“For now, it’s just disconcerting. The necromancer is real enough, but my mind twisted it, and in my dream… he was my husband.”

“You were married to him?”

Cat shook her head. “No, it was my husband from my home, Steven. I think I told you about him once.

Isabela thought back, vaguely remembering the man she heard about, but remembering clearly how sloshed she had been at the time. “Okay… and he’s a mage?”

Cat rolled her eyes, “You obviously don’t remember. Long story short, no, there are no mages where I come from. No templars, no magic, no chantry…”

Isabela let out a low whistle. “You weren’t kidding when you said it was far away.”
Cat smirked, figuring that was about enough she could say, without Isabela getting freaked out. "And so seeing him, as a mage, killing my friends… to save me… and how I felt when I saw him… ugh! But I wasn’t saved! I was chained up, I had cuts all over that were stitched back up… pieces of my skin that weren’t mine!” Cat gave an involuntary shudder at the memory.

While Isabela comforted her friend, trying to help her through the revulsion she was feeling, several feet ahead, Fenris silently backed away. He had come to retrieve them for Hawke, since they had arrived at the opening of the tunnel, though when he heard Cat talk about her home, he had instinctively stopped and listened. The thought that there was a place in Thedas that had not only no chantry was not so far-fetched, but no magic? Such a place could not exist. And yet, the way Cat acted whenever she saw magic…

Fenris came forward again, purposefully making noise so that they would hear him coming. When he stepped from the shadows, Isabela was looking at him, so he gestured for them to come. She gave a nod, so he turned to return to Hawke.

He continued forward, past the others in the group, making his way to the tunnel entrance where Hawke stood.

“They coming?” Hake asked him quietly.

“Yes, though it will be a few moments.”

Hawke nodded, peering out in the early morning light. “Someone is out there,” he said. “We may find ourselves having to fight to get Ketojan free.” Hawke turned his head to look at Fenris. “Will that be a problem?”

Fenris’ expression didn’t change, but inside he was reeling. It still surprised him every time Hawke asked for his opinion, or showed concern for him. He was a slave… a former slave, but still, he had made his stance on magic very clear, and here this mage not only didn’t hold a grudge, but treated him as an equal… as a friend.

“No. No problem.” Fenris paused, then continued. “Although, Catarina may be correct. This mage may not want to be free.”

Hawke’s eyes widened. “But he’s followed us this whole time…”

“I do not claim to know the mage’s intentions, I merely wanted to prepare you for the possibility.”

Hawke’s face went blank, his mouth in a firm line. “I am prepared. I’ll save him, even from himself.”

Fenris didn’t respond and the men stood there for several minutes looking out at the beach and cliffs surrounding them. “What could possibly be taking so long?” Hawke grumbled quietly. “It’s a bad dream, just shake it off.”

Fenris simply grunted in reply, though he didn’t agree. Some mornings it took him much longer than he liked to shake the dreams that plagued him, and he was a seasoned warrior, used to having magic used against him. This had been a first for Cat, so he easily understood why she was having such trouble. *Hopefully this will serve as a warning about the dangers of magic*, he thought to himself.

Once the ladies returned, Hawke set about giving instructions. As the group made their way out of the cave, Cat brought up the rear with Fenris, as Isabela had gone to stand behind Hawke.

“Uh, Fenris?” Cat asked quietly. He didn’t respond, but she felt his gaze, so she continued. “Please tell me Hawke knows he’s walking right towards a group of Qunari.”
“He knows someone is out there, but I do not believe he knows who it is.” There was a great pause before he asked, “How do you?”

Cat just smirked. *Distraction is the key here, she thought. “You just want to know all my secrets, don’t you Fenris?”*

“Yes.”

Cat had been hoping to throw him off guard with the flirty tone of her voice, but he merely answered straightforwardly, and she had no reply. He was really starting to worry her, he saw far too much, and unlike Isabela, he was curious. She was under no illusions, eventually she figured they would need to know about her, but they were not isolated here in the city like she had been with her friends in Ferelden. If anyone didn’t believe her, things could get out of hand very quickly, and she worried about what could happen if other people found out. Leliana and Zevran had been quite clear that she should not share her secret with anyone that she didn’t trust completely.

She glanced over at Fenris again, her thoughts running. It wasn’t that she didn’t trust him, it was more that she didn’t know him, or any of them really, well enough yet.

The group came to a stop, and Hawke began speaking, Cat realized that she had no idea what was going on. They were more than likely about to fight, but she had hardly paid attention up to now. She focused in, hearing Hawke getting more and more angry.

“He followed us out of the city, he wants to be free!”

“Bas, you know nothing. He followed because he wants to be led, he knows no other purpose. Saarebas must be contained. Even your templars don’t understand how dangerous they are.” One thing Cat could never remember was the titles under the Qun. This guy, was something like Aardvark…. Arvaard? Arvaarad?

“I know EXACTLY how dangerous WE saarebas are.” Cat stared wide eyed at Hawke, his eyes were narrowed and glittered venomously. It was fascinating, as she had always been around people whose anger ran cold. Even she, herself would become closed off and icy when she was angry. Hawke was like a wildfire, growing bigger and more threatening the angrier he got, and she found it hard to look away. She noticed that several of the Qunari were shifting, and her gaze went over to them. They all looked uneasy.

“You are saarebas? Bas saarebas?” Cat watched as each of them steeled themselves, the uneasiness disappearing as they thought of their duty. “Your vile words have spilled on us, and our only course is to cleanse the world of your corruption.” They pulled their weapons free, and got into fighting stance. “You will ALL die for this deception.”

Cat went for her weapons, pulling her daggers free, and was stopped by a huge roar, coming from Hawke. His arms came above his head, his staff spinning while he shouted up at the sky. Cat heard Anders shout, and watched as Isabela disappeared in a puff of smoke, while Varric did a startling backflip to get out of the front lines.

Fenris immediately took his place, with Carver placing himself in front of Hawke, both of them slashing their swords in an effort to keep the Qunari back. A Qunari at the back of their group fell over with a yell, and Isabela was seen momentarily before disappearing again. She appeared behind Hawke as he yelled out, “Anders! Now!”

At that moment, Fenris and Carver retreated, and Varric ran forward. The group was suddenly within a large barrier, and Cat could see the effort that it was taking Anders to keep such a barrier up.
She noticed the horror on Isabela’s face and the satisfaction on Hawke’s as he punched his hands up again. She followed his gaze, realizing that she should have paid attention while they were discussing strategy. Hawke had called down a firestorm, and she was not inside the barrier.

“KITTY!!” Cat looked over at Isabela, who was pounding on the barrier, but could not escape it. She started to back away, as the fireballs started coming. At first it was just one, but within seconds she could see dozens falling around them, and she knew she had no escape. She curled up as small as she could, hoping that she could somehow avoid the attack. She could feel something above her, but she didn’t dare move.

Cat stayed that way for several minutes, listening to the screams of the dying Qunari, hearing the impacts of the fire as it came streaming down from the sky. One impact came close and she could hear the sound of something shattering, which caused her to move her head, and look up, worried that the barrier around the others had given out.

Cat heard a thump next to her, and was startled to see Ketojan, his shoulder burned and bleeding, and looking like he was passed out. She quickly understood that the barrier that had broken had been his, that he had for some reason protected her, and that now, he needed her to protect him. She glanced up, noting that while the fires rages around them, it seemed that there were not anymore falling, so she stood, and hooked her hands under Ketojan’s arms, and started pulling him away.

She had no sooner done so, when another ball of fire crashed into the dirt where they had previously been, spurring her on faster, though they were making slow progress. She didn’t have the strength to pull him much farther, and eventually she had to stop.

Cat sat there, panting, before she went around to face Ketojan, looking over his wounds. She was surprised to find it much worse than she originally thought, as it looked as though he had taken a fireball directly to his side. From his shoulder to his waist on his right side was completely burned, black in places, bleeding and blistering in others.

Cat realized she could not see his chest moving, and she reached up to feel his neck, searching for his pulse. The smoke in the area had already caused tears, but she felt them well up anew, for this Qunari who had saved her, giving his life for hers.

She felt the others come up behind her, and someone crouch down and put a hand on her shoulder. Assuming it was Isabela, she turned into her friend, throwing her arms around her and crying into her neck. She realized immediately that it was not Isabela, but Hawke, but when his hand started rubbing her back, she couldn’t pull away.

“I’m sorry. I’m so sorry.” He murmured to her, “It’s all my fault.”

“I don’t think I will ever understand Qunari,” Varric stated. “He shielded her with his own body… why?”

“Varric…” Isabela warned him, gesturing towards Cat.

“The Qun demanded his death,” Fenris said quietly. “He chose the means.”

Cat pulled away from Hawke, embarrassed, and asked, “Can we please go home?” The others nodded, seeing that their job was done, though it felt far from complete.

“None of this would have happened, if they weren’t taught to hate and fear mages,” Hawke said bitterly as the group walked away.

“After that show, can you blame them?” Carver sniped back. “One spell wiped them all out.”
“Magic is a plague, and everyone feels it’s effects.” Fenris added.

“That only happens when you back a mage into a corner! We had to protect ourselves, they wanted to kill us!” Anders replied hotly.

Cat turned to Isabela, rolling her eyes. It was a never ending debate with this group, and she and Isabela had taken to either keeping silent, or leaving whenever the topic arose.

“You have a thought you want to share, Cat?” She turned back to see Anders giving her a glare. “You haven’t told us which side you are on.”

“I really don’t want to get into it,” she replied.

“No, you never do. But I want to know. How can I know how to help those that are not mages understand, if I don’t know what the problem is? Please?”

“She obviously doesn’t want to hurt your pride by telling you that you are wrong,” Fenris said, and Cat gave him a dry look.

“More that this debate is circular, and will never end,” she said.

“I admit, I am curious,” Hawke added. “We know where our friends stand, except for you.”

“Trust me, you don’t want to know.”

“Oh, but we do!” Anders said quickly, feeling hopeful. After all, she was his friend, she’d have to understand.

“Just remember, you asked for it.” Cat gave a big sigh, then continued. “I think you are all wrong.”

It was met with silence, as if each side had been prepared to crow, and then couldn’t. “Cat, there are only two sides to this, how can we ALL be wrong?”

“Well,” she replied, “it’s not like I have the solution or anything.”

“But?”

“But, from my point of view, you cannot group everyone together. You cannot say, mages should be free, because not all mages should.”

“Wha-?”

“Don’t interrupt. You asked for my opinion and I’m giving it.”

“But Cat-” Anders stopped again, realizing that Cat wouldn’t budge on this, so he kept quiet.

“The same for templars, and for all people, really. There are some who enjoy the suffering of others, regardless of what power they may have, and they should not be free to inflict their will on others. The templars, and those in power, should also not group everyone together, saying that all mages should be caged because of a danger that might happen.”

“So what is the solution?” Fenris asked, and Cat was surprised that he seemed interested, instead of angry, though she still smirked.

“I already said I didn’t have it,” she replied with a chuckle. “However, I will make one more point. A man once said, ‘with great power, comes great responsibility’ and I believe that couldn’t be more
true here in Thedas." Thanks Spiderman Comics for the quote... "Just as a king loses freedoms because of the duties placed before him, or grey wardens with their duties, or even children with their duty to their families… So do mages, lose some freedoms because of the power they receive as a mage. It may not be fair, but when is life ever fair?"

The group continued to walk towards the city in silence, and although Cat wondered if she had offended someone, she didn’t regret the things that she had said. The situation between the mages and the templars, or the chantry, or even the local leaders… was something that needed to change. Cat didn’t believe that there was an optimal solution, just that each group needed to be willing to bend, and so far, no one was.

They made their way back to Lowtown, and Cat and Isabela veered off towards home, as Hawke and the others went to confront Sister Petrice. Cat didn’t like the sister, and would happily avoid all interactions with her.

“Get what you need, and meet us at the Hanged Man,” Hawke called. “We’ll head to the foundry as soon as you are ready.”

Isabela waved in answer, and Cat headed into their small home. They gathered their weapons and changed clothes.

“Issy?”

“Yeah?”

“I need a favor.” Isabela looked over, intrigued, as they got ready. “I won’t explain how, but I know that necromancer is in that foundry. I need you to promise me, that we won’t leave until we find him.”

“Kitty, if he’s in there, we’ll find him.”

“It may not be simple, he’s killed several women already without gaining any notice. I’m thinking he may be underneath the foundry, maybe have a secret passage or something…”

“This means that much to you?”

“Yes.”

“All right, but if I do, I want that blue shirt of yours.”

“Issy, it’s too small, you came busting out of it last time.”

“That’s the point Kitty,” she replied with a wink.

“You drive a hard bargain, but if you promise not to wear it around me, it’s a deal.” Cat held out her hand with her pinkie extended. She tried not to share too many things from back home with the others, but Isabela was a different story. They linked pinkies, in a pinkie promise, and Cat felt much better about going to the foundry. That necromancer had no idea what was coming for him.
The Bone Pit

Chapter Notes

Sorry, it's a late chapter, but I was only half way through it yesterday, and I didn't want to only post a little half chapter. Thanks for being patient!! Especially thank you again for the comments! It is honestly a thrill every single time I see the email notifying me that I have a comment! AND... I finally chose a name for Hawke's mabari, so he is now introduced! Enjoy!!

When Cat and Isabela first arrived in Kirkwall, they had a few rough days. Cat had a pack on her back, but it was filled with things that she couldn’t bear to part with, along with a change of clothes, and a little bit of money. The money had got them food at first, but until Cat had found her job, and Isabela had found the better areas for pick-pocketing, Cat had almost been tempted to sell some of her things. Now, as she readied herself to go after the necromancer, she was glad that she hadn’t.

She buckled on her smaller daggers, one of two sets that were gifts from Isabela herself, though the thigh holsters were the original ones Zevran had gotten for her. She had almost put on her drake scale armor, it still looked as amazing as the day she had gotten it from Master Wade, but she knew there would be questions, and she wasn’t ready to share that part of her life yet.

Cat also decided to bring her crossbow, even knowing that the others would probably realize she had been with them the night they had fought together the first time. But, Anders and Fenris already knew, and the world hadn’t ended. Isabela may not agree, but Cat was determined to give herself every advantage.

Cat turned to her armoire and pulled out the blue shirt Isabela had requested, turning around and throwing it at her.

“There you go, blue shirt as promised. And remember, no wearing it out with me.”

“Don’t fret Kitty, this is for special occasions. Some men just need a little extra convincing.”

“You would assume I know who you’re talking about, but you flirt with everyone, so it’s hard to tell.”

“You know what they say Kitty, cast a wide enough net, you’re bound to catch something.”

“True. Maybe you could catch Carver… that would give me a nice break.”

“You say that, but Carver has something going for him.”

“Oh really, such as?” Cat asked as she sat to pull on her boots.

“He’s got you aware of his intentions. That’s more than the others have.”

“Huh?” Cat looked up from her boots. “What others?”

“Kitty…” Isabela rolled her eyes. “I can’t believe that you can be so blind. You practically have both Fenris and Anders wrapped around your finger. You could have either one of them in a blink.”
“Wha-? Issy, that’s not true.” Isabela’s look had Cat on the defensive. “It’s not! They are both just men we travel with sometimes. Anders… is like my brother, that would be way too weird, and Fenris… well, it’s complicated, but I’m not going there either. Plus, neither of them feel that way for me! You’re just reading things into it that aren’t there.”

“Only because you aren’t reciprocating! They don’t want to act on it if you are going to reject them. It’s been forever Kitty! At least the year that you’ve been here!”

“Issy, why are we fighting about this? I just don’t need romance.”

“Who said anything about romance? I’m talking about having some fun, releasing some tension! There are men and women all around you that would jump at the chance to help you let loose!”

Cat pinched the bridge of her nose. This was another endless debate, as Isabela could never seem to understand her stance. Hell, sometimes SHE didn’t understand her own stance, so how could she expect others to?

“Issy, look, I really appreciate you trying to help, and I promise, I’ll think about it. But for right now, I can’t separate the two. I’ve never been one for casual sex, and I really don’t want the complication of a relationship. If either of those change, you’ll be the first to know, okay?”

Isabela wanted to push, but felt like that would just spur Cat’s anger. So, she would have to push from the other end. Cat obviously didn’t want Carver’s advances, and though she had argued against both Anders and Fenris, her argument wasn’t convincing at all. If that failed, there was always several professionals down at the Rose that could help.

“Okay Kitty. Are you ready? Don’t think I don’t see that crossbow. But… I suppose Hawke is about as trustworthy as anyone at this point. He already knows you can fight. Maybe using your crossbow will keep you out of the front lines, and safer.”

“Knowing my luck, I wouldn’t count on it,” Cat replied as she opened the door.

“Too true. Well, lets go meet up with everyone, before Hawke decides to make changes to the schedule again.”

“I’m way ahead of you,” Cat said as she closed the door after Isabela had come through. “Though if Hawke even thinks of changing the schedule, I’ll kick him in the balls.”

“Promise?” Isabela asked with a laugh. Cat joined in, and laughing, the two of them headed to the Hanged Man.

* * * * *

“Hawke, trust me, that’s not a good idea.”

“I know Varric, but I’m sure they will go along with it.”

“Well, here they come. I’ll just be over there… far away.” Hawke squared his shoulders, and took a deep breath. He was the leader, he could handle this.

“Isabela, Cat… please sit down,” Hawke said as the two of them came up to their table. They exchanged glances, and Hawke looked between them, thinking that perhaps they were guessing as to what he wanted to talk to them about.
“I feel like I should tell Hawke what you said before we left,” Isabela smirked at Cat as she sat down.

“I get the same feeling,” Cat mused, also sitting. She smiled over at Hawke, her smile overly sweet. “But I’m sure Hawke wouldn’t go back on his word…” her smile turned sharp, and Hawke realized he should approach this a different way.

“I will not,” he replied. “But we have been approached with another job, and while there is a timing issue, I wanted the decision to be yours.”

Cat sat back, surprised. “I’ll admit, I wasn’t expecting that,” she said with one eyebrow quirked up in question. She glanced over at Isabela, and Hawke tried to discern their words from their minute gestures.

Finally Cat shrugged, and Isabela said, “We’ll hear you out.”

“I was given a share in a mine, just outside of town,” Hawke began, which had Cat suddenly interested. Dragons! was all she could think, and though she couldn’t keep a straight face, she did keep her smile to a smirk.

Hawke continued, “but it seems that there is some kind of problem at the mine that we need to investigate. Both of these can be accomplished today, and if it were my decision, I would go to the mine first and the foundry afterward. But!” Hawke quickly added before either of them could get angry. “I gave my word, and it is your decision.”

Isabela looked at Cat, letting her know that it was her choice, since she was the one so invested in the necromancer. Cat didn’t mind putting off the foundry for a little longer, as long as they actually did it. And, if they waited to go to the bone pit, the last survivor might not survive this time.

“I agree,” Cat said. “It makes more sense to go to the foundry later, to ensure that the necromancer is there. He more than likely scopes out his victims during the day, when he is less likely to be noticed, what with the commotion of the shops.” Hawke smiled, glad that Cat came to the same conclusion he had. “But…” she added, “we must find the necromancer. I’ll regret it the rest of my life if he kills again when we could have stopped him sooner.”

“I swear, I will not rest until we have investigated that foundry,” Hawke said, placing his hand on the table, and nodding at Cat in seriousness.

“Thank you.”

Hawke stood, “Now, we should get going.”

Cat and Isabela stood as well, and the group started to head out, when Cat was pushed from behind her knees, and fell forward, splayed out on the ground.

“Kitty? You okay?” Isabela asked, though she didn’t quite mask the laughter in her voice. Everyone else was chuckling as well.

“Ow… what hit me?” Cat asked as she lifted herself up to her knees. She was surprised to find herself face to face with a mabari. They both stared, eye to eye, and Cat couldn’t help but smile when the dog tilted its head in question. “Hi there. Can I pet you?” she asked as she held her hand out.

She was disappointed when the mabari moved its head further away from her. She had gotten along so well with Duran’s mabari, Dog, right from the start. She wondered if that was because she had
been in need of protection then.

“Hafter!” Hawke had turned, and was looking down at the mabari with a scowl. The dog in turn, was looking up at the mage as if to ask, “What? She was in my way.” Hawke scowled further, and pointing to Cat, “Hafter. Apologize.”

The two of them stared at each other, both trying to win the contest, which had Cat laughing. Both turned, and Cat quelled her laughter in order to speak. “It’s all right Hawke, I’m not hurt.”

“That doesn’t matter,” Hawke replied without looking away from the mabari. “We can always take you back home to Mother.” Hawke said, and Cat realized he was talking to the mabari, as he huffed, and went over to Cat. He lowered his head so she could pet him, and she didn’t hesitate.

Cat started scratching behind his ears, “Oh, you’re so handsome,” she said as she moved her hands down under his jaw, continuously scratching. She was surprised when Hafter flipped and showed his belly, but she only giggled, and reached forward to rub his belly, continuing to compliment him. After a time, she heard someone clear their throat loudly, and she paused, looking up. Everyone was staring at her, Isabela rolling her eyes, Varric laughing, Fenris with a small smile, and Hawke looked gobsmacked.

“We should head out,” Fenris said, and he held out a hand to help Cat up. As she reached for it, Hafter got to his feet, and licked her face, then headed over to Hawke’s side.

The group started out, and Hawke continued to look back and forth from Cat to his mabari.

“What?” Cat asked, her head tilting much in the same way as Hafter’s had, and Hawke smiled.

“I haven’t seen Hafter take to someone that quickly in a long time. In fact, I think he likes you more than he likes Carver.”

Hafter gave a “woof” in agreement, and Varric muttered “just like everyone else,” which had Cat laughing quietly.

“So, Garrett... where did Hafter get his name?”

Hawke looked at her incredulously. “You’ve never heard the legend of Hafter? He’s almost as famous as Dane.”

Cat looked at him with confusion. “Um... I thought Dane was a river?”

Isabela and Varric chuckled as Hawke’s jaw dropped. “I thought you lived in Ferelden for a time. How is it that you had not heard the stories of Dane and Hafter?”

“Oh... sorry?” Cat replied looking sheepish.

“No time like the present then,” Hawke said. “Come walk with us, I’ll tell you about it on the way to the bone pit.”

“Okay,” Cat replied, stepping up to the other side of Hafter. She was happy to find that he was tall enough that she could pet him as they walked, and the way he stuck to her side, she figured he was happy about that too. She listened to Hawke tell the story of the legendary man turned werewolf-Dane, and then Hafter, rumored as a son of a werewolf, and how they lived.
Rogue party! Cat thought to herself, though we are missing Sebastian... She barely considered herself a true rogue, but it was more by default than anything. She couldn’t really pick pockets or locks, but she was most definitely not a warrior nor a mage, so that left rogue. I guess I can’t call this a rogue party since Fenris is here, she thought with a frown.

Besides Hawke and Hafter, she was traveling with only Fenris, Isabela and Varric. As she thought about what they would be facing in the mine, she had worried that they would need the others, but she decided it was a pretty good combination. Ranged fighters would help keep the dragons distracted, Fenris was very fast for a warrior, and Isabela could use stealth until she was ready to attack, and Hafter would be able to distract the dragons in order for the ranged fighters to take them down. Hopefully all of that together would make for a good dragon fighting team.

“So, what do you think we’ll find in here?” Cat asked Fenris as they headed into the open mine.

“Probably more corpses, just like outside,” Fenris replied.

“Fair enough, but what made the corpses?” she asked.

“Spiders,” Hawke called back to them.

“Ugh! Hawke that’s not funny!”

“I do not think that was an attempt at humor,” Fenris said to Cat, as he looked ahead. He pulled out his great sword, and looked back at her. “Try to stay away from exploding spiders this time,” he said, and headed forward, his sword at the ready.

“Was that your idea of a joke?” Cat yelled after him.

“Sounded more like advice to me,” Varric responded. “Watch it Freckles,” he said as he shot a bolt past her.

“Freckles?” she asked with a grimace.

“Yeah, no good. I figured I would need to just try some nicknames out until the right one jumps at me.”

“Well, I definitely want veto power,” Cat said as she shot a bolt from her own crossbow.

Varric gave her a grin, “Sorry, that’s not how it works. And what, you liked my crossbow so much, you got one for yourself? Not that I blame you, Bianca is awe-inspiring.”

“Nah, I had this long before I met you, Issy just didn’t want me using it,” she replied, enjoying the distraction their conversation was. It kept her focused on killing the spiders without thinking about their size.

“Why not?” Varric asked Isabela, and she gave Cat a glare before disappearing to go after another spider.

Cat simply shrugged at Varric’s questioning glance. “Though if it makes you feel better, it was a dwarf that inspired me to get this crossbow, since he wouldn’t share his with me.”

“Oh really?” Varric asked, a twinkle in his eye at the thought of a story. “Do tell.”

“There!” Cat pointed to where a dragonling was silently coming up behind Hafter. “Hafter! Down!”
she yelled, and just as the mabari crouched, her bolt and several bolts from Bianca struck the
dragonling, and it wailed as it fell, then went silent.

Once all the creatures were taken care of, they regrouped. “Spiders and now dragons?” Varric stated.
“No wonder the men didn’t survive. They were just laborers.”

“Laborers with no one to protect them,” Hawke said crossly. “working in horrible conditions for
very little pay, simply because there was no other choice.”

No one commented, seeing that Hawke wasn’t looking for comfort. “Come on,” he said walking
further in to the mine. “Let’s clear this place out, so the workers can return and work in safety.”

“Kitty?” Isabela asked, and the others looked over to see Cat bent over a dragonling corpse, seeming
to pet it. “What are you doing?” she asked as she walked over to Cat.

“Issy, it’s a dragon. A real dragon!” Cat smiled, the child-like enthusiasm making the others smile.

“Yeah, a real dragon that would gladly rip your face off,” Isabela scoffed.

“Meh,” Cat said with a shrug. “They can’t help that, it’s just their nature.” But she smiled and added,
“and that’s why we kill them instead of trying to keep them as pets.”

The six of them continued on, clearing paths and caverns within the mine, taking very little time to
rest. As they moved on, Cat started to wonder how much further the mine could go when a man
literally ran right into Hawke.

Hawke, being much larger in stature than the other man, didn’t lose his footing and grabbed the
man’s shoulders to steady him.

“Whoa there friend,” Hawke said calmly.

“Keep your voice down!” the man hissed, terror written on his face. “We need to get away from
here!”

“Easy,” Hawke replied, keeping his voice soft and calm, trying to calm the other man down. “What
happened?”

“We opened a new tunnel, and these… creatures just started pouring into the mine, killing everyone!
We all ran for the entrance, but, I must have gotten turned around. I was able to hide, but I could hear
everyone screaming!” He paused for a deep breath, shuddering.

“Have we reached the end of the mine then?” Fenris questioned.

“No, that way,” he pointed behind him, “is where we opened the new tunnel. I don’t know how I
ended back in there, but as I was looking for a way out, I ended up outside. I could see that it was a
dead end, but suddenly this HUGE dragon landed! I ran as fast as I could, and I just seemed to get
more lost…” he face fell again, and he seemed so dejected.

Hawke gave his shoulder a light slap. “You’re in luck then. Just follow the path behind me, and
you’ll make it back to the entrance. We’ve cleared out any creatures, and you will be safe.”

“Really?” the man asked Hawke, looking at his savior with awe. He started walking, then stopped
and turned back. “Please, don’t go that way. That dragon will kill you all.” He then continued, in a
hurry to get out of the mine.
“Hawke?” Isabela questioned.

“We can’t leave a dragon here. No one will be safe if we do,” Hawke paused, looking around at all of them. “We can do this. Hopefully, it is just an adult. High dragons are said to be extinct, so it is manageable.”

Hawke continued as he outlined his strategy for their attack, and Cat made sure to pay close attention this time, although there was no secret plan to hide behind a barrier. “Anders has been teaching me to use cold spells, but it is not something I have an affinity for... but I will try. Otherwise, Fenris and Hafter, try to back the dragon to one side so that Varric, Cat and I can stay out of range. Isabela, look for the vulnerable spots, we need to weaken it quickly, same for you two,” he said looking at Varric and Cat, “eyes, throat...” he trailed off.

They all nodded, and steeling themselves, headed out, Fenris and Hafter leading the way.

As the group exited the cave, they came upon a large shelf of rock jutting out from the side of the mountain. The space was limited, and they followed the grating sound with their eyes, spying the sleeping dragon next to the cave opening.

Hawke came up to Fenris, his voice low. “We need to get it away from the cave. If things go poorly, it is our only means of escape.” Fenris nodded, and looked over at Isabela.

“Can you go to the edge there and call out for it?”

She looked at him in alarm. “Are you crazy?” she immediately hunched her shoulders in worry, and everyone looked at the dragon with bated breath. They all sighed in relief as the creature kept sleeping.

“I merely want it to head towards you, then you can stealth, and get away as I attack it.” Isabela looked at Fenris warily, unsure.

“But what if the dragon just breathes fire, and doesn’t move?” Cat asked quietly. Isabela’s eyes widened, as if she hadn’t thought of that, and looked pointedly at Fenris.

“Hmm... then I will shout and distract it.”

“Let’s just do that first!”

Isabela and Fenris continued to argue in whispers, until they heard the sound of Varric’s crossbow firing. The group watched as the bolt struck the mountainside nearby the dragon, but away from where they were standing. They all watched with different amounts of apprehension as the dragon spread it wings and took off, looking on with awe, before it circled back and landed in the midst of them.

Its wings beat harshly, and before they realized it, they were all dragged forward. Cat crashed directly into the dragon’s back leg, hastily scooting back to avoid getting trampled. She was tempted to look around for her friends, but the large clawed foot kept her attention, as it lifted, and came pushing back towards her. She rolled out of the way, avoiding being sliced in half, but felt a pain through her side as the dragon’s claw grazed her. Her adrenaline was pumping, and she raised her crossbow, firing in the softness of the dragon’s underbelly, then scrambling to her feet, and running to get some distance between them.

She kept moving, to her left then back to her right, keeping her distance from her companions as well, not wanting to give the dragon a tempting target to use it’s fire breath or spit attacks on.
She could hear Hawke shouting, though it was hard to make out, and as she concentrated, she realized he was calling out the areas that he was using his cold attacks on so that the others could attack the same areas, and hopefully cause exponential damage.

Cat did her best to join in, but half the time she couldn’t hear Hawke, and with Fenris and Isabela attacking those areas, she didn’t want to accidentally hit them, so she went for other areas, focusing on the dragon’s throat. With her companions moving so quickly, Cat opted to stay still for a time, using the moments to increase the accuracy of her shots.

The dragon reared and roared, and Cat found herself feeling dizzy, her equilibrium off. She teetered back and forth, holding her arms out to keep from falling over. After a minute or so, she shook her head, able to finally clear her mind. She looked around, seeing that the others were similarly affected, and realizing that she had just been stunned. She made a mental note to ask Isabela about a counter. If that happened with a regular enemy, she’d be dead before she realized it.

The group continued to hack away at the dragon, and its energy began to wane. After an extremely hard hit from Fenris’ sword, the dragon wailed and held it’s front leg protectively in by its body as it fell on the ground. Cat could see the others were as bolstered by this as she felt, and they renewed their efforts, sensing the end of the fight.

Cat raised her crossbow, moving closer as she aimed, trying to get her bolt as closely under the jaw as she could. She let out her breath and fired, watching as the bolt sailed over, hitting the side of the dragon’s neck instead as it had turned toward Hawke. The fury on the dragon’s face was suddenly aimed at Cat, as the dragon whipped its head around, a last desperate attack. Cat looked in confusion, the dragon seemed like it was choking almost, and made her think of a cat about to cough up a hairball.

“Move!!”

Cat realized what was happening as someone shouted at her, and she moved as quickly as she was able, but somehow, even though the dragon had spit where she had been, the projectile followed her. She felt a barrier surround her, and she tried to jump out of the way, as the fire spit came for her. She heard the crashing sound of the barrier breaking, and as she felt the fire on her side, she began to scream.

* * * * *

Cat opened her eyes, panicking slightly as she felt herself being carried. She looked up, surprised to see Fenris holding her, seemingly without any difficulty. She knew he must be exhausted after their fight, so she struggled slightly, and said, “I can walk now.”

“I wouldn’t bother Kitty,” Isabela said from beside her, and she turned her head to see her. “He’s being as stubborn as a mule right now.”

Cat watched as Fenris’ eyebrow quirked up. “Oh?” he replied dryly. “So I should let Hawke try to heal her then?”

“I didn’t say that…” Isabela replied.

“I feel like I missed something…” Cat said.

“Well Killer,” Varric said, and Cat gave him a deadpan look. “Yeah, not that one either. The point is, even though the barrier Hawke put up took the brunt of the damage from the dragon’s fire spit, it still
burned you. The wound looks pretty bad.”

“Yeah, I feel it.” Cat replied. “I also took a claw swipe to that same side at the beginning of the fight.”

“Ow.” Varric winced in sympathy.

“That doesn’t explain why Fenris is carrying me.” Cat glared up at Fenris, trying to get him to put her down.

“You were unconscious, Kitty” Isabela pointed out. “Hawke offered to heal you, but…”

“But?”

“But they don’t trust me!” Hawke finally spoke, and Cat could tell he was on her other side, though she couldn’t turn far enough to see him.

“Um, why not?” she asked, though she wasn’t certain she wanted the answer.

Varric, ever the diplomat, spoke up. “It isn’t a matter of trust Hawke. You said yourself that you haven’t mastered the healing spell Anders was teaching you.”

Cat could hear Hawke sigh grumpily behind her. “I know…” he muttered.

“And we all just want to ensure that Cat gets the best healing she can.”

“Okay, but really, still not answering my question here.” Cat interrupted.

“The others were arguing, so I simply picked you up and started back towards Kirkwall.” Fenris finally said. “The faster we get you to the…” he paused seeing the look on Cat’s face, and changed his mind “… Anders, the faster you will be healed.”

“I see,” Cat mused, supposing it could be worse, and her side was really hurting. “Well then, I guess I can only say, thank you. So, thank you, Fenris.”

“You are welcome,” he replied.
As the group reentered the city, Isabela turned to speak to Cat, but only smirked at the obvious discomfort she was feeling, still being held in Fenris’ arms. Cat leveled a glare at her, knowing what was going on in her mind, and their earlier conversation coming back to her. Cat could try to explain about chemistry or the lack of sparks, but knew that Isabela would counter that she was in denial or some such thing.

As Cat thought about it, she couldn’t think of how she would describe the state she was in. Mostly, as much as she was beginning to feel like she belonged here, she knew she didn’t. There was still a chance for her to go back home, even if there was hardly any reasons to do so. She did miss her family, but in all honesty, they were all she had. She was undoubtedly let go from her job, and her friends, and most likely her family had all moved on and probably didn’t think about her much.

She had been truthful with Isabela, she had old fashioned views when it came to relationships. She was romantic enough to still believe that once she gave herself to someone else, she gave it all. And that was most likely the biggest problem. How could she give all of herself to someone here in Thedas? She hadn’t been able to in her marriage, what made her think she could succeed now?

And that, she thought, is precisely why I can’t have a relationship. I swore I would never have another like I did with Steven... pretending to be happy while a hidden part of me died.

“Kitty?”

Cat shook herself, realizing that she had been glaring at Isabela the entire time. “Sorry Issy, got lost in my thoughts. What’s up?”

Isabela glanced upwards, an attempt to make Cat smile in remembrance of all the times the crew had done exactly that whenever she had posed the question. She was rewarded with a giggle, and the smile that remained.

“I’m wondering if you want us to go to the foundry without you, or wait until you are healed.”

“But Anders can heal me, so I’ll be fine right after, and then we can go to the foundry.”

“Not likely.” Hawke said. “Healing takes care of the wound, but the body still needs time to recuperate. You will most likely need several days of rest for that serious of a wound.”

“Oh…” Cat paused in thought. “I’d rather have it done, then worrying about what will happen if we wait, but-” she emphasized, “you need more than just you four.”

“I can get Carver and Aveline to join us,” Hawke offered.

“Fenris?” Cat asked, looking up at him.

“I can return after taking you to the healer.”

Cat relaxed visibly, “If you take everyone, then yes, I would appreciate it. And remember our deal Issy.”

“Of course Kitty, have I ever let you down?”

Cat grinned back, as Isabela came forward and whispered, “Be sure to enjoy your time alone with
“Anders.”

Cat scowled, and batted at Isabela’s shoulder to get her away. “Not funny,” she muttered.

“Fenris, we’ll meet you at the hanged man, say in an hour?” Hawke said, and they split off, Isabela and Varric heading toward Lowtown, Hawke and Hafter towards Hightown to get Aveline, and Fenris with Cat in tow started walking towards Darktown.

“Thanks again for this, Fenris. I know you don’t like Anders, so I really appreciate it.”

Fenris grunted, which Cat took to mean, “no problem”. She was trying to come up with something else to talk about, when Fenris spoke instead.

“Do you remember the conversation we had when we first met?”

Cat, surprised, just nodded.

“While I do not believe you mean me or the others any harm, and you have been somewhat open about who you are…” his mild expression became a scowl, “but there are too many inconsistencies for me to believe what you say.”

“Wait, what?” Cat asked, confused.

“What does that mean, you think I’m a liar?”

“Much in the same way as the pirate, however while she does it for fun, or to keep people at a distance, you on the other hand, want to believe what you are saying and hope that others will do the same.”

Cat just blinked, her mouth agape as she tried to understand what exactly she was being accused of. “I am not a liar. I may omit details about my life, but I do not make things up to fill their place.” She started struggling against him, angry that he was still holding her gently as he demeaned her. “Let go of me.”

“Then if I ask you a question, will you answer it honestly?” He asked, ignoring her demand to be released from his hold.

“Why should I? You’ll just assume I am lying.”

“If you answer honestly, then I will believe you.”

Cat fumed, as she had to stop her movements because of the pain from her injury, and she had been unsuccessful in getting released. She didn’t comment, but Fenris took her silence as consent.

“What is your homeland like?”

Cat paused, debating answering him at all, then realizing that she wanted to tell someone something of her home, as she felt that it was slipping so far into memory that sometimes it no longer felt real.

“It was beautiful, lush and green in the summer, white with snow in the winter. My town was smaller, but there was a bigger city nearby, which had thousands of people. Life was…“ she paused as she sighed, “simple. We had a farm where I grew up, though mostly crops, not too many animals.” She sighed again, wigging a bit to get more comfortable. “My mother got a job in the city, and they sold the farm and we moved. It was much more hectic there, but I liked it also.”

Cat stared out ahead as they moved into the under city, she’d need to keep her senses about her so they didn’t get attacked.
“And the mages?” he asked hesitantly, which Cat wondered about, but mistook for the hatred and/or fear he felt towards them.

“There are no mages in my homeland,” she replied softly, feeling the jerk as his body tensed. “Because there is no magic.”

Fenris didn’t respond and Cat looked up at him. The look on his face was very scary, and she worried that he would at any time drop her and pull out his sword to slice her in half. So she did what she always did when nervous… she babbled.

“I mean, that’s not the only difference! There, we didn’t have to fight everyday. In fact we didn’t even carry weapons, I mean, the police did, er, the guards. But that is just to protect others. We grow up, go to school, get married, get jobs… that’s the norm back home. And, yeah in comparison, it’s kind of boring… but it’s nice to not worry about dying every day…” Cat waved her arms around animatedly as she talked, wanting to glace back to see if he still had that look on his face, but also not wanting to see it again if he did.

There was another uncomfortable silence, and Cat opened her mouth to speak again, but Fenris beat her to it. “And where is this land of yours?”

Cat deflated slightly, but was determined to tell the truth, hoping beyond hope that he wouldn’t kill her. “Not anywhere in Thedas, as far as I can tell. It feels like a completely different world… And, to top it off… sometimes I know things that will happen.” Cat winced as she said that, preparing for the worst, the silence between them seeming to last forever.

“All right.”

It wasn’t often that she was stunned speechless, but Cat couldn’t speak, just turned her head to gawk at Fenris. After a moment, she became coherent enough to croak out, “That’s it?”

He in turn glanced at her, amused. “You were wanting something else?”

“To be completely honest, I thought you wouldn’t believe me, think there was some kind of evil magic at work, and kill me. I have a hard believing it myself sometimes. How can anyone know what will happen in the future anyway? It’s crazy!”

“Right.” He kept an eye on her peripherally as he continued to walk.

“You are really not what I expected,” Cat said, the uncertainty evident in her voice.

“Hmph,” he grunted in reply.

“I mean, if I had been held captive by mages for that long, I’d probably not be able to trust anything that sounded like magic, or you know, want to destroy all mages or something.”

Cat wanted to face palm when her brain finally caught up to her mouth, and she avoided looking at Fenris in her embarrassment.

“Well…” He drawled. “Not ALL mages,” which had Cat glancing up at him. “Hawke is decent, I suppose. So far.”

Cat took in his smirk, and realized he was teasing her, and started giggling, just as they approached the clinic door. “Here,” she said between giggles as she reached out. “I’ll get that.”

“No need,” he replied, and lifting his leg, kicked the door open with a loud “BANG”. A few people
that were inside, quickly moved out of the way, afraid.

“Cat?! What happened?” Anders looked from her to Fenris, practically hissing, “What did you do?”

Cat jumped in, wanting to diffuse the situation. “Hi Anders! While Fenris could do as much damage as a dragon, this time, it was an actual dragon- out at the bone pit. Fenris insisted on bringing me here, though Hawke offered to heal me.” She spoke, as Fenris placed her sitting on a cot, all while glowering at Anders.

“What?!” Anders stopped his glaring contest with Fenris in order to grab Cat’s hand. She had not seen him look like this before, so serious… and angry? “Cat listen to me, until I tell you differently, never let Hawke heal you. Understand? NEVER.”

“Um… okay.” Cat was shocked as Anders’ face immediately brightened, and she almost wondered if she imagined it.

“Okay then, let’s see what we’ve got.”

Cat began lifting her shirt, with Anders helping her, to keep it from peeling her skin off as well. She felt movement, and lowered her arms slightly to look out over the fabric around her face. Fenris was now in front of her, and the way Anders was fixing his robes, he had obviously pushed Anders away. Fenris glared at her and growled out, “What are you doing?”

Cat had been in plenty of awkward positions before, but she couldn’t think of ever talking to someone who was angry with her, while her shirt was practically over her head. “Um… taking my shirt off?”

Fenris’ eyes narrowed. “I can see that. WHY?”

Cat’s eyes darted back and forth between the two men, very confused. “Because… that’s where the injury is?”

“Surely you can show the injury without completely baring yourself to him.” Cat finally understood, and turned red.

“It’s not like that-” she muttered.


“Of course,” Fenris replied, his eyebrow raised in mocking. “Then you won’t mind if she keeps her clothes on.”

Anders sighed, and came forward to Cat, helping her untangle her shirt from her arms. He helped adjust her position so that she was facing sideways, putting her burned side towards him, while Fenris stood nearby with his arms crossed.

“Ugh, why is he even here?” Anders asked under his breath.

“Because he insisted on bringing me here.” Cat replied sweetly. “This is waaaay to much drama for a simple burn. I’m starting to think I would have been fine with Hawke healing it.

“No.” Anders said quickly and with emphasis. “Remember what I told you.” He gave an exasperated sigh. “Just hold your shirt over the injury please, and turn this way slightly so I can see it better.”
Once the injury was healed, Cat realized that the others had been right. Not only was Anders exhausted from the effort, but so was she. Fenris watched as Anders helped her lay down, and pulled a blanket over her.

“Get some sleep Cat, you’re body needs time to rest.” She nodded in reply and Anders slowly made his way to his own room. Fenris came forward, and Cat asked, “Will you tell Issy to come see me tomorrow? So she can tell me about the foundry?”

“Certainly,” he said. “Goodbye Cat.”

“Bye Fenris” she said as she slipped into sleep.

* * * * *

About twenty minuted later, Fenris entered the Hanged Man, seeing Hawke sitting at a table with his brother, the guard captain, and the dwarf. He headed to the bar, seeing Isabela perched there.

“Cat requested a visit from you tomorrow, so she can hear about the foundry,” he told her, causing her to to smirk, which he didn’t really understand.

“Oh really? And she didn’t request you?” Isabela asked him.

“No, just you,” he responded, then turned to walk back to Hawke. He wanted to get this done with, and head back home.

“Is she okay?” Isabela asked, putting her arm through his as they walked.

He looked down at her arm, then back at her face as he replied. “Yes, she is healed and resting.”

“Good.” Isabela released him as they came up to the table. “Hawke, we’re all here, let’s get this over with.”

“Agreed. I’ll be glad to have this done.”

“What resistance are we expecting?” Aveline asked as they all stood to leave.

“According to Cat, a powerful necromancer who is responsible for several women that are missing,”

“I hesitate to ask how she knows all this…” Aveline commented. “As well as his hiding place.”

“We’re going off that evidence from that templar, Emeric.” Hawke replied, leading the way through the streets toward the foundry.

“Hmm.” Aveline responded, unconvinced. “I suppose it can’t hurt to investigate.”

“If there is a necromancer, we will destroy him.” Carver declared as he marched ahead to the building.

“Not so fast junior,” Varric said with a smile. “If there actually is a necromancer, it would be better if we had a plan, not just barging in.”

Hawke glanced at Carver, the displeasure evident on his face, and sighed. “Very well Carver, you
can go first. But—” he added quickly before Carver ran in, “you have to have a barrier.”

Carver’s expression soured, but finally he relented. Hawke moved his staff in a simple pattern, and the barrier sprung up around Carver, who immediately raced into the foundry. The others all went as well, but at a much slower, almost nonchalant pace.

“It’s so cute how he’s trying to be the hero,” Isabela commented, which had the others smirking.

“Too bad Cat doesn’t seem to want a hero,” Varric added.

“Wait, what?” Hawke asked.

“Please Hawke, you must have noticed,” Isabela said to him with a roll of her eyes.

“Noticed what, exactly?”

“Men…” Aveline huffed. “He’s been mooning over her since we met her, Hawke. Always trying to protect her, or walk next to her.”

Isabela lowered her voice so Carver wouldn’t hear them, though the way he was pushing through each room of the foundry, she doubted he was even paying attention. “Or coming to the Rose whenever he can…”

“WHAT?”

“Oh, really…..?”

Varric and Hawke glanced at each other, not really understanding the others’ reaction. “He’s a grown man, Hawke, you can hardly blame him for pursuing a beautiful woman.”

“It isn’t that,” Hawke muttered. “I just don’t want him making her uncomfortable or anything.”

Isabela laughed, “She can handle herself Hawke, no need to fret.” Her smile turned sly. “Unless there’s another reason you don’t want men pursuing her?” Her eyebrows wiggled in suggestion.

“Of course not.” Hawke quickly shut her down. “I’m just looking after my team, that’s all. I would hate to lose the two of you because my brother made untoward advances. And besides, she’s not the type of woman to bring home to mother, is she.”

“I wouldn’t worry,” Isabela replied, ignoring the comment as she turned to head after Carver. There were here for a reason after all. “She doesn’t pick up on most of what he’s doing, and what she does, she ignores.”

The group continued forward, further into the foundry, only to be stopped as Carver came back to them.

“This is the only thing I’ve found,” he said, handing a ring over to Hawke.

“It looks Orlesian,” Varric commented.

“Indeed. Perhaps Ninette’s ring? Ghislain did say it was Orlesian.” He mused a little more, then asked Carver, “Where did you find it?”

Carver gestured with a nod toward an open doorway. “Right there in the doorway,” he stopped Hawke as he made to move, “on a severed hand.”
The group looked at him curiously. “Really?” Hawke asked. “Just a hand?”

Carver nodded. “Can’t find a trace of anything else.”

“Well, let’s have our experts take a look,” Hawke said, motioning for Isabela and Varric to take the lead.

The others stood back as Varric and Isabela entered the hallway, walking slowly, their eyes looking at every odd colored piece of wall or floor, looking for anything hidden in plain sight.

Isabela took her time, but she knew exactly where she should be looking. Cat had given enough detail, that she knew this hallway was where she would find the trap door to a hidden underground passage. She was suddenly very glad Cat insisted that they bring the others. Isabela was fairly certain now… they would be facing a necromancer.

She made her way to the corner, calling out for Fenris to help move the barrels and sacks that were placed there. She grabbed the top of a sack, and prepared to heave the heavy thing away, and almost fell over as she pulled.

“What’s wrong?” Hawke asked, as she righted herself.

“It’s not heavy at all,” she replied. She grabbed her dagger and split it open, looking in at the tufts of wool that was inside.

“That’s strange, why would this be here?” Varric asked as he came over to look inside the sack. “It’s fluffed out in order to take up more space in the sack.”

“To make it look heavier,” Isabela replied. She glanced over at Fenris with a questioning look.

“The same,” he answered. “These barrels are empty.”

“This doesn’t make any sense.” Varric complained. “Why store empty barrels and light sacks to look full in this corner? It’s not like there is a trap door or anything.”

“Wait, there’s not?” Isabela looked over where he stood.

“Not that I can see.” He answered, looking perplexed. “Were you expecting there to be one?”

She smiled as she did some quick thinking. “Wouldn’t you, after seeing this stacked here?”

Varric nodded. “Good point.”

Hawke joined them then. “If there isn’t anything here, then we need to search the other rooms.”

“No,” Isabela replied, still searching the walls in the corner. “It’s here. This isn’t some misdirection, it is just very well hidden. But I will find it.”

“You are certain it is here?” Fenris asked her.

“Yes.”

“How?”

“I just know,” she replied. The others kept talking around her, and Varric eventually gave it up as well. Isabela however refused to leave, knowing she would find a way in. This man thought he would never be found, but she would prove him wrong.
You can't handle the truth

Isabela ignored the protests around her, focusing only on the problem at hand. She knew where the trap door should open, but she was having an immeasurably hard time finding it. If it was any other situation, she would have denied there being a door there.

She looked behind her, seeing the scowls of her companions, and immediately putting that out of her head. If I wanted to have a trap door that was basically invisible… she thought.

She suddenly whirléd around, an idea so simple she wondered why they didn’t think of it. “Varric? If you wanted to conceal a door from prying eyes, how would you do it?” she asked, as she continued to run her hands along the walls in front of her.

“Me, Rivaini? I’d hide the switch far…from…” he stopped as he realized what she was suggesting. “You’ve got to be kidding me.”

“Unfortunately not,” she responded. “We’ve been looking for something advanced, but it’s really so simple.”

“I’m not following,” Hawke called out.

Varric turned to explain, while Isabela kept searching. “Basically Hawke, whoever built this door, made it with an extremely simple catch. The trigger is far from the door, so that if anyone found the switch, they wouldn’t notice the door.”

“Got it!” Isabela called, and everyone looked over to see a large piece of the floor slightly raised in the corner of the room. Isabela walked back over, and pulled up on the door gently, searching for a trap. “The barrels and the sacks kept the door from being visible if the switch was activated,” she explained. “No one would be able to find this, if they didn’t know what to look for.”

She noticed the appraising looks, and smirked at the others. “I knew there had to be something. I couldn’t go back to Kitty empty handed. I promised.”

She could tell they each wanted to ask questions, so she started walking down the steps under the hidden door. “You guys coming, or am I doing this alone?” She asked, and turning, headed down.

They took it slowly, hardly making any noise, with either Isabela or Varric in the lead to disarm traps. After an hour, Hawke called a break.

“I cannot believe how many traps there are,” Hawke commented quietly, as he stroked Hafter’s head.

“Definitely paranoid,” Varric agreed.

“With good reason,” Aveline added. “After the body parts we found, I’m ready to tear this man apart. He doesn’t deserve to be taken in.”

“There’s no way to tell how many women he’s killed, since all there was were pieces,” Carver added morosely. “I’m suddenly glad we don’t have women with us.”

Everyone’s eyes turned to him, and not realizing his mistake, he asked, ”what?”

“I’m sure Aveline and Rivaini have something to say to that, but we should move on, or we’ll be
“Yes, let’s go before Aveline or Isabela kill my brother for his thoughtless words,” Hawke replied dryly, earning a smirk from both women as they stood up. Carver looked from Garrett to Hafter, the confusion evident. Hafter gave him a look, then looked over to the two women and back again. Garrett tried to keep from laughing as his dog rolled his eyes at his brother. It took another minute, but Carver finally understood, and started sputtering.

“Well, obviously I didn’t mean you two…” Carver tried to explain, but he was silenced with a look from all the others, and just huffed and muttered under his breath.

* * * * *

Cat sat up and watched as Anders escorted the last of his patients outside, and with a wave of his hand extinguished the lantern hanging outside the clinic.

“I’m sorry to intrude in your home Anders,” Cat said again.

He smiled tiredly at her, but she could see it was genuine. “Cat how many times do I have to say it? I’m happy to have you here.”

“I know, I just feel like I’m imposing…” she replied with a frown.

He came over to her, lifting her head with his hand under her chin. “You’re not imposing. I’m glad you’re here, and you can stay as long as you need to,” he said softly.

“Thanks,” she replied, returning his smile. She noticed him hesitating, like he wanted to say something. “What is it?” she asked.

“Look, I do not really know how to say this, so I suppose I will just be blunt, and hopefully if I offend, you will forgive me.”

“Whoa, okay. That’s not ominous at all.” Cat scrutinized his face, but only saw the worry and hesitation. “Anders, I can’t promise not to get upset, but I promise I’ll forgive you.”

That seemed to settle his mind, and he stepped back from her. She looked at him, confused as his cheeks went pink, and he started pacing back and forth. “Uh, Cat… I mean, I wanted to ask… that is…”

“Anders, just spit it out.”

“Are you really working at the Blooming Rose?” he blurted, looking in her eyes. He immediately blushed brighter, and hid his head in his hands. “I’m sorry,” she heard, though it was hard to make out from behind his hands.

“I’m afraid you’ll have to be more specific, Anders. You’ve already heard me say I work there,” she replied though she was smiling slightly with hope.

Anders sighed hugely, hoping she would just understand, so he didn’t need to elaborate. “I know I’ve told you before, I feel protective of you, Cat. You’re like my good friend and my little sister all rolled into one. And while I find it hard to believe that you are selling yourself… “ he broke off at
her sudden grin, uncertain of why she was smiling at him. “… if… if that is the truth, then I can only in good conscience insist that you let us help you find another job. You deserve so much better than that life.”

His tirade over, he grabbed her hand. “Please tell me,” he asked. “I do not like this feeling of failing you, if it is true.”

Cat couldn’t stop grinning, even when she tried. She knew, _she knew!_ True friends wouldn’t just accept rumors. She felt vindicated in her earlier anger and disappointment. She stood slowly, and gave Anders a hug.

“Of course I don’t sell myself, silly. You saw me, I couldn’t even take my shirt off for a healer without blushing.”

Anders returned her grin with one of his own. “I must admit, it had me perplexed.”

“Thank you so much for asking. When Varric made a comment the other day, and I realized that that was what everyone thought, I was so upset.”

“Well, to be fair, you did tell us you were working there. What else would we think?”

“I guess…” Cat put her chin in her hand, staring across the clinic in thought. “Oh! I guess I’ll have to swear you to secrecy, just like Varric.”

“What? Why?”

“Because Madame Lisene asked me to say that I do work there now. Apparently people are asking for me? I don’t really get it, but, I said I would.”

“Asking for you? As in wanting your services? Are you crazy? What happens when they find out they can never have you?”

“Madam says that only her special clients get to see me, and there are no special clients, so everything is fine.”

“You actually think it is a good idea to keep pretending you work there?”

Cat nodded with a grin. “Yep.”

“No, it’s ridiculous! And you could get hurt, or worse.”

“Anders… please??” Cat employed all her wiles, uncertain though she was that she had any. But she stuck out her bottom lip, and tried to look like she was going to cry.

“You cannot really think that will work on me, do you?” He asked skeptically.

“Argh!” She huffed in frustration. “Please Anders, I’m asking as a friend.”

“That’s really all you had to say,” he replied. “Of course. But!” He added before she could cheer, “the moment something goes wrong with this whole plan, we find you a different job. Agreed?”

“Uh,” Cat thought quickly, but didn’t see a down side. “Agreed.”

“Good.” Anders nodded, then gestured for Cat to get back into bed. “You still need to rest, so your body can heal.”
“Okay, but can we still talk? Or if you’re tired, that’s okay.”

“No, that would be fine,” he replied, looking around the clinic. “How about we move your cot into my room though? That way we can both rest while we talk.”

“Oh!” Cat jumped up enthusiastically, and instantly regretted it. She held her hands to her head as it swam. Anders helped to steady her during her dizziness, and clucked his tongue at her.

“You need to take it easy Cat. Just because the wound is healed doesn’t mean you are back to full health.”

“Yeah, sorry.” Cat put her arms down, as the dizziness passed and nausea took it’s place. “Wow, I didn’t feel this bad when we first met and you healed that cut in my leg.”

Anders started hefting her cot to his room. “Actually, you probably did and just slept through it. That is what most people do after a more complicated healing.” He set up the cot in his room, though across the room from his own. While he didn’t care, and she most likely didn’t either, he didn’t want anyone thinking he was taking advantage of her… or worse.

He helped her get situated, then sat sideways on his own cot, his back against the wall. “So? What should we talk about?”

“Hmm, well, I didn’t really have a topic in mind. I just wasn’t sleepy after the nap I just had.”

“All right. How about we learn more about each other then? While I feel a definite affinity for you, there are many things I do not know. I am sure you feel the same about me?”

“Oh, um, yes of course.” Anders gave her a questioning glance, before turning and flopping down to lay on his cot. Cat did the same, laying on her back to look up at the ceiling. Fenris seemed to take it pretty well… maybe Anders can handle it too? She thought.

“Cat?”


“They must be pretty deep thoughts then. Care to share?”

Cat went silent again as she gathered her thoughts together. “Anders… have you ever heard of people using magic… to travel great distances?”

“Anders, also lying on his back, looked over as he demonstrated, spreading his hands apart, then mimicking a folding motion bring the two back to together. “The mage can then travel from the first to the second point in a single step.”

“Could the mage do this for someone else?” Cat asked.

“Like bringing someone else along? I am not certain, though it certainly seems plausible.”

“No… I mean, could the mage place the fade point in front of someone else? Causing them to cross a great distance without realizing it? Finding themselves somewhere completely foreign, not knowing how it happened?”

Anders sat back up, and turning, faced her. “I… cannot say.” He pulled the tie from his hair, shaking
it out and returning to his back. “Though I must admit this is sounding less and less like a hypothetical question, Cat. Can you not share your burden with me?”

Cat turned her head to see Anders looking back at her. He looked at her with such concern and caring, her face brightened slightly. “I want to… I just worry.”

“If you are concerned that I will tell others, let me assure you that I will not.”

“No, that’s not it. I’m more worried that you’ll think I’m crazy, or worse, under some sort of spell.” Anders’ eyebrow winged up at that.

“Perhaps I can relieve your anxiety,” he replied with a wink. “I already know you are not under a spell. I found no trace of magic on you, besides my own. And besides that, I find you to be an honest and logical woman. If you tell me something is true, I will not dismiss it out of hand.”

Cat gazed at him, scrutinizing his intentions before finally relenting, and laying back again with a sigh. “Fine, but don’t say I didn’t warn you.”

“Very well.”

Cat started at the beginning, telling him of how she woke up in Antiva, finding herself in different clothes, in an alleyway in a foreign land. She didn’t give any specifics of Zevran, the months and months of keeping secrets was now practically ingrained, and she wanted to focus on her travel, not her previous companions.

“Wait.”

Cat stopped mid-sentence, looking over at Anders.

“So what part of Thedas are you from then? You woke in Antiva, but how far did you travel?”

Cat steeled herself. It’s now or never. “I’m… not exactly sure.”

Anders’ head turned to her as well. “You don’t know where you are from?”

Cat shook her head. “No, I know where I’m from. I’m not sure where it is located in relation to Thedas.”

Anders brow lowered for a moment in confusion, then his eyes widened as he realized what she implied.

“Are you telling me that you are from somewhere outside of Thedas?”

Cat looked at him, keeping her eyes steady as she nodded.

“Cat, that… that’s just not possible.” His voice lowered until he was practically whispering. He looked concerned. “Are you certain about this?” he asked, somewhat skeptically.

“As certain as I am that you’re a Grey Warden.”

“Wha-?” Anders looked at her, shocked. “Oh. Hawke must have told you.” He lay back down, confusion and curiosity warring in him. “Right?” He asked, looking back at her again.

“Sorry, but no.” She held out a hand, as he looked about to bolt up again, and she remained calm, speaking low to keep him calm as well. “There is no good way to explain, so I’ll just tell you bluntly.”
“All right…”

Cat used the same explanation she used with Zevran, speaking of a story, its cast of characters, including Hawke and his troupe.

“Let me see if I understand this…” Anders asked sounding exhausted again. “You know all of us, things about us that we don’t know about each other even.” She nodded. “From a story you heard in your homeland, which is some unknown distance from here.” Cat nodded again. “And in the most likely scenario, you somehow travelled here magically, though you don’t know how because magic doesn’t exist where you are from.”

“Yes.”

“I…” Anders pinched the bridge of his nose, then rubbed his forehead as if to get rid of a headache. “I am sure you can understand how… fantastic this all sounds?”

“Yes, I do.”

“Well, that’s something at least,” he murmured.

“But sometimes, we have to take some things on faith, believing in others. Not unlike the Warden Commander conscripting you. He had no reason not to believe the Knight Captain, but he went with his gut.”

He looked at her in surprise, then turned back, gazing at the ceiling. She stayed quiet, knowing he was thinking through everything, and needed time.

His eyes came back to hers, and his face was sad, and guilty, she thought. “Cat, I think… I need to sleep on this. It’s not that I don’t believe you! It is just a… lot to take in.”

“Oh, well yeah! I mean, of course!” Cat stared as hard as she could at the ceiling, telling herself to not be hurt or disappointed. How could Fenris believe me and Anders not?

“You haven’t told anyone else this… have you?” he asked tentatively.

“Oh of course not,” she replied without looking at him.

“All right,” he responded quietly. “Let’s get some sleep, okay? Things will look better in the morning.”

Instead of replying, Cat turned to face the wall, so that Anders couldn’t see her face. She was determined to not be upset, but found that she was merely disappointed. He didn’t say he DIDN’T believe me, she told herself. He just needs time to process it all. But however she spun it in her head, she couldn’t help feeling let down.

After she finished brooding, tossing and turning for what seemed like hours, Cat got up off her cot. She looked over at Anders, seeing he was fast asleep, and hearing his soft snores every so often. She looked around the room, realizing that she just wanted to be home, and she wasn’t sure exactly where that was.
Previously...

Hawke took his brother, his mabari, Varric, Isabela, Fenris and Aveline to the foundry. Just when they had been about to give up, Isabela uncovered the secret passage underneath the building, and the group descended to find the necromancer. The amount of traps discovered, and all his preparations to stay hidden mean nothing as the group make their way to his hideaway.

Garrett put up his hand, signaling to stop, keeping silent as he looked at Hafter- his hackles were most definitely up. He turned his head, gesturing to his mabari for the others. They all looked to Hafter, then braced themselves for whatever may be waiting for them in the next room.

Isabela moved silently forward, sneaking forward to look into the room from the mouth of the tunnel they were in. She moved backward just as stealthily, walking several steps before turning and coming back to them. They all came close, listening as she whispered.

“It looks like he’s made himself a home here. It is a large room, with bedroom furniture, a table, some bookshelves…”

“Is he in there?” Varric asked just as quietly, receiving a glance, then a nod.

“At the table in the middle. He looks like he’s studying a book, taking notes.”

“And the problem?” Aveline whispered, getting a shocked look. “Obviously you’d have just killed him unless there was a problem,” she replied with a smirk.

Isabela nodded again tersely. “The drop Is too high, and the staircase looks trapped.”

“So if we sneak down the stairs we still have to worry about the traps, and the chance of having the element of surprise is out the window.” Varric said, annoyed. “Can’t I just shoot him from the doorway?”

“It’s not a great shot, furniture in the way.”

“And a blood mage that is bleeding will be an even harder kill,” Fenris added quietly.

They were all silent for a minute, trying to think of a foolproof plan. Finally Hawke gestured to get their attention.

“I’ll create a distraction, you get down the stairs in one piece, then take him down before he kills me.”

Carver rolled his eyes. “We don’t need you acting the hero, we need a good plan.”

However, the others didn’t agree, or simply saw the determined- or one might say crazy- look in Hawke’s eyes. They readied their weapons, standing in a line behind Varric and Isabela, ready to
rush in once the stairs were clear.

“Good luck,” Aveline said, touching his shoulder. “Hafter, with me.” Hafter looked to Garrett, who gestured with a nod toward Aveline, then fell in beside the warrior. Fenris took his place in front of her, his position making better use of his speed. As Carver made to go ahead of her as well, Aveline gave him a dry look, that had him scowling, but returning to the back.

Isabela and Varric stood in front of Fenris, several feet away from the entrance to the room ahead, waiting to move once Hawke started his distraction. They watched as Hawke looked to be having a silent conversation with himself.

In actuality, Hawke was going through his repertoire of spells, determining the best course of action. He needed to have something to gain the complete focus of the other mage so that his friends could flank the man, while still keeping himself from major injury.

A wild thought grabbed his attention, and turning to the others, gave his friends a saucy wink. There was several different reactions, ranging from curiosity- Isabela, anticipation- Varric, indifference- Fenris, exasperation- Aveline and Hafter, and anger- Carver.

Hawke quickly placed a barrier around himself, then ran forward, bellowing at the top of his lungs. “I’LL KILL YOU, YOU BASTARD!!!!” He barreled forward, getting to the entrance and continuing, jumping off the edge towards the middle of the room. He watched with glee, as the man stood in shock, unable to react to the sudden intrusion. That’s right, focus on me, Hawke thought as the ground came at him.

The barrier crashed as he landed, and he tucked his large frame in, rolling to prevent injury, though he had most certainly earned more than a few bruises as he hit. He rolled into the bed, striking his head on the base.

“Ugh,” he grunted, standing, though with difficulty. His vision swam, and he shook his head to clear it. He was happily surprised that it worked, and he looked up at the older man, just as a stonefist came barreling into his stomach, and he fell again, groaning at the pain.

“What is the meaning of this? Who are you?” The man glared down at Hawke, his anger curling his lip into a sneer. “How did you get here?” he demanded.

“Jumped,” Hawke wheezed cheekily. “I mean, you saw that, right?” The other mage brought a dagger from his robe, threatening him without speaking. “The name’s Hawke. And you are?”

“You came here without knowing? Are you some petty thief then?”

“No. I meant what I said. I’m here to kill you. I just thought it would be good to have a name to give the guards.”

“Quentin. Though it will do you little good. You’ll never leave here.”

Hawke stood slowly, staring at Quentin, and pulled out his staff. “You give all mages a bad name. Killing women wasn’t enough? You had to cut them into pieces to satisfy your twisted agenda?”

“You know nothing.” Quentin spat at him. “You do not know my suffering, my pain. You know nothing of my power, or the glorious work I am undertaking!”

“Yeah, not interested,” Hawke replied with plenty of snark. “Although I’m fairly certain there’s nothing glorious of a necromancer’s power over the dead.”
Quentin smiled creepily, and Hawke eyed it with distaste. “As I suspected, you do not understand. I suppose that is something I can grant you before I kill you. Listen carefully.” Hawke’s distaste was still evident, but he had to admit he was curious. “Necromancy is not the power over the dead, it is the power over death itself.”

“Oh really?” Hawke asked sarcastically, slightly disappointed, though he figured it made sense the crazy necromancer didn’t have world shattering secrets. “So what, after I kill you, you’ll come back to life?”

“You mock, but you only show your ignorance.”

“Oh please, enlighten me,” Hawke answered with a grin, aiming his staff at the other mage. He felt something hit him, and pushed forward with his own spell, watching in dismay as his bolt of energy went wide, completely missing Quentin.

“Wha-?” he said, looking down at himself to ensure he wasn’t hurt, though he felt no pain. He saw the glyph glowing green around his feet, and he quickly moved to avoid it, and was dismayed when it stayed with him.

“You cannot escape from my misdirection hex!” Quentin cackled at him. He waved his arms, casting another spell, and Hawke could see the purplish cloud around him, recognizing the siphoning cloud. He could feel his mana being pulled away, and he moved back, quickly casting a spell to dispell magic.

Quentin continued to smile, and Hawke was thoroughly creeped out. “I do not need your mana to finish you,” he called to Hawke, casting a spell at him. Hawke quickly released a defensive spell, groaning in dismay when he instinctively sent it behind himself instead of in front. He watched as Quentin’s spell hit him, and he fell to his knees.

Hawke yelled out, unsure of what was happening. He could feel the damage he was taking to his body, but even worse, the images that he was seeing… as if every terrible, despicable thing that he had ever done, or even witnessed was combined in some sort of horrific reality in his mind. He grabbed his head, trying to get rid of the images, the voices, but being unable to do anything but scream.

“Hawke!!” Varric yelled, sending his triplet of bolts to the chest of the other man, annoyed when they were deflected off a barrier, but running to Hawke.

“Release him!” Aveline called to Quentin, her sword and shield at the ready to run him through.

“Ah, so you didn’t come alone after all? Clever to keep me unaware.” he gloated to Hawke’s shaking form.

His gloating turned to pain as a great sword crashed through his barrier, and twin daggers found their mark in his back. He retreated swiftly before these two could cut him again. His hand raised from his back, looking at the red staining his fingers, then turning his eyes to the intruders, he smiled.

“Now you die.”

Hawke stood shakily, the spell no longer in effect, but the lingering effects of the hex still evident. The others rallied to him, giving him the boost he needed. He glanced to each side, then down as Hafter licked his hand. He raised his staff, pointing it at Quentin. “I don’t like it when other people steal my lines,” he growled.

“Now you’ve done it,” Carver said as he rolled his eyes. “Now he’ll say killing you is a matter of
“Truer words have never been spoken, brother,” Hawke grinned at Carver, before returning to face Quentin. “Shall we?”

Quentin scowled, and brought up a stronger barrier, fueled by his own blood. Several shades appeared, and Hawke’s group scattered to take them on. Quentin watched in disgust as not only Hawke, but a few of the others kept a commentary with the shades, or with himself as they fought through the horde. He found himself getting nervous as he heard them tell him how they would destroy him once they reached him.

He pulled again and again from his wounds, powering spell after spell, and summoning all the help he could. He would not be stopped here! He MUST finish his work! The noise of battle became dimmer, and Quentin could feel himself losing the strength to fuel his barrier. He let it fade as he gave everything to end the intruders.

He panted, smiling as his spell hit them, stopping them in their tracks, petrified where they stood—through their blood, and none too soon, as they were all coming directly to him. He limped over to the leader, raising his dagger slowly, the loss of blood almost dragging him to the floor.

“You tried to stop my work, so you must die. My beloved will live again, I just have to find her… scattered as she is…” His breath came slowly, and his anger grew as he looked at the people who almost stopped him.

He raised the dagger high, and smiled at Hawke. “Goodbye.”

And froze.

“Sorry to interrupt,” Isabela purred in his ear. She twisted her dagger, as she stabbed in and upwards to hit his heart. “Kitty gives her regards.”

She yanked her dagger back, watching as his body crumbled to the floor. She followed his gaze, over to a painting hanging on the wall.

“My…. Be…lov….ed.”

She watched, until he stopped breathing, then reached down to search him for anything valuable. She glanced over as the others moved themselves off the ground where they fell once his spell had worn off, though they came together to sit and rest from their fight.

Isabela came over, and joined them, sitting with her back to an armoire. “I’m suddenly wishing we had brought Anders with us as well,” she commented as she found a bandage for the large claw mark wounds on her arm.

“I could—”

“No,” Everyone replied.

Hawke scowled. “You did not ALL have to answer, you know.”

“Once Anders clears you for healing, I’ll be more than happy to let you, sweet thing,” Isabela replied, giving Hawke a wink. “But I really don’t want to end up like that slaver in the alienage.” She shivered as she recalled the incident.
“That was an accident,” Hawke whined. “Why can’t you just let that go?”

“That’s not easily let go.” Fenris commented dryly.

“But…”

“Hawke.” Aveline’s voice rang out, and had Hawke looking over. “You have to let these things go.”

He promptly scowled again, and the scowl grew as the rest of his group laughed.

After a moment, Varric changed the topic. “So, if I heard correctly, that” he gestured towards Quentin’s body, “was killing women to find pieces of his dead, uh, wife? And piecing her back together to then bring back to life? Did I get that right?”

“That’s what it sounded like to me,” Hawke agreed, as Hafter came and laid beside him, putting his head in Hawke’s lap. “Though I have to admit, there is something… familiar… about the woman in that painting.”

“I agree, it’s eerie,” Carver nodded and replied. “She almost looks like Mother.”

* * * *

Cat knew she shouldn’t have left. Anders was going to freak out when he woke to find her gone, but she needed fresh air—something she couldn’t really find in Darktown. Inside the clinic, she had felt suffocated, depressed, and disappointed that Anders hadn’t reacted as she had wanted, which made sleep impossible. However, as she walked through the quiet corridors, she understood that his reluctance to take what she had said at face value showed that he was considering the possibility, he just hadn’t accepted it as yet.

* * * *

Cat turned the corner, passing by a group of men on her way to the large staircase out of Darktown. She did a double take at the man in the lead, feeling like she should recognize him, and it continued to bother her as she climbed the stairs slowly, still feeling a little sore from her injury. She concentrated so hard on remembering, that she didn’t hear the men turn and follow her, not until a bag went over her head, and she was pulled off her feet and carried away.

* * * *

Anders threw open the door of the Hanged Man, practically toppling over a table, but catching himself in time. He frantically looked in the main room, and not seeing Hawke, hurried to the stairs, and coming up to Varric’s room, pounded on the door.

He fidgeted, intertwining his fingers, trying not to panic or break the door down as he waited for it to
open. Aveline opened the door, and Anders simply pushed by her in order to get into the room. He rushed over to Hawke as soon as he saw him seated at the table in Varric’s main room, calling out, “Hawke!”

Hawke was sitting to Varric’s right, who was at his usual place at the head of the table. Carver, Isabela, and Fenris sat with mugs in front of them, and Aveline returned behind him, sitting back in her seat. They each glanced his way, looking annoyed, though Anders couldn’t tell if it was because of him specifically, or just because of the interruption. Not that that would stop him.

“Anders! Sit down, celebrate with us!”

“Celebrate?” Anders asked, momentarily confused.

“Yes,” Carver added snidely. “We made sure that mage will never hurt anyone again.”

Anders glanced at Carver, the feeling of injustice surging within him, wanting to be released, but he pushed it back down, focusing on why he was here.

“I can’t Hawke, I need you. All of you! Cat is missing!”

There was a moment of complete silence, before Anders was bombarded with questions, insults, and accusations, everyone except Varric standing, and using wild arm movements to accentuate their comments, and then to top it off, Hafter began howling loudly.

Not moments later, they all had their hands over their ears to keep Hafter’s howl from bursting their eardrums. Hawke quickly gave Hafter a nudge with his foot, to indicate he could take it from there, and Hafter stopped and sat watching, in case he needed to intervene again.

"All right everyone, first things first," Hawke stated, leaning forward with his hands on the table, looking at Anders. "In as few words as possible, what happened?"

“I made her a bed, and we both went to sleep. I woke up, and she was gone,” Anders said, his voice steady, but he was quickly losing his calm. “The blankets were folded, so she left voluntarily from the clinic, however, she wasn’t home, and no one that I spoke to between Darktown and Lowtown had seen her.”

“We’re wasting time,” Carver said gruffly. “We need to go back to Darktown, see if we can pick up her trail.”

“She isn’t an animal trying to evade hunters, Carver,” Hawke replied.

“Maybe not Hawke,” Isabela interrupted. “But she knows how to leave a trail for friends to find. We should look.”

“We can ask around while they are doing that,” Varric suggested to Hawke.

Hawke looked at his crew, each of them had already finished their drinks, grabbed their weapons and coats and were prepared to leave. He looked at Hafter, gesturing him to the door, and said, “It seems our night is not over. Let’s go.”
Cat continued to struggle, though there wasn’t much she could do when she was being carried over someone’s shoulder, her limbs tied, and a sack over her head. She focused her energy on her breathing, staying calm, and using her senses to try to pinpoint where she was.

She waited, biding her time, since there was hardly any noise besides the men walking, and the only thing she could smell was the sack currently covering her face, and she frankly wished she could smell less of that. She couldn’t quite decide if the sack was used for dirty laundry or maybe something that had died, because it completely reeked.

After a time, she was roughly dropped down, landing painfully on her wrist, since her hands were tied behind her back. She groaned in pain, and rocked to get into a sitting position. Someone grabbed her shoulder, yanking her upright, and she felt a wall at her back, leaning against it as best as she could. She could hear the men around her laughing and talking now, and very quietly to her right, she heard what sounded like crying.

The sack was pulled from her face, and Cat winced, blinking to adjust her eyes to the well-lit room. She looked around slowly, noting how the men ignored her, even the one who had pulled off the sack, had thrown it on the ground and was walking away without speaking.

She looked to her right, and noticed a girl, probably in her late teens, wearing what Cat liked to think of as “standard mage attire”. The simple robes, with the ornate woven belt, shoes that looked more like house slippers, and the cowl. She didn’t see the appeal, especially with the purple feather adorning the top, standing up from her forehead. How anyone thought they hid the fact they were a mage dressed like this was shocking.

“Hello,” Cat said quietly. “Are you all right?”

The girl looked up at her, her eyes darting from Cat’s face, to the men around them, and back. “You shouldn’t talk, they’ll punish you,” she whispered back.

“I’m Cat,” she replied with a smile. “If we whisper, and keep looking forward, they won’t notice that we’re talking.” There was a pause, but Cat turned her face forward, to prove her point.

“Olivia,” finally came the response, though it was so quiet, Cat could barely hear it herself.

“Do you know where we are?” Cat asked.

“No, but I heard some of them talking about getting rid of us soon.”

Cat kept silent as a couple of men walked past, somewhat closely. Once they had moved past them, she whispered again. “So, do you know who they are, or what they want with us?”

She could see in her peripheral vision Olivia’s surprise, as she turned to gape at Cat, though she quickly hid her expression, and turned back to look forward. “They… are slavers. We’ve already been sold to them, and will be sold again.”

Cat’s eyes narrowed, and she looked again at the men around her. Little things began to make more sense, especially why the man she had passed in Darktown looked so familiar. The robes, the cowl with a big centerpiece that made it look like he had horns growing from his head… and the large handlebar mustache. Dan… something.
Cat could recall the quest with clarity now, questioning the slavers in Darktown, trying to find Feynriel, the half elf who didn’t want to go to the circle, and was sold into slavery while trying to make his way out of the city.

The people they were with now, seemed like the middle men. *Wasn’t there some sort of captain, who kept them in a building by the docks?* Cat thought to herself. Her eyes moved back to Olivia, as she remembered the mage girl who was there, who tried to run and eventually… turned into an abomination rather than be captured. The mage girl who left behind a note, that they took to her father, Thrask.

Cat closed her eyes then, thinking furiously. *There’s no doubt that Issy will come, the question is when, and with who?* If she could be sure of either, she could make a more concrete plan, however her first priority was now keeping Olivia from desperation- for Isabela’s sake as much as Olivia’s.

A burly man came in the building, and began walking toward them, followed by several others. Cat quickly spoke, no longer caring if they saw her speaking. She turned to head to look at Olivia.

“Olivia, no matter what, just stay with me, okay? They don’t want to hurt us, because then they won’t get as much money. My friends will get us out of here, we just have to play along for now, okay? Trust me.”

Olivia watched the men coming nearer, her face showing her fear.

“Olivia!” Cat hissed, breaking through, and getting her attention. “It will be okay, stay calm. I’m here with you.”

The men were on them now, one of them cutting the ropes from their feet, and pulling them up standing. The man who was obviously in charge stepped forward and backhanded Cat across the face. It hurt like hell, and Cat was wincing as she tried to look at him.

“I’m fine Olivia, just stay calm,” she said evenly, though she couldn’t see Olivia now.

“You’ve got balls, girl.” Cat looked back at the man, his smirk wasn’t one of amusement, and she could tell he wanted to keep hitting her. He refrained, probably in order to get a bigger payday. “You two come along without trouble, and you won’t be harmed. Otherwise…” he raised his hand again, and Cat unwillingly flinched. “Got it?”

“I understand,” Cat replied. “My friend is a little skittish, so if you keep her near me, it will help keep her calm. Mages can be unpredictable when upset.”

The man looked back and forth between the two women, not trusting the loud one, but the younger one definitely looked… off. It couldn’t hurt to keep them near each other. The older one was obviously not a mage, and the younger looked scared enough to not try anything.

“Tie them together, and get going. You have until dawn.” he shouted at his men as he walked off. “Oh,” he stopped, looking back. “and I won’t accept less than fifty sovereigns for the three of them.”

* * * * *

Hawke watched as Anders paced in front of his clinic, berating himself quietly as he walked. Hawke didn’t like that the man was blaming himself. Obviously Cat had left on her own, and it wasn’t as if
Anders had been tasked to keep her there.

“Anders, you need to stop, this isn’t your fault,” Hawke said as he halted Anders’ pacing with a hand on his arm.

“How can you say that? She was under my care, and now she’s gone!” After the shout, Anders deflated and added more quietly, “who else is there to blame?”

“I agree,” Fenris added in, from his spot behind them, leaning against the wall. They were waiting for news from Carver and Isabela as they searched for a trail.

“Not helping,” Hawke said with a turn of his head to Fenris, who shrugged. He turned back to Anders. “Cat is a grown woman, and she decided to leave. That’s hardly your fault.”

Anders face crumbled further into despair, as he scrubbed his hands over his face. “You don’t understand…”

“So, help me then.”

Anders looked at Hawke, noting again how noble he could seem. He truly is a man of many faces, going from a jester, to a cunning rogue, a mighty warrior, a fellow mage who understood his need to rebel against the chantry. All in all, a good man to know, and call friend.

“We were talking… and…” he stopped, unable to share details of what was most definitely a private conversation. Cat had confided in him, he couldn’t break that trust.

“And?” Hawke asked.

“I upset her. I didn’t agree with her, and I could tell she was upset about it. I suggested we go to bed, and we could speak more in the morning. Then I woke up in the middle of the night, and she had left.”

“So?”

“What do you mean, so? Obviously I upset her enough that she felt she had to leave.”

Hawke rolled his eyes at his friend. The man could twist anything to fit his own point of view. “Or… she could have wanted to think about your side of things. Or, she couldn’t sleep and didn’t want to wake you, so she went for a walk. Or any number of other possibilities. A simple disagreement doesn’t make this your fault.”

Hawke grabbed his shoulders to make Anders look at him. “Would Cat just leave the city, leave Isabela, because of your disagreement?”

“No.” That was one thing Anders could be certain of, and so was Fenris, if the snort they heard was anything to go by.

“Then the reason we can’t find her is…?”

“Someone took her.” Immediately after saying this, Anders finally understood what Hawke was trying to get him to see. Even if Cat was upset enough to leave, someone else was to blame for her being missing. He felt the fury grow within himself. Fury at himself, for dwelling on his own feelings when Cat was in trouble, and fury for whoever had waylaid her.

Hawke gripped Anders’ shoulders a little tighter, seeing the blue cracks growing in his skin, his eyes
shinning an unnatural blue color. “Stay with me here, Anders. We need to find her first… then we’ll get revenge.”

“Not revenge… justice.”

“Right,” he replied. It was always disconcerting to hear that deep, otherworldly voice coming from his friend. “Just, you know… stay calm.” He was relieved to see the blue clear from his eyes and skin, as well as seeing the determination on Anders’ face. It was so much better than the guilt.

“If you boys are done hugging it out, we’ve found something.” Isabela spoke up from across the hallway. The three men walked quickly over to join her, following her down the alleyways. After a few turns they came upon Carver, who was crouched, and looking intently at the ground.

“You’ve tracked them this far?” Hawke asked, looking at the ground and trying to see what his brother was seeing, but only saw dirt.

“Yes,” Isabela replied. She used a hand on Hawke’s shoulder to turn him toward the wall. “See this mark here? That’s from Cat.”

“Wait, this dark mark?”

“No, I’m fairly certain that’s blood.” Shaking her head, Isabela followed the scratch on the wall with her finger. “This mark. She used her boot to make this.”

“How can you tell? It looks completely random,” Fenris asked, looking intently at the mark.

“Because I taught her how to do it,” Isabela sighed. “Look, do you really want me to explain it? That will take time Kitty may not have. Or, you can trust me, and we go get her back.”

“We trust you, of course,” Anders answered for everyone, and the others nodded along.

“Good. Here’s the tricky part.” She gestured towards Carver, and he took over the explanation.

“They most definitely went this way, however there are more tracks heading east,” he pointed the opposite direction, which was the way towards Lowtown.

Isabela interrupted, “We’ve already gone some distance in both directions. There are a group of men this way, but no sign of Kitty. However, they may be our only lead, because we couldn’t find any sign of her that way,” she said with a nod towards the east.

“Then we find out what we can from them,” Hawke said decisively. “We have no time to lose.” He reached out a hand to Carver, helping him stand. “Lead the way, brother.”

Carver nodded and strode off. They followed quietly, each of them separately hoping to receive the answers they needed to find their friend. After a few staircases, they stopped momentarily, Carver pointing out the group of men loitering in a corner of Darktown.

Hawke nodded, and took the lead, walking the down the last flight of stairs towards the men. As they were noticed, the men stood and gathered around their leader, a man dressed in robes, and large cowl, with a thick handlebar mustache and small, squinty eyes.

“Excuse me friend, but we’re looking for a friend of ours, and it seems she may have come this way, perhaps a few hours ago?” Hawke asked civilly. He didn’t like the look of these men, especially if they had come across Cat all alone, but he had no proof… yet.
The man in charge smirked, “Nobody comes to this part of Darktown without my say so. This is my territory.”

Hawke smiled charmingly. *This man obviously knew something, the smirk gave him away, but two could play this game.* “Ah! We found the right person to ask then. She’s about yea tall,” he said while showing Cat’s smaller stature with his hand by his neck. “Dark hair, pretty thing. Any chance you’ve seen her?”

“Sorry, friend. As you can see, no pretty things around here.”

“Liar.” They both turned at the sound of Isabela’s voice behind the men. She had a man in a choke hold, a dagger pressed to his throat. “Show my friends what you’ve got in your hand, big boy.”

The man scowled, but held up his hand, showing off the long dagger. It appeared to be a normal dagger, but when Hawke looked closer, he noticed the blue color of the handle, with the blue dyed leather fringe hanging from it. It was one of Cat’s daggers, and not only that, but one that she hardly used because she prized it so fiercely.

“She would never willingly part with that,” Fenris said quietly.

Hawke, Carver, Fenris and Anders all turned at the same moment to glare at the leader, who flinched slightly at the heat of their glares. Then he smirked.

“Looks like we have a few more volunteers, boys. Clap ‘em in irons, and let’s see what the Tevinters will pay for ‘em.”

“Slavers,” Carver spat out. Hawke could feel the tension around him, his group ready to kill them all, but he didn’t have time to mess with this filth.

“Fenris… I need answers from him.”

Fenris tilted his head slightly, then the slightest of smiles graced his lips as he strode forward. His skin seemed a beacon in the darkness of the area as his tattoos flared to life, and he pushed his hand directly into the man’s chest.

To say the man was surprised would’ve been an understatement, and he grunted in shock and pain. Expecting to be impaled, but still breathing, he looked down, eyes widening in shock from seeing the arm protruding from his chest, with no blood. His knees buckled, but he was held upright, and felt a pain he had never experienced, feeling as if his heart was being squeezed, like the grip would continue until his heart was squashed into paste.

Fenris gave no sign of emotion, as the man panted, the heart picking up its pace in his hand, and he gripped tighter, holding back only enough to let the man still speak. “Where…. is…. she?” he growled out menacingly.

“We… we sold them to a ship captain…” the man wheezed, all confidence and bravery gone as he faced his own demise. “In… Lowtown.” He panted, trying to gain enough air to continue. Talking was much harder than he had thought it would be, his heart racing as if he had been running for hours. “He took them… to the docks. That….that’s all I know…”

Fenris said nothing, just crushed his fingers tighter, and the man wailed. “I… I swear! That’s all I know!” With satisfaction, Fenris brought his fingers into a fist, crushing the soft organ in his hand, and retracting his hand so the man fell into the dirt, lifeless.

The other men around him immediately put their weapons down, surrendering, while the others that
were further away, gave battle cries. Isabela made quick work of the men on the outskirts, stealthily moving in and out of the surrounding shadows.

Anders cast Haste on his friends around him, speeding their movements, though to each of them, they were moving as normal, and the enemies around them were moving slowly. Fenris and Carver used their large swords in sweeping arcs, cutting down several men at once, and Hawke cast a cone of cold, freezing the last few in place before Carver shattered them into pieces.

“Thirty seconds to loot, Isabela, then we’re leaving,” Hawke called out, catching his breath and stowing his staff.

“As if I needed that long,” Isabela scoffed from the staircase. “Let’s move slowpokes.”

* * * * *

Isabela grabbed the handle of her dagger and pulled it out of the captain, flicking it a few times away from herself to clean the excess off. She looked up, noting the angry expressions on the others’ faces. “What?” she finally asked, with a shrug.

“What?!” Hawke asked back sarcastically. “We needed to question him!”

“Did we really though?” She asked back with overt sweetness, batting her lashes.

“What do you know that we do not?” Fenris asked accusingly.

“Oh, just where they took Kitty. The man over there tried to bargain for his life,” she replied, gesturing to one of the bodies with her dagger as she spoke.

“You could have said so,” Hawke grumbled. “I wanted to kill him myself.”

“I’m sure I can think of a way to make it up to you, sweet thing,” Isabela purred, stepping closer to Hawke.

“We don’t have time for this,” Anders spoke up. “Where are we headed now?” He asked Isabela.

“The wounded coast,” she replied, and Carver groaned.

“What is with these slavers? This better not be some wild goose chase.”

“A little advice?” Isabela offered as they headed out of the city. “Don’t refer to Kitty as a wild goose again. She wouldn’t appreciate it.”

“I wasn’t… that wasn’t what I… you know I didn’t… ugh! Women!” Carver spluttered. Isabela laughed, and started jogging ahead.

“Let’s go boys, I want to be back in time for breakfast!” she shouted behind her, and for a moment, they enjoyed the joke on Carver, before steeling themselves for the fight ahead, and jogging after Isabela.
“Olivia, I need you to stop crying now.” Cat rubbed her temples with her index fingers, wondering how long one person could cry continuously. “I’m telling you, we’ll all be fine.”

Feynriel watched the two of them with wide eyes, and Cat could see the hope in his face, before despair took it over again. “I wish that were true, but how could we possibly get free of them?” he asked quietly.

“My friends are coming for me, and they don’t like slavers.” Cat said with conviction, nodding to him.

“Your friends?” He asked her, sounding wistful. She could see the loneliness etched on his features, and knowing they would be left here until they were going to get moved again, she decided to talk to them about Hawke and his group. Perhaps doing so, would help distract Olivia from her tears as well.

“Yeah, they are quite the rag-tag group, but together, they are amazing!” Cat said, leaning back against the cave wall. “First there is Hawke… uh, how do I describe him?” She laughed a little, picturing her group of friends.

“Well, he’s a mage, leaning more towards the elemental and primal schools.” She smiled as Olivia’s head came up, and Feynriel leaned closer. “He likes to be in control all the time, and has a schedule for all the jobs he takes, and gets upset when something interrupts or changes his schedule.”

“Sounds like my father,” Olivia said with a smile, and Cat beamed back at her.

“Well, for how strict he can be with that, he’s fairly light-hearted, and cracks jokes pretty often, mostly at the expense of his younger brother, Carver.” Cat took in the expressions of both of the younger mages, happy that her distraction was working so well. She went on to describe each of her friends, wondering to herself when she had become so attached to them all. It all happened so fast, similarly with Zev and the wardens. She had assumed it was because they were travelling together, alone, that whole time, but here with these people… why was she bonding so quickly?

Cat continued to speak, relaxing as she told of Varric, Aveline, Carver, Fenris, and Isabela, and finally Anders. Just as with Hawke, the two young mages became rapt when she spoke of Anders, telling them about his clinic, and his desire to get more freedom for mages.

Afterwards, they sat in silence for a little while, until Feynriel posed the question. “What will happen to us? Even if your friends do come?”

Cat thought for a moment before answering. “Well, the way I see it, both of you have three options.” They looked at her in surprise.

“We would?” Olivia asked tentatively.

“Yup,” Cat answered, “And we’re going to let you decide which one you want. Though they are slightly different for each of you.” Cat sat up straight, and looked between the two of them. “First option, we could take you to the circle. The first enchanter will help ensure your safety, and while it would be difficult, what with the templars cracking down on the rules and such… but, you’d be with other mages, get a foundation for your powers, and that is something.”
Both Feynriel and Olivia looked less than thrilled at the option. “The second option, we’d let you go, and you’d find your own path. You’d be free, but it would be difficult.” She watched as both of them shook their heads, fear written on their faces. “Yeah, I wouldn’t want that either, but it is an option. The third option, is where things would differ.”

Cat turned to Feynriel, “Feynriel, if you don’t want to go to the circle, your other option would be… the dalish.”

“Pfft,” Feynriel scoffed. “I’m not dalish, Cat. They have already rejected my mother, simply because she wouldn’t give me up. Why would they accept me now?”

“Although I don’t agree with it, the main reason would be because you are a mage. This particular option isn’t necessarily better, but it is an option. Being with the dalish will keep you safe from the templars, and the keeper will help you just as the circle would to control your magic. The dalish clan here has hardly any mages, so they need to accept you, even if they didn’t want to.”

“That’s hardly any better,” he groused. “Although, it had crossed my mind in the beginning, I will admit.”

“I will tell you now however, that it would only be temporary.” Cat responded. “Your powers, from what you’ve told us, are different than what mages here have dealt with. Eventually, you’d have to seek out help in other places, if you want to be able to master them.”

“Hmm…” Feynriel replied, deep in thought. Cat nodded at him, and turned her attention to Olivia, who smiled sadly back at her.

“My father is a templar, Cat, I really have no other option. Look what trying to run away got me. Captured by slavers and…” she cut herself off, the tears starting in her eyes again. “Cat… I’m… afraid.”

“We’re all afraid Olivia, but we have to help each other stay strong.”

“You don’t understand!!” she shouted suddenly, taking both Feynriel and Cat aback. They watched the door warily, expecting for a guard to stride in and demand to know what was going on.

“I can’t understand unless you tell me,” Cat replied gently.

“Back there… back at the docks. I was so afraid, so desperate… I… I … I heard it,” her voice had dropped so low, that Cat and Feynriel leaned forward so they could hear her.

“heard what?” Feynriel asked.

Olivia looked ashamed, and tears once again made their way down her cheeks. “A demon’s voice,” she answered. “It offered to help me, to save me. And.. I honestly thought, that I had no other choice. And if I was going to die, I wanted to take some of those evil men with me. I… I was ready to give in, and accept it’s offer.”

Cat lowered her head, taking a deep breath, and wondering what she could possibly say to her to ease some of the guilt she was feeling. There was nothing like looking back with regret.

“I understand, more than you might know,” Cat finally said. “True, I am not a mage, and haven’t been tempted by a demon, however there are many decisions that I have made, that looking back on, make me feel ashamed, or guilty.”

“All I can say to you, is that no matter what happened, you didn’t give in. Whether it was because of
someone or something else, that doesn’t matter.” Cat finally raised her head, looking Olivia in the eyes. “Now, it means that you have a chance to make better decisions, to learn from that experience and become stronger. And perhaps next time, you will be the one that keeps someone else from making that huge mistake.”

“Do you… really mean that?” Olivia asked in awe.

“Of course I do. Everyone makes mistakes, and some are more disastrous than others, but that doesn’t mean we don’t keep trying.” Cat smiled, “Would you like to hear about that third option?”

Olivia let out a small laugh. “More than anything,” she said.

“Well, I’d have to run the idea by Anders, but… I was thinking he could really use some help in that clinic of his…”

Cat went on to detail her idea, explaining how there would be some freedoms, and yet the necessity to hide would make life rather difficult. There wasn’t a sure solution for these two, but Cat was glad that they had enough hope now to be seriously considering what they would do once they were rescued.

During this time of contemplation, they started hearing a loud commotion outside their room, though it was hard to make out what was going on. The door slammed open, and men rushed in, tying their hands, and pulling them to their feet.

“Let’s go! Move it!” One of them shouted from outside the door, and Cat was practically dragged out of the room, followed by Feynriel and Olivia. The large man who had purchased them stood in front of them his expression thunderous. “We’re taking them further in. Take care of the intruders!” and with that he stormed off away from the entrance and the other men followed, dragging Cat, Olivia and Feynriel with them.

“ISSY!!!” Cat screamed, unsure of who all had come, but knowing they must be her friends. “HAW--” Cat was silenced with a hand over her face, and she found it difficult to breathe. Her heart was pounding, with the suddenness of their movement, and she wished she had one of her daggers to make these gorillas pay for manhandling them.

“Scream again, and I’ll gut you,” the man holding her spit in her ear, and she flinched away as she was roughly pushed forward.

“You’ll regret this,” she muttered, as he pushed her forward again.

* * * * *

“Did you hear that?”

“Who didn’t hear that?” Carver replied. “That scream probably echoed through the entire cave.”

“Well, at least we know we’re in the right place,” Isabela smirked as she ducked back behind a wall to dodge an arrow, then flung a dagger out, and retreated again. She smiled when she heard the cry of the man she threw it at. “Though this is taking longer than I would have thought.”

“Hawke? You okay?”

Garrett looked over at Anders, and realized he was scowling. *really don’t want to explain that I’m upset that Cat yelled for Isabela and not me. It would make me sound like a petulant child that*
wasn’t chosen first in a game, or worse. Oh Maker, I sound like Carver… That thought made him straighten up, and he finally answered, “Yes, I’m fine.”

“All right, if you are sure…” Anders replied, unconvinced.

“I am simply tired. Let’s kill all these slavers, and go home to bed.”

“Best idea I have heard all night,” Fenris replied, a wicked light in his eyes. His tattoos flared to life and he re-gripped his sword while striding out from his cover. He made quick work of the men blocking them, and the rest of his companions joined him.

“Which way did they go?” Anders asked, as he looked down several tunnels. Each of them were equally dark, and he was amused to note that Fenris’ tattoos were the source of light for their group.

Isabela and Carver immediately started looking around, for any indication of which route to take.

* * * * *

Cat was pushed up against a wall, the man’s disgusting hand placed over her mouth again. She was really getting sick of having to breathe in his stench. Did slavers not believe in bathing, like ever? she thought. She could hear the sounds of battle go silent, and then the soft murmurs of voices. The man holding her was looking so intently down the hallway leading to the room where they had some from, and Cat found herself peering down the tunnel as well. She wondered where the soft blue light was coming from, it made her think of veilfire, but she knew both Anders and Hawke were not aware of…

Fenris! She smiled as she realized that the glow was from his tattoos, she had seen them a few times now to be relatively certain. The man in the front indicated for several of those following to stay and kill the intruders, and Cat was pleased to see that the man that had threatened her was one of them. Another man grabbed her arm and began to cart her away, and she acted cowed, until she was past the group of men staying there.

“FENRIS!!!” she screamed, and smiled as the odorific man turned to glare at her. He would get exactly what was coming to him.

“Aaah!” Cat whirled around at the sound, to see that another man had pulled Olivia’s arm tightly at a bad angle, and another had Feynriel at sword point.

“Get moving, and quietly, or I’ll kill you all,” the lead man said, then he turned and rushed forward, the rest of them coming behind him. Cat did her best to stay quiet… for now. She was certain the others would catch up to them soon.

* * * * *

“FENRIS!!!”

All at once, their heads popped up, and as a group they made their way down the darkened tunnel.

“Aaah!”

They paused momentarily, but continued in pursuit. Due to the darkness, they couldn’t move quickly. That, combined with the second scream, put Isabela on edge.

“That didn’t sound good,” Isabela said. “She should not be pushing her luck.”
“But it is helping us find her more quickly,” Anders muttered, obviously upset.

“Certainly,” Fenris responded sarcastically. “Until they kill her and leave her body in order to escape. The pirate is right, she is being reckless.”

Fenris rounded the corner, and dodged an incoming arrow, then surged forward in a powerful scythe move, cutting two men in half with his swing. The momentum sprayed blood everywhere, and had the rest of his group stopping. Fenris killed the remaining men quickly, then turning said, “Come, we must hurry.”

“Impressive,” Isabela murmured, as the four of them made their way gingerly around the gore.

“More like savage,” Anders muttered in reply.

“Don’t say that like it’s a bad thing,” Isabela said. “Women like a bit of savagery in their men.”

Isabela smirked as the three men with her practically tripped over their own feet in their shock at her words.

“What?!”

“Really?!”

“No!”

Now she was laughing, as Anders and Carver glared daggers at Fenris’ back, and Hawke looked like someone stole his favorite treat. It amused her greatly that Fenris either didn’t notice, or didn’t care the ire he was receiving, and best of all, that Cat had no idea all of the drama she inspired.

* * * * *

“AAAHH!!”

“ANDERS!! HELP!!”

The group immediately forgot everything else, and rushed forward into a large room. At their feet, a young girl lay bleeding, and at the top of a staircase, a boy and Cat were held at knife point.

"Please… please help… her!” Cat struggled to get out, while keeping the dagger away from her throat. Anders went quickly to the girl, and began to heal her, while Carver stood nearby to keep him safe.

“That’s far enough,” a man stepped in front of Cat and her captor. “Come any closer, and they both die.”

“I’m sure we can work something out,” Hawke said as he took another step closer.

“NO!” both the man and Fenris shouted at once, and then glared at each other.

“You won’t be getting away with them, I’d cut my losses if I were you.” Hawke added much more sternly.

“So you can kill me? Not likely.”
Hawke continued to speak with the man, though he was watching Cat’s face. It seemed she and Isabela were having another silent conversation, but he knew he should do his part and keep the man busy, although he could feel the frustration pouring off of Isabela in waves.

“Well, it seems then, that we are at an impasse…” Hawke began, and at that moment, Isabela threw a dagger, and a moment later it was embedded in the man that was holding onto the boy.

Cat used the distraction and threw her head back, into the face of the man holding her. She pulled her hands up, gripping the dagger in front of her to keep herself from being skewered. The man was stronger then she was, but she put all her strength into it.

Suddenly the resistance was gone, and she pushed the arm forward with a resounding, “crack!” She fell forward on her knees, looking at the now severed and frozen arm in front of her.

“Ugh!” Cat reeled back, looking up when her back hit something solid. The man, minus an arm was frozen solid behind her. Isabela grabbed her arm, and helped her up. Cat shivered, “I’ll never be able to forget that sound… I broke that guy’s arm off!”

Isabela smiled, and put her arm around Cat. “You’ve done much worse in the past,” she said.

“I know, but…” Cat shivered. “that sound… gives me the chills.”

“That’s just your proximity to the freezing spell,” she said brushing off frost from Cat’s back.

“No, but I appreciate what you’re doing,” Cat replied with a smile.

“Anytime!” Isabela smirked back.

“CAT!” Anders came running up, grabbing Cat’s shoulders and looking her over. “Are you wounded?”

“No, I’m okay. But, how’s Olivia?”

“The girl?” Anders asked, looking over his shoulder. “A little worn out, but she’ll be fine.”

“Oh! I was so worried! Thank you so much!!” Cat exclaimed, pulling Anders into a hug. It shocked him at first, and then he wrapped his arms around her as well.

“It’s no problem, I’m just glad you’re okay.” Anders responded quietly, squeezing her tightly.
It had been awhile since Cat had gotten a good platonic hug. Zev and Alistair often asked for her “good luck battle hugs”, but she always felt there was something under the request that kept her from prolonging them. Hugging Anders was different, like how she imagined hugging a best friend would feel. Even hugging her brother hadn’t felt this good.

“Cat.”

Cat looked over at Hawke, though Anders didn’t break their hug, so all she could do was turn her head. “Yes?” she asked.

“I would like a word.”

“Right,” she said, pulling out of Anders’ grip with a smile to him, and a pat on the arm. It looked like they were taking a break before heading home. She sat down, across from Hawke, and said, “What’s up?”

“How about telling me why you left Anders’ clinic in the middle of the night,” Hawke snapped, “giving no indication of where you were going?”

Cat froze. Hawke’s words were much more forceful than she had been expecting, and while not untrue, it seemed a bit harsh. She looked over at Anders, biting her lip to keep from asking him what he told the others.

“I’m so, so sorry Anders. I couldn’t sleep, and I didn’t want to disturb you. I thought I would just go home, and perhaps the fresh air and walk would help.”

“It’s fine Cat–”

“It is NOT FINE,” Hawke interrupted Anders. Cat was so confused, because while his voice was stern, he didn’t look angry… in fact his face was oddly blank. “Alone in Darktown is one thing-- and this has nothing to do with you being a woman,” Hawke stopped her argument in it’s tracks, before she could say a word. “You were injured, alone, and in the middle of the night walking through Darktown. It was not only reckless, it was the most stupid thing you could possibly do.”

Cat reeled back slightly, unsure if she was angry or guilty, and not liking the feeling. “I thought--”

“Obviously, you did not think,” Hawke interrupted her. “otherwise none of this would have happened. Now after fighting your necromancer, we had to go running into fight after fight in order to rescue you.”

Cat stayed quiet, her frustration and guilt mixing to curdle in her gut. He wasn’t even listening! She wanted to lash out, and she wanted to cry. She started taking deep breaths, and even counting to ten to herself in an attempt to stay calm.

“I don’t think any explanation could help at this point,” Hawke continued.

One… two…

“but I would like to hear one anyway,”

Three… four…
“so that I can feel reasonably sure about trusting your decisions in the future.”

*Five, six, oh no…*

Of all the reactions Hawke was expecting, seeing Cat jump up suddenly and run off, was the furthest thought from his mind. He looked up, his eyes wide and his mouth open in shock.

“Maker’s breath, Hawke,” Anders said quietly, as he sat down. Isabela gave Hawke a glare before setting off after her friend.

“Well done, brother. We all know no one can be as perfect as *Garrett Hawke*, but now we must add making women cry to your epithet,” Carver sneered sarcastically.

“And what is *that* supposed to mean?!” Hawke responded, his face no longer the blank slate, but showing the myriad of feelings across his face, from shock to guilt, to embarrassment, and finally defensiveness.

“That’s enough,” Fenris said, not moving from his perch against the wall of the cave across from Hawke.

“I agree,” Anders added, sitting on Hawke’s right, looking between Hawke and Carver as he spoke. “We should not be pointing fingers and placing blame here.”

Carver sat opposite of Hawke, smirking at him, obviously pleased he had been able to get a shot in at his brother. They all looked up as Isabela and Cat walked back into the camp. Hawke could see no evidence of crying, in fact, Cat looked mad as hell.

“Hawke,” Isabela said, as she moved her arm to wrap it around Cat’s shoulders. “Kitty made an emotional decision, and obviously feels bad about it enough without you pointing it out.” Cat nodded, feeling vindicated.

“And Kitty,” Cat’s temporary vindication was swept away. “Hawke was worried, in fact ALL of us were worried. It was mostly luck that we found you, and if Anders hadn’t come when he did, it would have been hours later by the time we got here. Which means, you might have been gone. That’s enough to make anyone upset.”

Cat’s anger shifted to guilt, yet again. She just assumed they were coming, she hadn’t thought about how they would feel. “Since when did you become a diplomat, Issy?” she grumbled, and Isabela let out a laugh.

“I suppose you two just bring it out in me,” she replied, giving Cat a squeeze and letting her go. “*He really has been worried,*” she whispered.

Cat looked down at Hawke. He was looking off to a wall, his arms crossed in front of him, the look on his face seeming more unhappy than angry at this point.

“Garrett,” Cat said quietly, waiting for him to meet her gaze. “I am sorry. I did what I thought was best, and it turned out completely sideways.” She gave a shrug, not willing to go into everything. “Thank you,” she added, looking around to the others. “Thank you for coming for me. I was reasonably sure I could get away, but I didn’t want to leave Olivia and Feynriel in the hands of the slavers.”

“Ah…” Hawke raised his hand and scratched the back of his neck, looking away. “No problem.” He ignored the looks the others were throwing his direction, at his sudden change of attitude. “Uh, what is the plan with these two, anyway?”
Cat looked over where the two young mages had both fallen asleep. Smiling, she looked back to Hawke, then over to Anders. “I have a few ideas,” she said.

“Should I be worried?” Anders asked with a smirk.

“Maybe,” Cat teased.

She then told them of first Feynriel and his desire to go to the Dalish. Hawke and Anders especially agreed with the idea, and Cat was hardly surprised that Fenris and Carver were against it, though they put up little resistance to the idea. Cat got the feeling that they protested just out of principle, instead of actually caring what happened.

Cat then explained about Olivia, how her father was a templar, and her desire to leave the circle, seeing that it was the place she was raised, and had always been taught that her existence was basically a sin.

“She is young to become an apostate,” Hawke said, looking over at her sleeping form.

“That’s true, however, she is resilient, and learns quickly. I think if she had a place where she could see her powers doing good…”

Everyone was silent, looking at Cat in confusion, though Fenris was giving a Cat a look that asked, Are you sure about this?

“Wait… you mean the clinic?” Anders asked in shock. “I hardly have time to look after someone…”

“That’s the point!” Cat crowed in triumph, though the others didn’t share her enthusiasm. “Look, at first, yes, you’ll need to be there a lot, teaching her how to handle the day to day, the more simple healings, and so on. Teaching her how to look out for herself, and about Justice, and whatever. But then, she will be able to take a lot of the duties of the clinic off your plate, Anders.”

“Justice and whatever?”

“She’ll be able to handle the day to day, which will give you more time to spend as you need, whether helping Hawke, or working on your own goals. Or she’ll be able to help with healings that take too much out of you. Besides, isn’t she an example of exactly what you are trying to accomplish? Getting mages free from the circle?”

“Well… yes, but…”

“But?” Hawke asked, interested in his answer.

“I don’t know, I just feel like I should be arguing against this, even if I don’t have a good reason why,” Anders replied with a smile.

“That’s a normal reaction to Cat’s plans,” Hawke responded with a smirk at Cat.

“Hey! That’s rude,” Cat pouted. “just wait until the next time one of your plans goes wrong…” she threatened teasingly.

Hawke held his hands up in surrender. “My deepest apologies, my lady,” he said in a high, snooty voice, which had Cat giggling.

“I don’t know about the rest of you, but I for one would like to sleep in my bed instead of in a cave,” Isabela said, bringing everyone back to the present.
“Seconded,” Carver added.

Cat gave a huge yawn, her brain finally catching on to her body’s weariness. Eyeing the ground of the cave, she gave in. “I agree, though I may complain the whole way home,” she said to Isabela.

“You say that like it is something different than every other time,” Isabela teased.

“Ouch!” Cat pressed her hand to her heart. “You wound me!”

“Really, you just set yourself up for them,” Fenris added, as he went over to wake up the sleeping mages.

* * * * *

Cat stayed in the middle of the group since both Olivia and Feynriel stuck to her like glue. Everyone was polite, but both young mages were extremely nervous, worried that perhaps the promises that Cat had given them would not be upheld by these others.

Both Anders and Hawke were quick to show small spells, hoping to ease their minds by knowing that there were others mages with them, and while it helped, Cat could still sense their unease. Being out in the open after what happened most likely was the cause.

“You endanger yourself human! Do not say you were un-warned.”

The group stopped, looking around for the source of the voice, and Hawke pushed his way to the front of the group. Hawke looked back at Fenris who gestured with his head, and Hawke stepped in that direction to find the source.

Hawke’s eyes opened wide as a large Qunari stepped out of a hidden path. “Go no further human. The path ahead is littered with my kind,” he said to Hawke.

“What are you trying to pull here?” Hawke demanded.

“I did not like my… role, so I left the Qun. I do not want to murder as my brethren, so I warn their victims. I am currently pulling nothing. You are not helpless, so I will leave.”

Cat swallowed her giggle, her exhaustion making everything sound much more funny than it actually was. The Tal-Vashoth was obviously not trying to make a joke. He turned and left them once he said his piece, and Hawke turned back to his group looking confused.

“I know I don’t know much about Qunari, but that seemed very strange,” he said to Fenris, looking for an explanation.

“When Qunari do not follow the Qun, they are cast out, and known as Tal-Vashoth,” Fenris explained, sounding bored. “They are considered soulless, and without purpose they become wild and savage. They are basically criminals to those of the Qun.”

Hawke nodded, though it still didn’t make much sense to him. At least he now had a name to go with these… other Qunari.

“It seems we have little choice,” Hawke stated after some thought. “If we would be attacked anyway, I say we take the fight to them. I would feel better knowing others will not be attacked after
us.” He glanced around to his companions. “But, only if you feel up to it,” he added. He looked at each, and they nodded in turn. He knew they were tired, but a fight they controlled was better than a fight they were thrust into.

He looked over at Cat. “Cat I want you three to wait here,”

“What?” she replied looking disgruntled.

“I need you to protect them, in case any of these Tal-Vashoth get past us,” he explained.

“I… I can help Serah,” Olivia spoke up. “You saved us, and you are willing to help us further. It is the very least we can do.”

Cat looked over and gave her a questioning look, asking “are you sure?” Olivia nodded, and Cat turned to Feynriel, to see him nod as well. She turned back to Hawke. “I’ll stay with them, and we’ll stay back, but we ARE going with you.”

Hawke saw the determination on each of their faces, and gave in. “Very well, just don’t do anything reckless. Keep an eye on the perimeter, looking for ambushes or flanking attacks.” They nodded back to him, and he turned to his other companions. “This area of the coast has many winding trails and small caves, as well as bush and tree cover. Stay on your guard, and don’t get far ahead. Anders and I may need your help.”

They nodded again, the four of them staying quiet as they each pulled out their weapons. Cat pulled out her own daggers, glad that her things had been recovered. Well… almost all.

“Kitty?” Isabela asked, causing Cat to turn to her. “You’re scowling. Are you not ready for this?”

“Sorry, Issy, I just was thinking that I wasn’t able to find my blue dagger. It’s my favorite.”

“Oh, my apologies,” Fenris stated, pulling the blue dyed, leather wrapped, dagger from his belt and handing it to Cat. “We took it from the men who originally took you from Darktown.”

Cat beamed at Fenris, “Thank you, thank you, thank you!” she said as she took the dagger back. It was one of precious few mementos from her days with the Wardens, and had become somewhat of a lucky charm. She couldn’t even bear to use it, worried that something might happen to it. “Okay, now I am ready!” She said as she sheathed the dagger in its home on her belt.

That earned her smiles all around, though a few were smirks, and the group started off again, ready for an attack.

Cat quietly asked Feynriel and Olivia about their magic as they walked, and directing them on when and how to be most helpful with the spells they knew. They were both very young, and only knew a handful of things- Olivia being still an apprentice, and Feynriel being mostly self-taught. But, they wanted to help, so she would assist them in that. This was a chance to build their confidence.

Very soon, the fight had begun, with both Fenris and Carver charging forward at a group of Tal-Vashoth. Unlike the game mechanics, the shouts brought all the other Tal-Vashoth in the area out to assist, and the mages did all they could to keep the spears and other projectiles from wounding their warriors.

Isabela darted in and out of stealth, focusing on wounding more than killing blows, which not only kept the Tal-Vashoth from fighting, but made each wounded one easier to kill.

Cat now fully understood what Hawke had meant when he stated that he wasn’t as proficient with
ice spells as Anders. While Hawke’s ice spells froze limbs and with concentration an entire body, Anders’ spells were devastating in comparison, freezing several enemies solid at once, and with much more frequency.

It was a difficult fight, but soon they were making their way into the cave that seemed to be their base. Afterwards, they stopped to rest, and took what valuables and food they could use from the cave, and headed out back towards Kirkwall.

* * * * *

“So this is where you live?” Olivia asked as she followed Cat and Isabela into their dwelling. Cat thought it not big enough for one person, let alone three, but they would make do for one night. Anders needed time to make Olivia her own space at the clinic.

“We honestly only sleep here,” Cat answered. “So it’s big enough, and clean enough for that, and we don’t have to worry about anyone thinking we have things to steal, seeing as it looks so shabby on the outside.”

“I guess that would work,” Olivia said, though she didn’t believe her own words.

“I’d get used to it,” Isabela added, as she sat on her bed to pull off her boots. “Anders’ clinic is in the Undercity, which is a giant step down from Lowtown.”

Olivia looked dismayed as she thought on that, but eventually she steeled herself. “You said I would have my own room?” she asked Cat.

“Yes, and Anders will never violate your privacy. It's a big thing for him, since he came from the circle too.”

Olivia nodded. “Then it may not be ideal at first, but it will still be better than there. A gilded cage is still a cage, after all.”

“Smart, kid.” Isabela said, before she rolled over turning her back to the other two and pulling her pillow over her head.

“Guess she’s tired,” Cat said with a yawn. “I think I need a nap too,” she looked at Olivia. “What do you want to do? I wouldn’t recommend going out, but it’s your decision.”

“Um… if I write a letter to my father, could you deliver it to him at the gallows?” she asked hesitantly.

“Sure, if you don’t have a deadline. I’m not certain when I’ll be going to the gallows, but I can definitely make that happen.”

“Sorry to be so needy, but do you have letter writing supplies?” she asked with embarrassment.

“Not a problem,” Cat answered, digging through a crate to find the supplies she would need. “If you feel like sleeping, feel free to share my bed or there are books here in this crate if you’d rather read. Sorry there aren’t more options,” she handed the items to Olivia, and headed over to her bed. “I’ve got to work later tonight, so feel free to use my bed.” Then, pulling off her own boots, she laid down, and pulled the blanket over herself.
“Thank you, Cat. For everything,” Olivia said quietly, but Cat didn’t reply. She turned, and smiled as she could see Cat was already fast asleep.

* * * * *

“CAT!!”

Cat turned toward the voice that hissed her name, seeing Idunna motioning her forward.

“What is it?” she asked. “I’m working.”

“Shhh! Just come on!”

Cat shrugged and followed after her, back towards her room. After she had gotten inside and Idunna closed the door, she spoke again. “You know, I was almost to your room anyway.”

“Yes, but I couldn’t wait any longer!” Idunna said with wide eyes, and Cat wondered what had gotten into her.

“Okay… I’m here. What is it?”

“Is it true that Madam Lusine has been having Arina and Burne learning how to do your job?” she asked.

“Oh, yeah. I told her that I couldn’t be here every night any more. With the expedition that I’m investing in, and helping Isabela’s friend Hawke with odd jobs, it’s hard to tell when I need the night free.”

“Ugh, that is so like you!”

“Huh?”

“You, and your noble honesty. You realize that once you teach them, she’s just going to let you go completely?”

“But- she said she wouldn’t…”

“Cat. You are so naive.”

Cat frowned at her friend. Sure, she tried to see the good in everyone, but she hated when others called her naive. She sighed heavily. “It isn’t a big deal Idunna. If she does, then she does, and I’ll find something else.”

“No, there’s no need for that,” she said, and handed Cat a paper. Cat’s eyebrow winged up in question as she took the paper and began slowly working her way through the words.

It was a list of sorts, names on the left side of people that worked at the Rose, she realized as she read down the list. To the side of each name, there were tonics and potions noted, and to the right of that column, was another noting quantities.

“What am I looking at Idunna?” Cat asked, perplexed.
“I thought it was pretty straightforward,” she answered with a smirk. “These are your weekly orders for tonics.”

“I don’t get it, you want me to deliver tonics?”

“Cat, why do I have to spell this out?” Idunna huffed. “Even if we can’t have you cleaning for us anymore, we don’t want to go back to the old tonics. We convinced Madam to give us the money she bought the tonics with, and we take care of it ourselves now. This list are the people who want to get their tonics from you. Or I should say *our* tonics, because I want mine from you too.

“Isabela told me that you had your friend make them, and paid him for that to help with his clinic. So this is a win-win situation. He makes the tonics, you deliver them, we pay for the service, and get better quality goods. Everyone wins, and you have a new way to make money. Plus we still get to see you.”

Cat stood there, gobsmacked as the realization hit her. These amazing people had figured out a way for her to still make a living, with a job that was much more flexible. Cat gave Idunna a quick hug. “I have to get back to work, but this isn’t over. Thank you so much!”

Once her work was done, Cat made sure to visit every single person on the list, not only to go over the quantities, ensuring she had read correctly, but also to give hugs and thanks to each and every one of them before she left.

Cat wasn’t really surprised that someone was waiting to walk her home, though she was surprised it was Fenris, instead of Isabela. She walked up to where he was leaning against the wall, and asked, “what happened?”

“She was having a good time, and did not want to leave. I told her I would take her place,” he said.

“Drinking at the Hanged Man?” Cat asked.

“Indeed.”

“They aren’t all getting drunk are they? We do have to take Feynriel to the dalish tomorrow.”

Fenris simply grunted.

“I guess that’s a no,” Cat teased, as he pushed himself upright and they started walking through Hightown.

“You know walking home from Hightown isn’t the same as walking through Darktown.”

“Obviously,” he replied without looking at her.

“So, why do I need an escort?” she asked.

“Perhaps I needed the escort,” he said, teasing her back.

“Oh, well in that case, we are going the wrong way! Aren’t you staying in an abandoned mansion here in Hightown?”

Fenris turned his head slightly and smirked at her. “You are, as always, well informed.”

“True.”

They walked on in silence, and while Fenris was naturally not much of a chatter, Cat could tell he
had something on his mind, so she stayed quiet.

“Cat,” he began. “Did you know that necromancer was there?”

Cat turned to glance at him as well, then nodded. “Yes.”

“I see. And the trapdoor leading to his lair?”

“Yes.”

“You told Isabela about it?”

“Sort of.”

He stopped, and put his hand on her arm to stop her as well. She realized this was going to be a longer conversation than she had thought. She hooked her arm in his and turned towards the main housing side of Hightown.

“Let’s go to your place and talk. I don’t trust the eyes and ears around here.”

“Very well.”

After arriving at the mansion, Cat smiled at Fenris’ “re-decorating”. The mansion as a whole was overall ignored, most rooms collecting dust, though there were a few rooms that looked as if a tornado had gone through them, by the broken furniture piled inside. She followed him upstairs, and he pulled a chair closer to the fire for her.

“Thank you,” she said, sitting down and letting out a small sigh. Fenris busied himself with stoking the fire, adding on more wood, before sitting on a bench on the other side of the fireplace, waiting for her to speak.

“Now I feel like perhaps you convinced Isabela to stay drinking so you could come and speak with me alone,” Cat said, and Fenris smirked. “Yes, I did give Isabela some information, though when I tried to explain how I knew, she didn’t want to hear it. She was content to just believe me, and said that if I wanted her to know I could explain. Knowing that she didn’t want the explanation however, kept me from saying more.”

“And if she did want an explanation?”

Cat hesitated. True, she had already said as much out loud to Fenris, but her talk with Anders had her wondering just how much to share. Though Zevran believed her, and Duran and his group did as well, to a lesser extent, there had still always been small issues. Questions of what she knew, why she hadn’t shared, as well as the issue of trust. It was difficult to trust someone that was keeping secrets, and they ALL knew she was keeping secrets. No matter how close they had become, that had continued to be a wedge between them.

Now, here was a new group of people that she was becoming close to, and she worried about repeating the past. She didn’t like the looks, and the mistrust in her decisions, and was thinking that perhaps it was better NOT to share. After all, she had been spoiled with Zevran, and couldn’t expect anyone else to be as trusting and accepting as he was.

Being with Isabela’s crew didn’t have the problem of trust, but she wasn’t able to fully integrate with the sailors either, she always kept her distance.

“To be honest? Based on past experiences, I wonder if it is wise to share an explanation at all,” she
answered, looking into the fire to avoid his gaze.

“Why?”

Cat glanced over, and seeing he was not pushing, but truly curious to know, she tried to put her feelings into words.

“That necromancer… he killed many women, yes?” she asked him, and he nodded in reply. “It seems a small thing in the big picture, but if left alone, eventually… Hawke’s mother would have been one of his victims.”

Fenris’ eyes widened slightly as he took in this information, but he remained silent.

“Now imagine, if you are Hawke, and you know about me, and I hadn’t stopped the necromancer.”

“Ah,” Fenris murmured with a nod. “I could easily blame you,” he said quietly.

“Yes, but I am not all knowing, nor all seeing. And those that did not fully understand made life difficult, even knowing that they cared about me, there was always a slight distrust.”

They sat quietly for some time, Fenris contemplating what he had been told, and Cat giving the time and space to do so. It was a comfortable silence, and Cat smiled to herself as she realized this was far from what she would have pictured, having told Fenris of all people about herself.

Fenris cleared his throat, and Cat turned to him. “It is your decision, but know that I would like to understand. I may not be the wisest, or the kindest, but I am loyal to my friends. I swear that I would never share anything you share with me with another soul.”

Cat smiled wider, “Does that mean… we’re friends?”

He gave her a look. “Is that not what I just finished saying?”

Cat looked down at her hands. Sometimes, she knew she needed to be logical, but… “So where I am from there was a story. An epic story that spanned many years. It was so intricate, that you not only read the story, you participated in it, making decisions as if you were the main character.”

“How would that even work?” he asked, confused.

“Hmm… say, I am telling you a tale, where the hero is at the cave of the dragon, and I give you the choice. You are the hero… do you go into the dragon cave, or do you try to lure the dragon out? The story then would change based on your decision, would it not?”

“Yes, I see,” he replied, with a nod.

“In the beginning of this story, it was about a young recruit that joined the Grey Wardens. Tragedy struck this recruit, and during a blight, in a fight with the darkspawn, all but one of his companions were killed, along with the king, and half of the nation’s army.

“This recruit didn’t know why at the time, but was told that only a Grey Warden could stop the blight, so he and his companion travelled around the country, gaining allies and raising an army to fight this terrible foe.”

“Are you telling-—”

“Just wait,” Cat interrupted his question. “Save all questions for the end,” she added.
“Very well…”

“During this time, a young mage was living with his mother, brother, and sister in a small town. After this fight with the darkspawn was lost, the darkspawn started across the countryside, killing everything in their path. This mage had very little notice, just his brother, who escaped from death in the battle, coming right before the horde of darkspawn to warn them. They took off immediately, trying to escape from the horde, finding a warrior and templar along the way.

“Through the help of another, they were able to get on a ship, and travel away from the blighted land to the free marches, ending in Kirkwall. They had to scrape and serve to survive, but finally they carved a place for themselves in the city. Soon this mage met others that he helped, and were willing to travel with him. A dwarf, an apostate, a pirate, a former slave, a dalish elf, and a prince… along with one of his siblings, and his warrior friend- this mage had triumphs and tragedies, becoming a champion to the people, and leader to this varied group.”

There was silence, as Cat finished, and Fenris waited to see if she was really done. Finally he commented, “I see you make no mention of yourself.”

Cat smiled sadly then. “I was not a part of this story, when I heard it, though I often wished I was.” She laughed without any humor at the irony. “I read this story again and again, making different decisions each time, enjoying the camaraderie of these amazing people, feeling joy in their triumphs, and sorrow in their tragedies. I felt as if I knew them as well as any of my actual friends.”

“Tragedy stuck my life as well, and I found myself in a dark place. I stayed there, though friends and family all tried to help me, I refused to move on and up out of the dark. Then one day, I woke up, and found that I wasn’t in my bed… I was on a street. Many things happened, but I later found out, that I was in… Thedas. This place that I had heard and read about. Not only that, I met people… from the story. People that I knew- well, somewhat.”

“You… you found yourself IN the story you knew so well?”

“Yes,” Cat said, relived and yet scared that she had laid it all out. *There was no going back now.* “That is why I’m not some Oracle, I don’t really know the future. I just know the story.”

“So if I were to ask you things?”

“I may or may not tell you. I may or may not even know the answer. But I worry. Knowledge changes things, how people act, choices they make. Who knows what will change because the necromancer is dead before he should have been?”

“I see. I do not envy you.”

Now Cat did smile. “Thank you very much,” she said sardonically. “However, I cannot simply let horrible things occur. I worry more for what I may do to Thedas. Just being here has brought changes I can’t being to fathom, but I don’t know that I can just sit idly by and watch horrible things happen when I could stop them.”

“What was it you said before? Great power also brings great responsibility?”

“Wait, you were listening to that?”

“Of course. I believe that is what has caught my curiosity about you the most. Your ideas are so different than any other I have come across, though now it is apparent as to the reason for that.”

“That is true, but it is also from what I have seen. I have friends both who are mages, and those
who’s lives have been torn apart by magic. I truly believe there is no easy solution.”

“Hmm.” Fenris stood, going to look out the window. “There are still a few hours until sunrise. I should get you home, so we can both get our rest. I feel that tomorrow will be long.”

“All right,” Cat said, as she stood and stretched.

“Though I do have one final question for today,” he added and she looked over to him in question. “Though you work at the Rose, you are not a whore, correct?”

Cat grinned. “I knew I liked you Fenris.”
Cat looked up at the rising sun as she and Fenris left the run down mansion, and headed to the center of Hightown. She had gotten very little sleep once she had convinced Fenris to wait until morning. He had given her his bed, insisting on sleeping in the huge armchair he had.

“Are you sure you’re not stiff anywhere?”

Fenris smirked and nodded. “I am used to sleeping in worse accommodations than a large cushioned chair, worry not.”

“I guess…” Cat trailed off. “But just because it’s not the worst, does not automatically make it wonderful.”

“But wonderful in comparison,” Fenris added as they reached a flight of stairs. “I wanted to ask you, if it would be all right if I asked questions when I have them.”

Cat glanced at him with a smile, before turning back to watch her footing. “That’s fine, although…”

As they reached the bottom of the stairs, Fenris pulled her aside, and waited. His right eyebrow was raised in question.

“I know I mentioned that I had a similar talk with Issy, though not in such detail, and… somewhat with Anders as well.” She didn’t miss the roll of his eyes or the scoff at the mention of her mage friend. “I don’t know when, or if, I will tell anyone else.” Cat looked down at her hands, her fingers twisting around each other in a sign of nerves.

As his larger hand covered hers, Cat looked up. Fenris was looking at her softly, but seriously, obviously trying to be gentle, yet still intimidating to those who didn’t know him. “Every person has regrets,” Cat looked puzzled, unsure of where this was going. “I betrayed friendship once, and it will haunt me until the day I die. I swear to you, I will not betray your friendship, nor the trust you have placed in me, even if I must give my life.”

Cat’s eyes widened. “Thank you.”

Then she smiled.

“Questions are fine, I’ll trust your discretion in front of the others.”

They both turned as they heard two people arguing, seeing an armored man striding towards the chantry board. The older woman dressed in chantry garb was practically running to keep up with him, sounding like she was scolding him.

They watched as the man placed a notice on the chantry board, and walked away. The woman went to take it down, and the man spun around burying an arrow into the parchment so that it stayed where it was, giving a parting word and striding away.

The chantry woman sighed deeply, looking sorrowful as she glanced up at the notice, then turned around and walked back up the stairs to the chantry, leaving the notice where it was.

Cat turned to Fenris, asking “should we see what is causing all the fuss?”

Fenris didn’t speak, simply holding his arm out in a gesture of, “after you,” and Cat started forward
towards the board.

They stood glancing at the board for several minutes. Cat’s knowledge of the common tongue in written form she often compared to a child learning to read for the first time. She knew the runes, having been taught by several sailors on the Siren’s Call. However there wasn’t much opportunity to practice, and she was somewhat rusty.

“I’m sorry it’s taking so long,” she said. “Is there anyway we can just take it with us?”

Fenris reached up and pulled the arrow out of the board, handing the parchment to Cat, arrow and all. They started walking again towards Lowtown, Fenris guiding Cat by holding onto her elbow.

“What does it say?” he finally asked.

“I’m not the best reader, but I think I got the gist of it.”

“Why is that?”

“Huh?” Cat asked, thrown off track. “Why is what?”

“Why are you not a reader? You seem highly educated.”

“Oh!” Cat realized what he was asking, “I am, educated I mean. But while common sounds like the language of home, the written form is not the same. We didn’t use runes, so I’ve had to learn how to read all over again.”

“Truly?”

“Yes, and while Issy and the sailors I travelled with were very helpful and quite insisting that I learn, there hasn’t been a lot of opportunities since to practice. I feel like I’ve lost some of what I learned. What about you?” she asked.

Fenris looked startled, but the look was so quickly gone from his face, she could almost think she imagined it. “Should you not know the answer?” he asked, though teasingly.

“I do, though I ask for two reasons. One, there have been some things that are different, so it isn’t wise to assume that I know. And two, I’d rather get to know you from you, not from a story.”

He gave her a rare chuckle, though it was short. “Very well. My former master determined that reading was a skill not needed in his slaves. He preferred to keep us dependent on him.”

“Bastard.”

“Agreed.”

“Well, I think others are better qualified, but I can share what I was taught at least. Maybe learning together will make it easier.”

Fenris stopped, and since his hand was still loosely holding her elbow, she stopped as well when she felt the pull. She had never seen Fenris shocked before, and would have giggled if she wasn’t worried that he would think she was joking with him.

“Really? Why?”

“Why not? Friends help each other. You can spar with me, and help me with my combat in exchange.” With that settled, she started off again, knowing he would catch up easily with his longer strides.
She didn’t want to dwell on it, so she focused back on the parchment in her hands. “It says something about the man’s family being killed… and he traced the crime to a mercenary company, called the Flint Company.”

Fenris grunted as he took hold of her elbow again, changing her course so she didn’t walk into a wall.

“He also gives a few leads to help find them, though he is uncertain of their exact location.” Cat rolled up the parchment, holding it down by her side. “That’s terrible, to find out after the fact that your entire family was murdered. No wonder he was asking for help.”

“And you are going to ask Hawke,” Fenris commented, letting go of her as she now could focus on where she was walking.

“Well, no.” she replied. “But I will give him this,” she help up the notice. “and he can decide what to do with it. Though I will say he will probably help.”

“Oh? You seem pretty confident about that.”

“Well, he’s a nice guy. He seems like the type that helps others. I mean, just look at all of us. He’s pretty much helped each of us, right? If that’s not enough, the reward the guy is offering will probably convince him.”

Fenris grunted again, and Cat felt somewhat pleased that she was beginning to understand what he was saying, even though it was just a noise. It wasn’t unlike her and Issy’s silent language of gestures.

* * * * *

Cat walked into the hovel as quietly as she could, but realized she needn’t have bothered when she looked up to find both Isabela and Olivia looking at her, smirking.

“And where have you been, Kitty?” Isabela asked with a smug grin, which had Olivia giggling into her hand, trying to smother the sound.

“As if you didn’t know.” Cat replied. “deciding drinking was more important,” Cat held her hand to her chest in mock hurt, “than me!” She put her hand over her eyes and pretended to sob.

“Okay, cut the dramatics,” Isabela replied with a shake of her head. Cat smiled as she dropped her hand, and Olivia giggled again.

“You two ready to go?” Cat asked, as she went to collect her crossbow and quiver as well as her pack, and began putting them on.

“Yes, though I am still nervous,” Olivia said. Cat looked over at Isabela in question, and received a nod.

“Olivia, I know it goes against what you’ve been taught, but I promise, it isn’t the same. Anders will not harm you.”

“I know, it’s just so difficult...”

Cat walked forward placing a hand on her shoulder, causing Olivia to look up at her. “Have you
“ever heard of spirit healers?” Cat asked.

“Yes, though I do not know everything about them.”

“What do you know?”

“They are somehow able to call on spirits in the fade to aid in their healing ability? To greater effect? Is that right?”

Cat smiled. “I can’t claim to know everything either, but I will tell you that Anders’ situation is unique. With spirit healers, the spirits in the fade that embody good, like compassion, or virtue, or loyalty seek out those characteristics and assist those that have them. In Anders’ case, a spirit of Justice was taken out of the fade. It couldn’t survive without a host, and Anders did not want to see it destroyed or corrupted.”

“Wait, so he agreed to it?!” Olivia gasped.

“Um, yes?” Cat replied, glancing over at Isabela and receiving a shrug in return. “Being a human with emotions and a limited perspective can be hard for this new sense of Justice that is part of him now. So, as his friends, sometimes we must help keep him from seeking vengeance for things that are unfair.” Cat ran a hand through her hair, deciding to redo her braid in order to keep her hands busy.

“I see, that must be so hard for him!”

Cat smiled, “Yes it can be, especially because he is sometimes warring with himself over these emotions. He will help you in starting your new life, but in many ways, you will probably help him more. He is trying to do too much, stretching himself thin.”

Olivia looked determined now, as she slapped her fist into her other hand. “I will help any way I can! Because he is helping me, but also for you and your friends. For saving me.”

“Consider that debt repaid,” Cat replied, finishing her braid, and tossing it over her shoulder. “Your life is yours, and only you decide what to do with it. If the clinic doesn’t make you happy, then find what does, okay?”

Olivia’s lip quivered, and Cat was quick to usher her out the door, as she didn’t want to get emotional. Cat looked back to Isabela, concerned that she hadn’t moved.

“Kitty, I’m going to stay behind today. I’ve got some business to handle.”

“Oh, okay. I’ll go let Hawke know we won’t be going,” Cat replied, starting to shed her pack.

“No, you go ahead. I’m mostly going to meet with contacts, and they don’t like new faces. You should go with Hawke.”

Cat was concerned, though she could guess as to what was going on. But Issy had yet to look at her, which was a huge tell that she was feeling guilty.

“All right.” Cat finally conceded. “You’ll be safe?” she asked.

Isabela looked up with a smirk. “Isn’t that my line?” she asked as she stood up. She was startled when Cat stepped forward to give her a hug. “Kitty??” she asked, worried.

“Just in case,” Cat replied. “You never know what will happen after all.”
Isabela relaxed and gave Cat a squeeze before backing up a step. “Go you ninny, I’ll see you tonight.”

Cat nodded, looking as emotional as Olivia had just moments ago, and she abruptly turned and headed out the door. Isabela dropped back down in her chair, telling herself that it was for the best. *I need to find that tome, and it needs to be soon. Kitty would be fine with Hawke, he’d look after her. Not to mention Fenris and Carver. Yes, she’d be all right.*

* * * * *

Cat and Olivia entered the Hanged Man, seeing that they were the last ones to arrive, though the others were hardly ready to leave. Varric, it seemed, was in the middle of breakfast, while he held an animated conversation with Hawke, who seemed to only be paying half attention at best.

The others were quiet, though Aveline and Carver were pointedly ignoring each other, as were Fenris and Anders, and Hafter looked asleep at Hawke’s feet. The two ladies strode forward to the table, one more confident than the other.

“Good morning everyone,” Cat said cheerfully, getting a chorus of replies. “You all remember Olivia? Olivia, I think you met all the guys, though that’s Varric down at the end by Hawke.” Varric smiled and gave a nod in greeting, and Olivia gave a small wave. Cat gestured over to Aveline. “and this is Aveline. She’s a guard, not a templar” Cat added quietly. “She’s a great friend to have, though if you cause trouble, you’ll wish you didn’t meet her,” Cat added with a smirk, and Aveline merely nodded along.

“Nice to meet you Olivia. Follow Anders’ instructions and you should be fine,” Aveline said with a smile.

“Oh, uh, right.” Olivia replied, uncertainly. She watched as Cat climbed down on the floor to speak to and pet the giant dog at Hawke’s feet.

Anders stood then, coming around to face Olivia. “I thought we’d keep it simple today, and let you get used to everything. Have you been to Lowtown before?” he asked.

“This is my first time out of… you know.”

“Well then, we’ll give you a tour, so you can get to know your new home, and the routine of the clinic.” Anders kept a few steps distance, and a smile on his face, and Cat was glad he was so aware of Olivia’s fears.

“And I’ll come check on you later today,” Cat added, standing and giving Olivia’s arm a squeeze. “I know new things can be scary, but you can do this.”

Olivia’s determination came back on her face, and she smiled at Cat. “Anything is better than before,” she said with a small smile. She pulled out a letter, and handed it to Cat. “Whenever you can deliver this, I would appreciate it.”

“You didn’t give any details did you?” Cat asked.

“No, but you can read it to make sure,” she replied.

Cat took the letter, and then pulled a note from her own pocket, handing it to Anders. “This is a new order for the Rose,” she said in explanation. “I’d like to have it ready next week.” Cat went to her
coin purse, pulling out a handful of silvers and handing them to Anders. “I think that should cover the charge, but let me know if I didn’t give you enough.”

Anders was wide eyed, taking in the list, as well as the payment. “This is too much.”

Cat gave him a raspberry. “Nonsense. That’s the cost of supplies, plus your payment.”

“Cat, I can’t take this-”

“Anders.” Cat interrupted him smoothly, holding up a hand. “I was presented with a business opportunity, and I’m sharing that with you. Do you or do you not know how to make these?” she asked indicating the list.

“Well, yes. But-”

“And do you, or do you not,” Cat continued without letting him get a word in, “charge for said tonics?”

“Of course, but-”

“And won’t your clinic be better off having this extra source of coin?”

Anders was smiling now, realizing what was happening. “Thank you, Cat.”

Cat waved away his gratitude. “I’m being paid for delivering it, and honestly, they decided the charge, and it’s still less than what they used to pay, and they say your tonics are much better quality, so everyone wins. If you want to have Olivia help to earn her own money, that’s up to you.”

“I’m sure we can handle this, it’s not too much,” he replied, looking at the list again.

“This is a weekly order, Anders.”

His mouth dropped as he looked at her in disbelief. “Weekly?” he croaked.

Cat nodded. “Can you handle it?” she asked.

“We’ll earn this much silver every week?” he asked, gobsmacked, and Cat grinned.

“Yes. If you can handle it. I know I’d feel better knowing you two will have money to buy food, and supplies for the clinic.”

“We can handle it!” Olivia jumped in, looking at the silver in Anders’ hand. She was no doubt thinking of buying new clothes, Cat thought, since Issy and I had insisted she got rid of her circle robes. She was currently wearing some of my clothes, which didn’t quite fit. Olivia was tall and slim, where I’m shorter and curvy, though not so much as Issy.

“It’s settled then,” Cat said, patting Anders’ arm. “Just let me know when it’s ready. We’ll try to deliver the same day each week, but we have some flexibility.”

“All… all right. Cat… I…” Anders looked somewhat lost, then threw his arms around her. “Thank you so much.”

“No problem,” she said, then whispered, “someone told me to find a new job, anyway.”

Anders chuckled, and Cat joined in. He let go of her, and giving farewells, escorted Olivia out of the tavern.
“Nice one, Angel.” Cat gave Varric a smile, while also giving him a thumbs down. “Yeah, no good, I know. Don’t worry, I’ll find it.”

“He’s right though.” Hawke commented. “This will help Anders financially, but also to stay busy, and out of trouble.”

“Thank the Maker,” Aveline added.

“Who cares,” Carver muttered, then raising his voice, asked “so are we going, or what?”

“We’re going all right,” Hawke replied. “Let’s head out.”

* * * * *

It didn’t take long to get to the Alienage, and Feynriel was waiting outside his home. Once he spotted them, he ran inside with a whoop, and practically pulled his mother along to join him in greeting Hawke’s group.

“Cat, everyone, this is my mother, Arianni. Mother, these are the people I told you about.”

Arianni walked straight to Cat, and grabbed her hands, bowing over them. “Thank you, for saving my son.”

Cat looked around, unsure of how to act, but getting no help, she pulled a hand free, and brought it to the woman’s arm, helping her to stand upright. “I am happy to help, I would leave no one at the mercy of slavers.”

Arianni looked around as well, “Thank you all, I wish I had a way to repay you for your kindness.”

“Payment is uneccessary, madam.” Hawke interjected, full of charm. “Our friend was also captured by the slavers, and we are heading to the Dalish for another matter.”

“Giving Feynriel a choice, and allowing us to accompany you, shows how different you are, yet you see it as nothing,” Arianni stated in awe. “At the least, I can make introductions to the Dalish for you.”

“That would be much appreciated,” Hawke replied with a smile. “Then you are coming with us as well?”

“Yes, I wish to stay with my son, though I worry that the clan will not accept him as you think.”

“We will do what we can to help convince them,” Hawke replied. “Are you both ready to leave?” Feynriel grabbed two packs, handing one to Arianni and they both shouldered them. “We are,” he answered for them both.

“Then let’s go.”

* * * * *
During the walk outside the city, Cat noted that Hawke and Varric were talking as they walked ahead, Carver plodded along on his own, Aveline and Hafter stuck near each other, with Aveline giving Hafter a scratch behind the ears every now and then, and Arianni and Feynriel walked together. Cat and Fenris brought up the rear, and they didn’t speak much either, though it was a comfortable silence.

Cat marveled at the scenery around her as they walked. It was strange that in just a couple of hours time, they were in the middle of the mountains, or mountain rather. There was just the one large peak, surrounded by smaller hills. The path they were on was basically a serpentine path cut through the hills, and she could barely tell that they were on an incline.

“How much further, do you think?” Cat asked Fenris, but her voice carried throughout the group.

“Not much,” Arianni answered with a smile. “Just around a few more bends there,” she pointed ahead of them.

“Oh, great!” Cat answered, readjusting her pack. “I’m looking forward to lunch!”

“We just had breakfast,” Aveline spoke up, and Cat rolled her eyes.

“Aveline, that was hours ago.”

“Oh, right.” Aveline looked up to the sky, noting the position of the sun. “I suppose I didn’t notice how long we’ve been walking.”

Cat glanced over to Fenris, who was looking left and right, on alert. “What is it?” she asked quietly.

“I am not certain, but I feel as if we have forgotten something, and it is putting me on edge.”

Cat grabbed her throwing knives, searching around as they walked, Fenris’ mood affecting her immediately. She listened intently, as their group fell silent once again, Fenris falling behind slightly as he slowed his steps, and Cat stepped closer to Feynriel and Arianni, just in case.

As she looked around, she thought back to the game. *Going to Sundermount, was there something on the road? An ambush? Not that I can remember.* She turned to her right, and felt her arm brush something. Looking down, she noted the rolled up parchment that they had taken from the Chantry board. *Oh!! The Flint Company!!*

Cat rushed forward, as Varric and Hawke were turning the corner around the last bend, and she could hear Fenris following behind her. They pushed ahead of Hawke and Varric, hearing them squawk “Hey!” as they passed.

Fenris stopped momentarily in front of Cat, his great sword in his hands, as he took the measure of the group of men before him. With a feral grin, he rushed forward in a scythe, holding his sword as a reaper as he surged forward.

“Get them!” one of the mercs shouted.

Cat could hear the rest of her group behind her pulling out their weapons, as Hafter raced past her with a snarl.

“Cat, stay back. We’ll handle this,” Carver called.
“Not likely,” Cat replied with a frown. She moved to her right, pulling out her crossbow, and picking off several men on the outskirts of the group. The fight was over quickly, and Cat helped to loot the bodies.

“I wonder what these mercs were doing here?” Varric asked as he eyed the bodies around him.

“This may give you some answers,” Cat replied, handing the parchment from the Chantry board to him. “Fenris and I saw a well armored man post this on the Chantry board, even though the revered mother was against it.”

Varric took the notice, scanning the words, while Hawke looked at him expectantly. “Seems this merc band is called the Flint Company. They were responsible for the death of all but one of the royal family of Starkhaven. The remaining royal, is asking for help in taking this merc band down, and is offering a decent sized reward too.”

Hawke looked back, contemplating. “Does it give any other information?”

“Yeah, some locations where he tracked the mercs.” Varric answered. “At the docks, and…” Varric glanced up at Cat. “by Sundermount.”

“Right,” Cat said, “I knew I forgot something.”

Fenris walked up, sheathing his sword. “WE forgot. We saw the notice earlier, but forgot about it until now.”

“We could probably take out the others at the docks on the way back,” Varric suggested. “It won’t take long, and we have the numbers. It would make sense to get the reward since we’ve already done half the work.”

“I suppose you’re right,” Hawke answered. “Though next time, I’d prefer the information before the surprise.” He smirked, and Cat decided he wasn’t angry about it.

“I’ll try to remember that,” Cat replied with a smirk. She turned to Arianni, and smiled. “Ready to go home?” she asked.

Arianni took a deep breath, and steeled herself before nodding. “Ready,” she answered.
Hello, my name is Merrill!

Cat just looked around, enjoying the scenery. Obviously, a video game could hardly compete with reality, but it still surprised her and probably would continue to do so. Everything looked vaguely familiar, just enhanced, and Cat wondered where the Dalish hunters that were guarding the entrance to the camp were.

The group walked on, Arianni walking beside Hawke, with Cat and Feynriel behind them, Varric having dropped back to walk with Aveline, then Carver, and Hafter stayed in the back with Fenris. There were no pats or scratches for Hafter with Fenris, but the mutual respect for the other as a warrior was enough for both.

After another few minutes, Arianni came to a stop, holding out her arm to stop Hawke. The others came to a stop as well, gathering closer to find out the issue.

“We wait to be addressed,” Arianni explained, as two elves in armor seemed to come out of nowhere to stand in front of the group.

“Be gone Shemlen,” the male stated with a hard look.

“Arianni? Why have you come?” the female asked, curiously.

“I am here to see the keeper, about my son’s magic,” she replied. “The humans have been sent to the keeper by another.”

“Impossible,” the male replied sternly. “You have declined your place among the people, and the half-blood is not one of us.”

“What could a Shem want with the keeper?” the female asked, though warily.

Hawke looked at Arianni, and whispered, “Oh, I’m the Shem?” At her nod, he added, “What is a shem?” Cat held her chuckle in, Hawke’s whisper being loud enough for all to hear.

“It means,” the male elf corrected, “that you are not one of the people, so you should be on your way.”

“Yes Hawke,” Fenris interjected. “all the other elves you see are figments of your imagination.”

Cat put her hand over her mouth, unwilling to let a laugh escape and offend the Dalish. However, between Fenris’ sarcasm, the look of hero worship on Feynriel’s face, and the horror on Arianni’s, it was terribly difficult.

Hawke kept his calm, looking nonplussed. He held out an amulet for the elves to see and said, “I was sent here, to see Marethari. Please tell her I have come.”

The male elf puffed up, as if to say something angrily, but the female stopped him. “Wait,” she said, putting her hand on his arm. “This is the one the keeper told us of.”

“Are you sure?” he asked skeptically. “I thought he’d be an elf.”

“Enter the camp,” the female said, turning to the group. “You will find the keeper there, by the fire.”
“Don’t cause any trouble Shem. You or the Half-blood.” The male said, as he walked back to his post, blending in with the surrounding greenery and practically disappearing before their eyes.

“Neat trick,” Cat commented. She looked at Feynriel, and asked. “You okay?”

He was stoic, and tense, but he nodded. “I came to get help controlling my magic, and so that I can stay out of the circle. I don’t care what they call me.”

“Good lad,” Hawke said, as he led the way to the keeper.

Cat instantly liked Keeper Marethari. She reminded Cat of a grandmother, though not her own, but one from a story perhaps. She was elegant, but approachable, regal- yet kind. She spoke first with Arianni, greeting her as a child that had been away too long. She greeted Feynriel with kindness, and after hearing why they were there, agreed to help Feynriel with his magic.

Several of the elven women were waiting nearby to greet and welcome Arianni back, and while they were not hostile to Feynriel, they weren’t welcoming either. Cat worried that it would be tough for him, but seeing that his mother was here with him, perhaps he could handle it.

Cat waited with the others behind Hawke, as he and Carver told the story of meeting Flemeth as they tried to escape the darkspawn, with Aveline interjecting once to stop them from arguing a point. Mareuthari simply smiled, listening intently as the story unfolded. Similarly, Cat could see Varric’s attention was focused, and every so often his hand would twitch, as if he were taking notes.

Marethari tilted to the side, looking at those behind Hawke. “And you?” she asked them.

“These are my companions,” Hawke answered. “They are traveling with me, as we did not know what we would face.”

Cat said nothing, not wanting to nod and agree, since she had her own reasons for coming. She glanced up at the mount in front of them, feeling nervous as she thought of the many ways this meeting could go.

She tuned back in, and jumped slightly, seeing Marethari standing in front of her.

“And you, child?” Marethari asked Cat, her eyes holding Cat’s, and she felt she could not evade.

“I am… a long way from home,” Cat answered, choosing her words carefully. “I’m looking for help to find it again.”

Marethari held her gaze another moment, before nodding and turning back to Hawke. “We know as you do, Asha’bellanar does not do favors without a price, but perhaps she may help you in this. Now, for the last part, you must take the amulet up the mountain to the altar. There, you will preform a rite for the departed, and then… your debt will be payed in full. As will ours.”

“I was not taught a rite, are you going to teach it to me?” Hawke asked, annoyed, and yet resigned to doing more to pay back his debt.

“I will send my first with you,” she replied. “You would call her my apprentice. She waits for you on the path to the mountain,” she said, gesturing with her hand to the well worn path ahead of them. “If I can ask…” she began, and Hawke nodded. “She wishes to leave the clan and go to Kirkwall. Can you take her with you on your way back? Guide her to the city?”

“Why does she want to leave?” Hawke asked.
“That is not my place,” Marethari stated. “But it is her wish, and I must abide by it.”

“Strange,” Hawke murmured. “If that’s what you want, she can accompany us back.”

“Thank you,” Marethari replied, bowing her head to Hawke, and stepping away from us, walking back among her clan.

“Anyone else thinking this is weird?” Varric asked.

“Seems normal for us,” Carver replied.

“Let’s get this over with,” Hawke said, starting up the path, and the others followed him.

* * * * *

What was Hawke so broody about? Cat wondered. It’s like he’s channeling Carver!

Cat glanced over at their newest member of the Hawke troupe, to see Merrill looking at the ground as they climbed the path, her face glum. She had definitely been nervous meeting all of us, and Hawke’s short, clipped responses hadn’t helped to put her at ease.

Varric jumped in, and doled out his usual charm, even pardoning Hawke’s unusually silent behavior, before introducing the rest of them. “Sorry we didn’t get properly introduced. I’m Varric, and you’ve met Hawke. The grumpy younger version is Carver, the grumpy elf is Fenris, the scary woman is Aveline, and the happy looking one is Catarina.”

“Whatever Varric,” Cat grumbled, as Hafter gave Varric a few barks.

“My apologies!” Varric stated, with a small bow. “And the mabari is Hafter, though we’re not sure if he belongs to Hawke, or Hawke belongs to him,” Varric added teasingly.

Everyone glanced at Hawke, but he showed no signs of even hearing the joke. With a sigh, Varric started asking Merrill questions about the rite they were going to preform, and she answered in a way that reminded Cat of the keeper.

Cat was about to comment on Merrill’s ability to make things easy to understand when she tripped, and landed face first in the dirt.

“Cat?” Aveline asked, but before she could respond, she heard the others’ comments.

“Whoa.”

“Is that a skeleton?”

“There’s a bunch of them!”

Cat hauled herself to her feet, seeing the hand that tripped her had clawed most of its body out of the ground, and an actual skeleton was now poised to attack, and she didn’t have her weapons ready.

She backed up, narrowly dodging the sword that was swung at her, when a large stone went crashing into the skeleton, bursting it apart. The stone had disappeared as well, and she realized that it was a spell. Cat hung her head, and caught her breath; looking up when she saw a hand held out in
front of her, offering help to her feet.

She looked up at Merrill and grabbed her hand, picking herself up. She was slightly surprised at the strength which Merrill pulled her, and noted that she was stronger than she looked.

“Thank you,” Cat said.

“Oh! No- no problem. I’ve done a little bit of fighting before, but I was more worried about hitting the wrong person. I’m glad I didn’t!”

Cat chuckled, “That’s true for anyone, not just mages.”

“Princess, why do I get the feeling you knew she was a mage?” Varric said, wincing as soon as the nickname left his mouth.

Cat turned to glare at him. “Firstly, no. Just no. Secondly, of course she’s a mage. All keepers are mages, so any apprentice would also be a mage.”

“How did you know that?” Merrill asked, gaping at her.

“I’d like to know that myself,” Carver added.

“I spent some time in Ferelden travelling with a group, one of whom was an elf,” Cat said to Merrill with a smile.

“Cat, you say that like it’s an explanation, but it only brings up more questions,” Varric said, as Merrill came close to Cat excitedly.

“I’m from Ferelden as well! Do you miss it? We left to escape the blight, which was good, but sometimes I wish I were still there.”

“I know how that is,” Cat replied, as she and Merrill started walking up the path again. They continued talking while the others looked on, then at each other in disbelief, then hurried after them.

A short while later, they came across a camp, where a lone hunter was cleaning his catch. He sneered as he caught sight of Merrill and Cat, and the others behind them. He stood, rounding the fire to step in front of them.

“So! The keeper finally found someone to take you from here.”

“Yes,” Merrill replied quietly.

“Good!” he said contemptuously. “Hurry and finish your task, Shem,” he said to Cat. “We cannot be rid of this one soon enough!”

Merrill seemed to momentarily wilt, but her pride snapped her back straight. “I will save our clan! Whether you approve, or not!” She stormed forward, determined to not let the hunter reply.

“What a jerk,” Carver commented as she followed, glancing back to see the hunter return to his task.

“This does bring up a question Merrill,” Varric said. He glanced at Hawke, seeing him still silently brooding over who knew what. “If you leave here, you’ll be a mage, in a city full of templars.”

“Yes, that’s true,” she said. She interrupted herself, as she gestured towards the large pile of boulders blocking the path. “A landslide blocked the path, but there is a cave nearby, that should still get us to the top.” She gestured for the others to follow, as she turned to move up a smaller, newer path. “But
if I don’t go to Kirkwall,” she said, continuing the former conversation, “I’ll be alone. In the city, I can get lost, blend in. A solitary elf out here? Is easy prey.”

“Fair warning Cat,” Carver said with a smirk as they entered the cave, “it looks like spiders.” He looked back to Garrett and Fenris, who were now walking silently side by side, seemingly hoping for assistance in his teasing. Seeing that he was not getting what he sought, he sighed loudly and rolled his eyes. “Do we know anyone that isn’t brooding every hour of the day?” he complained.

Fenris looked up, and quipped back, “Like attracts like it seems,” then continued silently on.

Cat’s smile appeared momentarily, before disappearing again as she glanced back. *Fenris was often silent, though not always brooding. But Hawke? This was very unusual, especially that is was lasting this long, she thought.*

She quickly forgot about it, as Carver was proved right, and giant spiders came rushing at them. The fight was quick but difficult, and Cat was very glad at the slight breeze she felt once they left the cave, as she was very sweaty.

The group stood in front of a graveyard, the entrance marked with a large stone archway in front of them. In front of the archway, was a bright blue barrier, and Cat reached out to touch it.

“No,” Merrill said, blocking her hand. “It will protect itself.”

Cat put her hand back down, though she was disappointed. Merrill pulled out a small knife and made a small cut across three of her fingers. Using her other hand, the blood rushed from her hand to the barrier, and with another movement, from Merrill, the barrier disappeared.

“Blood magic? Foolish.”

Cat knew what was happening, yet she was still somewhat impressed. It was difficult to think of blood magic as evil, as the others did. Though, being somewhat taboo, it was also exciting. There wasn’t another mage she would trust to do blood magic while she watched on. “Yes, it was blood magic, but I know what I’m doing.” Merrill said. "The spirit helped us.”

The group was quiet, and Hawke stepped forward. “Sure, they’re very helpful. Right up until they take over your mind and body, and make you a monster that others have to put down.”

“Well... yes.” Merrill looked nervous, but she stood her ground. “But that won’t happen because I know how to defend myself.”

Hawke made a noise, that sounded like he didn’t care, but everyone around could tell he had somewhat come out of his funk. He didn’t like to see other mages suffer, nor cause suffering for others. He cared, and probably more than he should.

“Be careful up ahead,” Merrill cautioned as Hawke gestured to Aveline and Carver to lead the group forward. “The dead are no longer sleeping peacefully here.”

They went forward cautiously, seeing the altar ahead on an outcropping of rock. They moved onward, Cat, Merrill, and Varric in the middle, looking out to the sides, and Fenris, Hawke and Hafter in the back, constantly glancing back. It seemed that they would make it without incident, and they all relaxed slightly.

*Of course!* Cat yelled internally, as the Arcane horror rose up, followed by more skeletons. They immediately turned outward, their backs together, as they took stock of the situation. Cat could see the bright light of the spell the horror was inflicting on them, and she rushed forward with her
daggers, intent on getting rid of it first. Seeing Aveline’s shield up before it, and her sword thrusting at the horror from the front, Cat skirted around to it’s back and began stabbing it repeatedly.

She was nowhere near the grace or speed of Isabela, but Cat knew where to stab to inflict the most damage. Each stab seemed more and more difficult, as if her energy was failing rapidly, and she struggled and pushed with all her might to get the horror to fall.

Between the two of them, they were finally able to bring the horror down, and it sank into the ground. Exhausted, Cat fell on her knees, her hands on the ground in front of her as she panted. She had no idea what the spell was, but it had been extremely effective. If Aveline had not been there to take the brunt of it, she doubted she would still be conscious.

By the time Cat got to her feet, the fight was finished, and her friends were eyeing the altar, except for Fenris.

“Hawke,” he said, getting everyone’s attention. “Should we scout further ahead? I do not want to be taken by surprise during the rite.”

“That’s a good idea,” Hawke replied. “though I don’t think we need to go all the way to the top. Perhaps just around the next bend?”

Aveline and Carver waited for the Cat, Varric and Merrill to follow after Fenris and Hawke before they took position behind them. Cat smiled as she thought of Hawke’s attention to detail in keeping the squishier people safe from ambushes, by always having a warrior at the rear of the group.

“Shades!”

The yell went out, and everyone tensed. Cat could see the dark, shadowy forms moving across the ground towards them. How they could move so quickly and yet still look like they were creeping, was beyond her.

“Stay back!” Aveline yelled to her, and she looked around, noting that each shade was being occupied by at least one of their group.

“AAH! Revenant!” Merrill screamed.

“Wha-?!” Carver tried to reply.

“Pride demon, possessing a corpse!” Merrill hurried to explain. “Very tough and powerful, we’ll need powerful attacks in order to kill it!”

Cat looked around, seeing Varric flip back away from the shade he was engaged with. Carver, Fenris and Hawke were all finishing off their shades, and beginning to attack the revenant. Hafter and Aveline were going two on two with shades, and Merrill was readying a spell to hit the revenant with.

Decision made, Cat began to move toward the revenant. She put her smaller, easier to wield daggers back in their sheaths at the small of her back, and reaching overhead, pulled out the other daggers that Isabela had gotten her. They were larger, with curved blades, and wickedly sharp. This is why Issy makes you use them, for situations like this, Cat told herself.

She paused, waiting for Merrill’s attack to hit, readying her weapons, and tensing her muscles. Here goes nothing, explosive strike!

The vines that had wrapped around the revenant were torn away as it stepped towards Merrill, and
Cat struck. In one smooth motion, she leaped in and buried her blades into its back, twisting and pulling them out with a burst of power, then rolling back over her shoulder and away. She heard the unearthly scream of the revenant, and she scurried to find cover as the others pressed their advantage. She continued to back up, but she could feel the malevolent gaze of the creature, as it turned to keep her in its sights.

Without warning, it swung out, knocking back all the others, and reaching toward her, she could feel a cold spectral hand grabbing her and pulling her in.

“CAT!!”

She could hear the yell, but could not discern who had made it, her head was swimming, and as she looked up into the visage of the revenant, she truly knew what horror was. Cat saw its giant sword swinging in, and then… nothing.

* * * * *

“NO!!!”

Hawke screamed, his rage and agony combined in something that left him raw. He pushed forward only to be held back by Aveline, and he struggled against her.

“Wait, Hawke! The spell!” Aveline yelled in his ear, but he just twisted and pushed, trying to break free. She grappled back, using all her strength and training to keep him at bay while Merrill finished her petrify spell. Stone pieces from all directions came flying in, entombing the revenant so that it could not move, though Aveline could still hear it scream, a sound that would surely haunt her dreams.

Hawke used all his strength, and finally broke free of her grasp. He ran forward, chanting No…no… no… over and over again in his mind. He could see the blood covering her chest, and pushed forward. It’s my fault, my fault.

He went down as he neared Cat, sliding to a stop as he pulled her in his arms, and putting his hand on her neck. Please be alive…

He held his breath, though he had no idea that he had done so, until he felt her pulse, faint, but there. His breath whooshed out in relief, and he hung his head to hers. He could hear the sounds of the others as they took apart the creature while it was frozen in place, but his concentration was on the feeling of her heart as it beat, the soft sound of her breath near his ear.

It was almost his worst nightmare brought to life. Someone that he lead, someone that he swore to protect- had almost died, and it was his fault. He was the one who was supposed to take risks, he was the leader, so he should have had a plan. Instead he led them into a trap, and giving no direction, watched as one of his people was cut down.

* * * * *
The first thing that came in to focus, was the smell. It wasn’t a bad smell, but it wasn’t something she could name either. It was something she had never smelled before, and she laid there, just breathing it in, over and over, trying to memorize it.

Soon after, she could hear something. There was plenty of noise, all around her in fact. But this was different. It was soft, and she strained her ears to hear it. A voice, saying… saying… she grew frustrated as she tried to understand, listening again.

“I’m sorry… I’m so sorry… please don’t go…”

Her tension left as she finally understood, and she wondered mildly why anyone would want to leave. It smelled nice, it sounded nice… it felt… nice.

As her focus changed to what she could feel, she took note of several things. There was pressure, on one side of her face, where something soft, but furry was resting, and on her neck, something behind her, holding her up, and…

PAIN.

The focus changed, and Cat’s eyes flew open, as the pain hit her again. She gasped in a breath, trying to steel herself against the onslaught. She blinked rapidly, her hair in her eyes, and she tried to shake her head to get it out of the way.

It suddenly was gone, and as she looked up with her teeth clenched, she realized, Hawke had been holding her, in fact, it was his hair that had been in her face, his stubbly beard against her cheek… his hand, on her neck, now moving up to cup her cheek. His scent… his voice, telling her to stay.

Cat looked up at him, unsure of what was going on, knowing that something had happened. They just looked at each other, neither moving, until the pain became intolerable, and Cat hissed, and tried to move her hand to her wound, and slipping through something on her neck.

“Here. Get her to drink this,” she heard, though she was unable to see who. She watched as Hawke moved his hand from her cheek, and grabbed a small bottle. Pulling the stopper out with his teeth, he spat it to the side, and brought the bottle to her lips.

“Drink it, nice and easy,” he said softly. “It’s a healing potion, it will help for now.”

Cat could hardly believe how long it took for her to actually down the potion, but she could feel the effects, and sighed in relief, her eyes closing.

“Cat,” Hawke said, a little more sharply. “Stay with us now.”

She opened her eyes, finally able to see beyond Hawke, to her other friends that were all around her.

“Um, sorry?” she croaked, happy that she saw a few smiles.

“Sorry, Rosie? Whatever for?” Varric teased. “Not like Isabela is going to gut us all or anything…”

Cat laughed, then groaned in pain. “No laughing, I’m begging you,” she said, grimacing. “And no, that’s the worst one yet.”

Varric shook his head, but was smiling. “You gave us quite the scare there,” he said quietly, looking over at Hawke. Cat followed his eyes, facing forward and looking up into Hawke’s face. This time, she didn’t meet his eyes, as he was staring intently on her wound, and clearing her throat, she looked around to the others.

“They’re fine,” Aveline said. “Just checking around to make sure we won’t have any more surprises.”

Cat gave a sigh of relief, and then couldn’t help but ask, “How bad is it?”

“You’ll have an epic looking scar…” Varric said, trailing off.

“I’m honestly surprised you’re still alive,” Aveline said bluntly. “You must have fell back as the sword came at you, which saved your life. Otherwise, well, I’m sure you can imagine.” Cat reached up, gently feeling the skin around her wound. It started just below her right ear, and ended above her left breast. Passing out had most definitely saved her life, she realized, if this was the wound after a healing potion.

“Help me up, would you Hawke?” she asked, feeling a little uncomfortable, as he continued to stare at the wound. “Hawke??” she questioned again, and he seemed to snap out of it.

“What?” he asked, looking up to her eyes again.

“Help me up?” she asked.

He shifted, bringing his hand away from her face and gripping under her knees, he stood, bringing her with him, so that she was in his arms bridal style.

“Whoa, whoa, whoa. You are not carrying me.”

“You are not walking, you’re injured,” he said, with an incredulous look. “Don’t be foolish.”

“But…but…” Cat search around, for any reason to be put down. “You’ve got the rite thing to do, and I’ll just take it easy while you do that, besides, the healing potion helped loads… and… Fenris!” she said as she spotted him. “Fenris can help me!” she waved him over.

Fenris walked forward, looking intently at her wound. “It appears to be better, though it will be quite the scar.”

“That’s what I said,” Varric added.

“Cat, you all right?” Carver asked, looking uneasy.

“Yes, I just really need to walk. Fenris, can you help me, so Hawke can do the rite thing with Merrill?”

“Certainly.”

Hawke frowned, looking between Cat and Fenris, but he finally eased her legs down so she could stand. He held on as she shook, and stumbled, Fenris grabbing her uninjured shoulder, and her waist.

_What is wrong with me?_ Garrett asked himself as he let go of her. He ran his hand through his hair, shaking his head to clear it. “All right then, let’s go… nice and easy. Merrill, you’re with me,” he said.

“Right,” she answered, but like all of them, her eyes were still on Cat. Fenris ceased her attempts at walking, handing his sword to Aveline, and crouching in front of her. She placed her arms around his neck loosely, and he stood, holding her legs on either side of his body.
She has no problem letting Fenris carry her… Hawke grumbled to himself. He shook his head again, as he walked off, the others following behind. He really didn’t want to delve into what he was feeling, so he put it out of his mind… or tried to. Obviously, it’s been too long since I’ve enjoyed female company. Combined with almost losing her while on a job, I’m bound to feel attached at the moment.

Back home there were plenty of girls that fancied him, and Hawke had never seen the need or had the desire to visit a brothel. But as he tried to forget about the woman behind him, he thought he may change his mind, as the image of her face when he had conjured a spell was stuck in his head- her eyes wide, biting her lip… he had never forgotten how she looked at him then.
Hawke stood in front of the altar, unimpressed. It was basically a large stone slab resting on the ground. True there were candles of some sort, and their flame didn’t really look like normal fire, but that was his least concern. He wanted to get this over with, and get his group back home.

He glanced behind him as Fenris crouched to let Cat off his back, noting again that they were constantly touching each other. True, it wasn’t flirtatious like Isabela, the way she would brush up against one of them, or graze their arm with her fingertips; it was different, yet still irritating.

One of the first things he had noticed about Fenris was how he would avoid touching or being touched by others, even in the slightest ways. Yet, with Cat… something was definitely going on, and he felt that he should know what it was.

“Hawke?”

Merrill flinched back a step as he turned to her with a glare, and she almost lost her nerve.

“Um… should I start the rite?”

“Yes.”

“All right, perhaps everyone should stand back a bit? I’m not certain what will happen, if anything.”

Hawke’s glare didn’t ease as he took several steps back, though he did turn to ensure all of his group was behind him, and ready.

At his nod, Merrill began the rite.

“Hahren na melana sahlin.” Cat was sure she wasn’t the only one transfixed by the beauty of the language, but she didn’t look around to see. She felt enraptured by not only the words, but the flow of them, like poetry. “Emma ir abelas souver’inan isala hamin vhenan him dor’felas. In uthenera na revas.”

The bright lights that suddenly appeared had the group shielding their eyes, and Cat gasped softly as she saw Flemeth for the first time. She was suddenly glad that Fenris was helping her stand.

“A witch!” she heard him say, his tone guarded.

“Andaran Atishan, Asha’bellanar,” Merrill greeted her with a curtsy.

Flemeth turned to Merrill, a slight smile on her face. “One of the people… I see. Do you know who I am, beyond that title?”

“I know very little,” Merrill admitted.

“Then stand. The people bow their knee too quickly.” Flemeth gave Merrill an encouraging look.

“So nice to see a bargain kept,” she turned to address Hawke, who was standing with his arms crossed, his frown apparent, and Hafer poised at his side to attack at his command. “I half expected my amulet to end up in a merchant’s pocket.”
“I keep my word,” Hawke said shortly. “Though you could have told me you were inside it.”

“A bit of security, should the inevitable occur,” she answered with a smirk. “And if I know my Morrigan, it already has.”

There was a pause, and Flemeth looked at each of Hawke’s companions. Fenris took the moment to speak up.

“You are no simple witch. I have seen powerful mages, spirits, and abominations yet you are none of those.”

“Such a curious lad,” Flemeth appraised him. “The chains are broken, but are you truly free?”

“You see a great deal,” Fenris murmured.

Cat gulped as Flemeth’s gaze stayed with her, trying not to show her nerves, but it was difficult, knowing what she did.

“Wait…” Hawke said, and Flemeth gave Cat a small smirk before turning back to him. “Morrigan? Is that someone I should know?”

“She’s a girl who thinks she knows what is what better than I, or anyone. Ha ha! And why not? It’s who I raised her to be. Don’t you agree?” she asked, looking back at Cat, who nodded.

Hawke was confused, but didn’t really care, so he continued on. “Why not just come yourself? Why all this secrecy?”

“Because I did not want to be followed,” Flemeth turned, looking out around the mountainside. Turning back, she walked a few steps closer to Hawke, “You smuggled me here quite nicely.” At his uneasy glance, she added, “Know that you may have saved my life, as surely as I saved yours. An even trade, I think.”

“You have plans then?” he asked.

With a nod, Flemeth turned to look at Cat again. “Destiny awaits us all, dear boy.” Cat shifted uncomfortably, wanting to ask something, anything…but coming up blank.

Fenris tensed, and Cat held her breath as Flemeth came closer. She looked closely at Cat’s neck, examining the injury, and reaching out her hand.

“Are we going to regret bringing her here?” Carver asked Hawke loudly, and everyone turned to look at Hawke.

“Regret.” Flemeth said softly, and they all turned back. Cat could feel the magic working on her skin, but it was different than Anders’ and felt foreign. Flemeth continued to speak softly. “Regret is something I know well. Take care not to cling to it, to hold so close, that it poisons your soul.”

She lowered her voice even more, and Cat could barely hear her. “Do not look so long upon the closed door, that you do not see the one which has opened for you.” Finished in her ministrations, she stepped back, and Cat practically collapsed into Fenris in exhaustion.

“Wait…” she mumbled.

Flemeth turned to Merrill. “Step carefully- no path is darker, than when your eyes are shut.”

“Ma serranas, Asha’bellanar,” Merrill answered.
Cat wavered, trying desperately to stay awake, as her mind reeled. *Flemeth had healed her... Why?? Was she involved in her life somehow?*

“Wait…” Cat mumbled again, and felt herself drooping.

Fenris looked at Cat in concern, and helped her down to the ground. She was practically asleep on her feet, and knew the exhaustion would overtake her soon. He looked at her injury, and was shocked. It was not only healed, it looked as if it had happened months ago instead of hours. There was no redness, no puckering, simply a white scar line across her neck, and if the blood was not still staining her skin and clothes he might have thought he imagined the whole thing.

He missed what Hawke and the witch spoke of, but looked up in time to see her transform herself into a high dragon and take flight.

Hawke turned around, rubbing the bridge of his nose. “Just as clear as the last time we spoke,” he said, frustrated. “Let’s go.”

Fenris watched the dragon fly a moment more, before picking Cat up, and following after Hawke.

* * * * *

The dalish elves were more than happy to send them off, but Hawke took a moment to speak to the keeper again. He didn’t know if he would need to come this way again, and friendships with others made his life easier.

The keeper was unlike the other elves, hoping that at some point Merrill would change her mind and return to them. She told Hawke that he was a friend to the clan, and welcome anytime.

Merrill, trying to keep herself from crying, said “Let’s go,” and quickly started out of the camp.

Thankfully, they weren’t ambushed this time.

The group had made it back to Kirkwall, and Cat still hadn’t woken up. Varric was the first to voice their collective worry.

“So… what are we going to tell Rivaini?” he said. “I’m not in the mood to die today.”

“It would help if Cat was awake,” Carver added. “Then she could take the brunt of it.”

“Nice,” Aveline said, disparagingly. “She may be mad, but there isn’t any reason to take it out on us. We fought our hardest, and injuries happen. At least she is healed, and will be fine.”

“That’s really all we can do,” Hawke agreed. He looked at his group. “Fenris and I will get her home, Varric, you and Aveline take Merrill to the alienage, will you? I spoke to Arianni, and she said Merrill is more than welcome to take over her house there.”

“Oh, that was smart, Hawke,” Varric acknowledged. “I hadn’t even thought of that.”

“And that’s why, I’m the leader,” Hawke said with a smirk, and Varric grinned back, just happy to see Hawke acting somewhat like himself. *The grumpy Hawke was too much like Junior.*

“Carver, will you tell mother I’ll be home soon?” Hawke asked his brother, who nodded and walked away, Hafer following reluctantly after him at Hawke’s gesture.

“Come with us Merrill, we’ll show you to your new home,” Varric said gesturing to let her go first, and Aveline handed Fenris’ sword to Hawke.
Merrill turned to Hawke. “Thank you Hawke. Uh… will you come and visit me?” she asked, “not right now, of course… but sometime? It would be nice to have a friend.”

Hawke smiled. “Of course, Merrill. And thank you for all your help today. Without that petrify spell, we probably would have lost Cat,” he said, and they both turned to look at the sleeping woman in Fenris’ arms.

“I’m glad she’s all right,” Merrill added. “I enjoyed spending time with her.”

“I’m sure she felt the same,” Hawke said with a smile. “We’ll see you later.”

Merrill followed after Varric and Aveline, not really paying attention to the turns they took, as she thought about Hawke. He was much nicer than she had first thought, and she was glad that she had seen this side of him. Otherwise, she might have been too afraid to ask him to visit, and then she definitely would have been all alone.

“Here we are!” Varric said cheerfully, and Merrill snapped out of her thoughts, looking around.

“Is… is this really where the elves live?”

* * * * *

Hawke and Fenris walked in silence. They had stopped at the Hanged Man, but Isabela had not been there, so they walked on towards their small home. Knocking at the door, and getting no response, Hawke simply opened the door, glancing inside. Finding no one, he stepped in and held the door for Fenris.

“Do you know which bed is hers?” Fenris asked, looking from one to the other.

“And why would I know that?” Hawke replied sardonically.

Fenris grunted in reply, and choosing the less opulent looking one, set Cat down upon it. He sat her up, looking back at Hawke in question. “A little help?” he asked, which had Hawke stepping forward.

“With what?”

Hawke knew Fenris could convey many things with just a look, but he wasn’t a mind reader, and didn’t appreciate the look he was getting now.

“I doubt she’ll sleep well with her weapons on,” he finally replied, and Hawke felt like an idiot.

“Right,” he said, getting to work. Cat was wearing her crossbow and no less than three different holsters for her daggers, and Hawke felt only slightly uncomfortable as he set the crossbow aside and started unbuckling the first, on her back.

He noted that Fenris was holding her gently, and her head was resting on his arm, and he finally decided to say something.

“Cat has always been one to touch others, even from the start,” he began, and Fenris looked up in question. “And at first, I could tell that it bothered you, but it doesn’t seem that way anymore.”
Fenris looked down, and Hawke waited patiently. Fenris had always been completely honest with him, but sometimes had trouble finding the right words for his feelings. Hawke couldn’t imagine having been a slave, and suppressing all of one’s emotions, and gave Fenris all the time he needed.

“I suppose, you are right,” Fenris finally answered. “I hadn’t really thought about it, but as we have become… close, there is more… trust? I suppose that is the right word.”

“So, it’s a matter of trust in the person then?” Hawke asked, curiously as he set the daggers and holsters aside, and moved to her belt holster.

“I… I am not certain,” Fenris admitted. “Or perhaps I simply became used to her touch after a while, I do not know.”

Hawke set aside the belt, and looked up at his friend. “I do not want to push you, I am simply curious.” He held out his hand, so Fenris could see his intention, he placed it on his shoulder. “Does this bother you?” he asked.

Fenris exhaled, relaxing the muscles that had tensed in response. “Slightly, though not as much as it once would have.”

Hawke removed his hand, and smiled. “Well, then I suppose that could mean that you trust me more, or that you are getting used to others touching you. Either way, I’d say that’s a good thing.”

“I suppose so,” Fenris replied, as he cradled Cat’s head, and laid her down. Both men then looked at her thigh holsters, though neither moved.

“Oh, perhaps…” Hawke started, but Fenris merely reached forward and began unbuckling them. Hawke noted that they were slightly more complicated than a normal thigh holster, wrapping around each leg, instead of being on a belt worn around the waist. He also noted that Fenris had no problem having his hands… where he did.

“Can you get her boots?” Fenris asked, breaking the silence, and Hawke jumped slightly.

“Oh, sure,” he said, moving over to the end of the bed, and began loosening the laces, pulling off each boot in turn. He watched as Fenris stood, and pulled a blanket off the other bed, and covered Cat with it, and he felt something sink inside him, as he saw Fenris tuck a stray lock of hair behind her ear.

No… I'm sure that didn’t mean anything.

Fenris walked over to where his sword was leaning, and placed it back in its sheath upon his back. Hawke stood as well, looking back to Cat’s sleeping form, and then at Fenris.

Just my imagination running wild, Hawke thought. It was a ridiculous thought.

He stepped forward to follow Fenris out of the home, and placed his hand upon his shoulder again, giving it a pat. “Good job today, I’m grateful to have you with us.”

Fenris felt the touch, smiling slightly at the thought that it hadn’t bothered him at all. Now that it was brought to his attention, he could see the change for the better that was happening within him, and he was… proud.

“Thank you,” he replied, grateful that he had somehow stumbled into the people he hadn’t known he so desperately needed.
It wasn’t long until Hawke entered his Uncle’s home, weary down to his bones.

“Garrett? Is that you?”

Hawke looked up as his mother came into the main room, and greeted him with a hug.

“Darling, you look tired. I hope you aren’t getting in over your head with this expedition business?”

“Just a trying day, Mother,” he replied. “One of our companions was hurt, and we almost lost her.”

“Aveline?” She asked, full of concern.

“No, Aveline is fine,” he answered, as she led him over to a chair in front of the fire, keeping his hand gripped in her own. “Her name is Cat, and she was injured, but looks like she’ll be fine.”

“Thank the Maker,” she said quietly. “I’m glad you have people that help you. I worry enough now, I’d hate to think how bad I would worry if it were just you and Carver doing these jobs.” She gave him a look as she added, “not that you tell me much about them…”

“I can handle it Mother, I just don’t want you to worry yourself,” he said, patting her hand. “They are an excellent group, we just were… caught off guard.”

“You know, I would like to meet these friends of yours sometime,” she began with a smirk. “You’re never too old to bring your friends home to meet your mother.”

Hawke chuckled, “No, but sometimes your friends aren’t the type you would bring home to meet your mother,” he said, and chuckled again at seeing his mother pouting. “Perhaps sometime,” he relented, and she beamed at him.

“You know any friend of yours is welcome,” she said as she stood up. “If you’ve kept them close, then there has to be something special about them, right?” She leaned down to kiss his forehead, and said goodnight, leaving him to stare into the fire, alone with his thoughts.

* * * * *

Isabela knew she was not a patient woman, but thought that as of now, she could be considered a saint for how much leeway she was granting the her newest contact. She raised her hand, scrubbing it over her face, again, and gave a huge sigh.

“Look Anton, I will say this only once,” she said quietly, then reached out suddenly to grab his collar and pull him down to they were eye to eye. “You get the information… then you contact me. I have waited all day, and wasted plenty of coin. Now I find that you don’t have anything worthwhile for me.” She sneered at the man, and her voice grew harsh. “This had better not ever happen… again. Understand?”

As his head began bobbing up and down, Isabela pushed him away in disgust. Men, she thought. Always thinking women have nothing better to do than come running whenever they call.

She continued to fume as she made her way home. The day had been one bad deal after another, and now here she was, with no money and a wasted day, and nothing to show for either. She was almost
wishing someone would pick a fight, just so she could let off some steam.

After several hours, several drinks, and one bar fight later, Isabela finally made it home. She walked in, only to find Cat asleep in bed, though with her own blanket on top of her. She stopped, confused. *Nope, that can’t be right,* she thought, as her head swam slightly. *Oh well.*

Isabela quickly shed her boots, only falling over once, and since her blanket was on top of Cat, she nudged her over, and climbed in next to her. *We’ll talk about stealing blankets in the morning,* she thought as she quickly fell asleep.

Chapter End Notes

I went back through and did a few edits to several chapters. Most are grammatical, so there's no need to go back and re-read, but there are one or two corrections in dialogue. Just wanted to give the fyi in case someone re-reads and notices a difference here or there.
Once again, thank you everyone for kudos and comments. They are a motivation to keep going! Here's our Sunday update, just a little early.

Cat awoke slowly, feeling herself being moved, but not quite ready to open her eyes. She let out a groan, though it was small, and stretched her arms up, surprised at how good she felt.

Her eyelids fluttered as she opened them, trying to get used to the light around her. Hearing a noise near her she groggily asked, “Issy?”

“I’m here,” she was answered, much closer than she had been expecting. Her eyes opened fully, and she watched Isabela walk away with a blood stained shirt. Looking down, she noticed the blood stain on her skin.

“Haven’t I mentioned something about undressing me?” she asked ruefully, but when Isabela turned back, she wasn’t wearing a smirk.

“I couldn’t look at it any longer,” she replied, walking over to a bin they used for trash. “And I can’t save it,” she added as she threw the shirt away. “I’m surprised you didn’t wake up sooner… I may have been a little loud when I first noticed it..”

Cat winced. “I’m sure that wasn’t pleasant.”

“No, not really,” Isabela said, a smirk finally gracing her lips, making Cat sigh in relief. *It was just too strange when Issy was serious.* Isabela came back with a wet cloth, sitting next to Cat on the bed. “It took some time, but I finally saw that you were all right, and sporting a new scar.” She reached out, running her hand over the scar just below Cat’s ear.

“Turns out yesterday was much more eventful than any of us thought it would be,” Cat said with a smile.

“Tell me?” she asked, handing over the cloth.

“Of course,” Cat replied, as she began to clean herself of blood.

They spent the next hour talking over the details of the day before, with Cat downplaying most of the fighting, except for the revenant. She wanted Isabela to be prepared in case they came across one again.

Isabela didn’t speak much, but she did share some of her own day, telling Cat about the horrible waste it all had been.

“Well, at least you got rid of Hayder, that’s bought us time, right?” Cat asked, and Isabela nodded.

“But Castillon will find us eventually, so I have to find that relic.”

“We’ll find it Issy,” Cat said encouragingly.
“No Kitty, I want you to stay out of it,”

“What?” Cat asked, confused. “I’m already involved.”

“Yes, with Hawke, and all that. But I’m going to take care of the relic on my own. Hawke and his crew don’t know what it is, and I want to keep it that way.”

Cat didn’t reply, the stubborn tone of Isabela’s voice was nothing she couldn’t handle, but the pleading look on her face was new.

“Issy…” Cat began, unsure how to proceed.

“Please Kitty,” Isabela asked, grabbing Cat’s hand and squeezing it. “Let me try to do this my way.”

“Okay,” Cat said, unable to hold out. “But as soon as it gets too risky, or Castillon sends someone else…”

“If that happens, you won’t be the only one I ask to help,” Isabela cut in. “But I can do this… before that happens.”

Cat nodded. She knew too well that the relic wouldn’t be found until there was a buyer for it, so she could give this to Isabela. She just worried for what came after, especially if Isabela kept her distance from Hawke’s crew, like yesterday. Hawke’s influence was what had her returning in the game… and Cat needed to make sure Isabela wasn’t going anywhere this time either.

Cat’s stomach took that moment to let out a loud growling noise, which had both of them laughing.

“Breakfast?” Cat asked hopefully, pulling the blanket up under her armpits.

“It’s almost past midday, no wonder you’re hungry,” Isabela replied. She got up and walked over to her bag, pulling out a few biscuits and cheese. “It’s not much, but it will tide you over until we can go get something hot.”

“This is great!” Cat said enthusiastically, and started pulling off bits of bread and cheese to stuff in her mouth. “Mmm…” she said. “It’s so good!”

Isabela’s eyebrow rose. “If that’s good, you probably won’t be very picky about lunch,” she mused. There was a sudden banging on the door, and Isabela walked over, shaking her head at Cat’s cheeks stuffed full of food.

She opened the door, seeing Anders first, looking like he was all out of sorts. “Is Cat here? Is she awake? Is she okay??” he asked in rapid succession. Isabela gave a jerk of her head, letting him come in and see for himself, then stepped out, closing the door behind her, and leaning against the door jamb.

She studied the group in front of her, most of them looking scared or guilty, probably wondering if I’m going to stab them, she thought, but kept the smirk from taking over her features.

Hawke stepped forward, “Hello Isabela,” he said. “We told Anders what happened, and that Cat was fine, but he wanted to check for himself.”

She didn’t move, and Hawke eyed her. She was obviously trying to intimidate me, he thought, and continued to smile. “Did you miss me yesterday?” he asked cheekily, waggling his eyebrows. Aha! That almost got a smile, so she isn’t angry.
“Oh yes,” she answered. “But I found someone else who filled in quite nicely.” She smirked back up at him, as he laughed.

“We did try to find you last night to tell you,” he said, getting serious again.

“I was busy,” she answered.

“Busy?” he repeated, in question.

“Did you want a demonstration?” she asked softly, coming closer, and trailing her hand along his arm.

“Now is… hardly the time,” he replied, just as softly.

“Well, you know where to find me, when you change your mind.”

Hawke grinned at her, noting how easy it was talking with her, and how easy it would be to do more than talk. It seemed a simple solution to his problems of late. She was beautiful, she was eager, and there would undoubtedly be no complications.

“Come on in, Kitty will want to see you all,” Isabela said, breaking him from his thoughts, as she opened the door behind her, holding it open for the five of them and the dog to enter. “It isn’t much, but we call it… a hovel.”

“It isn’t like we are here very much,” Cat spoke up from the right side of the room, laying in bed and looking behind her to give Anders a better view of her scar, while he poked and prodded. “Between the beds and the two chairs, we should have enough seats for everyone,” she said as she went to sit up. She pulled the blanket along with her.

“Uh, Issy, can you get me a shirt?” she said, embarrassment pinking her cheeks.

“You don’t need to wear a shirt just for us,” Merrill commented as she sat down on Isabela’s bed. “We want you to be comfortable.”

“I think that’s why she needs a shirt, Daisy,” Varric said, pulling out one of the chairs and flipping it around so he would face the room. Anders was already sitting next to Cat on her bed, and Carver immediately sat by Merrill, which had Cat suppressing a grin. Fenris moved to sit in the other chair, so Hawke decided to sit on the other side of Merrill, so that he could see everyone.

Isabela threw Cat a shirt, and she pulled it over her head, feeling infinitely better, and she patted the bed next to her, to offer Isabela a seat.

“So, Anders?” Hawke asked.

“You were right, she’s completely healed,” he answered. “From the look of the scar, it would have taken a large amount of magic to heal it completely so quickly. You said she was a witch?”

They all nodded, and Carver spoke up. “When we first met her, back in Ferelden, Aveline called her a witch of the wilds, though she seems much stronger than that.”

“Hmm,” Anders said as he pondered this new information.

“What I thought was strange,” Cat said. “Was how her magic felt so different.”

“Different how?” Hawke asked curiously.

“Well, different than when I’ve been healed before.”
“Cat, every mage’s magic will feel different, just as each mage is different,” Anders explained.

“But… yours felt the same as Wynne’s did. But then Flemeth’s was so different.”

“Wynne?” Hawke asked.

“Senior Enchanter Wynne?” Anders echoed. “From the Ferelden circle?”

“Uh, yeah. That’s her. Anyway, when she healed me, it felt pretty much the same as when Anders does.”

Anders was still looking at her curiously, but said, “I have heard some people say that magic from someone they know well can feel different, but I don’t know how accurate that is.”

“Like a friend compared to a stranger?” Cat asked.

He nodded. “Yes, though I don’t really trust the source. It was just hearsay.”

Cat nodded as well, as she thought. “But it makes sense, doesn’t it?” she mused aloud. “Your magic is a part of you, and I know you, I trust you…”

Anders grinned at her, “Regardless, I’m just glad you were able to be healed. I must insist that you carry a healing potion, anytime you go with Hawke would be best, but especially if I am not there.”

“Good advice for everyone,” Hawke added. “Cat was hurt, but it could have been any of us. We’re all very glad that Varric was prepared,” he said as he gave Varric a nod. He turned back to Anders. “We should make time to work more on my own healing spells as well.”

“Good idea,” Anders added.

“It may be wise to get Cat some armor,” Fenris added, and Cat frowned. Hafter chose that moment to leave Hawke, and walk over to Cat, putting his head as close to her lap as he could. She reached out, scratching him behind his ears, not listening to the boys discussing the merits of the idea.

“There is no need,” Cat said, interrupting them. “I have some that may work.” She had put it off using it for long enough. And while she didn’t want to bring up questions of her past, she was pretty excited to finally get to wear it.

“Very well,” Hawke replied. “It wouldn’t hurt for the rest of us to outfits ourselves as well. If not for now, we will definitely want better armor in the Deep Roads.”

That was a subject Cat wanted to avoid for now, so she asked, “What have you all been up to today?”

Everyone looked to Varric, for if anyone was going to tell the story, it should be the storyteller. Cat was an excellent audience, laughing at his jokes, gasping in all the dramatic pauses. Isabela noted that everyone seemed more entertained by Cat, then by the story.

Cat smiled, as she heard of the group finishing off the Flint Company, and returning to Hightown to talk to Sebastian. When Varric described the prince, Isabela gave Cat a sidelong glance and smirk.

“Sounds like someone Kitty and I should meet,” she said, and Cat giggled.

“A real prince, huh?” she said as she laughed. “Could be worth a look.”

Varric continued, though he looked around to gauge the reactions of the room. The little kitten had
no idea what she did to those around her, did she? He thought. He continued on, telling Cat of how they met a magistrate, and were sent to capture a criminal, only to discover that the man had killed several elven children. The magistrate was covering for him, due to the criminal being his son.

Cat’s eyes narrowed. “How dare he?” she asked hotly.

“That’s not the worst of it,” Varric said, and Cat’s eyes grew wider.

“What’s the worst?” she asked.

“He then refused to pay us!!” Varric said, as if he were wounded.

Cat smirked. “There are other ways of dealing with underhanded men that care more for their position than actually doing their job,” she said with a wicked gleam in her eye.

“Remind me not to piss you off,” Carver said, and Cat laughed again.

“I don’t think I could pull anything off, but I believe in Varric to get what you all are owed,” she replied.

“Madam, you flatter me,” Varric said with a nod.

“So that’s it?” Cat asked. “Then you came to see us?”

“Yes,” Anders confirmed. “That’s when I heard about yesterday, and I had to come and see if you were all right.”

“That’s sweet,” Cat said, leaning over and kissing his cheek. “Thank you for your concern. But you know these guys wouldn’t leave me in bad condition,” she said gesturing to all the others in the room. “Me, or anyone else. That’s what makes us a crew.”

“Well, this crew,” Hawke said as he stood. “Is going to eat, and then start our next job.” He looked between Cat and Isabela. “So… how about it?”

They looked at each other with a smirk, and answered together. “We’re in.”

* * * * * *

“Wow, this feels fantastic,” Cat said as she finally, finally, donned her drake skin armor. True, she had tried it on before, but not with the intent of actually using it. This was too good to be true!

“It looks fantastic too,” Isabela said, checking out her backside.

Cat caught the tone, and turned, putting a hand on her hip and pouting. “What does that mean?”

Isabela copied her stance, and reaching out, skimmed a finger down her leather covered arm. “Let’s just say, it’s form fitting, and leave it at that.”

Cat glanced down at herself, realizing what Isabela meant. The leather was a dark gray color, which Duran had requested in order to help Cat blend into her surroundings. There were no frills, no skirt, no… nothing elaborate, besides a belt that she could attach pouches and her sheath to. The top scooped around her collarbone, and the sleeves were more of an arm covering, only covering the
togs of her arms and buckling in places underneath in order to stay in place. The gloves were thin, almost like a mesh, helping the air flow, and keeping her palms from sweating.

The pants were plain as well, though thick, and reached her shins. Her boots reached just below her knees, higher than she was used to, but not uncomfortable. Wade had placed metal pieces on the tops of her feet, ending in a small, sharp point, which Zev had commented would help in climbing, getting out of bonds, or distracting enemies.

Finishing her examination, Cat merely shrugged. “Yeah, it’s snug,” she replied. “But at least I won’t be caught or grabbed by my clothes.”

“That is true…” Isabela said as she began placing all her many daggers and knives on her person, and Cat decided strap on her own weapons. “I can’t wait to see how the others react though.”

Cat didn’t flinch, knowing Isabela was just giving her a hard time. “I’m sure they’ve seen an armored woman before,” she replied after a moment. Tying her thigh sheaths tightly, she shoved the daggers in place, and picked up her crossbow, stowing it on her back. “Are you ready?” she asked, heading to the door.

“After you, Kitty,” she replied, walking over to exit after Cat. She wasn’t disappointed in the slightest, as everyone took in the sight she had been enjoying for the past few minutes. Carver and Anders looked gobsmacked, Varric whistled in appreciation, Merrill smiled, and she and Fenris stepped closer to get a better look at the armor, asking Cat questions.

Isabela felt like crowing at Cat, and looked over at Hawke, her smirk falling from her lips.

Hawke stared at Cat as the others were, but there was more than the appreciation of some, more than the desire of others. It was a hunger, a craving… and Isabela looked over to Cat, and back to Hawke again, watching as he composed himself, the look disappearing suddenly before her eyes.

“I have to wonder what special occasion you were saving this for,” Hawke teased, though he didn’t step forward as the others had.

“Yes well, I got this in Ferelden, but then sailed with Isabela. I hadn’t needed it, and to be honest, I wasn’t sure if it would work or not,” Cat replied, her cheeks pink.

“It is excellent quality,” Fenris said, as he prodded her shoulder. “Do you know what type of leather it is?” he asked.

“Um, drake skin,” she answered quietly.

That brought several eyebrows up, and Cat was quick to change the subject. “So! I’m ravenous!” She looked over at Hawke, “I believe, O illustrious leader, you said something about food?”

Hawke smiled, “That I did.” He turned and began leading the way, the others following him towards the Hanged Man, talking animatedly.

Cat looked behind her. “Issy? You coming?”

“Yeah,” Isabela said, shaking her thoughts away. She caught up and smirked at Cat. “What did I tell you Kitty?”

“I should know better than to bet against you Issy,” Cat said, glancing over at Isabela with a smile. She was surprised at the intense look on her face, but then Isabela looked over and nodded.

“True. You should know by now that I always win.”
Cat wasn’t sure what she was watching, but she was enjoying it. True, Isabela was always a gigantic flirt, but Hawke usually ignored her advances. Since their meal, the two of them had been flirting as if no one else was around, and Cat found it adorable whenever Isabela made Hawke blush. Cat smiled fondly as she thought of a Hawke and Isabela romance.

“You’ve been staring at them for the past few minutes,” Fenris said quietly as they walked through the docks.

“It’s just a little hard to believe,” Cat answered, just as softly. “They are so different! But, as they say back home, opposites attract.”

“You think so? Perhaps they are merely wanting some company,” he added, after glancing at the pair in front.

“I think Kitten here is a romantic,” Varric jumped into the conversation.

“Shh!” Cat responded.

“Please. They’re in their own little world, and can’t even hear us.”

“Did you say something Varric?” Hawke asked suddenly, and Varric flinched.

“Nothing Hawke!” Varric called back, trying not to wither under Cat’s glare.

“You were saying?” Cat asked him, and he smiled back.

“Speaking of not telling Hawke things…” Varric changed the subject, putting Cat on the defensive. “Aveline asked me to confirm her suspicions of your actual employment.”

He raised his hands, knowing she would protest. “I didn’t say anything, but she took that to mean you were not actually employed as she once thought. Which begs the question… is it only Hawke and Junior that are still in the dark?”

Cat glanced around. “I suppose, though I don’t know what Merrill knows, or doesn’t know as the case may be.”

“I don’t know that Daisy has broached the subject as yet,” Varric said with a smile. “She has found herself busy with Junior lately.”

Cat returned his grin with one of her own. “I wish her luck,” she said quietly, causing Fenris to snort, which in turn made her giggle.

“There it is… the Gallows.” Varric gave a mock shudder. “The most wretched place in Kirkwall… which is saying something.”

The group continued forward, though the atmosphere had changed, and their conversations if any, were hushed.

“This seems more like a prison than a circle,” Fenris commented. “Are we certain it was wise to come here with mages?”

“Probably best to keep that part quiet,” Varric muttered.
Fenris looked around as they walked into the courtyard, taking note of the statues and general look of the Circle’s home.

“Does it seem more effective than the Circles elsewhere?” Cat asked him.

“It is dependent on which you are speaking of. Each is as different as its country of origin. Even those in Tevinter used to be the same, but then mages were allowed freedoms, even to the point of governing themselves, with the templars present only to help enforce the laws.” Fenris’ eyes narrowed as he thought of it.

“What happened next was inevitable. Now the mages rule, and the templars are merely puppets, used only in the political games the mages play.”

“It seems the Circle doesn’t work anywhere,” Cat replied, looking around the Gallows as well.

“What then is the alternative? Yes, there is fear here, but that is natural when dealing with magic,” he responded.

“The problem is, one mage determined to destroy, can ruin things for all others,” Cat mused, her memories of Ferelden surfacing. “The circle in Ferelden almost fell completely, because one mage decided to not only willingly let a demon possess him, but then captured and forced other mages to become hosts.”

Cat didn’t even notice how the rest of the group came closer, listening intently. She continued her story to Fenris. “The templars barred the doors, keeping the abominations trapped, but all the innocent mages and templars that couldn’t escape in time were trapped with them. It was horrific.”

“What happened?” Fenris asked.

“The Hero of Ferelden had come to ask the mages for help, as a demon had possessed the son of the Arl of Redcliff. He had hoped to get mages to help in removing the demon from the boy.

“He and his group entered the tower, when the templars were fearful to do so. Along the way, they came across a group of mages that had constructed a barrier, blocking themselves from the reach of the others in order to remain safe. There was a senior enchanter among them, who wanted to help get rid of the abominations, and make her home safe again. Otherwise, once the templars received reinforcements, the entire circle would be purged.”

Cat smiled as she remembered traversing the halls of the circle tower. It had been frightening at the time, but looking back, she was proud. “The hero and his group, including the enchanter, went from room to room, cutting down those that welcomed the chaos- demon, mage or templar. Eventually they made it to the top of the tower, where a young templar was being held, being tortured for who knows how long. After everything was done, and the demons defeated, this young templar was adamant that all the mages be killed, for who was to know if one of them was still a blood mage?”

Cat turned then, looking up at Fenris. “So who was right? Should they all die, in order to protect others? Even though the enchanter did all she could to help right the wrong that others created, should she have died as well because of the dangers her magic could cause?”

He looked down, avoiding her eyes, and deep in thought. “The templar is not wrong… but… it does not seem right to kill the enchanter.”

“Just all the other mages?” she asked wryly.

“I…” He looked at her, confusion evident on his face. “I… am not certain.”
“Yeah,” Cat agreed. “That’s why there is no easy answers to all of this.” She reached out, patting Fenris’ arm, letting him know there was nothing behind her questions. “If every mage were like the enchanter, a solution would be simple, but there are good and bad mages alike.”

Cat looked around the Gallows, seeing the templars wandering around. “It would take something drastic to get where we want to be,” she said softly, thinking of the future.

“Like what?” Fenris asked.

“Hmm?” Cat said, coming out of her thoughts. “Oh. Like a complete change. Perhaps… if the circle were more like a school, where mages willingly go to learn to control their powers, and how to defend themselves against demons. Other people would feel better around a mage, knowing they have gone through this schooling. Templars would also be there, helping, but also teaching mages the perspective of others, helping them fully understand their place in the world as a whole. Even those that are not mages could attend if desired, to better understand the dangers of magic.”

“What would that accomplish?” Anders posed the question, though there were several that looked as if they were going to ask.

“Short term, maybe not much,” she admitted. “But in the long run, there would be a greater understanding of magic, which would lead to less fear of mages themselves. True, those that use magic to harm would still be feared, but that is true of anyone that causes harm. Eventually, mages and templars could be part of the guard and other basic employments through the cities.

“How much more effective could the guard be with a mage in their ranks?” she asked with a smile. “People working together can accomplish SO much more than they can alone. Just look as all of us!”

“SO... not just a romantic, but an idealist as well,” Varric said with a smile. “If only things could be so simple.”

“Simple?” Cat asked. “Nothing I said would be simple.”

“He means,” Hawke interrupted, “that getting people to even try would be impossible. There is a lot of bad blood between the two groups. You would have an easier time getting the Tevinters and the Qunari to establish peace.”

“Hmph,” Cat grunted. “Nothing will ever change if people aren’t willing to try.”

Several of the group smiled at her, finding her optimism endearing.

“Those look like recruits over there,” Carver said, pointing across the courtyard. We should ask about Keran.”

“Good idea brother,” Hawke said, and started walking towards them.
Chapter Notes

Another early posting, because I just couldn't wait any longer! Things are just flowing with the writing, and of course, I'm excited to get to the Deep Roads... We're almost there!

Also... I realized as I read back through, that Hawke has seemed very serious lately... but hey, it's been a rough week for him. He'll be sarcastic again in no time!

Cat didn’t say much as they walked along the coast, heading after a recruit named Wilmod, who had also disappeared, but just returned this morning.

“Are you all right?” Fenris asked quietly.

Cat nodded, though she couldn’t bring herself to smile. “Just remembering a few details of this quest that are not pleasant,” she answered softly. She was glad to be able to see Cullen again, making sure he was okay, but after that… she was worrying about going to the Rose. She hadn't thought about Idunna’s role in all of this, and was hoping that perhaps she wasn’t involved at all this time.

“That bad?” he asked, and she glanced at him.

“Nothing we can’t handle,” she assured him, but he didn’t seem reassured, instead he became more alert for any approaching danger.

Suddenly Hawke started jogging forward, the rest of the group following, and Cat and Fenris had to run to keep up. As they came around a bend, they could hear the voices that had obviously spurred Hawke on.

“Please sir!”

“Tell me!”

Cat stopped as she recognized the two men. Cullen had the young templar recruit by the shoulders and was shaking him roughly.

“Andraste be my witness- I WILL have the truth from you!”

Wilmod looked like he would be ill, and once the shaking stopped he begged. “Mercy sir, please, don’t hit me!”

Cullen leaned in and growled. “If only it were that easy!” and he reared his leg back, bring it forward to knee Wilmod in the stomach, and the young recruit collapsed on the ground coughing. Cat was wondering how effective it had actually been through the templar’s armor, but forgot the thought as Cullen reached back and pulled out his sword, pointing it at Wilmod.

“I will know where you are going! Tell me now!”

Cat looked over at Hawke, who was standing next to Anders. Anders seemed indifferent to the
recruit’s plight, but Hawke was fuming. He had seen enough, and stepped forward.

“Hey! Stop that!” he called. “Why would you do this to your own man?”

Cullen glanced over momentarily, but returned his focus to Wilmod. “This is templar business, stranger. Leave now, before you regret interrupting.”

Before Hawke could reply, the young recruit rose up, having everyone gaping at him. He didn’t stagger to his feet as one might expect, instead he rose as if he were lifted, or pulled up by a string- it was very unnerving, even if one was expecting it.

Wilmod looked at Cullen, a wicked smile on his face, which had the Knight Captain falling back a step. He spoke, his voice a mixture of his own and something… else. “You have struck me for the last time, you pathetic human.”

His skin began to bubble and bulge outward as he grew and stretched within his own skin. The group stood there, horrified as the they could hear the simultaneous scream and laughter as fire spewed from the creature. The arms raised, and the shout rang out, “To me!”

“Shades!” Cat heard Varric yell, as he ran sideways and flipped backward out of the front line. Weapons were grabbed, and everyone flew into the fray, Cat included. She felt sorry for the young recruit, but the only mercy they could give now, was death.

She pulled out her crossbow, taking her time to ensure her shots were deadly, helping Cullen, Hawke, and Carver in taking down the abomination. She could see the others moving swiftly from shade to shade taking them down easily.

As the abomination fell, she moved forward, pulling Hawke backward as it exploded in a gust of flame. He gave her a nod, stowing his staff, and they both turned to Cullen.

He was on the ground, panting heavily, his head in his hand, and speaking… though Cat wasn’t sure they were meant to hear. “I knew he was involved in something sinister… but this? How… how is it possible?”

Cat immediately turned to go to him, worried that it had somehow triggered memories. But before she could help him, he stood, and sheathed his sword. He glanced at her curiously, but Hawke stepped forward as well, and Cullen gave a nod in acknowledgement.

”Thank you for your help,” Cullen said to Hawke.

“It looked like he was an abomination,” Hawke replied, as they both looked over at the mess on the ground.

“Normally, we only worry that mages will fall prey to possession-” Cullen said, and Cat interrupted.

“I have heard of blood mages that could summon demons into unwilling hosts.”

Both men turned to her and yelled, “What?!?!” simultaneously.

“Where did you hear this?” Hawke demanded just as Cullen said, “That’s not possible!”

Cat looked at Cullen with a sad smile. “I’m afraid it is, and unless we do something there may be more. Aren’t you missing other recruits?”

“Maker preserve us…” Cullen said, dazed at the new idea. “Yes, Keran is still missing.”
“Cat, are you sure about this?” Hawke said, turning her to face him, and both missing the focused look from Cullen at the mention of her name. “I’ve never heard of anything like it before.”

“Yes, I’m sure. But it takes several blood mages to tear down someone’s defenses. This is bad, but… we should be able to find someone who has seen such a group of mages. We have contacts we can ask.”

Cullen stepped forward, and Cat turned. “The templars are in your debt,” he said gently. “I can’t thank you enough for what you have done,” he said and Cat smiled.

“It is no problem, Knight Captain.” she replied.

He reached up, rubbing the back of his neck. “This may seem forward, but have we met? You seem very familiar, my lady.”

Cat bit her lip so she wouldn’t smile. “Perhaps we have, though we will have to speak of it another time,” she replied, turning back to the group. She looked over at Isabela, giving a specific look as she spoke.

“Hawke?” she asked.

“Yes?”

“I have a few ideas on how to proceed with this, but I need to get to work. Can we meet up later? At the Hanged Man perhaps?”

“Uh… sure,” he replied, confused.

“I’ll walk with you,” Isabela replied immediately, and Cat strode off towards the city. Isabela followed, turning back to give a Hawke a pointed look.

* * * * *

“You didn’t have to come,” Cat said once they were back in Kirkwall.

“And she speaks!” Isabela teased. “You did give me that look, you know.”

“That look was help me get away with this not come with me… and you know it.”

“True, but you’re up to something, and what kind of friend would I be if I didn’t tag along?”

“I figured you would understand. I need to do this my way.”

“I see,” Isabela didn’t really appreciate her own words from this morning being thrown back at her, and could understand why Cat had reacted the way she had. It wasn’t easy to not help her friend, especially when she was in the dark about what she wanted to do. “I’ll leave you to it then, once we get there.”

Cat sighed. “It’s not that I don’t want your help, it’s just… personal.”

“All right, don’t worry,” Isabela smirked. “I’m here if you need me Kitty.”
“Thanks Issy,” she said.

Isabela was true to her word, once they arrived at the Rose, she stopped at the door, asking Cat if she wanted her to stay and wait, and Cat refused. “I’ll meet you at the Hanged Man, you can get started on the drinking,” she offered, and Isabela laughed.

“How can I say no to that?” she joked, and turned away from the Rose. “Good luck Kitty,” she added as she walked away.

Cat steeled herself, and walked in, determined to talk to Idunna first.

* *

Isabella turned as soon as she noted that Cat had walked inside. She walked back to the door, waiting. Hopefully Hawke got the message, but if not, then she’d be there for Kitty, even if she didn’t want her to be.

It didn’t take long for Hawke to stride up, his face impassive. He walked to her, coming close and resting his hands on his hips. “You going to explain this to me?” he asked her.

“Just a hunch,” she said. “Kitty went inside to speak to someone, which means she knows something that she isn’t telling us.”

Hawke eyed the door, and nodded. “She won’t appreciate this,” he commented.

“I’d rather have her alive and angry, than dead.”

* *

Cat had double checked the schedule, not wanting to barge in on anything… indecent. But where she had once been so determined, she now worried. She climbed the stairs, looking back, almost hoping to see Isabela, and made her way to Idunna’s room, knocking softly on the door.

“Cat! What a surprise, come in, come in!” Idunna opened the door and greeted her with a smile.

Cat walked in, and they both sat on her bed, as they had done so many times before. Cat smiled, reminding herself that Idunna was her friend.

“So? What’s going on?” Idunna asked, her eyes bright and full of mischief. Lately, Cat had only visited to share gossip, but not this time.

Cat inhaled deeply, and sighed on her exhale. “There has been some crazy things happening in the city,” she began, looking down at her hands. “Involving the templar recruits and blood mages.”

“What? Really?” Idunna said, the shock in her voice seemed genuine, giving Cat hope.

“Yes.” Cat looked up, her face full of worry. “Please tell me you didn’t have anything to do with Wilmod or Keran…”

“Wilmod... Wilmod…” Idunna looked up as she thought, and Cat’s stomach dropped. “That doesn’t sound familiar,” she said dismissively.

Cat’s eyes closed, and she felt tears forming. “No… Idunna, no…”

Idunna straightened, reaching forward to grab Cat’s hand and giving it a squeeze. “Cat, please just leave. Don’t get involved in this, pretend you never came here! Please!”
Cat’s eyes snapped open in anger. “I’m already involved! How could you do this?! How could just hand over those boys to be possessed!”

“It wasn’t like I was given a choice!” Idunna hissed. “It was help or be turned over to the templars! It was this or tranquility!!”

“You have friends! You have me! I would have helped!” she lowered her voice, “We can still help.” She reached forward, hugging Idunna. “Just no more, please. I was there… I saw that poor boy be taken over.”

They sat for a moment, tears falling silently, before Idunna pulled back. Reaching up, she wiped the moisture from her face. “You told your friends about me?” she asked.

“No, of course not. I told them I would ask around and we’d meet later. You just give me the location, and we’ll go take care of the mages that are doing this, and you’ll be free.”

“Cat…” emotion welling in her voice, Idunna asked, “will you do me a favor first?”

“Of course Idunna,” she said as she looked at her with a smile.

“Thank you.” She smiled back at Cat. “Do your friends know where you are right now?”

“Uh… well Isabela” Cat was startled as she realized that she couldn’t stop herself from speaking. “she walked with me to the Rose, but… left… after… that.” Cat’s heart began racing as she realized what Idunna was doing, and she had no way to stop her.

Tears welled in her eyes, as she realized that her friend was so scared, that she was willing to do anything to keep her secret, even kill her.

“I’m so sorry Cat, but you won’t be able to beat them… there are too many, and Tarohne is too strong.” She avoided looking at Cat, not really wanting to watch.

“Now, pull out a dagger, and bring it to your throat,” Idunna said.

Cat couldn’t speak, and she couldn’t disobey. She reached behind her, pulling out a dagger, and brought it up below her chin. The tears slowly kept falling however, and Cat just let them fall, so sad that they were brought to this.

* * *

It took some convincing, but Hawke was finally pointed to the right room. He stood in front of it, debating if he should knock, or just barge in. If Cat was in trouble, then knocking could seal her fate. On the other hand, if she was simply talking with a friend, she might be royally pissed.

He heard Isabela’s voice in his mind, I’d rather have her alive and angry, than dead, and his mind was made up. He reached for the knob, and opened the door as silently as he could. Before he could decide whether or not to rush in, he heard the voice.

“I don’t want to do this! Why couldn’t you have just stayed away??” He wasn’t the sneakiest of people, but neither noticed him through the tears they were sobbing. “Don’t look at me like that… I have to do this…”
Hawke could see Cat’s back as he crept closer, she was sitting on the end of the bed. Another woman was in front of her, with her face in her hands. As he looked closer, his eyes widened as he took note of the dagger that Cat held to her own throat. What in the Maker’s name was she doing?? he thought.

He was done waiting, and stepped forward to grab the dagger from her hand, throwing it to the floor with a clang. “What is going on?!” he demanded.

The other woman jumped up, backing up against the wall in a panic. “Who are you? What are you doing here?” she asked in a high pitched voice.

“I’m sure Cat can make introductions,” he said, as he looked back at Cat, just in time to see her pull another dagger from a sheath and bring it to her neck. “Andraste’s ass, Cat!!” he bellowed, as he grabbed at her hand.

The woman behind him shifted, and his eyes moved to her. Something was off, but he could see her excitement, sadness and fear in equal measures, and he wasn’t sure what her game was. He looked back at Cat, noting her eyes seemed cloudy, and not just from the tears. It took him a moment, but he realized there was some sort of magic here, and he focused his own mana in order to dispel it.

Once his spell was complete, he no longer had Cat resisting him, and his pull brought her arm with his into his chest, the second dagger clattering to the floor. He could sense the movement behind him, and turned to look as the other woman knelt on the floor.

“Mercy sir, please!” she begged.

“What did you do?” he asked her, his voice dark and quiet.

“Blood magic, and desire, in equal parts,” she answered, as if the noose was already around her neck.

“Blood magic,” Hawke spit out in disgust. He turned back to Cat, to ensure that she was all right, however she was just staring at the bed, looking morose, her hand limp in his grip, and he let her go.

“Tell me everything,” he said, as he turned to stand next to Cat, facing the other woman, and crossed his arms over his chest.

As she spoke, Hawke kept an eye on Cat, noting with displeasure how she became more and more upset. When the woman finished by saying she should have killed Cat, but couldn’t bring herself to do it, Cat burst into fresh tears and covered her face with her hands.

“It seems you have punished yourself far worse than I could,” Hawke noted, as the woman began crying as well. “I would kill you for this, but I am certain Cat would stop me. Just go.”

He watched as the woman picked herself up, and as she came close, reached out for Cat, then changed her mind and ran from the room. He bent over to collect the daggers on the floor, and set them on the table, uncertain what to do. He didn’t have a great wealth of experience with crying women, but he wanted to help. Bethany had always wanted to be held by our parents whenever she had been upset... Hawke thought.

He walked over to Cat, and picking her up, turned around and sat on the bed with her in his lap. He had an arm around her shoulders to support her, and brought his other hand up to her head, stroking down her hair in a calming fashion.

“Go ahead,” he said softly. “Get it all out.”
Cat had thought she was almost done, but the sudden kindness of the gesture brought a fresh wave of tears, and she buried her face into his chest and let loose all the pain and frustration that she had been piling up. She didn’t know how long she sat there, with him stroking her head, but after awhile, her tears slowed. Her throat felt raw as she tried to swallow so that she could speak.

She lifted her head from him, his hand stopping at the back of her neck as she sat up. Her cheeks heated as she thought of how she had cried all over him, and was glad that no one else had been witness to it. She looked up as she felt his thumb brush her cheek, wiping away her tears, seeing him gazing down at her, though his eyes were not on hers, but rather watching his hand.

As much as she was embarrassed, she also felt a warmth that she hadn’t felt in a long time. A safety, that being held could bring and that she had not had in years. It was such that she didn’t want to move, and wanted to just revel in the feeling. She continued to gaze up at Hawke, feeling his thumb as it moved back and forth across her cheek.

The moisture was gone, but he just enjoyed the feel of her skin, touching the light dusting of freckles under her eye. His eyes roamed her face, noting that up close he could see the slight imperfections of her features, but deciding that it just added to the beauty.

He watched as her last tear moved slowly down her cheek, on the opposite side as his hand, and without thinking, he leaned down and kissed the tear away.

Cat inhaled sharply, feeling his lips catch the tear before it could fall completely. She could feel her heartbeat quicken, as he raised his head to look at her.

Hawke could feel her fingers clenching at his tunic, and he noted how wide her eyes were, her pupils dilating. His gaze was drawn down, as her tongue came out to wet her lips, and he continued to stare, clamping down on his desire to claim them.

Cat felt as if her heart was about to beat out of her chest, her body responding to the dark look in his eyes, and her head swimming as he leaned down again towards her.

Suddenly the image of Hawke and Isabela today flashed into her mind, and she jumped, as if cold water had just been thrown at her, her hand now pushing Hawke away instead of pulling him closer.

She placed both hands on his chest to keep him away, and said quickly, “We should go.”

Hawke released her, though he didn’t move from his seat, getting control of himself as she stood and gathered her daggers from the table. He was all calm, and she was nervous energy, and he knew she must have felt what he did, but he had seen fear along with desire, and didn’t want to force it, so he slowly stood.

“Let’s go meet the others then,” he said, and followed her out of the room and down the stairs.

Cat’s eyes were constantly moving, searching everywhere for Idunna. She hadn’t meant to let her leave like that, and was worried of what would become of her. Before she could leave however, Madame Lusine approached her.

“Cat dear, there you are!” she said in greeting. “I had wanted to talk to you myself, but it seems as if Idunna already told you.”

Cat looked at her in confusion, and Lusine continued. “You know I love having you here, but I need to have people that I can rely on to be here every night,” she said quietly. “I appreciate all you have done, but now that the others are ready, there is no need to have you coming in randomly. Although I have to have two people to take the work that you would do yourself!” She smiled, and Cat
supposed she should take the compliment. After all, Idunna had warned her this was coming.

“I understand Madame, and I appreciate all that you have done for me,” Cat said quietly.

“You know you are welcome back anytime,” she said to Cat, patting her arm. “And I will want to add to your order for potions next time you come in,” she added.

“All right,” Cat replied, warily. “I will make sure to see you when I come back.”

“Take care dear,” Madame said, and turned back to her customers.

Cat continued out the door, noticing that Hawke was still following her, and was no longer calm. She rubbed her forehead, not wanting to delve into all of this right now.

“So, now you’ve lost your job because you’ve been helping me?” he asked gruffly.

“No,” she replied. “I decided to do something else, and I trained others to do my job so that I could leave.”

“Hmph.” Cat could tell he wasn’t finished, but she just quickened her pace. She had all sorts of emotions running through her at the moment, and needed to sort them out… away from Hawke.

They didn’t speak for a while, but just as they entered Lowtown, Hawke rudely said, “Don’t you think you’ve been keeping enough secrets?”

Cat was flabbergasted, and whirled around to face him. “Excuse me?!”

Hawke glared at her and pointed directly at her face. “You know exactly what I am talking about, don’t play dumb.”

“You don’t know what you’re talking about,” she countered, and she turned back to keep walking, but was stopped by his hand grabbing her arm.

“Oh I know…” he said angrily. “Not just all the secrets about your time in Ferelden, but I got the feeling you knew that witch up on Sundermount. You just happen to have some of the finest armor I’ve ever seen, and it fits you like it was made for you. Then today, you knew exactly where to go to find the information we needed about a group of blood mages.”

Cat stood her ground, but inside she was sinking. He is far more perceptive than I gave him credit for, she thought, and this was trouble.

“I never agreed to share about myself with you,” Cat answered haughtily. “If you don’t like having me around, I can always go get my job back,” she said, wresting her arm from him and striding back the way they had come.

“Like hell you will,” Hawke said as he grabbed her again, whirling her back around. “You’re a part of my crew now,” he said possessively.

“Let me go,” Cat said coldly, and he loosened his hands.

“Everyone is allowed to have secrets,” he said, looking down at her, enjoying the stubborn tilt of her jaw. “But not when they affect everyone else.” He stepped aside and started walking toward their destination without her. “If you want me to trust you, you’ll remember that,” he said over his shoulder.
Chapter Notes

Hey, hey! A mid-week bonus chapter! It doesn't happen all that often, but the story is going great, I've made 401 kudos, and... well who needs more than that? Enjoy! (even though there isn't much more of the Hawke drama in this one!)

Once she reached the Hanged Man, Cat avoided the group’s table and found a small one on the other side of the room. She had thought she had a handle on everything, but now there was a large wrench thrown in the works, and his name was Garrett Hawke.

She sat and ordered a meal, brooding over the events of the past few hours, wondering if she should have done something differently.

“That’s quite the scowl Kitten,” Varric noted as he sat down next to her. She looked up and around, wondering if she had somehow sat at their normal table by accident, but no, Varric had simply come to join her at the table she had chosen.

“Yeah, well, I can’t be happy all the time,” she muttered, looking back down at the table.

“You know what would help? A story,” he said with a half smile, “particularly telling a story… maybe about something that happened in the past?”

“No thanks Varric, though I appreciate you getting creative in trying to worm out details from me,” she responded.

“I do my best,” he said, now with a full smile. “How about telling me why you’re sitting over here?”

“Just needed to think,” she replied. “Hard to do that around our group.”

Norah brought her food and drink then, and Cat just stared at it, wondering why she had ordered anything at all. She wasn’t hungry, and it looked… sketchy.

“You try and enjoy that,” he said as he stood back up. “We’ll be leaving once everyone gets here, so don’t think too long, all right?” He patted her back as he turned back towards his normal table. “I’ve got to write a letter before we go, but I’m here if you need an ear.”

“Thank you,” she replied, picking up her fork, and forcing herself to take a bite. It tasted like cardboard, but she wasn’t sure if that was because of the food, or her mood.

Her thoughts continued to run rampant in her mind, and she just tried to sift through them as best she could without emotion. Logically, she could see where Hawke was coming from, even though she couldn’t understand him. If he didn’t trust her, why…? When he had leaned down… she shook her head, trying to clear it. She didn’t need to dwell on those feelings again, she had already spent the entire walk from Hightown trying to figure them out with no success.

She heard a burst of laughter, and turned, seeing Isabela next to Hawke, both of them laughing loudly, making her smile. If anything, I’m just glad to see Issy happy.
She turned back to her meal, her smile growing as Varric’s words ran through her head again, and an idea formed. *A letter…* she thought. *Why didn’t I think of that sooner?*

* * * * *

Isabela had her wiles, and she knew how to use them, but Cat was one tough nut to crack. She had seen her glance over when the group laughed at her joke, but there was no trace of jealousy. In fact, she had almost seemed pleased, which confused Isabela even more, but she supposed she should be used to it. After all, Cat never acted as Isabela expected, ever since they met.

“Are you going to tell me what happened in the Rose?” she asked Hawke quietly, once the others at the table were conversing with each other, and no longer listening.

“She was with another woman,” he began, surprised when she didn’t give some sort of comment to that, but continued on. “I almost didn’t interrupt, but finally decided that you were right. Better angry than dead.”

“And?”

“The woman was some sort of mage. She had Cat bewitched, and was trying to have her slit her own throat.”

Isabela turned her head to glance at Cat again. “So she’s dead then,” she said, and Hawke sighed.

“I let her go,” he said softly. “She wasn’t actually able to make Cat do it, she just had her holding the dagger to her throat, and both of them were weeping. Once I realized what it was, I broke the spell, and had the woman talk. She was most definitely connected to our blood mages, and knew their entire operation. I gave Cat time to compose herself, and then we came here. Oh, and Cat lost her job on our way out,” he added hastily.

“Tough day then,” Isabela smirked, glad that she had gotten Hawke to follow them. *It could have been so much worse…*

“I’m assuming Cat heard about the blood mages summoning demons into others from that woman, but what I don’t understand,” his voice rose, as his frustration came out again, “is why she waited to say anything!” He took a deep breath, realizing others had looked his way. “That recruit is dead, because she held her tongue.”

“Oh really?” Isabela asked with a dry look.

“What does that mean?” he glared back at her.

“So Kitty comes to you a few days ago, and says, ‘I heard about some blood mages that can do creepy things, Hawke,’” making her voice higher as she imitated Cat. “and what?” she asked. “You go hunting for them? You wouldn’t even know where to look if that woman hadn’t told you.”

“Well yes, but-”

“But nothing. Kitty is a good friend to have Hawke, but she’s not perfect, and she can’t work miracles.”
“She’s keeping secrets,” he growled lowly. “Secrets that affect the rest of us.”

“Ah, so Hawke is just nosy.”

“That’s not- ugh! That is not what I’m saying.”

“I get what you’re saying, handsome,” she said, as she ran her hand through his hair, ruffling it. “But dwelling on it won’t help anything. Cat will open up when she is ready, and not before. Like a stubborn lock,” she added. “Keep forcing it, and all you’ll do is break your lock pick.”

“That was right poetic Rivaini,” Varric said without looking up from his writing.

“Also works for advice about sex,” she replied and she laughed again, while Hawke shook his head and smiled at her.

* * * * *

Cat had never felt the same dread others did when they walked through Darktown, which was how she had almost gotten sold into slavery, she knew, but it hadn’t changed anything. It was a place of danger, yes, but one she felt comfortable with. When walking with such a large group, no one dared to even stay in their path, skirting out of the way before they arrived.

Cat followed the others, as Hawke led them to an unassuming corner, and turned behind an old, rusted mining cart. There on the ground was an opening, with a ladder leading down into the dark.

Hawke wasted no time in climbing down, and Cat wished again that Fenris or Anders were here with her. They had plenty of fighters, with Aveline and Carver, Isabella and Varric, and Merrill and Hawke. But she was missing the two that would be keeping close to her, as they both had other things they needed to do, after this morning’s activity.

A pity party, huh Cat? She asked herself, shaking her head and smiling ruefully at her own whining. She thought of Idunna, and refocused on the task at hand. These mages were going down. It’s too bad the guys aren’t here for this, as they would actually agree with each other this time, she thought.

As everyone made it down the ladder, and looked around, Varric stepped forward to creep along, looking for traps.

“Are we certain we can do this without templar aid?” Carver asked quietly. “We have no idea how many there are.”

“Shades!” Varric called as he backed up, and Carver and Aveline surged forward. Isabela immediately went into stealth, and Cat side stepped, bringing up her crossbow to aim at an abomination that was heading towards them from across the room.

“Rage Demon!” she heard Merrill yell, and after releasing a bolt, she looked over. She was still covered, so she loaded another bolt, and kept firing until the fight was over.

The group spread out across the room to cover everything as they walked forward. “There are corpses everywhere,” Aveline commented. “Some are fresh, and others are just bones.”

“They must have been trying on others to perfect the process,” Hawke mused. “Who knows how long they have been here?” he asked, looking sideways at Cat.
Cat didn’t notice, or hear what was said, as she had seen a large patch of deathroot growing on the right side of the room. She went over, pulling out a dagger, and cutting it out of the ground, placing the root in a bag at her belt. *If Anders didn’t need it, then she could sell it,* she thought. Turning back, she saw the others looking at her. “What?” she asked.

Hawke just shook his head, and the group continued. Further on, the room ended in a small tunnel, opening again into another large room. Finding no traps, the group pushed on, and upon entering the room, Carver spoke. “This isn’t a good sign.”

They could all see what he meant, as there were skeletons everywhere, strewn throughout the room.

“Seems they got plenty of practice, Hawke,” Varric said, and he continued forward, albeit more slowly. He could sense something, but was unsure of what it was.

They stopped and looked around as the skeletons began moving, and then standing, and then pulling the bows off their bodies. Hawke was quick to cast a barrier on himself and Merrill, and they used quick attacks they could fire rapidly to bring the number down.

Aveline made use of her shield, charging for a group and swinging her shield out in an arc to keep them from firing. Carver leaped up, bring his large hammer down on the ground, causing skeletons near him to topple over.

Isabela, Cat and Varric, were the most active, constantly moving to avoid being hit. Once it was over, there were arrows all around Hawke and Merrill on the ground from hitting the barrier, several in Aveline’s shield, and everyone was out of breath— but they were all uninjured.

Moving forward, they found themselves again in a small tunnel, leading to a larger room that was filled with light. There were hanging braziers throughout the room, and the group made their way cautiously towards the front. There on their right was what looked like a person, suspended in midair, covered with milky white wisps of smoke, as if suspended there.

Cat moved forward, but Isabela held her back with a shake of her head. They all looked over as a door on the left opened, and a woman wearing mage robes entered, followed by three other mages that were covered head to toe so that only their eyes were seen.

The woman seemed to enjoy matching, as her shoes, her robes, and even the color on her lips were the exact same shade of lavender, and Cat felt uneasy at the excitement on her face.

“How wonderful that you have come to us willingly! We are always in need of more vessels for our experiments!”

Hawke was not amused, and stepped forward. “Where is Keran?” he asked.

The woman acted as if he hadn’t spoken, looking at each of them in turn. “Perhaps the demons will find one of you suitable.”

Carver looked uneasy. “She must be an abomination. I… think.” She sneered at him as he spoke.

“I am not some helpless waif that ran crying to a demon- I sought them out, and embraced them!”

“Why did you take the recruits?” Hawke demanded, focusing her attention back to him.

“Demons can inhabit much more than mages, or corpses,” she answered with a smile. “With assistance, they can control anyone I choose. Any templar… any noble… and any well-meaning meddler.”
Hawke merely smirked at her. “We are no easy prey. You do realize we cut a path through your abominations, right?”

“Good, good!” she answered, and Cat and Isabela looked at each other in confusion. “The demons will enjoy your spirit! When a few more templars fall prey, we will have sown chaos in their ranks. How long will the Knight Commander survive as they discover abominations among their own?” she laughed hysterically.

“And…she’s officially lost it,” Varric said dryly.

“It’s good to know you’re barking mad,” Hawke said calmly. “Makes things easier for me, as I don’t like to kill my fellow mages.”

She scoffed at his words and spoke again. “With a wave of my hand I can achieve much more than any templar in their lifetime. Yet they command us? Absurd! We should be ruling them! WE will rule all, and if you will not join with us, either the demons will have you, or the compost heap will!” She turned to the mages behind her. “Kill the vessels only if you must!” and they all pulled out their staffs.

She immediately created a barrier, and the other mages called forth shades and abominations.

“Issy!” Cat called. “Distraction Attack!”

“Got it!” she called back and went into stealth.

“What??” Carver yelled, and Cat called back, “nothing! Just attack!”

Cat dodged the shades, leaving them for the others, as she approached Tarohne, who was still inside her barrier. “You almost succeeded,” Cat said, as fire hit her armor from one of the mages, but with her drake skin armor, it went unnoticed. “but Idunna is no longer yours. She is free.”

Tarohne’s face darkened in anger, and she was so focused on Cat, that she failed to notice that the mages behind her fell one after the other. She finally dropped her barrier in order to attack Cat with a spell, and received Isabela’s dagger in her back as a result.

Cat moved forward, and smiled at her. “Goodbye, Tarohne,” she said, as she stabbed her own dagger in the mage’s ribcage. Cat watched as the life left her eyes, but the body didn’t fall, and she stepped back in shock. The mage’s body changed, until Cat and Isabela were standing with a desire demon in between them.

“Why do you fight us?” the demon asked, and Cat understood how others fell prey to a demon’s voice. It wasn’t a pleasant sound… no, it seemed more to grip her very soul, and pull her towards its words, and it was focused on Isabela, not her. “Why fight at all, when I can give you all you desire?”

“Oh, really? Because I desire quite a bit,” Isabela answered as she stowed her daggers away.

Considering Isabela easy prey, the demon turned back to Cat. “And you? We could be so much more together…” The demon looked at her, head tilting in question as Cat crouched into a fighting stance. “The home you seek… I would take you there,” it cooed at Cat, and she could feel it’s own excitement.

“I want nothing from you, and you’ll not leave this room,” Cat growled.

“You deny your desires, but I see them laid bare,” it spoke softly as it came closer, and Cat was fighting with all she could to simply not heed its voice. “The elf? The mage? They need not ever
leave your side with my help,” it whispered, though she felt it as a shout inside her head.

“Wanting my friends with me now, does not mean I want them to be slaves to my every whim,” Cat spoke angrily. “Issy! Help me kill this thing!” she called desperately.

“Kitty, can’t I get some things first?” Isabela called back, but she rushed forward to help kill the demon. Merrill finished with her own fight, and came over to help finish it off.

“You really should find out what it wants before agreeing with it,” she suggested to Isabela. “Otherwise you may end up not liking the bargain.”

“Thank you Merrill,” Cat groused, and turned to Isabela. “Never again, Issy. Swear to me. No deals with demons.”

“But Cat-” Merrill started, and Cat just held up a hand. “Issy…” she said, and Isabela rolled her eyes.

“I’d like to promise Kitty, but since I didn’t even remember making a deal, I don’t want to make a promise that I could unknowingly break.”

“Issy…” Cat glared at her friend.

“All right, I promise. No deals. But if I make one without knowing, you have to swear to forgive me,” she added.

Cat shook her head in exasperation. “I suppose that’s fair.”

“Will you please tell me what that attack yell was?” Carver asked as he pushed forward to them.

“Attack yell?” Cat asked, then realizing what he meant, she laughed and explained. “We’ve been fighting together for awhile now, so we’ve come up with names for certain tactics we use. That way we know what our ally is doing, and our enemies don’t.”

“We use something similar in the guard,” Aveline commented. “Very effective,” she added, complimenting them.

“Thank you,” Cat replied, heading over to where Hawke stood with Varric, looking at the man still suspended in air.

“Shouldn’t the spell have broken when they died?” Cat asked.

“One would think,” Hawke replied. “But since it didn’t there may be more that are unaccounted for. Hopefully they’ll slink back to the shadows or wherever they emerged from once they see their leader is dead.”

He stepped back, and indicated everyone else should do the same. “I’m going to try to dispell this, so everyone be on guard,” he said to them.

Normally Cat was eager to watch magic happening, but this time, as Hawke tried again and again, she found herself irritated that it was taking so long.

“The light!” A voice rang out, and everyone looked around, while Hawke took a moment to stretch and get his breath back.

“I… think it came from him,” Merrill said, pointing to the man that was still midair. “I think you’re wearing it down, Hawke. Do you want me to help?”
“No thank you Merrill,” he replied. “I’ve got it, now that I know which counterspell to use.”

Hawke raised his arms again, and true to his word, the spell was broken in minutes, and the man fell to the ground. Hawke went over to help him up, asking, “Keran?”

“Yes,” he answered as he stood. The man, well, boy, really… Cat thought, was wearing only pants, and rubbed his eyes before looking around.

“Thank the Maker,” he said. “I thought he had abandoned me.”

“But…” Varric said quietly. “Is it only Keran? It could be Keran plus one. And a nasty plus one at that.”

Carver spoke as well, looking very uneasy. “I never really understood how people could fear mages so, having grown up in our family with Father, you… Bethany.” He hung his head. “But this… Andraste was right to warn against magic.”

“Of course!” Hawke said, falsely jovial. “Maniacs with swords and lyrium, with “the Maker” on their side never hurt innocents.”

“It seems they may have a reason,” Carver shot back, angry at Hawke’s tone. “I just never looked at it from their side, and now… I see.”

Hawke didn’t answer, turning away from Carver and back to Keran. “What DO you remember, Keran?” he asked.

“I was… uh, with a lady,” he said, and he blushed slightly, looking at the women in the group. “and things got fuzzy. I remember feeling on fire for days, a demon laughing, a naked woman with razor claws, deep in my chest.” His hand rose, and he looked down, surprised that there were no marks on his skin. “I know what it sounds like,” he said.

“Merrill?” Hawke asked. “Any insights? Can we tell if he IS possessed?”

“I don’t know…” she answered as she walked forward. She took Keran’s hand and pulling out a dagger, punctured the pad of his finger with the tip. She took a drop of his blood on her finger dabbed it, rubbing it in between two fingers. She brought her fingers to her nose, smelling the blood, before tasting it, and Cat flinched.

“I would say he is not,” she said, rubbing her hand on her armor. “The blood is clean, with no scent of demons in it.” She walked back behind Hawke as she spoke.

“What… uh, what happens now?” Keran asked, looking oddly at Merrill.

“Well, it looks like you can go home, or back to the gallows. Your sister is quite worried about you,” Hawke said with a slight smile.

Cat grinned as Isabela rolled her eyes. “Such a goody-goody,” Isabela whispered, which had Cat laughing, and trying to hide it, which of course, came out in a snort, causing everyone else to look at her.

“Uh, yeah!” Cat said, uncertain was had been said, and hoping she was agreeing with something that she actually agreed with.

“Right…” Hawke said, and turned back to Keran.
“Please… don’t tell the templars,” he said as he took his leave.

“We definitely need to tell the templars,” Carver said as soon as Keran was out of the room.

“It would completely ruin that boy’s life,” Hawke debated. “The templars won’t care that he resisted, or believe that he isn’t possessed.”

“But it would garner their favor for us,” Carver offered as they began to walk away.

Cat wasn’t listening, as she berated Isabela for making her laugh, though they then spent most of the trip back to the gallows impersonating the crazy mage/abomination, and laughing at each others’ take on her.

As they entered the gallows for the second time that day, Hawke strode over to where Keran and his sister were speaking to each other. She saw Hawke approaching, and turned to greet him with a grin. “Thank you serah! You saved my brother!” she said, as she moved in to give Hawke an impromptu hug.

Hawke chuckled, surprised at the sudden hug, and patted her back awkwardly. “It was no trouble miss,” he answered, and Keran reached forward to pull his sister back.

Hawke looked back at his crew. “Perhaps I’ll let you go first from now on brother, so you can reap the rewards,” he teased, and Macha smiled timidly, while Carver looked annoyed at his older brother’s antics.

“What is Cat doing?” Hawke asked Isabela, as he noticed that Cat was talking to a red haired templar knight.

“Delivering a letter,” she answered. “For Anders’ new assistant.”

Hawke nodded, and was about to turn back to Keran and Macha, as he noticed another templar going over to intercept Cat as she made her way back. He stopped, and looked closer, seeing that it was the Knight Captain, and decided to wait for them to come to him.

Cat stopped as she heard “Hello again, my lady.”

Looking up, she saw Cullen approach her, and she smiled. “Hello Knight Captain.”

“Please, call me Cullen,” he offered.

“Very well, but if I do, then none of this “Lady” business for me. It’s Catarina, though my friends usually call me Cat.”

He had her continue walking, putting his arm out in a ladies first gesture, and following along beside her, his hands behind his back.

“It is a pleasure to formally meet you, Lady Catarina,” he said with a small nod.


He returned her smile ruefully. “I mean no disrespect, but I do not want to seem overly familiar,” he said.

“So you came from Ferelden, right?” she asked, changing the subject. They were walking very slowly, and but were approaching Hawke and the others.
“Yes, I was transferred from the circle there. Not many are aware of just how close the circle came to falling to abominations during the blight, and there were many painful memories that I wished to escape from.”

“I’m very sorry to have mentioned it then,” she replied, placing a hand on his arm, and looking at him, trying to convey her sorrow for what he had been through.

“It is all right,” he replied, and Cat pulled back. “There are many good memories as well.

“If not many knew of the circle’s problems, then how are you so knowledgeable Cat?” Varric asked innocently, and Cat gave him a dirty look.

Cullen looked down at Varric and back up to Cat. “You… you know of it?” he asked quietly, and she nodded. He stepped closer, not noticing the tension among the rest of the group at his movement. “It was you, wasn’t it my lady?” he asked in awe. “I thought perhaps you had been a dream, or even a vision, but some of the other templars had seen and spoken to you…”

He dropped to one knee in front of her, and her eyes went wide, frantically looking at her friends in desperation.

“Anything I can do, my lady, to repay your kindness, I would do- this I swear.”

Cat reached down and pulled on his arm, as they were getting stares from every direction. “Please stand up!” she hissed under her breath, and he immediately stood back up. “A bit of kindness needs no payment, only to be passed on to another,” she replied, much more comfortable now that he was standing again. “And don’t call me lady,” she added.

“You are too good to be real, Lady Cat,” he said with a small smirk. He grabbed her hand, bringing it to his mouth, and kissing her knuckles. She immediately turned red, embarrassed, because not only did it make her want to swoon, but everyone was watching. It could only be worse if Fenris or Anders were here.

Hawke chose that moment to step beside her, and blurt out, “Blood mages have infiltrated your ranks and are possessing your recruits with demons!”

Cullen, in shock, dropped Cat’s hand and stepped back. “Sweet blood of Andraste...” he murmured.

Macha, looking scared, stepped further away from her brother. “D...demons? Recruits and demons, you said?” she asked fearfully.

Keran dropped his gaze to the ground, his shoulders slumped. “I’m sorry Macha, I didn’t want to scare you, but I am fine, I was saved in time.” Macha looked relieved, and practically fell into her brother’s arms. Keran comforted his sister, and looked at the rest of them in anger. “Those mages see us all as ants to be crushed. They won’t stop until they see the Chantry and the templars destroyed forever.”

Hawke, never one to let mages be abused, even in speech, defended. “And the fact that mages have been systematically abused by the templars for over a thousand years?” he asked.

“How can you say that?” Cullen asked, truly surprised. “Especially after what you have seen?”

Carver stepped forward, his voice trying to convey his point to his brother. “Yes, how can you say that the to templar right in front of you?”

“Mages are not like you and me,” Cullen continued, “they cannot be treated as ordinary people,
because they are not people. They are weapons."

Cat glared back at him, Get off your soapbox, Cullen, she thought.

“Mages are people,” Hawke tried again, beseeching them all with his words. “They are humans, and elves... just like the rest of us,” he said.

Cullen looked at him sadly. “Many go their entire lives believing that. But if even one in ten falls to the lure of blood magic, they could destroy this world.” He turned to his recruit, sighing, “Keran, you are stripped of your commission until it is proven you are free of demons.”

“But ser!” Keran said, dismay on his features. “I need this position to support my family! And how could I possibly prove...” he and Macha looked at each other, disparaging.

“Keran is NOT possessed.” Hawke stated, matter of factly.

“I hesitate to ask how you are so certain,” Cullen responded, looking at Hawke in a new light.

Cat took that moment to interrupt. “Is this how the templars treat their own? If a mage had simply wounded him, would you not care for him and his family? You certainly wouldn’t give up on him as you are now.”

Cullen looked at her, pausing as he thought on her words. “You speak truth, Lady Cat, and it seems your compassion for templars knows no bounds, however, I cannot put all others at risk for one.”

“There must be some way of minimizing the risk without throwing him out on the street to starve,” she rebutted.

“Perhaps... you are right. It makes more sense to keep him close, that we may watch over him.” He turned back to his recruit. “Very well Keran, if you have shown no signs of possession, in ten years time you will be eligible for a full knighthood.”

Macha started crying, and Keran tried to soothe her, looking glum. “Thank you serah, all of you. I wish I could reward you as you deserve,” he said to Hawke.

“I will handle that,” Cullen said, handing over several coins to Hawke. “You have done the Order a great service by ridding us of these blood mages. We will not forget it.”

Hawke, still unhappy by how things played out, nodded once and turned to stalk away. Everyone else turned also, and Cat looked disappointed as she too, turned to leave.

“Lady Cat, if I may?” Cullen asked, stopping her.

“Yes, Ser Cullen?” she answered.

“I would like to... uh,” his hand crept up to run the back of his neck, “speak to you more, about your time in Ferelden? That is, if you would like to...”

“Uh...” Cat blanked, unsure of how to respond.

“Cat! We’re leaving! NOW!” came the yell from Hawke, and Cat gave Cullen an embarrassed smile.

“I have to go, but, perhaps another time?” she asked, and turned before he could answer, hustling over to her friends who were waiting, most of whom were smirking at her. “Goodbye!” she said turning back quickly, and then catching up with Isabela.
“Not one word,” Cat told her, as she opened her mouth, and she merely smiled back.
Avoidance Solves Problems Too

“Issey?”

Isabela glanced over, giving Cat a questioning look as she continued to get ready to leave.

“You’re going with Hawke today, right?”

“Does that mean you’re not, Kitty?” Isabela asked her.

“I need to deliver the shipment to the Rose, so I thought I’d go see how soon Anders will be done with it. Plus, since Anders will be going on the expedition, I need to make sure Olivia will be able to handle it, otherwise I might need to learn how to make some of them myself.”

“You’re still set on not going on the expedition?” Isabela asked her.

“Yep, not going,” Cat replied as she busied herself getting a pack together to leave for the day. She decided just her daggers today would suffice since she wasn’t going with Hawke. She had already chosen her regular clothes as well. “What about you? Have you decided?”

“No, not yet. Obviously you not going is a factor, but it might also be nice to get out of Kirkwall for a bit, and Hawke always finds good fights.”

“That is true,” Cat chuckled. “So will you give my apologies to the group?”

“Kitty, everyone understands when we have other things to do, don’t worry. It’s all right to have a life besides Hawke.”

“I know that Issy, but if they were counting on my being there…”

“I’ll tell ‘em,” she replied, giving Cat’s back a pat as she stepped toward the door. “Meeting for dinner?” she asked.

“I’ll try,” Cat answered, following her out the door, her pack on her back. They walked a short way together before parting.

“Take care of yourself,” Cat told her, and she smirked back.

“You too Kitty, and if you end up doing something fun today, I want all the details!” Isabela called as she walked off.

Cat shook her head, smiling at her friend’s back, and then turned and headed towards Darktown.

* * * * *

“Cat!” Olivia said with a grin as she opened the clinic door. “Come in, come in!” she said, as she pulled Cat inside and shut the door behind her. “You must have a sixth sense about this, we’ve just about finished the order for this week.”

“That’s exactly what I was coming to check on,” Cat said as she smiled. “And of course, both of
“That’s kind of you,” Anders spoke up as they made their way over to him. “I figured I would have to go to the Hanged Man this evening to find you.”

“I suppose that would normally be true, but I really wanted a day off from that today, and I had some other things I needed to do,” she replied, a little guiltily.

“Good,” Anders said. “It’s important to take time for yourself, as I keep telling Hawke. It’s important for your health, and state of mind.”

“So healer’s orders then? That makes me feel better.”

“Anytime you want to come spend time with us, we’ll definitely say it was healer’s orders to take time off,” he answered with a chuckle. “Especially after that last mess.”

Cat winced, “You heard about that?”

“Of course! I may not be going out with the group as much, but I still hear about the jobs.”

“Is it true, that a blood mage almost had you slitting your own throat?” Olivia asked, and Cat felt a pang of sorrow at the thought.

“Uh, yeah” she answered. “though she wasn’t a blood mage, she was a friend that was threatened to be handed over to the templars for tranquility if she didn’t help the blood mages.”

“Oh! That’s horrible!” Olivia said, her hands coming up to cover her mouth. “I’m so sorry!”

“Thank you,” Cat said, and smiled. “She was able to get away, and we stopped the blood mages, so everything worked out.”

“Blood mages,” Anders growled. “They give us all a bad name, and really, they’re the reason the rest of us are hunted and caged.” He looked up at Olivia as he spoke. “Just imagine how our lives would be different if there was no mages succumbing to demons and blood magic, we could live as other men!” He glanced over at Cat. “Right?”

“Uh…” Cat didn’t want to dim the look in his eye, but she couldn’t agree either.

Anders noticed the stall, and questioned it. “No Cat, tell me what you’re thinking.”

“Honestly? I think blood magic is just the reason they use, and if not that, they would find something else.”

“Really?” He asked, surprised.

“Yes, I don’t think blood magic is wrong, it is just a type of magic,” she said, and both of the mages looked at her in shock. “Yes, I know what others say, but it’s because so many who are seeking power over others use blood magic, it has become synonymous with evil. But it is the people who are evil or not, not the tool they use.”

“Cat, how can you say that?” Anders asked incredulously. “Blood magic is wrong!”

“I know that that is how you feel, and that’s okay,” Cat replied. “Look at it this way, if every mage that used hexes only did so for evil purposes, after a hundred years, everyone would start believing that hexes were evil. The same is true for blood magic. But just because a mage uses blood magic, does not automatically mean they are dealing with demons or that they are trying to take over the
world.”

“I…” Anders looked around, trying to refute her statement. “logically, I can’t argue, but I still think it is wrong.”

“And as friends, we can respect each others’ view without agreeing,” Cat replied. “We don’t have to agree on everything.”

“Thank you,” he replied, deep in thought.

“So, all the blood mages are dead, though?” Olivia asked.

“Yes,” Cat answered. “They were using their magic together to break down the resistance to demons of others, and assisting the demons in taking over unwilling hosts.” Cat’s face twisted in disgust. “There were a few templar recruits that were taken for that purpose.”

“Oh yes, Anders told me about that,” she said quietly. “It’s so awful.”

“Yes, it was,” Cat answered.

Olivia looked between the two of them, seeing the unhappiness on their faces, and decided to change the subject.

“So how is Hawke? It seems that all of you can come and go as you need, but Hawke is always working, isn’t he?”

“Oh, yeah,” Cat replied, desperately looking for something to change the subject to. “Oh, I almost forgot! I found this deathroot, and wondered if you needed it, otherwise I could sell it.” She pulled the root out of her pack for them.

Anders stepped closer, taking the root, and examining it. “Who harvested this?” he asked.

“Um… I did?” she said sheepishly.

“Oh, so we need to give you some basic lessons then,” Anders said, and he walked over to place the root on a table. He gathered his own satchel and walked back. “Olivia, you can finish this, right?” he asked, and she nodded.

“All that’s left is to separate and label this last batch,” she said. “I’ve got this, you guys go get some sunshine.”

Anders grabbed Cat’s pack, handing it to her, and pulling her towards the door. “We won’t be gone too long,” he called back and Olivia gave a wave as they left.

“Was it really that bad?” Cat asked.

“No, some is still usable, but we could have gotten twice as much if you had cut it right,” he answered. “The coast has the most variety, so we’ll go there,” he said.

Now that they were alone, Anders wondered how to broach the subject delicately, but couldn’t seem to find the right way. “So…” he started.

“Yeah?” Cat asked, looking over.

“About Hawke,” he said and watched her flinch. “Yeah, that.”
“Ugh, it’s totally apparent isn’t it?”

“That there is something going on, yes. What it is…? No.”

“He’s upset with me,” she said. “because he thinks I’m keeping secrets that would affect the group.”

Anders thought a moment, not wanting to just blurt out what he was thinking. “Well… but… aren’t you?” He asked.

“I suppose so,” she answered. “But every one of us has secrets, so why does he feel he needs to know mine?”

“Is that what he said?” Anders asked.

“He said he didn’t trust me, so what else am I supposed to think?” she asked, getting agitated.

“I am by no means an expert on Hawke, but I’ve noticed that he likes everything to be orderly, and in it’s place.”

“We’ve all noticed that,” she replied dryly.

“But when it comes to you, Cat… you’re a puzzle, and it’s probably bothering him.”

“What?”

“Not in a bad way,” he said placating her. “More like… uh…. an itch that he can’t scratch.”

She looked crossly at him, “thank you very much,” she groused.

“You understand what I am saying though,” he said. “You’re unlike anyone that any of us have ever met before, and act differently than we expect you to.”

“Being different shouldn’t be irritating!” she said, pouting.

“Hey, don’t put words in my mouth,” he replied, backpedaling.

“You literally said that I was bothering him,” she pointed out.

Anders rolled his eyes. *Why was she being so difficult?* “I said… that the unknown aspect of you was bothering him, not you.”

“What unknown? I’m just an ordinary girl.”

“Right. An ordinary girl that somehow came to Thedas from another world through means unknown.” He glanced over, seeing that she was gaping at him.

“I… I thought…” she whispered.

Now it was his turn to look sheepish. “Yes, well… I know you’re not lying, and you are my friend, so I trust you. Even though it is impossible and crazy… there is an explanation, I just haven’t figured it out yet.”

“You believe me?” she asked with a grin.

“Yes,” he said. “Though, I am glad you haven’t told anyone else. I’m wondering…” he stopped as he took in the guilty expression on her face. “All right, who else knows?” he asked instead.
“Uh… Isabela, though she’s in denial about it. She said that sometimes I just know things.”

“Not surprising, but still I wouldn’t have thought she would go with that.”

“And… uh… Fenris.”

There was a pause of silence, before… “WHAT?!?”

Cat flinched, the sudden shout startling her.

“What were you thinking?! He could have killed you! In fact, I’m shocked he didn’t try!”

“Well… he knew something was going on, and he confronted me about it,” She gave him a look as she finished. “He took it really well actually, and believed me right from the start… and that’s what made me decide to tell my other friend.”

He looked down as he realized what she was saying. “Me.”

“Yeah.”

There was silence besides their footsteps for a time before he spoke again. “Anyone else?” he asked.

“That’s it, besides my friends in Ferelden,” she answered.

“And you’re not going to tell Hawke?” he asked.

She thought a moment, “No.”

“I’m not saying you should, but, why not?”

She was silent another moment before answering. “I’m… not sure I can trust him,” she replied.

They continued to walk on, each lost in their thoughts, and made it out to the wounded coast. Anders led the way to a few spots where he always found some roots to harvest, and decided to ask, “What friends in Ferelden?”

Cat laughed, realizing that this was a perfect opportunity to speak of them, as Anders knew Duran at least, and they didn’t have many opportunities to speak alone.

“Well you knew him as Warden Commander, but I knew him as Duran,” she replied, and Anders looked at her in shock.

“I knew it! I knew I had heard your name from them before!”

“What, really?”

“Of course, the stories that Oghren would tell…”

“Oh no,” Cat replied, remembering the dwarf and the way he would improvise details.

“But I assumed that it couldn’t have been you, when I first met you…”

“Right, because you thought I was a raider?” she teased.

“Yes definitely, a raider,” he replied, glad that she wasn’t upset about their mistake.

They spent much longer at the coast than originally planned, as they shared any and all memories of
their time with Duran, Cat sharing about the blight, and his companions, Anders sharing about joining the wardens, and the time in Amaranthine.

Cat spoke of deciding to write a letter, and sending it to him in Amaranthine, and Anders suggested perhaps that Soldier’s Peak may be the wiser choice as the wardens had planned on relocating there. He also suggested Varric could get the letter sent, and even offered to take it to Varric as a letter from him, but Cat was still uncertain, and told him she would let him know.

It was well past dinner as they finally made it back to the clinic, and Olivia had the order ready so Cat packed it up, and headed to Hightown to deliver it.

By the time she completed delivering all the tonics, collecting payment and new orders for the following week, Cat was ready to crash. It had been an emotional day for her, and she felt freer than she had in a long time, finally being able to speak of the people she had been holding so closely for so long.

It had been fun to speak with Anders about them, even those that he hadn’t known, and had brought back memories that she had been bottling up. Now, she was feeling… homesick if that was possible, missing her family from Ferelden. She hoped that by writing Duran, he would be able to pass where she was on to the others, and that maybe, she’d hear from them eventually.

She finally made it home, and seeing that she was alone, she pulled off her clothes and fell into bed, falling quickly asleep.

* * * * *

The following morning, Cat and Isabela went out to the market for breakfast, buying scones with fruit, and enjoying them in the shade of a tree. Cat asked about the group’s pursuits the following day, and told Isabela of her time spent with Anders in harvesting plants needed for the tonics.

She also told of her delivery to the Rose, and that no one had seen or heard anything from Idunna, to which Isabela gave her a comforting pat on the arm, saying she would turn up at some point, and at this stage, no news was good news.

Cat had to agree, but didn’t like it. She asked Isabela about the jobs for that day, but she wasn’t sure what was on Hawke’s schedule. Cat asked her to make excuses for her again, as she had some things she wanted to do that day.

“Oh really?” Isabela asked. “Your job is completed for the week, you’ve spent time with friends… what else is there?” she asked, curiously.

“I thought I would go and see the Knight Captain,” Cat replied. “He would be a good friend to have in this city, plus I need him to get used to seeing me, so we don’t have a repeat of the other day.”

“Ah, now I understand,” Isabela said.

“What exactly?” Cat asked.

“I haven’t been able to figure out your type Kitty, but now it makes sense why Fenris and Anders haven’t struck your fancy. You must prefer the boys in armor,” she said with a smirk.
“That is so not true,” Cat protested.

“Oh? Then enlighten me. What is your type then?”

Cat looked around, realizing that there was plenty of time before either of them had to be anywhere. It couldn’t hurt to have some girl time. “All right then, girl talk?” she asked, and Isabela grinned.

“I thought you’d never ask!”

“But no sharing!” Cat warned.

“Of course not!”

“My type?” she asked, thinking. “I tend to go more for the rugged type than the clean cut,” she offered, “definitely needs to be confident, but not arrogant.” She looked questioningly at Isabela. “Do you even have a type?” she asked curiously.

“Well of course Kitty,” she replied. “I’m just not as picky as you are.”

“I’m not picky… I’m… selective.”

Isabela laughed loudly. “Right… selective. That’s why you haven’t found a single man since I’ve known you, and there has been plenty of opportunity!”

“Well, yes… but…”

“But?” she asked, smirking.

“I was tempted for a moment with Zev, I will admit that. But I wasn’t going to do anything in a tent,” she admitted. “And then the moment passed.”

“Oh ho!” Isabela crowed. “I knew it!”

They spent the next hour talking about the pros and cons of the men in Kirkwall, though it seemed that Isabela pointed out their pros and Cat would then point out cons.

“I just don’t understand why you’re not trying to get with Fenris,” Isabela said, once they had calmed down again.

“Why would I?” she asked. “He’s my friend.”

“He’s attentive, he’s rugged,” she began. “he’s confident, and he understands you in a way that no one else here has.”

“I just… I don’t think of him like that,” Cat replied.

“Some of the best relationships start as friends,” Isabela said. “All I’m saying is… maybe you have to take a risk somewhere. If not with him, then with someone else, but at some point, you’ll have to try something.”

“I guess so,” Cat mumbled, confusion evident in her voice.

“You know I just want you to be happy,” Isabela said, and Cat nodded, and then changed the subject.

“Speaking of… what’s going on with you and Hawke?” Cat asked, wiggling her eyebrows, and
Isabela laughed.

“Nothing yet, but I keep trying,” she said smirking.

* * * * *

Cat walked slowly into the gallows, looking around. *It would have been too easy to simply find Cullen standing around somewhere,* she thought. She walked up to a templar that was alone, looking like he was on duty.

“Excuse me ser, I’m looking for Captain Cullen?” she asked.

“I’m sorry miss, but the Captain is busy,” he replied.

“Oh, all right. Can you tell me when it would be good to come back to catch him?” she asked.

“The Captain is too busy to meet with civilians,” he answered. “You can direct any complaints to the entrance guard.”

“Oh, no, sorry… I don’t have a complaint,” she said. “The Captain asked to speak to me, and we never set up a time, so I thought…”

“Like I said, the Captain is busy,” he replied and looked away from her.

Having been dismissed, Cat turned away, unsure of how to proceed. She looked around, hoping to see a familiar face, and decided to go peruse the shops and wait a little while.

After some time, Cat decided to head back home. She started walking towards the entrance gate, when she heard her name.

“Cat? Is that you?”

She turned to find Keran in front of her, so she smiled. “Hello again Keran. How are you faring?”

“It could be better,” he answered with a smile. “I have a few knights that watch everything I do, but it could also be worse I suppose.”

“That is true,” she replied with a grin.

“Are you here alone?” he asked, looking around.

“Oh, yes, I was trying to catch the Knight Captain. He had asked that we speak sometime about my time in Ferelden-- I think he was hoping to hear news of his homeland,” she said, keeping her voice nonchalant. “But it seems he’s busy.”

“Busy?” Keran asked. “I’m fairly certain he will want to see you, rather than do paperwork,” he replied.

“Oh, but the knight I spoke to over there,” she started, then realized she may get him in trouble and stopped. Keran saw the direction she was looking and followed her gaze.

“Oh, Jenkins. Never listen to him, he thinks he should be higher up than he is, and takes it out on
everyone else. Now, wait here, I’ll go get the Captain,” he said as he led her to a bench in the courtyard.

“Oh, okay. If, you’re sure,” she said, sitting down.

“Absolutely.”

Cat sat, and watched the comings and goings of those in the courtyard, happily noticing that there seemed to be plenty of mages out and about, until she noticed that most of them were actually tranquil, which made her frown.

She had no doubt that there were some mages that couldn’t handle their powers, or couldn’t defend themselves against demons, but tranquility seemed such a harsh punishment. She couldn’t imagine the thought of having no personality, no emotions, no dreams. She shuddered at the thought.

“Lady Cat?” she heard, and she turned toward the voice. “Are you all right?”

She smiled up at Cullen, taking his proffered hand and standing up. “Yes thank you,” she replied. “I’m sorry to simply show up, but we hadn’t had a chance to plan anything, so I had some time today, and thought I’d try to catch you free.”

“A Captain is hardly ever free, but I can always make time for you,” he said smoothly, and she smiled.

“I apologize for my abrupt departure before,” she said, and he just shook his head.

“No need for apologies, my lady,”

“Now what did I tell you about calling me a lady?” she asked him, and he chuckled.

“I’m afraid it will be a tough habit to break,” he said.

“Well, friends use each others’ names,” she said. “And I’m hoping we can be friends, Cullen.”

He looked at her, and nodded. “I would like that,” he said. “Would you care to go for a walk with me, my lady?” he offered his arm out to her.

“Only if you ask correctly,” she replied, placing a hand on her hip and giving him a look.

He nodded with a smirk, and Cat grinned in reply. “I can see you are just as stubborn as I am,” he answered. “Would you care to go for a walk with me, Cat?” he asked and she nodded.

“I’d love to,” she answered, taking his arm.

“Excellent, my lady,” he replied, holding her there with his other hand, and leading her out of the gallows, as they laughed.

* * * * *

Cat arrived back in Lowtown around midday, and decided to head to the Hanged Man for lunch. She was pleasantly surprised to find Isabela there alone, and suggested that they eat together, knowing she had spent any of her own coin on drinks.
“So what happened?” Cat asked her as they sat down at a table.

“Hawke decided to see that dwarf, the one who wanted us to kill the Qunari outlaws? Well we found him, but he was actually in the compound with the Qunari, so I told Hawke I had to go.”

“He take that okay?”

“He didn’t like it, but I made a joke out of it, so at least he’ll get over it. I wasn’t going to push my luck by parading myself in front of the Arishok.”

“Smart,” Cat replied. “So what’s next on the grand schedule?”

“Nothing,” Isabela replied. “Not until tonight anyway. Hawke wants to go after the gangs that are plaguing the streets. Apparently a group is paying good coin for taking them out, and Hawke just needs a little more to fund the expedition.”

“Oh, okay,” Cat said, as their food arrived, and they both dug in. “Either this is getting better, or my taste buds are dying,” she said after the first bite.

“And that’s why I drink,” Isabela replied. “because then I don’t care either way.”

“Yeah, that’s why you drink,” Cat said dryly, and they laughed.

“So, are you going to tell me what happened with your templar?” Isabela asked. Cat grinned, and shook her head.

“Nothing happened,” she replied.

“Nothing never happens at the gallows,” Isabela retorted.

“Who went to the gallows?” a voice asked, and they both turned to see Hawke, Varric, Carver and Fenris joining them at their table.

“Kitty did,” Isabela said, and Cat rolled her eyes.

“Why?” Hawke asked Cat.

“Well I decided to turn myself in,” Cat answered sarcastically. “Obviously to see someone.”

“Who?” he asked, and Cat bristled.

“What does that matter?” she asked defensively.

“I’m curious, that’s all,” Hawke replied with a smirk.

”Keran,” she replied quickly, looking down at her food.

“Oh.”

“You spent several hours there talking to Keran?” Isabela asked, and Cat practically hissed at her.

“I ran into the Knight Captain too,” Cat answered, nonchalantly, focusing on her food.

“And?” Hawke demanded.

“And what? We talked, we took a walk, no big deal,” she answered.
“So you’re becoming chummy with the templars?” he asked, and Cat sighed.

“What? Are you now going to tell me who I can be friends with, and who I can’t?” she asked. The group looked between the two of them, as they glared at each other, wondering what was happening, and why.

“No,” Hawke answered sullenly.

“Good.” Cat finished quickly, her appetite gone, and stood up, leaving money on the table for her and Isabela’s meal. “See you all later,” she said, leaving the tavern in a rush.

“What was that all about?” Varric asked, and Hawke just shrugged.

“Ask her, I have no idea.”

Fenris stood then, “Very well,” he said and followed Cat outside.

Carver looked at his brother in scrutiny. “What did you do?” he asked.

* * * * *

Cat waited for Fenris to catch up, once he called her name. She wasn’t sure she was ready for the questions she was sure to get, but she was glad to see him. Isabela was right about one thing, Fenris did understand her better than the others, and she felt comfortable around him.

“Want to come over?” he asked as he reached her, and she nodded. They turned toward Hightown and began walking.

“You’re not wearing your armor today,” he commented.

“Yes, I figured I would be all right since I wasn’t with Hawke,” she replied.

He watched her, as her face scrunched up at the mention of his name. “What did he do?” he asked. “Should I beat some sense into him?”

Cat laughed, feeling much better with just the offer. “No need, but thank you,” she replied. “He just let me know that he doesn’t trust me, because he is aware I am keeping things from him. And I know it doesn’t make sense, but it makes me not trust him either.”

“And so you decided to avoid him?”

“Is it that obvious?” she asked, wincing.

“Maybe not to the others, but I could tell.”

“I just thought I could work it out, if I could get some distance,” she said. He nodded, and they continued to walk, even as she reached out and grabbed his arm.

“I haven’t seen you much lately,” she said. “I haven’t been trying to avoid you.”

He smiled a half smile at her, “I know,” he said. “I’ve been keeping busy myself. Working on my letters, and reading the book you left me, over and over until I could do it without stumbling.”
“That’s great!” she replied excitedly. “You’ll surpass me very soon like that!”

“We can’t have that,” he replied. “Then I will have to be the teacher, and you the student.”

She laughed at his expression, *he truly would think that was awful*, she thought. “I’ll work harder,” she promised. “In fact Varric gave me the idea the other day to write a letter to my friends in Ferelden. Since Duran is the leader of the Grey Wardens there, I should be able to send him one that would find him.”

“That is sound logic,” he replied, as they reached his mansion, and he opened the door for her. “Are you wanting to have open correspondence?” he asked.

“I think so,” she answered. “Anders suggested that I ask Varric for assistance, and since Varric is well established here, I can have Duran respond, I suppose. It would be fantastic to hear from any of them.”

“Then you should do it,” he said. They climbed the stairs to his room, and he set about stoking the embers into a fire to warm the room, while she looked around. She had been here many times, but Fenris was constantly collecting new things, weapons, armor pieces, wine… she smiled as she thought of his simple tastes.

“What are you thinking?” he asked her.

“Earlier today, I spent time with Issy talking about men,” she answered. “She pointed out that we get along really well, and I was just thinking that she was right. It was unexpected, to be sure, but you seem to read and understand me so well.”

He shrugged, “I’m just observant,” he replied. “and you’re not one to hide your emotions.”

“I suppose.”

She walked over to stand in front of the growing fire, rubbing her hands together. It wasn’t exactly cold outside, but the fire was welcome, but her closeness with Fenris had her thinking.

She replayed her conversation with Isabela in her head, feeling confused. It was true she was comfortable with Fenris, and they got along well, but that didn’t necessarily mean they should be romantically involved.

“What’s wrong?” he asked suddenly, and she turned, startled.

“Oh… uh… I don’t know.”

He simply looked at her, one eyebrow up in question, and she relented. “I guess… I’m just confused.”

“What?”

“Myself,” she answered. “I just don’t know where I am going, or what I want, or… anything.”

He smiled again at her. “I can understand that. I keep thinking, once Danarius is dead, what will I have? What will I do? Where will I go? There will be many decisions, and I am not certain of any of the answers, except one.”

“One?” she asked, looking up at him. “Which one?”

“I know now, what it is to have friends, to have family. I would keep that in my life, no matter what
else may happen,” he answered firmly.

Cat smiled softly, impressed and surprised at how much he was growing, what an amazing man he was becoming.

“Fenris?” she asked quietly.

“Yes?”

“Will you do me a favor?”

“Of course.”

“Will you…. kiss me?”
He wasn’t sure if he heard her correctly, but by the way she was looking down at the floor, and biting her lower lip, he concluded that he had indeed heard her right. To say he was surprised was an understatement, but it wasn’t as if he hadn’t thought of it before, he had just assumed it wasn’t what she wanted based on the way she treated him, and had moved on.

He stepped closer to her, lifting her chin with a finger, waiting until she was looking at him. “Are you sure that is what you want?” he asked. She still looked uncertain, but she nodded.

“I’m still not sure what I want, but it may help me figure some things out,” she replied. He had to respect her honesty. She wasn’t throwing herself at him like Isabela had, she wasn’t flirting or complimenting him as others did. She simply asked that they try something, to see if there was more, and though he was slightly disappointed in her answer, he couldn’t fault her for that.

He could always refuse. After all, he didn’t really think of her that way any longer, she was his friend, his chosen sister, but if he was honest with himself, he would regret not trying.

He stepped closer, taking her hand and placing it up around his neck as he used his other to pull her closer by her waist. “All right then, we shall try,” he whispered lowly, and bent his head to take her mouth with his.

He kept his mouth soft, exploring where normally he would demand and take, wanting to give her the time she needed. He heard her sigh, and felt as she surrendered to him, and was more surprised that he felt no need to press his advantage.

The longer it lasted, the more he felt for her, but as he brought the kiss to an end, and pulled back to look at her, he realized that his pulse was steady. He reached up to grab her wrist at his neck, checking her pulse as he brought her arm down, and finding it the same as his.

He brought her hand to his mouth, kissing her knuckles. “Did you find any answers?” he asked softly.

“I really wanted that to work…” she mumbled, and he smiled.

“It wasn’t unpleasant,” he said with a smirk.
“No, it was very good,” she replied. “But it wasn’t what either of us were hoping it could be, was it?”

“No, it wasn’t.”

She brought her hand up to his face. “I love you, you know that, right?” she asked, and he nodded. “I just wish I was in love with you. It would make everything easier. Maybe we just need more testing?” she asked with a smirk.

He chuckled and wrapped his arms around her, giving her a hug. “You deserve far better than I.”

“No such thing,” she answered, before clearing her throat, and stepping back. “Things aren’t going to be weird now, are they?”

“Only if you make them weird,” he answered, going over to the table.

“You know I’m coming to you any time I need a kiss now, right?”

“Ah, yes, like that,” he said, and they laughed. “Should we work on your letter, or my reading?” he asked, and had her grinning.

“You choose.”

***

Over the next week, Cat continued to avoid Hawke and his schedule, not sure of how to continue working with him. It wasn’t as if any specific thing had happened, but any time she thought of him, she became irritated.

Instead, Cat spent each day with a different member of the group, wanting to get to know them individually. She had been so surprised with both Fenris and Anders, that she felt it would be a disservice to the others if she didn’t get to know them as well.

She went shopping with Fenris, buying books and supplies as they needed, to continue in their reading and writing practice. He helped her draft out her letter to Duran, until she had a copy that looked good enough to send.

The next day, she spent with Merrill, visiting the Viscount’s garden, and collecting herbs to sell in the market, so that Merrill would have money for food. She brought Merrill to the clinic and introduced her to Olivia, hoping that they would bond as well, since they both needed more friends.

She even went to visit with Aveline, and ended up joining in some sparring fights, helping to teach some humility to her guards. They weren’t used to sparring with someone who fought dirty, and she ended up fighting several fights too many, since every guard seemed to want to challenge her.

That evening, she waited until after dinner, and headed into the Hanged Man. Looking around, she didn’t see anyone in the common room she knew, so she walked up the steps and knocked on Varric’s door.

“Well hello there,” Varric drawled as he opened the door and saw her. “Long time, no see.”

“Sorry about that Varric,” she replied with a guilty smile. “I had some things that I had been
“Oh really?” he asked, gesturing for her to come in. “I didn’t realize how short on herbs the city was, that you felt you needed to rectify the situation all by yourself.”

Cat gave him a dirty look, “Anders needed some, Merrill needed food money, and taking care of Isabela isn’t cheap either,” she said quickly.

“Oh-huh.” He replied dryly. “So I guess I’m next on the list of friends to spend time with?”

“Varric… it’s not… I mean… ugh. Don’t be like that.”

“I don’t mean to give you a hard time, Cat. But we all miss you, you know. And, no one knows why you’ve stopped coming around, though we can all guess who the culprit is.”

“No… no. There’s no culprit, it’s just… some things I need to figure out.”

“Can I help?” he asked with a smile, and Cat felt much better.

“You are a great listener, Varric, I’m just afraid I’ll read it later in one of your stories…”

“Ouch,” he said “Can you go ahead and pull that dagger out of my back?” he asked with a pout.

She laughed, and reached over to pull an imaginary knife from his back. “I actually didn’t plan on spending much time, since I wasn’t sure if you’d even be here. But… I do have a couple of things for you, and I’d also like a favor.”

“All right,” he said curiously. “Which is first?”

“There once was a dwarf,” she said, and the smirk he gave her just made her smile, knowing she was about to wipe it off. “Whose younger brother was so jealous, he killed their older brother, and framed him for the deed. His father was so upset, he banished the dwarf, never to return home.”

“Could be any number of people…” Varric mused.

“So, in his travels throughout the land, he came upon people that were strong and cunning, and invited them to join him on his journey, which they did.

Little did this dwarf know, there was also a contract out for his life, by none other, than the Antivan Crows,” she added, smiling as she watched him trying to figure out the identity of the dwarf in her tale.

“At the same time, there was a Crow, who took the contract, and traveled to find the dwarf and reap the benefits of his death. He hired mercenaries, and scoured the land to find him, and having found a clue, took his group and set a trap.”

“You have a flair for suspense,” Varric praised, now leaning forward.

“The time had come. The trap was set, the dwarf and his companions were almost caught, and the mercenaries waited to spring it. What happened, however, was something that no one expected.” She paused, and Varric gave her a cross look. “If this is punishment for what I said before, I don’t like it.”

She grinned and continued. “The dwarf’s group stopped, as a screaming woman ran directly into their path. The mercenaries looked on in shock, uncertain as to what had happened, then decided to simply charge forward and fight.
“The assassin, however, headed straight for the woman, cutting down his own mercenaries as they tried to kill her along with the dwarf, for you see… he had sworn to protect the woman from harm.”

“Wait, what?” Varric asked, not seeing the twist coming.

“When all was done, the mercenaries were dead, the assassin was captured, and the dwarf questioned the woman, to no avail. He turned instead to the assassin, asking why he had tried to kill them, and why he had turned on his own men instead. The assassin answered, that he wanted to die, but because of his pride, couldn’t simply take his own life. Instead, he had to find a fight he was certain to lose, but when the woman had shown up, he had no choice but to save her.”

“This is a strange story,” Varric commented.

“The assassin knowing they would kill him, asked that they take care of the woman, but instead, the dwarf invited them both to join him on his journey.”

“Why?”

Cat ignored the question, as she was almost finished. “The dwarf explained that he needed the best fighters he could find, and that all needed to band together against their common foe. He held out his hands in welcome, if the assassin and the woman would accept it, and said, the grey wardens needed all the help they could get.”

“Whoa, whoa, whoa,” Varric said, holding up his hands. “Two questions. One- is this true, and two- if it is, why are you telling me?”

“Why? Really? After all this time of you asking for my story, you’re asking me why?” she replied incredulously. “And yes, of course it’s true.”

“You’ve been very closed mouth about all this, kitten.” He looked shrewdly at her. “You’re going to ask me to keep it a secret, aren’t you?”

“Well, yes. It’s not something that I want out there, because the people are quite famous now, and-”

“Famous, now?” He interrupted. “Andraste’s… wait. The woman was you?”

She nodded.

“And the Grey Wardens…” she could see his mind putting the pieces together, and she smiled as she waited. “You travelled around with the Hero of Ferelden?” he asked, his jaw dropping.

“Well, can you blame me for keeping it quiet?” she asked, leaning her elbow on the table, and putting her chin in her hand. “I don’t want to cause them any trouble, or have people stopping me all the time to ask questions.”

“I suppose I can understand that…” he replied. “So why now?” he asked.

“I guess, I want to be friends. Better friends, anyway, and that can’t happen if I close myself off. I can’t promise to give you all my stories, but I can be more open. Now that you know who my friends were, you’ll understand my stories when I share them, even though I won’t be giving many details.”

“I get it,” he replied. “The one you just told was good, but once I knew it involved the wardens…” he stopped and smiled at her. “I knew you had something good to share. Of course this only makes me more curious.”
“Of course. But, this also brings me to the favor.”

“Wait, keeping this quiet was the favor.”

“No, that’s just the incentive. You blab, and no more stories.”

“Cruel, but it does the job. What’s the favor?” he asked.

“Now that the Blight is over, Duran and Alistair are the senior wardens in Ferelden. In fact, Anders confirmed that Duran is the Warden Commander, and that they have a base in Amaranthine, as well as Soldier’s Peak in Ferelden. I was hoping, that you could help me get a letter to him.”

“Is that all?” he asked with a grin. “You sure are easy to please, kitten.”

“Is that my nickname then?” she asked. “You’ve used it a few times now.”

“It’s the temporary substitute,” he replied. “I can’t find the right one.”

“You know, back home everyone called me Rina,” she said, and his eyebrow winged up.

“You don’t say…”

“Yeah, in fact, Duran was the one who started calling me Cat. But Zev, he didn’t call me by my name at all.”

“What did he call you?”

“Little dove, or my dove, most of the time. Sweetheart or something like it if he was upset with me.”

“Knowing you, that must have pissed you off,” he said, with a grin, and Cat sighed.

“You want to use it, don’t you.”

“Now that I know, I can’t not use it,” he reasoned.

“You are not allowed to call me little,” she said.

“Little dove…little dove….yeah, it’s perfect.”

“No one gets to know where it came from, though Issy will know already.”

“Give me some credit,” Varric said with a smirk. “She’ll never know we had this talk.” He held out his hand and she placed the letter in it.

“Thanks Varric,” she said genuinely. “It’s nice having you for a friend.”

“Don’t go soft on me,” he said, but she could tell he didn’t mean it, and she grinned. “Do me a favor, and go visit Blondie next, would you?” he asked.

“Anders? Why?”

“Let’s just say, he needs a friend,” he replied. “I’ll get this taken care of, little dove, and let you know if there is a response.”

“Just don’t read it if there is,” she warned as she stood up.

“You enjoy wounding me, don’t you?” he asked, walking her to the door.
“It is rather enjoyable,” she said, as she gave him a hug. It put his face right in her breasts, but she didn’t care. “Oh, I almost forgot,” she said, releasing him, and digging for a pouch in her pocket, and handed it to him.

“What’s this for?” he asked.

“I wanted to invest in your expedition,” she answered, and turned and walked away with a wave. *Looks like I need to head to Darktown,* she thought, as she headed out of the tavern.

* * * * *

“I don’t know what’s wrong, and he won’t tell me,” Olivia whispered to her as she let Cat into the clinic. “Maybe he’ll talk to you,” she said optimistically.

“Maybe,” Cat mused, walking over to him. “Hi Anders,” she said, and he looked up glumly.

“Oh, hey Cat,” he replied, looking down again.

“You want to talk about it?” she asked, seeing that he was obviously not himself.

“Uh, no… not really,” he replied, looking over at Olivia.

“Hey Olivia, will you be okay if I take Anders out for a little while?” she asked loudly, and Olivia answered immediately in the affirmative. Anders balked, but Cat pouted and he gave in rather easily.

“If you don’t want to go anywhere, we can just find a place to talk, but something is obviously bothering you,” Cat said once they left the clinic.

“Yeah, and maybe I do need to talk about it,” he replied. “I’ll walk you home,” he said, and they started towards Lowtown. Cat remained quiet, until she finally stopped and gave him a questioning look.

“You don’t have to talk about it with me, if it’s personal,” she said.

“It’s not that,” he replied, looking uncomfortable. “I’m just… disagreeing with Hawke about something, and I don’t want to add to what you’re feeling…”

“Oh, no problem then,” she smiled. “I’m pretty much over it.”

“Oh?” he asked.

“Yeah, in fact I just came from Varric’s, and I gave him the letter to send to Duran. I had to share a little about Duran, and how I knew him, and I realized that you all are my friends, and I need to trust my friends.”

“I’m glad to hear that,” Anders said, smiling back at her. “Well, you probably are already aware, but we went out today, following directions from a letter that Hawke received about some mages that were in trouble. Most of us thought it was a trap, but we went anyway, in case it wasn’t.”

Cat pulled his arm, and they started walking again, and he continued. “It turned out a templar named Thrask is the one that brought us there, hoping that we could convince the mages that were hiding from the templars to surrender peacefully, or they’d be killed.”
He sighed heavily, “I found out afterwards, that he was Olivia’s father, which is why I didn’t want to speak of it in front of her. I suppose he thought he was being generous by showing a bit of kindness, but it actually is worse. His own daughter, Cat! How could a father be so callous, to his own daughter??” He ran his hand through his hair, taking a deep breath to calm down.

"Once, I thought I would have children, I had big dreams once I had finally managed to escape the circle… but not anymore. Hawke has no idea how lucky he was…”

“You would be an amazing father!” Cat said happily at the thought. “You’re a kind and patient man, and besides, you’re getting plenty of practice now.”

He looked at her, perplexed, before he understood, and smiled ruefully. “You mean with Olivia? You know, I didn’t feel old before, but I do now, so thanks for that.”

She laughed, and he chuckled, though he quickly became serious again. “We went into the cavern, Fenris and Carver, even Aveline trying to convince Hawke to just kill the mages. There were animated skeletons all over, so we knew at least one of them was using blood magic. We even came across a young apprentice who was running away from the group because of it.”

“What happened?” she asked.

“When we found them, the mage, a man named Decimus, attacked us on sight. He refused to listen, summoning more and more things with his blood magic. Finally Hawke stood in front of him and said, ‘If nothing short of killing you will stop this, then so be it.’ and he killed him.”

He seemed to not see where he was going as he spoke, so Cat steered them towards her home. “The other mages swore they had not done blood magic, and I agreed that we should help free them, and tried to convince Hawke of the same,” he continued.

“It was simple, kill the templar, and they could run. Better one templar die, than so many innocent mages. If the templars saw evidence of blood magic, they would kill every last mage, just to be sure!”

He scowled then, “Then Hawke tells me, that if I have so little regard for life, I could kill him myself.” He punched a fist into the open palm of his other hand.

“I was so angry! Hawke kills everyday, and had killed the mage leading them! And here he was, judging me! As if the mages didn’t deserve freedom? Like they were meant to be caged again?!”

“And?” Cat asked quietly. “What happened?”

“On our way out we faced more corpses. Fenris and Carver wanted to return and kill the mages, because the others had to have lied to us. I denied it, saying that those were animated from our fight with Decimus. I could tell Hawke was torn, but I pushed harder, and he relented. We walked out of the cave, and I walked up to Thrask, but… I couldn’t do it.”

He sagged, the angry draining from him. “I couldn’t kill him. I hesitated because of Hawke’s words, and the other templars arrived. Varric gave some story about Hawke being an enchanter from Ferelden that assisted in hunting escaped mages or something. To be honest, I didn’t pay much attention. I haven’t been able to think of anything else since.”

He looked at her then, and she smiled sadly. He nodded, “You can tell me what you’re thinking,” he offered.

“Well… all right. Hawke does kill, but not indiscriminately,” she said. “He gives second chances, and has a deep sense of right and wrong. Perhaps he felt that killing a templar that was trying to help
mages would have eventually weighted heavily on you, or perhaps he didn’t want to, but didn’t want to force your decision, who knows?”

“Regardless,” she continued. “He is a good man, but he’s not flawless. There are going to be times we all disagree, but talking it out is really the only way to solve it, and yes… I need to take my own advice… but it’s different.”

“Is it?” he asked as they arrived at her home. She opened the door, and waved him to follow her in. Isabela was never home this early, so they could continue their conversation.

“Yes, it is, but I just needed time to get a handle on everything.” She held up the water jug, offering him a drink and he nodded, so she got cups to pour.

“What everything, Cat?” he asked. “I thought it was just an issue of trust, and by avoiding him, how is that fixing things?”

“It wasn’t that,” she replied. “I have a hard time understanding the subtleties from others, and often read things that weren’t meant and so on. I talked to Isabela about it, and got even more confused, and somehow I ended up kissing Fenris, trying to figure out my own head… and I just realized that I was thinking things that didn’t matter.”

“You kissed Fenris?” he asked incredulously.

“Well yeah, I mean, I was thinking that perhaps I was so intent on being unhappy because of being away from home, and Steven, and that I just needed to not think, and try things, that that would help me make decisions, instead of thinking them to death,” she rambled.

“Steven?” he mumbled. “Why didn’t you come to me then?” he asked.

“Uh, for what?” she asked, and he gave her a deadpan look.

He stepped forward, grabbing her and pulling her close, and kissed her with everything he had pent up.

Cat could swear her head was swimming, and she jerked as he just as suddenly pulled away from her, and stared as if she had grown a second head.

“What?” she asked, confused.

“Cat… that was … like kissing my sister.”

“Anders, you have a sister?” she asked in shock, which made him stare at her... then he started laughing, loudly. “What’s so funny?” she demanded.

“Of course I don’t, well, not that I know of, anyway,” he replied, still laughing. She pouted as he tried to calm himself. “Darling, you know I love you,” he said, and she thought of her conversation days ago with Fenris. “I was really hoping that would have gone differently, after all, you’re the perfect woman for me, well, aside the obvious.”

“The obvious being no sexual attraction?”

“Ouch, though I guess I deserve that,” he said wincing.

“You know what I mean,” she said. “You’re gorgeous and you know it,” she replied flippantly. “But you’re one of my best friends! Did you honestly think that kissing me was the best idea?” she asked.
“Honestly, no, but I don’t want you to be closer to Fenris than to me,” he said with a pout of his own.

“So I said I kissed him, and all of sudden you have to kiss me too?” she asked, wanting to slap him upside the head. “Men are so stupid!” she groused.

“You still love me, right?” he asked.

“Of course,” she said, rolling her eyes. “But don’t do that again.”

“No promises,” he replied with a grin. “Never know when I may need to dissuade a crazy suitor or something.”

He reached over and gave her a hug, pulling her close. “I’m sorry, really. I’ll make it up to you. We’ll have plenty of time together once everyone else leaves for the Deep Roads.”

She pulled back and stared at him. “What do you mean, everyone else?” she asked. “What happened?” she asked.

“Hawke told me I didn’t have to go, since Isabela and Merrill both want to,” he replied. “And yes, before you ask, I warned them about broodmothers, and everything. Everyone is confident they won’t see many darkspawn though.”

“How can they avoid them if you don’t go?” she asked, worried now. “Anders, I’m really sorry, but if Hawke is your friend, you have to go.”


“I know, but if things play out like I remember, Carver will get sick.”

“Sick?”

“And the only cure…”

“Maker’s breath, you can’t be serious…”

“I’m afraid so. I don’t think we could convince him to stay, but if he goes, and you’re not there…”

“Ugh.”

Cat tried to comfort him, as he had paled and looked like he would be sick, but he finally stood to leave.

“I’ll… think about it,” he said. “Goodnight Cat.”
Cat swallowed hard, wondering if she was making a good decision, or if she was butting into something that was none of her business. But after speaking with Anders, she felt that she should at least *try* to convince Carver to stay in Kirkwall during the expedition.

How she would go about that... well that was an entirely different problem. It wasn’t like she and Carver were close, or even friends really. In the very beginning he had started acting strangely, and she avoided him ever since. He was a nice enough guy, but too hot headed and rash for her to want to deal with.

She continued to stare at the door in front of her, thinking that she should either knock or walk away, or someone would wonder what she was doing. They had all been through the neighborhood enough to have Hawke’s uncle’s house pointed out, so she was at least certain she was in the right place.

Remembering her words to Anders, she told herself that if she was Hawke’s friend, she would try to save his brother too. Nodding resolutely, she knocked on the door.

The door opened, and a grumpy looking man stood there, eyeing her suspiciously. *Has to be Gamlen,* she thought. “What is it?” he asked gruffly.


The door shut in her face, and as she wondered what had happened, and if she should leave, it opened again, a older woman who was obviously Garrett and Carver’s mother standing there now.

“Hello dear, how can I help you?” she asked kindly, her eyes twinkling.

“Hello, Lady Hawke, I’m actually looking for Carver.”

“I’m so sorry, he isn’t home right now,” she said. “Would you like to come in and wait?” she asked Cat.

“Oh...” Cat faltered. *This hadn’t been part of the plan!* “I probably shouldn’t,” she replied. “It’s getting rather late... unless he’s expected soon?” she asked.

“Oh those boys,” Leandra sighed. “Always out and about, trying to make money to support the family, and Maker knows when they’ll be back because I don’t,” she said. “Perhaps I can pass on a message?” she asked.

“That would be great. I’m Cat,” Cat said with a smile. “I’m usually in the group following Garrett around,” she said, and Leandra’s face lit up.

“Then I’m very pleased to meet you, Cat” she said with a smile. “I keep telling those boys to bring their friends home so I can meet them.”

Cat kept her smile, but inside she was sinking. If Hawke had been asked to bring them to meet his mother, and he hadn’t... he probably would be angry that she had come. “Well, it’s our fault mostly,” she said. “Always busy, busy! Uh, anyway, could you tell Carver that I came by to speak with him?” she asked. “I was hoping to convince him to stay here in Kirkwall while the others go on the expedition.”
“Of course dear!” Leandra said excitedly, her smile growing wide. “It would be my pleasure. If anything could convince him, I’m sure you could! I’m so glad that Carver has met such a polite and pretty girl here in the city.”

“Oh… oh, it’s not like… that,” Cat fumbled her words as she tried to correct the conclusion made, or least keep from insulting Carver to his own mother.

“My mistake,” Leandra said, but she continued to grin, and Cat sighed.

“Thank you, and goodnight,” she said, and with a small wave, turned to leave.

“No time! Come back soon!” Leandra called before she stepped back inside and shut the door. Cat argued with herself as she walked, wishing that she had never gone.

Cat entered the Hanged Man, assuming that at least she’d find Isabela here. It was still early in Isabela’s mind after all. Her smile returned, as she found Varric, Fenris, Isabela and Merrill sitting at a table, playing cards. She walked over, and flopped onto the bench next to Merrill.

“Kitty,” Isabela said with a smirk. “What have you been up to?” she asked.

“Nothing good,” Cat replied, an answer that was sure to make Isabela smile, which it did.

“Oh, I’m sorry you’re having a bad day Cat,” Merrill said, and she was met with either rolling eyes, or shaking heads by her companions.

“It’s been okay, as far as days go,” Cat replied. “But I said that to imply to Issy that I’ve been naughty,” she explained.

“Oh!” Merrill said, embarrassed and yet intrigued. “So what did you do that was naughty?” she asked and Cat laughed.

“Nothing, sorry to disappoint.”

“Oh, well…” she replied. “It’s good to see you anyway.”

“You too,” Cat said. “I heard from Anders that you two were signed on to the expedition,” she said, and Merrill nodded.

“He told us about the dangers, but Isabela was talking about wanting to get out of Kirkwall for a bit, and I agreed,” Merrill said.

“Besides, Hawke will need all the eyes and ears he can get,” Isabela added.

“I still feel like I owe Hawke for all his help,” Merrill said. “So that was part of it too.”

Makes sense,” Cat replied with a smile. “It won’t be a picnic, but since the blight wasn’t too long ago, there should be less darkspawn.”

“Don’t you have that backwards, Kitty?” Isabela asked, as she continued to play. “With the blight over, they all retreat back to the Deep Roads.”

“True, but there are far less now, and they go back to searching for their next archdemon or whatever, digging new tunnels and such. Right at the beginning, there aren’t many found in the established tunnels, though you may still run into some.”

“You still not going then, Little Dove?” Varric asked, which had Isabela wide eyed and whipping
her head to Cat, then to Varric, and back to Cat again.

“No, I’m not.”

“Seems you aren’t the only one,” he replied, both of them ignoring Isabela’s look. “Aveline is in the middle of taking over the guard, and asked to stay as well, and Hawke told Blondie he could stay to watch over you.”

“I’ll be sure to spend time with Aveline then,” Cat said, with a smile. “I think I talked Anders into going, and I’m hoping to get Carver to stay as well, though I may need help with that.”


“Just a bad feeling,” she answered, noting that both Fenris and Isabela had looked to her when she said it. “In fact, I tried to speak to him before coming here, but he wasn’t home.”

“Hawke took him to deliver a few misplaced items that we found yesterday,” Varric told her. “Last minute coin and such, since they gave pretty much everything to Bartrand to fund this thing.”

“So everything is ready then?” Cat asked, surprised.

“Ready?” Fenris asked, giving her an odd look. He turned to Isabela in consternation, “You didn’t tell her?” he asked.

“I haven’t seen her until now,” Isabela answered. She looked over at Cat and said, “We leave in the morning, Kitty.”

“What?” Cat asked, shocked. “That soon?” she asked, looking around at the four of them. “But…but…” she stopped, as she didn’t actually have anything to say. “When?” she asked sadly.

“Sun up,” Varric answered, as Isabela won the hand, and they all threw their cards on the table. “Which means, we should probably get some sleep.”

Fenris seemed ready to leave, as he stood and clasped a hand on Cat’s shoulder, gave a nod to the others and left.

Isabela looked at Cat pleading, and Cat smiled. “Sure, one more,” she replied to the unspoken question, and Isabela happily jumped up to go to the bar.

“Well ladies, good night,” Varric said as he collected the cards and pocketed them.

“Goodnight,” Cat and Merrill both replied, though neither stood. As Varric walked to his room, Merrill reached over and put her arm around Cat’s shoulders.

“I’m sorry,” she said, “I didn’t know that you didn’t know.”

“It’s all right,” Cat said. “It just took me by surprise I suppose. I didn’t even get to apologize to Hawke yet for avoiding him.”

“You’ve been avoiding him?” Merrill asked.

“You didn’t notice?” Cat asked with a smile. “That’s good, maybe he didn’t either then.”

“Hmm,” Merrill mused as she brought her arm back to herself, and put her chin in her hand, her elbow on the table. “I don’t know, Hawke is pretty observant. I mean, he’s always pointing out things that I miss.”
“Hmph,” Cat said with a frown. “Guess I’ll have to talk to him in the morning then.”

“What’s that?” Merrill asked, looking at Cat’s neck.

“My scar?” Cat asked, looking down.

“No silly, the jewelry? Around your neck?” she asked.

“Oh,” Cat said, pulling the necklace out and showing off the charm, which depicted a sun with a carved smile. “Something I got back home,” she offered it to Merrill, and she leaned forward as Merrill took the small sun in her fingers, turning it each way to see it from every angle.


“Yeah, that’s why I got it,” Cat said, as she leaned back once Merrill had let go. “My husband had forgotten my birthday, and I was feeling down. I decided that day that I could only depend on myself to be happy, and bought this to help me remember that.”

“Oh, but that’s a sad story,” Merrill said, frowning. “And you can always count on your friends to help you be happy.”

Cat smiled softly at her. “I wish that was true Merrill, but even friends can make each other unhappy sometimes.”

“Well, but…”

“Hey, it’s okay,” Cat said quickly. “I don’t need to depend on anyone, I can be happy all by myself,” Cat said as she stood up. “I should get Issy home, or she’ll oversleep tomorrow.”

“Uh, okay Cat,” Merrill answered, still frowning at her.

“Goodnight,” Cat said, heading over to Isabela at the bar.

* * * * *

“Are you sure you won’t just come with us?” Isabela asked as she and Cat headed into Hightown.

“I’m sure,” Cat said. “I’ve got to continue my job while you’re gone, and besides, I just don’t want to.”

Isabela rolled her eyes at that, no matter what argument she came up with, Cat had been adamant from the beginning that she wouldn’t be going on the expedition. “Worth a try,” she said.

“Hey, there’s Anders!” Cat said, hurrying forward to greet the mage, and Isabela kept her same pace, coming up moments later.

“So, you gave in then?” Isabela asked with a smirk, interrupting whatever they had been saying.

“Gave in?” Anders asked.

“To Kitty,” Isabela clarified, but he still looked confused.
“I told them that I asked you to go,” Cat explained, and Anders gave Isabela a dry look.

“I didn’t give in, I decided to do a favor for a friend,” Anders said

“Same thing,” Isabela smirked, and turned to leave.

“Like you wouldn’t have!” Anders called after her, and Cat grabbed his arm, pulling him in the opposite direction.

“Don’t let her get to you,” Cat said. “You know she just likes it when you’re all riled up.”

“Why?!” Anders asked, already exasperated.

“She’s testing your limits,” Cat said patiently. “She wants to know what it would take to get Justice to come out, or so she says.”

“Wha-?” Anders asked flabbergasted. “WHY?!”

Cat shrugged. “Why does Isabela do anything?” she asked. “Because she feels like it. Besides, she’s in a mood today, because Varric started using a new nickname for me, and I won’t talk about it.”

Anders just rolled his eyes. “All right then, this will be a fun trip. I’d better go see what needs to be done,” he said. “Don’t leave without saying goodbye,” he told her, and walked off.

Cat looked around, noting that everyone was here, though they were still a little disorganized. She spotted a pair of dwarves she recognized, and walked over to them with a smile.

“Hello Bodahn, Sandal,” she said as she faced them. “Can I help with the loading?”

The elder dwarf turned and with wide eyes, and dropped jaw, came forward. “Miss Cat? Is that you?” he asked. “By my ancestors! I never would have thought we’d see you again!”

“What a surprise!” she replied happily, clapping his shoulder in greeting. “What are you doing here?”

“Well Sandal and me, we’ve been travelling around, selling our wares as always, ain’t that right me boy?”

“Enchantment!” Sandal said happily, and Cat ruffled his hair.

“Heard about this expedition from a friend of a friend, we’ll say, and knew a good opportunity when we saw one.”

“Seems it was fated then, as my friends are part of the expedition as well,” Cat said with a smile, and pointed several of them out. “They’ll take good care of you and Sandal, and keep you both safe.”

“Enchantment!”

“Right you are,” Bodahn said to Sandal. “It eases our minds to know we will have skilled people along,” he said to Cat. “Does this mean you’ll be accompanying us as well?”

“Unfortunately, no,” she replied. “I’ve got a job here that I can’t leave.”

“Though I wouldn’t call them easier times, I do miss traveling with the Warden,” he said. “Do you ever feel that way?” he asked her.
“Yes,” she replied. “But I’m glad that I wasn’t a hindrance to their goal,” she said. It had been a constant topic for them in the wagon, as the others had placed her there several times to keep her safe, and she had ended up sharing many conversations with Bodahn and Sandal.

“I’m sure this will be another grand adventure,” she said, smiling again. “I hope to see you when you return.”

“We will plan on it, Miss,” Bodahn said with a grin. “Won’t we Sandal?”

“Enchantment!”

Cat gave them both a wave, and they continued to pack up their supplies as she headed over to the main group. They looked a little more put together, and were all listening to Bartrand speaking.

“- fresh virgin thaig, ready for spoiling!” he said, and while several men cheered, others were laughing or shaking their heads.

“Now there’s an image,” Varric added dryly.

“Now then,” Bartrand started again. “Wait. Who invited the old woman?” he asked snidely, and Cat immediately disliked him.

“I’m sorry ser dwarf, but I need to speak to my children,” Leandra Hawke said, as she walked closer to Garrett and Carver.

Cat wasn’t sure what the outcome would be, so she took the time to walk to her other friends and give her goodbyes.

She had just finished speaking to Merrill and Isabela, and giving them hugs when Hawke grabbed her roughly by the arm and carted her off away from the others.

“Ouch! Will you let go of me!” she hissed at him, and he released her, turning to face her, in his most intimidating pose- arms crossed over his chest, and looking down his nose at her. She noted that his beard was filling out nicely, and cursed herself, thinking now was not the time for that.

“Would you care to explain why my mother believes you are asking Carver to stay in Kirkwall so that he can court you?” he asked icily.

“Uh… yeah, okay.” She took a breath, and let it out. “I did go to your home yesterday, looking for Carver, and when he wasn’t home, and your mother asked to give him a message, I said that I was trying to convince him not to go. The courting thing is all on her,” she replied, putting her hands up in a surrender gesture.

“And why the sudden interest in what Carver does?” he asked, not giving her an inch. “You made it pretty clear you were done with us Hawkes.”

“I just… I have a bad feeling about it, okay?” she said, looking away, and biting her lip. She wanted to comment on avoiding them, but couldn’t think of the right thing to say.

“And that’s why you asked Anders to come?”

“Yeah,” she admitted. “I didn’t think I’d actually convince Carver.”

“Well in that you were right,” he said, and walked off.

Cat looked up in surprise, and ran after him, pulling him back around with a tug on his arm. “What
the hell? Didn’t your mother teach you any manners?” she asked, then slapped her own forehead. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean that.”

“Oh? I’m getting the feeling that you did, in fact.”

“Don’t be a jerk,” she said through gritted teeth. “I’m trying to apologize here.”


Cat glared at him, “Maker’s balls, you’re such an ass.”

“Yeah, that makes it better,” he said sarcastically.

“Argh!” She yelled her frustration, and threw up her hands. This time, she was the one who walked away, over to where Varric was standing.

“Little Dove?” he asked tentatively. “You all right?”

“Yeah, wouldn’t be a good day without Hawke pissing me off, would it?” she complained. “Promise me you’ll never walk off when we’re talking, okay?” she asked. “I really hate it.”

“You got it,” he said. “Uh, you take care now,” he said with a pat on her arm.

“Varric, really?” she asked with a smirk. “You must know I want hugs.”

“You do know where your hugs put my face, don’t you?” he asked with a smirk in return.

“Don’t care,” she answered, and grabbed him.

“Best. Hugs. Ever.” he said with a wink, once they stepped back, and she giggled, thinking he must have heard Hawke’s complaint.

“Be safe, okay?” she asked, and headed to Fenris once he nodded.

“Don’t hug the dwarf anymore,” Fenris growled at her, as she walked up. “Did you even notice where his face was?”

Cat started laughing again, and threw her arms around Fenris’ middle. “Sorry, you had your chance,” she teased him, and he grumbled. “Be safe, and watch over the others, okay?”

“We will be all right?” he asked again.

“I told you what I could,” she answered. “But be ready for anything.” He nodded, letting her go, with a bit of a nudge. Still not ready for PDAs, she thought.

She turned again, seeing Anders was beside her. “Darling, are you sure about this?” he asked.

“Absolutely, and don’t call me that,” she said. “I only let you yesterday because you were sad.”

“But I’m always sad,” he said, grinning at her.

“Uh-huh, I can tell,” she said, smiling back. He threw his arms around her, rocking them back and forth in a long hug, and had her chuckling.

“Don’t worry, everything will be fine,” she comforted him with a pat on the back.

“You’d better hope so, or sad Anders is definitely coming back instead of me,” he said. He leaned
down and kissed her cheek, and she rolled her eyes at him. “What?” he asked in mock surprise. “There may be crazed suitors here, you don’t know. From what I hear, Carver is trying to court you.”

“Hurry up and leave, so I can miss you,” she said, rolling her eyes and pushing him away. She went back over to Isabela one more time, and gave her another hug. “I’ll miss you most Issy,” she said quietly and Isabela laughed.

“We’ll be back before you know it, Kitty.”

“And I want all the details!” Cat said, and Isabela looked at her in question, before speaking.

“You stay safe, Kitty.”

Bartrand started yelling, and the group began leaving. Cat stood there, waving as her friends picked up their packs and headed out with the group. She noticed that Carver and Hawke were having a hard time getting their mother to let go, as she was always wanting one more hug.

She continued to wave even though she watched the Hawke family. Carver suddenly strode off, leaving Garrett to deal with things. She smiled as Garrett took the time to calm his mother down, and kissed her cheek in farewell. Okay, so he wasn’t always an ass, at least to his mom, she thought. She watched as he sent her off home, not wanting her to watch them leave.

* * * * *

When his mother had finally left the square, he turned to follow the group. With all the supplies and animals, as well as people, they hadn’t made much headway yet. He started after them, feeling somewhat guilty for letting Carver come, but if he hadn’t… Carver would hate him even more.

There wasn’t much he could do to repair the relationship with his remaining sibling, though he continued to try. He just hoped his mother would understand someday.

He stopped as he felt a pull on his arm, and suddenly had his arms full of Cat, who was hugging him. He had tried not to watch as she went to each of his crew and gave them hugs, feeling even worse then the ass she had accused him of being.

“I’m sorry,” she mumbled, and he felt even lower, though he still put his arms around her to hug her back. “I’m sorry for avoiding you.”

“No,” he replied. “I’m sorry for making you feel like you needed to. I didn’t mean to make you uncomfortable…”

“It wasn’t that,” she said, clearly uncomfortable, and he gave her a look that said he didn’t believe her.

“Really… I… I just…” she licked her lips, and he groaned inwardly. “I just didn’t want to ruin…”

She trailed off again, and he stood there, perplexed, trying to read her face and understand what she was saying. Ruin what?? he thought. The group dynamic? Our friendship??

“No important,” she said suddenly, and stepping back out of his arms, she patted his arm forcefully a
few times, her face bright red.

“Uh, be safe,” she said, and turning, ran away from him.

Hawke stood there, gaping after her. What in the Maker’s…? he thought. She was acting so odd, and he started walking again, looking back several times, wanting to see her again, as if that would shed some light on her behavior.

* * * * *

Cat ran several blocks before she stopped to catch her breath, wondering where she had even been going. She leaned back against a wall, putting her face in her hands, feeling the heat trying to escape through her cheeks.

Again! she thought. Again, she acted like a complete idiot, just because she was around Hawke. She had hoped that kissing Fenris or even Anders would have gotten rid of this feeling, but just giving Hawk a hug had her remembering the last time she was in his arms.

“Crap, crap, crap!” she said under her breath. Issy didn’t deserve this, friends didn’t poach on someone the other was interested in. Cat wallowed another moment before she determined her new course of action. She had over two weeks at least, to get rid of… whatever this was.

“My lady? Are you all right?” A voice asked, causing Cat to look up through her fingers. “I couldn’t stand by, while a beautiful woman was so upset.”

Cat stared, unsure why this was happening. Why had she run here, of all places?!

“My name is Sebastian Vael, and it would be my pleasure to assist you in any way,” the man said with a gentle smile, holding out his hand to her. Cat slowly placed her hand in his, still wary, and he pulled her up straight, and kissed her hand. “And you, my lady?”

“Catarina, or Cat to my friends,” she replied, deciding she may as well be friendly.

“A beautiful name, befitting its owner,” he said smoothly. “Though I confess that I would prefer to use the shorter version so that I may be counted among your friends.”

“I suppose if that is what you want,” she said. “I believe you have already met some of them. Hawke told me your name as someone whose request he fulfilled from the chanter’s board.”

“Ah!” his face lit, as he smiled at her. “A good man, Hawke. He was so sincere in his desire to help, that I told him, once I gathered more information, I would gladly have his assistance. It seems we are indeed connected then, Lady Cat.”

“Not a lady, I’m afraid,” she said with a smile. “Just Cat.”

“I’ll respect your wishes, though you’ll never be able to convince me otherwise,” he told her.

“Flattery huh?” she teased. “Sorry, but I’m immune.”

“Then I’ll have to use other weapons in my arsenal,” he teased back, and she chuckled.

“Well Sebastian, if anything, I am grateful you came along, to help me out of my mood.”
“I live to serve,” he replied gallantly, and Cat wondered if he was able to act normal, or if this was normal for him, from being raised as a prince.

“I’d better be heading back,” she said. “Perhaps we’ll meet again sometime.”

She declined him accompanying her home, and walked through the streets of Hightown and Lowtown in deep thought.

It was strange, and perhaps it was just because the story had followed Hawke, and she never saw what the others had been doing when they weren’t with Hawke, but she seemed to be running into people that she recognized everywhere. She wondered how much she was actually changing things, by interacting with them. She suddenly remembered her encounter with Flemeth.

*Flemeth told me,* she thought. *In so many words, to not look back, but live looking forward. I can’t do that if I’m always worrying about changing things. It’s inevitable, if I live my life here, that things will be different, especially if I continue in Hawke’s crew.*

*And if I’m going to live my life here, I want friends, I want a home… a real home. And I want to help my friends have the best outcome they can.* Having thought that, she smiled to herself and headed home, determined to start right away.
The Deep Roads

Chapter Notes

Since it is a holiday weekend, I figured I would post now, to make sure I didn't forget! But I am taking my laptop with me on my trip, so if possible, I'll try to still post on Sunday. If not though... at least you get this, right??

For the first couple of days alone, Cat didn’t do anything out of the ordinary. She spent most of her time with Olivia, not only on the tonics they were making, but getting Olivia out of Darktown for a few hours each day. There was never a shortage of people that needed help, however Cat reminded her that she needed time for herself.

Cat finally convinced her when she spoke of cleaning out Fenris’ mansion, removing all the broken items, and making it a bit more liveable. As they went from room to room, deciding what to leave in place and what needed to go, they found some pieces they decided to take to the clinic, including a couple of beds.

They visited Lirene’s store that evening and found several men they paid to help move the furniture, and Olivia’s eyes were shining at the opportunity of rearranging the clinic space, and getting an actual bed instead of a cot.

The following morning, Cat made her way to the Keep, hoping to see Aveline, and perhaps join in the guard’s daily workouts. Though it was an unusual request, Aveline agreed to it as long as she stayed to spar with the guards afterwards.

As Cat left the Keep that morning, tired but invigorated, she heard her name, and turned to see Sebastian coming towards her. She gave him a smile, and a little wave, and stopped to speak for a few minutes, finding out he was meeting with the viscount, and sharing that she was working out with the guards, before going on her way.

The next morning, as she left the Keep, she ran into Sebastian again, which gave her pause. “Oh, good morning, Cat,” he greeted her. “Fancy meeting you here.”

She gave him a questioning look, but he barreled on, requesting that she join him as he had to assist the chantry with some task or another. She agreed, though she didn’t feel that he needed her assistance, figuring he was probably trying to get out of the chantry more.

However, morning after morning, Sebastian was waiting for her, some new reason that he needed her assistance, and finally she stopped him before he could ask, and demanded what it was he wanted from her.

He looked away, then back to her, smile gone. “A friend,” he answered softly.

“All right,” she answered. “I have some things I need to do this morning, so how about we meet at three bells? I could use some more time spent with my crossbow.”

His face lit like she had given him a great gift, and he told her of a place to practice near the chantry. She agreed to meet him there at three, and he took his leave, looking happy. She shook her head,
seeing him practically skip away, and headed to Fenris’ house to meet Olivia.

Cat and Olivia spent a few hours each morning, trying to make the mansion a little more liveable, and a little less… run down. She wasn’t sure that Fenris would even appreciate it, but since she spent time here several days a week, she wanted it to be more welcoming. Most of the rooms were left unchanged, they simply covered the furniture and removed the broken items. However, the kitchen and the front room she felt were necessary to fix up.

After Olivia had left, Cat went home to change, and grabbed her crossbow and quiver, and headed back to Hightown. Meeting with Sebastian, she followed him to the back gardens of the chantry, where he had his own practice range set up, with several targets placed strategically at different heights and angles.

It seemed to be just what they needed, and were finally able to build a budding friendship over archery, learning about how they each were taught, and sharing techniques with the other. Sebastian’s aim was much better than Cat’s, however she was more skilled in hitting smaller, moving targets.

She was glad at how easy it was to talk with him now, and was more at ease with his company. So when he suggested they practice together daily, and perhaps even go for a hunt, she agreed.

Somehow, after only two weeks, she found herself with a routine. Everyday, she would start out at the Keep, working with the guards, followed by spending time with Olivia or Cullen- rotating to see each of them every other day. Then she would have lunch, followed by practice with Sebastian. In the evenings, she would use her time to practice her reading and writing skills, determined to improve as she had told Fenris she would.

The days went by quickly, but the nights were long. She would find herself sitting alone, and wondering where her friends were, how they were doing. She was still glad she hadn’t gone, the Deep Roads seemed to scare her more than they probably should. But… she missed them, every last one of them. Olivia was fun, and loved to laugh, but she wasn’t Isabela. Sebastian and Cullen were great… and treated her so well… but they weren’t Fenris and Anders. Even though she was busy everyday… she couldn’t stop herself from feeling alone.

* * * * *

“My lady, I can’t help but feel like you aren’t truly here with me,” Cullen said, startling Cat out of her thoughts.

“Cullen, seriously!” Cat snapped. “I am NOT a lady!”

He was taken aback by her sudden temper, and immediately apologized, which in turn had her feeling like a heel.

“No,” she said, rubbing her forehead. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to snap at you. I haven’t been sleeping very well I guess.” She sighed as she looked around at the scenery of the coast. “But,” she went on. “I really wish you would just call me by my name.”

“I don’t mean to offend,” Cullen said quietly.

“I know…” she answered. “But it makes me feel as if you are keeping a wall between us. If that is
what you want, then fine, call me lady.”

“Well… no… I …. I mean…” Cullen faltered, and Cat started laughing.

“Maker, you remind me so much of Alistair,” she said, and Cullen looked over in interest.

“The Grey Warden? Who was once a templar recruit?”

“The same,” she answered. “When I first met him, he tried to call me lady too, but he let it go much sooner than you have. Do they teach all of you manners in your templar classes?” she asked, teasing.

“You would be surprised,” he answered, looking out at the ocean as well, his hands clasped behind his back. “I would say they are drummed into us when we are lads, just joining the recruits. Now, it is more ingrained,” he added.

“I’m going to be honest with you, Cullen.” Cat said, somewhat in warning, and had Cullen glancing over in question, though she was still looking out at the water.

“I always appreciate honesty,” he answered.

“I feel as if you do not see me as a friend,” she said quickly, wanting to get it out before she changed her mind. “Instead you see me as Andraste or someone that is completely out of reach.” She turned to face him now, wanting him to understand. “I can’t be that, not even for you. I don’t want to be admired, I want to have a friend. Someone who will tell me when I am being foolish, or even do foolish things with me and laugh about it. Someone who will tell me what I need to hear, even if I don’t want to.”

He opened his mouth, and closed it again, unsure of how to respond.

“For example,” she offered. “You do not seem like the same templar I first met. I know that you have been through something awful, and that can change your perspective, especially concerning mages.”

“In that, you are correct,” he replied, still looking out to sea. “Meredith is not an easy taskmaster, but ours is not an easy task.” He glanced at her then, with a wry smile, “I would not have liked her, as I was when I met you. I thought mages deserved a softer touch.”

His face tightened as he remembered, “I was held in that cage for what… weeks? Months? I can’t say. But I would gladly give my life to avoid seeing again what I saw.” He turned to face her now, face grim. “Meredith is never fooled by a sweet face. She always sees the demon behind it, and I have come to understand why.”

“I can see that,” she replied. “But Cullen, it’s like you went from one extreme to the other! Isn’t there more of a middle ground?”

Cullen was silent for some time, and Cat gave him the time he needed. “I don’t know anymore,” he said quietly.

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“Olivia?” Cat called out the next day as she entered the clinic. She heard some rustling, and suddenly Olivia came out of her room, breathless. “You okay?” she asked with a smirk.
“Oh, Cat, you’re alone, thank goodness…” Olivia sighed.

“Why wouldn’t I be?” Cat asked, perplexed.

“You wouldn’t, I just…” Olivia stepped closer, and lowered her voice. “You know what Anders is involved in, right?”

“Yes,” Cat answered slowly, though she wasn’t sure what Olivia was talking about, she figured she knew about whatever it was.

“I thought so,” Olivia answered. “Well, I have trying to join too, but he wouldn’t let me, told me it was too dangerous, but I don’t care anymore! I want to help others get free, just like you all helped me!” She spoke resolutely, though still kept her voice down.

Now Cat understood, Olivia wanted to be a part of the mage underground. She smiled at her friend, “Did Anders give any other reasons not to join?” she asked.

“No, and that’s why I went ahead anyway,” she answered. “If he had had a good reason, I might have considered it, but danger? That’s nothing. We face danger everyday, just because of who we are.”

“That’s true,” Cat agreed.

“So… uh… what do you think? Is he going to be mad at me?” she asked.

“I think it’s up to you,” Cat replied, and Olivia let out a sigh of relief. “But… I would tell him once he gets back, don’t let him find out from someone else.”

“That’s a good idea,” Olivia mused. “Anyway, that’s why I was so out of breath. I just barely made it back, and I had to hide the books I brought.”

“Huh?” Cat asked, confused. “Back from where?”

“The gallows, of course.” Olivia replied. “There’s a secret entrance here through Darktown, and it’s how the underground has been sneaking mages to freedom. Of course, the templars have noticed that too many are going missing, so we’ve had to stop temporarily, so now we’re smuggling out books—spell books and books of theory, anything the templars would ban us from.”

“Wow, that’s pretty cool,” Cat replied.

“Yeah, the grand enchanter has connections, so there is a place in Hightown we’ve been storing everything. You wouldn’t believe the things that are there! Plus we’re hiding everything right under their noses!” Olivia giggled, and Cat gave her a smile.

“Like what?” Cat asked.

“Well, I haven’t looked through it all, but there are letters, and journals, and books about everything! Spirit healing is the one I brought back, but there were even some on blood magic, necromancy, you name it.”

“Whoa, that could mean big trouble if the templars found it.”

“No kidding,” Olivia replied.
“It’s been over two weeks! You’d think we’d have found something by now, even if it was some darkspawn.”

“Don’t say that,” Anders looked up at Carver to glare at him. “You have no idea what they are like.”

“I’ve fought darkspawn, they aren’t too terrible,” Carver replied dismissively.

“Sure, just like rats,” Anders agreed. “One or two is no big deal. But what happens when you are suddenly surrounded by fifty?”

Carver glanced around, not wanting to show his unease at the thought, remembering their near escape from Lothering. “All I’m saying, is that I thought this would be more exciting.”

“I’m sure you aren’t the only one, brother,” Hawke said from his seat on the ground. “Isabela’s about ready to tear her hair out.”

“Any tearing will be to you, not me,” Isabela replied without opening her eyes. “But you’re right, we haven’t found any of the things you promised. Fights… valuables… I’m feeling let down.”

“Come on Rivaini, we’ll find something,” Varric teased. “Bartrand won’t let us leave until we do.”

“I wonder what Cat’s up to?” Anders asked aloud. “She’s probably bored without all of us.”

“Kitty?” Isabela scoffed. “She knows how to make her own excitement.”

“And what does that mean?” Anders asked.

“Exactly what you would think,” she replied. “Even aboard the ship, she was never one to stay idle. She would always find something to keep her busy.” Isabela smirked at Anders. “Hopefully she’ll take my advice, and let the Knight Captain help her stay busy.”

Anders and Fenris both rolled their eyes at her, and Isabela contemplated agitating them by pointing it out, but decided it wasn’t worth moving, and she’d save it for another time.

Bartrand’s scouts returned then, and Varric and Hawke stood and went over to hear their report. The group waited, seeing Bartrand punch his scout in the face and screaming at him. A few smirked at each other, feeling sorry for his people, and feeling a little better about their own situation.

Hawke walked back to them, letting them know that they were heading out ahead of the group to scout out the side passages, in the hopes of finding a different path, since there had been cave ins. “The scouts informed us these side passages are too dangerous, so it looks like you’ll get the excitement you were looking for,” Hawke told Carver.

“Finally,” Isabela said as she stood.

“Feel free to leave packs or anything else behind, since we’ll be coming back,” Hawke said.

”That is unwise,” Fenris said, and Hawke looked at him in surprise, as Fenris hardly ever spoke against him. “If another cave in were to happen, we could be stranded without supplies,” Fenris added, and after thinking on it, Hawke nodded.

“Very well, up to you then,” he said, letting each of them choose what they would prefer. He was hardly surprised when everyone except Isabela shouldered their packs. They looked at her, and she asked, “What?”
Before anyone could reply, Bodahn came forward, upset. “I’m sorry to add to your burden my friends, but I’m afraid I must! My boy, Sandal, wandered off and is somewhere in those passages right now! I beg you, keep an eye out for him!” Bodahn’s face fell. “He just… doesn’t understand danger like he should!”

“One boy alone? Out there?” Hawke asked, trying to be kind, but saying what they were all thinking.

“My boy is sturdier than you’d think. If he has one of his enchantments with him, he’ll survive. After all, he’s burnt the house down twice already! I’m more worried about him getting lost! Oh, my poor boy!”

“We’ll bring him back,” Hawke said with a smile. “In at least one piece.”

Bodahn didn’t see the humor, and just shook his head as he walked away. “Oh, Sandal! Why do you do this?” he muttered.

“Let’s get a move on then,” Varric said, and Hawke led the way into a hastily made side passage.

They hadn’t gone very far, when their tunnel of rock met with another passage. There was rubble all around, yet it was apparent to all that this tunnel was different. The walls looked smooth, and polished, with a light coming from the bottom. Every twenty feet there was a pillar, looking like stacked blocks though they were carved directly into the wall.

“Hard to believe this was once all solid rock,” Merrill stated, as they walked slowly, looking around.

“It’s definitely warmer here,” Carver mentioned.

“It’s the lava,” Anders answered, pointing at the base of the walls. The others moved over to look, seeing channels dug into the sides of the road where lava flowed, giving heat and light to the tunnel.

“The darkspawn are a much bigger threat than I realized, since the dwarves gave up this place,” Varric said. Hawke followed a source of light down the left fork in the passage, and they soon found themselves at a dead end, on a cliff above a lake of lava. They stepped back, and retraced their steps, taking the right fork instead, which was another hastily made tunnel, not nearly as fine, and without the light or heat form the lava.

“Looks like the dwarves were adding this tunnel,” Hawke said, taking in the discarded equipment, scaffolding, and carving machines left in disarray. As he turned the corner, he could see a few random fires burning, and headed forward, before being stopped by Anders.

“Darkspawn. Nearby.” Anders spoke softly, and Hawke merely nodded. The group went forward as silently as they were able, pulling out weapons, and preparing for a fight. Hawke turned the corner, and headed down the stairs, seeing a group of darkspawn in the room, though he couldn’t see what they were doing.

Before he could give instructions, a hurlock spotted them, and gave a cry, and the entire group turned as one. They charged forward, and Hawke stepped back, letting the melee fighters take point, while he readied a spell. The hurlocks were no challenge, but several of them let out screeches before they fell.

“Do you think they called for reinforcements?” Varric asked Hawke.

“If so, we’d better handle them fast before the call is passed on.”
The group moved forward more quickly, crossing a small bridge and finding another group of hurlocks in front of a stone door. The dispatched the darkspawn, and Anders insisted on taking time to check for injuries, as even a scratch could be fatal if any darkspawn blood were to get in it.

As Anders cleared them, the others looked around the area, not finding much, though Carver did discover a large two handed hammer. He placed his sword back in it’s sheath on his back, and hefted the new weapon, giving several practice swings.

Once Anders was done, Hawke led the group forward, opening the door, and stepping across the threshold.

“Evil is watching from the darkness…” Merrill said out of nowhere, and the group all paused, looking back at her. “What?” she asked, confused. “It is.”

Hawke shook his head, no where to go but forward after all, but he was much more cautious. Not ten steps in, more hurlocks came forward to engage them, and the group once again fell into battle formation. “Emissary!” Anders shouted, and Hawke whirled, seeing a horrific darkspawn, in what looked like old mage robes with a barrier around it, flinging spells at them. It didn’t even pause as its spells would kill its own kind, and Hawke’s lip curled in disgust.

He made quick work of it, flinging a large fireball directly at its chest, but was feeling somewhat drained, and waited in the now empty corridor for his mana to replenish. He watched as Varric and Isabela walked down another flight of stairs, seeing the old chest they were making their way towards.

“Wait!!” Merrill yelled suddenly, and giant spiders began dropping from the ceiling. Hawke started running towards the stairs with the others, seeing far more than they could handle on their own.

Something else came down from above, and blocked the way forward, though it took Hawke a moment to realize that it was also a spider, though the biggest creature he had ever seen. It was easily as tall as an ogre, and twice as wide, and Hawke felt his jaw drop just looking at it. He heard the screams of his people, and jumped into action once more.

“That’s the biggest spider I’ve ever seen!!!!” Anders yelled.

“It’s monstrous!!” Varric yelled back from the other side of the beast.

“Aaaah!!!!” Merrill screamed, as she went tumbling from a hit from one of it’s legs.

Fenris somehow made his way on top of the creature, and slammed his greatsword down into its body, causing the spider to screech in pain, and thrash. Fenris held onto his sword, obviously creating more damage to the spider, as it continued to scream and buck.

Hawke threw magic as if he had an unlimited supply, bolt after bolt of electricity, knowing it was their weakness, as well as some well placed stone fists, hoping to break its legs. It seemed like forever, but finally the spider fell, its legs curling up into its body.

Fenris picked himself off the ground where he was flung, and moved to the spider, trying to roll it over from it’s back so that he could retrieve his sword. He didn’t ask for help, but Merrill finally took pity on him, and using one of her nature spells, helped turn the spider enough so that Fenris pulled out his sword. He took it in hand and stalked over to the spider’s head, chopping it off in one massive swing.

“Was that necessary?” Varric asked. “I’m fairly certain it was dead.”
“And now you are absolutely certain,” Fenris replied, walking to the stairs and sitting.

They all by unspoken agreement decided to rest after this last fight, waiting for Hawke to push them onward. He didn’t mind, he needed to replenish his mana if he would be of any help in the fights to come.

“I will not be sorry to see daylight again,” Varric said.

“How does anyone live here in the dark?” Merrill asked him. “Don’t they bump into things?”

Isabela laughed, as Varric tried to explain, and the others smirked at his discomfort in coming up with a plausible explanation that suited her.

“And everyone told me I was being a baby about the Deep Roads,” Anders said with a superior look.

“Well yeah,” Isabela said. “It’s not nearly as bad as you said,” she replied, and everyone agreed with her, causing Anders to splutter and pout.

“We’re teasing,” Hawke said, clapping his shoulder. “Let’s keep going everyone.”

They continued without incident, finding a few deep mushrooms, and even a deposit of raw lyrium, giving the mages a boost, just by being near it. There were a few doors, but each one was impossible to budge, and it was assumed that there were cave ins, and the group continued on.

“Well, I’ll be a nug’s uncle…” Varric said, as he stopped at the top of a flight of stairs. “Isn’t that Bodahn’s boy?”

“It is! The great warrior stands victorious!” Carver said with a laugh.

“I don’t see a weapon,” Isabela said, looking at the dead darkspawn around him. “Did he stun them with his wit?”

Hawke glanced over, noticing the boy had his back to them, as if he hadn’t heard them approach, and was giving his backside a good scratch. He chuckled and headed down the stairs. The boy turned, being covered in blood, and said, “’Ello.”

“How did you kill all of them?” Hawke asked him, and Sandal handed him a rune that was cold to the touch.

“Boo.”

Hawke glanced over at the ogre, unsure if it was frozen, crystallized, or stone, but whatever it was, he wanted to know, “And how did you do that?” he gestured.

“Not enchantment,” Sandal said with a grin, and he walked back the way they came.

“Smart boy,” Varric said quietly.

“Let’s go,” Hawke said, and led out. Eventually, the passage led back to the ornate type of halls they had passed through before, but this time, they were even more ornate. “Are those… golems?”

Hawke asked Varric.

“Too big,” Varric said. “Must be statues depicting the paragons.”

Hawke continued forward, and Anders said, “darkspawn!” hastily. Hawke pulled out his staff, and
readied his lightning, turning the corner, and letting it loose. The hurlocks were stunned, as the lightning coursed through them, jumping back and forth in arc from one to the other, and both fell down at Hawke’s feet.

“Two more for me,” he said, smirking. “We’re keeping score, right?”

Carver gave a disgusted noise, and pushed ahead, heading for the door.

“It’s not over!” Anders called, as Carver pushed open the door and walked in. Fenris barreled forward, tackling Carver out of the way as an ogre charged past, and ran directly into the wall. It was stunned, but more than that, it looked as if its horns were stuck in the wall.

Hawke took advantage, as did the others, pelting its back with spells, arrows and cuts from weapons. By the time Carver and Fenris stood, the ogre was dead.

“I was fine,” Carver grumbled, and Fenris’ eyebrow winged up.

“You are welcome,” he replied, and headed off toward the next door. Varric and Isabela both shouted at everyone to freeze, and it showed how much they trusted each other in battle, that each of them stopped without another step.

Isabela and Varric walked slowly in between them, disarming several claw traps, and Hawke gave them a grin, and said, “Good work you two.”

Hawke took the lead again, and headed through the door after looking to Anders, who nodded. They were once again in an ornate tunnel, yet this time, it was a wreck. Rubble was everywhere, as well as bones, though it was hard to tell what they were from. Hawke led down the tunnel, seeing in the distance that it opened into a wide room. He glanced back at Anders again.

“I don’t sense anything…” he said, and Hawke nodded, and continued on. The group entered the room, seeing the statues of the paragons again, though twice the size as before, reaching up to the ceiling.

“Scatter!!” Hawke yelled, and their quick reactions saved them again. The dragon landed in the midst of the group, and roared loudly. It looked around, choosing its target, before heading straight for Isabela.

She threw down a smoke bomb, disappearing into stealth and moving away. The dragon then turned to the nearest person, Merrill, and headed for her.

Carver and Fenris began yelling, distracting the dragon, and drawing it away from the mage, who backed away at an even pace in order to not draw its attention again. The mages began pummeling the dragon’s wings with cold spells, and Hawke was annoyed again that even together, his and Merrill’s spells were weaker than Anders’ were.

He told himself to work on his cold spells again, and then focused back on the fight. He let out a cry as something attacked his flank, and he turned to see several dragonlings surrounding them from behind.

“Dragonlings!” he called out, limping away and dodging the jaws of the creatures trying to bite him again. Isabela and Varric appeared out of nowhere, helping to quickly down the little beasts, and as a group they turned back to the adult.

The dragon didn’t last long after that, as the group systematically broke through its defenses, and
killed it, with Fenris cutting through its neck.

“What’s with you chopping heads off today?” Varric asked.

“Why? Would you like to be next?” Fenris replied.

“Sorry I asked,” Varric muttered, and headed far away from Fenris. He headed towards the tunnel opening, and brightened. “Hawke!” he called. “This leads where we want it to. Let’s get back and tell Bartrand.”

“Need a minute here, Varric,” Hawke replied, as Anders worked to clean the bite to the back of his thigh.

“Thankfully, he wasn’t able to get a good grip, but you are missing a piece of yourself,” Anders said with a gentle smile. “This will probably take some time.”

“Varric, take Carver, Fenris and Merrill and head back, and lead the others here. I should be ready to go by then.”

“Okay Hawke,” Varric said, hefting Bianca. “Let’s go Broody, Junior, Daisy. The quicker we find the loot, the sooner we can leave.”

“I hate the bloody Deep Roads,” Anders muttered as he worked. “This is why I left the Wardens.”

“I heard that, you baby,” Isabela said, and Anders turned to glare at her.

“Sometimes I want to freeze you solid, if only to shut you up,” he groused, only half serious.

“Doesn’t everyone?” Isabela laughed. “But you won’t.”

“Oh? What’s stopping me? Hawke?”

She smirked at him, as she played her trump card. “Kitty, of course.”

“Oh, right,” he answered, pouting again.
Hey everybody! I did finish this chapter yesterday, but being on my laptop in the car driving home from another state in the middle of the night, was just not working for posting. So, now that I am home from work, here it is! Thank you to everyone new that is following and giving kudos! And a huge thank you to all those who have been sticking with me for so long!!

“Nothing makes sense…”

“Why’s that?” Hawke asked Varric’s brother, only halfway curious to hear the answer.

“We are well beneath the Deep Roads. Whatever dwarves lived here they came long before the first blight. But where are the statues of Paragons? I don’t recognize any of the markings on the walls, or the rubble. Which means, these dwarves…. must have been unique.”

“Then whatever we find will be very rare and valuable,” Hawke replied with a grin.

“Hmph,” Bartrand grunted, frowning. “Possibly.”

Hawke quickly lost interest in whatever Bartrand and his scouts were looking for, and gave his companions a nod toward the unexplored tunnel, heading there before Bartrand could call them back. They walked silently, no one speaking, until Bodahn stepped in front of him.

“I don’t know how I can thank you!” Bodahn said gratefully. I swear on my life, I will repay you for this!”

“There is no need ser dwarf,” Hawke replied, keeping his voice down, and glancing around.

“But there is!” Bodahn insisted. “I don’t know how, but I will find a way.”

Hawke gave Varric a questioning glance as Bodahn left them, and Varric merely shrugged. True, they hadn’t done anything to actually save the dwarf’s son, but Varric wasn’t one to argue if someone wanted to pay them.

The group moved forward again, glancing around as they walked. “This place seems intact,” Varric said to Hawke. “Think we’ll find anything?”

“Who knows?” Hawke replied. “Most likely we’ll find more darkspawn… or perhaps rubble?” he teased.

“Hmph,” Varric grunted, sounding awfully like his brother, though Hawke decided to keep that thought to himself. “Guess we’ll have to go in to find out.”

“It’s not like the scouts are in any hurry to do so,” Carver added, making his way to the front. “If we are going to find anything worthwhile, we should explore on our own.” He strode forward, and Hawke watched, amused, as the rest of them waited for him to signal before they moved forward.

Hawke paused as he heard his brother roar, and immediately went charging forward, staff at the
ready. He flung a stonefist at the nearest shade, before wondering why there were shades here to begin with. Before he could think too hard, the sharp sound of rocks smashing together had him turning to his left.

There was an activated golem, bearing down on his little brother, smashing its fists into the ground and stunning the smaller warrior. Hawke flung another spell, which seemed to not affect the stone creature at all, and he continued to try spell after spell, while yelling for the others to help him.

The shades now dispatched, the group turned their attention to the golem, which didn’t stand a chance. Isabela struck the final blow, watching with a smirk as the creature stumbled and fell onto its face, unmoving.

She moved over to look more closely, and then leaned forward to pluck something from it, standing back up with a small diamond in her hand. “Ooh… shiny,” she said, moving to place the gem in her tunic… somewhere.

“Rivaini,” Varric said in a scolding tone. “All loot goes to those who paid for the expedition.”

“Oh Varric, but of course!” she said as she continued on. Varric and Hawke exchanged unbelieving glances, sure that they would never see the diamond again.

Hawke followed after her, coming to a small staircase cut into the rock. His attention was caught by a shimmering pool on his right, and he crouched down to look at it.

“Orichalcum,” Anders said, answering his unspoken question.

“The metal?” Hawke asked incredulously.

“Yes,” Anders answered. “It is usually found in its liquid form, and crafted into solid metal. It’s pretty rare, usually only used as a top coating for steel or iron weapons.”

“Then we should take some,” Hawke suggested. “That shopkeeper, Solivitus, will most likely pay handsomely for rare metal as he did for the other materials.”

“You can use my waterskin,” Merrill suggested, finishing off the last of her water, and handing the empty skin to Hawke, who then dipped it into the shining liquid, filling it as much as he could. He started to hand the waterskin back, then picturing Merrill accidentally drinking the metal, he placed it over his own shoulder, and wiping the excess from his fingers onto his pants.

“Ha!” Hawke barked. “Instant armor!” He laughed at his own joke, though no one else did, and they continued down the small stairs. They walked slowly, looking for anything of note, and ignored the sounds of Varric’s brother storming furiously after them.

“I suppose this could be a thaig, it looks exactly like I’ve heard them spoken of,” Varric said, turning in a circle. “But if it is…”

“If it is?” Hawke asked.

“Well, if it is… then these dwarves are nothing like the dwarves of today. How did things become so different? Paragons are basically like gods, and there are none depicted here.”

Hawke didn’t respond, as he could feel something strange about this tunnel as well. There was something… odd… that made it different, but he couldn’t tell what it was.

Anders looked around himself, wondering what it was that seemed to be calling to him, almost.
No, it had to be his imagination. Same hallway, same rubble, same reddish glow from the lava… everything was exactly the same. Which could only mean that the Deep Roads were getting to me again, he thought.

Isabela eyed the veins in the rock, wondering how they could have gotten so big. Did the dwarves leave them alone, or had it simply grown back since the time this tunnel was made? And what was it? A new type of mineral? What would glow such an unearthly red, and more importantly, was it valuable??

Varric glanced left and right, as he followed Hawke up the stairs in front of them, seeing a large rectangular altar, that was practically singing his name. He grinned as they reached the top, seeing a statuette that was shining out at him.

“It’s definitely magic,” Anders said, looking at it. “And not the good kind.”

“Who cares?” Isabela stated with a smirk. “It’s shiny!”

“Is that… lyrium?” Hawke mumbled to himself, not really asking the others.

“Do not touch it.” They glanced over to Fenris, seeing his face twisted in a grimace. “If it is lyrium, it has something wrong with it.”

“How can you tell?” Varric asked, eyeing the statuette from several angles. “It doesn’t look like any lyrium I’ve ever seen.”

Fenris ignored Varric, turning to Hawke and speaking in earnest about the need to stay away from the discovery, though he had no factual reasons why. Varric gestured to Isabela, who leaned forward giving Merrill a nudge, who took that as a request to pick it up.

They all looked at Merrill for a few moments, waiting for something bad to happen, as Bartrand entered the room, finally catching up to them. Varric took the statuette from Merrill and showed it to his brother, stopping his anger before it was unleashed. “Look Bartrand, an idol, made of pure lyrium I think. Could be worth a fortune!”

“Could be…” Bartrand replied under his breath as he mused at the turn of events lining up in front of him. Varric tossed the idol to him, and holding it, he changed his appraisal to most definitely worth a fortune. He glanced up to Varric and his… friends… and turned, walking silently back to the door. He closed it slowly, not making a sound, with only a glance back at his brother.

At that moment, Varric and Hawke were listening to Fenris and Anders argue, though they were actually agreeing with each other, both wanting to leave the idol where they found it. Hawke, while not convinced, seemed to understand their concerns, though he worked to convince them that they would investigate the idol before leaving the thaig, and if needed, would leave it behind.

Fenris glared, eyes hot, and Varric suddenly understood why his victims were always looking like they would piss themselves. “C’mon Broody, let’s see what else we can find. If we find enough treasure, I’m sure Bartrand will forget about the idol.”

“Speaking of…” Isabela interrupted, and they all turned to where Bartrand had been standing. “Uh… where did that door come from?” she asked, running over to it. She pushed and pulled at it before Hawke nudged her out of the way and tried himself.

“Bartrand!” Varric yelled out through the door. “The door shut, and we can’t budge it!”

The group tensed as the muffled laughter came through. Varric felt his insides freeze. Bartrand
couldn’t be teasing him… Bartrand never teased. In fact, Varric had always assumed he got all the humor in the family.

“You always were a quick one, Varric,” he heard, and he could scarcely believe it.

“You’re joking?!” Varric spat out. “You’re going to screw over your own brother?! For some lousy idol?!?!”

The harsh laugh came again, and Varric knew the answer before he heard it. “It’s not just the idol… the location of this thaig alone is worth a fortune, and I am NOT splitting that three ways!” There was a pause, and Varric pressed closer to the door. “So long… brother.”

Hawke was silent as he watched Varric. He and Carver were constantly fighting with each other, it was true, but this was different. It was strange, but he knew Carver cared, because of how mad he would get. This… Bartrand’s voice held nothing but cold indifference, and knowing Varric… he knew he could hear it as well. He didn’t know how he would react if his brother had done to him what Bartrand had just done to Varric.

Varric cleared his throat, eyes growing hard. The mourning for the few good memories he had with his brother was done, and now he just had his anger left. “I swear it Hawke,” he said, still looking at the door. “I will find that son of a … sorry mother,” he muttered, stopping his tirade.

Hawke reached out, clasping his shoulder as Varric sighed.

“So, we’re trapped?” Carver asked.

“No,” Varric answered, walking further into the room, looking around. “We will just take another way out.”

“How do you know there is one, Varric?” Merrill asked, surprised.

Varric glanced back, his own face still hard and unforgiving. “Because, I have to see my brother again…. so I can kill him.”

* * * * *

“What is it Cat? I’m pretty busy this morning.”

Cat looked at Aveline, hesitating, since she certainly looked busy. “Nothing important Aveline, I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Wait,” Aveline called, and Cat turned back. “I’m sorry, I wasn’t trying to shoo you away. I guess I’m a little overwhelmed by all of this,” she said, gesturing to the full desk in front of her.

“Who wouldn’t be?” Cat asked. “But if anyone can do it, you can.”

“That’s sweet,” Aveline said with a smile. “Come on now, sit down. I have to remind myself to take time for friends, or I may end up without any.”

Cat smiled, and pulled a chair closer to sit in it. “It really is nothing, I just feel like they would have been back by now. It’s been almost a month.”
“Hawke didn’t really have an idea of how long it would take…” Aveline said with a shrug. “But I’m sure it won’t be too much longer.”

“I suppose so. I guess I’m just ready for something new.”

“Oh I see, though if you needed an adventure, you should have gone with them,” Aveline smirked at her, and Cat grinned.

_Aveline needs to tease more, it helps keep her from being too serious_, she thought. “No way was I going down there for weeks on end,” Cat said. “Can you imagine what they all smell like?” she asked, wrinkling her nose, causing Aveline to chuckle.

“Not pleasant, I am sure.” Aveline looked at her speculatively, and added, “speaking of, I hear you find the Knight Captain’s company rather pleasant.”

“Oh… we’re doing that now, are we?” Cat asked slyly. “If you want the answer, you’ll have to reciprocate…”

“What?” Aveline asked, taken aback.

“Oh come now, Aveline, surely you’ve at least appreciated the look of someone by now,” Cat said with a giggle.

“I’m sure I don’t know what you mean.”

“No? There are plenty of handsome guards around you everyday…”

“That’s… I mean, I’m not…”

“Um-hmm,” Cat grinned again, enjoying not being the blushing one. “All right, I’ll go first,” she said, to ease her friend’s discomfort. She was actually pretty happy that she and Aveline had this time without the others, because she probably wouldn’t have gotten to know her as well as she had if anyone had stayed behind as well.

“Cullen is… a frustrating, stubborn, kind man, and has become a good friend.”

“Interesting description,” Aveline commented.

“Well, it’s a unique situation, but we met about two years ago, when we were both in Ferelden. The group I was with saved him from mages who were torturing him.”

“Are you serious?” she asked with surprise.

“Unfortunately, yes, though please do not share that with others, he doesn’t like for people to know.” Aveline nodded, the mood now somber. “At first, he was intent on repaying me for this, seeing me as his personal savior, though we are on more equal footing now. But…”

Cat tried to think of a kind way to express her frustrations, leaving her words hanging, and Aveline asked, “but?”

“He has a hatred for mages inside him now, one that I’m not sure he wants to let go of. It’s become a wedge between us, that we are both ignoring, for now.”

“Is that really such a bad thing?” Aveline asked, which had Cat taken aback.

“I would think any hatred or prejudice is a bad thing, Aveline.”
“I understand, but when it comes to malificar…”

“Oh…” Cat replied, seeing what Aveline meant. “I suppose not, if that was the case, but it’s not. He sees all mages that way, because he is taught that every mage is a malificar in hiding. And of course Meredith is shoving her view down his throat daily… Ugh! Like I said… frustrating.”

“Then why are you spending so much time with him?” Aveline asked, confused. “I assumed he was trying to court you.”

Cat gave her a deadpan stare. “No. It’s not like that.” She rolled her eyes. “Everybody always goes there first…” she muttered. “I’m spending time with him, because he needs friends. People who will help him, since his trauma will stay with him throughout his life. And… because he has ideas, when he’s not focused on the bad times, dreams of a better life for both mages and templars, and when I hear them, I want to be better, make things better.”

“Varric was right, you are an optimist,” Aveline said with a smile.

“Yeah, well…” Cat mumbled, flustered. “I been in situations where I’ve done nothing and just hoped for the best. It doesn’t work. If you want things to be better, you have to work to make them better.”

“A sentiment I can agree with,” she said as she nodded. “So nothing romantic then?” she asked, just to be certain. Cat shook her head. “Too bad, though I’ll be sure to squash the rumors as best I can.”

“I’d appreciate that,” Cat said. “Though to be honest, I’m getting used to it. Issy is usually the one starting the rumors, after all.”

“I still don’t understand how you can be friends with her,” Aveline groused, and Cat chuckled. “Laugh all you want, but I just don’t see it.”

“It’s about accepting what is, and not expecting to change it,” Cat said. “She may tease me, but she doesn’t try to change me either, though to be fair, we certainly push each other towards our own way of thinking constantly.”

“If I’m honest…” Aveline started, and Cat gave a good ahead gesture, “I’m a little jealous. I never had many friends, especially as close as you two are.”

Cat grinned. “It doesn’t take much, just a little give and take,” she said while wiggling her eyebrows at Aveline. “Give me something Aveline,” she teasingly begged.

“Maybe you’d better go first…” Aveline suggested.

“I swear if you back out, I’ll be pissed,” Cat warned, but thought of what to talk about. There were plenty of incidents she could think of, but she decided to let out what was actually on her mind. “All right then, there is someone who’s been in my thoughts lately, which is extremely annoying.”

“Oh?” Aveline asked.

“Yes, he’s very handsome, in an orderly sort of way.”

“Orderly?” she asked with a laugh.

“Yes!” Cat exclaimed. “You know… always looking immaculate, put together, nothing sloppy or torn…”
“I see,” she replied. “And that’s important to you?”

“I wouldn’t have thought so,” Cat answered with a small frown. “But…”

“But he’s on your mind,” Aveline finished for her.

“Right.”

“There is… someone… similar, for me,” Aveline admitted, and Cat’s face lit up with a grin.

“Oh?” she said, asking for more.

“Very kind, and… soft spoken, not at all my type,” she continued nervously. “But…”

“But he’s on your mind,” Cat finished with a dopey grin, just thinking about Aveline’s future husband… *if things go right!* She thought.

“Yes.”

“So…?” Cat asked. “What are you going to do about it?”

“Do?”

“Yeah, do. Are you going to let him know that you feel something? Maybe flirt a bit?”

“Oh… uh… no.”

“Aveline…” Cat whined slightly. “How would you know what’s there if you don’t?”

“I’m… not really sure how to… do that.” Aveline cleared her throat, very uncomfortable now.

“What are you going to do, with…uh, yours?” she asked.

“Me?” Cat asked. “Nothing,” she said dismissively.

“Nothing?!” Aveline asked incredulously. “Then how can you say I should?”

“Completely different,” Cat barreled on. “For many reasons. One, we could never work, we come from… completely different worlds,” Cat knew Aveline wouldn’t take it as literally as she meant it, but still…

“Two, I think he is or will be committed to another, and three… well… I’m attracted, so something is obviously wrong with him.”

Aveline smiled at her last comment, but had to admit, her reasons were good reasons not to pursue a man. Though in her own mind, Cat’s reasons weren’t exactly accurate. *True, she might think the Starkhaven prince was too different, or spoken for by the chantry, but from what my reports said, he seemed to be pursuing her.*

They continued to speak for a while, until a knock on the door brought Aveline back to the present. Cat took her leave, as a guardsman came with several messages for Aveline’s immediate response, and as she watched Cat leave with a wave, she was glad she had followed her instinct to have Cat stay for a chat. She had looked happy when she left, which was better than when she had first come in her office.

* * * * *
“You’re getting much better, Cat.”

She grinned over at Sebastian, feeling the satisfaction that came whenever she hit the center of the target. “Thanks. Now if I could just hit the center while rolling, that would be an accomplishment!”

“Indeed it would!” he agreed. “Though in most fights, a hit is effective, no matter its location.”

“True…” she agreed. Sighing, she followed him in setting down their weapons, and walking to the other end of the garden to collect their bolts.

“I imagine we won’t have these daily practices once Hawke returns,” Sebastian said, and Cat nodded thoughtfully.

“I don’t know, it will depend on what happens. Hawke was so busy trying to get money together for the expedition, I doubt anyone has given thought to what comes after.”

“Then perhaps we can plan on practicing unless Hawke needs you for something else?” he asked.

“Well, between Isabela, Fenris, Anders, Olivia and Cullen, I may be busy at first, but don’t worry, I won’t forget about you,” she said with a smirk. “We’ll just have to plan a little further in advance.”

“We could set up some sort of schedule,” he suggested.

“And that is why you’ll get along fine with Hawke,” she replied. “Just don’t try to change his schedule, and you’ll be friends for life.”

“That’s good to hear,” he said softly. “I want your friends to like me.”

“Honestly Sebastian, as long as Hawke likes you, you’re good. Several of the others don’t really get along, but Hawke somehow brings everyone together.”

* * * * *

“Move Hawke. I’m going to cut his head off.”

“Look, I may want to kill him as much as anyone, but he’s still my brother,” Hawke retorted.

“Doesn’t matter to me,” Varric grumbled.

“I know this isn’t normal, but I agree with Fenris,” Anders chimed in, his arms crossed and eyes narrowed.

“Oh please,” Isabela scoffed. “He’s harmless, just trying to prove he’s as much a man, or more than the rest of you.”

“And that’s an excuse to get us all killed?” Anders shot back. “You wouldn’t be feeling so generous if it had been you down there with those creatures.”

Isabela rolled her eyes, and sauntered forward. “Let’s just keep going. I’m ready to get out of here.”

Fenris glared, but sheathed his sword and waited for everyone else to move, wanting to stay in the back. Merrill and Carver moved again at Hawke’s word, and the rest filed in.
Hawke rubbed his forehead, as he started to walk. Nothing was going according to plan, and it was giving him quite the headache. As he looked up, he caught Isabela eyeing him and he gave her a smirk and a shrug, getting a wink in return.

“Hurry up!” Carver yelled back, causing everyone’s annoyance to surface again. Anders slowed down, allowing Hawke to catch up.

“I’m concerned about this new lyrium we’re seeing,” Anders said softly, intending for Hawke to be the only one to hear.

“What’s to worry about?” Isabela asked, peering around from Hawke’s other side. “It’s so rare none of us have heard of or seen it before. Plus, it’s shiny, so it’s worth something.”

“Don’t touch it,” Anders warned. “We have no idea of the consequences.”

“You’d be more fun if you didn’t always think of consequences,” Isabela observed.

“Well after being caught and imprisoned in the circle several times, I couldn’t help but be more cautious.”

“Like I said… no fun.”

Hawke held up a hand, wanting to stop before the argument escalated. “We won’t touch it,” he decreed. “It doesn’t feel right.”

“This will all be a waste if we come home empty handed,” Isabela pointed out, but she didn’t argue with his decision.

The group was quiet as Carver came to a door, and opened it. The others rolled their eyes at his continued lack of caution, and pulled their weapons out, or placed hands on hilts, just in case.

“Shades!”

Hawke groaned, but jumped into the fray, already tired of the myriad of creatures they were encountering.

“Wha-??” Varric choked on his own question, as rocks rose from the ground and shaped themselves into humanoid figures. They came forward, attacking. Hawke stayed with his stonefist spell, finding it the most effective against the creatures they had encountered thus far.

He noticed that both Fenris and Carver were using their new mauls, that they had picked up along their journey. Merrill utilized her spirit bolts, and Anders stuck with freezing spells, assisting the warriors and rogues by keeping the creatures from attacking.

The creatures were destroyed back to rock, but the rocks gathered back together, forming a much larger creature, though its basic appearance was the same.

“Enough.”

The voice was deep and unearthly, and Hawke immediately recognized it as belonging to a spirit of some kind. He looked at the rock, seeing a skull being used as the head, and though it was missing pieces including an eye, he stared at it, unmoved.

“You have proven your mettle,” the voice said once the fighting stopped. “I would not see these creatures harmed without need.”
“I’d say being attacked on sight gives us plenty of need.” Fenris muttered, and Hawke couldn’t help but agree.

“They will not assault you further,” the creature said. Hawke opened his mouth to mention something about how they no longer had the ability to try, but the creature didn’t give him a chance. “Not without my permission.”

“Bloody flames, what were those things?” Varric asked. “They seem like rock wraiths, but…”

“They… hunger,” the creature interrupted. “The profane have lingered here for ages, feeding on the magic stones until the need is all they know.”

“They eat the lyrium?” Anders asked, surprised. “And you?” he demanded.

“I am not as they are… I am… a visitor.”

“You’re a demon, feeding on their hunger. I can sense it,” Hawke said. If the creature could have smirked, it would have, since Hawke could hear it in its voice.

“I can sense your desire,” it said. “You wish to leave this place… but you will need my aid to do so.”

“Don’t do it,” Anders cautioned. “Demons trip you up every time.”

“There’s no need to be scared,” Merrill said with a smile. “You can use it- - if you’re careful.”

Hawke thought for a moment, then asked, “Why do we need your aid?”

The creature nodded, sensing that it would get what it wanted. “There is a door. It leads to the paths above.”

“I sense a catch,” Isabela smirked.

“However-” the creature started, before Isabela interrupted with an “Aha! I knew there was a catch!”

“- it is sealed, and can only be opened with a key.” It continued as if Isabela hadn’t spoken. “I know where the key is, and if you do as I ask, I will tell you.”

Tell, not show, Hawke thought, bringing his hand up to stroke the hair on his chin, then letting go, not liking how long it was getting.

“So? What are our options?” Varric asked, wanting to move on. Hawke glanced around, before settling his eyes on Merrill with a grin. She gave him a questioning look, even as she flushed at the attention.

“This something you can handle?” Hawke asked her, and she nodded.

“Of course,” she replied, and strode forward pulling out her staff to attack.

“Foolish!” the creature bellowed, even as it fell to Merrill’s attack. The profane, no longer held back, surged forward to attack, just as an abomination rose from the rubble of the creature.

The fight wasn’t long, and as they moved to continue on, Hawke saw the nods of satisfaction and gratitude from both Anders and Fenris. It wasn’t often they all could agree, but demons were something they all viewed the same way.

“Let’s find that key,” Hawke said to everyone, taking the lead.
Varric gripped his pack, deciding that the few extra pieces probably weren’t the best idea he had, but he didn’t want to put back any of the treasure he had taken. The fight with the actual rock wraith had almost stopped them from returning to Kirkwall—ever.

He glanced around, noting that everyone else was similarly burdened, but they had earned this. He smirked as he thought of the one lousy piece Bartrand had settled for, knowing he could torment his brother with that knowledge before sticking him with a bolt.

Hawke used the key they had come across, and the door opened without protest. Finally, something going our way! Varric thought. He walked through the doorway, glancing left and right, before settling on the right fork. “This looks like our way out,” he announced.

“How long to get out?” Merrill asked pitifully.

“If we’re unlucky?” He answered, “about a week.” He just couldn’t bring himself to sugarcoat it, even for her.

“And if we’re lucky?” Hawke asked.

Varric gave a wicked looking smirk. “Then we’ll stumble over Bartrand’s half eaten corpse on the way,” he said and started walking.

* * * * *

“This looks familiar,” Hawke commented, as they passed a statue of a paragon.

“I would think so, this is where you got a love bite form a dragonling,” Isabela said with a smirk, though it lacked her usual luster.

Hawke looked around at his crew, wanting to get them out of here as soon as possible. Merrill was the first to wilt down here, but they were all feeling the same now.

“Can we… take a break?” Carver asked, out of breath.

“What do you say Varric?” Hawke asked.

“We’ve made good time,” Varric answered. “Only five days to get back here. A break couldn’t hurt.” He looked over at Carver, surprise and concern on his face as he saw him. “Junior? You okay?”

“I feel… wrong.”

“Probably those deep mushrooms we found,” Hawke said nonchalantly, looking around for somewhere to sit.

Hawke spun around as he heard the crashing sound, and the gasps from the others. “Carver!” he
called, rushing over.

Everyone crowded around him, looking to Hawke in concern. True, Carver hadn’t exactly endeared himself to them, but he was Hawke’s brother.

“Like… that… templar,” Carver said, breathing with difficulty.

“It’s-- the blight,” Anders said quietly. “I can sense it.”

Hawke looked stricken, though he smiled at his brother. “Just like you, to not say anything,” he said. “I suppose I should have listened to Cat’s bad feeling,” he added, hanging his head.

Fenris and Isabela looked questioningly at Anders, and he avoided their gaze. Maker, I don’t want to see them again, he thought, closing his eyes. What if they insist that I go back with them?

He opened his eyes, looking down again. It wasn’t the thought of Carver dying, nor the glares of Isabela and Fenris that had him speaking. It wasn’t even the thought of Cat’s reaction if he didn’t. It was the look on Hawke’s face, the guilt that he already was shouldering, that opened Anders’ mouth.

“There may be something,” he said, and Hawke looked up at him with hope. “You know I took those maps from some wardens that had come to Kirkwall. I had thought that they were looking for me, but it turned out they weren’t. They were planning their own expedition into the Deep Roads.”

Hawke looked confused, but Fenris grabbed his shoulder and glared at him. “Why would you keep this to yourself?!” he demanded.

Anders knocked his hand away, glaring back. “I was trying to avoid them! I didn’t want them to know where I was, and Hawke only needed the maps!” He turned back to Hawke, lowering his voice. “If they are still down here, we can bring Carver to them…”

“And what?” Carver asked. “Become a Grey Warden?” He laughed, but was interrupted by a coughing fit.

“Is it a cure?” Hawke asked.

“Yes, I suppose you could look at it that way. Though it is not without a price-- one not everyone is willing to pay.”

“A price? Maker’s breath Anders, just spit it out!” Hawke said somewhat desperately.

“The joining is… unpleasant.. and permanent. Your brother may survive the blight but at the cost of becoming a Grey Warden. It is not an easy life, trust me.”


Anders shook his head. “You think I got away? No. This is temporary. Eventually, they or the circle will drag me back. I have no illusions about that.”

Fenris wondered at that moment if Cat truly knew what she had asked of Anders, and how she was able to even ask it of him. His respect for the mage grew slightly, though he wouldn’t admit it to him… ever.

“But it is possible?” Hawke asked, thinking it through. “How does one even become a Grey Warden?”

“I can’t tell you.” Hawke looked up, wondering why. “But it’s not something you can undo once it’s
done, even if you want to.”

“This keeps sounding better and better,” Carver said softly, his breathing easier as he laid there, hardly moving.

“I’m not sure if they’ll even agree to it, if we can find them in time,” Anders finished, knowing he wasn’t giving them much.

Nodding, Hawke stood, and started helping his brother up. “Let’s go. It’s our only real option.” Carver’s arm over his shoulder, Hawke looked at Anders, gesturing for him to lead out.

* * * * *

“Hmm,” Anders stopped, glancing around, though he was looking with something other than his eyes.

“What is it?” Isabela asked.

“I think they are nearby,” he replied, though he didn’t move. “Or… it could be darkspawn.”

Fenris pulled out his sword, standing in front of Hawke and Carver. “Which way?” he asked.

Anders glanced back, seeing Isabela, Merrill and Varric with their weapons ready. The corner of his lip twitched up, and he led them down a corridor, pulling his own staff out as well. *If it was the wardens, I won’t go without a fight, but the same was true with darkspawn…*

As the tunnel opened up, the group could see a larger cluster of darkspawn running toward them. Hawke stopped, as the others moved forward, attacking at range, and staying close in order to protect him. They fought with a ferocity that Hawke hardly ever saw, and while the situation was dire, he enjoyed the chance to observe these people that he had gathered together, since he so rarely got the opportunity. He made a mental note to spend time training with them, to better take advantage of their individual skills.

Anders stepped forward, seeing an end to their fight, when an arrow pierced through the head of the last darkspawn from behind, spraying his face with black ichor. He grimaced, wiping the gunk from his face with his sleeve, and glancing up as a small group of men in blue heraldry stepped forward, swords and bows still pointed at them.

“Anders.”

Fenris smirked, as the dark haired warden looked at Anders with disdain.

“Oh, fancy meeting you here, Nathaniel,” Anders replied sheepishly, though both had yet to lower their weapons.

“I could say the same. I thought you were through with fighting darkspawn.”

Anders rolled his eyes, antagonizing the warden, and Fenris felt a sudden kinship with the man, as he constantly felt the same around the healer. “I’m not here to fight darkspawn Nathaniel, I came looking for you.”

The taller warden looked over at Nathaniel with a cheeky grin. “Soooo… this is the mage who was thought to be dead, only to show up to steal your maps?” he asked Nathaniel.
“Anders,” Nathaniel spoke, a smirk on his own face, “this is Alistair, the Warden Constable. Alistair, Anders.” He introduced them, finally lowering his bow.

Anders paled, and stepped back, muttering “Maker’s breath,” and Fenris and Isabela both stepped up to his sides, weapons out. Varric gave them speculative looks, while Merrill looked confused.

“Relax,” Hawke said, as he brought his brother forward. “I know we are not always successful, but we try to not fight with allies… usually.”

Nathaniel didn’t reply to this comment, instead taking in Carver, and turning to Anders. “You mean this boy as a recruit, don’t you,” he said, not really asking. He shook his head, glaring at Anders. “That is no kindness.” He turned to address Hawke. “I’m sorry, I know it is no consolation, but we do not recruit Grey Wardens out of pity.”

“No pity required,” Hawke shot back with a smirk. “Carver is an excellent warrior, and you would gain much by recruiting him.”

“Now he compliments me,” Carver muttered, and several of them smiled, including Alistair, but Nathaniel wasn’t budging.

“How could it be?!” Nathaniel demanded as he rounded on Anders. “You still treat it all as a simple thing, easily ignored.”

Alistair placed a hand on his arm, and he calmed, his face a mask again. “It is true,” Alistair said to the group. “Joining the Wardens may be as much a death sentence as the sickness.”

Hawke looked to Anders, unsure of what to say to convince them. “He’s my brother. I can’t just watch him die.”

Alistair looked away, but Nathaniel didn’t move, _stoic as always_, Anders thought.

“He’ll die anyway,” Anders said, as much pleading as he could muster. “Take him and try… I’m asking you.”

Nathaniel’s eyebrow winged up at that, and he looked at Anders as if trying to decipher his words. He glanced over to Alistair, and received a nod, then sighed.

“You may regret this,” he warned. “You may end up never seeing him again.”

Hawke looked down, feeling as if there was no good choice here. “You sure about this?” Carver asked.

“No… but I want you to live,” Hawke replied.

“If he comes, he comes now,” Nathaniel said, not enjoying feeling like he was ripping brothers apart. _Damn the blight, and all those who started it_, he thought, though not for the first time. “Being a Grey Warden is not a cure, it is a calling.”

“Then, this is it,” Hawke said, helping Carver over to Alistair.

“Take care of mother,” Carver said. “Tell her I don’t regret my choice in coming, but her idea to stay
“Farewell,” Nathaniel said, and Carver repeated it, as they turned around. “We’ll have to hurry men,” he called to the others with him. “We need to make the surface as soon as possible.”

Hawke and his friends stood and watched, even after the Wardens were out of sight, and until they could no longer hear them.

“Shouldn’t we have just gone with them to the surface?” Merrill asked, breaking the silence.

“They will most likely exit somewhere far from Kirkwall,” Anders replied, then turned to Hawke. “I’m so sorry, Hawke,” he began, but Hawke shook his head, and he fell silent.

“Thank you Anders. I don’t know what will happen, but this way I have hope.” Hawke glanced back to the tunnel the Wardens disappeared into, then finally back to his friends. “Let’s go home,” he said quietly.

The mood was much less desperate now, even Varric’s vengeance had cooled enough in the face of Hawke’s tragedy. The group stayed close together as they walked on, heading back to Kirkwall, each of them feeling as if they had failed. Hawke would have been appalled to know that they all felt as if they had failed him, because the only failure he could see was his own. How will I tell Mother? he thought in anguish.
Old Friends, New Warden

Chapter Notes

Sorry Seeker... I wanted to tell you to pop your popcorn, but it was pushed back slightly as the story changed a bit. But don't worry, it will still happen! We just needed some other things first! Thanks again for all the comments, I'm loving that I get to talk to others about this crazy idea that has become 45 chapters long already. Enjoy!!

Cat looked around the market, “Sebastian? Should we get something to eat for later?” she asked her companion.

“The animals will be able to smell the food on us Cat,” he replied. “Some fruit perhaps, nothing cooked.”

Cat smiled and headed toward the nearest food stall. Perusing her choices, she settled on a small sack of berries, the vendor letting her sample one before she purchased. They were sweet and slightly tart, reminding her of raspberries back home.

“I’ve never seen a woman with an appetite such as yours,” Sebastian commented. Cat turned to face him, a frown on her face.

“And… no berries for you,” she said, trying not to be offended. She knew that he was merely commenting on the difference between her and the noble ladies he was used to. However, she was far more active than that, and was constantly hungry, and didn’t feel bad about it.

Sebastian gave her a pout. “I didn’t mean it as a slight on you,” he said. “Merely an observation.”

“Well, think these things through before they escape your mouth,” she replied, buying another sack of berries from the vendor anyway. “Is that the kind of thing you would say to one of your previous conquests?”

Sebastian flushed, as Cat knew he would whenever she brought up his lifestyle before he joined the chantry. She appreciated his lack of regret, saying that it had been a rebellious time in his life, and helped him now to relate to others in the chantry. And yet, he would continue to blush whenever she brought it up.

She chuckled as she grabbed his arm, pulling him towards the weapon stands. “I’m only teasing you,” she said, and he laughed along with her.

“Just wait,” he warned. “I’ll get you back for that.”

“Oh yeah?” she asked with a smirk. “How do you expect to do that?”

She stopped in front of a stall that had arrows and bolts displayed, and seeing some top quality arrows, she turned to point them out to Sebastian. Before she could say anything, she felt something hit her, knocking the breath from her lungs and taking her to the ground.

Sebastian whirled around at the commotion, shocked to see a huge dog on top of Cat. From his view, it looked like it was tearing into her, and he quickly pulled out his knife, moving in to save her. And then he heard her laughing, which stopped him in his tracks.
“Hafter!! Get off me!” She yelled, though she continued to laugh uproariously. Sebastian moved around the pair, and caught a glimpse of her face, grimacing as he noticed that she was being licked and had dog saliva everywhere.

“Oh, no! I’m so sorry!” A woman cried as she ran up. Sebastian held up a hand to stop her, giving a smile.

“It’s quite all right, it seems they know each other,” he said, as Cat was finally able to push Hafter’s face away from her own. That didn’t keep the dog off of her however, and she had to hold onto his neck to keep him down.

“Blech,” Cat said, wiping her face on her sleeve. “I think it went in my mouth,” she said with a grimace, looking down at Hafter. Sebastian stifled a laugh as the dog looked suitably chastised, giving Cat a whimper.

“Oh, I can’t stay mad at you, and you know it,” she said, rubbing his head as he practically sat in her lap. “Are you here alone?” she asked, looking up and around, finally noticing Sebastian and the woman beside him. “Lady Hawke, I’m so sorry, I didn’t see you there,” she said, trying to move the dog enough so that she could stand up, which Sebastian thought an impossible task.

Sebastian turned to the woman, “Lady Hawke is it? I’m Sebastian, and it seems you know Cat already?” he asked her. He smiled as she brought her own hand up to cover her mouth, trying not to laugh at Cat’s attempts to move around the dog.

“It seems it is not only my children that have a hard time getting around Hafter,” she said. “Hafter! Come here!” she said a little more forcefully, and the dog obeyed, though it looked sad to do so. She turned to Sebastian then, her hand outstretched. “Yes, I’m Leandra Hawke. It’s a pleasure to meet you Sebastian. And to see you again as well Cat,” she said with a beaming smile.

“Whoa,” Cat said as she picked up a few of her fallen items, looking slightly unsteady on her feet. “Thank you for that. I knew Hafter and I were friendly, but he’s never given me that reception before.”

“That’s my fault,” Leandra explained. “With Garrett and Carver gone, Hafter hasn’t gotten out much. This is his first trip out in weeks.”

“Oh,” Cat said, feeling sorry for him. “I wish I had thought of it sooner, I could have come and taken him out for you,” she said with another scratch for his head. “What brings you out today?” she asked.

“I thought I’d fix a nice dinner for Gamlen and myself,” Leandra answered. “I thought to wait to celebrate until the boys are back, but with First Day almost here, it seems as good a reason as any.”

Cat could see the sorrow and worry in her eyes, and wanted to help reassure her somehow. “It’s hard to believe it’s already been three months. It feels like it was just Harvestmere yesterday. They’ll be back very soon, I’m sure of it.”

“Maker, I hope so,” she replied. She gave a polite smile and asked, “So what are you and your man up to today?”

“Oh, uh, Sebastian is just a friend,” Cat said quickly, seeing Leandra brighten. “We’ve been practicing our archery, so we thought we’d try our hand at a hunt today.”

“Yes,” Sebastian added. “Cat is fantastic with her crossbow, so I am sure we’ll bring home excellent game.” He leaned forward to pet Hafter, and then quickly leaned back when he heard the low growl.
“That sounds nice,” Leandra said. “I’ll let you go then. Anytime you want to come get Hafter, please do,” she said to Cat, taking her hand and patting it. “I’m sure he would love to get out more.”

“I’d like that,” Cat answered. “I’ll come for him in the morning,” she said, and received a loud bark from Hafter in response, causing the two of them to chuckle.

“Seems he is looking forward to it,” Leandra said. “Farewell, until tomorrow!”

“Goodbye!” Cat called, and waved as the two of them left. She turned to Sebastian, “Let’s get what we need, and get going,” she said.

“Cat! You’re hurt! What did that dog do?!” he exclaimed, turning her to peer at her hip. She looked down in confusion, and groaned.

“My berries!” she complained, holding up the smashed sacks that had been tied to her waist.

* * * * *

Cat walked at an unhurried pace toward the gallows. She was giving Hafter plenty of time to explore as they made their way from the keep. She smiled as she remembered the look on the guards faces when she showed up this morning with a mabari.

“We’re unbeatable!” she crowed, as Hafter came back to her side. “Aren’t we boy?” she asked, giving his head a pat as he barked in agreement. “Those guards didn’t know what hit them,” she added with a chuckle. “I wonder what the templars will make of you,” she said.

Hafter let out a small growl and then a whimper, and Cat glanced at him in question. “Oh, I suppose you’re not used to being around templars on purpose, are you boy?” she asked. “Well, we’re really only coming to see Cullen, not the other ones.”

She laughed as Hafter made a noise that sounded disgusted. “Oh, he’s not so bad,” she said. “He really needs friends though, and besides, he’s Ferelden, so he loves dogs.”

She glanced down, seeing Hafter rolling his eyes at her. “You know,” she said, “you’re smarter than most guys back home, or here for that matter.” He tilted his head in question, and she felt like laughing again. “Yeah, of all the guys I know, you’re the smartest,” she said, giving him another scratch.

She laughed as he started strutting, laughing hard enough that she had tears in her eyes. She finally stopped, so that she could get control of herself, and said, “Thanks buddy, I needed that.”

They finished their walk into the Gallows courtyard, seeing Cullen talking to a group of templars. She stopped, and said, “let’s wait here,” which had Hafter stopping as well. “That’s him, the blond one in charge,” she said quietly. “Remember, we’re being nice, right? Not like with Sebastian?” she said with a look at him, and emphasized, “right??” when he bared his teeth.

“This should be interesting,” she said quietly.

* * * * *
Cat hesitated in front of the door, as she could hear the wailing from outside. Hafter was agitated, but she didn’t feel right just opening the door, so she knocked. If no one answered, she could always open it after.

The door opened, and Cat was face to face with Gamlen. He looked as surly as always, but there was something else, like grief on his face. Hafter ran in, pushing the man aside, and Cat could see Leandra curled on the floor weeping, with Hawke trying to comfort her.

She thought, oh no, and Hawke’s eyes met hers. She was sure her face looked stricken as well, and she wished she could do something. He looks so... defeated... Then the door closed in her face.

Hawke… Hawke was here, and Carver wasn’t… she thought. I’ve got to talk to Anders.

She turned, and started running, not hearing the door opening behind her, or her name being called.

* * * * *

“It looks like he will survive.”

“Don’t sound so thrilled Nathaniel.”

“It’s not that I wanted him to die, but I really didn’t want Anders to be right.”

“Maybe he’ll be a horrible Warden and you can kill him later,” Alistair said in a sarcastic voice.

“Maybe I will,” Nathaniel responded, walking away, with Alistair staring after him.

“I will never understand him,” Alistair muttered as the boy started to wake up. “Welcome to the land of the living,” he greeted. “Well, tainted living, full of fighting and loss... but hey, it's better than being dead, am I right?”

Carver blinked a few times, wondering how there could possibly be another man in the world like his brother, and if he would have to be around him much.

“Did I hear something about killing me later?” Carver asked.

“Yeah, but I wouldn’t take it seriously,” Alistair said dismissively. “That’s just Nathaniel’s way of making friends.”

“Right...” Carver replied, as he hauled himself up. “So... now what?”

“Now? We head to the fire and hope there is some food left.”

*****

Over the next few weeks, Carver didn’t speak much. He enjoyed being with a group of warriors, even if there were mages too, where there were no outlandish expectations. Just killing darkspawn, which he was more than happy to do. He wasn’t sure where he fit in yet with this group, so he simply observed, hoping to find his place eventually.
Just as Alistair had said, he was glad to still be alive, even as he discovered that his life was now shorter than he had thought. It could have ended that day in the Deep Roads after all.

After days of walking, he was glad to see the ship. After days of sailing, he had never been so happy to see land. And after days more of walking, he resigned himself to the boredom. It seemed this life wasn’t as glorious as the tales had said, but it was his, and that meant something… something he could be proud of.

Now he stood in front of a set of huge stone doors, waiting. He wasn’t the most patient man, but felt that it was a skill that would soon be honed with his new status. The fighting was usually short, but the waiting was always long.

The door in front of him opened, and he was waved inside. He strode forward, coming up to a sitting area in front of a desk. At the desk was a dwarf, with short hair and a very long beard that was braided and twisted into a complicated pattern. In front of him, seated, were Alistair and Nathaniel, and he noticed that there was not another place to sit, so he stood to the side of the desk, assuming that the aura of leadership surrounding the dwarf meant that he was in charge.

The dwarf glanced to Alistair, and he spoke. “Duran, this is our newest recruit, Carver Hawke. We picked him up in the Deep Roads near Kirkwall as we mentioned.”

Duran turned to look at him, and for the first time, Carver felt like curbing his sarcastic comment.

“So Carver, what were you doing in the Deep Roads? If you were wanting to join the Wardens, there are easier ways.”

Carver wasn’t sure what the smirk meant, but he tamped down his annoyance. “I was part of an expedition, looking for treasure.”

“Really?” Duran replied. “I didn’t know there were such foolish people still in the world. The Deep Roads are no place for the ill prepared.”

“We were plenty prepared,” Carver shot back, only to receive the infuriating smirk again.

“Oh really?” Alistair said. “Then why are you here now?”

“Casualties are to be expected,” Carver replied sullenly. “I’m sure he’s telling Mother it was my own fault.”

“He?”

Carver’s eyes lit with anger. “Is this an interrogation then?” he asked. “I had thought I already passed my joining.”

“Passionate, and loyal,” Duran mused. “Both good qualities.”

“Your expedition went in that specific direction due to maps that were taken from the Wardens,” Nathaniel spoke up. “We’d like to know what you found.”

Carver glanced between the three men. “This isn’t going to get anyone in trouble?” he asked, and Duran smiled.

“The Deep Roads are not territory for wardens to protect,” he said. “We are merely curious.”

Carver nodded, and proceeded to tell them about their time in the Deep Roads. He explained about
the thaig, and it’s lack of dwarven statues, as well as the creatures they faced. The men stayed quiet, merely nodding as he told them his tale, leaving out anything of his companions and sticking only to the facts of the place.

“This is troubling,” Duran said, once he finished. “It seems that Tethras may sell the location to others, and we will have more trying to locate the thaig.”

“Undoubtedly,” Alistair agreed with him.

“What I don’t understand, is why Anders was there!” Nathaniel said angrily. “He wants nothing to do with us, and suddenly he is not only in the Deep Roads, but seeking us out to give us a recruit?!”

“It was a favor.”

The three senior Wardens stopped, turning to stare at Carver.

“What?” Duran asked.

“He went to the Deep Roads as a favor,” Carver said. “And he tried to save me, because of my brother.”

“Your brother must have helped him immensely, for Anders to willingly go into the Deep Roads again,” Duran said. “It was something I could never get him to do.”

“Well, actually…” Carver hesitated. “That was Cat.”

He watched as two of them exchanged looks that he couldn’t decipher, and then Duran looked at him and said, “Explain.”

It hadn’t sounded like a request, so Carver tried his best to be vague. “It was nothing really, our friend Cat, she had a really bad feeling about the expedition, and so she pretty much begged Anders to go. Since he was a Warden, he’d be able to give us some warning about darkspawn being near.”

He was more than surprised to see a smile on Duran’s face. “Thank you Carver, you’re dismissed. Nathaniel, will you show him to his room?” Carver was wondering what he had said that changed the atmosphere of the room, as he turned around and followed Nathaniel back out the doors.

Once the door was shut, Alistair said, “It can’t be, can it?”

Duran opened his desk, and pulled out a sheet of paper, handing it over to Alistair. “Read this.”

Alistair looked down first at the signature, and gave a sound of surprise before shaking his head and starting to read.

Warden Commander Duran,

I hope this finds you well. I have missed speaking with you and the others for some time now. Do you hear from them at all? Thanks to a mutual friend in the Wardens, I was able to locate where to send this, and felt it was well past time to convey my gratitude, as well as letting you know how I am faring.

This past year has been very exciting, and though I am no longer with the Wardens, I still find myself in similar situations, and must conclude that I am a beacon for such things. Those whose care I was entrusted into, have proven to be exemplary teachers, and I hope that when I see you again, you will be proud of my education.
If you agree, I would like to continue correspondence, as I plan to be here for the foreseeable future. If you are in touch with any other of our mutual friends, would you be so kind as to pass this information along? I would love to hear from everyone, as I have missed you all terribly. Don’t worry, I have not been pining away, but have found new friends, some of whom I have even shared some of our stories with.

I heard of your time in Amaranthine, and tried to visit, but was unable to at the time. I have heard of your archer friend, and am excited to meet him as well.

Ancestors bless you, and may the Maker watch over the Wardens.

Cat

Alistair glanced up, meeting Duran’s face. “It’s really her?” he asked. “I thought we’d never see her again,” he said with wonder.

“It seems she is cursed to forever be where the commotion is,” he replied with a smirk.

“She wants to meet Nathaniel?” Alistair asked. “I don’t think I will ever get used to the knowledge she possesses.”

“There are plenty of things she hints at,” Duran said as he took the paper back. “I sent a short reply, as the messenger was waiting, but next time I will ask some questions, to be sure. However the way she doesn’t come out and say specifics, or names of the others, makes me curious.”

“Do you think there is some enemy we should be aware of?”

“Isn’t there always?” Duran replied sardonically. “I don’t know,” he answered. “After that business with the Architect, I’ve been wondering what will show up next.”

“That’s not ominous… at all…” Alistair said glumly. Then straightening, he exclaimed, “Wait, so those people we met in the Deep Roads, were her new friends?”

Nathaniel walked back in at that moment, coming forward and sitting down. Duran handed over the note, and let him read it, his eyebrows raised as he got to the final part. “This is the girl you were telling me about before?” he asked.

“The same,” he replied. “I’ve told him everything once I received this,” Duran explained to Alistair. “If anything were to happen to me, I needed him to be able to continue communication with Cat.”

“It’s still hard to swallow,” Nathaniel said with a grimace.

“And yet, true,” Alistair responded. “Don’t worry, it still doesn’t make sense, even after all this time.”

“Very reassuring,” Nathaniel said dryly.

“It seems likely that she is now with the group you met in the Deep Roads,” Duran said to them with a smile. “What can you tell me about them?”

* * * * *
Cat was exhausted, physically, mentally… everything. Spending the last couple of hours with Anders, had her apologizing over and over for asking him to go, but he shook it off each time, saying that Carver would be dead now if he hadn’t.

He told her of the Wardens, and how afraid he had been that they would take him too. She hugged him and comforted him, finally helping Olivia get him to bed. Cat warned her that he would most likely wake up with nightmares after being in the Deep Roads for so long, and then had taken her leave.

She had headed home, hoping to see Isabela, but after a quick glance inside, turned around and headed to the Hanged Man. It was Isabela’s go to bar, now that they were part of Hawke’s group. As she entered, she glanced around, but didn’t find her anywhere. She started up towards Varric’s room and knocked on the door before wincing, hoping that she wasn’t pulling him out of bed.

Her hopes were dashed as Varric answered the door in only his trousers, and Cat flushed in embarrassment. Varric just smirked, and beckoned her inside.

“Good to see your face again Little Dove,” he said as he closed the door behind her. “There were a few times there that I wondered if I would.”

“Yeah, I’ve been at Anders’, so I’ve heard most of it. Sorry about your brother, by the way.” Cat found a seat, and relaxed.

“Meh,” he replied. “No one’s fault but his own.”

“True. Still stinks though,” she said. “And about Carver too.”

“Well, we’re still hoping he’s alive, but I guess we’ll find out sooner or later. For all intents and purposes though, he’s gone, which will be hard for Hawke to tell his mother.”

Cat frowned, remembering the scene she saw at Hawke’s home. She wished she could forget the look on his face, but knew she’d remember it for a long time.

“Well, once I heard everyone was back, I figured I’d say hello, and check on you,” she said with a smile. “I didn’t mean to pull you out of bed.”

“No one pulls me out of bed,” Varric smirked. “I just hadn’t gotten in yet.”

Cat smiled back, shaking her head. “Now that sound like a challenge, Varric. You know I can’t resist a challenge.”

“True, I should watch it, otherwise you’ll be in here waking me up every morning.” Cat stood, heading towards the door.

“Sleep well Varric,” she said.

“It wasn’t for nothing, you know.”

She stopped and turned back. His face was sad, and it seemed as if he was trying to convince himself.

“Once I sell the items we brought back, we’ll be rich. Don’t think I forgot your investment,” he said with a forced smile. “At least something positive will have come from this.”
She smiled back, and said another good night, before pulling the door closed behind her.

This time, she headed home, and stayed there. Isabela would eventually come back after all. Perhaps she had simply missed her.

* * * * *

The knock on the door had Cat jumping out of bed ready for a fight. She peered around cautiously, before hearing the knock again, and muttering to herself about being paranoid, went to answer it. She looked over, noting that Isabela’s bed was still empty, and wondered where she was.

She pulled open the door, surprised.

“Hawke?” she asked, as his eyes travelled down from her face, his eyebrow raising and a smile blooming. She looked down, remembering that she hadn’t put pants on, and her sleep shirt ended at her hips. She flushed, shutting the door quickly, and leaning against it, willing her face to fade back to its normal color.

The knock sounded again on the door, and she pulled herself together. “Just a second!” she yelled, rushing over to find her lounging pants where she had dropped them by her bed, and pushing her feet into them. In her haste, she started moving before they were up, and toppled over onto the ground with a yell.

“Cat? You all right in there?” she could hear Hawke say through the door, and practically snarled at the amusement in his voice. But, she told herself, that was better than the look I saw him last night.

She finally situated herself, and returned to open the door. “Yes, everything is fine,” she said, the picture of calm and collected.

He smirked at her, “No need to get dressed on my account,” he said, and she rolled her eyes.

“Isabela’s not here, and I’m not sure where she is,” she said, changing the subject quickly.

“That’s not why I came, though she did say something yesterday about following up with some contacts. We were gone longer than we expected.”

“Yeah,” she replied, uncertain of what to say.

“That’s not why I came, though she did say something yesterday about following up with some contacts. We were gone longer than we expected.”

“Yeah,” she replied, uncertain of what to say.

“I just wanted to come say, thank you.”

She looked up at him, confused. “For what?” she asked.

He didn’t meet her eye, and searched for what he wanted to say. “For… Carver. I assume you heard?”

She nodded, but he wasn’t looking at her, so she answered - but it came out as a whisper. “Yes.”

“If Anders hadn’t been there… if you hadn’t…” he stopped, clearing his throat. “Carver would be dead right now. I don’t know where he is, and I don’t know if I’ll see him again, but he knows now, that I care, that we’re brothers- always.” He slowly looked up, into her eyes. “When those wardens took him away, all I could think of, was that I would have had to watch him die…” he closed his
eyes, rubbing his forehead.

Cat looked at him in sorrow. *Here he was, trying to be a good brother to a man who didn’t appreciate it, coming home after a traumatic experience where he essentially lost another sibling, only to take the blame, as well as comfort those around him. But who will comfort him?* she thought.

She didn’t hesitate after that, just moved forward under his arms, and put hers around him and moved her hands in circles over his back. “I’m so sorry Garrett,” she said softly. She kept murmuring words of comfort as she moved her hands, keeping both soft and slow in an effort to stay calm. She found that she was more angry than anything- angry at the people in his life that couldn’t see what he needed. *He couldn’t always be the strong one... who could?*

She continued as she felt his arms around her, one hand at the small of her back and the other moving up into her hair and simply holding on. She could feel him tremble, but he didn’t cry, he just let himself relax and let go. As their cheeks were pressed together, she could hear when his breathing calmed, and the very faint, “thank you.”

Then as if she had dreamed it all, he stepped back and gave her a smirk. “Meeting at the Hanged Man in about an hour to make future plans. Perhaps you should wear pants.”
Cat walked into the Hanged Man, excited to see everyone together again. Her excitement didn’t last long when she found she had beaten everyone there. Looking around, she didn’t even see Varric, so she went and knocked on his door.

“Little Dove,” he nodded to her as he opened the door. “Eager are we?” he asked with a wink.

“That’s one way to put it,” she said with a smile, as they made their way back to the common room. “You have no idea how much I’ve missed everyone! And I haven’t seen Fenris or even Issy yet!”

He looked startled for a moment, and turned to return to his room. She turned and stood at the foot of the stairs, looking back in confusion, unsure if she should follow him or not. He returned quickly, holding out a few papers for her.

“I almost forgot,” he said as she took them. He guided her to a large table in front of the fireplace in order to ward off the chill in the air. Kirkwall didn’t get as cold as other areas of Thedas, but in comparison to the summer months, Wintermarch could be fairly chilly.

Looking at the first paper, Cat saw that it was a note from Isabela, explaining that she wasn’t coming back to Kirkwall just yet.

“What happened?” Cat asked Varric, looking up from the note.

“When, in the Deep Roads?” he asked.

“To Issy,” she clarified.

“Oh, well, none of us were sure, but she started acting strangely after we came back to the surface. Then, the next day, she gave me that note for you, and headed off on her own, saying she’d catch up with us sooner or later.”

“That’s it?” Cat asked.

“Yeah, sorry.”

“No problem,” Cat said.

“And yet, you seem worried,” he commented, making her look up from the paper. He sat at the head of the table, and she took the seat to his left, wanting to be near the fire.

“I’m hoping nothing spooked her,” Cat said, finally answering him. “She seems more desperate about finding a clue to the relic than she was before.”

“No one likes having something hanging over their head,” he said with a shrug. “She most likely wants to do something about it, now that we have a lull in jobs.”

“Do we?” she asked curiously. “When Hawke stopped by to tell me about the meeting, he made it sound like we’d be discovering his new schedule for our lives,” she smirked.

He replied in kind. “Well, you know Hawke. Idle hands and all that…”

She put Isabela’s note down, and opened the other paper. And then squealed with delight, causing Varric to grin at her.
“It’s from Duran!” she whispered excitedly.

Varric leaned in, hoping she’d share more. “And?” he asked quietly.

“It’s very short, but he says he’ll write again. He didn’t want the messenger to have to wait too long, and his other senior wardens are gone on a mission, so he’s got a lot filling his time at the moment. But he says we have a lot to catch up on, and he has plenty of questions for me… and basically he’s just really happy that I’m okay.” She sighed, holding the letter to her chest. “It’s so good to hear from him. I knew I missed him, well, all of them really… but I didn’t know how much until right now.”

He reached out and covered his other hand with his own, giving it a squeeze. “It’s nice to know there are other good dwarves out there,” he said with a smile.

“And to think,” she said with a smirk. “the poor dwarves in Orzammar are stuck with his… nug-humping brother.”

He chuckled at her attempt at cursing, then something clicked in his mind. “Ah, now it makes sense, back on the docks that day.”

“Yeah,” she answered, remembering her rant about Bhelen. “Duran doesn’t talk of it much, but he didn’t really want to be the king anyway. In fact, he helped put Bhelen on the throne. He has the ability to let go of the smaller things and look at the big picture, which can be down right annoying.” She paused as Varric chuckled again. “But… it also makes him a great leader. The Wardens are lucky to have him.”

She got lost in her own thoughts for a moment, then leaned forward a bit. She knew she could always talk about the others with Fenris, or Anders, or even Isabela, but she wanted to talk more about the person who basically saved her life.

“There was one time…” she started, and Varric’s eyes lit with curiosity even as he grinned.

* * * * *

Cat walked quickly to Hightown, looking all around her as she went. She thought perhaps she would run into Fenris on his way to Lowtown, but didn’t. Varric told her not to worry, that more than likely something had come up with Hawke, and he hadn’t had a chance to tell the others, but she needed to make sure her friends were all right.

She pushed open the door in her haste, and called out, “Fenris?! FENRIS!?”

She breathed a sigh of relief as he came out of his room onto the balcony, his eyes wide. She tried to calm her racing heart, closing her eyes and focusing on slowing her breath. When she opened them again, he was in front of her, grabbing her shoulders, and looking at her in concern.

“Cat?” he asked. “Are you all right?”

She smiled, and moved in for a hug. “I am now,” she replied, relieved. She pushed back suddenly, and demanded, “Where have you been?! I was so worried!”

“Oh… what?” he asked, confused. “I wasn’t aware of having plans, in fact I tried to find you yesterday to let you know we were home, but I must have missed you.”
“Hawke didn’t tell you to meet at the Hanged Man today?” she asked, and he shook his head.

“I haven’t seen Hawke since we returned.”

“Oh… uh, sorry then.” She felt embarrassed for not listening to Varric, and letting herself get all worked up. “Hawke stopped by this morning to say we were meeting, and no one showed, not even Hawke. It had me worried.”

He chuckled then, and ruffled her hair. “It’s good to see you too.”

She pushed his hand away. “Don’t do that! Now I have to re-braid it.” She pulled the piece of leather free from the bottom, and combed her hair out with her fingers, and started to braid it again.

“I missed you.”

She stopped, looking up at him. “I’m so glad you’re okay,” she responded. “You all were gone much longer than I thought.”

“How much of that could you have prevented?” he asked her, causing her to look away, focusing on finishing her hair, wrapping the leather tie around the end. “Cat?” he asked.

“Probably most of it,” she answered.

“But you felt it was necessary for it to happen?” he asked in disbelief.

“There’s something… big. Years from now. At the time, things happen almost by accident, and… I don’t know.”

“No, please… tell me.”

Cat looked up at Fenris again, wondering what she should do. “I don’t know if the Maker had a hand in things or not.”

“What?” he asked, surprised.

“There are a lot of factors that come together, and at one point, there is a single person that is the only hope of saving all of Thedas.”

His eyebrow winged up, but he remained silent.

“I’m worried, that if I stop some of those factors now, that I will prevent that hope as well, leaving Thedas in ruins. I don’t know if there really is a Maker… if there is someone that will ensure that that hope still remains, so I feel like I must.”

“I… see. This burden is even larger than you originally implied,” he said, and she nodded miserably.

“Won’t you share it with me?” he asked, and she looked at him in surprise, before shaking her head slowly.

“Not today,” she answered. “Perhaps at some point, but if anything were to happen to me, then things would progress as they should. I am the extra factor, the thing that is changing the story from what it would be.”

“Don’t say that like it’s a bad thing,” he said. “You think I can’t read between the lines?” he asked, and she looked at him in question. He gave her a look, and explained. “You continuously glaze over what you knew of me before,” he said, and she was taken aback. “Obviously it was not complimentary.”
“No, that’s not…” she trailed off, and he chuckled. “I am quick to judge and slow to trust,” he said with a no apology, and a shrug. “I can only imagine what my life would be like without you in it.”

“Oh… but I haven’t done anything…” she protested, worrying about this new thought.

“If anything, I don’t know that I would even be able to work with Hawke, let alone working with the healer,” he commented dryly. “I would definitely call him something else,” he added, which had her laughing.

“It seems I cannot help but change things,” she said disparagingly.

“And again, it is not a bad thing,” he emphasized. “Things could always change for the better, could they not?”

“You know… I think you’ve changed me too,” she said with a smile.

“Oh?” he asked in surprise.

“Yeah, I never really liked wine before I met you,” she said with a smirk, and he laughed.

“See?” he said, leading her to the kitchen. “We’ve both been changed for the better. Though, if you wanted to clean my house, you didn’t have to wait until I left town.”

“Well, I wasn’t sure if you were going to agree. Better to ask forgiveness, than permission after all.”

“So you want my forgiveness then?” he asked.

“No way, this place looks a thousand times better,” she grinned at him. “So much more welcoming.”

“Ah, so that’s it. You think I should welcome others more.”

“No, actually. I just wanted to feel more welcome when I’m here.”

He laughed aloud at that. “So really, you did this for yourself then?” he laughed again, as he realized he should have known. After all, his room hadn’t been touched.

“And what’s wrong with that?” she asked disdainfully, feeling insulted.

“Absolutely nothing,” he answered. “So, would you like some wine?”

* * * * *

Drakonis 9:32, Dragon

Lady Catarina,

Please feel free to take your time with a response, my letter carrier will be in town for several days. I am sorry to have missed you, when we were so close to Kirkwall, however I am eternally grateful that you were not among your friends in the Deep Roads. I wish we could explain the dangers of
broodmothers to all people, but fear that it would not help.

I was surprised to return home and find that you had written. Duran let me read your letter, and as he, I was very glad to hear that you have been safe, and well taken care of. I have missed all our former companions, but from what our newest Warden has told me, you seem like an entirely new person. Hopefully, I will have the opportunity to see you again.

We have heard much about your new companions, though I sense that this Garrett fellow must have his hands full, if I am to take young Carver’s words at face value. Some of his stories reminded me of our time traveling Ferelden against the blight. I know I shouldn’t miss those times, and I don’t miss the blight, I promise! But I do miss the companionship.

Will you tell us of how you are faring? We hear strange things from the Marches, and of course we Wardens cannot get involved, but it is always good to be informed as well. And of course, anything you learn… or hear… that we should know, please pass along as well. Duran has been interested in learning more about the Wardens, we know so very little after all, and now we are basically on our own.

We have kept in contact with the others mainly due to Leliana. I haven’t the space to write it all, but know that they are doing well, and find themselves on personal quests of sorts. I look forward to your response!

Your friend, Alistair

p.s. Enclosed is a letter for Anders from Nathaniel. Are you sure you want to meet him??

* * * * *

Anders-

Duran asked that I let you know that your friend survived, and is now a junior member of the Grey Wardens. He knows next to nothing, and acts like a spoiled, pampered princess. And yet, is still a better Warden than you are. Consider your favor done, and now you owe me one.

- Nathaniel

p.s. Anders, please help take care of Cat for me, though I am sure you are. She’s basically family, and missed, just as you are. - Duran

* * * * *

Cloudreach 9:32

Mother-

I’m sorry, there isn’t much time to write. But the Warden Commander heard that I was presumed
dead, so he insisted that I write and let you know that is not the case. I’m sorry that I can’t be there to look after you, but Garrett was always better at that anyway.

While this isn’t the life I went looking for, there is something that makes me proud, serving all of Thedas as a Warden, without thought of recognition. I will make you proud someday, I’ll be the best Warden there is.

Even though I cannot keep in touch, I’m glad you still have Garrett. Father and Bethany would be happy about that too I think, they wouldn’t want you alone. One day, Maker only knows when, we’ll all be together, and we’ll see each other again. Until then, take care, and think of me.

- Carver

* * * * *

Solace 9:32

My friends-

I wish I had known you would have met with my crew here, I would have been sorely tempted to have gone on the expedition. No, that is a lie, but I would have written a letter at least. To be honest, I was expecting Warden Stroud, but that is not important now.

Kirkwall is strangely quiet now, but it seems as if it is the calm before the storm. There are a group of Qunari that crashed their ship on our shore, and are waiting for another sent from Par Vollen. The people of the city grow tired of having them, and the Qunari grow tired of being here, and tensions are rising. How long does a ship take to arrive??

I am faring well, the city has been rather kind to Isabela and I, for the most part. We arrived here after being caught in a storm, and her ship… was lost, along with most of the crew. She has fulfilled her promise and then some, becoming not only a protector, but a cherished friend as well.

Anders has been an exceptional friend as well, and while he wouldn’t appreciate my saying this, he is sorry that he has disappointed Nathaniel. I think he enjoyed the time he spent with you, commander, but there is much that he wishes to accomplish, now especially. that it is not only his own desires he seeks to attain. He runs clinic here in the city, helping others with no thought of payment, almost as if he were seeking to do good to outweigh the bad. I don’t always understand his reasons, but I help where I can.

I should probably mention, there have been a few encounters now with Flemeth. First, she helped Hawke’s family escape Lothering before it was destroyed. In return, she had Hawke deliver an amulet to a mountain here in the Marches. When we brought the amulet to the correct location, Flemeth appeared, having been smuggled out without him even knowing he was carrying her.

I realize that this may or may not cause you alarm, as I am not certain what your choice for her fate had been. But let me add, that I was severely wounded, and she healed me, asking nothing in return. It was strange, and I still am uncertain why, but I feel that she will not only NOT cause problems, but will not be able to be found, even if you went looking. At some point, you may find a way to find Morrigan, and I ask that you not tell her about Flemeth. Trust me on this.

The rest of the crew are people that Hawke has helped, and in return, helped him with his
expedition. Now however, we are all friends, and I don’t think they would leave him, unless they had to.

- Cat

* * * * *

“Well?”

“Well what?”

“Obviously, I’m asking for your opinion,” Alistair sighed, rolling his eyes at Nathaniel.

“I… don’t know. There are too many things that don’t make sense. Yes, you’ve told me the stories,” he said quickly, before Alistair could interrupt. “But it isn’t the same as going through it.”

“True, but you can’t deny…”

“No, I cannot.”

“I’m sorry if this is becoming a burden Nathaniel,” Duran said, finally speaking.

“It’s… not a burden commander, more, trying to make my mind think a different way than it is used to.” He shook his head, as if that would help. “It can be exhausting, but eventually, it will become easier. I still am trying to wrap my head around how she knows Stroud.”

Duran smirked, enjoying the contrast between his two friends. Alistair, so trusting, and always smiling or joking. And Nathaniel, usually frowning, sometimes doubting and always serious. But for all their differences they were remarkably similar.

“What’s that look for?” Alistair asked, and Duran was brought out of his thoughts.

“Just thinking how much you two are alike,” Duran said, knowing the reaction he would receive. He smirked as they looked at each other, then him in disbelief. “Following your duty no matter the cost, extremely loyal and trustworthy friends, and exceptional leaders. I don’t know how I would do this without either of you.”

He laughed as they both flushed slightly at his praise, noticing that they avoided his eyes, as they searched for words.

“This letter has helped me some,” he said, putting them at ease by getting back to their previous conversation. “First, Cat is not one to exaggerate, so things in Kirkwall, while escalating, are not at a crucial point yet. We still have time to investigate.”

They nodded and he continued. “Secondly, it is nice to have confirmation of what we already suspected. She didn’t know that we let Flemeth go, but it sounds like she wouldn’t have been gone, even if we were successful in killing her. This also tells us, that while Flemeth is smart, and powerful, she cannot see the future, otherwise, why have this contingency plan?”

“Oh, that’s true…” Alistair mumbled.

“And third, Cat once again, knows more than she is telling.”
They looked up at him in question.

“I had yet to inform you of my decision, but I’m leaving for a time.”

“What?” they asked in unison.

“I got a lead on Morrigan’s whereabouts, and I’m going to follow up on it. And, if I’m able, I’m going to see my child.”
I thought about spending more time on letters and such, but I figured that it would probably be redundant. So just picture this all happening for the entire year and a half, and you'll see where we are. Next chapter will start Act II!

Leliana shook her head as she easily deciphered the letter. Duran was more than capable of a decent cipher, but it seemed he didn’t see the need for secrecy, or he just didn’t care who read it. However, after over a year of correspondence, there was no indication that someone was trying to intercept. But as the Revered Mother said, one could never be too careful, she thought.

Looking at the date at the top, she realized it had taken over six months for her to receive this letter, which told her that she had just missed it when she had left. Looking down, she re-read the letter.

_Drakonis 9:32 Dragon_

_Sister Nightingale—_

_Hopefully you receive this in a timely manner, as I am aware that you are continuing to lead the research and expedition teams to Haven. Alistair has told me that the ashes, nor the guardian have been located, almost as if they did not exist. I wish I could assist in some way, but you know as well as I that we left everything intact. I appreciate the work you’ve done, obviously your previous skills are convenient in your new position. It was good to hear that Sten found his way home, and that Zev is still alive, and causing trouble for his former friends. I also have some news to share, though knowing your connections, you may already have heard. We have received some information on our lost friends. Cat is currently residing in the Free Marches, having found friends in Kirkwall. We have started writing, and she asked that the others be told so that she may be able to write to everyone._

_Morrigan, on the other hand, still eludes us, though I have found some information. I am looking into it now, and will let you know what I discover. However, I must add that I feel she is simply trying to hide. If her plans were sinister as you fear, I feel we would hear nothing of her._

_I will continue to follow this through, so if you need anything, Alistair and Nathaniel now know everything. Contact them through our usual means, though I would caution to not use your most difficult ciphers, if you want a response that is._

_-Duran_
Leliana sighed again. *Morrigan*, she thought. *A source of contention between her and the Warden even before the blight was ended.*

Though she worried about the witch’s intentions, she knew she could do nothing about it in the meantime, so she focused on the happier news. She had been surprised and delighted to hear that Cat was not only safe, but wanting to stay in touch, and had quickly written a letter to her.

The letter was much longer than her normal notes, but she had known that Cat would want news of everyone. She was now eagerly waiting a response, uncertain of how much Cat would be able to glean from her message.

* * * * *

“This will be the best Satinalia yet!”

Cat glanced over, hearing the child nearby yell out in excitement. Next to her, Aveline chuckled.

“Oh, to be young again,” she murmured with a half smile.

“I don’t know,” Cat answered with a smirk. “though everything was much simpler then, I doubt I’d be smart enough to fix my mistakes if given a second chance.”

Aveline glanced at her. Though she heard her teasing tone, she could feel that she meant her words.

“But, our mistakes make us who we are, do they not?” She responded, seeing Cat nod. They continued on to the next stall, glancing around at the offerings. “Who decided that we were in charge of the food anyway?” she asked suddenly. “I have no idea what we should be getting.”

Cat laughed heartily. “That makes two of us, and I believe it was Leandra. Though, can you imagine any of the others doing this either?”

“I suppose not,” she groused. “We’d end up *drinking* our Satinalia dinner if they were involved.”

“Besides,” Cat added. “We don’t get to spend much time together, just the two of us. This is nice.”

“Speaking of…”

Cat glanced over, noting the uncomfortable expression on Aveline’s face. She smiled, as only one subject ever seemed to give her that look.

“Yeeeees????” she asked playfully.

“Ugh, why do I bother?”

Cat laughed again, enjoying the torment a moment longer then gave in. “What did you want to know?” she asked.

“It’s been a long time… have you… done anything? About him?”

Cat gestured with her head, and they continued to walk, finding a shady place to sit for a few minutes. “Actually I think I’ve successfully gotten him into the friend zone.”
“The what?”

“Oh, um, an expression from back home. Basically where a man, or woman, becomes such a good friend, that you can no longer picture them being anything but a friend.”

“I see… I think.”

She smiled, “well, basically, could you imagine ever being in an intimate situation with… well, any of our friends?”

Aveline’s face twisted, and Cat laughed again. “And if one were to try and flirt with you suddenly, and you had to let him down, you’d probably say something along the line of, I see you as a friend…” she said.

“Ahh…” Aveline’s eyes lit in understanding. “So in order to not have to deal with said man, you’ve worked hard to see him as such a friend, so there will no longer be an issue.”

“Exactly!” Cat grinned.

“Your mind works in such interesting ways,” Aveline commented. “And not just with men,” she added. “Watching you spar with the guards, it is apparent also. I would have thought that eventually you would run out of tricks, yet each time you surprise me with what you come up with.”

“What can I say? I play to win!” Cat said with a grin, though her cheeks were pink at the unexpected compliment.

“And it shows. You would be welcomed in the guard at any time, should you choose to.”

“Thanks Aveline,” Cat said with a smile. She knew what a compliment that was. “It’s nice to have something to fall back on, just in case.” She looked over, and decided now was as good a time as any. “How does your own man troubles fare?” she asked.

“Ugh… I have gotten nowhere,” she replied. “Though now, I worry that perhaps I have put myself into this friend zone, as you say.”

“Even if that were true, that is not always the end,” Cat said. “Some people prefer to have friendship first, and let love grow from that.”

“That… is true…” Aveline said, a new spark of hope on her face.

“Come on,” Cat said as she stood back up. “We’d better get on with this, or no one will be feasting tonight.”

“It’s hard to believe that after all this waiting, Hawke managed to get his family home returned to them,” Aveline commented as they stood, and walked back to the bustling market.

“Yes, Leandra has been almost camped out at the Viscount’s door all of the last month.”

“Sad, that it came down to money, but such is life,” Aveline said.

“It’s a very nice home, though we only managed to get the kitchen and dining room ready.”

“I’m sure Leandra has appreciated your help,” Aveline said. “And the fact that you brought others along.”

“Anders and Olivia knew of several refugees that needed a way to earn some money, so it wasn’t too
difficult. Besides that, it created some good will for the Hawkes. They won’t be seen as all the other rich people in Hightown now.”

“If they continue to spread that good will, they will most likely avoid being the target of thieves as well,” Aveline said with a nod. “Which in turn makes my life easier.”

“Knowing Leandra, she’ll have that house just as she wants it by Wintersend,” Cat said with a smile, and Aveline nodded as they continued to pick out what they needed for their dinner tonight.

* * * * *

Z-

You have been out of touch for some time now, but I am pleased you wrote, as I have been waiting to share that your dove was found. I’m sure she will be excited to see you again.

- L

* * * * *

L-

And you are just now telling me? I must wrap up some business, but am anxious for a reunion! Unless I am needed now? And what about D?

-Z

* * * * *

Z-

It is not time sensitive. He is on a trip, but has already begun correspondence. You can do the same.

- L

* * * * *

Wintermarch 9:33 Dragon

Leliana-

Thank you for writing, and for your concern! I am most pleased that you are well, and while there can be foul days as well as fair, I am more than happy to be where I am. Isabela and I have modest
accommodations, and I deliver medicines for the local healer, in order to provide our living.

I have been blessed by the Maker to have found such a group of friends as these, and surely that must make me twice blessed, since I have also you and the others in Ferelden.

Leli, that’s literally all I can do. If someone is truly reading this letter, they must be bored, for I surely am in the writing of it! I must admit that yours was difficult to get through as well, with all your double meanings- - you my friend, are excellent in saying many things in a single sentence!

I was delighted to receive your letter however, and was hopefully able to glean all from it’s words. You have made me so happy by knowing what is befalling our friends, and was only disappointed in your lack of knowledge concerning Zev. Though, if I interpreted correctly, he is waging war single-handedly from the shadows, so I can hardly complain about the lack of news!

Kirkwall is an interesting and sad city, full of strife and turmoil for most. The mages here are probably the worst treated circle in all of Thedas! And between them pulling at the yoke of the templars, and the Qunari warriors that are stuck here, intimidating and frightening the citizens, daily life can be trying at best.

Through all that, though… I am happy, and I have friends to thank for that. There are so many similarities between this crew and the previous, with close friendships, skilled warriors, and a bond that not many ever have a chance at finding, while I am lucky enough for twice!

While I am lucky to have the little home I do, I have begun searching for bigger accommodations. Isabela has been searching far and wide for a way to purchase a new ship- as we were in a terrible storm and lost the previous one. My job keeps me close to home, and so have found myself alone for almost a year. It is a far cry from having a small room on a ship full of crew, and between the others here and the letters, I have staved off most of the loneliness.

I can’t say that I am not busy however, by spending time with all those I care about here, I find myself training and sparring several hours of each day, working on my literary skills (hopefully there are not many mistakes and this is legible!), or helping in the clinic, (two friends remind me much of Wynne and her desire to help others with her healing skills). I think even you would be surprised at the group of friends I have managed to find here- believe me… it rivals our own in diversity.

There is so much I want to tell you that cannot fit into a letter, but hopefully at some point we will see each other again, and be able to share the adventures we had had since our parting. Stay safe my friend, and be happy.

- Cat

* * * * *

Cat moaned, laying her head on the table in the tavern, and instantly regretting it. Who knew what was on here?

“Cat?”

She raised her head, and glanced with a weary look over at Varric.

“You okay there, little dove?” he asked.
“Just tired,” she replied, as Fenris walked over and sat across from her, sliding the drink he had gotten her over.

“Do not think that will get you out of training tomorrow,” he said in a quiet voice, and she rolled her eyes at his teasing.

“Not that kind of tired, though do not mistake, I could easily go to bed right now…” she broke off and took a drink of her wine, and then sighed. “It’s this blasted city. I feel like I can’t go anywhere without hearing about mages and templars, or Qunari! And no one is trying to make anything better, they just want to push their own opinions at me!”

Fenris and Varric exchanged a look at her outburst. “What happened? This just isn’t like you,” Fenris asked.

“Sorry,” she replied, deflated a little. “It just has seemed to be piling on and adding up. Between Anders and Olivia, trying to convince me of their views, Cullen has been more and more vocal of his stance, and we can’t have a visit without hearing about the dangers of mages and magic. And now Sebastian took me to meet the Grand Cleric, and all everyone in the chantry talked of was mages and Qunari. I even saw that horrible sister that tricked us into taking Ketojan out of the city. Needless to say, it was not a pleasant experience.”

“Sounds pretty awful all right,” Varric agreed. “But it sounds to me like you need a subject change.”

“Yes, please,” Cat replied with a small smile, taking another sip of her drink. She glanced at Fenris, pointedly looking between her small glass, and the bottle he had brought back for himself.

“What?” he asked with a smirk. “I’m thirstier than you are.”

She rolled her eyes, as Varric turned and started a conversation about money. He was continuing to hold a good sum for her, re-investing and making it even larger, and she had yet to decide what to do with it.

“You’re not Hawke rich, but you have a good sized amount,” Varric continued. “Have you given any thought to what you want to do with it?” he asked her.

“Some, yes,” she replied. “At some point I want to find a bigger home, but I’ve been waiting for Issy to return to talk about it. I know she’s partial to Lowtown, which is fine with me, but we’re getting to the point where we can no longer fit in the shack.”

He nodded, “I thought you were going to speak with her last time she came back,” he said.

“I was, yes, but she wasn’t here very long at all, and spent most of the time here drinking, or with Hawke.”

“Yeah,” he replied. “He told me after that he had helped her run down a few leads that were avoiding her.”

Cat rolled her eyes again. “Maker forbid she let me help,” she grumbled. The two gave her looks of sympathy, but said nothing, so she returned to the original topic. “Otherwise I have been thinking of helping those who have helped me… investing in either the Rose, or the clinic… or both.”

Varric nodded. “Though I wouldn’t suggest putting all of it in, the Rose would be a good investment. Low costs, high profits… definitely a good choice. The clinic however, would be considered a charity rather than an investment. They don’t get paid after all.”

“True,” she agreed. “But they do take in money for the medicines we deliver to the Rose… perhaps
we can offer other varieties at the clinic for purchase or something. After all, it would help the overall condition of the area if the people were healthier.”

“Letting people know that such things are readily available at the clinic would cause more thieves to present themselves, as well as the likelihood of the templars finding out about the healers there,” Fenris commented.

“He’s right, I’m afraid, but I wouldn’t discount the idea. It may be something to speak to the Madam of the Rose about. After all, she already offers drinks in her establishment,” Varric added.

“Hmm,” she mused at the thought. “Perhaps I’ll speak to Anders first to get an idea of what could be offered.”

“Good plan,” Varric agreed, and quickly changed the subject to his new favorite, asking Cat to tell him another story.

* * * * *

“Good morning Cat,” Leandra said as she opened the door.

“Good morning, Lady Hawke.”

“Catarina, what have we agreed on?”

“Good morning, Leandra,” Cat amended with a shrug.

“That’s better,” the older woman opened the door wider, and gestured her inside the mansion.

“It’s really coming together,” Cat complimented as she looked up at the newest addition of a large chandelier in the front room.

“Yes, I could not be happier,” Leandra said with a smile. “Garrett has been too good to me, putting up with all my ideas for this place.

“You deserve nothing but the best,” Hawke said, joining the conversation as he entered the room. He looked at Cat with a smile, and bellowed out, “HAFTER!!”

The barking in reply was excited, as the mabari raced down the stairs, and practically took Cat down in trying to jump up to lick her face, causing her to laugh.

“Down boy!” Cat managed to get out in between laughs. Hafter then rolled onto his back, wanting to complete the ritual with a belly rub, which Cat didn’t deny him.

“You know, I’m starting to think that Hafter is your mabari, and I just let him stay here,” Hawke said with a smirk.

Leandra joined in Cat’s laughter as Hafter took offense to the comment, and jumped on Hawke, licking wherever he could.

“Hafter… no!” Hawke said, trying in vain to not get roped into another wrestling match. Finally he conceded defeat, by saying, “Is this how he helps you defeat the guards?” to Cat.
“Almost,” Cat agreed. “They are all his giant chew toys,” she added with a snicker as Hafter stood proudly with his tongue lolling out of his mouth. “I just help round them up.”

“He’d go everyday if you’d let him,” Hawke said, meeting her eyes.

“While I’m sure he’d love it, Aveline wouldn’t be as happy,” she said walking over to pet Hafter’s head. “The guards need a few days to recuperate in between beat downs.”

Leandra smiled as she watched the two of them, glad that Garrett had such good friends. She knew she had been on her way to being a sour woman with all the tragedy that they had gone through, and the shock of seeing those same habits in Garrett after he returned home had awoken something within her.

Since that Satinalia, when she demanded that he bring all his friends over for dinner, and had seen the difference in him when they were around, she couldn’t help but feel that they were the Hawke family’s road to recovery. No longer as worried about Garrett, she turned her attention to Gamlen, knowing he would be a much harder egg to crack.

He gaze sharpened as she watched Garrett reach out and tuck a stray lock of hair behind Cat’s ear. They are standing very close… she thought with an eyebrow winging up.

* * * * *

After dropping Hafter back at home, Cat went to visit the clinic. She grinned as she thought of Anders and Olivia, and how different they were, yet how they worked so well together. Though he could act like a father at times, Cat could see how happy Anders was to be helping a fellow mage in staying out of the circle.

“Anyone home?” she called out as she entered the clinic.

“Cat!” Olivia called out happily as she came out of her curtained off room. She came forward for a hug. “You just missed him, he went out for more herbs.”

“Oh no,” Cat said sarcastically. “Whatever will we do with ourselves?”

Olivia laughed, and linked her arm with Cat’s. “Come in, come in! Do you want some tea?” she asked with a laugh.

“We can hardly sit and visit without tea,” Cat added with a wink. “Well sit down then, and we’ll get started.”

Cat had enjoyed the visit immensely. Olivia was just as involved now with the mage underground as Anders was, but didn’t feel the need to bring the subject up, instead wanting to hear about the others and their adventures.

Cat grinned as she remembered Olivia’s blush as she later asked about men. She hadn’t been ready to talk yet, but Cat could tell she had her eye on someone. She snickered to herself as she thought of what Anders’ face would look like when he found out, since he seemed to view Olivia as a young girl most of the time.
At that thought, her smile disappeared. She truly hoped it wasn’t Anders that struck Olivia’s fancy… If she knew anything, she knew he didn’t see her like that, and didn’t think that would turn out well for her.

Over the next few visits, Cat continued to question Olivia, hoping that she could get a clue of the man she was thinking of, so that she would know what to say. But all she could glean from the younger woman was that the man was very handsome, a mage, older… and wanted to help other mages. She worried so much, that she finally came out and asked.

“Olivia… is… is it Anders?”

Olivia’s eyes grew wide, before she threw back her head and laughed. Cat felt a wave of relief before she joined in.

“I can’t believe you just asked me that!” Olivia said with a snicker.

“Well, it’s not like you gave such good clues!” Cat defended herself. “A mage… older than you, likes to help other mages, good looking… what was I supposed to think?!”

“Plenty of people fit that description!” Olivia protested with a smile.

“Uh-huh… and how many do you spend time with?” Cat countered.

Anders chose that moment to walk into the clinic, seeing Olivia and Cat look over at him and burst into laughter. He frowned, looking down at his clothes and touching his hair, wondering what could possibly have set them off.

* * * * *

It was another week before Isabela returned, surprised that Cat wasn’t home when she got there late that night. Weary from her travels, she flopped onto her bed, wondering where Cat was before she sank into oblivion.

The next thing she knew, she was rudely awakened by a boulder falling on her. She wheezed as she lurched up, blearily blinking away the sleep and focusing on the rock laying on top of her.

“Kitty?” she asked.

“I’m so glad you’re back!!” Cat exclaimed, though it was garbled since her face was pressed to Isabela’s stomach. She lifted her head, “please please please! Tell me you’re done with all this leaving me behind!”

Isabela smirked. “It wasn’t like you could just drop everything and come with me,” she said.

“I would have, if you needed me,” Cat replied with a grin, but Isabela could tell her words were serious.

“I know,” she said, then pushed Cat off her to stand. “So is there food, or should we go out?”

“That depends,” Cat said from her seat on the floor.

“One?”
“How long are you staying this time?”

“I’m all out of leads,” Isabela said smirking, though Cat could tell she was upset about it. “I’ll have to just keep my ear to the ground until I find another.”

Cat whooped for joy, and scrambled to her feet. “Then we’re going!” she said happily. “My treat!” Isabela’s face lit, and Cat hastily added, “on food.” She laughed as Isabela’s face fell.

They lingered over a small breakfast from the market stalls, enjoying the sunshine, and telling each other of what they did during their time apart. It didn’t last long, as Cat’s routine was pretty similar from week to week, and Isabela didn’t go into detail about her own. But she begged for details of the men in Cat’s life, and with a laugh, Cat told her all about her friends.

Cat then brought up the housing situation, unsurprised when Isabela mentioned staying in Lowtown, or even perhaps in the Hanged Man itself, after all, Varric did.

Cat rolled her eyes at the thought, but wondered where in Lowtown she could find a better place. She had been looking after all, but any place that wasn’t run down, was already occupied, and she didn’t want to simply rent a room any longer.

She told Isabela of the Wardens, and how she had received a letter from first Duran, which led to continued correspondence with the Wardens as well as others in Ferelden. True, mostly she wrote to Leliana, but it was almost as if Leliana were the hub that all messages went to, and she in turn sent them out again, so that all were kept in the loop of what was happening with the others.

She had gotten letters that described Wynne’s time with Shale and Carridin, some describing what she already knew of the Qunari’s Arishok in Kirkwall, several death notices of prominent people in Antiva, as well as a search for answers about Morrigan’s location. The Wardens were extremely tight lipped, but every now and then she would get information of darkspawn raids in random areas of Ferelden, which she would share with Hawke, so he had some idea of where his brother might be.

"Where were you last night?" Isabela asked suddenly, and Cat was brought out of her thoughts.

"Huh?"

"Last night?" Isabela asked. "I got back pretty late..."

"Oh, at Fenris’ place."

"Really?" Isabela asked with a sly smile.

"You know it's not like that. I stay in the guest bedroom sometimes, when we stay up too late working on our reading."

"I wasn't aware there was a guest bedroom..." Isabela drawled.

"Yeah, well, I made one. Fenris kept giving me the bed and sleeping in a chair, or on the floor."

Isabela smirked, but couldn't tease too much, she knew their relationship was platonic after all, though it still grieved her. Fenris was practically perfect for Kitty, she thought.

“So,” Cat asked. “How’s Hawke?”

Isabela looked over in question. “Shouldn’t I be asking you that?”

“Huh?” Cat asked. “Why would you?”
“Shouldn't you know?” Isabela countered. “I just got back.”

“Oh!” Cat laughed as she realized the misunderstanding. “Yeah, Hawke’s fine. But I meant, you know… how are things going with him…”

Isabela snorted. “You know Kitty… men are only good for one of three things.”

“Three?” Cat asked. “I figured for sure you were going to say only one.”

She laughed but continued. “One- sex, of course.”

“Of course.”

“Two- companionship. Not my favorite, but there you are.”

Cat snickered.

“And three- all the other stuff, like getting information, or being a part of your crew, or your friend… whatever.”

“Right. And the point?” Cat asked.

“The point is, sometimes, it takes awhile to figure out which one. Sometimes, the man decides he wants companionship where you only want sex… or in your case, flip those,” she said with a smirk. “If you’re not sure which one the guy is good for, you end up getting hurt.”

“And you don’t know which one Hawke is?” Cat guessed.

“Not yet,” Isabela said. “But I’ll find out before I let anything happen,” she said as she glanced protectively at her friend.
“I’m glad I caught you two,” Hawke said as Cat and Isabela crossed paths with him in front of the Hanged Man. “I’m heading out to collect everyone, we have a lot to talk about.”

“I don’t know…” Cat said, causing Hawke to look at her in confusion. “Last time you told me we were all meeting, no one showed up,” she added with a teasing smile.

Hawke searched his memory, and finally understood as he remembered several weeks ago coming to her house. He grinned as he remembered the look on her face when she realized how little she was wearing when she opened the door.

“Any way….” Cat said, remembering the exact same moment, but in utter embarrassment. Isabela gave her a questioning look, and she quickly shook her head.

“Yes well, sorry about that. Right after I saw you, I was dragged off by Bodahn for some unruly visitors at home. I had forgotten that I even told anyone, so I just figured I would try again another time,” Hawke explained. “And that is today. Give me and hour or so, and I’ll have everyone there,” he said with a small wave and headed off.

“Need help?” Cat called after him.

“No!” He replied without turning back.

“Well, plenty of time to find out what that blush was all about then,” Isabela said, opening the door to let Cat in first.

“You probably would have done it on purpose, and definitely wouldn’t have been embarrassed,” Cat muttered as she walked in.

Isabela laughed. “Oh Kitty, that covers so many things!” she said, pulling her by the arm over towards their usual spot.

* * * * *

“All right everyone, here is what happened,” Hawke said, getting their attention. He looked up and down the table, seeing each of his friends looking at him expectantly. “I was called into the viscount’s office the other day,” he began. “He wanted to talk to me about the Qunari.”

“Why?” Aveline voiced, though there were looks and whispers aplenty among the others.
“Apparently, we made a good impression on the Arishok.”

Cat and Isabela glanced at each other, then over to Fenris as he spoke up.

“It is not surprising,” he said, looking down at his drink. “We’ve had several skirmishes with his warriors now, and come out the victors each time. The Qunari appreciate strength and skill.”

“I suppose,” Hawke agreed. “He definitely wants nothing to do with the Viscount. In fact Dumar stated that his own diplomats have been all turned away by the Qunari.”

“Could be they don’t want to negotiate anything,” Isabela muttered. “Are we really buying that they are waiting for a ship?” she asked, a little louder so everyone could hear. “They could have built several and been home by now.”

“I think we all agree that there is something else going on,” Hawke grimly. “And apparently I was selected as the go between for the Qunari and the city. I need to go see the Arishok tomorrow, and I was hoping some of you would come with me.”

Isabela sat back with a frown, her arms crossed. That’s a no, Cat thought. Although I am curious, I shouldn’t go either. I have no idea if they know about me, that I was part of the crew of the Siren’s Call…

“Cat?”

Cat glanced up, seeing Hawke looking at her. “I’d rather not,” she said quietly. “Unless you need me there.”

Hawke smiled gently, “I think we have enough of us going, you don’t need to worry.”

“Thanks.”

“So,” he said louder, obviously including everyone. “Does anyone else have anything that needs doing?” They all glanced around at each other. “If not, I have a few more things.”

“Of course…” Varric teased, even as he got out his quill and ink.

“I’ve gotten a few letters,” Hawke said as he pulled out his own parchment full of notes. “First, from Feynriel. It seems that he’s been having a bit of trouble, and is not finding any solutions among the Dalish. I’m not certain how we can help, but perhaps just a visit will do.”

“Oh!” Merrill said loudly, causing Hawke to pause and everyone to look at her. “I… uh, would like to go, if you are going to go to the Dalish that is…” she said with a smile. “It won’t be pleasant, and I most likely won’t be welcomed, but, if I could talk to the Keeper, it would help.”

Hawke looked confused, in fact, Cat assumed she was the only one who understood what Merrill was requesting.

“I’m sure that won’t be a problem, Merrill,” Cat said with a smile.

”Thank you Cat.”

“Yes, all right then,” Hawke said as he nodded to Varric to make a note. “I also received a message from the Prince of Starkhaven. If you remember, we helped him wipe out those that murdered his family. It seems he has some new information, and would like our help once again.”

“Definitely,” Cat said.
“Cat’s become friends with him, while we were gone,” Varric said in answer to Hawke’s questioning look. He looked over to Cat, who nodded, and he looked annoyed for a moment before continuing.

“I would agree, as part of the Chantry, he doesn’t have anyone else to assist him in this.”

Hawke continued to speak, but Cat wasn’t listening as he pushed a piece of parchment in front of her. She glanced down and saw that it was a letter. Seeing who it was from, she started reading it intently, excited to hear from her.

She obviously was planning on never seeing Cat again, as she had asked Hawke to give her apologies and farewells. But she seemed in a better place, emotionally if not in actuality. She looked up as a few of her friends started standing up. She glanced over wondering if they were taking a break, or if they were done for today.

“Well?” Hawke asked, bringing her attention back to him. “What do you think?”

“First off, thank you for letting me read this. It’s not what I would have hoped for, but closure is good all the same. I had wondered where she went, so it’s nice to hear from her. At least I know she’s okay.”

“And the fact that she tried to kill you?” he asked skeptically.

“Idunna was my friend,” Cat said simply. “And as you well know, if she had actually tried, I’d be dead.”

“And what about these tomes she spoke of?” he asked.

“Idunna never mentioned it to me,” she said, thinking that she wasn’t exactly lying… “but I believe it. We should definitely keep our eyes out for them, and destroy them.”

“All right,” he said, making another note on his list. “It seems we will be pretty busy for the foreseeable future.”

“Oh?” she asked. “That didn’t seem like that long of a list to me.”

“Well, you did miss a few things there, at the end. Besides, if the looks I got from Varric, Aveline, and Isabela were any indication, I’ll bet they have something to add to it, that they didn’t want to talk about in front of everyone.”

“Hmm.”

“What about you?”

“Huh? What about me?” she asked.

“Do you have anything to add? Or something you want to talk about privately with me?” he asked as he winked at her.

She rolled her eyes at him. “Nah,” she said. “Just along for the ride.”

* * * *
Varric turned and nudged Isabela again. “You shouldn’t spend all your money Rivaini, you’ll owe me a few sovereigns before long.”

“Keep dreaming Varric,” she answered, following his gaze over to where Hawke and Cat were talking. “You are seeing something that isn’t there.”

“She makes him happy,” Fenris added, as he leaned on the bar. “But she has told me she isn’t interested in anyone.”

“You know she would be mortified to know what we are discussing, right?” Anders chimed in as he joined them. “Not to mention if she knew you two had a wager.”

“It isn’t what you might think,” Varric answered with a smile as he brought his mug up to his mouth.

“We don’t really know where any of this is going, or even if it will,” Isabela explained. “Varric seems to think that they are headed for a storybook romance, and soon.”

“Two years ago, I might have agreed with you,” Anders replied, as he too looked over at his friends. “But Cat has successfully befriended every man even slightly interested in her. At this rate, I’m surprised that Hawke isn’t already there as well.”

“Are you certain you even see something?” Fenris asked Varric. “Cat looks just as she would if she were speaking to any of us.”

“Perhaps he merely wants to have fun with her,” Isabela said, causing all three of the others to scowl.

“Rivaini, don’t spoil the moment,” Varric groused.

“Hawke would regret that, very much, if it were true,” Fenris grumbled, and Anders nodded in agreement.

Isabela laughed jovially. “You three, if I didn’t know better, I’d think you were jealous! Yes, yes,” she said, as they all looked ready to object. “I know, you’re just looking out for her. You’re not the only ones,” she added.

“Oh?” Varric asked with a smirk.

“I haven’t missed the way he looks at her,” she said, nodding in their direction. “I’m just not certain if it is a good thing or not.”

* * * *

“Oh, come in, Aveline! It’s so good to see you again!”

“Thank you, Leandra, how are you?” Aveline asked as she stepped into Hawke’s home. They had come a long way, in such a short amount of time, and as she followed Leandra into her home, she gazed around in amazement. “It looks wonderful,” she said genuinely.

Leandra’s quiet, lady-like laugh, echoed through the large room. “Thank you, that’s very kind, though I cannot take the credit. This is all Garrett’s doing.”

“ Mostly luck,” Hawke added, as he stood above them on the balcony.
"Indeed," Aveline agreed with a small smile. "Still, more work never hurt, right?"

Hawke smiled back, and started down the stairs toward them. "What do you need, Aveline?" he asked.

"Remember Emerie?" she asked, and he shook his head. "Oh that’s right, you didn’t ever meet him. Well, he’s more than aware of you, and insists that he speak to you about the missing women from a few years ago."

Hawke just looked confused, so she explained. "He’s the templar that gave the clues that led us to the foundry where that necromancer was," she said, watching the understanding dawn on him. "He’s convinced that the killer is still on the loose, and I couldn’t exactly tell him that I was there when the bastard was killed, pardon me Leandra," she said in excuse for her language, which Leandra simply waved away.

"So what does he want from me?" Hawke asked, incredulous.

"An ear, I suppose," she answered. "If he has any worthwhile information, then I’ll pick it up, but right now, I simply don’t have the time, and he refuses to talk to anyone other than you or me."

"All right, I guess I can do that," Hawke replied. "For a friend."

"Thanks Hawke," she replied.

"Speaking of friends," Leandra said, gaining their attention. "Aveline, do you have a few minutes to tell me more about Cat?"

"What?" Aveline asked, looking from Leandra to Hawke and back.

"Garrett tells me all about his group of friends, except for Cat, and I admit, I’m very curious."

"Mother…" Hawke said in exasperation. Aveline smiled, as it was obvious that she had asked repeatedly.

"What? I simply want to know your friends better," she said with an innocent look that made Aveline snicker. "And your apparent lack of information leads me to wonder what it is you are wanting to hide?"

"I would be happy to tell you more about her, though I am sure that just inviting her over would do the trick as well," Aveline commented, seeing Leandra’s face light with excitement, as Hawke glared at her. "What?" she muttered quietly.

"That is a wonderful idea," Leandra said. "Now that the house is completed, we’ll have to celebrate and invite all of your friends over, Garrett."

"Of course, Mother."

Aveline shook her head, as Leandra left them, murmuring plans for her newest idea. She turned to smirk at Hawke.

"That was fun," she said, and he glowered at her.

"Yes, thank you for that."

"Oh come on, it’s nothing," she said. "Just tell Cat about it, and you’ll both have a good laugh. Remember when she tried to do the same with Cat and Carver?"
“It’s different…” Hawke ground out through clenched teeth.

Aveline then noticed how uncomfortable her friend was, and eased back. “Obviously this is truly upsetting you, but I am at a loss as to why.”

Hawke sighed and rolled his eyes. “Because.”

“Very succinct,” she replied. “You can’t help the ideas your mother gets, and Cat will understand. The only reason you’d be upset is if-”

Hawke looked over at her, his arms crossed in front of him. “If?” he asked, eyes narrowing.

“Hawke…” she started, looking much more solemn. “Do you…? I mean, you and Cat?”

“Was that supposed to be a question?” he asked sarcastically.

“Oh, Maker, you do!” Aveline said with wide eyes. “How did I not see this?” she asked herself. “How did none of us see this?” She glanced back up at him. “And?”

“And what??” he asked, aggravated.

“And what have you done about it?” she demanded. “In case you are not aware, our Cat is a most sought after commodity.”

“Believe me, I’ve noticed,” he groused.

“So…?”

“So nothing.”

“Hawke. I’m not one to pry, but just as Cat was saying the other day, you may find yourself in the friend zone.”

“What?” he asked, confused. Aveline tried to explain it as well as Cat had, but felt she probably didn’t do it justice.

“The point is, you do not want to wait too long. What if Cat has already decided you are just a friend?” She looked away and muttered, “it seems as if she enjoys doing so.”

“Look, Aveline, I’m not even sure what it is I want. She’s beautiful, yes. Fun to be around, and all. But it is not like I want to court her. I’m not looking for marriage here.”

Aveline’s eyes narrowed this time. “What are you looking for then?”

“I don’t know!”

Aveline rolled her eyes. “Get it together Garrett. If all you’re wanting is a night of pleasure, may I suggest the brothel.”

“That’s not what I meant.”

“I should hope not.”

* * * * *
No one mentioned the change to either Hawke or Cat, but they most definitely mentioned it to each other. They couldn’t quite hide their smirks and smiles as Garrett flirted excessively with Cat, who was completely ignorant of what it meant.

Cat, for her part, didn’t see any difference between flirting with Hawke, or flirting with Fenris or Anders. It was fun, and harmless, so why not?

Isabela, after hearing about Aveline’s talk with Hawke, became more concerned then before, worried that perhaps she hadn’t done all she could to ensure her friend wouldn’t be hurt. She was responsible for Cat after all.

The others weren’t worried, in fact, they were silently cheering them on, but Isabela kept a close watch on Hawke, concerned for the moment when Cat would finally understand.

Several days later, most of the group was in the Hanged Man, spending a rainy with each other in Varric’s room. Cat was writing letters to her friends in Ferelden, and talking with Isabela about Zevran’s campaign against his former guild.

Varric had several of the others in a game of Wicked Grace, though they never seemed to make it very far, with Merrill constantly giving away her cards by asking what they meant, or if she had a good hand.

Anders and Olivia joined them later, walking in and shaking out their clothes. “Wow, that storm just came out of nowhere!” Olivia exclaimed, and Cat’s eyes darted over, and then to the window. “Storm?” she asked fearfully.

“Yes,” Anders agreed. “Nothing like earlier. It’s already raining heavily, and it just started a minute ago. With the way the clouds looked, I’m sure we’ll have a grand storm.”

Cat whimpered quietly, turning to Isabela with wide eyes full of fear. Ever since the storm that had destroyed their ship, Cat had absolutely hated storms, whereas before they were something she enjoyed to witness. Now, they brought back memories of chaos and destruction, and her personal fight for survival.

She ignored it as best she could, trying to act as the others were, but deep down she was quivering.

“It’s all right Kitty,” Isabela murmured in her ear, rubbing circles on her back. Cat nodded, trying not to flinch as the lighting lit up the room, and the thunder boomed across the sky.

*I’m fine, I’m fine*… she chanted to herself, focusing on anything, anything other than the storm around her. She tried closing her eyes, but saw the blackness of the ocean as she had jumped in, and she could feel her breathing quicken.

“Stay calm, deep breaths,” Isabela murmured, though it wasn’t working. She knew the others were looking at her in concern, but she couldn’t keep her mind on them, it kept returning to her memories, the faces, the screams of the crew, she and Issy, jumping into the water and becoming separated.

She did her best not to panic, and her anxiety increased as she couldn’t seem to succeed.

* * * * *
Hawke opened the door, letting his mother into the house before him.

“Thank you son, I appreciate you spending the day with me,” she said.

“Any time, Mother,” he replied. “I’m just glad we finished before the rain really started.”

“You and your friends don’t have plans tonight?” she asked.


“I’m glad you won’t be out then,” she said, as she started putting her newest purchases away. “That little shower is turning into quite the storm, and quickly.”

“What?” he asked, as he heard the thunder. Racing back over to the door, he threw it open, and looked to the sky.

“We have these types of storms so rarely, it always takes me by surprise,” she said as she walked over. “It’s as if all of nature were angry.”

“I have to go, Mother.”

“What?” Leandra looked up in shock as he ran out into the storm. “Garrett!!”

Everyone except for Cat looked up as the door banged open. Hawke disregarded everyone as he strode over to Cat, not caring that he was soaked, though she probably would. He plucked her up from her seat, and carried her around the table to the fireplace. Sitting down on the floor, with Cat in his lap, he held her as she shook.

“I’ve got you,” he whispered to her. “You are safe.”

She shuddered, but started breathing deeper. He continued to ignore the others as he spoke to her, running his hands over her hair, or her back, helping to keep her anchored to where she was, and not in the past.

“Do you think they even know we are here?” Varric asked quietly as they all stared unabashedly at them.

“They look so good together,” Merrill sighed happily.

“Rivaini?” Varric asked. “You’re awfully quiet.”

Isabela glanced over, before looking back to the pair in front of the fire. “I didn’t think he would remember,” she said. “It was back when we first met, he had come over to discuss something, and ended up staying, waiting for an awful storm to blow over. Cat was a wreck, worse than now,” she paused, caught up in the memory. “Nothing we did could get her to calm down, all the horrible memories from the shipwreck, and Hawke finally just grabbed onto her, and wouldn’t let go. And
miraculously, it worked.”

They all turned back to Cat, noticing that she was breathing normally again. It seemed Hawke had known what to do after all.

“So, he ran through the storm to find her?” Olivia said quietly. “Knowing she was scared? That’s…. really romantic.”

“Yeah,” Merrill agreed with a sigh.

They continued to watch as Hawke ran his hand over and over through Cat’s hair, calming her with his touch. And they watched as she finally turned to look into his eyes, all staring at them as they stared at each other. Not wanting to ruin the moment, they stayed quietly at the other end of the room, now looking down at the table or each other as they tried to give some semblance of privacy.

* * * * *

“You… you came for me?” Cat asked quietly.

“Of course,” Hawke replied, tucking a lock of hair behind her ear.

“You’re all wet,” she said, as she finally noticed, and he chuckled.

“Running through a storm will do that,” he said.

“But… why?” she asked.

He gazed at her, uncertain himself, but the words tumbled out anyway. “I would do anything for you.”

Cat’s mouth dropped open slightly, shocked at his words.

“I can’t stop thinking about you,” he murmured softly, coming closer, pulling her hair out of the last of its braid so it tumbled over her shoulders. “I want to be with you all the time… I just… want you. In my arms… in my bed…”

Cat’s eyes fluttered, she wanted to close them and revel in the feeling, but she wanted to continue to look into his. She wasn’t even remotely prepared for this, and her thoughts all jumbled together. But then, her mind finally understood what he had just said.

“Wait… what?” she asked, pulling back a little.

“Let’s stop playing games,” Hawke murmured, as he leaned forward.

Cat was alert now, and she backed up even more. “Who’s playing?” she asked quietly, aware of the others in the room.

“I’m not like the others, I don’t need that innocent routine,” he said, which had her looking at him in confusion. *The others wanted something innocent?* She thought. *That doesn’t make any sense.*

“What are you talking about?” she whispered.
“I’m saying,” he replied, just as quietly. “I want you, no matter what you used to do, or how many men, or women, you’ve been with.” He looked at her, confused. “Why that look?” he asked, forgetting to be quiet as he saw her upset. “I’m telling you, I don’t care about the past.”

She didn’t speak as she stood up, and Hawke, unsure of what was happening, helped her do so, standing after she was up.

“Is it the money?” he asked. “I know you lost your job because of me… I’ll pay you, whatever you want.” He turned to the others as he heard several gasps. “What? None of you want her going back to that life anyway, do you??”

Cat stood there motionless, all the earlier warmth replaced with cold.

“Cat?” “Kitty?” “Little Dove?” she could hear them ask, but she just stared at the floor. *So this is what he thought of her.*

“Cat?!” Hawke demanded, grabbing her arm, and she finally looked up. “I don’t understand,” he said.

“I’m trying very hard not to hold that against you,” she replied as her eyes filled.

“Hawke…” Varric started, but was cut off by Fenris standing up. He walked over to Cat, and grabbed hold of Hawke’s hand, causing him to release her. Then he reared back and punched him in the face.

“Maker’s breath…” Anders said under his breath.

Hawke fell to the ground, not expecting to be hit, and he scrambled back up, seeing Fenris leading Cat out of the room. “Wait! Cat!” He started to follow, but found everyone in the room standing suddenly in front of him, blocking his way.

Isabela sighed. She knew he would hurt her, she just hadn’t known it would be before they even started. “Sit down, Hawke,” she said.

His eyes flashed in anger as he turned to her. “What? No! I need to go after her, I need to fix this!”

“SIT! DOWN!!” She had yelled it, but apparently so had a few others, and the force of it caused Hawke to step back in shock. He looked from face to face, seeing the hurt, the anger, and the disappointment on each of them.

“I don’t understand,” he said miserably.

* * * * *

“Where are we going?”

“I’m taking you home,” Fenris answered, and it took a few minutes for her to realize he meant his home, as they headed toward Hightown.

“Do you want to talk about it?” he asked quietly, and Cat sighed.

“You shouldn’t have punched him, though a small part of me is glad you did.”
He smirked, but didn’t look at her, and she was glad. It somehow made it easier to speak if he wasn’t focused on her.

“He deserved it.”

“Did he though?” she asked, feeling awful. “I remember everyone was under the same impression at one point.”

“And yet we all came to the same conclusion, except for Hawke.”

“Yes, but to be fair, it’s not like we’ve spent time together as I have with everyone else. He doesn’t know me as well as you or Anders do. Besides, he’s got a lot on his mind.”

Fenris sighed, shaking his head. “How like you, to defend him. The man was trying to take you to bed, Cat.”

Cat flushed. “You heard that?” she squeaked.

He nodded, his jaw tense. “We were mere feet away, it was hard to miss.”

“Maker’s balls!” she swore, rubbing her eyes. “This keeps getting better and better.”

* * * * *

“What is there to understand?!” Anders exclaimed, while Olivia tried to hush him. “You just tried to seduce Cat- the most innocent girl we all know- and then offered to PAY HER FOR IT?!”

“No, I mean… that’s not what I meant,” Hawke said, obviously unhappy and still confused.

“What did you mean?” Merrill asked, giving him a smile. She was always one to see the best in people, Hawke thought.

“I was there, when that Madame at the Rose told her she no longer had her job. Cat was very strong, and made it look like she was fine, but even with her making deliveries now, there’s no way she’s making what she used to,” he explained. “It was because of me, always having jobs, and wanting her to join… so now that I have the money, I wanted to help her out.”

“Hawke…” Varric said as he slapped a hand to his own forehead.

“What?!” Hawke demanded.

“She didn’t act fine, she was fine,” Isabela said harshly. “She’s making more now than she ever did there.”

“Wha-” Hawke started. “But how?” he asked. “She’s beautiful and somehow keeps her innocence no matter how many clients she has had.” A thought came suddenly and he snarled. “Did that woman not give her the money she earned?!”

Varric hit his forehead again, not understanding how this wasn’t sinking in. Isabela, too, had had enough, and she leaned forward putting her hands on the table on either side of Hawke and getting up in his face.
“She didn’t have…any…clients.” she said quietly. “Yes, she worked at the Rose. She went in late at night and cleaned up the rooms of the workers. She made friends with them, though eventually the Madame had her train her own replacements.”

Hawke’s eyes were like saucers as her words hit him. “But-”

“And yes,” she continued, not allowing him to interrupt. “she was offered several times to be one of the whores, but she wouldn’t. However when the Madame asked her to not deny working there in order to bring more clients in- in a vain attempt to be with her- she didn’t refuse, because she wanted to help the woman who gave her a job.”

“Maker’s Breath!” Hawke groaned, letting his head fall into his hands, narrowly avoiding hitting Isabela in the process. She stood back up, still angry, but she could feel herself softening.

“Come on Hawke,” she said, grabbing his arm, and helping him to his feet. “I think you need a drink.”

“Or twenty,” he mumbled, and she smirked slightly. She knew he hadn’t meant to hurt Cat, but it had happened all the same.

“Obviously, you knew the entire time,” Hawke said, and Isabela nodded. He turned to look behind him. “But it seems I’m the only one who was unaware… so how did you know?” he asked the group behind him, as they followed him out.

“We asked,” Varric said, and the others nodded along, looking at him in sympathy. He supposed it was better than the anger, but didn’t help him feel better.
He stopped after his fifth drink, but only because it wasn’t helping. He had to go see the Arishok tomorrow, and if he couldn’t get blind drunk, then what was the point in drinking? Isabela seemed to have no such qualms, and while he could admit that his vision was a little blurry, he doubted the way she swayed on her feet was due to his eyes.

He had to admit, however, that she was either an extremely functional drunk, or could hold her liquor better than he.

“Come on handsome, I should help you get home,” he heard, and turning, looked into Isabela’s eyes… all four of them?

“Ugh… Arishok… don’t want to…” Hawke mumbled, which had Isabela making a tsk noise at him.

“Well, that’s what you get for being so responsible all the time,” she said, pulling up on his arm, and placing it around her shoulders. He grabbed at his mug, downing the contents before she could, and then allowing her to help him stand.

“How are you sweet thing?” she asked, and it took him a few moments to realize she was speaking to him.

“Feel awful,” he replied, his head hanging down, and wincing as she laughed.

“How are you sweet thing?” she asked, and it took him a few moments to realize she was speaking to him.

“From the drink, or the day?” she asked.

“Yes,” he replied, and glowered at her when she laughed again. Soon they were out of the tavern, and she started leading him away. Once he finally caught on as to where she was headed, he pulled them to a stop.

“No,” he said. “Mother can’t see me… like this. I’ll… uh, stay with Varric.”

Isabela cocked an eyebrow at him. “I know a lie when I hear one. You asked me to stop you before you were drunk, and I did. Taking you back to the Hanged Man would be breaking my word.”

“I forgive you, now take me back.”

“Sorry handsome, but I guess you can crash at my place tonight.”

He stared at her, aghast. “But… Cat… no, I need to apologize, but not like this!” he wailed dramatically, and Isabela thought he would be a very entertaining drunk.

“Kitty’s not home,” she said as she led him to the shack. “She’s staying with Fenris.”

“How do you know?” he asked.
“She usually does,” she answered, and bit her lip so as not to laugh at his thunderous expression.

She opened the door and led him inside, helping him over to Cat’s bed, and unceremoniously dumped him on it. She moved to step away, but his hand grabbed her arm and pulled her back.

“Everyone is mad at me,” Hawke pouted, closing his eyes.

Isabela wasn’t the comforting type, usually she was the distracting-from-problems type, and was somewhat at a loss. “Yep.”

He frowned and opened his eyes to look up at her. “You're still mad at me?” he asked.

“Yes.”

“Then… then why are you helping me?” he asked, sitting up with a wince.

“Knowing Kitty… and I do… I know you hurt her feelings. She’ll forgive you, in fact she probably already has,” she said, as his face lit up. “But, she won’t trust you like she did, not with her feelings. And those of us who care about her, don’t like to see her upset, you know how it is…” she explained.

“So… then what do I do?” he asked seriously. “I want to apologize, obviously, but what else can I do?”

“What exactly are you wanting here, Hawke?” she suddenly demanded. “I mean, we’re all aware you’d like to have Kitty under you and screaming your name,” she said, keeping a straight face at his snarl, “but besides that?”

“Don’t say that,” he muttered. “I may not know what I want in the future, but she deserves better than that,” he admonished her.

“Yeah, she does,” she replied glaring right back at him, until he looked away. “She’s not like me,” she continued. “She doesn’t separate sex and love, so you’d do well to understand and get used to it.”

“Now,” she said as she headed over to her own bed, pulling out several daggers that had him wondering how she managed to find places to hide them. “I’m going to bed.”

* * *

Hawke awoke with the sun, groaning as he laid there. The night had been torturous, trying to sleep while his brain ran over everything that had happened the previous evening. Then, when he finally curled up to sleep, he smelled Cat on the pillow, and had his mind awaken to the thoughts all over again. Now with very little sleep, and a thrumming headache, he tried to face the day.

At the same time, Cat walked slowly towards home. She too, had been unsuccessful in her attempts to sleep, her mind replaying all the events that had somehow led her to where she was. She smiled humorlessly as she recalled the times that she had found herself in Hawke’s arms, and berated herself for not putting the pieces together sooner.

Obviously, the man would be wanting more at some point, she told herself. A few heated moments
and some almost kisses were only going to make him want more, not less.

She walked slowly, giving herself time to think. Fenris was understanding, but didn’t give any helpful advice. She wanted to talk to Issy about it, but worried that she already knew what she would say. This time, she couldn’t use lack of attraction as an excuse either.

She was at a loss, as this was an entirely new experience for her. With Zev, the attraction hit her at the first instant, and though the moment had passed, she would always appreciate his looks. With Steven, it had been much the same, and his attention had flattered her. They had moved so quickly in their romance that she had never had the chance to stop and think until after they were already married.

Hawke, however, had seemingly snuck up on her. True, she had always found him appealing, that much she could admit- to herself anyway. Knowing that Issy was interested, had her closing off that part of herself, only now to find that he had thrown the door wide open again.

*I’m going in circles…* she thought. Looking up, she smiled at the irony of finding herself heading the wrong direction. *Emotionally, and literally it seems.*

* * * * *

“Isabela, I need help here…”

She turned and set the bowl of water in front of him, handing him a washcloth as well. “I don’t know what you’re expecting from me Hawke,” she replied, turning back to the small closet.

He glanced down at the water, and pulling off his tunic, started cleaning himself up for the day. “I don’t know how to proceed here,” he finally said. “I think we can both agree that just saying what I want isn’t the right choice.”

She smirked as she changed, and went back to her bed, and sat down. “Last night, you said you didn’t know what you wanted. Perhaps finding that out is the first step.”

He looked thoughtful as he leaned over and splashed water onto his face and hair. “I know that I want her…” he said as he rose up, using the cloth to wipe the water from himself. “And I was fairly sure she wanted me. Obviously, I was wrong.”

She simply shrugged in response. *Kitty wasn’t coy, and didn’t string men along. If he thought she wanted him, it was most likely that she did- a part of her anyway.*

Hawke sighed. “I thought, that perhaps it had simply been too long since I was with a woman… but…”

Isabela looked at him shrewdly, but he didn’t turn to her. She stood and went to him, looking up into his eyes. “If that’s what you’re wanting, my offer still stands. You and I can have a good time, without feelings getting in the way, and everything goes back to normal.”

He glanced at her, surprised to find she was completely serious. He didn’t understand how she could offer, with everything that had happened with Cat. She was being honest with him, and in that moment, he decided to be honest with her.
“I’d be a fool to not be tempted,” he said slowly. “I have considered it many times since you first offered…”

She questioned him with a look, but waited for him to continue. He reached a hand up, running a finger down her cheek.

“No matter how I looked at it, logically, it was the perfect choice.” They focused on each other, trying to see what the other was thinking, and neither noticed the movement of the door closing.

“But?” she asked after another long pause.

He looked down, and when his eyes returned to hers, she could see the apology in them. “But,… you’re not her.”

He winced as he spoke, and Isabela had trouble hiding her smirk. _He must have thought he hurt my feelings, but no, not me. Would he be fun in bed? I’d put money on yes, and if Kitty ever finds out, then lucky her._

“Then, you only have one option,” she said, her mind made up.

“And that is?” he asked, confused.

“Be her friend.”

He frowned, expecting something different. “So I be just like all the others? Fenris, Anders, Cullen, Sebastian? That doesn’t make any sense.”

“Hawke, it’s fairly obvious that you could seduce the pants right off her if you tried, and while she is oblivious most of the time, she is now aware of this fact, which puts you at a disadvantage. And being that I’m still mad at you about yesterday, I’m not going to spell it out for you.”

“What?” he asked in dismay.

“However, since you’ve passed my tests, I also won’t… what’s the phrase Kitty uses… cock block? Yes, I won’t cock block you.”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about,” he answered in confusion. “And what do you mean tests?!”

“I’m responsible for protecting her,” she replied. “I wouldn’t let you get this far if I thought you were just trying to get any woman into bed.” She grinned at him. “You have no idea how many men I’ve had to sleep with to keep them away from her.”

Hawke looked stunned for a moment, before throwing back his head and laughing. “Oh, I believe it,” he answered between laughs. “I don’t know whether to yell or thank you.”

“Neither,” she replied. “It’s for her, not you.”

“Right.”

“You better get going,” she said, stepping towards her weapons and beginning to outfit herself. “You’ll want to go home and change before meeting with everyone.”

“I do, yes.” He stepped towards the door, grabbing his staff from where it was leaning against the wall. “Isabela…” he started, turning back to her.
“I know,” she said with a smirk. “One more piece of advice?” she offered, and he nodded. “Kitty is always genuine. She doesn’t know how to act coy or innocent. Remember that.”

* * * * *

Fenris was brought out of his book as he heard the door slam. He marked his place and headed out into the hall, seeing Cat run into her room just as he exited his own. He walked over and looked in, seeing her flopped onto the bed, her face turned away from him.

“Cat?” he asked.

“Go away,” he heard her say, though it was muffled from the pillow.

“Are you all right?”

“No,” came the reply.

“What can I do?” he asked, wanting to walk over and pull her up to look at him. It was much harder to see what she was really thinking when he couldn’t see her face, but privacy was something he valued dearly, and he wouldn’t enter her room without an invitation. The fact that she left the door open was the only reason he was talking now.

He waited for another few moments, and was about to turn away when she sat up, and looked at him. He could see the tear tracks on her face, and his eyebrow rose in question, but he didn’t voice it.

“I need to find another place to live,” she said quietly. “Now. I can’t go back there.” She didn’t elaborate, and he respected her too much to push any harder. He would be here when she was ready.

“Cat… why do you insist on living somewhere else? I have offered many times for you to just stay here.”

“I can’t just barge into your home and make it my own,” she said with a frown. “Is that the concern?” he asked with a smirk. “It is far too late for that.”

She looked up seeing he was still standing in the doorway, and she gestured with her hand for him to come in. She moved over to give him a place to sit, and once he had, she looked at him in dismay.

“You already think I took over your house? If you didn’t like the changes, you should have told me,” she complained, feeling awful.

“I didn’t tell you, because I liked them,” he replied. “I like that you made this place an actual home instead of a decrepit mansion I was staying in. And… I like it when you are here. Why find another place, when you have already made this one? There is more than enough room for the both of us.”

“But, what if you get annoyed with me, always being here?” she asked.

“You are my friend, that would not happen,” he said, and she rolled her eyes. “But, on the off chance it did, there are many rooms that I could easily hide from you in,” he added.

Cat smiled in spite of herself. “You really want me to stay?” she asked. He placed a hand on her shoulder and nodded. “You can change your mind at any time,” she said, “for any reason, and I
won’t be upset.”

“Very well,” he replied. “Though I do not see that happening. Now, I need to head out to meet up with Hawke. Are you staying here, or are you coming?”

“Coming,” she replied. “I need to speak to Corff about a long term room for Issy.”

“Very well,” he said again, and she smiled at him. “Perhaps, you should wash your face first, though.” She rolled her eyes behind his back as he walked out of her room. “I saw that,” he said, not looking back, and she shut the door behind him with a laugh.

* * * * *

Coming into the Hanged Man, Cat felt slightly nervous. She had Fenris with her, which helped, but everything that happened yesterday was still fresh in her mind, and after hearing Hawke and Isabela at their home this morning, she felt like a huge idiot.

*The best thing she could do, she thought, is pretend that nothing happened, and not cause problems for Issy. It was all for the best after all, and I’m even glad that Hawke and Issy were able to work things out, though not as happy as I should be for some reason. Eventually, however, we’ll all be able to laugh about this, and Hawke and Issy are on their way to an epic romance.*

Cat followed Fenris over to where Varric was sitting, joining him for breakfast. It wasn’t long before the others trickled in to join them, each of them apologizing and asking if she was all right, to which she would smile and nod, and ask that they all just forget it ever happened. It was as if everything was back to normal, until Hawke came in. The table was quiet, and Cat could see the confusion on Aveline’s face as she looked around at their companions. When Hawke came towards Cat, both Fenris and Anders stood to block him.

“Look, I only want to speak to Cat, and apologize for yesterday,” he said calmly. They looked ready to refuse, but Cat just stood and agreed.

“Yes, I do,” she replied. “We’re friends, and we hear each other out. I appreciate what you are trying to do,” she said, including everyone as she spoke louder, “All of you, but I’m not going to let this ruin what we all have.” With that said, she walked over to Hawke and followed him to a corner of the room.

Anders sighed as he sat back down. “What was that all about?” Aveline asked.

“Hawke, may have said some things to Cat yesterday,” Merrill explained tactfully. “Apparently there was a misunderstanding about her previous job at the Rose? And Hawke was trying to let Cat know that he liked her in spite of all those things she used to do, but she wasn’t actually doing, because she didn’t do what he thought she used to do.”

Aveline brought her hand to cover her face as she shook her head. “Hawke, you didn’t…” she murmured.

“It made for quite the interesting evening,” Varric added, considering we were all in the same room.”
“What?” Aveline asked, surprised. “He really has the worst timing, doesn’t he?” she asked.

“Up until that point, it was very romantic,” Merrill sighed. “He came running through that storm yesterday, knowing that Cat was afraid of storms, just to be with her, and keep her from panicking. And what you told us, about the talk with his Mum, we all thought he was ready to start courting her.”

“So did I,” Aveline replied. “So now what?”

“Cat’s intention seems to be forgiveness,” Fenris spoke, though his gaze didn’t stray from the two speaking away from them. “She doesn’t blame him for his assumptions, in fact, she says it was her fault for not ensuring he knew the truth.”

“Which is ridiculous,” Anders continued sourly. “Even if he thought it, saying it was the greater crime.”

“I’m surprised that he doesn’t have any wounds from the pirate,” Aveline said.

“I’m sure she laid into him when she helped him home yesterday,” Varric said, “though she too seemed to feel bad for him. She helped him get plenty of drinks before leaving, though now that I think of it, could have been a way of getting revenge.”

They stopped their conversation as Hawke and Cat returned, both smiling. “Everyone?” Cat said, though she already had their attention. “Hawke was telling me how you all stood up for me yesterday, and told him the truth. I am sorry that this misunderstanding happened, but I wanted to thank you, for your friendship, and your care on my behalf.”

They all shrugged it off, knowing that would do so again, if needed, or for any of their friends. “Also,” she continued. “Hawke and I have apologized and agreed to forget the entire thing. So I want all of you to do the same,” she said. “No hard feelings, all right? We’re all friends, aren’t we?” she added.

She looked around the table as they all nodded and smiled at her. “Good. Well, good luck with the Arishok today,” she said. “I’ll see you all later.”

Hawke paused momentarily after she left, but seeing no anger, he took her place at the table. “Before we forget it,” he started. “I wanted to say, how sorry I am. I was actually trying to tell her how much I liked her in spite of what she had been forced to do to make ends meet, and well, it came out wrong.”

Varric was the first to smirk. “If that’s what happens when you are trying to be diplomatic, perhaps we should have Broody or Aveline do the talking with the Arishok, or who knows what you might say.”

There was a pause, before Hawke’s grim face broke, and he chuckled, which set off everyone else. They all laughed heartily at the joke, and the tension was quickly dissipated.

“So, Cat forgave you, Hawke?” Merrill asked innocently. “I’m glad you two have another chance.” Several of the party stiffened, including Hawke. He turned to Merrill with a smile.

“I don’t know about that, Merrill,” he said. “We’ve decided to just be friends.”

“Oh,” she said dejectedly. “That’s… too bad.”

“It is for the best,” Fenris replied, though he wasn’t certain as he took in the look on Hawke’s face.
Over the next week, Cat kept her feelings bottled up until she was ready to explode. She even wrote to Leliana, venting most of her aggravation and hurt feelings, and then tore the letter up before she could send it.

She had meant what she said to Hawke, she wanted to forget the whole incident had ever happened, and she wanted to be friends with him. However, she was having a hard time letting go of the fact that he had gone home that same night with Isabela, and had so quickly found a different woman that would give him what he was really seeking.

She also wanted to talk to Isabela about it all, but could never seem to pin her down, and felt that she was being avoided, which just made things worse. She knew her imagination was worse than anything that could have actually happened, but she didn’t have anything else to fall back on. She knew better than to talk to any of her other friends about it, as they would either tell her that she was the one who asked them to let it go, or get mad at Hawke again. So she suffered in silence.

Cat shook herself from her thoughts as she glanced around. She could have sworn she heard voices. She stood from her bed, and went out into the hallway. She moved over to Fenris’ room, and peeking inside the open door, she saw Hawke sitting with his back to her, speaking to Fenris. She quickly pulled back, not wanting to interrupt them, and started away when she heard Fenris ask Hawke about how he could start over.

“It seems you’ve got a good start already,” Hawke said with a chuckle. “A home, a woman…”

Fenris chuckled, just as Cat was ready to argue, but she stayed silent to hear his answer. “Cat is not my woman,” he replied. “She’s more like family.”

She smiled to herself, and decided to leave before she became too much of an eavesdropper.

“What of your family before?” Hawke asked Fenris. “Are they gone?”

“I… am not certain. The earliest memory I have, is when I was given these markings,” he glanced down at his arm. “The agony of it wiped everything else away. Any family I had, I no longer remember.”

Hawke’s face registered his surprise. “That’s… terrible. So, you don’t remember even who you are?”

“Fenris was the name Danarius bestowed on me… his “little wolf”. Anything before that, is gone.”

“I am sorry.”

Fenris looked uncomfortable, speaking of this. “I don’t mean to trouble you. These are my problems, not yours.”

“Fenris, you are my friend. Your problems are my problems.”

“Unlucky you.” He stood with a sigh. “But enough of this, I am certain you are busy.”

“Very well,” Hawke agreed, not wanting to push. “Tomorrow, we are helping Sebastian. We’re meeting in front of the chantry at mid-day.”
“Should I tell Cat?” Fenris asked, and seeing Hawke’s hesitation, bristled. “You want your friends there, do you not?”

“Of course,” Hawke agreed quickly. “Please let her know.”

Hawke thought about it, on his walk from Hightown to Darktown, and was nowhere closer to any sort of answer than he was before. He walked into the clinic, seeing that there were no patients at that time, and was glad for it.

“Hawke, what a nice surprise,” Anders greeted him. Olivia glanced over, and gave him a frown. No matter what Cat had said, Olivia was not forgiving him any time soon.

“What’s wrong?” Hawke asked, seeing the tension on their faces.

“Templars were checking the refugee camps earlier,” Anders said quietly. “It’s only a matter of time before they find us.”

“All of the raids and curfews, and hiding out just to avoid being made tranquil!” Olivia added. “It’s ridiculous how far the knight commander is allowed to go!”


Anders sighed heavily. “There is no concept of time in the fade, so it is nearly impossible to convince him to wait and be patient.”

“Not that you were patient to begin with,” Olivia said.

“True,” he said with a wry smile. “But, I fear what my anger has made of my friend.”

“You chose to merge with him,” Hawke said kindly. “Only you can make it work.”

“I am trying, but this cannot last. One day, everyone in Thedas will have to choose a side.”

Hawke’s eyes narrowed. “And, if they are not on your side? What then?” he asked. “They are many, including some of our own, that do not mistreat mages.”

“Who knows what the future will bring?” Anders asked, and Hawke thought he had a very odd look on his face. “Anyway, did you just come to check up on us?” he asked.

“And to tell you that we are helping Sebastian tomorrow at mid-day if you can make it.”

“I will see what I can do,” Anders replied, looking to Olivia who shrugged.

“And…” Hawke said, though he didn’t continue.

“Yes?” Anders asked.

“It’s… Cat. I am not sure what to do.”

“So you are done avoiding her then?” Anders asked with a roll of his eyes.

“I was trying to give her space,” Hawke defended.

“Hmph,” Olivia grunted, frowning at Hawke again.

“Look, I know I screwed up, okay?” he whirled on her. “I know, and you can hate me all you want,
but I’m trying to make it better, and it isn’t working!”

Olivia looked shocked, and then looked away, a slight blush on her face. Hawke turned to Anders, “please, I need some help here.”

“Anders said you had agreed to be friends,” Olivia spoke up, and both men turned to her.

“Yes, that is what she wanted, and I agreed to it,” Hawke replied.

“And? How is that going?” she asked.

“Wha--?” Hawke asked, frustrated. He turned back to Anders, to see him contemplating her words.

“I agree,” Anders said finally. “You agreed to be friends, but neither of you are doing so, and it makes it awkward whenever the two of you are together.”

“You don’t think that’s because of the stupid things I said, or the fight we had?” Hawke asked dubiously.

“We have all said stupid things to each other, and there have been many fights, and yet, we are all still friends,” Anders pointed out. “I think in order to fix this, you and Cat need to make a greater effort to be friends.”

“A greater effort?” Hawke asked in disbelief. “I don’t… ugh,” he groaned. “Look, I’m trying to get her out of my head. You really think spending more time together would be good?!”

Anders and Olivia both smirked at him, and Hawke crossed his arms in annoyance. “Perhaps not more time, but quality time,” Anders said.

“Yes, find out more about her, tell her more about yourself. You’d be surprised how quickly friendship will come, especially since you both share mutual friends.” Olivia reached over to pat Anders’ arm. “Anders can help with conversations, it doesn’t have to be just the two of you.”

“That’s true,” he added with a smile. “We will all help. We all want the awkwardness to go away, after all.”

“Okay… if you’re… sure.” Hawke wasn’t convinced, but thought he would ask Varric to help as well. If anyone could start conversations, it was him. “Fenris is bringing her along tomorrow, so we can start then.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all for your wonderful comments, and the kudos. I really hope you are enjoying this as much as I am writing it. These characters are so special, and I can't wait to write more, as I'm sure you can't wait to read more!
So now we are into Act 2, officially beginning quests! While plenty has happened with our main couple not becoming a couple, it was important to see that they are both easily swayed from the other due to past experiences, and their own denial. I'm not forgetting that things happened, but both are going to try pretty hard to "just be friends", albeit unsuccessfully.

“Anything I should know about today?”

“Hmm?” Cat asked, glancing at Fenris as they walked towards the Chantry.

“Today’s jobs? Anything important to know before we meet with everyone?” he asked.

“Hmm, no, nothing crucial. With Sebastian, we’ll come across a demon or two, but there should be no problem.”

“That is good to hear,” he replied. “Some days it feels as if the Maker himself were against us.”

Cat glanced over again with a smile. “More like Hawke is just a magnet for trouble, I think,” she replied. “No matter the job, we’ll have our work cut out for us.”

She could see his smirk, and chuckled, as it made him look more dangerous, rather than jovial. Turning the corner, she could see several of the group had already arrived, and she ran forward to greet them.

“Aveline!” She called out, as she came forward. “Hi!”

“What about me?” Anders asked with a fake pout.

“Hello Anders, how are you?” Cat turned to him with a grin, as he pulled her in for a hug. “Ready for this?” she asked.

“I’m not certain, as we haven’t been told what it is we are helping with yet,” he replied with a wink.

“Whatever it is, I’m sure we can handle it,” Aveline said stoically.

“Cat, my friend!”

She glanced up towards the voice, and saw Sebastian descending the stairs to the Chantry with Hawke and Varric. He had a hand lifted in something between a wave and salute, and Cat moved forward to meet them.

“Sebastian, good to see you again,” she said, clasping arms with him, and patting his shoulder.

“That’s right, I forgot you two already knew each other,” Varric said with a smirk, as Sebastian changed his grip on her hand, and brought it to him to kiss it. “Probably better than we do, in fact.”

Cat continued to smile, though she rolled her eyes. Today, she wanted to only spend time with her
friends. She had missed them in the past week, keeping to herself as she had. **Well, no more of that!** she told herself.

“That’s true,” she replied. “Though Sebastian insists that this is how one greets a friend, I have yet to see him greet any others this way,” she teased, and Varric’s eyes lit up.

“You have yet to dissuade me that you are a lady, my friend,” Sebastian spoke up. “And until you do, I shall greet you as one.”

“Well, far be it for me to disagree, for I am also not convinced of Cat’s humble origins,” Hawke said grandly, and grabbed her hand to kiss it as well.

Her eyes went wide, and she sucked in a quick breath, but she forced herself to treat Hawke just like her other friends. It seemed he was having an easier time of it than she was.

“Oh stop that,” she said, pulling her hand back. “I should have warned you that I haven’t washed my hands for awhile…” she laughed at the face Hawke gave her, and Sebastian joined in with a chuckle.

“Don’t fall for it,” he said to Hawke. “She has tried that numerous times as a distraction.” He gave her an eye roll as she stuck her tongue out at him.

“Are we waiting for anyone, or are we ready to leave?” Cat asked.

“We’re waiting for Merrill,” Varric answered. “So, Choir boy, when did you meet our Little Dove?” Sebastian spluttered. “C-- Choir boy?!” he asked.

“Eh, it just seemed right,” Varric answered.

“Varric gives everyone nicknames,” Cat said to Sebastian as an explanation. “Actually, we met the day that you all left on the expedition,” she said to Varric. “Though we didn’t become friends until later.”

“That’s true,” Sebastian said, still eyeing Varric oddly. “I was here, in the courtyard, and suddenly this woman came running in, as if someone was chasing her. She collapsed against the wall, panting, so I went over to see if I could aid her.” He looked over at Cat with a smile. “And introduced myself to Cat. Over the next few weeks, I ran into her several times in front of the keep.”

“That’s when I started working with the guard,” Cat explained, which had Aveline nodding and giving a smile at the memory.

“And we started practicing our archery together after that. Though, it has been awhile now…” Cat gave him a sheepish look. “I’m sorry Sebastian, things have been a little… uh, busy.”

“It’s true,” Anders jumped in. “We’ve all wanted to spend time with Cat since we returned.”

“Perhaps we should all get together to spar and work on our skills,” Hawke said, having everyone turn to him. “It couldn’t hurt to become more familiar with each others’ fighting skills, especially if we do not have another job.”

“A wise plan,” Fenris added. “We could practice combining our strengths into specific attack patterns.”

“Outside the city would be best…” Anders added. “To avoid the templars.”
“We have a large room at our house that can be used as well,” Cat offered.

“Did you move to a new home, Cat?” Sebastian asked. “That small hovel in Lowtown can’t be what you are speaking of.”

“Oh, yes,” she replied. “I’m living with Fenris now, in a mansion in Hightown, just a street over, and down,” she said as she pointed in the direction.

Sebastian’s brow furrowed, and he looked as if he was ready to say something about her living arrangements when Hawke jumped in.

“Oh, Cat, I almost forgot!”

She turned to him, gratefully. “Yes?”

“I brought you something,” he said, and pulled a book away from Varric, handing it to Cat. She looked down, seeing that it was destroyed, with burn marks all over its cover. She looked up in confusion, and he grinned at her.

“One down, four evil tomes to go,” he said.

Her face lit as she understood. They had found one of the tomes that Idunna had spoken of, and destroyed it! She assumed it was the one from the Chantry, being as that was where they had come from.

“This is amazing!” she said as she looked back at him with a grin of her own. “Was it difficult? Tell me everything!” she exclaimed as she forgot everything else and stepped over to him, looking at him expectantly.

He was surprised, but covered it quickly, and began relating the tale in a way that would make Varric proud.

* * * * *

“You’re certain about this?” Hawke asked Sebastian, as he stepped forward to the door, and pounded on it with a fist.

“Without a doubt,” came the reply. All smiles from earlier were gone, as the group waited on the doorstep. Sebastian finally reached forward to try to door, and it opened without a sound.

“Ominous…” Varric muttered.

“That’s strange,” Sebastian said. “The door is open, and not a single guard is posted? This is not the Lady Harimann I remember.” The group stepped forward into the large foyer, looking around. Everything seemed normal, except for the complete lack of people. “Something is very wrong here.”

Hawke waited for Sebastian to lead, but after a few moments with no movement, he stepped further into the room. The group followed after him, at a slow but steady pace, looking all around them for the people who lived here.

Several doors seemed not only locked, but braced against entry, leaving only one path to follow. Hawke pulled out his staff, wary for the trap that seemed inevitable, but continued onward. He heard
a voice, and followed the sound towards the wine cellar. He led his crew down the steps, all while the lone woman berated her invisible servant.

“Why will no one in this house give me what I want?!” she demanded.

“Flora?” Sebastian asked, as they reached the level she was in.

“Now! Give me more wine, or I swear I will drown you in the dregs!” she yelled at the air.

“That sounds familiar,” Varric said aside to Fenris. “I don’t envy the others in this house come morning.”

Sebastian looked at Hawke in confusion. “She doesn’t even see us…” he said quietly.

Hawke turned around, and headed back up the stairs. Turning down the corridor he was originally following, he led the group into the main dining room. They stopped just inside the door, seeing a man in front of a cauldron with a fire going beneath it in the middle of the wooden floor.

“Unwise,” Fenris muttered.

“More logs! It must be molten!”

“Brett?” Sebastian asked, coming closer. He paused as he saw an elven maid being held at knife point by an elven servant. “What’s going on?” he asked, in exasperation.

“You,” Brett called out. “Bring more coins! I want every piece of gold in this house!”

“P-please messere,” the maid begged.

“Don’t worry, you’ll be beautiful!” Brett turned to the elves, speaking to the male. “Once it is ready, pour it over her.”

“No, you’d kill her!” Sebastian protested. The elf turned, and seeing the group, left the maid and went over to them. Sebastian wasted no time, and rearing back, punched him in the face, sending him to the ground. He stepped aside as the maid ran from the room, noting that Brett had yet to notice anything was amiss. “What is this madness?!” he cried.

“Perhaps it should be me?” Brett mused, even as Hawke led his group onward. Cat looked back, seeing the glaze over his eyes as he spoke. “But then, how would I appreciate it? No, no… wait! Where did she go?”

Cat caught back up, Aveline waiting until she passed to continue. She could hear Sebastian speaking to Hawke. “… often played together. They could not have concealed such goings on.”

“We’ll get to the bottom of this Sebastian,” Hawke replied. As they reached the top of the staircase, Hawke said, “Fan out, see if you can find anything.”

Cat walked to the nearest door, hoping for an empty room, but her luck wasn’t that good. She stepped into the room and smirked, knowing immediately what, or who, she had found.

“Oh… lower… l o w e r…. no, no… where’s the feather? Yes, that’s it, use the feather!”

“Cat?” she heard behind her, and Anders, seeing what was in front of her, stepped up and covered her eyes with his hand.

“Hawke!” he called, and the others came racing into the room, expecting danger. Cat heard Aveline
give a disgusted sound, and heard a chuckle or two as well.

“My deepest apologies Cat. I beg your pardon, everyone. I did not mean to expose any of you to such things.”

“Nothing I haven’t seen or heard before,” Cat muttered, and blinked at the sudden light as Anders’ hand was removed, and he spun her around to face him. “Excuse me?” he said quietly.

“Where have you been all my life??” The man in the bed exclaimed suddenly. “Today, I am more than a man, and now, felicitate me!”

Cat snickered, bringing her hand to her mouth to try to stifle it. She could see Anders trying to look shocked, but the corners of his mouth were also coming up in a smile.

“Isabela will be sad she missed this,” Hawke said.

“He has absolutely no idea we’re even standing here,” Sebastian exclaimed. “I’ve known Ruxton Harimann my entire life. He’s a complete prude!”

“You know what they say about a man with big hands,” Ruxton said loudly, which brought another round of chuckles.

“No, what do they say?” Cat asked Sebastian innocently, causing him to flush.

“I… think it is time to move on,” he said, herding the group out of the room, but not before they heard the last part.

“Now, you be the naughty apprentice, and I’ll be the templar torturer…”

“Whoa… that’s a real thing?” Cat asked as she glanced up at Anders.

“Let’s talk about something else,” he muttered.

“Come on, I want to know!” she said back with a grin. “I can understand the role play, but I wouldn’t think mages would like it very much. Hawke, Merrill?”

“Hmph,” Anders grunted.

“Have you ever played apprentice and templar?” Merrill asked Cat, causing several of the men to choke suddenly.

“I haven’t played that particular one before,” she answered. “What about you, Anders?”

“Yes Anders, do tell,” Hawke said with a laugh.

“Certainly Hawke, right after you,” Anders countered quickly.

“We’re all friends here,” Varric said with a sly grin, and Hawke and Anders stopped talking.

Cat rolled her eyes. “It’s more fun when everyone shares you know. Maybe we should have a girls night soon, since the boys aren’t sharing. Aveline, Merrill? What do you say?”

“Listen!” Fenris hissed, causing everyone to be silent, and ready their weapons. They stopped, listening for whatever Fenris had heard, but in the silence, Hawke gestured forward and moved on.

They followed single file below even the cellar, all of them glancing around the dark room. As they
reached the floor, they grouped back together, and headed forward.

“Turn back. There’s nothing for you here.”

“Flora? Brett? Ruxton?” Sebastian called to the three of them, standing in front of his group and blocking their way.

“How’d they beat us down here?” Cat whispered to Varric, who shrugged.

“Oh, now you see us?” Hawke asked with a smirk. “Strange that you couldn’t when you were all acting like complete idiots, then you ignored us completely.”

“You shall not enter.” After saying this, Flora fell to her knees, and over on her back, followed immediately by her brothers.

“What… just happened?” Varric asked.

“Demons!” Merrill called out. They all braced, and a desire demon with several shades sprung up in their midst.

After the fight, Sebastian looked at the doorway across from them. “Demons, temptresses… we must see what evil they were protecting,” he said, though Cat thought he was speaking to himself.

“Let’s go,” Hawke replied, and headed onward.

After a particularly nasty fight with a rage demon, they stopped to catch their breath. “This is some kind of ruin, and so near Hightown… it’s… impossible,” Sebastian marveled.

“So many demons,” Hawke muttered. “What have these people gotten involved in?”

“With this many lesser demons,” Merrill spoke up, “we will probably find a greater demon in charge of them.”

“Just what I wanted to hear,” Varric mumbled.

“At least we won’t have to worry about them in the future,” Aveline added. “It’s good that we are destroying them.”

“Everyone ready?” Hawke asked. Receiving nods, he started off again, moving down stairs and through rough-cut hallways.

Cat couldn’t say she enjoyed the atmosphere, what with the dark halls only lit with torches on the walls. The corpses and shades that sprung up made things infinitely worse, and when the revenant appeared, she froze for a moment or two before running like hell the other direction, and letting the others deal with it.

However, she wouldn’t change it. She enjoyed their banter, and even more, she enjoyed when she was a part of it. Even those that didn’t really get along, would find things in common to speak of, or tease each other, and even then, if the teasing did turn mean, Hawke would step in and change the subject.

She absolutely loved it, and was having the time of her life.

Cat looked up as they walked under a large archway. Hawke looked left, toward a large wooden staircase, then right, to a large tunnel. He stepped right, and the corpses popped up as one, easily surrounding them. “Revenant!” Cat whipped around, surprised to hear the call again, and looked
where Merrill pointed to see the large, armored corpse striding down the stairs.

It looked like it was staring straight at her, with its red lit eyes, and she faltered slightly.

“Cat!” she heard Hawke call, and she focused on him. “All together, after Anders freezes it, all right?”

She looked back at the demon-possessed corpse, and nodded. *I can do this*… she thought, and she headed around the group to get into position, fighting a few corpses on the way.

“Now!” Anders yelled, sending a heavy Winter’s Grasp spell at the revenant. They knew it was resistant to cold, but it gave them a few moments before it broke free to damage it.

Cat watched as the others jumped into the fray, using their toughest attacks to bring it down. She worried, knowing that it could take them all in one attack, and if she tried to run, it could pull her back.

“Behind you!” Varric yelled, being at a distance for his own attacks. They broke off, seeing the Arcane Horror behind them. Hawke stayed where he was, pulling the blade of his staff from the revenant, and gathering mana to attack.

Cat could see the electricity gathering around him, and held back still, as the lightning surged forward to the revenant. Hawke bent over, panting, as the creature stood up, and loomed over him, and the fear for someone else won over the fear for herself.

Cat charged forward, her daggers overhead, and she jumped, digging her daggers into its back. She yanked the left one out, and moving higher, plunged it back in, repeating it with her right side, climbing up the back of the creature, her feet no longer touching the ground.

“Die! Just Die!!” She pleaded with it, stabbing it repeatedly, twisting the daggers as much as she could. The unearthly screams of the thing, were stabbing into her eardrums, and she wanted to let go, but her fear held her fast. It seemed like eternity, and there was a sound like something punching through a wall. She looked up, and saw the Hawke’s staff’s blade protruding from the head of the corpse, through its helmet. And then she was falling, as the thing fell down, and she rolled away, finally releasing her daggers.

She opened her eyes to see Hawke standing above her, looking concerned. “You okay?” he asked. She took a mental inventory, and nodded, relieved. “Good,” he said, reaching down to help her to her feet. He went and retrieved her daggers, handing them to her by the hilts. “You did good,” he said with a smirk, and she couldn’t help but return it.

“It felt good,” she replied.

“I don’t know about you,” Varric said as he came forward. “But I am ready to finish this.”

“I couldn’t agree more,” Hawke answered. He picked up his staff, stepping on the head of the revenant, pulling the blade free, and striding off while the others quickly followed.

* * *

“I put that Idiot Goran Vael into the Prince’s seat, but the other families will not heed him. I must marry him to Flora, and solidify our hold. And to do that, I need more power.
“She really did it…” Sebastian said sorrowfully. “I had hoped… but no. She killed my family. All for power.”

They stood quietly, observing Lady Harimann speaking to a powerful desire demon. They were a fair distance away, but the cavernous room echoed their voices to the group.

“You’ve already traded your husband and children,” the demon spoke. “What else do you have to offer?”

Hawke, having heard enough, strode forward, and Sebastian followed close behind. The others followed, though there was a small distance between them.

“What’s the going rate?” Hawke asked sarcastically. “It’s a standard fifty silvers down at the Blooming Rose.”

The demon turned, eyeing the new-comers with a smile. She glided over, admiring the look of them, feeling the desires bursting from each of them. “You’d hardly find my services “standard”, it replied.

The demon eyed each of them, unable to decide which would be most delicious. The two in the front, speaking with such righteous anger, even as they wanted the same power for their own… the male elf and mage, yearning for freedom, and the power to destroy their enemies. It turned its eyes to the females, dismissing the elf as too easy, and the warrior as boring.

This one, the desires are so many, yet unrealized… it thought with a grin. Not too simple, but fun to nurture along until it consumed her. Much as Lady Harimann used to be.

“And you murdered her!!” Sebastian yelled.

“Such a harsh word,” the demon spoke again, and Cat found herself about to nod, and shook her head. She could feel the demon smiling at her, and she looked away. “I prefer, “removed obstacles from her dream”.

“This is your influence!” Sebastian rounded on the demon, who shrugged nonchalantly.

“I could create such desires, if I wished. But it is far easier to nurture those that already exist. The desire for power is easy to find. You and your friend both have it, do you not? Or the power to destroy one’s enemies?” Cat’s head popped up, as she felt Anders and Fenris both tense beside her. “Or even desires of the heart?” Cat looked away again, feeling the demon’s pull and wanting to resist.

“I will hear no more!” Hawke bellowed, breaking the tension in the room. His crew raised their weapons, and charged forward, as both Lady Harimann and the demon disappeared.

Cat looked around, seeing the older woman appear behind them, and running for her. She would fight literally anything else in order to stay away from it, even the powerful blood mage. Before she could make it, the demon appeared in front of her, its hand on her face.

“I can help,” it whispered to her, and she whimpered at the force of the pull she felt, unable to look away.

“No… no!” Cat yelled, shaking her head.

“Leave her alone!!” Sebastian yelled, shooting a bolt straight at the demon, embedding it in its stomach, causing it to wail in pain.

“Cat! Move!!” he yelled, and she shook her head again, moving away as quick as she was able.
Not to be outdone, the demon moved on, calling forth shades to help protect it, as it came to the male elf.

“All of them will die, if you let me help you,” it cooed at him. He glanced at it, uncertain. The words did not feel right, and yet he wanted so badly to agree.

“Get the demon!” Hawke yelled out, as he fought with Lady Harimann. “I can handle her!”

“Ha ha! What’s a little boy going to do to me?” she spit back at him, lashing out with a spell that had his blood feeling as if it was on fire.

“Hawke!” Cat yelled, as she threw a small knife at the mage. It struck her leg, but was enough of a distraction to stop her spell, and Hawke stood once again in front of her, grimacing.

“Blood magic!” he spat, disgusted.

“Shall I show you more?” she asked with a horrendous grin.

“No thank you, Ma’am,” Cat said as she brought the dagger through her chest. The woman became limp in Cat’s arms, and she gently brought her down to lay on the ground, pulling her dagger free on the way. She waited until she was no longer breathing, and sighing, cleaned off her dagger, and stood.

Walking over to Hawke, she noted that the others had finally been able to take out the demon, and she felt better just knowing it was gone. She reached where Hawke knelt on the ground, and stuck her hand out to help him up.

“That looked painful,” she commented about the earlier spell.

“I believe she set my blood boiling within me,” he replied as he stood.

“Ew,” she said with a wince. “Glad we stopped it in time then.”

He looked down at her, with a smirk.

“Thanks,” he said.

“Anytime.”

* * * *

Cat didn’t say much on the trip back, listening to Sebastian speak to Flora, who was now free of the demon’s control, listening to Sebastian curse the demon and all the havoc it has caused. She almost wished for their earlier banter, as they left with heavier hearts.

“That was a horrible experience,” Aveline commented. “I didn’t realize how strong a demon’s words could be.”

“Agreed,” Fenris said. “It was as if the words themselves were pulling on me.”

“Yes,” Cat agreed, unable to properly put into words how she had felt. “I feel… dirty.”

“I do as well,” Sebastian spoke up from ahead of them, though he didn’t turn. “It is as if I have bathed in filth, and I will never be able to be rid of it.”

“We all acted honorably,” Hawke said with conviction. “There is no need to be ashamed.”

“Perhaps,” Sebastian said. “But the demon did not lie. I was terribly jealous of my brother, and
wanted what he had. Now, I could, while he lies in ashes. But, I ask myself, do I want it for the right reasons? Or simply to fulfill old desires?"

“Are you not your parent’s heir?” Hawke asked, confused.

“No, I am the youngest of three sons. They already had their heir, and spare, so I was sent to the Chantry.”

“But, you seem very dedicated to the Chantry. You didn’t join by choice?”

Cat glanced around, noting that everyone was riveted on the conversation in front of them, though they took measures not to show it. She also noted how filthy they all were, after climbing through ruins below someone’s house.

“I simply do not know what would be right,” Sebastian said as Cat tuned back in.

“What do you want to do?” Hawke asked.

“That demon stirred much in me, and now, I am afraid I have too many doubts. It cannot be right to lead with such doubt gnawing at my heart. I must wait, until I am certain.” He glanced over at Hawke, with a smile. “I owe you more than I can say, Hawke. Until I decide on my own path, I will aid you in whatever you need.”

“Well, killing a few hundred bandits will help. If not with your decision, than at least in feeling better.”

“You have a strange way of working out your inner struggles, Hawke,” Sebastian grinned at him in confusion.

“And this should help too,” Hawke added, reaching over to Varric, to have a large bow placed in his hand, which he turned over to Sebastian.

“Uh, how did I not notice Varric carrying that?!” Cat said to Aveline.

“My grandfather’s bow?!” Sebastian gawked at him. “Where did you find it?”

“It seems the Flint Company did some looting. I merely did the same.”

Sebastian pulled back on the string several times, testing its strength. “I look forward to testing it,” he answered. “What do you say Cat?” he asked, turning back. “Archery practice tomorrow?”

She grinned in reply. “Sounds fun.”
Cat looked around at her friends, noting that Isabela was still absent. Making a comment to Hawke about it had him eyeing her oddly and saying that if anyone should know, then it would be her, not him- which confused her.

She sat back against a tree, watching as Hawke worked with Aveline. No one really wanted to spar just yet, and fighting together as a group against the trees didn’t seem helpful. Hawke started by simply asking everyone to show what they could do, and the others would suggest something in their own repertoire that would pair well.

Cat stayed quiet for now, feeling that once they got into a rhythm this practicing would be beneficial. Now she simply observed, and would speak if she thought of something helpful.

“I don’t know Hawke,” Varric said, gaining Cat’s attention. “Perhaps I could spread some caltrops around Aveline? Any enemies trying to get close would find it difficult?”

“But then Aveline would be unable to advance also,” Fenris pointed out.

“Hmm…” Varric replied.

“What if,” Sebastian said, “you used your kickback, directly after Aveline staggers someone with a bash of her shield?”

“Kickback?” Hawke asked.

“I can’t use it often,” Varric said as he thought of the possibilities, “but Bianca has a lever that will pull her string back another inch and a quarter, causing greater force on the shot. If the man is already wavering…” he nodded along, “yeah, it could work. Maybe even take him off his feet.”

“Okay then, now we’re getting somewhere!” Hawke said with a grin. “Aveline, let us see what your shield bash looks like again.”

Aveline nodded curtly, and performed a shield bash against an imaginary opponent.

“There!” Varric pointed, having Aveline whip around to look at him. “I can look for that, where she steels herself for the attack.”

“That could be for any attack,” Fenris pointed out again.

“No,” Sebastian argued, “she plants the opposite foot when swinging with her sword.”

“And what?” Fenris asked, nonplussed. “You’re going to take the time to watch Aveline for a slight movement so you know when she will shield bash?”

“In time,” Hawke interrupted, “I hope to have all of us so used to fighting beside each other that we can tell by our fighting styles what we will do next. For now however, we should use signals or attack calls.”

“Perhaps we can focus on one type of attack like this with each person?” Merrill asked.

“For what purpose?” Hawke responded.

“Well, if I only have one attack with each of you, then when I yell out your name, you’d know what
attack I am about to do, maybe?”

Everyone looked over at Merrill, the shock apparent on some faces, but Hawke just grinned. “Merrill, that’s genius!” he exclaimed, which had her blushing, and mumbling something.

“Which reminds me,” Varric said. “Aveline, I need a couple of examples of attack calls the guard uses. My story needs a little realism.”

“I’m the wrong one to ask, Varric. If it were up to me, you would lose your printing blocks,” Aveline replied scathingly.

Varric sighed dramatically. “Once again, I am falsely accused of whatever it is I am accused of. Falsely.”

“Uh-huh.” Aveline looked at him skeptically. “Someone replaced the information on my recruiting posters with filth from the Blooming Rose.”

“Ha!” Varric let loose, before putting a smirk on his face. “Oh, that does sound pretty good.”

“Sure,” Aveline sarcastically replied. “Fill the barracks with whores! But you’ll also fill the Rose with guards.”

“Hey!” Cat called out, feeling slighted for her friends in the Rose, and Aveline gave her a look of apology.

Varric sighed again, with much more dramatic flair. “It’s true then, some of the best comedy comes from tragedy.”

“Ugh!” Aveline grunted with a roll of her eyes.

“Let’s get back on track here,” Hawke said diplomatically. “Let’s work out the timing on this. Varric? How much notice do you need to prepare your shot?”

“Five or six seconds I would think,” he replied.

“Right. So Aveline, this tree is the target.” Hawke walked forward, signaling for Varric to ready himself. “So, you’ll call out to Varric, and then do your shield bash, and move out of the way.”

“Which way?” Aveline asked seriously, the former banter forgotten. “If I am just calling out, I won’t know where he is. I may move directly into his shot.”

“I can yell back my location, left or right?” Varric offered. “Then if I don’t respond, you know I won’t be shooting?”

“All right,” Aveline agreed. “But you should tell me which way to move, not where you are. I have no doubt I would confuse the two in an actual fight.”

“Sounds plausible,” Hawke said. “Let’s try it.” He stepped back, and everyone looked on eagerly as Aveline called out, and Varric yelled back, followed by a shield hitting the target tree, followed by a bolt that buried itself deep in the bark.

“Well?” Varric asked, as he and Aveline turned to the others, though the smirk on Hawke’s face was the only answer he needed, and he had them run it again.

“This could work…” Anders said quietly next to her, and Cat found herself nodding along. He turned to her and asked, “do you want to go next, with me?”
“Sure,” she replied. “Did you have something in mind?”

“I do,” he cunningly grinned at her, and she leaned closer.

“And?” she asked.

“Think you could shoot a target through the foot, and pin them in place for a moment or two?” he asked.

“That… could be arranged,” she said, looking up in thought and nodding in affirmation.

“I think my Stone Fist would do much more damage if the target never saw it coming…”

“Agreed,” Cat said. “Let’s volunteer once Hawke is done with these two.”

“Okay, who’s next?” Hawke called out, and Anders and Cat both jumped up.

* * * * *

Heading out to the Bone Pit, the group was the most talkative they had ever been, and Hawke reveled in the feeling of accomplishment. Not only were they the best group of fighters individually that he could have found, but now they were well on their way to being the best, and most dangerous crew in all the Free Marches.

*Right now, they were paired off, and only working on one attack for each pair, but soon, he thought, they would be able to utilize powerful attacks no matter which combination of fighters I’ve got at any given time!*

As he came to the mine, he noticed the workers standing around outside. He strode forward, intent on finding out what was going on, and left his crew behind him. He wasn’t worried, they could handle themselves.

He walked up to a man named Jensen, who was now considered the spokesman for the workers, at least where he was concerned. He had no idea who was actually in charge, or if his “business partner” Hubert even had a foreman.

“Jensen,” Hawke greeted the man with a nod. “What is happening?”

“Hawke,” Jensen said with relief. “Glad to see you! There’s an awful new stench in the second mine shaft, but for the life of us, we cannot figure out what’s causing it! And we’re still waiting for the new axes Hubert promised us. Maybe Hubert should have let you handle the investigation. He’s been at it for over a year now.”

Hawke’s eyes narrowed. “What investigation?” he asked.

Cat looked over from the cliff edge where she stood, seeing the agitation on Hawke’s face, and not wanting to get in the middle of whatever was going on. She walked back to where the others were standing, and stood between Anders and Fenris, *since they so kindly left a space for me*, she thought with a smirk. *I’m surprised they are even standing this near each other, though they have been getting along pretty well lately. As long as they don’t have much one on one interaction, they are*
practically civil to each other.

“I’m going to check out that cave over there,” she announced. “Anyone that wants to come is welcome.”

“Is that really a good idea?” Anders asked as he glanced over at her.

“I don’t see why not,” she replied. “It’s away from the mine tunnels, and is most likely just for storage, but it beats just standing here.”

“I’ll join you,” Fenris said, turning and waiting for her to move so he could follow.

Anders sighed, and turned to Varric. “Let Hawke know where we went, if he asks, all right?”

“No problem Blondie,” Varric replied, getting comfortable near the fire. “Yell loud or something if you need help.”

“Can I come?” Merrill asked with hopeful eyes.

“Sure,” Cat said, even as both men looked perturbed. “What?” Cat whispered to Fenris as she led them out. “I thought you didn’t mind Merrill?”

“I do not,” he said quietly. “I was thinking of asking a question or two, but will not in front of her.”

“Oh, I see. In that case, I am sorry. We can talk later tonight if you remember your questions.”

He gave her a small smile, with only the corner of his mouth being upturned, letting her know that he was not upset.

“I have to say, you two really impressed me today,” Cat said louder as they walked. “Merrill, your nature magic combined with Fenris’ damage from his tattoos was very cool.”

“Cool? Should we add a cold spell?” Merrill asked, and Cat chuckled as she shook her head.

“No, saying something is cool, is like saying it is great, or neat to see.”

“Oh… I don’t get it, but all right,” Merrill said with a smile.

“Thank you,” Fenris added.

“No problem,” Cat said. “It was almost frightening, with the thorny vines everywhere, and the pulsing light from the lyrium… Let’s just say, I’m glad I’m on your side.”

Cat tilted her head, and looked at Fenris as he cleared his throat. *If I didn’t know better, I’d think he was embarrassed,* she thought.

“What’s wrong?” she asked.

“N-nothing.” He gave a weak chuckle and cleared his throat again, causing her to grin. *He WAS embarrassed!!*

She gave him a wink, and changed the topic, but she’d be sure to tease him about this later.

Coming to the cave, Cat realized the other three had stopped, and she turned back, with a questioning look on her face. “What is it?” she asked.
“Something feels… off,” Fenris said.

“I can’t tell what it is, but it is a strange feeling,” Anders replied. “Stimulating and powerful, which is very odd for a random cave.”

“We should see what it is,” Merrill said excitedly.

“Yes, but we’ll take it slow,” Cat agreed, turning back around and starting towards the cave. *If I have the right one, there should be another evil tome here,* she thought. *Let’s hope I’ve got the right one…*

She stepped silently into the cave, taking measured steps, and hearing the others behind her. One thing she had been correct about… this was a space used for storage. There were all sorts of rope, crates, pickaxes and other equipment that the miners used. Stepping further in, she noticed that it was a single room, with nothing else to see.

She turned around, and asked. “Can you still feel it?” and was answered with nods. “Which way?” she asked, and Anders pointed even as the other two turned in the same direction.

“Huh, I wonder why I can’t feel anything?” she muttered, as she walked over to the wall where he had pointed. What had looked like a small crack in the rock was actually big enough for a person to fit through, and she stuck her head in to see ahead.

“Looks empty, but let’s check it out,” she said, and stepped through before they could answer. She wasn’t in the mood for a lecture, so she waited for all three of them to follow before going further. Looking around, it appeared it was another dead end, though the room was bigger than the first.

“Let’s circle around by the wall, and see if there is another passage.” Merrill nodded, and took off to the left. Cat shrugged, even though she was pointing toward the right. Either way would work.

Before even making it halfway, they stopped in front of a cluster of glowing rocks.


“It does?” Cat asked them.

“Lyrium in its raw form is strong, and wild,” Fenris said. “Being this close, is like adding extra power to these,” he said as he pointed to the marks on himself.

“Here,” Merrill said, casting a stone fist over at the opposite wall. “My mana is already replenished,” she said, causing Cat to gape at her.

“That was almost instantaneous!”

“Yes, it’s very potent,” Anders agreed with a wry look. “Just don’t touch it, we don’t have any way to carry it safely. We’ll let Varric know, I’m sure he knows someone that will be able to come and collect it, or we’ll simply sell the information to an interested party.”

“If I doesn’t affect me, why can’t I touch it?” Cat asked, though she thought she remembered something about it even affecting dwarves, who were basically immune to it.

“It can still damage you, especially if you are in constant contact with it,” Anders explained. “It can addle your mind after prolonged exposure, even if you don’t touch it.”

“Definitely not touching it then.”

They continued on, to look through the rest of the room, and as they were almost done, they came
across the book. Merrill reached down for it, and Cat said, “Wait!” causing her to freeze before she touched it.

“This is no normal book,” Anders said apprehensively.

“Hawke got a letter, from Idunna, the one who told us about those blood mages trying to place demons inside the templar recruits? She got away safely, but she wrote to tell us that the lead mage had placed demons inside several tomes around Kirkwall.”

“She put demons inside of books?!” Fenris demanded.

“Tomes of magic specifically,” Cat replied. “There are five that Idunna was aware of, and it seems we have found one.”

“This is amazing!” Merrill said as she looked at the tome with wide eyes. “Do you hear it?”

“Hear it?” Anders asked in horror. “Don’t listen to it!”

“It is willing to give information in exchange for leaving it alone,” Merrill said with a smile. “That’s a very good bargain.”

“Are you insane?!” Fenris and Anders asked together.

“What? No.” Merrill pouted, as if someone had kicked a puppy, not just questioned her sanity.

“Merrill, Hawke wants to destroy them,” Cat explained. “He, Varric and Sebastian already got one this morning that they found in the Chantry.”

“But why??” Merrill asked, confused. “This isn’t something that will harm anyone!”

“How can you be sure of that?” Cat asked skeptically.

“I… don’t know… I just know!” Merrill exclaimed.

“We should definitely destroy it,” Fenris said with finality.

“I have to agree,” Anders added.

“Sorry, Merrill, but me too,” Cat said.

“You don’t understand!” Merrill cried out.

“Like I said, there are five that we know of. That means there are three more. You can talk about this with Hawke, and maybe convince him.” Cat didn’t think so, but chose not to say that part. “For right now, the consensus of our group is to destroy this tome.”

Saying Cat was shocked by the intense anger on Merrill’s face would have been a major understatement.

“FINE.” Merrill grit out, readying her staff. The other three eyed each other warily, but were determined to destroy the tome. They glanced between each other and the book before Fenris brought his sword overhead and swung it down at the book, slicing it straight through its covers, and making a slice in the dirt underneath it.

They heard an awful noise, and turned to see the abomination, desire demon, and shades that were released with the action.
“Get back!” Fenris called. “Merrill, our attack!”

Nothing happened, and Cat and Anders turned to Merrill who was fighting a shade, and purposefully ignoring them. Cat was shocked, never believing that Merrill would behave in such a way, but focused back on the fight as the creatures were practically on top of them.

She backtracked, and seeing Anders freeze the abomination, she shot her bolt at its head, shattering it on impact. It was a difficult fight at first, but they regrouped quickly and destroyed the demon, which made the shades much easier to kill.

Once they were clear of enemies, Fenris stalked over to Merrill, and Cat went to stop him, worried what he was going to do, and knowing she was already too late.

He was stopped by Anders, right in front of her, glaring down at her with a snarl. “You are extremely lucky.”

She looked up in fear, though through sheer stubbornness, kept his gaze.

“If anyone… anyone besides yourself had been hurt, I would have not hesitated to kill you. In fact, you should thank Anders and Cat,” he continued, “as they are the reasons you are not already dead.” Merrill flinched slightly at his words, and visibly jumped as his tattoos flared to life in front of her. “You don’t have to agree,” he continued, “but do not ever put our crew in danger during a fight again because your pride was wounded.”

Merrill eyes widened, realizing what could have happened, and looked as if she would cry. “I didn’t mean-”

“It is over now,” Fenris said as he turned from her. “We will not speak of it further. But you know the consequences if you should let it happen again.”

He walked to Cat and picked up the book’s pieces and handed them to her. “Let’s get back to Hawke,” he said, and she nodded. He gestured for her to go, doing the same for Anders and Merrill so that he could bring up the rear. The group was quiet as they walked back to the crew, Merrill only turning once to glance back at Fenris.

* * * * *

“I’m going to have to find some better equipment for those men,” Hawke grumbled to Varric as they headed out of the Bone Pit. “Some of those pickaxes couldn’t even chip bread.”

“Yes, well, I’ll ask around. Maybe we can find a good deal for buying in bulk.”

“I doubt my luck is that good, but it can’t hurt to check.”

“So Blondie,” Varric changed the subject by turning to Anders. “Find anything interesting?”

“Yes actually,” Anders replied. “A few things in fact.”

“Oh?” Hawke asked, curiously.

“A demon book?” Hawke asked.

“Raw lyrium?” Varric asked.

“Is your name Anders?” Anders asked Fenris sarcastically.

“No, thank the Maker,” Fenris retorted snidely, and Cat sighed.

“Yes,” she said loudly, taking over the talking to avoid a fight. Fenris was seriously pissed at Merrill, and trying to hold back, which only made him grumpy. She did not want him to give Anders a reason to fight with him.

“We found one of the tomes like you did earlier, Hawke.” Cat walked around to hand the pieces to Hawke, then walked backward so she could face him as she spoke.

“We destroyed the tome, though Merrill wanted to speak with you about that. She was able to hear the book say something before we did.” Hawke glanced at Merrill before turning back to Cat with a questioning look. “I didn’t hear anything, no, and we decided to destroy the tome since that was the last direction we got from you. But she wants to discuss alternatives for the next one we find.”

“All right, we’ll speak about it later, Merrill,” Hawke said, not looking pleased, but willing to hear her out nonetheless.

“Thank you,” Merrill replied. “And thank you Cat.”

“Anytime Merrill,” Cat said with a smile before turning to the dwarf. “And yes, Varric, raw lyrium. Again, I couldn’t feel anything, but the other three could all sense it before we actually saw it. It seemed a decent size. Anders was saying we could either pay someone to come collect it, or just sell the location, though we might have to lead them there, it was well hidden.”

“I’ll see what kind of money we’re talking, and go from there,” Varric replied. “I’d prefer to just sell the location, but I’ll get the best coin.”

“Excellent,” Hawke replied.

“So… where are we going now?” Cat asked. “To see Feynriel?”

“That was my original plan, but we got a lead on where Javaris went, and that is more pressing,” Hawke answered. “Can you not do that?” he asked her, as he looked at her feet. “You’re going to trip and fall.”

“Sure, Mother,” Cat replied with a smirk, and Hawke rolled his eyes.

Cat looked behind him, seeing Merrill trying to speak with Fenris to his aggravation, and she called out for Merrill to come talk with her at the front of the group. *Hopefully we’ll find a fight soon, so Fenris can get out his pent up anger,* she thought as she turned to walk facing forward.

“So, we’re looking for this guy for the Qunari, right?” she asked.

“Yeah,” Varric said, as he walked with the two of them, even as Hawke dropped back. “The Arishok seems to think he stole from them trying to get his hands on their explosive powder. But… he’s not exactly a master thief… or any sort of master anything. I think there is something else going on here.”

“I don’t doubt it,” Cat said. “There is so much anger and hatred in the city right now, both towards
“The Qunari and from them as well.”

“The Qunari must like it here, to stay so long where people are so mean to them,” Merrill said.

“Daisy, as far as I can tell, the Qunari don’t like anything.”

“Oh, they must like something… ” she said. “Sunshine?…. Butterflies?…. Rainbows??”

Cat smiled sardonically. “If I ever see a Qunari admiring butterflies Merrill, you will be the first one I tell.”

Merrill smiled back at her, without a care, as she enjoyed being out in nature while she could before they entered the city again.

* * * * *

“I think that’s it, right there,” Varric said quietly to Hawke, and he nodded, and strode over to the woman at the makeshift stall.

“I hear you’re selling the assets of Javaris Tintop?” Hawke asked.

“We are,” she replied. “Separate districts, separate workers, keeps things simple. This one had a meager lot, but skipped with dues outstanding, so up it goes.”

“Sounds like he’s made a few friends,” Hawke said casually. “Can one of them point me his way?”

The woman was shrewd, and knew what he was really asking. She assessed the group behind him before turning back to Hawke himself. “Say that about anyone else, and I’d throw you out. But this one… he owes me too. Can’t be certain, but if he’s trying to avoid patrols, he’d head out smuggler’s cut. It empties at a cave outside town.”

Hawke looked at Varric and received a nod, and turned back to thank her. She nodded, and said “And a word to pass on? Don’t come back.” Hawke gave her a nod, and turned away, heading back to the others.

“Seems we have a smuggler’s cave to check out,” he said quietly to the others. “Everyone in?” Receiving nods of assent, he gestured for Varric to lead the way, and the group headed out.

Upon entering the passage, they promptly fell over several crates, and spent the first few minutes trying to avoid damaging the goods.

“Why would anyone just leave this here?” Sebastian asked. “It’s like asking for it to get taken.”

“Honor among thieves,” Varric replied. “Ooh, what’s this?” he asked as he opened a crate.

“What was that about honor?” Aveline asked dryly.

“Madam, you wound me. I am no thief,” he replied.

“Of course, my mistake.”

Cat smirked as she listened to them bicker, enjoying the playful undertones. She caught sight of
Hawke peeking through several crates himself, but didn’t mention it out loud.

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They came across a few smugglers, some who let them pass without a word, and others who wanted a fight, so it took awhile for them to catch up to Javaris. Hawke tried to speak, but they simply attacked on sight, so he ordered his crew to fight.

He hung back slightly, knowing the smaller group of mercenaries didn’t stand a chance, and observed. *They would definitely need to practice with each other more*, he thought. *It still looked like an every man for himself out there.*

He turned as he heard Merrill yelling Cat’s name, seeing that she had used her daggers to kill a couple of men unaware, but now was being pursued by three others as she tried to get away. *She needs to work on her stealth ability,* he thought.

“Fenris!” Merrill called out, as vines travelled through the ground from Merrill and wrapped themselves around the three men, giving Cat the opening to run back. Fenris strode forward, sheathing his sword, and stood in the midst of them, as his tattoos began pulsing with light from the lyrium.

With each pulse, Hawke could see the pain on his face, as he grit his teeth to bear it, but he could also hear the screams from the men, as with each pulse something invisible clawed at them. “Maker…” Hawke murmured, as he witnessed the spiritual damage slash the men from the inside until they fell limp.

The vines fell back to the earth, the bodies with them, and the glow from Fenris abated as well. Looking around, Hawke realized that those were the last of the mercenaries, and that everyone had watched this combined attack in its entirety.

“Well, that was…” Hawke heard Varric say before he trailed off, obviously not knowing how to finish his compliment, and Hawke stepped forward.

“Thank you,” he heard Fenris say quietly, knowing it was only for Merrill’s ears. He slowed, but continued forward. “for watching out for Cat.”

“It was the least I could do… after…” she replied, and Fenris nodded before turning away. Hawke figured he should change the subject, but made a mental note to find out what that was about.

“Good work everyone,” he said, and he headed over to where he spotted the cowering dwarf, hearing the others walking behind him.

“Javaris…” he began with a smirk. “Is this any way to greet an old friend?”

The dwarf stood, the shock apparent. “You?! Granny’s garters, of course she would send you.”

***

Finally, Hawke thought. *After the trip back to Kirkwall, and asking around for hours, we finally,*
finally find the elf. And where is she? Surrounded by poisonous gas. Bloody elf, and bloody Qunari…

Aveline watched in amusement, only guessing as to the reasons behind the muttering and mutinous faces that Hawke was making. “Let’s get this over with Hawke,” she said.

“Uh…” Hawke looked up feeling hopeful. “How about we skip this one? I mean, the guards can totally handle this.”

Aveline’s eyes narrowed. “And how about I shove a canary up your coal mine?” she threatened. “Let’s. Go.” She gave Hawke a small push.

“Oooh, scary…” Varric teased, and Hawke gave him a withering look. He stepped up to the gate, and opening it, took a deep breath, and stepped through.

“Anything you can cover your mouth and nose with, should help,” Cat spoke up as she tied a bandanna around her face. “Even just breathing through your shirt.” She followed the group, noting that though a few looked for something to use, none of them had anything besides Hawke. Probably should have been better prepared, she berated herself.

“Find the source!” she heard Aveline call, and she stepped forward, squinting through the mist, trying to see… anything.

She heard Hawke swear, and went towards the sound. He was standing straight, holding what looked like a pipe in his hand. “Who leaves things like this around for me to kick??” he groused.

“That looks promising,” Anders said, and Cat turned to see he had constructed a barrier around himself. “That barrel over there!” he pointed, and they all turned to look.

The barrel itself was ordinary enough, but there was thick green smoke coming in streams out of it. The smoke thinned out as it moved away from the barrel, as if carried on a wind that Cat couldn’t feel.

Aveline and Fenris went forward, holding down the lid, as Hawke brought the piece of metal over, and between the three of them, were able to put it in place.

“Let’s split into three groups,” Hawke suggested. “Find the bars, and the barrels, and let’s get rid of this gas.”

Everyone nodded, and he pointed as he spoke. “Merrill, Sebastian, you’re with me. Fenris, Varric, go with Aveline. Cat, Anders…” he stopped as he realized they didn’t have a third.

“We’ll be fine, we’ll call if we can’t get the bar on,” Anders said. He grabbed Cat’s hand, and headed off to the east.

“Do you know where you’re going?” Cat asked.

“No,” he said as he changed direction. “I’m just thinking if we can follow the thicker smoke, we should find the barrel.”

“Which won’t do us any good without the bar,” she added.

“Good point.”

They moved slowly, dragging their feet as much as they could, in the hopes of finding another bar
amid the haze. Cat looked around as she heard coughing and gagging, feeling sick to her stomach. She stopped as she heard a maniacal laugh.

“Did you hear that?” she asked.

“The laugh? Yeah,” he responded. “Maker, this whole place makes me ill.”

“Agreed,” she replied. Hearing the laugh again, she turned, trying to zero in on where it was coming from.

“make the powder… blame the ox-men… make the powder… blame the ox-men…”

It was barely a whisper, but after several attempts, she could finally understand the chant.

“Creepy…” she uttered.

“Found it!” Anders called, and she turned, only to find herself alone.

“Anders?” she called. “I can’t see you!”

“Over here!” she heard, and started moving in that direction.

“Call again?” she asked, and heard nothing in reply. “Anders?”

Her heart started pounding loudly, and she slowly made her way forward. “Anders??” she said.

“the powder… the powder… the POWDER!”

Cat turned and stepped back, grateful that she did, as a small woman tried to stick her with a small dagger. She watched as the woman practically danced up the street, then turned back and ran at her in an attack.

Cat didn’t want to hurt her, yet dodge after dodge, the woman’s attacks were only getting better. She pulled out her own dagger, thinking that she could just injure her in order to incapacitate her, when something came from the mist and struck the woman on the head, causing her to fall down unconscious, and Anders stepped out of the haze, brandishing his staff like a bat.

“Anders!” Cat called in relief. “Where have you been?”

“Looking for you,” he said as he stowed his staff, and went to help her up. “I was calling and calling, and you never replied. I was so worried!”

“What?” she said, shocked. “I was calling for you, and you didn’t reply.”

“Hmm, that’s odd. There is more to this mist than we once thought.” He looked around, noting that he could no longer hear the sounds of the streets around them. “Let’s find that barrel and get out of here.”
“Issy!” Cat called.

She stopped short at the threshold to Varric’s room in shock, the sight of Isabela was expected, but she had no idea that Hawke would be here as well. The moment over, she rushed over to her friend and hugged her around her neck.

“Hi Kitty,” Isabela said with a big smile. “I’ve missed you too.”

Cat flopped on the bench next to her, though she was facing the wrong direction, but it made it easy to look her in the eyes. “How are you?” she asked.

“Good,” Isabela replied, before looking away. “Well, as good as can be expected for coming up empty, anyway.”

“You didn’t find anything?” Cat asked, as she turned her head to see where Isabela was looking. Seeing Hawke, had her smiling and thinking, Aww…they can’t stop looking at each other!

“Nothing,” Isabela confirmed.

“I’ll start asking around then~” Cat began before Isabela interrupted.

“No!” Isabela grabbed her shoulder, and squeezed it. “No Kitty, we’re going to wait a bit, let whoever has it think things have calmed down.”

“Oh… okay. If you’re sure~”

“I am. This is for the best.”

“All right then.”

“Hungry, Little Dove?” Varric asked her, as he opened the door again for Corff and Norah to bring several trays in filled with food.

“Sure Varric,” Cat replied, as she stood up to turn and sit properly at the table.

“So Kitty, fill me in,” Isabela said as she poured herself a drink. “It’s been awhile since we’ve talked.”

“Too long,” Cat agreed. “Well, we helped Sebastian deal with the people responsible for killing his family.”

“Really?” she asked. “What happened?”

Varric and Hawke seemed happy enough to let her be the one to tell the story, so she told what she could remember of the adventure, describing the details that would interest Isabela, and skimming over the others.

“Sebastian said the man was a prude, but I think you would have been impressed with his creativity,” Cat said with a snicker. “I tried to do you proud and get everyone sharing their thoughts on the matter, but the guys wouldn’t say anything.”

“I’m not surprised,” Isabela said with a laugh. “They are all pretty stuffy after all.”
“Stuffy?” Varric asked with a look of mock offense. “More like I’m too much of a gentleman to kiss and tell.”

“Ha!” Cat barked. “I’d believe that of Sebastian perhaps, but I know you too well my friend.”

Hawke merely smiled and shook his head as they continued their friendly bickering.

“And what is Kitty leaving out?” Isabela asked him suddenly.

“Hey!” Cat complained.

“Not much,” Hawke replied. “A couple of fights with demons. We’ve started working together as a group, practicing combinations of fighting styles to better counter any foe we meet.”

“Smart,” Isabela said, taking another drink. She looked over at Cat’s full plate of food. “Eat up Kitty,” she said with a smirk.

“Yes Mother,” Cat said with a roll of her eyes. “I guess Varric can tell you about the other day then.”

“My pleasure,” Varric said with a nod, and Cat started eating as Varric told Isabela of their most recent travels out to the Bone Pit, their sojourn after Javaris, and finally the mess that was the poisonous gas cloud in Lowtown.

“This was all for the Qunari?” Isabela asked uncertainly.

“Not exactly,” Hawke answered. “The Arishok said he was just letting us know, since I had some semblance of honor or something like that. But after we returned this morning to let him know the outcome, I no longer believe it.”

“What now?” Cat asked, her hand covering her mouth that was still full of food.

“Why not?” Hawke asked, and Cat nodded. “Well, we went and told him about the actual thief, and explained what she had said about getting help from some humans in the city. I had thought he would be concerned for his people, and the growing tension and hatred in the city, but he just shrugged it off.”

“Typical,” Isabela muttered.

“Then, he says something about the city trying to lay troubles at his feet, and Daisy speaks up,” Varric added. He cleared his throat and spoke high to mimic Merrill, “but your feet didn’t do anything… did they?”

Cat chuckled. “Typical Merrill…” she said.

“Then the Arishok starts listing all the problems with our city-” Hawke said.

“And Hawke just gives him an angry look and says, ‘save the lecture’ and turns away,” Varric interrupted with a grin. “The Arishok did not like that…”

“He surely didn’t,” Hawke agreed with a smirk. “Basically yelled at me to stop and listen, demanding how I can justify all the corruption around me… as if the whole city was somehow my responsibility because I have an ability to lead a crew that is strong?”

Cat could tell by the look on his face that Hawke thought the whole idea ludicrous, and smiled.

“And?” Isabela prodded.
“And I told him that this was a free city. People are free to live their lives as they choose.” Hawke gave a sarcastic laugh. “He just looked at me, stunned, and said, ‘you… like it?’ Then tries to convert me.”

“No, really?” Cat asked, and Isabela looked intrigued.

“Probably not in actuality.” Hawke relented. “But he surely tried to get me to understand how much better everything would be if everyone was as certain of their role and their purpose as those under the Qun.”

“I didn’t think they cared about convincing anyone,” Isabela said with disdain. “Normally they just brainwash their enemies, don’t they?”

“I wouldn’t know,” Hawke replied. “This is my first dealings with them, and I must say, they confuse the hell out of me.”

“I only know what I’ve heard,” Isabela stated. “and rumors can hardly be trusted.”

“So then what happened?” Cat asked, wanting to get back to the story. “You told him, no thanks?”

“Pretty much,” Hawke said with another smirk. “He wondered aloud if the weaker people would feel the same, but then said it wasn’t his purpose to convert.”

“So why bring it up?” Cat asked.

“Like I said… confusing,” Hawke replied.

“Then, Hawke asked what his purpose was, and told the Arishok it was taking too long, whatever it was,” Varric said.

“You didn’t…” Cat said with wide eyes.

“Again, not in those words, exactly…” Hawke said with a narrowed look at Varric. “Must you embellish?”

“I’m just making the story more exciting,” Varric replied.

“It was exciting enough,” Hawke muttered. “That didn’t go over well, and after a lot of yelling about being robbed, and having to recover their property being their true purpose, he told us that they are not going anywhere until they reclaim whatever it is that they lost.”

“And then… told us we should be grateful he hasn’t decided to do more than that,” Varric added. “Then, kicked us out.”

Hawke raised an eyebrow as Cat and Isabela looked at each other. He hadn’t forgotten his need to learn their silent language, and mentally moved it higher in priority on his personal list.

“Definitely glad I didn’t go,” Cat finally said, putting more bread in her mouth.

“Agreed,” Isabela said. “If they are this volatile, I’d prefer Kitty not be involved with them at all.” Cat rolled her eyes at Isabela, but didn’t disagree. “Well, since I’m back, I suppose you can count on my help in your next venture,” Isabela said to Hawke. “those not involving Qunari, that is.”

“You’re welcome along,” Hawke said with a smile. “I’ve missed your stealthing abilities.”

“I’m sure,” she purred, and Cat smiled, making an eye roll to Varric.
“What’s the plan for tomorrow?” Cat asked.

“Sundermount,” Varric said with a smirk, and Cat shrugged. “though I doubt it will be as exciting as last time.”

“Don’t say that Varric,” Cat teased. “You’ll hurt Issy’s feelings. She always thinks things are more exciting when she’s involved.”

“Too right,” Isabela added with a smirk.

* * * * *

“I cannot thank you enough for coming,” Arianni said to Hawke as she led the way to Keeper Marethari.

“It is no trouble,” Hawke replied courteously. “How is Feynriel faring?”

Arianni face dropped, looking as if she would cry. “I am afraid, I do not know how to explain it. His dreams have been troublesome for some time, and was the reason we sought help in the first place. But now… it is even worse.”

“Worse?” Hawke asked.

“The Keeper assures me it is not so, yet I feel the demons have taken him.”

“Why would you think that?” Anders asked.

Arianni didn’t turn as they arrived at a large tent. “We cannot waken him,” she said softly as she opened the tent flap, and gestured them inside.

Hawke walked in, noticing the sparse furnishings. Though the space was large there was only a single cot, with Feynriel laying on it. Marethari sat nearby, appearing as if meditating or something similar. She opened her eyes and stood as the group entered the tent.

“Andaran Atishan Hawke,” she said.

“Hello Marethari,” Hawke replied. “Arianni tells me Feynriel will not wake?” he asked, getting right to the point.

“I am afraid I have not been able to help him as I was wanting to,” she replied. “His powers are very rare, and have not been seen in ages.”

“Oh?” Hawke asked, looking over at the sleeping boy again.

“He is what we call a Somniari, or a dreamer.”

Fenris tensed as he heard this, and Anders gave a low whistle. “What?” Hawke asked turning back. “What does that mean?”

“I’ve only ever heard about it,” Anders replied. “Where most are unaware of being in the fade when dreaming, and mages, though aware, can only somewhat influence the specific piece of the fade they are in… a dreamer has the ability to enter the fade as he chooses, controlling and shaping it around
him. If he is powerful enough, he could change others’ dreams, or even kill them through their dreams while they sleep, rendering them tranquil.”

“I have heard as much,” Marethari said sadly. “I have no ability with such powers, and have been unable to help Feynriel in controlling them. With such a power, when in the fade it attracts all demons that are wanting to control him.” She looked back at Hawke. “Luckily, most dreamers are frail of mind, and do not survive possession. A Dreamer-Abomination would be nigh unstoppable.”

“So I just need to enter the fade and find him?” Hawke asked. “Sounds easy enough.”

“The great elves of the Dales were experts in the somniari arts, and with this ritual could send a number of people into the fade, even those without magic. I’ve recreated it as best as I can, and we will use Arianni here as a focus for Feynriel to return through the veil.”

She looked around, for a moment, speaking to everyone. “Excuse us please, I must speak with Hawke alone.”

Cat followed the others outside of the tent, hearing Merrill say something about hoping to see the ritual first hand. Anders grabbed her arm, and pulled her away, with Fenris following and blocking them from the others.

“Cat, what can you tell us?” Anders whispered.

Cat glanced around, noting that they didn’t have anyone around them, and she leaned forward. “She’s asking Hawke to kill him if he gets possessed. It will make him tranquil, but it’s better than the alternative,” she whispered back.

“I worry about going into the fade,” Anders said. “I don’t know what will happen, and I’ve been avoiding it since I merged with Justice.”

Cat gave him an understanding smile. “Basically, you’ll switch places. Justice will be in control and speaking, and you’ll be the passenger just along for the ride.”

Anders’ face screwed up in a wince, at the thought. “Does Hawke need me to go?” he asked her.

Cat shook her head as she glanced up and around again. “Pretty much everyone that does go is tempted by a demon, and every one gives in to it, except Sebastian, though I am certain he doesn’t want to go. Issy won’t care, one way or the other, but Aveline will suffer for it, so she shouldn’t go either.”

“And me?” Fenris asked.

“If Merrill goes, it will target her, not you. But if not, you will be its target,” she answered. “Hawke will understand, and forgive. But there is a moment when those that give in fight against Hawke.”

“And if neither Merrill or I go?” he asked.

“Um… Varric I think.”

“And what about you?” Anders asked Cat. She gave him a shrug in reply, but before she could say anything, Marethari and Hawke stepped out of the tent.

“I believe with the power of the ritual, I can send three or four of you into the fade after Feynriel.” Marethari said to Hawke. “Choose carefully, as all will face temptation.”
Issy smirked as she glanced over at Hawke. “I never give in to temptation,” she said loudly.

“Opinions?” Hawke asked.

“Demons have a hierarchy in the fade as well,” Anders said thoughtfully. “The more powerful will have scared off others, so we will face powerful demons there.”

“The Keeper said his mind is frail, so the demon will need to convince him to offer himself,” Merrill added. “If trying to force possession, his mind will break, and it will kill him.”

Marethari smiled at Merrill in pride. “Indeed. The same is also true for you, Hawke. You will need to help him decide to reject their offers. If you simply point it all out, his mind will not be able to handle it.”

“Better and better,” Hawke muttered.

“I will go... but Anders should not,” Fenris said, and everyone looked to him in surprise. “He has a spirit inside of him, and who knows how it will react inside the fade.”

Hawke looked thoughtful, and then glanced at Anders who nodded. “Very well,” he replied. “Anyone else that should not go?”

“I do not belong in a world of dreams,” Sebastian stated. “I will remain here.”

Hawke nodded again.

“I think you should have a well rounded team,” Anders said. “If Fenris is your warrior, you should also take a rouge, just in case.”

“Good idea,” Hawke replied. Looking at Varric, who looked less than thrilled at the idea, he turned to Isabela. “Guess you’re in Isabela,” he said.

“Of course,” she said, sauntering over to Fenris. “You need your best after all. Wonder what he dreams about?” she asked him, and Fenris merely shook his head.

“Maybe one more?” Cat asked, thinking that Hawke would be alone if he only took those two, and that could be a recipe for disaster.

“If you wanted to come, you should have just volunteered,” Hawke smirked at her.

“Oh! No, I didn’t mean me,” she replied quickly.

“This should be fun!” Isabela said as she grabbed Cat’s arm. “Like old times, eh Kitty?”

“Uh…” Cat had no words as Isabela pulled her forward toward the tent. Fenris gave her a concerned look, but she just shrugged at him. If I give in to a demon, I’ll just wake back up here, right? she thought.

“Very well, we will start the ritual. Arianni, I need you in the tent to help Feynriel focus. Everyone else, please relax and let my people know if you need anything.” Marethari nodded to those that were staying outside of the tent, as they lowered themselves to the ground, and prepared to wait. Then she followed Hawke and his three companions into the tent.

“If you will all lie down here,” she said. “Hawke, next to Feynriel please, and so on.” She nodded as they got into place. “Now, close your eyes. When you no longer hear my voice, open your eyes, and you will find yourselves in the fade. You should be nearby Feynriel, and can help him.”
Cat listened as Marethari gave her final instructions, wondering what she was going to do when her friends turned to fight against them. *Let’s be real here,* she thought. *Most likely, it will be when I betray and fight all of them…*

Hearing Hawke’s voice instead of Marethari’s, Cat’s eyes flew open. She could have sworn she was still lying down, but as she glanced around the hall, she felt as if she was simultaneously sleeping and awake, and it was *very* disconcerting. Like a really vivid dream, and she smirked as she pinched her own arm. *Ow! Guess I am awake… sort of. So weird!*

She looked around to see the others having the same reaction, and hearing Hawke say, “Let’s go.”

She followed them toward a door, looking back for the floating book, and finding it flitting around. She turned around, and reached after it, giving chase as it stayed out of her reach. She didn’t notice Fenris until she ran into him— he had turned back to see what she was doing, had caught the book without a problem, and handed it to her with a smirk.

“Not fair,” she told him with a smile. “Your arms are longer than mine.”

“Oh yes?” he asked. “It had nothing to do with being faster than a floating book?”

“Not at all,” she grinned, as she looked down at the book. She looked up as she felt the others approach, giving Hawke a small smile. “Sorry, I saw a floating book,” she said by way of an explanation.

“So you decided to catch it?” he asked with a smirk.

“Well yeah, who wouldn’t?” she asked with a grin, and held out the book for him.

He smiled back as he took it, and Cat had to remind herself not to blush. *We’ve been through all of that, remember??* she told herself.

“Whoa,” Hawke said, and Cat reached out to steady him, as he looked a little wobbly.

“You okay?” she asked.

“Yeah… I just opened it, and felt strange.”

“Strange how?” she asked, as Fenris took the book from him and he and Isabela looked through it.

“Like… like a thousand thoughts all coming to me at once.”

“Hmm… that is strange.”

“I do not feel that,” Fenris said, as he continued to leaf through the book.

“Well, all I did was open it,” Hawke said as he grabbed the book back. He randomly opened to another page, but looked disappointed. “Nothing happened.”

“Whatever it was, it seemed it only happened once,” Isabela commented. “Should we continue?”

“Yeah,” Hawke replied. “Let’s go.”

Cat shot glances at Hawke as they walked, wondering what it was that had happened. In the game, there were small puzzles that gained Hawke attribute points, making him stronger or learning a new spell. But here? Cat was flummoxed, wondering if completing the barrel puzzle would give the same result.
As they approached the room with the first barrel puzzle, Cat decided to try.

Hawke looked in the room, and left the door wide. “Huh, just some random barrels. That’s strange to have them here in a dream, isn’t it?”

She glanced in the room, then said, “Perhaps Feynriel likes puzzles.”

The other three looked back at her in confusion. “Why would you say that?” Hawke asked.

She pointed back at the room. “The barrels were set up in a puzzle. You try to move all the smaller barrels to the top and the large to the bottom in fifteen moves or less.”

“So, it’s some kind of game?” Isabela said, looking dubious. “Feynriel didn’t seem the type…”

“Well, I guess it wouldn’t hurt to try,” Cat said. “Perhaps it will give us more insight into Feynriel’s character?”

Hawke seemed doubtful, but he turned back anyway, not wanting to let something simple hinder him from helping the lad. “So I just switch the top and bottom barrels?” he asked as he walked over to them.

“One barrel at a time, and you can only move it one space, not through other barrels.” Cat explained as she walked over. “See this empty space on the end? That’s the only place you can move something to.”

“Oh, I get it.” Hawke stood for a long moment looking over the puzzle in front of him. “Okay, got it.” He started moving barrels one by one, and Cat counted his moves aloud.

“...and fourteen.” Cat finished as Hawke moved his last barrel into place. “You win.”

Hawke turned to face her, and she watched, fascinated, as his eyes blinked rapidly. It seemed like it was uncontrolable, and she wondered what was happening.

“Hawke?” she asked. She repeated her same question from earlier, “you okay?”

Hawke swayed slightly as his eyelids stopped their movement. “What was that??” he asked.

“How do you feel?” she questioned, as Fenris and Isabela walked over.

“What is going on here?” Isabela asked, looking around.

“Hawke won… and got… a reward?” Cat said. “I think?”

“Got something anyway,” Hawke mumbled. He stood upright, and looked around at them. “I think… it’s hard to describe, but I feel like my mana reserves just increased.”

“What?” Fenris asked in disbelief.

“I know…” Hawke replied with a smirk. “I’m having a hard time believing it myself.”

“Well, maybe we should look around some more,” Isabela said, as she started out of the room. The others followed behind her, hearing her call out from the hallway. “Found some more barrels!”

Cat followed Fenris and Hawke into the next room, looking at the four red barrels lined up with the regular ones. “Strange…” she murmured.
“Should someone else try this one?” Hawke asked.

“We are not mages,” Fenris answered.

“True, but…” Hawke paused. “Okay, I guess I’ll go again.” He walked forward to look at the barrels. “Cat?” he asked. “You know what the point of this one is?”

“Uh, stacking the red barrels in the center?” she replied.

“Are you just guessing?” he asked with a frown.

“Sort of?” she replied again, and he looked back at her crossly.

“Fine, we’ll try that then.” He took a few minutes again to stare at the puzzle then began moving the barrels. Upon completion, he called out, “Whoa!” and fell over.

“Hawke!?” the three of them cried, moving over to help him.

As they sat him up, he grinned, and they were all taken aback.

“You okay?” Cat asked yet again.

“Never better,” Hawke replied as he moved to stand. “I think I just figured out that healing spell.”

“What?” Fenris asked in disbelief.

“Yeah, it’s strange, but I was thinking that I’d prefer to know more spells instead of having a bigger mana pool. And it just came to me, in a flash. I know what I’ve been doing wrong.”

“Well, how about you wait on trying until you’re back with Anders, just in case…” Isabela said, giving Cat and Fenris a look that said she thought Hawke had gone crazy.

“Yeah, we should find Feynriel,” Cat agreed.

“Okay!” Hawke grinned, and started down the hallway to a final door. Cat could see the baffled looks on her friends’ faces, before she smiled and followed after him.

* * * * *

“Oops…” Hawke said snarkily to the demon. “That’s my bad. You see, I was trying to help, honest.”

“Oh? Then you won’t mind if I help your pet find another path as well…” the demon said as it floated over to Cat and Isabela. “You think your pirate queen would stay with you? If she had a ship and crew waiting?”

“Why?” Isabela smirked at it. “You happen to have any extra laying around?”

“Indeed,” the demon purred. “A two mast brigantine, and a hundred eager lads,” she offered. “I’ve named it, the Siren’s Call two.”

“It has a nice ring,” Isabela offered, though Cat could tell she was entranced with the idea.
“It’s all yours my pet. All I want in return is help in a fight.”

“I do like fights,” Isabela said, and the demon turned her to face the others of her group.

“Just the two of us, against the three of them… and the ship is yours.”

“Issy…” Cat said half warning, half pleading. Isabela glanced over, and something crossed her expression.

“I won’t fight that one,” she said to the demon.

“Very well, just the other two then,” it replied, tilting it’s head as it peered at Cat.

“Wow, I’ve never had anyone talk out their plan of stabbing me in the back right in front of me before,” Hawke said sarcastically to Isabela. “Should I just turn around so you don’t have to strain yourself?”

“You are just the sweetest,” Isabela said with a smirk, as she pulled her daggers out. “You know me well enough to know, I always come first.”

“No!” Cat yelled as Isabela threw a smoke bomb at her own feet, disappearing into stealth. She glanced around, trying to spot her, and found the desire demon approaching her.

“She desires your safety as much as you desire hers,” the demon said with a smile. “But yours is broader is it not? Wanting the safety of the others as well.”

“So?” Cat spat back. “That only happens when you’re gone.” She reached back, pulling out her own daggers, and pointing them at the demon.

“I am more powerful than the others you have encountered,” it said. “I can actually give you what you desire.” It circled around her, and she followed without letting her daggers fall. “Your life? Your home? This can all be a dream…”

“Don’t listen to it!” Fenris yelled out. “Fight it!!”

“Your mother and father… they miss you,” it cooed at her. “They have never given up hope of seeing you again.”

Cat froze in surprise.

“They are not all…” it said softly and Cat had trouble keeping her daggers up as her eyes filled.

Hawke looked back, seeing Cat’s arms lower slowly. “You got this?” he asked Fenris who nodded. Hawke took off towards Cat as Isabela charged at him.

His tattoos flared, and he reached out and grabbed her throat, even as her daggers pierced his arms. He gave a hard twist with his wrist, feeling her neck snap, and then his hand was suddenly empty, as if she had not been there in the first place. He winced as he pulled the dagger from his arm, watching as it turned to smoke where he dropped it.

Hawke went for the demon, almost flinging lightning in his haste, but quickly pulling back before he did something that would hurt Cat. He moved his staff and called his mana to form stone, waiting until the demon moved into the perfect spot to send a large stonefist directly at it.

“You husband,” the demon said, and Hawke’s eyes widened in shock, as he saw Cat’s face crumble. “He misses you so… and continues to look for you. I can take you there, you can see how
he has changed, how he realized how much he needs you.”

Hawke shook himself out of his stupor as Cat fell to her knees and sobbed. He shot his stone fist, taking the demon away from Cat, and followed through with attack after attack until the demon was no more.

Turning back, panting from the exertion, he saw Cat was hugging Fenris tightly, as he rubbed circles on her back. He waited, until Cat was calm before he spoke.

“We should move on,” he said softly.

* * * * *

“Cat, I want you to wait here,” Fenris said quietly.

“But-”

“I don’t want you to be near another demon right now,” he interrupted her. “I don’t want you to see me give in to such weakness, and I most assuredly do not want to have to fight you. Please.”

Cat glanced up at his face, then over at Hawke, who was waiting at the door. She stepped back with a nod. “I’ll be out here,” she said gesturing to the hallway they had entered.

Fenris nodded, and strode over to where Hawke waited. “Good idea,” Hawke told him quietly. “I was worried as well.”

Fenris acknowledged him, wishing he could apologize in advance for what would happen, wishing that he could be stronger… but he just gestured to the door. “Shall we?”

Cat waited for what seemed like an eternity, until she heard the footsteps in the hall. She threw open the door in front of her, and saw Hawke alone, looking so forlorn that she wanted to just wrap him up in a hug.

“I’m sorry…” she said as he neared her.

“It’s not your fault,” he replied. “I hope… they are not tranquil. They aren’t mages, so they should be all right… I think.”

“I think you’re right about that,” she answered. “Do you want to take a break before we go see Feynriel?”

“Yes, but I don’t want to be here any longer than I must,” he said. “Let’s go.”

They walked out into the main hall, and saw Feynriel looking around in confusion.

“Feynriel?” Cat asked, and he turned to them.

“Is it really you?” he asked. “If so, then it is the second time I owe you my life, both of you.” He looked around, a look of awe on his face. “The fade… seems different now. I can see the seams, where the dreams of others are stitched together.”
“If you do not master your powers, demons will continue to hunt you,” Hawke stated bluntly. “The Keeper has said that she cannot give you what you need here.”

“Then there is only one option left,” Feynriel said. “There must be someone in Tevinter that can help me.”

“Be careful of who you trust there,” Cat warned. “There are many that would use you even as the demons wanted to.”

Feynriel’s face fell. “I… I don’t know what else to do.”

“I think you were right,” Cat replied. “You can find help there, just do not trust too easily.” She paused wondering quickly if she was making some sort of horrendous mistake. “Uh, I don’t know many magisters, but…”

He looked up, hopeful. “But?”

“I know of a family by the name of Pavus. They are good people, and do not practice blood magic. I have only heard of them though, so I cannot give you a letter of introduction or anything.”

“It is more than I had a moment ago,” Feynriel replied looking more confidant. “Thank you my friends.” He turned and with a wave of his hand, the fade swirled in front of them, and he stepped through.

“You’re just one surprise after another,” Hawke said, and Cat glanced over at him. He was still watching where Feynriel had left.

“Oh?” she asked. “I thought you were used to me bursting into tears in front of desire demons by this point.”

The corner of his lip rose, but he just shook his head. “It’s nothing to be upset about,” he told her. “They pluck things from our minds and hearts and display them before us, as if they were possible.”

He turned now to look at her, but she had begun to look at the ground. “Many do not see it for what it is, let alone fight against it.” He snorted. “Just look at Isabela.”

Cat glanced up now, worried. “Please don’t be mad at her,” she said. “I know she can be impetuous, but she wouldn’t truly betray you.”

“What did she think that was, a dream?” Hawke asked sarcastically. He took in her worried expression, and smiled. “I’m not mad. She’s been up front all along, and I’ve known that once she gets a ship, she’ll be gone.” He paused. “And so will you.”

“Oh…” Cat wasn’t sure what to say. She didn’t ever think about what would happen in the future, but she was fairly certain she wouldn’t be sailing off with Isabela… unless she was going to meet up with Duran… Ugh, this is why I don’t want to think about it!!

She didn’t get a chance to say anything, as she watched Hawke fade in front of her, and she opened her eyes to see Fenris and Isabela sitting beside her prone form.

“You’re back!” Isabela cried out. “It’s about time!”

“Your friends awoke here some time ago,” Marethari said with a smile. “As did Feynriel. He told us of his plans, and I must agree.” She gave Hawke and Cat a nod in respect. “You accomplished a miracle with him. Ma Serannas!”
Hawke took a deep breath, and stood. “Our pleasure,” he replied, and turning, left the tent. Fenris and Isabela both looked at Cat, who shrugged.

“Probably just wants some fresh air,” she suggested. “Actually… that sounds kind of wonderful right now.” She squeezed her friends’ hands as they helped her stand, and escorted her out of the tent.
Okay, so I know that this is late... let me just say that. That being said, I will not regale you with the tale, but there's a very good reason. And of course, wanting to have a good chapter was part of it. Nothing like having to wait and not knowing why, to get a dinky, not good chapter.

And now that I said that, hopefully this chapter is good.

“So Merrill,” Hawke began speaking loudly. “We’re here at the camp… didn’t you say you had something to ask Keeper Marethari?” He asked, giving her a pointed look.

Merrill looked panicked at being put on the spot, and Marethari just smiled serenely and asked, “Yes da’len? What is it?”

Merrill looked as if she was in a stupor, saying “I… I … I …uh,” causing Hawke to step over and put his hand on her shoulder, giving her his support, but not asking for her. She took a deep breath, and glanced at him with a timid smile, then turned back to the keeper and rapidly said, “I want to use the arulin’holm, Keeper.”

“I see,” Marethari answered, her hopeful expression replaced by one of grudging acceptance. “You wish to repair the mirror.”

“You don’t have to approve, Keeper, but I must see this through.”

“I’m glad to know I can disapprove da’len,” she replied tersely. “You are seeing only the benefits this path will give. Do you not remember Tamlen? Lost in the mirror before it was broken? Or Mahariel? Poisoned by it and withered away unto death by its corruption?”

“Of course I remember… how could I forget?!?” Merrill exclaimed. “That is why I had to cleanse it!”

“This path is dangerous da’len. It will come at a price.” Marethari spoke, even as she gave up arguing.

“A price I am more than willing to pay,” Merrill responded. “The arulin’holm, Keeper.”

“Very well,” Marethari answered. “It belongs to us all, and I cannot keep it from you.” She glanced around speculatively at Hawke and his group, thinking she could fell two birds with one stone.

“There is a varterral, nearby, and several hunters have not returned,” Marethari said. “I would lose no more of our clan to it. Slay it, and I will give you the arulin’holm.”

“All right!” Merrill agreed happily, feeling as if things were finally going right. She had stood up to the keeper, after all. Perhaps she could do other scary things!

Marethari nodded to Hawke, and stepped away. Hawke then turned to Merrill. “Now, was that so hard?” he teased.
“Harder than you know,” Merrill answered on shaky legs. “But I did it!” She turned to face Hawke. “And I couldn’t have, without your help. Ma serannas Hawke!”

“No problem,” he replied. “But now I need you to explain what is happening.”

She smiled at him, and turned to lead him away from the camp, towards the caves where the hunters had gone. He gestured to the group as they walked, all of them stepping in and following after them as Merrill spoke.

“The artifacts the clan possesses are part of the dalish’s history, and therefore belong to all dalish,” she explained. "However, when we are to take one of them for our use, we perform a task or service to the one we receive it from. In this case, we are doing a service for the clan, since that is who has the arulin’holm now.”

“I see,” Hawke replied. “And what, dare I ask, is a varterral?”

“A powerful creature,” Merrill responded. “Normally it leaves our people alone… but the Keeper said that some hunters have not returned.”

“Do we need to find these hunters as well?” Varric asked.

“No, though I would like to look for them,” Merrill answered.

“Then we will,” Hawke said.

The group was quiet as Merrill led them on. They could see the barren ground around them, completely different from the area the dalish were camped on. There was the dark maw of a cave in the distance, and they walked towards it without hesitation.

* * * * *

“Oh… Holy Hell!!” Cat exclaimed as she sank to the ground, and took a closer look at the spider bite on her arm. She marveled at the fact that it got her only on the underside of her arm… it hadn’t been able to pierce through her armor on the top.

“Let me see it,” Anders said as he knelt down next to her. He gently took her arm, turning and raising it so that he could have a better view. “It’s not too bad, though I’ll need to get the poison out.”

“That thing poisoned me?!” Cat demanded. She glanced over to her right, all the more angry and threw a small knife at the spider’s corpse, where it stuck in it’s head.

“Did that make you feel better?” Varric asked with a smirk, as he stepped over to get her knife for her.

“Yeah, actually, a little,” she admitted.

“You’re lucky it wasn’t worse,” Merrill spoke up. “These two were wasp spiders… very dangerous, and highly poisonous.”

“Uh… Merrill?” Hawke called from across the cavern. “You’d better come see this.”

Anders finished up with Cat just as Merrill came back, followed by Isabela and Hawke. “Are you
sure you don’t want to take the body back?” Hawke asked Merrill.

“No, just the amulet will be fine,” she answered sadly. She held up the amulet and looked at it closely. “This signified her place as a hunter, and her family will keep it in remembrance.”

“Very well,” Hawke replied. “Shall we move on?” He asked everyone as he looked around at them. Receiving nods, and answered with Cat and Anders standing, he led out and the others followed.

Cat ended up being right behind Hawke and next to Merrill, so she decided to chat, and hopefully help raise Merrill’s spirits.

“So Hawke, where’s Hafter lately?” she asked. “It seems you don’t bring him along much, and I miss the big guy.”

“I’m certain he misses you as well,” Hawke replied, slowing down slightly to converse. “Or, I should say he misses being spoiled by you.”

“Then bring him with you next time!” she said with a chuckle.

Hawke gave a small smile before his face fell again. “Ever since we moved to the estate… well, let’s just say I don’t like to leave Mother unprotected.”

“Oh,” Cat replied. “That… makes complete sense, and I hadn’t even thought of that. I’ll have to just come spend time with Hafter when you are home then.”

Hawke glanced over at her at the comment. “You’re more than welcome to.”

“Okay, we’ll have to go over your schedule, so I know when to come then,” she answered with a grin.

He smiled in reply. “Varric and I usually go over the schedule in the Hanged Man after the day’s work. You can join us if you’d like,” he offered.

She nodded. “I’ll do that,” she answered. “I was planning to go anyway to spend time with Issy, you know,” she dropped her voice, “before she gets drunk.”

“I don’t get drunk every night,” Isabela said from several feet behind them. “I only have enough to have a good time.”

Cat turned and smiled. “Of course,” she replied, and rolled her eyes. “I leave for a few days, and you get all sassy on me,” Isabela said with a smirk.

“Try weeks, and I’ve always been sassy,” Cat replied, as she turned to face Isabela as she walked backwards.

“I prefer to think that you got your sass from me,” Isabela retorted.

“Hey,” Hawke interrupted. “Didn’t I tell you not to do that?” he griped at Cat.

She rolled her eyes and turned back around. “I do know how to walk backwards without falling…” she muttered under her breath. Seeing his glare, she quickly changed the subject.

“So, would you prefer I stop all the hugs and kisses then?” she asked him, her mind recalling that he said she spoiled his mabari. He gave her a strange look, so she clarified. “I mean, I just love him, but if you think I’m spoiling him, then I’ll stop.”
“Uh…” Hawke said, baffled. “I know I lead the group Cat, but I… uh… you don’t need my permission to hug or kiss someone…” he fidgeted uncomfortably, trying not to show how upset he was.

“Well yeah,” she agreed. “But you’re in charge of him, so I don’t want to do anything you wouldn’t like.”

“Uh…” Hawke said again, as this time he came to a stop. He turned to face her, noting that Cat was smiling happily at him. In fact, everyone looks a little too happy right now, he thought as he took in the expressions on the others’ faces. He glanced between Fenris and Anders several times, trying to discern if one of them was who Cat was talking about- she was quite close with both of them- but was unable to know for sure.

“Look…” he snipped. “I’m not in charge of everything Cat, just the jobs.”

“What?” she questioned, confused by both his words and his tone. “He’s your dog, isn’t he?” she asked. She turned as well, looking at Varric. “Did I misunderstand?”

“No Little dove,” Varric replied with a chuckle. “Hawke did,” he said as the group tried to hold in their laughter, though a few snickers were heard. Cat’s eyes widened slightly in understanding, before she too, held her mouth to keep her laughter in.

“Permission to get lucky tonight Hawke?” Isabela asked with a laugh, and the group let loose as Hawke glared at them.

“Ahem…” Hawke cleared his throat, trying to save face. “Yes, Cat, Hafter is mine, and no, I don’t think you are truly spoiling him.” He ignored Isabela’s comment completely.

“If you didn’t know I was talking about Hafter…” Cat said with a smirk. “Who did you think I was talking about?” she asked.

“I had no idea,” Hawke replied primly. “Hence my confusion.”

“Of course,” Cat replied with a grin. “Though to be clear, I know I don’t need your permission in my personal life.”

That brought another round of snickers, and Hawke sighed loudly. “Yes, yes, very good,” he said, wanting to change the subject quickly. He turned again and headed off, letting the others follow. You idiot, he told himself. You were there when the demon said her husband needed her. Her husband… which meant he needed to finally follow Isabela’s advice, and just be her friend.

He wished Isabela had just told him straight out… so many things would now be different. Like that night… he thought.

He rolled his eyes as he heard continued jokes about what they would need to ask his permission for, and he wished fervently that something would happen to get them to drop this.

He got his wish, as corpses began to surround them. Thank the Maker, he thought as he started his first spell.

* * * * *
“Little dove, what’s wrong?” Varric asked later that evening. They had returned to Kirkwall a little richer and with plenty of fodder for his stories. He was happy as he could be at the moment, and he thought that most of the crew were as well.

*Daisy had received her arula- whatever, and practically skipped through Lowtown on her way home. Blondie and Button were helping mages escape the circle tonight, which always put him in a good mood. Hawke had led them on do-gooder business that somehow made him and Aveline both happy. And even Broody had smiled as Rivaini made up a game about guessing the color of his underclothes.*

*But the Little dove... ever since they had made it out of the caves and returned to the dalish camp, she had been unhappy. Even finding a demon-possessed book and destroying it hadn’t helped her mood.*

He waited, but she didn’t reply. “You know I’ll keep asking, so you might as well tell me,” he said to her. She looked up and around the table they were seated at in the Hanged Man, with Hawke and Broody.

“I’m upset about that hunter, Pol.”

Varric paused, thinking back. “The one that ran from Daisy?” he asked, and she nodded.

“I can’t help but think that if I had just reacted faster, I could have stopped him… saved him,” she stressed the last part, and Varric could see the guilt she was carrying.

“Little dove,” he said gently. “There was no way to know that he was going to run off, or that he’d run right into the varterral. Don’t be too hard on yourself.”

The stricken look on her face was as if he had reared back and slapped her, not tried to comfort her. Her eyes filled with tears, and his widened in shock. “What did I say?” he asked.

“Nothing,” Fenris said as he gripped Cat’s shoulder, turning her to look at him. “She’ll be better after some sleep, right?” he asked Cat.

She recognized the way out he was giving her, and she gratefully took it, and nodded. “I’m sorry Varric, it’s hard for me to not feel like I should have done more,” she said to help set him at ease.

“Varric is right,” Hawke added. “You do not give yourself enough credit. You continued after him, and tried to help him even as the varterral attacked. I don’t know that anyone in the same situation could have done any better,” he said with a small smile. “You did well today,” he added.

“Thank you,” she replied. “I will try to remember that.”

“See that you do,” Hawke replied, as Fenris stood, and left money for their food and drinks. Cat also stood, but Hawke stopped her.

“Cat,” he said, and she turned to look at him. “Regret and guilt only eat away at you. Do not let them stay long, or you will never let them go... believe me.”

Cat nodded, knowing some of the guilt and regret he carried with him daily. She only wished letting it go was that easy.

As soon as they had left the tavern, and began walking home, Fenris spoke. “They are right, you know.”
“I think you of all people understand why they are not,” she replied without looking at him.

“I understand,” he said. “Were you not the first to tell me, that you are not some divine being… that you did not know the future? Can you truly tell me that trying to stop him would have been successful?”

“You know I cannot,” she replied sulkily. “But I didn’t even try!” She lowered her voice again as she realized how loud her outburst was. “I completely forgot about it! If I had just thought ahead… I probably could have saved him.”

They walked in silence for awhile, reaching Hightown and their mansion without speaking. Fenris escorted her through the house and up the stairs, before clearing his throat outside of her room.

“I wanted to be sure that I had my words thought through, though they may still be inadequate,” he started, causing her to roll her eyes with a smile.

“How often have I told you how eloquent you actually are?” she asked in return.

He cleared his throat the way he always did when embarrassed with praise. “I will not say that you have no fault or guilt in this, because I can understand why you think you do. I will only say that you also cannot take all the blame.”

After the months of friendship, and now as roommates, she had learned that he gradually would make his point, and so she waited for him to continue.

“Regardless of what role you may have played in this, he is still responsible for the consequences of his own actions. He chose to run away. Whether you could have stopped him is not the issue. He could have stayed and faced what he feared. He could have tried to kill Merrill for being a blood mage. He could have run in another direction.”

“Well… yes…” she said as she thought through these new ideas.

“You may regret your lack of action, but it is not the only factor in this. We all make decisions that we regret. As Hawke said… you can let it stay, or you can become better for it.”

“Thank you…” she murmured, deep in thought.

“Good night Cat,” he said with a nod, and turned away.

“Oh, and Fenris?” Cat called.

“Yes?” he said as he looked back.

“Your words, and your friendship, are far more than adequate, just so you know. Good night.” She smiled to herself at the shock he wore whenever she caught him off guard with a compliment.

* * * * *

“Catarina, how nice to see you again.”

“Thank you Leandra,” Cat replied as the other woman came forward to grab her hand and squeeze it.
“What brings you here?”

“I came to get Hafter, though I need to make sure Garrett is home?” she said. “I promised I wouldn’t leave you here alone.”

“Oh that boy…” Leandra huffed. “Sometimes he acts as if he were the parent and I the child!”

“I think it is sweet,” Cat replied, looking around the room that always seemed to fascinate her. The huge fireplace, the vaulted ceilings, the chandelier… it was all beautiful.

“That may be the reason I don’t throw a fit about it,” Leandra said with a chuckle. Her face became solemn as she continued. “He’s been through so much loss, it is understandable why we hold on tightly to each other.”

“That’s true,” Cat said with a gentle smile.

“We still have Carver… somewhere, but it is enough to know that I have not lost him completely.”

“Yes, and he is in good hands,” Cat said. “The Warden Commander and Constable are both great men who care deeply for those they are in charge of.”

“Do you know them?” Leandra asked, surprised.

“Oh, uh… yes. I ran into them, literally in Ferelden during the blight. They saved me from darkspawn and helped me get passage out on Isabela’s ship. We write each other, though the letters are few and far between due to the distance and the fact that they are always on the move.” Cat paused, looking at the hope on Leandra’s face. “Um… I can ask about Carver in my next letter, if you’d like?” she asked.

“Would you?” Leandra said excitedly. “Any news you could get would be such a blessing! The Maker must have a hand in this, I am sure!”

Cat stood awkwardly as Leandra hugged her again and again. She wasn’t quite sure how to handle herself, being that they weren’t exactly close. So she stood there, and took her cues from Leandra.

“It’s no problem, though not many know that I am friends with them, so…” Cat started.

“Say no more, I understand completely!” Leandra said with a knowing smile. “Truly, I don’t know how I can thank you!”

“Really, it’s nothing,” Cat said with a smile. “I’m happy to.”

“I know, while we wait for Garrett, let’s have a snack and visit. Would you care to join me?”

“Thank you, that sounds lovely,” Cat replied, feeling more comfortable already. Leandra simply had a way about her, that seemed to tear through any doubt or awkwardness that Cat had. Each time she met Hawke’s mother, she liked her even more.

“Well come on then,” she said as she took Cat’s arm. I hope you don’t mind that there aren’t any servants,” she stated as she led Cat to the kitchen. “I went so long doing things for myself, that we only have Bodahn and his son Sandal here with us to help run the house.”

“I don’t mind at all, as I’ve never had servants before,” Cat replied with a grin. Leandra gestured towards a seat, and started making tea.

“You know, there was a time I was hoping that you had taken an interest in my Carver,” Leandra
“Yes, I picked up on that,” Cat said with a smile, and Leandra shrugged.

“You can’t blame a mother for trying. We all just want to see our children happy.”

“True, but you didn’t even know me,” Cat pointed out. “I’m pretty sure we would have made each other miserable.”

“I agree, though it still saddens me,” she answered. “You would have given me pretty grandchildren.”

Cat spluttered at that, and felt something catch in her throat, causing her to start coughing roughly. Thumping her chest, she coughed and wheezed until she was able to breathe again.

“So- sorry,” she managed to get out.

Leandra gave her a smile, and put a hand on her hip. “Struck a nerve, did I?” she said, then picked up the tray she had prepared, and brought it over to sit near Cat. Pouring them each a cup, she settled down and took a sip.

“So then, Catarina…” She gave Cat another smile that she was instantly wary of. “Every time we have run into each other, I’ve seen you with a different man… my sons included. Which one is yours?”

* * * * *

Hawke watched as Cat practically ran from his house as soon as he returned. He slowly turned to gaze at the woman at his side. “Mother? What did you say to her?”

“Hmm? Why, whatever do you mean darling?” she asked innocently. “We just had some tea and talked a little. Nothing for you to worry about.”

“Nothing?” he stopped, knowing a losing battle when he saw one. “Mother, she couldn’t leave fast enough,” he said to prove his point.

“Well yes, dear. You took much longer than you said you were. I imagine she is late for meeting with the Knight Captain.”

“What? The Knight Captain?! Why is she meeting him?”

“Oh, well I didn’t think to ask…” she replied. “Should I have?”

“No, no.” Hawke closed his eyes as he rubbed the bridge of his nose.

“Tell me dear, what is it that troubles you?” she asked him quietly, and he sighed.

“I’m trying to be her friend. I’m having a rough go of it,” he admitted. “I don’t think I have her trust.”

She led him over to the bench in the foyer, and they sat. “Why not? It is apparent that she respects you,” she said.
“Not trust in fighting… more…” he broke off.

She smiled gently and squeezed his hand. “I know this is hard for you. Being who you are, your father felt it imperative to teach you to school your emotions from such a young age, in order to hide you better.” They sat quietly for a few moments, and then she asked, “Is there an example you can think of?”

He nodded, as one such example had been on his mind all yesterday and through that day as well. “We were fighting some demons,” he said, and he barreled on when he heard his mother’s gasp. “And I was going to help her. She was not giving in, though the demon spoke of her husband.”

He turned to look at her, expecting a gasp that time, but not hearing one. Leandra was deep in thought. “And… you didn’t know that,” she stated.

“No… I didn’t. That is a rather important piece of information, and she kept it from me. *Me* mother, not all of us… just me.”

“Are you certain?” she asked, and he shook his head, somewhat sullenly.

“Did you know?” he demanded.

She hesitated, but then nodded. “Though, I only found out today.”

“How?!” he asked.

“I asked.”

He stared at her in disbelief.

“Garrett, I think I see what the problem is here.”

“What?” he asked, wincing, as he was sure he was going to be lectured.

“Friendship, the kind you are seeking here, is double sided. Eventually, the shared experiences you have will build that, but if you don’t share of yourself, why would she?” Leandra stood up, reaching out a hand for him. “These other friends… so they spend time together, outside of the jobs you do?”

He nodded. “Constantly.”

“I think you have your answer,” she stated, and walked inside.

* * * * *

He peered out from under his hood, pulling it back slightly to keep his peripheral vision wide, but not so far as to reveal his features. It would do no good to spoil the surprise after all.

He watched as his target entered the tavern, and he settled himself to wait with a smirk. *I should give him time to celebrate…* he thought to himself, *seeing as he will be dead before the dawn.*

He was impatient, though the source was not the man he waited for that night. The last letter he received from Leliana was lacking the information he sought. He could hardly be mad at her, as she knew the task he was undertaking. And as a good friend, was helping him from making a decision
that he may later regret.

So you don’t know where Little dove is… Leliana agreed to pass on letters, and even promised not to read them. But have you written? No.

He sighed inwardly. Why a letter should be so difficult, he couldn’t say, but he had discarded each attempt. It was an ongoing argument inside his head, and he was once again at an impasse.

Zevran had sworn to protect her, and such oaths were not easily set aside. Yet from what Leliana had told him, his Dove had made herself a new life, and he didn’t want to drag her back into the shadows with him.

He was told that Isabela was fulfilling her side of the bargain and more, and his dove could now take care of herself, but that only made him wonder, what exactly Isabela had been teaching her.

He scowled. The thought was at once tantalizing and maddening. Until he saw with his own eyes, he would not be satisfied. Leliana knew this about him, and so, had ignored his request for her location-knowing that he needed to finish his self-appointed task.

And now we come to the crux of it all… Zevran thought. The most frustrating part of it was the monster he was trying to rid the world of. Yet with each kill, the monster grew instead of waned, and he found himself immersing back into the life he thought he escaped, in order to discover how to destroy it once and for all.

That is the greatest worry of all… that my little dove would be strong enough… and want to help. That… that I must prevent at all costs… Zevran steeled himself again, the argument taking its circular course, and ending as it had each time previously.

He glanced up at the movement, noting with a wicked grin that his target had exited the building. Soon, Little dove, he thought. I will finish this… soon.
Hello everyone! My craziness is finally over, after 12 hour days, and no days off for a few weeks, life has returned to normal. Here's our newest update, and I hope you enjoy it. While there isn't much in the way of questing... we do need some of the talking and relationship stuff every now and then. Thanks again for the comments and the kudos! Still the best part of my week!

“Hawke.”

“Hello Varric,” Hawke replied, sitting at the table.

“Slumming it again? Don’t you have better food at home?” Varric asked.

“Yes,” he said with a smirk. “But not you. And what would I do without my trusty dwarf?”

“Fine,” Varric smirked back. “But I wouldn’t get the breakfast special if I were you.”

“Noted.”

They talked of inconsequential things as they ate, each enjoying having time to just relax without others hounding them. Eventually, Isabela drug herself from her room to join them, with Fenris walking in minutes later.

“Hawke gives you the day off, and you come to the Hanged Man?” Varric asked Fenris incredulously. Fenris simply raised a brow and stared back at him. “That’s different,” Varric said, understanding the implication. “I live here.”

Fenris glanced over to Hawke who pointed to Varric. “I’m with him,” Hawke said with a smirk, and Fenris shook his head with a small smile on his face.

“I’m here to help the pirate,” he said, sitting down.

“And as soon as I wake up, we’ll go,” Isabela added, standing up and going to the bar.

“Helping with what?” Varric asked.

Fenris shrugged. “She didn’t elaborate.”

“I’m surprised Cat’s not going too,” Hawke said, causing Fenris’ eyes to roll.

“I was as well, though it seems Isabela is keeping Cat as far from this relic business as she can. Cat was not happy about it at all, and left earlier this morning.”

“So she’s pouting,” Varric said with a smile.

“Indeed,” Fenris replied, looking up as Isabela returned with a cup of ale. “She feels like she’s losing her friend, and doesn’t understand why.”
Isabela sighed, and took a long drink from her cup. Setting it down, she leaned in slightly. “You boys know as well as I do, this is the only way to keep her uninvolved. If she knew anything, she would insist on helping… it’s just the way she is.”

“And what’s so bad about that?” Varric asked. “Little dove can hold her own, like the rest of us.”

“It’s not her skills that I’m worried about,” Isabela muttered. “You don’t know the people that want the relic, Varric. I’ve kept Kitty out of their sights for this long, though sometimes I don’t know how. If they knew I cared about her…” she left the threat hanging in the air, and the mood turned somber.

“She wouldn’t care about that,” Fenris said. “She would want to help anyway.”

“Exactly,” Isabela replied. “So, if you’d do it differently… speak up.”

In the silence, she knew she had made her point, but the whole talk had spoiled her mood, and her appetite.

“Let’s just get this done,” she said, standing up.

“I’ll talk to her,” Hawke volunteered, and the other three just stared at him. “What?” he asked, defensively.

“You’ll talk to her?” Varric said with a grin. “Are you sure that’s a good idea?”

“Yeah, yeah,” Hawke muttered. “Enough of you have said I need to actually be friends with Cat, spending time… getting to trust each other, right?” He looked at each of them, scanning their faces for hints as to what they were thinking. “So, that’s what I am going to do.”

“Couldn’t hurt…” Varric said with a shrug, looking at Isabela.

“Oh, it could…” Isabela added. “But I think it is worth a shot.”

“But, we don’t know where she is,” Fenris pointed out. At Isabela’s questioning look he added, “she took off earlier, upset.”

“Angry upset? Or crying upset?” Isabela asked.

“Uh…” Fenris thought back. “If I had to say, I’d think angry.”

“Then check the Keep. Knowing the time, and that she likes to hit things when she’s angry, she most likely went to spar with the guards.”

“Then, I guess that’s where I’ll start,” Hawke said.

* * * *

Hawke headed straight to the top, figuratively, stopping in Aveline’s office first, and explaining that he was looking for Cat. Aveline escorted him out to the training area, using the walk to remind him that he said he would stop in the gallows to speak with Emeric.

“I didn’t forget Aveline, it’s on my schedule,” Hawke said.
“Just how far down the list has it been bumped?” she replied dryly.

Saved from having to answer as they walked into the training grounds, Hawke and Aveline headed over to the crowd in the middle.

A few guards spotted their captain, and gave a quick salute. She let them know to be at ease by asking, “Who’s winning?”

“Cat so far, though she hasn’t taken a breather,” the guard replied. “She’s bested six of us, but now she’s up against Melnor.”

“Ooh,” Aveline winced in sympathy. “She’s lost to him before hasn’t she?”

“The last four times they’ve sparred,” the guard replied. “It’s just starting if you want to stay and watch, Captain.”

“Yes,” Aveline said with a glance at Hawke, who was trying to see above the guards in front of him. “I think we will do that. Thank you.”

She tugged on Hawke’s sleeve, getting him to follow her around the group to the opposite side, where they would have better luck.

Hawke listened to the commentary as they moved, continuously trying to view the spar. From what he could hear, Cat was tricky, but Melnor wasn’t fazed.

“Who is this Melnor?” Hawke asked Aveline as they finally moved into the circle, and Hawke was able to see the fighters. “Blood of Andraste! He’s huge!”

“And packs a whallop,” a guard next to him added.

“What’s the rules? First blood?” Hawke asked the woman.

“Until the other yields,” she replied, without looking away from the scene. Hawke looked at Cat, practically seeing the fire in her eyes, and knew she wouldn’t yield easily.

“Hell…” he muttered, and settled in to watch.

* * * * *

It wasn’t the most exciting fight she had ever witnessed, but watching Hawke’s reactions to the fight was very entertaining. Aveline smiled as she thought of his earnestness in explaining how he was going to be Cat’s friend, because that was what she had requested. Aveline herself, knew how difficult it was to care for someone that you saw every day on the job, wanting more and yet not wanting to ruin what was already there.

She smiled again as Hawke booed and started arguing with the guard next to him. She paid better attention, wondering what she had missed. Cat was tired, everyone could see it. She was sprawled on the ground, which had Aveline assuming she had been flung away after trying an attack. Melnor was advancing, and she could see by the way Cat was panting that she would not be able to stop the next attack.

Hawke could see it as well, and she grabbed him just as he made to move forward. “It’s a spar,”
Aveline said quietly, and though he stayed where he was, she could tell how upset he was.

He surprised everyone by shouting out a cheer, “You’ve got him, Cat! Get up and finish it!!”

Even the fighters looked over to Hawke but his eyes were on Cat, nodding to her, and mouthing, “get up!”

Cat seemed shocked, then determined, and finally a wicked grin crossed her face, and she winked back at Hawke. She jumped up and went in for the hit, Melnor dodged and countered with a backhand. Cat went flying back, her daggers dropping as she hit the ground, unmoving.

Everyone froze, and they heard Melnor cry, “Maker’s mercy!” flinging off his helmet, and rushing for her. He was kneeling next to her, and the others waited with baited breath to hear how she was-the tension high, and the room silent. Aveline noted that she didn’t need to hold Hawke back as she thought she would.

The movement seemed to come from nowhere, just that suddenly Melnor was on his back, with Cat straddling his chest, her small knife at his throat.

“Do you yield?” she demanded.

Aveline grinned as Melnor nodded rapidly, just so relieved that he hadn’t hurt her. The room was in an uproar, and she pointedly ignored the money changing hands, as she strode forward.

“That was a dirty trick Cat,” she heard Melnor complain, even as he ruffled her hair.

“Dirty tricks are the only way to beat you,” Cat replied with a grin, and a pat on his chest.

“Great timing,” Aveline said as she walked up. “It looked as if he had struck you with all his strength.”

“I would never, Captain,” Melnor promised.

“Good man,” she replied. “Cat,” she said as she turned to address her friend. “I hope you’re done here, because it looks like Hawke needs you.”

Cat’s eyes followed Aveline’s gaze to where Hawke was getting paid by a guard. She turned as well to smirk at Aveline. “Looks like Hawke’s buying lunch, if you want to come too.”

“You should probably get off of my guardsman first,” Aveline stated. “But then, yes, I’ll come.”

* * * * *

“Can I see the throne room?” Cat asked as she walked with Aveline and Hawke through the Keep.

“You truly want to?” Aveline questioned.

“Well, yeah, it’s not like it’s open to the public. But if the guard captain is with me, no one will question it, right?” she asked.

Aveline glanced at Hawke, and he held up his hands in a surrender. “It’s your call, not mine,” he told her, and with a sigh, Aveline turned to head towards the throne room.
“Why doesn’t it get used very much?” Cat asked, excited that they were going.

“The viscount knows that keeping everyone appeased is the best way to stay where he is, so he tends to meet with others in his office, giving them a feeling of being on equal ground.” Aveline gave a small chuckle. “And he is not one for protocol,” she added.

“Interesting,” Cat replied as they walked to the closed doors. Aveline pushed them open, letting the two of them enter first, and then following after.

Cat turned around in a circle, getting the feel of the room. She could definitely feel the influence of slavers in the decor, and even the general layout. The throne was at the top of a flight of stairs, with a wall on all other sides, making it impossible to see anything besides the throne.

“Do you feel that?” Hawke asked suddenly.

Cat and Aveline exchanged glances, before answering, “No,” and “Feel what?”

“Feels like… power. And malevolence,” Hawke replied. He walked slowly, following the feeling, until he came up to a bench. “Hmm,” he said, looking around.

“Well?” Aveline asked.

“Well nothing,” Hawke replied. “I feel something, but see nothing.”

“Uh, maybe it’s hiding under the bench?” Cat asked, but she smiled as Hawke humored her, getting down to peer under the bench.

“I really should just start listening to you,” Hawke said as he came back up with a book in his hand.

“That’s what has you all worked up?” Aveline asked skeptically.

“An evil book,” Hawke corrected. “Those blood mages that were trying to possess the templar recruits hid a few of these around Kirkwall, though I believe we almost have them all,” he said.

“This makes four, if my count is accurate,” Cat added in. “Demon in book form,” she said to Aveline with a grin. “Nasty stuff comes out when we try to destroy it.”

“Terrific,” Aveline said with a groan as Cat and Hawke pulled out weapons. She followed suit, and though she hoped this was all an elaborate prank, she prepared herself for the worst.

“Here goes,” Hawke said as his spell hit the open book. They all heard the otherworldly scream, as abominations surrounded them.

“The one on the stairs first!” Cat yelled out, and headed for the Arcane Horror. Hawke focused on damaging spells, letting Aveline shield him from the creatures. Cat shouted and waved her arms as she ran after each creature, distracting them so Hawke could get better shots. In no time at all, the room was clear, and the ruined book lay on the ground before them.

“Your ice spells are getting stronger,” Cat mentioned as they made their way out from the throne room.

“I’ve been working on them in my spare time,” Hawke said.

“Really?” she asked.

“Well, yes… Anders’ are just so much better than mine…” Cat and Aveline laughed, and Hawke
just smirked at them.

“I can relate,” Cat said. “I hardly use my crossbow anymore, because my dagger skills are nowhere near Issy’s.”

“It’s actually difficult to compare the two of you, your styles are so different,” Aveline commented. “She relies on stealth, where you rely on distraction and trickery.”

“True,” Cat replied. “But the fundamentals are the same.”

They stopped as they reached the Viscount’s offices, and Hawke grimaced. “All right, I’ll go make my report. If I’m not out in ten minutes… no, make that five minutes… come rescue me.”

“No promises,” Aveline said, which had Cat snickering, at Hawke’s pouting face.

“Don’t worry Hawke, we’ll be right here waiting. You’re buying us lunch, remember?” Aveline said as she gave him a small push.

Hawke had hardly been in the office for five minutes before the door opened again, and he came out shaking his head.

“That doesn’t look positive,” Cat said.

“Apparently, since the Arishok deigned to speak with me, the Viscount would throw all Qunari problems at my feet,” Hawke grumbled as he stalked over to the next office, where the seneschal worked.

“What now?” Aveline asked.

“Something about a missing delegation,” Hawke replied. “And the seneschal has the details,” he said louder as he entered the room and walked up to Bran.

“I am to help you, yes,” Bran said disdainfully. “Though I would prefer that you were not involved at all.”

“You and me both,” Hawke grumbled. “Well?” he asked. “What do you have for us?”

“As best we can tell, there were guards all along the path that the Qunari used to exit the building, and Hightown. It is unlikely that the Qunari could have disappeared without it being seen,” Bran explained. “Since there was no report, they must be complicit.”

Aveline’s eyes narrowed, as she took the accusations personally. “Have any failed to report in?” she asked.

“Several,” he replied. “Though where you should go to look for a guard who has sold his honor,” he hesitated as he noticed the huge grin that Cat was sporting. “I’m sure I do not know.”

“The Hanged Man,” Hawke answered, with a tone that implied, “duh.”

Cat nodded along. “The Hanged Man,” she agreed, thrilled to have been a part of in game dialogue.

“Got to be,” Aveline said with another nod.

“Well,” the seneschal snapped. “You have your answer then.”
Hawke strolled down the street with Cat, as they had nowhere to be until later when they were going to the Hanged Man with Aveline to find the soon-to-be-punished guards. She had demanded he buy lunch since he made money from her spar, and he supposed it was only fair.

He let her choose the stall, and they bought some fruit, cheese and bread. She then pulled him over to what was obviously a place she used often, a small patch of flattened rocks that provided a small sitting area where they could eat.

“Is this your regular spot?” he asked once they had settled down.

“Fenris and I will use it sometimes,” she replied with a smile. “He is not one to spend a lot of time indoors during the day, so if we get lunch here, we’ll sit here to eat.”

“I must admit, I don’t understand how you and Fenris became so close so quickly. He’s been a tough nut to crack for everyone else.”

Cat looked up, and seeing the curiosity on his face, she took it as a good thing. “I don’t know that we understood it either,” she replied with a smirk. “It just… happened. Going through fights together, learning about each other, asking A LOT of questions…” she trailed off. “I guess sometimes it just clicks into place easily, and sometimes you have to work for it.”

She looked at him again, meeting his eyes and adding, “I guess you and I need to work a little for it, huh?”

“I think so,” he replied as he ate another piece of cheese.

“One of my friends in Ferelden used to eat all the cheese too,” she said with a smile.

“Oh?” he asked. “Like this?” he said as he snatched another piece from the shared wrapping between them.

“Not exactly,” she said, smiling. “He was more of the type to pout at you until you gave him all the cheese… then you couldn’t complain about it afterward, since you gave it to him in the first place.”

“Was this the man who swore to protect you?” he asked.

Cat smiled again, as she was swamped with memories. “No, though the whole group was very insistent on keeping me safe.”

“I can imagine that would be wonderful, even as it was stifling,” Hawke replied.

She met his eyes again, curious that he understood. “I wouldn’t have worded it that way, but yes, that pretty much sums it up. And why do you know what that feels like?” she asked.

“Growing up a mage, especially an apostate, meant always being careful… never being spontaneous,” he answered. “Mother didn’t really understand, she just wanted us to stay with our family, not be taken by the templars. But Father… he had lived in the circle, here in Kirkwall. He knew what it would take to stay safe.”

“And he taught you,” Cat surmised.

“That he did.” Hawke finished eating and stretched his legs out, leaning back on his elbows. “Then
Bethany and Carver came along, and it was more. Learning to care for others, to help my siblings so they wouldn’t get hurt. Then when we discovered Bethany was a mage…”

“That was a lot for your shoulders alone,” she said.

“Once Father died, yes, it seemed that way. Sacrificing what I wanted in order to take care of my family, or hide what I was. At the time, it seemed so unfair.”

“It is… a little anyway,” she replied. “though it can be worth it in the end.”

“Sounds like you know what that feels like as well,” he said with a smirk.

“Not quite to what you have gone through, but…” she shrugged. “I thought I would stay with my friends, but they had decided to send me away, in order to keep me safe from the blight.”

She sighed, as she pulled her knees up to her chest, wrapping her arms around her legs in comfort. “They were all warriors, and I couldn’t even look after myself, let alone help them. They were teaching me, but… I was just a distraction, really.” She looked up again and smiled at him. “That’s how I met Isabela and ended up on her ship. I didn’t want to go, but knew I should… that was how I was going to help them.”

“Why didn’t they all just go on the ship with you? Staying during a blight has to be the worst decision ever,” he said, confused. “Even for warriors of the greatest renown.”

“Well… it was sort of their job,” she admitted. “Come on, let’s get moving,” she said as she jumped up, leaving Hawke to scramble after her.

* * * *

Cat and Hawke went around the city, informing their friends of the job that evening. Several couldn’t be found, though Varric, Sebastian, and Merrill promised to join them later at the Hanged Man.

Being that there were still several hours until they were meeting, Hawke begged for Cat’s opinion on presents, and she took finally took pity on him. As they walked into Hightown, she assumed they were going to the classier shops there. But soon they were walking to Hawke’s home, and Cat spoke up.

“I thought I was going to help you buy presents?” she asked. “Why are we going to your house?”

Hawke smirked at her nervous tone, as he remembered the last time she was here, she had gotten interrogated by his mother. “No,” he replied. “I have already bought presents, and I wanted your opinion on them before I gave them out.”

“Oh,” she said, feeling foolish.

“Besides, I really enjoyed lunch, and I thought we could do that again.”

“You’re hungry?” she asked.

“What?” he replied. “No.”

“Then why do you want to do lunch again?”
He stopped at the door to his estate, looking at her face and seeing the genuine confusion. “I swear, if I didn’t know better, I would think that you misunderstand me on purpose.”

“Well maybe you should just say what you mean,” she countered with an overly fake smile.

“All right,” he said, opening the door, and letting her through to the foyer. He followed her in, and shut the door behind him, then turned to face her. “I enjoyed talking with you, both about my life, and hearing about yours. I would like us to be friends, Cat, like you are with Fenris, Anders, Isabela, and all the others. I feel like I am missing out on something.”

Cat stood there, looking at him, unsure of how to react. She couldn’t complain, she had asked him to speak plainly, and he had. But... what exactly did he want from her? A friendship like she had with Fenris or Anders, or even to an extent Issy, carried a lot of things that she couldn’t just go blurting out. Maybe starting small?

“O--Okay,” she finally said. “As long as you realize that isn’t something that just happens in a day or two. We’re not going to stay up all night and share life stories.”

He looked away slightly, focusing on leading her into the house. “I admit, I am used to keeping people away, not making friends, and I am uncertain of how to go about it,” he said, and Cat felt her heart soften into a gooey mess.

“Well, you’re doing well so far,” she said encouragingly. “Getting to know each other is a big part of it, as well as spending time together, which we already do.”

He nodded along, as if checking off items on a mental list. “What else?” he asked.

“Well, uh, having things in common is helpful, enjoying the same activities, or having meals together…”

“All right,” he said. “anything else?”

“Just, uh...” she put a little more thought into it, seeing as he was taking mental notes. “Being there for each other, making things easier” she added. “like you were today, at the Keep. Cheering for me, and helping me finish my spar.” She grinned, “thank you for that, by the way. It was exactly what I needed.”

He nodded, and waved away her thanks. “I think I’ve got the gist of it,” he said. “I suppose I never had anyone that it actually took conscious effort to be friends with. It was more of a “you help me- I help you” situation, and then we were friends. This is a new experience.”

“We’ll muddle through it together,” Cat said with a smile. “So, where are these presents?” she asked.

* * * * *

After making appropriate comments for the gifts that Hawke had thoughtfully picked up for his friends, Cat spent some time speaking with Bodahn and Sandal while Hawke read and answered some letters.

After a time, he returned, and suggested that she return home and change into her armor, since they didn’t know how badly this situation with the Qunari would be. She agreed, and he got what he
needed, and they headed out to her home.

“You don’t seem very happy,” he commented as they headed towards Lowtown. She hadn’t taken long to change, but had been in a much more somber mood since returning downstairs.

“I love this armor, and don’t want anyone to think otherwise,” she said. “But… I don’t like wearing it in the Hanged Man.”

Hawke frowned. “Why not?” he asked.

“Well…” she said, slightly embarrassed, “it fits like a second skin, which is great in fights…”

“Yes?” he said, still unsure of what her point was.

“And the Hanged Man is a tavern full of drunk people…” she said.

“Right…”

She chuckled. “Now who is deliberately misunderstanding?” she questioned. “I get some unwanted attention there, that’s all.”

“Wait, really?” he asked.

“To be fair, you are usually doing the talking, with whoever or whatever the job is. It’s not a big deal, I just try to avoid it whenever I can.”

“But… we meet at the Hanged Man practically every day!” Hawke exclaimed. “This happens every time?!” he demanded.

“Well, yes, but like I said, it’s not a big deal. No one actually does anything, there are just usually some stares. Don’t worry about it,” she said.

“It is a big deal,” Hawke grumbled. “No one messes with my crew.” He glanced over at her. “I’ll fix this,” he promised.

“Hawke…” she began.

“No,” he interrupted her. She fell silent, stealing glances his way. He continued to be a mystery to her, as he didn’t ever seem to react as she would expect.

He’s not Steven, she reminded herself, though she knew she constantly compared other men to him. While she had her father and brother, they were extremely mellow, never showing much emotion. Steven had been a whole new experience, and her time in Thedas was an entirely different one.

She had thought he would get a good laugh out of the situation, but it seemed that she had made him angry instead. Now as she glanced over again, she puzzled that he didn’t seem angry… more focused, or determined. She wondered exactly what was going through his mind at that moment.

* * * * *

Hawke was embarrassed, and trying not to show it. He knew that Isabela enjoyed the attention she received from others, and had assumed that Cat- while not quite up to Isabela’s level- also enjoyed it.
The more he learned, the worse he felt for all his earlier assumptions.

She actually reminded him a little of Bethany… with her happy nature, and her caring manner. She could tease with the best of them, and every so often her anger would surface. And above everything, she didn’t want to be a burden on anyone.

He didn’t know how to make her more comfortable in the Hanged Man, without threatening everyone there, so he decided to speak to Varric and Isabela and enlist their help in making it clear to all the patrons—Cat was not to be ogled.

She could most definitely handle herself, she was no pushover after all, and he wondered why she didn’t simply make an example of one of them, or tell Isabela about it.

They reached the tavern, and he held the door for her, using the opportunity of following her inside to look around the room. He saw several of the looks that she had been speaking of, and glared harshly at each of the perpetrators. It wasn’t a permanent solution, but it did help make him feel better.

They went to their table, and joined Varric, Merrill and Sebastian.

“Aveline here yet?” Hawke asked as he sat. He kept his eyes moving around the room, continuing to glare at patrons when he felt necessary.

“No… haven’t seen her come in,” Varric replied, curious as to what was distracting Hawke. He followed his gaze several times, and seeing the men he was staring down, followed the line of their previous looks to Cat. “Interesting…” he muttered.

“So, Hawke…” he began, getting his attention.

“Yes?” Hawke replied, though he didn’t stop what he was doing. Noting a few moments later that Varric had not answered, he finally stopped and looked at the dwarf, who was grinning mischievously.

“What are you doing?” Varric asked with a smirk.

Hawke looked over to Cat, noting that she was talking with Merrill and Sebastian, and leaned closer to Varric. “Cat said she didn’t like being here,” he said quietly. “She said she got unwanted attention.”

Varric’s smirk stayed, though his eyes narrowed. “They’re making the little dove uncomfortable?” he asked. “That simply won’t do. I’m sure I heard something about a murderous elf, or perhaps a mage, or even a pirate that would take great offense to having her being looked upon too much.”

“Is that the best way to handle this?” Hawke asked uncertainly.

“You can’t fight every battle with your spells,” Varric replied. “In this case, it’s not even rumor, but fact. A few words in the right ear, and our dove can relax here.”

“All right then,” Hawke said. “I’ll leave it to you.”

Varric nodded, then signaled toward the door. Looking up, Hawke saw Aveline come in, trying her best to not draw attention to herself. She sat down, and Cat turned to her.

“Aveline?” she asked. “You okay?”
Aveline shook her head. “One bad apple can spoil the entire bunch,” she groused. “I’m trying very hard to not take this betrayal personally.”

“I’m certain there are others behind this,” Hawke said, by way of consolation. “The guard was most likely paid handsomely to look the other way.”

Hawke could tell what Aveline thought of that excuse by the disparaging look on her face. He shrugged, but gave her a nod, letting her know that he had her back.

They waited and ate in silence, listening to the chatter around them, listening for clues as to who may have been responsible for the situation. After another hour, Hawke heard Norah say something about a big spender, and he rose and followed her back toward the bar. He could hear the others behind him, though no one spoke.

He found himself behind a man who held a bottle of ale. He listened as the man bragged of his sudden wealth, offering drinks to those that he suddenly considered friends.

Hawke was about to say something, when Cat pushed Sebastian forward. Sebastian looked caught off guard, but covered smoothly.

“Surely you’ve been blessed by the Maker to have such coin,” he said. Varric gave a quiet groan and shook his head, thinking of several better opening lines.

“That’s right pal,” the man said, turning to Sebastian with a huge grin. “Tonight I am blessed and paid… and all because I turned my head.”

Aveline was simmering, and Hawke decided to introduce her before she gutted the man. “I know someone who would love to hear the details… isn’t that right, Guard Captain?” he said with emphasis.

The man heard it in Hawke’s tone, and gulped as he replied, “g..g..guard captain?”

Aveline strode forward, holding to her righteous fury. “Who?” she demanded. Cat was awed at how she kept her anger in check.

“What?” the man asked.

“Who?!” she demanded again.

“Who what?” he replied, confused.

“Who bought you?” she spat as she reached out and grabbed the man’s tunic. “Who took a proud guardsman and turned him into a whining dog?”

“I…” he started, and seeing the look on the captain’s face, he relented. “I don’t know.”

Aveline glared at him, gripping his tunic tighter until he was almost off the ground.

“It was a templar, though I don’t know his name. He said we were on a holy mission! He had the seal of the Grand Cleric and everything!”

Aveline slowly released the shirt, setting the man back squarely on his feet. She looked at him as if he were slime. “The penalty for abandoning one’s post is ten days on the wall. Report to the barracks.”

The man whined, but left his full bottle behind, and slunk out the door. Aveline turned to Hawke.
“You have your answer. A templar.”

Hawke nodded, and gave her shoulder a squeeze. “Thank you.” He looked around at his group. “Let’s go visit the Grand Cleric, shall we?”
Whew! Finally some vacation! Had to work some crazy hours to get everything done first, but now? I'm on vacation!! Just wanted to share that happy thought. Enjoy!

Previously--
Hawke and crew found out about the missing Qunari delegation, and discovered that a templar was using chantry authority to persuade guards to help in the kidnapping. Now, they head to the chantry to find out how far up the ladder the conspiracy goes.

“The man was a drunk!” Sebastian argued as they strode toward the chantry.

“Being drunk, and being a drunk are two completely different things,” Varric reasoned.

“Regardless,” Sebastian countered. “You can’t possibly think that Grand Cleric Elthina is funding zealots.” He reached the door, and held it open for everyone. Cat smiled, noting that even with how angry he was, he still kept his manners.

“We’re here to find out about kidnapped Qunari,” Hawke said quietly. "The templar was seen with the seal of the Grand Cleric. If she is not involved, then she can at least point us to who has use of her seal, don’t you think?”

Sebastian had nothing to say to that, and stewed for a moment as they approached a young initiate.

“Just keep an open mind Hawke,” he finally said.


“Hawke...” Sebastian groaned.

“What?” Hawke turned back with a smirk. “It’s the quickest way to know what she knows.”

“Serah Hawke.”

They all turned at the voice. “Sister Petrice?” Hawke asked, recognizing the woman from so long ago.

She shook her head slowly, the sly smile never leaving her face. “Mother Petrice. Time has changed us both it seems. Grand Cleric Ethina cannot grant an audience to just anyone. Perhaps I may help you instead?”

“Isn’t it funny how you and trouble with the Qunari seem to go together?” Hawke asked sarcastically.

She gave a small nod, “and you always assume their side. I was naïve when last we met. I did not want you dead, but felt that a death was necessary. That may be too fine a point for you to understand.”
“Oh, we understand,” Varric added. “We just happened to be in the right place at the right time.”

“Indeed,” Petrice answered.

“I know you,” Hawke said with a smirk. “And I know someone is abusing the Grand Cleric’s seal.”

Cat noted how Petrice’s face grew red as she spoke in anger. “Who are you to question who serves Her Grace? Leave now, as I see no reason to let you pass.”

“And the fact that her authority was used to abduct Qunari?” Cat added, before anyone else could. She continued to smile, even as Petrice glared silently at her.

“A pause that says you knew…” Hawke added. “But does Her Grace?”

“The grand cleric trusts her stewards to enact the wishes of the Maker.”

Cat and Varric each gave a derisive snort, then looked at each other and started chuckling. Hawke looked back at them sternly, but she could see the laughter in his eyes, and didn’t take it seriously.

“It sounds like you’ve been naughty…” Hawke said, and Cat covered her mouth to keep from laughing at the strangled sound Sebastian made. “This will shock Her Grace, no doubt.”

Petrice took a deep breath, trying to remain calm. “Stubborn ass…” she muttered, and Hawke’s group could only agree with her assessment.

“Very well… if you won’t abandon this, I will offer something in its place.” She came closer, so as not to be overheard.

“The templar you seek is a radical who has grown… unreliable. Confronting him may actually do us all a favor.”

“And his relationship to you is?” Hawke asked, not bothering to stay quiet.

“He is my former bodyguard, Ser Varnell. Make your own assumptions, but I offer him to you as… reconciliation.” She handed him a piece of paper. “Meet me at this location Serah Hawke, and see the unrest these Qunari have inspired.” Turning, she then walked away.

“Need I say I’m skeptical?” Aveline asked.

“Aren’t we all?” Cat replied.

“It’s her game at the moment,” Hawke answered. “We’ll have to play a little longer.”

“Are we meeting her now? Or later?” Sebastian asked.

Hawke looked down at the paper. “It says to meet just after sunrise, in Darktown, so I guess you all are free until the morning.”

“Excellent,” Varric said with a grin. “Daisy? Want me to walk you home?”

“Would you Varric? I forgot to bring the string you gave me.”

“My pleasure,” he answered.

“Cat?” Sebastian asked. “Would you like an escort?”

“No thank you,” she answered. “It’s just around the corner, I’ll be fine.”
“See you in the morning then,” he replied. “Hawke, Aveline,” he said to each with a nod, retiring further into the Chantry.

The three of them headed out after Varric and Merrill, and upon reaching the steps Hawke said, “Cat?”

“Yes?”

“I… I would like you to stay home tomorrow.”

Cat stared at him in confusion. “Why?” she asked.

“Because the Qunari are bound to be there,” he said. “Both you and Isabela have been adamant about not being involved in their affairs.”

“It’s not the Qunari that I worry about, it’s the Arishok I don’t want to see,” Cat retorted.

“Still… I would feel much better if you would stay back this time… please.”

Cat had been riled up, until she heard him say please. He looked like he was really asking, and not telling, and that small point deflated her instantly. She glanced down at her boots, and grumbled, “fine,” and walked off towards home.

* * * * *

The next morning, Cat left a note for Fenris, since she hadn’t seen him come home, saying she was going to Darktown. Yes, a part of her wanted to not listen to Hawke and go along anyway, but she decided instead to visit with Anders and Olivia, and purposefully didn’t wear her armor, just to be sure she wouldn’t be tempted. She felt bad, as lately it had seemed that she only visited with them when she was picking up the orders of potions to deliver to the Rose.

She realized she was quite early, and hoped that she would run into Hawke’s group on the way, if only to wish them luck. She should have known that her own luck wasn’t that good, and upon arriving at the clinic, found both of her friends still asleep.

Smiling to herself, she decided to climb in for a cuddle, and realizing how it would be taken if she joined Anders, she moved towards Olivia’s room instead. The bed wasn’t huge, but Olivia was curled up, and had left enough room for Cat. She climbed in and closed her eyes, feeling Olivia shift and cuddle up against her. She smiled as she dozed off.

She didn’t sleep long, but it was nice and warm, and she daydreamed peacefully for awhile. She noted that Olivia was practically wrapped around her, and even mumbling in her sleep a bit. She opened her eyes, trying to understand what she was saying. It sounded like “gus” and she thought, maybe it was a name? For the man Olivia had been so secretive about?

She smiled at the thought, though as Olivia’s hand started wandering up from its place on her stomach, she decided it was time for them both to wake up.

Before she could grab the wandering hand, it made it up to her breast and grabbed, and Cat let out a squeal. Olivia’s eyes shot open and she let out a scream, and toppled over backwards off the bed.
“Cat?!” she said from the floor. “Is that you?”

“Who else would it be?” Cat asked, with her hand over her rapidly beating heart. “You about gave me a heart attack!”

“Me?!” she flung back, as she climbed back up to the bed. “I know you weren’t here when I went to sleep, so how did you think I would react!

The curtain surrounding the room went flying, as Anders came in branding his staff. “Who dares?!” he demanded, and both women just stared at him.

He looked around in fury, but calmed when he saw Olivia and Cat staring back at him with wide eyes. “Uh… I heard screaming,” he said uncertainly.

“Anders, I didn’t know you slept naked,” Cat said as she reached both hands up to cover her and Olivia’s eyes. “I’m suddenly very glad I chose to get into bed with Olivia.”

“Don’t bother, we’ve already seen everything,” Olivia said with a smirk. “And it’s not like it’s the first time either.”

“I’ll… go get dressed then,” Anders said, running back out the way he came, leaving Cat and Olivia giggling.

“You see that often, do you?” Cat asked.

“Not so much anymore, but in the beginning I used to have nightmares. After the first couple of times, he started keeping his underclothes on when he slept, just in case. He asked me not to tell, and it became a joke. I tease him sometimes about sleeping better now.”

“Of course you do,” Cat said with a roll of her eyes. Anders came back, knocking on a beam and Olivia said, “come in” before he joined them.

“Oh, morning excitement aside…” he said as they giggled again. “What’s going on?”

“Hawke’s out with some of the crew following a lead on the group that kidnapped the Qunari delegation.”

“What?” they both asked her.

“Hawke asked me not to,” Cat said with a frown. “And like, really politely too. I apparently can’t say no when he says please.”
“Oh really?” Olivia said with a grin. “I’m sure Hawke would find that information helpful…”

“So you came here instead?” Anders asked, and Cat smiled gratefully.

“I did, and you both were still asleep. I decided I could use a cuddle, and thought I would get less problems from joining Olivia, though it seems I should have just grabbed a cot.”

“What?” Olivia said, as Anders said, “We’re always happy to share!”

Cat gave them both a look. “Maker’s breath Anders, you sleep naked! And Olivia, you must have been having a good dream, because you were very, uh… handsy.”

“Handsy?” Anders asked giving Olivia a smirk.

“Hey, at least I didn’t parade around naked!” she replied, causing him to roll his eyes at her.

“You won’t make me feel bad for running to the rescue when I hear screaming. The one time I actually take time to put on clothes, someone could be slitting your throat.”

Olivia didn’t hesitate. “Okay, you win that one. And having a show in the morning is never a bad thing, am I right Cat?”

Cat just shook her head at her friends. At one time, she had thought that they could maybe be romantically involved, but now she knew that they were as good of friends as any.

“So…” Cat began. “Can I help you two today?” she asked.

The two of them looked at each other in question, and having made some sort of decision, turned back. “Herb gathering,” they said in unison.

Cat sighed. “Of course…” They are determined to make me somewhat decent at gathering herbs, aren’t they, she thought to herself, while smiling. “Fine, as long as we go somewhere new.”

“I think we can manage that,” Anders answered.

* * * *

“Fenris?” Hawke asked in shock, almost running directly into the elf as he turned a corner. “What are you doing here?”

“I’m looking for Cat,” Fenris answered. “She left a note saying she was going to Darktown.”

“ Seems to me you would check the clinic, not wander around Darktown aimlessly,” Varric teased.

His smile disappeared as Fenris glared at him. “I have checked there already. It is empty,” Fenris announced.

“Empty?” Hawke questioned. “Anders and Olivia are gone too?”

“That is what I said,” Fenris responded dryly.

Hawke sighed. “I have to report to the Viscount.” He turned to the rest of his crew. “You all can go
with Fenris, I can handle this,” he said.

“Are you sure Hawke?” Merrill asked, thinking how tired Hawke looked.

“Yes, I’m sure,” Hawke answered. “We’ll meet up later at the Hanged Man.”

“Very well,” Aveline said, and Hawke continued on without his crew.

“I doubt there is any danger,” Fenris said as he watched Hawke’s back receding. He felt slightly concerned that he would be on his own. “Perhaps someone should stay with Hawke.”

“I’ll go,” Sebastian and Varric both said, then looked at each other. “I’ll catch up to him more quickly,” Sebastian said as he walked away hurriedly.

Varric wasn’t the only one who scowled at Sebastian’s back.

“Let’s go,” Aveline finally said. “Any guesses where to start looking?”

“Since she’s with Blondie and Button, and they’re not at the clinic, there are only a few other options,” Varric said.

“I’d say herb gathering,” Merrill commented. “Olivia said Cat is still really bad at it, and they use a lot of them.”

“Knowing Anders, he wants out of the city every chance he gets,” Aveline added.

“Sounds like the Wounded Coast is our best option then,” Fenris replied, and he started walking, the others following in his wake.

* * * * *

“Which way should we start with?” Aveline asked.

“I’d go right, there are some amazing patches of elfroot there,” Merrill said. “Or left…” she added as Aveline started to the right. “there are great amounts of spindleweed, or even deep mushrooms in the caves nearby.”

“Helpful as always, Merrill,” Aveline said with a sigh.

“Come on Daisy, if you were Anders, which would you go for?” Varric asked.

“Uh, all of them,” she replied. “If I were Anders, I’d need every herb I could find, and then some.”

“All right then, we’ll check everywhere,” Fenris growled impatiently. He couldn’t tell the others what had him in such a hurry, but he didn’t care. Fenris needed to speak to Cat about some rumors he had heard, and he needed to do so…now.

The group moved to the right, coming to the dead end that showed the patched of elfroot Merrill had spoken of, though they were quite bare. Feeling as if they were on the right track, Fenris sped the group along, turning right again and heading further up the hill.

“Wait!” Merrill called as she stepped off the path into a small alcove, and stooped down to a flower. Pulling out her dagger, she cut off the blooms and leaves, sticking them in her bag. Standing back up
beside the small stalk, she waved them on. “Anders will want this embrium, I’m sure,” she called up to the group as she joined them.

Fenris huffed, but the group moved on, finding nothing but an old campsite or two as the moved about. As they continued on the path that led down the other side of the hill, they came across an entrance to a cave.

“Anders? Cat? You in there?” Aveline called at the mouth, hearing her words echo. They listened for an answer but heard nothing.

“I’d rather be certain, wouldn’t you?” she asked Fenris who nodded, and they led the way into the cave.

Once his eyes had adjusted to the dim light, Fenris was surprised at the tight spaces the cave sported. He moved forward, past a small corner, and was stopped short at the small room. Looking around he spotted the way forward just to his right and stepping into the room, heard a sound he despised.

“Spiders!” he shouted back, pulling out his sword and making for the farthest wall, hoping to lure the spiders away from the doorway so that his group could enter and assist him. The three giant spiders had little hope against the four warriors, and they were once again on their way.

Fenris continued to lead, feeling odd at the new sensation. He could understand and appreciate the tension that Hawke continually carried, knowing that his decisions would affect the others.

A sound once again stopped him, and Fenris sighed. “Ready yourselves for a fight,” he said to the others, as he continued around a bend and down a small flight of stairs. His attention was diverted as he felt the malice from one side of the room, but as the mature but smaller dragon landed, he focused back where he needed to.

As he went to strike its legs, his only thought was, good, it’s not a high dragon.

Once the fight was over, and he felt rested enough, Fenris stood and made his way to Merrill.

“I will not argue about this. We must destroy the book.”

Merrill looked in the direction of the tomb that he could feel, and both Aveline and Varric stared at him strangely.

“Since we are in a hurry, and Hawke is not here, I agree,” she said finally, and Fenris gave an almost smile in relief. “We are on the same side after all,” she said quietly, and he gave her a nod.

“There is an evil book,” he said for the other two. “Once I hit it, it will spew demons at us. Ready yourselves.”

Aveline and Varric both nodded, not knowing that the other had already dealt with such a book before. Fenris approached what looked like a small shrine, and the book that sat on it, and with a yell, swung at it with his sword.

“Revenant!!” Merrill’s scream was heard echoing around the room, and the four of them turned their backs to each other in order to help protect each other.

Aveline and Varric made for the abominations in front of them, and Fenris scythed toward a few shambling corpses, protecting Merrill while she cast spells to disorient and slow down the revenant, buying time so that they could all attack it together.
“They’re not working!” she called, and Aveline struck the abomination in the face, and turned to get in between Merrill and the possessed corpse. Holding up her shield, she planted her feet, and prepared for the onslaught.

“Hit it! Everything you’ve got!” Aveline called back to them, as it struck her shield, and her arm wanted to give way. “Hurry!”

Fenris’ glow lit up the room even more, as he struck out with his lyruim power. The revenant cried out, and Merrill cried, “spirit damage, of course!” before launching a bolt at the creature.

It howled in pain, and lashed out, causing Varric to backflip out of its path. He gave it an exploding bolt in the back, yelling out to the others to stay back. The revenant eyes glowed with anger as it pushed back to its feet, as Merrill struck again with another bolt, and Fenris came down from a leap with a mighty blow.

As the creature faded away, leaving a half decayed corpse behind, Aveline took off her shield and shook out her hand. “Maker’s breath, those things are the worst!” she muttered.

“Oh I don’t know,” Varric said with a smile. “Seems Broody here was more upset about the spiders.”

Fenris glared over at him with a scowl. “Abominations don’t leave as much of a mess to clean off your armor,” he stated, and Varric and Merrill laughed.

“If it bothers you that much you could have someone else clean your armor for you,” Aveline said dryly.

“They wouldn’t do it correctly,” he grumbled, causing even Aveline to smirk.

“Let’s get going, shall we?” Varric said. “Not every dwarf likes caves you know.”

The group made their way out back to the fresh air, and all felt they could breathe easier. Heading down the hill, they found nothing but remnants of others’ previous stays in the area.

Reaching another fork, Fenris meant to turn right, since going left would take them back where they started. But instead, he followed his gut, and turned to the left. It wasn’t long before he started hearing voices, and pushed quickly to the place where he found his quarry.

“Blondie! You sure are hard to find!” Varric called out, spotting Anders. Looking shocked, Anders looked up from the log he was sitting on.

“I didn’t know I needed to be found,” Anders replied as the four of them approached. “Is everyone all right? Hawke?” he asked quickly.

“Everyone is fine,” Aveline assured him. “More problems with the Qunari and the viscount.”

“Cat filled us in on that,” he said. “Were you able to find the delegation?”

Fenris looked out to the water where Cat and Olivia were plucking spindleweed leaves nearby, though he was listening intently to the conversation.

“Found yes, but they were killed by zealots before we could get to them. Hawke and Sebastian went to inform the viscount.”
“Oh,” Anders answered. “Then why were you looking for me?” he asked.

“I was looking for Cat. I assumed she was with you as her note said she went to Darktown.” Aveline and Anders looked to Fenris as he spoke, though he was still looking out at the water.

“Well, it is getting late, and we need some embrium before we leave. Cat! Olivia! We need to move on!!” he called out to them, then started packing up their sacks.

“Hey everyone, what are you doing here?” Cat asked with a grin as she approached, giving each of them a squeeze on the arm or a hug. She made it to Fenris and gave him a hug, though she went to pull away almost immediately. He held her close and whispered, "we must talk" before letting her go.

Cat nodded, “We need to head back?” she asked, looking around.

“We’re not in a hurry, so we’ll get some embrium first,” Anders said as he handed her her bag.

“Ugh, that’s the worst,” Cat groaned. “I always mess it up.”

“Come on, right over here there are always plenty. You get your practice, and we still get what we need,” Olivia said with a smile.

“All right then, lead the way,” Cat replied.

Anders and Aveline headed out first, and Fenris automatically stayed in the back, holding Cat’s arm to ensure she stayed as well. She waved the others on, but they obviously had gotten the memo, as they left plenty of space between them.

“What has you all worked up today?” Cat asked as they slowly followed their comrades.

“I was helping Isabela track some contacts,” he started, and Cat frowned.

"Look, if you’re going to tell me something about Issy, I’ve decided I don’t want to know. Not unless it’s from her. She’s obviously keeping me in the dark for a reason, and I want her to explain it.”

“I’ve told her the same,” he replied.

“You have?” she asked incredulously.

“Why would that surprise you?” he answered. “Her friendship is important to you, and she has hurt you. Nothing I say will change that.”

“You’re very astute,” Cat mumbled, unhappily. “But since she isn’t here explaining, I imagine that fell on deaf ears.”

“Not as deaf as you may think,” he said. “She worries for you as much or more than you do for her.”

“I know that, but I wish she wouldn’t.”

“That is like saying you wish that the sky were not blue. Some things just are.”

“Very well, o wise one,” she said teasingly. “What then did you want to talk about?”

Fenris didn’t get a chance to speak as the shout went up and their friends rushed forward to fight… something. Cat and Fenris rushed forward as well, seeing their group engaged with abominations.
Cat looked down, and noticed the bodies of several Qunari warriors on the ground around them.

The fight was quick, but there were no more answers as to how the abominations had gotten there. The bodies of the Qunari soldiers were not possessed, and there were no traces of a mage anywhere.

“Let’s get your flowers and get out of here,” Aveline stated and moved forward again.

They had barely begun, and Fenris started to speak when Cat hushed him. Looking forward, their group was crouched down, and gesturing for them. They moved quietly forward, staying low, hearing the sounds of shouts and cries of pain.

Aveline continued forward, and they followed, seeing a small group of guard come into view.

“Lieutenant Harley?” Aveline asked once they were in cover of some large rocks.

“Aveline?” the woman in charge looked at them as if they were heaven sent. “We didn’t think the messengers got through!”

“They didn’t. I was here for other reasons.” Aveline looked around at the small group. “This is all of your squad?” she asked.

Harley looked discouraged for a moment. “We’re dealing with Evets Marauders. Fell Orden is up there, and its been all we could do to just keep them trapped here. I tried two sorties up the path… but it’s lined with traps.”

“You’ve done well Harley,” Aveline said with a nod. “I’ll help you.”

“I think she meant to say, we’ll all help,” Cat added, having her group look at her oddly. “What?” she asked. “I’d rather deal with them here and now, then on some street in Kirkwall, when they have more men.”

“Besides,” she continued, “Varric’s the best at spotting and disarming traps, Merrill and Anders are amazing with cover fire, and Fenris is so fast, most people don’t know they are dead until it’s too late.” She smiled back at her group, who were embarrassed or preening at the praise. “We can do this.”

“Thank you,” Aveline said as they all readied their weapons. “Get your men ready Harley, you’ll take the left flank, and my group will take the right. Wait until we’ve got their attention, so you can get the drop on them.”

“Yes Captain,” Harley said with a salute. “Men! With me!” she called, and the guards that could still fight moved into position.

“We’ll follow your lead, Varric,” Aveline said quietly.

“These men are bad news,” Cat added. “I’m fairly sure that Fell Orden is a blood mage that enjoys killing.”

“Thank you for the distinction,” Merrill said happily.

“No problem,” Cat answered, as Varric shook his head.

“Blondie, Button, Daisy…” Varric said, getting their attention. “I need some room to work my magic. Some heavy cover would be preferable.”

Anders and Olivia grinned at each other. “We have something we want to try, Merrill, if you’ll
indulge us.”

“Sure,” she answered, stepping back.

“Aiming behind that peak there,” Anders said to Olivia, who nodded. Lifting their staffs, they both started an intricate spell, and Cat watched in awe as the blizzard and the lightning storm brewed together above them.

“Storm of the century, no way…” Cat said in awe, not even noticing as Varric moved forward toward the first of the traps. She felt a push behind her, as Fenris gave her a nudge and she focused on her job. Varric was going to leave any traps she could disarm to her, and go after the tougher ones. She rushed over to him, and said, “I’m here when you need me!”

“Take that one on the left!” he called back over the wind, and Cat moved for it. It was a relatively simple device, but deceptive in its appearance. Varric had been teaching her traps for some time now, and her skills were mediocre, but improving.

After a short time, Varric called back, “All clear!” and Aveline and Fenris moved forward with the others to join them. Varric gave direction, as to where was safe, and where wasn’t, and he and Cat moved off to the side, to continue their work even as the others engaged the marauders.

The fight was long and grueling, but they came out the victors in the end. Anders and Olivia put their healing skills to use, though they used bandages for the guards. Having the mages stop casting as the guards came into view had almost lost the fight, but it was better than exposure.

Once the guards left, Anders and Olivia used their magic to heal their friends, and they rested for a short time before deciding to head home. Hawke was surely awaiting them by now, and they were eager to eat and relax.

Fenris tried to keep Cat back, but Aveline had been hurt worse than he had, so he found himself leading again. Cat joined him in the front of the group, but he chose his words carefully, knowing that the others would possibly hear them.

“I heard a rumor while I was gone,” he said, and she glanced up in question.

“To have you worried, it must be bad,” she replied.

“Very bad,” he said. He stopped, holding out his arm to stop her as well. Looking up above, and around them, but seeing nothing.

Cat tensed, looking for the threat. Fenris’ instincts were like an actual wolf, and she knew to trust them. She had her hands on her daggers, waiting…

“Hunters.”

She looked over in shock, even as the men appeared on the cliff above them. “Stop right there!” a man called out to them, and Cat followed the movements of the others, as they moved to surround them. She looked back to Fenris, who was snarling in rage.

“You are in possession of stolen property! Back away from the slave, and you will be spared!”

“There are no slaves here!” Aveline called up to them. “We are all free!” Cat smiled, glad that she wasn’t the only one who felt that way.

“I won’t repeat myself! Back away from the slave!” the man called, his voice turning angry.
“You did just repeat yourself, you idiot!” Cat yelled back, pulling out her daggers.

“I am not your slave!!” Fenris yelled, his tattoos exploding with light. He moved so quickly, Cat could swear she could only see the trail of light behind him. The men surrounding them were quickly taken care of, and the crew sprang into action as more came.

The fight was quick, even though there were mages as well as soldiers, they were not as experienced as their own group. Cat looked over to Fenris, calling out “Fenris? You okay?”

He didn’t answer, in fact he didn’t even look her way. He glared at a body laying on the ground and headed straight for it, pulling the head up by the hair. Cat could see the mage was alive, though he was injured, and she moved forward along with her friends.

“Where is he?!” Fenris demanded in a quiet and terrifying voice.

“Please, don’t…kill me,” the mage replied. “I don’t know. I don’t know… I swear. Hadriana…. brought us. She is… at the holding…caves. I can… show you-”

“No need. I know which ones you speak of.”

“Then let me go, I beg you-”

He voice cut off, as Fenris grabbed his head and twisted, breaking his neck. “You chose the wrong master,” he said, dropping the man.

Cat wasn’t surprised, and yet she was still in shock. She knew Fenris could be brutal, but he had always been gentle with her. She didn’t comment however, knowing that he didn’t necessarily like showing this side of himself.

“Hadriana, hmph!” he said with a grunt. His hands clenched into fists. “I was a fool to think I was free. They will never leave me be!”

Aveline took charge, and Cat stepped back. “This is someone you know?” she asked Fenris.

He nodded, glaring at the ground. “My master’s old apprentice. A sniveling social climber who would sell her own children if it would make him happy. The only reason she’s here, is to do his bidding. I knew he wouldn’t let this go!”

“And they paid for it,” Aveline replied calmly. “We’ll go after them, but we need to regroup with Hawke and the others.”

He stared her down, but she didn’t flinch. “If she is here, there will be more. They will not stop. We need to find her, and send him a message he will not soon forget.”

“Let’s get back and report to Hawke,” she said again, calm as could be. “They will not get away with this.” She grabbed her pack that she had dropped, and gestured for the others to gather their things, after they finished looting the bodies, and piling them away from the road.

“I’ll take the lead,” Aveline told Fenris, as Anders flung a fireball at the pile of corpses. She lowered her voice, “I think you’re scaring the others,” she said quietly.

“Good, then perhaps they will understand,” he muttered, as he glared, waiting for the others to walk ahead of him. Cat finally went ahead, only because he wouldn’t walk until she did, but she stayed nearby, without speaking, just to let him know he wasn’t alone.
A Bitter Pill

Cat walked back into the Hanged Man feeling weary, both mentally and physically. Trying to get Fenris to speak to her was a battle of wills, and he was much more stubborn than she was. Not to mention all of the fights and walking to and from the wounded coast.

At least I’m not in my armor, she thought, which made her feel petty comparing that to the problems of everyone else. She followed the group over to the table and sat at the opposite end of Varric, with Anders and Olivia.

“I feel like I’m a part of the crew, sitting here,” Olivia said with a chuckle.

”And who says you aren’t?” Anders asked, pretending to be offended.

“I’m teasing, but it is nice to come along once in awhile, without being the one getting rescued I mean,” she replied. “Though I probably shouldn’t stay very long.”

“Why not?” Cat asked.

“Olivia has a mission tonight,” Anders said quietly.

“So I’ll need some rest before hand,” she added. “You never can be sure how long you’ll be hiding in those caves, and being tired is not ideal.”

“Understandable,” Cat acquiesced. “Just let us know when you’re ready to go then.”

“I’ll go when I’m ready, you stay and have a good time,” Olivia replied with a smile. She leaned in and whispered, “and get Fenris to knock the chip off his shoulder too.”

“I’ll need more than a good time to do that,” Cat answered, and they giggled.

After another hour, Hawke and Sebastian entered the tavern, and Olivia stood as soon as she saw them.

“I’ll get going, now that you all are going to talk business,” she told Cat. Cat stood and walked her to the door, telling her to be careful. Olivia waved off her concerns but accepted the luck with a wink, and left.

Cat returned and sat in her seat. “She sure has come a long way, hasn’t she?” Cat asked Anders as she sat.

“Olivia? Yes, it’s incredible the bravery that she shows, especially like tonight,” he answered.

“Do you two get these missions very often?” she asked, keeping her voice low.

“I do more than she,” he answered. “But she’s been asking for more and more responsibility. I’m really proud of her.”

Seeing the commotion around them, as everyone was standing and moving, Cat and Anders looked up and around in confusion.

”We’re moving to Varric’s” Merrill said to them, and they quickly grabbed their mugs and followed suit.
Once settled, and the door closed, Hawke cleared his throat to gain their attention, and everyone quieted down and focused on the head- or just slightly to the left of the head of the table.

“I’ve… seemed to make matters even worse today,” Hawke began, and everyone looked concerned and confused but waited for him to continue.

“After reporting to the Viscount, Dumar was insistent on seeing the delegation for himself. Sebastian and I took him to the scene where he promptly fell apart. The man is terrified of the Arishok, but trying hard not to show it.”

“That’s not exactly a surprise,” Aveline commented. “Considering he got you involved in the first place.”

“How is that worse than before?” Isabela questioned.

“That’s not the worst part,” Hawke answered grimly. “The Viscount then asked what he should do with the delegation. His plan was to simply hide the bodies.”

The group looked at Hawke in disbelief as he shook his head. “I know what you’re thinking, but as I said the man is scared witless. Sebastian and I tried to convince him to return the bodies but he wouldn’t hear of it. The compromise we came to was to burn the bodies before returning them in order to hide the torture they went through.”

Hawke waited as several conversations burst out. He could tell that everyone agreed with his assessment that the plan was foolhardy, but there was little he could do now. He waited another few moments and held up a hand to silence them.

"This will not work Hawke,” Fenris muttered grumpily. “It will only antagonize the Arishok.”

“I agree, however it is already done,” Hawke announced, and waited again as the others spoke their minds. “I only wanted to let you all know, so that you understand how strained things are in the city.”

“I doubt the fanatics are finished either,” Varric added. “So we’ll probably see even more troubles in the future.”

“I agree,” Sebastian said with a nod. “Unfortunately or not, the Arishok will likely not involve us again if there were a problem.”

“Unfortunately or not?” Anders asked in disbelief. “Hawke here was the only thing keeping him somewhat calm!”

“Agreed,” Sebastian replied. “But these fanatics already see Hawke as an enemy because of that. Either way, he is gaining enemies.”

“If Hawke is, that means we all are,” Varric stated, and they turned back to look at Hawke who was rubbing his face, showing his weariness. He looked around as everyone nodded along to Varric’s assessment.

“Thank you everyone, that means a lot,” he smiled, seeming less burdened. “Now… what happened with all of you?” he asked as he sat down to eat.

Varric began, as he always did, but there were many interruptions and accusations of embellishment, as there always were. The room was lighter though, as they enjoyed each others’ company, and they all took some pleasure in seeing Hawke laugh at some exploit or another.
Cat for her part, didn’t add much to the story, she just reveled in the atmosphere. However when Isabela asked her about her morning, she turned to Anders with a wicked smile, watching as his own faltered.

“I went to the clinic, but the healers were still asleep, so I jumped in bed with Olivia to take a nap,” she said looking over to Isabela.

“Cat, shut up,” Anders said quickly, which brought several interested looks from the others.

“Well, I was only going to tell what Olivia did, but just for that…” she teased, seeing his face flush red.

“Fine, I’m not ashamed,” he said in challenge, which had Cat laughing.

“Your face belies your words my friend,” she replied with a chuckle.

“So what happened?” Isabela asked with a grin.

“Nothing much,” Cat answered. “Olivia was dreaming about somebody, and ended up grabbing me pretty hard. I yelped, she woke up and screamed, and Anders came running from his bed to save us.”

“That’s not very exciting,” Varric commented. “Wait, was he glowing? Like all abomination-y?”

“What?!” Anders cried. “What does that even mean?”

“You know, all Justice-y,” Isabela added. “That other guy in there.”

“No, of course not,” Cat said with a laugh.

“Oh! Did he accidentally cast a spell on you, thinking you were a thief?” Merrill guessed, and Cat kept laughing.

“No, really, it was nothing like that…”

“Well then, it must have been-” Aveline began, as Anders interrupted with a shout.

“I SLEEP NAKED!”

The room was silent as they all stared at him, before all but a few started snickering.

“Are you saying what I think you’re saying?” Sebastian asked primly.

“I’m saying, yes, I sleep nude, and yes, I heard screaming, so YES, I ran over to help my friend, who happens to sleep in the next bedroom. AND YES,” he continued, “Cat and Olivia saw me naked.” He whirled on Cat, “are you happy now!?”

Cat laughed even as she looked offended. “Me? I didn’t tell them, you did!”

“Oh please, you were going to,” he grumbled, even as everyone continued to laugh.

“Remind me to come visit you some evening,” Isabela teased, and Anders glared at her.

“Remind me not to wake you up,” Hawke added, and Anders groaned.

“How long will I have to live with this??” he questioned the ceiling.

“So Kitty, how was the show?” Isabela asked, hearing the groaning from several others.
“Even better than you’d think,” she answered with a wink to Anders, who sat up a little more proudly.

“Not to dampen the mood, but we still need to tell Hawke about the hunters,” Aveline said gently, and crew quieted considerably, and Fenris tensed.

“Hunters?” Hawke asked.

“Slave hunters, coming after Fenris,” Aveline said. “They ambushed us on our way back from the Wounded Coast.”

“We handled them quickly, but it seems it was only a small part of the group that is actually here,” Anders added, looking at Fenris in concern, as he had yet to do anything but drink.

“Danarius?” Hawke asked Fenris. Fenris glowered, his fists clenched atop the table beside his bottle.

“No, not yet anyway,” Cat answered, also looking to Fenris in concern. It was more than obvious to everyone how upset he was, but that he wasn’t trying to take action, or even tell Hawke about it had her even more worried. “What we got out of one of the men was their leader was a woman named Hadriana. Fenris told us she is Danarius’ apprentice.”

“He also knows where her base is, some specific slaver cave on the coast,” Aveline continued. “We want to go and take them out before she tries anything else.”

“Good idea,” Hawke said, as he rubbed his chin in thought. “The sooner the better too.”

Cat was still looking at Fenris, and saw the shock on his face at Hawke’s words. Had he been thinking we were all going to abandon him or something? she thought. The thought had her a little mad at his stupidity, but she quelled it instantly.

“You... you’ll help me then?” Fenris asked quietly, and Cat’s anger was back in full force.

“Of course you idiot!” she said as she punched his shoulder. He turned to gape at her, as she shook her hand out from the pain, while he hadn’t seemed to even notice she hit him. “How could you even think that we wouldn’t?!”

“I... am used to being alone.”

“Well, you’re not anymore, so get used to it!” Cat said with finality, then huffed and got up and left.

“You punched me when I hurt her feelings,” Hawke said with a smirk to Fenris. “Does that mean I get to punch you now?”

“Try it,” Fenris offered, and stood up to follow Cat. “I guess we’ll meet tomorrow?” he asked.

“I’ve got a few things to do for the Viscount,” Hawke replied. “But we’ll go see these slavers as soon as we can.”

“Very well,” Fenris said, and left.

“That’s what he’s been so moody about this whole time?” Aveline groused. “He thought we would leave him to deal with slavers alone?”

“It seems as though it has happened before,” Hawke replied with a frown. “If anyone can convince him though, it’s Cat.”
“Sure, after she tears into him,” Isabela added. “Varric!” she called. “We’re out of drinks!”

* * * * *

Fenris was on his last straw, and he knew it. He was ready to explode, and was trying hard to keep it in. He told himself over and over that these people were his friends, his family even, but another part of him whispered to prepare himself for betrayal.

He expected it from some, after all, the blood mage and the abomination hardly cared what happened to him, and would gladly see him gone. The others may care, but would easily forget him and the problems he brought to their group. Having a warrior to help with the fighting didn’t outweigh the fights he brought to their doorstep.

Even Cat’s words from several days ago couldn’t penetrate through this barrier of self loathing. They had spoken for some time after she stormed off from the tavern and he had followed her home. Her accusations had not been misplaced, and he realized he had hurt her as he had sworn he never would.

*That is what monsters do*, he told himself. *It was better to be alone.*

He glanced around in anger, wondering why he was still following Hawke on these useless errands. Meeting with the Arishok, or trying to at least, asinine deliveries such as pick axes for laborers out at the Bone Pit. Patrolling the city streets at night and removing gangs that preyed on the weak. And now of all things, they were heading to take care of a thief who had been stealing from one of Hawke’s business ventures.

*As soon as we can… isn’t that what he said?!* Fenris thought as his anger grew. *As soon as you decide it is worthwhile anyway.*

He followed the group through a sewer in Darktown, as they turned a corner and stopped. Since he was taller than most of them, he was able to see the group of fighters before them.

“Stop stealing from my shipments,” Hawke said sternly.

“You’re that upstart Fereldan,” the man in the front said snidely.

“And you must be Brekken,” Hawke answered just as rudely.

“No one comes to my territory and orders me around,” Brekken said as he pulled out his daggers.

That was all the invitation Fenris needed, as he had to get some of this anger out somehow. With a roar, he moved into the melee, striking out ferociously. The fight was over much sooner than he wished, and he stood panting in disappointment.

“What in the hell has gotten in to you?” Hawke asked him in surprise.

“This,” Fenris answered on a growl. “This is more important than my life?!”

Hawke stepped back, instantly on the defensive. “Of course not Fenris,” he said calmly, and the others looked on in shock.

“Tell me then,” Fenris growled. “Why have we not gone after the slavers!”
“I did tell you, but I will say it again,” Hawke replied testily. “We needed everyone with us, which didn’t happen until today. And we came here first, because we knew he was here now, whereas he might have moved if we waited.”

“The SLAVERS might have moved since we waited!!” Fenris roared at him.

“Not without their slave they wouldn’t.”

Hawke stood his ground as Fenris screamed out his frustration. He understood it, but he was the leader for a reason. He had to make the hard decisions, and not everyone would agree with him. Like now.

“Let me make this very simple,” Fenris growled as he got up into Hawke’s face. “Either we go now… or I do.”

Hawke heard the gasps, and he saw red, and a small part of him wanted to deny him simply for giving him an ultimatum. But his rational side came back to him as Cat spoke up.

“Fenris, you don’t mean that,” she said pleadingly.

“Of course I do,” he spat at her, and she recoiled back.

Hawke looked over at the devastated look on her face, and wondered if even Fenris would be able to be forgiven for what he was doing. “Of course we’ll go,” he said calmly. “It is all we left on our plans today, and we have everyone with us so that we can wipe out these slavers once and for all.”

“Hmph,” Fenris grunted as he stepped back.

“Will you lead us there?” he asked, and Fenris stormed off. He went after him gesturing for the others to follow as well. He gave Cat’s shoulder a squeeze as he passed her, seeing her smile gratefully at him. “Let’s get this done,” he said as they rushed to keep up with their friend.

* * * * *

Cat had no idea how to even process what she was seeing. Since coming to Thedas she had seen her share and more of blood and death, knowing inside that it was inevitable here. Kill or be killed had been drummed into her since that first day when she met Zev.

Here in this awful cave however, she realized that there was an entirely new set of rules for those that chose to lord themselves over others. The needless death surrounding her was appalling, and the fact that the slaves went begrudgingly, even if not willingly, made her sick to her stomach.

She could see that she wasn’t alone in her horror, though the others hid it much better than she had. Once she even ran from the room to be sick, and had to stare at the ceiling as she finally went past the carved up bodies sprawled before her.

She listened as Fenris explained what they saw, and she was furious and saddened that he had been forced to live with this depravity. She tried to remember that as he accused Merrill of being the same as these animals, but thankfully Hawke came to Merrill’s defense.

She knew that Fenris had a darker side that he tried not to show, and it hurt her heart to see it
firsthand. She steeled herself against the pain, chanting in her head that it wasn’t his fault, and he would be able to get past it because of his friends. He sure wasn’t making it any easier though.

Room after room, they made their way through the slavers. Only once did they find an actual slave, and having her ask Fenris if he was her new master had all of their hearts breaking. Hawke offered her a place in his house, and while Fenris was furious at first, after Hawke explained, he was remorseful and grateful.

But now, the time had come. Cat recognized the end of the cavern, knowing the awful mage was hiding there with her men. They were taking it slowly, watchful for traps, but she could see the determination on everyone’s faces. They were ready to finish this.

“All clear,” Isabela said, and she and Varric waited as the group joined them. Together, they turned the corner and faced the magister’s apprentice.

“You made a grievous mistake in coming here, slave!” she shouted as she spotted Fenris.

“Not as much as you have, witch!” he retorted, running into the fray.

Several of crew fell throughout the course of the fight, but Hawke was like a whirlwind, getting others back to their feet. The sheer amount of power Hadriana wielded was amazing, and Cat fought for her life to survive, unwilling to let her win.

Round after round of enemies came at them, first slavers, then shades and corpses alternating while Hadriana would barrier herself away from their attacks or deliver sweeping area attacks that would scatter them away from protecting each other. Many times they tried to use their combined attacks, with very little luck.

Finally, the tides turned in their favor as Anders caught Hadriana in a winter’s grasp spell right after her barrier dispelled. The nine of them immediately went for the woman, attacking with gusto even through the ice.

As the spell dispersed, she fell over to the ground, reaching with one hand for her staff that Fenris quickly kicked away. He stared at her as he lifted his sword, ready to chop off her head.

“Wait!” she called. “You do not want me dead!”

Fenris scoffed. “There is only one person in this world that I want dead more than you.”

She struggled to sit up, and no one came to her aid. “I have information, elf,” she spat as if it were a nasty word. “And I will trade it, for my life.”

“No information would be greater than the pleasure of your death,” he replied.

“You have a sister!” she said quickly before he could swing. Looking up since the blow did not come, she added. “She is alive.”

Fenris turned his head to look at Cat, and she froze at the emptiness of his stare. Turning back to the woman he sheathed his sword. She smiled as she realized she had gotten his attention. “Let me go, and I will tell you where she is.”

“How do we know you’re even telling the truth?” Hawke asked, since Fenris was silent.

“You don’t.” Hadriana replied. “But I know Fenris. If we wants me to betray Danarius, then he’ll have to pay for it.” She smiled coldly at Fenris, knowing exactly what the thought of losing her death was costing him. She felt the same way, after all.
“Your call Fenris,” Hawke said as he stepped back.

Fenris seemingly made up his mind. He stepped forward and crouched in front of Hadriana.

“I have your word?” she asked.

“Yes,” he nodded, looking her dead in the eyes. “You have my word.”

She eyed him, looking for hints of betrayal, and finding none, began to speak. “Her name, is Varania. She is Qarinus, serving a magister by the name of Ahriman.”

“She’s a servant?”

“Yes,” she replied with a nod. “A servant, not a slave.”

Fenris eyed her as well before nodding. “I believe you.”

He didn’t move, but he didn’t have to either. His tattoos lit up, and Hadriana looked at him in confusion. His hand whipped out, and she gasped as he gripped her heart. She couldn’t look away from his eyes… so cold, so… dead. And then everything went black.

Fenris stood and turned, and began walking away. “We are done here,” he announced to the shocked crew.

“Uh… Fenris?” Cat asked, wondering why she was. “Are you okay?” She regretted it instantly.

“Okay?!” he fumed as he whirled on her. “NO! I am not OKAY!” He was staring down at her like he wanted to punch her. “This could be a trap! This entire thing could have been Danarius sending her here to tell me about this “sister”, but even if he didn’t trying to find her would still be suicide!”

“I’m-” she started.

“Danarius has to know, and he has to know that Hadriana knew. But all that really matters, is that I killed her. May she rot in peace, along with every other mage…”

Cat’s inner monologue was screaming don’t cry, don’t cry! But she felt the tears falling anyway. Fenris was looking at her as he had only in nightmares.

“I’m so sorry,” she said as she put her hand on his arm, which he immediately shrugged off.

“Don’t comfort me,” he spat. “Look around you! This is what mages do, what mages are!! And you come along and tell us that things can be different, and I almost believed you! But this is the reality. THIS is what will happen and I will not let you convince me otherwise!!”

Cat was frozen, looking at him, wondering when it was that he had become so hard and cynical, wondering what he had been like as a young elf and full of dreams, and she continued to cry, for that poor elf that was lost.

Fenris, on the other hand, saw her looking at him as if she didn’t recognize him, and he wondered if she finally saw the monster he had been trying to hide from her. The thought grieved him more than he expected.

“I have to go,” he said quietly, and rushed past everyone to the exit.
Cat waved off the others’ concerns, letting them know she didn’t blame Fenris, and speaking a little about finally understanding what he had really been through. Most of them seemed to feel the same way, and there wasn’t much conversation on the way home.

Knowing Fenris would be waiting for Hawke at his home made it easier to refuse going to the Hanged Man. She wanted to get home, get clean, and sleep for a very long time. There was little she could do now, and until Fenris calmed down, she wouldn’t be able to speak to him.

She walked to the door, opening it and pulling it closed behind her. Walking past the foyer, she headed for the staircase, only to see Fenris sitting at the bottom, waiting- for her it seemed.

She hadn’t prepared herself for that, and backed up a few steps as he came near.

“I deserve that,” he mumbled. “Though all I can say is that I am sorry.”

“Sorry?” she asked. “For what?”

“I… took my anger out on you, though you did not deserve it.”

“You have absolutely no need to apologize Fenris,” she replied. “I know what killing her meant to you.”

“Of course you do,” he muttered. He tried a step forward, and seeing that she didn’t back away, took another. “This… hate… I carry, I thought that I had gotten away from it, but it dogs me no matter where I go.”

Cat worried about saying the wrong thing, but it was worth it to try. She stepped forward, and put her hand on his cheek. “Perhaps you weren’t quite ready to let it go,” she said quietly.

“You think I want this?!?” he asked as he moved forward, pushing her up against a wall. “This evil crawling through me at every turn, making me the monster you shy away from?!”

“What?” she asked.

“How can you say that?” he spat in disgust at himself. “As you look at me and wonder where your friend has gone.”

“Oh Fenris, no,” she said, reaching for him again, putting her hand on his chest. “That’s not it, I swear!”

“How can I deny what I see with my own eyes?” he muttered.

“I don’t see a monster,” she said quietly. “I see a younger version of you, before these people took control of your life, and I feel such sorrow that he had to suffer through such awful things.”

She put a finger under his chin to get him to look at her. “I see who you are, struggling past these things that were out of your control, and I wish I could find that magister,” she said as her voice turned hard, “and strangle him with my own hands!”

He backed away from her this time, confused at her unexpected words. He had hoped to somehow explain himself and beg forgiveness, and found himself at a loss. How he wanted to believe her, yet it seemed too impossible.
“You… you’re too generous,” he said, causing her to look confused.

“We’re friends Fenris,” she replied, as if that explained it all.

He closed his eyes briefly, and opened them again to look at her. “I’m not sure I know what that means,” he answered, and rushed up the stairs to his room.

Cat sighed, no longer wanting to be home. She wasn’t much of a drinker, but perhaps a night of forgetting her troubles was in order.
Friends are Forever

9:33 Solace

Hello my dear friend! It has been far too long since I’ve heard from you! As I am certain you are aware, our mutual friends have been too busy to write, though their leader did manage a quick visit through Val Royeaux not too long ago. It seems he is helping some of his people with an expedition, and I have to admit that I do not envy him, though it was wonderful to see him again!

Your sworn protector still asks of you, as I thought I would pass on since he has not written anything to pass on instead. He is a man of action, not words, no? I am certain he wants to greet you in person, and will do so once he is able to ensure he will not be followed. Until then, I am certain these friends you speak so highly of will keep you entertained.

Your last letter was very enlightening, I must admit. Do these people know just how lucky they are to have you? I certainly would have you come to stay with me if I felt I could tear you away. But from the sounds of it, I would have a fight on my hands, no? I would love to hear more, as I feel I am getting to know them all through your eyes. Perhaps one day we will meet!

Of course, his highness asks of you as well, certain that you are writing to me far more often than to him. I have dissuaded him of this as I could, but he does have a way of knowing the truth, does he not? Please ensure you send him a note, he sounds lonely and busy, which would normally be hard to do… but we all know how difficult it can be to be without your friends.

I see that you neglected to tell me of the men, {or women?] in your life last time. Are you going to make me beg? You know you are only making my curiosity grow! I’m certain with your beauty and, how did you put it? Curvy? Yes, your pleasing curves, that you are enticing plenty of suitors. If I find you are married without an invitation sent to me, I will be most upset, just so you are aware.

Your friend,

L-

* * * *

Cat rolled her eyes as she reread the letter. Leli was always so concerned with my love life, and never with her own! She had had many a conversation with Leliana about this, only to have the woman turn the tides back on her.

Married! What is she thinking?! Cat thought as she shook her head. There wasn’t anything further from her mind at the moment. She glanced up, and folding the letter, put it in her pocket.

She wondered again why she hadn’t changed before coming to the Hanged Man, and as she walked out of Varric’s room to join her friends, she turned back to go to Isabela’s room in the hopes that she could find something that would show her body off a little less.

If anything, there’s that blue shirt I gave her, she thought. Issy’s got to have one pair of pants, right?
While she doubted her own thoughts, she searched anyway and found a pair of pants that she’d say were more like leggings. Hoping that they actually belonged to Isabela and not someone else, she changed from her armor, and headed back out to the main room.

Joining the table where Isabela, Varric and Merrill were sitting, Cat noticed Aveline standing, looking like she was leaving.

“Aveline, where are you going?” she asked in a pleading sort of voice. “Don’t leave me!” she cried dramatically, though with a smile.

Aveline rolled her eyes at Cat’s theatrics, but sat back down. Varric and Isabela were having a whispered conversation, so Cat pulled Merrill into another with her and Aveline.

“I’m sorry to have taken so long, but I rarely get letters, and I couldn’t wait to read it,” she said by way of an explanation.

“From your friends in Fereldan?” Aveline asked with a smile.

“One of them, yes. She’s quite nosy though, so I usually get some news of the others as well.”

“Well that must be nice,” Merrill said as she sipped something in front of her, making a face before sipping it again.

“Merrill, if you don’t like it, you don’t have to drink it,” Aveline commented.

“It’s not that bad,” Merrill insisted. “Varric told me to acquire a taste for it.”

“Are you sure he didn’t say it was an acquired taste?” Cat asked.

“Yes,” Merrill nodded. “Wait, what did I say?”

Aveline and Cat chuckled even as they shook their heads. Aveline reached over and switched her glass with Merrill’s. “Oh, thank you Aveline,” she said as she tried her new drink and it enjoyed it much more.

Cat ordered some wine and stretched slightly. “Some days seem long, but today felt never ending,” she said.

“How is he?” Merrill asked in concern.

“He’s doing well, but there are a lot of old wounds that haven’t healed,” she replied. “I mean, not real wounds,” she added quickly at Merrill’s horrified expression. “You know, like in his heart.”

“Oh…” she said quietly.

“I can only imagine what life was like with that awful woman,” Aveline said as she drank.

“Yeah, he has a hard time believing he’s worth the trouble,” Cat said with a sigh. “It’s going to take time.”

“Well we have plenty of that,” Aveline responded. “But… I stayed because I want to talk about… you know what we were talking about… before.”

“Oh?” Cat asked. “How’s that, uh, project going?”

“Not well,” Aveline said as she rubbed her temple. “It seems every time I try something, it
“Like what?” Cat asked.
“Well I tried giving him something that would share my feelings without, you know, sharing my feelings,” Aveline said as she thought back.

“And?” Cat asked.

“He thought it was trash.”

“Ooh…” Cat winced. “Uh, it couldn’t have been that bad,” she said, trying to look at the bright side.

“It was, believe me,” Aveline replied despondently.

“Anything else?”

“I tried assigning him to the Hightown patrol, you know, as a reward?”

“Okay, and how did that go?”

“He came barging in my office, demanding to know what he did that I would punish him like that.”

“Okay, so not great,” Cat muttered. “But at least he came to your office right? Did you tell him why you really did it?”

Aveline looked at her like she was crazy. “Of course not! I was so flustered, I told him it was an accident and changed it right then.”

“Oh.”

“So?” she asked. “Any ideas? I’m in desperate need of help here.”

“This is absolutely too delicious,” a voice said softly, and Cat and Aveline looked up to find Isabela standing at the end of the table over them.

She stood up and put her hand on her forehead. “Let me see if I have this straight,” she said with a laugh. “You, are coming to her” pointing to Cat, “for advice about men?!” and with that, she started laughing loudly.

“I swear, I will gut you if you don’t keep quiet!” Aveline hissed.

Isabela continued to chuckle, though she did lower her voice. Cat looked around, finally noticing that while Merrill was listening intently, Varric was now talking to several people at a nearby table. Cat felt herself being pushed, so she scooted over to make room for Isabela to sit.

“You do realize, that Kitty is even more clueless about signals than the unfortunate man you’re talking about, don’t you?”

“Hey!” Cat said in offense. “I’m not clueless, I have been married you know.”


Cat crossed her arms and shot her a dirty look. “I am not clueless.”

Isabela smirked and looked at her in interest. “Shall I start naming names of those that have given you signals that you’ve missed?” she asked sweetly.
“No,” Cat said even as Isabela began.

“There’s “your friend” the Starkhaven prince, and “your friend” the Knight Captain, and “your friend” Anders, “your friend” Fenris, oh, and the man that works at that food stall we like, and don’t forget about Norah here, oh, and the woman at the…”

“STOP!” Cat hissed at her. “It’s not funny anymore,” she said angrily. “You see signals everywhere you look, no matter if they are there or not!”

“Silly me, how could I forget,” Isabela said snarkily. “And Hawke.”

Cat’s face went blank. “Now you’re being ridiculous,” she said as she downed her wine and held her hand up for another glass.

“Is that what I am?” Isabela asked, her smirk back in place. “Like I said, clueless.”

“Isabela…” Aveline said in warning. “Perhaps this conversation is better suited for somewhere less… uh public?” Aveline offered.

“Of course,” Isabela answered, her usual smirk on her face. “Merrill, come help me get some drinks,” she said as Merrill got up and followed her to the bar.

Cat put her head in her hand. “I’m not going to like this, am I?” she asked.

“Probably not,” Aveline answered, looking at her in sympathy.

“Never… ending… day,” Cat muttered and she stood, gathering her glass and then following Aveline to Isabela’s room.

* * * * *

“Which of these surfaces have you not had sex on?” Cat asked as Isabela led them inside. She smirked and offered Cat a shrug.

“Someone’s feeling feisty,” she replied.

“Look, I’m not looking forward to this,” Cat retorted. “I should probably just go.”

Isabela seemed to look disappointed, and Cat was taken aback. “Look Kitty,” she began as she flopped on the bed and offered the wine bottle to Merrill. “I’m not going to just point out all the missed signals,” she said somewhat contritely. “I know you, and I know that you miss some of them on purpose, to let the other person keep their dignity.”

“What?” Merrill asked. “How does she do that?” Cat reached over and grabbed the bottle from Merrill who seemed all too glad to give it up.

“Oh there was this one time, back when we first met,” Isabela began with a smile. “Kitty here had just joined my crew, and decided that she needed to improve her swimming skills.”

“Oh Maker…” Cat groaned.

“What… happened?” Aveline asked tentatively, and looked at Cat in apology.
“Well Kitty didn’t have extra clothes for swimming, not at first. She just stripped down to her unders, tied a rope around herself, and jumped into the water!”

Merrill and Aveline looked at her in surprise. “You didn’t!” Merrill said in glee.

“She did. Of course, all the men were enjoying the show-”

“And their captain,” Cat cut in. She gave up on her glass and started drinking straight from the bottle, hoping she’d just fall asleep soon.

“Her too,” Isabela consented. “When one of the lads decided he would ask Cat for a private encore.” Aveline and Merrill gasped, and Cat just shook her head at the dramatics.

“So what happened?”

“Oh he spent a good amount of time trying to convince Cat to let him dry her off, if you know what I mean…”

“We always know what you mean,” Aveline grumbled even as Merrill asked, “what do you mean?”

“After trying fifteen or so different ways of suggesting it, with Kitty just sitting there saying, ‘what?'”, Isabela said in a high pitch while fluttering her lashes. “He finally figured out that she wasn’t interested, and let it go.”

“But what did he mean?” Merrill asked, even as she was ignored.

“You could of shot him down right away, but you let him think you were some innocent child instead, which not only insured that it wouldn’t happen again, but that he’d protect you from anyone else that would try something.”

Cat rolled her eyes. “I really didn’t know what most of what he was saying meant,” she muttered.

“But you caught the idea,” Isabela said with a wink.

“So who was this man?” Aveline asked.

“My first mate,” Isabela answered with a sad smile. “Biggest and most lovable guy there ever was.”

“To Big Tom,” Cat said quietly, holding up the bottle in salute, and taking a long drink.


After a moment, Isabela turned to Aveline with a grin. “So… lady man hands has a man dangling on the hook does she?”

“I swear whore-” Aveline began.

”Hey!” Cat said with a glare to Aveline. “Don’t say that like that.”

“Like what?” she asked.

“Like… like it’s a bad thing.”

“Oh… uh, my apologies to whores everywhere,” she replied, and Cat nodded, looking satisfied.

“Anyway,” Isabela gave Cat an odd look. “What’s the problem?”
Aveline almost blurted it out, after all, the woman obviously got plenty of men, and might actually have good advice. But then she remembered it was Isabela, and stayed quiet.

“So there’s this guy,” Cat said, thinking that if she asked for herself, maybe Aveline could save some face, but still get the idea she needed. “He’s a friend, and I’m thinking, maybe it would be great if we could be more than friends…”

Isabela’s eyebrow went high, as she looked between Cat and Aveline. She was no fool, but she was always one to grab an opportunity when it presented itself. “Do tell,” she replied.

“But, let’s say I tell him, and he doesn’t feel the same… well then, our friendship could be ruined.”

Isabela settled back against the wall. “That’s true,” she said.

“So…” Cat glanced at Aveline, wanting to be sure that she didn’t step over a line. “How do I let him know, while being able to maintain my friendship if it doesn’t go as I want?”

“You should just tell him,” Merrill said with a sigh. “It will make you feel better, and no one could not love you, Cat.”

“Oh, thanks Merrill,” she replied, handing her bottle off to Aveline, as her tongue felt tingly.

“That is good advice,” Isabela said. “It can be freeing to just admit it.”

“And if I’m not willing to do that?”

“Obviously the answer is to wrangle yourself into an plainly romantic situation, and see if he… takes the bait.”

Cat snickered at the analogy, but her smile wiped away at Isabela’s next words. “Though since you and Hawke have already done that, I’d say you should just admit it.”

Cat sat up before rounding on Isabela. “I don’t appreciate this, you know.”

“It can be hard to face the truth,” Isabela replied nonchalantly.

“Face the… what?!” Cat spluttered.

“You heard me Kitty,” Isabela said with a sigh. “Why you are insisting on this dance between you two, I’ll never understand.”

“STOP IT!!” Cat yelled loudly, her breathing erratic as she tried to clam herself. The other three stared at her in surprise. “I don’t understand why you are doing this! I am not that type of friend, and why are you so insistent on having me admit feelings for a man, is… is… that one word! Appalling! Yeah, that’s it!” Cat grinned in triumph at remembering the word.

“Merrill, time for you and I to go,” Aveline said quietly.

“No, I’m sorry,” Cat turned, instantly contrite. “I didn’t mean to chase you out.”

“Honestly?” Aveline said, “I think you two are overdue,” she stood and gave Cat’s shoulder a pat. “We’ll see you tomorrow for lunch.”

“Good night,” Merrill said with a large smile. “I had such a good time!” Cat sat back down in her chair, feeling dizzy, as the two of them left.
Cat looked up finally as she heard Isabela clear her throat.

“I guess Aveline has a point, even if I’d never let her hear me say that,” she began. “I… I’m not trying to upset you,” she said. “I just thought if you finally said it out loud, you’d realize how you felt. Not really sure why that’s appalling.”

“If you knew me at all,” Cat said icily, no longer concerned about keeping her anger in check. “Then you would know that I would never pursue a man that had been with a friend of mine. Regardless of how bad of a friend that friend was being.”

Cat could see that Isabela was thinking through that one, and the look of confusion threw her off. “What don’t you get?” she said snidely.

“You, obviously,” Isabela replied. “You shouldn’t spend time with Fenris anymore if you’re going to start acting like him.” Cat’s eyes narrowed. “I’m trying to figure out what you meant by that,” Isabela continued. “I thought you were talking about me, but obviously you’re not, so who is it then?”

“What?” Cat asked. “It IS you.”

“That’s just not possible,” Isabela replied.

“And how do you figure?” Cat demanded.

“Easy,” she said seriously, which had Cat pausing. “I’ve never been with Hawke.”

* * * * *

Cat was at a loss. She knew that Isabela was hardly ever serious, but when she was, it was worth taking notice. She also knew when Isabela was lying, and for the life of her, she couldn’t understand how she could be saying those words truthfully.

There was also the fact that her heart had picked up speed, and she had no idea why.

“You’re lying,” Cat said quietly.

“We both know that I’m not,” Isabela replied. “But I’d like to know what has you so certain.”

“The morning after that night,” Cat said slowly. “I came home, and Hawke was there… with you… and you were talking about having sex.”

“That sounds like me,” Isabela said with a smirk.

“Maker Issy,” Cat grumbled, as she rubbed her forehead. “Is everything a joke to you?”

“You know I can’t stand all the seriousness Kitty. I’ve reached my limit for the day.”

“Try week,” Cat groused.

“See?” Isabela beamed. “You do know me.”

“So you’re telling me, that you and Hawke… aren’t… together?” Cat asked. “With all the foreplay, and angry sex? Are you sure? I mean, it’s epic.”
“Really,” Isabela questioned. “I’m pretty sure there was no foreplay or sex, angry or otherwise.” She then waved it off like she was shooing a fly. “Doesn’t matter. He wants you, not me.”

“Wait, wait, wait a minute…” Cat said as she stood to pace, and fell back in her seat. “I mean, back then, sure I could see it, but now?” She faced Isabela and shook her head. “We’re friends Issy, that’s it.”

“And why is it that I’m doubting that?” Isabela asked with a grin. “Let’s say you’re not the sharpest when it comes to that sort of thing.”

“Rude,” Cat grumbled. “But I still stand by it. Regardless of anything else, he’s my friend, end of story.”

“Ah… the plot thickens,” Isabela muttered. “So you’re not willing to let it be anything else,” she clarified. Cat thought for a minute and nodded.

“That’s right.”

“I see.”

“So I don’t want to hear any more about admitting feelings or anything like that, got it?” Cat asked, simultaneously feeling relieved and pained, though she couldn’t- or wouldn’t- look deeper to understand why.

Isabela looked at her for a moment, and then nodded. Clearing her throat again, she reached over for her bottle, and took a long pull. “I think it’s time I told you what’s been going on,” she said.

“High past time,” Cat replied with a yawn, moving over to the bed to lie down.

“But there’s a catch.”

Cat looked at her suspiciously. “And that is?”

Isabela looked in her eyes, once again serious, and Cat felt goosebumps on her arms. “You cannot be involved, at all.”

“What?” Cat demanded. “Why not?”

“Castillon,” Isabela answered.

“What about him?” Cat asked, confused.

“I know I haven’t shared much about him, and for good reason,” Isabela said, without a smirk in sight, and Cat began to feel the dread and worry piling in her stomach as she sat up. “I’ve never met a more cold and calculating man in my life.”

“Okay…” Cat replied.

“He doesn’t see people as you or I do, he sees tools. Ways to get what he wants.”

“Yeah, a lot of mercenaries are like that,” Cat said.

“No,” Isabela said with a sigh. “I don’t know how to explain Kitty, so you can understand. If he knew about you,” she explained. “If he knew there was someone that I cared even remotely about? He would take you, and use you to keep me in line.”
“Issy, that’s-”

“NO Kitty,” she stressed, cutting her off. “He’s sadistic. I’ve seen some of the people after he’s done with them. He finds out what you fear, what you hate, what you love, and he twists them all around, until you are no longer the person you once were. He tortures, he changes, he molds… just to hurt someone else. Then he sends you back to your loved one as a shell of your former self, begging for death, so that all they can do is grant it.”

Cat looked horrified, seeing the fear on Isabela’s face, seeing her close in on herself. It was obviously even worse than what she was describing.

Isabela sighed. “I may not be a good friend, but I’d die before I let that happen.”

“That… uh, that actually sounds like you’re being a good friend…” Cat replied, and Isabela looked up, the haunted look in her eyes diminishing somewhat.

“That day… on the ship…” Isabela said with a far off look of remembrance. “That was almost me, but I was more useful in getting the relic. My death wouldn’t have hurt anyone- the only reason I was spared,” she said.

“Issy, don’t say that,” Cat said softly. “Me, the crew… we all would have been hurt.”

“Thanks, but crews don’t matter much to Castillon.” Isabela straightened up, and rubbed her arms. “Enough of that,” she said, though Cat felt she was talking to herself. “That’s the deal,” she told Cat. “I’ll tell you what’s going on, but that’s the only way you’re involved. No helping, no acting as look out, nothing. Take it, or leave it.”

Cat leaned over, putting her head on Isabela’s shoulder. “You know, I’ve missed you,” Cat said taking her hand.

“Back at you,” Isabela replied.

“If that’s all I get then, Captain, I’ll take it.”

* * * * *

9:33 Kingsway

My Lord Constable of the Grey-

I have sent a package to raise your spirits my friend, and don’t eat it all at once! I have it on good authority, from another lover of cheeses, that this is some of the finest that Kirkwall has to offer, and it will keep well enough to reach you.

I have heard from a lovely bird that your commander is on an expedition, so that puts you in charge, which I know you dislike. However, I am also aware that you are an exceptional leader, so quit feeling sorry for yourself! Besides, just put Nathaniel in charge if you can’t do it.

I’m certain that got through! Ha ha! I miss you Al, you big oaf. I am certain that you would fit into this Kirkwall group seamlessly, in fact our leader reminds me somewhat of you, except that he
actually seems to like leading.

I see pieces of you and the others in the things that the people here do, from the healer to the warrior, the smirks, the lock picking, the occasional campfire, and the laughter. There is the stoic warrior, the bawdy rogue, the... well you get the idea.

In warning, I should tell you to prepare yourself sir, for when I see you again, I shall challenge you to a duel. My skills are growing while I fear yours are rusting as you sit in your office handing down commands. You should challenge Nathaniel to a spar right this moment, for you have no time to lose, and you need all the practice you can get, old man.

Oh, and any news you can give me of Carver Hawke, for his mother, would be most appreciated.

--Cat

* * * * *

Nathaniel looked up at the strange choking sounds coming from the other side of the room. “What has gotten in to you?” he asked in confusion.

“That little minx!” Alistair muttered, as he continued to read from a paper.

“Are you all right?” Nathaniel asked.

“Yes, yes,” Alistair replied, “as you were,” as he waved him off.

“You were going to tell me who you wanted to send on tomorrow’s scouting expedition,” Nathaniel said as he rose from his own chair. “Or would you prefer I decide?”

“What?” Alistair’s voice took on an edge as his head snapped up. “Of course, I can do it,” he said quickly, and Nathaniel handed the paper with a list of names on it to him.

“I don’t recognize any of these names,” Alistair finally grumbled as he handed it back to Nathaniel. “Do you... have any suggestions?” he asked.

“Of course,” Nathaniel bent over circling several names before handing it back. “These are the wardens with experience in tracking or field work,” he said.

Alistair nodded, and looked over to what he had been reading. “Nathaniel, I’m not old,” he declared.

“Oh, no,” he replied. “I’d say we are fairly close in age actually.”

“That’s right,” Alistair pounced on that as if it were a prize. “And we’re some of the best we’ve got!”

“Undoubtedly,” Nathaniel agreed, still unsure of what was happening.

“Then it’s decided! I’ll meet you on the training field!” Alistair said as he circled a few more names on the paper and rushed to hand it off to his assistant.

Nathaniel looked over, and skimmed the letter Alistair had been reading. He smirked as he realized what had gotten into the man, and decided he could spare an hour or two for some exercise. I’m now eager to meet this woman, he thought as he went to fetch his bow and daggers. She accomplished in
one paragraph what I’ve been trying to do for weeks.
Framing Templars and Friendly Gifts

Chapter Notes

Of course thank you again for your wonderful comments and kudos! It's amazing how motivating a comment can be! And of course, I want to hear if anything feels rushed or slow, or just plain wrong. Sometimes I'm thinking too much about the future of the story, and I tend to forget what's going on in the now.

Thank you for those that follow and read the story as well! I appreciate it so very much!

As she walked into the Hanged Man, Cat could scarcely believe how this dive of a tavern had become like a second home. She looked around as she entered, hoping to find the man she had been looking for the past few days. Smiling as she spotted him, she made a quick detour to speak with him before making her way to Isabela’s room.

Cat followed behind Isabela as they then walked down the hall to Varric’s room. “I wonder what this is all about?” she asked.

“No idea,” Isabela replied. She opened the door to find almost all of their crew in the room. “But it seems as though this wasn’t just a summons for us.”

“It has been a few weeks since our last job,” Cat said. “Perhaps Hawke finally has something lined up besides problems with the Qunari.” They headed to the large table and took a seat to wait for Hawke to begin.

“I’m sorry Kitty,” Isabela answered. “I know you’ve been bored lately. Between the relic, and the Qunari, there hasn’t been much time for anything else.”

“I didn’t think it would be a big deal to stay out of those two messes,” Cat replied with a smirk. “But everyone else has been involved with them, so I’ve been on my own lately.”

“I thought you were spending your days with Anders and Olivia?” Isabela asked, even as she looked around the room for the healers.

“They haven’t been home much themselves,” Cat answered. “They are getting very involved in the mage underground. In fact, I’ve spent a few days with Cullen, and the mage disappearances were all I heard the templars talking about.”

“Oh?”

“Yeah, obviously Cullen is looking for those that are helping others escape, but most of the recruits are spreading rumors about the mages learning to turn invisible or escaping through the fade.”

“Preposterous,” Fenris spoke up as he sat across from Cat.

“Hi Fenris,” Cat greeted him. She had hardly seen him in days, as he spent most of his time with Hawke.

“Cat,” he answered with a nod at her. “You’ve been spending time with the Knight Captain again?”
he asked.

Cat nodded. Isabela handed her a cup of wine, and she turned with, “Thanks Issy,” before taking a drink.

“No problem,” came the reply.

Noting something behind her, Cat turned back the other way, just as Hawke reached out to get her attention. The shock of a large hand on her chest was enough to cause the wine to spew from her mouth as she jumped.

Those in the room went silent as they all looked over at Hawke, whose face was dripping with wine, and whose hand was on his own chest, as if it had been burned. Their eyes then went to Cat, who had an arm covering her chest, while her other hand wiped her gaping mouth.

“I…I’m so sorry Hawke!” Cat finally managed to squeak out.

“I didn’t mean…” she reached over to place her wine cup on the table, but missed. Hawke reached out just in time to keep it from falling, and Cat pulled her own hand back like it had been shot at.

Hawke steadied the cup on the table, grabbing the cloth that Varric handed him, and wiped his face. “My fault completely, I should be the one apologizing,” he replied. He looked over at Cat’s beet red face, and gave her a gentle smile. *The only way to make this easier was to not make a big deal of it,* he thought. “I didn’t mean to startle you,” he said.

“Uh, right… no problem,” she muttered, hunching her shoulders in embarrassment.

“Well, I have to admit, the wine is good. Perhaps I’ll have some more, in a glass this time,” Hawke told the group, and they laughed good-naturedly.

“Coming right up,” Isabela offered, pouring another glass. Hawke moved Cat’s glass back in front of her before taking the proffered glass from Isabela and settling himself in his seat.

“I suppose you all have been wondering why we are here,” Hawke started with a smile. The others took their cue and began finding places to sit.

“Kitty and I were guessing another job,” Isabela offered.

“No, well… not at first anyway,” Hawke replied.


“He wasn’t able to come, but that’s all right,” Hawke replied with a shrug. “Actually, Sebastian is what started me thinking about this.”

Hawke took a moment to look around the room at all of his friends. “It isn’t much, but with your pay this month, I wanted to include a small gift, just to let you each know how much I appreciate you. Not just the work you do, but for your friendship.” He nodded to Varric, who handed him a small bag. “Now, these are nothing big, in fact, most of them were picked up along the way during jobs. But they made me think of each of you.”

“Ooh, look at this,” Isabela cooed. Cat leaned over to see the model ship.

“Hey, now you can introduce yourself as Captain again, since technically, you have a ship.”

Isabela let out a throaty laugh. “Too right Kitty, though the sad part is I can’t go for a sail.” She
pushed Cat back to lean over towards Hawke. “Thank you Hawke, for the sweet gesture,” she said.

“My pleasure,” Hawke answered with a grin.

Cat watched as the others opened their presents, whether delighted, such as Merrill and Varric, or needing some convincing as to Hawke’s intentions like Aveline and Anders.

Merrill leaned over the table to show Cat her new sylvanwood ring, and asked what she had gotten. Cat followed her gaze down to the table in front of her to see a small package. Surprised, as she hadn’t been expecting anything, she slowly opened it.

“What is it?” Isabela asked, as Cat pulled the amulet out of the box by its cord.

“Ooh!” Merrill exclaimed excitedly. “That’s Master Ilen’s work too!”

Cat turned to glance at Hawke in question, still holding the amulet in front of her. It wasn’t a necklace like the small silver one she was wearing, but what looked like a large tooth encircled with a fine metal wire and attached to a long cord.

“It’s called Fen’Harel’s tooth,” Hawke said to Cat in response to her look. “Master Ilen crafted it for a hunter. It helps to evade traps, as well as protect against the wildlife. I thought it was fitting since you are learning how to disarm traps, and well…spiders.”

“Thank you, truly,” Cat said with a smile. She moved to put it over her head, but found the cord too small to fit.

“Here,” Hawke said, grabbing the cord and untying it. “Turn around,” he said as he gestured for her to turn away, and she did so, lifting her braid away from her neck. It didn’t take long, until he was finished, and looking down, she saw the tooth sitting right below her clavicle.

“It fits you,” Merrill said as she turned back face forward.

“Thank you,” Cat said once more. She then turned and repeated her thanks to Hawke. He gave her a smile and then cleared his throat.

“Now, let’s get down to business,” he said loudly, and they all quieted down. “I think we are all aware of how escalated things are becoming with the Qunari, so we won’t speak of that,” he muttered. “But there have been a few other developments. Varric?”

Varric cleared his throat, and told the group of getting rumors of Bartrand coming back to Kirkwall, and how he and Hawke had gone to see him. He spoke in disgust of the conditions of the home, as well as what the servant had said of Bartrand’s behavior. Finally he told them of his brother’s death.

Merrill gasped, but Cat had been expecting the news. She gave her condolences, and Varric waved them away. “He made his choice down in the Deep Roads,” he said in response, but Cat could tell he hadn’t quite made peace with himself over it.

Varric ended by telling them that he still hadn’t been able to find the idol that Bartrand had brought out of the Deep Roads, and while they hadn’t been able to make sense of most of what he said, it had sounded like he sold it.

“Hopefully, that’s that, and we won’t hear anymore about it,” Hawke said. “Though I know I’m not that lucky.”

“True,” Varric said with a smirk. “Lucky is definitely not a term I would use for the likes of us.”
“Anything else?” Hawke asked him.

“Actually, yes,” Varric replied, shuffling through some papers. “These are the letters you asked me to go through. While several of them were nothing more than offers of work that would pay next to nothing, and a few pleas for help doing menial tasks, there were a few that looked promising…”

“Oh?” Hawke asked, as he leaned back and crossed his arms over his chest. “Such as?”

“This one here, we already took care of, you know those groups of assassins we kept running into?”

“Wait, that wasn’t a coincidence?” Hawke demanded.

“Not exactly.” Varric replied. “Seems there is a fellow that decided to stretch the truth of some of his exploits, and before he knew it, he was given credit for several crimes in multiple countries. He’s now on the run, trying to stay alive while assassins from all over Thedas are hunting him.”

“Sounds like something that could happen to our own story teller,” Isabela muttered to Cat, who chuckled.

“Any way…” Varric continued with a wink to Cat. “He’s safe now, and gave us a reward for our help.”

“All right,” Hawke said.

“And then there is this one,” Varric said, holding up a paper. “But I’ll let the little dove explain.”

All eyes turned to Cat who smiled widely at Varric. “I just finished on my way here,” she said, “and we should see results today or tomorrow.”

“Excellent,” Varric answered with a matching grin.

“Are you going to tell us what it is?” Fenris asked Cat.

“Sure,” she replied. She held out her hand for the letter, and Varric handed it to Hawke who passed it on to Cat. “We received this letter from a group of mages who are still anonymous,” she began. “directing us to a woman in the docks named Mistress Selby. She has a legitimate business, but she also acts as a go between for mages and those that look to help them.”

Cat looked over at Anders with a smile. “Apparently, her sister was a mage, and was made tranquil for reasons unknown. All that I could find out was that the templars claimed she was dangerous. This was many years ago, so there wasn’t much I could discover. Mistress Selby however, says that her sister was one of the most gentle people ever born, and wouldn’t even hurt a fly.”

Cat continued on, as she could see the tension in Anders’ face, as well as feel Hawke’s next to her. “One task on her list you all completed, saving that mage girl from being sold by slavers out on the wounded coast.” Several of the others nodded in response as they remembered. “However the other required more information. It asked that a templar be taken out.”

“What?” Aveline questioned. “You’re not seriously suggesting…”

“No, I am not,” Cat interrupted her. “But before taking action of any kind, I wanted to find out more about the man. Since I was already spending time at the Gallows, it seemed a good opportunity to observe.”

“And?” Hawke asked.
“And they were right,” Cat replied. “Ser Conrad is one of the worst examples of a templar that I’ve ever seen. He doesn’t care about what is right and wrong, he uses his power and authority to take what he wants from the mages, and has performed an astonishing amount of tranquility rituals.”

Cat sighed. “I don’t think I need to list all his crimes, but just suffice it to say, that even Cullen doesn’t like the man. There have also been rumors that he has made several women tranquil because they refused his advances…” she looked up as Anders’ hand banged on the table. “I could not verify that, but… I believe it. The man is disgusting.”

Isabela grabbed her shoulder then, and looked in her eyes. “What did he do Kitty?” she asked.

“What?” Cat replied. “Nothing.”

Hawke now pulled her other shoulder, turning her back. “What happened?” he insisted.

“Nothing, really.” She caught all the skeptical glances. “I promise, he just was speaking to me, while Cullen got pulled away for something. Nothing happened, because Cullen came back.”

“Would something have happened if he hadn’t?” Varric asked shrewdly.

Cat’s face became angry as she remember the sleaze ball. “Yeah, he would have found several daggers sticking out of his body,” she snarled.

She was relieved that after that they dropped it. She had been truthful, he was careful not to say anything directly, but he implied plenty, and she had felt dirty for hours afterward. But she also meant what she had said. Cullen coming back had saved him from his death, not saved her from anything.

“Needless to say, I’ve been working on a way of taking him out… of the templar order. Death would be too good for him, I’d rather see him disgraced and suffering.”

“I’m so proud,” Isabela said softly with a grin.

“You said earlier that you had finished?” Fenris asked.

“Yes,” Cat answered with a grin for him. “I believe I’ve hammered the final nail in his coffin. Would you like the details?” she asked, to a unanimous agreement. “Then grab a drink, this may take a moment,” she replied.

“I knew I’d need more than one crime, as one could be easily dismissed. But knowing Cullen, he would never let two serious accusations go, especially if there were witnesses. So, I started with the obvious, having lyrium delivered to the Gallows for him. I chose today, knowing that Cullen was teaching the recruits in the courtyard this afternoon.”

“Clever…” Varric smirked at her.

“And the second?” Anders asked eagerly.

“The second… well I wanted to get some justice for those women. After Cullen chased off Ser Conrad, he apologized for his behavior, saying that he was just feeling stir crazy since he was confined to the Gallows. When I asked why, he told me that there had been accusations to his character, and he was to stay in the Gallows until an investigation was completed.”

“You didn’t…” Aveline said, though she was smiling.
“Of course I did,” Cat stated. “Not only that, but the templar performing said investigation is quite lyrium-addled. I’ve spoken to him five times now, in different clothes and changing my hair, and he had no idea I was the same person. I gave witness of horrible acts that Ser Conrad was engaged in, mostly including livestock—”

She stopped as several of the men choked on their drinks, and Isabela started laughing loudly.

“Maker’s breath, Cat!” Anders spluttered.

“What?” Cat asked with a shrug. “He deserves it! Ser Roderick is no doubt heading back to the Gallows now with all his evidence to give to Cullen, and then the lyrium will be delivered in the courtyard in front of all the templar recruits and the Knight Captain…”

“And Ser Conrad will be denounced and thrown out of the templars,” Hawke finished for her.

“Cat… this was truly amazing.”

“Oh, well… I had plenty of time on my hands,” she replied happily.

“A toast, to Cat!” Anders called out.

“Officially of course, I can’t condone such things,” Aveline said saluting Cat with her glass. “But as a citizen, all I can say is, well done.”

“Agreed,” Fenris added. “A fitting punishment for the crime.”

“Good job little dove,” Varric said.

“Wouldn’t expect anything less from you,” Hawke tacked on after Varric.

“You learned from the best,” Isabela said with a wink. “Though you keep surprising me.”

“Thank you Cat, for looking out for mages,” Merrill said with a smile.

“Cheers!” they all said as they drank, and Cat laughed along with them.

Hawke let the merriment go as long as he could before steering the conversation back to business.

“Any other matters to discuss?” Hawke asked, and Anders cleared his throat.

“You remember the feeling of those tomes that we’ve been destroying?” Anders asked, and Fenris, Hawke and Merrill all nodded. “I’ve been feeling something that seems similar, in Darktown. I’d feel better if we looked into it.”

“That can be arranged,” Hawke said as he grabbed one of Varric’s papers and made a note.

“There are also a few more gangs trying to take over the neighborhood again,” Varric added, and Hawke made another note. “And one final letter asking you to use your skills in disposing of a few bodies.”

“What?” Hawke asked in disbelief. “You can’t be serious.”

“Unfortunately I am,” Varric replied. “Though I am glad to hear you say that. That was one job I was hoping to refuse.”

“Definitely a refusal,” Hawke said with a roll of his eyes. “I swear, sometimes I feel as if I’m the entire city’s nanny.”
“Aren’t you?” Isabela asked with a smirk, even as Aveline scowled at her. “Too many good deeds, and this is what you get.”

“Shut up,” Aveline said, though it only made Isabela smile.

“You’re just mad because I’m right,” she countered, and Aveline glowered at her, but said nothing.

“Very well, if that’s all, take the rest of the day,” Hawke said as he stood. “We’ll meet tomorrow morning to go to Darktown.”

Hawke stood and made his way away from the table, most of the others following his lead. Several went to speak to him, but Cat just stayed where she was to finish her drink.

“Well my friend,” Fenris began and Cat smiled. Ever since their argument after he killed Hadriana, Fenris had been trying to understand the whole idea of friendship. After having that talk with Hawke, she never thought she’d have it again, but she had been surprised at the ideas and thoughts that Fenris had associated with the word.

In her mind, it was obvious that everything he had learned was from observing Danarius, who wouldn’t actually have true friends, but she didn’t point that out. She just gave countering examples, using Hawke and the others to demonstrate her point. After several days, and many, many talks with Hawke, Fenris had come to her with a hug. She was so happy she had started crying, which of course had him thinking that he had done something wrong…

They had come a long way, and she still grinned every time he called her friend, knowing what the word now meant to him.

“Yes?” she asked in reply.

“I’m glad we are doing something different tomorrow, so that you can accompany us,” he said. “These last few days have been missing the levity you bring to our group.”

“Hawke didn’t try to tell jokes again did he?” she asked quietly, even as Fenris rolled his eyes.

“They are getting worse,” he answered. “The other day he was making puns about how the wounded coast got its name.”

Cat could see Aveline waiting a small distance away, and she waved her forward. She glanced at Fenris and Cat just smiled. “Don’t worry, Fenris can keep a secret,” she said quietly.

“I… uh, I just wondered how last night went?” Aveline asked.

“You mean when I invited Donnic to the Hanged Man, and you never showed up?” Cat asked quietly. “How do you think it went?”

“I’m sorry, I just couldn’t do it,” Aveline said as she look disheartened. “What did he say?”

“Uh, well… he thinks I’m interested in him, and tried to use you as a reason to get him alone with me.”

Fenris chuckled, and Cat gave him a glare. “Perhaps you should just talk to the man?” he offered. “I try, but I’m a mess,” Aveline said. “The only time I’m comfortable is on patrol, but that’s no place to have that type of conversation… and I’m tired of making a fool of myself.”

“The answer is simple then, isn’t it?” Hawke asked as he slid next to Cat on the bench.
“Uh… Hawke!” Aveline squeaked in surprise. “We were discussing some bandits…”

“You don’t want my help?” Hawke asked with a pout, and Cat covered her mouth to keep from chuckling.

“No, I mean, of course I do… it’s just that… uh…”

“Great!” Hawke replied, overlooking her stammering. “So here’s my idea. You go on patrol with this Donnic, and we,” he pointed around to Fenris and Cat, “will clear the way so you have time to talk. What do you think?” he asked.

Fenris and Cat looked to Aveline, seeing as she was trying to find the down side to Hawke’s plan. Finally she smiled. “You’re too good at this,” she replied. “Are you free this evening?”

* * * * *

“And that’s how we found ourselves roped into clearing out bandits on the wounded coast,” Cat said to Varric.

“Thanks Little dove, but what I asked was, how did I get roped into this,” Varric replied.

“Oh, that’s easy,” Cat replied. “You’re nosy and wouldn’t stop pestering us about where we were going, and eventually followed us out here.”

“Oh, right,” he said.

“Here we go!” Hawke called out, and they all rushed forward to deal with a group of bandits. Once finished, Hawke sent up a small fire, giving a flare to let Aveline know it was clear. They waited until they heard the conversation flowing up from below them, and Hawke gave a snort.

“What kind of conversation is that?!” he muttered, as he led the group further down the path.

It wasn’t long until they encountered another group of bandits, and made quick work of them. Again, Hawke sent up a flare, and again, they waited for Aveline to catch up.

“A blade for every purpose, don’t you agree?” they could hear Aveline say.

“Oh, I’m sorry Captain, I think I got lost in my thoughts,” came the reply.

“In the nicest way possible, she’s hopeless,” Varric said quietly.

“Let’s go,” Hawke grumbled.

For the third time, Hawke’s group took care of those that would cause trouble, and waited for Aveline. Hearing the conversation, Hawke stalked over to stand in the path, his face determined, and his arms crossed over his chest.

“Some one’s going to get it…” Varric said in a sing song voice, causing Cat to giggle.

“She kind of deserves it,” she agreed. “That isn’t what we’ve practiced at all.”

“You two practiced?” Varric asked, an eyebrow shooting up. “Do tell.”
“Sorry, sworn oath to never tell,” Cat replied, but smiled at his disappointed look.

Aveline and Donnic walked up, and seeing Hawke, she smiled nervously. “Hawke! What a surprise!” she said, and Hawke just glared at her.

“Aveline,” he responded, scolding her with just her name.

“Hawke, don’t,” she replied.

“You’ll feel better once it’s done,” he said.

Cat chose that moment to go over to Hawke. It wasn’t that they had been hiding, but they also hadn’t been noticed. She knew this would turn out well, I hope, she thought, but wanted to be as gentle as possible.

“What’s going on?” Donnic asked, confused.

“Well, remember what you thought I was trying to get the nerve to tell you the other day at the Hanged Man? Aveline is actually trying to get the nerve to tell you that.”

“Captain?” Donnic asked, as he turned to Aveline.

“Uh…huh, huh….” Her voice came out like a strangled laugh.

“I should get back to the barracks…” Donnic said, and strode off.

“That was unexpected,” Hawke said, staring at the guard’s back.

“Actually, that turned out rather well,” Cat replied.

“How can you say that?!” Aveline demanded. “You two are going to the barracks right now to apologize and explain yourselves!!”

“Aveline, I am more than happy to apologize and take responsibility, but I’m just saying, it isn’t over.”

“Oh yes it is!” she answered, hiding her embarrassment with anger.

“Aveline, this is a new idea for Donnic, and he probably hadn’t given it much thought before since you’re his captain. He just needs some time to process it,” Hawke said, squeezing her shoulder.

“The barracks,” she replied through gritted teeth. “Now.”

The three of them set off, Cat worried, Fenris unconcerned, and Hawke hopeful, with a disappointed and sad Aveline walking behind them. Cat looked back, wanting to help her friend, but she merely shook her head at Cat, wanting to be left alone.

* * * * *

Coming to the guard barracks, Cat was greeted by many of the guards, and Hawke by a few. Questions and conversations stopped mid sentence as Aveline herded them towards her office.
Speculative looks followed them as the guards wondered what had happened.

Just before entering, Donnic stepped forward. “I’d like a word with the captain,” he told them. “Alone.”

Aveline looked nervous, but Cat grinned as inwardly she was jumping and shouting in victory. She gave Aveline a smile, knowing that very shortly, her friend would be even happier.
The Evil Pit- Forbidden Knowledge Conclusion

If anyone had said months ago that Cat would not only be friends with Hawke, but that they would bond by teasing Fenris… she would have laughed in their faces. However that is exactly what happened the next morning.

Hawke came by the mansion early, Undoubtedly, Cat thought, to have some of our food. The knock sounded at the door just as they were about to eat.

“Your timing is as impeccable as ever,” Fenris commented as he opened the door to Hawke.

“Is it?” Hawke smirked. “Well, if you’re inviting, I won’t refuse.”

Cat rolled her eyes, but got a third setting out for Hawke to join them for their meal. As the two made their way to the table, Fenris asked, “Do you not enjoy your food at home?”

“It’s not that…” Hawke said as he looked away. “More that both Bodahn and Mother are insistent that we live as nobles now. It’s far too extravagant. Can you imagine eating as if you were at a banquet for every meal?” he asked.

“I cannot imagine eating at a banquet at all,” Fenris replied without emotion.

Hawke winced and began back pedaling. “Uh… I didn’t mean… uh…”

“He’s teasing you…” Cat whispered as she passed by Hawke to set the food down on the table. It wasn’t much, but served their needs. Mostly fruits with a few muffin-type bread rolls, and cheese.

Hawke looked as Cat gave Fenris a glare before he realized that she spoke the truth. Two can play that game, friend… he thought.

“Besides that, it is of the highest compliment to eat at the home of a friend, but if you would rather I didn’t…” Hawke said lightly, giving Cat a wink.

It was Fenris’ turn to back pedal, looking over to Cat to verify Hawke’s statement. She thought she might regret it, but decided it was only fair and gave Fenris a serious nod. “We’re always happy to share a meal with you Hawke,” she said kindly. “I’m sure not everyone is allowed such an honor…”

While she was exaggerating enough that Fenris could catch on, and Hawke’s eyes narrowed on her face, Cat just kept her smile in place. Fenris immediately spoke of having Hawke over more in the future, and Cat shook her head once she wasn’t being watched.

Hawke himself wasn’t one to let a joke go on for too long, and eventually came clean to Fenris. The elf pretended to be outraged, but became sheepish as Cat and Hawke teamed up against him about his own teasing before that.

The two then began bringing up moments designed to unnerve the other, asking Cat to confirm how each had happened. The three ending up reminiscing and telling stories to each other of their individual adventures, laughing uproariously at their earlier ineptitude.

“We are meeting the others soon, are we not?” Fenris finally asked, steering the conversation away from a particular fight he had tried to have with a squirrel.

“We still have some time,” Hawke commented. “What are your plans after Darktown?”
“I had not made any, you seem to get into enough trouble to keep us all busy,” Fenris said with a smirk.

“I’d deny that, but we would all know I would be lying,” Hawke retorted. “You, Cat?”

“I’m meeting with Cullen. I was going to ask to take Hafter, he misses seeing him.” She stood and gathered the remains of the meal to clean up, heading out to the kitchen.

Hawke turned and grinned at Fenris. “So, the Knight Captain is not only trying to steal my rogue, but now my dog too?” He hollered so that she could hear him from the other room.

Cat hustled back into the dining room, her eyes wide. “Whaat?” she said. “He’s not trying to steal anything! And I’m not your rogue!”

“Well, you are part of my crew, aren’t you?” he asked as he examined his fingernail, pulling out a small knife to clean underneath it. “I just don’t appreciate him trying to steal you away to become a templar.”

“A temp- what in the world gave you that idea?” Cat said, standing with her hands on her hips, looking at him like he was insane.

Fenris wasn’t slow, he knew what Hawke was doing, and he knew Hawke wanted him to help him do it. He just wanted to be sure Cat wouldn’t throw a knife first. Then he decided, what fun would life be without a little risk?

“I think we’re all aware of what the Templar wants…” Fenris added in a nonchalant voice, and Cat’s gaze whipped to him in dismay. He kept his expression stoic, though he could see the glee in Hawke’s.

“And what is that?” Cat asked tightly.

“Clearly the man is trying to steal away the mabari’s affections, and is using you to accomplish this,” he said in perfect deadpan.

Cat’s jaw dropped open, and Hawke could no longer hold in his laughter, exploding with it. Cat glanced back and forth between the two of them, before smirking. “You realize what this means, don’t you?” she asked Fenris, who looked at her in apprehension. “You,” she pointed at Hawke, “will no longer be warned when he,” pointing back to Fenris, “is teasing you.” She walked over to Fenris, “and you!” she said as he stood to face her. “Are simply delightful!” she exclaimed as she gave him a hug.

“What?” Hawke complained. “I’m being punished, and he gets hugs?”

“Oh, no.”

“No?” he asked her.

“He is no longer immune from teasing, and he’ll regret it very, very soon,” she answered as she walked from the room to get her things. “We’d better get going!” she called.

The two men glanced at each other. “No wonder she never messed with you before,” Hawke said. “Sorry about that.”

“No need,” Fenris replied. “I brought it on myself. Though I think I may enjoy the experience.”
“I wouldn’t count on that…” Hawke warned, as they took their leave.

* * * * *

“Did we really all need to be here?” Varric asked. “It’s just another book, right?”

“No, well, maybe,” Cat replied. “But we already destroyed all the tomes we were told about, so we’re not really sure what we’re dealing with here. Better to be safe, than sorry, right?”

In actuality, Cat knew exactly what they were dealing with, and had told Fenris and Anders to ensure that everyone was accompanying Hawke today. She had also explained that Hawke needed to read this book, not destroy it, which did not please either of them.

She had tried to explain about what had happened in the fade when they were saving Feynriel, and Hawke had received an upgrade- for lack of a better word- but Fenris held out that it had been evil magic. She had finally commented about more troubles coming, and Hawke needing every advantage he could get before Fenris relented.

Anders on the other hand, had entirely different reservations. Magic wasn’t meant to be taught just by reading words, and he was convinced that Cat was somehow brainwashed and trying to brainwash others in turn.

She had looked in his eyes an told him that extremely bad things were going to happen, and while she wouldn’t tell him what they were, he needed to trust that she was going to make right the things that she could. She wouldn’t let him become friendless and alone.

Of course, that had opened an entirely new bag of worms, which she couldn’t and wouldn’t elaborate on. He then said he trusted her, but that she needed to understand that it wasn’t always easy to do.

And now here they were, the entire crew, crawling into an underground cavern in Darktown. Cat was surprised that it didn’t smell as bad as the rest of Darktown, and it almost seemed as if the passage was taken care of. By whom, she couldn’t even begin to guess.

“So…” Isabela said, breaking the silence. “How did things go yesterday?” she asked Aveline. Aveline turned to Cat in dismay, and she shook her head. “No, Kitty didn’t tell me,” Isabela smirked. “She was loyally tight-lipped. The dwarf however…” she drawled.

Aveline turned to glare at Varric. “What?” he asked. “No one said it was a secret.”

Aveline sighed hugely. “He’s speaking to his family,” she replied.

“What?” Isabela prodded. Aveline looked around hoping for help to get Isabela off her back, but everyone was looking at her expectantly, and she sighed again.

“It’s a secret,” she said with a tiny smile at everyone else’s disappointment. “Since I have no family, his will handle the dowry.”

“You’re getting married?!” Hawke demanded.

“Not right this moment,” Aveline said merrily. “But eventually… yes.”
“I KNEW IT!” Cat hollered, and threw her arms around Aveline. “See? I knew you weren’t hopeless!”

“That makes one of us,” Isabela added on, smiling at Aveline’s glare. “You almost did yourself in for a moment there,” she said. “Good work.”

The others gave their congratulations, and Aveline allowed it for as long as she could stand before ordering everyone back on task. Cat could see that she couldn’t quite get rid of her smile however.

Opening a door, Anders held it open for the others to walk through, and the group found themselves in a large room with four large pillars. It was lit with torches lining the walls, and although it was clean, it also had the feel of a room that was abandoned many years ago.

Hawke stepped forward towards a large stand on which rested an open book. He glanced at it curiously before turning back to look at his crew. “So, are we ready to destroy it?” he asked.

*There is no need for that…*

Hawke, Anders and Merrill all stiffened with a quick inhale of breath, and the others looked at each of them in concern.

“What is it?” Sebastian asked quietly, eyeing the corners of the room, his bow in hand.

“Please tell me someone else heard that…” Hawke spoke up.

“No,” was the collective answer.

“Balls.”

“Uh…Yes,” Anders said hesitantly.

“Yes!” Merrill exclaimed happily.

“Must be a mage thing…” Varric muttered.

“Thank the Maker, I thought I was crazy,” Hawke said.

“You are darling,” Isabela said. “But we like you that way.”

“So… uh, what did you hear?” Cat asked.

“A voice… uh, I think, from the book?” Hawke replied, looking uncertain. “I know, I know,” he said as several of his friends gave him an incredulous look. He stepped forward to look at the open grimoire, the pages larger than any he had seen before. He stared at it for a moment, before shaking his head and rubbing his eyes, only to stare at the pages once more.

“Hawke?” Aveline asked.

“It’s strange…” Hawke replied, still looking at the page. “When I try to concentrate on the words, they swim around on the page. I can’t actually read anything that is written here!”

“What?” Aveline asked in disbelief before stepping forward to look at the page.

*There is a power that comes with the words…*

“There it is again!” Hawke said, looking around and finally back at the book. Merrill was slowly
stepping forward, while Anders was increasing his distance.

*I will give you this knowledge in exchange for a promise…*

Hawke glared at the book, wary of a trap.

“Oh Hawke, let’s do it!” Merrill cheered excitedly. “Just imagine what we can learn!”

“What’s going on Daisy?” Varric asked.

“The book,” Anders interrupted. “It says it will give power by way of knowledge, in exchange for a promise.” He too then stepped closer to the group, still staying far from the book as he could. “Don’t do this Hawke. The promise will not be something you will like.”

“You can’t know that,” Merrill said angrily. “We should do it!”

“But what is the promise?” Varric asked, and Hawke shrugged.

“I haven’t a clue, but I won’t make deal without knowing my side of the bargain,” Hawke replied. He cocked his head as he listened to something, and those that weren’t mages felt frustrated in not being able to hear what he obviously could.

“Apparently, the book simply wants a promise to leave it alone afterwards,” Hawke finally said.

“If that were it, I wouldn’t have a problem,” Varric commented. “But can that truly be all?”

“What about the other books we encountered?” Aveline said. “Did they offer this same bargain?”

“Apparently so, but I think only Merrill could hear it,” Cat reasoned.

“Which means it has something to do with blood magic,” Fenris sneered.

“Then let me do it,” Merrill shot back. “I’m not asking anyone else to take this bargain.”

“I can’t do that Merrill,” Hawke replied. “If anyone is going to do this, it will be me.” He turned around to face his crew. “I’ll be honest, I’m feeling conflicted about this, and I’d like to know where you all stand.” He started to his right, looking at Merrill.

“You should do it,” she said immediately. Looking next at Sebastian, who replied almost as quickly.

“You should not.”

Hawke turned to Fenris, who looked down, then glanced over at Cat. He then very quietly said, “I agree… with Merrill.”

Sebastian looked at him in shock, as did several others. Hawke even seemed surprised, but concealed it well, looking over to Cat.

“I think so too, it seems worth the risk,” she answered his silent question.

“Honestly, I don’t care either way, but getting something from these books seems reasonable,” Isabela said next.

“I’ll follow your decision Hawke,” Varric spoke next, “but if it were me, I don’t think I would do it.”

Hawke nodded, and looked at Aveline who shook her head. “It’s too dangerous,” she replied. “Too
many things could go wrong.”

Hawke nodded again, and turned finally to Anders. He looked conflicted, though if Hawke were to guess, he would say Anders was disgusted by the tome entirely. His friend finally looked up and met his eye. “It could be dangerous, it’s true…” he replied staring at the tome. “But it could also be worth the risk. It seems the book simply wants to exist, nothing more.”

If Hawke was surprised by Fenris, he was bowled over by Anders’ words. With this new information, his decision became all the more difficult, but after a moment, he decided that his friends were right. It was a dangerous idea, but…

“I’ll do it,” he said, turning back to the tome. “Be ready though… uh, just in case.”

They all pulled out their weapons, and some of them turned around, creating a semi circle around Hawke, some watching him, and others the room around them.

“If it’s anything like the other tomes, we’ll have a fight on our hands…” Cat warned.

Hawke stepped forward to look at the pages. “You have my word,” he said aloud. “You will be left in peace.” After he spoke, he found the effect of the words on the page was gone, and the words began coming almost faster than he could read them. He grabbed onto the podium, focusing with all his might to read the words as they danced across the page.

Hawke suddenly grabbed either side of his head. It wasn’t painful, not in the normal sense anyway. It was as if knowledge was being burned into his mind, searing through his skull. It was not a comfortable feeling.

“Hawke?” He could hear someone ask, and he opened his eyes, feeling more powerful… stronger… than he had just moments ago. He also found that he couldn’t even bear to look at the tome, and quickly turned away from it.

They all tensed as they heard the roaring of a rage demon as it sprung out of the ground, and readied their weapons.

“Rage demon!” Anders shouted.

“Abominations!” Isabela called, even as she disappeared.

“Rage! Here too!” Sebastian yelled as he began firing.

“DESIRE DEMON!!!” Cat called out in terror, even as the demon grabbed her arm and threw her away from the group, sailing over the floor to follow.

“I am no mere demon…” it purred at her, as it advanced, and Cat searched around for incoming help, only to find everyone fighting for their lives against the other demons. “I am the all-powerful Xebenkeck! You will submit!”

“NO!!” Cat screamed, scuttling back across the floor, trying to get away. She watched in horror as the face of the demon began morphing into faces that she knew. Some that were here in the room with her, and some that she had even started to forget.

“What is it that you desire my pet?” It crooned to her. “I will bring all your desires to life…”

“NO! NOOO!!” Cat howled, wanting to simply crawl into a corner and hide. She couldn’t stop herself from screaming, but she could still fight back!
Grabbing blade after blade from where she had them stashed on her person, she threw each with deadly precision, causing the demon to falter. When she was down to her last blade, she paused to gather her strength.

The demon, bleeding and gory, and wearing the face of her best friend from her old life loomed over her- she burst forward, tackling the creature as it fell back. She was now looming over it… and she screamed again and again as she struck over and over with her small throwing knife.

****

Hawke was panting, his arm hanging limp by his side from a wicked slice from demonic claws. He glanced around, seeing several of his crew out cold on the ground. He hoped desperately that they were alive. He looked over at Cat, her mouth open in a continuous scream, even though her voice had given out.

He saw the gory mess beneath her, and watched as it dispersed away, the small blade she had clinking over and over against the stone floor that she now lay on.

“Cat…” he uttered, knowing there was no way she heard him, he started making a slow and painful way to her. “Cat…” he murmured again, trying to raise his voice over the sound of her blade against the stone.

“Cat!” he heard Fenris call from where he had collapsed against a wall, and saw as he struggled to stand. “Stop! It’s gone now!”

He finally was to her, and reached out his good hand, clasping onto her shoulder.

And he grimaced as she turned and buried her knife into his leg.

“Maker’s balls Cat!” he groaned as he fell over. It seemed to snap her out of it, and she rushed over to him, asking in a hoarse voice if he was all right, and apologizing so rapidly that he couldn’t get a word in edgewise.

“Help me up,” he muttered to her, and putting his arm around her shoulders, she slowly stood, helping him to do the same. He started moving, though it was very slow going, and Cat struggled just to keep him upright.

After an amount of time that he couldn’t begin to guess at, they made it over to Fenris. Hawke used his good arm against the wall to keep himself up, telling Cat to sit. She looked at him in confusion.

“I said sit,” he replied, starting to get annoyed. “Let Fenris help you,” he continued. “I need to find Anders.”

“I can…” she started in her hoarse voice before he interrupted.

“No, you can’t,” he stated harshly, and she looked away as she sank down next to Fenris.

Fenris glanced at her in worry before turning to Hawke. “The mage is over there,” he said quietly showing the direction with a nod of his head. “He… got in the way of a strike meant for me…”

Hawke nodded gratefully, and turned, continuing to utilize the wall as he made his way toward the
prone body of the healer. His plan hinged on Anders now, if he could make it to him... he could hopefully heal him enough that he would in turn be able to stabilize the others. Then, Maker willing, and after some rest, they could make it to the clinic... he hoped.

Fenris and Cat watched Hawke limp away slowly, both of them feeling like a failure and useless to their friend. Fenris gathered Cat close with an arm over her shoulder, wincing as the movement stretched the gash on his back.

“Are you all right?” Cat croaked.

“I will be,” he responded quietly. He turned his gaze to meet hers. “Are you going to explain what that was?” he asked, nodding in the direction she has come from.

“What was?” she replied. “I killed the demon... I think,” she said as she glanced over at the floor.

Fenris arched his brow in disbelief. “You completely ignored every other enemy, didn’t so much as acknowledge when your friends called out to you, lost every weapon except a tiny blade, which you kept stabbing into the floor long after the demon was dead, and then put said blade into Hawke.”

Cat’s eyes widened as she surveyed the room. “Issy...” she uttered gruffly, moving to escape from his hold, but he held on tightly.

“She isn’t dead, just wounded,” he said, and she relaxed slightly. “Hawke is working on Anders now, and hopefully he will able to help the others. For now, just rest. Get your strength back.”

Even wounded as he was, Cat was no match for his strength and knew she couldn’t get away, though she couldn’t seem to muster the energy. So she gave in, and relaxed against him, letting her mind review what she could remember about the fight with the demon.

The faces... I remember that, she thought to herself. But... how long was that?

“If I remember correctly,” she muttered, turning into Fenris so that he could hear her, “there should have been multiple abominations, rage demons and even a revenant? Along with Xebenkeck?” she asked as she looked up at him.

His brow rose again. “You knew the demon’s name?” he asked.

“It may have been mentioned,” she muttered with a shiver.

“Yes, there were all of those, as well as some shades and another revenant,” he answered, and her eyes widened in shock.

“How did I miss all of that?!” she said, though mostly to herself.

“I would like to know that as well,” he muttered.

They sat there for hours, as Hawke slowly healed Anders. He had to wait for his mana to replenish healing bit by bit of his injuries and waiting for more mana in between. Once Anders awoke, they both rested for another hour, before Anders started working on Hawke’s injuries.

Anders glanced over at Cat in question as he pulled the small blade from Hawke’s leg and healed the puncture. He and Hawke then helped each other up and made their way to Fenris and Cat.

Cat just shook her head as Anders reached for her. “Help the others,” Fenris said so that Cat could
continue to rest her abused throat. “We have been awake the entire time, our injuries are not as severe.”

Anders nodded, and helped Hawke to sit next to them, before making his way to the next of the fallen.

Cat looked over at Hawke, whose eyes were closed. She wanted to ask how he was, but it was fairly obvious he was in rough shape, even after the healing. She looked him over, wondering if his leg was healed. She had never stabbed a friend before today, and didn’t like the feeling.

“I’m fine,” Hawke said, though he didn’t open his eyes.

The hours of not speaking had done wonders for her throat, but you couldn’t tell by her voice. “Yes, you look perfectly fine,” she muttered sarcastically.

Hawke opened his eyes this time, and reached out for her. His hand covered her throat, and she could feel his magic before she realized what he was doing. She tried to push him away, but he was already moving his hand off of her.

“Why… would you waste your energy on that?!” she demanded softly.

“It was purely selfish, I assure you,” he replied, closing his eyes once more. “Hearing you sound like a frog was annoying.”

Fenris chuckled beside her, stopping mid laugh to cough harshly before finally settling back again.

“No jokes… please,” he muttered.

“No more, you have my word,” Hawke replied. “A story would be nice though… to pass the time?”

“A story?” Cat asked, surprised.

“Yes,” Hawke answered. “I’ll let you choose, though I would like to hear why the desire demons affect you so.”

Cat glanced up at Fenris, who gave her a look and a nod. They were her friends… right? she thought.

“This… is my home.”

Hawke opened his eye, peeking out at Cat, her words confusing him. She wasn’t looking at either of the men at her sides, but staring out at the room, seeing something else than what was in front of her. He didn’t speak, just waited for her to continue.

“However, is wasn’t always so. That home is gone now… I’m sure you both can relate.”

Hawke nodded slightly, knowing just what that displacement felt like… starting over again.

“To myself, I often think of that as my old life, and this… Ferelden and Kirkwall… as my new life, since I started a new life here.” Cat sighed, not really wanting to continue, but knowing she owed them some sort of explanation.

“I don’t quite understand it, but the desire demons have a way of reaching in and pulling out things that I didn’t even know that I desired. People from my old life, that I had forgotten… regrets of things that I wished I could change…”
“That is the same for all of us,” Fenris said softly. “That is what desire demons do.”

“Each time though…”

They waited again, for Cat to find the words she wanted to use.

“I don’t know if they are stronger… or if I just want to give in… but each time is harder to resist… … even knowing that what I want… isn’t real.”

“Do you… want to talk about it?” Hawke asked.

Cat pondered that for a few moments. “I suppose it couldn’t hurt,” she replied. “At first, it was simple things. Showing me Fenris or Anders because they weren’t there at the time, and I wished they were.”

Fenris nodded, though he had startled when he had first heard his name. “And then?” he asked.

“Then… people from that old life. My parents, brother, and sister… friends that I had.”

She paused again. “People that I’ve lost… my friends from Ferelden, or from the shipwreck… here with me… alive and happy.”

“I’m sorry…” Hawke said quietly. “What about…?” he stopped, shaking his head.

“What?” she asked, looking over at him.

“Nothing… I don’t want you to have to relive painful memories.”

Cat frowned, uncertain of what he could be meaning. “I’m not sure what you mean,” she said. “They were unsettling, yes, but not painful.”

“It mentioned… your husband?” Hawke said, feeling guilty to have brought it up.

“Oh… right,” she replied. “Part of that other life, and no longer painful,” she said with a self depreciating smile. “He had left long before I came here.”

“Wait, what?!” They both said as they tried to sit up.

“Don’t aggravate your injuries!” she scolded them instantly.


“How is that important?” she asked. “It’s in the past.”

“So you were married?” Hawke asked, his curiosity burning.

Cat sighed. “Yes, I was. Emphasis on was. As in no longer.”

“Oh, he died. I’m very sorry.”

“Ugh,” Cat groaned. “Obviously I need to explain this. Look… where I come from, just as a couple can decide to get married, they can also decide to get… unmarried.”

She stopped as both of them turned to glare at her demanding a better explanation with their expressions.

“It’s a very long story, which I will not be telling. We were not happy, and decided to stop being
married. There was a legal process, and I was no longer married. Long *before* I even met either of you.”

“But… the demon…” Hawke said confused.

“Like I said… regrets.” She sighed again. “It doesn’t matter now. In the end, I knew it wasn’t real, no matter how much I may have wanted otherwise. Obviously this time… I was weak, and gave in.”

“What?” Fenris asked, looking at her like she was crazy. “You killed it, you did no such thing.”

“Evidently that is not true. In the end, certainly. But in order to have lost that much time… and not heard any of the fights around me… I must have been- - at least listening to its offer.”

They went back to silence, understanding now what she was saying.

She looked down, feeling a hand on her arm, and looked up to its owner, seeing Fenris smile at her. She felt another on her other arm, and looked over to Hawke, who was also smiling kindly.

“Evidently…” he began, “you also got yourself out of whatever it held you in, and were angry enough to continuously stab it out of existence. Everyone else it alive, and if not well, will be soon enough.” He gave her arm a squeeze. “Give yourself a break from the guilt,” he said, and let her go, closing his eyes again, signaling the end of the discussion.

Cat looked back to Fenris who smirked at her. “Seems our illustrious leader has spoken,” he said with a smirk. “Best not to argue with a mage, after all.”

Cat finally felt herself able enough to relax, letting go of the feelings she had been nursing the entire time since the fight. “Sorry about the stabbing thing,” she muttered, closing her own eyes to rest.

“That little thing?” Hawke replied. “Can’t even call that a stab… more like a poke.”

“I’ll remember to use my bigger blades next time,” she murmured.
Whew! This was a tough one! There was a lot of little information I wanted to get out into this chapter, so hopefully it all flows well enough. As always, thank you thank you for your comments and kudos! I know I say it every time, but they are that special!

If you've been keeping track, you know there isn't much left in Act 2, and we're reaching the climax! No worries, I still have some tricks up my sleeves, so don't pop that popcorn just yet!

Enjoy!

“This is amazing…” Hawke said as he performed the spell again. He kept it small since he was still practicing it, but the insects that had been scurrying around were now moving as if they were slugs.

“You didn’t know this spell before?” Fenris asked, uncertainly.

Cat, sitting next to him, could feel the unease he radiated, and gave his arm a pat. The three of them were crowded onto a cot, sitting rather than laying down as the rest of their comrades were doing. Anders was bustling from bed to bed, trying to make the injured members of their crew comfortable as they healed.

Once finished making his rounds Anders came over to sit on the ground in front of them, looking exhausted.

“I’m sorry about all this Anders,” Hawke said, canceling the spell. Cat watched amused as the insects suddenly altered their courses and sped away, now that Anders was suddenly blocking their path.

“I’m just glad you weren’t unconscious also,” Anders said again. “I’m so sorry that I wasn’t strong enough…”

“Oh stop it already,” Cat groused. “We heard this back and forth, apologizing the entire way to the clinic.”

Both men gave her a wry smile. “Sorry,” they said in unison, and Cat struggled not to smile. She didn’t win that particular battle.

“There’s nothing to apologize for,” Cat replied. “No one died, and everyone will recover, right?” she asked Anders.

“Yes,” he answered, looking back around the room. “In fact everyone is healed, and just resting now. Except one…” he looked to Fenris.

“Stay back mage,” Fenris grumbled, giving Anders a dark look.

“It doesn’t have to be me,” Anders replied with a glare. “Hawke can heal you. But if we don’t take care of that slice down your back, it will get infected and you’ll die,” he said matter-of-factly. “Not
that that would be a problem…” he mumbled.

“I’ll be fine,” Fenris said stubbornly.

“Hawke? Cat?” Anders said, ready to wash his hands of Fenris completely.

Cat turned to Fenris, giving him a questioning look. “Are you really fine?” she asked. “Honestly?”

“Uh…” he started, but was unable to agree. “I don’t want magic to touch me ever again,” he said softly, but earnestly.

“I’d have to see it before making any promises,” Cat replied.

“Very well,” he answered, turning sideways on the cot, and showing her his back. She lifted the sliced armor out of the way, and grimaced at the dirty cut.

“It doesn’t look too bad,” she said, “but it has to get cleaned if nothing else.”

She leaned over the other way to whisper to Hawke. “Can we do this without magic?” she asked.

Hawke looked at the cut as well and nodded. “It would take much longer and be much more painful,” he whispered in warning.

“I think he would still prefer that,” she whispered, and jumped when Fenris spoke up.

“I would,” he said.

Hawke laughed at the blush blooming on her cheeks, and came up to whisper again in her ear. “Oh, and elves have really good hearing, in case you didn’t know,” he said as he chuckled.

“Yeah, yeah,” she muttered. “I’ll need moral support if I’m going to do this,” she said, looking to Anders and Hawke. They both stood, Anders going to retrieve clean water and towels, and Hawke directed Fenris to remove the top portion of his armor and lay face down on the cot.

“Thank you Cat,” Fenris said as he took his place.

This time, it was Cat that looked uneasy, but Hawke and Anders stayed by her and helped her as she cleaned the gash on her friend’s back. Fenris, for his part, stayed still even when she could hear his sharp intake of breath, and knew that it was hurting.

Cat couldn’t help but think of the difference between this and the healings she and the others had received, realizing just how badly the misuse of magic had scarred Fenris. And yet, he had befriended Hawke, trusted him, and because of that, trusted Anders-- to a lesser extent.

She hadn’t realized that a tear had rolled down her cheek until Anders tried to take over for her and she shook her head, wanting to see it through, and knowing Fenris wanted her- the non-mage- to do it. The tears weren’t for what she was doing after all, just her own thoughts. Hawke took over once the wound was clean, helping wrap a bandage around Fenris’ ribcage in an effort to keep the wound clean.

Fenris stood and acted as if he wasn’t wounded at all as he put his armor back on, and Cat just smiled at his stubborn bravery. Knowing they all needed a subject change, she glanced around the room and asked, “Anders? Where’s Olivia?”

She didn’t expect the look of fear on Anders’ face, and was also surprised when instead of answering, he started pacing around the room. It seemed to surprise Hawke as well, who stepped
over to block his path.

“Anders?” Hawke asked. “What is it?”

Anders looked up at Hawke, and then over at Cat. “It’s been too long, I’m worried. Really worried.”

“What do you mean?” Cat asked, stepping forward. Fenris followed behind her though he stayed silent.

“She’s been gone for days,” Anders replied. He too glanced around the room, and they waited. “It was another mission… another chance to help free some mages. This time however…”

Cat reached out to place her hand on his arm, getting his attention. “This time?” she asked. “What changed?”

“The templars are much more vigilant now,” he replied. “We knew it was a risk, but she wanted to go.” He walked over to his makeshift desk and shuffled through some papers, bringing back one sheet and handing it to Hawke.

“One in particular has all the mages worried,” Anders said to them. “Ser Alrik.”

“Tell me about him,” Hawke said, his brow furrowing as he looked over the paper.

“He’s a sadistic bastard,” Anders spat out immediately. “He is the one that made Karl tranquil, and he won’t stop there.” He glanced left and right as if worried there were spies nearby listening in. Cat worried for her friend, knowing that this was a major step down his path of destruction, and she didn’t know how she could stop it-- or if she should.

“He has a plan you see… a plan that would make every mage in Kirkwall tranquil, within the next year. Olivia and I have heard about it extensively over the past few weeks, and decided that we needed to find the evidence to bring to the Grand Cleric.”

“Every mage?” Hawke asked in disbelief. “Are you certain about this?”

“Absolutely,” Anders replied. “The last time I was in the Gallows, I looked for the evidence, but found nothing. One mage volunteered to stay behind in order to find what we needed, and Olivia went four days ago to bring him back out. I… I expected her back yesterday morning.”

“What does that mean? Shouldn’t we go find her?!” Cat jumped in.

“It doesn’t necessarily mean anything,” Anders replied, though his expression was troubled. “Some times you are forced to wait for the right time to move, especially now when the templars are so focused on catching escapees.”

“It sounds as if you are trying to convince yourself, not us…” Hawke said.

“I had planned to go look for her once we had finished in Darktown,” Anders replied angrily. He gave a huge sigh. “But now?”

Hawke put his hand on Anders’ shoulder. “Now, you have help.”

* * * * *
Anders led them down a flight of stairs, and Cat covered her mouth and nose with her arm. The stench down here was positively awful, but she knew it was just another deterrent for those that were keeping this a secret.

Opening a door that had been camouflaged to blend into the wall, Anders paused and looked over at Cat and Fenris.

“You must never tell anyone of this entrance to the Gallows,” he said. “Many innocents would die if the templars were to find out.”

Cat nodded, but that didn’t appease him. “I need you to swear it Cat.”

“I swear, I will never tell another soul,” she said to him, and he seemed to relax. In fact, he didn’t even ask that Fenris give the same, and she wondered why she had been the one to give him worry.

“You have templar friends,” Fenris said, answering her unasked question in his uncanny way.

“I have one templar friend, and I’m trying to get him to see mages in a better light, not trying to turn mages over to him,” she replied, pouting slightly.

“He knows that,” Fenris answered, and Anders shushed them from his place ahead of them.

“We must be silent from here on,” he said in whisper. “We do not know who may be in these tunnels with us. The templars are known to patrol down here,” he said.

Fenris and Cat nodded, and they continued to follow Anders through the winding passageways underneath the city and to the Gallows. They moved quickly but quietly, occasionally hearing others, and hiding to keep undetected.

Eventually, they heard voices, though they were too quiet to understand. Hawke instinctively took the lead, with the others close behind as they snuck forward to investigate.

Cat couldn’t see anything, with the two broad-shouldered mages in front of her, and since the people in the room ahead were not speaking loudly, she couldn’t hear anything either. Placing her hand on a shoulder in front of her, she stood on her toes of her feet to see over them.

There wasn’t much to see, just the backs of armored templars, though that was a daunting view. There were at least six of them, and knowing that they could cut off a mage’s mana, that would leave all six of them to Cat and Fenris.

Resting back on the soles of her feet, she glanced back at Fenris, to see the steely determination in his face. She worked on having that same focus now.

Oddly, she could begin to hear the conversation in the next room, almost as if the speaker was talking loudly on purpose so that the entire room could hear his voice.

“So, the good little mage girl decides to finally show her true nature,” the man spoke. “You know what happens to mages who lie?”

Cat focused hard to hear a response, but only caught Anders whispering to himself. “No, we cannot. This is their place.”

She looked sharply over to him, noticing the small cracks of blue light on his skin, and worried even more.
“I know you,” the man’s voice said in delight. “Oh, and here we thought you had done your father the service of killing yourself. How happy he will be when he can hold you in his arms again. Unfortunately, you will not recognize him.”

“I am dead,” came the response. “I am no longer that girl.”

Cat nearly called out, recognizing Olivia’s voice, but Fenris held her shoulder to keep her steady.

“Get up!” the man ordered snidely.

“I will not take orders from the likes of you!” Olivia growled back.

“Oh, but you will,” the man Cat knew was Ser Alrik crowed. “Once you’re tranquil… you’ll do anything I want!”

“Naughty, naughty,” Hawke spoke up, stepping forward with a smirk.

“Who’s this?” Ser Alrik asked his men.

The light burst brightly in front of her, and Cat could hear the other-worldly voice of Justice mixed with Anders call out. He stalked forward as a predator seeing its prey frozen in fear before it. “YOU WILL NEVER TAKE ANOTHER FROM ME AS YOU TOOK HIM!!”

Cat gulped, as Vengeance started casting spell after spell. She could hear the shouting of the templars, and felt Fenris push past her, which spurred her into action. She was not at her best, and knew that both Fenris and Hawke were the same.

Anders must have been exhausted, but he didn’t look it as the spirit took over his body. The spells he cast were devastating, and Cat had to remind herself over and over to focus on the fight or she would get herself killed.

There were no templar survivors but Anders/Justice continued to glare around the room looking for more to take his vengeance upon.

“A…Anders??” Olivia said in fear, her eyes widened even further as the blue swirling depths that were where Anders’ warm eyes had been peered at her. She shrank back, uncertain of how to proceed.

“WHY DO YOU COWER?” the spirit inhabiting the mage questioned. “ARE YOU ONE OF THEM, THAT WOULD LOOK UPON ME IN FEAR?”

“You’re not my friend, what did you do to him?!” Olivia yelled suddenly, holding out her hands in a way that a mage would when about to cast a spell at another.

“Wait!” Cat called, and Hawke began moving forward as well.

“YOU WOULD DARE?!” Anders/Justice hollered. “YOU HAVE BECOME THEIR SERVANT!”

“Anders, it’s Olivia!” Hawke bellowed, trying to get through to him. “She fights along side you! She’s your friend!”

“So that is your answer?!” Hawke demanded. “ALL mages deserve freedom, do they not? Even if
they do not agree with your views? Are they not who you are fighting for??"

Cat wanted to run forward to Olivia, but Fenris held her back. Anders/Justice was casting something, and Olivia stood there, closing her eyes, waiting for the end. Hawke crossed his arms, and glared at Anders, feeling he had said his piece.

“NO!” Cat yelled, even as the blue light flickered on Anders’ face. As swiftly as it had started, the light was gone, and it was just Anders standing before them again. He staggered backward, looking aghast.

“Maker no…” he uttered, looking around at his friends, and down at his hands. Cat thought he looked like he would be ill. He finally looked up again, and turned, and ran away.

Olivia looked relieved, but no less ill. “What… was that?” she asked as Cat came to her.

“I think you know,” Cat said gently, putting an arm around her.

“I ….I ….” Olivia stammered, and began shaking. “I’m sorry,” she said in defeat. “I’ve never seen him like that before, and…”

“Not many have,” Hawke said softly. “He’s upset with himself, not with you.”

“After all we’ve been through…” Olivia said as tears came to her eyes. “And I turned on him…”

“I’m sure he’s telling himself the same thing,” Cat replied.

“We should find him,” Olivia said resolutely. “I need to apologize.”

“Fenris?” Hawke asked.

“Ready,” Fenris answered, having found a small ledge and had thrown the bodies over it.

“Then let’s get going,” Hawke said, and he led the way out.

* * * * *

Cat listened in awe as Olivia shared what had happened. She and a few young mages had been sneaking out when they discovered the templars on their tail. She had sent the mages another way, and had been leading the templars in circles, casting spells when necessary to keep the trail fresh.

She had been unaware however, of how well the templars had known the paths of the cave network, and had found herself being slowly cut off and surrounded throughout the day. She had been certain that she was about to become tranquil, and had wished for death.

“And that’s when I looked up, and saw Anders,” she said quietly. “I thought I was dreaming, but knew something was wrong when I looked closer.”

“We’ll get it all worked out,” Cat responded soothingly. “Anders is a good friend, he’ll understand.”

“I guess…” Olivia said, though obviously not convinced.

“It seems pretty obvious that you and Anders haven’t talked about Justice before,” Hawke said.
“That seems odd since you are so close.”

“He tried once, but I wasn’t really interested,” Olivia said sheepishly. “It was against everything I had ever been taught…” she sighed. “Oh, this is all my fault.”

“No it isn’t,” Cat said with a smile. “It’s just a misunderstanding, and we’ll get it cleared up in no time.”

Cat knew Anders would be packing to leave when they found him, but even she was surprised at the state of the clinic. Several of the crew were awake and trying to get answers from Anders, who was ignoring them.

He had gathered several items in a pack, but the room looked like he had been trying to wreck it. Everything was overturned, items were covering the table and desk, and even the floor. Anders himself looked haggard and worn, with a crazed look in his eye.

“ Anders,” Hawke called as the group stepped into the clinic. Anders stopped what he was doing and stood, looking similar to Olivia when she had accepted her death earlier that evening.

“Hawke, I know I messed up,” Anders said, standing still with his eyes shut. “I almost killed my best friend. There’s no excuse for that.” He dropped his bag, yet still didn’t open his eyes. “I… wanted to simply leave…. but if you’ve come to kill me… I understand.”

There were stunned looks, and a few gasps from the others in the room. A few of them even looked to Cat, but she was watching Olivia, who was trying to hold back her tears. She gave Olivia a small nudge, and the girl didn’t hesitate any longer as she went to Anders.

He stiffened as he heard the footsteps near him, but opened his eyes in shock when he felt the hand on his cheek. Seeing Olivia, he shrunk back, ashamed.

“I’m so sorry Anders,” she said, hanging her own head. “All this time, I refused to understand what it was you were going through, what… you are. I’m sorry that I didn’t see you through that… uh, spirit form?”

Cat and Hawke smiled, but Anders just shook his head. “How can you apologize to me?” he asked. “If it hadn’t been for Hawke, I would have killed you!”

“No,” she replied. “Justice would have. He didn’t seem to recognize me either, and that’s my fault. I never got to know him.”

“This isn’t a joke!” Anders said dramatically, and Cat felt like rolling her eyes. But she refrained as she remembered how scary it must have been for him, watching himself do things that were beyond his control.

“No, it isn’t,” Hawke said, stepping into the conversation. “It’s true, this is on both of you.”

They looked at Hawke, then each other, then hung their heads as they would if they were getting scolded by their father.

“Olivia, as a friend and partner in the clinic, Anders relies on you to have his back,” Hawke said to the younger mage. “That means you need to understand his situation, not ignore it.”

“Yes Hawke,” Olivia replied softly.

“And Anders,” Hawke continued, turning to the healer. “You chose to merge with Justice… only
you can make this work.”

“I am trying,” Anders said sadly.

“I know,” Hawke replied. “Keep trying, I know it’s difficult, but you can do this.”

Cat couldn’t stop the grin on her face. Hawke was a natural leader, someone that the others gravitated towards. He wasn’t all fun and games, and knew when to reprimand, but there was no doubt in any one’s mind that he believed in his crew, and he just proved it again.

“Uh, anyone want to catch us up?” Varric said from his bed, where he was sitting up.

“Evil templar, Justice got a little carried away,” Cat said before anyone else could speak up.

Anders and Olivia looked at her, gobsmacked, and Hawke just chuckled.

“It was a bit more complicated, but that covered the finer points,” he said.

“An evil templar?” Merrill asked with wide eyes.

“You went and fought with templars?” Sebastian asked.

“Evil ones, apparently,” Isabela told him with a smirk.

“And… Ser Alrik?” Anders asked. “Did we find the evidence we needed?”


“Does it matter?” Hawke asked. “He’s dead now.”

“We were hoping to take the evidence to the Grand Cleric… get her aid in having the templars take it easier on the mages,” Olivia answered.

“This may help,” Fenris said, pulling out a paper, and handing it over to Hawke. “Found it on the body.”

Hawke read the letter quickly. “Seems you were right,” he said to Anders. “Ser Alrik suggested a ‘tranquil solution’ to Meredith. He then wrote to the Divine herself, saying that tranquil mages would be better servants to the Maker.” He looked up to see the angry and confused faces around him.

“He suggested that all mages be made tranquil once they reach the point of their harrowing,” Hawke explained. “Whether they pass the test or not, he says that there would be less of a problem if the mages were simply made tranquil.”

“That’s barbaric!” Aveline exclaimed, and the mages in the room smiled. Aveline wasn’t always on the side of mages, but they knew she cared about their rights as citizens.

“However…” Hawke said, and other conversation stopped. “This letter is written by Ser Alrik, beggin the Divine to reconsider. It seems not only the Divine, but Meredith too rejected his idea.”

“What??” Anders said, shocked. “Let me see that!” He grabbed the paper from Hawke, and he and Olivia looked it over eagerly. “I… I can’t believe it!” he exclaimed once he was done.

“They actually… rejected it…” Olivia mumbled.

“Perhaps the Grand Cleric would be as reasonable…” Anders said.
“The Grand Cleric is a wonderful and just woman, who cares for all the Maker’s children,” Sebastian said proudly.

“It’s something to think about,” Hawke suggested with a smile.

“Thank you Hawke…” Anders said, his whole persona filled with hope instead of despair, and Cat smiled to see it. “Now… everyone back in bed!” he called out, and the others’ groaned, even as they obeyed. Olivia and Anders began making the rounds, while Cat and Fenris got comfortable on their cot.

“Hawke?” Cat asked. “Aren’t you joining us?” She patted the spot next to her where he had been sitting before.

“I’m going to check on Mother,” he said with a smile. “But thanks.”

“No problem,” she said with a yawn, and leaned her head on Fenris’ arm. The arm moved as he put it around her, bringing one of the clinic’s blankets up to tuck around her. She smiled at the gesture, knowing both of them would be uncomfortable but both preferred it to the floor.

Hawke looked back at the empty spot by her side, looking wistful for a moment, before Olivia walked over and claimed it for herself. He shook his head, remembering his responsibilities, and headed out the door.

* * * * *

Cat awoke feeling overheated, and wondered why as she opened her eyes. At first she wondered where she was, and blinked in surprise when she couldn’t sit up. As her eyes adjusted, she found herself in bed with Olivia, and while she couldn’t remember how she got there from the cot, she assumed Fenris moved her. He was always more concerned with others’ comfort before his own.

Cat started to try to extract herself from Olivia’s hold, but finally decided to just wake her up. Olivia’s eyes popped open once she moved around some, and she grinned at her friend.

“After last time, I didn’t think I’d get in bed with you again,” Cat teased.

“Well, I can’t help it if I have sexy dreams when you’re here,” Olivia quipped back.

“Is that what that was?” Cat asked with a grin. “Do tell! Was it Mr. You’ll-never-tell?”

“Is there anyone else to dream about?” Olivia asked.

“Well… there are plenty of attractive men, and women, as Issy would say,” Cat answered.

“Not for me,” Olivia responded.

“And you won’t tell me anything??” Cat pouted.

“Actually,” Olivia started quietly. “I’ve been asking him if I could, but he’s adamant.”

“Wait…” Cat stopped, looking at her friend as she blushed. “I thought you were just interested in the guy, I didn’t know you were actually involved!”
“SSHHH!!!” Olivia hissed at her, and Cat was immediately contrite.

“Sorry,” she whispered.

“It’s nothing,” Olivia backtracked. “I shouldn’t have said anything.”

“Olivia…” Cat pouted.

“I’ve already said too much,” she replied, and getting up, walked out into the clinic, Cat following behind her.

* * * * *

The next few weeks had Cat busier than she had ever been. Hawke and Fenris were still assisting Isabela with her relic search, and dealing with the Qunari. Anders and Olivia were so busy with the mage underground that she often had to enlist Merrill’s help to gather herbs and make the concoctions herself that she needed to deliver to the Rose each week.

Sebastian was constantly requesting that she practice with him, and after being accidentally dragged into several conversations with Chantry mothers about either mages or Qunari, she finally insisted that if he truly wanted to practice, they could go hunting, but that was all.

Now, she was visiting Cullen, and had spent the last half hour listening to him rant about the wicked mages that were plaguing the streets of Kirkwall.

“I’m just saying, if you had a bodyguard…”

“What?” she asked in shock. “Cullen, I can take care of myself.”

“Against a mage?” he shot back. “How in the Maker’s name will you be able to shield yourself if one of them decides to hurt you?” He stepped forward and grabbed her shoulders, not seeing the wince as his gauntlets dug into her skin. “It is common knowledge that we are friends,” he said seriously. “They would hurt you in order to wound me!”

“Cullen,” Cat sighed. His paranoia was getting worse. “I have lived here for years now, no one is out to get me. Besides, I’m part of Hawke’s crew. If anyone wanted to harm me, they’d be declaring war on Hawke! No one would dare.”

He grunted in disgust as he turned away. “These mages do not care who is in their way!” he said, his voice raising. “They would do anything, and harm anyone to achieve their goals!”

Cat looked at him in concern, noting his pale and sweaty face. “Are you… all right?” Cat asked.

“It is past time for my lyrium,” he muttered. “But I cannot leave until you agree to this!”

“I’m not going to agree to this,” she replied firmly. “Our crew has fought mages and demons before. We’ll be fine.”

“You take these mages too lightly,” he scowled at her. “You do not understand the blackness of their hearts. They are not the people they seem, they are monsters!”

“Cullen!” Cat said in reprimand, thinking of her mage friends, and how wrong he was.
“Don’t ‘Cullen’ me!” he said, stalking away from her. “You have not seen, not what I have seen! You could not possibly understand!” He swung back around, nearly crashing into her, as she had been following after him. “Obviously, you care more for these mages… these… creatures… than you do those that care about you.”

“What?” she gaped at him. He was showing her a side of himself she had never seen before; a side that she wouldn’t have believed existed before.

“Go then!” he said loudly, as they neared the gate to the Gallows. Several others turned to stare. “Go back to the mages you care for so deeply! I will not stop you! But I will not protect you any longer either!”

She just stood there in shock, as he stalked away from her. There was movement to her left, and she could see the templar guards coming near with uncertain looks on their faces. “I’m sorry,” she said. "I wouldn’t accept his help in guarding me in town, and he started talking about being in league with mages…” she shook her head, showing her disbelief.

One of the guards still looked at her warily, but the other stopped in her tracks. “I’m sorry Miss Lewis,” she said quietly. “It’s been a rough few weeks, what with the mages escaping and we’ve had several templars go missing… the Knight Captain is taking too much on himself.”

“Shut it,” the other guard glared. “That’s templar business,” he muttered.

“And she’s the Knight Captain’s business,” the female guard shot back. She turned back to Cat. “He won’t be coming back, you should probably go,” she said, though not unkindly.

“Thank you,” Cat replied. “Can you tell him I’m sorry we argued?” Cat asked. “Ser…” she left it hanging, so that the woman would supply her name.

“Still a recruit I’m afraid,” the woman said as she gave Cat a wink. She was hardly more than a teenager. “Just call me Lysette. I’ll be sure to let him know.”

“Thank you Lysette,” Cat replied, trying to place why the name sounded so familiar. She gave a look back as she headed away from the Gallows.

* * * * *

The next day, Cat was still brooding over her argument with Cullen. It was his attitude more than his words that worried her, and the fact that such a drastic change came when he missed his lyrium did not bode well.

The nudge brought her out of her thoughts, and she looked over to see Fenris giving her a look.

“Sorry, thinking about Cullen.”

“Still?” he asked though not surprised. “You cannot fix things by brooding about them,” he said, and laughter rang out.

“You’re the last one to talk, Broody,” Varric said as he chuckled.

“Yes, but I enjoy it,” Fenris said with a smirk. “Cat is not made for brooding.”
“He does have a point Little dove,” Varric commented. “You could always share your troubles… that will help.”

“Thanks Varric, but I’m not ready to share just yet,” she answered with a smile. Of course, she had already spoken of what had happened in general terms to Fenris, and he had been ready to fight Cullen. She could just imagine what her overprotective friends would say, or do, if she were to share what had happened.

“Sorry I’m late,” Hawke called out as he entered the clearing where they practiced together. “Ever since Mother decided to help Aveline with the wedding, I’ve been dragged into far too many conversations, and asked my opinion more than I can count!”

“Oh it can’t be that bad,” Cat smirked.

“It’s worse,” he deadpanned.

“Oh, poor Hawke,” Isabela cooed to him. “The least you can do is make sure this party will be fun. Though with Aveline, I’m sure that’s a lost cause.”

“Be nice,” Cat said in reflex.

“I’m just being honest Kitty,” she replied, and Cat rolled her eyes.

“So what are we working on today?” Merrill asked, changing the subject. “We’re missing a few of us though,” she said.

“Yes, Aveline won’t be coming either,” Hawke said as he looked around, noting the absence of both Anders and Sebastian which was no longer a surprise as both had been absent for the past three sessions.

“Sebastian still in the Chantry?” he asked.

“The templars are no closer to finding their missing members, or the mages,” Varric said. “He feels he must guard the Grand Cleric, even though she sends him away.”

Hawke shook his head. “He knows full well what happened to them,” he muttered. “Why the sudden panic?” He shook his head again. “And Anders?” he asked.

“Working on his manifesto, I think…” Cat replied. “He believes he shouldn’t be out in public until he gets a handle on the ‘Justice thing,’ she quoted. “I think he’ll see reason, but someone else will have to point it out, because apparently I didn’t do it right.”

Isabela make a comment about finding Cat a tutor to teach her how to “do it right,” which led to several eye rolls and chuckles, and Merrill asking what she had missed.

“Well, let’s get started then. I want to show you all the new spells I’ve learned from that book in Darktown.”

Fenris and Cat were the only two that didn’t look uneasy at the idea, having seen the spell in action before.

“I think you should demonstrate,” Cat spoke up. “I’ll be the enemy for this,” she said.

“What?” Isabela asked, as Hawke appraised her.

“Why?” he asked.
“Two reasons,” she answered as she stood and got her daggers out. “One, while it was interesting to see on insects, I think the impact will be stronger on a person. And two…”

She looked around as she continued. “We may not be part of the problems that are growing here in Kirkwall, but we’ll inevitably find ourselves in the middle of them. We need to prepare counter attacks to the attacks that could come our way. We can’t do that until we experience them.”

The others picked up on her seriousness, and Hawke studied her face a moment more before he nodded. Cat jogged about fifty feet away before turning back. “I’m coming at you full speed,” she warned Hawke.

Hawke stepped forward from the group, pulling out his staff and readying himself.

Cat wasn’t sure what exactly would happen, but wanted to understand it completely. “Come at me once you cast it,” she hollered to Hawke, who paused, and then nodded again.

Taking a few deep breaths, Cat adjusted the grip on her daggers, and burst forward, running full speed at Hawke. She didn’t feel anything hit her, and wondered if he was holding back. The thought pissed her off, and she let the anger fuel her speed.

She could see she was coming closer to Hawke, and almost fell over in shock as she saw a blur next to her, and she was stopped short with Hawke behind her, his arm wrapped around her arms.

She panted, trying to get her racing heart to slow, and she realized the spell had struck, and she hadn’t even noticed. She grinned as she turned to look over her shoulder at Hawke. “That grip won’t stop me from stabbing your leg,” she teased. “And this time it would be more than a poke.”

He chuckled, and she felt her heart speed up again as his breath hit her ear. His free hand moved forward to show he had taken one of her own daggers from its sheath. “You’re already dead,” he teased back.

“Get off,” she said grumpily, shrugging him off of her. Sheathing her blades, she held her hand out for the one he had taken. He simply stepped forward and reached around to her back to slide it into place.

“Better luck next time,” he said with a wink, and she punched his shoulder before heading back to the group.

“What exactly was I seeing just now?” Varric asked with a smile.

“Hawke’s new spell,” she answered, looking confused when he just shook his head. “Looks like you’re a student of the Force school now,” she told Hawke, trying not to giggle or call him a padawan. She stood facing the others even as she spoke to Hawke about the experience.

“It was strange, I didn’t feel a difference. I couldn’t have told you when you cast the spell… in fact, the only reason I knew you had was when I was caught. Up until that point when you moved, I thought I was going to run right into you.”

“You were running full speed the whole time?” Merrill asked surprised.

“Yes, in fact when Hawke stopped me, it felt jarring, like running into a wall or something.”

“Oh, sorry,” Hawke said contritely.

“Not your fault,” Cat replied. “And when you moved, all I saw was a blur, just a second before you
caught me."

“He walked up to you, calm as could be, once the spell was done,” Fenris spoke up.

“Really?” Cat asked. “Huh, this could definitely be useful during a fight, especially if we can somehow get the enemies into a group.” Cat turned back to the open field. “Let’s try another.”

“What?” Hawke asked, eyes wide.

“You didn’t only learn one spell did you?” Cat asked. “So show me another.”

“The other spells are meant to wound, Cat,” Hawke replied.

“I told you, I need to experience them if I’m going to come up with a defense,” she said. “You don’t have to pull punches with me, I can take it.”

“Little dove, this sounds like a bad idea…” Varric cut in.

“Look, I appreciate your concern… all of you,” she said as she looked around. “If one of you wants to take a turn after this, that’s fine. But I can’t continue to reply on what I already know. I need to get stronger. Those demons almost took us all out a few weeks back, and the only reason I wasn’t in one of those beds with you all, was because I was in the hold of a desire demon.”

She looked around, and they could all see the determination on her face, even if they didn’t like it. “We’re making good progress with our combined attacks, but you all know we need to keep improving. This is the next step.”

“You want me to openly attack you, but I won’t,” Hawke said defiantly.

“Some friend you are,” Cat shot back. “It’s just like in a spar. You don’t have to use all your power, but I need to know what I’m up against.”

“I’m a great friend,” Hawke argued. “Just look as I don’t attack my friend.”

“Hawke…” Fenris spoke up. “She’s right.” He looked over to Cat, then over to Merrill. “Will you show me that Petrify spell of yours?” he asked.

“Is everyone insane?” Varric asked.

Hawke walked past Cat, back to the field. “Let’s go,” he said. “One time only.”

Cat nodded, breathing deeply as she walked, steeling herself. It was a victory yes, but she knew what some of these spells did in the game. She was always thrilled when her Hawke character took out large groups of enemies with a single spell. And she had seen this Hawke in action on many occasions. This is going to hurt… she thought.

* * * * *

Hawke debated with himself. Part of him wanted to give her the Fist of the Maker spell, so she could learn her lesson. But, another quieter part of him knew he couldn’t. He settled on a telekinetic burst, knowing it would simply fling her away instead of pound her into the ground.
He watched as she readied herself, not bothering to pull out her daggers this time. He brought his staff out, and brought his mana forth, ready to cast. Cat started running at him again, and he shot the spell directly in front of her. The small burst knocked her off her feet, and she rolled over, and back on her feet.

He could see her expression darken, and she came running at him again, looking more angry than he’d seen in quite awhile. He knew instinctively that he shouldn’t have done such a small spell, it was exactly what she didn’t want.

He moved without thinking, powering the spell again with more mana this time. He faltered as he realized she was almost on top of him, and he flung the spell out in front of her again.

Too late, he realized how much faster she was moving than before, and the burst set off behind her, and shot her into the air straight at him, knocking them both over, and rolling on the ground.

Finally coming to a stop, he groaned as he sat up, looking around for Cat. She was several feet past him, having had the momentum. He went over to her, even as the others made their way across the field to where they were.

“Cat?” he asked, hobbling over and wheezing like an old man.

“Go away.”

“Cat, you okay?” he asked, standing over her. She glared up at him.

“Why do you have to be an idiot?” she groused.

“Yeah, realized that after the first one…” he said with a wince, rubbing his gut where she had slammed into him.

“Not too bright putting it behind me,” she wheezed out as the others made it to them.

“What happened?” Isabela asked, seeing Cat looking like she wanted to stay down for awhile longer.

“I uh…” Hawke stammered.

“Genius here decided to use such a small amount of mana that the spell was basically non-existant,” Cat said loudly.

“Which of course, only pissed you off,” Isabela surmised.

“Naturally,” Cat replied. “So he tried to do it again, and this time put it behind me, so I’d go flying right into him.”

“That is… not exactly accurate…” Hawke said, and everyone looked at him in question. He rubbed the back of his head, looking embarrassed. “Cat got back up after the first one, looking like she was going to murder me. I knew I’d better do it again.”

“Good thought,” Cat interrupted. “Because I would have murdered you.”

“Any way… so I did it again…but,” he paused, uncertain if he actually wanted to admit it after all.

“But?” Isabela asked.

“She was moving faster than I expected…”
The laughter from Varric stopped Hawke this time, and he looked up at the sky… the trees… anywhere but his crew.

He looked back at Cat as he heard her stand up. She walked right up to him, and poked her finger at his chest. “Are you telling me that you meant to put it in front of me, but you missed your mark?” she demanded.

“Uh… something… like that… yes.”

Her face didn’t change, but he could see the amusement sparkling in her stormy eyes. It amazed him how gray they could look when she was angry, and how the blue in them would peek out when she was happy… just like the sky after a storm.

Her lips twitched, even as Varric and Isabela laughed, and swapped insults of Hawke’s aim, but she just watched him. Finally she smiled slowly.

“I hope you learned your lesson,” she said finally, and he smiled too as he nodded.

“Never piss off Catarina?” he asked in jest.

“Always a smart move,” she replied, and she let Fenris help her to the side of the field to rest while he worked with Merrill.
Dear Cat-

I was surprised to receive your second letter, before I could even reply to your first! I must admit, I didn’t much care for the first one, though the cheese you sent was very good! You’ll be pleased to hear that my spar with Nathaniel ended in victory. You’ll find I am not the “old man” you may think me to be!

We thank you for the invitation to your friend’s wedding, unfortunately we will not be able to attend. Carver is upset about it as well, but I’m afraid you know all too well the duty that the Grey Wardens are given.

In fact, I must admit my curiosity that you continue to stay in Kirkwall. Even here in Ferelden we hear of the growing threat that are the Qunari. All of us feel concern for the mage/templar issues that are amounting as well. If you are not careful, you could find yourself in an all out war from multiple sides.

I have spoken to Duran about assisting you in this, however he assures me that the best way we can help is by focusing on our duty. I cannot say much on the subject, as you are keenly aware, but I will note that we are looking for solutions on a much grander scale than before. There are none more dedicated to seeing the blight eradicated once and for all.

I believe you may have… thoughts… on that subject, and if so, I ask that you consider sharing them with us? The more we uncover, the more certain I am that information is being kept purposefully from us. Duran has agreed, and has begun preparing for a trip to Weisshaupt to try to discover these things. He has stated that if he cannot find the answers there, he will travel the world until he can.

I do not relish that thought, you know I do not enjoy being in charge, but I cannot fault him for wanting to act. I am struggling with that myself, not wanting to disappoint him, but needing to be doing more than paperwork.

Perhaps one day we will see each other again, and be able to speak of all that has happened. For now, know that our thoughts are with you, and you are always welcome here. Please take care of yourself! I really want to see how our future spar will go… and Nathaniel has already stated he believes you will win. Did I mention what an ass he is? No? Believe me, it is the truth.

- Al

P.S. You know my name, so stop using the title! You do this on purpose don’t you?!

* * * * *

Cat chuckled softly as she read and re-read the letter. She had known the Wardens wouldn’t come for the wedding, but wanted to invite them anyway, just in case. It would have been such a nice surprise for Leandra to see Carver after all.
Cat was still surprised, but happy at how well Leandra was doing. She had practically taken on the role of mother to Aveline, assisting in her wedding plans, hiring the necessary people to decorate, and make and serve the food. She had even taken Aveline to a dress maker for the big day.

It was hard to believe that in less than a month, her friend would be a married woman again. She had been alone for so long now, even among the crew, and Cat was thrilled at how happy she was now.

She brought herself out of her thoughts, and glanced to her companion. “I’d say I was sorry for not talking to you, but I assume you enjoyed it,” she teased. Hawke had sent a message to meet at his estate, and they were walking over together.

Fenris glanced back with a small smirk. “Indeed. It was a nice reprieve from your usual morning chatter.”

She rolled her eyes at him. “If I was like this every morning, you’d miss it,” she said.

“Let’s test that theory sometime,” he stated.

“You think you’re so witty, don’t you?” she asked, even as they walked up to Hawke’s door.

He glanced at her with a raised eyebrow. “Yes,” he said, lifting his fist to rap on the door.

She grinned at him, and they waited as Bodahn answered the door, and led them inside. Cat didn’t make it far before she was pounced on by Hafter, and she crouched down immediately to give him a rubdown.

Fenris stood near the fireplace to keep warm. Though the days were already growing warmer, the mornings still had a lingering chill. Both Cat and Fenris were more than happy that winter was almost over.

“Thank you for coming,” Hawke said as he and Leandra came down the stairs. “Mother insisted on choosing clothes for the wedding, though I am uncertain why I need to dress up. I’m not getting married,” he said with a smile.

“You know very well why, Garrett Hawke,” Leandra said with a gentle swat to his shoulder. Looking at the Cat and Fenris she asked, “Do the two of you have appropriate attire, or do we need to help find you some?”

“Uh,” Cat and Fenris said, uncertain of what that meant.

“I’m sure I have a tunic that Fenris can wear,” Hawke said, trying to hide his grin.

“Excellent! And Cat?” she asked, turning to face her. “Do you have a dress?”

“A dress?” Cat croaked, then cleared her throat. “Uh, no… but I have some very nice clothes I was saving for the occasion…”

“No that simply won’t do,” Leandra barreled on. “Come up and look in my closet, I’m sure I have something that we can make work.”

“I’ll send her up in a minute Mother,” Hawke said, highly amused at Cat’s expression. “I need to speak with them first.”

“Very well, I’ll get started.” She turned around to head back up the stairs. “I expect you to join me soon,” she called back.
“Yes Ma’am,” Cat replied, dismayed at the turn of events. It wasn’t as if she hated dresses, but she was really hoping to be comfortable at the wedding.

“Sorry about that,” Hawke said, not sounding sorry at all. “Though I must admit I’m glad it isn’t only me.”

“Yeah, great…” Cat muttered. “So why are we here?” she grumbled.

“I was hoping you could take care of something for me today, since you’re going to the Gallows.” Hawke walked over to his writing desk, and took a piece of paper, handing it to Cat. “There’s a templar, I’m sure you remember him… Emeric?”

“Uh, yes, I believe so,” Cat replied, reading the note. “Wasn’t he investigating the missing women a year or so ago?”

“Yes,” Hawke nodded. “Seems he now has some vital information that he will only share with me.” Hawke ran his hand through his hair as he sighed. “I’ll be honest here, I think we got lucky with that necromancer, and Emeric had nothing to do with it. His evidence was nothing but a hunch, and I don’t have the time, nor inclination to get more of the same from him.”

Cat’s eyebrows went up, showing her surprise. “But?” she asked.

“But he won’t stop bothering me about it,” Hawke answered. “I’ve got some business with Hubert about the bone pit I have to deal with, the Viscount wants yet another meeting about the Arishok, and Anders has been worrying me lately with how depressed he’s been.”

Cat smiled sadly at that last part, happy that she wasn’t the only one trying to cheer Anders up. He was trying to do too many tasks and while accomplishing much good, he would berate himself for not meeting his own impossible standards.

“How can we help?” she asked.

“I’m hoping that Emeric will tell you what he wants me to know, knowing that you two are part of my crew. Barring that, the Knight Captain could vouch for you if needed. I really just want this to go away,” he said.

“I think we could handle that,” Cat replied, sticking the note into one of her pockets. “The permission to speak on your behalf note was a nice touch,” she added, patting the pocket.

“Hopefully it won’t be necessary, but I wouldn’t bet on it,” Hawke replied. “And also…” he trailed off.

“Also?” Fenris asked, surprised.

“I’m sorry, I just have a lot right now,” Hawke said. “I’ve been meaning to talk to Sebastian about having the wedding in the chantry gardens? Mother just mentioned it again this morning, how lovely it will be with everything blooming… and I realized I never spoke to him about it.”

“But, Sebastian isn’t in charge of the Chantry,” Cat protested.

“No, but he could help us get permission,” Hawke responded. He looked at both of them, pleading. “Pleeease????”

Cat looked unconvinced, and glanced at Fenris who wore the same expression. Then a thought came to her, and she smiled broadly. “Of course we’ll help!” she said enthusiastically.
“You will?” Hawke asked in surprise.

“Yes, in fact, we’ll go right now! Come on Fenris,” she said, pulling him toward the door.

“Well, but…” Hawke started.

“Not a worry Hawke, we’ve got this covered!” Cat called back as they headed out the door. “You just handle that dress decision with your mother for me!”

”Wait-” Hawke said before Cat shut the door behind her.

Fenris looked at her satisfied expression, and started walking in the direction of the chantry. “You may think it clever, but what happens when he picks a hideous dress?” he asked her.

“Leandra doesn’t own hideous dresses,” Cat replied. “Having her choose one would have taken all afternoon,” she said. “Hawke’s impatience will cut that down considerably, or Leandra will just send him on his way, and do it herself. Either way, I win.”

“Let us hope so,” Fenris smirked at her.

* * * * *

Hawke rubbed the bridge of his nose, quickly losing all patience. “Mother, why is this so difficult? Just choose one!”

“Garrett, there are many things to think about here,” she replied calmly. “It needs to be nice, but simpler than Aveline’s so she doesn’t upstage the bride. It needs to be a color that would work well with her coloring, and it needs to be-”

“Here!” he said, pulling out a random dress for her. “This one.”

Leandra eyed the dress, ready to reject it, but decided her son had a good eye, even when he was at his wit’s end. “That… could work,” she said, unwilling to praise the decision when she knew it was luck that he grabbed it.

“Thank the Maker!” he said, turning and heading out of the room. Leandra smiled to herself. He was so oblivious at times, it made her laugh. The dress was a lovely deep green, and an exact match to the tunic he had thrust at her earlier that morning when he lost patience in deciding his own outfit. She smiled at the thought of their coordinating wardrobes, and decided it was a perfect lesson for them both.

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“That wasn’t so bad,” Cat said as they left the Chantry. “At least the Grand Cleric is a nice enough woman.”

“Agreed,” Fenris said.
“Although, it almost seemed as if she were, I don’t know…” she trailed off.

“No, speak your mind,” he said.

“You know I have no problem with that,” she teased back. “It’s just that she tries so hard to be the neutral party in all the conflicts, that it just enrages others. I’m not saying she should pick a side,” Cat barreled on before Fenris could comment. “But if the people around her don’t understand what she is trying to accomplish, how will anyone else in the city?”

“It did seem as though the others in the Chantry were having arguments,” he observed.

“Yes, over the Qunari, or the mages. There will always be zealots who will not listen to her words, or twist them to fit their own purposes. I can’t really blame Elthina I suppose.”

“Yes, over the Qunari, or the mages. There will always be zealots who will not listen to her words, or twist them to fit their own purposes. I can’t really blame Elthina I suppose.”

“Yet, you do,” he answered. “Why?”

She glanced over at him, troubled that he could see her distaste. “Because the conflicts will only worsen,” she answered. “And a woman in her position could do much to quell it, even without choosing a side.”

He could see that at this point, she was arguing with herself, and stayed quiet.

“I don’t know her, nor her motivations…” Cat’s voice became softer, finishing the last sentence in her mind. So why would someone who preached of doing good… do nothing at all?

Cat shook her head, trying to rid herself of the feelings that had surfaced when she met the Grand Cleric. They were based on assumptions from a story, and couldn’t be taken as truth now. But she couldn’t deny that she hadn’t liked the woman.

“At least the wedding will be lovely, being in such a beautiful garden,” she finally said. Fenris merely glanced at her with a roll of his eyes, and she decided he had just earned himself a chatter-filled walk to the Gallows for that.

* * * * *

“It is almost a different experience, coming here without a mage,” Fenris commented quietly.

“It definitely is,” Cat agreed, leading the way into the Gallows.

He observed her interactions with the guards at the gate, the waves she received from most of the recruits and several of the templars themselves as they made their way into the courtyard. He followed behind her as she walked to the staircase in front of them, where the Knight Captain stood speaking to another templar.

Cat stopped several paces away, not wanting to intrude on their conversation. “We made good time,” she said to Fenris. “The recruit’s training session hasn’t started yet, so we won’t have to wait long.”

She saw him shrug as he continued to look around the courtyard. “It’s interesting, isn’t it?” she asked.

He looked back to her with an eyebrow raised in question, and she smiled at the idea that they were having a conversation while he didn’t utter a word.
“I mean, the different perspectives,” she answered. “For as many mages that want to do good, like Hawke,” she added under her breath, “there are just as many that want to subject others to their will. And the same can be said for the templars, though they usually don’t see such similarities.”

He contemplated her words as he watched the templars around him. It was easy to see that she was right, simply from the way the people held themselves, or the look in their eyes. He could see the desire for justice in some, the superiority in others, and even kindness in a few.

“Lady Cat,” Cullen said as he approached them, and Cat smiled and turned to greet him. She had long ago convinced him to drop the title from her name, but he continued to do so in front of others.

“Knight Captain,” she replied giving her hand to him, and he bowed over it, since he knew she’d give him a tongue lashing if he were to kiss it.

“To what do we owe this pleasure?” Cullen asked politely, and Cat smiled.

“This is my friend, Fenris,” she said by way of introduction, and also to get Fenris by her side instead of behind her. “We were sent here to meet a Ser Emeric?” she asked.

Cullen gave Fenris a curt nod, and turned back to Cat. “Ser Emeric? May I ask what this pertains to?” he asked, and Cat’s eyebrows went up.

“I’m not entirely certain myself,” she answered, more careful of her words. “I believe, he and our boss are old friends, and have been keeping in communication. He sent us with a note for him?” she said as she patted her pocket.

“Very well,” Cullen replied with a nod. “I will see you to him.” He turned back to converse with the templar behind him, and then turned back and started walking. “This way.”

Cat glanced at Fenris, and shrugged, following after the knight captain. “So… uh, how are you… Ser?” Cat asked, unsure of what was going on, but trying to follow Cullen’s lead.

“I am well, thank you for asking.”

Cat glanced over at Fenris again, concern showing in her face now, and she silently followed her friend as he led them to a secluded corner of the courtyard.

“Ser Emeric, you have guests,” Cullen said, as he stopped before an older man.

The templar’s face lit up, but fell again as he took in Cat and Fenris. Obviously he was hoping for Hawke, Cat thought.

“Hello Ser,” Cat said in greeting. “Our friend asked that we bring this to you,” she said as she handed him the note from Hawke. “We’d like to speak with you, if that’s all right.”

Emeric glanced down at the note, then up at them, scrutinizing them from head to toe, looking uncertain.

“I’m afraid he is very busy,” Cat said softly. “It will be much longer if you wait for him specifically, but I promise to tell him everything you tell us.”

She didn’t know if he remembered her from their brief meeting in Darktown so long ago, or if he simply decided that this was the best he could get, but he finally nodded.

“Thank you Knight Captain,” he said to Cullen. “I will escort them out after we speak.”
Cullen nodded, and strode away, and Cat looked at his retreating figure in confusion. *What is going on with him??* she thought, before turning back to Emeric. “Serah Hawke asked us to come,” she said to the templar. “He said you had information for him?”

“I am hoping he will take it more seriously than the guard,” Emeric said bitterly. “I may be older, but I am not senile.”

“Oh course not,” Cat said with a small smile.

Emeric gave her a look, but he continued. “A few years ago, there was several women who disappeared,” he began, and Cat and Fenris nodded. “Serah Hawke was instrumental in helping us discover the whereabouts of these women at that time.”

“We are aware,” Fenris said, and Cat gave him a look, which he returned.

“We never caught the killer however,” Emeric continued, and Cat started, looking at him in surprise.

“What?” she asked, looking from Emeric in shock, to Fenris in accusation.

“And I believe, he has returned.”

Fenris and Cat stopped the silent conversation they had been having, and both turned to Emeric in surprise. “What?!” they demanded.

Emeric shushed them both, looking around him. “I have told my superiors, but they have done nothing without evidence. So I investigated myself, and found several disappearances that I believe are related. In my investigation, I discovered the culprit and took everything to the city guard.”

“And?” Cat asked a frown of concern on her face. *They killed Quentin… right?! But… if they didn’t?* her thoughts ran in circles.

“They found no evidence, and set him free.”

“He’s free?!” she squeaked.

“Yes,” he answered, looking at her oddly. “And now I have been ordered to stop my investigation.” He thrust out several pieces of paper to Fenris, who looked down at them, but didn’t take them. “This is everything I have. Please… tell Serah Hawke to finish this, as he once started. This monster must be stopped.”

Cat reached out and took the papers from the templar. She didn’t know what to think, her mind racing with thoughts of Quentin the necromancer, the poor women he killed, Leandra, Ninette, Alessa. She surprised herself by remembering that last one.

“We’ll tell him,” Fenris remarked, looking concerned at Cat’s behavior. He nodded to the templar and grabbed her arm, leading her away.

“Cat?” he asked softly, as he led her toward the gates. She shook her head, as she often did when trying to clear her thoughts.

“He’s dead, right Fenris? You all killed him… didn’t you?” she asked softly, as if in fear of his answer.

“Lady Cat?”

Cat stopped, looking up into Cullen’s face as he stepped in their path before the gates.
“Cullen?” she asked, and his face darkened momentarily before it became stoic again.

“Let me escort you out,” he said, waiting for them to continue, and falling in step ahead of them.

Cat had far too much to think about, and wanted, no needed, answers. She waited as long as she could past the gates before opening her mouth to demand them.

At that moment, Cullen stopped, and spun around, causing Fenris and Cat to stop suddenly.

“There has been quite the commotion in the templar hold these past few weeks,” he said speaking to Cat. “Mages escaping, losing templars to their own vices, or having them simply disappear with no explanation at all."

“Uh…”

Cullen broke her off with a hand, raising it to stop her even as he stepped forward. “Meredith trying so hard to keep order, and her kindness being exploited by those that are charged with a sacred duty,” he continued, even as Cat’s face went incredulous.

“Mages may think that they are oppressed,” he stated firmly, “but it is the templars, and the citizens that suffer when they prove time and again that they cannot handle the curse that is upon them.”

“Wha--?” Cat started, even as he interrupted her again.

“After dealing with this each and every day, you can imagine how distraught I was when I heard a rumor that your group was helping a mage to conceal himself in the city.”

He looked at her with hooded eyes. “Is it true… Cat?”

“What…” she began, clearing her throat and starting over. “What are you talking about?” she said cautiously. She had no idea who he was speaking of exactly, and needed to say nothing until she found out.

His eyes narrowed. “That’s it then,” he said. He wasn’t angry with her, so much as himself. Meredith was right after all… he thought remembering their argument about Cat and her group and their influence on him. She had said she wished she wasn’t right, and I foolishly defended them. But I can’t, not anymore.

“Cullen,” Cat said sadly. “It’s not that simple.”

“But it is,” he said looking at her, and she shivered at the icy disinterest in his eyes. “I am a templar, and you are helping a mage. I can not protect you.”

He stepped past them, walking back towards the gate. Stopping and turning back, he looked sadly at her. “I will not turn you in, because of what you have done for me,” he said. “I implore you to break ties, before something bad happens. Good day, Lady Lewis.”

Cat watched him, her sadness quickly being replaced with anger. Anger at him, at Meredith and all her stupid restrictions for mages, anger at the mage underground for making the templars tighten their hold, anger for the idiot mages that did whatever the hell they felt like- causing all these problems in the first place. And for some reason she couldn’t understand, the anger focused on the mages in her own circle of friends that were somehow at fault that she had lost a sweet and dear man as a friend.

Her anger focused on something specific now, Cat spun on her heel and stormed off toward the dock, anxious to be back in the city. She had a few choice words for some mages that she knew, and
she had the ferry ride back to choose which ones to use.

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Fenris stayed quiet, knowing nothing would come of trying to talk Cat down now. Over the years he had known her, he had never seen her quite this upset. It was a little unnerving for him, seeing another side to her that he hadn’t known existed.

Normally, her anger was an icy shell, something that she hid behind, freezing others out. She would become quiet or sullen depending on if she was angry or sad, but either way she couldn’t stay that way for long before she confronted the problem.

Now however, she was like a fire outside a bottle of alcohol. Soon enough, the control would break, and an explosion would occur. With her shorter legs, she didn’t have a chance to out pace him, but he still needed to walk quickly to keep up.

The truly disconcerting part, was that he had no idea where they were going. Once they were back in Kirkwall, she had headed directly to Hightown, and he assumed they were going back to Hawke’s, or even home, but Cat kept turning down other streets, until he wasn’t certain where they were, let alone what their destination was.

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Cat mind was snarling, and if asked, she couldn’t have said exactly where they were going, only that she would recognize it once she saw it. All these Hightown mansions all look the same, she thought, glancing left and right as she strode down the street.

She had in fact, changed her mind several times on the walk to the city. Her first thought was to go to Lowtown and look in that stupid foundry herself, to make sure that the necromancer was dead. Then she changed to Darktown, wanting to talk to Anders and Fenris about this, spelling out everything she knew was to come, and getting them to realize how idiotic all this drama was.

Then, knowing that was the worst idea, and with the possibility that Olivia would be there too, she redirected herself to Hightown at the last moment, deciding some sparring at the keep would be the least damaging thing she could do with the anger that was boiling inside her veins.

Passing the Chantry had her fuming as all her thoughts circled again, and she started charging toward Hawke’s home. Before they reached it however, she finally decided that she needed a fight. If she went to Hawke’s, there would be a fight all right, but not what she was looking for. She wanted an all out fight, one that couldn’t come from a spar.

That was how she began looking for the base of the Invisible Sisters. Isabela had shared a few days ago how they had tried to recruit her, and after declining not so politely, she had followed them back to their base. She had shared the intel with Hawke as well, but they hadn’t had time yet to take them out.

Seeing a house that looked promising, she walked forward, and noticed the small sign carved into the
door, she smiled a feral grin, pulling out her large daggers.

“Cat, what is going on?” Fenris finally asked.

“A fight,” she answered, kicking in the door, and striding forward.

* * * * *

Orana had gone to the hanged man as Hawke asked, and given the news to the dwarf as instructed. She hadn’t expected so many others with him, nor for them all to accompany her back to her new home. The group was quiet, and she quickly took her leave once they arrived, as they all made her nervous.

Hawke looked around at the people gathered, and directed them to the sitting room.

“Hawke?” Aveline asked as she entered, the last to arrive. “What’s going on? The message wasn’t specific…”

Hawke didn’t answer, as he heard the footsteps on the stairs and went to open the door. Anders and Olivia walked in, followed by Fenris, who was practically covered in bandages, and there were several quick intakes of breath.

“Where’s Kitty?” Isabela demanded as she stood up.

“Sleeping,” Anders answered as he collapsed into a chair. “She’ll be fine,” he said to Hawke, who nodded in relief.

“What happened?!” Isabela insisted.

“Everyone sit down,” Hawke directed. “It’s going to take a bit.” He went to the table and grabbed the decanter. “Drink?” he offered to the room, and almost everyone nodded. Olivia went to help pass out glasses as Hawke poured.

“Today was one of Cat’s visits to the Gallows, so I asked Fenris to accompany her to speak with a templar,” Hawke began.

“Emeric?” Aveline guessed, and Hawke nodded.

“So what, they were ambushed?” Varric asked, and they looked over to Fenris, who just shook his head.

“Just listen,” Hawke said, and continued. “For those of you who don’t remember, or weren’t with us yet, Emeric is a templar who was investigating missing women. We stumbled into him, and ended up taking over his investigation, which led us to a powerful necromancer, who was… experimenting with and killing the women.”

“What happened to him?” Merrill asked with wide eyes.

“We killed him,” Isabela said bluntly.

“We attempted to arrest him, and he resisted,” Aveline corrected, and Isabela smirked at her.
“Whatever you say.”

“The reason I bring this up,” Hawke interjected, “is that Emeric has been under the impression that the necromancer escaped.” The group looked back to him in surprise. “We didn’t exactly give a report about the experience,” he responded tersely.

“So?” Varric asked. “He’s still investigating?”

“Yes,” Hawke answered. “And he believes he has found the killer.”

Aveline shook her head. “He believes,” she said with a shake of her head. “His evidence looked promising, so my guards raided the man’s house. And found nothing.”

“Very embarrassing,” Varric noted, and Aveline scowled at him.

“He’s insistent that we missed something, though both the guard and the templars have dismissed the matter.”

“Which brings it back to us,” Hawke continued. “Cat and Fenris went to speak to him today at the Gallows.”

“So what happened?” Anders asked after a pause and Olivia elbowed him.

“Cat asked if we had truly killed the necromancer or not,” Fenris spoke up, and everyone besides Hawke looked at him in surprise.

“What, she thought he could resurrect himself after death?” Isabela asked in jest.

“You never explained you know,” Anders told her. “When you came to the clinic, you just told her he was dead, that’s all.”

“And what?” she retorted. “Now she doesn’t believe us?” She turned to Fenris. “You set her straight, right?”

“I didn’t have a chance to, we were interrupted.”

“Okay, so we simply tell her we watched him die then,” she said, as if that solved everything.

Fenris shook his head. “That is not my concern,” he said, moving slowly to adjust his position. “The information Emeric gave us is.”

Hawke cleared his throat, bringing the papers Fenris had brought him in front of him. “While I think we can all agree the necromancer is dead, Emeric’s investigations have recorded over fifteen women that have disappeared within the last six months.”

“What?” Sebastian asked. “How is that not public knowledge? That’s a serial killer loose in our city!”

“There is absolutely no connection between those women,” Aveline stated. “I personally interviewed their families and associates. Some have run away, some had publicly stated they were leaving the city. Our city has its share of crime, true, but that doesn’t mean every single disappearance is because of a serial killer.”

“Good point,” Varric agreed. “Between the gangs on the streets, slavers, and your common criminals, that number seems almost small,” he reasoned.
“True,” Hawke agreed, “but it can’t hurt to be cautious, especially with our friends.” He glanced over at Isabela, and Aveline, before focusing closer on Merrill, then Olivia. “Everyone gets escorted home for the foreseeable future,” he announced causing Aveline and Isabela to scowl, Merrill to smile, and Olivia to look relieved. “I would hate for anything to happen to any of you,” he added, and the two that scowled rolled their eyes, knowing they had lost before the argument even began.

“I still haven’t heard what happened to Kitty,” Isabela brought up as she stood to refill her glass.

“I gathered that the knight captain was acting strangely, by the looks Cat was giving me,” Fenris explained. “And once we were done, he met us at the gate as we were leaving, and escorted us away from the ferry, in order to speak privately.”

Hawke frowned, taking a gulp from his own glass, and hissing through his teeth after he swallowed.

“He told Cat that he heard she was helping to harbor a mage in the city, and asked if it was true,” Fenris continued.

The others looked at their mage friends, who glanced at each other.

“And what did she say?” Anders asked.

“Nothing,” he replied, taking offense that Anders could think otherwise. “And he took that as a sign of her guilt.”

“What happened?” Isabela repeated again, wishing they would all get to the point.

“There will be no more visits to the Gallows,” he said, not wanting to explain further.

“Did he hurt her?” Sebastian demanded.

“No,” Fenris answered. “She did that all herself.”

The crew looked at him in question, and turned to Hawke as he cleared his throat again. “Remember that gang of assassins we were going to take care of?” he asked. “Apparently Cat was so angry at everyone and everything that she picked a fight with them… at their base.”

“WHAT?!?” the question from everyone became as loud as a shout to his ears.

“Fenris ran in after her, but she wouldn’t stop, until the last one was down,” he continued, looking over to the elf. “He brought her here, and we got Anders and Olivia, as quickly as we could.”

Anders picked up from there. “She lost a lot of blood, and will need several days of rest,” he said soberly. “And she has a few new scars… but she’s alive.”

* * * * *

Cat grumbled to herself, unhappy to be told to stay in bed another day. *I'm fine!* she shouted internally. She understood why her friends were upset with her, she would have been furious had the situations been reversed, but it didn’t stop her from being sullen about it.

Only when Anders threatened to keep her in bed until the wedding, did she stop protesting out loud and kept it to herself.
When she finally had woken up in the middle of the night, she had honestly been surprised to wake up at all, and if she were being completely honest, it was almost a let down. She was glad to still be alive, truly, but she was so tired of the constant drama around her over the mages and templars.

*Cullen’s just the first,* she thought. *How many more will I lose over this… insanity?!

She knew it wasn’t fair, and didn’t make any sense… she was furious with everyone, but most especially Hawke. The boiling hatred she had felt that day was gone, so she simply retreated into herself, wishing she could go back to simpler times like getting a divorce. Even that didn’t hurt as much as this.

The door cracked open, and she quickly shut her eyes.

“Pretending to be asleep will only work for so long,” Leandra said as she walked into the room, setting down a tray and fussing with the curtains, bringing more light into the room. Finishing with that, she picked up the tray and set it on Cat’s lap, then sat in the chair next to the bed.

“I’m afraid I’m going to watch you eat that,” she told Cat gently. “You’re not eating enough to suit your healers.”

Cat sighed, finally opening her eyes to look at the tray containing bread and broth. Everything tasted like cardboard, but maybe she could choke down enough to satisfy Leandra. She picked up a piece of bread and nibbled at it.

“I realize you don’t want to talk about it all,” Leandra said, watching the frown deepen on Cat’s face. “But keeping it all inside is most likely what is keeping you from getting out of bed.”

Cat looked at her dryly, showing her disbelief for the idea.

“Now now,” Leandra said with a smile. “Don’t just dismiss it without at least giving it a try,” she said. Her voice was extremely gentle as she added, “they love you, you know. They can’t help but worry.”

Tears welled, and Cat just willed them to go away. Her body betrayed her, as it always did when it came to tears, and they fell down her cheeks. “I’m sorry,” she said quietly. “I can’t seem to stop.”

“The tears?” Leandra asked, knowing that wasn’t what she meant. “It’s nothing between friends, now is it?”

“Not friends anymore,” Cat said as her lower lip quivered.

“Oh, of course you are,” Leandra said, and Cat wondered who she thought they were speaking of.

“Mother?” Hawke asked as he walked in. Noting Cat was no longer pretending to sleep, he gave her a small smile, though the tears had him worried.

“You have… a visitor?” he said in question, wondering if he should send the woman away.

“Oh, it must be about the wedding,” Leandra said as she stood. “Sit here Garrett, Anders said Cat needs to finish everything on her plate today.”

Garrett noted the food looked untouched, and while he would love to give Cat the space she seemed to want, he wanted her well more. So he sat, and his mother left the room.

“So… uh…” Hawke started, uncertain of what to say. “What were you two talking about?” he
“Friends,” Cat said as she looked away, and started eating her bread again. *The faster I finish this, the faster he’ll leave.*

“Oh?” he asked, looking uncomfortable. “I’m sorry about that, by the way.” She had heard him say it before, but since he thought she was sleeping he didn’t know that.

“Thank you,” she said icily.*Perhaps if I make him uncomfortable enough, he’ll just go.* “I’m sure you are deeply upset that I am no longer friends with a templar,” she said.

Hawke wondered how he could feel cold from someone’s voice but decided there were stranger things in the world.

They were quiet for some time, the only sound from Cat’s chewing and swallowing. Hearing something else, he looked up to see she was crying again.

“Actually, I am upset,” Hawke said suddenly, and Cat looked at him like he was a bug.

“Oh?” she said. “And do tell, what has the mighty Garrett Hawke so upset?” she mocked.

“That you are no longer friends with Cullen,” Hawke answered, and Cat sneered.

”Sure,” she said sarcastically.

“It’s true,” he insisted. “He made you happy, and helped you see things from both sides, I always envied that.” Cat looked at him in confusion and he continued. “From what I’ve heard, he’s had a rough go, and you’ve helped him too. It seems wrong to simply let that go, just because of me.”

Cat sneered again, grateful, because she had felt herself softening. “Don’t flatter yourself,” she said. “He felt betrayed, and I don’t blame him. Anyone would do the same.”

“Not everyone,” Hawke contradicted her.

“Please,” she said with an eye roll, dipping her bread in the bowl of broth and taking a bite. “You get turned in to the templars, and you hear it was me. When you ask, I don’t deny it.” She looked at him angrily. “And we’re still friends? You don’t feel betrayed?”

Hawke went to shake his head, but seeing the defeat and fear in her eyes stopped him. He took a moment, thinking it through honestly. “I might feel betrayed…” he said, and she scoffed. “But we’d still be friends.”

“What.”

He stood, and looked out the window. “I know you, as well as I can I suppose,” he said. “You would never betray a friend. So… if that was how it looked, I would just be missing information. So I’d ask you, who was forcing your hand?” He turned back around, seeing the shock in Cat’s wide eyes.

“You would not.”

Hawke shrugged, glad that he saw something besides despair in her face. “Say what you want, but that’s what I would do,” he replied as he sat again.

She continued to stare at him, and he went with impulse and grabbed her hand, giving it a squeeze. “I’ll always be your friend,” he told her. “No matter what.”
He didn’t quite know what to say after that, as she bit her lip and stared down at her plate. “Promises like that, are made to be broken,” she said, closing her eyes for a moment, before looking back over at him. “But thank you, all the same.”

She glanced down, seeing that she didn’t finish the broth, but she was suddenly very tired. “I think I want to sleep some more,” she said, and he smirked at her.

“Oh? With all the sleep you’ve been getting?”

She flushed, knowing now that Leandra wasn’t the only one to see right through her. “That’s fine,” Hawke said with a smile as he stood and picked up the tray. “Hafter will be delighted to help you finish, and Anders will never know.”

He looked back as he got to the door, seeing her settling back on the pillows, the corners of her mouth upturned. He thought about what he knew of her as he walked down to the kitchen, uncertain of why he had never picked up on her fear of others leaving her. He whistled quietly for Hafter, determined to keep his hastily made promise no matter the cost.
“Can you believe this is happening?” Isabela asked Cat. Cat opened her eyes, seeing Isabela’s face directly in front of hers.

“No, not all bad,” Cat answered, not really wanting to talk about it. In fact, the memories had been bittersweet, remembering how she had prepared for her own wedding and how happy she had been, and then what it had led to. She felt slightly jealous of Aveline at the time, that she could be so
carefree and happy now, and Cat had struggled to keep such thoughts to herself, and just be happy for her friend.

“Well, you may not want to get lucky tonight,” Isabela said as she finished, coming back around to Cat’s front to see her work. “But it won’t be for lack of opportunity. You look gorgeous.”

Cat looked up at her friend’s smiling face. “I don’t want to outshine the bride,” she teased. “Maybe I’d better just put my hair in a braid.”

“Not a chance Kitty,” Isabela countered. “Aveline will shine because of how happy she is, no one can outdo that. You, on the other hand… should probably stay close with the crew tonight.”

Cat’s face scrunched up. “What’s that mean?” she asked.

“You may not be sad, but it’s like a cloud around you. It makes you look vulnerable, and exactly something that someone trying to take advantage would look for.”

Cat chuckled at the thought. “Don’t worry about me, I’ve got that thigh holster and blade you got me last year, and I was planning on wearing it.”

“Alright then,” Isabela agreed, but was torn between warning the others to keep an eye on Cat, or let her have a good time tonight. “Let’s see this dress of yours.”

“I probably should have tried it on before now,” Cat laughed as she went to the closet. “But if it didn’t fit, I didn’t want to give Leandra a chance to find another one.”

“Sounds like you’re hoping it won’t.”

“It’d be nice to have an excuse to wear my pants,” Cat replied. “I mean, look at you! You’re wearing pants, and you still look amazing!”

“I think they’re just happy I’m not showing off the goods,” Isabela laughed at Cat’s look. “Okay, yes, I am showing them off, but I’ve got clothes on, that’s the important thing.”

Cat looked over again at the skin tight dark leather pants Isabela was wearing, paired with a flowing purple blouse that was constantly falling off her shoulder, and showing a large amount of cleavage. Her hair didn’t change, but she had placed a jeweled band in her hair to replace her normal bandanna, and a smaller necklace in place of her large golden one.

“You look fantastic Issy,” she commented, putting the dress on her bed, and starting to change. “You’ll have your pick of anyone at the party.”

“Thanks Kitty,” Isabela replied, looking in surprise as Cat finished putting the dress on. It was simple as far as noble ladies’ dresses were concerned, but it was nicer than she had expected. The deep green color complimented Cat’s dense brown hair, and reminded Isabela of the forest with it’s many hues.

“It fits,” Cat said, somewhat dejected. “There goes my hope for pants.”

“It suits you,” Isabela said, helping to fasten the back of the dress. The cinched in waistline accented her friend in all the right places, and the thin material had several layers, creating a flowing look. Even the higher neckline just added to the sex appeal instead of detracting as she would have thought.

“She’s taller than me,” Cat mumbled, looking down as the dress dragged along the floor. “I’ll have to
wear boots."

“She’s also smaller than you,” Isabela said with a smirk. “In certain areas at least, but no one will complain.”

“Shut it,” came the reply from the closet, as Cat searched for her boots.

* * * * *

“It’s still chilly,” Cat complained as they walked to the chantry.


“I didn’t take you as one who cared so much for fashion,” he teased, and Isabela laughed.

“Kitty may pretend not to care, but this isn’t the first time she has suffered for beauty,” she said.

“Oh?” Fenris asked.

“You have it so easy, I don’t think you get to have a say here,” Cat interjected, pointing at Fenris. “You don’t have to worry about hair, or makeup, or dresses, or even shoes!” she said as she pointed to his simply wrapped feet and bare toes. “Black pants, and a black tunic, and you look utterly beautiful! It’s not fair.”

Isabela looked at Fenris as he blushed, and tried to speak, but failed. She snickered and teased, “Ah, you got him all flustered Kitty!”

Cat looked over at him, and decided to give him a break. “Maybe we shouldn’t be going,” she said with a smile. “With the three of us together, we’ll leave too many broken hearts in our wake.”

“Such is the curse that we must live with,” Fenris deadpanned, and Cat grinned. “Come, my friends, we are almost there.”

He offered his arms to the women, who latched on at either side, and together they made their way to the chantry, laughing and teasing the entire way.

* * * * *

The chantry gardens looked spectacular, with the first buds of spring on the trees and bushes. The sun was starting its decline in the sky, and the initiates had braziers lit throughout the area to help ward off the chill in the air.

Cat took everything in at once, awed by how lovely the garden looked. There were many pathways throughout the flora, and though she had been down them before, she found herself wanting to take another walk through.
The three of them made their way to the large terrace where the guests were currently waiting. Cat could see Aveline and Donnic at the side, greeting and speaking to many people at once. Cat had to admit, that Isabela had been right. Aveline simply glowed, and no one could compare that day.

“Fenris, Isabela,” Sebastian greeted them in turn as he made his way over to them. “You clean up rather nicely,” he said with a smile. Cat realized she had wandered off, and went back to her friends. “Cat? Is that you?” Sebastian asked in awe.

“Uh, yes?” Cat replied.

Sebastian smirked at her. “Seems I now have the proof I needed, Lady Lewis,” he said, and Cat scowled at him.

“Not even close,” she said in mock seriousness, and he laughed.

“You are so much fun to tease, you know that?” he grinned as he chuckled, and Cat smiled as she rolled her eyes. “You look beautiful,” he said.

“Who looks beautiful?”

The group turned, to see Anders and Olivia arriving in the garden, and Cat was amazed at how they looked. Neither one of them were wearing robes, nor carrying a staff, and if you didn’t know, you would never guess them to be mages.

Anders was wearing dark brown pants, with a cream colored tunic. Olivia was in a light blue blouse with tan pants, and both of them had kept their hair down. Cat was once again disappointed that there was nothing romantic between them, because they looked so good together.

“You do!” Cat answered with a grin, moving over to give each of them a hug. “You look amazing! I love this shirt,” she said to Olivia. “And you!” she turned to Anders, “you’re going to have women swooning all over you tonight.”

“Oh really?” he asked with a mischievous grin, reminding her of what he must have been like before he merged with Justice. “Well, I’ll be sure to catch every one of them, don’t you worry.” He cocked his head as he got a good look at her. “You look amazing yourself,” he said, and she waved away the compliment. “But it looks like we won’t have to worry about keeping the men off of you.”

“Anders!” Olivia said as she swatted him. “What an awful thing to say!”

“That’s not what I meant!” he said quickly. “It’s because of Hawke!”

“Oh,” Olivia said, then looking over at Cat, smiled widely. “Oh… I see.”

“What are you talking about?” Isabela asked before Cat could.

Anders looked over, seeing the confused expressions, and smiled. “I don’t want to ruin the surprise,” he said. “You’ll see.”

Cat looked behind her, and Isabela shrugged. Anders and Olivia stepped forward, joining their circle as they visited with each other.

After some time, Varric and then Merrill joined them. Cat was telling the group about writing to Alistair, hoping to get Carver there for the wedding.

“I’m not surprised,” Anders said solemnly. “The Grey Wardens have very little time for fun. It’s
always treasured when they do.”

“I just wish it would have happened,” Cat said with a smile. “Can you imagine how Leandra and Hawke would have reacted?”

“How I would have reacted to what?” Hawke asked as he stepped over to join them. He started giving hugs to each of them, greeting them as if it was his wedding.

“Thank you for coming! Don’t you clean up nice! Maybe we should have a dress code in the future, what do you say, Varric?” Hawke said happily as he went from friend to friend.

“Didn’t feel like dressing up Merrill?” he asked her.

“Oh, I wore this fancy ribbon in my hair,” she replied.

“Oh, then it’s perfect!” he replied, and she lit up.

“Anders, Olivia, long time no see,” he teased, and they smiled.

“Fenris, I think you should probably keep that tunic,” he said with a smile. “I’ll never do it justice after this.” He gave Fenris a hearty slap on the shoulder as the elf flushed with pleasure.

“Isabela, sultry and stunning as always,” he said nicking her chin.

“Why thank you Hawke,” she smiled and gave him a wink.

“And Cat…” Hawke said as he came to face her, “Wow, you look…” he was looking her up and down, with an odd look on his face. “Uh, where did you get that dress?”

“Your Mother?” she said, looking down at her dress, wondering if she had something on it, then looking back at him. “Huh. We’re matching,” she commented.

Turning suddenly back to the others he said, “Everything will be starting soon, you should all make your way to your places. I’d better go find Mother.”

Hawke strode off, and the group was silent for a moment before Varric chuckled. Olivia looked down at him and said, “Does he know what an ass he just was?”

“Doubtful,” Varric said with a sigh, and walked over to Cat. “My lady, may I accompany one of the most beautiful women in the city to her place tonight?”

“Would you care to explain what I missed?” Cat asked.

“You know,” Varric replied. “Hawke is really good at laying on the charm,” he said as he put his hand on the small of her back to move her along with him.

“Is he now?” Cat asked dryly, and the others chuckled behind her as they followed the pair.


“I think we can all agree on that,” Cat replied.

“I guess what I’m saying is, don’t take it personally? I’ve always thought you were cute,” Varric said. “But tonight? You’re breathtaking.” They moved into place, creating a part that would encircle the area where the couple would marry.
“What was that about Hawke being able to lay on the charm?” Cat asked wryly.

“I merely verbalize what my eyes perceive,” Varric said with a shrug.

“Spoken as a true writer,” Cat said with a grin. “Thank you Varric.”

* * * * *

Hawke tried to keep from storming over to his mother and dragging her away from whomever she was currently speaking to. *What in the world was she thinking, giving Cat that dress to wear?* he said to himself.

Coming up to his mother, he waited for a break in the conversation to politely interrupt. “Mother? I think we need to move into place now,” he said. “I’m sorry to interrupt,” he added.

“Not a problem,” Leandra answered. “Garrett, this is Lady Henley, her husband is one of the men organizing the jobs we are trying to get for the refugees,” she explained. “Sarah, my eldest, Garrett.”

“A pleasure, my lady,” Garrett said, actually meaning it. Leandra had explained how few there were that were trying to help the poverty stricken refugees in the city, and he wholeheartedly agreed that those with means should help.

“The pleasure is mine, I’m sure,” the lady demurred. “Leandra, you never said how handsome he was! Surely you won’t have trouble finding him a suitable wife.”

“No, I don’t think I will,” Leandra said with a smirk to her son. “But please excuse us, we must be getting into place.”

They gave small nods, as Garrett led his mother away. “Enjoying yourself, Mother?” he asked softly.

“Oh indeed,” she answered. “It helps that my son seems to be taking the noble world by storm, even though he never attends any functions.”

Garrett rolled his eyes. “I’ll leave that to you,” he said.

“Of course,” Leandra replied, though he could hear the sarcastic edge to her words. “Apparently it only adds to the mystery and your appeal. But even I must admit, you look handsome,” she added as they came to a stop. She turned, and brushed something off his tunic. “This was a good choice,” she complimented.

“Speaking of,” he said. “I found the choice for Cat’s dress interesting.”

“Did you?” she asked, turning back and watching the people as they all moved around them to their places.

“I may act ignorant, but I know the significance of coming to a function in matching colors,” he said through gritted teeth.

“Don’t be silly,” Leandra chided. “Just because some couples choose to do so, doesn’t mean that anyone matching is a couple.”

“But that’s not what others will think,” Hawke argued. “I don’t need this tonight.”
Leandra glanced up at her son, noting he looked upset rather than disgruntled. “What does it matter what they think?” she asked.

“Cat won’t like it,” he muttered. “And I’ve just barely gotten her trust… and… I don’t want to lose it.”

“Oh,” she answered with a small smile. “Well that’s easy enough to fix, I’ll simply explain it to her.”

Hawke gave his mother a skeptical look. “You’re going to tell her what, exactly?”

“Simple dear,” she replied. “I’ll just tell her that it was all a coincidence… since you picked the dress by grabbing one at random.”

* * * * *

“I swear, unto the Maker and his bride Andraste, that I will love this man, and be by his side, until the end of my days.”

Cat stifled the urge to cheer as Aveline finished and the revered mother spoke once again of the commitment that Aveline and Donnic were undertaking. The ceremony was short, and sweet, though Cat was certain the mother was using this as a chance to preach a little.

Cat couldn’t help but compare the ritual to the others she had witnessed back home, and found that she quite enjoyed the simple declarations of love, and the reminders of the promises that were being made by each party.

* * * *

If that had been the same for me… would I even be here now? she thought.

* * * * *

When it came to parties, however, there wasn’t much of a difference, even when you found yourself in an entirely different world. Cat made her way around the gardens, stopping every so often to greet and speak to those she knew. She kept a drink in her hand, though she hardly had a chance to drink from it.

It had taken quite awhile for her and Isabela to make it to Aveline and Donnic, and give their congratulations and best wishes for the couple. Now, on their way back to their group, Cat had been stopped frequently enough by guards that she knew, Isabela had finally went ahead without her.

Cat was glad that every guard she had spoken to were thrilled at the change that had come into their captain because of her relationship, and spoke of how understanding and patient she was with her guards, though they emphasized she was still tough as a dragon hide when it came to training or rules.

She turned as she heard the sounds of instruments, seeing a few musicians seated together and getting ready to play, so she excused herself, and walked quickly for her friends. The last thing she wanted was to get caught in the middle of a dance that she didn’t know.
That was when she ran right into Cullen.

“Oh, pardon me…” she said, rubbing the sore spot on he shoulder. Looking at the person she ran into, she stopped, and asked, “Cullen? Uh… sorry, Knight Captain, I mean.”

“My lady,” Cullen replied, his face stoic.

“I’m really glad you could make it,” she said with a faltering smile, as he looked at her and then away.

“Meredith wanted to congratulate the Guard Captain, but was unable to attend, and asked me to extend her best wishes. Then I will be on my way.”

“I can take you to her then,” Cat offered to which he nodded, waiting for her to move so he could follow. “Cullen,” Cat said in a plea, and he looked at her again. “Can’t we talk about this?” she asked.

“I am a templar. You are harboring a mage in the city. That’s all there is to say.”

“That is what you accused me of,” Cat replied, unwilling to agree, as she didn’t see it as a crime, and technically, she was just friends with a few.

“You are not then?” he asked, his frown disappearing. “Truly?”

“Why is that so hard to believe?” Cat asked him as she pulled him along.

Their conversation was interrupted as they bumped into Aveline and Donnic that were heading toward the music. Cullen offered the best wishes of the templars to which they said thank you, and they were alone again.

“I guess they are going to dance…” Cat said awkwardly.

“We should probably go as well,” he replied.

Cullen steered her back through the foliage to where the music was playing lively, and the people were watching as others danced. There was laughing and merriment as Donnic and Aveline tried to show off dancing skills that neither possessed, though they seemed to be enjoying themselves.

“Do you want to dance?” Cullen asked her, and she chuckled.

“I’ll be as good as Aveline over there, so I hope you are better than Donnic,” she said, and Cullen watched the couple for a moment before joining in with her laughter.

“I’d hate to show up the groom, but I’m only marginally better at a guess,” he replied.

Cat looked up with a smile. “I will be just fine without dancing, I promise,” she said.

“Very well,” he said with his small smirk. “I should be returning to the Gallows in any case. There is still much to be done this evening. Can I escort you somewhere?” he asked.

“No, no, you go ahead,” she answered. “I’m just going to watch for a little while.”

“I hope we can forget everything that happened last time, and perhaps… you’ll visit again?”

“Cat! There you are!” they both turned as Anders came up to them. “I’ve been looking all over for you!” he said as he grabbed her hand. “Let’s go.”
“Don’t be rude,” she chided, pulling back to stay where she was. “The knight captain was just saying goodnight.”

“Yes, I was,” Cullen said, pulling Cat’s other hand up again to his mouth, looking up in her eyes as he kissed her hand, lingering over it slightly, giving her a small smirk as he heard her quick intake of breath. “Goodnight, my lady,” he said, before turning and walking away.

“What the hell was that?!” Anders demanded, his face contorted in disgust.

“Keep your voice down!” she hissed back at him, noting the people that were turning to look at them. “That was nothing.”

“Hmph,” he grunted at her, pulling her with him as he stormed away, and she hurried to keep up.

He led her directly to their group of friends, who cheered her name as they joined them.

“You found her!” Merrill said happily as she gave Cat a hug. “It just wasn’t the same without you here,” she said in Cat’s ear.

“Thank you Merrill,” Cat replied with a smile. She walked over to where Varric and Hawke were seated on small benches, that had been moved into a semi circle. Olivia and Fenris were seated next to them, with Isabela and a beautiful woman that were talking quietly seated on their other side.

Anders directed her to an empty bench next to Olivia, and Cat was only a little surprised to see Merrill sit on the grass behind them.

“Where did you run off to?” Olivia asked.

Anders sat next to her with another grunt. “I found her swooning over the Knight Captain,” he said, looking as if he were nauseated.

She struck out quickly, backhanding him on the chest. “I was NOT swooning.”

“We better hear the evidence, before we decide,” Olivia replied with a grin, taking another drink of her mug.

“The Knight Captain,” Cat started quickly before Anders could, “came to give Aveline congratulations on behalf of the templars. We spoke for a bit, and watched Aveline and Donnic dance, and as he was leaving, Anders came running up and grabbed my hand. Like any other man not wanting to be outdone, Cullen grabbed my other hand and kissed it, which made Anders upset, for reasons unknown.”

“What?” Anders asked in disbelief. “That is sooo wrong!”

“All right Blondie, let’s hear your side,” Varric said with a grin.

“First off, one thing Cat failed to notice, was the infatuated look on the templar’s face! Then, when I come up, and say something about joining our friends, he gets an evil smirk, grabs her hand, and then does this!”

Anders proceeded over to the woman currently enraptured with Isabela, and grabbed her hand, gaining her attention. He then brought it to his mouth, saying “my lady,” huskily, so that his breath coursed over her skin, causing her to shiver slightly. He then gave her hand a gentle kiss, his eyes never leaving hers.
Cat could see the woman was affected, her eyes became wider, and her free hand went from Isabela to her own chest, as if to contain her heart from leaping out. Her eyes followed Anders as he came back to his bench to sit.

“I think you’re ready to make this a private party,” Isabela said as she stood up, holding her hand out to the woman, who nodded and took it. She gave her friends a wink, and led the pretty woman away.

“Hmm, if that’s what the knight captain did, I may have to go with Anders on this one,” Varric said with a smirk.

“That isn’t what happened!” Cat sneered at Anders. “It’s a totally different thing when it’s your friend!”

“Oh really?” he sneered back at her.

“Yeah!” she said poking her finger to his chest. “Besides, Issy had her all hot and bothered before you did that!”

His mouth dropped open. “Are you saying I can’t affect women without help?!” he asked in shock.

Cat looked him over, much to the amusement of the others. “No, curse you, you’re crazy handsome, and any woman would be lucky to get your attention.” He looked mollified at her words. “But I still mean what I say. As a friend, you wouldn’t affect me the same way.”

“I suppose,” he relented.

“What if you weren’t expecting it?” Olivia asked, laughing.

“What are you thinking, Button?” Varric asked with a grin.

“Well, from what we know, Cat and the knight captain weren’t on good terms, so obviously, it was an unexpected move from a…friend. And of course, seeing Anders there probably had the man trying to make an impression…”

Cat turned to glare at Olivia. “Whose side are you on?” she asked grumpily.

“I’m just saying, you really like those romantic gestures, even if you don’t feel that way about the man.”

“No way,” Cat argued.

“It seems we’d better experiment,” Varric said, giving Hawke a nudge, so he shrugged, then stood up and walked over. “How’d he say it?” he asked Anders.

“Goodnight, my lady,” Anders replied, as he grabbed his own drink again.

“Oh, okay.” Hawke cleared his throat and put out his hand to Cat, who stared back with one eyebrow up.

“Really?” she asked dryly.

“Just give me your hand,” he said, and she did so. He looked over the spot where they were, and shaking his head, reached down, grabbing around her waist, and pulled her to her feet. “There, that’s better.”
She pushed him away, and he backed off slightly, but held onto her hand. His thumb was slowly rubbing small circles into back of hers, and she looked down with a scowl.

“Cat,” he said softly, and she looked up to meet his eyes. He gave her a wicked smirk, stepping closer as he brought her hand up to his face. “Good night,” he said, pressing his lips to her knuckles.

She could feel the softness of his lips, along with the scratchiness from his beard, as he kissed her hand and then released. “My…” he whispered, and she instinctively leaned in to hear him better, their eyes never straying. “…lady.”

“Wow,” Olivia breathed out, causing Anders to roll his eyes at her.

“I win!” he shouted as he jumped up. “You were completely swooning!”

Cat pulled back her hand, feeling the heat rushing to her face. She turned and moved quickly, desperate to get away to where she could cool down. Everything was hot, too hot and she couldn’t think straight.

“What did I say?” Anders asked Olivia, as he stared after her. Olivia however was watching Hawke, who had a dopey grin on his face. She looked over at Varric, who winked back at her, and she sported her own dopey grin.

* * * * *

Cat made her way onto one of the garden paths, feeling mortified. Olivia had been right, she fell each and every time for a romantic gesture, and now she had embarrassed herself in front of her friends.

She took a few deep breaths, trying to forget the way it had felt, the rapid pace of her heart, the heat that crawled all over her… all of it! She needed to forget before she found herself making the same mistakes that she had before.

“Cat?” she heard, and turned in surprise to see Hawke in front of her. “Hey, sorry about that,” he said sheepishly. “I didn’t mean to embarrass you.”

“Oh, it isn’t your fault,” she replied, ashamed at the direction her thoughts had suddenly turned. “Apparently I just swoon at every little hand kiss… good to know for the future.”

“Oh yeah?” He asked with a grin, enjoying that she was able to make fun of herself. “Well we’d better not spread that around, or you’ll get every man in Kirkwall trying to kiss your hand.” He continued toward her, stopping at her side, and looking out at the garden, trying to see what she was looking at.

She glanced over at him, before focusing again on the tree in the distance, wondering if she could hit it if she had her crossbow. “That would be a sight, surely.”

“Sorry about Anders too,” he said, wondering what was so interesting about plants.

“It isn’t a problem,” she replied. “I just wish I knew why he has a problem with Cullen.”

“I would think that was fairly obvious,” Hawke drawled, turning to look at her.

Cat turned to face him, rolling her eyes. “Besides that,” she said.
“Isn’t that enough?” Hawke countered.

“No,” Cat retorted.

“Hmm…” Hawke thought for a minute before leaning closer, his voice a whisper. “Maybe he doesn’t like sharing with the templars.”

Cat smirked, leaning forward as well. “Maybe he should realize, I’m not his to share or not.”

Hawke stepped forward again, and Cat had to tilt her head up to look him in the eye, which put her off balance slightly. Bracing a hand on his chest, she gave him a defiant look.

Hawke grinned, he really enjoyed that stubborn tilt in her jaw. His hand at their sides, started playing with the ends of her hair, happy that it was loose. “It can be tough,” he murmured, looking down, his eyes roaming her face. “being what we are. You seem to grasp things that matter more tightly, because you know how easily you can lose it all.”

Cat looked down, feeling sorry for her friends, and what they had been through, but her eyes went back to his face. “That can’t be easy,” she said softly.

“It isn’t,” he muttered, then the corners of his mouth upturned. “But some things are worth it.”

Cat swallowed hard, wondering suddenly what she should do. She was practically in his arms, they were face to face… only a slight movement would bring them together… Yet she waited. And waited. Until Hawke stepped back.

“.. should get back,” he said hesitantly.

“Oh... uh, okay,” Cat replied, bringing her arms in front of her, her hands clasping. “Me too, I mean, yeah.” She wanted to just curl up and die, but the earth wasn’t opening to swallow her, so she just stood there.

“I’ll see you later then?” he asked, and she nodded. Then he turned and left. Cat closed her eyes and counted to ten before she started hitting her forehead with her palm. She hadn’t felt this dumb since middle school when she admitted to Jeremy Morgan that she had a crush on him.

* * * *

Cat avoided not only Hawke, but all of her friends for a couple of hours after that. She was embarrassed, sure, but mainly she just kept remembering the moment, and she was trying to do anything she could to forget it.

She spent time with the guards that she knew, and made a point to find Leandra and thank her for the dress. She chuckled as Leandra explained Hawke’s concern over their attire, and assured her that she wasn’t upset at all, in fact she had gotten nothing but compliments over the dress.

Though it made sense now why no one was asking her to dance, or had refused her own invitations.

As she walked around the garden again, losing herself in her own thoughts, she stopped as she heard Hawke’s name coming from the people ahead of her. Curious to get some gossip to share with Varric, she made her way closer, straying from the path in order to hide in the foliage.

“You should have your mother speak to Lady Hawke quickly then, it seems he is trying to take
“You mean that voluptuous woman that was wearing the same color?”

“The same. Only the foolish who decide to marry for love would do something so insipid.”

Cat stopped, realizing that the comments weren’t so much about Hawke after all.

“I’m certain my father could exceed any dowry that has been offered.”

“Perhaps we have it wrong, and she is merely infatuated with him.”

“Ha! You’re right! She obviously has certain things to offer, and I doubt they are family connections.”

“No doubt he has grown tired of her charms, but she won’t let him go!”

Cat listened for another moment, before rolling her eyes and leaving. *Idiots are everywhere then I suppose,* she thought. She grinned as she headed back to find Olivia, who would no doubt enjoy what she had heard.

* * * * *

“Those… those harpies!” Olivia screeched, and Cat just laughed along. She had no idea how much they had had to drink, but with each retelling of the story, she found it more funny, and Olivia, new insults. “How dare they say such things about you!”

“Who cares?” Cat replied with a giggle. “We should get them together so she can be totally unhappy with a noble husband that doesn’t want to be noble!” she snickered.

“O husband, why are you always coming home so late?” Olivia said in a high falsetto, mimicking the catty women.

“But husband, I don’t want to help the Ferelden refugees!” Cat answered in kind.

“Hawke… why are you spending more time with the dwarf than me?”

“Hawke… your dog keeps hogging my side of the bed!”

At that last one, both of them erupted in giggles, and Cat knew she shouldn’t drink any more.

“Any way… where is er’body?” she asked.

“Uh…” Olivia thought for a minute. “Anders had several women complimenting him left and right, so I made him take them somewhere else before I lost what was in my stomach.”

“Naturally,” Cat replied.

“Fenris and Seb… Seba… Choir boy, are over there talking,” Olivia said with a wave. “It seems serious and choir boy is happy, so I’m guessing it is about the chantry.”

“Most likely,” Cat agreed, looking over at them.

“Varric left to ask some guards some questions, now that Aveline left. Said he needs realism in his story.”
“Probably Hard in Hightown,” Cat muttered.

“Some peacock came over and ordered Merrill to do something, and she actually got up to do it, but then I saw her wandering the gardens, so I assume she’s all right.”

“Hawke got asked to dance… I think his mother had something to do with it,” she said, and Cat thought she meant to whisper that last part, but hadn’t.

“And Issy’s probably with another person by this point,” Cat murmured. “And then, there’s us,” she said, smiling at Olivia.

“Yes, us. The sad and lonely, with only their cups as comfort.”

“What? No. The amazing and beautiful, who choose to enjoy the night with a friend,” she corrected. Olivia pouted, looking at Cat. “At least… at least you could be with someone if you wanted to,” she said. “I want to… but can’t.”

“Okay, what is the deal with this guy?” Cat demanded. “Is he ashamed of you?!”

“No, no…” Olivia said, shaking her head. “He’s not, not at all. But can you imagine, the two of us together… here?” It wouldn’t work… only cause problems…”

“Well then, why aren’t you with him, wherever he is?” Cat asked. “If you love him, you should be with him… right?”

“You… you think so?” Olivia asked, with hope filled eyes.

“Absolutely!” Cat thundered.

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