When Solas awakes to a world much changed from the one he knew, he struggles to regain composure of himself. In his grief he decides upon what must be done. When his plans are set into motion, however, he is met unexpectedly by a human woman. A woman who claims to know him. He sees his plans unravel before him as she appears to have the gift of foresight.

The first part of this story is told only from Solas' POV, but will change later on.

Eventual romance, smut and all that fun stuff.

Disclaimer: Everything is owned by BioWare. I just play there.
The Dalish tell a story. The Dread Wolf tricking all the gods away from the world. Long ago, there were two clans of gods. The Creators looked after the People. The Forgotten Ones preyed upon us. And one god who was neither. Fen’Harel, the Dread Wolf. He was kin to the Creators, and in the old days, often helped them in their endless war against the Forgotten Ones. We barely even remember all their names, let alone who struck the first blow, who was wrong...

Fen’Harel was clever. He could walk among both clans of gods without fear, and both believed he was one of them. He went to each side, and told them the other had forged a terrible weapon, a blade that would end the war. He told the Creators it was forged in the heavens, and the Forgotten Ones, that it was hidden in the abyss. And when the gods went seeking it, he sealed them both in their realms forever. Now he alone is left in the world.

Merrill, Dragon age 2

The fade. My sanctuary. My retreat. My true home. You would think that after eons I would not want to retreat back here, but I do. I have to. My body is still weak and I cannot stay awake for long. Therefor I rely heavily on my agents spread across Thedas. Through the fade I guide them until I can once again become fully conscious. What I have already seen of the world disturbs me to my core. This world of tranquil separate from the fade. To see how far the elvhen people have fallen. They have turned into something I no longer recognize - and their tales of me mocks and diminishes everything I tried to accomplish. But are they not right to mock me? I attempted to make the world better. What I did made it a thousand folds worse.

I’m drawn from my dismal thoughts as one of my agents contacts me in the fade. He approaches me and I keep my figure hidden.

“Fel’assan, I did not expect you so soon.”

“Neither did I,” he confesses his violet eyes seeming uncharacteristically troubled. And that is when I see her approach. A human woman dressed in black and white.

“What is the meaning of this?” my eyes turn to Fel’assan, who to his credit stands his ground.

“Andaran atishan setheran. Ar’melana dithavaren. Revas vir-anaris,” the elvhen words flow effortlessly from the human’s lips, and I confess I’m equal parts shocked and intrigued.

“Forgive Fel’assan. I’m only here because I gave him little choice. If you wish to vent your wrath, then do so at me. But I assure you, I come as a friend and I mean you no harm,” there is only sincerity in her hazel eyes and from her accent she sounds Ferelden. She knows who I am. She has to if she knows not only how to find me, but knows that particular greeting. Yet she shows no fear - despite her offering to suffer my wrath on behalf of another.

“So the greeting would suggest,” I reply calmly and a small smile forms on her lips as her eyes evade mine into the ground.

“You have gone to great trouble to seek me out. And I am quite interested to learn how. Do you
wish to enlighten me?”

She nods and then turns to Felassan.

“Ma serannas, I appreciate all that you have done. Would you mind giving us some privacy?”

Felassan looks at me and I close my eyes as an agreement that he might leave. He bows to her and then leaves. The woman steps forward and looks directly at me. Perfectly calm and collected.

“My name is Mona Aim, I’m a scholar from Val Royeaux.”

I chuckle despite myself.

“You mean to tell me you came all the way to find me for research?”

She leans her head back with a small laugh, and I see a slight tremble, but she does not smell of fear.

“No, of course not. I…” she pauses and scratches her auburn hair, “Would you mind stepping forward. It’s a little awkward talking to a pair of large floating eyes.”

“As you wish,” oh, she has no idea, what she is inviting. I step forward in my wolf form. My eyes staring down upon her. I expect her to jump or avoid looking at me. Most do, largely in part to the reputation the eons seem to have created for me. Only she doesn’t. She gives me a smile - a tender one that makes something inside me ache. To her I am not a monster or a god. I’m not sure what she sees.

“As lovely as your fur coat is, I prefer your true form.”

I raise an eyebrow at her as she continues.

“You know, the slender one, with pale skin and grey eyes.”

I give her a suspicious look. How does she know this?

“Not convinced I see,” her smile turns a little devious, “do you still shave your head? Oh, and that scar above your right eye, how did you get it? I never did get the chance to ask.”

I transform into my true self and I look down at her. She is a little short for a human, but as curved as you would expect one of her kind to be - perhaps a little more in some areas. She looks at me briefly, then looks to the ground. Her cheeks redden as she pushes some of her hair behind her ear. I had not expected someone so bold to be so shy.

“How do you…” I try, but she interrupts.

“We were friends once. In another life, but as much as I would like to discuss it with you, I don’t have time,” and just like that her tender smiles are gone. There is a heaviness to her words that can only be described as dread.

“That so?” I don’t trust her. How could I? She knows far too much, and is far too at ease around me.

“Have your agents allowed Venatori to locate your orb yet?”

Something inside my flares. She is a spy. She must be. My eyes glow in an attempt to frighten her. I can’t kill her. Not yet. Not until I know how she knows all she does. She seems to know this as well, because she does not flinch. Rather than demand, she touches my cheek gently as she speaks.
“Solas, please…”

I freeze as she says my name. It has been so long since I have heard my true name. Especially spoken with such softness. There is no deception in her eyes, and though I have met many gifted spies in my long lifetime, I confess she must be one of the best.

“Tel’harel, Solas. Lasa ghilan,” I hear wisdom whisper from across the fade. Despite myself I trust in her words and gives the woman the answer she seeks.

“Yes,” as soon as the word leaves me she keels over clutching her stomach as if she has fallen ill. She chants “no” repeatedly. Does she know what I intend to do with the orb once Corypheus is dead? For a moment I feel something I did not expect. It’s not pity exactly rather… no I dare not give name to this feeling. It would lead only to complications. Complications I can’t afford.

She looks up at me with her eyes brimming with tears holding a hand to her mouth. She gives cry that shakes the very fade and I give a small jump at this sudden reaction. She starts pacing, and I admit I’m uncertain how to react. In a matter of minutes this woman, whose name I don’t even recall, has shaken my world - and I’m not certain in what capacity.

“Fenhidis lasa!” she cries and I nearly smile at here uttering them. “Fuck!” also gets repeated profusely.

I walk over to her and take her gently by her shoulders.

“You’re hyperventilating. Breathe,” I try to calm her and she looks up at me and shakes her head.

“Solas, you don’t understand,” she proclaims with a mournful sigh.

“You’re right,” I admit, “I don’t, but perhaps if you gave word to your thoughts I might.”

“I’m too late. I’m always too late,” she laments as she starts pacing again.

“Lethallin,” I press, hoping that the friendship she mentioned can be used to make her feel more at ease. I need to know what she knows.

“Corypheus is using blight magic and has connected the very essence of his being to a tainted dragon. Solas, for all intent and purposes he is--”

“Immortal,” I finish and my blood grows cold. She could be lying, but I know she isn’t - not about this at least. Pieces start to fall into place. Why she is here. Why she is acting so distraught. The only answer I have yet not gotten is how she knows all this. But in the light of an immortal madman being in possession of my orb it hardly seems significant.

“I have to stop this,” I declare and turn away as she grabs my wrist. My eyes meet her hazel eyes now reddened by unshed tears.

“Solas, you must keep an eye on Corypheus. He is mad, but he is not a fool and he will not use the orb until the right moment arises. Don’t let him or the orb out of your sight. I will do what I can,” she lets go of my wrist and turns, but this time I catch her.

“What could you possibly do?”

“This is my fault. I found you too late, but I have made plans in case this should happen,” she reaches for my cheek as if she means to comfort me, “We will fix this, Solas. I promise you. But do me a favour. Do not punish Felassan for his failures. Spare him and I shall give you what he fails to
She pulls herself from my grasp and I can feel her slipping from the fade.

“Where will I find you?” I ask, though I am not entirely certain as to why.

“Presuming I don’t die, when things seem the most hopeless.”

With that she vanishes and I am left with the knowledge that I might have doomed everything I attempted to save.

A year later

I watch in horror at the explosion at the conclave shatters the sky. I was warned this would happen, but I was too late. The world is in terrible danger and I am solely responsible for it. I have seen nothing of the woman who tried to warn me of this occurrence more than a year ago - and now it hardly matters. From Haven I stare into the sky, as the rest of the small village is in mourning and uproar. A part of me wishes to flee, but I can’t release myself of this responsibility. As I ponder my options, a dwarf walks up next to me. I have had the pleasure of sharing a drink with him for three nights in a row before this nightmare occurred.

“Master Tethras,” I greet him.

“Chuckles,” he nods and then sighs, “And once again the world has gone to shit. Do you think the world will ever stay fixed?”

“Doubtful, though I would settle for us being able to simply fix the current events.”

Varric nods in agreement.

“Perhaps, the prisoner can help. They survived the explosion from what I am told.”

“There is a survivor? Are you certain?” the slightest spark of hope forces my heart to beat faster.

“Apparently walked right out of the fade. I got it directly from the woman in charge.”

“I must see the survivor immediately,” I insist.

“Alright, alright. I warn you though, Cassandra is not the most forthcoming person in the world. She might just lock you up.”

“Thank you, but I’ll have to take that chance.”

I follow my drinking partner to the chantry. I had merely approached him as he was said to have a lot of information, and seemed like pleasant company, that would not object to the shape of my ears. Little had I known then, how useful this association would become. As soon as we approach, the Seeker, Commander and Spymaster notice us. The Seeker steps forward and seethes at Varric.

“Not now, Varric. Save your curiosity for another time.”
“You wound me, Seeker. I have come to offer my help - well, Chuckles’ help actually,” he points to me and I step forward handing my staff willing to the Commander.

“My names is Solas, and I am a mage with expertise in spirits and the veil. I understand a prisoner survived the explosion at the Conclave? I would like to offer my expertise,” I bow slightly and the Commander and Seeker already have their hands rested on their swords.

“You’re an apostate,” the commander notes starring me down.

“And how exactly do we know you are not responsible for what happened here?” the seeker continues promptly.

“A fair question,” and honestly one I have no intention of answering.

“Cassandra, Commander. This is hardly the time,” the Spymaster objects.

Varric is about to interject on my behalf, when a voice can be heard from inside the Chantry.

“Please, there is enough unrest without you making it worse,” the voice is gentle and kind - almost with a childlike quality to it. However, it does not belong to a child, but a woman dressed in black and white. I nearly lose my breath as I see her and I realise I know her.

She throws her auburn braid over her shoulder as she exits, but she doesn’t look at me. Has she even noticed me?

“I know, you are frightened. I am too, but now more than ever we need to show trust in those around us. Regardless of origin.”

The seeker turns her head towards the ground in obvious grief and the woman puts a kind hand on her shoulder.

“Of course, you are right Inquisitor,” the Spymaster replies.

It’s not until then she turns towards me with a gentle smile, though her eyes too are heavy with grief. If she recognizes me it doesn’t show. She puts her hand forward in a polite greeting.

“I’m Inquisitor Aim--”

“Also known as Waffles,” Varric interrupts. The Seeker groans loudly, while the Inquisitor giggles before turning her attention back to me.

“I don’t believe I caught your name.”

“Solas,” I bow politely, and her face turns towards the ground. I had forgotten how humble she acts.

“If you think you can offer any insight on our prisoner the help would be appreciated. He is currently in the dungeons. Cassandra, would you please show Solas the way and offer him anything he needs?”

“Oh course Inquisitor. If you will follow me,” she walks ahead and I follow, as she shouts back without looking, “Not you, Varric!”
When I am shown down to the dungeons I see that the survivor indeed has my mark upon his hand. He is human, young and healthy even though my mark is killing him. I turn to Cassandra and gives her a long list of things I’ll need. A pretence of course, so that I might be left alone with him. I have trouble keeping my hands steady and I confess I’m frightened. If this will not be resolved I will have doomed the world forever. Everything I ever worked and hoped for will be forever lost. I have only just stabilized the mark, when the Seeker returns. She drops the supplies carelessly beside me.

“You better figure out what is causing this, mage. Or I’ll have you trialed as an apostate,” she hisses, and I do my best not to react.

“Cassandra,” it’s a warning from behind and I no longer have to turn to know, who is speaking. I find myself amazed by how such an innocent sounding voice can harbour so much authority. The Inquisitor walks up to the seeker and places a hand on her shoulder.

“Get some rest. You need it,” she encourages.

“I’m perfectly fine,” Cassandra grunts stubbornly.

“I know you are, but you’re my friend and I need you now more than ever. We will close the breach and we will mourn, but right now you need rest.”

Cassandra releases a deep sigh and nods. As she leaves something soft crosses over the Inquisitor’s face before she kneels down beside me. She strokes his hair and I clearly see compassion and pity in the way she looks at him.

“How is he?”

“I believe I can keep it under control for now. This is unfamiliar magic to me, however—”

Her suppressing a chuckle interrupts me, and the look she gives me lets me know she knows perfectly well who I am. It was a pretense then. But for her benefit or mine? She turns to the guard at the door.

“Will you get us some more clean water and some clothes, please? He is running a fever.”

“At once Inquisitor,” the guard bows and walks of.

We’re alone and I don’t know if I should feel relieved or cautious. My powers are not what the once were and I have as of yet not determined if she is a threat or an ally.

“You can speak plainly, when we are alone, Solas. And don’t worry, I have no intention of exposing you - now or in the future,” her voice is quiet and she cringes, when the prisoner flinches in pain. A thousand questions roam around my head, but I know that, however great my curiosity might be, now is not the time. A part of me resents her for it, though I know it is unreasonable. This role reversal makes me feel disquiet. I’m not use to be the one kept in the dark.

“Thank you,” I reply quietly still uncertain of what to make of her, but for now at least she seems to wish me no harm.

“I will be able to stop it from spreading, but he needs to be taken to the breach soon if we have any hope of closing it,” I continue and she gives a small nod.

“Hang in there, Edward. You will make it out of this. I promise,” she whispers before she leans down and softly kisses his brow. Somehow her motherly kindness is familiar, but I find myself perplexed by the familiarity.
“How long until he wakes?”

“He should wake within the hour,” I answer as I make one final attempt to stabilize the mark further.

“Good…” she sighs and gets to her feet looking down at me, “It’s chaos out there. Would you and Varric help in the valley? The soldiers need your expertise, and for now it seems like there is little more you can do here.”

It is not quite a request, but not a given order. It is something in between. I’m tempted to challenge her if only to see how she would react, but right now that would not further our purpose. I let none of my true feelings show as I rise and does as she asks.

“Oh, and Solas,” she calls after me and I turn to see her giving me a fond smile, “Ma serannas, lathallan. We will make it through this. I swear it.”

The confidence in how she says it makes me believe that she is right.

The battlefield is chaos. Rifts keep opening and the amount of demons is overwhelming. The forces are being overrun. If the survivor does not awaken soon all will be lost. A plan starts to emerge. I will have to flee across Thedas and find another way to seal the breach. Just then we are aided by Cassandra and the young man from the dungeons. He awoke then. Good. I grab his hand and makes it close the rift. It appears that the Inquisitor might have been right all along.

As we turn our attention to the task at hand and we continue through the mountains, I learn that the holder of my mark is named Edward Trevelyan. A mage from Ostwick circle. I wonder how well the Inquisitor knows him. We encounter Leliana and Counselor Rodrick, but I don’t see her anywhere. They bicker and argue like children, but thankfully the survivor is as dedicated to ending this as I am.

“Isn’t closing the breach the more pressing issue?” he berates and Leliana nods.

“The Inquisitor has gone through the mountains to search for our people that way. It will allow you to head directly for the breach,” Leliana instructs, but there is something in her eyes that I can’t dismiss.

“How long since you have heard from her?” I ask finding myself worrying. I will not have her die before I get answers.

“Too long,” she admits.

“She is strong. She has done this to give us the advantage, let us not squander it,” Cassandra states heading towards the battlefield.

“Now wait a minute Seeker. If Waffles is up there, I’m not leaving her there. You can go be heroic, but I won’t abandon my friend,” Varric stomps of towards the mountains, and I find myself surprised by his devotion to her.

“I guess that settles it,” Edward smiles and follows the dwarf.

When we finally find her, she is with the missing scouts fighting a rift. She kneels on the ground with a barrier surrounding her and a wounded soldier laying on the ground. As the rift closes I the barrier for what it truly is. It’s not magic. Its something I haven’t seen since the ancient times of the dwarves. It emanates from a pair of bracers created with an engineering expertise I didn’t believe this world was capable of. Who is she? And how did she come by this knowledge. She stands and looks at us.

“Seeker Pentaghast! Thank you for rescuing us. And you inquisitor. Had it not been for you we
would not have lasted this long,” the scout turns to her.

“It was worth trying if I could save you. As for you four, I believe I left instructions for you to move directly to the breach?” she looks at us like a mother scolding her children, then her eyes turn to Varric. She pulls him into a bear hug.

“Varric, you big softie,” she chuckles.

“Well, don’t tell anyone,” he gives a sideways grin and brushes her off.

Her gaze turns to Edward.

“Thank you, for all you have done so far, but you must go close the breach. Hurry,” she urges and he salutes her with a charming smile. I can’t stop myself from looking back as she stays to tend to the wounded.

Edward, The Herald of Andraste, is still unconscious, when we return to Haven. The breach has been closed and we are safe - for now. I tend to him, but I find myself unable to focus. I intend to get my answers from this supposed Inquisitor. As soon as the Herald is stabilized I walk to the Chantry and ask to see her.

“Of course, Master Solas. She has been expecting you,” the cleric answers politely and leads me to an office far from the rest of the Chantry. The cleric shows me the open door.

As I enter the Inquisitor doesn’t look up, but keeps her focus on the documents in front of her. I know she notices my presence, but she doesn’t even offer me a greeting. The cleric closes the door behind me, and the Inquisitor pauses her scribbling. She listens intently for the clerics footsteps to be swallowed up by the distance between her and the door. I know this, because I do it too. When her footsteps are no longer an echo in the hall the Inquisitor’s gaze turns to me. An devious and amused smirk grace her lips as she speaks.

“I suspect you have questions.”
I suspect you have questions

Chapter Summary

Solas starts to get answers from the mysterious woman, who knows a disturbing amount of things about him.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“I suspect you have questions.”

She tries hard to suppress a giggle that grows into a full blown laugh as she meets my gaze. I suddenly feel like I’m the victim of a joke I don’t understand. She must see the annoyance in my expression because she raises her hands as she regains her composure.

“I’m so sorry, Solas. Please forgive me,” she dries a tear from her eye, “You told me that once, and let’s just say the irony seems fitting. Please sit.”

“And how is it that you know me again?” I ask as I take a seat.

Some of the mirth vanishes from her face and a part of me even regrets its absence. She hands me a drink as she seems to ponder her words carefully. She leans forward on the desk and rests on her elbows.

“I will answer all your questions, Solas, but you must understand there are exceptions.”

“What exceptions?” I eye her closely for any signs of deception.

“I will reveal everything I know about you, but I will not tell you the secrets of others. I will not tell you their story or share their plots with you. That being said I will never stay quiet about something that might cause you harm. Understood?” from her expression she is quite serious.

This is becoming even more intriguing by the minute. So I am not the only one, who she knows so intimately.

“Understood,” I agree. I have to earn her confidence now anything else will come later.

“Good. First things first. Is Felassan still alive?”

“Yes,” I answer honestly. I can not deny I thought it a risk to let him live, but she had already warned me that I potentially doomed the world. I was not prepared to take the risk of doubting her.

“Thank you,” she smiles softly and lowers her head, “Fen’harel enansal.”

My eyes widen at her words as I lean back into the chair.

“Excuse me?”

“The words that will open the eluvians in Halamshiral are “Fen’harel enansal”. I believe you will find the irony amusing,” she grins and takes a sip of her glass.
“I admit, that does…” terrify me. I look up at her again, “Just like that. You demand no proof that I kept my word?” I give her a sideways smirk to which her face grows serious.

“No.”

There is absolute trust in the way she says it. So much so I even feel some resemblance of shame for having it bestowed upon me. Of all the falsehood my reputation bestows upon me, “trickster” is probably the one that has been well earned. She gets up from the chair and looks to a map of Thedas hanging on her wall.

“You already aware I know intimate details about you. So I will start making our,” she hesitant, “association more equal,” her fingers brush over the southern part of the Freemarches.

“My name is Mona Aim. I came across a - lets say… a relic almost ten years ago, which gave me some insight into the future. I saw the major events of Thedas as they played out in different scenarios. I saw the fifth blight, the Kirkwall Rebellion and the formation of the Inquisition. I saw you, learned of you, and your plans. I have seen you for your virtues and you darkest deeds,” she looks at me with a tenderness meant to soften her words. Instead it increases my discomfort.

“What I said is true; I will not stop you and I will not expose you. I value everyone secrets and understand that they are theirs alone.”

Her words are compelling, but I do not trust anyone easily - and definitely not a human, who knows my deepest secrets.

“Spoken very nobly indeed. Though, ultimately irrelevant. Have you not already used your knowledge? I presume that is why you are Inquisitor,” I expect her to flinch, but instead she smiles.

“You’re right. I do use them. I believe I was meant to, but I do not reveal the secrets of the individual - merely events.”

“Pragmatic,” I watch her closely as she shakes her head.

“I don’t believe I will ever hear that word from you, where it sounds like a compliment,” she chuckles, “Regardless of how pragmatic it is, I have tried to the best of my ability, to let history unfold and save as many lives as I could. Even if they are only a few. I was too late you see. I could not stop it, only give history a nudge and make certain that from this point forward it will be the kinder world that will be shaped. Now, to answer the questions you truly want the answers to,” she sits down and looks at me.

“Yes, I know you are the Dread Wolf. I know that the Dalish legends are half right - and half wrong. I know why you banished the Evanuris, created the veil and that they killed Mythal. I know you are frightened and that the world in front of you seems like a shadow of it former self.”

“Poetic…” I respond. It is not often that I am at a loss for words, but right now my words are not the ones that must be uttered.

“I know you mean to tear down the veil and rebuild the world of the elves. But more importantly, I know you. You are kind, wise and feel pain more deeply than anyone would ever suspect from your calm demeanour.”

The softness of her gaze and kindness in her words surprise me. I admit I do not like this sensation of being the one in the dark. I feel the collar around my neck tighten as she continues.

“I consider you a friend - even as you sit before me and have absolutely no idea of who I am,” her
voice cracks a little by the end, but she regains her composure quickly.

I have to take a moment to compose myself as well.

“I see. And how do you know you will not reveal my identity? That you are not my enemy,” my tone is harsh and everything rides on her next answer.

“You don’t. I know your life has taught you not to trust. I can’t fault you for that. But at any moment I could have revealed, who you truly are, but I didn’t. Another matter is that even if I did no one would believe it.”

There is honesty in her words and her gaze does not waver from mine.

“Not exactly reassuring,” I counter.

“No, it isn’t. So don’t judge me by my words, but my actions. You have a spirit friend, Wisdom. You need to watch over her carefully and get her as far away from the Exalted Plains as possible. Make sure that no one can summon her. Do whatever it takes.”

My heart starts pounding in my chest and I get up from the chair nearly knocking it over in the process.

“What is going to happen?”

She stands up and gets behind the chair - wringing the leather on the back of it between her hands.

“Some “demon experts” from the Kirkwall Circle,” there is a spite and an anger in her words that makes me believe she feels this almost as keenly as I, “They are going to summon her to protect them from bandits. Twist her against her purpose.”

I grow pale and I feel fear grasp my heart.

“There is plenty of time for you to stop it, but you must go now. Here,” she takes a letter from her table already with her seal on it, “Show this to the stable hands. Take a horse and save your friend.”

“I… thank you,” I feel stunned as I look at her.

“Go,” she urges softly.

I take the note without a second thought and bolt out the door without as fast as I can. I must save my friend. I show the stable hand the seal as soon as I approach.

“Very good ser. The inquisitor said you would be by within the hour. We already have a mare waiting for you. Packed with rations and a bedroll. I trust you will find everything you need,” the stable hand states as he wipes his hands on his clothes not touching the letter in fear of dirtying it.

I thank him as he gives me the horse and I ride as hard and as fast as I can. I do not stop until I can feel the poor creature getting fatigued.

I make camp for the night and hope that when I drift of I will be able to find my friend in the fade. But the adrenalin is too much and I can’t truly rest. Reaching into my pack I decide that getting something to eat would be wise. That is when I see the Inquisitors letter still unopened. I note that it feels heavy, when I pick it up. Something I didn’t notice in my rush that morning. I open it and find a letter along with a talisman. I study it curiously for a few moments, then turn my attention to the letter.
“Solas,

I know that you are afraid for Wisdom’s life. Don’t be. What happened to her is in a near, yet distant future. You will have time enough to save her.

I have included a Rivani Talisman. You taught me that it can protect spirits from being controlled by mages and blood magic. I hope it will help save your friend.

Remember there is a civil war, where you are headed.

Please, my dearest friend, be careful.

M. A.”

I find myself smiling at the letter. She knew how I would react, what I would need and how best to help me. I might not know this woman, but I’m beginning to believe her, when she says she is my friend. Discouraging that my life has taught me that I even need to be weary among friends.

It takes two days, but I eventually find the place, where my friend dwells. I hold the talisman tight in my grasp as I enter the fade. The Exalted Plains are recreated in the fade with great detail. Everything is a place of beauty and I see the spirits recreate the Dales. Normally I would take it all in, but my patience is not my greatest virtue. I call for wisdom and do not rest until it appears before me in the shape of a woman. I’m reminded that the Inquisitor even knew this detail of my friend.

“Solas!” it greets me happily, then sees my expression, “What troubles you, lethallin?”

“I will explain everything, but first I must bind you to this,” I show her the fade version of the talisman and she recognises it immediately.

“Ir abelas, lethallan. I have been told the future and this is the only way,” I explain.

“You are not usually one for soothsayers… ah… I see,” it smiles at me, “The woman with the wisdom of time. Of course. You understand that wherever that talisman goes, so will I until you release me from it.”

“Yes, I will keep it safe. I promise.”

It nods with understanding and I charge it with magic. I release a trembled breath and silently thank the Inquisitor for this small mercy. My friend gives me a curious expression as I sit down. We talk for awhile as I explain everything I know about the Inquisitor - this Mona Aim.

“She sounds fascinating.” Wisdom smiles enraptured by my story.

“She is an enigma. At one time kind and yet suspicious and secretive.”

Wisdom laughs heartily, then looks at me.

“Many would say the same of you, lethallin.”

“Also true, which is why I’m not certain I can trust her. I can have spies in the inquisition. Make sure she keeps her word, but--”
“You wonder if she would know of them too. Solas, until now all she has done seems to have been a help - or an attempt thereof. She gave you the knowledge and item you needed to save me without asking anything in return. All for a being her kind consider insignificant. She even gave you a horse and might well know you will not return. Her actions in this have shown great kindness and might have sacrificed any advantage she had over you,” wisdom looks at me with a serious expression.

“I must return to her,” I conclude.

“That would be the wisest cause of action.”

Five days have passed when I return to Haven and there is an optimisme in the air I had not expected. The men are training as Cullen instructs them and pilgrims seem to be coming in along side me. I notice a great deal of children in the camp as I approach and I can’t help, but wonder why that is. Unsurprisingly, the first person I run into after putting the horse in the stable is Varric.

“Chuckles! There you are! Waffles said she didn’t know when you would be back. She said you had gone to see if your friend was alright after everything that happened with the breach. Everything go alright?” the dwarf pats my shoulder as he walks next to me.

“Yes, the Inquisitor was very kind to be so accommodating under the circumstances,” I smile and it seems to please him.

“That’s our Waffles.” he seems almost proud.

“Out of curiosity, how does the Inquisitor feel about your nickname for her?”

“She has never complained. And I have know her for… must be close to ten years now. Ancestors, I’m getting old.”

“You must know her well. How did you meet?”

“Long story,” it’s an obvious evasion.

“You don’t seem to mind those,” I chuckle and Varric grins.

His response takes longer than I expected which means what he is about to tell me is a lie - partially at least.

“It’s personal to her, but in short; she has no family left. After the Blight she was all alone and ended up in Kirkwall. Turns out that before the blight my brother did business with her father and owed him some money. I felt bad for the kid, so I asked her what she wanted. After the deep roads I could pay her back,” Varric ends his sentence there, but there is more to it than that.

“And what did she ask for?”

“An education of all things. She wanted to become a scholar - Avvar and Elvhen culture mostly. Even dappled a little in dwarven and Andristian history for a while. I paid for her schooling in Val Chevin and as soon as she was done, she paid me back every piece of gold I gave her. I wouldn’t take it back and she refused to keep it, so now I have it locked away in a treasury. It will be there for
“That was very kind of you, Varric.”

“Well, she is worth it. You better go see her. She will want to know you made it back.”

“I will see her directly.” I bow to Varric and walk towards the chantry on my own. There is no denying his devotion to her. It might all be true, but there is something that is nagging in the back of my mind. When she said she knew the secrets of others, did she mean Varric? It is unlikely she is blackmailing him. Her affection for him seems sincere.

I meet a servant in the hall as I approach her office, and see the Inquisitor speak with the ambassador.

“We must ensure to show him every courtesy, Inquisitor. If we do not it will set a precedent for other nobles opinion of us in the Bannorn,” Josephine explains.

“I understand. Fergus Cousland is also a direct relation to the Queen of Ferelden. I would take Leliana’s suggestion. We might not be there physically, but her close friendship with both the Queen and Justinia will make it seem more personal. Hopeful Highever will see it as such as well.”

“Very well, my lady.”

The Inquisitor looks up and sees me. She gives me a bright and welcoming smile, before turning her attention back to Josephine.

“Is there anything else?”

“Not at the moment. The Herald should be ready to leave for the Hinterlands tomorrow morning.”

“Excellent. In the meantime see if we can requisition any supplies. With the skirmishes currently going on in the area I’m sure the people will need it.”

“Well, I could try to -- oh, Master Solas. It is good to have you back with us,” Josephine gives me a courteous smile, “I will see what I can do about those supplies. Please excuse me.”

She closes the door behind me as she leaves and the inquisitor lifts a finger to her lips for a moment until the ambassador is far away.

“Did you save her?” she asks a little worried.

“I do believe she is safe, yes.”

The Inquisitor gives a sigh of relief smiling to herself. There is so much going on behind those eyes. Whenever they turn from me it’s like a hidden conversation she has only with her thoughts. A tiny piece of mystery.

“I’m so glad to hear that. And thank you for coming back. I was not certain that you would, considering.”

“Truth be told, neither was I. But Corypheus must be stopped, and I can think of noone better suited to avert this threat than the woman who foresaw it,” I smile at her and she gives a chuckle.

“I will stay then,” I continue.

“Was that in doubt?” she raises an eyebrow.
“I’m apostate surrounded by chantry forces in the middle of a mage rebellion. You and Cassandra have been accommodating. Even so…” I pause as I realise she is aware of this already. The way she looks at me makes it seem like she knows my words before I speak.

“You came to help, Solas. I will not let anyone harm you,” she assures me with that air of confidence that has me both intrigue and worried.

“How would you stop them?”

Her expression turns dead serious.

“However I have to. Being the Inquisitor might not count for much yet, but they are my forces. Rodrick can scream to high heavens, but I set the precedence for how we represent ourselves and treat those around us.”

“Thank you.”

She blushes faintly as she looks down into her documents.

“Now go relax. You have had a long journey, and I’m sure your expertise will be needed before either of us knows it.”

“You mean you are not all knowing?” I jest and at that she laughs loudly. It is not a graceful laugh, but it is heartfelt.

“Definitely not. If I was I would have gone into business with Varric and swindled half of Thedas,” she winks, “Ahem, I mean made lucrative partnerships with upstanding businessmen.”

I shake my head as I feel a certain unexpected fondness.

“I would like to meet her some time… if it’s not too much to ask,” there is something submissive in the way she looks at me - like she is very aware that this is something personal for me.

“That might be arranged at some point,” I offer before exiting the door.

That night I sit have a drink with Varric and the Herald. Other than hoping he would reveal more about the inquisitor I enjoy his company. His tales are always a source of great amusement - and as he starts talking about the Inquisitor I find myself intrigued.

“So, there we are at the party at the Viscounts office, and the Knight Commander start reprimanding Seamus, the Viscount’s son, about his association with the Qunari.”

“Seems reasonable, if a little out of place,” Edward points out.

“Insulting the Viscount’s son in his own home? I wouldn’t recommend it,” I point out and Edward shrugs.

“Oh, but it’s what she did next, that was interesting. Now Waffles had just started working for the Divine as her personal scholar. The Knight Commander starts howling and saying that if Seamus does not change his ways, he will never get supported to succeed his father. So, Waffles walks straight up to Seamus and kisses him right in front of Meredith - wearing the seal of the Divine on
her clothes. She doesn’t say a word merely smiles at Meredith, who then storms out the door,”

“Well, that’s certainly a pleasant way of getting the Divine’s blessing!” Edward laughs, “How did the Viscount’s son react?”

“He was flustered for the rest of the evening,” Varric chuckles and drinks his ale.

“They must have been close?” I conclude hoping I can find any edge at all. Know how she intends to grab for power,

“A relationship with the viscount’s son would have secured her both sides of the political power in Kirkwall. Smart,” Edward points out.

“Waffles isn’t like that. He had a hard time with his father and she wanted to give him the support he never seemed to get anywhere else,” Varric’s face turns grim, “Poor kid died only a few short months after that.”

Edward empties his cup and gets up from the chair.

“And on that cheery note, I’m going to bed. See you gentlemen bright,” he groans as he says the next word, “early.”

We bid him goodnight, when Varric’s starts to look around.

“What time is it?”

I look out the window to see the location of the moon “Almost midnight.”

Varric lets out a deep sigh as he gets up.

“Tell me, Chuckles, how are you with lifting weights?”

“Excuse me?”

He motions me to follow and we walk into the chantry towards the Inquisitor’s office.

“Normally, I would ask Cassandra, but after Waffles allowed you to run of - well… let’s say she wasn’t exactly pleased.”

“Oh, I wasn’t aware I had caused problems for the inquisitor,” I apologize as my regret is sincere.

“It will pass,” Varric shrugs, “Waffles means well, but sometimes she is too kind for her own good. Cassandra is worried that she will be taken advantage of in her role as Inquisitor.”

“Cassandra was against her being Inquisitor?”

“What? No… it’s complicated,” he scratches his neck as we approach the door. As he slowly opens it I see the inquisitor slumped over the table asleep. Varric sighs as he strokes her hair fondly. She doesn’t stir.

“She is completely exhausted,” I note as I walk to the other side of her.

“Yes, when she gets like this there is no waking her.”

“This has happened before?”
“At least four times a week. There is a couch over there. Usually, I can get her to walk over there, but I’m just too short to support her without her falling over from exhaustion,” the way Varric cringes makes me believe he has attempted it at least once.

“Where does she sleep?”

“Here,” Varric chuckles, “oh, you mean where she is supposed to sleep? I think there is a bed somewhere down the hall, but we will have to drag her the entire way.”

I carefully adjust the chair without waking her and pick her up in my arms. When she almost wakes a cast a small spell to calm her. Varric smiles at me and quietly leads me down the hall. The room is unoccupied, tiny and has merely a makeshift bed. For the room of the Inquisitor it isn’t very impressive. She stirs again as I place her on the cot.

“Solas?” she murmurs against my neck.

“It’s alright, lethallan. Go to sleep,” I comfort as I lay her down. Varric pulls a blanket over her with an almost fatherly affection.

“How long has she worked herself to exhaustion like this?”

“Since the start of the Conclave - before the explosion. Most nights she doesn’t sleep, so she passes out instead. She wants to do so much for everyone else that she forgets herself. It hasn’t been this bad since Blondie blew up the chantry. She has been haunted by nightmares ever since, poor kid,” Varric laments.

“I see,” I nod, but I can’t help but wonder if it is all she knows that causes her insomnia. It is always a good thing to be aware of one’s limitations. Yet, I can’t keep myself from admiring her dedication.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for all your support already! I can't wait to share my story with you :)

Happy New Year!
The Hinterlands seem endless as we walk through them. The situation is dire for the people there, and both mages and templars are out of control. Cassandra, Varric and the Herald, however, prove to be excellent company. Even Varric and Cassandra’s bickering seem somehow endearing. I walk alongside the Herald, while Varric and Cassandra are trying to find some mineral deposits.

“I have yet to thank you for saving my life, Solas.”

“You in turn closed the breach. I believe that makes us even.”

“Even so. How long have you been with the Inquisition?”

“About a fortnight.”

“And you decided to stay? Had it not been for this damned thing on my hand I would have run for the hills. Apostates are not exactly popular right now,” Edward sighed, “What do you know of the Inquisitor?”

“Not much, but I’ll share what I can,” hoping that if I do he will in turn tell me what he knows.

“I mean, we have all heard the rumours--”

“I’m afraid I have not heard these rumours. Maybe they have only circulated among the circle mages?”

“I doubt it. Only people with my family connections seemed to much of anything going on outside the circle - that wasn’t mage related at least.”

“Then perhaps this knowledge was most common among the nobility,” I offer.

“Maybe… so you really haven’t heard them?”

“No, I can’t say that I have,” I evade and hope my new friend is as eager to share as he seems.

“Well, it is said that the Divine had two hands and a mind to command them. The hand of secrets, the hand of truth and the keeper of knowledge. It is said that the keeper knew everything. All the secrets of the Chantry’s darkest knowledge. For example Shartan being Andraste’s lover, Andraste being a mage, the truth about tranquility--”

“What a load of horseshit!” Cassandra objects from behind.

“Then perhaps you should enlighten our friends here, Seeker,” Varric teases and gets a nasty glare from Cassandra.

“Yes, Cassandra. I would love to hear more about the woman I’m working for,” the Herald says with an intrigue that rivals as own. Though be it obvious by ten folds.

“Fine!” the Seeker groans, “but no rumours or gossip. The truth is Divine Justinia wanted a scholar to research Chantry history, who also had an interest in the Arcane. We had all felt the uprising with the mages was starting to simmer around Thedas, and Justinia wished to seek any means of
appeasing them.”

“But you are a seeker of truth are you not?” I smile.

“True, but I have little patience with nobility. Too restless to search through endless of books. So, she looked for a scholar, who would take on this task. Mona - I mean the Inquisitor, fit this role and carried it out with far more grace than I ever could have. When there was talk of forming the Inquisition, Justinia felt that it needed a leader with--”

“Charm?” Varric teases and Cassandra groans.

“Patience. She chose Mona with the wish that Leliana and I would help her in the areas, where she lacked. It’s that simple,” Cassandra explained walking ahead.

“Well, I need to make that more interesting in the book,” Varric whispers to me to which I smile.

“I liked my version better too,” Edward grins.

“Would the three of you get going? At this rate you’re worse than scullery maids!” Cassandra hisses, “Mother Giselle will meet us at Haven. So, I suggest we get the horses from Master Dennit and get back to Haven as quickly as possible.”

When we return to Haven three days later, supplies have begun to arrive on caravans from Denerim. Our arrival almost goes unnoticed in the commotion.

“Let’s give them a hand,” Varric suggests and both Edward and I start helping unload the carriages.

When I turn, after placing some supplies on the ground, the Inquisitor comes running towards us. Her eyes alight with joy and her arms wide open. I assume she is running for Varric at first, but keeps heading in my direction. It is not until she is a few paces from me that I hear a loud bark behind me. A large black mabari with a little white on its front and tail jump into her arms. I almost don’t recognize the bread at first with its floppy ears, long tail, longer snout and slimmer build.

“There is my good girl! Have you missed me?” the inquisitor cooes at the dog and the makes a happy grumbling sound.

A man comes running up to her and is completely out of breath. He has red hair, skinny and is wearing robes. On his coat is the mark of the Inquisition - clear for all to see.

“Forgive me, inquisitor,” he takes a few deep breaths, “I couldn’t hold her.”

“Think nothing of it, Finn. Thank you for taking her,” she smiles and turns to see the dogs neck.

“Good, it seems to be healing nicely. What did the kennel say?”

The mage takes a moment and then stands up straight.

“Well, they almost didn’t take her in, my lady. As you suspected, but I fought it and eventually they had the vet look at her,” he explains between breaths.
“Damned Royal Kennel and their purebread nonsense. You’re just as smart and loving as any of those fancy hounds,” she kisses the dogs nose.

“Well, cutting her ears and tail would make her match the breed standard.”

She glares daggers at him.

“I’m just saying!” he raises his hands as if he means to defend himself.

“Breed standard… Fereldens! They are as obsessed with their dogs as orlesians with their fashion.”

It isn’t until this moment she notices me. She stands up.

“Solas… Varric, Herald. I didn’t know you were back yet. I’m so sorry,” she apologizes.

“We have only just arrived,” I smile and she nods.

“I guess we better get to it then. I’m assuming Cassandra went directly for the war table. Finn, why don’t you take Atish’an with you and you both get something to eat.” she hands him the loose leash, “A decent one, you hear? No rushing because you are to figgity to eat around the books.”

“Well, that’s just proper hygiene,” he complains and then sighs,”Very well. Perhaps we can both get some stew,” the young man smiles as he walks away with the dog.

Edward walks up and offers her his arm with dramatics.

“Shall we, Inquisitor?”

She gives him a wry smile as she takes his arm and they walk toward the war room. Atish’an… she named her dog the elven word for peace.

In the war room they had decided that the Herald should go alone with Cassandra, Varric and I to Val Royeaux. The argument was that it was the Herald the Chantry was weary of, as Aim’s position as Inquisitor had been sanctioned by the Divine before her death. On our way back we had meet with First Enchanter Vivienne and an outlaw named Sera, who offered to join the Inquisition. An offer the Herald accepted. When we returned we learned that in our absence the Inquisitor had build the watchtowers that allowed the Inquisition to get horses from Master Dennet, and she had even convinced the man himself to join the Inquisition. In addition she had hired a mercenary company called the Bulls Chargers and found a single warden named Blackwall. As I was introduced to these people, I couldn’t keep myself from wondering if their first experience with her had been as unusual as mine. It did not take me long to find that this was not the case.

After we return from Val Royeaux the Inquisitor is nowhere immediately to be found.

“Hey Curly!” Varric calls for the commander, “Have you seen the Inquisitor?”

“Not for more than an hour. She left with her mabari and a few of my men. They are patrolling the area for demons and smaller rifts. Even took that elven girl… her names escapes me… Minaeve, the one who works with the tranquils.”

“Wait, Waffles is hunting demons? And your sitting here instead of watching?”
“She carries no weapons and she prefers sending others to do the dirty work… uhm, no offense.”

“None taken,” Edward chuckles.

“She has some of my best recruits with her. She’ll be fine,” the commander crosses his arms and keeps watching the recruits.

“Oh, you have no idea what you’re missing! Come one!” Varric urges and runs in the direction the Inquisitor was headed.

When we approach I see that the Inquisitor and the Chargers have indeed found a minor rift. Fighting the demons seems chaotic, but effected.

“I don’t see her anywhere,” Edward points out.

“Wait for it,” Varric holds out his hand and counts down from three with his fingers.

Just then I see her appear as if out of thin air next to the demon. Sliding along the ground she knocks it over. There are no weapons in sight only the bracers I have seen her wearing before. The mabari pins it to the ground as the scouts take care of the lesser demons. We aid the scouts, but I keep awareness on her at all times. She repeatedly creates barriers that covers her from attacks, but never retaliates. Instead she systematically moves across the battlefield placing runes on the ground. When she needs to get to a high spot she even makes a barrier she can jump on to get her destination. By this point the lesser demons are dead and she commands us to stand down. On the ledge she watches the demon, and when it is where she wants it, she creates a portal and the demon lands from above onto the ground - the runes trapping it.

“Told you,” Varric nudges my shoulder and I offer a small nod in agreement.

The Inquisitor takes a syringe and plunges it into the demon, taking some of its essence.

“Ready to close the rift, Herald?” She cries and Edward runs to her.

“You need only ask.”

She kneels to the ground and holds a hand on the rune.

“Now!”

She removes the rune and the Herald begins to close the rift, resulting in the demon getting absorbed back into the fade. Breathless she thanks the Herald before walking to the elven woman and placing the syringe in her hands.

“Are you sure this will work, Inquisitor?”

“No,” she laughs and puts a hand on the shoulder of the elf, “but won’t it be interesting to find out?” She then turns to the men.

“Return to Haven. Thank you so much for your help. It has been invaluable.”

As the scouts walk away we walk towards the Inquisitor, who is still struggling for breath.

“You’re a… mage?” Edward asks.

“What? No, don’t be ridiculous. Why is it that most of Thedas believe anything extraordinary can
only be achieved with magic?"

She sounds positively offended by the notion.

“And yet what you just displayed could not truly have been accomplished without it. You are using lyrium, are you not?” I point out and she gives a disgruntled expression, then concedes my point.

“Very well... That does not make it any less impressive,” she points her finger at me with a fake confidence.

“Indeed not,” I smile at her.

“So, the lyrium makes you do that?” Edward’s expression turns more perplexed by the minute.

“The device does. The lyrium merely powers it. Since I’m not a dwarf, and don’t have a deathwish, I only use the processed form used by the templars and the mages. Another reason I help the Chantry. Have you any idea how difficult this is to come by once Hawke and Varric decide to piss off the Carta?” she grins at the dwarf, who hushes her with a devious smirk.

“I suppose we should be glad Cassandra isn’t within earshot,” I chuckle.

It is clear that Edward has a hard time comprehending it. He might be gifted with magic, but seems to have a difficult time looking beyond it.

“So, what are you? A politician? A scholar? A mad engineer?”

“Does either of those things exclude the others?” she grins, “Engineering was my first love, lore my passion, and the politics are merely a way to gain more knowledge about both.”

The Herald still seems to not make sense of it. He looks at her as if she was the strangest creature that ever lived. I believe she notices as I see her evading her gaze from us. I almost feel sorry for her, but I doubt it is the first time her experiments have been received so poorly.

“She clearly has chosen a path which steps she does not dislike because it leads to a destination she enjoys,” I explain to the Herald and I then turn to her, “The intellect with which it is accomplished is pleasing side benefit.”

“Are you suggesting I’m intelligent?” she laughs, while her body reveals her doubt that it should be the case.

“No. I’m declaring it. It was not a subject for debate,” I’m being purposefully seductive to see just how deep her modesty and doubt runs.

Her cheeks flare with heat as she looks at me and swallows. She recovers quickly, but it surprises me how much my words affect her. She steps back and pushes her chest forward with a dramatic pride.

“Hear that? You should all bow to my superior intellect!” it’s a mask she can’t hold as she bursts out laughing before walking back to where the rift appeared.

I hear Edward and Varric chuckle behind me.

“I had no idea she was so… daft,” the Herald chuckles.

“Well, enjoy it while it lasts. As soon as we get closer to Haven she will turn right back to being the serious Inquisitor,” Varric sighs a small chuckle.
At Varric’s words I walk towards her. He obviously knows her very well, and if he is right then perhaps this is my only chance to get an insight into who she is. Her hound sniffs around the small demon’s body as she is crouches down - looking for samples from what I can tell. Her hound is the first to notice me and it eyes me cautiously. I crouch down to make myself looks less threatening and let the dog approach me.

“Andaran atish’an, falon,” I greet the hound in a low voice as the dogs sniffs me.

When the Inquisitor turns a fond smile appears on her lips as her dog calmly lets me pet it.

“You seem amused, Inquisitor.”

“I was reminded of a tale my friend Merrill told me. How hounds will keep Fen’Harel at bay,” she murmurs ruefully.

“And Dalish lore remains as accurate as always,” I sneer.

“I’m glad she likes you. She does not take that easily to everyone. Unless you have treats, and perhaps not even then,” she reaches to nuzzle the dog’s ear, “You’re my good girl. The best puppy dog in the entire world.”

The dog makes a happy sound and rubs up against her. The Inquisitor embraces the dog, but seems sad. Whatever questions I have die on my tongue, as it somehow seems wrong to disturb her.

Another week passes as we help the people in the Hinterlands, while the debate whether to align with the mages or templars remains. It strikes me as odd, that the Inquisitor has not been more decisive in this matter. She should know the outcomes after all if she spoke the truth. Which leads me to the conclusion she is biding her time. But for what purpose? I have managed to plant a few spies in the Inquisition, so they might be my ears, when I can not. Until now nothing had been revealed that benefits me.

I walk passed the tavern with the Herald, and I admit I find him amusing. He is faithful and has an idealistic view of the world. Completely certain he is Andraste’s chosen. He is straightforward and I doubt he could keep a secret even if his life depended on it. I enjoy the conversations about magic, however, and he shows great aptitude for rift magic.

“I’m just saying, Solas, that if we where to somehow invert the veil to counterbalance the disruption it would create a faster result.”

“True, that not assuming you make the tear in the viel worse. It is not a needle you can simply poke through to force the seams back together,”

“Blast it… I didn’t think of that. What if we…” he pauses and as we look ahead the Inquisitor is sitting next to Varric’s fire with her dog and talking with the dwarf.

Coming up the stairs is a regal, proud and arrogant woman dressed in robes that are far more fashionable than practical. Cassandra and Leliana follow right behind her.
“I see the First Enchanter has arrived,” I nod in her direction.

“Yes, let us hope she is useful,” Edward ads.

The First Enchanter greets the Herald, then walks up to the Inquisitor, but keeps a fair distance. Her pride and sense of superiority unnerves those standing around her.

“I can’t believe you still have that mongrel, darling,” she addresses the Inquisitor.

“My fashion sense must be improving since all you find fault with is my dog, Madame De Fer,” the Inquisitor replies as she rises gracefully from the ground.

“Only mildly, my dear,” Vivienne offers as she looks the Inquisitor up and down.

The two women stay silent for a short while looking at each other. The people around them grow quiet - many even stare. The tension in the air slowly rising. Like a battlefield before the battle. It’s not until both women look around at the crowd it starts to move and pretend as if nothing is happening. The Inquisitor is the first to break countenance and walks over to the First Enchanter with her arms spread out - grinning.

“It’s wonderful to see you, Vivienne.”

“It has been far too long, darling!” Vivienne gives her a heartfelt embrace, “How have you been? It’s been ages since we’ve spoken.”

“Do you want the honest answer or the one reserved for the court?”

“I see…” Vivienne replies as she eyes the Inquisitor carefully, “I suggest we speak in private,” she eyes both Varric and I with suspicion. The mabari walks right in front of the First Enchanter and sits down in front of her, where it gives a pitiful whine.

“I don’t think she has forgiven you for calling her a mongrel,” the Inquisitor smiles.

“Oh, you silly thing. You will never be a true master of the game unless you hide your emotions better,” Vivienne remarks at the dog as she reaches into her satchel and pulls out a treat. The dog grabs it and jumps around playfully.

“Fereldens and their dogs. What would the world do without them?” Vivienne remarks sarcastically.

“Suffered a blight is the most recent example I can think of,” the Inquisitor gives a devious grin as she starts walking towards the chantry with Vivienne at her side.

Varric is taking his notebook forward and scribbling, while Edward is scratching his neck.

“I had no idea those two were so… close,”

“Don’t be fooled,” Cassandra remarks leaning against the barricades, “They are very different people. Their polite arguments are famous throughout the court.”

“They seem like peas in a pot,” Edward remarks.

“They are playing the game,” Leliana explains, “They can be fast friends and passionate adversaries all depending on the issue they are discussing. I have seen many try to involve themselves in their affairs, trying to win the favour of either side, where both of them suddenly turn on the unfortunate party.”
"I had no idea the Inquisitor could be that… dangerous," Edward cringes.

I, on the other hand, had my suspicions.

"I wouldn't go that far. Waffles can be shrewd, but dangerous? She wouldn't hurt a fly that hadn't pissed her off first. I swear, I once saw her not swat a mosquito biting her because "it was just finding food for its children"--" Varric continues his anecdotes, but I have stopped listening. I must make certain one of my spies make it into that room.

Later that evening I walk to the Inquisitors office. It's late, but she is still buried in her work. Atish'an lies sleeping on the floor and next to the Inquisitor is a plate of food. Long since cold and hardly touched. I make sure the door is closed behind me before I begin to speak and the hound gives a happy bark as it sees me.

"Good evening, Inquisitor. I have my newest findings on the state of the veil for you," I hand her my notes.

"Thank you," she reaches for them and smiles, "You didn't have to bring me these in person."

"True, however, it did give us a chance to talk," I smile and point to the chair to ask if I may sit down. She nods and puts the paper to the side. I have her full attention.

"What can I do for you, Solas?"

"You said that if I had questions, you would answer them," I begin eyeing her carefully.

"As long as it doesn't compromise others, yes."

"The orb…" my question is vague, but she understands immediately. She takes a breath and for a moment I actually believe she is not going to answer.

"We will stop Corypheus and find the orb."

I only hear the words and pay attention to little else. A weight has been lifted from my heart as I close my eyes and release a deep breath. She stands up to get a glass of wine and offers me as well.

"Thank you."

The bottle looks untouched and she has clearly never opened it. Previously she has only offered water. She drinks her glass in one large gulp, then hands me my glass.

"Trying day?" I ask as she sits back down.

"Any day with Vivienne is a trying one," her smile is mischevious to which I laugh.

I take a sip of the wine and put down the glass.

"Another thing. You have not as yet made a decision about the templars or mages. I wonder why that is since I would assume you know the consequences of both outcomes."
“That’s true. I do. I’m waiting for my scouts, Finn and Ariane, to return,” she pauses, “You remember Finn.”

“Indeed I do,”

“I know… he always manages to make an impression. I have already decided we are going to ally ourselves with the mages. Not because it is more right, but because it fits my morals to be perfectly honest,” the look she gives me is and earnest one. She might not consider her decision right, but if it is guided by her morals, then I dare to claim it is.

“I’m pleased to hear it.”

“There is also a more… personal reason for my choice, but as it is not my secret to keep I can’t go into more detail.”

She looks at her hound for a moment and strokes her head.

“So, why are you waiting for the arrival of your scouts?”

“There is an Envy demon posing as the Lord Seeker, “ she says it so casually that even if I were to doubt her I wouldn’t have been able to, “I have a friend, who has been watching them for awhile, but I need something more reliable than the word of my friend to convince Commander Cullen and Cassandra,” she gets up and walks towards the map looking at the south of Ferelden, “That’s why I made my scouts intercept them. That way we can approach both the mages and the templars.”

“You intend to ally yourself with both? Are you certain that is the wisest cause of action? It could lead to trouble.”

“I’m aware. That’s why I’m sending the Herald to recruit the mages. I have little fondness for the Templars as a group, but there are those among them that I would rather not see dead - or worse. I sincerely doubt that we will be able to conscript more than a handful, but a few lives still matter,” she looks down and closes her eyes before she returns to the table and sits down.

“It isn’t always that easy, but I wish you luck,” I offer her what I hope she sees as a consoling smile.

“Thank you. I’m a little surprised you didn’t come to see me earlier. You are not usually one, who lets a mystery go unsolved for this long,” she gives me this knowing look that reveals an almost intimate kinship with me.

“I wanted to respect your privacy, Inquisitor,” I bow my head before I get up from the chair.

“I see,” she replies and looks down into her notes.

As I reach for the handle of the door she speaks again.

“I haven’t looked for your spies by the way.”

My hand releases the handle as if it was burning, and I turn slowly to watch her. She does not look up.

“My spies?”

She gives me a knowing look that lets me know that I can’t deny it - no matter how carefully I might choose my words.

“So, you know I have them, but have not informed your spymaster of this?”
“What good would it do me? It would cause suspicion within the Inquisition at a time where we need to be united. And I refuse to turn on every elf because a few of them work for you.”

She looks back down to her papers as if this is just another absent minded conversation.

“If you are so curious about my daily conversations and are unwilling to ask, then by all means use your spies,” she reaches for a quill and start scribbling her signature on a document.

“You don’t seem bothered by this, Inquisitor,” I feel unsettled by her calm demeanour.

She gives small smile, but doesn’t look at me.

“Varric writes everything I do down for some epic novel - putting my life on display I might add -, Sera will put bugs or lizards in my bed, Vivienne uses the power she gathers here to further advance her ambitions, the Iron Bull sends reports to the Ben Hassrath and you spy on the inquisition. I would have no friends if I let such trivialities bother me.”

Triviality? I confess my pride might have been a little wounded by that remark. Thankfully, that can be turned to my advantage - as long as she considers me as harmless as it appears.

“So, why bring them up if you have no objections?”

“Simply to let you know I am aware of their presence. And don’t worry; I truly have no clue who they are or how many. Use them as you see fit. If they find anything that will endanger us, I know you will act accordingly.”

I almost laugh at the absurdity of it.

“That’s pragmatic,” I offer politely and she laughs.

“One day you will have to tell me that and actually mean it as a compliment,” her eyes turn to mine again, her expression as serious as before, “I meant it, Solas. I will be honest, but I will keep the secrets of others. Even those of Vivienne.”

I’m taken aback by the fact she seemed to know, which meeting I was spying on.

“I thought you said you didn’t know my spies.”

“I don’t, but three different elven servants entered with refreshments during one afternoon of conversations. I figured something was going one beyond a sudden epidemic of stomach cramps among the elven servants.”

I groan inwardly. I need to pick my people more carefully. Something wicked passes through her face as her eyes avoid mine.

“I look forward to seeing you in the latest fashion from Val Royeaux. Vivienne really has excellent taste,” a large radiant grin forms on her lips as she looks down on the documents before her.

With all honesty, I can’t tell whether she is mocking or testing me. Goading me into revealing what I learned. My spies may not have found anything of use to me, but she does not need to know that. If she assumes that all the knowledge I gained was fashion advice from the Enchanter, so be it.

“I’m not certain I could do such clothes justice, Inquisitor,” I bow and turn to leave with her bidding me gooday without turning her attention from the papers. Her hound does nuzzle my hand as I leave, and I take some childish satisfaction in the fact that at least I do not have to bribe it with treats to gain
its favour.

I rub my face as I exit the chantry and walk towards the small house Cassandra has given me. Despite my annoyance I give a low chuckle.

Chapter End Notes

A new chapter. Thank you all so much for your wonderful support so early in the story. I hope you will bear with me regarding typos and so on. I don't have a lot of time on my hands. This is also my first time writing everything from 1st person, so if I mess up, that's why :)

The next chapter might take a little longer as I'm going back to work tomorrow.

In the mean time please theorize away and if there is anything in particular you wish to see, please write it in a description below. It can be relevant to this story or just something you have always wanted to see or do in the game, that you couldn't.

Happy New Year
Chapter Summary

Things come to a head, when Solas and the Inquisitor have an argument.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Re-reading the note from my spy, I find myself getting more frustrated. It is absolutely useless unless I wish to mock the First Enchanter about her dying lover. You would not have guessed such a tragedy was imminent with her joining the Inquisition. I curl up the note in my hand and throw it into the fire. From the small house they have generously provided, I can’t get a good look at the chantry. I know it’s there, and I can only just see the roof. It is forever in hiding. The Inquisitor’s smug smile the evening before still makes my skin crawl. I’m used to being ridiculed and mocked for all that I believe - called a dreamer, liar, madman. But this? Her manipulations of me and that which I love is something I can not allow to continue. Her kind words are a thin, beautiful veil between myself and the dagger she holds at my throat.

I can’t trust what she says to me is sincere. She knows me which means she must know how to manipulate me. A human, a player of The Game with knowledge of elves and dwarves alike. I have no reason to trust her, and I don’t. Yet, there is this nagging sensation in the back of my mind: what if I am wrong - again? I must be unseen in order to discover her true reasons for her rise to power. To confirm whether she is playing a game or not. She has already guessed the presence of my spies, so it is unlikely she will reveal anything in front of servants. Fortunately, there are other ways of coming by information. As I start to strategize, the door is barged in as if hit by a battering ram.

“Solas!” The Inquisitor’s voice is loud and demanding.

My mood was already foul, but this interruption has set my temper ablaze. “Yes?” I sneer without turning.

"You’re needed!” Her voice is still high strung, and my resolve snaps.

“Aahh … the Inquisitor turns her hawk-like gaze to me. Penetrating my deepest desires - only, not.”

“What is the problem?” Her voice uneven.

I scoff loudly as I turn. Her face is red, and she looks shocked. Had she not expected the wolf would have teeth?

“Why would there possibly be a problem? I’m powerless to hide anything from the keen eye of the Inquisition. If there were one, I’m certain you would be aware of it by now,” my voice is drenched in sarcasm.

“Solas … I don’t have time for this,” she berates and rubs her forehead. “You’re needed. Now!”
“I volunteered to help, Inquisitor. Rattle the bars if you like, but I chose to enter this cage,” I reluctantly grab my coat.

“You know what? Never mind!” she hisses and walks out the door, slamming it behind her.

I cast my coat aside and turn back to my desk. I should have hidden my anger better, but I do not regret my words. She might have me caged and cornered for the moment, but that will change.

Night falls, and I feel relieved the Inquisitor has not let her presence be known since this afternoon. She is probably hiding in her office as always. Sitting on the sidelines plotting rather than acting.

“You’re being too hard on her,” I can hear Wisdom whisper. With the amulet so close I can sense my friend beyond the Veil. I hope its is happy exploring Haven and the Temple of Sacred Ashes for lost wisdom. Its is as caged as I am. My mind wonders if the Inquisitor intended this. Had me trap my friend in this way so that she might hold it against me. I nearly reach for the amulet to free the spirit, but as I do I hear a knock on the door and someone hastily entering it. I turn to see Cullen enter.

“Solas! Thank the Maker,” he gasps for breath. “You must come quickly. A child is trapped in the Fade.”

Without a second thought, I reach for my coat and follow the commander. “Take me there.”

To my relief, Cullen runs which allows me to do the same. When we run into the cabin, I feel a deep fear washing over me. The Inquisitor is sitting on a bed where she cradles a small elven child to her chest - rocking the little girl gently back and forth. Vivienne is standing with a book in hand looking over some ritual. The Inquisitor’s grief stricken eyes see me as Vivienne turns towards me.

“Thank you for coming, Solas. But it is quite unnecessary. There is nothing to be done but let it run its course, I’m afraid.”

"Is that so? Do you have another expert on the Veil hiding around here? Are you absolutely certain you won’t need me?"

“Quite,” Vivienne huffs.

“Solas, ma halani. Please,” the Inquisitor’s voice is gentle as she looks at me - ignoring the First Enchanter.

“Of course,” I answer, and a part of me cringes. There was no naturally assuming I would help after my behaviour that afternoon.

“Cullen, Vivienne, stay outside with the templars. I’ll call if you are needed,” the Inquisitor instructs as I walk over and sit on the bed.

“Darling~” Vivienne objects with more concern than I had believed her capable of.

“Give Solas the space he needs. I’ll be safe with him here,” she assures with confidence as Cullen sighs.

“Alright. If there is anything you need, just say the word. We’ll be right outside.”

“Thank you, Commander,” I nod as I start to examine the child.

The Inquisitor strokes the child’s hair as she explains what happened while tears begin to stream
from her eyes. “One of the templars here panicked because she was playing with a wisp. For whatever reason, he began the harrowing ritual instead of killing her outright.”

“How long has she been like this?”

“Since this afternoon.”

The pang of guilt hits me as I realise this must have been the Inquisitor’s reason for visiting me earlier. How easily could her harsh tone have been caused by fear? Her apparent rudeness been merely urgency? Whatever my anger with the Inquisitor, I acted too impulsively. My desperation pushed me to act with a rashness that I have not shown since my youth.

"I must enter the Fade. From there, I might be able to find the girl and save her from this fate,” I explain trying to keep my shame from showing.

She points to the table. “There is lyrium on the table should you need any. My runes are there as well. I don’t believe they should interfere, but if you wish I will remove them.”

“Let them stay as they are, but we will not need them,” I try to comfort and she gives me a small smile, “What is her name?”

“I don’t know,” the Inquisitor answers, and I find it hard to hide my surprise. So much pain and tears for an elven child she doesn’t even know.

“She is one of the orphan children staying here,” she explains as she dries her tears. “When we were to hold the Conclave I insisted that no children be allowed to attend. Is there anything I can do to help?”

“Keep talking to her. Try to reach her just as you have been. I’ll do the same from inside the Fade. Are you ready?”

"Yes."

I begin the ritual and enter the Fade to find the little girl. Her trance is luckily not too deep; there should still be a chance. I reach out into the Fade, and I sense the child. As I feel myself getting closer to her, I hear a faint song coursing through the Fade. It’s a Dalish lullaby, and it occurs to me it must be the child’s memory.

Elgara vallas, da:len - Sun sets, little one,

Melava somniar - Time to dream

Mala taren aravas - Your mind journeys,

Ara ma'desen melar - But I will hold you here.

Iras ma ghilas, da:len - Where will you go, little one

Ara ma'nedan ashir - Lost to me in sleep?

Dirthara lothlenan'as - Seek truth in a forgotten land

Bal emma mala dir - Deep with in your heart
Tel'enfenim, da'len - *Never fear, little one*

Irassal ma ghilas - *Wherever you shall go*

Ma garas mir renan - *Follow my voice*

Ara ma'athlan vhenas - *I will call you home*

Ara ma'athlan vhenas - *I will call you home*

When I find the girl, she's laying on the ground holding herself, the spirits and demons around her trying to reach her. I crouch down beside her and stroke her hair. “Come, da’len. I will help you wake up.”

“I’m scared,” she whimpers.

“It’s safe. I promise.” I help her up, and she throws her tiny arms around my neck.

“I was so scared the demons would eat me. I just laid down, closed my eyes, and listened to the song,” she sobs into my neck.

“Very good, da’len. Who taught you this song?” I ask, hoping it will ground the child.

“I never heard it before. It’s pretty.”

At that moment, I realise that the faint whispering song must be the Inquisitor trying to reach the child. I pull away from the girl with my hands on her shoulders.

“Focus on the song. Every note of it. Close your eyes and listen to only the song.”

When the little one starts humming along with the song, I can feel her consciousness slowly fading. When I awake, the Inquisitor is still humming the lullaby so quietly I barely hear it. When I look at her, the child awakens, and the Inquisitor gives a deep sigh of relief. The child, on the other hand, gets frightened and jumps into my arms away from the Inquisitor. I can almost see the Inquisitor’s heart breaking a little.

“It’s alright, da’len. The Inquisitor will not harm you,” I assure her.

"The man in the armour like hers did. Said nasty things. Called me knife-ear,” the child sobs.

The Inquisitor gives the girl a sad smile and gets up. “It’s alright, Solas. Please stay with her. I’ll have some food sent for you, sweetheart. Are you hungry?”

The child gives a careful nod. The Inquisitor attempts to reach for her as if she means to stroke her hair but thinks better of it and quietly walks out the door.

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After I have examined the child and given Cullen my assurances that she is well, my attention turns
to the Inquisitor. I must apologize for my behaviour. I’m told, unsurprisingly, that the Inquisitor is in her office. It seems like that room and the war table are her whole world. A player of strategies that moves pieces on a board. But what I saw not an hour ago showed me that there is more depth to her. I should have known by her reaction when I first met her. I was so consumed by my wounded pride I let it subsume me beyond rational thought. I stop and pinch the bridge of my nose. With the breach, the loss of my orb, and the knowledge that a woman - who is gaining increasingly more power and influence - seems to know all my deepest secrets, I have lost any hold I had on my emotions.

As I continue through the Chantry, I hear the sound of a violin as I get closer. The tune is unfamiliar, but I admit that my interests so far have not dwelled on the musical compositions of the Orlesian elite. Though, it does not match what little I have heard of it. I realise the music is coming from the Inquisitor’s office. It stops as soon as I knock on the door, and I take a deep breath as I am asked to enter. Atish’an growls at me as soon as I enter, but makes no move towards me. The Inquisitor looks at me with a worried expression as she gets up from the chair.

“How is she?"

“She is fine. I left her with one of the mages she is familiar with.”

She closes her eyes and gives a faint smile. As quickly as it appears, it vanishes as she sits back down and adjusts the strings on the instrument.

“Thank you for letting me know. It was good of you to come all this way in here to tell me. Goodnight, Master Solas;” her voice is calm and emotionless which makes me feel uneasy.

“Inquisitor, I must apologize.”

Her response is merely to turn her eyes at me and holding my gaze.

“For my behaviour this afternoon,” I clarify.

“Solas…” she sighs and closes her eyes with a pained expression as she rubs her forehead.

“You caught me off guard the other evening. In truth, you terrified me. All the secrets I have kept so long. Every truth kept in hiding, so that the elves might have a future is in your hands. Experience has taught me not to trust even my friends. Yet, I was suddenly in a situation of having to do so in a stranger - out of nothing but faith and your word that you wished me no harm.”

The hardened, pained expression softens into a vague smile - so soft it’s hard to notice. “I understand, Solas. More than you can possibly imagine.”

As I hear the profound feeling in her voice, I sit down in the chair opposite her hoping that she will look at me as I speak.

"My poor manners shame me, Inquisitor. Of all people, I should be able to look beyond preconceptions.”

Atish’an places her big head in my lap and grumbles as if she meant to say she forgives me. The Inquisitor gives a soft chuckle.

“Tish, Solas might not --”

“It’s alright, Inquisitor,” I assure her as I stroke the dogs head.

The Inquisitor sighs and puts down the violin. “I owe you an apology as well. I don’t think I have
handled the situation very well, and for that, I’m sorry.”

“For what part are you apologizing, exactly?”

“For keeping my distance and waiting for you to come to me. I wanted to give you space, respect that you need time, but I’m afraid that I have come off as rather calculated and cold instead. It was never my intention to make the situation worse for you.” She still doesn’t turn to me but rather leans on her desk and rubs her neck.

“Hush now ... I appreciate your honesty, Inquisitor, and if what you have told me is true, then I owe you a debt of gratitude for saving my friend at the very least.”

“What else could I have done? I couldn’t just leave her to die when I had the chance to help you save her.”

I can’t conceal a smile as she says it as if it was the most natural thing in the world.

“Few would think as you do.”

She gives short laugh. “Thank the Maker for that. Thedas would have self-imploded by now had that been the case,” she smiles, but it’s transformed into something regretful.

“At least this life I could help save.”

She takes my hand and squeezes it. “It’s alright, Solas. We might all do things we later regret, when we’re afraid. Now, I really need some sleep,” her expression is apologetic, but I can see the heaviness around her eyes.

“Goodnight, Inquisitor,” I smile and get up to leave.

As I walk through the Fade I find her - the Inquisitor. The enigma that both traps and captivates me. What I find shows me how sensitive she truly is: a dream that is a nightmare unlike any I have seen.

Bodies are piled on the ground and hanging from clothes lines between tall buildings. People walk passed them without noticing even as their shoes are soaked from the blood of the dead.

“Help them!” I hear a cry and I walk towards it.

On the ground sits the Inquisitor - her clothes drenched with blood and clutching a small body to her chest.

“Why won’t you help them?” she sobs as she rocks the little one back and forth.

None of the people around her react until children with an unfamiliar type of weapon begin shooting each other. She runs to a child hit by a weapon - no more than 4 years old. It bleeds profusely, and she attempts to stop the bleeding. A small human boy.

“Help me!” she shrieks with a dry throat.

I have seen many horrors through my journeys in the Fade, but I must turn away from it to compose myself. I feel Wisdom’s presence.
“Lethallin, don’t. This is unwise,” Wisdom warns me, but I can’t heed her warning.

I turn and reach out into the Fade, changing it. The battlefield turns into a lush grove with a waterfall. One of my favourite places from a long time ago. Her clothes are turned to a simple white gown. Wisp appear before her as she begins to investigate. I reach out through the Fade to find the sleeping mind of her hound. With any luck, it will give her some familiar comfort. I lean against a tree as I watch her.

“I don’t understand her. She knows a lot, but not all. She informs me of what she knows, but with seemingly no reason to do so. Every advantage she has over me she gives up without any hope of reward.”

“Perhaps,” Wisdom offers, “she sees the wisdom in gaining your friendship. You feel violated by her knowing your secrets without you entrusting them to her - so she must be completely honest.”

I scoff. “What could a human possibly gain by my friendship? I do not fight for her people. She claims she doesn't want to hinder my plans of restoring the elves. She is no mage so I have no magical secrets that would benefit her.”

“Lethallin, maybe it’s just as it appears,” Wisdom says softly and turns her gaze to the Inquisitor. “Look at her and the things the Fade shapes before her. She has a vibrant mind and a lively spirit. Yet, she shows none of it when awake. Does it remind you of anyone?”

“I suppose,” I give her a wry smile.

“She seems lonely. Proceed cautiously, but try to let go of your suspicion. If I’m wrong you won’t have lost anything, but if I’m right then you will have found some company for awhile. We should leave. She will notice,” Wisdom scolds.

“Perhaps,” I give Wisdom a rueful smile and turn to watch the Inquisitor. “Melava somniar, lethallan.”

Chapter End Notes

New chapter - yay!
So many thanks to ninaninabobina for beta reading. You're wonderful!

I have been considering making an AU short stories for this universe. So, if you have any prompts for these let me know :)

Again thank you all so much for the love of the story so far. You guys are amazing.

Easter Egg: If anyone one wants some insight into the Inquisitor she is playing "I love you" by Woodkid. The lyrics may give some insight into how she is feeling :)
Poison into the Inquisitor's ear

Sitting in a chair in my small cottage, I look over the reports on the Veil. The Herald is to leave for Redcliffe soon and has requested that I join. I have taken the time to get to familiarize myself with the area and see if there might be any places that could hold forgotten secrets or more artifacts of my people. It has been so long since I last used them, and some of my memory has faded over time. I hear a knock on the door and ask them to enter.

“Good morning, Solas.”

I turn and see the Inquisitor looking at me with a friendly expression. She remains just outside the door, politely waiting for my explicit words for her to enter.

“Inquisitor, this is unexpected,” I smile, and it surprises me how genuine it feels.

“I hope I’m not intruding. I can come back later if you’re busy,” she turns halfway as if she is just about to leave.

“Not at all. What can I do for you?”

“Would you take a walk with me?”

I find myself curious, as this is the first time she has specifically sought me out since our very first meeting in the Fade more than a year ago - with the exception of the unfortunate misunderstanding with the little girl a few days earlier. I grab my coat and staff as I agree to her request.

We walk for awhile in silence, but it is neither awkward nor uncomfortable. There are the sounds of a few birds in the distance and the creak from the snow as our boots tread lightly. The calm is a welcome change to the hills that were not so long ago filled with rifts, demons, and the roaring sound of the breach. Even the Inquisitor seems at ease. It’s not obvious at first as she always seems to have careful control over herself unless the lives of children are threatened. In fact, I don’t recall seeing any strong emotions from her since our first meeting - not counting the Fade.

Though I’m bursting with curiosity, I don’t want to push the subject of why she asked me on this short journey. I have to be careful around her as she sees through me far too easily. Eventually, she does speak in a low, soft voice as if she is loathe to break the natural quiet of our surroundings.

“We’re going to see the Templar who tried to perform the Rite of Tranquility on the little girl. I don’t know how he might have been corrupted, so I’m having him held in a house nearby.”

“I see, and how do you suspect he might be corrupted?”

“Red lyrium? Demon possession? Alcohol? I don’t think it’s the case, but I need to make certain,” her voice is heavy with a sorrow that I have both seen and felt far too often.

We approach a small cottage some distance from Haven. As we enter, I see a few Templars, Commander Cullen, and Vivienne. In the corner on a bed in shackles is the Templar without armour. He lays in the fetal position on the bed - shivering uncontrollably and covered in sweat. Vivienne’s eyes turn to me immediately, and they are not kind.
“We hardly need an expert on the Fade for this, my dear.”

“No, but since Solas helped the girl in the Fade he knows her side of the events. I thought it might help us piece together what actually happened without upsetting the child,” the Inquisitor explains.

“Good idea, Inquisitor,” Cullen agrees. “There are no unusual marks on him and neither the First Enchanter nor myself have found any signs of demonic possession.”

“I see,” the Inquisitor looks to me, and I try to get a sense of the Templar.

“It does not appear to be a case of demonic possession. He is, however, showing signs of lyrium withdrawal,” the First Enchanter adds.

“And it’s not a side effect from exploring too close to one of the rifts, perhaps?” The Inquisitor asks looking at me.

“It does not appear so. I believe the First Enchanter is correct,” I reply watching the man closely.

“And the girl? Did she tell you anything that might help?” Cullen asks.

“She said he used some rather colourful racial slurs, but I believe she was too young to understand what was happening.”

“So, they are both victims of circumstance. The Inquisition needs to take a more direct approach in the daily oversight of both mages and Templars,” Vivienne points out.

The Inquisitor merely nods as she carefully walks over to the man. He looks at her with eyes brimming with tears.

“Don’t make them hurt me. Please keep them away,” he begs.

“No one will hurt you,” she assures. "Do you know who I am?"

“You’re the Inquisitor.”

“That’s right. May I sit?”

He nods, and she sits down slowly on the bed.

“Can you tell me what happened?”

“There were so many of them. D-demons... It never stops. They just keep coming and coming. They tried to take the little girl. I thought if they are here, then she must be safe there. But she resisted. She wanted to stay. So I shouted …” the man begins to sob. “She needed to want to go. To get away from me, so she was safe from them. They’re everywhere!” he screams and thrashes, hitting the Inquisitor in the process.

Cullen moves towards her immediately.

“It’s alright, Cullen,” she holds a hand back and the Commander reluctantly stays where he is.

She reaches into her satchel and takes out a small rune.

“Here, take this. It will help with the pain,” she comforts the man as she places a rune between his hands. Even from a distance, I can sense a small humming from it as it begins to glow. A distant whisper of the song of lyrium thrums through the rune, just enough to expose a little amount of
lyrium in through the skin.

“Don’t let them hurt me,” he begs.

“I won’t allow anyone to hurt you, alright? These Templars - your friends - are here to make sure you’re safe. We’ll make sure you get the help you need.”

The Inquisitor stands up and motions for us to follow her outside side. She kicks the snow gently and crosses her arms with a deep sigh.

“PTSD with a heavy dose of lyrium withdrawal. That would make anyone unstable. Poor man.”

“Forgive me, what did you say, darling?” Vivienne asks.

“Post-traumatic stress disorder,” The Inquisitor clarifies. “He is traumatized, and nothing but long-term help will improve it. The rune I’ve given him will calm him, but it’s not a long-term solution.”

“I thought procuring lyrium and dividing it between the Templars was your responsibility, Commander?” Vivienne turns to the Commander.

“It is, and I have been. I don’t know why he isn’t taking it,” he rubs his neck with a groan.

“Perhaps his condition deteriorated in such a fashion he became distrusting of it?” I offer.

“Or he wanted to break the Chantry leash,” the Inquisitor sighs. She reaches for the Commander’s arm and strokes it fondly as she gives him a kind smile.

“Do all you can for him. We will discuss our options later.”

“It might be wise to have the Templars examined in general. There might be more whose minds are no longer their own,” I point out, and the Inquisitor gives a small nod in agreement.

“Now hold on--” Cullen objects.

“Cullen, no one's going to harass them. But Solas is right. Vivienne, will you arrange it together with Cullen? And do it gently, please. These people have put their faith in us. If they are having problems, they need to see it as help, not an accusation.”

“I will get right on it, my dear.”

“Thank you. Would the two of you mind giving Cullen and me a moment alone?” The Inquisitor smiles, and the First Enchanter and I walk away to a respectful distance.

After a few moments of silence the First Enchanter's attention turns to me.

“I don’t know what you’re playing at Solas, but a bit of advice.”

“Oh, this should be good.” The arrogance of this woman rivals those of the Evanuris.

“The Inquisitor is not as easily fooled as you seem to believe. She is an excellent judge of character. You can try to sway her, but it would be a waste of your time. She will not hear it.” She does not look at me as I speak, but keeps her eyes locked on the Inquisitor. I’m a mere insect buzzing in the air to her.

“If that is the case, this conversation would have no purpose. The Inquisitor appears to be a woman of reason. I’m sure she will make her decisions based on what she considers right and not blindly
following the word of an apostate or a First Enchanter,” I can’t help but hiss the end of the sentence.

“Then we are in agreement.”

“We agree that the Inquisitor is a woman of good judgment. I doubt that your attempts to sway her towards your ambitions will still simply because of that,” I feel my grip hardening on my staff.

The First Enchanter remains as cold as the snow surrounding us and doesn’t acknowledge my remark either way. In silence, we watch as the Inquisitor has a quiet conversation with the Commander. The Inquisitor smiles warmly at him as he looks to the ground. She then holds both his shoulders and twists her head down to meet his eyes.

“Oh, do be careful, darling,” Vivienne cringes.

“Excuse me?”

“If she continues like that, I fear for the Commander’s heart. She has been an agent of the previous Divine, is a somewhat accomplished scholar, and is now the Inquisitor. There a far better matches for her.”

“You would have her marry a noble, one presumes. Without any regard for her affections,” it shouldn’t bother me, but it does. Despite appearances, the Inquisitor is a sensitive soul. She might marry for power, wealth, or to strengthen the Inquisition, but I would much rather that she have the freedom to choose, rather than accept whatever suitor the First Enchanter has lined up for her.

“Of course. Marriage is a matter of alliance, and she knows this. Better not to tempt the affections of one’s allies,” her cold eyes turn to me, her face a carved emotionless mask. “And better for them to realise that an attachment will not be possible, don’t you agree?”

“I think the Inquisitor has enough sense to make the right choice in that matter as well,” I smirk at the First Enchanter.

I can’t hide the delight from my words. It has clearly surprised her that the Inquisitor turned to me for my expertise and has taken my counsel more than once. That she mistakes it for an romantic interest on my part, or that I’m feigning it to gain more influence, only makes her seem more foolish. The Inquisitor walks towards us, and we start our journey back to Haven.

“What a mess.”

“If only the mages would have remained as they were, then all this could have been avoided. You must be pleased, Solas, to see the Templar order so weakened. It bodes well for your rebellion,” the First Enchanter’s voice is reprimanding.

“My rebels? Am I an agent for their cause, whispering poison into the Inquisition's ears? How comforting,” I could not contain my sarcasm if I wished it. The nerve of this woman knows no bounds.

“You enjoy seeing yourself as a villain?”

“No more than any other clever man who wonders what he could do if pushed,” I state, and the Inquisitor’s eyes flicker briefly to me. For a moment, I had almost forgotten that she knows. I keep my attention on the subject at hand as the look in the Inquisitor’s eyes sends an ache through me.

“But I meant you, Enchanter. How comforting it must be for you to see a traitor helping the rebels from within. You need never concern yourself with the possibility that your Circle was wrong.”
“The Circle did serve a purpose,” the Inquisitor insists. “Unfortunately, that purpose was already corrupted by fear in its infancy. The Circle's largest flaw was that it perpetuated ignorance.”

“Darling, the Circle is a place of knowledge and learning. You will find no more educated people than those fortunate enough to have been trained at a Circle,” the Enchanter’s voice is full of scorn and a little bit of surprise which amuses me greatly.

“For some knowledge, sure. But what about exploring the universe we live in? How many actually study the Fade, spirits, or the Veil in any proper detail? Spirits are evil and will possess you. Case closed. And everything that went into truly studying them was seen as heresy against the Chantry. So we remained ignorant. Stagnant,” she speaks with a passion in the her voice that burns with an unexpected fire. I find myself entranced by the possibility of what this could mean.

“A pity Hawke killed the blood mage in Kirkwall. His experiments on those poor women would have increased “knowledge” considerably,” the Enchanter scoffs.

“That you would simply say that shows the root of the problem,” the Inquisitor points out. “I don’t suggest we legalize everything, but it should be studied. Most mages are terrified of spirits and demons, as are Templars. But perhaps if we took the time to study them, we would find the answers rather than living in fear.”

“What nonsense have you filled her head with, Solas? She is becoming unhinged.”

The Inquisitor steps in front of the Enchanter blocking her path.

“Do not speak of me as if I’m not here, Vivienne,” he voice is deep, but calm.

“Careful, First Enchanter,” I offer politely. I shouldn’t, but I admit I can’t deny myself this small pleasure.

“Well, it seems like I’m seeing a new side of you, darling,” the proud woman straightens her back - more unyielding than ever.

“This is The Game, Vivienne. You only see what I wish you to,” she gives Vivienne a charming smile. “We don’t always agree, but trust that no matter what might happen I will always protect your right to express your opinion openly. And though I might not follow your advice, I will always listen to it carefully. I need it so that I might make an informed decision.”

This minute bit of flattery offered with sincerity is enough to lower the hostility between them.

“Well of course you do, my dear. I suppose I had better go and finish marking the locations of all the books and knowledge lost when the Circles rebelled and coordinate with Commander Cullen when he returns. At least in that we agree.”

“Thank you, Vivienne. I promise I will make it a priority.”

Vivienne gives the Inquisitor a polite nod and turns toward the Chantry as the Inquisitor and I walk towards my cottage.

“You impress me. To stand up to a woman such as the First Enchanter, not to mention a mentor, with such determination takes courage.” I look closely at the Inquisitor as she chuckles softly.

“We ruffle feathers from time to time. I was never one for socializing, but it was necessary if I was going to study some noble’s trinkets he had raided from someone. It was also Dorothea’s … I mean, Justinia’s wish that I learned as much about The Game as possible. Vivienne helped me get to the
knowledge I sought at Montsimmard Circle and took me under her wing.”

“Her pride has clouded her mind.”

“True. Unfortunately, there is truth in much of what she says which means it is wise to both listen to and acknowledge it - whether I agree or not,” she raises an eyebrow.

“And she tolerates you for your power and influence,” I scoff.

“Yes. She knows that if she is to restore the Circles and maintain her position and power, I’m her best hope of doing so.”

“Perhaps she will make it so that you become the next Divine.”

She looks at me, her face a dramatic visage of horror before she bursts out laughing. I find myself laughing as well merely because hers is so infectious.

“What?"

“Oh, just the irony of having someone who isn’t Andrastian on the Sunburst Throne. I would get murdered by my own clerics before dessert.”

“So, you’re not Andrastian.”

“I’m not much of anything. I’m just me,” she shrugs.

“Such a modest reply. Tell me, Inquisitor, what do you have faith in?”

“You …” she pauses and blushes. “That’s not what I meant. I don’t think of you as a god or anything like that.”

“Then what did you mean?” This is getting intriguing.

“That I trust your guidance, and I have faith that you can be reasonable, just, and kind. I value your thoughtfulness. That’s all I meant to say,” she gives a faint smile and starts to walk again. “As for the rest, I don’t need a deity to tell me right from wrong. I have my conscience for that. I do admire people with faith, though, and I’m so happy they found something that makes their life more meaningful.”

“There will always be the threat of corruption with any organization - even religious ones.”

“There are fanatics in every area. Best we can do is be aware of it and make sure our own goals, wishes, and motivations don’t push us to become one,” the smile she gives me is gentle and kind - it almost makes me stop in my tracks just for it to last a little longer.

We approach my cottage, and as our paths divide, I turn to her.

“Would you like to come in, Inquisitor? If you have the time, I would enjoy talking.”

She smiles, and for a moment, I think she might just accept my invitation.

“I would love to, but unfortunately, there is still a lot of work to do. Besides, the Herald will need you soon. Let me know what you find at Redcliffe.”

“You mean you don’t already know?”
She gives me a devious smile as she walks backwards for a few steps before turning.

Only an hour later I find myself at the Inquisitor’s door again, and as I enter, she doesn’t hide her surprise.

“Solas, I thought you left with the Herald?”

“That was the intention, but the First Enchanter was so good as to inform the Herald that bringing three mages for this would be a terrible waste.” I raise an eyebrow, and the Inquisitor’s eyes turn hard.

“Of course she did. I will have a word with her; in the meantime, it seems I have the pleasure of your company,” she smiles and gets up, pouring hot tea into a cup and hands it to me without asking.

“Thank you, Inquisitor, but—”

“It’s lemon and honey. Not a tea leaf in sight, I swear it.”

She puts her hand over her chest as she says it and smiles.

“You even know of my detest of tea,” I chuckle, somewhat amazed and take the cup.

“I’ve seen the face you make when you’re forced to drink it. It’s not something quickly forgotten,” she chuckles and takes a gulp of her own cup.

“A distaste you do not share evidently.”

“Nope. I also don’t like sleeping much. But enough about tea. Solas, I would like your advice. I have sent the Herald to meet with Fiona in Redcliffe. This will fail, however, as a Tevinter magister named … argh, what was his name … Dorian’s old tutor … Alexius! That’s the one. He has been playing around with time magic and succeeded.”

“Am I to understand he has succeeded in distorting time - to actually make it possible to travel through time?”

“Yup, with terrible consequences I might add,” she suddenly seems lost in thought with a sad expression on her face.

“Inquisitor?”

“Sorry, I’m fine. Anyway, I will send Edward to deal with it. I would like your help with the Envy demon controlling the Templars, if you don’t mind.”

“I will give whatever insight you need, Inquisitor.”

“Thank you. We will find my friend there. Should Envy try to possess one of us, Cole will help us.”

There is complete confidence in her voice.

“If you have a friend with such knowledge, I’m surprised you need me.”
“He is not … he is a spirit of compassion - or he was. I’ll let him tell you his story, but he is vulnerable and has trouble adjusting to our world.”

She knows a spirit. A virtuous one and that. It would explain her willingness to protect Wisdom, but I’m curious how this came about to begin with.

“You continue to surprise me.”

“Hopefully in a good way. So far you don’t seem to have been fond of the ways I have surprised you,” there is a playful spark in her eyes that removes any concern that she is holds it against me.

“I’m pleasantly surprised, yes.”

“Finally, took you long enough,” she jests, and I have to chuckle. “I’m not a fighter, Solas, and I don’t want to be. I can protect myself to an extent. I don’t need bodyguards, but I need someone else to fight the demon. If I tell you everything I know, will you help me plan a strategy?”

“With pleasure.” I smile at her, and her smile brightens. Whatever the First Enchanter intended, I believe it has most certainly backfired. The Inquisitor seems to trust me. Something not even I could have foreseen.

Chapter End Notes

Again thank you so much for all your support for this story! I love reading your comments and I'm so excited every time I post a new chapter.

Thanks to ninaninabobina for beta reading! It's such a great help to me :)

As always, if you have any suggestions to this work or some mini stories set in this story, please let me know.
The Herald came back from Redcliffe the following day, and it turns out the Inquisitor had been right about everything. I should no longer be surprised at this point, but I am still in awe of it. How many secrets does she keep? How many wonders does she know of? I’m curious beyond belief, but a part of me enjoys this slow reveal. I should be deeply concerned by all of this, and I am, but she has awoken a sudden confidence in me that makes me believe her when she says we will get through this. Usually grim and fatalistic, this newfound optimism is surprising to say the least. Tomorrow, she is going to send the Herald to Redcliffe, and we will leave to face the Envy demon with a delegate of nobles.

Tonight, I have let Varric talk me into joining him, the Iron Bull, Blackwall, and the Herald for some drinks. I usually prefer my solitude, but their conversation is interesting and with any luck I will learn something worthwhile. As we sit around the table, the Herald joins us. His eyes look like they are far away, and he has the air of a man in love. We all look at him for a few moments before he realises.

“What?”

“So, how is Josephine?” Bull asks looking absentmindedly at his cards.

“Why would I know how she is?”

“Come now, you always have a certain glow when you come from her office,” Varric adds and throws another card on the pile.

“I have no such thing!”

“Come now, leave the lad alone,” Blackwall grumbles and tosses a card on the pile.

As they play, I’m more concerned with watching how they play than the conversation. A lot can be discovered from watching such details. Are they willing to take risks? Sacrifice? Bluff? I would gladly join them, but with a book in my hand it will seem less obvious as to why I’m watching them.

“You sure you don’t want to play, Solas?” Blackwall offers.

“I’m afraid I do not know the rules.”

“I can teach you if you'd like.”

“Another time perhaps.”

“So, not to ruin the mood, but have any of you noticed the dwarf in the corner?” the Herald says leaning in.

“Yeah, he’s a spy. Carta most likely,” Bull replies.

“He is from the Coterie,” Varric surmises in such an even voice that I’m convinced he has known about this for a while.

“How are you so certain?” I ask, looking at the dwarf through a reflection on a shield hanging as an ornament on the wall.
“I know people, I talk, and occasionally I listen.” Varric’s voice is deadpan, which makes me certain he knows a lot more than he is leading on.

The door opens and an elven woman enters. It would not have been so strange if not for the fact that she is Dalish. She looks around then walks directly for Varric.

“Have you seen Mona?”

“Well, hello to you too, Ariane,” Varric grouses.

“Hello, now where is Mona?”

“What do I look like? Her mabari? Have you tried her office?”

“No, I didn’t think to do that,” her voice is filled with sarcasm.

“She is probably with that skinny mage. Nervous. Redhead,” Bull replies and downs his ale.

“Finn. Why didn’t you just say that in the first place?” she sneers and walks out without another word.

“Charming woman,” Edward remarks and starts dealing the cards anew.

“Yeah, but Waffles likes her for some reason.”

“Does the Inquisitor usually befriend the Dalish?” I ask, my curiosity increasing rapidly.

“Well, there are Ariane and Daisy, but not usually. They’ve had some business dealings over the years.” Varric reaches for his ale, looking over his cards once more.

“Odd for a Dalish to do business with a human scholar isn’t it?” Edward points out.

“Waffles is a scholar. She’s found artifacts here and there and traded them to Ariane’s clan. Very dull stuff.”

An hour later, I walk out from the Tavern leaving the others to enjoy their game. I see the Inquisitor walking towards the gate with the mage called Finn and the Dalish woman from earlier.

“I can’t believe you found this,” the Dalish says in awe as she puts an item in her satchel.

“I have my ways,” the Inquisitor winks.

“Ahem!” Finn objects.

“And Finn’s excellent talents, of course,” the inquisitor grins. “It belongs to your people. I have my notes. They will do.”

“Are you sure you want to go face that demon? The Templars there are not acting right,” Ariane’s expression turns worried.

“I’ll be fine. I have people with me that I trust. And I went over my plans with one of the most intelligent people I’ve ever met.”

I can’t help but smile a little at the praise she offers me even as she doesn’t know I can hear. At least this time I might be certain she is not doing so to flatter my ego.
“You would think I wasn’t standing right here!” Finn objects again.

The Inquisitor laughs, “Not counting you, naturally. Now, the two of you better get going. I don’t want you here if things start to heat up.”

They look like they are about to object when she holds up her hand.

“Please, you did what I asked and more. I need to know you are safe.”

“The more distance between us and the Templars the better, to be honest. Oh, Philippe send his regards, by the way,” Finn states as he adjust his staff and prepares to leave.

Anguish crosses the Inquisitor’s face.

“Thank you. Make sure you tell him that I hope he is well. Take care, you two.” She gives them each a short embrace and walks quietly back towards the Chantry.

The Dalish elf gives Finn a strict look as they pass me.

“You shouldn’t have mentioned Philippe!”

“What else could I have done? Not give her the message? Now that would just have been rude.”

I hear someone walk up behind me, and the Herald takes a deep breath.

“So, Solas, have you ever been in love?”

“I have had infatuations in my time. I’m assuming Lady Montilyet is the reason you’re asking?”

“Yes.”

“And why I are you coming to me with this?”

He releases a heavy sigh.

“Because you’re a mage. You know what dangers it brings for us. I might be the Herald of Andraste, but if the Circles come back I will be locked up again - title or no. I guess what I’m asking is, if you were in my shoes what would you do? Do you think it would be a problem if I tried to … ehm … woo Josephine?”

“Far from it. People should seize any chance for a moment's respite in times such as these. I am glad you've allowed yourself some happiness.”

He chuckles with obvious relief.

“Thank you. And what about you, Solas? No one around here caught your eye yet?”

“I find my peace elsewhere.”

“So not yet?” He claps me on the shoulder, “We’ll find someone for you yet. How about that elven mage who always talks to the Tranquil?”

“I thank you for your concern, but that won’t be necessary.” I scowl, and Edward starts laughing, clapping me on my back. Suddenly, I am less disappointed that I am not going to experience time magic first hand.
The journey to Therinfal Redoubt has taken longer than expected. It would seem that the nobles are more concerned with mingling among themselves than approaching the Templars. That and getting whatever attention the Inquisitor is willing to spare them. She is graceful, polite, and kind to them, but I can tell she is not fully herself. Though she is composed, her mind often wanders when she isn’t directly involved in the conversation. But I suppose this could be explained by Sera’s pestering. Something that does not seem to concern either Bull or Cassandra.

“You’re not right,” Sera remarks as she walks beside the Inquisitor.

“I suppose I must be wrong then. What are the parameters for being right exactly? What standard of yours is it I fail to live up to?”

“Well, you must be a noble, right. Because manners and all that thinking book stuff you do. But I’ve spoken to Varric and he says you cook and mend clothes. So, not noble. Then I saw you tinkering with some mechanic thing, so you're not a servant.”

“And that is strange because?”

“You know too much. Can do too much. It’s like you have been all places at once. You’re not noble, but you’re not little people either. That’s weird.”

“So, your predicament is that you don’t know if you should have your people go after me or not?” The Inquisitor grins.

“Nah, I already did that.”

“I see …” The Inquisitor looks down with a small smile. “I bake cookies, too, you know.”

“Cookies? Why would I care about cookies?” Sera looks incredibly uncomfortable for a moment, and all mirth is lost from her childish nature.

For a brief instant the Inquisitor has a wicked look on her face that vanishes as quickly as it appears.

“No reason. Just thought it would get me on your good side. Cookies do that,” the Inquisitor says in a cheerful voice.

To my surprise Sera is silent. However, it seems like this little episode has caught the interest of Bull. The Inquisitor is lost in thought and doesn’t realise this.

“Something troubling you, Iron Bull?” I ask.

“There is something off about her, though. She has the education of a noble, the skills of a commoner, and I’ve seen those eyes of hers. There’s a temper underneath those sweet smiles.”

“She is the Inquisitor. Some would say it is her job to be more dangerous than she appears.”

“So, how is it that the leader of the Inquisition claims she can’t fight?”

“Perhaps it’s not a matter of ability, but willingness to fight. Or am I wrong, Inquisitor?” I ask pulling her from her thoughts.
She looks at us with a crooked smile.

“Not you two as well. Cassandra has many talents, too. Go pester her for a bit.”

“Thank you for that, Inquisitor,” Cassandra sighs, no doubt fearing her diversion will work.

The Inquisitor gives her an apologetic look before turning her attention back to Iron Bull.

“I had better things to do than learning how to fight. While you were out fighting on the front lines, I chose a battle more suited to me - behind the lines.”

“Aha, and those fancy bracers of yours? They’re just there to look pretty, right?”

“And what if I say that it was the role given to me, and I had chosen to stay within that role and succeed?” She gives Iron Bull a smirk.

“Ha … maybe,” Iron Bull chuckles.

“Liar,” she looks up. “So this is it. Therinfal Redoubt.”

“Defensible. I like it. Someone worked out some serious issues building this place.” Iron bull stands next to her looking up on the fortress. The inquisitor isn’t tall - especially by human standards - but is roughly the height Sera. Next to Iron Bull, however, she looks like a child. Had I forgotten the wisdom of her brilliant mind, I would be tempted to consider her rather innocent.

“The Inquisition's reach is increasing. Impressive,” I add, walking up next to them.

“I’m more concerned about the Lord Seeker changing his mind so quickly and requesting me. I was not the one he met in Val Royeaux.”

Cassandra, Iron Bull, and Sera walk ahead as the Inquisitor keeps looking at the building.

“Perhaps he has a plan for us,” I conclude, but the Inquisitor doesn’t answer. “Inquisitor?” I ask softly so that only she might hear.

“I had not expected … never mind. It will be fine. Cole is waiting for me,” she smiles as if she meant to provide me with comfort when she is the one who seems in turmoil.

Cassandra is already speaking with a noble and a young Templar as we approach. The Inquisitor’s eyes scatter around. I can tell she is noticing something, but I’m uncertain as to what.

“My apologies for interrupting,” she smiles at the noble and turns her attention to the Templar, “Ser Barris, why are there so few Templars here?”

“Most have been sent elsewhere. The Lord Seeker was keen at first when he heard you were coming, but he sent the majority of us elsewhere when he realised it would be you and not the Herald coming here,” the Templar explains.

He looks troubled by it, but not as troubled as the look I get from the Inquisitor. When we went over the events she told me that there would be a lot of Templars here. Most would die in a large battle with their red lyrium tainted colleagues. Now, their presence is far diminished which should make our task here easier, but it means that Corypheus might have managed to get the majority anyway. With a determined look, she walks passed Barris into the keep and directly for some flags on the wall. Without a word she hoists the flag of the people to the top, leaving both the flag of faith and the Order at the bottom.
"I have done the ritual. Take me to the Lord Seeker," her tone is hard and unwavering.

"Inquisitor! We should show some respect," Cassandra scolds, but the Inquisitor doesn’t look at her.

"Who set the Inquisitor’s ass on fire?" Sera mutters to Iron Bull, who shrugs.

"It is customary for the participant to explain their choices," Barris offers more diplomatically.

"The choices are mine. You do not need my reasoning. The Lord Seeker, if you please." Her words are softer - the tone of her voice is not.

Barris nods and takes us into the fortress. As soon as we enter, we are attacked by red templars. They are every bit as monstrous as the Inquisitor described to me. Parts of their bodies shatter as Cassandra and Iron Bull hit them with brute force, and Sera’s arrows have trouble penetrating their armour. Even my spells have trouble getting past their natural defenses. As a large one charges at Sera, the Inquisitor creates a portal underneath Sera, placing her on the rafters where she can more easily get a clear shot. It would have worked if Sera did not immediately gone into a state of panic. The Inquisitor rolls her eyes and turns to me. I nod, and she sends me through one next to Sera.

"Did you see that? That’s freaky, yeah?"

"Focus on the battle, if you please," I insist as I take advantage of the height.

"Piss off! I knew there was something off about her!"

From the elevated height, I get the opportunity to see the Inquisitor in combat. She does not fight. Never retaliates or engages the enemy. Instead she deflects and rearrange our foes on the battlefield. It makes me wonder what she might do if faced with an opponent who wields magic. As the battle ends, her first priority is to examine the wounded on either side.

"Inquisitor, if you please?" I call to her and she looks up.

"Oh, I’m sorry," she blushes and creates a portal for me.

"Ah ah, I’m not going into that. And don’t ever do that to me again!" Sera whines as she crawls down instead and grumbles, “Portal shite …”

The Inquisitor walks over to Barris, who is kneeling next to one of the Red Templars.

"The Knight Captain, will he survive?"

"He may get up again if we give him a healing potion," Barris sighs.

"We’ll give it to him. We’ll judge him after we deal with the Lord seeker," the Inquisitor instructs and gets to her feet.

"He might have useful information," I add, and she nods.

"Let’s go give your boss a talking to, Cassandra, shall we?"

"With pleasure. Though I can scarcely believe what I’m seeing."

The Inquisitor places a hand on the Seeker’s shoulder.

“I’m sure there is an explanation. And no matter what, as sad as this is, I’m glad my Seeker is alright.” The Inquisitor’s smile is warm and makes Cassandra shake her head before giving a small
smile in return.

We continue through the fortress, and I’m both relieved and terrified by the prospect that there are indeed far fewer Templars than what I had expected. I can only imagine what the Inquisitor is thinking at this moment. She was set on trying to make things as difficult for Corypheus as possible. We head upstairs where we encounter the Lord Seeker who grabs a hold of her. It is but a moment before she pushes him aside and the envy demon is revealed, as I had expected from our preparations. What I did not expect was the Inquisitor falling to her knees and freezing for a few moments. She is unresponsive to the world around her, and I can feel the demon attempt to snare her mind even as it is apart from her.

“The Lord Seeker?” Barris asks.

“It appears to have been an impostor. An envy demon most likely,” I offer, but my mind is preoccupied. I crouch down in front of her and place a hand on her shoulder. I feel the demon’s hold still, and then the comforting sensation of a spirit. She breathes then and trembles.

“It will be alright,” I comfort. “Feel the ground, the breath in your lungs, fabric rustling against your skin.”

Her hazel eyes meet mine with a desperate look. She surprises me by wrapping her arms tightly around me and burrowing her face in my neck, taking deep breaths. This close I can tell she uses scents of vanilla and something more spicy I can’t place - sweet, mysterious, and tantalizing to the senses. Taken aback by this sudden closeness, it takes me a moment before I lightly place my hands on her shoulders. At this, she recoils as if shocked by her behaviour herself.

“I’m sorry,” she apologizes with a sheepish look on her face.

“It’s alright. It can be overwhelming for anyone,” I assure her as she jumps to her feet and enters the keep.

“We need to get through that barrier fast. Most of the Templars are gone. It means we need to get back to Haven - and fast,” she instructs and walks directly for the barrier.

She reaches into her satchel and takes out a large rune. She places it on the barrier, and within a few seconds it vanishes into nothing. Barris walks up next to her in awe.

“We would have needed several Templars to accomplish that.”

“If you ask nicely, I might just teach you,” she grins and walks ahead.

As she walks with confidence, I wonder where the emotional woman I had in my arms mere moments ago vanished to. As we engage the envy demon, a boy appears - the spirit she mentioned.

“Dark and desperate. Death to make yourself feel alive. I used to be like you. I’m not anymore, you shouldn’t be either.” The spirit walks straight toward the demon in defiance.

“Cole!” The Inquisitor smiles, and the spirit smiles back at her.

“Stay out of this spirit!” Envy hisses.

“No! I will not let you hurt my friend!” Cole objects.

At that the demon attacks and teleports from place to place. As before, the Inquisitor aids the battle without even hurting the demon. Halfway through she moves across the battlefield placing the runes
in a circle. She intends to send it back to the Fade, though why she wants to protect it, I’m unsure. When it is greatly weakened, she creates a portal and places it in the middle. It is locked in place. She turns to me.

“Solas, I need your help. We need to adjust the harmonic frequencies. By stabilizing its electrons … argh ... energy, we might be able to stabilize the instability on the macromolecular level.”

I run to her and help her adjust the runes. I don’t understand it completely, but as I feel the runes activating, I have a feeling that I might.

“You’re purifying it - returning the spirit's essence towards it original purpose.” I can’t hide my surprise had I wished to.

“Assuming it works.” She adjust the last rune and places a mechanical device unlike any I’ve seen. “Hit it with a small electrical charge.”

We both move away as I cast a spell at it. The vibrations around the Veil shift ever so slightly, and the form of the demon begins to destabilize, but rather than being destroyed it changes its form.

“It’s working,” the Inquisitor breathes and seems even more surprised than I.

“Solas, what is going on?” Cassandra asks.

“The Inquisitor has just managed to purify the demon. It is no longer Envy, but Admiration.”

“Is that even possible?” the Seeker says with disbelief.

“Evidently,” I reply as the Inquisitor turns off the device, and the spirit flows back through the veil.

“Shit, now demons aren’t even demons … I need someone to hit me with a stick …” Iron Bull grumbles and walks away.

“As I said, weird!” Sera states and follows him.

The Inquisitor sits on the ground and catches her breath,

“Inquisitor…” my voice has an unfamiliar softness to it as I look at her. She looks up at me with a small smile which vanishes as her gaze turns to the few Templars left. She reaches for my hand, and I help her to stand.

“Later, Solas. I need to deal with this mess first.”

She walks over to the others, and I feel the spirit, Cole, besides me.

“One soul saved, but failed so many others. We are all real to her,” he mutters as he looks at her beneath his large hat.

“Pleasure to meet you, Cole. I’m Solas.”

“I know. She said you’d be here. I’m glad she was right, she wasn’t sure she would be.”

I look at the young man and I see what the Inquisitor told me. Everything he feels is without any tools to process it. He is pure but troubled. He must feel so lost in this world. A world where no one until now has truly been able to see and understand him. No one but her.

“Have you known the Inquisitor for a long time, Cole?”
“No … maybe. I know her, but she has known me longer. The tides turn in wrong directions. I tried to make her forget when I found out what I was, but she didn’t want to forget like she had been.”

“She knew you were a spirit?”

“Compassion … yes. I thought I was a demon. A wrong thing. But she told me I wasn’t. I made myself real, but I’m still not. She is real, but like a faint shadow.”

“Her situation is different. She isn’t a spirit.”

“No, she pulls to here … not like Templars, more like dwarves, but not.”

I would expect myself to follow his thoughts more easily than I do. I understand his meaning, but they are contradictory. And it doesn’t give me any answers.

“You don’t have to be afraid. She doesn’t hurt people. She wouldn’t hurt you.”

“Thank you, Cole.”

The Inquisitor walks over to us, her expression difficult for me to read for once.

“Cole, I need you to follow the rest of the Templars. Find them and Corypheus then warn us when they approach. Will you do that for me?”

“I’ll help if I can.”

“Thank you. Keep your distance and stay safe. I don’t want you to get hurt.” She holds her hand on his face and gives him a small smile. He nods and vanishes.

The Inquisitor takes a deep breath and looks towards the breach.

“Seven Templars … that’s all we managed to save.”

“You took a great risk to try and prevent a greater harm. It is a quality that is rare and might be important in the time to come. Don’t lose sight of that.”

The Inquisitor turns and sees Cassandra and the Templars approach.

“Ma banal enasalin,” she tells me with a sad smile and walks toward the few survivors.

I feel a sudden wish that my words had given her more comfort. I know all too well the burden she carries. She believes her efforts are in vain, and for the first time, I hope they are not. Whatever she is planning, I trust Compassion would have revealed any danger to myself or others. As I follow, I already hear Sera pestering her again.

“You’re weird, you know that, right?”

“Do I?” The Inquisitor’s voice is emotionless.

“Yeah. Demons, mages, and Templars with red things all over them are all just experiments to you. You’re not afraid of anything. It’s wrong!”

I feel an annoyance I can barely contain at her childishness and complete lack of understanding. Has she so little discernment that she can’t see the despair on the Inquisitor’s face? To my surprise, something in the Inquisitor’s demeanor changes.
“That’s not true. Find a tax collector or a mortgage payment, and you’ll see me running for the hills.” The Inquisitor’s eyes grow large with a humorous expression as she looks at Sera. One to which Sera instantly laughs.

“You’re daft!”

“Completely mental, but that should be common knowledge by now.” The Inquisitor smiles as she walks ahead with Sera grinning behind her, agreeing with her.

I have noticed how much of her humour seems to come at her own expense. A self-deprecation that seems to be as intricate a part of her as her courage. The only thing I can not tell is whether this comes from humility, a lack of confidence, or ... self-hatred.

When we return, we learn that Herald has managed to recruit the mages, and we will be attempting to close the breach the following day. For now, we all need some rest to ensure the attempt won’t fail. I’ve been trying to read, but my mind keeps wandering - inconsistent thoughts I can’t quite capture. Even so, I’m pulled from them when I hear a bark outside. As I exit, I see Sera sitting on a roof and Atish’an growling as she patrols around the house, preventing Sera from coming down.

“Enjoying the view?” I tease, looking up at her.

“Oh, go twang your ears! I was trying to have a bit of fun is all. Until this thing turned up,” she complains.

I smile to myself, remembering that the Inquisitor had foreseen that Sera would try to pull pranks on her. A foresight Sera didn’t have about the Inquisitor’s dog. Regardless, I can’t leave Sera on the roof the entire night - no matter how much I might be tempted to do so.

“Atish’an, come here, my friend,” I call the dog, and it gives a happy bark as it runs towards me.

“Figures it would like you,” Sera grumbles.

As if in agreement, the dog rubs its head against my hand, then grabs my sleeve gently with its teeth and tugs.

“Alright, I’ll follow. Just give me a moment.” I reach for my vest, and as I put it on, I still smell the faint scent of vanilla and spice. I will need to wash it. Sera is about to jump off the roof, when the dog barks, and she desperately hangs on to it.

“Solas! Get that thing away from me!”

I chuckle and stroke the dogs head. “Let’s go.”

Atish’an takes me up a nearby hill, and as we get closer, I see the Inquisitor sitting on a blanket with a telescope turned towards the stars - away from the breach. I consider turning around and leaving her to her solitude, but the dog reveals our presence before I get the chance.

“Solas,” she smiles, “what are you doing up here?”

“It seems that your dog thought I could do with a bit of star gazing,” I smile in return, and the dog barks happily.
“You’re certainly welcome to join me. It’s been a long time since I did this …” she pauses and a sad
looks passes over her face. “It used to give me hope … once.”

I sit down next to her and see books and charts scattered across the blanket. This is clearly something
she must have done regularly at one point or another. Atish’an places herself at our feet, and her
warmth is comforting.

“This is at your own peril, by the way. I have mad theories, and in the presence of my dog, anyone
who hears them and laughs will get used as a chew toy,” she jests with a teasing glare.

“I would not dare to offend your hound. I’ve already seen what she did with Sera,” I chuckle.

“Tish, bad girl,” she chuckles at the dog, who merely shrugs.

“So, I’m intrigued. What are these theories?”

She blushes a little and seems to debate whether or not to tell me.

“Alright … well, look at all the stars. The Chantry only concerns itself with life in Thedas but never
with what is out there. I can’t even find anything from the elves that say differently, but look at it all.
What are the chances that out of all those planets, stars, and galaxies, there is only life here?” She
keeps talking, and I don’t interrupt her. It feels wrong to as it clearly took a lot of courage on her part
to even start the conversation. Usually, I’m the one to tell the stories, but as her mind unfolds before
me I find myself grasped by the possibilities of the unknown for the first time in ages.

I can barely keep myself from grinning as she speaks and points to the stars. She hypothesizes the life
forms the universe might contain and speaks with such enthusiasm it’s intoxicating. The sense of
wonder with which she speaks lightens my heart. She reminds me of a wisp - innocent, curious, and
playful. It’s so easy to forget the burden she has chosen for herself - how heavily the needs of others
fill her mind.

“They don’t even have to be corporeal,” she postulates. “They could be beings of pure energy like
spirits. Or maybe even gas.”

“Gas?” I chuckle.

“Of course. It simply depends on what you consider life. How you define intelligence. Just because
something is so unlike us doesn’t mean its existence has less merit than ours.” She keeps looking to
the stars which I find is a small mercy. She doesn’t see the surprise on my face. She throws me off so
easily that I fear I cannot recover quickly enough for her not to notice. I regain my composure and try
to continue the conversation as I do truly enjoy it. I turn to a subject where I know I have the upper
hand. I cannot allow myself to be caught so off guard again.

“So, pray tell me, Inquisitor. If you had magic, which schools would you pursue?”

She looks at me with a playful smile. “Well, healing obviously.”

Her answer is prompt - without a second thought - as if her choosing the answer would be the easiest
thing in the world. She then bites her lower lip and ponders which allows me to believe that she has
indeed not given this much consideration.

“And shapeshifting,” she concludes.

“An interesting field of study,” I agree, and there is a sparkle in her eyes. She then lays down and
turns her attention back to the stars.
“I could be a dog, comforting children and biting bullies by the ankles.”

I smile at the imagery, and the dog gives a cheerful bark.

“A bird, flying across the sky without a care in the world. Oh!” she prods herself up on her elbows and looks at me mischievously. “I could be a bear or a wolf. Live with the Avvar and become a magnificent hold beast!”

I can not contain my laughter. It is not the notion - for it is utterly charming. It’s the passion and enthusiasm with which she declares it. She laughs as well and lays back down.

“I like when I make you laugh,” she confesses, looking up into the kaleidoscope of stars.

“As do I, lethallan. You have proven yourself a good friend.”

Chapter End Notes

Hi everyone! Thank you so much for all you wonderful comments! It's so much fun to read your input and it makes writing this story an even bigger joy.

If there is anything you wish me to explore, please let me know in the comments.

Again thanks to my wonderful beta reader!

Ma banal enasalin : My victory means nothing / My victories are meaningless
The Orb

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

After sitting under the stars, we go into my cabin to get some warmth. The Inquisitor is curled up in a chair with a blanket in front of the fire as I sit in a chair of my own. Atish’an is sleeping on the floor in front of the fire looking contented. We talk for hours, and she goes into detail on how she managed to purify the envy demon.

“I honestly had no idea it would work.”

“How did you come up with idea?”

“I got the idea from studying the Avvar’s separation ritual of host and spirit. I thought that at our core all beings are energy. Spirits are a more pure form of energy that gets affected by energy around them. That’s why - is my hypothesis - they adapt to people’s emotions so easily. They are like sponges. So, I thought, if it’s simply a matter of the energy being imbalanced, then perhaps the right frequencies and harmonics could set it right. It’s why I was taking samples from that demon a month back where you and Edward found me,” she explains in detail looking into the fire.

“Fascinating! So you are creating a safe environment within the runes to prevent outside influences that affect the spirit by nullifying the area around it.”

“Exactly!” She looks at me and radiates with enthusiasm.

“Wouldn’t that create an area within the bubble were the Veil is less stable?”

“That depends on the setting. I can do that if I wish to encourage the spirit to pass back through the Veil. But I can also remove all connection to the Fade … in theory.” She makes gestures as she talks with a passion that makes me want to chuckle.

“In theory?” I raise an eyebrow, and she shrugs.

“I would never subject a living creature to that so I have no way of testing it.”

I look into the flames with a small smile. I had never expected a human to be so sensitive towards spirits - especially not one representing a religion that claims spirits are not truly people. Regardless if she believes in the Maker or not.

“You could have revealed your plan to me before you set it in motion,” I point out with a knowing look, and she makes a sound of disbelief.

“Suuuuure, tell the elf who has dealt with spirits for a millennia my mad plan. Like I could just swoop in and be a genius. It would be like telling Varric how to use Bianca,” she laughs.

“Well, it did work so it seems that I still have things to learn.” I smile at her as she gives me a doubtful look.

“Bollocks!” she holds her hands over her mouth as she realises what she said and laughs from embarrassment.

“Excuse me?” I chuckle.
“Ahem …” She sits up properly in the chair. “What I meant to say was that if you were at your full power I bet you could do something similar without moving a muscle.”

I avoid her eyes and look to the dog lost in peaceful dreams on the floor.

“Perhaps, but that should not take away from your accomplishment.”

She chuckles softly and looks out the window.

“It’s almost morning. I’m sorry I kept you up.” She gets up from the chair, handing me the blanket.

“You have no reason to apologize. I enjoyed the company.” I start to get up, but she makes a polite gesture for me to stay where I am.

“I’m sure Wisdom misses your company. How is she?”

“She is well, thank you.”

“I’m glad. I would like to meet her sometime.” Her request is so earnest it makes something inside me ache.

“I … maybe … yes.”

“Solas, if I’m pressuring you--”

“No, you’re not … I’m perhaps pressuring myself,” I chuckle a little nervously. “It’s been a long time since I could trust someone.”

“I know … Thank you for taking the time to talk to me about all this. I know it’s a lot to take in -- most would have a hard time wrapping their head around it.” She looks away with a shy smile that is unfamiliar to me.

“I’m not most people.”

She gives good-natured chuckle. “That you’re not.”

I feel trapped and enraptured for a brief moment. I need to compose myself.

“If you wish me to speak of Orlesian fashion, I may be at a loss. Magical surprises I can handle. Speaking of which, we should ready ourselves. Corypheus is unlikely to stay passive after we have interfered with his plans on three separate occasions.”

“I know.” Her face turns grim. “I’m going to make plans for evacuating Haven while you leave to close the breach. The children and civilians must be far away once he attacks.”

“He is coming here then?”

“Yes, and he has a nasty temper. I can only assume with so many Templars missing that he will come here. Anyway, I’ll leave you to get some rest.” She smiles at me and rubs my shoulder before walking out the door.

She whistles as she walks out. Her hound stretches as it gets up and gives my hand a lick before following its master out the door. I walk to the door and lean against it as she walks away with her trusted hound beside her. It surprises me how such a vibrant soul would dress only in black and white. It is as if she is hiding her true spirit from the world. I close the door with a sigh and lay down in bed. I should get some rest, but I confess I would not have minded had she stayed longer.
The breach is closed and we are on our way back to Haven. The Herald still seems to have something weighing on his mind. He walks next to me and is unusually silent.

“You seem troubled, Herald.”

“Yes … the future I saw in Redcliffe … I had hoped that when we closed the breach this nightmare would be over, but I don’t think there is a chance of it now,” he sighs.

“I’m afraid you are correct.”

He glances at me for a moment as if debating whether he should speak.

“I saw you there. In the future. You helped me and Dorian out of that nightmare. You said the Inquisitor had told you to find us and help us. I found that odd. It sounded like she knew what was going to happen.” He scratches his head as if he is considering his own words to be ludicrous.

“The Inquisitor is resourceful. She might have had a chance to spy on Alexius. In any case, that future should no longer come to pass.” With any hope I can persuade him to think better of his notion. It seems only fitting that I keep her secret when she is willing to keep mine.

“I hope not. We found the Inquisitor as well, you know. The other Solas said she had been missing for six months. She had been tortured just as Leliana.” His face cringes, clearly still upset by the ordeal.

“I understand that it must have been disconcerting, but try to take comfort in what you have accomplished so far. At the very least by the knowledge that the events at Redcliffe will not repeat themselves,” I offer in a friendly voice, but the Herald’s expression remains grim.

“What does “Ir alas vena” mean?”

My eyes widen.

“Ir abelas, vhenan?”

“Yes,” the Herald nods.

“It means ‘I’m sorry’ ...” I hesitate to reveal the last part.

“Alright, I just needed to be sure.”

He looks ahead and seems to have let the matter rest. I wish I was not consumed by my own curiosity.

“Why do you ask?”

He stops in his tracks and looks down into the snow.

“You kept saying it when we found the Inquisitor.”

It takes everything in me not to visibly react to his words as a surge of emotion goes through me. Luckily, he continues without me having to respond. I do not trust my own voice at this moment.
“The Inquisitor … She was dead when we found her. Her body was still warm. When you and Varric saw her … I won’t allow that to happen to her. I swear to the Maker.”

He walks ahead with new determination while I am now the one left with a troubled expression. The implications of what those words mean...

As we return, the Inquisitor is preparing to evacuate Haven. Most do not understand her caution or urgency. They believe her to be paranoid and unable to take relief in this victory. Some believe it is an attempt to hold on to power after the Herald has proven himself. Only I know the bitter truth. Haven will be overrun, and if not for the Inquisitor’s resolve to prepare the small town many more would die than what is inevitable. I help as best I can, but I keep my distance from the Inquisitor. If what the Herald told me is indeed true, then I need to be more careful. I would not use the term “my heart” lightly. A month ago, I would have thought it impossible that my heart would be in any danger from her, but now … her smiles are tender and warm. Her spirit lively, thoughtful and kind … No, I must stop this line of thinking. Nothing must come of this. I grab my shirt in front of my chest, hoping I might still the increasing beating in my breast.

And still I can’t help notice how she calms the children’s fears. How patient she is with her people regardless of how stubborn or fearful they seem. In the Chantry, I’m helping with preparing the supplies and making sure the youngest mages are all assigned to a caregiver responsible for their safety should we need to flee. Atish’an has been following me around for most of the day as the Inquisitor is also busy. I can’t help but wonder if the dog has been asked to stay close to me or if it merely prefers my company. From my current position, I can hear the Inquisitor and her advisors from the war room.

“I still think you are being overly cautious, Inquisitor,” Cullen notes.

“I might be, but I’d rather not take any chances. You did not see what we did at Therinfal Redoubt,” the Inquisitor points out.

I can’t imagine how difficult it must be to convince people that you know what is going to happen but still not telling them exactly that. Even if they have been exposed to the possibility of time magic, I doubt anyone would believe her before it was too late. How easy would it be to declare her insane after all that she has witnessed? She would not be the first to lose her mind to the grief of losing a friend.

“I agree that it was troubling, but for the Templars to go so far…” Cassandra frowns.

“Let us hope I’m wrong, but if anyone shows up at our gates, I don’t want to be caught unprepared. Leliana, have you heard from your agents?”

“No, Inquisitor. Some of them have gone silent,” Leliana’s voice turns concerned.

“Pull the rest of them back, if you fear for them. We can’t afford to lose them.”

“Maker, something is coming isn’t it? Where will we go?” Josephine takes a deep breath.

“One thing at a time. We might be able to retaliate should anything happen. In the meantime, our priority should be everyone who is noncombatant.”

The advisors agree and turn to their tasks with new purpose. The Inquisitor leaves the war room and stops up next to me but doesn’t seem to notice. She pinches the bridge of her nose and takes a deep breath.

The alarm sounds, and I know danger is upon us.
“Mother Giselle, are all the supplies ready?” the Inquisitor calls out.

“Everything is packed, Inquisitor,” the Mother bows.

“Good. Leliana, have your people guide the children and civilians through the mountains now. Roderick knows the way,” she orders, and people start evacuating through the back of the Chantry. The Inquisitor have given us a route to follow up into the mountains.

“At once, Inquisitor.”

The Inquisitor runs past me out of the Chantry towards the gate and I follow. There we find the Herald talking to the spirit, Cole. The Inquisitor runs to him and embraces him. She pulls away and looks at him carefully.

“Are you alright? You’re not hurt?”

“No, but others will be. We need to hurry,” Cole insists, and she nods.

“Herald, protect the garrison. I will get as many people as I can into the Chantry. We need to give them as much time to escape as possible.”

“I know, go save them. I’ll keep the Templars at bay for as long as I can,” the Herald urges, and she holds his shoulder fondly before running back into the village.

I help the Herald fight what seems to be an endless horde of Templars. Eventually, we are forced to retreat to the Chantry when the dragon, the Inquisitor has told me about, appears. My spirit chills at the sight of it and what it means. I dearly hope the Inquisitor is right that we will succeed at vanquishing it. We are approach by Cullen, Cole and the Inquisitor as soon as we enter.

“Herald, our position is not good. That dragon stole back any time you might have earned us. If not for the Inquisitor’s foresight the civilians would still be here - trapped.” Cullen says, gesturing to the recently vacated Chantry.

“I’ve seen an Archdemon. I was in the fade, but it looked like that,” Cole wrings his hands and frowns.

“I don’t care what it looks like. It’s cut a path for the army. They’ll kill everyone left in Haven, maybe even catch up with the refugees.” Cullen growls in frustration.

“The Elder one doesn’t care about the village. He only wants the Herald,” Cole replies as he points to the Herald.

“I guess I’m fighting a dragon then. Anyone care to join me?” The Herald gives a grin to hide his fear.

“He wants to kill you. No one else matters, but he’ll crush them, kill them anyway. I don’t like him.” Cole frowns.

“You don’t like…? Herald, Inquisitor, there are no tactics to make this survivable.” Cullen nearly yells, desperation tinging the edge of his words.

“We can stop them. Use the trebuchets. Herald, if you're willing, the two of us can buy the others more time.” The Inquisitor looks to the Herald.

“But what of your escape?” Cullen’s face turns grim.
The Herald and the Inquisitor look at each other in silence. It is reckless, but I must trust that the Inquisitor knows what she is doing. She has been right so far.

“Perhaps you will surprise it, find a way…” Cullen tries to be hopeful. I wish I could find that within myself as well.

“Go, Cullen. Lead them to safety.” The Inquisitor smiles, then kneels down to her dog. “Tish, protect Solas. Keep him out of trouble for me.”

The dog whines, but then nods.

“Good girl. Shall we, Herald?”

“Way ahead of you,” he replies as he runs out the door.

She rises and prepares to follow when I grab her wrist before she runs.

“Are you certain you will come out of this alive?” I try to steady my voice, but I can hear I’m not successful.

She chuckles at that moment - it’s strained, but a chuckle, nonetheless.

“No,” she smirks, but I hear a quiver in her voice. “Protect them, Solas.”

She pulls herself from my grasp and runs after the Herald.

“Inquisitor!” I object, but it’s too late.

She runs out into the horde of Red Templars at the Herald’s side. For a moment, I wish that she had lied.

As we take the refugees through the mountains, I hear a rushing sound echoing throughout the valley. Like the rest, I turn and see the avalanche covering Haven in a mire of snow along with the Herald and the Inquisitor. Vivienne and Varric move past me and look down towards Haven.

“She … they are going to get out of that alright, right?” Fear is edged into Varric’s voice as he speaks.

“I hope so, darling. I…” the First Enchanter stops for a moment as her mask falters. “We can’t focus on this now. We need to get these people to safety.”

The First Enchanter’s eyes meet mine, and she turns. I would never have expected a woman with the nickname “Iron Lady” to look so vulnerable - even for but a moment. Varric keeps looking over his shoulder as if he at any moment means to run back to Haven. In the distance, I see the Templars retreating away from us, but my heart still aches with a debilitating fear. As I remember Cole, I walk to find him as he is carrying one of the smaller children.

“Cole, can you tell if she is alive?”

“Dark, cold, and forgotten. She aches, but waits for the sound of wolves.”
Wolves … I could guide her and the Herald back to the Inquisition. In the commotion it is unlikely I would be missed. I turn and walk slowly waiting for the rest of the group to pass before I disappear unnoticed into the trees. Or so I thought, until Atish’an whines behind me. I kneel into the snow and rub her ears.

“I will find her, I promise. Can you protect the others? Make sure to inform them if there is any danger?”

The dog whines again and pushes itself closer to me forcing me to embrace the gentle creature. It then backs away slowly with a whine and walks back to the crowd with its tail unmoving and its head low to the ground. Had I not already been motivated to find them, the look of that dog would certainly have done the trick. Poor creature. I turn my eyes toward Haven and change my form to that of a wolf. It allows me to move faster through the snow.

I run as fast as my feet can carry me, hoping that I’m not too late. That she and the Herald are not gravely injured. She told me the Herald would survive this, but her blunt reveal that she was uncertain of her own fate terrifies me. The Herald is a good man, but he is too easily manipulated. Who knows what the Inquisition might become if left in his hands? There are other thoughts lingering in my mind, but they are better left suppressed. I can’t give in to what I am feeling - especially not now.

As I reach Haven, I see nothing but snow, and I can’t sense either of them. I turn my head towards the skies and howl. Perhaps she will hear me. I howl again and again in the hopes that something in the drifts of snow will move. It is when my patience is at an end that I see movement and sigh with relief. The Herald is walking out from a tunnel with the Inquisitor leaning against him. She is injured. Badly. It takes all my will to keep me from running to them. I need to remind myself that the Herald is a good and capable individual. She will be safe with him. The blizzard intensifies and finding their way to the rest of the Inquisition will be nearly impossible. I howl, and the Inquisitor looks up.

“This … argh … this way.” She points in my direction and slowly they start to move towards me. She is limping and holding her side.

“How can you be sure?”

“I gave Cullen directions.”

It’s a vague explanation, but one the Herald accepts.

“Sera is right. You are crazy,” he chuckles as he takes a better hold of her.

“She is a lot smarter than she looks,” the Inquisitor replies with a wry grin until she winces in pain. I feel my muscles jerk at her obvious agony.

“Aiming a catapult at a blighted mountain. Didn’t see that one coming when we first met. I thought if anyone in the Inquisition was going to try and kill me it would be Cassandra,” he grins.

He is trying to keep her distracted from her pain. Trying to keep her alert. Just how severely is she injured?

“If it helps, you were an excellent distraction.”

Her chuckle is comforting, but from the Herald’s expression, I can’t be too relieved. I run ahead, howling every so often, making sure they can hear me through the blizzard. When her pain becomes too great the Herald sits down with her for a moment - holding her close for warmth.
“You should leave me here. The Inquisition needs you,” she insists.

“And leave you here alone to freeze to death? Not a chance.”

I give a sigh of relief at his refusal to leave her. It would be wise, but losing her would not be acceptable.

“So, what do you think they’ll say when we find them?” he asks as an effort to keep her awake.

“Probably that the Maker interfered on some grand scale.” She gives a pained chuckle. “Now bloody leave before I make it an order.”

“Who is to say the Maker didn’t help? We could both be chosen, and I’m not risking his wrath by abandoning you in the snow.”

“Ha, the only thing to ever choose me was the flu,” she laughs and then makes another agonizing sound.

“I wouldn’t know about that. The way Solas looks at you when he thinks no one sees--” The Herald makes a whistling sound which catches her attention.

My head snaps in the direction of the Herald. That meddling…

“I think you hit your head,” she dismisses instantly. “He sees me a colleague, perhaps a friend. You should not confuse sympathy with affection.”

“Oh, there was affection at Redcliffe. I’ll tell you that. He even had your bracers when he helped Dorian and I escape.”

“You’re an idiot,” she sneers.

“Low blow, Inquisitor. Did I hit a nerve?”

“I’m not sure I’m able to feel my nerves at the moment,” she laughs as she shivers, and he helps her to stand.

“Look, all I’m saying is that there are people who care about you. And Maker or no, I’m not willing to face Varric’s, Vivienne’s, and Solas’ wrath at once.” He raises an eyebrow at her.

“You’d be alright. You have the mark, they can’t hurt you,” she grins despite her obvious pain.

“Says you. If I come back without you they’re probably just going to cut off my arm.”

We are getting closer now. If only she can hold on a little longer. I run ahead where I’m met by Atish’an. The dog seems to recognize me even in this form and gives a happy bark. It runs back to the camp, and I follow. I enter the camp unnoticed and change back as Atish’an is making an awful ruckus. She finally grabs a hold of Ser Barris’ Templar robes and pulls.

“Hey, what’s the matter with you?” The realization dawns on him. “They’re alive, aren’t they?”

The dog gives a happy bark as Barris calls for Cassandra and Commander Cullen. They follow the dog into the blizzard, and I can rest a little easier.

As they return the Herald is being carried by Cassandra and Cullen while Barris is carrying the Inquisitor. I want to rush to her side, but I can’t. I need to control myself. Instead, Vivienne is the first at her side, guiding the Templar to take her into a nearby tent and rushing one of the healers to enter
as well. The rest are turning to the Herald and offering him any help they can. I stand so that I might look inside the tent the Inquisitor is in, and Vivienne is on her knees beside her. The Inquisitor seems to be drifting in and out of consciousness.

“Relax, darling. You’ve had quite the ordeal, but you’re safe now,” Vivienne soothes, and I find a small smile appear on my lips. Whatever their differences, at least her affection for the Inquisitor is sincere.

The Herald has woken up and has been honoured with song. The Inquisition is rallying behind him, but he insists that the Inquisitor deserves as much recognition as him. The same people who claimed her paranoid the morning before now praise her strategic wit and ability to predict her opponents. I take the Herald aside, and I tell him about the orb without revealing too much. He is not as perceptive as the Inquisitor and takes my every word as the whole truth - the one exception being my weakness for the Inquisitor. He claps me on my back and looks towards the camp.

“We should see how she is doing. I honestly can’t tell if she’s brave or crazy, but we are going to need her if we’re going to get out of this mess.”

“She is in capable hands,” I assure him, trying to keep my own desire to see to her hidden. He has seen too much in Redcliffe. Worse, he has revealed too much.

“I would feel better knowing you were looking after her. You kept me from being killed at Haven. Solas … I don’t want my friend to die. Please,” he begs. The look in his eyes is an earnest one.

“Alright, I will see what I can do, but she has already been tended to by some very experienced healers. I’m sure she is out of danger.” I really hope I’m speaking the truth.

When I enter the tent, I see Varric sitting at her side looking exhausted.

“Hey there, Chuckles.”

“How is she?”

“She is over the worst, but I don’t think she should be left alone. Some of her ribs got bent, and they said something about internal bleeding. They managed to stop it. Did you hear them call her the saviour of Andraste’s Herald?” Varric asks with a small grin.

“By the Herald’s insistence, no doubt. Why don’t you get some rest? I’ll watch over her for the rest of the night.”

“I could use a nap.” He pats the Inquisitor’s arm. “Hang in there, Waffles.”

I sit down next to her and try to examine her. The damage she sustained could have been fatal. The Herald must have used some simple healing magic to keep her alive long enough to get here. I tighten my hand as I realise I’m trembling. She stirs and looks up at me.

“Solas?” She furrows her brow and tries to sit up when she winces in pain.

“Careful, stay as you are,” I speak softly as I take a gentle hold of her shoulder, preventing her from getting up.
“What are you doing here? Where is Vivienne?”

“You were hurt. The First Enchanter is resting, as is Varric. They have taken turns to watch over you,” I explain and let go of her.

“Good, they need the rest. Thank you.” She gives me a soft smile as she reaches for my hand and gives it a quick squeeze before releasing it again.

“Why would you do something so senseless? You knew the Herald would survive, yet foolishly you run after him.” I don’t mean to scold her, but I can’t keep my voice devoid of anger.

“Where nothing ventured,” she grins, then cringes holding her side.

I touch her side and let a little soothing magic dull the pain. If I give her too much she might fall back asleep.

“Do not make light of this. You could have been killed.” My eyes do not waver from hers. A part of me is furious. How could she do something so reckless and ill-advised?

“You mean I’m not an all powerful Evanuris who can’t be squashed by a mere immortal magister? Who would have guessed?” she remarks sarcastically and turns her head from me.

“What could you possibly have hoped to gain?”

“The orb,” she whispers.

I feel myself struck by her words, holding me in place as if I was surrounded by ice. She takes a deep breath and turns her face towards me again. She continues to whisper so that no one hears.

“I was hoping that I would get a chance to take the orb from him. That way I could have returned it to you, and you could have stopped him before there was more needless suffering,” she sighs before making a pained expression before she continues. “I keep trying to make things better. And I keep falling short. It was foolish of me to believe I could ever make a difference.” She sighs hopelessly.

“Ambitious, perhaps. But not foolish.” I turn my gaze from hers and focus on dulling the pain.

“Solas, the orb might not survive when Corypheus is defeated. I’m so sorry.”

My heart stops for but a moment. The lengths I will have to go through if I can’t recover the orb … it sickens me to think of it. A tear falls from her eye and a part of me believes she might have done it for me. But why would she? That is still the question that I can’t seem to get the answer to. If it is merely because she considers me a friend, then she is a better one than I ever deserved.

“I should have tried harder. I’m so--”

“Hush, lethallan. You took a great risk for the sake of others. And now that you have told me, perhaps there is a way to prevent its destruction.” I try to offer her some solace.

“Perhaps.”

I stay quiet for a moment to make sure no one outside is listening. I lay down next to her, hoping that I can be as quiet as possible. My face close to hers so that there is no chance of anyone else hearing.

“You know my plans, but I see you trying to protect this world. Why is it that you do not oppose me? Why is it that you say you will not stop me?”
She gives me a faint smile and closes her eyes.

“I can’t stop you. I’m not powerful enough for that. Everything I do is in a slim hope that you will stop yourself.”

In that moment I can feel my heart split into two - as if she has sundered it with a magical blade. She knows not of the doubt slowly starting to form, and now my resolve is beginning to weaken.

“I--”

She takes my hand for a moment which makes any words I have die on my lips.

“This is not the time for that debate. We had better get some rest. There is still a long distance to Skyhold,” she whispers and closes her eyes. Her last words before she drifts into the Fade are a murmur, “I can’t wait to see it.”

Chapter End Notes

And a Saturday update! I hope you will enjoy this chapter. Thank you again for all your comments. I'm overwhelmed by the support of this story :)

Thanks to ninaninabobina for beta reading!

I'm looking for someone to make some cover art for this story (commission), as I don't have the time to do it myself. If anyone is interested you can find me as Cowoline on Deviantart.
I walk through the Fade, exploring forgotten dreams and ancient secrets. It has been so long since I slept so close to a place I used to call home. I give a rueful smile as I see a younger version of myself walking amongst Tarasyl'an Te'las. As a much younger man, I was so certain I knew everything. To see such a past at a point in my life where I feel less certain than ever before both troubles and humbles me.

“You’re not as impulsive as you once were. But patience remains a mystery to you,” Wisdom says behind me, and I turn with a smile.

“Perhaps you’re right.” I sit down and look as the Fade changes. What was once my home is now an old Ferelden ruin. I wonder if she knows what it looks like.


I look her momentarily confused.

“What isn’t?”

“To visit her dreams. Your heart is vulnerable after so many ages trapped in the Fade.”

I take a deep breath as I fear she might be right.

“I admire her … After watching their world through dreams, I thought I knew them.”

“You know better than anyone that the Fade is merely a reflection, its emotions never to be taken as fact,” Wisdom reminds me.

“I know…” I give a frustrated sigh. “I must distance myself. I have no other choice.”

“That depends on what you hope to achieve. Tell me, lethallin, what is it you want?”

Through my mind flashes an image of the Inquisitor. As she smiles mischievously at me, I take a gentle hold on her face and kiss her deeply. Her soft lips glide against mine as a shudder runs through me. A build up of emotion that is finally released.

“This is absurd! I have only known her three months. How can she have this effect on me?”

“Because you’re lonely. When she looks at you, she sees you for who you truly are. You’re not the Dread Wolf, a betrayer, or a hero who you believe gets far more credit than deserved. She looks at you and sees only Solas, despite the fact that she is the only one to know the truth. In your moments with her, there is no war, and for a moment you feel as if there never was. She makes you feel real, and that frightens you--”

“Because that would mean she is. I can’t let this go any further.” I look to my friend. “What should I do?”

“I can’t tell you that.” Wisdom sits down next to me.

“You can’t offer me advice?” I give a bitter chuckle.
“No, because I myself am conflicted. I know the path you must take, but I also want you to be happy. And for all that might transpire, in her company you are happy.”

I rest my face in my hands. What am I going to do?

As I wake the following morning, I realise I’m still laying close to the Inquisitor. Almost close enough to touch. She looks peaceful and still. So still that for a moment I have to reassure myself that she is alive and well. It would be so easy to reach for her, and my heart pangs at my restraint. My thoughts betray me as she releases a soft sigh, and I force myself to get up. I need to get out. I exit calmly and see that Cullen and some of the Templars have already slowly begun to pack up the camp, though many are still asleep. Good. I have to focus and guide the Herald through the mountains to Skyhold - a task and conversation that should give me the distance I need from her.

Cassandra is the first to approach me.

“There you are. We should be able to leave within the hour. How is she?”

“The Inquisitor's condition is stable. She should be able to travel, but I would suggest that she rides on horseback or in one of the sleds,” I offer politely.

“Thank you, Solas. I owe you an apology - for threatening you. I hope you understand that my opinion of you has changed. You are a valued member of the Inquisition.”

“Thank you, Seeker. But I understand why you might have considered me a threat given the circumstances.”

The Seeker smiles at me. It's a rare sight and one that I'm happy to receive.

“The Herald is waiting for you. I will help the Inquisitor.”

I find the Herald and prepare him for the journey ahead. We walk for hours, and I am thankfully spared the company of the Inquisitor. And yet, I feel her absence. As nightfall approaches, we slow to wait for the rest of the people to catch up.

“So, how loud do you think my echo would be from up here? Think I could speak with the booming voice of the Maker?”

“Not pointing out that, as I recall, no one has actually heard the voice of the Maker, it would probably attract unwanted attention. Or create another avalanche.”

“No, thank you. I already had one mountain levelled on top of me. Well, two if you count the conclave.”

“Hmm … Now I come to think of it, giving you a home in the mountains might not be the best idea.”

“I don’t know if anyone has told you this, Solas, but you’re an ass,” he grins.

“That has been mentioned before, yes,” I smirk, which only has the Herald laughing more.

“One day I’m going to be more than just your frustrating pupil. One day, Solas, you will look at me and call me friend.” He bumps his shoulder with mine, and I shake my head.

He is like an overgrown child, but he means well. And considering who else my mark could have
been bestowed upon, he I can at least respect. As we see the others in the distance, the Herald laughs.

“And the Inquisitor is walking.”

“Seems like she has given her horse to some of the children,” I observe, as she is walking next to it, and two small people are sitting on top of it.

“Well, yes, because of course she has. I swear to the Maker, that woman either has a deathwish or enjoys torturing those who care about her,” he chuckles and sits down in the snow.

I smile as they approach, though I see the Inquisitor is limping slightly. Cassandra takes the reins out of the Inquisitor's hands and gives it to a nearby Inquisition scout. She then wraps the Inquisitor’s arm around her neck as they keep walking. Atish’an runs towards me, and I crouch down to greet her. If I did not know better, I would say this hound was a spirit of joy that had taken physical form. There is so much affection and protection in her nature, I can’t help but being fond of her.

“I think Cassandra is giving her an earful,” the Herald points out as they approach.

From what I can hear he is right.

“I can walk. I will not add to their burden,” the Inquisitor insists.

“And people say I’m stubborn,” Cassandra grouses.

“What can I say? I aspire to be just like you, Cassandra.”

She gives her a brilliant smile, and the Seeker laughs.

“You think flattery will get you out of this?”

“Oh, flattery has gotten me out of far worse.” She winks at Cassandra, who shakes her head at her.

“Solas, why don’t you see if you can talk some sense into her?”

“I will try, but it is difficult to teach a student unwilling to listen,” I grin as the Inquisitor scowls at me.

“Why do I suspect I have a mutiny on my hands?”

The Herald takes off his coat and lays it on the snow for her to sit on. He then helps her to sit.

“If we wanted you gone, we would simply let you kill yourself. But none of us wants the burden of command, so we’re forced to keep you alive,” he grins at her.

“I feel so loved,” she grumbles sarcastically.

“Solas, will you stay with her? We will help the others with setting up camp.” Cassandra looks at me.

“No, let Solas help you. I don’t need a nursemaid.” The Inquisitor shakes her head with a smile.

“Are you certain?” I ask.

“Yes, I’ll be fine. I don’t want to be a burden just because I’m an idiot. Go help the others,” she insists as Atish’an lays down next to her.
I purposefully keep myself at a distance from her for the rest of the journey to Skyhold. What I’m feeling can’t go any further - I can’t let it evolve. It is better to distance myself now.

It takes two more days for us to arrive at Skyhold, but the journey remains uneventful, thankfully. I’m beginning to feel more at ease again, though I suspect that Cole is the reason. I have continued to keep my distance to the Inquisitor. Something she either hasn’t noticed or decided to respect. Retreat seems like my only option, but she is the Inquisitor. There was always a limit to how long we could avoid crossing paths.

It takes a week at Skyhold for other members of the Inquisition to take notice of Cole. Vivienne and Cassandra have already expressed their concerns about him. My arguments fall on deaf ears as the Inquisitor approaches.

“This is not some stray puppy you can turn into a pet. It has no business being here,” Vivienne asserts, and Atish’an growls.

“Wouldn’t you say the same of an apostate?” I point out.

“Inquisitor, I wondered if Cole was perhaps a mage given his unusual abilities.” Cassandra turns to her.

“He can cause people to forget him, or even fail to entirely notice him. These are not the abilities of a mage,” I insist - for the third time this afternoon.

A faint smile brushes the Inquisitor’s lips.

“No, Cole is a spirit of Compassion,” the Inquisitor states as if it was the most natural thing in the world.

Vivienne looks at the Inquisitor with a foreboding glare.

“It’s a demon, darling.”

“If you prefer, although the truth is somewhat more complex,” I object, placing my arms behind my back.

The Inquisitor shakes her head and looks at the Enchanter.

“To you, maybe, Vivienne, but not to me. We are all products of the people who perceive us, spirit or no. Some will call me a calculating bitch and a social climber, while other will say I’m kind and intelligent. And they are both right. This is as much the truth now as in The Game. It might have escaped your notice, but I have known Cole for years. In that time, he has never put myself or anyone else in any danger.”

“You can’t be serious, my dear.”

“I’m absolutely serious. It might be a flaw in my Chantry upbringing, but I know my friend. He is as dear to me as anyone. But you needn’t concern yourself. I will take all responsibility for him and ensure he is not a danger to others or they to him.”

I take my stand next to the Inquisitor.

“As will I.”

Cassandra sighs.
“Very well, Inquisitor. We will leave him in your care.”

“You will excuse me. It seems others will need my advice, darling.”

Vivienne and Cassandra both walk away. When they are some distance away, the Inquisitor gives a deep sigh and covers her face with her palm.

“Semantics, religion, and politics. Damn it, I hate them all. What does it matter when Cole is willing to help?”

“Open mindedness is a rare commodity, it would seem.”

“Huh, and here I thought it was common sense. I guess I learned something new today,” the grin she offers me is a devious one as she walks towards Cole.

As soon as she reaches him she pulls him into a hug.

“You’re letting me stay? To help?” His voice trembles ever so slightly

“Of course I am,” she pulls away and rests a hand on his face. “You’re my friend, and I love you. You will always have a place at my side, whenever you want it.”

I can’t help smiling at how open she is with him. There is no mask or carefully chosen words. Just her honest feelings for him. In his company, she seems almost as open and vulnerable as he is. She takes off his hat and ruffles his hair.

“You need a bath,” she chuckles.

“Baths are not important,” Cole objects, and the dog whines as if it agrees.

“Oh, yes, they are. Hygiene prevents people from getting sick, though I hardly think you pose a danger - which reminds me I need to see the plans Cullen and Josephine are working on for this place. Hopefully, we will be able to install decent plumbing for once.” She makes a grimace as she shudders and walks towards the tent where Cullen and Josephine are located.

Atish’an looks up at Cole and barks happily.

“I like you, too,” Cole laughs and pets the dog.

I walk up to him as he crouches down to the dog, who wags her tail at me as I approach.

“The Inquisitor is very fond of you, Cole.”

“Yes,” he smiles. “We are one, but we are different. When she talks to me, she talks to him. The shape is different, but the feeling is the same. She thinks of him, but I’m still me when she looks.”

I nod with understanding. It doesn’t take me by surprise that she has lost someone dear to her. Despite her knowledge about the people around her, she seems all alone.

“Some things can be far too painful to remember. I’m glad you’re helping her.”

“I’m helping? Good. You help her, too. A comforting voice of a friend. ’He believes me.’”

Cole has a point. I shouldn’t let myself be so controlled by my feelings. She is my friend. A dear one, even though I have known her for such a short time. If I am to have any chance of recovering the orb, then I will need her friendship. I can’t be selfish or cowardly when my people depend on me.
I smile as I look around Skyhold. This place holds so many memories. It was here I created the Veil. With any luck, this will be where I will tear it down. And when I do all this will be forgotten. At the very least, I should make sure all this is remembered. That their heroic efforts are remembered. I walk into the castle that is still in ruins, and I clear a path. I look at the round walls and smile. This will do perfectly.

It has been so long since I picked up a brush, but I find myself lost as I paint. The events up till now unfold before me, and with a ladder, I can create murals as I used to.

“It’s beautiful, Solas.”

I hear the Inquisitor’s voice from below as she looks up at it.

“Thank you,” I smile. “It’s far from finished.”

“But it’s taking shape.” She keeps looking at it deep in thought. “My mother was an artist. I always wanted to draw, paint, and create sculptures like she did.”

“I can give you some fundamental advice if you would like,” I offer.

“That’s very kind, Solas. I do know how, I’m just not very good. Too impatient,” she gives me a rueful smile, “and too hard on myself. My father was intelligent when it came to numbers and calculations - analytical. My mother was resourceful and artistic, but somewhat naïve - not to mention frightfully stubborn. I got a bit of both worlds, I guess.”

“You miss them.” From up here, I can’t get a good look at her expression.

“My father, at times. My mother … constantly.”

“What happened?” I find myself asking without thought as to why I’m doing so.

“They were … lost to me … long ago. Along with my brothers and sisters, and…” she pauses and doesn’t complete her sentence. She looks sad, but not in agony. Whatever pain she carries, it is an old one.

“Did you have a large family?”

“I had a broken one … it’s complicated,” she smiles wistfully. “Anyway, it seems that my parents only gave me half their useful genes. I’m doomed to a life of mediocrity,” she quips and follows up with a dramatic sigh. “Having a lot of talents, but not really exceeding at any of them.”

She smiles at me, and it pains me how honest those words are. She truly believes them.

“You’re the Inquisitor. Clearly you succeeded at something,” I frown.

At that she gives a bitter laugh.

“Trust me, you don’t want to open that particular can of worms with me.”

I start walking down the ladder.

“No, don’t trouble yourself. I just wanted to ask you to watch out for Cole for the next few weeks? Josephine and I are going to Val Royeaux to get funding for rebuilding Skyhold.”
“Of course.”

“Thank you. Goodnight.” She smiles and turns to walk back out into the still broken castle.

“Goodnight, Inquisitor.”
As I read through the missives from my spies, I realise a pattern between them and the information gathered by my agents following the Venatori. Both pieces of a puzzle that by themselves mean nothing. But now … the Venatori are already here. And they plan to kill the Inquisitor.

My heart grows still. I can’t allow her to be threatened like this, but I cannot reveal that I know either. Even if I were to inform the Inquisitor herself, I could not offer her any proof to give Leliana that would not implicate myself. I can’t spend my time watching over her at every turn, and I can’t expose the Venatori myself.

As I study the recent measurements on the Veil I hear slow footsteps behind me.

“Hey there, Chuckles.”

I turn to see Varric dragging his feet across the floor and his head lowered. He is undoubtedly troubled.

“Hello, Varric, what can I do for you?”

“Nothing, just came by to talk,” he evades and moves his head around the room but doesn’t really see anything.

“You seem troubled, Child of the Stone.”

“The Venatori tried to have Waffles assassinated.”

Aah … I should have expected how the news would affect him. At least my hand in it seems to not have been revealed. I frown and feign concern.

“I see … Have they been able to apprehend the people intending to do so?”

“Yes, thankfully. An elven servant tipped off Leliana by accident. Lucky the servant was at the right place at the right time.”

Lucky, indeed.

Varric releases a breath of relief. “I just don’t get why. I don’t want the Herald dead, but wouldn’t he have been the logical target?”

I put my hands behind my back and look at my studies on the table before me for a moment before answering.

“She is the head of a powerful organization who has already been responsible for interfering with their plans. One assumes that they wanted to make the Inquisition leaderless.”

“I suppose,” he grunts.

“You are very protective of her,” I remark as he leans against the table and gently kicks at its leg.

“I’m protective of all my friends. She’s a good kid. Argh, shit … this is all my fault,” he hisses.
For the first time in this conversation, I find myself at a loss.

“T’ve … I always said I had one story I could never tell. I had not expected to get another one of those.” He rubs his neck in frustration.

I find myself intrigued. Is it possible he has had a similar experience with the Inquisitor as I did? I could ask, but that would just lead to an awkward conversation of half truths. And Varric is clever. I would rather not give him any reason to suspect me of duplicity.

“Can I ask you for a favour?” he asks.

“Of course. How may I assist you?”

“Could you go with the Inquisitor and Josephine to Val Royeaux? To protect her? I would go, but there is a contact I have to meet.” He makes that frown again - the one he always makes when he is lying or hiding something.

“Certainly, though I did promise the Inquisitor I would watch over Cole in her absence. Besides, one apostate against a group of Venatori would not improve her chances, I fear. Perhaps some of the soldiers…”

“Let me stop you right there, Chuckles. The Inquisitor refused to let the soldiers escort her because they were too valuable in other places - like securing Skyhold. I can bring the kid with me, and I already asked Tiny and Sparkler to accompany her and Ruffles.”

“Then why?” I fail to hide my surprise.

“Because I’m being overprotective. Something I wouldn’t have to be had she agreed to take fighting lessons like I told her. But noooo, ‘I’m a pacifist, Varric.’ That girl is too stubborn for her own good,” Varric grumbles and crosses his arms.

“Very well, Varric.”

“Thanks, I owe you one.”

Chapter End Notes

Hi everyone. Thank you so much for all your wonderful comments.

I have gotten a few saying how much they enjoy this POV. Is this how most of you feel because then I will continue doing so :)

As always, let me know if there is something you want me to explore or something you want to know more about.

Again a lot of thanks to ninaninabobina. The story wouldn't be as good without you :}
The ride to Val Royeaux is long, especially in the company of a Qunari and a Tevinter magister. Both represent a way of life I despise. It is not made shorter by the fact that the Inquisitor has barely spoken a word the entire journey. She doesn’t seem downcast in any way, just not present - save for petting the horse. Even Atish’an seems a little concerned as she frequently whines at her master. Our companions are much more lively as Josephine, Bull, and Dorian have been chattering nonstop since we left Skyhold. Unfortunately for me, Dorian seems to have noticed me being quiet as well.

“Solas, have I offended you?” Dorian asks as he rides up next to me.

“If you have, why would it concern you?”

“Because we’re here working together for a common cause and because I respect your abilities.”

“My abilities as a mage,” I sneer.

To his credit, Dorian looks a little uncomfortable.

“Well, I ... realize there's more to you than that.”

“The differences between us are not technicalities to be discarded, Dorian.”

“I ... was hoping we might find common ground, that's all,” he sighs and after a minute rides up next to Bull and Josephine again.

I turn my head back to look at the Inquisitor. She frowns at me in a way I have never seen before - as if she is ashamed of me.

“You're too hard on him,” she says in a low voice so that our conversation remains private.

“Am I? Have you heard how he speaks of spirits? Are you not aware of the crimes of his homeland?” I can’t contain my disbelief. I thought that if anyone would share my point of view it would have been her.

“I am, but he is reaching out. Not only is he amenable to change, but he actively seeks it. Surely, I don’t have to tell you how rare that is.” The expression on her face is tender, but she does not quite manage a smile.

“Indeed not,” I frown, having to concede her point.

“As for the other things, you do not wish to be judged by your race or you being a mage. Do yourself a favour - if you do not wish to be a victim of preconceptions, then don’t fall into those pitfalls yourself. You’re better than that.”

There is a confidence in her voice that lets me know that not only does she know me, she knows of my weaknesses and strengths. I have known this for some time, of course, but somehow this seems more intimate.

“I’m confused, Inquisitor. Is this flattery or a reprimand?” I smile, trying to hide how accurate her words truly are.
“Whichever it takes to change your ways.” She gives me a wry grin before riding ahead.

It takes nearly five days to reach Val Royeaux. As we enter the tavern where we will be staying, Dorian and Iron Bull head directly for the bar. I’m left in the company of Josephine and the Inquisitor.

“How long before we have to meet with the Duke, Josie?” the Inquisitor asks as the proprietor gets the keys for our rooms.

“Not until later this evening. I thought we might want to freshen up a bit before we start negotiating for funding for the Inquisition.”

“Perfect. I’ll be leaving for awhile then. I need to go by my apartment and get some of my things. I will be back before nightfall,” the Inquisitor smiles and is nearly out the door when Josephine stops her.

“Inquisitor, would it not be wise to take someone with you? You are a target after all,” Josephine remarks.

“Josie, I don’t need a bodyguard. I can take care of myself. Besides, I have Tish.” She smiles down at the dog who barks happily.

“If not a bodyguard, then perhaps a friend? Master Solas, perhaps?”

The Inquisitor rolls her eyes, but as her hands go to her wrists where her bracers are not applied, she sighs.

“Very well. If it will ease you mind,” she gives the ambassador a fond smile. “Solas, would you mind accompanying me? It’s not far, and I happen to know of a bakery along the way.” She is all smiles as she asks, and I can’t help but return it.

“Not at all, Inquisitor.”

I follow her to the streets along with Atish’an who seems content to walk between us. Every so often the dog will push my hand with her snout to make me stroke her head. We do not walk far before the Inquisitor strikes up a conversation.

“Sorry for stranding you with babysitter duty.” A faint blush caresses her cheeks.

“It is a small price to pay for your company,” I smile.

At that, she laughs.

“Smooth, Solas. There is a bakery a few streets from here that have these delicious little frilly cakes you like.”

“I do?”

“I think so. I could be misremembering. It’s been so long since we have spoken naturally - from my side of things at least.” She looks away as her cheeks flush.
“Things between us have been rather…”


We are silent for a moment, and for the first time, the silence feels awkward. Usually, I’m happy to just be in her company, but things between us have not been the same since she told me about the orb. Eventually - and unexpectedly - I’m the one who can’t take the silence any longer. I take her gently by her elbow and make her stop.

“Inquisitor, this is unnecessary. Perhaps there is some way we can get passed this. You did say we were friends after all,” I smile, and to my relief she returns it.

“We were. Very good friends. It’s just strange. I know you, but you have only just started to know me. I feel like I have you at a constant disadvantage, and I don’t enjoy it one bit,” she sighs, shame evident on her face.

“Then perhaps I should get to know you better?” I can almost hear Wisdom scolding me from beyond the Veil.

“Alright, ask away,” she smiles - a natural one this time.

We start walking again and I find that I hardly know where to start. I decide that it would be wisest to ask questions that are in no way personal - something that appeals to her intelligence.

“The knowledge you gained. How did that work exactly? When you touched the relic?”

She ponders her answer for a moment before replying.

“It’s hard to explain. Imagine you have a book where you can make choices along the way. For every choice you make you are sent to a new page that tells one story. If you choose differently, you’re sent to a different page where something else will be revealed. And before you ask, when I approached you in the Fade was the first time I had actually spoken with you. Am I making any sense?” She gives me an uncertain look.

She has never actually met me before the Fade? That relic of hers must have been incredibly detailed. I would never have guessed as much. Though that does explain why she was both shy and confident at our first meeting. What a bizarre situation.

“Fascinating! So, each time you went through this process you would see different outcomes?”

“Provided I made different choices, yes,” she nods.

“Incredible! I would love to see this relic, if I may?” I ask enthusiastically.

“I would love to show it to you. Unfortunately, it’s not something you casually move and the area has been overrun by darkspawn again,” she seems to shudder as she says it.

“Aah,” I can’t hide my disappointment, and she strokes my arm.

That is when we approach an Orlesian woman with her elven servants trying to put some luggage onto a carriage.

“Excuse me! You there, can I borrow your rabbit?” The woman directs her attention to the Inquisitor.

I feel the annoyance burn inside me but give merely a sigh. The Inquisitor's eyes, on the other hand,
are ignited with a fury so intense that Atish’an moves to the other side of me as if to hide from her master.

“Oh, I’m sorry. I’m all out of cute, fluffy forest creatures at the moment,” she replies, her voice dripping with sarcasm.

“Very funny, madame,” the Orlesian lady laughs.

The Inquisitor walks straight up to her and smiles. It is not a pleasant one, rather one that comes off as almost sadistic.

“Let me introduce myself. I’m Mona Aim, adviser to the late Justinia the Fifth.”

The woman seems positively thrilled, not acknowledging the anger that hides beneath the surface of the Inquisitor.

“A pleasure to make your acquaintance.” The woman curtsies.

“Let me give you some advice. This man is one of my most trusted advisers. Refer to him as a rabbit again, and I will make certain no one will ever attend your soirees again. It will be social suicide,” her smile never wavers, even as the woman grows pale.

“Understood, my lady.”

“Now, run along.”

The Inquisitor continues to walk toward our destination and chuckles softly. Any anger vanished in but a second. I shake my head, and the dog happily walks up next to her master again.

“You do not have to trouble yourself on my behalf,” I smile.

“Who says I did it for you? Maybe I just like making people uncomfortable,” she winks with a carefree look on her face.

“The woman who usually goes around trying to solve everyone’s problems enjoys making people uncomfortable. Intriguing, but I know you better than that,” I raise an eyebrow, and she laughs.

“We’re here.” She walks up some stairs and unlocks the door.

The apartment is small but nicely decorated. Her desk is filled with drawings, and despite what she has told me earlier, she is not as hopeless as she believes. Some are technical drawings, but most are of animals, flora, and people. She takes a book from a drawer and puts it in her satchel, then proceeds to a wall nearby.

“Alright, let’s see,” she murmurs to herself and walks to a wall. She pushes the tiles around in an intricate fashion until a small “click” sounds. A tile appears with a shape of a hand, and when she puts her hand on it, another "click" sounds, and a door opens.

Inside is what looks like a vault. It’s filled with artifacts from different origins. Most, however, are elven.

“This is remarkable. I have never seen anything like it. You must have been very skilled and dedicated to find them all,” I say in awe as I look at it all.

“The only thing this proves is that I’m a thief,” she scoffs.
“You stole them?” I frown.

“No, I found them - but I didn’t return them to the Dalish. Remember I mentioned Ariane? She helped me locate a great number of artifacts. Her and Finn. I kept these from her.” She sighs with regret.

“The Dalish would squander the knowledge hidden here, their minds dulled by ignorance as they are. You could be considered wise for having recovered and protected them.” As I say the words, I think of the irony that I actually prefer them to be in the hands of a human.

“We are all villains in someone’s story.”

“And you’re the villain among the Dalish are you?” I give her a curious look.

She laughs as she hits her head softly against the wall and makes a movement as if she where to hang herself in jest. I frown.

“Don’t do that.” I take her by the wrist and lower her arm.

“Do you mind leaving? I’m just going to hide here until the embarrassment wears off. I’m thinking a century at least.” She looks at me for a moment. “I didn’t mean to make you uncomfortable.”

“You didn’t,” I assure her.

She gives my shoulder a friendly rub and turns to find whatever she is looking for. A mask on the shelf catches my eye, and I take it down.

“The Mask of Fen’Harel would be the first thing to catch your eye,” she teases.

I turn it in my hands and examine it.

“It’s broken.”

“Yes, I know. One of my many futile attempts to contact you over the years.”

My eyes widen.

“You attempted to use this?”

“No. Unfortunately, it was broken when I retrieved it. It would have been difficult anyway to find a mage to send me to the Fade. Hawke and Anders were already suspicious, and can you imagine if I showed that to my Dalish friend, Merrill?” She sighs, shaking her head.

Well, this is intriguing.

“How many attempts did you make?”

“I have lost count, but I suppose that also depends on what you mean by attempt. I rarely got far enough to attempt anything,” she gets on her knees and reaches for something under a desk.

“Alright, what did you attempt?”

“Breaking into Halamshiral to find Briała and getting thrown in prison for a week until Varric got me out. Only to find out she hadn’t met Fel’assan yet. Searching for Flemeth, then a woman named Morrigan hoping she would lead me to Flemeth. Then, I searched for that mask you’re holding. When that failed, I thought if I could find where you were sleeping physically, then I could take a
tent and just live there until you finally decided to wake up.” She gives me a teasing glare from under the table, and I hear another "click".

“You dedicated your life to finding me.” I look around the room in astonishment.

She gets down on her back and meddles with something under the desk again.

“I dedicated my life to finding a way to prevent the people of Thedas from as much suffering as I could. But if you want to romanticize it as a besotted woman searching for you endlessly, be my guest.” She bites her lip and bats her eyelashes playfully.

I laugh and place the mask back on the shelf before crouching down.

“What are you doing down here?”

“Unlocking my desk.”

“This all seems a bit cumbersome.”

“Says the ancient elf. I’ve been to your temples. Not exactly a quick journey. Fun though,” she grins.

“So, which temples have you been too?” I ask with a small smile.

I hear yet another "click: and a hidden drawer pops open.

“Spoilers.” She winks at me as she gets up.

I could pressure her to tell me, but her carefree expression makes me believe it’s not important. I find her playful nature somehow endearing. Especially in light of how somber, confident, and rigid she appears back at Skyhold. The mask of the Inquisitor is one she has crafted carefully, and this moment is a small window into the woman that lays beneath it. She takes out a small device with a rune in the middle of it. She tries it on, and I see it attaches to palm of her hand. She reaches into her pocket and pulls out an odd piece created from screws, wires, and gears.

It occurs to me that she never actually had to reveal anything to me. She could have manipulated me in so many ways - or killed me in my sleep if she so desired. Instead, she decided to reveal all of it to me.

“I am curious ... you could have kept all this to yourself. Why did you decide to tell me?”

She looks at me for but a moment before turning her attention back to the rune.

“Understand, I’ve had years to think about this. It was very calculated at first, pros and cons. I considered just interrogating Fel’assan, but the thought left a bitter taste in my mouth. Ultimately, it came down to one thing…”

“Which was?” I press.

“If I were in your shoes, what would I prefer? In the end, your feelings were my only concern.”

The air leaves my lungs unexpectedly as I look at her.

“That’s, well…”

She smiles and glances briefly at me, as I’m left speechless.
“Surprising, given you’re aware of my plans.” I try desperately to regain my composure.

“Whatever they are and whatever you might have done, it doesn’t change the fact that you have a good heart - with a lot more feeling than most give you credit for,” she says knowingly, still not meeting my gaze.

I look at her for a moment, taking her in. The clever expression in her hazel eyes, the softness in her round features. The elegance of her auburn hair in a low bun on her neck. It feels like a part of me hasn’t truly seen her until this moment.

“Thank you ... for saying that and seeing that. Few in this world can see me. Most people look at me and see only a pair of pointed ears.”

“You don’t have to thank me for common decency, Solas.” She says it so casually that I have to laugh.

“I’m not so certain it is common.”

“It might not be a given, but it should be. To think of all that could be avoided if people would just respect each other. For all heavens, disagree about politics and religion, but have respect for the feelings of others. Understand that your feelings and opinions should not be forced on others. If we could just learn to...” she pauses and looks at me. “And I’m ranting.” She laughs at herself and rubs her forehead.

“A rant would suggest you did so without reason or thought. From what I heard, it was anything but.”

She laughs again.

“What you heard I might as well have screamed at a door a million times. For people to change, they need to be willing to listen. And if they were willing to listen the problem wouldn’t exist to begin with.”

“And so the circle continues,” I sigh, knowing she is right.

She looks at me for a moment with a gentle expression in her eyes.

“I’ve missed this,” she admits softly.

“Ranting at a door?” I tease, and she rolls her eyes.

“Talking naturally. Not just thinking, but feeling the flow of the conversation and exploring the world around us through it.”

“Things are quiet until the Herald returns from the Storm Coast. We are not needed at the tavern right this minute, so if you would like, I would enjoy talking,” I suggest.

“I would like that, but Josephine is probably waiting for us. Now that I have this,” she holds up the device, “we can deal with what’s to come.”

“Why did you not retrieve it earlier?”

“It was missing a part when I left, and I couldn’t leave the Inquisition, and I didn’t dare bring it with me when everything was so uncertain. If this thing should get into the wrong hands...” she sighs deeply. “And I’m talking too much. Let’s go.”
I see her retreating behind her mask as she closes the vault.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks again for all your wonderful comments and to ninaninabobina for beta reading.

Looking forward to hear what you guys think about this chapter :)}
Josephine and the Inquisitor are out approaching the nobles of Orlais to support the effort to rebuild Skyhold. In the meantime, I’m stuck at the tavern with Iron Bull and Dorian. I’m sitting with my book - Varric’s *Hard in Hightown* - while Dorian and Iron Bull are busy drinking themselves into a stupor. A dwarf enters the tavern, which isn’t that unusual except for the fact that he is clearly looking for someone. His eyes keep going from one end of the tavern to the next - his eyes only stopping when he sees human women. I get up from the table under the pretense of refilling my glass. As I walk up to the bar, the dwarf follows.

“Excuse me,” he asks the bartender, “I’m looking for Mona Aim.”

The bartender shakes his head.

“I know a woman by that name. What do you wish from her?” I ask looking down at the dwarf.

“My name is Bodahn Feddic. I’m an old friend of hers. I have some items she requested.”

Interesting. I wonder if they are anything like her collection in her vault.

“You are welcome to wait with us until she returns,” I offer.

“Thank you kindly. Though I can’t stay too long. I've got to get back to my boy.”

As we walk to the table, I reconsider. I have no interest in anything being revealed to the Iron Bull or for him to notice my fasc-- curiosity in the Inquisitor. We sit down at one of the empty tables, and though Bull notices, if he thinks anything of it he doesn’t show it.

“How do you know her?”

“Oh, we go way back. My boy found her, the poor girl, and good thing he did. She would have died or worse.” His expression turns grim.

“Found her where?”

“In the Deep Roads. To think she survived that ordeal.”

The amount of questions seem overwhelming, but before I get to indulge my curiosity, the Inquisitor walks into the tavern and sees Bodahn immediately. She looks different. Her normal black and white clothes covered by a black coat don’t reveal much. Tonight, she looks as elegant as Vivienne, though her choice of colour remains the same. Gloves, skirt, corset, and form fitting jacket in black with white details and shirt. Her smile brightens as she walks over to us.

“Bodahn! It’s so good to see you!”

She reaches for his hand with both of hers and shakes it warmly.

“And you, messere.”

“You didn’t have to come in person,” she smiles.
“Oh, it was no trouble. I have everything you asked for.”

“That’s wonderful. Thank you!”

She takes the bag and looks down into enthusiastically.

“My boy says hello.” The merchant smiles.

“How is my favourite dwarf?”

“Well, messere. I wanted to bring him, but he was too busy with enchanting. It’s odd, he usually doesn’t make so much of a fuss when I ask him to join me.” His expression turns thoughtful.

The Inquisitor’s eyes turn to me for a moment. I can’t place the look she is giving me, as it seems at one time both sad and thoughtful.

“Perhaps that’s for the best. Will you excuse us, Solas? I’ll be right back.” She smiles with a tender expression.

She walks with the merchant to the bar, and I rejoin the others. The entire encounter makes me feel disquiet. Why was she in the Deep Roads, and why does she keep seeking them out? After about half an hour, she says goodbye to the merchant and rejoins us.

“Inquisitor! Finally, someone to talk to!” Dorian enthuses.

“Hey, what have we been doing this entire time?” Bull objects.

“Solas is being austere, and you can’t open your mouth without turning it into an innuendo.”

“Where is Lady Montilyet, Inquisitor?” I ask as I attempt to ignore the others’ verbal exchange of insults.

“She went to see her sister.” She sighs and then leans her head on the table and mumbles, “I’m so tired.”

“Did you get the funding at least?”

She pushes herself up again and offers me a small smile. She looks paler than usual and her eyes are hooded.

“Yes, we did.”

“Are you alright?” I furrow my brow in concern.

“Just a headache. Nothing to be worried about.”

As I put my hand on her neck, she tenses ever so slightly and gives me a curious look.

“Relax.” I smile and cast a small cold spell to help reduce discomfort.

Her shoulders immediately relax and she closes her eyes. It takes me a minute before I realise that some people are watching us - or rather watching the elf who dares to touch the human noblewoman. I let my hand slip down her back to relax her muscles, then remove it completely. The Inquisitor notices the looks as well.

“What do you suppose they make of us?” she asks as she reaches for her drink.
“We do look like an odd group,” Dorian points out.

“They’re probably tearing their hair out to figure out which one of us is doing the Inquisitor,” Bull jests, and the Inquisitor chokes on her drink making Dorian and Bull laugh.

“That would be an interesting rumour. Which one do you think would cause the most scandal? The Tevinter, the Qunari, or the elven apostate?” Dorian grins.

I roll my eyes and take a drink of my cup. The Inquisitor rises slowly from her seat and gives Dorian a coy look.

“Why pick? Imagine the rumour if I was with all three of you?” She bursts out laughing and walks away towards her room.

“Hey, that sounds like fun!” Bull calls after her, but she doesn’t acknowledge him.

“And after that mental picture, I think I need more wine,” Dorian groans and looks into the bottom of his empty glass.

Truthfully, I want to retire as well, but with the eyes still watching me, I decide to wait awhile before leaving.

“I will be turning in as well.” I finish my drink and get up, leaving Iron Bull and Dorian to their drinking.

As I turn around the corner of the stairs leading up to our rooms, I see the Inquisitor in the hall getting some water. She is already dressed in her nightgown - black silk, long, and covered in lace. On top she is wearing a robe that isn’t closed, revealing how the silk caresses her every curve. I have to tear my eyes away when I notice she is fuller than most elven women but every bit as tantalizing.

“Oh, hey, Solas. Going to bed as well?”

I have to force myself to look at her and she is turned towards me, seemingly either unaware or not caring that anyone will see her dressed in so little. Her hair is loose and, despite it being curled from being in a bun all day, reaches down to the middle of her back.

“Yes, I think that would be wise before Dorian or Bull loose their senses completely.”

She gives a good-natured chuckle.

“It is. Well, goodnight. Give Wisdom my best wishes.”

With that, she turns and walks away while I walk to my own room. I close the door behind me and lean my back against it. My head hits the door with a low thud. It was my intention to search the Fade for answers on the artifacts I saw in her vault, to ponder over the conversation she had with the dwarf earlier, but my mind is distracted by black silk.
Some days later, we return to Skyhold as the Inquisitor and Josephine managed to get the funding they needed to restore the fortress. Varric and Cole have returned with the Herald. Apparently, Varric has been trying to reach out through his contacts. I would assume he is in communication with Hawke even though he has told Cassandra otherwise. Since Val Royeaux, things between the Inquisitor and I have been more relaxed. I'm starting to see the beginnings of the friendship she mentioned. She listens to my stories of spirits and old ruins with great interest. She is inquisitive, thoughtful, and somehow always manages to respond with a surprising point of view. Her quick wit is always entertaining, and she appreciates my sarcasm and opinions, but is not above contradicting me when she disagrees. Through her, I get a glimpse of this world which terrifies me. What if I was wrong, and by restoring the elves I will be destroying something beautiful and worthwhile?

Even so, I can’t stay away from her. Her and Cole’s company are the highlight of my days. So, even though I could have a messenger deliver my reports on the Veil, I still do so myself. As I look for the Inquisitor, I walk out of the great hall and see her returning with Cole from the camps. The children there don’t have much, and she always makes certain to check up on them. As they walk closer I can hear their conversation.

“He loved you. You didn't fail him,” Cole insists.

“I should have been there.” She sighs and rubs her face.

“It’s not your fault you couldn’t.”

“But he won’t know that.” Her expression remains unchanged and full of sorrow.

“Feet running across the floor. Happy. Laughing from joy. When she enters the room, the world is whole. He remembers you loved him,” Cole comforts.

The Inquisitor holds a hand to her mouth as if she holds back a sob.

“I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean to make it worse,” Cole laments.

She embraces Cole and holds him tight against her.

“It’s alright. Thank you, Cole,” she smiles and then sees me. “Hello, Solas. How are you today?”

The sorrow doesn’t leave her face, but no tears have fallen from her eyes.

“I’m well. I have the latest report on the Veil. Is everything alright at the camps?” I ask with concern.

“For the moment, everyone is fine, but that won't last unless we get the supplies soon.” The Inquisitor sighs.

Cole looks at her for a moment.

“That’s a good idea!” He smiles and then vanishes.

The Inquisitor gives me a confused look and smiles.

“I’m not certain I suggested anything.” She chuckles and reaches for the report in my hand.

“An unconscious thought you had, perhaps?” I offer.

“So, my best ideas are the ones I don’t realise? Sounds about right.” She gives me a wry grin. “Will you follow me to the War Room? I have something I want to show you.”
Inside, Josephine approaches the Inquisitor, giving her an overview of the situation as they continue to walk.

“Oh, and we have had to change the rooms between you and the Herald,” Josephine states.

“Alright, but why?”

“Apparently, the Herald has a fear of … heights.” Josephine gives a small smile which the Inquisitor returns.

“Thank you, Josie.”

“You’re welcome. They are ready if you wish to see them.”

“I’ll go right away,” the Inquisitor enthuses.

“Are your quarters to your liking, Solas?” Josephine turns to me.

“They are quite comfortable, thank you,” I smile.

“Good.” She nods and bids me good day as the Inquisitor is already at her door.

She looks back at me.

“Well, come on. I still have things to show you.” She grins and runs through the door.

I follow her up the tower and have to chuckle at her playfulness. She enters the last door and walks up the stairs, slowly taking it all in.

I watch her as her fingers travel along the stone wall. Her eyes look towards the ceiling and inspect every detail. At places she pauses as if she is trapped in a memory. She turns to look at me with a bright smile.

“I feel like I’m stealing your bedroom.”

“You’re welcome to it, Inquisitor.” I smile.

“Well, thank you, Master Solas, for the generous gift.” She curtsies to me in dramatic fashion and then laughs. “I wonder what it used to look like.” She reaches for the walls once more.

She is so entranced by it all, and it reminds me of myself when I find the remnants of an ancient dream.

“If you’d like, I can show you?”

She turns to look at me with widened eyes.

“In the Fade? That would be wonderful! Thank you!”

Her eagerness makes me chuckle.

“Come. Lay down, and I will take you there.” I gesture towards the four poster bed covered in white silken sheets and linen.

She raises an eyebrow at me and laughs.

“Ha, 'let me show you the Fade.' I haven’t heard that particular pick up line before,” she jests but
moves to the bed unconcerned.

“I would not ask you to the Fade to merely seduce you.” I smile at her.

“Good, because I might have to throw you down the stairs,” she laughs.

“Even if that had truly been my intention?” I challenge.

“Then you would have been honest instead of trying to trick me.” This time there is no amusement in her voice. All I am granted is a soft smile before she lays down on top of the sheets and closes her eyes. Somehow, that makes it a hundred times worse. I don’t realise I’m unresponsive until she makes a remark, her eyes still closed.

“So, how do I do this exactly? Just fall asleep?”

“More or less. I will help you with a spell.”

“And what about you?”

“When you are asleep, I will go to my quarters and enter the Fade. I will find you from there.”

“Or you could just use the couch?” She opens one eye at me.

“And if Cassandra were to march in here? I have only just earned the Seeker's goodwill. It would be a waste to lose it with a reputation as the sleeping apostate.”

She suppresses a laugh. “The snoozing apostate. Fitting.”

“Relax, lethallan.”

“I’m sorry. I’m just excited. I’ll be good.”

She adjusts herself on the bed and starts taking deep breaths. Her face begins to relax, and I let my hand hover over her - helping her to sleep. I look at her as she drifts off. I swear her relentless teasing will be the death of me. I wonder if she has any idea of how her words torture me. With a sigh, I walk down into my own quarters. They are small but comfortable and with a view across the mountains. I lay down on the bed and enter the Fade.

I find her quickly, surrounded by a world unlike any I have seen. The things the Fade forms before her are extraordinary. The music, on the other hand, is terrible. It appears to be a tavern filled with people in unfamiliar clothing. Bright lights fill the place and moving pictures cover the wall. I have never seen anything like it. No wonder she creates such unique things when her mind can go to such bizarre places. I find her sitting at the bar with a young man. He is tall, even for a human, with a scruffy beard and hair colour that matches hers. They are talking and laughing loud enough to even hear through the noise. She is dressed in a black suit pressed close to her body and covered in lace. Her hair is curled and her make-up dark. Her eyes glance briefly in my direction, and she is suddenly aware of everything. She looks around, and a wistful expression replaces her amusement.

“This isn’t real…” And just like that, the Fade disrupts the dream.

“That’s a matter of debate. Do you wish me to leave?”

“What? No … I want you to show me. It was … good to see my brother again. I’ve missed him,” she sighs.

“A shame the dream changed so quickly. You could have introduced us.” I smile, hoping to offer her
some comfort.

She giggles. “Sure, though a spirit posing as him isn’t really him. Just a reflection of how I remember him.”

“And how do you remember him?”

“We were like night and day growing up. I was optimistic and lively, where he always seemed sad. He was only nine years old when he first talked about taking his own life.” She shakes her head.

I look at her closely with regret. “Forgive me, I shouldn’t have—”

“It’s fine. He didn’t die. We just …” she pauses to find the words, “drifted apart … He had a wonderful sense of humour.”

“Something you shared.”

“Yes, and he loved animals. He was just always so troubled. Life was hard on him. But growing up, and even as an adult, he was the one person I knew that if anyone ever hurt me, he would go after them and show no mercy. It’s comforting when someone loves you like that - even if you do not always agree.” She wipes a tear from her eye.

“Sorry, let’s forget about this. Please, show me what Skyhold looked like.” She looks up at me with a forced smile.

“Ma nuvenin, lethallan.”

I reach out into the Fade, and it shapes into the home I once knew. Crystal and stone harmonize into an elven structure with a spire leading far into the sky. Staircases and independent balconies float in the air, only approachable by the eluvians. All covered in mosaics, wolves, and a statue honouring Mythal.

“Solas, it’s beautiful,” she sighs in awe and walks forward.

She puts her hands to her mouth and looks up, giggling with disbelief as she twirls.

“It’s absolutely incredible!”

I smile as I sigh with relief. Seeing her enthusiasm come to life after seeing her so downcast is a comfort.

“Come, let me show it to you.” I smile and gesture in the direction of the gate.

To my surprise, she takes my arm as she continues to look up. It quickly becomes necessary as she is so busy looking she is not paying attention to where she is going. Inside, she studies all my murals. The originals have long since been leveled by the humans. As she walks around exploring, she doesn’t say a word. Merely takes in every detail.

“Garas quenathra?” A spirit approaches her.

“Oh, I’m sorry. I only know a few phrases in elven.” She gives it an apologetic look and turns to me. “Merrill taught me some, but even the Dalish only know little.”

“Do not be troubled, lethallan. This is Wisdom. I believe you know her,” I smile.

“Wisdom? Andaran atishan. Ir abelas, when last I saw you … well, that doesn’t matter now.” She
blushes awfully, as though she is ashamed.

“You are the one who helped save me. Ma serannas.” Wisdom bows.

“Oh, you don’t have to thank me. I just did what anyone would have had they known.” She gives the spirit a bright smile.

“Such humility, but I do not believe that is the truth. You have my thanks, nonetheless. Do you want me to show you this place? Tell you its secrets?”

“I’d love that! Thank you. Though, I trust you not to reveal anything Solas isn’t comfortable with. I don’t wish to pry.” She looks back at me as if waiting for me to agree, and I nod.

How can I trust my words when everything she says pulls at my heart?

“Mala then, Lethallin. Lathbora viran,” Wisdom tells me as she guides the Inquisitor around the Fade.

I know Wisdom is right, but as I walk behind them, I see the spirit quickly becoming as fond of her as I. She listens to the spirit and is always polite and respectful. We end our journey in the upper spire, and the Inquisitor leans against the railing taking in the view. Wisdom gives me a sad smile before traveling further into the Fade. It is time to wake.

“I think it’s time to wake up,” I say softly as I walk up next to her.

“Alright…” She takes a deep breath and looks at me.

“Ma serannas.” She smiles and leans in to give me the lightest peck on my cheek.

As she pulls away, my eyes catch a glimpse of her lips. Her warm breath caresses my face and her hand rests on my chest. It has been so long, and she is so close. She steps away, thinking nothing of the innocent gesture, but before she pulls herself from me completely, I grab a hold of her waist and kiss her. I never thought that she would have such an effect on me, but as I hold her in my arms and feel her soft lips against mine, it seems like the most natural thing in the world - a long forgotten song reclaimed despite the passage of time. As it occurs to me that I have made a mistake, she kisses me back with the burning passion she hides so well. Her arms wrap around me tight as a sigh escapes from her lips onto mine. Has she been aching for this moment as much as I have?

Whatever rational thought I have flees. She is warm and soft against me, giving me solace by her mere presence in my embrace. I keep kissing her for what could be moments or hours - time seems of no consequence until I remember myself. As I pull back, I still find myself bewitched by her and give in to one final kiss.

“This isn’t right. Not even here.” I shake my head as I step back, but I can’t let go of her waist completely.

She blushes and seems almost as distraught as I am. How could I have done this? So quickly, I see the consequences of the ill-considered kiss, and still all I truly wish is to pull her back into my embrace.

“Perhaps we should wake up?” She suggests with a blush.

“Perhaps we should.” I smile and the dream ends.
Standing in the rotunda my thoughts keep drifting to the kiss. How her warmth felt in my arms. How soft her lips felt pressed against mine. I have yet to see her, and I find myself both eager and anxious. This could be complicated. Dorian approaches me, drawing me from my thoughts.

“Aah, Solas. Have you seen your Inquisitor?”

“My Inquisitor?” I frown.

“Yes, the one for whom you very soul aches - that sort of thing.” Dorian makes a dramatic gesture. My heart stops for a moment. Surely, he is not aware of what happened a few hours ago. She wouldn’t have told him … would she?

“What are you talking about?”

“You’re not … Oh, forgive me. It seems I have been misinformed.” Dorian gives me an uncomfortable look.

“Misinformed by whom?” I press in my annoyance.

“Well, your future self, actually. The way you talked about her was quite heartwarming. But don’t give up. A few smiles and gifts and she will be your Inquisitor in no time.” He grins, and I take a deep breath as I close my eyes.

“Was there something you wanted other than creating gossip which has no basis in reality?”

Liar, my mind cries.

“As I said, I’m looking for her. The library here is full of nothing but propaganda. She said she might have a more … let’s say ‘varied’ collection I could borrow from.”

“I don’t know where the Inquisitor is. I would suggest you ask Varric or Josephi--” I begin as the Inquisitor walks into the room, looking directly at me with a faint blush.

“There you are! Where are the books you were talking about?” Dorian asks, walking directly to her and seeming not to notice anything amiss - thankfully.

“I was just about to tell you. They are arriving as we speak.” She smiles.

“Finally!” he sighs dramatically and walks out into the great hall.

I swallow as her eyes meet mine, and she walks over to me.

“Sleep well?” I smile, and she giggles.

“Very much so. I think I enjoyed the ending the most,” she cajoles, and I laugh nervously.

“I apologize. The kiss was impulsive and ill-considered, and I should not have encouraged it.” I try to compose myself.

She takes a step closer, her eyes dark and mischievous.
“And yet, you were the one who started with tongue.” There is a mysterious, amused sparkle in her eye. Another jest I don’t understand.

If she takes one step closer, I don’t think I have the will to resist kissing her again.

“I did no such thing!” I object the lie.

She giggles, shakes her head, and begins to walk away. Before I can stop myself, I take her wrist gently, releasing it again when I realise my mistake. She gives me a curious look.

“It’s been a long time. I’m not certain this is the best idea.” I swallow.

Her eyes meet mine for a moment as if she is pondering.

“Truthfully, I’m not so sure, either.” She takes a step closer almost touching my chest with hers as she looks up at me and murmurs, “And yet, I wonder what a real kiss would be like.”

Her pupils dilate, and I can see her chest slightly heaving. The heat of her body goes right through the fabric of my shirt. She raises herself slowly and begins to close her eyes. Every argument and reason I have evaporate as I feel myself leaning in as well.

“Inquisitor! You have to see this!” Dorian calls from the other room, and the spell is broken. Though if it’s torture or a mercy, I can’t decide.

“This isn’t over,” she promises and walks into the other room.

I take a deep breath before I follow. In the hall are crates upon crates of books. Dorian looks through them all.

“Some of these are even banned in Tevinter!” he enthuses.

“It’s from one of the most extensive personal libraries in Thedas, I thought the two of you would enjoy it.” She smiles and reaches out for one of the books.

A cough sounds behind us, followed by a male voice.

“You can touch me all you like, Monique, but a man's books? Is nothing sacred?” The Orlesian accent is overly dramatic with some mirth in there as well.

The expression on the Inquisitor’s face brightens in a way I have only seen when she is experimenting with her runes. She turns immediately and runs towards the voice.

“Philippe!” She jumps into his arms and throws her arms around his neck.

The thin human with dark eyes, dark hair, and beard chuckles warmly and picks her up, twirling her.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you guys liked this chapter! Please leave a comment :)

For those who have play Divinity Original Sin II, Philippe is based on Fane, who is a
romance option in that game.

Thank again to ninaninabobina for beta reading. (And being so awesome and fast :) The almost kiss at the end was her doing)

Mala then, Lethallin. Lathbora viran, = You should be aware, my friend. the path to a place of lost love / a longing for a thing one can never really know. Garas quenathra = What is your purpose here (roughly)
He chuckles as he twirls her, and even as he sets her back on the ground he doesn’t release her waist.

“There you are, my darling. Let me look at you!” He takes her in, staring at her without any shyness or hesitation.

“A little leaner than when we last met, but you seem in good health, otherwise. Are you alright? I heard what happened at Haven. I was worried about you.” He frowns, looking deeply into her eyes.

“I’m fine. It’s so good to see you!” She avoids his gaze and takes a step back but places her hands on his shoulders.

His smile brightens then turns dubious.

“Likewise, though it wasn’t entirely for your benefit. I wanted to make sure these books got here safely. Who knows what these brutes would do with my collection?”

“I swear, I won’t let the Chantry touch them.” Her voice is firm and unwavering.

The Herald and Cassandra walk into the great hall and stop for a moment taking in all the cases with books, then stare at the formal Orlesian.

“Oh, my dear, it’s not you I’m concerned about.” He frowns as he stares suspiciously at Cassandra.

“Perhaps you should introduce us to your ... friend.” Cassandra returns his glare.

The Inquisitor smiles with a nod and takes another step back.

“This is Professor Philippe Dubois. This is Dorian Pavus, Edward Trevelyan, Cassandra Pentaghast and Solas. They are some of my most trusted advisors.”

“A pleasure to meet you.” The Herald gives him his hand.

“Phillipe is an expert on the Veil.” She smiles, holding a hand on his arm.

“Leading expert on the Veil,” he corrects with some pride, and Mona suppresses a chuckle as she looks at me.

“Actually, not to wound your pride, but I think Solas here might give you a run for your coin.” For once, I can actually join her in her amusement.

I usually take no joy in concealing my identity. It is necessary, after all, and I truly doubt anyone would even believe me. But in this moment, it’s a shared little secret between just her and me - just as a surprising moment in a dream. It’s misguided, but I can’t help hoping for more to come.

I expect Dubois to observe me with scorn or superiority; instead, he seems positively thrilled.

“Really? A fellow scholar who is actually interested in the Veil? I never thought I’d see the day. A pleasure to meet you!” He enthusiastically takes my hand and shakes it.
“It is so rare to meet a like-minded individual. Perhaps you would like to compare notes when I’m done unpacking?”

“Certainly.” I smile.

“Follow me, if you please.” Cassandra’s voice is icy.

Dubois directs his eyes at the Seeker. The look he gives her has not gotten any fonder.

“I will have you know I have catalogued every single book. If so much as a page goes missing, I will know.”

I can almost hear Cassandra groaning as she shows the man into the library.

“With the danger of sounding like Varric, I can tell there is a story here,” Dorian smirks.

“A rather short one I’m afraid. We were together awhile, and then he proposed,” the Inquisitor sighs.

For a moment, my heart stops, and it feels like my chest has lost all air. The Herald looks at me for a moment as if to ascertain my reaction.

“And you turned him down. Poor man.” The Herald clucks his tongue. “Is there anything sadder than unrequited emotions?”

The Inquisitor shakes her head.

“It wasn’t like that. I loved him ... dearly, but ... I should have known better. I almost did say yes, but my work was … is too important.”

She evades my eyes until Dorian and the Herald have walked into the library, and I see the sadness on her face. She takes my hand discreetly and gives it a squeeze. I don’t know whether to be grateful for or despair the fact that we are surrounding by prying eyes. All I can think of is pulling her to me and kissing her deeply. How much has she given up for Thedas, for the people … for me?

At this point I should be used to surprises. There was a time in my life where everything seemed to certain. Now, everything is in chaos and disarray. It has been a few days since Dubois arrived. He is an unusual man. Brutally direct, arrogant, and rarely has the patience to let people finish their sentences. On the other hand, he is also a thoughtful and intelligent man who will listen with careful consideration to any input coming from a person he deems worthy of his attention. I have seen him act with both surprising generosity and affection. He frequently mentions his daughter with great fondness.

The conversation is stimulating, and I’m impressed just how close his theories have come to actually being true. Beyond myself, he might indeed be one of the people who understands the Veil the most. Now, if I could only get over the way my insides turn whenever the Inquisitor smiles at him.

From the rotunda, I can look straight up into the library. The Inquisitor is looking through one of Dubois’ many books. All of them are banned by the Chantry, so I can hardly fault him for being reluctant to leave them unguarded with the Inquisition. They are helping Dorian finding anything they can on Corypheus, while I’m downstairs going over the latest findings on the Veil.
“No, no, you don’t want that one. It’s shit!” Dubois grabs the book out of the Inquisitor’s hand and throws it over his shoulder, making her laugh as he does so.

The book naturally lands close to me, making me step aside at the sound.

“Solas, are you alright?” she asks with concern, leaning over the side.

“I’m fine, Inquisitor,” I assure her as I pick up the book and drop it on my desk with a loud thud.

I can’t help but scowl up at the man who hasn’t even noticed.

“Just give me a moment, Monique, and I’ll find you the proper ones.”

He vanishes from my view, and I turn my attention back to my own research.

“So, Monique is it? How come you never use that name? It’s certainly more elegant,” Dorian points out.

“Mona is nice and short. And the people who used to call me my full name are long gone now,” she sighs.

Dorian offers her a smile but doesn’t press the subject. Cassandra walks past me and up the stairs as Dubois returns with the books.

“Any progress?” Cassandra asks.

“Only limited, I’m afraid, but we should find something useful in these.”

I feel a slight echo in the Veil and look up as Dubois opens an old tome.


“Keep it down, you pillock!” he hisses and turns to the Inquisitor. “Good grief! Where did you find these savages?”

“Oh, you know. Laying around Thedas.” She gives him a wry smile

“That is usually how you stumble upon things,” he chuckles good-naturedly.

“It’s fine, Cassandra.” The Inquisitor tries to assure her.

“Inquisitor, we can’t use blood magic. I won’t permit it.” Cassandra’s voice is hard.

“We’re not. It’s merely keyed to his blood so that only he might open it. We’re not going to do anything reprehensible.” The Inquisitor smiles, but I do not believe the Seeker is entirely convinced.

“What other means should true seekers of truth use to protect and gain knowledge? It should come as no surprise that the Chantry has failed society by its insistence to keep anything unsavory behind closed doors. How long have you held back society with some nonsense pretense of not offending the Maker?” Dubois hisses.

“Nonsense?” Cassandra sneers. If he is not careful, the Seeker might strangle him.

“Yes, nonsense. We both know that the true reason was not whether the Maker would approve but rather that the Chantry should remain in control.”
“Philippe, that’s enough,” the Inquisitor scolds.

“No, it’s not. If not for the Chantry, how might we have evolved as a society? We might have been able to deal swiftly with this Corypheus instead of browsing endlessly through tomes while the maniac continues to wreak havoc through half of bloody Thedas.”

“Now listen, you little--” Cassandra steps forward, and the Inquisitor steps in between them.

“You have a point, Philippe. And I agree, but Cassandra is different. I trust her, and there is no way she personally is responsible for any of those problems. If more people in the Chantry were like Cassandra, Thedas would be a better place.”

The earnest and endearing way she speaks dissuades either of them from taking the issue any further. Cassandra even mutters something with a blush to the Inquisitor I can’t quite make out.

“Alright, perhaps you do know best,” Dubois concedes with a small grin. “Curious, I was certain that I would burst into flames were I to ever utter those words.”

The Inquisitor’s response is a quick slap across his shoulder to which he merely laughs.

The Seeker looks down at me for a moment and sighs before walking off. The Inquisitor must have caught me staring because she smiles down at me.

“If you gentlemen can spare me for a moment?”

“Certainly, I’m sure I can offer as much assistance as you can,” Dorian boasts, and Dubois looks at him as he gives him a deadpanned answer.

“Truly? Maker, you hide it well.”

The Inquisitor walks down stairs and approaches me.

“I’m sorry, Solas. I know he is a little eccentric.” She lifts her shoulders uncomfortably.

“That’s one way of putting it.” I smile and take a step towards her.

“He has his good sides, too. You should see him around animals or children. And he really is quite brilliant.” She evades my eyes, and I have to fight the urge to reach out and take a tender hold of her chin.

“You are intelligent enough to do this on your own.” I smile, and she blushes with a grin.

“You act as if I’m all-knowing.”

“Aaah, so you admit that there are in fact limits to your knowledge, Inquisitor?” I tease.

“Well, we can’t all be walking encyclopedias like you.” She straightens her back with a smug confidence. “You’re special that way.”

The smile she gives me is warm and lively.

“Where as you are perfectly average, is that it?” I give her a doubtful glare to which she chuckles.

“Are you trying to insult me or appeal to my ego?”

“I doubt that either would work if that is what I intended.”
“And what did you intend?”

I lean closer resting my hands on the table and answer her just above a whisper.

“You’re the one who is aware of the future. You tell me.”

“My dear Solas, are you trying to flirt with me?” she teases in the same low tone and leans across the desk as well.

“And if I were?” I lean even closer looking into her hazel eyes.

Her face is flushed, and she can’t meet my gaze. I don’t mean to laugh, but it escapes me all the same. She is so endearing it’s hard not to be swept away by feelings of joy. She looks at me and gently slaps my arm.

“You did that on purpose, you ass!” she accuses with a grin.

It’s so tempting to pull her close. To ensure the elation I feel in her company will not be mere fleeting moments. They have become so precious to me, though I know I long for something that I have no right to desire.

“What are you two hens giggling about?” Dorian asks as he comes down the stairs.

“Solas is teasing me. Not very nice of him is it?” She grins up at Dorian.

Dubois still has his nose in a book, his finger moving across the page while he remains oblivious to his surroundings.

“I quite agree. If anyone is to do the teasing, it should be me. I have the charm to get away with it,” Dorian boasts.

And just like that, the moment is gone. I ache for it to return. She reaches for my papers and sits down on the couch studying my latest findings. After a few minutes of me fighting the urge for my eyes to seek her out, she get up and walks towards me and places the papers in front of me.

“Please, come with me. I didn’t get to show you what I wanted the other day.” A faint blush appears on her face, and my heartbeat quickens as I remember the kiss.

We barely speak as we walk through Skyhold, but I remain close to her. When our hands collide accidentally, I almost reach for hers. I shouldn’t ache for her every touch like this. I can’t possibly give her what she deserves - no matter how much I desire to. I wish I was merely Solas. We walk into the War Room, and the Inquisitor reaches into a satchel stored there. It’s the same satchel she got from the dwarven Merchant in Val Royeaux. She takes out a handful of runes unlike any I remember seeing in modern Thedas.

“I wanted you to look at these. I have another mad idea, you see,” she grins.

“Fascinating.” I chuckle and pick up the runes. I can feel them suppressing the Veil. “For capturing spirits?” I ask and find that my question is without malice. Had it been anyone else, I would have assumed they wished them harm, but I know in her hands that will never come to pass unless there are extenuating circumstances.

“Not quite. Do you believe it will be possible to strengthen the Veil in the area around the rifts - perhaps close them?” She hands me some papers.
I take her notes and specifications and study them closely. Most of it seems to be in ancient dwarven, like that used by the Sha Brytol. But the paper is new.

“How did you come by these?”

“I looked,” she says unhelpfully with a skewed smile.

“Very well. It might be able to strengthen the Veil in that area but not close the rifts. Only the mark can do that.” I keep looking at the documents, and I come across designs I have never seen before.

“I thought so, but I thought maybe we could create like a bubble around the rift - reinforce reality around it.” She looks at me closely as if she means to hang on my every word.

“Possibly, yes.” I ponder her notes.

“So, we can’t close it, but we can prevent spirits from coming through until the Herald can close it.”

As she says it, it all comes together: what those runes and her contraption is for. I’m so used to any solution involving magic, but she has done something I would never have considered -something I would probably have deemed impossible. But her research and theories are undeniable. It might not work, but to even attempt such a line of thinking is...

“These are … remarkable. How did you come by this knowledge?”

“Oh, I can’t take all the credit. I came up with the idea and the device you see there, but the runes are not my doing. I know this dwarven boy. He is so wonderful and sweet. He helped me with it.” She gives another of her self-deprecating smiles as if she was not truly worthy of the praise given to her. What happened for such a rare spirit to think that everything incredible about them is of no worth?

“Really?” I can’t hide my increasing curiosity.

“I know you're curious, but it’s someone else's secret.” She gives me an apologetic look.

Without thinking, my feet take me closer to her, and my eyes stare at her delicate lips. Her chest starts heaving as her eyes meet mine.

“I’m sorry if I misread you the other day,” she murmurs as her breathing gets uneven.

“You have no reason to apologize.” I step just a little closer. “Things have always been ... easier for me in the Fade.”

“I don’t intend to make anything difficult for you,” she whispers.

I swallow. She is so close now and - spirits save me - my heart cries out for me to embrace her. To kiss and love her until she can see herself as I see her. If only I was not Fen’Harel. We hear a cough, and we turn to the door. In the doorway stands a man with black hair and beard and a very disgruntled look on his face. The Inquisitor turns pale as she utters his name:

“Hawke…”

“Mona.”

“So, Varric convinced you to come. Good. Thank you.” She composes herself, but I can see a slight tremble in her, and she remains pale. Why would a woman who faces Red Templars, demons, and demanding nobles show signs of fear from just one man?
Hawke scoffs with disbelief.

“He did, though I almost left immediately when I heard the Inquisitor was you.” His voice is even, while his eyes remain darted at her with a hostility that unnerves me. I want to step in front of the Inquisitor to create a physical barrier between them.

“Solas, would you give us some privacy, please?” She looks up at me with a wistful smile that makes me ache.

“Alright, I’ll be right outside if you need me.” I smile to give her comfort and walk out into the hall.

The first long while is uneventful, but my eyes keep wandering to the door as if I fear she is in danger. It would seem irrational if not for her reaction to the man. All that I have heard from Varric regarding Hawke is that he is a man prone to humour but not devoid of ruthlessness should it be needed. A fierce supporter of mages, yet he still nearly killed his best friend Anders after the explosion in Kirkwall. From what Varric told me, the Inquisitor interfered. A booming voice can be heard form the room, and it takes every ounce of my willpower to not run for the door.

“No, I will not keep my bloody voice down!” Hawke bellows at the top of his lungs.

“I tried to save as many lives as I could.” I hear the Inquisitor’s voice. It’s more controlled, but it’s picking up momentum as I can now hear her through the large door.

“Is that what you call this mess? How many lives have been lost - at the conclave or at Haven?”

“You can’t hold me responsible for that,” she cries.

My fists tighten into balls. I know she can handle herself, but it’s hard for me to pretend I can’t hear what is happening.

“Blighted nug, I can’t! You knew this was coming! You could have stopped it!”

“Oh, did I become suddenly omnipotent? I wasn’t aware I had ascended to godhood!” She gives cynical laugh that sends a chill down my spine.

“You could have warned them! You could have done more. But you didn’t. Just like with Anders you sat on your ass and did nothing!”

I hear the loud sound of a fist being slammed into a table and things falling off it.

“I explained to you why I couldn’t interfere! With Corypheus and the Idol--” she tries to explain.

“Don’t you dare defend this! Had you been braver you would have saved all those people!”

For a few moments there is no response, and I take a few steps toward the door ready to enter should I feel the need.

“Had I done that, then I might have sacrificed the entire world!”

He gives a loud hollow laugh.

“You’re a monster! An abomination just like Anders and just like Corypheus! No, worse. You’re simply a pathetic coward!”

I hear steps towards the door. I step back as it opens and see the Inquisitor.
“I’m not listening to this!” she sneers. Her face is red, and I can see her trembling.

Hawke takes a few steps in her direction and points at her back.

“Yes, run away and hide like you always do when something unpleasant comes along. Perhaps you can pretend to fix it afterwards!” The dripping sarcasm in his voice is like poison.

The Inquisitor turns and looks directly at him.

“Hawke, go fuck yourself,” she hisses and storms off.

I look into Hawke’s icy eyes and unbidden a scenario of different ways of causing the man as much agony as possible goes through my mind. I’m normally calm and collected, but there are few things in this world I truly treasure, and I would do anything for those select few.

“I didn’t come all this way just to be an ass you know.” Hawke gives a hint of a smile.

“And yet, as of now that is all I have seen you accomplish.” I make sure my voice is as even as possible.

He laughs, but some severity in his eyes remain.

“You will not even hear how she is responsible for all of this?”

I wonder why he is even speaking with me. Perhaps Varric has told him of me, but that would hardly explain why he thinks it important enough to justify his behaviour to me.

“It is my understanding that in fact you were the one to release Corypheus back into this world. That you helped Varric fund the expedition into the Deep Roads where you found the original source of red lyrium. Or have I been misinformed and the Inquisitor was indeed present for these events?”

“No.” Through his anger shows some resemblance of regret.

“I understand what it is like to carry a burden of regret, but I do not lash out at those who are trying to compensate for my wrongdoings. Carry your own guilt tightly, if you must. Do not try to relieve yourself of that guilt by attacking a woman who is clearly doing everything in her power to minimize the suffering.” I cross my arms.

He gives an overbearing laugh as if what I have said is the most senseless thing ever uttered.

“Don’t you even care what she might have done? Do you not care about the world?” He challenges.

“I care deeply for many things in this world, Champion, just not you.”

To my surprise, Hawke chuckles genuinely this time.

“That might be the politest way I have ever been insulted.”

“You did ask.”

I give the man a polite nod and walk away calmly - though I can feel the rage simmering beneath my skin. In any event, my anger is not important. I must know how the Inquisitor is faring. Clearly, Hawke has some knowledge of her awareness of the future and events but not the full extent of it. From their conversation, I gather she never truly trusted him with much of the information that came to pass while she knew him in Kirkwall. That leads to two important questions. One: Why is she so open with me? Two: How much is she still concealing from me?
As I look for her, Cole appears.

“She is on the ramparts. Walking, twisting, withering. ‘What if he is right?’ Solas, she hurts, but it’s not my help she wants.” Cole’s voice breaks just a little, and I can feel how her pain is tugging on the essence of his being.

“Thank you, Cole. I will go talk to her.” I place a hand on his shoulder.

“Thank you,” he sighs with relief.

As I walk up to the upper ramparts, I hear her crying out in frustration while pacing back and forth. I am almost at the top when I see Dubois approaching her. I stop dead in my tracks. When did my feet start to act entirely out of their own volition?

“The training dummies are down in the courtyard if you need them,” he jests.

She looks at him and sighs.

“What are you even doing here, Philippe? You have better things to than wasting your time here.” She avoids the subject of her being distraught.

“How, and I here thought I was instrumental in preventing a darkspawn from conquering Thedas.” He scratches his neck with a grin.

“You know what I mean. Amalia needs you.” She looks at him.

“True, but I think it just as important to ensure she has a chance at life. I will spend time with her when this is over. Besides, there comes a time when a man must choose between his friends and the goodwill of the monstrosity that is the academic society of Val Royeaux,” he snarks.

Despite herself, she chuckles. Then her face changes as her mask falls away. She wraps her arms around his waist and sobs violently into his chest as he holds her tight.

“Hush, my sweet. I’m right here if you need me,” he soothes and rests his head on top of hers.

He doesn’t ask her what happened. Doesn’t say a word. He merely holds her tight and allows her to cry. I look at them transfixed, but neither of them notice me standing below. I feel a hand on my shoulder, and my gaze is met by the Herald’s blue eyes.

“Come, Solas. I think you and I need a drink.”

I have no interest in drinking, but I follow him all the same. Perhaps it was for the best that Hawke interrupted us when he did.

Chapter End Notes

This was an emotional chapter to write - so much angst! I wanted to make it clear that the Inquisitor walked through Thedas only making friends, but managed to build some sort of life. With adversaries and former lovers included.

Please let me know what you think of the direction the story is taking. I write this as much for you as for myself, so the more input you give me the more I can make sure to
write something you'll enjoy.

Philippe is inspired by the character Fane from Divinity original Sin 2. If you love stories and romance I can warmly recommend it.

Thank again to ninaninabobina for beta reading.
As I walk across the Fade in my dreams, I come across two demons: Obsession and Desire. Desire approaches me as the Inquisitor, dressed in nothing but black lace revealing the expanse of her skin.

“May the Dread Wolf take me,” it quips, licking its lips.

I frown in revulsion and walk ahead, ignoring it. Obsession appears before me as my mirror image except dressed in nothing but a black wolf pelt.

“She is right there. You can make her yours. Take her. Own her,” it grins in my own voice.

“She is not a possession. She is a lively spirit with an indomitable will.” I look at the demon unimpressed.

Obsession vanishes and appears next to Desire. Standing behind it, Obsession grabs its throat, digging in its nails and making Desire hiss.

“You have yet to see it dominated. I imagine that the sight would be … fascinating.” Obsession bites at Desire's throat, forcing it to moan in part lust part agony.

I don’t attempt to hide my disgust at what the demons are portraying. I have seen worse things in the Fade - and outside it - but these demons are not very talented if they think this would entice me. Very young, perhaps. I turn from the display easily and continue my walk through the Fade when I hear the demons talk loudly and purposefully for me to hear.

“Perhaps it is not lust or passion,” Desire hums.

“Nor dominion,” Obsession notes.

They appear before me again but very different from before. Desire looks up at me with tender hazel eyes. The vulgar clothing exchanged for soft white silk that caresses warm skin. I allow myself to smile briefly before waking passed it. Obsession changes into my exact reflection. No grandiose armour or wolf pelt. This is not Fen’Harel, but merely Solas. It ignores me and instead looks at Desire with a pained expression before turning from her.

“I will not have you see what I become.”

Desire reaches for Obsession preventing him from leaving.

“I see you for who you truly are. I will never look at you and see a monster, a betrayer, or a manipulating trickster.” Her voice is soft and heartfelt.

I find myself unable to look away as the demons change from Desire and Obsession to Love and Devotion. The Inquisitor strokes the face of my reflection and looks deep into his eyes. I sigh and turn from the vision and continue through the Fade. Behind me, I hear a faint whisper:

“I love you, Dread Wolf.”

“You’re lonely,” Wisdom laments as she walks next to me.
“I have you, my dear friend.” I try to smile.

I know how to protect myself from spirits, but I admit they learned quickly. I told the Herald it was no more than a brightly coloured fruit tempting you to eat it. Thankfully, that rings true even in situations like these. If I could only master the same willpower when the real Inquisitor stands before me - her tender eyes exploring my spirit, her sweet smile granting forgiveness, and her feather-like touches offering both comfort and the promise of more.

“Why do you continue to punish yourself? You never acted out of malice, and for eons you have been as trapped as the Evanuris. Allow yourself some happiness. We both know it might be fleeting,” Wisdom encourages.

“She cares for another,” I sigh deeply.

It has been days since Hawke arrived at Skyhold, and since then, the Inquisitor has not been by to see me. In fact, she has kept mostly to herself with the exception being Dubois. When I had seen her, she always offered me a smile, but it never reached her weary eyes.

“And? Does her caring for him mean she can not care for you?” Wisdom looks at me quizzically.

“Their personal history far supersedes whatever might be between us. Besides, I have my duty to my people once we have stopped Corypheus.”

I fold my hands behind my back as I keep walking and try not to notice the frown Wisdom gives me.

“You were never one for excuses. She has known you for a long time, lethallin. Memories and visions gained more than a decade ago prove it. What do you think makes a person carry even small, intimate details about a person’s tea in their memory for so long?”

“She said we were friends,” I point out.

“You avoid the answer because it frightens you.”

“The motivation does not matter. She loves another.” My voice is even, but my heart aches a little.

“She loved another. Is it not possible that the reason they are not together is because she could not give her heart to him?”

What Wisdom suggests is a treacherous road, giving hope to something I have no right to wish for.

“You cautioned me against this, but now you guide me towards it?” I give a strained chuckle.

“Can there not be wisdom in both? You have already made retreat impossible. And I want you to be happy even as I know you won’t allow yourself to be.” Her expression turns mournful as she looks at me.

I turn to see Devotion resting on a bed of white sheets with Love in a tender embrace.

“Perhaps you’re right…”

“Take happiness where you can find it. You will need it in the days to come.” Wisdom smiles.
I had hoped to speak with the Inquisitor, hoped that I might follow Wisdom’s advise, but with the arrival of the new arcanist, Dagna, she has been absent. She probably also wants to avoid Hawke, who is walking around as if he owns the place. The Herald has kept him occupied to spare the Inquisitor of another confrontation, I imagine.

Instead, I’m spending time with Dubois in my office in the rotunda. We were actually making a lot of headway until the Herald decided to join us and engage Dubois in idle conversation.

“So, you said you were a scholar?”

“Yes, what of it?” Dubois answers evenly looking through a book he is holding.

“It’s just that I have never heard of you before. I don’t remember seeing any of your work,” the Herald points out, and Dubois chuckles.

“Not every scholar is as well known as Genitivi, you know.”

“I would like to know more about your work.” The Herald smiles, seeming pleased that he managed to make him chuckle.

“What is your opinion on the theory that Andraste was actually a mage herself?”

“I… I have never heard that…” The Herald’s eyes grow wide.

“Truly? Then what about Shartan being the lover of Andraste, and their affair was the true reason for Maferath’s betrayal?” Dubois places the book on the table and picks up a chart, not looking at the Herald even once.

“I have a hard time picturing that to be true. The Chantry says--”

“And now you know why you have never heard of me.” Dubois raises an eyebrow and gives the Herald a brief look.

“Where are you going, Herald?” I ask as he walks towards the door.

“Oh, I have to inform Vivienne of these theories. No way I’m passing up the opportunity to see how her eyes will flare. I wonder if I can find the right wine for the occasion?” he muses as he exits the door.

“If that man used as much time on gaining knowledge as he does on wine, gossip, and his appearance, he might have gained even more knowledge than you, Master Solas,” Dubois chuckles.

“Indeed,” I laugh.

Dubois holds the map up to light and watches where the Veil is marked as he sighs.

“Think of it. The secrets to the universe may lay behind that curtain.”

“Unfortunately, we may never know for certain.” It’s a lie he hopefully won’t notice. “We can already see the result of Corypheus’s attempt.”

Dubois grunts as he puts down the chart.

“You and I both know it’s because the idiot punched a hole through it.” He shakes his head and then mutters, “Such a waste.”
“I’m sorry?”

“You are an intelligent man, but you have not been allowed to join the academic society because you’re a mage. The knowledge you possess and your insight could have revolutionized so much. Instead you were forced to live in the shadows. Such a waste.” He shakes his head again.

“I thank you, but do not pity me. In my journeys in the Fade, I have seen many things and gained experiences I would not change for anything.” I reach for the notes I made the day before.

“And left the world lesser for not being able to share them. Magic is not a curse. It is simply a state of being that we need to understand, not locked away due to paranoia. You have fallen victim to the curse of all great minds: fear. Fear of the unknown. Fear of change. These are the things that poison civilizations.”

I can’t help but smile at the words as a pleasant memory of the Inquisitor wanders through my mind, recalling the passion in her voice and the earnest look on her face.

“I heard the Inquisitor say something similar once.”

“Of course you did. She is an intelligent woman with independent thought. It’s truly abysmal how difficult that is to find these days,” Dubois states as a matter of fact. “But mark my words, Madame Vivienne is going to say it was my doing. That I poisoned her mind. Truthfully, she had that notion long before I met her nearly five years ago. She has such a passion and devotion for equality. I think perhaps--”

Dubois is interrupted by a loud explosion.

“What was that?” I ask alarmed, but Dubois merely sighs.

“Another one of her experiments gone wrong, I imagine. How are you at putting out fires?”

“The Inquisitor…” I whisper as I realise what he means, and I run towards the smith beneath Skyhold.

There is a thick smoke hanging in the air, and the smith runs out of there coughing, then looks at me.

“Those two women are mad!”

I run down and see scorch marks everywhere and both the Inquisitor and Dagna laying on the floor - conscious, but coughing. I run to the Inquisitor and kneel down in front of her, making her sit.

“Are you hurt?” I take her chin and see a sizable cut on her cheek.

“I’m fine, Solas.” She smiles, and then looks at Dagna.

“That was--” Dagna starts, and the Inquisitor finishes, “Awesome!”

They both start laughing, and I can barely contain my worry or annoyance. Dubois enters calmly and walks towards her. Not the first time this has happened, presumably, though I doubt I will ever be able to be as calm about it as he is. He helps Dagna up then looks at the Inquisitor.

“How many limbs did you break this time?”

“None. And would you quit fussing?” She grumbles and gets to her feet - reluctantly taking my hand when I offer it.
“I will as soon as you stop acting as if you are immortal,” he remarks dryly and takes her chin as well.

“A cut on your face and your hip is hurting. Am I right?”

“Maybe.” She frowns at him, and he shakes his head.

“At least there was no fire this time. Solas, I’m afraid I’m not aware of your talents. Can you heal her, or do I need to take her to the new infirmary?”

“I can heal minor injuries,” I confirm and he smiles.

“Solas, you don’t have to trouble yourself—” the Inquisitor objects, but I make her lean on me all the same.

“It’s no trouble, Inquisitor.”

Please … let me heal you. Let me make certain you are not hurt and relieve you of any discomfort.

She gives me a nod, and I help her to the rotunda where I place her on the couch. People are already trying to figure out what the loud noise was and seem oblivious to us. I first touch her hip and ease the pain with a cooling spell, then turn to the cut on her face. I take her face between my hands, and she avoids my eyes.

“Inquisitor…” I say softly, hoping she will look at me.

“I owe you an apology. I know I’ve been distant, but you need to know that it has nothing to do with you. I just…” She swallows and doesn’t meet my gaze. “I need to focus on my duty as Inquisitor and the lives that depend on me. There is so much at stake.”

“I understand.” I keep my voice low and run my fingers across her cheek with a healing spell.

She looks down, then closes her eyes with a pained expression. I put my other hand on her shoulder.

“I will not hate you as Hawke does. I can not blame you for my mistakes, and you need not feel responsible for them.”

Her eyes snap up at me.

“How…”

“Despite your secrets, I do believe I have begun to understand you, lethallan. I can’t imagine I could ever hate you.” I offer her a small smile.

“You say that now, but that is a promise you simply can’t make,” she sighs hopelessly, “Hawke was right. I am a coward. I’m terrified all the time.”

“No. You’re not. You’re braver than most. You do not let fear control you. You set yourself above it and don’t hesitate to act.” I try to comfort her, then offer her a small smile. “Even when it might not be the wisest course of action.”

“If you knew all, you would think me mad or worse…” she sighs and shakes her head. “Please, be patient with me, if you can.”

“Take as much time as you need.”
There are no tender smiles or touches from her. No lingering emotions or teasing. The flourishing spirit I had seen her reveal to me is nowhere to be found. What did Hawke say or do to her that made her hide her spirit away?

It's later on in the evening, and I have joined Blackwall and the Herald at the tavern at the Herald’s insistence - something he seems to regret when he realises the Inquisitor and Dubois are there. I’m tempted to leave, but that would raise too many questions. Philippe and the Inquisitor are sitting at a table in the corner going through their research. She laughs often and to the point of tears. A part of me wishes I could despise the man, but I can’t.

“It’s nice to see the Inquisitor happy, for once. Maker knows she deserves it.” Blackwall smiles and takes a gulp of his ale. The Herald looks at me briefly and pours a little more ale in my cup. It’s not much, since I have hardly touched it.

“Yes, she does,” I agree, attempting not to seem bothered by it.

“He seems like a decent fellow. Cultured. Clever. I hope they’ll be happy together,” Blackwall continues.

I say nothing, and merely try not to stare as they get up from the table and walk out the door with Atish’an behind them. The Inquisitor smiles at all of us as she passes, and the dog makes sure to walk over to me and nuzzle her nose into my hand. Blackwall continues his musings as they walk out the door.

“They look like a family. They just lack the child.”

“How about we play some cards?” the Herald suggests, seemingly eager to make the Warden focus on anything else.

The waitress puts down our ale.

“Oh, he has a daughter from a previous marriage. He is a widower.”

I place my hands underneath the table and force myself to dig my nails into my thighs.

“Really, well, that little girl is going to get a wonderful mother, if it comes to that.” Blackwall smiles and takes a gulp of his ale.

That does it. I look up at Blackwall with a calm demeanour.

“So, Blackwall, does your offer to teach me Diamondback still stand?”

The following morning, I’m preparing to leave with the Herald for Crestwood to meet with Hawke and the Warden contact there. I rather wish I could avoid Hawke myself, but I am interested to learn what exactly is going on with the Wardens. I could ask the Inquisitor, but I respect the distance she had asked for. As I turn, I almost walk into the Inquisitor, who is leaning against the desk. I had not
even noticed her. She gives me a crooked smile, as if she is amused by how I have been taken aback.

“Inquisitor.” I smile.

“So, I heard you picked up gambling again.” She gives me a knowing look, and I remember playing Diamondback with Blackwall the night before.

I laugh and feel my face getting slightly flushed.

“You heard about that?”

“Uh-huh … Blackwall had to walk all the way back to the barracks … naked.” She scowls at me, though she has trouble concealing a grin. “You know, you could at least have left him his underwear.”

“I suppose.” I smirk.

She leans against me and gets up on her toes as she whispers a grin against my ear: “You’re wicked!” then walks away laughing and up the stairs to the library.

When I hear Dubois greet her I pick up my satchel and leave.

It takes about three days to reach Crestwood. It’s dark and raining endlessly when we arrive, and I can’t help but feel that it fits my mood perfectly. Be it tragic circumstances, at least the rogue Wardens and endless amount of undead keep my mind occupied. Mostly. Blackwall and Varric have joined the Herald and me for this expedition. With some effort, we manage to rid the local castle of bandits, and the Herald has sent for reinforcements to hold it. So we sit and wait until they arrive. I’m sitting with a book, but I must have read the same page a dozens times over, and I still can not recall what it says when the Herald approaches me.

“Solas, I want to have a look at the elven statue we passed. Will you help me look at it? Maybe it will lead to treasure,” he beams.

“As you wish, Herald.”

I follow him out of the keep as we walk through the rain to one of the statues we passed. The remnants of my people. The Herald is quiet as we walk, but the silence is a comfortable one. As we approach the statue, I start examining it when the Herald interrupts me.

“Alright, we’re alone so now you can be honest.”

“Excuse me?” I look at the Herald with a frown.

He takes a step towards me, his expression serious.

“You are always quiet, Solas, but never like this. I know you don’t want to let anyone know how you’re feeling, but this time I really think you have to own it.”

“I’m at a loss as to what you mean.” I shake my head as I turn away from him.
“No, you’re not. I might not know much. I’m not wise like you or clever like Mona, but I’m pretty good at relating to other people’s feelings. I took you away from Skyhold to help you so you could get some distance, but it hasn’t helped.”

“What is it you wish of me?” I try to seem ignorant to what he is suggesting.

“I want you to admit that it’s killing you that Mona is with that arrogant ass!” he hisses.

I huff and turn away, but he steps in front of me.

“Come on, Solas. It’s just me, the rocks, and this statue.” He pats the statue in frustration as the rain slides down it.

I look up at the statue dedicated to Dirthamen. The irony is not lost on me.

“You assume that I have something to admit to. And even if I did, your interest isn’t my concern.” I cross my arms.

He gives an exasperated sigh.

“No, but your well being is. You’re my friend, and so far I can count at least three interesting magical phenomenon around here you have failed to notice. You’re distracted.”

“What would you have me say?” I rub my face with one of my hands.

“Admit that you’re in lov--”

“Don’t!” I hiss, pointing at him. Please, don’t speak those words.

“Why?” he challenges.

That question alone is layered with more pitfalls than I can count. He is demanding a truth from me that I can’t give.

“Because I’m an elven apostate.” It’s not a lie, simply not the entire truth.

The Herald’s expression softens.

“I can’t imagine that would matter to her in the slightest. I know she is the Inquisitor, human, and noble, but--”

“Please, Edward, let it go,” I beg quietly.

He seems taken aback, but if it is by me using his name or the softness of my plea, I’m uncertain.

“I’m sorry, Solas. I had hoped I could help.”

“I know. Thank you for your concern, but whatever I might regret, I’ll be fine.”

He puts a hand on my shoulder.

“If I can help in any way let me know,” he says as we start waking back to the keep. “I could burn his books,” he offers with a wry grin, and despite myself, I laugh.
Later, I’m standing at the top of the keep looking toward the rift in the water. I find myself wondering what approach the Inquisitor would have taken. Her runes might be able to act as wards preventing it from creating more undead until we manage to seal it. I’m lost in thought when I turn and to my surprise I find Hawke standing behind me.

“Solas, right?”

“Yes,” I confirm. “Is there anything I can do for you?”

“Actually, there is.” He steps a little closer, and there is a suspicious look in his eyes. “I noticed how you defended Mona when we first met.”

I pinch the bridge of my nose. This can not be happening. I have trouble enough controlling my growing fondness for her. I do not want to have to deal with his antics.

“She is the Inquisitor, and she needs my insight on the rifts and the Veil. Her not being a mage herself, she values my opinion. We have become fr--”

“Stuff it,” he interrupts, and I look at him. “I know that look all too well. Varric suspects it, too.”

Fenhedis lasa… And here I was convinced I had kept my feelings quite well hidden, but apparently, half the Inquisition are aware of them.

“I don’t--”

“Wait! Let me guess.” He steps even closer - so close that I’m tempted to take a step back from him being within my private sphere.

“One day out of the blue she shows up at your door. You have no clue who she is or why she is there, but for some reason, she just is. And then she starts talking like she knows you. Does it sound familiar?”

My shame turns into curiosity which I evidently can not hide.

“By Andraste’s knickers, I knew it!” Hawke exclaims in an almost joyful fashion.

“It happened to you as well, I gather.”

“Yes, and Varric and Anders. And she didn’t just talk like she knew us. Oh no, she knew us. She knew all about Varric’s crossbow. How Carver used to nail Bethany’s braid to the bed when we were young. And when she talked to Anders, he nearly freaked. The intimate things she knew about him and Justice were uncanny.” He makes a verbal noise of disbelief.

“She tried to warn you,” I realise as I remember how my own meeting with her was.

“Yes…” Hawke’s expression turns grim, and he turns from me.

“She asked us about the Deep Roads - about Corypheus - but it was too late. We had already fought Corypheus and found that blasted idol. Her face when she told us … Varric’s face - it was a grief so deep I had no idea what to do with it.” Hawke makes a deep sigh and sits down on a broken column.

“And the Kirkwall Rebellion?” I ask as I sat down next to him.

“I will never forget it. When we told her what had happened, she told us never to blame ourselves for
the future. She said she was sorry, but she dared not meddle in big events now that she knew both
the idol and Corypheus were loose. That if she warned us or changed anything on a large scale,
things would not happen as they were supposed to,” Hawke rubs his face and seems to struggle for
breath. “Neither Varric, Anders nor I would accept it, so we demanded that she tell us how it could
be averted. And she said she knew only of one way, but she had no way of doing it. She searched
with Merrill through endless amounts of elven lore. She went to Val Chevin, where she befriended
Grand Cleric Dorothea who became the next Divine. She was gone for months at a time - searching
for someone. You, maybe?” He looks at me and expects an answer.

“She did find me more than a year ago. She warned me of the breach, but told me it was too late.
That she needed me to come to Haven.” It’s not the truth, but neither a lie.

“Yeah, we realised that, too. I found out that there were smaller things she did change. We might
have paid her studies and given her a home, but she paid us back - and not just with coin.”

“What did she do?”

“She saved my mother,” Hawke smiles and wipes a tear from his eye. “She broke her own rule to
save her. Risked everything so that I would not lose my mother to a monster. She told me exactly
who the man was and how to find him. He had killed other women, but my mother was spared.”

“And the rebellion?”

Hawke’s face turned stern.

“Forging her for that was nearly impossible, but looking up at the sky now I can almost forgive
her. Varric blames himself, of course. How she bewitched that dwarf I’ll never know. She knew
what Anders was planning all along. She could have warned us. Stopped him. Anything, but she
didn’t. She was afraid that if it did not happen, then she couldn’t predict what would happen. Anders
did later tell me that she had told him that she knew. Demanded that he only use half of his vile
concoction. She spared lives, but to think that the entire thing could have been averted...”

I can feel Hawke’s anger at her, and my heart cries out to her. The burden she has carried is one I
know all too well: the sacrifices that come with what doing what is necessary.

“She was trying to protect the world,” I offer.

“I know, but I felt like her pawn. Being dragged around the board like a chess piece. Had I known I
might not have...” he stops himself before he fabricates a lie. “Varric and I are responsible for all this
mess. Logically, I know she tried to help us. I know she saved many lives, but had she been braver,
maybe we could have saved more.”

I feel rage simmering inside me. Everything she ever did and said was to help us. As I rise, I try to
keep my countenance.

“And yet, we must forgive her. We shaped this world into what it is, whatever she found may yet
save us all.” I look down at Hawke, who nods.

With determined steps, I walk through the keep. I’m tempted to seek out the Herald and travel back
to Skyhold, but first, I need to see Varric.
This chapter is a little longer than the previous ones. I hope you will enjoy it. Thank you so much for your wonderful comments. They are always such a joy to read. I hope you enjoy that I'm beginning to include the Herald as a more active part of the story.

If you have any questions or things you want me to address, please let me know :)

Philippe is inspired by the character Fane from Divinity original Sin 2.

Thank again to ninaninabobina for beta reading.
Marvels of a wounded mind

I’ve been walking to clear my mind, but unfortunately it hasn’t helped. Between my conversations with the Herald and Hawke, my mind is racing with so many questions that are unanswered.

I walk into the keep trying to find Varric. I knew the Inquisitor wasn’t all that she appeared to be. Nothing about what Hawke has said really surprised me, but it has ignited a desire to find out who exactly she is. I became complacent when I knew she meant no harm, but what about the harm it is causing her? The truth is I also need a distraction to focus my mind. Anything to keep me from remembering the sentence the Herald almost uttered.

Varric is sitting around the campfire telling stories as usual. The Herald, Blackwall, and Hawke seem amused by his tale. I hate to interrupt, but I admit that I have little patience left.

“Varric, do you have a moment?”

“Sure, Chuckles, what’s up?”

I motion for him to follow me, and he does. We walk to the side of the keep and can still see out camp from there.

“I need you to refresh my memory of how you know the Inquisitor,” I request in a low voice, keeping our conversation as private as possible.

Varric’s eyes widen as he looks at me and then to Hawke, who is apparently oblivious to us.

“Wait … Hawke talked to you, didn’t he? That meddling son of a nug. So, was I right at least? She sought you out, too?”

“Indeed, she did. She knew my expertise would be needed apparently. As unlikely as it seemed at the time, I could not deny her.” Vague, I admit, but correct.

“Yeah, she has that effect on people.”

Varric rubs his neck as if he is trying to determine where to start. “I know this merchant who use to be Hawke’s servant, Bodahn.”

I recall that name. It was the name of the merchant she met with in Val Royeaux. I hold my tongue. The last thing I want is to keep Varric from talking.

“They joined on us the expedition into the Deep Roads. We found his kid walking around the Deep Roads on his own. Killed darkspawn with his enchantments. We didn’t think much of it at the time. Figured the kid had gotten lost. Then Hawke and I were locked in by my brother.” He shivers at the memory.

”Anyway, we returned to the surface, and then a few weeks after, this woman comes into the Hanged Man dressed in nothing but her nightgown. She starts asking us about Corypheus and the Idol, but by that time, we had already encountered both. She started crying and apologizing that she warned us too late.”
I have to close my eyes as he speaks. I remember her own despair during my first meeting with her as well as my own coldness and suspicion. Had I only known.

“So Hawke said. Did you ever find out who she is?” I ask.

“No. Turns out Bodahn’s boy had found her in the Deep Roads after the Blight. We asked how she got there, of course, but she didn’t answer. Blondie told us to leave her be. That usually darkspawn kidnap women to turn them into broodmothers. I can’t exactly blame her for not wanting to talk about it. All she said was that she lost all her family and had nothing.”

“So you helped her?” I nod with understanding.

Varric has a giving nature and a protectiveness of anyone who needs it. To him, she might as well have been a starving puppy seeking the affection of a child.

“When things she said started coming true, I felt bad for the kid. Figured if anyone had any chance of fixing the mess we made, it would be her. So, I helped her out. But, Chuckles, why are you asking me and not her? I’m sure she would explain all this if you ask when we return to Skyhold.”

An excellent point, and I truly have no answers for him other than my impatience.

“I wanted to verify what had happened before bringing up any unpleasant memories. And Hawke’s opinion of her is very antagonistic. I did not want to cause her further grief.”

“Yeah, I know. They use to get along. Before Blondie blew up the Kirkwall Chantry,” Varric sighs. “But I look up at the sky, and I know exactly why she didn’t stop it. If she knows how we can fix this mess, then I’m not going to lecture her. And you know her. There is no way she takes any joy from any of this. If anyone is to blame for this shit, it’s me.”

“You’re being too hard on yourself, Varric.”

“No. I’m really not.” He shakes his head and walks off.

I sigh as I look up into the sky. I long for the stars hidden behind the dark rainy clouds. Varric, Hawke, and I carry the blame for all of this, so why is it that I feel like she is the one carrying the burden of it all?

In the Fade, I contact my spies. I had sent them searching for information about the Inquisitor months ago, but as I began to trust her I redirected my people. Finding my orb and Corypheus is much more important, especially when I need to prevent the destruction of my orb. I feel sick at the thought of it. It does not take long for one of my agents to return with information.

I did not kill Felassan for his treachery. He is still among my people - only I do not trust him with anything that may compromise my plans. I felt it better to keep him close than risking him possibly sabotaging my plans. Luckily for me, he is as interested in the Inquisitor as I am. She did seek him out and spent years looking for him, after all. In this, at least, our goal remains the same.

“I have looked into the Inquisitor’s background, but all I found were falsified documents acquired by
Varric Tethras. There is no trace of her before then. She could be a Ferelden peasant lost during the Blight. But with her knowledge and skills that seems unlikely,” Felassan ponders, holding his chin.

“Are you suggesting she had those skills before she joined the academy?” I narrow my brow.

“Not all, but definitely most. Her professors called her a prodigy and said that getting her diploma was merely a formality. That and her age suggests that she had the knowledge before she joined.”

I pause at that. She looks like a young woman of no more than thirty years, at the most.

“How old is she?”

“It’s hard to be certain, but if the papers Tethras have created are any indication, then she is approaching forty.” Felassan shrugs.

Odd … It’s not a problem, but it is rare for a human to not show such signs of aging.

“Or it could simply be that they had to make her older on paper to make it possible for her to be a relation to a minor noble house in Ferelden. They all died during the Blight,” Felassan continues.

Something about all of this troubles me.

“Is it possible she is half elven?”

“No idea, but I suspect it could be possible.”

“And it would not be the first time that a human noble would keep his elf-blooded child hidden from the world. It would also explain much of her fascination with elven history,” I muse.

“It’s as good an explanation as any. Is there anything else?”

“Yes. Try to find out where in the Deep Roads exactly she was found and why she is so interested in them.”

Two days later, the Inquisition reinforcement arrives. It was all we could do to keep the undead at bay and protect the villagers, but we managed. I admit that I’m relieved, as it means we might finally be able to reach the rift in the lake. It is late and the rain seems never ending.

As the soldiers enter the gate, I hear a familiar bark. Atish’an storms up the stairs and directly to me, and I can’t help but chuckle as I kneel down to greet her. She nuzzles her face against mine but without licking - something her master must have taught her. I swallow and feel suddenly nervous, and as I look down, the Inquisitor enters on her horse. Her auburn wet hair clings to her face and her black clothes are soaked from the rain. She looks up with her bright eyes and flushed cheeks. What is it she hides behind them? What mysteries will I uncover hiding beneath them? The Herald walks down to her, but I keep my distance. There are many questions burning in my mind, but this is not the time for me to indulge my curiosity.

“Inquisitor, what in the name of the Maker are you doing here?” he chuckles.
“I heard you needed aid to hold this keep. If we don’t want to get into trouble with the King of Ferelden, we need to go about this right. Besides, I thought you could use some extra help with the undead.”

“I thought you didn’t fight?”

“Not the living.” She grins, but it quickly disappears as Hawke glares down at her.

I see Cole waving up at me, and I smile at him. I should have figured he would follow where she goes.

“We better get going,” Hawke sneers. “Don’t you agree, Herald?”

The Herald nods as he helps the Inquisitor off her horse. I expect her to stay behind, but she joins us despite how cold and tired she must be. I find myself wondering if something specific is going to happen now that she has joined us.

“Blackwall, will you coordinate everything here?” the Inquisitor asks.

“Of course, my lady,” he bows.

We start our journey to clear the dam of water, but the air between Hawke and the Inquisitor is full of tension. Even the Herald does not make a single jest on our way to the dam. We enter a decrepit pub where we interrupt two lovers sitting in the hovel covered in webs and dust. It’s filthy.

“Ah … wonderful,” I sigh sarcastically.

“You’ve seen this place. Where would you have chosen to go in their situation?” she asks in a low voice as the Herald speaks with them.

“Somewhere meaningful where it would not be cheapened by its surroundings.” I shake my head, but then I catch the Inquisitor giving me a wry smile.

The way she looks at me is as if she is trying to discern something, and I feel that suddenly my very nature has been exposed to her. She looks away from me with a small smile.

“Anywhere can be meaningful with the right person,” she replies and walks ahead as if her comment had merely been about the weather.

My thoughts wander for a moment, but I collect myself before I can properly discern what they were. Atish’an looks up at me with her head turned. I would guess there is some amusement in her eyes even as I stroke her head. When we find the wheel to the dam intact, there is sorrow on the Inquisitor’s face. She does not seem the least bit surprised by what we found, and I start to fear what else we might find.

The beach is crawling with demons, undead, and spirits all pressing against the Veil. As we approach a rift, the Inquisitor reaches for her runes. Of course. She means to test her theory. Where better to do it than when the Herald is present should anything go wrong?

I expect her to be cautious as we approach, but instead she runs ahead, creating a portal that leads her to a cliff. Hawke laughs with an odd satisfaction and runs after her. Atish’an barks and turns around, refusing to go any closer.

“Oh no. I hate it when they do that!” Varric hisses as we follow them.
“Friend, stay close to me,” I tell the dog, and with a worried whine, she seems to agree.

Hawke conjures a massive fireball and throws it at a cliff wall. At the last moment, a portal appears that leads to the air above the demons. The creatures have no way of preparing for the misdirection of the fire that pulverises them from above. As they move through the battlefield of undead and demons, Hawke takes every advantage from the portals that she creates. They have done this many times before. The Inquisitor doesn’t harm any of the creatures, merely makes the battlefield so unpredictable that even the Herald and Cole nearly get caught by it all. Varric keeps his distance, and I do the same. There is nothing controlled about what they are doing. Hawke is reckless and dangerous while the Inquisitor tries to keep everyone safe. She even creates a portal underneath the Herald and places him on the cliff next to her, where he can reach the rift. As it closes, Hawke grins wildly.

“That’s my Mona!”

As soon as those words leave his lips, something in his expression changes as if he for a moment had forgotten his anger and distaste for her company. The flash of pain I see in the Inquisitor’s face as he glares at her with fury aches in me. She comes down off the cliff and leans against it for a moment as if to keep her balance. Atish’an runs to her and stands beside her to support her. Something isn’t right.

I approach the Inquisitor.

“Were you not supposed to attempt to suppress the rift?” I question carefully.

For a moment, she looks confused. Then she turns pale.

“I forgot…”

“You forgot?” I ask as I walk up next to her.

She swallows and for a moment seems disturbed by it.

“I guess Hawke being here is distracting me more than I thought.” She shakes her head without looking at me and follows the others deeper in to Old Crestwood.

As we fight through undead, speak with the spirits trapped beyond the Veil, and walk through the caverns below, the Inquisitor remains distant and quiet. Hawke on the other hand keeps talking endlessly with Varric. At each corpse we pass, her melancholy seems more profound. Even her hound cannot get her attention and frequently looks at me as if it expects me to make it better.

“Sharp. Deep. Cold. Like needles dragged across burned flesh. She feels it. Not like me. Her mind shapes it so the feeling will fit,” Cole murmurs as he looks at the Inquisitor.

After closing the big rift, we attempt to find a way out. The Inquisitor has still shown no sign of wanting to test her runes. On our way, we cross paths with some nugs. The Inquisitor immediately smiles and crouches down, watching them. It is a relief to see some of her spirit at peace - even for but a moment.

“I think the nugs like it down here,” the Herald chuckles.

“I bet. Ever tried braised nug with elfroot? It was my brother’s favourite growing up,” Varric replies.

“This must be the first time they’ve seen people like us. I wonder what they make of the giants passing their home.” I smile and am rewarded by one of the Inquisitor’s sweetest.
“It’s quiet. They like the quiet.” Cole kneels down as he looks at them.

Hawke gets a devious smirk on his face and prepares to cast a fire spell at one of the nugs. At the last moment, a portal appears before him and the spell hits his rear rather than the nug he was aiming for. His tailcoats catch on fire and he turns around himself to put them out.

“It wasn’t doing anything!” Cole objects.

“Maker take you, Mona!” Hawke hisses.

“You should be thanking me. Imagine what Merrill would say if she heard you harmed a nug,” she answers straight-faced.

“She has a point, Hawke. I think Daisy would be happier with one as a pet,” Varric points out, earning himself a glare from Hawke.

Hawke groans and walks ahead. Atish’an grumbles at him and leans against me as I gently scratch her ear.

“Thank you.” Cole smiles at her as he pets the nug, and she kneels down to offer the creature a treat from her pocket.

“You don’t have to thank me. He only tried to hurt the poor thing to upset me.”

“But he doesn’t have to upset you. You’re already hurting.” Cole frowns.

She reaches out to his cheek and assures him she is fine before following us out of the caves.

When we reach the keep, the rain has finally stopped, and the Inquisition soldiers are already searching for the mayor. Everything is quiet and I should rest, but I can’t. I have the opportunity for the first time in days to speak with the Inquisitor. I have questions, and this time, she will answer them.

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I find her on the hill above Crestwood looking at an astrarium, her face turned towards the stars. The hunting cabin next to it is empty. I have noticed this is a habit of hers when she needs to think - to hide away from the world. Though this time I suspect it is to avoid Hawke as well.

“Inquisitor, we need to talk,” I call, and she stops, looking down at me.

She is smiling at first, but it vanishes as I get closer.

“What’s wrong?” Her eyes widen.

“I spoke with Hawke and Varric. They told me everything. My spies found something interesting as well. Apparently, you didn’t exist until ten years ago. You lied to me,” I point out with perhaps more severity than I intended.

I have never seen her anger so quickly, but her eyes flare and her cheeks flush.
“Only through omission,” she seethes with a satisfaction the source of which I don’t understand. “And you’re one to talk!”

I keep calm and watch her carefully.

“As if I could ever keep anything hidden from you,” I point out in an even voice.

“Doesn’t keep you from trying.” She crosses her arms in defiance.

“Who are you? What is it in your past you don’t want us to see?” I question to keep myself from being swept away by her anger.

She makes an exasperated noise and throws her hands into the air.

“What do you want from me?”

“The truth.”

At that, she laughs and looks to the heavens.

“The truth, he says. If anything was ever that simple!”

It’s as if she is talking to someone else before she turns to me. Her body trembles from anger or fear - I can’t tell which.

“You wouldn’t believe me,” she scoffs.

“Try me.” I cross my arms.

“What would you have me tell you, Solas? That I’m an alien from another world? That I had a child, a boyfriend, a family and a career? That I grew up in a world filled with technology that even you can’t imagine?”

Tears fill her eyes as she stares at me.

“Perhaps, that I know of Thedas through books and something I can best describe as plays? Would that intrigue you? Or how about the fact that I woke up one day in a cold, damp, dark tomb in the Deep Roads wearing threadbare clothes, and all that was in there was an old Eluvian that I had no idea how to activate. How about the fact that for days I crawled through those dank tunnels, praying to anyone who would listen that I did not run into any darkspawn? Is that what you want to hear?!” she screams at me - terrified.

“If it is the truth,” I say calmly. I suspect she is lying, but I also know there must be at least some truth hidden within.

“And you would believe me?” she challenges.

She is right. What she is telling me does sound completely mad. Yet, with that realisation comes another: an understanding as to why she hasn’t told me - why she kept it secret for all these years. She would have been labelled as insane and locked away. I might have come to the same conclusion, but now that I know her ... see her as she truly is, I can’t help but feel a crushing weight of doubt. The mind will do incredible things to protect itself, and if she survived the Blight and escaped the fate of a broodmother, the trauma would have been extensive. Not to mention the damage the relic might have done to her.

“I want to.” My reply is soft as I attempt to hide my doubts.
She closes her eyes with a trembled breath and holds a hand to her chest. It didn’t work. I’m hurting her.

“That’s not a ‘yes.’”

I speak softly as I approach her and put a comforting hand on her shoulder, “Ma ghilana, lethallan.”

She gives a trembling sigh and rests a hand on top of mine. Any anger towards me vanishes by this simple gesture.

“I don’t know how any of this happened - or why. Only that I am not from Thedas but from another world. I charted the stars in an attempt to find it, but my knowledge of the stars from my home is poor. I have no proof to give you.” She shivers, and I pull her close. It has been a long time since I last held anyone so close, but whatever comfort I can offer is hers. I sense something in her, but before I can determine with certainty what it is, she pulls from my embrace.

“The expedition found you in the Deep Roads?” I ask as gently as I can.

“Sandal, my dwarven friend, apparently found me. He had wandered off, and when he got back to camp he led his father, Bodahn, to where he had found me unconscious. For weeks, I drifted in and out of consciousness. When I finally came to, I was delirious. When I realized I was in Kirkwall, I stormed down to the Hanged Man, and the rest I’m guessing Varric and Hawke told you.” She sits down on the railing overlooking the cliff.

An air of melancholy about her reflects my own. She is alone, apart from her people, and carrying around a deep sense of loss. I sit down next to her on the railing. We might be alone, but in each other’s company, we can at least pretend not to be.

“It’s been ten years, Solas. My son is a teenager by now. I have missed his entire childhood. I could walk straight up to him, and he wouldn’t know me.” It is then I realise she is crying.

I put my arm around her and pull her close. Her face hides in the crook of my neck as she weeps, and I can feel her warm tears streaming down my throat. She truly believes everything she is telling me, but I can’t release my doubt. The death of a child and her entire family would explain why she would cling to a fantasy. At least this way, she can pretend they are still alive and well. It might hurt, but not compared to the trauma she must have suffered.

“Ir abelas, vhenan,” I whisper in a voice so low I know she can’t hear.

She pulls away again, and I’m left feeling cold by her absence.

“You heard Hawke. He hates me, and he doesn’t even know the entire truth.” She sighs and dries the tears from her eyes. “Everyone would hate me if they knew. I’m as guilty as Anders.”

“They would be wrong to. You did what you had to in order to save this world - to save all that which could be saved. As for Hawke and Anders, you cannot save people from themselves.” I try to comfort her, and she looks at me with a mournful look.

“I know,” she whispers quietly, and it strikes a blow at my heart. The pain intensifies as she gets up and looks at me again.

“I know you mean well, Solas. But you of all people cannot comfort me this time even though you can empathize better than anyone. I don’t blame you for thinking I’m mentally ill. I know how my explanation sounds.”
The look she gives me screams of her crippling despair. I never wanted to hurt her like this.

“Inquisitor, it’s not uncommon for the mind to protect itself in remarkable ways. Your spirit may be wounded. If you like, I can help you through this,” I plead. Please, let me help you.

“Solas, thank you for being so kind, but you don’t believe me.” Her breath quivers as she closes her eyes for a moment, “And that’s okay. I shouldn’t have expected anything different. But please understand that I can’t bear for you to think of me as insane. I don’t want your pity. I think it would be best if we never spoke of this again.”

She turns from me and starts walking back to the keep with hastened steps.

“Inquisitor!” I call for her, but it is of no use.

She continues to walk away from me, and I lean helplessly against the cabin wall. Cole appears next to me, probably attracted by the grief I brought forth in her.

“She thinks you believe she is damaged. Why would you think that?” Cole frowns at me.

I sigh to myself. The disappointment he feels in me might as well have been my own.

“The mind is very fragile and changeable, especially when traumatized. Not unlike when you took human form.”

“But she isn’t lying, and she didn’t forget,” Cole insists.

“I know. But like with the Fade, memories are all too easily muddied. Just like history books, they contain truths, but reason and sense are required to extract it.”

“And you can’t tell if it’s real?”

“I suspect both are real to her, Cole.”

“She hides, but she never lies.” He nods, but if he agrees with me, I’m uncertain.

As I see her disappearing down to the keep, I hear the wolves howl in the distance.

Chapter End Notes

Good weekend all!

I hope you’ll enjoy this chapter. Please leave a comment below and thank you so much for following this story. I’m touched by how many is dedicated and captured by this story.

Thanks again to ninaninabobina for beta reading.
A week later, I’m back at Skyhold. The Inquisitor has hardly spoken a word to me since that night in Crestwood. I find myself missing our time at Haven when we would talk and be so at ease. It seems like a different lifetime now, a memory as distant as those of Arlathan. It all changed when Hawke arrived, or perhaps Dubois is the cause. Perhaps I sabotaged myself. It is not as if they would not have been a recurring event. In any case, I should not dwell on it. It is better this way.

In the Fade, I find Wisdom. I tell her everything that has happened and explain my fear that the Inquisitor’s mind has been wounded. I express my desire to help her overcome it, but by my own pride, I have made it impossible for her to trust me. I see it every time she looks at me - a ground shaking emotion of disappointment and self-loathing. The exact things of which she did not need more.

“Has she given you any reason to believe that she is not in her right mind?” Wisdom asks.

I think of everything that has happened and how carefully and thoughtfully she makes her decisions. With the exception of her willingness to risk her own life, I cannot think of a single situation where she seemed unhinged or her emotions were unpredictable. She has great empathy, but her emotions do not control her. She is neither cold nor distant, though she might sometimes retreat into herself.

“No,” I admit.

“Then, perhaps this is not a question of likelihood, but of trust. Lethallin, do you trust that she is telling the truth?”

“I trust that she believes it to be the truth.”

Wisdom sighs and shakes her head.

“Whatever the truth is, if you wish for her to forgive you, it is her truth you must accept. Only once you accept it will your offer of help be welcomed.”

“I suppose you’re right.”

The following night, I go to see the Inquisitor. She has kept to herself, burrowing herself in work again from what Varric tells me. As I walk up the stairs, I hear a sad and mournful yet hauntingly beautiful tune emanating from her instrument. I knock on the door, and I hear Atish’an barking. The door opens, and the Inquisitor looks at me with an emotionless expression.

“Good evening, Inquisitor.”

“Good evening,” she replies with stoic politeness as she walks back up the last stairs. Atish’an looks at her and whines, then greets me with affection. As I walk up the stairs, I see her desk covered in documents and papers. Varric was right. She stands on the balcony, looking out and playing her violin.

“It’s a beautiful tune. What’s the name of it?”
She looks at me as if she can’t decide to be amused or upset. She stops playing and walks towards the bed.

“It’s called ‘The Lost Elf’, but I doubt you came here to discuss music.”

“Inquisitor, about our discussion at Crestwood--”

“You know, I’m tired. I think it’s best if you leave.” She sighs and turns her back to me.

“I … Perhaps you’re right. I’m sorry.” I sigh and turn to walk down the stairs as Atish’an whines up at me.

“I know you are,” the Inquisitor replies softly and without malice as I leave.

I return to my quarters and realise that there might be nothing I can do to make this right. Sleep eludes me as I turn in my bed. I normally have no trouble drifting away into the Fade. Instead, my waking mind torments me with what I should have done. I made her feel broken when in truth there is nothing about her spirit I do not admire. I twist in my bed again, playing every scenario in my mind that would have ended better. I wished to help her, but I offered no such confidence in me that would have made it possible for her to accept it. I did not need the explanation I sought so desperately. In the end, it doesn’t matter. I could simply have let myself appreciate her as she is. Frustrated, I place myself on my back and look out the window where I see the brightness of the universe in the frost-covered night.

I see her standing on that hill in Crestwood, her astute gaze turned to the stars with complete fascination. I would have joined her looking up at the stars and stood behind her as she asked a question, her back pressed against my chest as she would look to where I was pointing. I would look down at her as her eyes sparkled with curiosity, then lean in to kiss her deeply. My heart would beat faster as she turned in my arms and sighed. I would have pressed her body close to mine and deepened the kiss further as my tongue would brush against hers. My lips would taste her neck as I led her backwards into the cabin. With a spell, I would light a fire and heat up the room as she pulled at my clothes. She would push me back with one of her coy smiles as she undressed before me, her eyes glistening with desire and a faint blush the only part that would reveal her modesty.

“Vhenan,” I sigh breathlessly.

It’s not until the endearment leaves my lips that I’m aware of my actions, and at this point, I can’t be bothered to care. At the very least, I can allow myself this minute bit of happiness. I unbind my breeches and arch my back as the fantasy consumes me.

The warm comfort of her spirit would be reflected in her soft skin set alight by the glow of the fire. Her eyes would darken as she bit her lower lip with a grin. As I swallowed, she would laugh kindly, as she always does, and I would catch her in my embrace with a kiss. Slowly, we would lower ourselves onto the rug, and I would explore her and she me. I know I would shower her with endearments and try to convey just how dear to me she has become, but none of them are coherent at the moment. My pulse spikes as I imagine my hand on her thigh as I press my body against hers. I recall how my name sounds on her lips, and I’m lost. Nothing comprehensible goes through my mind - just her. Every memory, every touch, a surprising kiss in the Fade and black silk across her skin are glimpses that push me further. As I moan another endearment, my chest rises from the mattress, and my heart aches at what could have been.

After cleaning myself, I turn to my side and fall into the Fade imagining that if I were to reach out she would be there next to me - peaceful, sated, and happy.
I have just delivered my report to the Ambassador when she detains me. I have thought it best to keep my distance from the Inquisitor and focus on what truly matters: recovering the orb and destroying Corypheus.

“Oh, Solas, may I suggest chocolates from Val Royeaux?” Josephine suggests politely.

I turn and give her a confused look.

“I don’t pretend to know what has occurred between you and the Inquisitor, but I know generally she is not one to avoid apologizing, which leads me to believe it must have been something … unpleasant that has happened between you,” she clarifies.

“Are you trying to play matchmaker, Lady Montilyet? I would think a noble would suit her better than an elven apostate,” I jest with a wry smile.

Josephine chuckles in an apologetic and polite fashion.

“Not at all. You are, however, her friend. The Inquisition has benefited greatly from your vast knowledge, and the Inquisitor especially values your counsel. Having things be less tense between the two of you would be of benefit.”

“I was not aware this was so publicly known,” I frown.

“Oh, not at all. I would not have known if not for a comment Edward- I mean, the Herald made yesterday. I believe he meant for me to discuss this with you.”

Of course, the Herald would be responsible for this.

“I will take your suggestion under advisement,” I reply dryly. I will need to have a talk with that man.

“Excellent! She has a particular fondness for chocolate-covered licorice.”

I can’t hide the disgust on my face, and she giggles.

“I know, a truly awful combination. Regardless, it has been known to win her good graces on more than one occasion.”

“I hesitate to ask how you came by this knowledge.”

“She had a falling out with the Duke De Montfort a few years ago. Her close friendship with Divine Justinia made it dangerous for him to lose her favour. If the rumour speaks true, she did not speak to him until he had bought her an entire crate. Also, I have noticed it’s the first thing she eats whenever we attend soirees.” Her smile is playful.

“Rest easy, Ambassador, the Inquisitor and I are both professionals. Should we have any disagreements, I can deal with the matter.” I bow and walk out the door.

I grow determined as I exit her office. It is one thing for the Herald to be concerned, but to meddle in my private affairs and involve the Ambassador is quite another. I find the Herald outside of Skyhold training his magic by himself. He is improving, but his magic and technique still leave a lot to be desired. I know he feels that he is not up to the task, and honestly, there are quite a few mages here more gifted than he is. His heart, however, is in the right place, and despite his religious beliefs, he is
fair minded and just. He almost hits me as he twirls, but I hold my ground with my arms crossed.

“Have you been training with the First Enchanter? Stop front loading your barriers.”

“Maker! You scared me, Solas!” he gasps.

I do not intend to waver around the subject.

“I just got some interesting advice from the Ambassador.”

He rubs his neck uncomfortably.

“I swear I told her nothing about … well … you know. I simply said you had a disagreement with Mona and if there was any way she knew of that would get her more likely to speak to you again.”

“I fail to see how this is any of your concern.”

“I’m a hopeless romantic.” He shrugs with a nervous smile.

“Well, you do seem to have a liking for hopeless causes. At least that much is true,” I agree, though I’m not in the least bit amused.

“I … I know … I’ll stop meddling. I promise.”

“Very well … now what are you doing out here?”

The Herald gives an exasperated sigh and sits down in the snow.

“It has been brought to my attention that I need to specialize my talents. Josephine already has prospective teachers lined up for me. But I’m … embarrassed.”

“I’m sure they are accomplished teachers, Herald.”

“I’m sure. But … I’m the Herald of Andraste, but before this I was just an average mage. As in completely average. I didn’t excel at anything. I passed my harrowing, but after spending time with you and Cole, it just seems like an absurd test that meant nothing. I already play the part of the fool. I would rather not have a teacher who confirms that.”

“You are not a fool, Herald. Simply … impulsive,”

“The Enchanters at the Circle said I’d never amount to anything. I was hoping, however, that you would teach me.”

“Me?”

“Wouldn’t you enjoy proving to Vivienne that you would make a better teacher than the Circle?” he grins at me.

I laugh. "Appealing to my pride?”

“Depends if it’s working,” he laughs.

I sigh and stand next to him, offering him my hand to get him to his feet.

“Do you even have an interest in becoming a rift mage?”

He looks at the anchor on his hand.
“Solas, I don’t know what this is or how it works. What I do know is that I’m the only one who can close the rifts. It’s my obligation to learn more about them.” He is as serious as I have ever seen him.

“Very well, if you insist. Because you are my friend and nothing else.” I raise an eyebrow and the Herald nods. “Now, let us begin. Close your eyes. Focus on the vibration in the Veil…”

I train him for hours, and though he might not be the most naturally gifted, his determination and willingness to listen to my instructions make up for it. I quickly see improvements in him - even if they are simply minor ones. I’m responsible for putting this burden on his shoulders - be it indirectly - at the very least I can give him the training he desires. Had his teachers been more patient with him, he might have excelled.

As we walk back to Skyhold, he asks me about spirits, memories, and ancient ruins. I admit I enjoy his company.

“How about a drink, Solas? You better say yes, after what you did to Blackwall, I’m not offering to play cards with you.” He grins, and I chuckle.

“Alright. One drink, then I really should be getting back to my work.”

Cole meets us at the gates, seeming distraught.

“What is the matter, Cole?” I ask.

“She needs your help. Please help her,” Cole urges, and we run after him towards the entrance of Skyhold.

As we approach the main hall, we are met by Varric and Cassandra, both with worried expression on their faces.

“Thank the Maker, there you are!” Cassandra sighs with relief.

“What’s going on?” the Herald asks.

“Chuckles, you better come quick.”

I follow Varric and Cassandra into the rotunda. The Inquisitor is painting on the walls that I have yet to paint myself. But it’s not calm or collected. Her hair is in disarray, she is covered in paint, and she keeps painting on top of what she has already painted. It's as if her mind is constantly changing the imagery she is trying to illustrate. Dubois is standing next to her and trying to reach out to her. She doesn’t even sense his presence. Cole tries as well, but he is having no luck either.

“I had the library emptied. No one but the ones present know of this,” Cassandra points out.

“I’ve never seen her like this,” Varric mumbles with worry.

“It hides. Masked by memories as fragments and embers intertwine. She reaches across mindful, meaning. Making it real here,” Cole mutters.

“Solas, can you help her?” Cassandra asks.

“I will attempt to do so, yes.” I turn to them, “If you would give us some privacy.”

They nod and do as I ask. Only Cole and Dubois are a little reluctant, but they eventually follow. I walk up to her and see her face smeared in paint as her hands brush over her face in frustration. My heart cries out at her obvious anguish. Did I push her to this? Had I handled the situation at
Crestwood differently, would this never have happened? She starts to pinch and slap herself as if she tries to keep herself awake. I take her wrists gently to keep her from hurting herself.

“What are you doing, Inquisitor? This behaviour is unlike you.”

She looks confused. She has no answer to give me, then grasps her head.

“I … I was told to do it.”

“By whom?” I frown with concern.

She shakes her head in frustration.

“Solas … help me,” she pleads.

“Just look at me, Inquisitor,” I say softly as I reach for her face, helping to steer her gaze towards mine.

“Good, now look past me and relax.”

She stares deep into my eyes, and the odd sensation I felt in Crestwood seems more present now.

“I sense something. Faint, but present. And not entirely you.”

Her expression turns distraught, “If you’re trying to tell me I’m mad again—”

“No. There is something present. It’s collecting knowledge. A task with simple goals, but it’s effect compulsive. From the breach. The Fade or … ah … No. Not the Fade. Your dream at Therinfal Redoubt,” I realise. The presence is drawing on her - a link I can’t quite determine the cause of.

She pulls from me as she seems to wake from her trancelike state.

“I’m fine, Solas. Nothing is wrong with me. I’m sorry I bothered you.”

I hold her shoulders firmly but without hurting her.

“Inquisitor, listen carefully. When you were trapped within Envy’s dream, something happened to you.”

She looks at me again for the first time with a look that seems like her own.

“Envy did this?”

“Not directly. You sent Envy back to the Fade, but spending so long in its dream … something happened to you. Your mind was wounded and your spirit is compensating, as you might tuck an injured arm to your side.”

The look she gives me is pained. I can tell it hurts her when I mention her mental condition.

“Now that you are aware of it, there is no true danger. This impulse is simply an annoyance. If you wish to deal with this, I suggest you return to Therinfal.” I try to assuage her worries.

Hopefully, she will trust me enough to get the help she needs.

“Wonderful, I’ll be swimming in Red Templars before lunch,” she snarks with sarcasm.

“Regardless, this problem began there. It should end there.”
She releases a deep sigh.

“Then, I guess I will have to leave.”

“I’m coming with you,” I declare, and she frowns at me.

“I’m not sick, Solas. I can handle myself,” she objects passionately as she tries to walk passed me. She doesn’t want my help, but she must accept it. No matter how much she might despise and mistrust me, she must see reason.

“I really must insist.”

“You always were bloody stubborn,” she hisses.

As she walks passed me she nearly trips, and I catch her by her waist.

“You’re exhausted. It wants you to lower your inhibitions and numb your mind so that it may learn more,” I warn as I keep her standing.

She looks up at me with a vulnerable expression.

“Solas, I’m afraid.”

I hold her close.

“I know, lethallan. I know,” I coo softly. “It will be alright.”

I see Cassandra waiting respectfully at the door. She wasn’t able to hear our conversation to its fullest, but she remained close enough that should anyone try to interrupt she might send them away. I nod at the Seeker, and she comes to help me.

“She needs rest.”

“And a bath,” Cassandra agrees.

Cassandra and I get her up the stairs to her room, but she is barely conscious. Atish’an greets me at the door with a whine. The Inquisitor doesn’t even notice her. Cassandra takes over and makes the Inquisitor lean against only her.

“I’ll get her cleaned up,” the Seeker murmurs and leads the Inquisitor to the bathing chamber.

I walk to her desk and look over the documents. Maybe something here can reveal what is happening. I see schematics and documents that all either relate to her experiments or dealings with the Inquisition. I find a lot of drawings of a small boy. They don’t look exactly alike, but it seems to be meant as the same one, as if the person drawing them did so from a memory they couldn’t quite recall. I see drawings scattered and crumbled. They resemble the same imagery as the paintings of the wall. Some are unfamiliar and depict areas and contraptions that I have no idea as to what they are. Others seem to be glimpses into Thedas’s closest future. I see Wardens and Empress Celene. Some look like ancient elves with vallaslin. And a lot of wolves. I frown in concern. Each one is either torn or crumbled. I walk to the fireplace and see the remnants of drawings.

“What did I do to you?” I whisper with a deep sigh.

I hear the door and turn to see the Inquisitor, her hair damp, wearing loose clothing, and leaning
against Cassandra. Her fatigue worries me. How long has this been going on unnoticed?

“I can walk, Cassandra,” she objects softly.

“I know, but I feel better knowing you get to the bed in one piece,” Cassandra offers gently.

Cassandra places the Inquisitor on the bed. She is nearly unconscious, and her hound jumps up on the bed next to her and looks at me with a pitiful whine.

“I know, my friend. I’ll help her,” I assure the dog, who brushes my hand with her nose.

I cast a small spell, making her fall asleep.

“Can you help her?” Cassandra asks with great concern.

“I believe so, but we need to travel to Therinfal. The Envy demon wounded her somehow. That she has gone this long without showing any signs says a lot about the endurance of her spirit.”

“Alright, we leave first thing in the morning then,” Cassandra states.

“I think it would be better if I went with her alone. This is a very … private matter,” I explain, and Cassandra nods.

“Understood. Bring Cole and the dog at least. They are probably already aware. I will have everything prepared so that you can leave early in the morning. I will keep what happened between those already involved and the advisors. Hopefully, she will recover soon.”

“Thank you, Seeker.” I nod, and she gives me a sad smile before leaving.

I start healing the Inquisitor when I notice she is covered in bruises and do what I can to make her comfortable. I cast wards that might protect her mind from whatever is trying to invade it.

Atish’an looks up from her master and whines softly. Dubois stands on the top of the stairs with a worried expression. I get off the bed as he walks over to us. He looks down at her sleeping from.

“How is she?”

“She is stable, for the moment. As for what compelled her to act so out of character, it might be the trauma of losing her family. I won’t know for certain until we reach Therinfal.”

He gives a grim nod and rests a hand on her hair.

“Go on, you can ask me,” he says vaguely.

“Ask you what?”

“What in the name of the Maker she would be doing with an arrogant fool like me.” He gives a huffed chuckle and sits down on the bed carefully

“When I met her, I moved through the world like a ghost. I paid no attention to the life around me and saw only my obsessions - my work. The most heroic deeds or worst atrocities were mere footnotes to me.”

I feel a chill run down my spine as he talks. The similarities are not lost on me.

“But for some reason unknown to me, she saw me. She touched something inside me I had thought
long dead and brought it to life. I started to see the world through her eyes. She showed me just how little I knew. It was like having seen the world in nothing but shades of grey, then suddenly seeing a spectrum of every colour in the universe.”

I wish he would stop talking. Every truth he says rings so clearly in my mind, and it is nothing short of pure torture.

“Why are you telling me this?”

“I loved her for years, and I know nothing of her past. If you know more than I, you must be aware of just how much trust she has placed in you.” He gives a regretful sigh as he strokes her cheek, then gets up to leave.

He turns at the last moment and looks at me.

“Make sure she gets out of this unscathed, if you can. She is … well, the world is more meaningful with her in it.”

“I will do what I can.”

Chapter End Notes

Hi everyone.

Things continue to be angsty, but it won't last for much longer. Please let me know what you think and thank you so much all of you who have left kudos and comments. It means a lot and helps to keep me motivated!

This chapter is based on some deleted content from Inquisition :) Philippe is based on the character Fane from DOS 2.

Thanks again to ninaninabobina for beta reading.
“Tell me a story.”

Her request comes out of thin air after we have been riding for a day without speaking a word to each other. Both of us have talked to Cole - I more frequently than her. I see the pain and resentment in her eyes, even when she does not look directly at me. The loathing seems changeable. Sometimes it is directed at me, other times it seems to be a state of being - perhaps at herself.

“A story?”

“The silence is getting boring and, quite frankly, bloody awkward. So, tell me a story - at least I believe yours. So, unless you have a better suggestion, then tell me about the spirits you’ve met?” Her voice changes rapidly from hurt to sneering and back again.

“You mean to say you do not already know of my stories?” I quip, attempting to lighten her mood.

“I might, but I still enjoy hearing them from you,” she replies, her voice more even than I had hoped.

I sigh as I look to the sky. This is going to be a long week, as simply getting to Therinfal takes more than three days.

“Jabbing, pounding. Thoughts in an endless spiral. She is embarrassed. Hurt. She thinks you believe she is stupid and broken.” Cole gives me a stern look and Atish’an growls up at me, making my horse twitch slightly.

The Inquisitor turns her head with a smile. Everyone else finds his nature intrusive, but she has merely accepted it.

“I didn’t mean to hurt you. Only to help,” I emphasize as my eyes meet hers.

She takes a deep breath and looks away.

“I know you did … do. That doesn’t make it less painful,” she sighs. “How many have called you a madman or a liar?”

“Many,” I admit. I know her feelings all too well. If people knew of my story it would sound as unbelievable as hers, “How many know?”

“You mean how many have I told? Or how many believe me?” She glares at me, and I feel somehow smaller. “Until you, Cole is the only one who knows. He is the only other person I trusted enough to believe me.”

Her comment cracks the air like a whip, and I feel myself cringe inwardly. She smiles back at Cole for a moment.

“Inquisitor--”

She holds up a hand to keep me from talking.

“Please, just tell me a story.”
“Ma nuvenin, lethallan. I would be happy to share them with you,” I concede and attempt to find the more cheerful stories of my journey.

I begin speaking of the spirit who guided village girls to kind village boys who would return their love with gentle kindness. She lets me speak for hours and merely listens. Only from her expressions can I be certain that she is in fact listening to my every word. Her smiles and eyes change depending on the story I’m telling. I could almost convince myself that Crestwood never happened - if she would only look at me. It remains the same as days pass until we finally arrive at Therinfal.

The Inquisitor is the first dismount some distance from the fortress.

“Let’s leave the horses here,” she instructs.

“Yes. Better. They’ll be frightened otherwise,” Cole agrees.

The Inquisitor seems anything but eager to enter. And I can’t blame her. She takes her time removing saddles from the horses and making sure they are placed where they have plenty of grass to eat and water. Cole walks up to her.

“Cold and dark. Reflection on--” he begins, but is interrupted by the Inquisitor pulling him into a hug.

She burrows her face in his chest and pulls him closer. He puts her arms around her and rests his cheek on top of her head. Cole’s eyes meet mine.

“It’s odd that a being so gentle gets embraced so little,” he murmurs, and I realise that the words are mine.

The Inquisitor chuckles and squeezes him one last time before letting go.

“You deserve all the hugs in the world, Cole.” She smiles brightly.

“He wasn’t thinking of me.”

The Inquisitor’s eyes look at me, and I feel my breathing getting heavier. She rubs Cole’s shoulder.

“I have you and Tish. That’s more love than many get in a lifetime.” She smiles and pets her dog, who crawls into her embrace as she crouches down.

“Now, Solas. Let’s see if we can find whatever is playing tricks on me. Hopefully, I will just be my regular crazy before nightfall.” She gives me a snide look as she passes.

I sigh, cover my face with the palm of my hand, and shake my head.

“You think she hates you. She doesn’t. She believes that if she hated you it would hurt less,” Cole states.

I nod at Cole. She would probably be right.

I follow her into the keep and even from a distance I can see her tensing up. She keels over and I have to Fade-step in order to catch her before she falls to the ground.

“I’m fine,” she murmurs as if she means to reassure me.
“It will be over soon,” I comfort, “Tell me what you hear.”

“Humming… it’s not… coherent… it seems confused,” she holds a hand to her head then gives me a small wry grin, “At least I’m not the only one.”

We pass through the doors of the keep and walk up to where we fought envy. Dusk is approaching and in the background the breech lights up the dark clouds. The Inquisitor walks to the middle of the courtyard. She places her hand on the ground and I feel a disturbance in the veil and Atish’an barks.

“Inquisitor! Get away from there!”

She is pushed backward on the ground as rocks beneath the ground rise up. With a red and blue lyrium attached to it, it seems far older and larger than any other of its kind I have encountered. The spirit that resides within does not seem aggressive, but emanates an all-consuming distress. It is most certainly dangerous.

“A Profane … what the hell?” The Inquisitor looks at me wide eyed before she is pulled into the air, held there by the creature.

“Amgeforn…” it mumurs as it stares down at her.

The Inquisitor sits on the gorund paralyzed, but not by fear. It pulls her limp body into itself, the stone and lyrium that creates it encasing her in its chest.

“Sacrifice? No! What do you think you’re doing!”

“Mathas gar na fornen pa tot isatunoll,” it explains - its voice full of sorrow.

“Veata Salroka!” I cry back in ancient dwarven, ”What is it that you regret? What do you want with her?”

“Gangue...” it moans in despair.

“In the dark, she was forgotten. It was a mistake. She is not a wrong thing, a wreck, a ruin. It doesn’t understand.” Cole’s voice is filled with worry.

“She is a living, breathing woman. Not a mistake. And even if she were, what would a Profane want with her?”

“It knows she does not belong, but she isn’t a wrong shape. You won’t hurt my friend!” Cole cries at it.

“Belong where?” I demand as I look up that Profane.

A blue and black fog emanates from the creature. I hear the sound of a child laughing as the dark blue shadow shifts then turns into that of a small human child of perhaps four years old. I see a shadow of the Inquisitor chasing him and catching him in her embrace while they both laugh.

A fog horse gallops around me turning into a carriage without a horse. Fast, loud, and quite possibly deadly. There is so much noise. Sounds I have never heard. The horseless carriage turns into metal contraptions unlike any I have ever seen. I see the shadow fog of her building the contraptions with arms and legs that move on their own.

“Where did she come from?”

Buildings of fog rise from the ground and into the sky - seeming endless. It changes into a horde of
humans walking with hasted steps not acknowledging each other. In the middle, she stands alone while the chaotic crowd rushes past her.

I find myself unable to fully comprehend what I’m seeing, but the visions are just as odd as those of the Inquisitor’s dreams I have seen.

The fog forms an entire star system with one blue planet that looks nothing like Thedas. There are no stars in the sky with that constellation. That is what she was searching for. So much time she spent looking up at the stars - searching for a home as lost to her as Arlathan is to me.

Cole gasps, “This is what pulls her hurt. Dreaming, wishing, lost. Shining, glittering, they create maps that glow in the dark.”

It was all true … and like a fool, I did not believe her. I take a deep breath.

“Mathas gar na fornen pa salroka astrar.”

“No! Do not leave her in the dark!” Cole cries and attacks.

Cole charges, and the Profane flashes red as its giant stone arm swings at Cole. Cole vanishes and reappears behind it, jamming his dagger into a crystal on its back. It cries out in agony.

“We must disrupt it! Remove the binding!” I call out as I place wards around the creature to hinder its mobility.

When Cole charges again, the Profane opens up its chest to expose the Inquisitor. She looks still until Cole’s dagger lacerates her shoulder, and she cries out in agony. Cole recoils in horror and appears next to me.

“It will use our feelings for her against us. We must banish the creature. We need to find the binding!” I explain before Fade-stepping away as the creature lashes out at me. Cole pierces its elbow with his dagger, and the arm falls into pieces - only for it to seconds later put it back together.

“It sings below!” Cole calls to me.

“Of course. The binding is under ground.” If I only knew how to make them appear, but fighting the creature and not killing the Inquisitor as it exposes her every time we make a vital attack is taxing my resources.

Atish’an runs towards me with the Inquisitor’s satchel in its mouth, but she is hit by the Profane. She howls and whines in agony before I manage to shield her. The satchel falls and the Inquisitor’s runes fall onto the ground. I gather my focus and mana and direct a burst of ice towards the creature, momentarily freezing it in place. With my magic, I reach for the runes and spread them around the creature. If I can suppress the Fade around it, I will have limited the demon’s hold on the rock.

“Cole, get the device inside the satchel!”

Cole jumps to the back and looks at the tool with confusion.

“I don’t know how! I’m no good with things that don’t have feelings!” He despairs.

“Bring it to me!” I instruct as I keep solidifying the ice, barely keeping the creature at bay.

I place the device on the ground and activate it as the Inquisitor showed me. For a moment, the Profane gets stronger. I see a knob on the side of the device, and as I turn it, the Profane falls to its
knees - paralyzed. Through the holes in its chest, I can barely see the Inquisitor. She is trapped, and there is nothing I can do to free her without killing her. My eyes burn, and my chest spasms in anguish.

“Inquisitor! You must fight it!” I plead in a loud cry. Please.

“Fen’Harel! Veata!” the Profane screams the warning.

I feel a burst of energy from inside the Profane as it shatters. The Inquisitor falls to the ground her bracers surrounded by smoke.

I run to her side and drop to my knees. She is unconscious. Her bracers are smoldering hot, the leather singed. The runes on them crumple to the touch, lyrium pouring out. I cast a cold spell so that I might touch them long enough to remove them. Her sleeves and skin underneath is cauterized. I gather her in my arms, but her breathing is fading. I brush her hair from her face and place my hand above her heart between her breasts. I let healing emanate from my hand into her chest.


Moments that feel like hours pass, when she draws a deep breath and coughs.

“Damn it all to hell…” she mutters as she falls to her side out of my embrace.

I feel every part of my spirit quiver as I place a hand on her back.

“How … do you feel?”

“That’s what you call ‘an annoyance?’ I think you should leave premonitions to me. You really suck at them.” She gives a pained chuckle which dissolves into a small cry of agony.

“You are hurt. Let me have a look at you.” I reach for her.

“You’re fussing.” She pushes me away and tries to get up.

“Considering you were just host to a Profane, I do believe it’s warranted.”

She ignores me.

“What are they even? I know they’re rock wraiths, but … argh,” she cringes, bent over in pain, and I place my hand on her ribs.

“They are rock, lyrium, and spirit. Or demon in this case. When the remnant soul of the Titan that resides within the lyrium merges with a spirit, its purpose is perverted. It becomes the will of the Titan and yet has manifestations of its own impulses - despair in this case,” I explain and pick her up in my arms.

“I’m not a damsel in distress,” she complains.

“No, you’re a brave warrior who is seriously wounded.”

“Solas, please put me down. I can walk.” She doesn’t look at me.

“And might injure yourself further,” I tell her sternly.

She then sees her hound on the ground whining.
“Tish!”

Cole is at the dog’s side.

“Her paw hurts, but I can help her,” Cole reassures her and picks up the dog.

The Inquisitor gives a relieved sigh and rests her head against my shoulder as I carry her inside. Cole leads us to one of the rooms in the barracks where there are no corpses of Templars. Most have been reclaimed by their families, but I’m still saddened to see so many left unclaimed. I place her on a bed, and she makes a cry of pain.

“Ir abelas. I will heal you as soon as I can,” I lament.

My mana is still low from fighting the Profane, but hopefully, there is still some lyrium that the Templars left behind. Cole places the dog down next to us on the floor and spreads out a blanket for her to lay on. She whimpers in pain, and I stroke her head.

“Cole, will you get some firewood, lyrium, and rations?” I ask.

“And check on the horses,” the Inquisitor instructs.

“I’ll be right back.” Cole nods and then vanishes.

I start examining the Inquisitor. Her arms are badly burned, her sides are badly bruised, and the cut on her shoulder from Cole’s dagger is bleeding. I manage to stop the bleeding, but she has lost some blood.

“How is Tish?” she asks, though she must be in excruciating pain.

I examine the dog’s paw. She wines but does not try to bite me.

“Her paw is broken, but I should be able to heal it.”

“Good … I’m so sorry, Tish. My good girl,” she coos and looks down at the dog.

She closes her eyes, and I can see her tremble from the pain.

“Lethallan…”

“Yes?” she replies as she attempts to even her breathing through the pain.

“Ir abelas. I should have believed you,” I sigh with deep regret.

She raises her gaze slowly to mine.

“You … you believe me?” Her eyes tear up.

“Yes, I do.”

Her breathing gets heavier, and her expression is strained.

“You’re not lying?”

It sounds like a plea, and it pierces my heart. I get on my knees in front of her bed and place my hands on her shoulder as I look deep into her eyes.

“No. I believe every word of it.”
She looks at me for a moment, then laughs as I heal her shoulder further.

“I honestly don’t know if I should laugh, cry, or kiss you. I truly believed no one would ever believe me other than Cole.” She shakes her head and looks up to the ceiling.

I feel myself swallowing, and I’m certain my eyes are darkening.

“When you told me about Envy I was starting to believe that perhaps you were right,” she sighs. “That maybe I had gone completely mental. That maybe all I remembered was nothing but a dream. I felt like I was losing my mind,” she chuckles sadly.

I’m overcome with sorrow as she says it.

“Calm yourself, lethallan. You are not mad or anything else that comes close. The mistake was mine - never yours.”

“It was idiotic on my part to think that. But thank you for believing me. It means a lot to have another friend who knows. I haven’t had that since … well, a very long time ago,” she laughs hollowly.

Cole returns with the lyrium, and I begin to heal her shoulder. Cole looks at her with a remorseful expression.

“Oh, no, sweetheart. It’s wasn’t your fault. Don’t blame yourself. It’s going to be fine. Solas will make it all better. Just get a fire going.” She smiles at Cole, who merely nods in response - too ashamed to speak.

My magic starts to seep into the wound, and it slowly closes. She sighs with relief.

“It always amazes me how good healing feels. How comforting it is.”

“You’ve been healed often?”

“Ha, yes. Anders used to heal me all the time, actually.” She grins as I turn my attention to the seared flesh on her wrists.

“Why would you need healing so often?” I frown.

“You saw what happened when Dagna and I experimented. It’s not the first time a rune exploded near me. Anders was always so kind to me.” She chortles, “He scolded me of course, but he is the only reason that I have practically no scarring all over my body.”

“This is the first time you’ve mentioned him,” I point out, trying to remain focused on my task.

“He was … is a good friend. But that’s not something you admit to in polite company, considering what he did.”

“Hawke and Varric said you made Hawke spare his life?”

“I did. I made sure he and Justice got the help they needed. I just couldn’t bear for them to die - no matter what they had done.”

I stay quiet as I’m reminded that she is aware of my plans. She said she would not oppose me, just as she didn’t oppose Anders. She even saved his life after he had committed an atrocity he believed necessary. There is no anger in her voice as she speaks of him, merely fondness and sadness. How is it that she forgives so easily? She cringes in pain again and is having trouble keeping her breathing even. She needs something to focus on other than the pain she feels.
“Would you tell me of your world? It seems fascinating,” I request, hoping it will be a good enough subject for her to concentrate.

“Sure, but it might not seem so fascinating afterward … where do I even begin?” Her brow furrows as she pauses for a moment in thought. “There is no magic in my world, which probably explains why we have no elves, spirits, or Qunari either. There are dwarves, but not as you understand it.”

“There is no magic at all?” I ask surprised.

“Our legends tell of it, but no. It seems to have long vanished, if it ever existed.” She looks at me and snickers, “Do not despair so, Solas. It has its own worth.”

I give her a rueful smile until she twinges in pain again.

“Your people … do they dream?”

“Yes, they dream. Everyone does. There might be a Fade - though we would probably call it a higher plane of existence, but nothing that I can define for you.”

“What are they like?”

She laughs at that.

“Expecting me to explain them all in one sentence would be like me asking you to describe the ancient elves and the Qunari with the same breath.”

“Fair point. So tell me of the best of them.” I give her a wry grin.

“In truth, the people there are much the same as they are in Thedas. Some are kind and giving, others cruel and greedy. The best of us try to make the world better. We aim for peace. Try to help those starving or in need. We appreciate all life, and some devote their lives to protecting the wildlife. We try to create societies where everyone has equal opportunity to learn and everyone has the same rights. It is not your origin that determines your potential. It will always be you. And slavery is not unheard of, but extremely rare and illegal everywhere - depending on the definition.”

She gives a gasp in pain as she clutches her side. I get up and sit on the edge of the bed, leaning over her so I can put a hand on her ribs and release a cold spell to soothe the bruised flesh.

“And the worst?”

Her expression darkens.

“Evanuris are not the only ones who can destroy worlds. We might not have magic, but we make up for it with ingenuity. Pollution is destroying our oceans and our sky. A pollution that continues only because of greed. People are murdered over differences of beliefs. Fanatics try desperately to hold on to the past. We have weapons that make gatlock look like children’s toys and poisons far more dangerous than saar-qamek.” Her face turns pained as she looks into the fire.

It passes quickly, however, as she smiles at me. “My people are like yours. All of us flawed. We are not black or white. We are this jumbled mess of grey, and each of us might at any time be both good and evil. It all comes down to who we choose to be at any given moment.”

I can’t help but smile at her.

“It’s surprising that you are so at ease around magic and spirits, considering your upbringing,” I point
out.

“Well, I have lived here for awhile,” she grins and then sighs as the pain in her side resides.

“You give yourself too little credit. People who have lived their entire lives in this world do not look at spirits as people or see the beauty of the Fade. Not like you do.” I stay quiet for a moment. “When you learned of me … did I teach you?”

“You taught me many things, but not that, no. Faith, Justice, and Compassion--” she smiles over at Cole, “I knew them all before I ever knew of your existence. I loved them before meeting you. I do not care for spirits because of you. I care for you in part because we both see their wonder. I did not change my nature to make you my friend. We became friends because of our shared beliefs.”

She smiles at me, her hazel eyes looking directly into mine. In this position, she is even closer than ever before. Leaning just a bit further would be so easy.

“I’m glad to hear it. Though, me thinking you were merely manipulating me is but a distant memory now,” I smile as I pull away from her.

“Is that why you still have spies in the Inquisition?” She teases with a smile. “Thank you for saving me, by the way. I remembered to thank the elven servant, too.”

“You’re welcome.”

I kneel on the floor and start treating Atish’an’s paw.

“I’m afraid to fall asleep … how childish I sound.” The Inquisitor shakes her head in embarrassment.

“You’re afraid that if you fall asleep, this will all have been a dream and you’re still trapped. Afraid of the nightmares that will haunt you because of this,” I say with understanding, but I keep my attention focused on the dog. Anything else would be too … precarious.

“Yes,” she admits in a low voice, and despite myself, I turn to her.

“You have nothing to fear. If you like, I will meet you in the Fade--” ‘vhenan’ is the word that almost slips out. ‘Lethallan’ is the word I can’t remember as I look into her deep eyes, “--da’len.”

She gives me a quizzical look.

“Da’len? Are you trying to say I look young or telling me that I’m childish?”

I can tell by her expression that I have already lost. It’s filled with amusement, and everything I say from this point forward will be turned into an antic at my expense.

“I was referring to your youthful spirit, presumably,” I smirk.

“Where as yours is old, withered, and dusty, is that it? Are you having a midlife crisis all of a sudden?” She laughs then, but there is no cruelty hidden within. It is as if she has just said the most absurd thing in the world.

Trouble is that she is right. Though midlife might not apply, the more time I spend with her, the more my inner turmoil gains traction. My entire way of life and beliefs are in crisis. And she seems to not have the slightest idea of how her presence affects me.

“Well, I am ancient.” I give a vague grin.
“And how do you know mine isn’t?” her clever eyes challenge me with a smile.

“Surely, I don’t need to remind you of my origin.” I raise an eyebrow.

“There is a theory - well, belief - on my world called reincarnation. The premise is that when you die, your soul, energy, spirit - whatever you want to call it - travels into another life. So, a spirit is reborn in the shape of another. The idea is that from each lifetime your spirit learns and grows. It becomes more. True or not, to me that doesn’t sound so far from what happens to spirits if they die.” Her kind eyes seem almost affectionate as she explains.

“No,” I admit in a low voice, “it doesn’t.”

But it will never manifest in the same way again. When she dies, I could nurture the spark of spirit left. Carry her through the ages as I rebuild the world of the elves. But it will never truly be her again.

She gives me a small smile as she settles down to rest. “Goodnight, you two. Thank you so much for all your help,” she whispers before closing her eyes.

“You're welcome. Goodnight,” I murmur and get up.

I walk to the door and look out into the dusk as nightfall approaches. Cole appears next to me with an elated chuckle.

“She is smiling! Good. She feels so much better now.” Cole looks at me with a bright smile “You wanted to kiss her.”

“Yes,” I chuckle, followed by a sigh containing more longing than I wish to admit.

“She would have let you,” Cole beams.

“And it would have been a mistake,” I lament with a frown.

“You think it would, but the sound inside feels right.”

Chapter End Notes

Hi everyone! Another update. I hope you'll enjoy it and hopefully we will take a break from the angst train for a bit. If you have anything you wish me to explore let me know.

Thank you all for your wonderful comments! They are so great.

Thanks again to ninaninabobina for beta reading.

Translation:

Amgeforn (dwarven) : sacrifice
Mathas gar na fornen pa tot isatunoll (dwarven) : "I regret the sacrifice of my kin, but it means we will find our way home"
Veata Salroka! (dwarven): stop friend (rougly)
Gangue (dwarven) : "Stone waste" or "Impure spirit-of-the-stone."
Mathas gar na fornen pa salroka atrast (dwarven) : "At my side find your way in the dark"
Fen'Harel veata! (dwarven) : Fen'Harel stop!
Ir abelas (elven) : I'm sorry
Vhenan (elven) : heart
Lethallan (elven) : Kin/friend
Da'lan (elven) : Child
As we make camp for the night, the Inquisitor leans up against a tree and looks up at the stars. We were able to find an abandoned wagon at Therinfal so that she and Atish’an might lay down during the journey. Cole is sitting by the fire with Atish’an’s head in his lap. When everything is settled, I sit down next to her and take her arm to further heal and treat her injuries. She smiles at me briefly, then looks up at the stars again.

“I want a better telescope. It would be interesting to see what the planets and stars look like if you could get closer.”

“Well, if you look at Fenrir,” I point up at the constellation, “the planet at the tip has a green glow and purple rings surrounding it.”

She looks at me with a bright smile.

“I suppose Arlathan had better telescopes.”

“They did, though I admit I was not much of an astronomer. Too busy getting into fights and causes.” I give a rueful grin.

“Which I bet you enjoyed it, you savage,” she teases.

“I did,” I admit, then sigh. “The ages have somewhat mellowed me. Now, I’m just tired of losing.”

“You should consider winning, then.” She grins, and I laugh.

“I have given that advice to others in the past.” I grin, but something changes in her features as she looks at me. “What is it?”

“I’m sorry, Solas.”

“Whatever for?”
“At heart, you’re a kind person. Victory or not, I think a part of you will always feel a sense of loss. I’m so sorry.” She reaches for my hand and gives it a gentle squeeze.

I feel breathless, and I have no answer to give her. Instead, I give her a mournful smile and hold her hand firmly in mine. I have started to see the value of this world, to see its population as people rather than mere shadows. When I reclaim my orb, I will not enjoy the chaos that I will inevitably create. For a moment, I feel almost tempted to ask what she will do when the Veil falls. I’m certain she has plans. Though, even should I ask, I’m not certain I wish to know. I see the harm that I will create, but I also mourn deeply for the destruction of the elves, and the restoration of my people has become all that I am.

“Inquisitor, may I ask you something?”

“Anything.” She smiles.

“What do you miss most about your world?”

“Besides the obvious being my family?”

“Naturally.” I nod with understanding.

“Hmm … that’s difficult. I miss bathrooms, for one. All the comforts we have, really. Our society is much more advanced in many ways. Hygiene and devices to make our lives easier were the first things I missed. But as I adapted to Thedas, what I miss the most is how easy it was to get knowledge.”

“What kind of knowledge?”

“Any kind, really. We had something that served the same purpose as the Vir Dirthara, but it worked very differently. All that knowledge at your fingertips. All the people you could share ideas with. In Thedas, the Chantry has made all of it so cumbersome. If not for Justinia, I would have been executed or imprisoned for blasphemy by now,” she chuckles with a grim expression.

“Sweet smell as it turns golden,” Cole mutters as he pets Atish’an.

“Maker! Pizza! How could I forget about pizza or ice cream?” she laughs. “Do you have any idea how bland food is here?”

There is a playful enthusiasm to her that makes me chuckle.

“You can make it when we get to Skyhold,” Cole suggests with a smile.

“I’m too busy to be standing in the kitchen, Cole. Besides, I make myself noticed far too much as it is. I need to be careful with how much I let on that I’m different.” She smiles a little sadly. “Besides, I tried having Hawke help me make ice cream once because I need the cold. It wasn’t a success.”

She cringes awkwardly as if she can still taste it.

“Solas could help.” Cole grins with enthusiasm.

“You need only ask,” I offer as I smile at her.

“Perhaps, when we have time to indulge in things like that.” She blushes and looks down.

We both realise that our hands are still intertwined, and she pulls hers away. I swallow and turn my attention back to her wrist, where I start applying a salve made of healing herbs. The skin is healing,
but the salve will prevent scarring.

“What about you? What do you miss most about Arlathan?”

I sigh wistfully as I tend to her other wrist, letting my magic seep into her as I apply the salve.

“How effortlessly magic ran through the world. Crystal twined through branches and palaces floating among the clouds. The countless marvels lost and shattered when I created the Veil. It was so beautiful.” I take a deep breath.

“It really does sound like it … I’m sorry about Mythal.” Her voice is soft and low.

I look at her with surprise, though I suppose I shouldn’t be.

“I … thank you.”

“What a pair we are.” She smiles wryly. “Both separated from the people and worlds we knew. Living in one that on the surface seems so much more primitive and ignorant.” She looks at Cole for a moment. “Well, all three of us I suppose. And yet, the people are so much the same. Just as flawed, corrupt, and wonderful. If only they weren’t so afraid. They could become so much more than what they are. We could all become so much better.” She smiles at me.

“You would risk everything you have in the hope that the future is better? What if it isn’t? What if you wake up and find the future you shaped is worse than what was?” I exasperate in my grief.

“Solas,” she says my name so softly it aches as she rubs my shoulder, “we have to move forward. Any society that stays stagnant or species that doesn’t evolve die out. The best we can do is learn from our mistakes and hold on to the values that make the world better. It’s not going to happen overnight, and I will never see it, but I see it’s potential.”

“Thank you.” I smile as I squeeze her hand.

“You’re welcome. And thanks for asking about my home. It’s been so long since I truly remembered it - even longer since I could talk about it so openly.”

Her smile turns into a frown.

“I have been thinking of my home a lot more lately, since that Profane started messing with my head. What did it want with me?”

“A question I had hoped you could answer. What do you remember of how you got here?”

“Well, nothing more than what I have told you. Unless you want a detailed description of the smell in the Deep Roads. I’m not even sure what my last memory of my home is. It was like I was just plucked out of time and placed in that bloody tomb. No explanation. Nothing. Welcome to Thedas, Mona, where everything will try to kill you - provided you don’t get tainted or turned into a broodmother first. Maybe a Titan had something to do with it, but what could it possibly want with me? And what would be the point?”

“It is a mystery.” I lean back and sit on the ground and look into the fire. “A Titan being involved is highly unlikely, but at the moment I have no alternative to offer you. What of your own research?”

“Nothing. Not a word. I tried ancient dwarven text, but Ozammar was not thrilled about letting me into the Shaperate. So that was a dead end. It should be easier to find out more once we have defeated Corypheus. My curiosity can wait,” she looks down at her arms, “or so I thought.”
She swallows nervously before looking at me.

“Will you check … just to make sure that everything is fine?”

“Of course.”

She sits up, and I kneel in front of her. I make her look at me, and I place my hands around the back of her skull as I search for any remnants of the Profane’s influence. I’m reminded of the first time I met her. How unafraid she was. Whatever she knows me capable of, she doesn’t fear me. Just tender hazel eyes that see me for who I am - not Fen’Harel, not a god, and not a monster. Just Solas.

“Your mind is as clear as it ever was and your spirit as lively as usual.” I smile as I let go of her. She gives me a bright smile. “Thank you … spirit, you say. I wonder what kind I would be if I was a spirit. Any ideas?”

The answer that comes to mind is not one I will give voice to.

“Let me think on it.” I smile and get to my feet. “We still have a long journey ahead.

When we return to Skyhold, the Herald is preparing to set off for the Western Approach within a few days. The Inquisitor is all but swept away as soon as we enter the gates. Cassandra approaches us quickly and looks at us both as we get off the horses, while Cole and Atish’an are already starting to move around Skyhold as usual.

“Inquisitor! Solas! It’s good you have returned. Are you harmed?” Cassandra asks with great concern.

“I’m fine, thank you. Thanks to Solas’ efforts, naturally.” She smiles at me, and Cassandra looks at me with an unspoken question.

“There is nothing to be concerned about. The Inquisitor and I have dealt with the nuisance.” My eyes meet the Inquisitor’s. Better if we do not reveal what actually happened.

“That’s good to hear,” Cassandra sighs with relief.

The Inquisitor looks to the stable where a wagon is being loaded with belongings. Next to it is Dubois. Her expression turns sad.

“There are things that need your immediate attention, Inquisitor,” Cassandra points out.

“I know. Let me just say my goodbyes, and I’ll be in the war room directly. Solas, will you take the horses?”

“Of course.” I smile at her.

She walks with hastened steps towards Dubois and embraces him. They exchange words I can’t hear until I get a little closer.
“Thank you so much for lending them to us. I promise you will get them all back.” She smiles at him.

“I suggest you have Solas safeguard them. He is the only one I would trust not to butcher my collection,” he grins at me as I approach.

I chuckle, and one of the stable hands comes to relieve me of the horses.

“I have to go, but please give Amalia my love, and I promise to drop by next time I’m in Val Royeaux.” She gives him a final embrace before she leaves.

He puts another case in the carriage.

“So, you are leaving us, then?” I admit I’m going to feel his absence and the always interesting conversations.

“I would have enjoyed staying longer, but alas, my little girl needs me,” he smiles. “In truth, I probably miss her more than she does me. Please, do visit next time you come to Val Royeaux.”

He shakes my hand and gets into the carriage.

“I will attempt to make the time,” I promise.

He leans out the window and looks as the Inquisitor vanishes inside Skyhold.

“I hope your heart fares better in her hands than mine did.” He smiles sadly as the carriage leaves.

I close my eyes, trying to not let his words affect me. I am far more concerned about hers should she harbour any such feelings for me.

Later that evening, I feel those concerns swirling around in my mind. Though I know she cares for me in some fashion, the distance that was created in Crestwood seems at once smaller and larger since I learned the truth about her. The conflict in her eyes has grown, but I can imagine what it must have meant to her to finally tell someone. All that she has lost has been hidden for a decade. The questions I deeply desire to ask would bring back a pain she has hidden away, one that only Cole knows to its full extent, I imagine.

Even though it's been more than a month, our kiss still haunts me. It ignited the spark of attraction I felt towards her, and I have been set ablaze. By her very nature, she is unpredictable for the simple reason that she knows what is to come. She does not act out of her moral compass alone or to honour some doctrine of her home - that is what makes most people predictable. But not her. She has an understanding of the world that even I can't grasp.

As I ponder on the nuances of her nature, I find myself wishing she was there to grant me one of those gentle touches of hers that she offers so willingly to all around her. I ache with the intensity of my longing. As a result, it leaves me restless. I’m having trouble finding rest, and when in the Fade, I have to fight the urge to seek out her dreams. So instead, I spend my night painting the walls of the rotunda.

I turn as I hear footsteps and see the Inquisitor walking into the room. She is dressed only in her nightwear. Long black silk clings to her body like fluid. Her feet are bare and her auburn hair is loose.

“Solas, what are you doing up so late?” she asks with surprise.
“I was having trouble sleeping,” I confess.

“Because of the rumours with the Wardens?”

“You could say that.” While that is definitely a concern, it is not my predicament at the moment.

“I couldn’t sleep, either. I was going to see if I could find a book … preferably not one of Varric’s romance novels.” She grins, and I chuckle.

“Would … would it be intrusive if I stay here? We can talk like we used to, if you like,” she offers.

“I would like that.” I get down from the ladder and sit on the couch as far from her as possible as she curls up at the other end.

We are all alone. Even the rookery above is abandoned. We have total privacy, which is becoming a rarer occasion as of late.

“So,” I begin, “did you really learn of Thedas because of a relic?”

She giggles and looks thoughtful for a moment.

“Everything I told you about that was true, except it wasn’t a relic. Well, it’s the only way I can explain where I am certain you can understand it.”

I give her a skeptical look.

“I didn’t mean it like that,” she chuckles. “They were stories. Entertainment taking you to a fantasy world. I used it as an escape from the troubles in my life. I’ll give you a moment to appreciate the full irony of that statement.” She raises an eyebrow, and I grin at her expression.

We talk for hours. We share the ideas and mysteries of our worlds. We both laugh as we talk about … everything. The more her mind unfolds, the more I admire her. She has a fierce sense of justice but is more prone to leniency than punishment. I don’t ask about her family - I don’t wish to cause her any grief. If she has something she wishes to share, I’m certain she will. In turn, she never asks me anything personal, either. Why that is, I’m not certain. It is obvious that while she knows of big events and occurrences, she is by no means all-knowing.

As our conversation turns humorous, she leans back into the couch laughing to the point of tears.

“I’m going to die,” she laughs, holding a hand on her stomach. “Is this your new weapon of choice? Death by laughter?”

“If that had actually worked, I would not have had to lock the Evanuris away. They would have died way before then,” I chuckle.

Her expression changes into something soft as she wipes the tears from her eyes. Instinctively, I reach out and remove one of them from her cheek. If the world was kind, I would wish to never see anything but tears of joy from her. For a brief moment, she closes her eyes and leans into my touch.

“It’s late,” she murmurs and gets up from the couch and places a hand on my shoulder. “Goodnight, Solas.”

“Goodnight, Inquisitor.”

Her perfume lingers in the air, and the silk moves in harmony with her body as she leaves. I’m never going to get any sleep.
The more time I spend with the Inquisitor, the more fascinated I become by her, her thoughts and ideas. As a result, I have begun to seek out her company more often instead of waiting for her to come to me. My reports are the most frequent excuse I use to do so. I do not believe she attempts to avoid me, but the Inquisition must be her main focus - even if it’s dealing with a matter as absurd as a goat being thrown at Skyhold. As the Herald has requested that I join him at the Western Approach, I seek her out to confirm she is still doing well. I’m surprised to find the Inquisitor at the cells with Alexius. I keep a respectful distance at the door, waiting for her to conclude her business. She ensured the man is studying magic and is kept in a cell at night - a wise, if surprising, decision on her part. She sits on a chair in front of the cell and looks at Alexius, who sits on a cot near the bars. She gives him a plate of food.

“Here, you should eat something,” she says kindly.

“Do all prisoners get such luxuries? The Inquisitor bringing them food personally?” he huffs.

“I thought you might be persuaded to eat if you saw a friendly face.” The smile she offers him is as gentle as Cole’s.

“I almost destroyed the world, and the woman helping the Herald safeguard it is a ‘friendly face.’” He gives a bitter chuckle.

She reaches through and makes his hand take the plate. From the looks of him, he isn’t eating much if at all. He is much thinner than when the Inquisition brought him in.

“I heard from Felix today. He is doing much better. He promised he’d be by to visit you soon.”

The man’s face lights up, and he looks at her.

“How … how long does he have?”

“Five years, maybe longer. The rune merely delays the taint, but we might find a cure by then. I know it’s not what you wanted--”

He grabs her hand between hers.

“It’s more than he would have had otherwise. Why do you do this, Inquisitor? Why bother with the sorrows of an old, foolish man who attempted to destroy it all?” His question is heartfelt, and his voice seems broken.

“You did it for Felix. Because you matter to Dorian, and he is my friend. And I know your grief better than you might imagine.” She takes his hand between hers. “And because you deserve compassion and understanding. Now, please, eat before it gets cold.”

I smile to myself and leave the cells. Somehow, it does not seem right to interrupt, and the Inquisitor will surely know that I have left. Since the revelation of her son, I understand everything so much more clearly. Blackwall jests that Varric and I have adopted Cole. In her case, I believe it to be true. I’m glad Cole helps her and that in turn she cares for him in a way no one else ever could. I find myself wishing that I, too, could provide her some comfort. But she knows who I am and what I am
prepared to do to save my people. It is entirely possible that she sees my deeds and is unable to look past them. I would not blame her, as I have started to feel conflicted about it as well.

What we find in the Western Approach disturbs me greatly, so as soon as we are back at Skyhold, I seek out the Inquisitor. Idiots! Like a fair maiden they chase the pretty butterfly off the cliff - and as a result the rest of us will fall as well. Surely, she knows of this. We must prevent it at any cost. I draw near to her quarters and overhear her and Josephine talking.

“If we utilize the treaties…”

“Those treaties are for blights. More importantly, they represent a willingness to do anything … even burn down villages and take people by force. We might have the authority to do this, but that is not a reputation that would benefit the Inquisition. Besides, something is happening with the Wardens. We might want to wait for the Herald’s return,” the Inquisitor cautions wisely.

“Perhaps you’re right,” Josephine agrees and then sees my approach as Atish’an greets me happily.

I pet the dog, but the way the Inquisitor looks at me lets me know she can see something is amiss. She rises from her desk as she addresses me.

“I’m glad you have returned safely with the Herald, Solas. Josephine, would you call the war council as soon as the Herald is ready? We need to know what happened at the Western Approach in its full detail,” she instructs.

“At once, Inquisitor. And I concur, it is good to see you have returned safely, Master Solas.” She smiles before walking past me and down the stairs.

I nod at the ambassador and step toward the Inquisitor.

“You know what happened.” It sounds like a question, but we both know it isn’t.

“Yes, I would have prevented it if I could, but Wardens are nothing if not stubborn. Those I trusted … well, you saw what happened with Stroud.” She sighs regretfully and walks from her desk towards me.

“I cannot believe the Grey Wardens could even conceive of such a plan!” I hiss as I start pacing. “To seek out the Old Gods deliberately in some bizarre attempt to preempt the blight!”

“Solas…” She looks at me with a compassion and understanding that is so rare among her kind as she approaches me. She pulls me into her embrace, and despite my surprise, I rest my hands on her waist.

“It’s going to be alright. We will stop them. They won’t find the Old Gods. I promise.” Her voice is full of kindness and sincerity.

“Thank you. I’ve been on my own for so long. It’s difficult to get used to having the support of others.” I look at her as she pulls away.

“I know, but I’m here. Hold on to that.”
“I will work on it.” I smile at her.

She is … extraordinary. I look out onto the balcony and walk towards it. “After your journey here, did it change you in any way? Your mind? Your morals? Your … spirit?”

She looks to the ground with a smile as she exits onto it as well.

“No, I have always been like this. No miracle required.” She gives me a wry grin.

“Ahh.” I can’t hide my disappointment. It would be easier if that had been the case.

“Why do you ask?” She looks at me, her eyes as tender as when she was comforting me moments ago.

“You show a wisdom I have not seen since Arlathan. A wisdom usually gained from centuries of experience.”

She blushes instantly but remains composed.

“That’s high praise, Solas, but you give me too much credit.”

“What I mean to say is that you are not what I expected.” I try to convey how much she has affected me without revealing how emotionally compromised I have become.

She laughs a little.

“I would have been rather surprised if you had expected me at all. It certainly didn’t seem like it when we first met.” She smiles.

“That is true,” I concede, returning her smile.

“But, Solas, I’m not different from anyone else.”

“Perhaps not in the form of your body, no.”

How do I make her understand? How do I make her look beyond her modesty and self-deprecation?

“Humans are … short-sighted, brutish. Blind to the beauties of the Fade, their minds cast in a duality of black and white. But you have shown a subtlety in your actions that go against everything I know of your people.”

“In all fairness, you have never truly met any of ‘my people’ to judge,” she chuckles.

“That’s an excellent point. Perhaps that is it. I guess it must be.” I smile.

“In all honesty, I only try to do what I can. With varying results, I might add.” She raises an eyebrow.

“You are modest. So many would use this Inquisition as a blunt instrument to claim power,” I feel my expression soften, “but not you.”

She blushes and looks away, her modesty flowing through her very being. I adore her for it.

“So, what does this mean, Solas?”

Her eyes meet mine, and I feel my heart dance an ancient tune I thought it had long since forgotten. It
means that I have not forgotten the kiss. It means that an hour cannot pass without her presence in my thoughts. It means…

“It means I respect you deeply, Inquisitor. And I have disturbed you enough for one evening.” To my surprise, she looks suddenly downcast. She turns a little pale and refuses to meet my gaze. She composes herself and looks at me with a smile that is not truly her own.

“I respect you, too,” she walks past me and into her quarters.

I could easily walk down the stairs, but watching her shoulders slump pains me.

“Inquisitor, what is the matter?”

She turns towards me with that same smile that never reaches her eyes.

“It’s nothing. Your words were truly kind.”

I step towards her.

“Then why do they cause you pain?”

“They don’t. You just surprised me. I thought you were going to say something else.”

She walks towards her desk as if she means to escape me. I don’t recall her ever being this uncomfortable.

“What did you think I was going to say?” I press as I walk up behind her.

“It’s nothing. Let it go, Solas.” She sighs and grabs a hold of the table.

“You said you would withhold no more secrets from me,” I remind her - my voice a little more emotional than I intended.

“I promised to tell you all that I knew of you, but this … this is ... personal…” For a moment, she looks more vulnerable than I could ever imagine. I reach for her, putting my hand on her shoulder, and her breath hitches in her throat.

“What were we to one another?” I suspect I know, but I must hear it spoken from her lips. My heart races at an unbearable pace as my limbs cry out to me - though if they wish me to retreat or to pull her closer, I’m not entirely certain. She releases a trembling breath as she speaks, her back still turned towards me.

“The first words you ever taught me in elvhen were…” she hesitates as a shiver goes through her. It is so profound I feel it in my hand.

“Ar lath ma, vhenan,” she whispers, then covers her face. I’m petrified. It is merely a second, but it feels like an eternity. I know she speaks the truth, for as those words leave her lips, my heart already knows them. I have fallen in love with her.

“I don’t expect anything from you. I’m aware…” she begins to explain, giving me the freedom to not feel any obligation to return her now obvious affection. “Let’s just forget I said anything.”

“It would be kinder in the long run, but losing you would--”

It’s selfish. It’s ill-considered, but my heart does not permit me to stop. I turn her towards me and embrace her with as much tenderness my passion allows and kiss her deeply.
More than just friends?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

She melts against me instantly and wraps her arms around my neck. I feel her tremble, and I rejoice in a feeling I have not felt in eons. Her lips are soft and filled with a warmth that spreads throughout me. When she breaks away for air, my lips move to her neck. As she gives a soft moan, she leans onto the desk, and I lean against her. My senses are filled with the scent of vanilla and spice. A scent that for so long has brought me nothing but agony now threatens to undo my very spirit. How could I ever make myself believe I could be apart from her? My heart is still thundering in my chest as I pull away and look down into her hazel eyes.

Mona looks at me with an uncertainty that threatens to sunder my heart, and I grab a tighter hold on her. If she pulls away now, I’m not certain how I will recover.

“Solas…” she murmurs with a shiver in her voice.

“Yes, my heart?” I smile, trying to seem as calm as possible.

To my relief, she blushes with a sweet, genuine smile.

“I’m sorry for my reaction. Are you sure you want this? I know it will make things hard--” She begins to evade my eyes but doesn’t try to leave my embrace.

“Hush … I’m certain I want it, yes. Whether it’s wise is another matter entirely.” I stroke her cheek fondly. “Ar lath ma, vhenan,” I whisper against her lips before reclaiming them in a tender kiss.

She deepens the kiss as she pulls me closer, and I happily oblige. I bury one hand in her hair while the other settles on her lower waist - my fingertips brush against her spine. She releases a trembling sigh against my lips as her tongue caresses mine. It’s agonizingly slow and makes my spirit flare with emotion. In this minute of affection lies more tenderness than I have received for ages. Her hands rest on my chest, their heat rushing through my clothes as the flesh underneath yearns for the touch of her skin against mine. When a pleading moan falls from her lips, my mind wanders to the bed in the room just as she pulls away.

“I would love to stay like this, but I have to join the war council,” she sighs with annoyance, her eyes dazed and her lips flushed - both radiating desire.

I swallow as I’m short of breath.

“And I’m distracting you from your duty.” I lean in and nibble her jaw.

“Yes,” she gasps with longing, “but you can distract me as much as you desire later.”

“Such a generous offer.” I smile as I step away from her.

“I thought so,” she smirks with faked smugness as she walks towards the stairs with Cullen’s report in her hands. She turns and beams at me before running towards me and giving me one final kiss.

“I’ll be waiting,” I promise as I finally release her.
It’s getting late as I’m sitting in front of the fire in Mona’s quarters. With a book in hand, sitting on the couch, and Atish’an resting at my feet in front of the fire, it’s quite comfortable. Save one detail: Mona hasn’t yet returned. I had suspected it might be the case, though I had hoped otherwise. What we found in the Western Approach will probably require immediate action. Atish’an finally raises her head and runs down to the door, and I smile to myself - more eager with anticipation of her company than I would have believed. When she comes up the stairs, she smiles at me, but she looks exhausted.

“Solas,” she sighs happily as she walks towards me.

“Come, sit with me, vhenan.” I smile and pat the seat next to me.

She lets herself drop onto the couch and leans against me. I wrap my arm around her shoulder and kiss her hair as she pulls her feet up on the couch.

“So, we’re leaving first thing in the morning.” It’s a statement, not a question.

“Yes. The sooner we get this mess over with, the better.” She gives a quivering sigh and closes her eyes.

“What is the matter?”

“There is an entrance to the Deep Roads near there. I’ve had some trouble with claustrophobia since I got here.” She sits up and rubs her face.

“Not surprising, given the circumstances. What can we expect when we get to Adamant?” I ask as I rub her back.

“Wardens, demons, but the real problem is Corypheus’ dragon - and Erimond, that sick bastard. The one I’m most concerned about is the Fear demon. I think Edward is going to bring you with him in the assault. He is going to open a rift and you’ll end up in the Fade,” she explains.

“Physically?” I ask in awe.

She grins at me. “I would try to hide your enthusiasm a bit considering we are going to be making an assault on the Wardens.”

“Point taken.” I smile.

She gets up and walks to her desk where she picks up the rune she got from her vault in Val Royeaux and puts it in her pack. Her expression turns a little regretful.

“I’m sorry. I know we have so much to ... talk about,” she blushes, “but this has to come first. I need to start packing so we can leave first thing.”

“I understand, vhenan.” I get up and walk over to her, taking her hand in mine.

“I love it when you call me that.” She beams, kissing my cheek.

“Then I shall continue to do so whenever possible.”

“Before you go, how do you want to proceed with this … with us?” She gestures between us with a
“Though I’m in no way ashamed of my affection for you, given your role as Inquisitor it might be wise to keep it private for now. Especially since we are headed off to battle,” I explain as I tighten my hold on her hand.

“Agreed. Besides, I don’t fancy becoming Varric’s next attempt at a romance serial.” She grimaces. “I’m sorry you waited so long for nothing,” she apologizes.

“Tel’abelas. I had excellent company.” I smile over at Atish’an. “And then there is this.” I lean forward and give her a soft kiss.

The following morning the Inquisition starts its march towards Adamant along with Hawke, the Herald and - to my surprise - the Inquisitor. Mona, my mind corrects, and I can’t help but smile to myself. The journey is long, and after merely a few days, I long for her, though she is present. We are both very private, and keeping our confessed feelings to ourselves is for the best at the moment, but we cannot even steal a moment alone. Even seeking her out in the Fade has been impossible as we have taken turns standing watch at night. Instead, I enjoy the small pleasure of talking to her or amuse myself by her conversations with others.

I’m walking behind with the Herald, Hawke, and Varric while Mona is walking with Dorian and the Iron Bull. Ever so often, the Herald takes a note from his back pocket and reads it. I have seen him write on that piece of paper every night since we left Skyhold.

“Are you sure it’s wise of you to come? You don’t exactly have the proper training,” Dorian points out, looking at Mona.

“Though I might choose not to hurt people, I’m still needed. At the very least, I can make sure to keep you out of trouble.” She grins.

“But killing is fun!” Bull enthuses.

“You know, Bull, you have a disturbing coping mechanism.” Dorian frowns.

“People have different coping mechanisms: drinking, religion, sex. Makes us able to deal with everything going to shit, I suppose.” Mona shrugs.

“But you’re not religious, drink, and unless you have some secret lover I don’t know about…” Dorian gives her a wry grin.

“I have my work.” She smiles.

Unbidden, my lips twitch ever so slightly. Who would have thought happiness could be so hard to conceal - especially with all this chaos surrounding us, which should draw our attention elsewhere. I should worry about the Wardens succeeding, but I have her assurance that they won’t. I can’t imagine how difficult all this would have been for me to bear if not for her gift.

“You know, Boss, if you’re carrying some tension I would be happy to help.” Bull winks at her.

She leans against him, and Bull’s eyes glance at her cleavage for one moment then stare directly into
her eyes.

“Don’t worry about me. I have the best lover in Thedas,” she smirks, biting her lip.

I have to hide a nervous laugh with a cough even though our relationship has yet to be that physical.

She wiggles her fingers at him, then laughs and starts walking away, leaving Bull and Dorian grinning as well.

“But if you want some fun you can always ask Dorian.” She winks before walking back to Varric, Hawke, the Herald, and me.

“But if you want some fun you can always ask Dorian.” She winks before walking back to Varric, Hawke, the Herald, and me.

“Now, Waffles, I’m pretty sure that was against the rules.” Varric grins.

“I don’t know what you mean,” she replies innocently.

“Your odds just went down,” Hawke smirks at her.

“No, gentlemen, you can’t do that after a bet has been placed.” She bats her lashes playfully.

“What are you talking about?” the Herald asks with confusion.

“I find myself curious as well,” I admit.

“We’re betting on people’s love lives.” Hawke chuckles.

“We’re betting on people’s love lives.” Hawke chuckles.

“Waffles here is betting that Sparkler and Tiny will be the first to pair up. Which is why encouraging is against the rules,” he grumbles up at her.

“While Varric has his coin on Sera and Dagna.” Mona chuckles.

“You people are crazy.” The Herald grins. “Who did you bet on, Hawke?”

“You and the Ambassador. If you ever work up the courage to talk to her.”

The Herald instantly flushes, and I can tell how uncomfortable he is. Mona seems to notice as well.

“Leave him alone. Besides, isn’t informing him about the bet against the rules, too?”

“T-There is nothing between Jo-- Lady Montilyet and I.” The Herald tries to compose himself.

By the twinkle in Hawke’s eye, I get a feeling as to where this is going. Mona slaps his shoulder, and while they are distracted, I quickly reach into the Herald’s back pocket and exchange his note with one of my own.

“Would you stop that?” Hawke hisses and turns his attention back to the Herald. “I see, then you won’t mind if we see that letter you have been fumbling?”

“Hawke, don’t!” Varric attempts to stop him, but Hawke has already taken the note from the Herald.

“Give that back.” The Herald reaches out for it.

Something in his demeanour lets me know that it is not the first time he has been exposed to such tyrannical behaviour. Hawke’s face turns from glee into disappointment as he reads the note and hands it back to the Herald.

“Notes on the rift expansion. Well, this was a waste of time,” he groans.
“You’re such an ass! Maker knows what Merrill sees in you,” Mona hisses in disgust and walks off.

“At least I’m not a coward,” he sneers, to which Varric pulls him aside.

The Herald looks at the note confused, and then looks at the ground. I hand him his note, and he sighs with relief.

“Thank you, Solas.”

“You’re welcome.” I smile and follow the army alongside the Herald.

That evening as we make camp, Mona is busy talking to Cullen, Cassandra, and Leliana, which means I will probably not get any time with her this evening, either. I’m fortunate enough to have the company of Atish’an. I lean up against a tree reading a book while Atish’an’s head is rested in my lap. Cole has been scarce as well - calming the fears of the many soldiers no doubt. The Herald approaches me carefully, holding the note in his hands.

“Evening, Herald. Would you care to join me?” I ask as I offer him some of my rations.

“Yes … thank you,” he says quietly and sits down next to me.

He stays quiet for a while as I continue to read my book. It’s obvious he wants to discuss the note, but I will wait for him to share it rather than force the issue.

“You must have thought me pretty pathetic today,” he laments.

I put my book down.

“By no means, but it would do you good to be a little more self-assertive. You are no longer bound by a Circle or its Templars. You are free to do as you please and defend yourself,” I remind him, hoping he is in fact listening to my words.

“I have been in a Circle since I was six … it takes time to get used to,” he agrees softly.

“Understandable, but you should not measure your strength by the ill-considered opinions of others, but by your abilities.”

He snorts in protest.

“You give yourself too little credit. The Circle’s inability to teach you in a fashion suited to you does not make you an incapable mage. You have made great strides so far, and there is no doubt in my mind that your talents will continue to grow.” I observe him closely, making sure he understands my meaning.

“Powerful enough to deal with Corypheus?” His voice wavers ever so slightly.

“You have courage to look beyond what has been taught to you. To think on your own. That is something most Circle mages lack. That is why you will succeed when so many others fail.”

“And what about the display with Hawke?”

“Choosing not to fight is not weakness. Responsibility is not expertise. Action is not inherently superior to inaction. That you understand this gives me hope that we will succeed, whatever comes.” I straighten my back with pride so that he might sense my confidence in his abilities.

“I wish I had your certainty.” The Herald smiles and looks down. “Solas, will you look at this for
me? Give me your honest opinion?"

He hands me the note.

“Certainly.” I take the note, and what I read is a love poem. Not the most articulate, but heartfelt.

“What do you think?”

“This is for Lady Montilyet, I gather?”

“Yes … I want to let her know how I feel, but I’m such a mess with words. I thought that if I wrote it down beforehand, maybe … it was probably a stupid idea,” he sighs.

“I would point out that you are asking advice from an apostate who has lived most of his life on his own. I might not be able to offer you the guidance you seek, but I can come up with some suggestions, if you like,” I offer, resting the letter on the cover of the book I was reading and bringing forward a pen.

“Please.” He smiles.

That night in the Fade, I find myself pacing, hoping the Inquisitor will soon get some rest.

“You miss her.” Wisdom smiles knowingly.

“Yes,” I admit with a sigh, then give her a rueful smile.

“It’s good to see you happy.” She smiles with fondness.

“I would be happier if I could speak with her openly.” I shake my head at my behaviour. I’m acting like a lovesick child.

“It is wise to not express your affection openly. It might cause her or you great harm, at least for the moment. She misses you, too.”

I turn to Wisdom.

“You’ve been speaking with her?” I realise.

“Yes, I find our conversations quite enjoyable. I have been trying to teach her how to control her dreams better. It’s difficult since she doesn’t have magical talent, but she is improving.” Wisdom’s voice fills with pride at what her student has been able to accomplish so far.

“It seems we have both taken on pupils.” I grin.

“Yes, And helping the boy was very kind, lethallin.” She smiles at me.

“He is a fine young man. Life in the Circle has done him great harm by making him doubt his ability. I will see it corrected, if I can.” I shake my head with regret. “Now, have you seen any interesting places for us to explore in the area?”

I walk together with Wisdom deeper into the Fade, searching for dreams long lost to time.
The following day, we continue our march towards Adamant. I keep thinking of what is to come. The Fade and the Fear demon. All the pointless sacrifices of Warden recruits. I find it curious that Blackwall seems to be unaffected by all that is happening. Though he seems concerned, he does not seem to be suffering as Hawke’s friend Stroud. Instead of spending time with his fellow Warden, he is walking next to me. It is not unpleasant, as I know we have both seen war and know it’s terrible cost, though we know it has been necessary. The conversation is stimulating until...

“Sera and I were just talking about you. We need you to settle a question for us.” Blackwall grins.

I sigh loudly.

“Sera's involved? So, this question will be offensive.”

I’m already dreading this as his expression remains amused.

“Yes, probably. Sorry. You make friends with spirits in the Fade. So ... um, are there any that are more than just friends? If you know what I mean…”

I scowl, and then roll my eyes.

“Oh, for... really?!”

“Look, it's a natural thing to be curious about!” Blackwall chuckles.

“For a twelve-year-old!”

“It's a simple yes or no question!”

“Nothing about the Fade or spirits is simple, especially not that.”

“Aha!” Blackwall grins in triumph. “So, you do have experience in these matters!”

This is not a conversation I wish to have with him, especially not with the Inquisi-- Mona right behind us.

“I did not say that.”

“Don't panic. It'll be our little secret.”

“Ass,” I sneer.

Blackwall laughs. “Now who's twelve?”

I make a frustrated sound, then turn to see Mona peering at me with a dramatic look in her eyes and obviously struggling not to laugh. Blackwall chuckles to himself as he walks ahead. I glare at Mona, which naturally only makes it worse. She leans in as we walk.

“Now I'm curious,” she teases in a whisper, her voice quivering as she attempts to hold back her amusement.

When I scowl at her, she bursts out laughing.
“I suppose I can just ask Wisdom.” She gives me a wicked grin, her eyes coy and seductive. That same expression I have fallen in love with, if only because I’m incapable of hating it.

“Fenehdis! You’re infuriating,” I hiss.

She walks ahead and then turns, briefly walking backwards.

“Ma ar lath,” she states triumphantly before turning back around again.

I smile as soon as she turns around and look to the ground for a moment. She is right, of course; I do love her, which probably means I already lost this fight. Though for being on the losing side, defeat does not taste bitter in the least.

That night, I find her standing at the outskirts of the camp looking towards the stars. I wonder if she still longs for her home as I do mine. Perhaps I should offer her the privacy of her own thoughts, but I can’t deny myself the opportunity to speak with her freely. Even if we are not truly alone, I can still enjoy a private conversation with her. She gives me a loving gaze as I walk closer.

“I’ve missed you,” she confesses as I approach.

“And I you.” I smile softly.

“Even after my teasing earlier?” She gives me a coy look.

“Even so.” I stand beside her, and she giggles, seeming to remember the conversation I had with Blackwall before. Or perhaps her conversation with Bull the day before. A wicked idea enters my mind.

“I wish we were alone,” I state calmly as I look up at the stars.

“And what would you do if we were,” she teases.

Perfect. She took the bait so willingly. I place my hand on her lower back in a position that can’t be seen from the camp. My fingers rests on her spine while I speak softly.

“First, I would lean in and brush my lips against yours,” I murmur, and she smiles, touching her lips.

“Then, I would let my hands travel across the expanse of your thighs and your stomach.” I release a bit of magic which makes her gasp suddenly. It creates a tingling sensation across her skin where I imagine my fingers would touch her.

“I would let my fingers ghost the back of your neck.” I let another surge of magic slip from my fingers. It travels up her spine to a point on her neck I suspect is the most sensitive. The hitch in her breath lets me know I was right.

“I would kiss you there.” The spell creates heat against that spot, and a soft moan escapes her.

“Be quiet, Inquisitor. People will notice,” I chuckle darkly, and she gives a breathless giggle.

She can move at any time she wishes, but she doesn’t. She remains a willing subject to my teasing. As the heat and thrill of the magic spreads, she closes her eyes with a soft whine. Her face is flushed, and I have to swallow at the sight. How long could we be lost in the woods before anyone noticed we were missing? I see Scout Harding walking towards us, and I remove my hand from her back.

“Inquisitor, Commander Cullen is asking for you,” Harding informs her.
“I will be right there,” Mona replies, more evenly than I would have thought possible.

“Are you alright, Inquisitor? You look really flushed,” the dwarf remarks.

“It’s been a long day, is all. I will be there directly.” She smiles, and the dwarf merely nods before walking back towards the camp.

Mona turns to look at me, her eyes heavy with desire.

“You’re evil!” She grins.

“You did express curiosity earlier. I thought it only fair that I indulge it.” My chuckle darkens a little.

“I adore you,” she says so affectionately that I can’t help but soften.

She looks back, then takes my hand and gives it a quick kiss before walking back into the camp. I lean against the tree with a heavy breath. She was not the only one to whom I had given empty promises of desire.

Chapter End Notes

Just some fluff and filler. I hope you enjoy it even so :)

Thanks again to ninaninabobina for beta reading.
As I enter the Fade, I’m finally able to find Mona. It’s good that she is able to get some rest, and I can once again enjoy her company more freely. I approach quietly as she is sitting down talking with Wisdom.

“Truthfully, what concerns me the most is that it won’t really change anything. Some people will be able to adapt, but such a drastic cause of action can reinforce racism that is already stirring. Which means we would be right back where we started,” Mona explains with a frown.

“History does have a way of repeating itself.” Wisdom nods in agreement.

“Exactly. What concerns me is doing it so drastically. It might simply reinforce the hostility that’s already there. Do you know what happens to a species or society that cannot adapt to change? It becomes extinct. We need to evolve and change. And yet, we are so terrified of it. We cling to the past like it is the foundation of what we are. But it isn’t. The past is what we are supposed to surpass. We need to learn and grow from it. Take those lessons with us so that we may shape a better future. No society is perfect, but if we keep learning and we keep growing, then maybe we will at least have a world where no child goes hungry at night. Where no parent has to fear their child is born with magic. A world where not everyone is of equal means, necessarily, but everyone has an equal right and opportunity to learn. Where words like knife-ear, oxmen, and shemlen hold no meaning anymore.”

She gives a loud exasperated sigh and then laughs.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to lecture.” She leans forward on her elbow and shakes her head.

“You didn’t. In fact, I enjoy your convictions and devotion to them. Wisdom does not come from our recollection of the past alone, but the responsibility we feel towards our future. That such a young spirit has already gained such understanding is--”

“Arrogant?” Mona gives cheeky grin.

“Hopeful.” Wisdom smiles. “I wish you all the luck in the world, lethallan.”

Mona turns her face towards the ground with a blush, and Wisdom laughs as she sees me.

“Such humility. Good, perhaps you can keep his pride at bay.” The spirit nods in my direction.

Mona’s face lights up as she looks at me with adoring eyes and gets to her feet. I reach for her hands, then lean forward to give her a brief, feather-like kiss against her lips. She has to be strong so often and remains so with such a natural grace that it is easy to forget the more mild and subtle part of her essence. Out of the corner of my eyes, I see Wisdom vanishing with a small giggle.

“Eavesdropping?” Mona gives me an impish grin.

“Merely taking the opportunity to admire how freely you showed your spirit,” I reply, looking deep into her eyes.

She evades my gaze with a blush and shakes her head. Mona then pauses and bites her lower lip as if
she is pondering something.

“Is anything the matter?” I frown.

“No, just surprising.” She smiles and squeezes my hands. “You’re not as guarded this time as you were before. Perhaps the comparison is unfair, but you seem … less uncertain, conflicted.” She blushes as she looks up at me.

I can certainly understand myself being so. Mona knows who I am and most of my secrets, but had she not, then my every other breath would have been an omission of the truth.

“When we were together before, were you aware of my past?”

“No. Perhaps it helps that you can be open with me this time?” Her expression turns thoughtful for a moment before she brushes the soft palm of her hand against my cheek. “Thank you for trusting me.”

I turn my head to give her palm a quick kiss.

“You know of my secrets regardless of my trust in you. I’m so grateful that you chose to protect them,” I murmur, leaning in to kiss her.

“How grateful?” she whispers before my lips crash down unto hers.

One hand still holds her hand while the other comes to rest on her neck, my thumb running across her jaw. Her free hand rests on my chest right above my heart. Every kiss from her is so soft and so full promise it’s intoxicating. If we could stay like this until we have to wake, it would have been a night in the Fade well spent. As we pull away, we’re both panting softly.

“We better stop here or even the threat of a million desire demons won’t keep me in check,” she giggles.

I lean my head back with a laugh and kiss her brow.

“So, I understand Wisdom has taken you on as her student.” I step away, trying to control my urge to be near her.

“Yes. You once told me that everyone who could dream had the potential to make friends with spirits. I have wanted to for so long, but damned if I could ever find anyone willing to show me how.” She sighs in annoyance.

“That is not surprising given the Chantry’s stance on spirits,” I point out as we start walking purposeless through the Fade.

She scowls in my direction. “Don’t remind me,” she grumbles. “But one night, Wisdom came to me. I think she was curious about me."

“You could show her a history and places she has never had the opportunity to see before. And you have a thoughtful mind that sees all the nuances of the world. Everything Wisdom cherishes.”

Mona flushes and again avoids my gaze.

“Can you go back to scolding me? I think I might better be able to handle that than all this unnecessary praise.” Her face is an adorable pink, but she seems genuinely uncomfortable.

“You should be better at accepting compliments - especially when they are well-earned,” I correct her.
She smiles up at me.

“See, that frown? Much better. I’m already feeling so much more at ease.” She grins, and I have to roll my eyes.

“So, will you show me what you showed Wisdom?” I ask.

“Alright, I’ll try. I’m not very good at this.” She closes her eyes and tries to reach out through the Fade.

I step behind her and place my hands on her shoulders. I let some of my magic seep into her, amplifying her will. In time, she will be able to do this on her own, but with her not being a mage, what comes naturally to me will take great effort on her part. That she even has the willingness to attempt it is … incredible. The Fade starts to shift, and she opens her eyes.

“What do you want to see first?” she asks.

“Your home,” I request as I look into the Fade with anticipation.

A planet shows before us, and I roll my eyes as she giggles.

“Vhenan,” I sigh.

“You have to be more specific.” She grins, but then takes a step forward and points to the northern hemisphere.

“This is where I come from. We call this the Western world. Generally, it belongs to the more wealthy part of the world, and in many ways, we are considered to have more freedoms.”

She begins to tell me about her planet and points to the different continents. She explains how the political system and climates are like - its benefits and its flaws. She tells me about the ecosystems and some of the wildlife. She speaks with such enthusiasm, I can’t make myself interrupt her. Other than any related questions, I merely listen to tales of a world that is nothing like Thedas and yet has so many similarities. After a brief explanation, she looks at me with a sad expression, and the Fade changes. I see a house unlike anything in Thedas. It’s covered in snow and is a fair distance from any of the surrounding houses.

“This is where I grew up … well, one of the places. We moved a lot when I was little.”

“Why was that?”

“My father was never truly happy wherever he was. He kept switching jobs in order to find something that would make him happy. In the end, it turned out what made him happy was not being around us.” She gives me a rueful smile. “That along with beer and women.”

I can’t return her smile, remembering what she told me of her brother.

“He abandoned you.” I try to keep my voice free of resentment, but I can’t quite manage it.

“Yes, but I saw the drunk he became and the life he led. It really was for the best. It broke my mother’s and brother’s hearts. It devastated their world.” Her expression turns mournful.

“And what of you?”

“I survived. Their world was in shambles. I could not allow myself to give in to my own feelings.” There is some pride in her voice at her inner strength, and it is the first time I have ever seen her take
pride in anything.

“You were but a child yourself, weren’t you?”

“Yes.” She looks at me and gives a huffed chuckle. “Sweet Solas, don’t look at me like that. It’s fine. It’s an old memory that stopped hurting long ago.”

The sound of a small voice can be heard coming towards us. Mona turns in my arms, breathing heavily, her eyes heavy with grief.

“Solas, get me out of here,” she begs.

The boy comes towards her. A little thing with blonde hair and grey-blue eyes.

“Mommy!” he says excitedly and runs to her.

“Now, I beg you,” she mutters as she closes her eyes.

The boy starts pulling at her sleeve and calls for her in a sad, confused little voice.

“Vhenan,” I murmur softly.

“It’s not him. It’s just a spirit … I can’t…” She holds back a sob.

“I know it hurts you, and I’m so sorry, but this is a spirit reaching out to you. To help you and heal your hurt. Let it help you.” I look down, hoping to meet her eyes.

“What spirit is it?” she asks in a low voice.

“Joy, but if you are not careful, it will change to despair,” I warn her in a gentle voice.

“Will you help me? I don’t want to harm it,” she murmurs.

I smile despite her pain. Even in her sorrow, she worries more for the spirit than herself.

“Close your eyes and remember him. Not the pain but remember him. All the things about him that brought you joy.”

She closes her eyes, concentrating. “He was such a good little boy. Before he could speak, he was so generous.” Silent tears start to spill from her eyes. “He did not own a toy or get a snack that he was not willing to share with others. There was no jealousy or greed in his heart. He loved animals so much. Whenever he saw one, he would get all excited and run to them. He would look at them with awe and giggle. When he got a little older, the first thing he did every morning or after every nap would be to hug me and give me a kiss.”

I reach for her and stroke her cheek, wiping away the tears. She smiles despite the tears streaming down her face.

“Good,” I encourage. “Now turn. Let Joy help you remember. You have held onto the pain for so long, now allow yourself to remember the joy and love in those memories.”

She inhales deeply before turning. She looks down at the spirit in form of her son and crouches down to meet his eyes.

“Why you sad, mommy?” the spirit asks.
“Because I miss you very much.” She closes her eyes and another line of tears drips from her chin. She reaches for him and runs her fingers through his hair.

“I love you so much. You’re my good little boy, and I’m so happy that you are such a sweet little thing. I’m so proud of you.”

“I love you too, mommy.” The spirit wraps its arms around her neck and holds her tight.

Mona wraps her arms tightly around the spirit and kisses its cheek over and over, rocking the small body back and forth.

“I had forgotten how soft your cheeks are. Such soft little pillows,” she chuckles as she keeps kissing them.

“Are you still ticklish?” she asks, pulling away.

The spirit giggles and prepares itself as Mona moves her hand from side to side while humming an odd tune. Her hand reaches the small chest, and she tickles the spirit, making it laugh in joy. She scoops the spirit up in her arms and gets to her feet, twirling it around. When she stops, she holds it tight in a hug.

“Thank you. For reminding me. I love you, Joy.”

She pulls away, and the spirit turns from the little boy into its original form, floating in the air. It hovers forward and kisses her cheek.

“Always remember that you are very loved,” the spirit murmurs with a male voice and then disappears.

Mona turns to me and embraces my waist, sobbing into my chest.

“I know, vhenan,” I coo softly, holding her close to me. I feel so helpless knowing that this is a pain that can never truly be healed.

“I had forgotten what he looked like. I could no longer remember his face or his voice.” Her voice is heavy from tears.

“My love, look at me,” I say softly, taking a gentle hold on her chin to make her look at me. “You did not abandon him. You are not your father.”

“I didn’t even say goodbye. It doesn’t matter if I intended it. I left my child behind,” she cries in anguish.

“No, you were separated from him by force.” I have absolutely no proof of what I’m telling her, as neither of us knows how she came to be here, but seeing her now I know she would never have abandoned him. She would never leave anyone behind who needed her.

“Remember what Cole told you? That he remembers how much you loved him. That will carry him through much of the hardship in his life,” I coo softly in her ear before kissing her head.

She takes a deep breath and steps back, drying her eyes. She raises her chest, and I see the Inquisitor. The strongest woman in Thedas - not because of her power, but for her ability to carry so much suffering and still be able to continue.

“I’ll be fine.” She smiles at me.
“Are you certain?” I step forward and rub her shoulders.

“Yes … whatever I regret, whatever I mourn, there are good things in my life, too. I need to hold on to that - even those that don’t last forever.” She steps up on her toes and kisses my cheek.

I feel her slipping from the Fade as she awakes before I can ask her meaning.

The following evening, we sit around the campfire eating our supper. Mona has been at the front all day leading the army towards Adamant. Tomorrow, we will reach the fortress, and I confess I’m starting to feel a little anxious - as is the rest of the Inquisition forces I imagine. I’m relieved to see that Mona doesn’t seem as downcast as I had feared. A part of me regrets that I ever asked her to show me her past and encourage her to speak with Joy. I know better than anyone that there are some hurts that cannot be healed.

I notice that Dorian and the Iron Bull are beginning to spend a lot more time in each other’s company, and I have to smile. Mona is definitely cheating when it comes to her bet with Hawke and Varric. She already knows it’s going to happen. Hawke and Varric are reminiscing while Mona seems lost in her own thoughts from across the fire, Atish’an at her feet. I would like nothing more than to enjoy her company more closely, but I already feel as if my feelings are plain for all to see if they notice me. The Herald is still working on his poem, and I have to admire his dedication. Sera keeps looking at me and giggling. Presumably amused with herself for a prank she tried to pull on me this evening. But two can play that game.

“Have you ever had any interest in learning magic, Sera?” I ask innocently.

“Get off?”

“While it has not manifested naturally, there are ways to determine whether arcane gifts lay dormant within you,” I continue in the same tone.

“What? Don’t make me think about that. I have to sleep at night!” Sera shudders.

Mona looks at me with a grin as if she knows what is going to happen.

“Sleeping would give you the chance to explore the Fade. I could introduce you to spirits,” I offer and Mona has to suppress her laughter.

“Right, you’re messing with me on purpose!” Sera whines.

“Why would I do that? It is not as though I know who filled my bedroll with lizards.”

Sera chuckles. “Heh. Fair point! That was pretty good.”

Mona shakes her head.

“Sera, why don’t you go find Cassandra and lend a hand instead of causing trouble?”
“Is that an order? Wait, why am I asking that. You’re not my mum.”

“I could be, you little shit,” Mona mutters underneath her breath and gives Dorian a wry grin. “Now, get going before I come down there and beat you with a frozen leek!”

“A frozen--?” Sera laughs. “You’re daft!”

“Says the girl who still hasn’t learned not to mess with my dog.” Mona gives her a knowing look, and the dog rumbles with satisfaction.

“I bet you used to be fun once. You walk around acting all normal, but I can tell.” Sera leans forward and eyes *ma vehnani*.

“Who, me? I’ve always been stoic and cold,” Mona replies, not meeting her gaze.

Hawke and Varric start laughing.

“Two things that have never been true,” Hawke guffaws.

“Says who?” she challenges.

“You forget, we were there the night you taught Isabela--” Varric begins.

“Not another word, Varric!” Mona hisses.

“Oh, now you *have* to tell us the story!” Bull enthuses.

Mona’s face turns red as she pulls her hood over her head and hides her face.

“I still hear that song in the Hanged Man from time to time,” Varric grins.

“Oh come on!” Mona whines. “The only reason I did that was so Isabela would leave Aveline alone so she could work things out with Donnic.”

“Oh, she blushes! Inquisitor, I had no idea you could look so adorable!” Dorian laughs.

“Leave her alone, you vultures,” the Herald chuckles.

“Story! Story! Story!” Sera begins to chant as the others follow suit.

“Alright!” Mona cries out. “But I’m telling it without any of Varric’s embellishments.”

The group looks at her with great interest and I confess I’m a little curious myself.

“Alright, so our friend Aveline had this crush on one of her guards named Donnic. Now, Isabela has this unfortunate habit of butting into other people’s business, driving Aveline insane, and being wildly inappropriate. Hawke was to bring Donnic to the Hanged Man, where Isabella lived, so I was given the task of providing a distraction,” Mona begins.

“And there are only three ways of distracting Isabella: drinking, coin, and sex,” Hawke chuckles.

“You slept with a pirate?!?” Sera exclaims in glee.

“No!” Mona objects. “Isabela is nice, but no. We started drinking, and at one point, I might have taught Isabela a drinking song that played on the word…” she blushes fiercely and hides her face in her hand, “seamen.”
Sera bursts out laughing, which has everyone else following suit. I restrain myself to a grin as I look at Mona. It would not have been nearly as entertaining if not for the way she blushes.

“Sing it!” Sera demands.

“No!” Mona objects instantly.

“Then I will.” Hawke laughs and stands up, starting to sing a song that sounds innocent but can easily be construed as something far more inappropriate.

Mona gets up in defeat and walks outside the camp. I follow her discreetly by taking the longer way around but do catch up to her. Her face is still red and her expression mortified. She is chuckling to herself, looking out over the dune and the cliffs.

“Are you alright?” I ask as I get closer.

“My pride is a little wounded, perhaps, but I’m fine. It’s just … I still cringe at that memory,” she snickers.

“So, how did it end? Between Aveline and Donnie?” I take a step closer.

“They’re happily married.”

It’s so good to see some happiness in her eyes and a smile on her face - even if it comes from her embarrassment. After last night in the Fade, I had been so worried for her. I see Cole looking at us from the outskirts of the camp. He talks to the guard as if he is making him forget, and I take the opportunity to take Mona in my arms. She makes a noise of surprise, but then returns the embrace with tender affection.

The next day brings about our final march to reach the fortress. It’s nearing nightfall as we are approach Adamant. We make camp some distance away, and the followers of the Herald are all joined for the war council. For the first time, I see the Inquisitor dressed in armour rather than leather clothing or finery. Cullen goes through the plans of attack.

“The trebuchets will then assault from afar, giving us the distraction we need to ram the gate.”

“While you try to enter through the gate, Hawke and I will be on the ramparts taking down as many archers as possible,” Mona explains.

“Are you sure that’s wise, my dear? Your combat experience is somewhat limited,” Vivienne points out. Despite the superior attitude, I sense some genuine concern.

“Hawke and I work well together. Besides, I know of no one else who can create portals that will take us to the ramparts,” she says.

“Don’t worry, no one will touch her as long as I’m around,” Hawke swears.

I can’t help but wonder how close their relationship was before the incident with the Kirkwall Chantry happened. Or if there is any sincerity to his words.
“We should proceed with caution,” Leliana adds. “If we want to make this as bloodless as possible, our assault will require a fair amount of finesse. The Inquisitor and Hawke, along with my agents, are in the best position to offer that. I would also suggest you bring Cole, Inquisitor.”

Mona nods and smiles over at Cole. I admit, it gives me some relief as I’m not convinced with Hawke’s vow to protect her.

“Which leaves us to deal with the assault,” Cassandra states. “Herald, who will you be bringing along with you?”

“Solas, Dorian, and Iron Bull.” The Herald looks at me as if seeking my approval.

“Very well. Cassandra, Vivienne, Blackwall, Varric, and Sera, you can go in from the east while The Herald goes in from the front gate. Leliana, have Tish taken to the forces who will search for survivors after.”

“As you say, Inquisitor.”

Mona turns to Cullen. “Anything to add, Commander?”

“The strategy is sound. Let’s just hope the Wardens will see reason quickly.”

“That would be nice, but they won’t,” Iron Bull remarks, and I must concur.

“Get everything ready. The less time we give them to prepare, the better. Dismissed.” Mona nods, and we start leaving.

Outside the tent, the Herald stops me.

“You should go back in and talk to her,” he encourages.

“Shouldn’t you be more concerned with the battle ahead?” I smirk.

“She has to stay strong for everyone. It would do her good to have someone who can stay strong for her. Besides, I know how you feel about her, and with Philippe out of the picture—” He gives me a wry grin.

“If I go in there, will you stop interfering?” I scowl.

“Well, for tonight at least.” He winks. “Told you, I’m a hopeless romantic.”

He continues to grin as he walks off, and I shake my head with a smile. Despite his meddling, I can’t help but feel a certain fondness for the boy. His low confidence aside, he is spirited. Even so, he was right about Mona. I walk back into the tent where she is leaning on the table, looking over the battle plans.

“Worried?” I ask from the other side of the table.

“Terrified. I hate seeing people die.” She sighs and pushes herself away from the table.

“I know. Please be careful,” I ask, knowing my expression is more worried than I have any right to be.

“Neither of us should make promises we can’t keep, Solas.” She gives a grim smile. “But for you, I will try.”
“Ma serannas, vhenan,” I murmur as I have to struggle against my desire to walk over to her. I feel a presence behind us, and Hawke steps into the tent.

“Are you ready, Mona?”

“Shall we show them why even the Qun hesitates to piss us off?” Mona smirks at Hawke.

“Hey, I was the one who took down the Arishok,” he remarks as she walks up next to him.

“Only because I gave you that stun rune. Otherwise, you would have just run around the Viscount’s Keep in circles of eight for half an hour.” She laughs at him.

“You always takes stabs at my pride,” he grumbles.

“That’s because you pride is large enough to have its own gravitational pull.” She gives him a wicked grin.

“And what is that supposed to mean?” he calls after her as they walk out of the tent.

I clench my fist. If something happens to her because of him...

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for this chapter taking so long. This week has been very busy.

This chapter actually made me cry to write, but I hope you enjoyed it all the same and that it gave a better idea of who Mona is.

Please leave a comment so I know if I'm writing what you guys would like to read.

Thanks again to ninaninabobina for beta reading.
We start the assault, but the Wardens are prepared for us. This is going to be a difficult fight with a lot on the line. Should we fail, I will have doomed the entire world. Everything it has been or could have been will be reduced to ashes. Hawke, Cole, and Mona are quick to reach the ramparts and make quick work of the archers. She is using a device I have not seen before. It springs a chain into her victims and pours electricity into them. As one of them fall over the side, I notice he is still alive. Whatever she is doing to them, she is not killing a single Warden in her path. The gate is finally broken, and I follow the Herald, Dorian, and The Iron Bull into the keep. Stroud leads us through the place, and the Herald seems as determined as Mona to not hurt any more people than necessary on either side.

“They need help on the battlements!” Bull notices.

I look up and see Hawke and Mona being pushed back towards the edge by a large Pride demon as Cole attempts to attack it from behind.

“Herald, we must help them,” I urge, and he nods.

“Let’s get up there quickly.”

We fight up the stairs and eventually get to the Pride demon. It lashes out towards them and hits Mona as she shields one of the wounded Inquisition soldiers.

“You’re going to regret that!” Hawke shouts and hurls an enormous fireball at the creature.

Bull is the first to engage the demon while Dorian and the Herald begin with the long ranged attacks. My focus is to create as many barriers and wards as possible. I notice Mona get to her feet with a groan, and she sends the wounded soldier through a portal. I look down and notice Cole on the other side of it ready to get the man to safety.

Once the demon is vanquished, I walk over to Mona, whose expression is grim. There is a large cut on her cheek, and blood runs down her neck.

“You're injured,” I remark.

“I'm fine. Nothing major,” she tells me as reassurance, and I nod.

I still reach for her cheek and heal the cut immediately, though it is a minor injury that could easily have waited until after the battle.

“We have to get to Magister Erimond. Any idea of where he is?” Hawke asks Mona.

“Yes, in the center with Clarel. They are probably summoning one huge demon.” She looks at Hawke and me, meaning there is no “probably” to it.

“Then we better hurry,” I urge, looking at the Herald.

“Way ahead of you!” he calls back, already running toward the middle of the fortress.

Reaching the center, I see the open rift that Mona told me about. On the other side is an enormous
demon, and she was right. It does appear to be a variety of fear - an ancient and powerful one. Mona runs towards the rift as Hawke and Cole cover her. She then activates the device that creates a barrier around the rift.

“No! What do you think you’re doing, you foolish girl?” Erimond cries out at her.

“Hush, darling, mommy is working,” she retorts back at him and adjusts the device.

“Wardens, stop her!” he orders.

The Herald steps in front of her as I run to her and help her stabilise the runes.

“We saved the other Wardens before. Stop this bloodshed! We never wanted to fight you!” he calls out.

“Listen to him,” Stroud implores. “I trained most of you. Don’t give into this madness. Don’t make me fight you!”

“You fools! My Master sent along a gift for you!”

Mona looks at me. “The dragon. I will try to stabilise the rift. Help them.”

I look to the sky and see the tainted dragon looming over us all. Evading the dragon and getting people to safety is no small feat, as I can see demons pressing against the barrier Mona is creating. She would choose this moment to test her theory.

“Herald! It won’t hold much longer! Be ready!” Mona warns, the metal in the device turning and twisting as if it is being warped by the forces surrounding it.

The Herald steps in front of the rift, and the mark flares with magic. My heart moves at the last possible moment as the device explodes. The Herald thrusts his hand into the air and closes the rift before any more demons come through, while the rest of us deal with the shades let loose from Mona’s barrier failing. She runs to some of the wounded soldiers.

“Go get them,” she urges the Herald, and we proceed through the fortress.

Mona had warned me that it would be horrible, but I admit I’m appalled by all the senseless destruction. Honoured as heroes, indeed. They are nothing but fools playing with forces beyond their comprehension. They have no idea that what they perceive as their sacred duty might be what dooms us all, regardless of Corypheus. Clarel chases Erimond, and we follow suit through the fortress with the dragon constantly breathing down our necks. We are almost at the top when a surge of unfamiliar energy can be felt from below. The dragon dives, and my lungs seize as I see it carrying *ma vehnan* in its claw. A portal opens in front of Clarel, and Mona falls to the ground, gasping for breath. We all back away from the dragon as it approaches. It takes Clarel between its jaws, and in her final moments, Clarel releases all her power, making the ground beneath us crumble. We all run towards safety, but none of us make it.

We fall, and the Herald opens a rift. As Mona had told me, we find ourselves physically in the Fade. I’m in awe of it.

Mona lays on the ground and looks straight up. I begin to walk towards her, and she sits up and makes a gesture for me not to worry.

“Asshole dragon!” she seethes as she gets to her feet.
Cole twirls around himself, muttering, “No no no no no. This is the Fade, but I'm stuck. I can't ... why can't I...?”

She walks directly over to Cole and puts her hand on his face. She looks under his hat and strokes his cheeks.

“I'm right here, Cole. Everything will be alright. Just hold on to me,” she murmurs and takes his hand, holding it tight. Cole gives a hesitant nod, and she kisses his cheek.

“Thank you. It should be like home. It's not. This isn't me, not this part,” he explains, and Mona pulls him into a hug.

“Where are we?” Stroud asks.

“We were falling … perhaps we landed. Are we dead? If this is the afterlife, then the Chantry owes me an apology. This looks nothing like the Maker’s bosom,” Hawke grunts.

“No. This is the Fade. The Herald opened a rift. We came through … and survived. I never thought I would find myself here physically…” I point to the sky. “Look. The Black City. Almost close enough to touch.”

I smile then turn to Cole, who seems to still be struggling even as Mona attempts to comfort him. “Cole, how does it feel to be back home?”

“I can’t be here. Not like this, not like me!” He gestures wildly, only stopped by Mona embracing his shoulders with her arm.

“It’s alright,” I assure him. “We’ll make it right.”

“This place is wrong. I made myself forget when I made myself real, but I know it wasn’t like this.”

“Solas and I are here for you, Cole. Nothing will happen to you, okay?” Mona looks over at him, and he gives a slow nod.

“This isn’t how I remember the Fade, either,” Hawke grumbles.

“The first time I entered the fade, it looked like a lovely castle filled with gold and silks. I met a marvelous desire demon as I recall. We chatted and ate grapes until he tried to possess me. Perhaps it is because we are here physically. This is no one's dream,” Dorian quips.

“They say you walked out of a rift in Haven. Was it like this?” Hawke asks looking at the Herald.

“Honestly, I have no idea. I can’t remember a thing,” the Herald replies as he looks around.

Mona walks ahead and looks up into the sky, exploring and taking it all in with the curiosity I have come to adore.

“This is … incredible,” she breathes in awe.

“Not to mention a place of great power,” Dorian remarks, walking up next to her.

“Screw power!” she dismisses, not even looking at him. “Every hope and dream, all the fear and anger, every thought and feeling is here. It’s like a recording of the very essence of what and who we are. This place is … everything.”

There is a wondrous smile on her face as she observes it. No fear. No suspicion. Just pure fascination
at the world she is seeing.

The Herald steps close to me, so no one else can hear and coughs into his hand, “Marry her!”

He shrugs innocently as I scowl at him.

“Humans...” I sigh in jest.

“You’ve been spending too much time with Solas. You even sound like him.” Dorian grins at Mona.

“No, Mona sounded like this long before that. It’s part of her unique and sometimes disturbing charm,” Hawke grins.

“Oh, this is shit. I’ll fight whatever you give me, Boss, but nobody said nothing about being dragged to the ass end of demon town,” Bull grunts, looking at Mona.

“You’ll be alright. I’ll beat you with a stick later.” She nudges him with her elbow.

“Was that some sort of euphemism?” Hawke asks with a grin.

“Wouldn’t you like to know?” Mona grins at him, making Bull give a little huff of amusement.

Iron Bull makes his sound meeker as he speaks, "Hey, chief. Let’s join the Inquisition! Good fights for a good cause! I don’t know, Krem, I hear there are demons. ‘Ah, don’t worry about the demons, chief! I’m sure we won’t see many!’” He starts to grumble, “I can’t believe I listened…” then bursts out, “Asshole! Everyone, if I get possessed, feint on my blind side, then go low. Cullen says I leave myself open.”

We start to walk through the area, and I look around, in awe of everything. All that I have sealed away. All the magic, all that I love. Some of it is still here despite everything else I destroyed. This proves that the elves can be restored - that despite my terrible mistakes restoration is not beyond reach.

“This is fascinating. It is not the area I would have chosen, of course, but to physically walk within the fade…” I sigh, looking at it all and barely noticing the smirk Mona gives me.

I feel the Herald next to me, looking out into the Fade.

“Well, hello, Fade. You’re looking as deadly as ever. Got any friends in the area, Solas?” the Herald asks with a grin.

“I’m afraid I must disappoint, Herald.”

“What use are you? You poor excuse of a Fadewalker.” He grins with no true malice.

We walk through the Fade and encounter fearlings. All of them mere shadows of what we will encounter later. Mona seems almost as fascinated as I am. I would never have expected to have so much in common with her when we first met. A human, a mortal, an … alien. Yet, in her spirit, I see parts of myself reflected, as if she has been constructed from all the parts of myself I have lost along the way. Parts that contain hope, trust, and a true empathy for all that surrounds me. When she looks at me, I am the best version of myself.

Suddenly, a voice rings through the fade. Its words filled with malice.

“Perhaps I should be afraid, facing the most powerful members of the Inquisition,” the demon cackles - an unnatural, icy sound that hangs in the air like fog.
It starts to mock all of us, saving me as one of the last.

“Dirth ma, harellan. Ma banal enasalin. Mar solas ena mar din,” the Fear demon cackles with glee at me.

It can’t bother me. Not truly. The words it spouts at me is an anchor I carry with me always. It can’t possess me or hurt me.

“Banal nadas!”

I feel Mona’s hand briefly rest on mine to give me comfort. As if the demon sensed her concern for me, its attention turns to her.

“The dreaded Inquisitor. Have they yet noticed how you falter? Careful now, they might start to notice how all your good intentions fail. You couldn’t stop it then, how do you suppose you can stop it now?”

“Did you just copy paste that? So much for ingenuity,” she replies as if she is utterly unimpressed.

I don’t know what she is implying, but I admit that his insult to her was close to my own. Where we try to ignore the demon, the Inquisitor seems to want to taunt it as she continues.

“Empty bank account perhaps? A phone dropped in a toilet? That one is truly horrendous.”

The others look at her with puzzled expressions, but they quickly fade as the fearlings keep coming upon us. With the fear all around us, it is likely that none of us will remember the details of what has occurred here.

“You mock fear. Yet, you feel it more deeply than the others,” Fear hisses.

Mona looks at me with a smile, as if she takes strength from my presence.

“Oh, I know you, Fear. You have been my good friend all my life. You keep me from being reckless and remind me of my limitations. But tell me, dear friend who reads my thoughts, when have I ever been so paralyzed by fear that I didn’t act?”

I can’t help but feel pride as I hear the confidence in her voice. My confidence in her conveyed with her own words. For the coward Hawke would brand her as, she is one of the bravest souls I have met. How many would see the apocalypse and willingly run towards it in the small hope that they might make even a small difference? The Fear demon doesn’t respond, and a dark smile appears on my love’s lips.

“You asked if you should be afraid. Yes, my friend. Be very afraid.” She walks with determined steps, and I look to Hawke and the Herald. Seeing their expressions, I start to believe that the demon has just received competition when it comes to inspiring fear.

“If she keeps mocking it, she is going to end up dead,” the Herald remarks with worry.

“You’re still hopeful we’ll survive this?” Hawke gives him a doubtful glare.

As we fight our way through demons and explore the Fade, we come upon a spirit that seems to have taken the shape of the Divine. Mona steps back as she sees it and turns from it, meddling with her bracers instead. After speaking with the Herald, the spirit notices her and appears before her.

“My child, it was not your fault. You gave everything and tried everything to protect us from
ourselves. Do not doubt your intentions.” The spirit smiles at her, reaching for her cheek.

“You spirits always forgive way too easily. Let me carry my guilt so that I may learn from it and not repeat it.” She moves from the spirit’s touch and walks ahead.

I had begun to believe that there was no person that she could not forgive, that her spirit in that regard was as innocent as Cole’s. As I look at her now, I realise that there will always be one person who she refuses to forgive - the one who is probably the most deserving of her forgiveness.

The Herald looks at the memories floating in the fade.

“Solas, I don’t know how to…” He looks afraid, and I can hardly blame him. Retrieving his memories will question everything he has believed so far.

I step up next to him as he reaches out, not activating the mark. His emotions are holding him back.

“What…” his voice is low, “what if I wasn’t chosen by Andraste? What if I was a mere accident?”

I rest my hands behind my back and look at the memory floating in the air.

“Then you are a brave young man who overcame all that you have been through thanks to your own abilities. Or your Maker chose for this accident to happen to you rather than someone else. Whatever the truth, it does not take away from the fact that all you have accomplished, you’ve earned.” I look at the Herald who nods at me.

He reaches out towards the memory and absorbs it. He gives a shiver but quickly brushes it off.

“I want this thing to die an agonizing death,” he grunts.

We’re getting closer to the rift that will lead us out of the Fade. For most of us, the trip has been unsettling. Mona has retreated into herself, but the others don’t notice. It is somehow tragic that a kind spirit could accomplish what Fear could not. How full of adversity her life must have been for her to react this way. She keeps herself composed, and though she creates barriers and portals, she refuses to harm even the demons. It’s a principle that might one day get her killed, and yet, there is something about it I admire. After a fight, she sits down and adjusts her bracers again.

“Is something wrong?”

“The wiring needs replacing. They are getting overheated. Things are much more difficult for me to affect here,” she replies without looking at me.

I see some smoke emanating from one of the runes. I take her wrists in my hands and cast a cold spell.

“You should have told me earlier. If they continue to overheat like this, they will burn your flesh again,” I say softly, remembering how damaged her skin had been after the encounter with the Profane.

“Edward needs you more than I do. And I didn’t want to trouble you.” She keeps looking at my hands rather than my eyes.

“I will never consider protecting you as any trouble.” I smile and she looks at me.

“That’s exactly my point. You have enough who depend on you. I don’t want or need to add to that burden,” she tells me seriously, then looks down at my hands again. “Thank you.”
She gives me a sweet smile, and we start walking again. We reach what resembles a graveyard containing tombstones with each of our names engraved on them. I look down at mine, where my greatest fear is etched into the stone beneath my name. “Dying alone.” Mona walks up to stand next to me and rubs my arm, looking down on the writing.

“Do you know if…” The words die on my lips.

“No, I’m sorry, love, but I have no idea. I wish I did so I could promise to prevent it.” She sighs mournfully.

My heart skips a beat at the endearment despite the answer she gives. She looks towards her own gravestone which is engraved with the words “Living forever.”

“For you not to suffer, I would face even that,” she whispers with a wistful expression.

I can’t keep myself from smiling down at her. I hear the Herald cough, which separates us from each other. My love walks away calmly and smiles at the Herald.

I scowl at him when Mona is out of sight, and he raises his hands.

“I didn’t say anything!” he objects with a wry grin on his face.

When we approach the rift, a Terror demon is blocking our path. Behind it, we see the large presence that has been haunting us on this journey. Mona kneels on the ground and goes through the satchel on her side.

“What are you looking for, Mona?” Hawke asks.

“Deal with the demon. I’ll be right there.”

Without hesitation, the Herald, Dorian, Bull, Cole, and Stroud enter the battle. To my surprise, it’s Hawke that lingers with hesitation before joining the battle. For a brief moment, I look at her to see she has created a bubble around herself where the demon cannot touch her. She is fiddling with something. The rest of us are fighting our way closer to the rift, but she stays far from it. When the smaller Fear demon falls, it’s Dorian that Fade steps towards her to get her to follow us. We run towards the rift, but our path is blocked by the huge Fear demon.

“Hawke…” The Herald looks at him with a sad expression.

“Say goodbye to Varric for me.” Hawke nods resolutely. “I’m sorry, Merrill,” he mutters and runs towards the demon.

“Spiders! Always damned spiders!”

We run to the rift using the valuable time that Hawke has bought us. I turn as we exit the rift, and a second later, Hawke appears behind us, falling through a portal and out of the rift. I look into the rift and see Mona in the distance. She switched places with Hawke.

“No!” I cry out.

Varric runs towards us.

“Where is Waffles?” His face turns pale. “Where is Mona?”

The Heralds turns to look back at the rift that is slowly closing on its own. I run towards the rift, but Edward grabs me by the arm and holds me back.
“I’m not losing you, too,” he says in a low, determined voice.

“We can’t just leave her in there!” Dorian objects, making to walk towards the rift as well. But the Iron Bull holds him back. “We have to.”

Can’t.

Breathe.

Chapter End Notes

I know, I'm a monster! I'm sorry!

I'm working on the next chapter and I hope to publish it soon, so you won't have to wait in suspense too long.

Thanks to all of you who have followed the story so far with such devotion. It means a lot!
I feel my knees failing as the rift starts to flicker. Only the Herald’s hold on me keeps me from keeling over. In the distance, I see Mona holding her hand towards the large demon crawling over her. I hear a cry in agony, but I can’t make out what is happening as the rift closes. At that moment, a portal appears, and Mona is thrown through it. The portal vanishes as the rift closes tight.

Varric and Cole laugh with relief and run to embrace her as she lays on the ground. The first to reach her is Dorian, however, who picks her up in his arms and holds her tight.

“That girl is tough!” Bull exclaims with disbelief.

I walk over to her but keep my distance. A part of me doesn’t know what to do with myself. I thought I had lost her, but there she is. Breathing, though she looks a little beaten. I step forward and catch her as she drops to the ground.

“How … how do you feel?”

“Just give me a moment.” She takes a deep breath and regains her footing.

She puts a rune in my hand, and I recognize the device as the one she got from her vault in Val Royeaux. She steps up to the Herald, and they both look down on the Wardens.

“Wardens, what you have done here today, the danger you have posed to Thedas proves that your order has been corrupted!” Mona calls out over the crowd. “Your secrets nearly became our undoing. Until an investigation can be made of the members left of the order in Southern Thedas, you are conscripted by the Inquisition. We will watch you and offer you sanctuary, understanding that those of you left were misled by your leaders. Report to Commander Cullen!”

“But they hurt people,” Cole objects, and I sigh deeply.

Mona walks up to him and places a hand on his face.

“I know. We will make sure they don’t hurt anyone else.”

As she speaks with Cole, Hawke walks up behind her. When she turns, he picks her up in his arms, lifting her off the ground. He whispers something to her, and she merely embraces him with a smile.

I walk over to the side of the fortress and look down into the Abyss below. Everything feels … numb. I’m relieved yet furious. I look at the rune in my hand. What was she trying to accomplish? Did she know she would make it out alive?

I look at her as she approaches, but as I’m about to speak, she holds up her hand. She looks pale, and her steps are unbalanced. She takes quick steps towards the railing and throws up down the side of the fortress. Despite my anger, I can’t help but pity her as I stand next to her.

“Remind me never to do anything that stupid again,” she groans as she spits down the wall.

I shut my eyes tight in impotent fury. She had not known if she would survive. She is leaning over the side and looks ill.
“I would if I believed you’d listen.” My answer is deadpanned as I cross my arms looking at her.

“I know. I was reckless and foolish, but if I hadn’t, Hawke would have died. It was worth the risk.”

“To whom exactly? The Inquisition? Varric? To me?” I can’t keep myself from scolding her. The fear of nearly losing her is dominating me in a capacity greater than I had expected.

“Who exactly would your death have benefited?” I sneer.

“Solas…” she begins to object.

“You are not expendable, Inquisitor!” My outburst is louder than I intended, and I can see members of the Wardens and Inquisition looking at us briefly.

“But don’t you understand? That is exactly what I am. I’m the one who wasn’t supposed to be here. Mine is the life that will have no real impact on what happens here. The Inquisition and what comes after will succeed with or without me. I know you don’t like it, but my life is the only one on that I can say with absolute certainty is expendable. Therefore, it is the only one worth risking.” She stands up, still looking pale.

“That’s where you are wrong. The fact that you can’t predict the path your life will follow makes yours the most important one. And I refuse to stand by as you risk it needlessly,” I fume, rubbing my face in frustration.

“I saved Hawke’s life. That’s not needless.” She crosses her arms.

I step closer to her, my voice low and deep.

“That man is not worth your life.” I barely keep my words from quivering with rage and worry.

She gives me a look of disbelief.

“That’s unfair, Solas.”

“It’s the truth.” My voice is hard.

She looks up at me, her expression softening as her lips crease into a faint smile.

“I’m sorry I worried you. I will try to be more careful and to tell you what I plan before doing anything idiotic.”

I take a deep breath and shake my head in defeat. I have a feeling that this is never going to change.

“Thank you. Now, let me have a look at you. Despite the nausea, are you experiencing any other symptoms?”

I help her to sit down and sit in front of her, examining her.

“A stabbing migraine and my thigh is bruised, but I’m fine, otherwise.”

“If it’s nothing serious, perhaps I should let you suffer to ensure you have learned your lesson,” I jest.

At that, she chuckles, and then holds her head with a moan.

“Don’t make me laugh, you ass. It’s making it worse.”
With a snicker, I reach up behind her neck and let some cooling magic suppress the migraine.

“About the Wardens--” she begins.

“I think we have had enough arguments for one evening, don’t you?” I raise an eyebrow.

“Dearest Solas, would you please let me explain?”

“As you like.” My voice is even as I examine her further.

“I know you’re angry at me because of the Wardens, but there are things you don’t know.”

“Then enlighten me. You do have the power to do it, after all,” I reply calmly, tending to her thigh.

“The choices we make have direct influence over the power in Thedas. Including who becomes the next Divine. Conscripting the Wardens wasn’t a sympathetic or nostalgic choice. It was a strategic one.” Her voice is serious, and I look up at her.

“And what benefit can a proud little cult of blighted lunatics offer? They are vulnerable to Corypheus.” I can’t help myself from sounding doubtful.

“They affect the people’s and the Chantry’s opinion of Leliana,” she murmurs, ensuring we are not overheard.

“What does Leliana have to do with this?” I stop the healing, as I’m way too focused on what she is trying to tell me to pay attention to it.

“There are going to be three possible candidates for the Sunburst Throne. Leliana, Cassandra, and Vivienne.”

My eyes widen for a moment.

“The First Enchanter? That is ambitious, but at this point, nothing she does really surprises me,” I admit.

“Between Cassandra and Leliana, the mages and other races will gain the most freedom under Leliana’s rule. Cassandra does make a wonderful Divine as well, but I could not risk it, as the choices that would have been made to put her on the throne would have given Vivienne that opportunity as well. I didn’t exile the Wardens because I wanted to make sure there was no way in hell Vivienne could become Divine,” she explains. “I was worried her friendship with me would make her an even more likely candidate, so I didn’t dare to take chances.”

I give her a small smile. I might not agree with what choice she made regarding the Wardens, but it was not a hastily made decision - quite the contrary.

“Alright, but we still need to be careful with where we deploy them - especially their mages,” I warn her making sure my skepticism is known.

“I know. And I’m really sorry for scaring you. I shouldn’t have put you in that position.” She reaches for my hand.

“Enough, vhenan. You came back alive. You need not apologize any further,” I whisper as I rub her knuckles with my thumb.

When the Herald approaches us along with Hawke and Varric, I retract my hand discreetly.
“What did you do in there? Are you insane?” The Herald sniggers looking at Mona.

She lifts two fingers showing barely a centimeter between them.

“Don’t do it again!” Varric grunts with a chuckle.

“Why did you do it?” Hawke asks with concern as he sits down next to her.

The resentment is gone from his eyes when he looks at her and the venom gone as he speaks. I can’t help but feel even more enraged by the fact that it took this for him to forgive her for something she should never have asked for forgiveness for in the first place. She reaches her hand out to me, and I place the rune and the device in her hand.

“I remember that one,” Hawke remarks, looking at it with fear in his eyes.

“Shit, Waffles.” Varric rubs his face.

“What is it?” I ask.

“This is a rune I created around the time when a murderer was running loose in Kirkwall. I created this rune in order to help capture the killer. I did it together with a savant named Sandal and … Justice.”

“Justice?” The Herald asks.

“Justice was the spirit who possessed Anders,” Hawke clarifies.

“And blew up half of Kirkwall. Don’t forget that part,” Varric grumbles.

“You transferred part of the spirit - its purpose - into that rune,” I realise, not entirely sure if I should be in awe of it or terrified.

She nods. “Yes. Justice and Anders helped me willingly. The purpose of the rune was simply to identify guilt. Like a compass of a sort.”

“Why do I feel like there is more to it than that?” The Herald frowns.

“What I actually created was a rune that could transmit guilt. I’m not certain how it works, but this device can make any creature - flesh or spirit - feel the pain of every single person they have ever harmed.” Her voice wavers as she explains.

“So it’s a rune of Justice?” The Herald rubs his forehead.

“No, it’s something far darker,” I comment, looking at it.

“This is nothing short of a torture device.” Hawke shakes his head.

“It doesn’t discriminate, and it knows nothing of forgiveness or redemption. It knows only its purpose and as such will inflict it on anyone,” I explain as I stand up next to the Herald.

“In the wrong hands, this device is one of the most dangerous things I know of. And I created it.” Mona’s face turns heavy with regret as she packs it away in her pocket.

“And you turned it on the Fear demon … you paralyzed it. Were you hoping we could use it on Corypheus?” the Herald asks.
She reaches for his hand, and he helps her stand.

“Let me make one thing clear. I hope never to use it on anyone. And I trust you and Solas to keep this secret as Hawke and Varric have.” She looks at the Herald.

“Of course … What happened to the killer?”

“He killed himself,” Hawke says plainly.

“Don’t think about it too much, Herald. There is a reason why I shot him in the head in the book,” Varric sighs.

The Herald nods and looks at Mona.

“You look really ill,” he comments.

“Side effect of the rune. I wore it so a little of that can’t help but affect me, too.” She holds a hand on her stomach as if she is going to be ill again.

“Couldn’t that escalate so that you would feel all the emotions you inflicted on the person you exposed? It could create a never ending spiral where you would be trapped in that pain.” I watch her closely.

“Theoretically, yes. It could potentially create a never-ending loop. As I said, it’s one of the most dangerous thing I can think of.” Her voice is even, but I see a deep shame in her eyes.

“We better get you to a tent,” the Herald says with worry, and Hawke steps up next to her.

“I’ll take her.” Hawke walks next to her, his hand on the back of her arm.

“I need to brush my teeth,” she groans as they walk away.

I look back at Varric who almost collapses against the wall.

“Why can’t I ever find friends who aren’t intent on getting themselves killed?”

The Herald chuckles, but I have to admit, I’m beginning to wonder the same thing.

When The Herald and I return to camp, I’m greeted by Atish’an running towards me. I kneel and greet the dog, who grabs my coat gently with her teeth to drag me towards Mona’s tent.

“In a moment, my friend.” I pet her head as I stand up, and she gives a quiet whine, sitting down next to me.

The camp is quiet and most of the soldiers are either receiving medical care or are getting some much needed rest. The key members of the Inquisition’s tents are placed in the same basic area, and I can see Commander Cullen, Cassandra, and Leliana in the War Council tent. Cassandra approaches us, looking tired.

“I’m glad to see you have returned safely. Hawke and the Inquisitor gave us the quick version. I suggest we wait for the full version until the morning. Commander Cullen is already dealing with the
few Wardens who have any authority. To see them fall so low…” She sighs deeply.

“They are fools, a fact only amplified by Corypheus' meddling,” I state, a little anger seeping through against my will.

“A harsh assessment – but after this, perhaps not undeserved.” Cassandra nods.

“How is Mona?” The Herald asks, and I can’t help but feeling grateful that he asks so I don’t have to.

“A little worn out. I never liked those runes she meddles with. Too many unknowns. I fear what it might one day do to her.” Cassandra’s expression turns concerned.

“Perhaps Solas should watch her tonight? Just to make sure someone is nearby,” the Herald suggests with concern.

“Would you mind, Solas?” Cassandra asks, looking at me.

“Very well.” I nod as I hide just how welcome this suggestion truly is.

I grab my things and walk to her tent with Atish’an following me. I lean against the entrance to the tent.

“Inquisitor, may I come in?” I ask politely.

She pushes the entrance aside and gives me a smile, sitting only in her trousers and a loose white shirt. Atish’an jumps into the tent and lays down at the end of her bedroll. I take off my boots and coat and lay out my bedroll alongside hers before taking a seat across from her, our knees touching.

“Young new coat looks nice … I feel bad for the wolf though.” She smiles a little sadly.

“It was possessed by a demon. It could not be avoided I fear.” I give a rueful smile. “How are you feeling?” I ask with concern, holding her jaw gently with both hands.

“I’m fine. A little rattled and sore, but fine, otherwise.” She kisses my palm.

“I’m staying here tonight to watch over you,” I explain in a low voice.

“Well, that’s lucky,” she whispers.

“I do believe our dear Herald has put it on himself to play the matchmaker,” I murmur with a grin.

“Smart man. He obviously knew you would make me happy.” She smiles and wraps her arms around my neck.

“More likely he knew you would make me so.” I let my hands rummage across her back.

“I make you happy, do I?” She moves forward and straddles my lap as her eyes darkens with allure.

“More than you can possibly imagine.” I capture her lips in a tender kiss.

My lips graze over hers softly, and she doesn’t deepen the kiss. Instead, she allows me to tease her with slow, featherlike kisses across her jaw and neck. As my lips and tongue caress her collarbone, she sighs helplessly, forcing herself to remain quiet as I feel her pulse quicken. Her hands travel across my chest, exploring me slowly. When my lips return to hers, her tongue caresses mine with the same gentleness. There is no rush. No desperation. She leans back on her bedroll pulling me with
her. I lean over her, my thigh in between hers. She is so warm and soft as she gives a quiet moan I’m certain only I can hear. I would give her everything she desires. Anything to make her happy. But not tonight. Not in a camp where we would have to worry about being overheard or interrupted. Not so close to so many dead and wounded, where the ground and the Veil are already soaking up the bloody battle we took part in.

“Solas,” she whispers in a way so endearing it tugs at my heart before she kisses me deeply. We kiss and explore, never taking it any further. When I pull away for air, my forehead rests against hers, and I hear her soft panting. Then someone moaning … loudly. I pull away and we look at each other. Her face turns from disbelief to amusement.

“I think that was Dorian,” she whispers with a cheeky grin.

“Oh, for…” I groan and turn over on my back, laying on my own bedroll.

Mona starts laughing, trying to keep it down as she sits up. A loud grunt follows, and I groan in disgust, but Mona puts a finger to my lips. She turns her head up and with a big grin declares loudly, “I’m glad to hear relations between Tevinter and the Qun are improving!”

“Agreed, though I don’t recall agreeing to attend the negotiations!” the Herald calls back from across the camp.

“Is that what that sound is?” Hawke asks loudly.

“It’s the sound of my coin purse getting lighter!” Varric groans in defeat.

I hear Sera laughing as she joins in.

“It’s like falling through a tree into custard. ‘Too high! Wham! Too fast! Wham! Leaves! Wham! Splat!’”

Bull gives a triumphant roar, and laughter breaks out through the camp as they start to applause.

“I’m glad it amuses you. What I get from my affairs … is my affair,” Dorian complains.

“Granted you don’t have an audience, one assumes!” I reply loudly as well, making Mona laugh.

“Vishante kaffas! I hate you all!” Dorian cries.


The camp continues to laugh, but it dies down after a minute.

“And you accuse me of being evil, vhenan,” I chuckle.

“And yet, you love me. First Andruil, now me. You might want to reconsider your taste in women, love.”

“I never--”

I want to object, but when she leans down for a kiss, I can’t be bothered. I pull away when I feel something beneath my bedroll and see that Atish’an has hidden her face in embarrassment.

Mona leans her head back with a laugh, still holding on to me. I smile as I caress her face with my hand.
“I’ve missed seeing your spirit.”

“I’ve missed you too.” She smiles and nestles in my arm, resting her head on my chest.

Chapter End Notes

Tadaa! Next chapter! Sorry for the cliffhanger - I hope I fixed it with fluff. I’m planning a special Valentines day chapter. It will be a Bonus Chapter and not set in chronological order, but I will make a note in the beginning so you know.

Thank you all for your support and as always requests are welcome. Please leave a comment.

Thanks again to ninaninabobina for beta reading. You’re so wonderful for helping me :)}
Cold (Bonus chapter) *

Chapter Notes

READ BEFORE READING CHAPTER:

This chapter is a bonus chapter. It's not plot relevant and is not placed in this story in chronological order. This is a special chapter I wrote for Valentines Day and to thank my wonderful beta reader ninaninabobina. I wrote this listening to Ruelle - War of Hearts and Fenris' theme (if anyone is curious).

This is written from both Mona and Solas' POV and switches throughout the story.

Enjoy!

Mona POV

Sitting at my desk and going over reports, I’m reminded of how tedious I thought those war table missions were. Now, I sit here with a mountain of paperwork, knowing that each decision I make will have a large impact on the people around me. It’s terrifying. I want to help all of them, but I feel as if I keep falling short. I try not to think of it, but I don’t succeed. Tish is lying on the balcony, looking down longingly. Another life I’m not paying as much attention to as I should. She props her head up as she hears a sound and storms towards the door. I smile to myself, knowing that Solas is not far behind. She barks, whines, and grumbles with excitement making it impossible for me to hear what Solas is telling her. He walks over to me with a smile, Tish not wavering from his side.

“Hello, my heart,” he murmurs, kissing my cheek, and I feel a pleasant shiver go down my spine.

“Hey love.” I stand up to give him a hug. “How was your trip? Found any interesting dreams or spirits?”

He left the day before telling me he needed to do some research, but he didn’t really specify - and to protect myself, I don’t want to know. If he can’t tell me, then it might be something dire, and right now, I have to deal with the Inquisition.

“I’d rather show you. I have talked to Cassandra and told her we will be leaving today and coming back tomorrow. The Herald is searching for Samson, so all we can do here is wait.”

“That sounds lovely, Solas. But all this--” I gesture at the table, and he takes my hand.

“Can wait till tomorrow. I will help you then, and I promise you will not be behind.”

I smile and nod in defeat before he kisses the top of my head. Tish runs over to get her leash and runs towards Solas with it between her jaws.

“Ir abelas, my friend. Not this time.” He looks down at Tish and pets her head.

She looks up at him with big eyes and a pitiful whine that makes me both smile and ache. He gives a fond chuckle and crouches down to meet Tish on her level. And the Dalish say that dogs will guard
against the Dread Wolf … pfft … Either someone forgot to inform my dog or they have entirely underestimated just how fond he is of animals in general. It’s something I had forgotten - or perhaps never known? There are so many things I don’t remember anymore. It’s been years since I played the games, and they are a mere hollow representation of reality.

This is not a game where I can just pick the option I think will work and reload if it doesn’t. This is reality, and Solas is so much more than I expected. I had always been fond of Solas, but it doesn’t compare to how I see him now. I had not realised how gentle he is. How when every time there is a wounded person nearby, he is the first to act. How he can observe animals almost unnoticed, and a smile will always form on his lips. Nugs, birds, wolves, or Tish.

I was wary of approaching him in the beginning. I wanted to keep my distance, and I thought the years had made any romantic fondness I had imagined go away. I know what he intends after all. I needed to protect myself, and being his friend was enlightening. Then he kissed me. My kiss on his cheek was meant as nothing but a friendly gesture, but he surprised me. And I was lost. Every feeling that had gathered accumulated into a whirlpool beyond anything I had imagined. And as he sits there on the floor petting my dog, I don’t see an ancient, powerful elf, but a kind man with an affection and compassion greater than anyone else’s.

“I’m certain Cole will enjoy your company,” he tells her, and Tish grumbles - not completely against the idea, but not convinced. She looks at me with her big, brown eyes and whines.

“We still love you,” I coo at her, not really knowing why we can’t bring her.

“I also might have left a bone with Cole,” Solas tells her in a low voice.

That gets Tish’s attention, and she stares intently at him. She gives a happy bark and tries to lick his face, nearly knocking him over in the process as he just manages to keep her at a distance, nuzzling her ears. She then twirls around herself before pouncing down the stairs.

“How many people do you think she will knock over on her way down into the Tavern?” I laugh.

“Hopefully, enough so that I can slip away with the Inquisitor unnoticed.” There is a mischievous glint in his eyes as he rises.

“That sounded almost nefarious.” I grin at him as he walks towards me.

“Are you afraid, Inquisitor?”

“Intrigued,” I correct.

“Get your things and we’ll leave.”

If he is taking me towards Crestwood, I think I might have to “slip” and break my ankle.

Solas guides me up through the mountains, and I feel the air rushing through my clothes. Had I know he was taking me this way, I would have dressed warmer.

“It’s fucking cold!” I shiver.
“Language, Inquisitor,” he teases, and I can’t keep myself from snorting. A truly unladylike sound that makes me wonder how he can possibly look at me with such affection. That man has strange tastes.

“Says you. Do I need to remind you that I know exactly what ‘fenedhis lasa’ means?”

He gives a short laugh, and a faint blush starts showing on his cheeks and the tip of his ears. He is so damned cute!

“You know, if you truly want to teach Sera elven, then profanities are probably a good place to start,” I tease with a quirky smile. When he chuckles, I can’t help but laugh too hard at my own joke. I hate it when that happens. He must think of me as such a dork!

Solas POV

“Something to consider.” I chuckle.

Her laugh is so warm and heartfelt. Genuine. It affects everyone around her. It’s like a warmth that spreads through your chest and makes you feel the happiness as well. Her spirit is intoxicating and vibrant, and I had never expected to find anyone who could draw my attention from the Fade as she does.

I had expected Mona to be excited by the prospect of mystery and exploration, but as we leave Skyhold, she seems hesitant. I take her hand in mine, and for a moment, she smiles, though it doesn’t quite reach her eyes. It’s not until we walk up towards the mountains away from Ferelden that her spirit seems to lighten.

“Where are we going?”

“To the other side of that mountain.”

“Is there a ruin up there? Some elven artifact?” Her eyes sparkle with curiosity.

“Patience, vhenan. You will see soon enough.”

She gives me a mock glare, and I shake my head with a grin.

“Good thing we didn’t bring Tish. She would have been freezing. My good girl.” She smiles fondly as she thinks of her dog.

I feel a smile form on my lips. She cares for the dog a great deal - any animal really. There is such a tenderness to her spirit that makes me believe that any life, no matter how small, is important to her. The burden she has chosen to carry must weigh heavier on her than most. Even now, I can see her mind pondering as strongly as if she had brought the documents with her. The weight of the world is on her shoulders. And I can’t help feeling that I was the one who placed it there. It only makes the times she laughs so much more dear to my heart. My eyes meet hers for a moment and we continue to walk in silence.
Mona POV

Sometimes, that sadness will appear in his eyes out of nowhere. He thinks he has to correct the world on his own. That it is his burden and responsibility. He doesn’t understand that, if he truly wants things to change, then we all need to do it together. It’s not a quick fix, and even with all his might and power, he can’t do it on his own. I think he knows that, but life has taught him that he can’t trust others. I don’t know how he learned that lesson, but it has been an excruciatingly painful one for him to carry so deeply for so long.

The Dread Wolf.

He wants to protect all of us, but he thinks he is forced to choose. Choosing is easier. It means no debate, no corruption, no trust. All the things he hates, because he has seen what it can lead to. Even after all this time, I believe he still thinks that I don’t understand - and I don’t have the words to explain it. I remember Earth and all the corruption. No society was above it - no matter how evolved. Every form of government was flawed in some way. And even if I find the words, show him in the Fade, will I have merely confirmed his fears? Shown him that a good society can’t be created on hope and wishes alone. If he could only see what I see when I look at him. My Solas does not seek or want power. He does not want minions or to be seen as a god. But I know he will not give up his power. Not because he wants it, but because he fears others will misuse it. He wants to protect them like a loving but, ultimately, overprotective father.

My darling love, will you become a wise king or a benevolent dictator? You will rule from the distance and your people will thrive under you. I have no doubt of that, but how can I make you understand that Thedas does not need you to be that? It needs a protector in shadows as time will evolve and change it. It needs you to show faith in it, but you lost faith long ago. When will you understand that you are not just the protector of the elves, but of all of them? I know what you will do to the Qunari. I know you care for all of us. But me knowing and you understanding is not the same thing. If Lavellan’s love was not enough for you to see this, then how can I possibly hope that mine is?

“Vhenan?” He calls to me with a concerned expression.

“Sorry, my mind drifted,” I reply as evenly as I can.

“Nowhere pleasant, from the looks of it.”

“I was contemplating the likelihood of you being able to heal my toes of frostbite,” I grouch with a playful sparkle in my eyes - I hope. Otherwise, I just turned out to be the most insufferable date ever.

“You do not usually complain so,” he points out with a teasing smile. Good. Awkwardness avoided.

“A bad habit I picked up from Varric.” I grin, then turn to look down over the mountains, “It’s so beautiful.” I sigh, seeing my breath fog in the air.

I feel him behind me, and he puts a blanket around my shoulders.

“It gets better,” he promises against my ear and gives me a peck on my earlobe.

He guides me for a little while longer, and I see it. Bright lights in colours of purple, green, blue, and
pink cascade like waves across the night sky.

“You weren’t kidding … This is…” I give a breathless chuckle as I try to find the words. “It looks like the Fade is trickling through the Veil into this world.”

I feel him against my back again. He does this a lot, I’ve noticed. Like it is the best way to protect me. He puts his hands on my shoulders, and I feel his chin on the top of my head.

“Now, close your eyes and listen,” he whispers softly.

I close my eyes and listen. I hear the wind howling through the mountains and smile as it rushes past me almost playfully. Then I hear the faint sounds like bells or … crystal. I open my eyes and smile in amazement.

“The mountains are singing.”

“I hoped you would enjoy it.” His voice sounds so pleased, and I rest my head back against him. I love it when the worry leaves him. “Come,” he says softly, “there is more.”

“A sled back down? Because then I hope we can race.” I grin and he gives short laugh.

“Not quite.” He takes my hand and leads me up a little further.

Just on the other side is a tent. It’s one of the larger ones that belongs to the Inquisition, except there is no roof. I walk over to it and see that a magic shield covers the top part. My fingers slide against it, and I smile at the tickling sensation.

“How are you able to maintain it? Wards?” I ask studying it.

“Glyphs, a very old and rare technique. It is only possible to create where the Veil is thin. Like here,” he explains with his usual patience as he observes me. He takes my hand and leads me to the front of the tent.

“Come. You’re shivering.”

When he speaks to me with such care in his voice, I believe I would follow him anywhere. He filled the inside of the tent with the softest pillows and furs, a metal fire pit in the middle. Solas ignites the wood with his magic, and then makes a lid float above it on three chains, so we can still see the light from above through the magic ceiling. My heart aches at the beauty of it all and the trouble he has gone through for my sake. My boots quickly discarded, I crawl towards him and put my arms around his neck before kissing him. His lips are cold from the freezing mountain air but just as soft and tender as always. His chilly fingers brush against my neck, looking for the only naked skin on my body, sending a shiver through me.

“Thank you. You didn’t have to do all this for me,” I murmur, pulling away with my eyes still closed.

“I can think of no one else worthy of it,” he murmurs in return, giving my lips another soft kiss.

I would speak if I had the words, but he always manages to catch me off guard. I’m so much more comfortable when he is teaching me something or talking about ideas. Anything that takes the attention away from me. As he looks at me now, I can feel my insides tremble - and I’m not certain it’s from the cold. His smiles warmly, taking off his coat, and then reaching into his pack.

“I’ve brought food and tea,” he states as he starts to put things near the fire.
“You hate tea,” I chuckle.

“But you don’t,” he points out with a smile.

“I hope you brought at least something you like,” I laugh and he chuckles.

“You don’t count?”

I feel my face flushing instantly and throw myself into the pillows and furs, hiding my face and making him laugh loudly. Sometimes I think he gets far too much amusement from making me uncomfortable.

“Ass…” I grumble into the pillow, uncertain if it’s loud enough for him to hear. When I turn on my back, he is still grinning at me. I sigh with a tremble and look into the sky, studying every piece of it. Solas turned the tent in a direction where we cannot see the scar from the Breach. Like it never existed. As if nothing existed besides us. My eyes don’t waver from it while I sit up to remove my gloves and coat as the tent starts to warm up.

“Did the sky look the same before the Veil?” I ask, laying back down.

“Yes and no. The lights are a natural phenomenon that occurs as a state of nature, not the Fade,” he explains as I can hear him poking the fire.

“Earth has it, too. We call them Northern lights. I’ve never seen anything but pictures, though. I think the colour is a little different here.”

I study it closely as I see the purple and green colours mingling.

“That would be the interaction with the Veil. It reflects it. The spirits linger close to it.”

“I can see why.”

He lays down next to me.

“Are you still cold?”

“I’m starting to get warmer.” I scooch myself closer to him and cuddle up against him, still looking toward the sky.

I lean my cheek against his chest, feeling it slowly rising and falling. He gives a pleasant sigh and pulls a blanket over us. I don’t think anyone else truly appreciates how kind he is. How considerate he can. Most either see his arrogance or fail to notice him at all. He is so guarded, and I can’t help but feel incredibly lucky that he allows himself to be so vulnerable and open with me. I love him.

Solas POV

We lay in silence, watching the stars and the light. I hear the crackling of the fire, the sound of her calm breathing, the feel of her warmth against my chest.
“You’re thinking,” she murmurs.

“Every mind usually is.”

“Alright, you’re pondering. Anything you want to share?”

“I’m reminded of a conversation I had with Varric some time ago. About a fisherman who lived alone on an island. Most of his tribe had fallen to beasts or disease. His wife had died in childbirth. He was the only one left. He could have struck out on his own to find a new land, new people. But he stayed. He spent every day catching fish in a little boat, every night drinking fermented fruit juice and watching the stars.”

“That’s a gloomy story for such a pleasant night.”

“True. However, when I first encountered the memory, I thought he had given up. Varric informed me that the man continued to live his life despite all the heartache. He saw a courage in that life that I failed to recognize.”

“You wonder, don’t you, if that will be your life?” She turns over on her side and looks at me.

“At times,” I confess and turn towards her. She edges closer to me and wraps her arms around my neck and her leg across my waist.

“For most of us, life doesn’t last forever, and even our moments of happiness seem fleeting. But it’s not about quantity of life but the quality of it. We cling to memories and experiences that enrich each moment. We let those moments define us and take strength from them. You more than anyone should know the value of a memory. Those are as precious as any treasure.”

“Perhaps I should.”

“Then don’t sacrifice these moments for worries about the past or the future. Enjoy them and save them in your heart for when life is harder.” She gives me a small smile. “And always remember to look at the stars.”

“I don’t think I have ever loved them as much since I met you.” I touch her face with my fingers as she closes her eyes with a faint blush.

To my surprise, she straddles me, and I look up at her, the sky above creating a beautiful light around her.

“So, how do we make this a happy memory?”

“You are already here. It is hard to imagine how anything else could compare.” I smile up at her.

The blush on her face is instant as she hides her face in her hands, and I can’t keep myself from grinning. My affection for her runs deeper than I could have imagined, but she is right. Tonight should not be spoiled by my changeable disposition.

“Are you being grim and fatalistic just to get me into bed? There are easier ways to do that, you know.” She chuckles.

“I am grim and fatalistic. Getting you into bed is just an enjoyable side benefit.” I smirk.

She grabs my wrists and puts them above my head, softly pinning me with a mock threatening look.

“I’ve heard that phrase a lot. Just a side benefit?” she sneers playfully.
“It was not meant as an offense.”

“Well, I’m offended, so tell me, ‘Dread Wolf,’ how are you going to make it up to me?”

My eyes narrow and my lips twitch in a predatory fashion.

“Is that a threat, Inquisitor?”

“Well, I do seem to have you at my mercy.” She bites her lips seductively.

With a quick motion, I flip her over on her back, pinning her beneath me.

“So quickly the tables turn, Inquisitor. Do you surrender?”

“Never!” she cries out in glee.

“How entirely expected. Whatever should I do with you?”

I begin to nibble and kiss her neck, where I know she is the most sensitive. Each kiss drawing a sigh from her lips.

“Solas…”

“Yes?” I murmur against the pulse on her neck.

Her grin widens.

“The food is burning.”

I look back over my shoulder, and she makes her move.

“I can’t believe you fell for that,” she giggles.

I can’t help but laugh as she flees from my grasp, and I start contemplating my next move, but then something in her eyes softens. She crawls over to me and holds me tight - her victory cut short by her own actions.

“I love making you smile and laugh,” she confesses sweetly.

I embrace her and take in her scent. She could tease me endlessly, yet she never takes it too far before her kindness shines through once more. I love her.

“When we fall asleep, come and find me in the Fade. There is something I want to show you,” she requests in a whisper against my ear.

“Ma nuvenin, vhenan. Not just yet, however.” I pull away and look at her. “I assume you have not eaten all day, as usual?”

“I’ve been busy.” She shrugs.

“Then let us eat something before it truly does burn.” I suggest with a kiss to her brow.
Mona POV

I look up into the sky with my tea nestled between my hands. I’m not sure what I had expected when Solas took me up here, but this is so incredible. I could get lost in that sky forever, and I only wish that I could have had a camera or a telescope to take it all in. The tent is finally warm and comfortable. I have taken off my trousers and relax in my shirt. Everything is quiet except for the crackling of the fire and the faint, beautiful sound of the wind rushing through the mountains. Neither Solas nor I say much, but the silence is a comfortable one. It’s so peaceful. I catch Solas looking at me again, and his eyes avert from mine. I finish the tea quickly and crawl over to him, making him lay down with me as before, looking up into the sky. He holds me so carefully in his arms, as if he thinks that if he holds me too tightly I will vanish into nothing.

Every day, what I see in his eyes and feel in my heart is that we are at war with ourselves. My heart and purpose are as divided as his. These moments are precious because we can convince our hearts to forget. In these moments, the Dread Wolf and the Inquisitor are mere figments of someone’s imagination.

His breathing becomes softer, and I notice he has fallen asleep. Who would have guessed that a man with such a menacing reputation could be this gentle? All I can think of as I look at him is how much I want to kiss him. I imagine myself straddling him and capturing his lips in a lingering kiss. How I would begin to … argh, damn it. Pointless thoughts since I can’t make myself wake him, anyway. Instead, I snuggle up close to him and try to fall asleep in his arms.

Solas POV

When I find Mona, she is sitting in the same odd tavern I have found her in before. She is sitting at the bar wearing a long black coat. I swallow as I see the expanse of her bare legs and notice her shoes have high heels. They cannot be comfortable to walk in.

“There you are.” She smiles and looks at me. She is wearing dark make-up, and her lips are a dark red.

She gets off the stool and goes over to kiss me on my cheek. Even with those absurd heels, she is shorter than I am.

“I have a surprise for you.” She steps back and looks at me.

Her hands run over my shoulders and my clothes change into some sort of black suit with a green sweater underneath. I give her a curious look.

“I see your ability to manipulate the Fade is improving.” I raise an eyebrow.

I admit, I’m impressed with her progress.

“Well, thank you. Not by much, though, but it will serve for this purpose.”
“Can we get away from here? The noise is insufferable.” I frown.

She leans her head back with a short laugh.

“Alright, come on.” She takes my arm and leads me out on the street.

It’s night, and there are bright lights everywhere and carriages without horses filling the streets along with other transportation devices unlike any I have seen. It’s intriguing and so far removed from the serenity of the tent in the waking world. Chaos seems rampant in this dream, and yet, patterns of order emerge. She doesn’t take me far before the Fade shapes before us, and I see a regal building with an Orlesian feel to it. In the middle is a pyramid made entirely out of glass.

“This is the Louvre Museum in Paris on Earth,” she explains. “It has some of the most beautiful art ever created. I thought I would show you. No guarantee for accuracy, though, it’s been many years since I saw it.”

She takes me inside the building, and there is no one there. No spirits linger here to enact the people who used to walk these halls. All of it is merely from her memory. Spirits will eventually discover this dream she has shaped, but for now, we are alone. I can faintly hear a pleasant sound in the halls. I walk around with my hands placed behind my back, taking in the art around me. Each is unique and different in its own way, a different style or representation of a complex mind and world. It’s fascinating.

When I turn to look at Mona, she is no longer wearing her coat but a revealing red dress with a deep neckline. The colour compliments her hair and skin beautifully. I can feel myself swallowing, my mouth opening slightly. She is looking at the art herself, not noticing how I have been entranced by her. The usual black and white hides her so well. It’s the colours of the Inquisition and the colours which are least likely to attract attention. The deep red transforms her into a beacon of my desire. It is as vibrant and warm as her spirit, and all that I am seems set ablaze by the sight of her.

I walk over to her and place my hands on her waist, pulling her flush and against me, and kiss her deeply. She makes a noise of surprise as I slightly dip her sideways so that I might better deepen the kiss further. My tongue caresses her lips and meets hers only a moment after. A tremor passes through me from my heart to my fingertips as I hold her and feel the smoothness of the tantalizing fabric. When her lips leave mine, I keep my eyes closed, trying desperately to regain some control over myself.

“If the dress has this much effect on you, then you should see what is underneath.” She gives me a smoldering look, biting her lip seductively.

“Such thoughts would attract demons, I fear,” I smile shakily, trying and failing to even my breathing.

Something in her eyes darken as she looks up at me with a full blush. She leans in and puts her lips to my ear, making a pleasant wave rush down my spine. “Then why don’t you wake up and have a look instead?”

I wake instantly and feel myself blushing at the effect that small remark had on my abilities in the Fade. We are both awake, and I look down at her in my embrace where her face is heated and flushed. Her eyes are dark with a desire deeper than I have seen before. She pushes herself up and
gives me a single kiss before pulling away. She straddles me and removes her shirt slowly. Each button is a promise of something alluring beneath as my breathing grows heavier.

As the shirt falls, red satin is barely covering her, and I have to swallow. No wonder she was so cold on the journey here. Even in the dim light of the fire and light above, I can see her blushing as I can’t keep myself from staring. The nuances of the flames reflect in the shimmering fabric and the waves of her hair. She looks more radiant than a spirit of the Fade. My fingers slide across the delicate, smooth fabric, and she gives a sigh as my fingers reach her breast.

“Ar lath ma,” I whisper before sitting up and capturing her lips in a deep kiss.

With an impatient vigor, she begins to pull at my clothing, and with eager motions, I help her to discard every thread covering my body in haste. I try to move to get a better hold on her, when she pushes me gently back onto the soft layer beneath us.

“Stay,” she requests softly, “Let me take care of you.”

Her hand drifts along the inside of my thigh as she says it, and I can do nothing but surrender. Her tongue and lips taste my skin, leaving a trail in their path as they travel down my neck, chest, stomach, and lower. I prop myself up on my elbows to watch her while her delicate touch envelopes me. Even in this, she shows both care and skill.

“You don’t--” As if expecting my objection, her tongue caresses the tip and my head falls backwards.

When my eyes meet hers again, the adoration I’m met with is almost overwhelming. My chest constricts at the depth of feeling I see.

“I love you, too,” she murmurs before lowering her lips.

A sigh escapes me as the warmth of her mouth subsumes me. Every movement she makes is done with confidence and attention to every sound escaping me. The way her hand grabs firmly at the root and releases at the top is set at a pace that matches the thrumming of my heart. She discovers when to twirl that sinful tongue to make me moan and tremble.

There is nothing hurried or rushed in her ministrations. The motions are languid and exploratory. I can feel she knows what she is doing to me, but still she takes her time to get to know me, as if committing it all to memory with the purpose of doing it again and again. Laying still becomes more difficult as a knot tightens in my stomach. My fingers dig into the pillows and furs in an attempt to keep still. I would reach for her, but I’m uncertain that I can be gentle, and I wish to be nothing else when it comes to her.


Her deep eyes look directly into mine, unyielding, overflowing with a devotion I do not deserve. I fall back into the furs with a cry as my back arches. It has been so long, but never like this, the ecstasy I’m feeling made more potent by the love I feel both for and from her. Her mouth never wavers, but stays until the last wave of my pleasure is finally abated.

I struggle to catch my breath as she lays down next to me.

“So, am I still a side benefit?” she teases.

“You,” I take her by her arms and pull her to me in a passionate kiss before finishing the sentence, “are nothing short of my heart’s desire. Ma vhenan’ara.”
Mona POV

My heart aches at his words. I wish I could be as poetic and sweet as he is, but I’m not and have to settle for the obvious.

“I love you so much. It has never felt like this before.” I give a quaking sigh, leaning my brow against his. Regardless of my inability to be original and romantic, he seems pleased as he pulls me closer. Our bodies intermingle as his breathing slowly returns to normal. Should I be impressed that I can make even a “god” become so undone? Dread Wolf take me, indeed. I giggle without noticing, and Solas looks into my eyes. Rather than asking, he captures my lips in a heartfelt kiss. The tent lights up from a green spell he casts, but I don’t get the opportunity to ask what he did as his hands begin exploring again.

His every touch is gentle and kind. I will never get so much as a mark from him. I hear myself whimper at his light touches - begging him to be firmer. A part of me enjoys this teasing and anticipation, while another cries out for him. His fingers travel between my legs, and I’m a little embarrassed by the breathless moans I make from this simple gesture. To my relief, it is enough for his touch to deepen, and I hear a groan rumble in his chest when he feels my underwear is already wet. With his teeth, he slowly removes the fabric covering one of my breasts, and his tongue caresses my nipple. I used to hate it after I had my son - the act of former lovers being too rough or reminding me of leeches. This is nothing like it. It’s sensual and arousing. Aching for more contact, I begin to remove my underwear, and Solas grabs a hold of them, removing them completely.

His lips move to mine again, and I move my hands to his neck. His hand once again explores my folds, and I feel him hardening against me. How is that even possible?

“Shifty mage,” I chuckle before releasing a moan as my hand caresses his length again.

“Infatuated mage,” he corrects with a smile.

His fingers reach the spot that makes me cry out. I don’t know what he does, but he has placed some sort of magic there that keeps pulsating against me. I can’t decide if it’s sadistic or merciful, but I’m addicted to it, nonetheless.

“Solas,” I manage between my ragged breaths.

“Yes, my heart?” he says so lovingly that, despite all the sensations, the quiver in my heart becomes the strongest.

I’m so close it feels like agony.

“I need you closer,” I plead.

He kisses me deeply as he hovers himself above me. I cling to him as he enters me, and I press him as close to me as possible. I want to feel him with me. To know that this is real. My Solas. He keeps kissing me, not abandoning any part of me. In an incoherent moment, I wonder if spirits that fall in love can truly merge and become one. I try to make my pace match his and make myself contract and release to improve his pleasure, but I’m barely self-aware at this point. I don’t mean to, but as my back arches, my nails dig into the skin on his, back making him hiss. Even so, he kisses my neck, letting his tongue linger on my pulse.
“Sing for me, vhenan, and even the echoes of these mountains will envy its beauty,” he breathes in my ear, and I shatter.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, I’m really not good at writing smut, which is part of the reason why I’m writing this fanfic to improve my writing. Any criticism good or bad will be appreciated.

I hope you enjoyed all the fluff :) Thank you all for reading and your wonderful comments!

Thanks to ninaninabobina, who made this chapter so much more awesome than I could have done on my own :)

fenedhis lasa = Supposedly means "wolf's cock"
Ma vhenan’ara = My heart's desire
I awake the following morning with Mona’s head still resting on my chest. One of my hands runs fingers through her hair as the other laces fingers with hers. I listen to the serene sound of her breathing and feel the heavy weight of Atish’an’s head on my legs. I’m trapped in this blissful moment, and I wish it would last for eternity. Much to my dismay, the soldiers outside begin to make noise, and Mona stirs. Her eyes flutter open, and she stretches against me.

“Good morning,” I whisper, and I’m rewarded by a warm smile.

“Good morning,” she whispers back, gracing my lips with a gentle kiss.

She pulls from my grasp, and I feel instantly cold by her absence.

“I’m going to talk to Cullen and see what the state of our wounded are. Depending on if they can be moved or not, the army should start marching home tomorrow. We will need to take the horses back. I can’t leave Josephine on her own for much longer. And we need to prepare for the Winter Palace,” Mona starts to explain as she dresses.

The tender woman who slept peacefully in my arms is once again hidden away behind the mask of the Inquisitor.

“And the Deep Roads?” I ask, sitting up and reaching for my coat.

She gives me a quirky smile.

“Surely, you didn’t think I had forgotten?” I raise an eyebrow.

“That was optimistic of me,” she admits with a low chuckle. “I’ll go down there today with Atish’an.”

“I’m going with you,” I state as a matter of fact.

“No, Solas, your healing will be needed here,” she reasons, and I take her hand.

“I will be of no use here if I’m worrying about you. I will help the wounded this morning, and we can go into the tunnels this afternoon. How far do you intend to explore them?”

“Not far. I just need to see if there are any signs of anything unusual. Exploring them fully will take too long. I just need to know where to continue my search once Corypheus is dealt with,” she explains, and I lift her hand to my lips.

As soon as she exits the tent, she is greeted by Hawke, who gives her a large hug. My eyes dart at him, and when his gaze meets mine, I know he sees the animosity in my eyes. I only break the stare when Atish’an stretches and rubs against me for me to pet her.
“Hello, my friend.” I rub her head before getting to my feet and walking towards the camp with the wounded.

I reach the camp and see the extent of the wounded, and I can’t help but give a loud, mournful sigh. All this pointless suffering. I see Cole walking around both the wounded and the healers tending to them. Morning turns to noon, and when we reach afternoon, I feel exhausted. To think how much I could once accomplish with a mere thought and how weak I have become. How easily I could have spared them all this suffering. I must recover my orb from Corypheus. I must regain my power. There is no other way.

I walk to find Mona at the outskirts of the camp so we might try and discover if anything in the Deep Roads can provide her with any answers. Instead, I see Hawke standing on the edge, looking down from the precipice to the dark tunnels beneath.

“Hawke.” I greet him in a hard voice, and he turns.

“Ahh, Solas. I was waiting for this.” The cold amusement in his face makes my skin crawl.

“How observant of you,” I remark dryly as I lean against my staff, not looking at him. The less time I spend around that man, the better.

“You have been glaring at me like a frenzied wolf for more than three days. You really are arrogant, aren’t you?” he challenges, and I nearly laugh at the absurdity that he - of all people - feels he has any justification for calling me that.

“Tell me, how does it feel?” I look at him with a narrow gaze.

“My new boots? They fit quite snugly, thank you. A gift from Mona,” he quips, turning his foot in the air.

“How does it feel being you? Are you blissfully unaware, or deep inside, is some part of you banging on the walls, screaming?” I sneer.

“Well, it could be better. Some warm stockings too might do the trick.” He shrugs playfully, obviously trying to ignore me.

“Continue with your merry japes. It would be sad if you were forced to examine yourself with a critical eye. Though I should watch my tone. I’m speaking to the great Champion, after all. The judge of all, and with a moral high ground above those of mere mortal men and women. Even those you consider friends are not to be forgiven - or understood. Merely crushed underneath your boot.” I feel heat rise to my face.

“Usually, I simply prefer a knife.” He grins. “I assume you are referring to Mona. It might have escaped your notice, but nothing in the world can crush her - regardless of their boot size.”

I have to fight myself not to take a step towards him.

“Have you no remorse for what you put her through?”

“What I said was true - and by her actions yesterday I would say she took it to heart. She finally took a stand.” He crosses his arms in defiance.

“She has always taken a stand. She has always tried to protect this world and the people in it. You think you could have done better?” I challenge, grabbing a tighter hold on my staff.
“I know I would have had she told me everything. But I have forgiven her for that,” he says proudly, and I feel my eyes flaring. Had I been at my full power, I might not have been able to contain my rage.

“She deserves better! An apology, an understanding of exactly how much she risked. You think she enjoyed this? Seeing all this pain and suffering?”

“I think she was too cowardly and made excuses that would make her feel better,” he spits as his eyes narrow looking down at me.

I give a bitter laugh.

“I had spent little time with your people before this. From the stories, I thought you all thuggish, simple, and crude. An assumption you have been all too happy to confirm. If not for the Inquisitor, I would still have believed it to be true.” I turn and walk away from him.

“You might not know this, Solas, but my wife is Dalish. I know exactly what ‘vhenan’ means,” he calls after me, and I turn slightly to look at him over my shoulder. “And Mona’s elven is better than mine.”

He looks at me for a moment and starts laughing, walking over to me and putting a hand on my shoulder. I push it off me in disgust.

“You’re right. About everything,” he admits with a heavy sigh. “I blamed her because it was easier. We are all responsible for the world going to shit. Sometimes, individuals just set it into motion. Blaming Mona and Anders was easier. It’s not like the Maker would listen if I were to shout at him,” he laments as his shoulder slump.

I can feel my anger simmering beneath my skin. The provocation, the exposure, and blatant disregard for anyone's feelings as long as it serves as an anchor for his amusement has me seething.

“Then why the pretense?” I sneer.

“Because I was curious to see just how much you love her,” he replies honestly. “You hide it so well, I would never have guessed had I not overheard that conversation. I wanted to make sure you were sincere and not just using her because of her role as Inquisitor.” He crosses his arms and eyes me up and down like he means to challenge me.

“Even if I were, why would that concern you?”

“My sister, Bethany, was killed by an ogre about a year before I met Mona. I believe the Maker sent her to us, just as some say the Herald was. Keeping her safe is my penance for letting Bethany die. I wanted to make sure that when I leave for Weisshaupt there is someone besides Varric who can protect her from herself.”

As he speaks, I begin to recognize the root of all his anger - the disappointment and worry of a brother.

“I won’t tell Varric or anyone else. I assume when you’re ready to let the world know, you will.” He bows his head and walks away.

He passes Mona as she walks towards me with Atish’an by her side. She looks at Hawke then me with a curious expression.

“What are you two up to?” she asks, narrowing her eyes in suspicion as she approaches.
“We simply had a difference of opinion,” I smirk as she stands next to me.

She looks down into the Deep Roads with a humorous expression.

“And you didn’t push Hawke into the abyss. I’m impressed by your restraint.” Her beautiful grin turns anxious as she swallows, staring down between the cliffs.

“It’s alright,” I assure her as I take her hand.

She smiles at me and interlaces her fingers with mine.

“I know.” She rubs my hand with her thumb, then opens a portal in front of us that leads a few meters down into the chasm.

As we start walking, I notice her breathing is strained. She closes her eyes and leans into me as I guide her down into the tunnels. After a while, she stops me and embraces my waist, taking a deep breath. I hold her close to my chest and rest my cheek on her head while Atish’an presses up against her mistress’s leg to give her some comfort. When she steps back, she takes a deep breath and gives me a smile.

“Thank you for being my anchor when I’m not strong enough,” she says softly.

“You have no reason to doubt your own strength,” I encourage, stroking her cheek.

She starts walking ahead, pushing aside her fear as if it never existed. Her courage never ceases to amaze me - if only she was not so foolhardy.

“You know, one of these days we need to go on a real date.” She grins.

“A date?” I furrow my brow, and she chuckles.

“It’s what we call it when we start … courting, I suppose. Though it's a lot less formal and there are no expectations of anything.” She holds her hands out as if she means to calm any worries I might have, and I give her a wry smile.

“I see.” I chuckle as she blushes.

“Don’t look at me like that.” She giggles. “All I meant was it would be nice to spend time together that is not during a horde march, down in the Deep Roads, in the midst of a battle, or even in the Fade.”

“Like when we were stargazing at Haven?” I smile at her and hers brightens.

“Yes … that night was…”

“Wonderful.” I reach for her cheek, and she leans against my palm. “I will see what I can arrange when we return to Skyhold.”

Ma vhenan beams at me, then crawls down the broken stairs.

“Might have to wait a bit, though. I plan on taking a three hour long bath when we get back and spending a week in bed.” She walks over to the ledge and creates a portal to a ledge opposite the chasm, leaving me on the other side.

“Well, I’m sure that would qualify as well.” I smirk at her, and I’m sure my eyes are darkening.
She turns around, biting her lips with a seductive smile and purposefully hooded eyes.

“And pray tell me, Master Solas, what would we possibly entertain ourselves with spending all that time in bed?”

“Reading, talking, exploring the mysteries of the Fade,” I answer innocently.

She laughs. “You tease.” She then turns around and focuses on the writing on the wall.

“What are you looking for?”

“I have absolutely no idea. Anything that could give me a clue as to why I’m here. But it’s a pretty large haystack spread over an entire continent. But because of its proximity to the Wardens, these tunnels don’t have as many darkspawn. Speaking of, did the darkspawn really come from the Golden City?”

“Yes, and no. The blight and darkspawn are far older than the Chantry assumes.”

“Let me guess … it’s part of the reason you locked the Evanuris away?”

“Yes. It’s what they used to kill Mythal.”

She makes a grimace.

“And now I understand why you didn’t kill them if that’s what it takes. And the Golden City?”

“Used to be Elgar'nan's temple, actually.”

“God of the sun … explains the Sunburst Throne. Where did the Blight come from? Andruil?”

“Yes. She kept stalking the depths so often that it finally corrupted her. Or actually, a Titan did. Mythal eventually had to interfere and kill the Titan, but the Evanuris saw the power they could gain through that corruption. It drove them mad with power.”

“Solas, if this is too difficult to talk about, then you don’t have to,” she says softly.

“It’s fine. I just … I’m unaccustomed to talking about these matters with anyone.”

She opens a portal and stands next to me.

“Thank you for trusting me. I know how hard that is for you.”

“You make it far too easy for me to reveal everything.”

“What about the Old Gods?”

“They are the seals that keep the Evanuris locked not only in the Fade, but an eluvian within it. When the last Old God falls—”

“The Evanuris are freed. Shit … No wonder the Wardens’ plans made you panic.”

“Indeed … no matter what comes after Corypheus is dealt with, I will need to stand against them. They reached out to the magisters with the intention of making them contract the Blight and engineered the darkspawn with a purpose to seek out the Old Gods and wreak havoc on Thedas, destroying the seals to their prisons while doing so.”
“And in order for you to wake your people and deal with the Evanuris, the Veil has to fall. Before the Blights do it for you.” She turns to me with a compassionate gaze. “Emma ir abelas, ma vhenan.”

I take a step closer to her and let my thumb brush against her lower lip.

“Elven sounds so beautiful coming from your lips,” I murmur.

“Then teach me more,” she whispers, leaning closer to me.

“Mir vhenan ma’athlan.” I smile, then lean in to whisper against her ear, “My heart belongs to you.” (Literally: my heart is your home.)

“One of these days, I’ll be the one to utter words that have you twisting in agony,” she sneers playfully.

“Every smile you give me already does.”

She pushes me backwards until I hit the stone wall and gives me a bruising kiss. I wrap my arms around my love tightly, crushing her weight against me, deepening the kiss further.

She starts laughing against my mouth.

“What?” I ask breathlessly.

“When we met that couple in Crestwood and I told you the location didn’t matter, I had not imagined we would make out in the Deep Roads. Perhaps we should try to restrain ourselves.” She gives a wry smile.

“That might be more difficult than you think. You throw me off so easily.” I kiss her brow. “But you’re right. We should focus.”

We walk for a few more minutes into the deep along a road that leads down into the chasm. We can hear darkspawn approach, and I reach for my staff. Mona holds a hand in front of me.

“I have this.” She winks at me and cracks her knuckles. As the small group approaches, Atish’an starts growling. Mona reaches out and creates a portal beneath them and drops them into the abyss.

“Serves you right, assholes!” She chuckles as we hear them wailing before they land at the bottom. She turns to me with a shudder.

“Whatever you have planned for the Evanuris, make sure you punch Andruil in the face for being responsible for those things.” She gives a sideways grin.

“I will remember,” I promise, shaking my head. I release a sigh at the reminder of what lays ahead. Not that any of it truly matters until Corypheus has been defeated.

Mona walks along the wall of the thaig and lets her fingers dance across the wall, much like I saw her do when she first discovered her chambers at Skyhold. I give a soundless chuckle remembering it. When I kissed her then, I should have held on to my heart and not let go. She stops dead in her tracks and looks at me with an enthusiastic smile.

“Here.” She touches the wall and the runes in her bracers activate, opening a hidden door. “The Wardens are many things, but they never did get the hang of archeology.”

“Seems to me that if you corrupt yourself with darkspawn blood, then you haven’t succeeded at
much of anything but your own early demise,” I scoff.

“But had they not, there would have been no Thedas for you to wake up to…” She looks at me thoughtfully for a moment. “That would have been easier for you, wouldn’t it? Had the world been blighted, you would have felt no remorse in restoring the elves - as long as they didn’t find all the Old Gods first.”

I feel like I’ve been struck.

“I do not do what I must with any pleasure - or happily.” I turn my gaze from her, and Atish’an licks my hand to ease my pain.

“I know. I’m sorry, it was thoughtless of me. I never want to hurt you,” she apologises and puts a hand on my shoulder before entering the chamber.

As we enter the room, I see old dwarven furniture and a lot of bookcases.

“I wonder what dreams this place might hold,” I wonder out loud, looking around.

“If not for the darkspawn, I would encourage it, but for now, I suggest we get anything of value and get out of here.” She looks around and picks up some minor figurines and puts them in her pack. “Tish, see if you can find anything.”

The hound starts to sniff around the place, searching. Mona then reaches for the shelves and sees some old documents.

“Perfect!” she enthuses.

She reaches into her pack and picks up some see through sheets of paper. As her hands shake, one of them breaks.

“Solas,” she says weakly, “I need your help.”

I can see my heart trembling even from a distance. Her claustrophobia is getting worse. That she is able to control it this far is a sign of the strength of her spirit. I walk over to her and delicately pick up the sheets for her.

“It’s wax. I need you to put it directly on top of the page on the shelves, then turn it over and put another sheet on the other side. That way we don’t accidentally tear it or have it disintegrate.”

“Ma nuvenin, vhenan.” I kiss her temple and do as instructed.

When I have carefully covered the pages in the wax, I put them in one of her books where they will not be damaged. In the meantime, Atish’an has found some tablets that Mona picks up as well.

“Thank you, my loves.” She looks at me and then kisses her dog on top of her head. “Now, let us get out of here. Hopefully some of this will give some answers, and if not, hopefully get the attention of the Shaperate in Orzammar.”

I look at her silently as we walk back up towards the surface. I reach for her hand and once again interlace my fingers with hers.

“Do you wish to go home?”

She is quiet for a moment.
“I wish to see my son again.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank all of you for being so devoted and commenting so much. It means a great deal to me.

I hope you'll enjoy this chapter :)

Thanks again to ninaninabobina for beta reading.
My heart still aches at her last words as we return to the surface. Not because I don’t sympathize - if anything I understand her all too well, but my pain is threefold. Whatever ache she feels can’t help but affect me too. I wish I could help her and reunite her with her son - somehow get him here, as the small boy he was, and place him in her arms. But in the deepest part of my heart there is another pain that I should not admit to. I have no right to do so. The overwhelming dread her brilliant mind will succeed and find a way home. If kissing her and being with her is a selfish action on my part, I can’t even think of the word that would qualify for the horror of that particular emotion.

My relief is that the closer we get to the surface the better Mona appears to be doing. We speak little, but her fingers remain intertwined with mine. It is a comfort to me that we are so at ease in each other company - especially if I remember back on those first months we spent at Haven. I can’t recall it without feeling like a fool.

When we return to the surface a runner comes up to Mona.

“Inquisitor! Urgent message for you!” The woman struggles for breath as she hands it to Mona.

She opens the letter with great haste and reads it. Her breathing gets heavy and her eyes wide.

“Scout, get my horse ready this instant. I don’t have a moment to lose,” she instructs as she runs towards her tent.

I walk up to the tent, where she is packing in all haste. Nothing is folded or neatly packed, but merely thrown into the satchel.

“Vh-- Inquisitor, what are you doing?” I look around the camp, but it seems relatively calm. None display the same urgency Mona does.

“I’m sorry, Solas, but I have to leave. This is urgent and it can’t wait,” she doesn’t look at me but merely forces everything down into her pack.

“Is there anything I can do?”

She turns and smiles at me for a moment.

“You’re sweet to offer, but no. This is something only I can do. I have to go tell the others I’m leaving. Make sure that you and the Herald gets back to help Josephine as soon as possible. I will return to Skyhold as soon as I can.”
She gives me a quick peck on my cheek and jumps out of the tent. Before I even have a chance to say goodbye she is running off with Atish’an at her heels - leaving me confused and with a puzzled expression on my face.

“What’s gotten into her?” I hear the Herald ask from behind.

“I’m at a loss,” I confess looking into the direction where she vanished.

“You better not have scared her off, Solas. I have good money invested with Varric on the two of you,” he crosses his arms over his chest as he stands next to me.

I get to my feet and I turn towards him with a disgruntled expression, when he bursts out laughing.

“I jest, I jest! No reason to freeze me or anything!” he holds up his hands in self defence.

“I’m not so certain. There will no doubt be made statues of the Herald of Andraste. I might get a handsome price for the most lifelike version,” I give a devious smirk.

The Herald chuckles with a grin on his face.

“I’m going to have to sleep with one eye open, don’t I?”

“I would suggest next time you direct your jests towards Sera.” I give him a sideways smirk and he makes a playful, nervous gesture.

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It has been days and I have heard nothing from Mona. No letters, no information from the advisors, and I have not even been able to seek her out in the fade. Even Wisdom seems unable to find her. As a result my actions have become somewhat desperate. I’m waiting for my agent to report, trying not to pace as I await him in the fade.

“Felassan,” I greet him as I feel his presence.

“I found her,” he informs me. That he does not bother with a greeting tells me that I was not successful in making him believe that my interest in this matter was mere curiosity.

I ache to ask if she is unharmed, if she seems burdened or upset, but I can’t allow myself to show affection for her. Especially not towards a man who I berated for having a fondness for Briala. Imagine what he would think of me to know I have fallen in love with a human.

“And?” Is what I settle for.

“Turns out that the Inquisition has founded an archaeological expedition made almost entirely out of dwarfs. It’s led by a scholar named Philippe Dubois. A former betrothed of the lady Inquisitor from what I have discovered,” he explains calmly. At least he did not expect this information to affect me in any way - or he is testing me to see how I will react.

“I’ve heard of him,” I remark calmly, though with both some internal fondness and unease.

“Then you are one of the few. Not counting those who call him a madman - which means he probably came to some correct conclusions.” There is some mirth in Felassan’s voice.
“Presumably.” I give a wry smile. “Any notion as to what they are doing?”

Felassan rubs the back of his neck as if he is not quite certain how to answer that question. If something has Felassan taken aback, then it must be something intriguing. Or Mona is trying another one of her experiments.

“Well, the Inquisitor joined them in them above the Hissing Wastes close to Orlais. There is nothing but sand, however, they found something in the dunes.”

“Interesting… Dwarven ruins?” It would seem likely given how she came to this world that they would interest her.

“No.” Felassan shakes his head. “Surprisingly, what they seem to be digging up is a whole lot of metal.”

“Metal? They’re mining?” I frown. That is… unexpected.

“No, metal plates. Entire structures. But that’s not the most intriguing part. They are shipping it to Tevinter.”

“Tevinter? So, what you’re telling me is that the Inquisitor has gone out into the middle of the desert with a scholar, an expedition of nothing but dwarves, excavating metal and sending it to Tevinter?”

Even with all that I have witnessed so far this sounds so absurd it almost has me smiling with disbelief.

“Yes.” There is no deception in his expression.

“Intriguing… There are no Venatori involved?” I dare hardly ask, but I have to. I doubt Mona would deal with them, but she could not be aware of it. She could be in danger as a result.

“No. The Venatori seem to be completely unaware of it. Their efforts are invested in helping Corypheus and sabotaging the Herald. They do not seem to care about her at all. There is one Tevinter with them, however. A former slave by the name of Calpernia. The pieces are sent to her in to Tevinter, then they simply seem to vanish.”

If they are using portals like Mona does, then they could be anywhere. Were they using eluvians I could simply track them, but Mona’s portals are different. I know nothing of her abilities other than that they use runes made of small traces of lyrium and a technology unfamiliar to me. From her home most likely. After what I saw her do at Adamant I’m getting increasingly worried she is involved in something beyond her comprehension. What makes me even more uneasy is the fact she is hiding this from me. For a brief moment I wonder if it is a creation to get her home. My heart aches at the thought, because I know should she find a way, then I would have to see her go. I can’t ask her to stay in Thedas for my sake. No matter how much I might desire to do so.

“How does she know this woman from Tevinter?”

“Uncertain. From what I have been able to gather, she met the slave some years back while visiting Tevinter. She purchased her from her former Master, then freed her. There seems to be some connection between a Magister named Maevaris Tilani and the Inquisitor, but nothing concrete. And since Magister Tilani is the widow of Varric Tethras’ cousin it seems like the Inquisitor knows her through him. I’m afraid that is all I have been able to gather and, with there being no elves hired for the expedition, I can’t even place another spy in their ranks.”

There are only two possibilities I can think of that would cause Mona to not hire elves. Either there are large amounts of lyrium envolved, which only the dwarves can mine, or she is deliberately
making certain my spies can’t infiltrate the expedition. And since dwarves do not dream, I can’t even find information in the fade. I’m about to order Felassan to investigate further, when I see Wisdom looking at me. With a very displeased look on her face.

“That will be all. Ma serannas.” I nod at Felassan, who vanishes as he wakes up.

“You’re spying on her again.” The sound of disappointment in her voice makes me cringe inwardly.

“Are you certain that’s wise?”

“Since I am unaware of her intentions, and her extensive knowledge of me and my organization, I consider it prudent, yes.” I put my arms behind my back and raise my chest.

“She adores you. Trusts you. It might be clever, yes, but wise? You’re deceiving the woman you love.” Wisdom shakes her head.

“What would you have me do? Sit by idly while she can undermine everything--”

“Tel’harel, Fen’Harel!” the spirit hisses.

I sigh in defeat and turn from her.

“I can’t bear the thought of her being harmed. She is... too impulsive. Too reckless. I only wish for her to remain safe, not to interfere,” I sigh in shame. “You’re right.”

“Ir abelas, lethallin. I wish you had found love at another time in your life.” She walks up to me and rests a hand on my shoulder.

A part of me wishes I had never found it at all.

We return to Skyhold some days later, and I have still to receive any word from Mona. It feels like she has simply vanished. Though, I know from my agents in the Inquisition Leliana has received some information from her. Nothing about what she is doing - merely instructions for the advisors.

I feel restless and disquiet. I’ve been trying to work, but I find myself leaning back in my chair resting my chin on one hand, while the fingers on the other drum against the arm of the chair. When I hear footsteps from behind I hurry to grab the notes in front of me, only to notice I’ve picked up a blank sheet of paper, which I’m pretending to read. In my annoyance I place it back down and get to my feet greeting the person approaching me.

The Herald is looking at me with a large grin on his face and his cheeks flushed.

“I take it your conversation with the Ambassador went well?” I smile. I confess it pleases me to see him happy.

“She loved it. I can’t thank you enough!” He enthuses with an elated chuckle.

“It was your doing, not mine.” I smile at him. “And you might want to lower your voice a little in case Leliana can hear you,” I warn in a low voice.

He looks up through the rotunda.
“You might have a point,” he grins sheepishly. His expression then turns more serious. “Heard anything from Mona?”

I turn from him and rest my hands on my desk looking over my research feigning indifference.

“I understand the advisors have received missives from the Inquisitor,” I answer evenly.

It has been more than two weeks since I last saw her at Adamant, and in that time I have received no word from her. Even in the fade I can’t seem to find her when I reach out. I have begun to wonder that perhaps she has a rune to block out even her unconscious connection to the fade. ‘Or she merely sleeps during the day as working in the heat will be impossible,’ the more rational part of my mind counters.

“You know, you could always just write to her,” the Herald points out.

“I believe my reports on the veil can wait until after she returns. In the meantime you’re the one who should be concerned with the rifts,” I dismiss.

The Herald makes an exasperated noise.

“Solas, stop being so bloody stubborn! You care about her and I can tell you’re worried.”

“Edward,” I warn looking up at him with a determined gaze.

“Even if you’re simply her friend you can write and ask how she is. It would set your mind at ease.” He puts a hand on my shoulder.

“If I do will you stop pestering me?”

“Perhaps,” he gives me a cheeky grin.

I frown for a moment before I stare at him with a threatening, yet playful, glare.

“It occurs to me, Herald, that I have been neglecting your training lately. I would suggest you get your gear and we can get started.”

“You’re going to make me regret this, aren’t you?”

“Perhaps,” I mimic his response and he laughs walking out of the room.

As expected he comes back a mere minutes later with his gear, ready to train. The young man has many flaws, but he is honest and he does not give up so easily. It has been a long time since I have made a new friend.

A few days later the Herald has dragged me to the Exalted plains. And that night I finally swallow my pride and decide that I must do as the Herald suggested. I was concerned what suspicions might arise should I write to her and it would be read by one of Leliana’s agents - or worse. For some reason the Herald insist that we make camp with the Dalish. As we approach I see a familiar figure sitting with them and a dog sleeping on the ground next to her.

“Seems like the Inquisitor is here. What a surprise!” The Herald smiles broadly and looks at me.
There is no doubt in my mind that he new - or that he did this for my sake.

“Let’s see if she is surprised to see us, shall we?” Dorian suggests.

As we approach Mona is talking to the Keeper and his First. I can’t make out what they are saying to begin with, but Mona looks at the First with a annoyed glare.

“Do not make assumptions by the shape of my ears, lethallan ,” Mona scowls at the Keeper’s first, “They do not prove my heritage.”

“You’re kin is here,” the First sneers and Mona turns to look at us. She smiles and Atish’an wakes up and runs to greet me.

“Let me just finish here and we’ll talk,” she smiles as us and turns her attention back to the Keeper.

The Keeper says something to a hunter nearby, which I can’t hear from this distance. The hunter then greets us and leads us to a fire on the outskirts of the camp. Bull and Dorian look at us clearly sensing the tension.

“Yeah,” Bull starts, “I think we’re going to go over there and set up camp.”

I expect the Herald to give them some snide remark, but he merely nods before they walk away. The Herald and I sit down together with the hunter.

“I wasn’t aware the Inquisitor had business with the Dalish,” I ponder as I sit down.

“She is one of the few shemlens that the Keeper truly respects. The blood of the Dales runs through her - though you might not understand its importance,” the hunter sneers.

“You believe one of her parents was Dalish?” The Herald asks.

“Probably the mother raped by some Shemlen lord, who took the child in. Why else would a Shemlen care so much for our history? Or our Keeper tolerate her?”

“I don’t know. She could be in love with an elf,” the Herald suggest looking at me briefly and I have to fight the urge to retort.

“No Dalish blood would marry a Shemlen. We need to preserve our ways. Now, the heart of the dales might beat in her chest, but then she will understand why it is important that we keep to our own,” the hunters eyes dart to me for a moment, “And flatears care nothing for our history.”

“You racist asshole,” the Herald sneers at the hunter and I see anger simmering in his eyes as if he intends to defend me. “How dare you call him ‘flatear’? He probably knows more about your people than anyone, but you got your arrows so far up your own ass that--”

I take him by his arm as he gets up to face the hunter.

“Herald, it’s not worth it,” I tell him in a low serious voice.

“Maker’s ass it isn’t!” he bellows and turns his attention back to the hunter, “How would you like it if I called you knife-ear or Halla-fucker!!”

The last insult catches my attention - that’s certainly a new word for the Dalish I had not considered. The hunter gets to his feet and pulls out a knife.

“Just try it shem!”
“The circle had many flaws, but at least we were taught to treat everyone with respect - no matter race or background!” The Herald fumes as fire ignites in his palm.

The Keeper and Mona comes running towards us.

“What is going on here?” the Keeper demands.

“A misunderstanding,” I try to mediate still holding the Herald by his arm.

“This Shem is being disrespectful!” The hunter defends.

“What did you do?” Mona asks looking at the Herald with disappointment.

“You called my friend a flatear and attempted to humiliate him. You insulted my friend and I will not accept anything less than an apology!”

“Edward, enough!” I demand and he looks at me for a moment. He takes a step back and crosses his arms, retracting his fire. I can’t help but feel a little touched by his wish to defend me, but his actions are anything but wise.

The Keeper looks closely at me and the Herald for a moment. He then turns to the hunter.

“Apologize.”

“Tel’abelas!” The hunter cries.

“Fen’Harel ma halam!” The keeper sneers, and I have to struggle not to smile, “This human defended his kin no differently than you would have one of ours. This man might not bear a vallaslin, but he is still of our people - and this human defended him. If not respect, then it is at least worthy of understanding. Apologize.”

“Ir abelas,” the hunter mutters at me.

“I’m not certain I heard that, lethallin,” the Keeper states crossing his arms and the hunters gives a defeated sigh.

“Ir abelas, hahren.”

“Ma serannas, Dalen,” I nod politely.

“I…” the Herald hesitates for a moment and looks at me, “I should apologize too. I acted rashly.”

“All is forgiven, dalen. Now let us put this incident behind us,” the Keeper suggests.

“A good idea,” Mona smiles and puts a hand on the Herald’s shoulder. “Loyalty is a good thing. Just don’t let it cloud your judgement.”

Mona smiles at me, then follows the keeper back further into the camp.

“Solas, I’m sorry,” the Herald apologizes lowering his head in shame.

“You’re too impulsive, but thank you. It’s been a very long time since I had a friend, who is so determined to defend me.” I put a hand on his shoulder and give him a sincere smile.

“Now, I’ll find some wood for the fire, so that we can contribute to the Dalish hospitality,” I continue, but the Herald picks up on my sarcasm and has to suppress a grin. Thankfully, the hunter
seems unaware.

I need some air and distance from the Dalish. Their superior attitude combined with their frightening lack of knowledge is an annoyance. My own reputation aside - I’m used to being ridiculed, so no matter - they are a reminder that everything I sacrificed to help the elven people was in vain. I have to scoff at the irony that the people, who care for me most, are humans.

There is truth in the hunters words. Everything elves are is absorbed, when we have children with humans. I need to restore my people and yet my heart belongs to a human. I should refrain in order to be what the People need. I stop dead in my tracks. Why is this even a concern? I love her, yes, but I have no intentions of starting a family. Even should I wish it I don’t have that liberty. My thoughts are interrupted as I’m embraced by a pair of loving arms turning me around, then a pair of soft lips pressed against mine. I make a noise in surprise, then put my hands on her waist. When our lips part I kiss her cheek and then pull her into a tight embrace.

“I’m glad you’re back safely,” I murmur holding her tight.

“So am I. I missed you. I wanted to write, but--” she begins, but I give her a tender kiss.

“I know. So did I,” I reply as I pull back looking at her.

Her eyes are heavy and her shoulders slumped.

“You look exhausted,” I note with worry resting my hand on her cheek.

“I am,” she takes a deep breath and rests her head on my chest, “I’m so tired,” she whines with a breathless chuckle.

“Then go to bed,” I kiss the top of her head.

“Will I see you in the morning?”

“Of course. Sleep well,” I smile at her and she begins to walk back to the camp. She then stops and looks at me.

“Edward cares a great deal about you. I think you have become quite the father figure to him - and to Cole. I’m glad you have others who care for you almost as much as I do,” she gives me a rueful smile.

As she leaves I can’t help but wonder what she meant by that. I close my eyes and lean against a tree, my hand clutching tight to the fabric above my heart. Could it be that she is happy that if she disappears I won’t be alone?
Joy and Reality

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

It’s nearly dawn, when I hear something moving outside my tent. As I sit up Mona opens the tent and makes a sign for me to be quiet. My mind hopes that she will enter, but instead she motions for me to follow her. We walk some distance from the Dalish camp up towards the cliffs nearby with Atish’an following us loyally. The light is starting slowly to peek through, but it’s not quite sunrise yet. Mona looks up towards the mountains and see a large wolf statue at the top.

“There is no escaping you it seems,” she chuckles and in a quick motion I pull her to me as she makes a noise of surprise.

“You’re welcome to try, vhenan ,” I dare her.

She wraps her arms around my neck.

“Nah, I’m kinda fond of you,” she grins.

“Kind of?” I raise an eyebrow.

She leans in giving me a soft kiss. Atish’an whines and hides her face beneath my coat in embarrassment. When Mona pulls away she takes my hand and we continue up towards the edge of the cliff.

“There is this island on earth,” she begins to explain, “It’s isolated from everywhere, but has a rare amount of birds. All the birds belong to the same species and they were all reliant on the same food source. It stands to reason that a great number of the birds would have died from hunger.”

“That seems probable, yes.”

“Only they didn’t. They adapted. It didn’t happen overnight and many did die, but not all. Some learned new ways of survival and turned to other food sources. Over generations their physiology changed and all of them could coexist. There wasn’t mass extinction, but merely change.”

“And you think this world would be amenable to such change? They cling to all that is familiar and most do as they have always done. It’s their nature,” I sigh sadly.

“That is now, but given time they will adapt because they want to survive. It will not be a miracle and it will take time. But give them that--” she puts a finger to her lips and lays down on the ground crawling slowly forward motioning me to follow and makes Atish’an stay where she is.

Curiosity conquers my reluctance and I carefully crawl to the ledge of the cliff, hiding beneath shrubbery. She points to a small cave below and whispers.

“And sometimes the world will surprise you.”

There I see a mother wolf taking care of her wolf pups and one small Halla. By all accounts the pack should have killed and eaten it. Instead the pack is guarding it as if it were one of its own. Wolves are often misunderstood, but even I am surprised by this. Mona smiles at me before we carefully move away giving the pack it’s privacy.
When we are some distance away she starts talking again.

“Our nature is not so easily defined and is capable of adapting - if you have faith and trust that it is possible.”

“I wish I had your optimism, but experience has taught me otherwise. And while that is remarkable, I have seen little in my journeys to confirm it.”

“Are you certain? You thought so little of humans before this. You saw what I am like a soulless husk - a tranquil - brutish and simple. And now you confess to being in love with me - is that not in some way proof that change is possible?”

I can’t hold back a smile as I reach out to touch her face and she leans against my palm.

“Were there more like you I would believe anything to be possible.”

“If there were more like me I might have to compete for your affection,” she pouts playfully.

I take a step closer with a smile.

“I can’t imagine--” a flare in the background catches my attention and Mona turns as well.

We look down the cliff and some distance away I see a Pride Demon attacking a group of men. Bandits from the look of it.

“A summoning circle,” I note in disgust.

“They didn’t! Those bastards!” Mona turns to her dog, “Tish, go get the others.”

The dog bolts back towards the camp, while Mona and I run down towards the river bed, where the men, the demon attacked, are now dead and the Pride Demon is shackled by it’s bindings. Mona’s steps are determined as we approach and anger simmers just below the surface. I pity the idiot, who decides to pick a fight with her, when she is in this particular mood. She gives frustrated cry as we get closer.

“Simple minded idiots turned a peaceful spirit into a demon.”

I give a deep sigh of frustration. There is nothing sadder than seeing a good spirit corrupted by ignorance. A mage approaches us seeming relieved. An emotion that will soon change I imagine.

“A mage! You’re not with the bandits. Do you have any lyrium potions? Most of us are exhausted--” he is interrupted by Mona walking up to him directly and slapping him so hard across his face he drops to the ground.

“What in the name of the Maker?” he stares up at her and holds his cheek.

“You summoned that demon!” I hiss.

“Except it was a benevolent spirit at the time. You tortured and enslaved a living creature! If you come out of this with merely a bruised cheek you should count your blessings!” Mona sneers.

The mages eyes widen as he stares up at us.

“I-I-I understand how it might be confusing to someone, who has not studied demons, but after you help us--”
I glare at him as I reply through gritted teeth.

“We are not here to help you!”

Mona looks at him and gives a bitter laugh, then crouches before him pushing him back onto the ground as he attempts to get up.

“My friend here has more experience and knowledge of demons than you could hope to gain in a lifetime, and I even my knowledge is superior to yours. Whatever ‘expertise’ you believe you have keep it to yourself!” she growls at him.

“Now now, you two, I doubt they summoned a demon on purpose;” the Herald says from behind as he, Bull, Dorian and Atish’an comes running up from behind.

“Of course not, do you think me mad?” The mage objects.

“I think you stupid! That’s far worse. You summoned it, to protect you from the bandits,” I shout at him.

“I… yes…” the mage looks to the ground and tries to scootch away from Mona now on her feet towering him.

“You bound it to obedience, then commanded it to kill. That is when it turned!”

I feel Mona’s hand on my arm.

“We need to break the summoning circle. I can do it quickly, but I need you to keep the spirit of me,” Mona turns to the Herald, “that could have been Cole if things were different.”

The Herald’s face hardens as he looks at the mage.

“Void take the idiots who believe circle training adept,” he hisses, “Lead the way.”

As Mona takes a step forward a take her wrist and she looks back at me with a worried expression.

“Be careful. Disrupt the binding, but be mindful of your surroundings. I will protect you as best I can, but--”

She takes her hand in mine, squeezes it, then runs of with the rest of us behind her.

Bull starts twirling his two-handed mace with a weary look on his face and groans.

“Why do I always end up as demon bait?”

“It’s part of your charm,” Dorian grins, which makes Bull grunt.

Mona sets up the device and disturbs each part of the circle with impressive haste, while we attempt to keep the demon of her. I’m distracted by everything that is happening and only manage to put a barrier on the Herald at the very last moment as I’m trying to keep Mona out of danger. This has to stop. I’m becoming a liability. As soon as the binding breaks the demon turns into a spirit. Mona gives a loud audible gasp as she recognises the spirit and falls to her knees before it.

“Joy…” she reaches for it, her fingers lingering on it ghostly presence. “Forgive me. This is all my fault.”

I walk over next to her and crouch down putting my hand on her shoulder. A sob escapes her and a
tear falls down her cheek. I feel her pain. This was the same spirit, who took the form of her son in the fade.

“Tel’abelas, da’vhenan. Dirth’ena enasalin ,” Joy whispers softly.

“It lead to your death,” she cries looking at the spirit.

“Tel’numin .” The spirit looks at me. “Fen’Harel lasa ghilana - lasa lath .”

“Dirthavaren ,” I nod at the spirit.

Mona closes her eyes and takes a deep breath as she tries to get a hold of her emotions. She then turns to me with her eyes full of emotion. “Solas, ir halani .”

“Ma nuvenin ,” I nod and look at the spirit, “Dareth shiral .”

We stay quiet for a few moments as I place an arm around her shoulders, while Bull, Dorian and the Herald keep a respectful distance.

“This is all my fault,” she laments and I feel my hold on her tighten.

“Neither you nor it are responsible for what happened here.” I turn my head and look to the mages. “They are.”

I get to my feet and look at them.

“Thank you. We would not have risked the summoning, but the roads are too dangerous to travel unprotected,” the mage from earlier thanks us, his cheek still scolding red from where Mona slapped him.

“You tortured and killed our friend!” I cry out at them.

“We didn’t know. It was just a spirit. The book said it could help us,” he explains as he backs away from me.

I feel Mona coming up behind her her steps quicker than mine, but just as determined.

“These books you used, where are they?” She demands and one of the mages points to a satchel on the ground. She grabs the books and walks over to me.

“I know they won’t be misused with you.” Her hand brushes against mine as she hands them to me.

“W-what do you intend to do with us?” the mage swallows.

“Reeducation in the Inquisition. Bull, will you and Dorian make sure these idiots are escorted back to the Inquisition?” she towers over the leader on the ground, “And if I hear of as much of a scuffle with my people or you summoning even a wisp I will let my friend here do whatever he pleases. Am I understood?”

They nods vigorously and seem eager to get away from the two of us. If not for the tragic circumstances I would have found it amusing they found the Qunari warrior and Tevinter less frightening than the pacifist and eleven apostate.

I look at the binding circle and the place where the poor spirit vanished into nothing, as Bull and Dorian takes away the Kirkwall mages. Mona turns her back to us and walks towards the river looking into the water with her arms crossed. Atish’an sits down next to her leaning against her. The
Herald looks at both of us for a moment.

“I’m going to set up camp over there and make sure we have something to eat, when Bull and Dorian return. I’m sorry about your friend,” he excuses himself, then makes a silent gesture for me to go to her.

I don’t give it much thought as my mind is preoccupied and I walk over standing next to her - looking at her reflection in the water.

“This was the fate that awaited my friend,” I say quietly.

“Yes,” she replies, her voice heavy from tears.

I turn and pull her into my arms burrowing my face in her neck.

“I’m sorry for the death of Joy, but… _Ma serannas, ma vhenan._”

“You owe me nothing,” she murmurs as she wraps her arms around my waist.

“I do,” I object as I pull away my voice heavy with emotion, “I know it might seem strange to you, but what you did mattered to me. _You_ matter.”

“It’s not strange at all,” she whispers pulling me closer again.

I owe her… everything. I have always known the world to be cruel and unfair, but to see her suffer so still tears at me. The death of Joy is yet another thing she will carry with her. How long before my cynical thinking will be mirrored in hers? Will I one day look at her and no longer see hope in her eyes?

Back at Skyhold Mona once again devoted herself to her duties. And one of her most hated: sitting in judgement. Not that you would know it from looking at her. There is a confidence in her face as she sits on that throne. It is one of the few occasion, where you will see her actually acknowledging her own power and influence. There is a regal countenance to her, and something assertive, though her judgements are always wise and thoughtful. And on the ground beside her lies Atish’an - the fierce and devoted protector and enforcer. And us who follow her are gathered around to watch as she shows this display of power. I wonder how many realise just how uncomfortable it makes her.

Erimond is dragged before her as arrogant as ever.

“I recognize none of these proceedings. You have no authority to judge me.”

“On the contrary,” the Ambassador objects, “many officials have communicated that they will defer to the Inquisitor in this matter.”

“Because they fear. Not just Corypheus, but Tevinter, rightful ruler of every piece of ground you’ve trod in your pathetic life. I serve a living God. Bring down your blades and free my from the physical. Glory waits me.” Erimond puffs up his chest filled with pride.

Mona gets up from the chair and walks towards him staring down at him with a rage deeper than I believed her capable of. Atish’an sits up next to the Inquisitor’s chair and growls.
“There are many reasons why I can choose to offer a man repentance. The grief of losing his son, an honest conviction that what he was doing was for the sake of his country or for the betterment of the world - No matter how misguided. But you,” she sneers in a deadly growl towering the man still on his knees, “You did this out of nothing but pleasure. Forget demons, abominations or darkspawn - the true scourge on this world are people like you.”

He remains unaffected by her words. Arrogant and fanatic to the last. She crouches down before him and looks into his eyes. She murmurs something to him and he scuttles backwards trying to escape her only for the Inquisition soldiers to grab a hold of him.

“No! No! Please!” he cries out in fear, “I will not lose myself!”

“Are you sure? Alternatively, I can sent you to the Qunari. Imagine how the gratitude of the Qun would benefit the Inquisition.” Her grin turns sinister. “I wonder if they have a collar in your size.”

Tears starts forming in his eyes as the dread is consuming him. It is perhaps fortunate he does not know the kindness of the Inquisitor’s judgements. He might not believe her threats genuine otherwise.

“He looks like he is going to piss himself,” Sera remarks with a grin and I frown shaking my head.

“I beg you, please! Inquisitor! Show mercy,” he pleads his voice ringing through the great hall as she stands up.

“As it is, I have no intention of wasting resources and I don’t want to make you a martyr by killing you. Life in prison will have to do and you will reveal everything you know of Corypheus’ plans to Commander Cullen or I will make good on my threats.” Her voice is hard and unwavering. “Iron Bull, will you help escort him to the dungeons?”

“Sure thing, Boss,” he agrees and grabs Erimond by his arm.

He looks up at the tall qunari with terror in his eyes. Mona bows her head and the crowd disbands. She steps through the door leading to her chambers, then stops holding a hand to her head. Atish’an looks at her then her eyes dart to me and then nods her head as if she wants me to follow. I follow Mona standing in the doorway and look closely at her.

“Are you alright?”


“He does not appear to have it any longer. Executing him might have been wiser,” I point out.

“I know, but that would make me seem like a hypocrite later,” a sad smile brushes her lips. That statement holds a pain deeper than I expected.

“Who is it you dread you have to judge?”

“Not my secret to tell, Solas,” she takes my hand discreetly and squeezes it. “I’m going to take a nap. I have a migraine.”

I frown. She has been having them a lot since Adamant. I place my hand on the back of her neck and let both some cooling and healing magic run through her. She gives a sigh of relief.

“Go get some rest,” I suggest in a low voice stroking her neck with my thumb and she nods with a small smile before walking upstairs.
Atish’an leans against me with a quiet whine. She has noticed too how distant Mona is and how often she seems ill lately.

“Want to keep me company?” I look down at the dog and she gives me an approving grumble.

The dog follows me loyally into my study, where I pick up a book and some of my notes and sit in the sofa. I pat the seat next to me, but Atish’an gives me a doubtful look.

“She doesn’t let you on the furniture, does she?”

The hound shakes her head and I smile.

“Come, my friend, I won’t tell.”

Atish’an happily jumps up onto the sofa next to me and rests her head in my lap.

“I know, my friend. I worry for her as well.” I nuzzle the dogs. “If you could only speak, what would you say I wonder?”

She gives a pleasant grumble and rubs her face against my chin making me chuckle.

“Well thank you. I’m rather fond of you as well.”

I sigh as I stroke her.

“If only you could tell me what happened in that desert, maybe I could help her.”

Atish’an jumps of the couch and starts scraping her paws at the tiles on the floor. I scootch forward in my seat and put the book aside.

“That’s right. You were digging for something. What was it?”

Atish’an looks around the room for a moment and goes to my desk, where she delicately picks up a letter opener with her teeth and hands it to me.

“Weapons?”

She shakes her head.

“Metal?”

The dog gives an excited bark and runs up the stairs to the library. I follow as the dog sniffs around the cases making a few people there smile. She stops next to the table where we turn in creature samples for research. The dog looks at the books.

“Can you read?” I find myself asking the dog.

She shakes her head, then takes my sleeve gently between her teeth and presses my hand against the books. I try to pick it up, but she growls.

“I’m not certain what it is you wish…” I look at the books, then turn back the dog. “You need me to read the titles of the books?”

The dog nods vigorously. I read a few titles, but don’t get a reaction till I read:

“Aviation: The complete encyclopedia of winged beasts.”
Atish’an barks and I take down the book. She then runs down stairs to my desk and puts her front paws up on it. I open the book in front of her and turn the pages. She presses her nose against a page with a drawing of a dragon from above with its wings spread out.

“They dug up the remains of a dragon and metal?”

She grumbles in agreement.

“With what purpose?”

The dog whines and seems to think I’m disappointed.

“Hush, friend. You did very well. Thank you,” I praise stroking her head.

She turns her head, when we hear footsteps from behind.

“Not that I’m judging, but you are aware you’re having a conversation with a dog?” Dorian smirks.

“Considering the intelligence of the creature, her wisdom seems to be far above anyone else present,” I give a sideways grin.

“Is this another stab at my homeland and countrymen?” Dorian raises an eyebrow.

“The mabari breed originated from Tevinter did it not?” I can’t seem to hide my amusement at the look Dorian gives me.

“I was not aware you were so well versed in austere Ferelden fables,” he remarks seeming somewhat amused.

“Those that I have been fortunate enough to observe in the fade.”

Dorian looks down at Atish’an.

“And what of you? Do you look at me and think ‘that’s the evil tevinter’?”

The dog licks his hand and he makes a face before looking around to find something to rub of the dog slopper - which is not his own clothes.

“In all honesty, Solas, do you know if the Inquisitor is alright? She has seemed rather troubled since she almost got trapped in the fade for good,” his expression turns concerned.

“That I can not answer, unfortunately,” I sigh.

“That display out there worries me. Erimond deserves worse than he got, I know that, but she is not usually one to make such threats. And her reaction towards the mages at the Exalted Plains... Do you think there is anything we can do to help her?”

“I’m uncertain,” I look at him closely, “But why come to me with this? Varric and Cassandra - even Leliana has known her for longer.”

“True, but none of them are mages.”

“Then you should have come to me, darling.” I turn to see Vivienne approach us.

“Oh, don’t look so surprised. This isn’t exactly the place for a private conversation. It might have escaped your notice, as the Inquisitor can very easily give of an air of compliance, but the behaviour
she displayed today is not out of character. I’m more concerned with the increasing migraines.” She folds her arms across her chest with an unfamiliar frown on her face.

“True,” I admit, “That does seem to be an issue of concern, but I am still at a loss as to why you are discussing this with me.”

She rolls her eyes.

“Because, we have far more eyes upon us than you do. If we voice our concerns, she has been affected by magic, people will wonder about the strength of the Inquisition. Should a mere elven apostate, with no influence or power, do so it will not attract as much attention,” the Enchanter counters.

“I will see if she agrees to let me examine her,” I agree a little reluctantly. I want to protect her and help her, but I would much prefer it if she comes to me.

“Thank you, Solas,” Dorian says honestly and pats my shoulder.

The Inquisitor sleeps for most of the morning and afternoon, and I don’t find her until supper is approaching. Atish’an has been following me for the most of the day and it seems that the servants have begun to wonder if the dog is mine. When we find her she is in undercroft working on something with Dagna. The dwarf sees us immediately, but Mona is too preoccupied. Dagna walks up to us with a cheery expression.

“Isn’t the Inquisitor wonderful? It’s so rare to meet someone, who truly grasps what I do. And she has the most incredible ideas. Did you know she has plans for making a library of crystals - like the shaperate, but one where it is possible to access the information from everywhere as long as you have a crystal? No more mouldy books and searching for hours. It’s truly fascinating,” Dagna says with entusiasme.

I can’t help but smile to myself, remembering our conversation of the Vir Dirthara, which in turn leads to the reminder of everything I lost… everything I destroyed.

“Are you feeling okay there? You look like your favorite nug died,” Dagne looks up at me.

“Yes, I’m fine, thank you.”

“Alright. Well, I'll go get some stew before Sera eats it all. See you later.”

“Goodbye, Dagna.”

Atish’an is already at Mona’s side, who absentmindedly pets her head. An unconscious movement that shows she is used to the dog being there. She scratches her own hair and seems frustrated.

“Having trouble?” I ask walking up behind her.

“Yes, Reality is giving me a world of hurt today,” she groans wiping her forehead with the back of her wrist.
“Reality can often be an unpleasant reminder,” I smile putting my hands on her shoulders from behind.

“True… Reality is the name I have given this project.”

“Why Reality?”

“Isn’t that what I do? Reinforce reality?” She turns her head to look at me with a smile and I see some oil on her cheek.

With a chuckle I turn her around and pick up a cloth to remove the oil smear.

“I’m not so certain. Some days it seems like you could easy be a vision I conjured in the fade.”

Her face reddens, her breathing gets heavier, her lips part and her eyes darken. I have little presence of mind to ascertain my own expression, but it must be reflecting the longing I see in her eyes.

“Please come to my quarters tonight, love,” she whispers as her hand slides up my stomach towards my chest and rests over my heart.

“That would not be wise,” I caution as I swallow.

“Do you think here would be wiser?” she smiles mischievously and I laugh.

My breathing gets heavier as her expression turns genuine.

“Solas…” she whispers tentatively.

“I’ll see you after nightfall.”

Chapter End Notes

Hey everyone I hope you enjoyed this chapter. It hasn't been beta read so please forgive any mistakes.

The story of the wolves and the Halla is based on a true story, where a lioness would foster abandoned gazelle babies.

Tel’abelas, da’vhenan. Dirth’ena enasalin = Don't feel sorrow, little heart. Knowledge that led to victory
Tel’numin = Don't cry
Fen’Harel lasa ghlana - lasa lath = Dread Wolf guide you - guide love
Dirthavaren = The promise
Ma nuvenin = As you wish
Dareth shiral = Safe journey
It’s late when I make my way to Mona’s chambers. Most of Skyhold is asleep with the exception of the guards. I feel my heartbeat getting stronger with each step I take up the stairs towards her quarters. There was a promise in what she said earlier, but I know this isn’t wise. I know I should not indulge this longing and fantasy. I should act with wisdom as well as I speak it, but I find that I can’t. Had she not known, what I am, it might have been easier to keep my distance. It would have been a lie and that conflict might have sobered me. But I have no such shield to hide behind. She has seen more of me than most, and still she does not flee. She does not condemn or judge. She merely looks at me, and is not fearful or repulsed by what she sees.

What she offers is open, accepting and honest, despite her many secrets - and in her presence I can be the same. I reach the door and it is my last chance to think better of it, but I can’t.

Unsurprisingly, Atish’an is the first to greet me as I open the door. Her faithful, fierce and loyal protector. If all allies were like this dog, then no one would ever need to fear corruption. As I walk up the stairs Mona walks towards them smiling at me. Her eyes are hooded again and her features tense despite the heartfelt smile on her lips. I kiss her affectionately as I reach the top of the stairs and when she pulls away she rests her forehead against my chest.

“Migraine again?” I asks, my voice heavy with concern.

“Yes… I’m sorry,” she mumbles.

“You needn’t be sorry. Here. Let me help you.”

I guide her to sit on the couch and make her sit with her back turned towards me as I sit behind her. I reach around her and pull the lace keeping her corset in place. She tenses for a moment before giggling.

“Well, that’s rather forward.”

I kiss her cheek without giving any further response. As the lace has been loosened I push her shirt down her shoulders leaving her neck and shoulders exposed. The muscles in her back starts to relax and her shoulders fall. I put one hand on her neck and let a little healing magic emanate from my hand. Her muscles relax further and she gives a sigh of relief.

“That feels wonderful. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. You should have come to me sooner. It would not have taken the same hold if you had,” I frown.
“You have enough on your mind without worrying about me.”

I wrap my arms around her waist pulling her close and kissing her shoulder.

“I will do so regardless, and the Inquisition will not benefit from you being fatigued or in pain.”

She gives an audible smile and turns her head to kiss my temple. As she does so my eyes catch sight of her cleavage and the soft expanse of her barely covered breasts. I lean back and focus on the task at hand instead of letting my desire linger. My hands reach for her hair releasing it from its bondage and letting her auburn waves fall. She rubs her scalp as soon as it falls making a sound of relief. I brush her hair to the side and start massaging her neck with healing and cold magic soothing her.

“I have a question for you.”

“You have a question for me? Did I enter some alternate reality?” She grins, “Ask away.”

“What were you doing after Adamant?”

“I’ve been funding Philippe’s archeological excavations - well, the Inquisition has, technically. He has been held back for so long and I owe him. When I got that letter he said he had found some odd metals that he couldn’t decide where came from. He made it sound otherworldly, so I went there as quickly as I could.”

“You thought it would be from your home, but it wasn’t.”

“No… it was another false lead. I need to accept that this is my home, but even with you right here – loving me - I can’t let go. Why can’t I let go?” There is a frustration carried in her voice that intermingles with a deep hurt.

“Because, you still feel a duty towards those you left behind.”

She reaches back and rests one of her hands on top of mine, as if she means to give me comfort. Selfishly, it does help me. I should carry my burden alone, but her thoughtfulness and her ability to relate to what I’m feeling makes it difficult for my to contain it all. I want her understanding, her sympathy, her love. My People please forgive, but I want all of her. Being near her makes it easier to breathe. She winches in pain and leans forward.

“Did I hurt you?” I feel my heart tighten at the sight.

“No. It just felt like a electric charge going from my neck to above my eye. It wasn’t your fault,” she grimaces as she holds her head.

“Here, lean back towards me,” I guide her shoulders back and I change the healing spell making her muscles relax again. Her relief almost sounds like pleasure and despite my concern I give a small smile.

“Does that rune always have this effect on you?” I ask with concern, hoping she will reveal what exactly is waying so heavily on her mind.

“I’ve only used it once before. Anders treated me for weeks after. Much like you are doing now.” She gives a huff. “It’s odd with him. I can never remember him, without also thinking of what he did, but I just can’t see him as a monster.”

“He was a man who fought for his convictions,” I agree, “You had good cause not to stop him. And had he not started the rebellion, who knows what might have happened.”
“Like with Wisdom and Joy… I knew saving Wisdom would condemn another spirit. I--”

I pull her back into my arms as I make her turn to face me.

“Listen carefully, you are not responsible for that. You cannot keep blaming yourself.”

“Said the pot to the kettle.” She gives wry smile.

I lean my forehead against hers; “Please, vhenan."

“I’ll try,” she murmurs and gives me a kiss. “I didn’t expect this you know.”

She gives a giggle, there is nothing more than a huff of air, as I give her a curious look.

“I’m afraid you will have to elaborate.”

“Us falling for each other. I mean, I always cared about you… a great deal, but I thought that after more than ten years that would have dwindled. That, when I finally found, you we could be friends and I would be able to distance myself from everything I had felt.” She looks at me with a bright smile. “And then there you were. As arrogant and judgemental as ever, but all I could remember was how intelligent and altruistic I knew you to be.” Her hand strokes my cheek fondly as if to mellow her words.

I cringe as I remember my treatment of her caused by my suspicion.

“ Ir abelas, vhenan . I have made so many mistakes. It was--”

“Solas, it’s alright. I’m not upset about any of it,” she smiles.

“Even so, I wish to apologize to you. Experience has taught me not to trust even friends, but you not only kept my secrets, you tried to protect me from my own mistakes. You devoted your life to it. To find a spirit like yours in all this chaos, and for me not to recognize it...” I reach for her cheek. “I should have treasured it from the beginning. I’m so sorry.”

“Love, you couldn’t have known. There was nothing strange about your behaviour. And yes it did hurt, but I don’t blame you. Not even for a moment.”

I catch her lips in a deep kiss. I lean back into the sofa pulling her with me as the kisses are slow, deep and lingering.

“Forgivenes,” I whisper against her lips.

“What?”

“You asked me once what spirit I thought you’d be. Forgiveness is a variation of love and empathy, just as Compassion is. When I look at you that’s what I see.”

The look she gives me wavers between affectionate, astounded, and speechless, as her breath hitches in her throat. She closes her eyes and kisses me, while I let my hands slide across her body. Her breath is uneven and I feel her body tense.

“ Vhenan , you’re trembling.”

“I know,” she gives an awkward chuckle, “I’m sorry, I don’t know what’s wrong with me. I’ve spent ten years… and now... It wasn’t supposed to be like this,” she hisses in frustration and gets up as walks away from me.
It occurs to me how long she must have struggled with these feelings. All those years waiting to confront me - a brief conversation before she would have to leave. And all these months spent in each others company. For me this is new and exiting. For her it’s the reunion with a lover after more than decade.

I get up and walk up to her as she looks shyly into the ground. I cup her jaw with both hands as I pull her to me in a lingering kiss and feel her quiver against me. Her lips are searing against mine as her lips slightly part my tongue caresses hers. Panting, I pull away only a few centimeters resting my brow against hers. I feel a tear on her cheek as I stroke it. She pulls away and looks up at me - her features heavy with emotion.

“All this time I have tried to save as many lives as I could. Tried to just save… something. Without making things worse or unpredictable. I was afraid that if I changed too much Corypheus plans would change. And that it would have meant losing everything,” she sighs, then reaches for me - her palm stroking my face.

“But during all that time you were always with me. It didn’t matter who I was with or what I was doing, you were always there. When everything seemed hopeless I would close my eyes and try to remember your voice. Imagine the advice you would give me.” She takes a breath before she continues. “I love you, Solas.”

My breath escapes my lungs and I feel my heart expanding. It is the first time I have heard her actually tell me how she feels about me. I knew, certainly, but hearing it somehow makes it more real. It’s both terrifying and breathtaking.

“Ma lath, Ir abelas. I love you, too, my heart.”

She wraps her arms around my neck and kisses me. I will do anything I can to ease the emotional pain she has been carrying for so long.

“Does your head still hurt?” I murmur as she pulls away.

“No,” she sighs rewarding me with a small smile.

“Good.”

With a passionate kiss I pull her to me once more and press her body against mine. The People forgive me, but I need her. My hands travel effortless across her body as I discover her every curve. My one hand goes to her neck as I kiss the other side of it. She moans as my kiss deepens and I can feel her pulse quickening. The sound is so beautiful and sends a tremor down my spine. My fingers travels down her neck with a light touch following her pulse till it reaches her collarbone. Her skin is so soft, warm, and inviting, as her arms wrap around me and I can feel her holding on to my sweater while giving a breathless sigh. My fingers travel across her collarbone while my palm brushes against the very top of her breast. I pull a gasp from her lips as I kiss her further down her neck towards her shoulder and reach a particular sensitive spot. I feel my blood rush through me as I feel her thigh between mine, releasing an almost feral need within me.

“The bed,” she breathes and pulls from me. She takes a step towards the bed before I pull her back to me - her back against my chest. She moans as I caress her neck with deep kisses, her body pressed against mine as if she needs my support to stand. Her one hand rests on my neck, while I feel the other travel up my thigh. I pull the strings in the front of her corset as her hand moves to my rear. I smile as she moans again, her emotional shudders being substituted for ones of pleasure.

As her corset falls to the ground she turns in my arms and captures my lips, while her nimble fingers
open my belt. When I hear it fall I pull away and tear my shirt over my head along with my necklace. My lips press against hers as soon as I am free of it and I lift her up. Her legs wrap around my waist as I carry her to the bed. I lower her on the bed as I find myself entranced by the sweetness of her lips. A part of her spirit is hidden in each one as if aching for release. Her quick fingers discard my green undershirt and soon her soft touch is roaming across my chest. I kiss her down her neck as she pants and sighs, while my fingers move to the buttons. For each one I open a kiss follows and I feel her hands caressing my head and neck. When I reach her stomach I give it a tender nip and she squeals.

“That tickles!”

The joy of the noise touches my heart and I can’t resist doing so again and again as I open the last of the buttons. My blood rushes through me at a quicker pace as she withers beneath me. The last button falls open and she pushes me back on my knees on the floor as she sits up on the bed. Her hands on my neck she kisses me deeply before the kisses travel along my jaw. Reaching the spot below my ear and jaw her tongue circles making me sigh in pleasure. It has been so long since anyone has touched me, both spirit and body. I feel drunk by her mere presence. My hand travels up her stomach and cup her breast - unbound by both corset and shirt. Full and soft it weighs heavy in my hand. I feel her hiss against my neck, which sends a pleasant shiver down my spine. As I gently caress her nipple her legs wrap around me pressing me to her. I moan as I feel her against me.

She pulls back and rips her shirt off before throwing it across the room. Her hands then begins to open my trousers as I move turn to the laces on hers. Trousers, legwraps and boots discarded she pulls me to the bed and places herself above me. I moan as I feel her against me. She reaches down my stomach, her touch featherlike as it closes in on my abdomen. The ghosting touch continues as I harden further.

"Vhenan," I plead breathless against her throat and she finally takes a tender hold.

It doesn’t take long for me to pant softly against her neck making her shiver in pleasure.

I press my lips against hers as she continues to tease me. My hand slips between her legs with a feathered touch, which makes her gasp into my kiss. As her breathing becomes ragged I reach for her underwear to push them down. In an effort to help them off quickly she rolls on to her back. She grabs one of the bedposts and I her waist as she nearly falls off the bed. We both start laughing and I roll her over me so she lies on the middle off the bed, her head facing away from the headboard. She gives me another kiss laughing against my lips as she does so.

“I’m so happy you’re here, love,” she grins.

I shudder at her sweet words. She is a beautiful person, so intelligent and thoughtful. Her spirit vibrant and unique. She has captivated my heart and I find myself falling more deeply in love with her the more she reveals it.

“You are so beautiful,” I murmur as I give her a deep, tender kiss.

My hand travels along her soft curves towards her folds - warm and soft as she sighs at even my lightest touch. A current dances on my fingertips and with a surprised moan her back arches and her
breasts press against me.

“What was that?” she laughs.

“Magic,” I grin as I do it again forcing another moan of pleasure from her.

“Cheater,” she teases and wraps her legs around me pushing me closer to her body.

“Not yet,” I murmur against her lips and kiss her. I’m already nearing my breaking point and I will not give in until I hear my name from her lips. I kiss my way down her collarbone and further, when she gently stops me.

“Please… stay here with me,” she asks with a tremble, her face flushed, her eyes closed and a shy smile on her lips.

“Whatever you wish,” I reply as I give her a tender kiss before laying on my side next to her.

My one arm keeps me from bearing down on her as I run my fingers through her hair. The other continues to pleasure her as she moans against my lips. I press my forehead against hers with a groan as I feel her tightening around my fingers. I find myself lost in her.

“Solas…” she pants more desperately, “Ar… Ar lath ma, Solas.”

Happiness consumes me at her declaration in her heat of passion. Heartfelt and enrapturing, she chose to do so in my language. I catch her lips in a desirous kiss as my touch becomes more insisting. I want her to feel the extent of my love for her. How fully my spirit has been enchanted by her. Her rapture is a high pitched sound against my lips as she arches against me and her grip on me tightens. I embrace her with both arms and her leg wraps around my waist. She hides her face the the crook of my neck as she heaves for breath and her body quivers against me.

“Ar lath ma,” I murmur in return as I kiss her neck and tighten my hold on her a little. If eternity could be nothing but this moment, then I would face it gladly.

Still holding me close, she rolls onto her back and places me above her. I tremble against her as our bodies are joined and she wraps her arms tightly around me - keeping me close. It has been ages - quite literally - but even had it not I don’t think I could have been prepared for this. My love for her feels more meaningful than any I have experienced before. I have changed so much since my youth, and in this moment I can truly feel how much. She matters so much more than I could ever have predicted, and in her arms I feel every obligation lifted and each regret banished. There is only my heart. When I feel her tightening around me I have to pull away for breath and start panting against her cheek. Her one hand moves my face and makes me meet her gaze, where she gives me a radiating smile.

“Ma vhenan,” I whisper hoarsely before I have to close my eyes from the pleasure.

I feel an eruption building in me, but not one that is merely physical. My heart grows and expands, as if my spirit is growing and reaching out of my body - merging with her purpose and love. My hands become tight knots into the bedsheets, as I feel pearls of sweat gather on my brow and down my spine. I have to remind myself to breathe, as I unconsciously try to hold it anticipating an all-consuming release. She trembles against me, giving soft moans as encouragement. I push against her and my body stills as a flash of white light blazes across my closed eyelids. A sound escapes me, but I am not aware enough to determine exactly what it is.

She gives me a glowing smile and kisses me before I lay down beside her. I turn to my side and pull her to me keeping her as close as I possibly can.
“I don’t remember when I was last this happy,” she whispers as if her saying it too loudly will break the spell.

“Neither do I.” I smile and kiss her brow.

For a few minutes we lie quietly in each other’s arms. The only sound is embers in the fireplace and our ragged breathing that is slowly returning to normal. I turn my head and see Atish’an lying in her basket a small room to the side - her head hidden beneath a blanket. I chuckle as I see it and Mona lifts her head giving a soft giggle as well. I let my hand run down her back and feel her damp skin starting to get cold. Wordlessly, I turn around towards the headboard and make her follow me underneath the covers. I rest my head against her hair and feel myself slipping towards the fade. She pulls from my embrace and leans over me, her hand caressing my cheek and I lean in to kiss her palm - not in the slightest bothered by the fact that she disturbed me from falling asleep. Her fingers trace my face as if she means to memorize every part of it. A feathered touch brushes over the scar above my eyebrow.

“So, my dear love, how did you get this scar?”

I smile as I’m reminded of our first meeting. Had she known then how I would grow to love her?

“I got it while removing my vallaslin,” I explain letting my thumb caress her cheekbone.

Her eyes widened slightly as she looks down at me.

“**You** had a vallaslin?”

“Yes, but it was a long time ago,” I sigh a little wistfully at the reminder of just how long ago that in reality is.

“Whose?” Her expression is filled with the curiosity that I have come to admire so much.

“Mythal’s.”

“Really? So did I,” she replies as she starts tracing the area, where my vallaslin once was.

This time I’m the one, who is surprised. Why would she ever…?

“Excuse me?”

She gives wry smile with a faint blush.

“Well, in the “book” I was an elf - Dalish elf if you can believe it. If I choose to be human you wouldn’t... Or rather I couldn’t be with you. That’s why I...” she trails off and turns her face away in shame.

I gently take her chin and turn her face towards me.

“I fell in love with your spirit - not your body,” I give her a small kiss as reassurance.

“I know… I was just afraid. Everything was suddenly real and distant at the same time. I didn’t know if me being human would bother you, though I wanted to believe it didn’t matter...”

“Stop. You’re perfect exactly as you are.”

I kiss her tenderly conveying with the gesture promises to remove any doubt that it should be the case. A small smile grace her lips and I feel my heart tightening. That she would ever believe it to be
the case disturbs me - perhaps, because I can see why it would have been an easy assumption to make. I reach for her and let my finger run against the rounded curve of her ear.

“Does it bother you that I’m an elf?”

She laughs.

“Not even a little. But let’s be honest, you could be an undead at this point and I’d still love you.” Her eyes sparkle with mischief.

“I’m not certain whether to be flattered or disturbed,” I chuckle.

“I’d say a bit of both would be wise,” she grins and I shake my head, “What? I thought you liked it when I surprised you.”

I can’t hold back my laugh.

“Conversations with you always seem to be surprising.”

“Ar lasa mala revas,” she murmurs and kisses the scar on my forehead, “You are free.”

I pull her down for a soft kiss. Perhaps I am free, and this world is enough, then I am free to love her and give her everything she desires. Everything that will make her happy. There is value in this world and in her embrace - perhaps that is enough.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you all enjoyed this chapter. Thank you so much for your loyalty to this story. I'm so grateful.

Please, leave a comment and let me know how I did with this chapter. And if you have requests and such, please let me know.
Dawn rises over the mountains as I awake. I smile when I recognize the weight of an arm across my chest. I turn carefully to face her, but Mona is still asleep. The red of the sunlight shimmers on the white silken fabric and against her skin. The red nuances of her hair are more pronounced than usual. She looks like the sunrise itself. So long I have walked in darkness, and only in her presence can I allow my mask to disappear. I reach out and stroke the contours of her face with a single finger.

“Shouldn’t you be asleep?” she murmurs with a smile, her eyes still closed.

“For once, the Fade is the furthest thing from my mind,” I reply in a low voice and kiss her brow.

She pulls herself closer to me and rests her head on my bare chest. Her soft breathing comforts me, and in this moment, I feel like I’m the luckiest being in Thedas. She inches a little bit closer and tilts her head back to kiss my neck while her hand strokes along my abdomen.

“I thought you were tired,” I chuckle, a low rumble in my chest.

“Should I stop?” She gives a coy smile against my neck.

“I didn’t say that.”

I lean over her and kiss her deeply as my hand travels along her thigh. There is a knock on the door, and I pull away.

“Damn it,” she hisses and gives me one more kiss before getting out of bed. I sit up as I see her put on her long, white, silken robe, the sunlight shimmering on it. The smile she gives me as she catches me staring rivals the light around her.

“Inquisitor?”

“Impatient…” she mutters and then answers loudly, “Just a moment!” She closes her robe as Cassandra walks up the stairs with her usual brashness. Judging by Mona’s relaxed attitude and Atish’an still sleeping soundly, I assume that this is a regular occurrence.

“Inquisitor, we should--”

As soon as she is up the stairs, Cassandra sees me, then turns her eyes to the clothes scattered across the room as a faint blush forms on her face.

“Cassandra, I believe you’ve met Solas,” Mona says deadpanned, making a gesture in my direction.

“Good morning, Seeker.” I nod cheerfully, and her face goes from flushed to a bright red.

“I’m sorry. I thought you were alone…”

“Evidently,” I remark with some amusement.

“So, I take it--”

“Anything you wanted, Cassandra?” Mona interrupts.
“I merely brought up Dagna’s latest notes and wanted to remind you that there is a war council in an hour.”

“Dagna’s notes? Give them here!” She reaches for them enthusiastically and sits down on the bed next to me as she begins to read them.

I hear the door open again, and Mona groans rolling her eyes.

“Mona, have you seen Solas? I have been loo--” the Herald comes up the stairs and gives me a broad grin. Cassandra grabs him by the shoulder and starts to push him towards the stairs.

“I apologize for interrupting what I assume was a … momentary diversion?” she asks, looking at Mona.

“Hmm … what do you say, Solas? Was this just a one-time diversion?” She gives me a coy look, and I laugh.

The Herald looks at me with great interest as well.

“No.” I kiss her cheek. “Is that a problem, Seeker?”

The Herald chuckles and murmurs something sounding like finally, and the Seeker starts pushing him towards the stairs again.

“A surprise, I’ll admit. But not a problem. I’ll leave you for now, then.” Cassandra turns, but the Herald looks over her shoulder and remarks, “And do yourself a favour and lock the door from now on.”

“We shall, thank you, Herald.” I narrow my eyes at him, and he grins.

“Or you could just wait for me to open the door,” Mona calls after them as Cassandra and the Herald walk back down the stairs.

She lays down with her head in my lap and looks over her notes. I let my fingers run through her hair and smile at seeing my heart so content. Right now, she is not the crouched-over Inquisitor whose work is swallowing her but a passionate woman relaxing in my company.

“What is it?”

“Dagna and I are trying to reverse engineer a golem. I want to see if we can meddle with the harmonics of the construction and substitute it from other alloys. See, if this part can be adapted, then I might be able to create a conductor. The wiring could run alongside here and…” She trails off as she looks up at me, then laughs heartily.

“What?” I feel my face heat up as she looks at me.

“You looked absolutely lost! Not something I would have expected from my wise mage,” she answers innocently, her hazel eyes dancing with mischief.

“I would have expected you to be used to it by now.” I let a hand run across my head and down my neck, feeling suddenly self-conscious.

“You usually follow things so easily.” She reaches up and strokes my cheek. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to make you uncomfortable. You just looked so sweet and flustered.”

I hum in reply, accepting her apology, and kiss her palm. I then reach for one of the pages and look
over the schematics.

“How did you learn these things?”

“Well, before I came to Thedas, I was an engineer specializing in artificial intelligence.” She tries to suppress a smile at the look I give her. “I created machines and developed very simple minds for them to operate on. Kind of like Caridin, but without the murdered dwarves and killing machines.”

“What kind of machines?”

“I worked with prosthetics and other aids for children, mostly. Giving them missing limbs, helping them with speech if they couldn’t speak well. That sort of thing.”

I smile at her as she sits up and puts her papers aside. She then straddles my lap and takes a loving hold around my neck.

“You’re so wonderful,” she whispers as she leans in and kisses me deeply.

“I believe that was my line,” I reply, returning the kiss.

My hands travel under her robe and around her waist as the kisses become more passionate.

“We promised to lock the door,” I remind her, nibbling her collarbone as she pushes against me.

“Tish, stand guard.”

Atish’an rises - reluctantly - from her dog bed and walks down the stairs. I chuckle at her as I push her robe off her shoulders.

“What? I’m the Inquisitor, I delegate.” She grins, captures my lips in a fervent kiss, and pushes me down into the mattress.

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Watching Mona getting dressed is bittersweet. I love that we have become so close that I’m starting to know every intimate detail about her - and her body. On the other hand, seeing the softness and tenderness transforming into a determined, brave, and competent leader is captivating as well. Besides, I don’t doubt that if I wish to return tonight she would welcome it. I walk over to her and kiss her neck as she braids her hair. She looks into the mirror and smiles at me.

“So, how many people do you think know? It’s been an hour,” she chuckles.

“That depends if they told Varric first or not.” I smile as I wrap my arms around her waist, resting my chin on her shoulder. “Are you regretting it?”

“No, of course not. It would just have been wiser after we dealt with the Winter Palace, but that’s merely for Josephine’s sake.” She turns in my arms and looks up at me. “I could never be ashamed of loving you.”

I kiss her brow and give her a wistful smile.
“You deserve so much better than what I can give you.”

She frowns and shakes her head.

“Even if that were true, it doesn’t matter when what I want is you,” she replies, giving me a small kiss.

I hear a knock on the door and Mona turns.

“Five minutes! That’s all I’m late!” she groans, rubbing her face. “Will you run away with me?” she jests.

“Perhaps, once Corypheus is defeated,” I respond lightly.

She walks down the stairs and opens the door. I go to the bed and sit down to put on my leg wraps, when I can hear her speaking with an unfamiliar voice. Probably one of the runners or servants. When she returns she is carrying a tray with food. Her expression is somewhere in between disbelief and humorous.

“So, it turns out Edward cancelled the war council today as he thought it more important to go over the trebuchets with Cullen. Apparently, the servants were informed that we would be occupied with some important studies, and we are to be left undisturbed for the day.”

I can’t keep myself from laughing, and she joins me as she walks over to the table near the bed and puts down the tray. She grabs a handful of berries and walks into the room next to us. Atish’an walks to me and looks at the tray. I take a small piece of the eggs and give it to her.

“You spoil her,” Mona reprimands, but without any true sternness.

“I’m sure I have no idea to what you are referring, Inquisitor.” I grin in return and stroke Atish’an’s head, who is already looking hungrily for the next bite.

“Oh-huh…” She raises an eyebrow as she return with a vial of black liquid and a small glass. “I suppose this is why she started sleeping on the furniture when I’m not around?”

I merely give her a grin and she giggles, as she pours some of the black liquid into a small glass. She sniffs it and makes a face as if she is about to gag. In a quick motion, she swallows it and immediately eats the berries trying to cover up the taste.

“What are you doing?”

“Extract of deathroot and Venedalh oil.” She makes a tremble in disgust and takes a drink of water.

“And why are you poisoning yourself?” I frown.

“Well, unless you want to be a father in the near future, it’s kind of necessary. And I refuse to use those shell things the Orlesians use. Those things hurt,” she cringes.

My frown remains as she walks over to me and sits on the bed.

“You asked me what I missed from my world; proper birth control. Yuck…”

“You are aware there is a spell for that?” I question.

“No, but that’s useful.” she scowls at me. “ Couldn’t you have said that five minutes ago?”
“I thought you knew.” I smile softly and put my hand on her abdomen. “There will be some discomfort.”

The magic in my hand surges and burns what is left of me inside of her, and she cringes.

“Ouch…” she whimpers softly. “Better than the deathroot though.”

I release a little healing into her to remove the discomfort and purge what I can of the poison she consumed. It might be effective, but it can also harm her if she uses it continuously. Mona gives me a sultry look as she straddles me and pushes me back down onto the bed.

I see the confident teasing in her eyes and know she means for nothing to come of it beyond that. She squeals in surprise when I flip her over.

“I was just teasing!” she objects with a laugh.

“You should know better, *vhenan,*” I chuckle darkly and start to nibble her neck, drawing a moan from her lips.

Atish’an bolts back to her dog bed and covers herself with a blanket, making us both laugh.

“I think we traumatized my dog,” Mona laughs, and I chuckle.

“Come here, my friend,” I encourage the dog as I sit up and pat the bed. Atish’an scowls from underneath the blanket, then trots over to us and jumps on the bed, sitting down behind us and taking turns to nuzzle our cheeks.

“If she insists on sleeping with us and pushes you out of the bed, don’t look at me.” Mona mock scowls.

My only response is to give the dog a slice of bacon.

“You’re such a pushover!” She laughs.

As a response, I lean over and give her a kiss.

It is midday when we return to our duties. I could have stayed with her in that room forever, but neither of us want to neglect the responsibilities to which we have committed ourselves. Going over reports and the information we have on the stability of the Veil, I find it easier to concentrate than I have in a long time. I don’t find myself distracted or worried. For right now, I have an unfamiliar confidence that everything is going to solve itself somehow. I hear steps entering the rotunda and see the Herald approaching with a grin on his face.

“So?” he asks, leaning against the desk with his arms crossed.

“So what?” I reply evenly as I pay attention to my work.

“How did it happen?”
“I really don’t believe that is any of your concern.” My tone is stern, and I glare up at him, still bend over my desk and looking at the maps.

“Come now, Solas!” He makes an exasperated noise.

I do not offer a reply and continue my work. Just when I think he might have given up, he speaks again. I should have known better than to underestimate his excessive curiosity.

“You know, I fully expect to be the man of honour at your wedding. And none of this ‘Herald’ business when you have children. It’s ‘Uncle Ed.’” He teases with that childlike playfulness I’m now quite familiar with.

He means for me to get flustered and give in to his goading, but that is a wrong assumption on his part.

“I see,” I reply, making certain my answer is unaffected by his words. “Tell me, have you contacted Josephine’s family to ask for her hand yet? I believe that is customary among the nobility.”

The Herald’s face flushes instantly, and he steps away from the desk. He wrings his hands nervously, and had it not been for his own relentless poking and prodding, I might even have felt some pity for the boy.

“Not…” he swallows, “exactly.”

I take a hold of my chin as I rise completely, seemingly contemplating his words.

“A dowry might be required along with the right connections. Perhaps starting with approval from your own family might be appropriate.”

“Alright, alright! I’ll relent,” he concedes and throws his hands up in the air. “You bloody savage.” He grins, and I return it.

His face has turned scarlet, but despite his embarrassment, he is laughing. It is a good thing that he is able to dealing with being teased as well as he teases. He then walks up to me and lowers his voice, but not so low that it will cause suspicion.

“Understanding that it’s none of my business, I do have one question, if I may?” he asks as politely as he can.

“You may ask, but I may choose not to answer.” I narrow my eyes at him.

“Does she love you?” There is concern in the way he looks at me.

“I think I’m going to go down to the kitchens and find some cake. It seems like a celebrate with cake type of day.” He beams, but it disappears as Cole enters the room with a distraught look on his face. “Or not. Are you alright, Cole?”

“No. Twisted, turning, pulled against what I am - what I want.”

“Sorry, what?” The Herald looks confused.

“I want you to bind me, Solas,” Cole insists, looking at me.

“I see … this about the Fear demon at Adamant.”
The Herald looks at me and seems to notice the seriousness of my demeanour.

“I’m guessing Mona should know about this?” He looks at me, questioning.

“Yes, that would be wise.” I nod.

Edward nods and walks out of the room to find her.

I turn to Cole and give him my answer, “No.”

“But you like demons!”

“I enjoy the company of spirits, yes, which is part of why I do not abuse them with bindings.”

“It isn’t abuse if I ask!”

“Not always true.” I give an exasperated sigh as I look for Mona. “Also, I don’t practice blood magic, which renders this entire conversation academic.”

Mona and the Herald enters the rotunda and approach us. Mona walks directly up to Cole and puts a hand on his shoulder.

“He won’t bind me. He is a mage, and he likes demons, but he won’t help!” Cole cries in his frustration, and I give a heavy sigh. At least I can hope that Mona will know how to talk some sense into him.

“Sweetheart, I know you’re frightened, but a mage binding you isn’t the answer.” She comforts the spirit with a motherly affection.

“He has to!” Cole walks back passed me and stares helplessly into the ground, wringing his hands. “If Solas won’t do the ritual to bind me, then someone else could. Will! Like the Warden mages! And then…”

“There must be some middle ground between ‘do nothing’ and ‘bind Cole with blood magic,’” the Herald remarks with a concerned expression.

“Indeed,” I reply and remember the talisman in my pocket. Of course...

Mona walks up to Cole, whose shoulders are slumped with head bowed.

“Listen to me. We will figure this out, and we will help you.” She gets on her toes and kisses his forehead. “You’re my friend, remember? I didn’t turn my back on you when Rhys and Evangeline did. I’m still here. Do you know why?”

Cole gives her a careful nod. “You wouldn’t want me to hurt innocent people. I don’t want to hurt innocent people again.”

“Exactly. Solas and I have a talisman that will help.” She looks at me, and I reach into my pocket and get out the Rivaini talisman. She gave me this months ago when she first helped me save Wisdom. I had released my friend from it after the incident with Joy in the Exalted Plains. And now I hold it forward in hopes of helping another friend.

“And you just happen to have this?” The Herald looks at us with something between amusement and disbelief.

“I figured it would be helpful at some point ever since I first met Cole. I left it with Solas for
safekeeping.” Mona looks at me and I continue to explain.

“A spirit wearing an amulet of the unbound is immune to blood magic and binding. It should protect Cole as well.”

Cole looks at me.

“What do I do with it?”

“It is simple enough. You put it on, I charge it with magic, and you should be protected,” I explain.

“Are you ready, Cole?” the Herald asks with concern.

“They can’t make me a monster.”

I attempt to charge it, but the spell recoils, and Cole cries out. It doesn’t work, but Mona does not seem surprised. She knew it wasn’t going to work, but I believe she had hoped it might.

“What was that?” I hear Varric’s voice, and Mona gives a heavy sigh. This is the first time I have ever seen her show displeasure at his company.

“Oh, for … What are you doing to the kid?” He sounds positively offended.

“Stopping blood mages from binding me like the Wardens at Adamant. But it didn’t work.” Cole sounds distraught.

“Something is interfering with the enchantment,” I clarify.

“Something like Cole not being a demon?” Varric objects.

Mona crosses her arms and looks at him with a frown.

“Varric, he is a spirit and a person. What you want him to be is human. I know what happened with Justice scares you, but they are not lesser people than we are. Regardless, we need to figure this out.”

“I’m not human. Neither is Chuckles.”

“Regardless of Cole’s unique circumstances, he remains a spirit,” I insist.

“Yes, a spirit who is strangely like a person.”

“So was Justice,” Mona points out, and Varric turns a few shades lighter than usual.

“That was different. He was a madness that took over Anders. We all know what kind of disaster that was,” the Child of the Stone grunts.

“No, he wasn’t. You never got to know Justice, but I did. It is because of that disaster that Cole needs to embrace who he is. Life is hard, messy, and incredibly painful. Would you rather he suffers all that we do than be able to let go of it?” The passion in her voice as she says it has me worried, and as I look at her, I notice her eyes have more water in them than usual.

“I don’t matter. Just lock away the parts of me that others would knot together to make me follow,” Cole objects and walks away.

Mona steps up to him quickly and makes him look at her again.
“You do matter! I love you, Cole. Do you understand?”

Cole looks at her carefully, studying every expression, reading every feeling.

“You’ll protect me no matter what.”

I step up next to them.

“Focus on the amulet. Tell me what you feel.”

“Warm, soft, blanket covering, but it catches, tears, I’m not the right shape. There is something…” Cole turns around and points toward Ferelden. “There. That way.”

The Herald steps forward and places a hand on Cole’s shoulder.

“I’ll help Cole find the spot on a map. Then we can leave,” he suggests.

“Yes, help him, but please stay here while we help Cole. We can’t both leave at once,” Mona reasons with a smile.

I expect the Herald to object, but instead he merely nods with understanding as he walks away with Cole. Cole turns and looks at us.

“Will you come with me? All of you?” he asks.

“Of course,” Mona smiles warmly, and I nod.

“Sure,” Varric agrees.

He looks at Mona, but she holds up a hand to stop him.

“I know, Varric. We can discuss it more later. I promise,” she assures him, and he gives a reluctant nod before a teasing glare twinkles in his eyes.

“So … you love the kid, huh?”

“You would find a way to turn that into something it’s not,” she scowls at the dwarf, unamused. “Will you get the horses ready? I need a word with Solas for a moment.” She smiles wryly at him, and he returns it.

“Sure thing, Waffles.” Varric nods and walks away.

She then turns to me with a small smile that lets me know everything will work itself out. I caress the talisman in my hand. It’s odd to think that I was the one to teach her about it, yet I have no recollection of doing so. I wonder if my previous incarnation, real or fiction, harboured such tender feelings for her as I do.

“This was why you acquired this so long ago,” I smile at her.

“I wanted to find two originally, but they are hard to come by. But yes. What would I be if not for my impressive foresight?” She chuckles with a playful spark in her eyes.

I smile at her, but her self-deprecation makes my heart ache a little. Surely, she does not think this her best quality? I take a step closer and give her a fond look.

“Clever, considerate, lovely,” I lower my voice as I continue, “and very passionate.”
She evades my eyes with a blush and a bright smile on her lips.

“Ass…” she mutters as she attempts to suppress a giggle.

“I appreciate that part of you as well.” I give her a wicked grin as she becomes even more flustered.

“That’s it! I’m going to pack. Get your gear,” she hisses, unable to suppress a large grin and a joyful sparkle in her eyes.

“As you command, Inquisitor.” I give a small bow as she gives me a mocking glare.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you again for all your support. We are nearing the events at the Winter Palace, so if you have any certain requests for that part of the story let me know.

I'm trying to keep the next few chapters a little more lighthearted before the angst train starts up again :)

Thanks again to ninaninabobina for beta reading.
Nightfall is closing in as we approach Ferelden. We won’t be able to make it to Redcliffe tonight. Along the way we pass statues left by my people and I’m reminded of all that has gone wrong in my life. This morning had been a blissful dream, but now reality is beginning to manifest itself and the severity of my feelings have begun to set in. The people of this world can no longer be mindlessly discarded. I’m also reminded of Mona’s efforts to return home and I feel discouraged. I look to Cole and think of the journey ahead. If only there was something as simple as an amulet that could solve my problems.

Cole looks at my curiously; “You don’t need to envy me, Solas. You can find happiness in your own way.”

He looks at Mona and smiles at me.

“I apologize for disturbing you, Cole. I am not a spirit, and sometimes it is hard to remember such simple truths.”

“They are not gone so long as you remember them,” he attempts to comfort.

“I know.”

“But you could let them go,” he points out once again turning his eyes towards Mona.

“I know that as well,” I sigh with some regret.

“You didn't do it to be right. You did it to save them.”

Mona looks back at me and I know she has heard the entire conversation. The kind smile she offers me feels like a balm on a burning wound.

“I will never know that for certain, Cole, but thank you for saying it.” I attempt a smile, but do not quite manage it.

“I think there is a storm brewing,” Mona looks to the sky, “We better make camp.”

“Great, camping in the wild and we’re going to get soaking wet,” Varric grumbles.

It starts pouring before we manage to finish the camp completely. I create a barrier above myself to keep myself from getting wet. Atish’an along with Varric jumps into the finished tent preventing himself from being wet, while in the meanwhile Mona is getting soaked through. She gives me a radiant smile that makes me believe she doesn’t mind in the slightest. I can’t help but laugh, when she playfully twirls in the rain.

“You’ll get a cold,” I chuckle.

“A cold won’t kill me.” She smiles closing her eyes and turns her face towards the sky.

A thunder sounds that rattles the horses as I tie the last of the tent poles.

“Get into the tent, Inquisitor. Cole and I will secure the horses,” I instruct and she shakes her head,
but doesn’t object.

When the horses have been secured Cole offers to watch them and I return to the tent, where Mona sits in nothing but her shirt and looks out into the rain. I get inside the tent removing my wet clothes and leg wraps, then sit behind her. She leans back against me, leaning her head on my shoulder looking out into the rain, while Atish’an is snoring a little further inside the tent.

“I love the rain,” she murmurs happily.

“So I gathered,” I chortle.

“Is Cole with the horses?” She asks and I nod.

We are quiet for a moment, and I can hear Varric snoring in the tent next to us - even through the rain and wind. I think of the task at hand and I hope we can help Cole.

“How did you meet Cole?” I ask looking towards the horses.

“I read about him in a book. An actual book, the first time. There was a boy named Cole, a mage, who was abused by his father and treated horribly. Killed his sister by accident due to his father’s abuse.” She gives a heavy mournful sigh and I rub her arm with my hand as she continues. “The Templars brought him to the spire and forgot him. He starved to death and Compassion came through to help him.”

“Such an experience would have been traumatic for such a spirit and perverted it from its purpose.”

“Yes. I felt so strongly for him and all he had suffered, so I insisted that Justinia let me join the expedition to research tranquility. And that’s when I met Cole. He was with Rhys at the time - a circle mage. Cole was so broken and timid, but Rhys had taken a liking to him. Then by the end of it all, Rhys and a templar named Evangeline found out what Cole was and abandoned him.” There is an unforgiving anger in her voice as she says it.

I give an audible smile and kiss her temple. It warms me how protective she is of him. She blushes a little as if she knows my thoughts as she shrugs.

“He needed a friend, and I wanted to be there for him.”

“Thank you, vhenan.”

“Why are you thanking me?” She looks up with a curious expression.

“Because no one else know how much heart and effort you put into everything.” I hold her a little tighter for a brief moment.

“It’s fine. I want to help.” She says it as if it the most natural thing in the world. As if anyone would have done the same in her position. Her modesty is endearing, but I fear it clouds her judgement.

“I know.” I burrow my face in the crook of her neck and give her a small kiss. “So, in this ‘book’ you said you were a Dalish elf?”

“Only in the third one. In the first I was the Hero of Ferelden, in the second I was actually Hawke.”

She grins up at me as I feel my eyes widening.

“Hawke?”
I recall the angry and overly sarcastic man I know, who pushed my love to extremes I still shudder to recall.

“Well, an interpretation. I was a woman - with much better manners I might add,” she chuckles.

I join her for a moment, but then the truth of it starts to sink in. If she were these people, then her relationship with their companions must not be so different from her connection to me.

“I see… That’s how you knew all of them.” My conversation with Hawke comes to mind as well as his wife. “So you and this Merrill...?” I keep my inquiry vague.

She shakes her head.

“No, nothing like that. I love Merrill, and we became friends when I was in Kirkwall, but nothing more. In the books relationships weren’t predefined. I choose who to be with.”

“And?”

“You should know the answer to this one.” She beams up at me and I give low chuckle.

“So, we were together when you were the Hero of Ferelden, Hawke and the Inquisitor?” I give her a doubtful look. She is concealing something and, in this at least, I know I’m not overstepping any bounds.

“Alright,” she sighs in defeat, “I was with you as the Inquisitor - or Herald, as they were one and the same in that story - and Alistair Theirin as the Hero of Ferelden.”

“You married the King of Ferelden, then?” I deduce.

“In one possible outcome, yes. I have never met twice in reality, and never beyond a polite greeting.” She looks up at him and caresses my cheek as if she means to comfort me. “He had business with Varric. He was very kind, idealistic and had a very good sense of humour. He was also very young,” she shakes her head with a grin.

“And when you were Hawke?”

Her face changes and mirth leaves her face.

“I was with Anders.”

Those words hit a little harder, because this is a man she has met. Not only that, but she has known him for a decade. He was - is her friend and related to much of the guilt I know she carries. I have no reason or cause to let this affect me, yet it does. It’s not quite jealousy, but I know what he did and how it hurt her. A man dedicated to a cause and willing to do anything in order to help his people. Part spirit, part man. How can I not see a likeness between him and myself?

“I see…”

She takes one of my hands and kisses it before interlacing her fingers with mine.

“Solas, I’m not the Queen of Ferelden and I’m not on the run with Anders. Instead I’m right here in your arms. That should tell you everything you need to know.” She pulls my arms around her a little closer to emphasize her words.

She looks up and puts a hand on my neck encouraging me to lower my lips to hers. We sit quietly for a while looking at the rain as it slowly gets darker.
“You never mention the father of your son,” I note.

“It’s been more than ten years, and we weren’t happy for a few years before that. For all that I regret leaving behind, with him it was more relief than anything. So, I don’t think of him often. But what about you? Who was your first love?”

I look down at her with a smile and she rolls her eyes.

“Nope, I’m not buying that I’m the first woman you have ever loved.”

I lower my mouth to her ear and reply in a low voice.

“You’re the first one worthy of any mention.”

She snorts with disbelief, but still manages to blush.

“And yet I recall a tale. How did it go? Fen’Harel had been captured by Andruil after hunting Hallah without her permission - let me know how she did that later by the way-” she smirks at me and I groan as she continues, “and ordered him to serve a year in her bed. And don’t tell me that one bares no truth, because I know that one from Felassan.” She looks at me knowingly.

“When did he tell you that story?”


I shudder as I recall Andruil and her advances.

“It was a very one-sided fascination, I assure you. And if you remember that story you should also know I escaped that fate.”

Mona gives a giggle seeing my obvious disgust.

“Alright, keep your secrets. I’m going to bed.” She gives my cheek a light kiss, then crawls towards her bedroll.

I look out into the rain for a few more minutes before I crawl up next to her and lay down looking at her back turned towards me.

“My first love was a spirit,” I begin quietly.

It’s a difficult subject for me as most people of this age do not regard spirits as people, but I remind myself that if anyone understands it’s her - my heart. She turns to me and looks at me with a soft expression.

“Solas, if this is too painful--”

“No, you answered my questions. It’s only fair I answer yours.” I reach for her hand and bring it to my lips.

“What type of spirit was it?” Her voice is quiet and she moves a little closer to me.

“I honestly can’t recall. It was so long ago, and things were… different back then. It wasn’t anything like our love. It was much more innocent.”

An alluring, sensual, and mischievous look passes her expression briefly, but whatever it was is replaced by something far more gentle.
“What happened?”

“Mythal asked me for help and the world changed. My world changed…”

“And you drifted apart.” She nods with understanding and lets her hand caress my cheek.

“In a manner of speaking.” I close my eyes and lean into her touch.

A bright light flashes across the sky and is followed by a haunting thunder. It’s enough to wake Atish’an who jumps up and sits between us. Mona lifts her blanket and the dog hides beneath it.

“I’m sorry, Solas.”

“What for?”

“Everything you’ve been through. If I could do something to change it and prevent it, I would.” Her words are so soft and the look she gives me tender and kind.

“I would do the same for you,” I whisper kissing her hand.

“Meh, I’m fine,” she shrugs with a careless expression, “I have the wisest and most wonderful lover in Thedas.”

I chuckle and move a little closer.

“Only in Thedas?” I tease to which she merely grins and leans in to kiss me.

The wind howls and pulls at the tent, while rain is whipping against it. Lightning and thunder continues, but I barely sense any of it. As long as she is with me, and I feel her love, everything else seems to be in a state of serenity.

As we arrive at Redcliffe the following day Cole seems increasingly on edge. We are almost at the center of the village, when he vanishes.

“Shit!” Mona hisses, “After him.”

As we run towards him a man is on his knees on the ground while Cole holds a dagger forward.

“You forgot. You locked me in the dungeon in the spire, and you forgot, and I died in the dark!”

“Cole, stop.” I say as we approach him and the man scurries away in the confusion. Cole turns to us - raw fury burning in his eyes.

“Just take it easy, kid.” Varric steps in front of him and tries to calm him.

“He killed me. He killed me. That’s why it doesn't work. He killed me, and I have to kill him back!”


“Cole, this man can not have killed you. You’re a spirit. You have not even possessed a body,” I reason.
“A broken body, bloody, banged on the stone wall, guts gripping in the dark dank, a captured apostate. They threw him into the dungeon in the spire at Val Royeaux. They forgot about him. He starved to death.”

Mona walks up to him and embraces him tightly.

“I came through to help…” he continues in a broken voice as he lets her hold him, “and I couldn’t. So I became him. Cole.”

“If Cole was an apostate that would make the guy we just saw a templar. Must’ve been buying lyrium.”

Cole breaks from Mona’s embrace and he follows the templar.

“Let me kill him. I need to… I need to.”

Mona turns to me with hurt in her eyes.

“Solas, help him.”

“Now wait a minute--” Varric objects.

“Varric, please trust me,” she says softly and the dwarf shakes his head in defeat.

“I believe I can help.” I offer her a smile to give her comfort before approaching Cole. “Cole, come with me.”

When I have helped Cole confront his pain and forgive the templar, we look for Mona and Varric. They are standing some distance away near the docks. It’s isolated and most people are some distance away. Mona is talking to him, but Varric seems to be responding with mere shrugs or short answers. She puts a hand on his shoulder and he gives her a small sad smile before he walks towards me.

“He could have been a person,” he mutters to himself as he passes me.

“It’s alright, Varric,” Cole comforts as he follows him towards the tavern.

Mona is turned towards the lake and looking into the water, her shoulders slumped. I walk up next to her and look into the water, where our eyes meet in the reflection.

“Varric’s angry at me,” she sighs.

“It will pass. We did the right thing,” I try to comfort.

“I’m not sure there was a right choice, but he will be happier this way - less burdened. Not emotional messes like you and me,” she smiles softly and I sigh as an acknowledgement.

“You used to be a spirit didn’t you?” She asks as she turns to me.

I’m taken aback by the question, but in hindsight I shouldn’t be.
“Why do you say that?”

“Just a guess,” she replies with a small shrug.

“It seems you have a talent for it,” I praise, which makes her smile.

“The odds were in my favour - fifty fifty.” She dismisses it as if it was the most normal conclusion to draw and sits down with her feet hanging of the pier. But perhaps for her it is. With the exception of Wisdom and Mythal, I can recall noone else who seems to understand me to the extend she does.

“You continue to surprise me,” I smile fondly and sit down next to her. “What would you like to know?”

“Tell me more of how you became a physical being,” she murmurs.

The way she phrases it is enough to make me smile. Varric would say real. Cole might even say so, but not her. She understands better than I could have hoped the nuances of what reality means. Sera uses the term ‘people’, but her understanding of the concept is limited - my own interpretation of the subject was questionable until I fell in love with Mona. But my heart sees nuances in the world lost to all others. Dubois was right, when seeing the world through her eyes I have been introduced to colours of the universe I had never before considered. Black, white, grey all seem like analogies that pale in comparison to the spectrum she sees. How could I have been so wrong?

“Solas?” she murmurs softly and looks at me with worry.

I look around making sure that we are alone, but Redcliffe is quiet and there is noone near us. I give her a small kiss on her cheek and give her the answers she seeks.

“Long ago, after the Evanuris had taken their forms, war broke out with the Titans. As a result the Evanuris needed to bolster their numbers. Though, they were not known as Evanuris then - or Gods. Mythal asked me to help her, so I did. I would have lingered as a spirit forever without regret, but the People needed me. My friend needed me. At first I was but a servant and wore her vallaslin, but as I became more powerful and more assertive of myself that changed.”

“They began to respect you as their equal.”

“Yes. I was cocky, hot-blooded and always ready to fight. When Mythal asked me to help her broker peace with the Titans, I saw it as a challenge. I took pride in everything that I had accomplished.”

“My rebel wolf,” she smiles wryly and lays her head on my shoulder. “So your first love - you were spirit then too.”

“Yes, but when I gained a body I was so fascinated by everything. I changed much faster then what I had expected. Now, I confess I miss being a spirit. I envy that existence and regret that I did not take more value in it,” I sigh a little sadly as I recall me conversation with Cole the day before.

“Remarkable… to exist as pure energy.” The fascination in her voice makes me smile, and I’m reminded that whatever I might regret, being with her in this moment is not one of them. “Did you know there are actually people aspiring to reach such a state?” She continues in awe.

Her surprise intrigues me. I have gotten used to her knowing so much about me it almost feels like a new experience for her to be surprised by something I tell her. Genuinely fascinated like when she does one of her experiments. Her not knowing about my first love wasn’t unexpected, but this is such a large part of who I am - how I became Solas. I had sincerely expected her question to be more than a mere hunch.
“You seemed surprised to hear that story. Which means you didn’t know.” I pause and look at her for a moment. What else doesn’t she know? “Why do you so rarely ask my about my past?”

“I love you,” is her only answer as she keeps looking into the water.

“And I you, though that’s not much of an answer,” I try again.

She moves her head away from my shoulder and looks at me with a loving gaze.

“You hate lying, so I do not ask questions that will force you to. The reason is that I love you.”

I take her in my arms and press my forehead against hers.

“Ma serannas, vhenan. I do not deserve the kindness you show me.”

“You deserve every bit of it,” she smiles and kisses me before she gets up. “Now, let’s get some food. I’m starving.” She reaches for my hand and helps me to my feet.

Later that night I walk up to the room Mona has rented at the tavern for the night before we make the journey back to Skyhold. I knock on the door I hear her telling me to enter. It’s small room with a single bed, where Varric, Cole and I are sharing a larger one. Since Varric has made no mention of our relationship it seems that neither Cassandra or the Herald has told anyone. Mona is sitting on the bed with both star charts and unfamiliar schematics spread out across the bed. She smiles as she sees me approach.

“Hey love,” she greets me and I bow down to give her a quick kiss.

“I just came by to say goodnight. What’s all this?” I point to the schematics.

“I have been trying to cross reference these maps with what little is left behind from your people. To see if they have encountered a star system or a galaxy that is somehow familiar.”

“Making any progress?” I look at the maps, though I’m truly not certain how much help I can offer her.

“Not really… My people didn’t discover this world, so I’m really just grasping at straws.” She furrows her brow for a moment and looks at me. “Can I ask you something?”

“Of course,” I reply without hesitation and puts the map back down.

“Well, if all elves were spirits and the dwarves were created by the Titans, where do humans in Thedas come from?”

“Falon’Din created them.”

She gives me a doubtful look.

“Falon’Din? What the hell did he want with humans?”

I frown in disgust and give a deep sigh.
“More minions. He raised bloody wars to gain more worshippers, but it was at the cost of his own followers. Humans had short life spans, and as such bore children earlier and more frequently.”

“So, we were cannon fodder. Lovely,” she groans with sarcasm.

“I believe you were intended as such, but Mythal intervened before Falon’Din completed his plans.”

Mona looks at me carefully as if she is deciding whether to speak or not.

“Love, what if he didn’t create the humans? What if he simply took them from somewhere else?”

“From your world?” I nod with understanding. “Since I learned the truth about you I have been pondering the same thing. It is entirely possible that is what he did. Though as to how, I am uncertain.”

“Could we find out?” There is an endearing enthusiasm and hopefulness to the way she says it - and it makes my heart ache, though I know it has no right to do so.

“Technically, but the problem is that he did it in Seheron.” It’s the truth. And it complicates any attempt to help her. For a moment I worry that she will be angry at me for not informing her of this sooner, but instead a playful expression forms on her face.

“What? You don’t fancy to walk around a sweaty jungle with me while Tevinter and the Qunari are trying to murder one another? You’re so hard to please,” she sighs dramatically.

“And yet you do it with so little effort.” My eyes darken and I lean towards her.

“Oh, it takes great effort, but you’re worth it,” she teases leaning in as well.

“I should consider myself lucky then,” I continue putting my hands on her waist pulling her closer.

“Yes, you should,” she grins as she is about to kiss me.

Mona’s eyes flash towards the door and she stares intently at it.

“Varric drop that notebook or so help me I will set the Hanged Man on fire!” She threatens.

I feel a chill going down my spine. How much did he hear? And even if he heard that conversation how much would he be able to deduce from it?

“If you had given my insight knowledge of this development I could win my coin back from Hawke. But now I get the story as compensation,” Varric grins.

“You don’t fool me. The story is what you wanted all along.” She scowls at him.

“Allright, alright!” Varric chuckles. “I’m going to bed and the kid is… well, doing whatever it is he does at night. You two behave.” He winks as he closes the door.

Our eyes meet and she chuckles.

“Where were we?” I muse as she gives me a sultry look. “Ah, I remember.” I grin as I capture her lips in a tender kiss.

Chapter End Notes
Thank you all for supporting this story. I know there are many opinions on what choice is "best" for Cole, but I hope it will make sense why Mona choose as she did. Personally, I do it because I ship Krem and Maryden waaaaaay to much :D

This chapter has not been beta read, so please forgive any mistakes.
We set up camp before the last part of the journey to Skyhold. Mona reads the many messages from Skyhold while the raven pecks at the bread she has offered it. Cole tends to the horses, Varric scribbles on scratch piece of parchment, and I attempt to make us dinner from the rations we have left. Atish’an sits next to me, her eyes hungrily follow the spoon as I stir. That is when I catch Varric staring at me.

“Anything I can do for you, Varric?”

He grins at me as he fiddles with his quill.

“So, you and Waffles ... I need some details. Did you go down on one knee? Did she jump you? Did you swear eternal vows of love, or is this just a physical thing?”

I raise an eyebrow and look at him.

“And how, exactly, is this any of your concern?”

“Come now, I need details for my next tale! Imagine it; the admired noble who falls in love with the mysterious elven apostate. People love that sort of drama!” He enthuses.

Mona looks up at him from her missives and directs an impressive scowl his way.

“Not if my life depended on it,” she sneers. “I saw how you butchered Aveline’s love life in Swords and Shields. I’m not having a horror like that written about me.”

A short laugh escapes me as Varric gives a heavy sigh.

“You know, I would be offended. Problem is -- it’s true.”

“I can tell you stories of spirits if you’re seeking inspiration, Varric,” I offer cheerfully.

“Thanks for the offer, Chuckles, but I think I’ve had enough dealings with spirits.” Varric sighs and looks over at Cole with a sad expression on his face. His eyes then dart to me again with a scowl. “You do know I owe the Herald a small fortune because of you two? I thought he was out of his mind.”

“Well, you think that everyone who cares about me are out of their minds,” Mona giggles.

“All I’m saying is that you have a type. And I didn’t think Chuckles here was that kind of crazy. Not to mention too optimistic,” Varric replies with a wry grin.

“It’s comforting to know that whatever qualities I lack, you’ll invent for me, Varric.”

“No, really. Why else would an elven apostate help crazy Chantry folk close a hole in the sky?”

“When you put it like that, I must concede your point.” I grin, looking over at Mona.

She has grown quiet and looks down at the letters with a frown. Varric notices as well.
“Hey, Waffles, what is it?”

“A letter from Josephine. The ball at the Winter Palace is three weeks away, and we still don’t have enough influence to even be granted an invitation.” She rubs her forehead. “What am I missing? I feel like there is something important I can’t remember.”

She gets up in frustration and starts pacing and muttering to herself.

“It’s probably my own bloody fault. Now that the Herald isn’t the Inquisitor, interest and power have been divided. But how do I fix it?”

“Easy, it will work itself out.” Varric attempts to assure her.

“Varric, I could have messed up everything. If we don’t get into the Winter Palace … I could have doomed all of us.” She makes an exasperated noise, and her distress is enough to catch Cole’s attention.

“You did it to help. It’s not your fault,” Cole reasons.

“Thank you, Cole, but regardless of intent, it is my fault - my responsibility,” she sighs heavily.

I get up and take her gently by her shoulders to prevent her from pacing.

“You must have some connections in Val Royeaux that can help. Perhaps you have been relying too much on what you know and are missing new opportunities that were not there before.” I cup her cheek with my palm and smile at her. “I refuse to believe that you have changed things for the worse. You must know someone with influence who can help you solve this.”

A smile forms on her lips.

“Vivienne! Of course! You’re brilliant!”

She gives me a quick kiss and runs to her tent. Varric chuckles as he looks at me.

“Not who you had in mind, Chuckles?”

“No,” I admit with a sigh.

“I suppose the Iron Lady doesn’t know about the development between the two of you?”

“We have not strived to make it publicly known.” I raise an eyebrow at him, remembering how he found out, and he grins.

“You probably won’t be able to keep it secret for much longer - and no, I’m not going to say anything.” He holds up his hands as if surrendering.

“I’m aware,” I sigh, but even so, I can’t help but smile as I look at Mona sitting in her tent, writing with haste, and biting her lower lip as she always does while concentrating.

“So,” Varric begins in a low voice, “what are you going to get her for her birthday next week?”

“I wasn’t aware… I suppose that requires some consideration.”

“Happy to help.” Varric grins as he returns to his writing.

I look at Mona and smile. Birthdays are somewhat of a foreign concept to me personally, but I want
to surprise her. I just have to find the right gift.

When we return, Skyhold seems to be buzzing with life. We are barely inside the gates before both Josephine and the First Enchanter approach Mona, and she runs off with them. Her mind has been occupied the entire trip back. The Herald, on the other hand, greets me as I take the horses to the stable.

“I see Cole is happier. He is already trying to help some woman in the courtyard. I’m guessing he can’t be bound any longer?”

“Cole’s spirit has been healed. And with the Amulet of the Unbound, no one - not even Corypheus - should be able to bind him,” I explain.

“That’s good. So, are you up for another trip to Orlais in the near future? I’m going to the Emerald Graves, and with all the elven history, I thought you’d enjoy it. Don’t worry, we will be back for Mona’s birthday,” he assures me, childish grin on his face.

“I will always join you when required, Herald. Seems I was the last one to know about the Inquisitor’s birthday,” I remark, frowning with the realization.

“Josephine is turning Skyhold over backwards because of it. She and Vivienne invited many nobles in order to gain more influence. Hopefully, it will be enough to give us an invitation to Halamshiral.”

I rub my chin. It could work.

“They believe that the Inquisitor stands a better chance of persuading the nobles to support our cause in person. And they are, undoubtedly, too curious to turn down an invitation from the Inquisition. I hope it will succeed.”

“I do, too. Josephine was really worried.” He blushes ever so slightly, and I have to smile.

“How about a game of chess, and we can talk about what happened in my absence?” I suggest, and the Herald groans.

“I don’t know why I always agree to this torture. I will beat you one day,” he vows as we walk through Skyhold’s courtyard.

“Not until you’re willing to sacrifice some of your pawns.”

“Hey, I’m learning. I will not fall for you sacrificing your queen this time. I’m just going to let her live.”

“A dangerous mistake,” I chuckle.

“Solas, you would make one lousy king sacrificing your wife like that,” he teases.

I feel a small sting in my heart, but I do not dwell on it. Instead, I change the subject.

“Indeed, but hopefully a somewhat decent teacher. How have your studies progressed in my absence?”
I need to focus my mind on the present and not let the past or future carry me away. In these moments, the present is all that matters. Thankfully, the Herald has a talent for being distracting with his enthusiasm, humor, and occasionally slow wit.

That evening, I am in the Rotunda drawing when I hear a commotion from the other room. I do not pay it much attention at first until I hear music coming from the other room. As it piques my curiosity, I put the drawing aside and walk into the great hall. Most of our companions are lined up as Vivienne gives them instructions on how to dance.

“We need to make an exceptional impression next week if we are to secure an invitation to the Winter Palace. So focus!” the First Enchanter barks at her pupils.

The Herald gives an exuberant bow before Josephine, making her giggle and blush.

“Shall we show them how, Lady Montilyet?”

“You flatter me, my lord.” She curtsies as the two of them begin to demonstrate.

That is when I notice Mona sitting in a corner, just watching with a smile on her face. I walk over to her, and I’m rewarded with a smile for my own.

“Should you not be joining them, Inquisitor?”

The look she gives me is close to horrified.

“Oh no, Vivienne has given me strict orders never to dance at any event in Orlais,” she grins.

“Really?” I frown, looking at the First Enchanter close by.

“I believe she said I dance like a toad,” Mona clarifies loud enough for the First Enchanter to hear.

“A toad with no legs, darling,” Vivienne corrects.

“See?” She grins, not seeming the slightest bit bothered by the insult.

I sit down next to her and watch the others.

“You could join them, you know. I know you actually enjoy dancing.” She smiles at me, and I chuckle.

“I can forgo the pleasure for your company.” I grin, making her give a slight giggle.

I look at her as she observes each movement carefully and ever so softly hums the tune - barely loud enough for me to hear even though I’m sitting right next to her. It is clear that the dancing enchants her, and I suspect a part of her would like to be out there with them.

“You say you can’t dance or sing, but I have difficulty imagining that there is anything you cannot accomplish once you put your mind to it.” I look at her carefully trying to figure out why she would hold back.
“I received lessons once. I was horrible.” She giggles, but her expression turns more serious when she notices my frown. With a sigh, she continues, “Dancing, singing, and art all reveal part of your soul - your spirit. And I have tried to keep mine hidden for as long as I can remember.”

It’s a more poetic and painful response than I was expecting, indicating something deeper than wounded pride.

“Why would you do that?”

“For the same reason some spirits hide comfortably behind the Veil. I fear what will happen to it should my essence be exposed to the world around it.” She says it so calmly that if I did not know her better, I would believe that her past did not affect her at all. I begin to understand why restoring Cole to his purpose was so important to her. It was not merely my council she followed, but something intangible. Her protectiveness of Cole and the memories of her son pull at something deep inside her. For a moment, I see a little girl that once was, and I wonder what happened to her to create the woman in front of me.

“Who hurt you so deeply?”

“What makes you think it was merely one person?” She smiles still, though her words are so sad. “I’m not kidding. My coordination is terrible, and I’m not willing to test singing. I can’t afford to repair the damage it will cause.”

She returns to the original subject so easily that whatever glimpse I saw of that part of her spirit is gone - hidden away. A part of her I have not seen since Haven.

“Regardless, I remember an elven lullaby sung to a frightened little girl who had lost her way. As I recall, it was very lovely.”

She laughs and blushes fiercely. She can’t meet my gaze and seems genuinely uncomfortable.

“I was just murmuring … I didn’t know you could hear me … Besides, you’re biased because of your feelings for me,” she dismisses with a grin.

“Vhenan …” I try softly when she gets up.

“I’m going to bed. Goodnight, love.” She smiles and kisses my cheek before walking towards the door.

I frown and find myself deep in thought as she walks off. I’m so distracted that I do not notice Vivienne approach me.

“I see you managed to get the Inquisitor’s undivided attention,” she remarks.

“Are you worried my opinion of you will influence the Inquisitor’s, First Enchanter?”

“Not at all. I’m concerned about you, darling.” Her sweet words are laced with poison.

“Oh, this should be interesting. Pray tell, what is it that I’m in danger of?”

“Unlike most here, your affection for her does not come as a surprise to me in the least. She is, however, not a woman to make decisions based on her affections, but rather sense. A quality I assume you admire about her?”

I do not have to answer. We both know that it is the truth.
“You seem to make each other happy. I was just wondering how you imagine your future. The Inquisitor and the elven apostate. Half of Thedas will be in uproar.”

Her words ring true, and their taste is bitter as I know something similar has left my own lips. Nothing about my affection for Mona is wise.

“If the Inquisitor has no objections to it, then why should you?”

“Which is exactly my point. This affair of yours is likely only temporary. Do enjoy it while it lasts. When this is over with, you can vanish back into the wilds, forgotten – but she will never be able to follow you.”

“Your concern for my well-being is noted, First Enchanter,” I reply politely and turn from her. I can’t suppress a devious smirk as I walk directly towards Mona’s chambers.

When I reach her chambers, they are dark except for the embers in the fireplace. Atish’an gives a pleasant grumble when she hears me but doesn’t move from her spot in front of the fire.

I crawl into bed where Mona is already tucked in, not quite asleep. Without a word, she rolls over to me and rests her head in my arm as I heal her migraine. I hold her tight, take in the scent of vanilla and spice, and fervently wish that I could deny that there is any truth to the First Enchanter’s words.

When I wake the next morning, the other side of the bed is already cold. There is no sign of Mona, but Atish’an is still snoring in front of the fire that went out hours ago. From the position of the sun, it is still early, but it does not surprise me that she is already awake. As I walk downstairs, the Skyhold servants are already running back and forth while the contractors are struggling to finish the newest improvements Mona chose for Skyhold. I hope this plan works. Mona is standing at the entrance to the great hall speaking with one of the dwarven contractors. I wait patiently for them to finish before I approach. My heart gives me a tender smile.

“Good morning.”

“Good morning, Inquisitor,” I smile in return, looking at the servants and the few nobles who have already arrived. “How is your head?” I ask more quietly.

“It’s fine for now. I took some herbs Adan gave me earlier. Don’t worry. I’ll be fine while you’re off chasing Red Templars with Edward.” She gives me a wink that makes me chuckle.

“You know, if--” she stops talking and looks down towards the gate. “What the hell is he doing here?” She sneers.

I look towards the gate and see a man in white armour enter on a horse, followed by a handful of soldiers.

“Varric, there’s trouble inbound,” she calls over to him and then looks at me. “Later.”

She walks down the stairs, and Varric walks towards me with hastened steps. He groans as he sees the man.

“Well, shit!”
“Who is that, Varric?”

“Prince Sebastian Vael. I suggest we go somewhere he won’t find us.”

“You don’t think--”

“No, let Waffles handle this one. Come with me, and I’ll tell you all about that particular individual.”

“Along with embellishments?”

“Naturally,” he winks.

I look down to the gates, where the man in white armour takes Mona’s hand and kisses it. From her expression you would think the tender gesture was boiling water scolding her skin.

More than an hour passes before I walk up to Mona’s chambers. Josephine informed me that Mona is having her meeting with Vael there. I found this rather odd, but remembering the first conversation I overheard between her an Hawke it might have been wise on her part. This is another relation from her past intertwined with some unpleasant repercussions. And true enough, as I approach I can hear their voices rather clearly before opening the door.

“I simply ask to know where he is,” Vael tries to reason, though his voice is stern.

“Ask? What I heard was a demand,” Mona scoffs in reply.

“Why do you insist on protecting that murderer?”

I walk up the stairs and see Mona sitting in her chair at her desk and the Prince on the other side. Atish’an greets me at the top of the stairs.

“Excuse me, Inquisitor,” I interject, making my presence known.

“I’ll be right with you, Solas.” She smiles softly at me.

“Perhaps we should continue this later,” Vael suggests, trying to get up from his chair.

“No need. Solas is one of the most trusted members of the Inquisition. There is nothing we can say between us he may not hear. Besides, the sooner you and I settle this, the better.” Her voice is far gentler than I would have expected.

“All I’m asking for is Anders,” he sighs.

“You and I had a deal. I was to have Justice sent back to the Fade so he could not possess anyone else. There is nothing left of the man you hunt.”

Despite her calm reasoning, his calm countenance snaps. He jumps up from his chair and leans on the desk.

“I swore I would get justice for Elthina’s death!”
“You tried to destroy Kirkwall for the actions of one man! The only reason you’re standing here is because I aided Aveline and her forces.” She leans forward in her chair, finger jabbing down on her desk.

Though clearly enraged, she is far calmer than he is.

“I warned you and Hawke of this,” he sneers.

“We made a deal that you broke in your anger!”

“You protected that monster from the Chantry. You were the advisor of the Most Holy. You knew the threat he posed and did nothing. You are as responsible for Elthina’s death as he is. I wonder if you are not responsible for Justinia’s as well.”

The roaring fire I see in her eyes even makes me want to recoil. She might be mortal and not have a shred of magic, but in her burns a fury I think would make even the Evanuris pause. She slowly rises from her chair and leans over her desk, making him take a step back.

“Dorothea was my friend.” I expect her to scream, but her voice is deep and deadly, “And you yourself heard me warn Elthina a million times, but she did not even interfere with Patrice before it was too late. If you want to accuse me of murder, take it to Val Royeaux when the next Divine is elected.”

He turns from her and looks directly at me. Atish’an steps in front of me, growling menacingly at the Prince.

“Another apostate, I gather.”

“\textit{Hamin, falon},” I murmur as I stroke the dog, “he means me no harm.”

The dog growls again. She doesn’t believe me. I should give her intelligence more credit. Even so, she sits down and stops baring her teeth.

“Does this one intend to slaughter innocents as well?” Vael sneers.

Atish’an jumps up and barks at him, ready to defend me.

“Josephine will take care of your needs, Sebastian.” Mona’s voice is cool, but I can see her shaking even from a distance. He gives a small bow as his only acknowledgement of her words.

Atish’an snaps at the Prince as he walks past me. He jumps to the side.

“Keep that hound under control.”

“Had she intended to bite you, she would have.” I reach down and nuzzle the dog’s ear to keep her calm.

“And to think, there was a time where you begged me for treats.” A small, genuine smile appears on Vael’s lips as if a memory is cast before his eyes.

I approach Mona as he continues down the stairs. She points towards the stairs, her anger still permeating the air, but she doesn’t speak until she hears the door close.

“I swear I started that conversation politely,” she defends.

“Cleary the right approach.” I smirk at her.
“Stuff it,” she growls, but I can’t suppress my amusement. “That man is a complete asshole! I’d use
him for nug fodder before I’d do him any favours!”

I turn my face down and to the side to suppress my chuckle, and put my hand on her lower back.

“I’m not sure the nugs would enjoy that.”

“I’m sure they won’t,” she seethes, though I see a hint of a smile on her lips.

She makes an exasperated sigh and falls back into her chair. I lean against the desk next to her and
face her.

“He is not completely wrong. I did allow Elthina to be murdered, and Dorothea…” She rubs her
eyes and shows clear signs of fatigue. “When I realized that I might not be able to stop Corypheus,
the first thing I did was to travel to Val Chevin, where I knew she was Grand Cleric. I showed up at
that Chantry and half expected to be thrown out or placed in a sanitarium. I demanded to see her, and
for some reason, she kept the clerics from throwing me out on my ass.” She smiles a little
mournfully, gets up from the chair, and walks to look out over the balcony.

“I told her everything, Solas. Everything with the exception of you and where I come from. I admit, I
sounded absolutely insane, but she merely listened. I must have ranted for hours,” she laughs at
herself.

Atish’an walks up to her and nuzzles her leg while I try to patiently wait for her to continue.

“When she became Divine she took me in as an advisor. Leliana and Cassandra were her Left and
Right Hands, but there was no word for what I was. The court started calling me the Whisper of the
Divine.” She gives a wry grin as she shakes her head.

“And what did that entail?”

“Cassandra is a Seeker of truth. I was a seeker of knowledge - in my case, everything that the
Chantry would have considered blasphemy, they placed me in charge of. Not to suppress it or punish
anyone. I went to Kirkwall, Tevinter, Denerim - anywhere that might hold knowledge we could use. I
even tried the Dalish.”

“The Dalish? Not exactly a reliable source,” I remark bitterly, and she laughs.

“Try, if you can, to imagine a shemlen walking straight into a Dalish camp, telling them she knows
how to refute every belief they have.” She looks at me with a grin, and I laugh with her.

“I’m surprised you yet live,” I jest.

“I was a bit more tactful, naturally, but no, that was not pleasant. Anyway, my research is how I met
Cole and got involved in everything that happened with the Rite of Tranquility.”

“But you already knew it was possible.”

“Yes, I even knew how. It’s why Justina began the research. I tried to push it further along and have
it revealed before Anders went ahead with his plan. But I was too late … again. The Chantry blew
up, and I went back to Val Royeaux to do what I could for the mages. It’s why there were no
children in the Spire during the Conclave that started the rebellion. It was during that time that I
finally gained the authority to get into the Winter Palace and seek out Briala and Felassan.”

I walk over to her and embrace her from behind. She trembles against me.
“And that’s when you came to see me.”

“Yes, only took me nine years,” she laughs bitterly.

“You did all you could, vhenan.” I kiss her temple.

“I know, it just … wasn’t enough. I told Justina what was going to happen at the Temple of Sacred Ashes. She knew she was going to die.” Tears stream down her face, and she removes them with her fingertips. “I warned her not to go. Suggested that she send me – anyone – in her stead, but she didn’t listen.”

I feel both grief and anger rise in my chest as I release my hold on her.

“You would sacrifice yourself? Even with all your knowledge?”

“It wouldn’t have mattered if it was her or me. She knew everything besides who you were. She would have been able to guide the Inquisition as well as I could. But we both knew she had to do it. I sent my friend to her death, and what is the last thing she does? She makes me Inquisitor before we set off towards Haven from Val Royeaux.” She looks at me, her face covered in tears. “Oh, don’t look at me like that, Solas. You didn’t know me, and the Inquisition would have done fine without me.”

I remember her reaction to the spirit in the Fade that represented Justinia. The guilt Mona carries is all-consuming. She carries the death of every life she couldn’t save with her. But her tendency to sacrifice herself both angers and terrifies me.

“You would have given your power up so willingly, not knowing which hands it might fall into?” I cannot help how my emotions bleed into my words

“It was a notion when I mourned for what I had to do. Thinking a thing and doing it are two very different things. And I am here now, so obviously I chose what was wise and not what was kind … we choose,” she wraps her arms around herself as she walks by me.

My strong reaction doesn’t seem to have surprised her, and somehow that makes my shame even worse. She collapses on the bed, sniffling into a handkerchief. Atish’an looks up at me with a whine, and I walk up to the bed to sit next to her.

“Ir abelas, vhenan. I didn't mean to cause you pain.”

“You didn’t. It’s just hard. I have never spoken of it to anyone - for obvious reasons.” She sits up and dries her eyes. I reach for her cheek, and she leans into my touch.

“Thank you for trusting me. I know how difficult it can be. It must have been a long time since you could share your thoughts openly.”

“Not as long as it has been for you.” She smiles and lets her hand run across my head and down my neck. “I hope you know you can trust me, too, love?”

“Even if I did not, it’s too easy to tell you too much.”

I’m avoiding her question, and she knows it. Rather than confronting me, she smiles and shakes her head before she pulls me down on the bed with an affectionate kiss. She winces against me, and I let my hand run through her hair down to her neck while healing her.

“Try to relax. Your guilt and anger is making it worse,” I murmur, looking down into her hooded
“I know…” She stays quiet for a moment before speaking again. “Solas, do you think it’s possible to create a spirit?”

The question takes me by surprise as I lay on my side and look down at her.

“The Fade does so naturally, but that wasn’t what you meant.”

“No, do you think you can take a piece of the Fade and mould it and shape it into a consciousness?”

“I can’t say that I have ever attempted it.” I look at her, trying to ascertain exactly what is going through that complex mind of hers. “Why do you ask?”

“Just a silly idea…” She sits up with a sigh. “Sometimes I wish that I could forget like Cole does. Somehow, it just seems too easy. I did this. I should feel the repercussions of it all.”

I sit up and wrap my arms around her.

“You’re late. Edward is waiting for you.” She gives me a light kiss, and I sigh. When the Herald needs me, I will go, but I admit I’m not thrilled about the idea of leaving when her mind is clearly toying with something. Knowing her, it’s probably far more dangerous than anyone assumes.

Chapter End Notes

I'm getting to a point in the story, where things are going to take a different turn in terms of cannon, but a lot of the events will remain the same. Mona has a complicated relationship with a lot of the characters from DA2 which will be made more clear in the future chapters. I really don't hate Sebastian, but the way Mona handled things with Anders is slowly starting to unravel.

Thank all of you for your lovely comments! They always make my day.

And yes, I know the title is cruel. :'

And thanks to nina for beta reading. I'm so grateful for all the hard work she puts into this :)
Riding through the Emerald Graves, I find my mind lingering on the past. All around me are echoes of the empire of my people. An empire I destroyed in my hubris and desperation. They linger in every cliff, and I hear their voices in the rustling in the treetops above, a constant reminder of my grief. I’m thankful that neither Cole nor Mona is here with us to sense the despair in my heart. Both already carry so many burdens of their own - and mine. The more I can limit their exposure to my past the better. They are both so dear to me as well as a painful reminder of all that has and will come to pass.

My salvation comes from the Herald humming a tune while riding ahead, completely unaware of him doing so. Though always one of our more cheerful companions, it’s rare to see him this elated. I suspect his increasing closeness with Lady Montilyet is the cause, and I’m glad he has found some happiness after a lifetime in the Circle. The Enchanters had no comprehension of the strength inside the young man, and he is slowly becoming a skilled mage. He is taking well to his training, but I have discovered I have not been his only mentor as of late.

I look to Blackwall next to me. He seems more bothered lately, the heavy weight he carries darkening the cheerful demeanor Sera brings out of him. I have noticed how Blackwall looks at the ambassador, and though I know he would never try to come between the Herald and his love, the look of heartache is unmistakable. My throat tightens at the thought of what I felt when I believed Mona’s heart to belong to Dubois. The mage, Anders, crosses my mind briefly, and I shake my head. Dwelling on her past is a destructive path I refuse to tread.

“I heard you in the training yard this morning,” I remark as I ride up next to Blackwall.

“Ah, yes. The Herald wants to learn how to use a sword of all things. Should I be quieter next time?” He seems genuinely uncomfortable for a moment.

“No, no. It’s fine,” I reply calmly. “Children don’t learn unless you shout at them.”

Blackwall releases a huff of air, clearly understanding my meaning no matter how even my voice is.

“You’ve become quite fond of the lad.” He smiles.

“His talents have been overlooked by his ‘mentors’ in the past because they did not know how to properly motivate him. Not to mention, their methods are designed to teach everyone the same, when no one ever is. Besides, his honesty and optimism are refreshing.”

“That it is. Out of curiosity; are you planning on adopting the entire Inquisition?”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, you seem to have become a father of a sort to both Cole and Edward. Father of the Inquisition has a nice ring to it.” He laughs as I shake my head. At least one of us managed to get out of the discouraging state of mind we were both trapped in.

We approach an old mansion the Herald wanted to investigate. The architecture is beautiful as are its surroundings, but it looks abandoned, and even from a distance I can sense something stirring within. I understand why the Herald asked both Dorian and me to join him.
“I think we’d better make camp and leave the horses here. I don’t want that mansion spooking them,” the Herald suggests.

“A good idea. There are some ruins over there that should be suitable,” Blackwall agrees and points to the distance.

I have to suppress a smile as I see a statue of Fen’Harel. I should be used to them being everywhere by now, but they still make me as uncomfortable now as they did eons ago. I never wanted to be seen as a god because I’m not. It pulls me back into the somber memories as I look out over the forest after we have made camp.

“Josephine would love this place,” I hear the Herald sigh as he walks up next to me.

In that moment, I see the beauty of it and not just the echoes of a dead empire. The peaceful rustle of the treetops, the birds chirping, the distant sound of water, and the quiet away from battle and death - for now. A smile creeps unto my lips as I close my eyes and take in the scent.

“I like being out in the forests. It is peaceful. So would the Inquisitor, I think.”

The Herald grins at me, and I give him a curious look.

"You are in love,” he chuckles, as if it was some great revelation.

“Why is it you never use her name in public? Well, at least I assume you don’t call her ‘Inquisitor’ in bed.” He grins.

I shake my head, rubbing my face with my hand, barely able to conceal my amusement at his playful nature.

“Formality. Whatever my feelings for the Inquisitor, there needs to be a distance between us in public. Both so that we can maintain a professional relationship and so that any enemies are unaware of the true extent of our feelings.”

“Solas, I think if anyone had those sinister plans, it would happen anyway. It’s not the best kept secret anymore.” He gives me a doubtful look.

“True; however, there is a great difference between a dalliance with an elven advisor and a deep emotional entanglement.” Should someone like Falon’Din or Andruil find out how much I truly love her, they would never stop hunting her. Better to think her a momentary amusement on my part. It would be foolish of me to assume I have no enemies of power left in this world, even with the Evanuris locked away.

“I understand ... If anyone hurt Josephine to get to me…” He pauses, clenches his hands, and grinds his teeth at the mere thought of it. He then laughs, shaking his head. “I love her, Solas. She is so sweet, considerate, and resourceful. No one affects me as she does, but how in the name of the Maker can I love someone so much after such a short time?”

I put my hands behind my back and look into the forest again.

“You never seemed to have any reservations with my feelings towards the Inquisitor, so why do you have it regarding your own?”

“That’s hardly a fair comparison. From the moment you two met, it has seemed like you have always
known each other.”

I nearly laugh. He has no idea how close to the truth that statement is. He looks at me and his face turns serious.

“I won’t let them harm you. I’ll open a rift and make it swallow anyone who tries to harm any of you.” He tries to reassure me, and his protectiveness of me continues to surprise me.

“I thank you, but let us hope it never comes to that. Shall we see what mysteries that mansion holds?”

“After you, my friend,” he grins with a bow.

“Why do I get the distinct feeling I’m being used as a decoy?” I narrow my eyes at him.

“Because you can just Fade step away, and then Blackwall can ram into whatever is in there.” He gives a broad smile, and though I nearly laugh, I scowl playfully instead.

As we enter, the house is quiet and dark – even the natural light from the windows have trouble penetrating it.

“This place gives me an uneasy feeling…”

“No kidding, I think I just felt something brush past me,” Dorian moans with a shudder.

Walking through the house, the eerie feeling does not leave me, and the longer it stays quiet, the more apprehensive I get. The Fade is almost crackling in the air and the emotions emanating through it are contentious. I walk up next to Dorian, who seems to be sensing it as well.

“Ah, Solas. You startled me,” Dorian gasps. “You're always so ... nondescript.”

“Please speak up! I cannot hear you over your outfit!” I sneer in my annoyance.

“Hush, you two, or something unpleasant might hear us,” the Herald shushes us.

“Like a small horde of undead?” Blackwall remarks drawing his sword.

“Yes … well, shit…,” the Herald groans.

For the next thirty minutes, we attempt to disperse what seems a never ending battle with undead. Whatever resides here is incredibly powerful.

“Unless we get to the source of this, I fear this battle will never end.” I look to the Herald as the latest wave is culled.

“And quickly. This place is even more disturbing than I thought. Let’s look for clues.”

As we search for clues, we slowly make our way through the house.

“Well, that’s an odd dragon,” the Herald muses, but I only look briefly, not paying attention to the mounted head on the wall. I want to find those clues as quickly as possible and banish the angry spirit that resides here.

“I would suggest paying attention to the undead rather than the decor,” Dorian grunts.

“Come now, you could bring it home to Bull as a gift.” The Herald sounds as cheerful as ever,
despite the circumstances.

“Are we adding burglary the Inquisition’s list of accomplishments?” I chuckle with some minor abhorrence.

“I think we did that when we asked Sera to join the Inquisition,” the Herald laughs.

“Fair point,” I concede as I activate the next clue.

“I think we’re getting too used to this. Having casual conversations while fighting a horde of undead doesn’t seem quite right.” Blackwall grins.

“Regretting tagging along, Blackwall?” Dorian asks, his voice lighter than it has been since we entered the building.

“Not for a moment.”

Another group of undead approach us, and when we get closer to the vault, the Herald picks up a sword and lops the head off one of the undead. He succeeds with luck more than skill, but the foe does lie unmoving on the ground beneath him.

“I heard Blackwall is teaching you how to use a sword.” I nod towards the weapon in his hand.

“Rapier, specifically. Mona suggested that I take lessons.”

“That’s curious…” What is she planning now? I will have to ask her when we return to Skyhold.

“She also taught me how to pick locks.” He grins and walks toward the final door to the vault.

“She knows how to-- of course she does,” I sigh, but even so some of my fondness for her shines through.

Inside we find a large amount of weapon, coin, and other riches. I, however, am more interested in the books, but as I pass an armour stand, something curious catches my attention. It’s one of a pair of bracers large enough to only fit a Qunari, but it looks like the ones Mona uses. I pick it up and notice how heavy it is. I sense no magic from it, and I see no runes placed in it. I take off my satchel to make room for it and manage to put it away without the others noticing. How did something like this get here?

When we return to Skyhold some days later, I go up to Mona’s chambers despite it being late into the night. I had promised I would see her as soon as I returned so she would know I had come back safely. To my surprise, neither she nor Atish’an are anywhere to be found. As I walk back down to the great hall, I notice a sound coming from the armory. I release a breathless chuckle. I should have known she would be working on something.

Atish’an is asleep on the floor - so exhausted she doesn't notice my presence like usual. Even from a distance, I can tell that Mona’s migraines are getting worse. Her hand keeps rubbing her right temple. It has been almost two months since Adamant, and I find it difficult to understand why the rune would still be affecting her as it does. The pain could be exponential to the amount of guilt
transferred through it. And the Fear Demon would have channeled far more than a serial killer.

“Work, you piece of shit!” She hisses and slams the device onto the table. For a brief moment, an orange light emanates from it.

“Vhenan,” I speak softly as I approach, and she turns to face me.

She wraps her arms around my waist and settles her face in the crook of my neck. She sobs softly into my shirt as I hold her close.

“What’s the matter?” I ask gently as I rub her back and hold her close to me.

“I’m in pain, I’m tired, I’m afraid, everything I touch turns to shit, and I can’t get that damned thing to work!” She releases a large sigh into my shoulder. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t--”

She tries to pull away and once again hide all her despair beneath her mask. Instead, I pull her back to me and hold her close. Without even thinking, I begin to heal her. It is disconcerting how normal this has become.

“You have nothing to be sorry for. I’m here for you,” I murmur into her hair.

She chuckles a little and holds me closer.

“I’ll miss you,” she murmurs in a voice so low I am not sure I heard her correctly.

“What?”

“I missed you,” she sighs and gets up on her toes to kiss me.

“I missed you, too.” I kiss her brow. “Go to bed.”

“Are you not coming?” She looks up at me, and the disappointment in her voice tugs at my heart.

“There are a great deal of Orlesian nobles arriving tomorrow. I think it would be better if they do not see an elven apostate exit your quarters in the morning.” I give her a rueful smile.

She sighs and gives me a nod.

“You know, one day this racist nonsense has to stop.” She raises an eyebrow as she huffs.

“Nothing would make me happier, my love.” I give her a brief kiss and am rewarded a smile.

“Don’t try to steal any secrets the moment I’m out the door,” she teases as she walks out the door.

She knows I intend to look through her notes. Perhaps I should refrain, but I find that I can’t. As similar as her old bracers are to what I found in the Emeralds Graves, the current one she is working on is much more so. I’m tempted to go to her quarters right away, but she needs to rest. Tomorrow is her birthday celebration, and the nobles will be pouring in. Oddly enough, I look forward admiring her from the sidelines and seeing the Whisper of the Divine in her true element.
The following day, Skyhold is filled with more people than ever before. Whatever Vivienne and Josephine did, they seem to have gathered half the nobles in Thedas. To my surprise, Vael is still present at Skyhold - much to Varric’s dismay. I have a feeling he is hoping he will somehow get information that will lead him to Anders. If he put as much energy into running his city-state as he did to getting revenge, he might actually accomplish something worthwhile. I have noticed that Mother Giselle seems to pay him a great deal of attention. I’m guessing Mona has something to do with it. I don’t see my heart until a mere hour before the celebrations. I hear her enter the rotunda with Sera right behind her.

“Sera, please. I have a thousand things to do. And no, you’re not assaulting my guests with bees or earwigs!”

“You’re no fun!” Sera whines, to which I can almost hear Mona roll her eyes.

I turn and see Mona dressed in a long black dress that clings jealously to her curves, with a long piece of white see-through fabric glittering in the light from the candles wrapped around her delicate shoulders and ornamented with a few white feathers. Her hair styled in immaculate detail, swept up in an elegant bun with a few tendrils escaping to frame her lovely face, leaving the long, graceful curve of her neck bare. I hardly get the chance to notice my breath escaping me before hearing Dorian’s voice from above.

“Well, Inquisitor, I didn’t think you had an eye for fashion, but you look breathtaking!”

Mona laughs looking up at him.

“And I’m still hopeless. This was a gift from Maevaris. Even Vivienne has given her approval.”

“That explains it!” Dorian laughs as he begins to walk down the stairs.

“Hey!” Mona objects.

“What if--” Sera begins.

“No!”

“Mona, can we talk, please?” Vael asks as he walks into the Rotunda, and Mona releases a deep breath. I imagine the entire day has been like this.

“What can I do for you, Sebastian?” She replies politely with a sweet smile.

He looks her up and down as a fierce blush creeps up on his face.

“I would have thought the leader of the faithful would wear something a little more … conservative.” He swallows and looks away when he realises he is staring.

“What? Afraid I’m going to outshine that armour of yours?” She teases and twirls making the shawl glitter. “I’m afraid we will both be outdone by Dorian though.”

“Right you are, my lady Inquisitor.” Dorian chuckles.

Mona laughs as Vael seems to continue to be uncomfortable.

“What was it you wanted?” She asks Vael sweetly, taking a step towards him.

He stares right down at her, his blush continuing.
“I simply wanted to offer you some advice, and consider who you are seen with this evening.” He looks at both Dorian and I briefly. “I would be happy to offer my assistance should you need some reprieve from the Orlesians.”

Sera, Dorian, and I look at each other briefly, but Mona keeps calm.

“Thank you for your kind offer, Sebastian. Now, if there is nothing else, I have a lot of preparing left still.”

“Of course.” He bows and picks her hand up to give it a quick kiss and walks away.

Mona’s eyes don’t darken until he is out the door. Sera looks at Mona with a wicked grin.

“Do your worst,” Mona chuckles, and Sera runs off cackling.

“What had him so flustered?” Dorian asks.

“Oh, he saw me naked on accident one time. Every time he sees more of my skin than usual, he does that. He was always very sheltered.” She brushes it off as nothing and turns to me. “Can I see the latest report on the Veil?”

“Today?” I smile at her and hand it to her.

“This is important.” She smiles as she begins to read it where she stands.

Dorian picks up some of my notes without asking, which annoys me.

“Some of these areas seem to be bleeding with the Fade. I wonder if the Venatori have been conducting some large blood magic rituals nearby.”

“I am surprised you do not practice blood magic, Dorian. Is it not popular in Tevinter?” I ask with genuine curiosity.

He looks up with a slight frown that quickly fades.

“While we’re sharing surprises, you’ve done a lot less dancing naked in the moonlight than expected,” Dorian replies with a charming smile, hiding his annoyance at my question.

I’m about to reply, when I catch the way Mona looks at me. She bites her lower lip alluringly, her eyes sparkling with mischief, but she does not say a word. To my dismay, I feel a slight blush creep up on my face as I chuckle. Her smile broadens as she walks away from us, her hips swaying a little more seductively than they did before - or perhaps it is merely my imagination. Dorian catches the unspoken conversation as well and laughs heartily, leaning some of his weight on his thigh.

“Why, Solas, I have never seen you fluster so!”

“I do not fluster, Dorian,” I reply, sitting down into my chair and looking over my notes.

“That would be easier to believe if you hadn’t just blushed.” He gives me a broad grin as he walks away.
I take great enjoyment from watching the celebrations throughout the evening, but I do not participate. Few barely even notice me, and it is better this way. All of Skyhold probably knows that I have spent several nights in the Inquisitor’s chambers, but the nobles do not – and it is less likely that any should accidentally find out if I stay away from Mona tonight. Vael hardly leaves her side, but nothing in his demeanour comes off as being romantic.

Even from a distance, I can see how effortlessly Mona blends in. She is cheerful and charming in her demeanour and makes every person she talks to smile or laugh. She mimics the behaviour of the person she talks to and touches only when it will have the most effect. Her touch is always from the back and from the side, making sure she does not overstep, but enough to make the person she is talking to comfortable and familiar with her - even if they have just met.

I catch Vivienne watching her closely as well. Her face is filled with a pride that, for once, is not her own. Mona is a very good pupil. Ma vhenan holds herself with a regal posture, as powerful as when on the throne judging, but nowhere near as intimidating. With a small smile, I return to my studies in the rotunda.

A few hours go by when I hear a knock on the door, and Mona enters. She has a bright smile on her face as she closes the door. I get up as she walks directly towards me and takes my hands.

“It worked, Solas. We have gotten an invitation from Duke Gaspard,” she enthuses with obvious relief.

“I’m glad it all worked out. You do not need to doubt your own abilities.” I look down at her with a knowing smile, to which she merely scoffs with a small smile.

“If you have the time, I have a gift for you.”

“I always have time for you, love. Gift or no.”

I reach under my notes and take out a frame wrapped in a silk handkerchief. She gives me a sweet smile before she begins to open it, and a gasp escapes her as she looks at it.

“I saw the drawings you attempted to make of your son, and I know you had trouble making one that was accurate. I thought you would like one with both him and you in it,” I explain with a tender smile. I watched her dreams of him in the Fade until I could recall his likeness from memory and draw a picture of her holding him.

She holds her hand to her mouth and sits down on the edge of the couch, looking at the drawing. Tears are brimming in her eyes, and I crouch down in front of her.

“I didn’t mean to hurt you. I--”

I’m interrupted when she gives me a deep, lingering kiss, and I can’t help but reciprocate.

“You didn’t. Thank you. This is the most precious gift I have ever gotten.”

She kisses the frame and places it carefully on the sofa. She stands up and pulls me to stand with her. She looks up at me quietly, while tears stream effortlessly from her eyes. I reach for her cheeks to wipe them away.

“I love you,” she whispers before kissing me.
She wraps her arms tightly around my neck and my arms instinctively wrap around her waist. It is unwise. Should one of the nobles walk in on us, it would cause a scandal, but I cannot for the life of me let her go.

“I love you,” she repeats, “with all my heart.”

“Ar lasa mala vhenan bellanaris,” I whisper in return.

“I’m not sure I can truly appreciate how long forever is,” she replies a little wistfully. “Just love me now.”

“Nothing in this world could be easier,” I murmur as my lips captures hers again.

She pulls away reluctantly with a small smile on her lips as she dries her tears.

“I have to get back. When all this is over, then it doesn’t matter what they think. I’m yours, and I will admit it openly, if you will have me. You’re the best man I have ever known.” She kisses me briefly on my cheek and leaves so quickly, I don’t have a chance to respond.

I turn my head to the floor and close my eyes as I remember who I am and what I must do.

“No, vhenan. I’m truly not,” I whisper as she walks out the door.

Chapter End Notes

And another update. I hope you’ll enjoy this chapter. Again thank you so much for all your lovely comments! You guys are the best!

Thanks to ninaninabobina, who is such a big part of making this story enjoyable!

Ar lasa mala vhenan bellanaris = I give you my heart forever / My heart will always belong to you
The Wisdom of trust

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

In the days leading up to our departure for Halamshiral, I have hardly seen Mona at all. She has gone from meeting to meeting and dealt with more delegates than I have seen in all the time I have been with the Inquisition. I can only imagine how busy she will be after we have dealt with the events at the Winter Palace. She has given me a brief summary of what is going to occur that evening, but she is confident that we will deal with whatever the evening has to offer. As a result, I have not yet found an opportunity to show her the bracer I found in the Emerald Graves.

Skyhold is still filled with nobles, but the evening before we leave for the Winter Palace, I manage to make my way to her quarters. The guard pays me no mind with the exception of a small grin.

Upon entering her chambers, Atish’an barks and jumps around with excitement. I kneel to greet the dog, but I don’t see Mona.

As I walk further in, I see her in her bath chamber, the tub still filled with water, but Mona is standing with her leg up on a small stool with a barber knife in her hand. With the exception of sleeping, I have never seen her so relaxed. The mirror on the wall in front of her reflects the bedroom, so I am certain she is aware of my presence. I place my satchel on the floor and notice my framed drawing on the nightstand next to her bed before leaning against the door frame.

I watch her as the blade runs across her leg and up her thigh. A delicate procedure that leaves the skin soft and smooth. My mind briefly wonders if she does this for my sake - to appear more elven - but it evaporates as I watch how the smooth skin shimmers in the candlelight. Her wet hair clinging to her as if it was pure liquid. Drops of water drizzle across her face, neck and upper part of her breasts. The white towel embraces her curves, and I can’t help but feel a little envious of it. I’m surprised that a body my hands now know so intimately still manages to evoke such feelings in me.

A smile creeps up on her face, but she doesn’t look at me.

“You’re staring,” she points out, her eyes not wavering from her task.

“Admiring,” I correct with a wry grin.

Her hazel eyes dart at me briefly with a mischievous smirk on her beautiful lips.

“In that case.” She lets the towel fall to the floor without ceremony, as she continues her task. “Missed me?” she teases.

“Mir somniar ma’elgar las Sulahn’nehn,” I smile as she looks at me trying hard to decipher my words. (My dreams of your spirit brings me joy).

She is interrupted by a knock, and Atish’an barks at the door. She gives a large sigh and reaches for her black robe. When I hear Vael’s voice I step back into the bathing chamber. I see Mona in the reflection. The silk robe clings to her curves even more than usual because of the damp skin and the wet patches created by her damp hair. Vael’s eyes scurry around the room, attempting to look at anything but her. Mona furrows her brow and looks for me - our eyes briefly meet in the mirror.
where she smiles at me.

“Do you want me to speak with Sera?” Her voice full of innocence as she turns to face him.

“No harm done. She is a spirited child - with more faith than I had believed.” He gives Mona a wry grin. “I came to apologize. Accusing you of wanting Justinia dead, when I know how much she meant to you … I should have offered my condolences. Of anyone, I should have understood your grief.”

“Thank you. You must have been surprised when you heard I was Inquisitor - you did write to Leliana, after all, rather than me.”

“I was … I had hoped maybe you had finally accepted the Maker into your heart, but I feared you would use that power to openly support Anders’s actions.”

“I never condoned what he did, Sebastian. But what he said was true. There was no compromise because neither side wished for it. And for it to end peacefully, both sides needed to want that change.”

“That you would even say that … all those innocents. A woman of faith slaughtered without mercy-” He turns to the railing and slams his hands into it.

“It is not so far from what you did.” Her voice is firm and unwavering as she steps closer to him. “The Maker granted us with a mind and a conscience. He does not approve when we fail to use them.” She places a hand on his cheek and something inside me turns. “Do you remember that?”

“Elthina told me that…” His voice grows quiet. “I can’t forgive him.”

“I would never ask you to. But please, try to forgive yourself.”

At the sound of her velvet words, he turns to her as if slapped. Before he has a chance to react, she pulls him into a hug. His face flares as his hands move up and down, uncertain where to let them rest. He eventually settles for her shoulders.

“Thank you,” he mutters as she steps away.

His eyes seem to wander down her body on their own accord, and as he realises it, he turns around on his heels and hurries down the stairs saying his goodbyes.

Mona laughs as the door closes, and I walk out into the bedroom.

“Poor Sebastian. He really needs to get a wife, so he can get over his bashfulness.”

She walks over to me with a grin.

“I can’t say I blame him. You are very…” I wrap my arms around her waist and pull her closer, “distracting.”

She places her arms around my neck as she leans in.

“I disagree. I seem to have your undivided attention.”
I hum in agreement and give her a tender kiss.

“As lovely as you are, however, I did have a purpose in coming up here.”

I pull away, and her eyes narrow with curiosity.

“See, I would make a joke, but now I’m intrigued.”

I pick up the satchel and place it on the desk, and she walks up next to me. As I open it and pull out the bracer, she looks taken aback before reaching for it. She twirls and turns it, her clever gaze taking in every detail, her lips a smile of fascination. How I do adore seeing her mind unfold as the passion of discovery and knowledge overtakes her.

“Where did you find this? It’s incredible!”

“It was locked away in a vault in the Emerald Graves.”

“The haunted one with those annoying corpses that keeps rising?”

I’m uncertain if she knows this from reading a report from the Herald or her memories, but that matters little compared to the astounded look on her face.

“Yes. I managed to take it with us without the others noticing. I thought it better to not involve them in this.”

She is giddy with excitement, and as she looks at it as she makes a joyful sound. I can’t help but chuckle with fondness as I take in the sight of her.

“This might be able to solve my problem. I’m sorry, love, but I need to work on this right away. Thank you.” She gives me a quick kiss and walks towards the stairs.

“Vhenan—”

“I know what you’re going to say, but I’m fine.” She holds up a hand, but doesn’t look at me. “I can sleep in the carriage on the way to Orlais.”

She doesn’t see my playful expression as I keep my voice even.

“Actually, I was going to suggest a change of clothes.”

She looks down at herself and laughs.

“That might be a good idea. On the other hand, maybe it would encourage more soldiers to volunteer for the night shift.” She laughs again and gives me a wink as she passes me walking towards her dresser, and I release a low chuckle. She turns to me with a humorous expression. “Or maybe no one would.”

“Doubtful.” I smile as she lets the robe fall as she looks for something to wear.
We arrive at Duke Bastien’s estate the day before the ball at the Winter Palace. Vivienne has ensured there are accommodations for all of us, and the servants treat all of us with respect - even Varric and myself. I have noticed that the First Enchanter has seemed a little more quiet than usual and that Mona has been spending more time with her. They are so different that I sometimes forget that their friendship is a sincere one. With Duke Bastien being on his deathbed, however, Mona wanting to support her isn’t a surprise. I frown at myself, remembering how I came by that knowledge in the first place. It has been eight months since the explosion at Haven, but it seems a lifetime ago. So much has changed even as Corypheus remains at large.

Some of us sit and have some food while Mona and the advisors plan for tomorrow night. I try to focus on a book while eating, but unfortunately, Sera is not far enough away to ignore – even with the Herald sitting right next to me.

“So, you and the Lady Inquisitor? Interesting.”

“Your interest is not my concern.” I keep my eyes fixed on the book.

“Good, because I meant boring.” Her attempt at defiance is clear, but even so, she continues. “She is only the ears short of being all elfy.”

“It is not a topic for discussion.” I turn the page as if she has not managed to distract me from my reading.

“What happened to ‘drop ’em and rebuild the empire’ Phwoar!?! The elf usually always picks the elf so bumping bits will mean something,” she goads.

The Herald laughs. “You’re ridiculous!”

“It’s not me! It’s him! And her!” Sera’s objection is a loud whine.

My eyes leave the book as I give her a wry grin.

“Only one of us is looking sad and foolish, Sera.”

She sneers something incomprehensible and leaves the table. The Herald and I look at each other for a moment then laugh, shaking our heads.

Not long after, I excuse myself and hurry to my quarters to get my things. I have an appointment in Val Royeaux I can’t miss. As I get ready to leave the estate, I overhear Mona and Sera talking.

“Sera, you’re not broken. And anyone who thinks that can kindly stuff it. I don’t approve of everything you do, but you don’t have to be ashamed of who you are. And I know you’re not.”

“Why do you care? You’re as elfy as him!”

“Elfy?” Mona tugs at her ear with a dramatic, confused look.

“Yeah. All that ‘glory to the elves.’ You’re human, why would you care?”

“I’m a scholar, Sera. I can appreciate the culture of another without being a part of it. In the end, it is about showing interest and respect for the values of the people around you - even if you do not share them.”
“But you’re supposed to be people.”

“I am people. But to be a part of people you have to care about their thoughts, feelings, and motivations. I don’t do that by simply ‘not being elfy.’”

“This was supposed to be fun,” Sera whines.

“Was it? I know you meant to tease me, but to me it looked like a friend wanting some reassurance.”

“Piss off!” Sera hisses and walks away, then stops and looks back at her as if she is about to say something, then turns away.

Mona sighs and rubs her face before she turns and sees me at the bottom of the stairs.

“You’re leaving?” Her expression is concerned as she walks down the stairs towards me. I know her well enough to see that she knows I wasn’t going to tell her.

“I was going to go for a walk.” A pointless lie made out of habit and her unexpected presence, rather than a conscious choice. She can see right through me, and my insides turn even as I am met by nothing but an expressionless face.

“Be safe.” Her smile is genuine, but I see the acknowledgement in her eyes of the lie. Yet she does not push. Does not confront me. Merely accepts that I’m lying. Accepts the fact that I will not tell her where I’m going or why. Somehow, that makes everything feel a thousand fold worse. I try to remind myself that she has not told me about the artifact - or whatever she found in the desert - she sent to Tevinter. But it feels hollow.

“I will. Goodnight, Inquisitor.”

“Goodnight, Solas.”

She walks upstairs without looking back down at me, and I feel as if my heart is being pulled towards her. I take a deep breath before I leave the estate to meet with one of my agents.

I travel to the alienage in Val Royeaux, where I meet a blonde elven woman in a tavern. One of my spies, though she is not aware of my identity. To her, I am just another of Fen’Harel’s agents. Unlike most taverns I go to, this one is filled only by elves. Curious that I should find it odd to be surrounded by them - more so than I do surrounded by the members of Inquisition. They look like my People, but they are merely a faint echo of what once was. What I once destroyed. My agent recognizes me immediately and smiles casually at me. She walks over to me and greets me without reservation - as if she knows me.

“Come with me.” She smiles, brushing a short lock of blonde hair behind her ear. It looks so different when an elf does that from a human. When did Mona’s gestures become so familiar to me that I find those of my own race different? Am I losing my sense of self in my affection for her? The elven woman takes my hand, and though the gesture is more familiar than I’d prefer, I allow it to not draw attention to us. She takes me up to a bedroom and locks the door behind her.
“About time you showed up,” she sneers. “What took you so long?”

“I could not leave sooner without drawing too much attention to myself.”

“You’re the Inquisitor’s advisor, right? I bet the *shemlen* loves having to rely on an elf,” she snorts as she sits down on a chair and rests her feet on the table.

“On the contrary, she is very fair-minded to all - regardless of race or station. However, I did not come here to discuss the Inquisition. Have you found it?” I pull off my cloak before taking the chair opposite her.

“We have tried to track it since Kirkwall. Unfortunately, we’re not the only ones looking for the blighted thing.” She takes a knife from her belt and throws it at the wall in her annoyance.

“Who is looking for it?”

She scratches her neck as if she is uncertain. I’m really starting to doubt the competence of the spies my higher ranking people are choosing.

“Some elf named Vaea, I believe. Doesn’t matter. Best we can tell it has made its way to Tevinter and is in the hands of a Magister Qintara.”

I take a deep breath in an attempt to keep my annoyance under control.

“It is imperative that it gets retrieved. In the wrong hands, that sword can do irreparable harm. It is not made from a form of magic we can contain.”

“Surely, Fen’Harel can do something with it.” She says it so calmly I cannot contain my dismay. I have not risen yet, and these people already insist on seeing me as a god.

“The blight is not something someone smugly outsmarts!”

She sits up in the chair with her back straight a blush creeping up on her face.

“Alright, sorry,” she laments. “I’ll give you all the details.”

“That would be helpful.”

The elf reaches into a locked drawer taking out maps and notes.

When I finally return to Duke Bastien’s estate, dawn is almost upon me. I need to take a more active role in picking these spies. The ones I have met so far have been dubious at best. Unfortunately, right now I act as my own spy as part of the Inquisition. The only spy who the Inquisitor can identify with certainty. It occurs to me that I have truly missed her during the course of the night. I have become so used to her understanding and insight that almost everyone else seems lesser. They cannot help it, of course. They are not privy to the information and knowledge she is. I’m so tired, and all I truly wish to do is go straight to Mona’s chambers and fall asleep with my arms around her. Alas, it is a desire I cannot divulge in.
As I walk down the hall towards my quarters, I find Sera of all people waiting for me in the hallway.

“You arsehole!” Sera hisses at me.

“Excuse me?”

Instead of an answer, she punches my shoulder.

“What’s wrong with you? She’s so good, and you betray her because she isn’t elfy. You bastard!”

“I do not know what you mean.” For a fraction of a moment I’m tempted to retaliate, but a calmer head prevails.

“A Jenny saw you in that tavern walking into some room with a little elfy thing.”

My expression clears, and I remember what happened the evening before. One of the Jenny’s recognized me and saw me with my agent. That Sera assumes that it means I have been unfaithful to *ma vhenan* should be a relief - my heart most passionately disagrees with that sentiment. I hear a familiar voice from behind me and turn to see Mona standing in the door to her chambers dressed in nothing but her black nightwear.

“Now Sera, I’m sure there is an explanation.”

“Sure, there is. He’s a pisspot!”

Mona conceals a giggle while I scowl.

“This is a matter between the Inquisitor and me. Your involvement isn’t required,” I sneer.

Sera looks at Mona for a moment, who gives her a nod.

“It better be good or you’ll find somethin’ much worse’n lizards in your bedroll,” Sera hisses before she walks away.

Mona makes a gesture for me to follow her into the room. I look around to make sure I’m not seen before entering. With Sera’s prattling, it’s a wonder that the servants are not aware of my attachment to the Inquisitor. Mona looks into the fire with a downcast expression on her face.

“I’m aware of how this looks, but you should know that my heart is not easily swayed--” I pause as she tries desperately to repress a smile and gives me a tender look.

“Solas, I wasn’t worried for even a moment. Whatever secrets there are between us, in this I trust you completely. Vivienne and Sera might not, but they don’t know you like I do.”

“*Vhenan,* I--”

“You lied to me.” Her hazel eyes meet mine without any of the playfulness I have come to love so much. They look so much older and wiser - and they are tearing right through me to the point where I have to look away.

“You didn’t have to. You could simply have told me you couldn’t tell me, and I would have respected it. But you chose to lie.”

“I never meant to hurt you.” I hope she hears the sincerity in my voice. She meets my eyes with the same dispassionate stare. She then takes a step towards me and kisses my cheek. It scalds my flesh, as I know I do not deserve it.
“Get some sleep, love. We have a long night ahead of us.”

She turns to get back to bed, and I leave without a word. There is nothing I can say. I walk back to my room unnoticed and rest my head against the door as I close it. The more I know her the more I understand her. You would think such understanding would keep me from making such terrible mistakes. You would be wrong.

I find Wisdom in the Fade standing by a lake she has recreated. The moon is hovering above. I stand next to her, looking out over the landscape.

“She has already forgiven you, lethallin.”

It is unsurprising that Wisdom already knows my troubles. Whether it is from her intimate knowledge of me or Mona herself.

“Should I be forgiven? What am I doing? I feel as if I’m wandering aimlessly until my orb is recovered. I can no longer see this world as I did when I awoke. Truths I once knew as certainty no longer hold any meaning. I cannot even look at my own race and not see her. I cannot tell if she is a sickness or a cure.” I rub my face with my hands as I release a groan.

“Your love for her need not be a weakness unless you choose to make it one.” Wisdom narrows her eyes at me.

I pick up a stone and throw it into the water reflected in the Fade - creating ripples distorting the reflection.

“I can no longer see the path ahead of me.”

“Then focus on one step at a time until it reveals itself. Fortunately for you, your heart already knows the steps. Lean on her until your path becomes clear.”

I chuckle at the wisdom she brings, and I sit down looking into the pond. My reflection stares back at me with the moon hovering above me as the water clears.

“How did I come to love her so quickly?”

“For as long as I have known you, you have been doubted, betrayed, feared, and hated. Every time you reached for the surface to gasp for a breath of air, you were pulled back into the drowning waters. Is it truly so strange that when you met someone who knows, believes in, and loves you that you should cling to her so tightly?”

“It’s not wise,” I lament.

“Is happiness not wiser than despair?”
When I awake, it’s passed midday and the rest of Inquisition’s members are already getting ready for the ball. Unfortunately, this means that I cannot approach Mona as I walk towards her chambers. Josephine meets me at the door.

“Solas! There you are. Would you please make sure that Edward - I mean, the Herald gets ready? He has a tendency of getting caught up in - well everything else than what he is supposed to be doing,” she sighs, but with an underlining fondness that makes me believe she doesn't mind it in the slightest.

“Certainly. Is it possible to have a word with the Inquisitor?”

“Not at the moment, but I will let her know you wish to see her as soon as possible.”

“Thank you.” I give a small nod and walk towards the Herald’s quarters.

As I enter, I see that Josephine’s suspicion was right. He is fiddling with something at the table, wearing his coat but neither boots nor trousers. He looks up at me and an amused grin forms on his lips as I enter.

“Nice hat.”

“Interesting choice of attire.” I grin in return, nodding towards his legs.

He gives a short laugh and gets to his feet, walking towards me. He holds out a gold necklace with blue stones.

“What do you think?”

“I think Lady Montilyet will be very pleased. It’s beautiful.”

“It’s not too much?” He bites his lips nervously.

“It seems to go well with her normal attire, though I am not exactly an expert on fashion.”

“Good. Thank you, Solas.” He smiles with obvious relief and puts it back in its casing.

“Though I would suggest trousers. Otherwise, I fear it will only be compensation for the goodwill you will have lost.” I chuckle.

He looks down at himself and laughs.

“Excellent point.”

With the Herald dressed, we walk downstairs and wait for the rest of the party. Cassandra, Leliana, and Sera are dressed in the same attire as the rest of us, but Vivienne and Josephine are wearing red gowns. I do not pay much attention the design until I see Mona walking down the stairs wearing a similar one, and my breath hitches.

The red gown exposes her shoulders and glitters in the light of the candles. A blue sash that matches our uniforms drapes across her form, accentuating the allure of her curves. She wears dainty gloves a similar colour to ours as well. Around her lovely neck is a choker with the Inquisition’s emblem – my fingers ache to run across it and feel her pulse thrumming against them. Her hair is curled and ornamented with pearls that match the pale creaminess of her skin, while her lips are almost as rose red as the dress. It takes all of my self-restraint not to run to her and act on all the desires pulsing through my veins at the mere sight of her.
“Do avert your eyes, Solas. Gawk at her during the evening and the entire court will be gossiping and all my hard work will have been for nothing,” Vivienne reprimands in a low voice next to me.

A smirk crosses my lips as my eyes turn to the First Enchanter.

“Do not concern yourself, First Enchanter. With the Inquisitor in the room, I’m certain you will go unnoticed.”

She makes a noise of annoyance as I walk away and towards Mona, who is looking over the documents in her hands completely unaware of how the sight of her affects me. To my relief, she does smile at me as I approach, but the look she gives me turns curious.

“What’s with the sadistic smirk?”

“Nothing to concern yourself with, vhenan.”

“You snarked something at Vivienne, didn’t you?”

“What makes you say that?” I ask innocently.

“I know you and you’re wicked.”

She grins at me, but my own expression turns serious at the memory of the night before.

“Ir abelas, vhenan. How do I make this right?”

“Well, last time you messed up, you gave me Skyhold.” She grins at me with mischief sparkling in her eyes and a chuckle escapes me.

Her expression turns more serious as she speaks in a low voice as we walk outside.

“You don’t need to do anything for my forgiveness. Just try not to repeat the same mistake. Love means nothing without trust.”

The carriage arrives, and I feel the distance between us growing as she steps away from me.

“Ar lath ma,” I murmur and she gives me a tender smile before walking ahead into the carriage where Duke Gaspard is waiting for her.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all for the engaging comments! They mean so much to me!

So, last chance if there is something you desperately want to see at the Winter Palace :D Leave a comment and I'll try to incorporate it.

Thanks to ninaninabobina, who is such a big part of making this story enjoyable!

Mir somniar ma’elgar las Sulahn’nehn : My dreams of your spirit brings me joy
Wicked eyes

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

For the first time I find myself in the odd situation Mona must be in most of the time. Knowing who the real enemy is, but not revealing it. It’s like seeing a play transpire, where you know the ending, but being able to shape vents to your liking. For a brief moment I wonder if that is why I find myself so attached to her. If she is playing me like her fiddle so I will respond in a certain way. A thought I quickly dismiss as I have no doubt her affection for me is sincere - not to mention the implicit trust she has put in me by revealing her past.

Walking down the middle of the ballroom in the Winter Palace on Duke Gaspard’s arm she looks like an Empress in her own right. Graceful and powerful. And I am the ‘man servant’. That I even got an introduction seems uncharacteristic of the Orlesian nobility, but I do not mind it. It makes me unimportant and I am free to enjoy watching the machinations. The Orlesians do not seem to know what to make of me, so I keep to myself not wanting to give them some purchase to cling to.

Watching Mona in this setting is fascinating as well. Her carefully crafted mask does not crack in the least. It is so different from the passionate, quirky scholar I hold so dear. This woman is as calculating, manipulative, and cold as Vivienne. Had I not known the tender heart that beats underneath, I might not notice when her voice cracks ever so slightly with sincerity. Not notice the way her eyes light up, when the sympathy and mild affection she shows is genuine.

Even the way she gesticulates as she speak is deliberate. Standing in one of the salons outside the ballroom Mona starts a conversation with some nobles near me.

“Lady Aim.” A middle aged noble wearing a particular ordained outfits greets her by kissing her hand - holding it for a few moments longer than necessary. “It has been far too long since you have gifted us with the delight of your company.”

“Marquis Baptiste De Chalons, it’s good to see you. I assure you the absence has not been of my choosing. Have you seen Duke Cyril? I have some interesting prospects that might interest him.”

The conversation is a rather boring affair until the subject of the Wardens and Adamant is brought up.

“The Wardens have proved anything but reliable. That is why I believe my studies, with the help of Philippe Dubois, will prove useful. There are barely any numbers left in southern Thedas - and after Adamant… well…” Mona’s smile is a strategic one that never quite reaches her eyes. While I agree with her words, I’m not certain she means them.

“What the Wardens did was despicable!” An Orlesian noble hisses.

“Did you not recruit them into the Inquisition?” Another asks narrowing her brow at Mona.

Unflappable, Mona gives a charming and unfamiliar smile that catches my attention. I turn my head discreetly not to give anyone the notion I can hear the conversation. I might be an elf, but I’m not quite invisible.

“I did. For two reasons; We must not forget the efforts of King and Queen Theirin, nor that they are the only current defense against the Darkspawn.”
“‘Current defense’?” De Chalons seems intrigued as he takes a step closer to her.

“Yes, but with your support I hope it will not be so for long. Together with the Wardens and the dwarves of Orzammar it is my hope that we can recreate the seals of the ancient dwarves and keep the darkspawn locked away—”

I feel a finger on my shoulder and see the Herald gesturing for me to follow. I do so without reservation, but my mind lingers at the conversation I overheard. It makes no sense for Mona to be pouring energy and resources into this. She has not expressed a particular interest or worry about the blight before. It could be a pretence to explore the Deep Roads - to find the broken Eluvian that brought her here in the first place.

After dealing with the mess in the servants quarters, and meeting Brialia, I return and see Mona still in discussion with the same nobles. Mona notices me for a brief moment and as our eyes meet I feel my chest rise on its own accord. She is so…

A noble bumps into me without any regard and continues in his drunken stupor. I struggle to suppress a chuckle and catch Mona looking to the floor with a smile. When appropriate, she manages to excuse herself and comes to talk with me. She walks up to me, but keeps an acceptable distance, while I lean against the pillar watching the gathering around us.

“How did it go?” She asks, but even as she smiles I see the concern. The brief look up and down to make sure I’m not injured. Such a small gesture and yet the significance of it makes my heart swell.

“Better for us than the elven servants.” I keep a smile on my lips and my voice even, knowing I do not need to convey my feelings for her in order for her to know them. And in this gathering it would be a mistake.

“I know… I’m sorry.” Her voice is as calm as mine, but the look in her eyes falters for a brief second, where I see the guilt. I swallow and fight the urge to hold her shoulders to give her comfort.

“Whatever you may think, you are not responsible for that.”

The smile she gives me is the first all night I can say with absolute confidence is genuine.

“So, enjoying yourself?”

“Very much so. I do adore the heady blend of power, intrigue, and sex that permeates these events.”

Her eyes flicker playfully and her voice becomes just a little lower.

“Well, if you are very lucky you may experience all of these first hand, rather than merely watching from the sidelines.”

I return the grin as she walks away as my mind creates images of my fingers slowly removing the sensuous gown she is wearing. She walks out into the garden, where I can watch her from the window. The moonlight and flames from the torches shimmers in her gown and on her skin, while I hide behind a curtain in the shadows. A poetic display of just how different we are on the surface. People from different worlds - quite literally in our case. Yet, I see so much of myself in her - or rather the man I wish I could be. The man I had once hoped I could become.
I enjoy watching all of the displays before me, and despite being in the observer time passes quickly. When Mona walks passed me again she hardly seems to notice as the Marquis de Chalons walks right next to her - always close enough to touch her should she be so inclined. During the evening I have come to know more about him. A recent widower who married his older wife for her wealth and power. He is also a distant relative of Duke Gaspard De Chalons. He has met Mona before, but it did not appear to have been a close acquaintance of any kind. And though she carries herself well, I do not doubt she has tired of his advances by now. The Inquisitor would be a powerful ally - or wife.

As they walk passed me his hand goes to her waist. My eyes linger a little longer on his hand than it should and I take sip of my wine.

“If you have an offer feel free to leave it with my ambassador. In the meantime.” Mona takes his wrist and pulls his hand from her as she smiles sweetly. “I do not give away free samples.”

“Then how will I know it’s worth?” He sounds as if he means to be flirtatious - he isn’t.

She tilts her head back giving De Chalons a generous sight of her neck and cleavage. I had not noticed the neckline was that deep until this moment. He reaches for the stray curls and his nostrils flare - taking in the scent of her. I can feel my hand tightening painfully around my glass - a little more force and it will shatter. My magic stirs on the edge of flaring, when her voice turns low and sultry.

“As with all exclusive merchandise, the prestige that comes with it can’t be priced, and you need no proof it is to your liking for you already know you’ll have the envy of others who desire it.” She bites her lips seductively, like a cat playing with a mouse it has no intention of eating. “That is what you truly want, is it not?”

De Chalons bows over her as if he means to kiss her, but she moves at the last moment making him stumble - spilling his wine in the process. A chuckle escapes me at her playful innocence.

“Oh, do forgive my clumsiness. Let me find a servant to clean that up.”

She excuses herself and walks off. He cusses at first, but then chuckles before turning to me and looks me up and down. He approaches me with a determined expression.

“You, rabbit. You’re the inquisitor’s man servant, are you not?”

“I’m an advisor and a friend,” I correct him calmly.

“I can trust your discretion?” He lowers his voice grinning with his red wine stained teeth.

“Of course.” I give a small bow to set his mind at ease.

“Well, could you inform me in which quarters she’ll be staying? I wish to pay her a visit later this evening.”

He coughs, faking a blush rather than feeling any humility.

“Certainly.” I smile. “It’s in the Guest Wing to the east. Third door on the right.”

“Much obliged.” He walks away his head held high, while I release sigh taking another sip of my wine.

To my surprise Mona does return with a servant, but seems relieved when De Chalons is nowhere in
sight. From the empty hallway she looks at me with a deep amorous gaze. I should give her a smile and leave it at that, but my feet are already guiding me towards her.

“I have something to show you.” Her words and how she says it is quite harmless - so why does my blood simmer with anticipation and every movement she makes seem seductive?

Her lips look as soft and vibrant as rose petals. Her skin glistening in the light around her. The velvet silk enhancing her every tempting edge. Perhaps I am more affected and intoxicated by these surroundings than I thought. Memories brought to life of a time where I participated rather than observed. But I cannot recall desiring anyone as I do her. In Arlathan we casted spells that took years to create and lasted for decades. A spell of that magnitude is the only thing I can think of resembling what she has awoken in me.

As she leads my into a study I’m fully prepared to slam the door shut and kiss her, but as I see the genuine look in her eyes I refrain. She had intended to show me something. She points to the wall and I see a strange type of… dragon? Lizard?

“What an interesting creature.” I step closer looking at the mounted head.

“That’s a krogan - an alien like me. And this poor guy was more than a beast. But what he is doing here in the first place is an even better question.”

Her shoulder is pressed against mine as we look at it. Her scent as sweet and enticing as ever. It would be so easy to turn my head and…

“I believe I have seen this before. In that mansion in the Emerald Graves.” My hand discreetly slides down across her arm and settle on her wrist. “It’s where I found that bracer I gave you.” Our gloves are an uncomfortable barrier and I ache for the heat of her touch beneath the fabric. What is the matter with me?

“I wonder how they managed to get him. Maybe he they found him dead?” She muses and seems unaware of my struggles.

“Or killed him in a fit of panic?”

She gives a small chuckle and takes my hand.

“Love, no one just kills a Krogan. They’re tough as dragons, as intelligent as we are and with a bloodlust that could rival a Tal Vashoth.”

“They sound resourceful - and most certainly dangerous.”

“They are, but awesome.” I can’t help but grin at the way she says it, before she continues. “And far more advanced than the people of Thedas… I wonder if this means…”

She turns pale as a sheet. I squeeze her hand and speak softly.

“Vhenan, what’s troubling you?”

“Reapers…”

“The warriors?” I can’t help but frown, but she does not look at me. Her gaze has become vacant as if a dark memory is resurfacing before her.

“No… They are like the blight. Only a hundred times worse on an galactic scale. The harvest the
worlds of highly advanced society in a perverted attempt to prevent total annihilation.”

Few things still send terror through me, but the effect of those words are instant.

“That’s… unnerving.”

She places her hand on my chin and makes me look at her, where she offers me a tender look.

“It’s nothing for you to worry about. They will never turn their eye on Thedas - if we are even in the same galaxy.”

A breath of relief escapes me. I hope she is right in this.

“So, he is not from your world?”

“No, the universe is a whole lot bigger than you and me. His planet is called ‘Tuchanka’.”

We hear footsteps pass in the hallway and I’m forced to step away from her. It has been weeks since we shared a bed, but it should not affect me to this extend. Perhaps it is the allure of something forbidden or my guilt from the night before that drives me. She puts her hand on my chest and for a brief moment I believe she is going to kiss me.

“Go have fun, and see if you can find out anything useful. I’m going to introduce myself to Morrigan.”

“Who is Morrigan?”

At that she merely smiles and walks of. The look in her eyes is daring me to watch her. To find out exactly what she is up to. Well deserved considering what I put her through the evening before. She has tempted me with what fascinates me most; knowledge, secrets, and her. I should not give into this game she is playing, and yet I find myself captivated by it. I am now certain that all she says and does, while I’m near are breadcrumbs for me to follow. Daring and testing me to find out the truth. I should not give in...

I force myself to walk in the other direction and I can’t help but feel amused by it all.

Mona POV

Ferelden - Nine years earlier

Ferelden… I had never thought to see it. This place that was nothing but pixels and fiction is now as real to me as anything. It has been two years since the blight and the lands are still scorched and barren. Bloody darkspawn. Damned blight. I look around and I remember the bloody battles more clearly than I do the face of my own son. Seven months - and I am still no closer to figuring out why I am here. I can still smell the taint as I walk through the Korcari Wilds - throwing up twice in the process. At least it's not a broodmothers lair. No, no, no. Bad thoughts. Think pleasant thoughts. Bunnies. Puppies. Anything else. I walk passed some old monuments and statues. The only one I recognize for certain is a wolf. It's head is tilted down as if it’s watching me as I pass.
“Oh, don’t scowl at me, Solas. You’re just snoozing away, you lazy bastard.” I grin to myself.

I take a deep breath and step up to it - my face in front of the giant snout.

“What would you say, I wonder, if I told you my story? Would you know how to help me? Would you even believe me?” I release a sigh before kissing the stone on it’s nose and continuing on my way.

It close to nightfall when I finally reach the abandoned hut. I hear Solas’ words in my head. As clear as if he is right behind me.

“I found in the Korcari wilds a humble cottage far removed from any of the simple Chasind tribesmen. The trees and weeds had not reclaimed the home nor did the Chasind dare to come and claim the trinkets still remaining. It was empty. Long abandoned. But the world feared she would return.”

I look at the hut and give a chuckle that is no more than a huff of air.

“So Solas, shall we see if anyone is still home?”

If anyone heard me, they would think I’ve gone mad. Talking to a man, who has not met me, doesn’t know me, and more importantly isn’t anywhere near me. But perhaps that is right. I have gone completely mental and everything around me might be delusions inside a rubber cell.

I rummage through the hut, but find nothing of interest. After a few hours I’m at the point of frenzy.

“Oh come on, Flemeth, you old hag! Where the hell are you? You must have left some kind of clue. Anything!” I look up at the ceiling. “Mythal, I beg you. I have no one else to turn to. Nowhere else to go. Who other than you would understand?” I sit down on the bed and rest my face in my hands.

“Please… Mythal enansal enasta. Ma ghilana, ma halani, lasa ghilan…” The prayer comes out as a strangled sob.

“I had never expected to hear a Dalish prayer from the lips of a shem.”

I jump to my feet and pull out a dagger. Pointless really. I have no idea how to use the damned thing. An elf looks back at me and she seems familiar… I remember her.

“What business do you have here, shem?”

“I’m looking for Asha’bellanar. She has… knowledge I need.”

“She is long gone. Along with her daughter unfortunately.”

“So I see. My name is Mona Aim, if you care for such things.”

“I’m Ariane.”

Ariane… that means.

“Well, well. Isn’t this a busy place for a worn out old hut.”

I turn and see a woman looking back at me. A human warrior from the looks of it, dressed in warden armour and a mabari at her side. Her brown hair is in a tight braid around her head and her green eyes study me closely. I bow my head in respect.
"Your Majesty. I had not expected to find such fine company here." Oh, I’m lying my ass off. I knew she would come at some point. My timing is just lucky. Ha! Luck… nothing about this mess is lucky. But she is looking for Morrigan. That could give me the answers I seek.

"Majesty?" Ariane narrows her brow.

"Also known as the Hero of Ferelden, if I may be so bold to make the introduction." I bow my head again. I have no idea what this woman is like - other than what little Anders managed to tell me before I left Kirkwall.

"You may, but let us not be so formal. Elissa will do for now. We are in a place where titles mean little after all." She sheathes her sword and looks closely at the both of us. "So, ladies, what is that brings you here?"

A week later

My heart beats stronger as we walk passed the dead varteryl. I have managed to convince my companions that I’m a scholar. Even Finn bought it - much to my surprise. I feel like I know so little, but I must seem like I know so much. The few elven phrases I can remember helps. The basic knowledge of Thedas, but I feel like a fraud. I’m useless in combat. It’s all I can do to simply keep myself out of harms way. That they have even allowed me to come along this far is a miracle. The sight of chopped off limbs and blood still sickens me. I feel weak, pathetic, and still I can’t let go of some superior pride. They are barbarians, killers, and utterly ruthless in battle. I have never killed or wielded a weapon - and regardless of my circumstances I refuse to do so now. I’m an engineer - not a soldier. I feel a hand on my shoulder and turn to see Queen Elissa look at me.

"Are you alright?"

"No," I laugh clutching my stomach.

"It’s alright. I felt sick too, when I saw so much death for the first time. It still sickened me, when I became a warden. You’ll get used to it."

She means to be kind, and I smile, but I don’t want to get used to this. I want to go home. I want to hold Sam, my sweet little boy, in my arms again. I look at Elissa and wonder what she will feel when she sees Morrigan. The mother of her husband’s son. Keiran is such a sweet boy - at least he will become one. As we walk through the tunnels we finally reach Morrigan.

"No further please."

Elissa turns to us.

"Give me a moment." I try to object, when she puts a hand on my shoulder. "I will remember you need to speak with her."

I rub my hands together to the point where they hurt. It’s either that or pacing. Elissa makes a gesture for me to come closer and I do. Morrigan looks at me with a curious expression.

"And who is this?"

"This is Mona Aim. She is a scholar from Kirkwall."

"A scholar? And pray tell me, what would a scholar possibly want with me?" There is both
amusement and superiority in the way she looks at me, but I can’t help but smile. She has no idea, who I am. But I was Elissa once. A very different Elissa, but Morrigan was my friend.

“Will you give us a moment?” I look to Elissa, who smiles at Morrigan before walking away.

“So mysterious. You have me quite intrigued.”

“I won’t keep you long. I need a way to find your mother.”

“My mother? Are you even aware of who and what my mother is?” Morrigan narrows her eyes at me.

“Yes,” I answer honestly. In fact I know it better than even her own daughter.

“I see… And what do you want with her?”

“I came through an Eluvian on accident, and now I can’t find my way home. I believe she is the only one who can help me.”

Morrigan scoffs and rolls her eyes at me. I step forward and she looks like she might retaliate.

“Please, I know you don’t know me. But my son. He is only three years old.” Despite myself I feel my nose and eyes sting as tears starts to fall. “I want to go home to him. I miss him. Please…” I sob. “I have nowhere else to turn.”

Her face changes instantly. It’s filled with sorrow and compassion - things so rare for her to display that I know I have reached her. Had she not been a mother herself I doubt it would have worked.

“I see… I can’t help you. I need to protect my own son and I have stayed hidden from my mother as best I could. I am…” she struggles with the next word. “...sorry.”

As Morrigan vanishes through the Eluvian I can’t hold in the pain any longer. I give a cry that echoes in the cave as I sob into my hands, heaving desperately for breath. My heart throbs and I fall to my knees, the ground sending an agonizing pain up through my knees to my hibs.

“Solas, ma halani… I beg you.”

I feel a pair of arms around me as I keep sobbing into Elissa’s shoulder. I have lost everything.

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Halam’Shiral - present day

I can’t help myself from grinning as I walk away from Solas. I love tickling his curiosity. I wonder if he is any closer to figuring out what happened to the Krogans. He is so cute, when he is trying to unravel something, and it happens so rarely. The more mystery I can bring into his life the better. I sigh to myself. As if there wasn’t enough secrets between us as it is. But I knew that it would likely be this way. I can’t really blame him for being himself. I love him, which means I must accept his flaws as well as his virtues. I dread the months ahead, but I can’t focus on that now. There is so many other things I must do. Loving him means everything, but it can’t be everything if I am to succeed.
I walk up to Morrigan as she talks with Edward. He seems unsure what to make of her, but is polite. I approach her as the Herald walks away from her and back into the ballroom.

“Hello Morrigan,” I smile and the witch turns.

It takes her a moment, but she finally realises who I am.

“It has been a long time.”

“It has. You’re at court and I’m Inquisitor.”

“You’re inquisitor Aim? Then I suppose we have a great deal to discuss.” Morrigan smiles.

“That is an understatement.”

Chapter End Notes

So we are finally at the Winter Palace! Yay! I hope you will enjoy it.

This chapter has not yet been beta read, so please forgive any mistakes.

Thank you all for your lovely comments! It makes me so happy and I always wait with excitement every time i upload a new chapter :)
I stand in the upper plateau looking down at the small courtyard underneath. Mona has been talking with a blackhaired woman for more than half an hour. The Lady Morrigan, from what I am told, is an apostate who has been at Celene’s court for awhile. Something in their demeanour has me curious, but in all fairness they might be mere acquaintances catching up. If that is the case, then why do I have the nagging feeling that a blade is being pressed against my throat?

“She is spirited, your Inquisitor.”

I hear the voice from behind, but I do not turn. I had not expected him here.

“Felassan.”

He nods at me and steps up next to me looking down at the display below.

“For a shemlen she is rather captivating.”

I hear the mirth in his voice. The humours expression that betrays his hidden suspicion - the irony that I am in love with a human. The ancient elf who will destroy her world. My heart withers in agony at the mere thought, only stilled by the reminder of the thousands of my people, who yet dwell in their eternal slumber. I remove my eyes from Mona and look out into the night. In the far distance I see a wolf statue on a hill overlooking the area.

“What have you found out?”

Felassan leans up against the wall before answering.

“Gaspard is smuggling in mercenaries, Celene is plotting, but you already know these things from Briala.”

“And the Eluvians?”

He takes deep breath.

“There is one located in one of the upper rooms, near Celene’s bedchamber. I still don’t have the key.”

I don’t respond to that. His deliberate failure to not get the key is why I nearly killed him in the first place. Only Mona’s warning held me back. Besides, thanks to Mona I now I have key for it regardless of his blunder. Though, since Briala knows of this key I might still have to overwrite the magic. Felassan cannot know this. I cannot trust him, when it comes to the restoration of my people. Only our shared curiosity about Mona has kept him as one of my informants. Now even that position seems redundant and pointless. I’m drawn from my thoughts as he speaks.

“Professor Aim.” He gives a bow. “It has been a long time.”

I turn to see Mona approaching - looking at both of us carefully. After a moment she smiles at Felassan.

“Two years, give or take. How have you been?”
“Well, thank you. Exploring the mysteries the world has to offer.” He offers her a charming smile to which is given a quiet chuckle.

“Time well spent then.”

“I would have offered my help to the Inquisition, but I see you have all the expertise you could need.” Felassan looks at me briefly.

“The Inquisition can always use able hands and minds, but I suspect Brialia will benefit from your guidance once the night is over.” She is as graceful speaking to him as she is everyone else. Earlier I stated to the Herald that the powerful have always been the same, but once in awhile one will stand out among them. One who is just and fair. We are all fortunate that the power of the Inquisition and the mark ended up in the hands of worthy individuals - and not despots merely concerned with their own power.

Felassan smiles as he lowers his voice and looks at me.

“I see… There is hope for the future of my people then.”

I feel the stab he makes at me. A reminder that the people around us are real. He wants me to give them a chance to do all of it without us - without me. But what of all those of our people trapped in unethera? How can I forsake, those who have waited centuries in an endless slumber to reawaken? I cannot break my promise to them. They need me.

“For all our people, hopefully,” Mona replies sweetly. I wonder if Felassan has realised how strong she is. Knows that the sweetness she presents in this moment is a shell containing the vigor underneath.

“Hope? It has been a long time since that word has carried any true meaning. I have kept you long enough. Dareth Shiral, Vhenan’Assan.” He bows and walks away with a calm demeanour.

Mona looks at me with a frown.

“The arrow that pierces the heart?” She murmurs.

“Yes,” I confirm that her translation is correct.

“Have you told him?”

“No.” But he might have guessed because of the interest I have shown in her. The times I have asked him to spy on her… find information about her. I feel repulsed by myself.

She merely nods looking into her glass. Her mind is trying to discern something, but she does not let it linger.

“The Herald has sensed some rift activity. He needs you to meet him in the guest wing.”

“At once, Inquisitor.” I bow my head and put down my glass.

“Oh, and Solas?”

I turn to look at her, her expression playful.

“If you mess anything up, make sure it’s not my room.”

I take step towards her, and make sure no one is nearby to hear my response.
“For now. As for later, I make no such promises.”

She grins and walks away seeming nowhere near as affected by my words as I had hoped.

As the night progresses we manage to avoid Empress Celene from being murdered. The way Mona destroys the Duchess without as much as one spilled drop of blood makes me smile even as I keep to the shadows. I’m uncertain as to how she does it, but she manages to reunite Celene and Briala with merely a locket. When I find her after she is on a balcony to the side of the ballroom looking down at the landscape below. So much rests on her shoulders and she is a private person, who has been wearing a mask all night. She does not like the attention - no matter how much I think it becomes her. But somehow this Mona seems more real. The one who seems a little lonely, isolated, and wistful. As much as I hate seeing her like this, I also find myself drawn to it. She is so beautiful and strong as she carries her burdens without ceremony.

I walk up behind her and she gives me a small smile.

“I’m not surprised to find you out here. Thoughts?”

She huffs an unamused bit of air.

“I feel bad for Gaspard. I could have done this differently - without anyone needing to be executed, but that would have left a more unstable Orlais. So I chose the ‘best choice’. I killed a man today. So many people are dead as a result of my choices.”

She sighs and leans against the railing.

“He wagered his head for the crown and lost. You cannot save people from themselves.” I put my hand on her shoulder and she looks at me with pain in her eyes. “Remember what happened. Do not dwell on it.”

She turns to me and embraces my waist, resting her cheek on my chest. Instinctively, my arms curl around her even as I look back at the open door to see if any nobles have noticed.

“Vhenan,” I warn with a frown as I look back. To my luck the Herald notices before anyone else and quickly closes the door with a smile. I feel her hands on the middle of my back press me closer, her eyes still closed and not noticing that the Herald closed the doors.

“I don’t give a fuck, Solas. I need a hug from the man I love.”

I chuckle as I tighten my hold on her.

“Such language.”

“Meh, it’s been that kind of night.” She shrugs.

When her hold lets up I take a step back and reach my hand out to her.

“Come. Before the band stops playing. Dance with me.”

Her eyes grow wide in horror as she looks at me.
“No, no, no, I can’t dance.” She holds up her hands with a grin trying to step back only to bump into the railing.

“Humour me.” I smile as a blush forms on her lovely face and down the expands of her neck.

She rubs her face and sighs in defeat.

“On one condition though.” She reaches for my helmet and takes it off placing it on the bench.

She looks at me for a moment as a wicked smile forms on her lips. She tries to suppress it and covers her mouth with her hand.

“What?”

“It’s nothing,” she tries not to giggle.

“Vhenan,” I warn.

She leans in so she can speak softly, but through her giggling I can only make out part of what she is saying, “Eclipse of Fen’Harel”, when her eyes reach my bald head.

“I’m so sorry. I must have had too much wine,” she apologizes and covers her cheeks with her palms.

I grab her waist and tickle her making her squeal and squirm.

“Solas! No! That tickles!” She laughs breathlessly.

“Really? Are you certain, Inquisitor?” I ask calmly as I continue mercilessly.

“Solas! Stop!” she laughs, “I don’t want to kick you! Please!”

I stop and take her face between my hands wiping away the tears of joy from her face. She tenses as I reach for her waist, but I then take her other hand in mine.

“You promised me a dance, did you not?”

“Your toes will suffer for your pride, my love,” she grins.

She looks to our feet and tries to follow my steps, biting her red lips in heavy concentration. She nearly steps on me and mutters a “sorry”.

“Look at me,” I say softly and she looks at me with an unfamiliar uncertainty. “Let me guide you. Trust me.”

“It’s not you that’s the problem. It’s me I don’t trust.”

I press her closer so that her chest is pressed firmly against mine, my arm going from her waist to her back holding on almost possessively. Her arm travels up my shoulder and settles on my neck. She swallows as she looks into my eyes and I begin to take the steps anew. This time she matches my step, not quite perfectly, but much more evenly than before.

“Sorry, I’m not more graceful.” She blushes.

“You, my love, are the embodiment of it. Tonight, you brought an Empire to its knees and shaped it in a way you saw fit - most of it achieved with careful words. And they are inside toasting to you not
even realizing that surrender.”

“Edward and you—”

“We unravelled a plot, but you were the one pulling the strings. You were the one who charmed the Council of Herald’s. You were the one who reunited two lovers who started out the evening by wanting to destroy each other. All of it with a grace and sensitivity few possess.”

To emphasize it I twirl her in my arms making her feet leave the ground. She giggles a joyful sound and wraps both her arms around my neck. She looks like she is about to say something, when here eyes catch something behind me. I turn to see Edward on a balcony on the other side of the building, with Josephine in his arms kissing him deeply.

With a giggle she steps back, her eyes sparkling with joy, her skin set aflame with passion, and her smile radiating with amusement. The other side of my heart that only I get the pleasure of seeing.

“I better go see Celene before I go to bed. Tomorrow we start getting the treaties in order before we return to Skyhold.” She walks towards the ballroom and opens the door, but then looks back at me.

“Thank you for cheering me up.”

“Whenever you need, Inquisitor.” I bow and she chuckles before walking back inside.

I return to the quarters I share with Varric, Blackwall, and Cole, but my mind is further down the hall. I lean against the door trying to compose myself.

With a groan I give up. I can’t stay away from her. Not tonight. I look out in the hall to make sure it’s empty. I fade-step to her door and knock. To my luck she answers the door quickly. She gives me a bright smile as I enter. As the door closes I pull her to me in a insistent kiss, holding her shoulders tight as I press her to me. I don’t pull away till I’m desperate for breath and I lean my forehead against hers.

“Forgive me. I have been able to think of little else all night.”

“I’m glad you could restrain yourself. Walking around the Winter Palace wearing my lipstick would have been a dead give away.” She giggles as she presses her thumb to my lips to remove the smear. I chuckle as I kiss it as she brushes it against my mouth.

“I suppose that would have caused some unwanted attention.”

“Aha, but at the price of some much wanted attention.” She baters her eyes playfully and pulls away. “You’re timing is actually perfect. I’m having problems reaching the buttons. I have dancing around myself to reach them for the past five minutes.” She makes a fake pout and turns around awkwardly to emphasize her point. There is no seduction in her request, but my pulse quickens all the same. I remove my gloves, then put my hands on her shoulders and make her turn around.

“Had I known you were in such distress I would have come sooner.”

She gives a quiet giggle reaching behind her to cup my cheek briefly. One by one I open the buttons on the back of her dress.
“Red suits you,” I murmur as I place a kiss on her neck.

“I’m glad you think so,” she blushes.

“I do. You look radiant in it.” The tip of my fingers caress the smooth fabric, cool to the touch, where her skin is warm and soft.

“Thank you. I like it too, but it attracts so much attention.”

I frown and turn her around placing my hand on her cheek.

“You have no reason to hide. I wish you could see yourself as I do.”

“Says the man who is an expert at hiding in plain sight,” she raises her eyebrows, then wraps her arms around my neck. “But perhaps you should tell me what you see then?”

I’m about to respond, when we hear a loud noise of people yelling from a room nearby and a door slamming.

“What was that?” She pulls away her eyes widened.

“Oh, that was probably Iron Bull and Marquis de Chalon.” I shrug and she gives me a doubtful glare.

“I’m sorry, what?”

“He asked me for the location of your quarters and I may have… misremembered its exact whereabouts.” I give a sideways grin and Mona laughs.

“You didn’t?!” She grins and pulls me in for a deep kiss, while still chuckling then removes herself from my embrace.

“Where are you going?”

“I’m not going to miss this!”

She opens the door only to slam it shut again leaning her back against it with a humorous expression.

“Bull is standing out there naked with de Chalon pressed up against a wall.” She laughs and then slides the door open to take a peek through it. I can hear someone running down the hall and a door being slammed shut. She closes the door with a hand covering her face and laughing. She walks over to me and wraps her arms around my waist pulling me close.

“See, completely wicked.” She beams up at me with joyful unshed tears lingering in her eyes.

“Ma ar lath,” I tease.

“With all my heart.” She grins as she pulls away.

“Now, I believe I made a promise.” I kiss her nose before turning her.

I keep brushing my lips against her neck and shoulders as each button opens. Her scent rushes through me, and I’m struck by the realisation of how familiar it has become. When the last button falls open I let my hand slide slowly up along her spine from her waist to her neck.

“You’re acting as if it’s a ritual.” She gives a low chuckle.
“It is.”

My hands slip in under her dress and I place one on her stomach while the other takes a tender hold of her breast. She sighs and leans back against me as I let my lips and tongue travel along her neck. Her hand reaches back and strokes the back of my head.

“I wonder if he ever made it out.” She chuckles to herself.

“What was that, vhenan?” I murmur as I kiss up her jaw.

“Celene has one of Gaspard’s men tied naked to a bed. I wonder if he is still stuck there. Must have been hours by now.”

I release my hold on her and look down at her over her shoulder.

“And why, may I ask, are you wondering about this now?”

She blushes fiercely and looks to the floor.

“No reason.”

“No now who is lying?”

“Just a pointless fantasy is all.” She shrugs as she steps away from me.

I twirl her around up against the wall and pin her wrists above her head. Something in her eyes darken as she heaves for breath. The intense depth in her eyes makes my heart pound so hard it’s difficult to breathe.

“You surprise me, vhenan.” My voice comes out more husky than I intended.

I expect a playful remark, but instead she looks to the floor and shakes her head as she laughs.

“I would never ask… it was foolish… just forget--”

I cut her off with a tender kiss and she leans against me.

“Have you ever done this?”

“No, I never trusted or wanted anyone else to do it.”

That makes something inside me snap. She must see it too for with a predatory grin she captures my lips in a brutal kiss and pulls her hands from my grasp. In a rushed movement I push the dress down the length of her body. Stepping out of the dress she is only wearing some delicate finery that heats up my desire, but does nothing to give release or satisfaction. She pushes me back towards the bed, my lips never leaving hers, as she opens my coat. My hands slide over the smooth skin on her back. I turn her around at the last moment so her back collides on the bed with me on top of her. I kiss her down her jaw as I remove the blue sash around my waist and shoulder. With the silk freed I raise myself above her straddling her. Her chest heaves as she hands travel up mine and removes my coat completely. I take her hand in mine and give it a tender kiss before tying to blue sash around her one wrist and then the other. She closes her eyes with a giggle. There is no fear, just anticipation. I pull her arms over her head and tie the silk sash to the bedpost. For all my cautiousness earlier tonight there is none to be found now. A servant could come and check on her, de Chalon could make another foolish attempt, or a member of the Inquisition could need something from her. And no matter how skilled the silver tongue, no words could explain this away. My eyes travel down her
body and my mouth goes dry as I tie the last knot.

This is not about control or dominans. All she is and does is give to others. Their wishes, hopes and well-being always comes before her own. Regardless if they have deserved it or not. Her love for me is no different. My needs and pleasure always comes before her own. It’s like a compulsion she can’t help. A selflessness she cannot abandon. But in this moment she can think only of herself - without the guilt or responsibility. There is a poetic irony to the fact that tying her with silk releases her of her metaphorical shackles. Only made even more so that I am the one she trusts to do this. Fen’Harel, the liar, the trickster, the betrayer. At this moment she is the one bound, but I’m the one feeling helpless and captivated. I can not deny her.

I kiss her along her jaw and murmurs hoarsely.

“Tell me if I go to far and I will stop.”

“I know.” There is complete confidence in her voice. She does not doubt me for a moment no matter how vulnerable she is.

My blood howls and sparks at the sight of her. It is not surrender or submission. I have no interest or desire for either. But the devotion I see in her eyes - the unconditional trust. It is unlike any aphrodisiac I ever known.

She meets my eyes briefly then blushes fiercely with a bright smile and leans her head to the side - hiding her face in her arm. I have never seen her shy away or any signs of innocence, when I have lain with her before. There was always some air of confidence to her. But what I see before me is no less fascinating or tantalizing. I adore her.

Her skin is smoldering to the touch as I let my hands travel down her arms. Magic surges on my fingertips as frost accumulates in the immediate air around them. She shudders and whimpers as my frozen fingers travel down the middle of her chest, between the swell of her breasts and down her stomach. I reach for her breasts and she hisses and trembles at the cold, only for her to give a sigh of relief as my warm lips and tongue replaces them.

Her body echoes her spirit; her skin soft and warm as her kindness. The smile she gives me as I tease her could forgive anyone willing to atone. Those clever eyes, that holds equal amounts of intellect, curiosity, and mischief. Her every full curve a reminder of the passion that fuels it all. I catch her moan with my lips as my hands travel across her body without forethought.

All night nobles have watched her, and planned for her. Thinking her a mere piece on the board that they could move from square to square without her notice. Their desire for her power - perhaps her body - but never her heart.

Her hips grind against mine making me moan against her lips as my hands travel up her arms to interlace my fingers with hers - my thumb caressing the silk holding them.

“My heart, I fear you might have been the one to capture me.” I chuckle breathless against her ear.

“All part of my wicked plan, love.” She cackles playfully and turns her head to kiss me.

I kiss her down her neck and down her body, playing attention to every spot I know will make her wither with need. As I kiss along her abdomen she tenses.

“You don’t have to--” her objection dies on her lips as my fingers tease the bundle of nerves hidden beneath the fabric.
She always stops me from giving her this pleasure. It is a surrender she never gives, but she craves to have. I want to give her this. Release her from shackles that has convinced her she doesn’t deserve this. When she moans I remove the final barrier and let my mouth and tongue explore her. Her breath catches in her throat and she pulls at her bindings helping her arch her back further.

“Solas… Don’t stop. Please don’t stop,” she pleads. Every moment she struggles to keep her hips from thrashing. My thumb replaces my tongue as I look up at her. Her eyes closed tight and her body flushed.

“I wouldn’t dream of it,” I promise kissing the inside of her thigh.

Her moans are a hymn that consumes my heart, as my name is carried in them repeatedly, while my ministrations continue.

“Ar lath ma,” escapes her lips as a whimper as she reaches her breaking point. Even in this state her volume is controlled. A prayer and a declaration for my ears alone - the only kind that will ever signify any value for me.

I remove my clothes before I crawl over her and straddle her as she rises from the bed struggling against the restraints to capture my lips in a passionate kiss.

I raise myself above her and let my hands travel down her body as I sit back on my knees between her legs. She give a good natured laugh as she watches me.

“I won’t break, you know.”

Without warning I thrust into her - to tease, to arouse, but I become my own fool. At the sensation a loud moan escapes me, a sound echoed in the one she makes.

“It appears not,” I pant with whatever boldness I can manage.

She laughs as her eyes narrow. The daring look she gives me is enough to set my blood aflame. Her legs enrapture me quickly forcing me into her with almost equal force. An undignified groan escapes me as my hands claws at the sheets for support. Despite her being bound it is clear that the tables have been turned on me. I am not in control anymore. I might have lost this battle, but the war is not over. And I cannot think of a more worthy opponent. I thrust into her with determined strokes. She moans and gasps ever so softly, as I feel my body sizzling with desire and warmth. Her eyes closes as she leans her head back.

“Look at me, vhenan .”

She merely sighs staying in her haze with her eyes closed. Only then do I place my hand were we are joined. A surge of my magic goes through her and she cries out.

“Wicked!” She gasps with grin and looks at me.

I lean over her and captures her lips in a deep kiss containing all my desire for her.

“My wicked mage,” she grins as she kisses me down my neck making me shudder.

“Release me,” she murmurs against my ear and thoughtlessly I grant her request. I do not care if I lose - just give me more of her. Only and always her.

In a quick motion she rolls me on to my back. She peppers me with kisses not seeming to care where they land as long as they convey her love and passion. Each one searing my flesh. I can’t contain
myself any longer - I…

“Ar sumiel... Lasa lath...” the words flow from my lips of their own volition.

“What was that, my love?” The teasing in her voice is almost too much.

“I need you,” I gasp my thoughts no longer coherent enough to be my own. My very being has been consumed by my passion for the woman I love.

“When we return to Skyhold, you’re moving in to my quarters.” There is a hint of a growl as she says it, emphasized with a tender nip into the flesh of my stomach.

“That so?” I raise an eyebrow. She looks up at me with a tender and playful spark in her eyes.

“Please?” She crawls over me as she kisses her way back up. “It has the best view, best room service, and—” she kisses me close to my ear, “- the best entertainment.”

“You make it impossible for me to refuse, Inquisitor.” My hands travel down her shoulders before I kiss her neck in all the spots that makes her gasp with pleasure.

“That was the point.”

Where she was denied pleasing me before all her passion returns with vengeance. I bite my wrist as she envelops me in her. I would cry out to her, but I cannot allow that. Not here. Not now. This pleasure cannot possibly exist without the devotion we feel for one another. I damn the one, who taught her to give pleasure so efficiently. It is breaking my resolve. Of all the pleasure I know she can give, at this she is not a mere temptress. I would call her a goddess if I believed in such. To my luck she is a merciful one and she leans forward just in time to capture my cry with her mouth.

I wrap my arms around her pressing her against me as the last waves shake through me without breaking the kiss. Panting she breaks the kiss, but even as I heave for breath I kiss her cheek, jaw, and neck. Her eyes flicker to the blue sash still tied around one of her wrists. She rolls onto her stomach besides me and hides her head beneath the pillow. I can’t help but laugh at the sight.

“Now you’re embarrassed?”

“Yes.” Is the muffled reply coming from underneath the pillow. I laugh again and begin kissing her up her spine.

“Ar lath ma, vhenan.” I whisper lifting the pillow and capturing her lips in a kiss.

“Thank you… for this… and for loving me.”

“It is not as if either is altruistic on my part.” I stroke her cheek. “But you’re welcome.”

I rest on my elbow looking down at her as my other hand strokes her back. She closes her eyes and makes a pleasant humming sound. After a minute or so she looks up at me with a smile.

“So, ‘courtly intrigue, danger and sex’... Care to elaborate on that?”

I give a short laugh.

“You think the Evanuris were subtle?” I raise an eyebrow.

“No, but your fascination with it has me curious. I’m guessing this was shortly after you took physical form?”
“You are far more clever than you give yourself credit for, my heart,” I smile down at her.

“What happened?” Undeterred she pokes my ribs tickling me slightly.

“What happens to most spirits, when they are first exposed to new surroundings. Let’s say I overindulged.” I give her a sheepish grin that only seems to intrigue her further.

“Is that what I am? Overindulgence?” She batters her lashes playfully with a sultry smile that turns into a giggle.

“Perhaps,” I tease, “You are, at the very least, too captivating for your own good.”

My hand slides down her soft bare back as I recall the evening.

“Solas, about de Chalons—” she begins as I lean down and kiss her briefly.

“Hush. I know I have no cause to feel jealousy.”

“Really?” she teases, “Not even a little bit?”

I laugh.

“No. First, you are too bright to be deceived by their poor attempts at flattery. Second, none of those courting you this evening held true affections for you - their intentions were purely political. Though how they could not recognize the beauty of your spirit remains a mystery.”

She smiles at me and rises briefly to kiss me. “Third, I love you and would never betray you.” My heart flutters at her words, as the devotion in her eyes turn to mischief.

“And you’re right. I am too bright to be distracted by flattery, so stop avoiding the question,” she growls playfully.

I run my fingers through her hair recalling the distant memories, so full of a much younger man’s mistakes.

“I was so young then… Drinking, gambling, fights, women. All of it new sensations and experiences I had never had the opportunity to feel before. I was so certain that I knew everything and confident in my own abilities. I relished it. And I became Solas.”

She notices the last part of my sentence, because of course she would. None but her seem to be able to unravel my words - especially, the carefully selected ones.

“What where you originally?” Her question is so earnest, yet holds an understanding far beyond anything I have a right to expect.

“Sulevin.”

“Huh, I figured you were a spirit of wisdom, but purpose makes sense too.” She chuckles to herself then raises herself to rest across my chest pressing me back into the mattress.

“My purpose,” she murmurs right before capturing my lips in a heartfelt kiss.

Chapter End Notes
So yeah ehm... interesting chapter to write! I hope that the underlying themes got through all the smut!

One more Winter Palace chapter to go. This chapter has not been beta read, so please forgive any mistakes.

For those of you interested I wrote a Modern AU with Edward, Josphine, Mona and Solas: https://archiveofourown.org/works/18267287
I might write more of these if you guys would think it would be fun.

Thank you so much for all your comments! They mean a lot to me :)

I stay behind at the Winter Palace with Mona, Vivienne, Leliana, and Josephine two days after the ball. We are working on the treaty between the Inquisition and Orlais. Since the ball Mona and I have slept in separate quarters - on my insistence. I refuse to make anything more difficult for her than it already is. With Varric, Cole, and Blackwall returning to Skyhold with the Herald, I have the quarters to myself. That is why it surprises me, when a portal opens up in my room and Mona comes through it fully dressed. She is wearing her field gear and a black coat with a hood. I have not seen her wear this since Adamant.

“Evening Solas,” she smiles brightly with some obvious pride that she has caught me by surprise.

“My heart.” I greet her with a small kiss. “Anything the matter?”

“No, but I do need your help.”

She reaches into her pack and pulls out a bracer unlike any I have seen. It’s much lighter and thinner than her other ones, but I see some resemblance to the one I found in the Emerald graves - and significantly smaller.

“This is remarkable.”

“It would be if the bloody thing worked.” She grumbles. “But that’s where you come in. See the junction right here? Can I get you to create some electricity and direct it there? Just a slow steady pace. Please?” She smiles at me sweetly and I kiss her brow before doing as she asks.

When I’m done she takes a deep breath and looks up at me chewing her lip nervously. She twists a small nub and I hear an odd sound as it lights up. Mona twirls, while making a happy squeal then jumps into my arms, wraps her legs around my waist, and kisses me deeply. I only just manage to catch her and chuckle against her lips.

“You are the most wonderful person in the world!” She enthuses and kisses me again.

I’m still grinning as I place her on the floor.

“I’m happy to help, vhenan. Care to tell me what that is?”

“This is an Omni tool! It scans--” A smile creeps up on her at the look I give her. “I’m sorry. How do I explain this?... Well, I suppose it’s like the caretakers in the Vir dirthara... in a way. It absorbs the energy and information around it and translates it into words and figures I understand. It’s not an accurate analogy, but as close as I can get without a long-winded explanation.”

“I think I see... thank you.” I smile at her, but she doesn’t seem pleased.

“Let me show you.”

An orange light surrounds me and I look back at Mona, who is directing the bracer at me. From it emanates the same orange light. It reminds me of a curious wisp looking for treasures.

“Humanoid: elf, male, enhanced neural pathways allowing the individual to draw power directly
from subspace and... huh,” she sounds surprised, but there is a humorous spark hidden beneath it. “According to this you don’t look a day over forty. Well, aren’t you spritely for your age?” She gives broad, mischievous grin as she bites her lower lip to prevent it from becoming a laugh.

“Let us see how well you look, when you reach my age, da’len ,” I tease back.

She makes a pondering expression - purposely dramatic - and turns the device on to herself.

“Let’s see, Mona Aim; amazingly beautiful, always the most intelligent being in the room, and doesn’t look a day over twenty-five. And Solas should always listen to her. Damn, this thing is good!” Her tone is overly mocking, sarcastic, and quirky. The faked arrogance is quickly banished by a short laugh as I chuckle and shake my head.

She walks up next to me and holds the bracer in front of me as she - scans? - the plant in the corner.

“See-” she points at the picture of light coming from the device. “That tells me the species it belongs to, this tells me if its edible or poisonous, and this tells me its age.”

“Fascinating!” I wrap an arm around her waist without even registering it myself.

“I thought you’d like it.” She gives me a broad, pleased smile.

“So, when are you going to create one for me?” I look down at her with a smile and for a moment she looks taken aback.

“You... really mean that? It’s not... magic.”

“I have come to realize there are more wonders than those that stem from magic or the fade... and it would seem like it could be useful tool.” In truth there is also a sentimental reason for my request. I wish to understand how she sees the world, and for her to trust me enough to share the things with me she shares with no one else - not even Dagna. To have something she has created...

The small smirk she gives convinces me her hesitation is due to the surprise of my request - not a lack of trust.

“If I can recreate enough parts, maybe. Transferring the program that operates it will be the tricky part.”

I rub my neck feeling a little self-conscious, when she gives me a brief kiss.

“I’ll explain in detail later. Now get dressed.”

“Where are we going?” I walk over to get my coat and boots.

“It’s a surprise.”

She opens a portal and I follow her through it. It leads to the outside of the palace, where we walk quietly to remain unseen. I had not realized how experienced she is with this. Though, after a decade of roaming tombs, and who knows what else, perhaps it shouldn’t. She opens a portal and then another so we end up on a balcony above.

“How far can you project those portals?” I keep my voice low as I look for guards.

“A few meters at most. Five is really pushing in. And the energy consumption is insane. It’s why I don’t use them that often.” She looks at her bracers and frown. I can sense it. The amount of lyrium is almost used up. She reaches into the pouch stripped to her thigh.
“Which is why I have these.” She winks as she shows me the lockpicks and then bends down in front of the balcony door.

“Yes, the Herald informed me you could pick locks. Not as reliable as the portals. No door seems able to keep you out.”

I look down below making sure the guards have not taken any notice of us.

“I didn’t always have the portals, and they don’t get me passed things like Eluvians. Besides, I couldn’t very well portal myself into a chest... Aha!” She gets to her feet with a smile as the door opens.

“You’re a lot more devious than I suspected,” I tease.

“Well, if you’re good maybe later I will show just how devious I can be.” She leans against me with a seductive smile.

“You think I can be that easily dominated?” There is a hint of a growl in my voice.

“I think that if probably motivated y—”

I interrupt her by pulling her into a passionate kiss making her giggle against my lips. She opens the door as she breaks away from the kiss and walks inside. It looks like one of Celene’s private room and in the middle is an eluvian. Probably the one Felassan mentioned.

Mona walks towards the eluvian and swallows. Carefully she reaches for it, letting her fingertips caress the cool mirror.

“Fen’Harel enansal,” she whispers and the eluvian activates. She grabs my hand as she gasps and looks at it in awe.

“Are you alright, vhenan?”

“Yes... it’s just the first time I have ever used one of these - that I remember. Merrill and I never could get hers to work.” She looks at me and narrows her eyes. “Stop looking so smug!”

“I have no idea what you mean.” I smirk and her nose cringes adorably as she looks to the eluvian with a huff.

I take her hand in mine and lead her through into the Crossroads. I take a deep breath as I look around on the wide variety of colours. I had almost forgotten how beautiful it is. I turn and expect to find Mona taking in all of it with awe. Instead she is averting her eyes. Of course! Humans react differently to the Crossroads than elves. The light is too bright - almost blinding - and the colours invisible to them.

“My heart,” I mutter the words softly as I step in front of her shielding her from the light. She looks up at me with a smile, but her eyes are still narrow. I lift my hands to run over her face, across her skull and down her neck as I cast a spell. Her pupils dilate and the frown from the light begins to disappear.

“There... that’s better, is it not?”

“Much. Thank you. What would I do without you?”

I release a low chuckle and kiss her brow.
“Gotten into far less trouble, I would imagine.” I smile remembering how drastically I have impacted her life even before I knew of her existence.

“Ha! Shows what you know.” She grins and steps around me to take it all in. “Solas, I can see all the colours… it is so beautiful!”

“Yes it is,” I sigh and close my eyes. All of this… all of these wonders shattered and destroyed as a result of my actions to strike the Evanuris down. I feel Mona’s hand in mine and she looks up at me with more concern and tenderness than I could ever deserve.

“I’m sorry. I should have known it would affect you like this. Was I wrong to bring you here?”

“No... ma serannas. I had to face this eventually, you being here is a comfort.” I lift her hand to my lips and kiss it.

“We shouldn’t linger too long. We might run into one of Briala’s agents. That’s a conversation I can do without.” She gives a rueful smile. “Which way to the Vir Dirthara?”

“This way.” I guide her by the hand through the Crossroads, and my heart stirs from all that has been lost. Mona looks around in fascination, but doesn’t say a word. Instead she lovingly brushes my hand with her thumb. Such a small gesture, yet it holds so much comfort.

As we enter the library she gives me a sad smile. So much history and knowledge has been lost. An entire civilization and Empire - these are the last lingering remains of it… And it was my doing.

“Are you sure you’re okay? We can leave anytime you want.” She tries to comfort me and she takes both my hands in hers.

“I do not need you to do that, my love.” I reassure her.

She puts a hand on my cheek and I lean into it instinctively.

“This is just knowledge, Solas. Your feelings matter so much more. If it gets too much promise you’ll let me know.”

I pull her to me and embrace her tight as I lift her of the ground with her arms around my neck. I burrow my face in her neck and take in her scent. I expect her to protest, but she doesn’t. She simply lets me hold her for as long as I should wish it. She gives me an affectionate smile as I set her back down.

“What are you looking for?” I ask as she walks ahead.

“Plans over the Deep Roads. Anything the Wardens have are incomplete. The ones at Adamant anyway. And I was hoping to find some information about the fade pre-viel.”

I raise an eyebrow with a smirk.

“And you could not ask me for that?”

“Do you fancy talking for hours and hours, while I take notes that I then have to put into this device?” She gives me a doubtful glare pointing to her wrist and I smile.

“I can’t imagine anything I would enjoy more than talking with you for hours.”

She gives a quiet giggle.
“Very sweet, but your time is better spent helping with Corypheus than indulging my curiosity.”

“Alright. Let us see how much is left.”

I take her deeper into the library and after a few hours we have found as much information that is both relevant and intact as we can. I’m increasingly impressed by the device she uses. She makes the light run over all the pages and it absorbs the information into the device. Remarkable what can be achieved without magic. I had never imagined such wonders.

When we return to my chamber I feel the crushing regret of all that I have done. The destruction of my people in a futile attempt to save them. *Vir Dirthara* and the Crossroads are a painful reminder of all that was lost. Lost because of me. I sit down on the bed and rub my face after removing my coat. I feel Mona’s hand on my cheek as her lips kisses the top of my head.

“Try to get some sleep, love,” she murmurs sweetly, but I can hear the worry in her voice.

As she steps away to use a portal to get back to her chambers I reach for her wrist. Without thinking the word escapes me.

“Stay.”

She looks at me with surprise, then puts her pack down on the floor and closes the portal.

“For as long as you’ll have me.”

She undresses to her underwear and shirt and crawls into the single bed, where I lay down beside her. As we lay in bed, her back pressed against my chest and her head resting on my arm, I can’t help but revel in the feeling of having her so close. My arm wraps tightly around her stomach and I bury my face in the crook of her neck. It’s selfish of me to indulge in all of this, I know it is a mistake, but it doesn’t feel like it. Her fingers interlace with mine and she kisses my arm close to her head.

“Are you alright, love?” She murmurs in a sleepy voice.

“I’m fine,” I try to convince myself and she kisses my arm again.

“Everything will sort itself out somehow, Solas. I promise. Let me worry about the future for now, and you focus on the good things. Try to find strength in these happy moments. Whatever comes, we will deal with along the way.” There is such comfort and confidence in the way she says it. How is it that she can make my burdens feel lighter with merely a few words?

“Ar lath ma,” I murmur against her neck, but the words doesn’t seem like enough. I love her so much. May The People forgive me, but I’m beginning to love her more than almost anything. I have always known fate is cruel - Mythal taught me as much - but to find such a spirit at a time in my life, where I know I cannot act fully on it. Finding it in a person with such a short lifespan. It’s torture as much as a blessing. She turns in my arms to face me, her expression still heavy from sleep.

“I love you, too. How can I help you feel better?”

“You already help me more than I have any right to ask,” I sigh and tighten my hold on her.

“It’s what people do, when they love each other. I will never stop wanting to help you.” She kisses me softly and then rests her head against my chest with a small yawn. “Try to get some sleep, love. I’ll still be here, when you wake up.”
Ma serannas, vhenan.

A week later we’re back at Skyhold and planning what to do next. Mona has been putting pressure on the Herald and Cullen to investigate Samson more, and has made it a top priority along with creating more stability in Orlais. In the meantime my belongings - the few I have - have been moved to Mona’s chambers. While our relationship is not a secret anymore, public displays of affection are still very rare. And as a result the dignitaries, pilgrims and diplomats are often unaware of our attachment. A fact only made blatantly obvious by the gifts, inquiries, and even marriage proposals still arriving frequently. Most have never even met Mona, and from the few of them I have read it is clear they have absolutely no idea who they are dealing with.

Leliana and Vivienne do attempt to make the most of these letters and inquiries. Mona seems amused by them, but the Herald seems annoyed - almost insulted on my behalf. I have thought little of it until I walk into his chambers one day as we have some lessons planned. He is kneeling in front of the fireplace throwing letters into it.

“Herald, what are you doing?”

“Oh, it was a little cold in here and needed paper for kindling.”

The wicked grin on his face has me curious and I pull a piece of paper out of his hand. I barely manage to suppress a chuckle as I realize it’s one of the proposals sent regarding Mona.

“Unwise, Edward.” I shake my head at him.

“Oof… Edward?” He cringes as he looks up on me. “I must really have stepped in it if you use my name rather than my title.”

“Something that seems to be a more frequent occurrence as of late.” I grin at him.

We hear footsteps approach the room and he quickly pulls the letter from my hand and throws it in the fire. Josephine walks in the open door with her usual cheerful smile.

“There you are. I have been looking for you--” She pauses as she sees the fire. “What are you doing?”

“Oh, the fire was dying down.” The Herald gets to his feet with a panicked movement and I have to fight the urge to scowl at him. Unwise to be so obvious, Herald.

Josephine walks directly to the fire and pick up one of the half-burned pages.

“Edward!” She scolds. “Why would you do this?”

“First, Solas had nothing to do with this.” He immediately defends me taking the entire blame.

“Well of course he didn’t. He is sensible.” She turns to me. “I assume you just arrived for this… childishness?”

“Yes, but do not be too hard on him. He was trying to be helpful-” I look at him for a moment. “- in his way.”
Josephine looks at him shaking her head.

“You’re impossible! I have to go through my mail to see which ones are missing and try to send some sort of response.” She hisses and throws up her arms and walks out the door with haste steps.

“Josephine!” The Herald calls out as he walks after her. “It’s romantic, when you think about it.” He turns to me as he is on his way out the door and shrugs in bewilderment.

“Do not look at me. Getting involved in other people’s romantic entanglements is your area of expertise.” I chuckle.

“The lack of gratitude!” He exasperates in mock offense before running after Josephine.

I guess training will have to wait to a little later in the day.

It’s late at night, when I sit in bed reading a book with Atish’an sleeping at the foot of the bed. A very recent development - and much to Mona’s dismay. She is sitting at her desk, rubbing her neck as she is going over the latest reports on red lyrium. She rubs her eyes with increasing frequency and I have noticed she has gotten more sensitive to light as of late. I put the book down on the side table with a sigh.

“Vhenan, come to bed.” I pat the empty side of the bed.

“In a minute. I just need to finish this.” She bites her lip in deep concentration.

“You said that half an hour ago. If you continue you’re going to fall asleep at the desk… again.” I raise an eyebrow and she finally meets my gaze.

“Oh, alright.” She gets up from her desk and starts to undress as she walks over to the bed. “Figures the workaholic would end up with the dreamer,” she grumbles goodnaturedly before getting into bed.

“You need to take better care of yourself.” I stroke her cheek.

“I’m fine, love,” she dismisses as she lays down on the bed.

“Continues migraines being an evidence to the contrary.” I give her a knowing look as I place my hand on the back of her neck and let some healing spread through her.

“If I’m ever pregnant with your baby, then you’re entitled to an opinion on my health. Until then I’m a big girl, who can handle herself,” she jests with a low chuckle.

Something passes through my face and all mirth vanishes from her face as she puts a hand to my cheek.

“I didn’t mean--”

“It’s not that. I sense something.” There is an energy coursing through her that mingles with the
healing. I have sensed it before, but nothing in an amount that would cause any concern... until now. “I need to see the rune.”

I’m ready to get out of bed, when she takes a hold of my wrist.

“Solas, no.” Her voice is adamant. “It’s highly volatile. If it’s powers was turned on you... The pain it would inflict... I won’t allow it - not even to protect me.”

“My love, it feels like there is some energy of the fade inside you and it’s growing. We need to stop this, and I need to see the rune in order to help you.”

“In the morning. Right now I want to sleep,” she sighs and closes her eyes.

She means to push this away in the hopes that I will forget, but I won’t. I can’t let any harm come to her. She can be infuriatingly stubborn, but I won’t get anywhere arguing with her, when she is this fatigued. I will have a better chance of reasoning with her in the morning. I have not known her to not listen, when presented with reasonable arguments before. I could try talking to Dagna again, but last time I mentioned the rune to the dwarf she seemed to be in the dark about what I was referring to. Seems not even the Arcanist is allowed access to the full extend of Mona’s research. And if that rune is any indication, then with good reason.

I lay down with my back turned towards her as I make the candles go out with a frost spell. In truth I’m frustrated with her as much as I am concerned. I still can’t help but smile as I feel her wrapping herself around my back and placing her hand on my chest.

“In the morning. I promise,” she murmurs kissing my back.

I give a small huff before kissing her hand and letting sleep claim me.

I wake, when I feel a hand shaking my arm gently.

“Solas.” I hear Mona’s voice and I sit up rubbing my eyes. It is still pitch black and it can’t have been more than a few hours since we fell asleep.

“What is it, vhenan ?”

I turn to her, a mere shadow in the night sitting right next to me. She opens her eyes and I see them glowing a light blue colour as if she is possessed by a spirit.

“I can’t see.”

Chapter End Notes

Hi everyone. Thank you so much for all your lovely comments!

I hope you enjoyed this chapter. Please let me know if there is anything you wish for me to include in the future. I’m also creating some AU’s for fun. So let me know if anything comes to mind.

This chapter has not been beta read, so please forgive any mistakes.

Thanks to ninaninabobina, who is such a big part of making this story enjoyable!
She stares into the dark, right passed me, her hands going up my shoulders and neck to find me. As bizarre as it is, it’s almost a relief she can’t see the expression on my face. There is no way I would be able to hide the dread I feel as I look at her. The core of me is trembling as if struck by ice and even controlling my breathing feels impossible. Atish’an whining is the only thing that brings me back to reality. I give Mona a brief kiss as reassurance before turning on the lights with a spell.

“I need to see that rune.” I insist as I get out of bed.

“No, Solas. Look at what it did to me. To risk your lif--”

I spin around and look at her with more fear and anger than I would have thought possible.

“Fenedhis lasa! Why won’t you listen? I can’t help you unless you let me see it!”

She turns her head down as if ashamed.

“I… you’re right… I’m just terrified of it hurting you. If anything happened to you--”

Of course it is me she fears for even blinded and terrifies as she is now. I kneel on the bed and interrupt her by taking her face between my hands.

“Then you know how I feel right this moment.”

“Yes… of course… I’ll give it to you, but you need to take me to the Avvar. Go get Varric and tell him that we’re leaving. Make him get the horses ready and supplies. Then come back here and I’ll tell you where to find what we need. And have Leliana come and see me. We can’t let anyone but her and Varric know what is happening.”

“Cole will know,” I remind her some anger still in my voice.

“He can come too if he wants, but if it can be avoided then please don’t tell him. I don’t want him feeling all of this.”

“You don’t have to protect me,” Cole mutters softly from the stairs and Mona chuckles.

“I should have known.”

“You where very loud.” Mona smiles, probably thinking he meant her, but Cole is staring directly at me.

I look to Cole and he must be feeling how I am loathe to leave her even for a moment, but I must be the one to get Varric and Leliana. Cole, though now more a spirit, is still too emotional and the last thing needed is anything that can cause more panic or concern.

“I’ll help her, Solas.”

“Thank you, Cole. I’ll go find Varric and Leliana.”

I reach for my clothes and put them on as quickly as I can before I rush down stairs. I unexpectedly
bump into the Herald as he is leaving from what I assume is Josephine’s room.

“Solas, why are you up?”

“I’m sorry, Edward, but I can’t talk right now.”

He grabs me by the arm and looks at me wide eyed.

“Is Mona alright?”

I don’t answer, but I don’t have to. Other than Mona and Cole I expect noone in the Inquisition to be able to read me better than him.

“What do you need?” He asks without hesitation.

“Get Varric and have him meet us in the Inquisitor’s chambers.”

Without a word he runs of and I run to the rookery hoping Leliana is still awake.

When I return with Leliana, I see Varric and the Herald are waiting outside the bedroom door. I walk in ahead and what I find shakes me to me core. Cole is sitting on the floor with Mona motionless in his arms. I rush to her side and Cole looks at me with tears in his eyes.

“I’m sorry. I don’t know how to heal this hurt.”

I take her head between my hands and let healing slip through my fingers. The problem is that there seems to be less and less for me to heal, which means...

“She is dying. If we’re going to save her, we need to do something now.” There is a tremble in my voice I hardly recognize.

“We need to take her south to the Frost Mountain Basin,” Varric says in a low voice.

“But the healers in Skyhold—” The Herald objects.

“Look, Chuckles already said she might die. If we are going to risk her life, then I want to make sure the ones she sees can actually help her. Besides, she said to take her there if anything ever happened to her.”

“Yes, they know how to help.” Cole agrees.

“I suggest we speak with Morrigan. She has an eluvian. It might be able to take you a fair distance before you need to find other transportation.” Leliana suggests looking at me. “It’s your decision, Solas.”

“Why?” I sneer rather annoyed. I don’t have time for debates. I need them to get everything in order, while I tend to her if she is to have any chance of surviving this. Can’t they just for once just act?

“You’re her lover, Solas.” The Herald murmurs as he places a hand on my shoulder.

I look up at the Herald and nod. “The Eluvians.”
After getting everything ready, I can feel Atish’an press up against my leg as I carry Mona in my arms. She doesn’t whine or make any of the usual noises I have come to find so dear, but remains quiet and watchful. She knows something is terribly wrong. Morrigan is waiting at the Eluvian ready to guide us through. Who I had not expected to be there is Iron Bull, his expression grim.

“Edward!” I look at him sternly.

“You can’t carry her all that way on your own Solas - nor can Cole or Varric,” the Herald reasons.

He is right of course. We will be able to move much more swift this way, and having Iron Bull along will be an assert if we run into any trouble. I walk up to Iron Bull, who with a surprisingly gentle motion takes her in his arms.

“Don’t worry, Solas. We will get there in time,” he comforts.

“I will lead you through the Crossroads. There is an Eluvian a little further south, but you will still have some distance to go after that,” Morrigan informs us.

Leliana hands Varric a letter as Morrigan activates the Eluvian.

“I have sent word ahead to expect you in a village nearby. One of my agents will have supplies and a wagon ready for you.”

Iron Bull, Varric, Cole, and I follow Morrigan through the Crossroads. I remember this part of the labyrinth well, and it takes all my self-control to not suggest a quicker path. At this moment I’m at odds with myself. Do I get us through this as quickly as possible and give Mona a larger chance of survival, but might reveal myself in the process - or do I allow the journey to take longer keeping myself above suspicion? To my luck Cole must sense this, because he starts to suggest a few shorter routes - and much to my surprise, Morrigan listens. Other than Cole’s comments everything and everyone is silent. Normally, I value the quiet, but right now it’s presence is devastating. Ever so often I feel Atish’an’s snout pressed against my hand.

“Don’t worry,” I whisper, “you will always have a place with me.”

I close my eyes as I realise my words. A part of my has already begun to suspect her death inevitable. I tighten my hands in anger at myself. I refuse to lose her. Finally out of the labyrinth Varric turns to me.

“Why don’t you and the Kid stay here with Waffles? Then Tiny and I will get the supplies. We have to walk a bit backwards, unfortunately.”

“Thank you, Varric.” My reply is a little lower than I would have expected.

Bull hands me Mona, who is still only drawing shallow breaths. As Varric and Iron Bull start hurrying through the forest I put Mona down on a bedroll and examine her. Morrigan crouches down on the other side of her and hands me a blend of herbs. An ancient elven blend.

“This will help.”

“Thank you, but I fear it might be too late for that.”

Morrigan merely nods as she gets up and vanishes back through the Eluvian. I crush some of the herbs beneath my fingers and put it underneath Mona’s tongue. Long ago these herbs were used to awaken dreamers, who had gotten lost in their dreams. I begin to heal her in a desperate attempt to protect what little of her mind I can find. Cole appears in front of my and hands me the rune.
“She wanted you to have this. Cold, but burning, twisting, screeching nails on glass. Be careful, Solas.”

“I will. Thank you.”

I take the rune between my hands and I feel the humming. Wailing sounds and screams enter my mind and I see flashes from the Crossroads as they tear apart. I release it as if burned. Last time I held it my guilt was not so present. Mona had just escaped the fade, and despite my anger relief was what filled the most. This time the rune seems to be feasting on a guilt inside me. Most likely due to my recent trip to Vir Dirthara still being present in my mind.

I pick it back up and another flash goes through me, but this time they are much more resent. I hear Mona crying and I sense the hurt in her heart. “He doesn’t believe me,” her ghostly voice whispers in my mind. It’s from Crestwood. Another whisper “He hates me!” I see her back at Haven, holding an elven girl in her arms. Her balcony at Skyhold flashes across my memory, “He doesn’t love me.” Her standing in front of a fire “He doesn’t trust me.” All the times I have deeply hurt her curses through me, and I must suffer each one. It is agony and it is happening for a reason. I see the Crossroads and my hands casting a spell to open her mind. The rune falls from my grasp unto the ground.

“What did I do? What did I do? What did I do?” I rant as I begin to heal her head.

I begin to remove whatever aftermath I can find of the spell I cast in the Crossroads. That is what finally pushed her condition over the edge. Envy, the Profane, the Feardemon… me… we all kept escalating some process that had begun in her mind. This all started with Envy and since then something has slowly been building in her mind. How did I not see this?

“Because she hid it. ‘Need to be strong’. ‘I can’t let them know’. ‘Just a little longer’. It wasn’t your fault, Solas.” Cole comforts.

“I did this, Cole. She might have recovered had I not…” I take deep breath. “Stand back a little.”

Cole does as I ask and Atish’an moves to his side. I tap into the depths of my strength and cast a ward around her mind - locking out the part of her that is the most affected. Her eyes flutter open with only a shimmer of blue light.

“Vhenan…” I breathe and help her to sit as she rubs her eyes. “Can you see?”

“Not really… shadows…”

“Scraping. Burning. I will get some water.” Cole vanishes and I lean against a tree trunk as I gather Mona in my arms. I feel some small sense of relief, but I know this is far from over. Her legs are draped across my thigh as her face is hidden in the crook of my neck. I kiss her hair and press her a little tighter.

“Where are we going?” She asks leaning her head back kissing my neck.

“Varric is taking us the the Avvar. He said you told him to take you there if anything happened to you.”

“Oh yes… of course,” she smiles.

She feels her way up my chest and neck until she finds my cheek.

“It will be alright,” she coos softly.
A breathless chuckle escapes me.

“Shouldn’t I be the one comforting you?”

“You’re right here with me. That’s comfort enough.”

I press her to me as I kiss her. I know she is terrified, but her courage is unlike any I have met. I give her soft lingering kisses reminding myself that she is still with me. When Cole returns he helps her drink some water and she settles against me again.

“Where are we going?”

My breath catches in my throat. It’s getting worse again.

“The Avvar, remember?”

“No, but that’s wonderful. Their culture is fascinating.”

She sounds so calm and collected. I do not believe she is still aware of her precarious situation. I struggle to keep my emotions under control, but I can feel them slipping ever so slightly. What is keeping Varric and Iron Bull?

“Did you pick up Sam from daycare?” She mutters.

I pull back and look down into her eyes covered with a blue shine.

“Vhenan, what are you talking about?”

“Sam, our son.” She pulls away from me and sits up. “Don’t tell me you forgot him there, Solas. Who forgets their own child at daycare?” She sounds livid and looks up at me though she can’t see a thing.

I take a deep strangled breath keeping myself under control.

“I picked him up. He is in his bedroom asleep.”

“That’s good.” She relaxes and leans her head against me. “A little late for a nap, though. I was thinking later we could have some dinner and then go for a walk in the forest out back. I know how much you both love to explore the woods. It’s good for Tish, too.”

I lean my head back against the tree trunk and bite my lip to not let any sound escape. Her mind is fading and hallucinating - and I have no idea how to stop it. No ordinary magic will effect it. If only I was stronger - then I would not be failing her. There is no point in debating with her. Better to go along with the hallucination then upsetting her.

“Sounds delightful. Now rest, vhenan. I’ll take care of everything.” I kiss her brow and make her head rest on my shoulder will releasing a spell that will make her sleep.

“I love you,” she murmurs as she falls asleep.

After more than three hours Varric and Iron Bull finally return. We place Mona on the back, where I
sit and watch over her as we make our way to Frostback Basin. Cole and Atish’an sit on the back, while Varric and Iron Bull are at the front.

“How is she doing, Chuckles?” Varric asks leaning back from the seat in front.

“She is fading… Before her connection to the fade seemed stronger, but now it’s slipping. Almost as if she is slowly turning tranquil.”

“Well shit… Hold on there, Waffles. Help is on the way.”

“Solas, couldn’t you do that fade thing you do? See if you can find her in there somewhere?” Bull suggests.

“I could, but I’m needed here in case she gets worse.”

In truth it’s not a bad idea, but I’m terrified to leave her body unattended for even a moment.

“I’ll help her here, so you can help her here,” Cole murmurs as he points to her head.

“Alright, thank you, Cole. Do not hesitate to wake me if anything happens. Even something minor.”

He nods and I lean back against the side of the wagon. I pull out the rune. Hopefully it can lead me to the cause of her mind being slowly severed from the fade.

The fade around Mona is quieter than usual. Her mind is usually so vivid, but right now there is nothing. It reflects nothing, but fog. Wisdom appears next to me as if sensing my despair. She says nothing, but merely offers me the comfort of her presence. I hear a faint noise and walk towards it. It is a memory, but not clear as hers usually are. Almost everything is shadows.

“Vhenan,” I call to her as I see an translucent image of her.

“She cannot hear you, lethallin.” Wisdom puts a hand on my shoulder.

Mona is walking back and forth in a large dark room filled with cots and a single desk. She holds a piece of paper in her hand and chews her lip as she reads it. At the desk sits a man I have never seen before and on it a rune I’m all too familiar with by now. His elbows rests on his knees as he watches her closely. Mona’s expression turns into a frown I’m all too familiar with.

“It’s… it’s not convincing. It’s the same platitudes the Chantry uses, but in reverse.”

“How can you say that?” The man rages as he gets up from his chair.

“You think like an Andrastian still. Clinging to the belief in the Maker rather than fact. This is not a question of faith, but of the fundamental rights of the individual.” She shakes her head as she places the letter on the desk.

He makes an exasperated noise. The fade is simmering with his disappointment at her words.

“I swear, I don’t know whether to kiss you or kill you!”
“Charming Anders.” She scoffs and I feel my heart stop. “If you don’t want my honest opinion then don’t ask for it,” her voice is stern, but seems to be familiar with his harsh tone.

“You walk around thinking you know better than anyone else!” He throws his arms up in the air, but there is nothing to suggest he would hurt her. “You’re arrogant and condescending! You claim to know all that is going to happen, yet do nothing! You could right the injustices of Thedas!”

She looks at him with a scowl as there is only a foot between them.

“Of course I could. Because I’m so powerful. Tell me, if I’m so terrible why do you even bother to talk to me?” She scoffs shaking her head. His body crackles with a blue shimmering light. The spirit in him making its presence known. She doesn’t move.

“Because, perhaps together, we can do what we cannot do alone.” His body is shaking, but she looks at him unafraid. Where most people would have run, she stands there patiently.

“And I will help you, but that’s not really the problem is it?”

He huffs and turns his head away from her as he closes his eyes.

“I can’t stop thinking about you.” He laments as if ashamed his voice changing into something deeper. “I wake aching for you. It is madness. This can only end in ruin!”

He kisses her with an unquenchable hunger, his arms on the small of her back pressing her to him in a desperate movement. His frustration and passion opening like a floodgate. She makes a noise of surprise, but then cups his cheek. I feel sick. The kiss, brutal at first, turns into something soft and longing - almost gentle.

This blend of monster and man, melts away in her arms. Like uplifting a curse.

I should stop myself and look away, but my heart cries out for their loneliness. When he lets go he rests his brow against hers.

“I never meant to make you feel this way,” she murmurs, her voice heavy with tears. “I do support your goal, and I do want to help the mages. But you must trust me now. I will never hurt you or your cause.”

The back of his hand runs down her cheek.

“I never thought the world of mortals would be so... beautiful.”

He steps away as the spirit recedes as does the memory.

I awake with a sudden movement - like one might make if you’re at the verge of sleep and believe you’re falling.

“Are you alright there, Solas? You look pale.” Bull notices glancing over at me for a moment, then turns his eyes back to the road.

“Nightmare? Wait… do you even get nightmares, Chuckles?” Varric hands me a water skin and I pour some water into my hand before letting it run across my face.
“Of a sort.”

I have been reliving that same memory of hers over and over. Trying to find what I have been missing. Other than my deep worry for her, and my frustration at myself, the memory of the same man kissing my heart again and again is not a pleasant one. It is nothing, however, compared to the fact that as I examine her nothing has changed. I pick her up in my arms and hold her close to my chest, while Cole tries to comfort Atish’an.

“Vhenan, come back to me. Please. Ma din’an ar’banal suledin.” I whisper softly holding her close to me (Your death I can’t endure.) “We’re nearly there. Just a little while longer. My love, please stay with me.”

As we finally approach the village the Avvar are standing with their weapons close at hand. Uncertain what to make of the lowlanders.

“Wait here,” Varric says as he holds his hand up and jumps off the wagon.

He approaches them alone and talks to one of the Avvar. The Avvar turns to nod at one of the younger warriors, who runs into the village. Mona is still lying unconscious on the back of the wagon and I remove the cold sweat from her brow. Truthfully, I do this far too frequently. I need to remind myself that she is still alive. I wish I was at my full strength so that I might help her. Instead I feel this mixture of rune energy, lyrium and emptiness run through her in a way unfamiliar to me. I was never much of a healer, which at this moment is a regret that weighs heavily on me. I have searched and searched for her in the fade, but it feels as if she is tranquil. Even the memory is unattainable now. For her to wake with no emotion sickens me - if she will ever wake at all.

Minutes pass, when the young warrior returns with another Avvar. He is as tall as the rest of the Avvar and covered in both pelt and feathers. He talks to Varric for a moment and then runs to the cart. He jumps up into it and immediately takes her between his hands.

“Maker…” he mutters to himself. “What mess did you get yourself into this time?”

He looks up at his kin.

“We need to let them into the village. She will not last much longer.”

“You all heard Salve Claw. Let them enter!” One of the warriors call out.

I feel him pulling on the fade around us as his hands glow blue and from her he drags a black cloud.

“You’ve been taking care of her this far?” he asks examining her.

“Yes.”

He reaches to his belt and gives me a small flask of lyrium.

“Drink. You must be exhausted by now.” He gives me a comforting smile, but all that can be seen from the pelt is his dark eyes.

Chapter End Notes

Hi everyone. Thank you so much for all your lovely comments!
I know, I know, another cliffhanger! I'm sorry!

I hope you enjoyed this chapter anyway. Please let me know if there is anything you wish for me to include in the future. I'm also creating some AU's for fun. So let me know if anything comes to mind.

This chapter has not been beta read, so please forgive any mistakes.

Thanks to ninaninabobina, who is such a big part of making this story enjoyable!
Chapter Notes

Lasa ghilan, ma vhenan

The Avvar, known as Salve Claw, picks up Mona in his arms and carries her into a hut in the upper part of the village. Inside the cottage I can feel the spirits. They linger against the veil as they are used to pass through it and back with ease. There are several bookcases, shelves with herbs and potions, a desk, and a large bed covered in furs. Atish’an follows us inside the cottage, while Iron Bull and Varric remain outside. Cole sits on a chest wringing his hands - distressed that he can’t help. Salve Claw puts her down on the bed and opens her eyes to look at them. Atish’an walks up next to her master and puts her front paws up on the bed looking at her, while I begin to unpack all that I suspect we will need. I hear a cat hissing as it bolts out a window at the sight of Atish’an.

“Silly cat,” he groans. “Tish won’t hurt you. Isn’t that right, girl?”

Atish’an grumbles up at him as he strokes her head.

He removes the pelt and reveals his longer blonde hair. I knew his voice sounded familiar…

“I’m Anders by the way.”

“My name is Solas and that’s Cole.” I nod in the spirits direction

“Hello.” Cole’s voice is pained and timid, his eyes turned towards the ground.

Anders looks at me for a moment and with wide eyes - his eyes shifting from Mona to me for a brief second. He makes a movement as if he is about to say something, but then thinks better of it as I walk towards him with the rune. He groans as he sees it.

“I hate that blighted thing…”

“Didn’t you help create it?”

“Sort of… where is the counterpart?”

“Counterpart?” I look at him with worry.

He motion for me to throw the rune into the pelt he holds towards me - refusing to touch it with his bare hands. I can’t say that I blame him.

“The problem with this one is that it projects guilt and pain onto anyone it’s in contact with. That means the person using it will feel all that they are exposing the other person to. So, if you use this device on say a torturer--”

“You will feel all the suffering of his victims.” I hold my hand to my mouth and close my eyes as I recall the Fear demon at Adamant. All that suffering that must have been cursing through her. No wonder it affected her mind. I then sit down on the bed next to her and let the back of my fingers caress her cheek. It’s cold.

“Exactly…” he pauses as he sees my gesture, but I can’t be bothered to look away from Mona to see his expression. “That’s why we created a counterpart that was supposed to limit the effects - in theory at least - but if it isn’t here…”
“It burns. Pulses like lightning that stops the heart. It became too sharp, so it shattered,” Cole murmurs.

Anders raises an eyebrow uncertain what to make of Cole’s words.

“It broke, when she used it last,” I clarify.

“Or it never actually worked... never mind,” Anders sighed.

He sits down on the other side of the bed and puts his hands around her neck. His magic dances across her skin intermingling with her senses and mind. Seeing someone else use their magic on her in such an intimate way affects me unexpectedly. Rationally, I know he is trying to help her. He is more familiar with the runes and her medical history. He needs to form his own opinion. Emotionally, I could have done that myself without his help. I did not risk the life of my heart by traveling all the way here just so that he might rekindle whatever affection he holds for her.

He pulls away and scratches his neck with a frown.

“The rune shouldn’t affect her to this extend. That she is even alive at this point has to be your doing.” Anders looks at me for a moment. “You must be very skilled and powerful to have kept her alive.”

“My abilities are not limited by circle training.” It’s the only answer I can possibly give.

“Alright, tell me everything you tried. Perhaps together we can still save her.”

I go through every step and spell I have used. I tell him about the growing presence I have sensed in her head, but he does not seem to calm. If anything his expression become more grim with each passing moment.

“It doesn’t make sense... Everything you did... It should have worked... unless...” he turns to look at her. “Oh please tell me you didn’t!”

He runs to one of the shelves and rummages through boxes and pots.

“Of all the reckless, mind blowingly, senseless people I have ever met!” He hisses.

He finally finds a piece of metal attached to a leather string. He runs up next to her and lets it roam over her head like a talisman.

“What are you doing?”

“It’s a magnet, so if I’m right--” as he says it the magnet is pulled towards her temple.

“There you are, you little blighter.” He puts the magnet aside and brushes through her hair. Close to her right temple is a small patch of hair shorter than the rest. I see the scarring from stitches. Anders takes my hand unceremoniously and my fingers brush against the spot. I feel the uneven texture of her skull underneath. I have no idea what this is, but it still has the lingering sense of magic I sensed the night all this began.

“Jolt. Twitching. Then empty. It isn’t her fault. She didn’t know it had started to sing again.” Cole looks at me his eyes heavy with worry.

“Vhenan, what did you do?”

“One of her blighted inventions.” Anders hisses in his worry. “When she created this it was to
connect better to the fade.”

To connect better with the fade...

“Shadows upon shadows upon memories. ‘I hope I’m not too late. Please, let me find him’... She was so afraid.” Cole stands at the foot of the bed looking at her.

“So, she has had it for years?” I reason.

“Yes, but then it was just a minor nuisance - and it never worked. I helped put it in - reluctantly. She swore to me it wasn’t working or even doing anything.” His fingers brushes over it with great care. “That clearly isn’t the case anymore. Perhaps the rune and the encounter in the fade made it worse this time? Activated it somehow?”

He walks to the shelves and comes back with some alcohol and a small sharp knife.

“Will you hold her hair?”

I lift her head carefully and place it in my lap, holding her head in the right position for him to cut as my one hand keeps her hair away. My other hand ignites the torch on the wall with veil fire giving him as much light as possible.

“Thank you. Now, let’s see what we can do about this.” He carefully removes the small patch of hair with a barber blade before delicately cutting along the scar. He truly is a very skilled healer. I take a piece of cloth and help soak up the blood, and then we see it. A minute little piece of metal somehow attached to her skull. How did she manage to do this? With a pair of tweezers he removes it and puts it in a bowl. I, however, hardly notice as I see what's underneath. Small blue crystals.

“Lyrium…”

“Lyrium?” Anders’ eyes snap back at the wound. “How in the name of Andraste did she get lyrium in there?”

“She didn’t. They are growing in out of her.”

A gasp escapes him.

“How…That can’t be... is that even possible?”

“Apparently so.” Though, as to how that is possible is another question. “We need to remove them.”

“Obviously.”

Anders reaches in with the tweezers and uses the delicate knife to pry them loose. Then stitches it together and heals it. He examines her again, but there is no need. I can sense that there has been no change. She still feels hollow and empty. Despite the fact that her head is placed in my lap he leans forward placing his forehead against hers and brushes her nose with his own.

“Don’t you dare die on me…” his growl turns into a whisper. “Please.”

When he pulls away his mouth is pressed into a thin line, but his eyes contain more water than before.

“Varric said you’re good with spirits?”

“I have experience, yes.” An understatement if there ever was one.
“Good, help me complete the summoning.”

As he says it I know what he intends and I help him. The way the Avvar summon spirits is a lot more kind than the barbaric methods used by the circle mages. Seems that Anders has learned quite a lot living among them. A spirit appears, but before either of us says a word it rushes to the Mona’s side. It seems distressed as it looks at her.

“Mona…” it laments. “How could this be? She is not a mage. What purpose would this serve?” It sounds downright furious looking at both Anders and I as if we are the cause. Or can at the very least be held accountable somehow. I remember the Crossroads and my jaw tightens as I look to the floor closing my eyes in shame. Had I only known...

“All will be made clear, but please. Help her.” I make my request as gently as I can keeping my guilt suppressed.

“Yes… I will help.”

The spirit seems hesitant - almost afraid that it will somehow harm or corrupt her. Cole stands next to the bed and puts his hand on her head - waiting for the other spirit to reach for her as well. The spirit pulls at her heart. There is a darkness there left by the rune. A darkness that meanders through her spine and skull. I know it is there, because I have kept it at bay since Adamant. Slowly making it less pronounced until time could remove it. If only it had been enough. But if this is the spirit, who helped create the rune, then it can remove the part of itself latched on to her.

Anders kneels down next to her as the spirit touches her mind. Both it and Cole interact with her spirit, connecting with her consciousness. Her breathing returns to normal, and when her eyes flutter open I feel my chest heave for breath as well. An audible sigh escapes my as I put a fist to my mouth and lean against the wall for support… it worked.

“Justice…” she murmurs and reaches out for the spirit.

Its spirit hand seems to caress through her hair before it slips back through the veil. She catches the sight of Cole and gives him a small smile. When the spirit goes back beyond the veil she falls unconscious. I rush to her side, but Anders begins to examine her first. A part of me wants to push him out of the way so I can do it myself, but cooler heads prevail. He gives a relieved sigh.

“I think she is going to make it.” He smiles.

I sit down on the bed and take her hand giving it a deep and long kiss. Anders looks at me, but I only see her and the comfort of her chest rising and lowering at a normal pace.

“How are you feeling?”

The sincerity of his question takes me off guard.

“You need not concern yourself.”

“If I don’t, Mona will have my head when she wakes - at least if she feels just a fraction of what you feel for her. So, mana exhaustion. Any other symptoms? Dizziness, headaches?”

“Thank you, but it is nothing a little rest won’t cure. I will deal with it.”

Anders gives me a wry grin.
“I never said otherwise.”

He walks to a cabinet and pulls out some more herbs as he rummages through it.

“I wouldn’t recommend anymore lyrium potions - you have probably had your share already. But--” he walks over to me and hands me a bowl of herbs. “- chew these. They will help. We can brew a tea from them later if you’re still feeling fatigued. And then try to get some rest.”

I look into the bowl and frown.

“Some of these are for calming nerves.”

“You obviously care about Mona. If anyone ever needed those herbs, it’s you.” He chuckles.

I give him an incredulous look.

“Look, most people don’t have to worry about their partners going into battle on a frequent basis - or actively seeking it out. But for some of us that is reality, and though we never get used to it we learn to control it. But Mona… She knows the danger coming and runs directly into the jaws of the beast anyway. Worse, she meddles with things that often seem out of our comprehension. Like this thing.”

He shakes the bowl with the small bit of metal. “You and I know how to heal wounds. You seems very capable and strong, so I’m sure you can with some confidence that you can deal with most situations. But when it comes to her, and the trouble she gets into - it’s all just guesswork.”

“True enough.” I give a rueful smile.

“She would not have survived long enough to get here if not for you.” He pats my shoulder before walking towards the door. “I’ll go let Varric and that Qunari know she is going to recover. How did she manage to pick up a Qunari anyway?” There is mirth in his voice as he shakes his head.

I sit by the side of the bed holding her hand as she sleeps. I should get some rest as well, but I’m terrified that when I wake up something will have happened to her.

“You don’t need to be afraid, Solas. You’re her heart.” Cole comforts as he leaves.

Hours later my heart is still trapped in a dreamless slumber. What I wouldn’t give to see her eyes looking back at mine.

I hear the door open behind me and I expect it to be Varric or Iron Bull coming to check on her again. Cole is always close by, but all the spirits hovering by the thin veil distract him. Instead it’s Anders who comes bringing some tea of all things.

“You need to keep your strength up.”

I keep the desire to cringe at bay and take the tea. I force a sip of it down my throat. He is right - it will help me with the fatigue I’m feeling.

“Thank you.”

He nods and goes to one of the shelves. He takes down a book and walks back towards me.
“It’s one of her oldest notebooks. After Justice and I were separated she left in such a hurry she forgot a few of her things. This was one of them.”

I take the book as he hands it to me. I let it rest in my lap as I thank him, my attention still turned towards my heart.

“Open it and look at the first page.”

Curious, I do as he asks. The first page is a long list of names. Some with a circle around them - others have been crossed out. My name is on the top of the list.

“What is this?”

“It’s a list of names of all the people she attempted or will attempt to save. Justice and I are second on that list, but you are first. I don’t know, what your future has in store for you, but if you are so important to her that you were the first one she remembered, I would try to keep my head low.” His voice is an odd mixture of hurt and anger, yet some of his affection for her shines through as he looks at her.

“I will do what I can.” What else can I possibly say? I have no answer to give, as I’m not even certain what it is specifically she wants to save me from. Was it the stupidity that led to my orb being in Corypheus’ hands? Or something else, which either is too painful or too worried for her to mention to me. I have a nagging suspicion that regardless of the event, she is trying to protect me from myself.

Anders walks to the other side of the bed and feels her arm for warmth, then covers her with another blanket to ensure she is comfortable.

“You’ve noticed it, too, haven’t you? How the runes somehow interact with a differently than anyone else.” Anders looks at me.

“Yes,” I admit.

“I wish I knew more, but she was always rather secretive, but I assume it has something to do with that blighted relic she found in the Deep Roads.”

I merely nod. I know now that there wasn’t truly any relic to give her all the information she has, but there might have been something else that could have affected her. I curse myself. Had I been at my full strength I could have easily explored the area without any fear of Darkspawn or blight and gotten the information hidden there. I could gain the knowledge I need to help her. I resist the urge to punch my fist into the wall, but in truth I want to scream. All I can do is sit here and wait for her to recover. Hope that Justice removing his essence from her will be enough. The whole scenario terrifies me as I remember how she struggled silently in the fade at Adamant. When I tear down the veil how will it affect her? A more interesting question is why. I feel like I’m missing something, but I have no idea where to begin looking.

I bring her hand to my lips and give in a tender kiss. Her pulse is getting stronger. She just needs to recover, but I fear if her mind has been damaged in some way. This ordeal has been going on for months and I am no closer to understanding, what demons and the Profane could possibly want with her. I suspect neither does she. Frustrated, I rub my face. I shouldn’t get wrapped up in all this. Corypheus and reclaiming my orb must be my first priority. Restoring the elven people is my purpose and I must remain true to it. But my heart aches to protect her. Needs to know that she is safe from harm.
“It was not suppose to happen this way.” I sigh to myself and look at her sleeping form. “It was not supposed to be this complicated. Ar ghilan’him banal’vhen. Lasa ghilan, ma vhenan.”

I wake by a familiar tender touch stroking my head. I barely realised I had fallen asleep. I look up and see Mona’s hazel eyes looking at me with a tired smile. Some of the colour has returned to her face, but there is still pain in her eyes. I release an uneven breath as I look at her as warmth spreads through my chest.

“Vhenan…” I sit up on the bed and take her face between my hands. “Are you hurting? Can you see?”

“I’m tired, nauseous, and my vision is a little blurry. But I’m fine.”

“It will take some time for you to regain it all. You have been through a gre--”

“Solas,” she interrupts softly and caresses my cheek. “It’s alright. I’m here, well, and safe. I’m going to be fine.”

She pulls me closer and I bury my face in the crook of her neck. When she makes a calm humming sound while stroking my back, I shatter with a silent tremble tightening my hold on her. I could have lost her.

Her life is so short and fragile. I close my eyes as I recall the feeling, when I thought she would die. Feelings that still linger just underneath my skin.

Perhaps I can postpone my plans. Be by her side until time takes her from me and love her for the short time she has left. My people need me, but they have waited for centuries… will a few more decades make a difference?

But should the last of the dragons in the depths be discovered before then the Evanuris will be freed. These conflicting feelings are the reason why I should never I have given into my love for her. I should never have fallen in love with her - but looking back that seems inevitable regardless of my choices. I hear Anders’ voice outside and my insides turn. Had things been differently she might be in his arms. He would get to see every time her spirit radiates with curiosity and fascination. He would be the one to explain magical concepts to her, while she would listen tentatively and nibble at her lower lip. He would be the one to see her every discovery as her lively hazel eyes would twinkle with enthusiasm. The thought of her looking at him as she does me makes the ache in me stir. The People forgive me for my selfishness, but my heart could not bear it. The world has gone awry, but she makes it seem alive and hopeful.

Chapter End Notes

Hi everyone. Thank you for reading this far and I hope you're still enjoying the story.

This chapter hasn't been beta read, so please forgive any mistakes.

And as always if there is something you wish me to write - a certain scene, topic or a
Ar ghilan'him banal'vhen. Lasa ghilan, ma vhenan." = My path leads astray. Give me guidance, my heart.
Deathwish

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

I’m looking through the notebook Anders gave me to see if there is anything that might make Mona’s recovery easier. We will be needed back at Skyhold soon, and though it has only been three days I know every hour is precious. Though, in reality I would happily stay here for weeks to let her recover. As I look through her note book I find all the ways she has been trying to find me over the years. Sketches of the mask of Fen’harel. Extensive studies of the dreamers abilities and notes to keep an eye on a mage named Feynriel. Ever so often I come across drawing of a wolf with six eyes. Sometimes black, but most of the time it’s white. It both warms and saddens my heart as I see them. If only I had known she had been searching for me. Had I known what I do now I would have approached her in her dreams. I look through the names and smile as I see both Cole’s and Wisdom’s names right beneath Anders and my own. Some of the names I recognize from Varric’s tale of the champion. Leandra being the one name I know she managed to save. But the list is a long one, and I can see the page has a few spots that have been wet at one point. Dried tears from the looks of it.

I hear noise outside. Varric and Anders in an argument again. Or rather Anders trying to get Varric to talk to him, while Varric is being very passive aggressive. Cole has attempted to help, but Varric doesn’t let him. Since Cole has become more spirit Varric seems a little uneasy around him. Such foolishness. Cole is not less himself now than he was before. The only thing they actually do accomplish is waking Mona.

“Solas?” She murmurs as she sits up and looks for me.

Atish’an jumps up onto the bed and starts licking her fiercely. I hurry to her side and take her hand, gently shooing Atish’an of the bed.

“I’m here, vhenan. Everything will be alright.” I comfort. After everything she has been through I am uncertain how she is feeling. As always she seems more concerned about my well-being than her own.

“Of course it will. You’re here.” She smiles with such warmth my heart swells. A wistful chuckle escapes me and I give her a soft kiss. If she only knew how helpless and frightened I felt. When I’m about to pull away she holds me close deepening the kiss. When she allows me to break away I rest my brow against hers.

“I don’t know what I might have done had I lost you.”

“You would have been fine.” She cups my cheek and lets her thumb caress my cheekbone.

I pull away and look at her. Does she not know what seeing her almost die did to me?

“I think you underestimate how important you have become to me.”

“Perhaps, but I know your strength. It would have hurt you, but you would survive.” She gives me a quick soft kiss. “You always do.”

“Of course…” I turn my head down towards the floor evading her eyes. She is right of course. I would go on, but my heart would have been torn from my chest in such a way I’m uncertain even eons would be enough for it to heal. I still feel the murder of Mythal keenly. Mona’s death would…
Mona takes a gentle hold of my chin and turns my eyes back towards her.

“There is a difference between surviving and living, however. Whatever comes please remember that... I love you.”

Regardless of my many conflicting emotions I can’t help but smile. She has given me her heart so freely, and though I know I do not deserve it there is nothing in this world more dear to me.

“And I you, my heart.”

Her eyes turn to the book.

“I haven’t seen that in ages. I wondered what happened to it.” She picks it up and looks through.

“I didn’t mean to intrude--”

She gives me a soft kiss.

“It’s fine.” A fierce blush forms on her cheeks. “I’m a little embarrassed at the amount of poorly drawn wolves, but it’s fine.”

Her eyes turn towards the door and I hear it open. Anders walks into the cottage and releases a deep sigh as he sees her.

“Hi...” she greets meekly.

He rushes to the other side of the bed and kneels on it dragging her into his embrace.

“You are one daring woman.” He burrows his face in her neck and closes his eyes. He then pulls away looking at her sternly. “What were you thinking?!?”

“Well, good morning to you too, Anders. Good to see you are your usual delightful self.” She gives him a humorous scowl.

“There is nothing ‘delightful’ about having to save you from attempting to kill yourself - again!”

They are quiet for a few moments before he rushes forward and pulls her to him in a tight embrace again. Atish’an presses against my leg and puts her head in my lap. Should I take this much comfort in the fact that her dog seems to prefer me to any other who cares for my heart?

“It’s so good to see you! Thank the Maker you made it!”

“I’m happy to see you, too.” Her embrace on him is tight - as if she never intends to let him go. “Thank you for saving my life,” she murmurs softly before he pulls away. I feel suddenly out of place, but then Mona’s hand reaches for mine without looking - interlacing our fingers.

“You’re welcome.” Anders smiles his eyes briefly looking to our hands. “So, what in the name of the Maker were you thinking? You tried to increase your connection to the fade before and it didn’t work. What did you do to that thing?”

She looks at me for a moment - more hesitant than I have ever seen her.

“At first... but this time it wasn’t supposed to increase my connection to it. It was suppose to shield my from it.”

“You were attempting to make yourself tranquil?” I frown. A part of my wants to be furious, but I
know her well enough to know there has to be a rational explanation. Anders has no such patience.

“You're kidding!”

Her eyes dart to him momentarily, but she turns to me again and answers my question.

“No. No, of course not.” She strokes my cheek. “I was trying to see if I could make a device that limited the connection to the fade without severing it. When I realised Envy had somehow activated it, I needed to see if I could control it.” There is a slight tremble in her voice. It’s important to her that I understand.

“Why?” I keep my voice soft.

“Because, I was trying to find a safe way to prevent mages from becoming possessed. Imagine if there was a safe way to do it until they were old enough to control it.” Mona does not look at me. She knows the rage that is buried beneath my calm demeanour. However, I have no intention of berating her in front of Anders. I can’t fault her intentions, but for her to take such a risk with her own life...

Anders drops back onto the bed and stares at her. I cannot tell if he is pleased or offended. He simply looks at a loss for words.

“And you thought attempting this on yourself was the wisest cause of action?” I sigh, unable to hide my disappointment.

“What would you have me do? Use the Inquisition to kidnap mage blooded children and implant these devices in them? I could have an entire set up in a lab, where they would be watched in cages and studied around the clock.” She raises an eyebrow that matches the sarcastic tone of her voice. Anders puts a hand on her shoulder to get her attention. Both of us ignoring her sarcastic remark.

“If it worked it no child would have to be ripped away from his mother… but why you doing this now? Because of the breach?”

“It’s what started it, yes.”

“So, it had been dormant for years until you had that encounter with Envy.” I deduce.

“Actually, it didn’t even work until Envy. And immediately after I had no idea that it even worked. Not until I was able to interact with the fade, Wisdom…” Her gaze softens as she looks at me. “You, that I even suspected it was working.”

That would account for her being able to dream with such focus. The only other thing I know that manages to do that is the mark of Fen’Harel.

“You could have told me you put raw lyrium in the blighted thing.” Anders hisses.

“I would never implant raw lyrium into my skull.” She rolls her eyes at him and seems a little offended. “Do you think me a complete idiot?”

Anders grins and she points at him with a scowl: “Not a word, feathers!”

My eyes widen as I look at her.

“There were crystals growing behind it, you know.” Anders hands her the bowl with the small metal object and the small crystals. Atish’an sniffs in the direction of the bowl and then grumbles.
“That makes no sense.” She rubs her forehead and for the first time since I have met her she looks truly bewildered.

“There was no lyrium in it. Not even some traces of dust?” I ask holding her hand a little tighter to offer her some comfort.

“Only a tiny amount of liquid inside the wiring.”

“You idiot!” Anders hisses and her eyes dart to him with fury.

“Oh, come on, Anders! How many lyrium potions have you swallowed? How many templars have taken this stuff on a daily basis? Have you ever seen crystals grow out of them?”

I have never heard her sound so arrogant before, but I assume I can come of quite the same, when talking to those who are not able to comprehend my meaning.

Anger flares in his face for a moment before he sighs in defeat.

“Then what happened?” He crosses his arms.

Mona looks to me again with a pensive expression.

“The Profane? The fade? Or was it the rune all along?”

“Or when I cast that spell in the Crossroads. Possibly a combination.” I turn my gaze from her feeling the shame that I was the possible cause of her almost dying.

“Well, I’ll make sure to run a lot of tests before I implant the next one.” She turns my head and smiles at me, while I give her a stern look.

“I can’t believe I’m hearing this! Have you lost your mind?!” Anders cries, his eyes ablaze as he looks at her. Atish’an gives a short bark, but Anders just glares at the dog. I stroke her head to calm her and reluctantly she places her head in my lap again.

“Because I have to.” Mona sighs.

She is omitting the question. But I know the answers Anders doesn’t. It’s purpose was to shield her mind from a dreamer. Either Felassan or myself. It was an attempt to find a way to protect the children of Thedas once I tear down the veil. She did this to help the people of Thedas to adapt to the changes that I will bring. Slowly adjust them to the fade.

“You did it for me.” I state quietly and she looks at me. ‘For me’, ‘because of me’ - when it comes to Mona those words mean the same. Her heart is intertwined with everything related to me.

“Yes.”

Anders gives me a pained look before getting up.

“Perhaps, I better give you two a moment. I’ll just go talk to Varric - because that hasn’t been awkward at all.” He grimaces at Mona, who gives him a sympathetic look.

“I suggest bringing, Cole. He’ll help.”

He merely nods as he walk out the door his gaze turned towards the floor. I look to Mona. Her face is flushed and I can tell she is uncomfortable.
“Will you tell me what happened?”

“After Adamant I thought it has short circuited. I truly believed that it was just the rune and stress causing all of it. I don’t know… sometimes my body just doesn’t feel right - and I can’t tell why. It’s almost as if it absorbs everything. Maybe it’s the runes, the lyrium… or something in the Deep Roads I don’t remember… I just… Solas, I’m so sorry…”

I cup her jaw with my hand.

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

She gives me a sad smile.

“Because you would have told me to stop.”

“You do not have to risk your own life - or do anything so drastic. Take the time you need to explore this safely if you must do it.”

Despite my voice being soft she pushes away and gets out of bed. As she stands she crosses her arms across her chest.

“I don’t have that luxury, Solas. The world is going to change, whether I like it or not - and I’m trying to just save… something… someone… anyone.” She releases a deep sigh.

“What is it you want, vhenan?”

“Do not ask me that question, Solas.” She shuts her eyes tight and her voice is heavy with grief.

“That you do not wish me to is the very reason why I must.”

She rubs her face and makes an exasperated noise.

“I want to see the veil fall. I want to see the magic return and the spirits free from the fade. I want to see Thedas as it was always meant to be. I want to share that with you. I want to see the miracles that you can shape. But just because I want it, it doesn’t make it right.”

She releases a deep trembling sigh.

“I want everyone to have a place in that world - not just elves. We both know that in the end, what you and I want doesn’t matter. So, I didn’t want to sour any moment I had with you…”

She turns to me, her eyes brimming with unshed tears. They are a weapon more potent than any that could ever kill me. I sigh with regret as I respond:

“What you wish for might not be possible…”

“I wished for you and you’re here.” She gives me a rueful smile that makes me release a breathless chuckle.

The door is pushed open and both Iron Bull and Varric walk towards her taking turns to embrace her.

“You scared us, Waffles.” Varric shakes his head.

“Yes, but think of the story you get to tell.” She winks at him and he grins.
“So, Boss, there is this arena here and I was wondering…”

As they talk I walk out the cottage and walk towards the edge of the cliff. I need some air to recover from this. Atish’an follows me on her own accord.

I sit on a cliff overlooking the Avvar village. I have been sitting here for hours in the company of my own thoughts. Now that my heart is out of any immediate danger I need time to absorb all that has happened. Atish’an is lying on the ground beside me as I sit on a rock. I cannot think of a creature whose company I enjoy this much - save for Mona and spirits naturally. It is all quiet and peaceful - in complete contrast to the battle raging inside my mind.

Unfortunately, Anders is the person to seek me out after a long while has passed. He stands next to me with his arms crossed.

“I’m trying to understand what happened to her. She never dealt with demons before. Only good spirits.”

“The two are not so dissimilar. And she never dealt with any. She was merely subjected to them and resisted their influence over her.”

“Is that what you call it? She nearly died!” Anders fumes in frustration. “Do you honestly not recognize the difference between demons and beneficial spirits?”

“They are the same. The Chantry sees black and white, but nature is, and always has been, grey. A spirit is a purpose. A demon is that purpose perverted. I would have believed you had come to that understanding on your own, considering…” I keep my voice calm.

He scoffs shaking his head.

“Spirits were the first children of the Maker, but He turned his back on them to dote on His mortal creations. The ones who resented this became demons, driven to take everything mortals had and gain back the Maker's favor.”

“That is one story, yes.” I agree. “Whether it is the right one is up for debate.”

“Exactly, what do you believe?” Anders crosses his arms again and gives me a stern look.

“Cause and effect. Wisdom as its own reward, and the inherent right of all free willed people to exist.” I reach down and stroke Atish’an’s head as she makes a pleasant grumbling sound.

Anders’ arms falls to his sides and he looks at me with a wistful expression.

“You sound so much like her… Mona I mean.”

“We share many of the same views on the world, that is true. Further proof of the lacking knowledge of the circle. If a woman, with no magical ability, can have a better grasp on spirits and magical phenomenon than a highly skilled spirit healer trained in circle, it is a wonder so many managed to pass the harrowing.” I point out - this time failing to keep my voice quite as even.

“Was that a compliment or an insult? It is hard to tell.” Anders chuckles.
“You have gained remarkable abilities and proved you have great talent despite the boundaries put on you. That you still follow them now, that you are free of the Circle, is you own doing.” I get to my feet and walk away before he can engage me in any further conversation. As much as I understand how and why Mona admires the man I find him increasingly frustrating. A frustration not made less by the fact that I can hear his footsteps right behind me.

He walks up next to me and point toward a circular structure at the top of the village. “They are down by the arena. That Qunari and Varric wanted to join.”

“I don’t doubt it.” I manage a smile and Atish’an licks my hand.

Mona is standing at the edge of the arena looking down. She manages a smile as I walk over to her. After she greets Atish’an I kiss her cheek. Her normal lovely scent of vanilla and spice is replaced by a more earthy scent filled with herbs. His scent. Hardly surprising since she spent the past two days in his bed, but it still bothers me. She gives me a curious look, but doesn’t ask. Instead she hands me a letter.

“Leliana wants us to stay put for a few days. She is sending Philippe along with a Professor Kendrick and some of the Inquisition soldiers. There is quite a lot to learn here about the previous Inquisitor. I’m not going to divert any serious resources to it until after we have dealt with Corypheus, but I’ll wait until they arrive.”

“And Samson?”

“Edward found the tranquil that was working for him. Dagna is researching the tools as we speak. I can’t wait to see it, when we get home.” She takes my hand at the last word and I feel her meaning. It’s the first time she has called it something besides Skyhold. It’s our home. I reach for her cheek and she leans into my palm closing her eyes.

“It’s very cute, you two being all doe eyed and shit, but Solas, we need you to help us kick some ass!” Iron Bull all but roars from behind us with enthusiasm.

“I’m not interested.” I smile as I turn towards him and Varric.

“Now Chuckles, do I need to remind you that you are personally responsible for me losing a lot of coin to the Herald? You owe me.” The dwarf winks up at me.

“Yeah, even Cole agreed to join… if we can find him.” Iron Bull turns around to find him and sees him talking to a woman not far away.

“Duty calls.” Mona smiles giving me a nudge with her elbow.

“Edward is going to complain we did this without him.” I point out and Mona giggles.

I kiss her cheek before following the others into the arena. On my way down Anders passes me giving me a quick nod before walking towards Mona and Atish’an. I feel a large hand on my shoulder.

“What’s with the glare, Solas?”

I look up at Iron Bull, who seems uncharastically concerned.

“It’s nothing.”

“That’s right. Whatever you’re imagining it’s nothing. Anyone interested in her lost that fight to you
ages ago.”

“Thank you.” I can’t help but letting a small chuckle slip.

“Now, let’s go rip those Avvar a new one!”

He pats my back hard pushing me in the direction of the arena.

To our luck we actually manage to win the challenge and Mona is the first to congratulate us, when we exit.

“See, this is why I’m proud of my Inquisition!” She wraps her arms around my waist and gives me a quick hug.

“Aaw, thanks Waffles. Joining us for a victory round?”

“Yes, boss, want to see what swill they serve here?” Iron Bull grins.

“Thank you, but I’m not quite up for that yet.” She smiles at him and then turns to me. “You go with them. I’ll see you later?”

“Of course.” I smile at her as she rubs my shoulder.

I only get one drink with my overeager companions. Cole is already gone to find some hurts to heal, when I make my way back to Mona. When I return to the cottage after the celebratory drinks I hear noises coming from the cottage. I look in the window and see Anders holding something in the air, while Mona is trying to reach it.

“Anders, give that back to me!”

“Void I will! You keep messing with these things that can kill you!” He hisses, though there is something playful about the scenario.

Mona groans resting her hands on her hips.

“Why is it that whenever any of you idiots risk your lives it’s perfectly acceptable, but when I do all of you become suddenly overprotective?”

“Because you seem to have a deathwish. So, I’m not giving it back to you.”

He holds it up in the air as she jumps for it. He really is quite a lot taller than her.

“I do not have a deathw--”

“Bullshit!” Anders sneers. “Don’t you realise that there are people, who love you and depend on you?”

There is something burning in his voice as he says it and he looks down at her - his eyes not wavering for a moment. Mona either doesn’t notice or refuses to acknowledge it. She reaches for it and he turns his back towards her to prevent her from getting it.
“People are responsible for themselves!” Mona jumps onto his back as she reaches for the small metal piece in his hand.

“Think you can take on a mage?!” He growls playfully.

“Bring it on!” The defiance in her voice becoming almost a chuckle.

He creates an iceflare that goes down her back and she squeals from the cold before laughing. He twirls her around on his back and she giggles still trying to get a hold of the metal piece in his hand. I close my eyes and take a deep breath before I go to open the door. Anders stops and looks at me - his face flushed. Mona grabs the piece from his hand and jumps off with a triumphant grin on her face. She then takes a few quick steps towards me and embraces my neck from the side. I put one hand on her shoulder and force myself to give a small smile as she pecks my cheek.

“That’s cheating.” Anders chuckles.

“It was strategic.” She grins in return, then looks at me. “I asked Sunhair for another cottage, so Anders will actually be able to sleep in his own bed for once.”

“It’s no bother. At least it’s better than Darktown.” He gives rueful smile and Mona chuckles.

“Goodnight Anders. I’ll see you tomorrow. And thank you for everything.”

“You’re welcome.” He smiles and I bid him goodnight as well.

Mona says little as we walk to the empty cottage the Avvar have lent us, while Iron Bull, Varric, and Cole are staying at their tavern. I can feel how fatigued she is and in truth she should probably have spent the entire day in bed.

As we lay in bed she rest her head on my chest and it takes me a minute to realise I’m healing her as I run my fingers through her hair. Though the migraines don’t seem present she has been through and ordeal. It might help her some either way. I should feel nothing, but relief - though that is hard when the scent from her is unfamiliar herbs.

Chapter End Notes

Hi everyone. I hope you'll enjoy this update. It hasn't been beta read, so please forgive any mistakes.

Let me know what you think of this chapter and where the story is going. Theories and speculations are always welcome!

Thanks to ninaninabobina, who is always such a big help :)

Haunted memories

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

Mona POV

Two weeks before the chantry explosion in Kirkwall

“Alright, I’ll go to the Chantry, Anders. But at some point you owe me an explanation and a drink.” Hawke shakes his head and begins to walk out the door. I feel the taste in my mouth turn sour and bitter bile to the point where I want to vomit. I could run after him this minute and stop everything.

“Are you coming, Mona?” Hawke calls after me.

My eyes meet Anders’ briefly and he gives me a curious look. I then turn to Hawke.

“I’ll be by the Hanged Man later. I just want to go over some of my research with Anders.” I manage to smile and my voice doesn’t waver. I wonder if Solas would be disgusted or impressed by how easy lying has become to me. It’s eerie that even after all these years I can sometimes hear his voice.

Hawke flashes a grin as he looks at us.

“And this is why you should have declared you love for her years ago, Anders.”

We both groan in unison and Hawke walks out the door laughing to high heavens. Did the idiot never realise that Anders has been in love with him for years? Though, it does seem to have dwindled since Hawke let Merrill move in. Anders turns around and walks over to the table where he makes his potions.

“So, Mona, what is it you need? I’m fairly busy, so if you would make it quick I would appreciate it.” He starts crushing herbs with a mortar and I can see by the combination he is doing it to distract himself not because he is making anything specific.

“Amoniac is not used in potions, but explosives.” I cross my arms and I make certain that though my voice isn’t loud it’s clear. The mortar falls from his hand and rolls down the table onto the floor. He doesn’t turn, but merely stares into the desk with his shoulders slumped. He is quiet for awhile as if frozen in place, but I don’t speak. I don’t trust myself to. I have been dreading this conversation for six long years. You’d think I’d be better prepared. I’m not!

“How long have you know?” His voice is low and ashamed, but remains calmer than I had expected.

Anders turns to look at me. His kind brown eyes concealing the passion that would tear entire Thedas asunder to see mages free - Justice or no.

“How long have you know?” His voice is low and ashamed, but remains calmer than I had expected.

“I have always known.” My voice quivers without me meaning to and I curse myself.

Anders turns to look at me. His kind brown eyes concealing the passion that would tear entire Thedas asunder to see mages free - Justice or no.

“Are you going to stop me?” There is a pleading in his voice I don’t recognize. As if he is both hoping and dreading that’s exactly what I’m going to do.

I can’t stand the way he looks at me. I care about him - I care about them both, Anders and Justice, so much - and seeing this even though I always knew… it’s tearing me apart. I turn and walk
towards the door keeping my voice calm and hard as I speak.

“You only need half.” At least the damage will be less this time around.

I feel his hand on my wrist, holding me in place, but I don't turn. I can’t turn. If I do I’m going to break down crying like a child. He pulls me to him and burrows my head in his chest, while his rests against my temple. He is too tall to hide in the crook of my neck. I’m ashamed by how easily I surrender to his touch, and how much comfort his embrace gives me. He is my friend… I don’t want him to die.

“I never meant for you to carry this burden.” His whispers, but nearly croaks at the end. “You’re a better friend than I deserve. I promise, this will be on my head. It won’t come back on you.”

I push from him and look towards the ground. If I look up at him I’ll cave.

“You speak as if I can walk away from this with a clear conscience. In this I’m as guilty as you. I’m proof that it doesn’t take a spirit to make you a monster and an abomination.”

He places his hand on my cheek and I can feel his healing brush against me. Like it always does when I’m stressed and get headaches. My heart trembles as he looks down at me.

“Don’t say that. You're the one bright light in Kirkwall…” The emotion in his voice is too much. He is lonely, grateful, and so very afraid - we both are. What his mind is now creating isn’t real - not truly. It’s a desperate need for closeness before the world is in ruins - quite literally. I step away from him, but the disappointment I see in his eyes is almost enough to make me step back towards him.

“You might think that, but I’m not. If I’m anything I’m the flame who will one day set the entire world on fire.”

I turn around and walk out the clinic. This time Anders doesn’t stop me.

I awake from my dream feeling as sick now as I did then. I try to steady my breathing, then turn to Solas. He is still sleeping, but his face is less peaceful than usual. It’s a shame. I love it, when we’re at home and I see that peace in him. His face is relaxed as he sleeps and he has surrendered every part of his control. He even mutters incoherently in his sleep, when he is that relaxed. I wonder if he is aware of it? Everywhere else he is completely in control - even in his sleep. But in our bed at Skyhold, he is different. I almost fall asleep again as I watch him, but the Chantry explosion flashes through my mind. The smell, the screams… my throat grows tight and I heave for breath. I know the explosion was so much smaller this time, but it was still devastating. And nothing could have prepared me for it. I thought I knew… I had no idea!

I carefully get out of bed making sure I don’t wake Solas. I reach for his coat and wrap it around me as I walk quietly out the door. Tish notices and follows me out. It’s still dark, but the first shimmer of dawn has begun to glow in the distance. I sit on the bench outside and try desperately to get control of my feelings. Instead I begin sobbing, but force myself to keep them quiet. Tish whines and lays her head in my lap to comfort me. I love that dog so much. I wrap my arms around her giving her a hug, but I need to let go as the tears keep coming and I need to dry my face. I wrap Solas’ coat tighter around me as I weep - his wolf pelt catching most of my tears. It smells like him; herbs, soap, a tiny bit of sweat, and magic. I had never considered magic to have a scent, but it does. And it’s different for every mage. Solas’ smells like mist and dew - like right after rain on a summer morning
before heat begins to crackle in the air. Calming, soothing, but always on the edge of igniting. If I focus on the scent of it I can imagine he is right here with his arms around me. I turn to look through the window, where Solas is still sleeping.

I want to go to him, but I can’t. I can’t let him see me like this. He has already seen too much of my vulnerabilities. If I am to save him from himself, he needs to not doubt my strength or determination.

“You don’t want him to worry, but he already does.” I hear Cole’s voice as my spirit friend sits down next to me.

“I know, which is why I don’t want him to see me like this. I’m so stupid! I--”

Cole embraces me tightly and I begin sobbing violently into his shoulder. He is the only one who has ever seen me break like this. A side of myself I will not even allow Solas to see.

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Solas POV

When I awake, Mona is already awake and dressed, sitting up in bed reading through her old notebook. She still looks tired and fatigued. Has she gotten any sleep at all, I wonder?

“You need rest,” I murmur softly as I gently take the book from her hands.

“I’m fine, love. No need to worry.” She smiles and leans over to kiss my forehead.

“I’m not so convinced.” I sit up and start examining her - which she makes difficult as her head keeps turning to kiss my hands. Her mischievous smile makes me chuckle. “You’re impossible.” I sigh with a smirk and throw my hands into the air.

“But so very wonderful.” She grins and crawls over to me pushing me back down on the bed. As she is about to kiss me Atish’an jumps onto the bed and lands right on top of me. Mona laughs loudly as I groan.

“And that’s what you get for ever letting her on the bed!” She laughs, which only gets harder, when Atish’an licks my face.

“Ugh… Good morning, friend. Now get off.”

Happily the dog jumps of the bed and I dry my face. Mona is still giggling, her eyes dancing playfully. I lean over to her, but she pushes me away.

“I’m not kissing you, when you’re still all slobbery.” She teases.

I grab her waist, twist her down onto the bed and capture her lips in her deep kiss. She immediately surrenders and wraps her arms around my neck.

“We need to get up.” She sighs as I pull away.

“I suspect you are correct. The others will probably be here any moment now.”

I have only just said the words as we hear a knock on the door and Iron Bull’s voice on the other side of the door.
“Are you two awake, or do you want me to come back later if you.. You know… yeah.” The glee in his voice makes Mona giggle.

“Just come in,” she chuckles still lying beneath me.

Iron Bull flashes a big grin as I move of her.

“So, Solas… need me to fetch a bucket of cold water for you? Or do you just cast some sort of frost spell?”

“Neither will be necessary.” I scowl and reach for my coat and legwraps.

“Sorry to hear it.” He grunts with a humorous expression.

We’re having breakfast in Anders cottage as Mona goes over the plans for the area for when the Inquisition arrives. Why it is so important - other than curiosity, I’m uncertain, but I trust Mona has her reasons. And for once she doesn’t seem as secretive as usual. Things between Varric and Anders are still rather awkward, but I have heard them exchange a few jests this morning. If it’s Cole or Mona’s doing is anyone’s guess, but I suspect both have something to do with it. I had suspected to see more of Justice, but the spirit has not appeared since it healed Mona. Curious given how easily it is for them to interact with the world in this area.

“We need to find a place for the main camp, when the Inquisition soldiers arrive.” Mona explains pointing towards a map place on the middle of the table, surrounded by everyone's breakfast. “Sunhair suggested some place to the east, close to the river.”

“Makes sense. Easy to transport cargo and plenty of water for the horses.” Bull agrees looking down at it.

Cole looks at Mona with a grin. “In the trees? Really?”

“If we can make it safe. Otherwise our camps will be strictly on the ground.” She smiles at him.

“I prefer the ground,” Varric grumbles.

“I wonder what the birds will think? We shouldn’t scare them,” Cole murmurs, then starts picking a loaf of bread into tiny pieces making breadcrumbs.

Anders hands me a cup of tea and I take a sip - only just managing not to frown. Mona looks at me with a smile, and whenever Anders has his back turned or is distracted by talking to the others she takes a large gulp of my tea. When the others leave the table she kisses me below my ear.

“It’s adorable you’re too polite to say anything.” She whispers and gets up to help the others find our gear. I grin to myself and start clearing the table, while Anders is putting the remaining food away. As I look up Justice is floating in the corner of the cottage observing me, but then vanishes again quickly.
Mona seems almost happy as we walk through the landscape. She is looking around taking in the beauty of it as she takes a hold of my arm. She points toward a grove we pass and talks quietly.

“There is a giant bogfisher down there.” She grins and I raise an eyebrow.

“Truly?”

“Enormous!”

“Should we take a detour, Inquisitor?” I find myself chuckling at her enthusiasm.

“Nah, Bull would just kill it - and we don’t have any bait.”

I feel her pull on my arm and she brings me to a holt. Her eyes watch me carefully.

“Solas, I know you’re worried about me, but we both know Corypheus has to be our main priority. I will look into what happened to me, but I need you focused - and I know you are.” She releases a deep sigh and takes both my hands in hers. “I never meant to be a distraction.”

“I know. I--”

“Hey Waffles!” Varric calls from ahead of us. “How about over here?”

Mona looks and nods.

“Yes, that’s perfect! Watch out for any open rifts, though! If we run into any we’re in serious trouble!”

“I can guide us there safely. I should be able to sense them from some distance away,” I suggest looking down at her.

“Good idea. Thank you. Solas, you’re with Varric and Cole. Anders, you’re with me and Bull.”

We manage to find a good place to set up a compound and I understand why Mona was weary of the rifts. The demons pouring through in this area are stronger than in most of the other areas we have encountered them. Mona has marked the rifts on a map and is intending to create some of her devices that can suppress the rifts - making it harder, but not impossible for the spirits to pour through.

As we explore the area for a while and we don’t neither hear or see the others I begin to grow concerned. Varric seems a little worried too.

“Hey kid, do you know if the others are alright?”

“I don’t sense any hurt… But… string tugs, frayed, but not broken... That way.” Cole points towards the river.

“I’ll go have a look if you set the markers for the Inquisition forces?” I suggest and Varric nods.

As I walk towards the river I see Mona crouching by the riverbed filling her waterskin and Anders standing next to her looking down at her. Atish’an is next to her master, but it too busy looking at something in the water to notice me. Bull passes me and I guide him back towards the others. Mona and Anders are on a slope beneath me and do not notice me as I approach. Even though I’m some distance away I can hear them.
“I know it isn’t my place to criticize, but…” Anders tosses a stone into the water. “Are you sure about Solas?

Mona pinches the bridge of her nose, but doesn’t look at him.

“Anders…”

“He is on that list for a reason.” There is worry carried in his voice - I wish it was unfounded.

“You had no right to look in that book.” She sighs deeply - sounding more disappointed than upset, as she continues to fill another waterskin.

Anders tosses another stone. Harder this time.

“I didn’t hear you berate Solas for reading it.”

That makes her look up at him with both eyebrows raised as her lips are pressed into a thin line.

“That’s different. Him reading it is different.”

“So, you don’t trust me?” The tremor in his voice carries a deep hurt. “You have known me for ten years and you have known him for what? Eight, nine months?”

She gets to her feet closing the water skin keeping calm, but her annoyance it obvious - to me at least.

“It’s not about trust. This is something deeply personal to me, and because of that Solas has a right to read it - he is the only one who does.”

Anders’ expression transforms. His eyes widen and he drops the rest of the pebbles on the ground.

“You really love him, don’t you?”

She leans her head to the side and gives him a doubtful glare.

“That would be the logical conclusion.” She sounds offended by the question.

He pulls her to him and she pats his back.

“I’m glad you’re happy… just be careful. Other than Justice, you’re the only friend I have left. It would kill me to lose you.”

I decide that it would be better to retreat and walk away hopefully without either of them realising I was ever there.

As I walk away I feel the veil stir and a spirit passing through effortlessly. Now that is has been summoned the spirit from before stays close to the part of the fade connected here.

“She loves you,” the spirit remarks.

“Unfortunately, yes,” I sigh looking back at her.

“You know she loves you, but you keep her at a distance. This behaviour seems unjust.” It’s voice is hard and unforgiving.

“It is.” It truly is. I should not give in to this. I should end this, but I can’t make my heart do so.
“Then what is the purpose of this behaviour?”

“To protect her…”

“A familiar excuse,” the spirit grunts.

I eye the spirit carefully.

“You’re Justice. She has mentioned you.”

The spirit looks a little bashful.

“Few who have met me thinks of me as little but a demon. She is… unique. But you are already aware of this, Purpose.”

I narrow my eyes with curiosity.

“Why do you call me that?”

“That is what you were before you took that form, correct? A spirit of Purpose. A spirit that adapts far easier to different desires than any other spirit.”

“Purpose can have many motivations, yes, but how… aah… she told you.” I had not guessed she trusted him so much… but that can’t be right. She promised that she never revealed my secret - that she never would.

“She has never mentioned you by name. She told me spirits could take physical form in this world - without the need to possess a body. She theorized that the original elves had in fact once been spirits who took physical form… But I am a spirit of Justice. I sense your willingness to atone and repent. As well as your resolve, reason, motivations, and justifications. It was not hard to make the conclusion even had she not told me as much.”

“She shared this with you?”

The spirit nods and I can feel its shame.

“Anders laughed at her, thinking her mad, but after our seperation I began to wonder.” It sighs deeply. “She said so many things that we scoffed at. Spirits, magic, eluvians. We were so certain we knew better than her. Anders thought her arrogant. She didn’t have any magical talent, how would she know?”

“But you began to wonder if she was right… You began to care for her.” I smile.

“More than you could possibly imagine…” it looks at me for a moment. “Or perhaps you can. I suppressed my feelings for her. It was a struggle simply to keep Anders from being distracted by his feelings for Hawke - I could not act on it had I wished it… Indeed, I had little inkling as to what I was feeling.”

I sense the spirits platonic devotion to her. It must have felt so lost and alone in this world - a feeling with which I’m eerily familiar.

“She cherished her friendship with you… You still mean a great deal to her.”

“For years she was the only one, who did not blame me for what Anders and I had become. I was not a demon or an abomination. I was my true purpose… I would have lost that forever had she not saved us from ourselves. But… Even had she shared my feelings it was not just for me to act on my
I can’t help but cringe at the spirit’s words as it looks at her with longing. The truth that rings in them makes me feel sickly, yet all that truly matters is that she is alive. Justice vanishes and I turn to see her and Anders walking towards me. She gives me a loving smile making my heart soar.

When we all are gathered once again we walk back towards the Stonebear Hold. Mona and I walk behind the others, while Anders is talking with Varric. Both seeming uncharacteristically cheerful for once. Mona smiles as she looks at them. We walk in silence, but in her company it’s never an uncomfortable one. Still, it takes me by surprise when she wraps her arm around her shoulders and wraps her own around my waist. Not the easiest way to walk through the rougher terrain, but as we reach the path I find myself enjoying it.

I break the silence as we enter the edge of the village, as Atish’an runs off sniffing the ground. Mona frequently lets her hound roam as she pleases, knowing it will never stay far.

“I spoke with Justice.”

“How is he? I think he is avoiding me.” She gives a rueful smile.

“He seems well adjusted, but speaking with you might be too painful. Even with all the years he lived in this world, affection seem overwhelming to him.” I pause. “What happened between you?”

She gives me a sad smile and guides me towards the cliff looking down at the waters below.

“Exactly one kiss that was never spoken of again. Anders seems to have no idea it ever happened.”

She sits down with her legs hanging off the ledge and I join her.

“Then why did you leave in such a hurry?”

“Well, Kirkwall had just been blown to bits so I was needed in Val Royeaux… and I saw the way Anders began to look at me after I made Hawke spare his life. I couldn’t let that gratitude develop into anything.”

“So you were wise then, what changed?” I kiss her cheek as I wrap my arms around her. An unspoken translation that I’m referring to myself. She smiles at me as she caresses my cheek.

“I… I just couldn’t. At first I thought I could, but the more time we spent together the more I realised that what I felt… feel for you is real. You actually enjoyed my company, and not just because I had a certain role. Liked me for me.” A faint blush creeps up on her cheeks. “Then we kissed and it felt like for the first time something had actually gone right since I came to Thedas.”

My chest tightens and I feel a need to have a closer. To drag her into the grass and give my emotions free reign. Show her what I’m feeling and reassure her that I feel the same. She must see it in my eyes because she places a hand on my thigh - her fingers teasingly lingering on the inside of my thigh.

“Vhenan,” I groan against her ear as a warning.

“You were jealous,” she murmurs with triumphant satisfaction - her hand only sliding further.

“Perhaps…” I lean my brow on her shoulder as I take her by the wrist only stopping a few centimeters from its destination.
“You have no reason to. I think for Justice it is more platonic than anything. And Anders doesn’t love me… not in that way at least.”

I take a deep breath, but I’m not met with the sweet scent I’m so familiar with.

“That would be more convincing if you didn’t have his scent all over you.”

She giggles.

“Want to help me take a bath?” She looks down into the waters as if she is considering jumping in.

“Not afraid of the bogfisher?” I tease and she laughs.

“Sure, I am. Those things are mean.” She leans her head against my shoulder and for a moment it seems like she is about to say something, but thinks better of it. We hear one of the Avvar horns blowing and we both turn to see the warriors run towards the edge of the village.

“Are we being attacked?” Mona asks one of them and he stops for a moment.

“Yes! Battle is on it’s way.” He nearly grins.

“Jaws of Hakkon?”

“No lowlanders.”

“Lowlanders?!” Mona seems genuinely shocked.

“Are they under Inquisition banner?” I ask as I get up and help Mona to her feet.

“No! Those we were expecting!” He calls back as he runs off.

I’m about to follow, when Mona grabs my arm.

“Solas, who knew we left for Stonebear Hold?”

“Too many…” I admit and mentioning them would take too long.

“Shit!” She hisses and runs towards the outskirts of the village. In the distance we see a group of soldiers lead by a man in white armour.

“Sebastian…” she sneers, but doesn’t seem surprised.

Chapter End Notes

Thank all of you for following and commenting on this story. It means a lot :)

This chapter hasn't been beta read, so please forgive any mistakes.
Mona and I look down the path and see Sebastian dismount from his horse. He is in full armour and walks with his back straight. Even from a distance his satisfaction is obvious. Sunhair arrives and stands next to Mona looking down at the Prince.

“Friend of yours?”

“He is the one, who has been hunting Anders.” Mona sighs and turns to the Avvar leader. “You should recall your people. I never wanted to endanger your village like this.”

“You were honest, when you came to us. Salve Claw has become part of the hold and is as devoted as you said he would be. We protect our own.”

“Thank you.” Mona smiles.

“There is no reason to thank me. Now, let’s see what this lowlander wants. Bring your husband, he should be able to set the man straight if he tries anything.” Sunhair chuckles as she nods in my direction.

Mona’s eyes meet mine and I expect her to object to the title Sunhair has given me - I expect myself to, but it never comes.

“Don’t look so surprised. You’re attachment is clear for all to see. I have seen him fight and heard him talk with the people of my hold. He is strong and wise. You choose well.”

Mona takes my hand. “Yes, I did.”

“Thank you for the compliment.” I lower my head in respect and Sunhair gives me a smile.

I turn to see Anders, Varric, Iron Bull, and Cole running up behind us. Anders turns pale as he sees Sebastian in the distance, but is quickly replaced by a redness as rage begins to build in him.

“Well, shit…” Varric grumbles and Mona nods in agreement.

Sunhair turns to me for a moment before walking towards Sebastian.

“Now, let’s see if you can talk some sense into this lowlander before we tear him to shreds.” She gives me a grin then turns to Anders. “Salve Claw, stay here.”

When he is about to object Varric holds him by the arm and shakes his head.

Sunhair, Mona and I walk towards Sebastian, whose expression turns from smug to remorseful at he meets Mona’s gaze.

“Hand over Anders and this will all end peacefully.” His voice is firm, but it still carries the kindness and softness it usually does.

“Hello Sebastian,” Mona greets him with a sad smile making his eyes soften.

“Hello Mona… I never wanted it to come to this.”
How is it that a man driven by such vengeance can carry so much modesty and kindness in his
demeanour? It is almost too easy to forget how it drives him and the almost fanatical devotion he has
to the Chantry.

“Intercepted one of the Inquisition’s messages, I’m guessing.” Mona deduces looking at him.

“Unnecessary. There are people even under your command who wants to see that murderer brought
to justice.”

Mona’s eyes turn towards the ground and slightly tilts in my direction. A subtle way to question if I
was aware of this. Already the Inquisition is corrupted by some of the many members it houses.
Hardly unexpected, given it’s founded on the Chantry and by decree of the Divine, that some wishes
for nothing more than see Anders dead. My hand brushes discreetly against hers hopefully reassuring
her that I had no idea. Clearly, my spies are not as efficient as I would like.

Mona’s eyes turn to him - her voice strong and unwavering.

“There is no justice in this.”

“You let that murderer go free! Despite what he did! It is my right!”

“There was a time where you were more concerned with doing what was right than what you were
owed. You were a voice of reason, kindness, and forgiveness. Is there nothing left of the man I
knew?” Her voice is almost mournful and I can see in his eyes that they are sharper than any blade.

“I am devoted to the Chantry and it’s ideals. I want to protect the innocent from monsters like him. “
He points towards Anders. Anders tries to interfere, but Varric and Cole seem to stop him. “Mages
are dangerous and unhinged!”

“Of course they are!” I object with more anger than I can contain. “They've been locked up in towers
and told they’re monsters all their lives.”

I feel Mona take my hand, though if it’s to offer comfort, gain it or pride at my words I’m uncertain.
Sebastian’s blue eyes flashes at me.

“This would not have been necessary had the mages not rebelled or Anders blown up the Chantry,”
he fumes.

“Yes, I’m certain they did that with no provocation,” I sneer.

Sunhair steps forward eying Sebastian up and down.

“I do not care what cowardness has let you lowlanders to lock up your algurs, but you will not
threaten a member for my hold and get away with it.”

“We’re not handing him over to you, Sebastian.” Mona’s voice is as firm as Sunhair’s.

“Why do you protect him? Protect them?” His eyes turn to me for a moment. “You’re leader of the
army of the faithful, yet you go against everything the Chantry stands for. You sided with the mages,
when you should have brought the templars back into the fold.”

“And reinstate the Circle, meaning we will have had no progress or change. We can’t put the lit back
on the pot once it’s been blown up.” Mona sneers.

How did this conversation so rapidly become about much more than Anders? Of course… Mona is
stalling. It is probably also why Sunhair remains mostly quiet. The archers are probably crawling to
the cliffs above. Sebastian must realise that he is in a vulnerable position, though he seems far too
distracted by his anger. Unless his own archers have taken to the trees. I look up discreetly and see
that my guess was correct. They are well hidden and I’m not able to determine how many there are.

“The circle was there to protect the mages!” Sebastian’s voice echoes through the valley. “What does
their freedom matter compared to the rest of the population of Thedas? If you will not recreate them,
then I will.”

“Of course., What is the sacrifice of a few lives to keep people from discomfort?” I counter. “Perhaps
when you do, you can leash them like the Qunari do.”

His expression changes as pain grasps at his throat - like a haunting memory has resurfaced as he
looks at Mona. I hear the snap of a bowstring and a man crying out in pain. One of the Stark Haven
soldiers is now noticeable in the tree, while a small portal can be seen in front of him and a arrow sits
firmly in his shoulder - his bow falling to the ground. I turn to look at Anders, where there is another
small portal as well. Mona’s hand is risen in the air, her bracers glowing.

“Do not make me do this, Sebastian.”

Both the Avvar and Stark Haven soldiers seems taken aback by power she wields. It has become so
familiar to me that I have quite forgotten how unique it is. But one thing is to have that power,
another is the skill with which she wields it. The precision and the opportunistic use of them.

“You give me no choice.” He shakes his head with regret.

He gives the signal to attack and I shield Mona right before she portals me to the top of the cliff and
Sunhair back with her warriors. Iron Bull and the Avvar warriors charge into the battle, while Varric
and Anders appear next to me. Giving us the advantage of height with the Avvar archers, we join the
battle. Mona is nowhere to be seen, but her portals appear everywhere - often with Cole slipping
through them effortlessly. Removing the Star Haven archers to the ground taking away their
advantage. I have seen her in combat before, but this… The way she forms the battle field to her will
is fascinating and terrifying. We are all like pawns in her hands, though I can still tell she is holding
back. If she does this too much she will confuse the warriors on our side. Still, there is only so much
she can do. A wave of arrows appear above us and despite our efforts several of the Avvar are hit.
As I tend to one of the wounded and try to turn I see Sebastian aiming specifically at me. I am
drained and fatigued as my mana resources are running low. Before I have regained enough to act
fully his arrow hits my chest near my right shoulder. Despite myself I let out a cry and fall to my
knees.

“Solas! No!” I hear Cole cry out and a mere few moments he is at my side.

Anders quickly follows and examines the injury.

“ENOUGH!” Mona’s voice is a physical shockwave magnified by her bracers.

Anders is already sending pulses of healing through me, otherwise I would have lost consciousness
by now. A large splash can be heard and as I look towards the battlefield most of the Stark Haven
soldiers are now struggling in the water. Another portal appears beneath Sebastian and he is thrown
on the ground in front of Mona. Yellow sparks are flying from her bracers and smoke rises from
them. I fear for how the flesh underneath looks. Even the Avvar pause at the sight in front of them,
and Sunhair makes a motion for them to stop. Anders tries to remove the arrow from my chest and a
cry escapes me. Mona’s eyes look towards me for a moment and her voice becomes hard and
unforgiving.
“I will not allow you to keep threatening the people I love. They are mine to protect and there is nothing I won’t do to keep them safe.”

“I demand j--” Sebastian attempts to object.

Energy flares from her bracers and sparks around his face leaving small cuts in their path.

“Do not mistake the lack of will to kill for a lack of ability, Sebastian!” Mona fumes at him. His eyes widen and for the first time I see some resemblance of fear in his expression.

Mona crouches down in front of him and glares at him. “Can’t you see that your vengeance have driven you to become the exact monster you set out to kill? You never managed to rid the world of one, you merely created another one!”

“I-I…” Whatever argument he has dies on his lips.

“Cole…” Her voice is soft and tender, where it was aggressive mere seconds ago.

Cole reluctantly leaves my side, but goes to her. Anders presses herbs and cloth against my wound to prevent me from bleeding out, so that I can be moved safely. I want to scream in pain, but bite my lip suppressing it to an agonizing groan.

Mona turns to Cole and points at Sebastian.

“Will you heal him? Make him forget?”

“Yes.”

“Thank you.” She gives his cheek a small kiss and he touches Sebastian’s forehead.

“Forget.”

Sebastian stumbles back and looks up at Cole as if he has no recollection of him at all.

“What was I saying?” Sebastian shakes his head in confusion.

“Return to Stark Haven. What you’re searching for isn’t here.” Mona’s voice is emotionless as she turns from him.

She looks up at us and I see the fear in her eyes. Without her bracers in working condition she cannot reach us so easily. Anders gives her a nod before he helps me to stand. I lean against him as he supports my weight. Cole is on the other side of me, while Varric rushes ahead. I feel myself getting light-headed, but I attempt to stay alert.

“Solas!” I hear Mona’s voice as she runs towards us. She looks at the wound, but doesn’t get close - making sure she is not in the way as Cole and Anders help me towards his cottage.

“He’ll make it, Boss.” I hear Iron Bull’s gruff voice. “He’s tough.”

Inside the cottage I’m helped onto a surgery table, and Anders begins to ready the arrow for extraction. His magic keeps pulsing into me in order to keep me conscious. Mona paces back and forth, but keeps at a distance giving Anders the room he needs. He creates a ward to keep the blood from flowing as he carefully removes the arrow. I try to concentrate and let some of my own healing roam through me. As soon as the arrow is out Anders goes to get some supplies. It’s not until I need to sit up to get my shirt off that Mona actually touches me. She refuses to meet my gaze as she removes my coat, belt and finally my shirt.
“Vhenan, it’s not your fault.”

She freezes for a fraction of a moment and I brush her cheek with my good hand.

“He shot you to get to me… It might not be my fault, but I am responsible.”

She is trembling against my touch and I look towards her bracers. They have stopped sparking with energy, but the runes are cracked and the leather singed. Before I can say anything more Anders has returned and Mona steps back.

“I’m sorry about all this.” He sighs as he begins to clean and heal the wound. “You should just have let him kill me.”

“Not a chance. Cole has healed his mind. Now, he can return to Stark Haven and hopefully become a decent ruler.” Mona crosses her arms, then winches and lowers them.

“You have too much faith in everyone.” Anders shakes his head.

“So not true.”

“It is.” I agree with Anders earning me a scowl from Mona. Anders chuckles as he gives my wound a few stitches.

“The internal bleeding has stopped and the wound should close soon. Try not to use it the next week. It needs time to heal.” He hands me a blanket.

“Thank you.” I wrap it around my shoulders and look to my shirt soaked in blood.

“As for you, little girl,” Anders sneers it playfully as he looks at Mona, who raises an eyebrow at him. “Sit. You burned those out again.”

She shakes her head and sits in the table next to me. I hear Anders’ voice hitch and I look down. Her bracers are seared into her flesh. It’s worse than when the time with the Profane. Anders lets cooling magic spread across them and with a whimper Mona turns her face away resting her temple on my shoulder. She bites her lower lip, suppressing the pain. She cries out as he pulls them off as gently as he can and my good arm goes around her to keep her steady.

“Sorry,” he murmurs with true regret in his voice. His breath hitches once more, when he sees the damage. Her skin is marred by the heat. Oozing with blood, string of skin and blisters up and down her lower arms. She has always had a little scarring there due to all the times she has been healed. This time it will be worse.

“Mona…” he takes both her hands in his letting the healing spread through her. “How are you still standing?”

“Adrenalin, anger, fear… best pain killers in the universe.” She grins, though, her eyes are filled with pain and tears.

“If there hadn’t been frostrunes in them to compensate…” I’m unable to finish the sentence. She could have been incinerated.

“But there was. I had to stop Sebastian. I wasn’t aware I could ignite them with quite so much force. But sometimes the dire is necessary to protect what is important. Dagna would be impressed.”

I give her a rueful smile and kiss the top of her head. Had it not been for my injury I doubt she would
have acted so forcefully.

“There, that should feel better.” Anders gives her a small smile closing the bandages after he has healed as much as possible. “I will make a salve for you, when I have tended to the other wounded.”

He rubs her cheek and opens door, where Iron Bull and Varric walk in the door.

“I swear, Waffles, you’re trying to put me in an early grave.”

“One day the two of you are going to end up getting each other killed.” Bull remarks with some amusement shaking his head.

I feel a chill in my heart at those words, but before they get to linger as I feel Mona’s hand discreetly caress my lower back.

“Where is Sebastian?” Mona asks, her voice hard.

“He is retreating along with his army.” Bull offers a grin.

“And Cole?”

“Clearing the mind of each of his soldiers. I got to hand it to you, Waffles, I don’t think I have ever seen Sebastian so shook up.”

Mona frowns at Varric’s words.

“It’s hardly worthy praise, Varric. I take no enjoyment out of being scary.”

“Why not? You’re good at it! That guy almost pissed his pants.” Bull enthuses.

Varric grins at Iron Bull before he continues.

“Besides, it’s not like you didn’t have good cause. He did try to kill one of our friends.”

“That so?” Anders looks down at Varric with a grin. Varric adjusts his coat as he shrugs his shoulders.

“Don’t get ahead of yourself, Blondie. Just because I hate him more doesn’t mean I don’t hate you, too.” He grouses, but Anders’ smile only widens. “Why are you grinning?”

“You called me ’Blondie’.” On that note Anders leaves the cottage and Varric chuckles to himself shaking his head.

Two days later the Inquisition arrives at Frostback basin with Professor Kendrick and Dubois. Mona has been aloof for the past few days - distant. I know she is planning something, but I also believe her when she says she will not prevent me from tearing down the veil. I just wish I knew what she was planning. I despise this secrecy between us, as if we are both fighting a secret war we cannot allow the other to be a part of. I had pulled my agents back and not given any further effort into figuring out her plans. Perhaps that was a mistake. There are so many questions I want to ask her, but I can’t. Selfishly, I wish the world would stop. That once Corypheus has been defeated that things would never change. Only I know that will never be possible.
I’m aiding the Inquisition at the newly established camp, when I’m approached by Anders.

“Solas, have you seen Mona anywhere?”

I turn to look around the camp for a moment.

“I confess I’m not aware of where she is at the moment. Probably not far.” I concede and return to the task of marking all the areas affected by rifts on a map of the area to ensure the Inquisition soldiers to stay clear of them. At least until the Herald will have time to come to this area.

Anders raises an eyebrow and gives me a doubtful glare.

“You’re her lover.”

“True, but that does not mean she requires my constant oversight. Perhaps, because of the nature of our relationship me not doing so is important.” I shake my head with some amusement. I could not imagine a relationship between the two of them would have lasted very long if that had been his approach.

“Afraid you will crush her independence?” Anders teases and I give a short laugh.

“I do not believe there is a force in Thedas capable of that. Is it anything I can help with?”

“I just wanted to know if there was any supplies she needed before you return to Skyhold.”

“That’s very kind. I can provide you with a list if you’d like?” I reach for a quill and some paper.

“Sure.”

I hold a hand to where I got hit by the arrow and cringe as I reach for the quill.

“How is your shoulder?” There is some genuine concern in his voice.

“Some minor ache. Nothing to be concerned about, thank you.”

“Back to Skyhold then?”

I feel my expression grow weary.

“Yes, we must deal with Corypheus.”

“Kick his ass for me will you? He was a nightmare last time I fought him.”

The humorous expression on his face makes me chuckle. Anders turns his gaze to the camp and looks around. No doubt searching for Mona.

“I would ask you to keep Mona safe, but we both know that’s impossible. She is the only friend I have left in this world. I’m glad she has someone who makes her happy.”

“I… I will do my best to keep her from harm, though it isn’t always that easy.” I give him a rueful smile.

“Definitely not,” Anders responds with a more serious expression than I had expected.

I do start to wonder, where Mona has run of to since we are to leave for Skyhold shortly. I admit I’m somewhat anxious to return. Both because we need to return all our resources to Corypheus, but also
because I miss simply sleeping in my own bed. Skyhold did once belong to me, but I had not expected it to feel like home once again. Though, I suspect it is not the place in itself rather the life Mona and I have managed to build there. After giving Anders the list I attempt to find Mona. Once of the Inquisition scouts thankfully gives me the location and as I approach I feel how thin the veil is. I see Mona and Dubois standing at the top of a hill - a little too close to a rift, that has spawned three Pride demons, for my liking. The demons thankfully seem unaware of their presence.

Mona is fiddling with some sort of contraption that creates a blue barrier of some sort. Almost like the one she used to capture Envy. Dubois is taking notes, while a small wisp is fluttering around Mona as if investigating her every move. I expect her to be in awe of it, but it is almost as if she has gotten use to its presence. Before I can figure out anything more, Atish’an sees me and runs towards me with a happy bark. The wisp vanishes quickly as if afraid of me - which is peculiar. Mona is too distracted to pay much attention to me, but Dubois gives me a smile and walks over to take my hand.

“Master Solas, it’s good to see you again. I was not certain I would get the opportunity again so soon.”

I smile a little as it has been months since I last met him.

“Likewise. What are you trying to accomplish?”

“Monique and I are attempting to create pocket within the energy of the fade. You know how she can make the fade less stable within the contraption?”

“Yes, I have seen her use it once or twice.”

“Well, we are trying to reverse it. A difficult process since we are technically not inside the fade. Unfortunately, we’re not making much progress.” Dubois sighs and takes out his notebook going over his notes once again.

I walk over to Mona, who still hasn’t acknowledge my presence, but I know she is aware of it.

“Having trouble?” I ask as I crouch down besides her.

“Yes, the catalyst won't remain stable. I’ve been trying to compensate with runes of amplification and reservoir, but it still won't produce enough energy.” She scratches her scalp in frustration.

“We could try wards,” I suggest.

“We could, but that would defeat the point. I need to do this without magic. You can’t always be here to help me.” She pats my thigh as if to soften the statement still not looking at me.

“Mmm…” it’s the only reply I give. What can I possibly say, when the truth is given so completely without ceremony?

“I still think we should give the enhanced runes a try,” Dubious counters.

“Maybe, I merely wanted to use as little energy as possible. Anyway, do what you can and let me know what you find.” Mona sighs as she gets up, clearly disappointed with her lack of progress.

“I will. And please do come by next time your in Val Royeaux - both of you. I will not take no for an answer.” His voice is strict, but there is something playful about his demeanour.

“We will, I promise.” Mona chuckles in defeat as she gets to her feat. “I’ll better get back to camp and get ready so we can leave.”
“Before you leave might I have a word with Solas? I have some interesting theories I would like his opinion on.” Dubois is already scurrying through his notes.

“Do you mind?” Mona asks looking at me.

“Not at all. I’ll be back shortly.” I smile at her and get a nod.

Dubois begins to go over his theory while I look back at Mona walking away with Atish’an right next to her. It has been a while since I have seen her so disappointed - and my heart aches at the sight.

Chapter End Notes

Hi everyone. I'm so sorry for this update taking so long. I hope you will enjoy it. Thank you so much for all your comments. They always make my day!

This chapter has not been beta read, so please forgive any mistakes :)

BTW, how would you guys feel about a chapter from Dubois POV?
A week later we have returned to Skyhold and resumed our regular duties. Mona still has some occasional headaches, but those seem purely related to stress rather than any rune or contraption of hers. Whatever she was meddling with in the Frostback Basin still seems to weigh heavily on her mind, as she has been distracted and distant ever since. The distance only seems greater when I get a message from one of the runners to meet her in the war council chambers with the Herald. Normally, she would always seek me out personally. Even so I must respect it and I’m soon joined by the Herald as we walk towards the meeting.

“So, do you have any idea why we have been summoned?” The Herald has a frown on his face. He too has noticed how unusual this is.

“I confess I have not, but I think it safe to assume it’s one of our upcoming missions.”

“But Mona doesn’t usually brief us in person. Josephine, Cullen or Leliana usually does.”

He has a point. Mona has many responsibilities and carries a lot of burdens on her own shoulders, but she has never been shy about using her advisors to their full ability.

“True, but the Inquisitor’s motives are often a mystery.” I give him a wry smile hoping it will lighten the situation and the Herald returns it with a sideways grin.

“Even to you?”

I chuckle at his doubtful remark.

“Yes, especially to me I think.”

His expression turns concerned and he stops as we are almost at the end of the hall.

“Is everything alright with the two of you?”

“There isn’t reason for concern.” I smile and place my hands behind my back - hoping my relaxed and familiar behaviour will assuage his doubts.

“Solas, it’s me you’re talking to. You can be honest.”

“I… she has become distant lately. I find approaching her… difficult.” I can’t keep myself from frowning, but I quickly suppress the feeling. “I’m certain it will resolve itself.”

“I hope so. I’m still expecting a wedding when all this is over.” He winks at me.

“Oh, so you have decided to propose to Josephine. Congratulations.”

A fierce blush creeps up on his face as he mutters “ass” beneath his breath and opens the door to the war room. Mona is standing on the other side of the table. None of her advisors are present, but I can see from her demeanour she is tired and worried. I ache to reach for her, but I know she has chosen this formal setting for a reason. I’m not here in the role of her lover, but as her advisor.

“Solas, Edward, please come in.”
Closing the door behind us we walk towards the table as she continues.

“'The Inquisition has received an interesting request. It’s from the Qunari.’”

The Herald looks at me for a moment shaking his head in disbelief.

“'The Qunari? What do they want?’”

Mona turns her gaze to the war table looking over the different pins. Many I notice as being the Ben Hassrath reports the Inquisition has utilized so far.

“An alliance with the Inquisition to help defeat Corypheus.’”

“I see... and are you considering this cause of action, Inquisitor?’” As I keep my demeanour calm, there is an unsettling feeling in my gut that I can’t escape. Of all the atrocities and injustices I have seen in this world, the Qun is what sickens me the most. Mona and I have not spoken much of it, but I believe with some certainty she despises it almost as much as I do. Yet, there is a pensive look in her eyes. There is more to this than I would have expected.

“We at the very least have to see what they are offering. I have seen the Qun for the best and for the worst during my time in Kirkwall... but in the end the Qun serves and are loyal only to themselves. They might help with Corypheus, but once that is done they will turn their gaze to another threat.”

Mona looks at the Herald.

“Meaning you and me.” He looks concerned for a moment, but then shakes his head. “Bull would never let that happen.”

“Bull has no pull within the Qun - and if he is truly loyal to them he will kill even us if the Qun demands it.” Mona releases a sigh still not looking up from the table.

“You can’t honestly believe that!” The outrage in the Herald’s voice reveals that he had never expected Mona to be distrusting of anyone under her command; especially not someone she considered a friend. It makes me wonder how he would react to knowing of the fragile aspect of my relationship with her. I put a hand on Edward’s shoulder, as he has done so often for me, to comfort.

“A true follower of the Qun has had their mind twisted into mindless obedience to the Qun. They do not question, do not think, and most certainly obey. There is only the Qun, where individuals have been stripped of their individuality.” Even though my words are harsh I keep my voice level. Edward is a mage after all - and an Andrastian. I know he would never willingly support the Qun.

“Then why even let him join in the first place?” The quiver in his voice reflects a feeling of betrayal and doubt.

“Edward, I know this is hard to swallow, but you don’t have to worry. I’m not asking you to act against Bull. He has been helpful and I consider him a friend. I’m sending the two of you with him and the Chargers to negotiate with the Qun. But I will make one thing very clear: you are not to trade the lives of any under the protection of the Inquisition. If you have to make the choice between their forces or ours, you choose ours. Understood?” Mona looks at the Herald with a soft expression, who nods slowly.

“I’m certain Bull will follow wherever you lead. I’m not asking you to put down a friend.” Her smile is soft and her expression caring as she finally meets his gaze and hands him a scroll. Probably a location for where we are to meet with the Qun representatives.

“Understood. I’ll go get everything ready.”
There is an innocence to him that is so easy to forget, and as he walks away, his entire being tense, I understand how heavily this burden lies on his shoulders. Mona walks around the table and strokes my arm.

“Take care of him. I know this will be a difficult task for him.”

“I will. Though I do wonder why you do not go yourself?”

“I’ve been away from Skyhold for too long as it is and Edward needs to be shown more responsibility if he is to become the man the world needs him to be.”

“Of course.” I kiss her brow before I walk towards the door.

“Be careful, and try not to piss of every Qunari you meet.” There is some mirth in her expression that makes every serious counterargument die on my lips. Instead I offer her a smile as I close the door.

Nightfall is approaching fast as we return to Skyhold. We have been gone for five days and I feel a sense of longing to return. The Iron Bull has been more quiet since we left the Storm Coast only muttering a few words to Krem and the Herald, when necessary. Even as I despise the Qun, I feel for him. I understand what it is like to be separated from those you consider your people. It might have been the right choice, but it has been a difficult one nonetheless. As we put away the horses Iron Bull lingers a little longer, tending to his mount, but his stare is vacant. I give my own horse an apple as a reward for the long journey as I try to offer Iron Bull some conciliation.

“You are not Tal-Vashoth, Iron Bull, not really.”

“Well that's a fuckin' relief,” he grunts, clearly not convinced.

“You are no beast, snapping under the stress of the Qun's harsh discipline. You are a man who made a choice... possibly the first of your life.” I try to keep my voice cheerful and encouraging. Whatever difference we have, I respect him, his ability, and his dedication to his men.

Something pained and worried flickers through his expression. He does not look at me.

“I've always liked fighting. What if I turn savage, like the other Tal-Vashoth?”

“You have the Inquisition, you have the Inquisitor... and you have me.”

He releases a small huff of air as a genuine smile appears.

“Thanks, Solas.”

“You’re welcome. Now, I’m sure your men are waiting for you... with a cask of ale if I assume correctly.”

“You’re probably right.” He grins and we start walking through the courtyard. “So, are you joining us, Solas, or are you eager to return to the Inquisitor’s quarters?”

“It’s been a long journey. I think rest would be best.”
“Suuuure, rest. Either you’re lying or stupid to not take full advantage. And I know you’re not stupid.” Iron Bull chuckles.

I merely shake my head, as any response I give will only encourage him.

“I never figured you the kind to bed yourself to power.”

I scowl at him briefly.

“The power she commands is of little interest to me. If you must know, it is her mind and spirit that has captured my fascination.”

“Too bad. You and the boss should use that between the sheets. Nothing wrong with a little power play. I’ve seen the fire in her eyes beneath that calm surface - that unquenchable passion.”

“Do you mind?” There is more bite to my voice than I would like.

“Not at all. Also, next time you send someone to my room to get pummeled, give me a heads up.”

I give a short laugh.

“Fair enough.”

“Yeah, you owe me details after that little stunt.” He points to me as I make my way up the final steps into the Great Hall as our paths diverge.

“I will say only this; the Inquisitor is devoted in all that she does.” I give him a wry smile and he laughs as he walks towards the tavern.

When I return to our quarters late at night I find Mona sitting on our bed with notes and books scattered around. She is meddling with the omnitool, but I confess its purpose and function still holds many mysteries. Atish’an is spread out in front of the fire fast asleep.

“Hello vhenan,” I greet her as I take off my coat and place it on the couch.

“Hey love. I got your report. How is Bull taking it?”

“He is doing well enough, considering. What is all this?” I smile as I approach the bed and Mona looks up at me with a smile.

“Reality,” she replies unhelpfully.

“Aha, and what is ‘Reality’ exactly?”

“A theoretical idea. I want to tell you, but not until it works. I don’t want to get anyones hopes up if it doesn’t.” She looks at me as if she is unsure. “Is that alright? I don’t want you to feel like I’m shutting you out.”

I give a low chuckle at her sweetness and kiss her hair.

“It’s perfectly fine.”

She seems relieved as she removes some of the documents and pats the bed for me to sit down. I let my hand run up and down her back.

“Something is weighing on your mind. Do you wish to talk about it?”
“I’m just… Solas, when do you consider a spirit a person? Is a wisp a person and when are you sure if they have transformed into a complete spirit?”

I find myself taken aback by the question - which is a frequent occurrence - but there is a seriousness to it this time I can’t quite define.

“First of all the process of a wisp becoming a full spirit takes decades, often centuries. It is unlikely that you will meet a wisp and see it fully form into a purpose. A wisp is the untapped potential of something it might one day become. Though, I am very fond of them they are still merely a concept of an idea, where a fully formed spirit is the manifestation of its purpose. Why do you ask?”

She pulls her knees up under her chin and embraces her legs, her expression pensive.

“When I studied artificial intelligence there was always a certain ethical debate that came up. The question of when something is alive. If I create… argh, damn it… how do I explain this?” She rubs her face in frustration.

“Take your time.” I keep my hand running up and down her spine, giving her any encouragement she might need.

“Let’s say I have written a book. In that book are characters with their own dreams, motivations, purpose, and desires. They’re not real of course, because I wrote them, but in order for it to be a good story they have to feel real. With me so far?” She turns to me placing her legs on top of mine. I embrace her and pull her to me fully making her sit in my lap. She is so warm and tender. I love being reminded for the comfort it gives me simply to be near her.

“Of course, it’s something Varric values highly as well, as I recall. And if a character is well written the emotions they evoke are just as valid as any other emotion.”

At that she gives me a brief kiss.

“I love you,” she murmurs with a smile.

“And I, you.” I rest my brow against hers.

“Alright, where was I…” She smiles with a faint blush as her arms snake around my neck. “Oh, right. Now, let us say that character can suddenly make its own choices. It can learn and grow. It is still based on what I created to begin with, but it has free will to interpret how to act. Does that mean that it is a person?”

That is… actually a fairly good question with no simple answer.

“But they wouldn’t have a connection to the fade. They would not dream or perceive the world in the same way.”

“Neither do dwarves. And I’m not a mage, I stumble through the fade by accident.”

There is humour in her voice, but I know of the pain underneath it. Since Anders remove the metal device from her skull her abilities in the fade haven’t been the same.

“Fair enough…” I smile, attempting to keep the conversation light. “Well, then I suppose I must concede your point.”

“I don’t want you to concede, I want your opinion.” She pushes away gently and gives me a severe look.
“I have made the mistake of misjudging what made a person real before.” I reach for her hand and give it a tender kiss. “You showed me that I was wrong. I cannot doubt your judgement in this.”

She caresses my cheek with the palm I kissed before getting up and walking out on the balcony looking towards the stars. I follow her, but stay at the door not approaching until I know it’s what she desires.

She closes her eyes with a sad smile. “It always had a soul. The question is the answer.”

“Vhenan, what is it?”

“I don’t know if I can do all this, love. If I can truly follow through on all my tasks and ideas. So much seems to be riding on everything I do, and I know I have to press on, but… I’m just so tired. Tired of fighting, planning, and scheming. I hardly feel like me anymore.”

I approach her calmly and wrap my arms around her from behind.

“I understand. It’s difficult living with a title that all but replaces your name. But you have me, and I see you for who you truly are.”

I feel her shudder in my embrace. Her answer is so low I barely hear it. “I don’t want to lose you.”

My heart aches and wrenches in agony. There is uncertainty in her voice, which gives me both hope and fear. Spirits know I wish to remain with her, but duty might yet pull us apart. I turn her in my embrace and capture her lips in a passionate kiss. My hands at her lower back presses her into my chest and I allow a spell to travel up her back making her give a pleasant shudder. Not the best way to help her relinquish her thoughts, but the most immediate that came to mind. I can’t give her a promise and there is so much we cannot reveal, which only makes my need to hold her close greater.

She places her arms around my neck and pulls me flush against her. As my lips travel down her neck I feel her hand resting at the back of my head.

“Do you need a distraction?” I murmur against her neck before giving it a tender nip with my teeth.

“Maker, please.” She quivers and I chuckle.

“And here I thought you didn’t believe in the Maker.”

She pulls away with a grin.

“Dread Wolf, please?” Her eyes sparkle mischievously.

“An improvement.” I give a wry grin.

She leans in and places her mouth against my ear as she in a heated whisper says; “Solas, please.” Unexpectedly, my breath hitches at her whispered plea.

She nips at my earlobe at the end, a soft pain enough to tantalize, and I shudder helplessly. My pulse quickens and my groin tightens as my hands clench at the fabric at her waist. The distance to the bed seems a lot shorter than before and she giggles as her back collides with the mattress as my weight crashes down above her.
As I awake the following morning I find the bed empty as I reach for her, and Atish’an is absent as well. Not an unusual occurrence, though I admit one that leaves me slightly disappointed each time. Putting on my clothes I walk down through Skyhold and a guard informs me I can find Mona at the stables. She is saddling her horse almost ready to leave as I approach. Atish’an greets me as usual and follows me as I walk up to her.

“You’re leaving,” I smile trying not to show my disappointment.

“Hey Solas. Yes, I was about to come say goodbye to you. You looked so peaceful this morning I didn’t have the heart to wake you.”

“You know I wouldn’t have minded. Where are you headed?”

“I finally managed to get an audience with King Alistair and Arl Teagan.”

“I wasn’t aware you had been trying. I suppose they would be interested in a meeting after the Inquisition helped Celene remain in power.”

“Not to mention we have been walking all over Ferelden and setting up camp wherever we please. Now, we might have the authority to do whatever we want, but I’d rather have as good relations with our neighbors as possible.”

“That is wise considering what happens after Corypheus has been defeated.”

Her eyes sparkle playfully. “My, Solas, did I sense some optimism in that statement?”

“Presumably,” I smile and she leans up and kisses me. “Vhenan,” I warn.

“Oh, stop you. In case you haven’t noticed, Hawke is with Merrill and Celene with Briala. Human-elven relationships are in fashion,” she teases and gives me another kiss.

“And when it is no longer in fashion?” I retort with some amusement.

“Oh, you don’t have to worry about that,” she shrugs, “Tish would never forgive me if we broke up. Just imagine all the sad puppy looks. My heart couldn’t take it.” She touches her heart melodramatically and leans her head back as if she is growing faint while Atish’an barks happily.

I chuckle as I shake my head and this time I kiss her.

“Dareth shiral, ma vhenan.”

“Same to you, love.” She smiles and takes the horse out and mounts it.

“Keep Edward out of trouble while I’m gone.”

“I believe you have too much faith in my abilities.”

At that, she merely smiles as she rides of. Atish’an licks my hand and waits for me to pet her before following her master.

“You’re a lucky bastard. You know that, right?” I hear Blackwall say from within the barn.

“That does seem to be the general opinion. But yes, since you asked, I’m aware.”

“I don’t suppose it explains why I had to walk back to the barracks with only a bucket for my bits a while back?” Blackwall grins.
I smirk at the memory as I walk off.

Chapter End Notes

Hi everyone. Thank you so much for all your wonderful comments!

Thanks to EmberLeo and ninaninabobina, who made this chapter so much more awesome than I could have done on my own :)

The line "It always had a soul. The question is the answer." is an easter egg from Cole in the Trespasser DLC. It refers to Legion and the Geth from Mass Effect, who are artificial lifeforms.

I hope you're still enjoying the story as we slowly approach the Temple of Mythal.
“Dearest Solas,

I’m glad Edward is continuing to improve, but I never doubted in your abilities to teach. Just try not to set fire to anything unexpected this time. Dennet is still complaining about the last time one of Edward’s spells scared the horses half to death. I would suggest you go outside Skyhold, but then he would probably start an avalanche.

And wonderful that Dagna created that rune, though I’m sorry to hear about Maddox. Such a waste.

I’m sorry my stay in Ferelden is taking longer than I expected. Arl Teagan is being a nuisance, to put it mildly. I like the man well enough and I can appreciate his position, but he is acting as if the Inquisition is helping Orlais invade Ferelden. To say he is exhausting would be an understatement. I wish you were here with me.

I sent word to Josephine, but I’m bringing King Alistair to Skyhold. I’m hoping I can smooth things over with him and that hopefully Arl Teagan has enough on his plate so he won’t follow. The King is very dependant on him, so I’m not certain it’s going to work. He is a good and reasonable King, he doesn’t need to be so dependant on his uncle. Then again, I bet many would say the same about you and me.

We’re leaving the day after tomorrow so hopefully I will be home soon.

I love and miss you.

Love Mona“

I smile to myself as I read her letter and lean back into my chair in the rotunda. Even as her tone is formal, when she writes, I can imagine her exasperated noises. I see her pacing in aggravation as she tells me every detail, and the rueful smile she gives me when she realises she has gone on for ages.

My thumb caresses her signature fondly as I hear steps coming down the stairs. Vivienne walks towards me but looks at my murals, not revealing if she finds them appealing or not. I fold the letter and put it away. The last thing I want is for anyone to read Mona’s private thoughts.

“Can I help you, First Enchanter?”

She turns as if she hadn’t noticed my presence at all.

“Solas, you should know I received a letter from an acquaintance in Val Royeaux.”

“And why should that concern me?”

“It was regarding the disturbing rumors about your relationship with the Inquisitor.”

I struggle to keep my voice void of annoyance. “Has it foiled any of your plans to marry her off?”

“I informed him that the only disturbing thing in evidence was his penmanship.” There is some satisfaction in her voice - as if she truly enjoyed putting the man in his place. I doubt she did it for my benefit, but perhaps her affection for Mona is greater than I imagined.
“That was unexpected. Thank you, Enchanter.” Even I find myself a little surprised by the sincerity in my voice.

“I’m not so quick to judge. The Inquisitor cares about you a great deal. Do attempt to be worthy of that affection, darling.”

Her voice is indifferent, but there is a hint of a scowl as she passes me. I sigh as I pick the letter back up. I sincerely hope I am as well.

Sitting in the rotunda, going over the new measurements of the veil I get distracted by a loud barking and paws running across the floor. I only just manage to turn before Atish’an is greeting me with her usual enthusiasm. As I pat her I see the Herald standing at the door.

“I thought you might like to know that Mona has returned. She’s in the war room.”

“Thank you.”

I stroke the dog fondly and as she lays down under my desk, and I return to my work. The Herald stands and observes me for a moment before he makes an exasperated noise.

“Oh, swallow your pride will you? I know you have missed her so just go see her.”

The Herald walks past me with a grin towards Cullen’s office. I can’t deny that I am tempted to do just that, but I know she has arrived with King Alistair and I do not wish to interrupt. In truth I’m also beginning to struggle with being near her. I feel the distance between us becoming more profound. Though, she is pulling back I don’t believe that is the real cause of my sudden discomfort. For the first time I must admit that the secrets between us are bothering me. It is a final barrier I must keep in place if I wish to restore my people, but my heart aches at its ever-lingering presence between us. In some ways that distance is not unlike the veil separating this world from the fade. Reality and dreams are supposed to coexist, yet cannot because of what I did in order to protect the world from the Evanuris.

I sigh as I resign myself to waiting for her to approach me.

After an hour my patience has reached its limit. The Herald is right; I have missed her - so much more than I have any right to. I walk to the war room, where I knock on the door and insist that Atish’an remains outside. I enter as I hear Mona’s voice. She is standing on the other side of the table talking to a blonde man with a darker complexion. Their conversation continues unaffected by my presence.

“I had hoped you had received word from Elissa.” He releases a deep sigh, while his fingers rest on the map west of the Western Approach.

“I’m sorry, your Majesty. We only met once and she hasn’t had anything to do with the Inquisition.”

“Maybe not, but she thinks a great deal of you.” He gives her a fond smile. “And please, call me Alistair. All this formality is exhausting.”

“As you wish.” Mona gives a soft smile. “Leliana might have better luck tracking down the Queen.”

“She is already looking into it.” He sighs looking down at the map before noticing my presence.

I clear my throat and Mona motions for me to come closer.

“This is King Alistair. Alistair, this is Solas, my— “ she pauses for a moment as if pondering to
answer. Hardly surprising as what we have has been left undefined on purpose. She gives me a bright smile as she finishes. “-- my better half.”

“ Better half?” Alistair laughs and takes my hand. “Either she is being modest or you have to be more of a saint than the Divine.”

“The former I assure you.”

She takes me by my arm keeping me close. It is the first time she has been so public about our attachment. Even so I do not mind it.

“Solas is an invaluable member of the Inquisition and is one of its founding members. I couldn’t do any of this without his insight.”

“And how does Morrigan deal with someone being smarter than her?”

“Don’t ask, I beg you.” Mona grins looking at me. “Love, can you do me a favour and ask Grand Enchanter Fiona to come in here, please? Discreetly.”

Despite her smile there is a severity in her eyes.

“Of course. I’ll go directly. When you are finished perhaps you would join me? I have some concerns I would like to discuss with you. I’ll try to convince the Herald to play a game of chess with me in the meantime.”

Mona chuckles.

“That poor man. I’ll see you a little later.”

I did manage to convince the Herald to play a game of chess with me, but as we play I find myself distracted. The Grand Enchanter seemed more uncomfortable with being summoned to speak with the king than I would have expected. There was a fear and a hurt in her eyes I had not anticipated. I suspect Mona is fully aware of why that is, and it was no coincidence she brought King Alistair to Skyhold. Like the pieces on the board before me I can feel something is in motion. The only trouble is that I cannot predict my opponent, where as Mona already knows the next move being made on the board in the future. Playing chess against the Herald is a much simpler task - even if he is improving.

“I can’t believe you talked me into this - again!” He grumbles knocking his king over before the game has even been completed.

“Your game is improving, my friend. Surely, you did not expect to turn from a novice to a master over night - and with only limited practice.”

Atish’an grumbles from underneath the table as if in agreement.

“You know, you could let me just win one.”

“And what lesson would be learned from that I wonder?”

“Confidence?” He gives a wry grin. “But here is a spirit to save me. Mona, come and kick his ass for me.”

Mona smiles as she approaches and further inside the garden I see Alistair talking to Morrigan and her son. There is something about that meeting, which seems odd. From what little I could gather he
does not care for her much, yet he seems almost emotional.

Mona looks down at the board and chuckles.

“Oh no, I’m not foolish enough to play against him.”

“Are you afraid, Inquisitor?” I give her a daring look, but I already know it will not work. She is not so easily provoked.

“Why would I allow myself on to a battlefield, where I know I’ll lose-” She sits down in my lap and wraps her arms around my neck. Her eyes darken and her voice is purposefully sultry. “When I know of another one, where I might win?”

“And I think that is my cue to leave.” The Heralds grins as he gets up from the chess table and walks away.

Mona sits down across from me as I start putting the pieces back in position.

“I thought you didn’t want to play, Inquisitor.”

“I can lose this battle, as long as I win the war.” She grins. “Besides, the company is worth the humiliation of losing.”

A warm chuckle escapes me and I set the final pieces back on the board.

“So, I noticed King Alistair and the Grand Enchanter were in their meeting for quite a while.” I look over at her as she gets ready to move the first piece.

“Well, that’s hardly surprising considering what happened at Redcliffe.”

“No, but it is peculiar that he took the time considering the hostility at their last meeting. And now he is spending a great deal of time with Lady Morrigan and Kieran.”

I watch her carefully as she replies, while I move the next piece. It would be so much simpler if we could be truly honest with one another.

“They knew each other during the blight.”

“I know. What I don’t know is why it was so important for you to mend those relationships. Why you took the time to do it.”

She meets my gaze then, and something infinitely soft crosses her features.

“It’s not my secret to tell, Solas. Remember what I said when we first met? It is not only yours that I keep.”

“I do. I’m just amazed that with all the weight on your shoulders, you still take the time to heal these little hurts.”

She reaches for my hand and I let go of the piece I have been moving, not caring that it did not go where I needed it to be.

“There is so much misery all around us. Most of my decisions have so much resting on them, and I might not get them right. But this, these little hurts, at least those I might help.”

“You give yourself too little credit, vhenan. You work tirelessly to remove injustices and cruelty
from this world.”

“Thank you, but… removing evil is not the same as creating something good. If we want to leave the world better than we found it, we can’t only remove the bad. We need to create something better… and worthwhile.”

With a smile I lift her hand to my lips and kiss it. Mona looks over at King Alistair, who is talking with Kieran and giving him some figurines of various origins. I see the pain in her eyes as she watches the little boy. I imagine her son is only a few years older than Morrigan’s. What I would give to see that heartache vanquished from her mind and spirit frightens me.

The past few days Mona has been preoccupied with entertaining the King and having various meetings with him. Some I have been a part of, others not. But before he leaves there is a treaty signed between King Alistair and Mona, as well as a more personal understanding the details of which elude me. I do, however, recognize the difficulty he has when saying goodbye to the Grand Enchanter as well as Lady Morrigan and her son. I confess I’m curious, but these matters seem deeply personal, and I must respect that Mona keeps his secrets with the same devotion as she does mine. I can easily imagine the power Leliana and her spies could gain for the Inquisition if Mona allowed herself to use this knowledge. Had I been in her place I’m not so certain I would have done the same.

As I’m getting ready to retire for the night I seek out Mona, hoping that she will join me. As I leave the rotunda out in the great hall I see her on the balcony above speaking with Vivienne. Most of Skyhold are either in the tavern or have retired by now. Mona is leaning against the railing with her arms crossed, her back towards me.

“No matter how sweet and charming he is, I’m usurping his Queen!”

My heart tightens at the implication of the words. Even from below I can see Vivienne sitting quite calmly on the couch. I should have known it would only be a matter of time before she attempted to get her oar in once more. Though, I do wonder why she went through the trouble of rebutting her acquaintance.

“My dear, you are already on first name basis with the man. It would be a fortuitous alliance. And I’m certain that you would get a husband you respect. Not all are so fortunate.”

“Who says I have any interest in marrying?”

“Oh, do not make the same mistake as Celene, I beg you.”

Mona rubs her forehead with a sigh of annoyance.

“Look, Alistair is perfectly lovely, but I’m not interested. I don’t need a husband to validate my place in society. I can do that myself.”

“I know. Be that as it may, there are no connections to be had by marrying an elven apostate. Better to keep him as an advisor and lover, as Bastian does me, and then--”
My heart stops. Marriage? Is this something Mona has mentioned or something Vivienne has assumed? Mona holds up a hand to interrupt the First Enchanter. That Mona dares this and that Vivienne lets her is quite impressive.

“Alright, let us for a moment entertain the idea that marriage is something I aspire to. One; I’m not going to dethrone someone trying to save the life of their husband - a woman I’m acquainted with by the way. Two; should I marry an eleven apostate it might cause a scandal, but it might also influence people to think differently of both mages and elves. Show the world that they are equals. That would be preferable to blowing up more buildings, correct?”

“You should take great care, darling. I’ve seen the lingering looks between you and our Solas. This is more than a casual dalliance.”

At least in this the First Enchanter is correct. There is nothing simple or casual about my feelings for Mona - there never was. I confess I see the wisdom in what Vivienne is proposing as well - even as my heart feels sick at the mere thought of it.

Mona releases a deep sigh.

“If you can make a list of any unmarried prospects, let me know and I’ll consider it.”

“Thank you, darling. That’s all I ask.”

Mona nods and turns to walk down stairs. She catches me looking up at her. The smile she gives me is both sad and apologetic, but it is a truth we both knew all along. Down the stairs she takes my hand and we walk silently back to our quarters. For now at least we may acknowledge what we feel openly.

Mona is laying on the couch with her feet towards me as I sit at the other end. It has become one of my favourite ways to spend our evenings. Each of us with our own book, reading, as I stroke her legs draped over my lap, and Atish’an rests in front of the fire. In these moments I can almost make myself believe that nothing else exists. No breach, no Corypheus, no Inquisitor or Fen’Harel. In another world it could have been like this forever. In this one I know it is but a brief moment in the eye of the storm. I’m drawn from my thoughts as she giggles.

“What is so amusing, vhenan?”

She blushes endearingly and hides her face in the book.

“Just something in this book.”

I grin to myself, but I do not push for an answer. I would not have believed her to have a romantic streak had I not learned of her efforts to help Edward and Josephine, and of her sudden interest in having Varric finishing his romance serial for Cassandra. Now, I know she enjoys reading novels that contain romance, though from what I can tell not quite the same genre as Cassandra enjoys. It is so rare for her to indulge in something that isn’t her purpose. And her finding it somewhat embarrassing and private only makes me treasure this side of her even more.
As I realise I have read the same page three times and have yet to understand its content, I look at her again. My heart's desire. The only thing in this world - in my life - that is present because I’ve been selfish. I might regret this selfish desire later, but right now I can’t. My hand travels along the inside of her leg up her thigh, my eyes turned toward my book as if my actions are completely unconscious. I hear give an amused huff, but she doesn’t object.

When my hand discreetly travels higher and releases a tiny amount of magic I hear her release a pleased sigh. I let my hand slide back down still acting as if I did so unawares, but I know my heart knows better. After a minute I do it again - this slow lingering motion, teasing and tantalizing. Eventually, her book falls and she leans her head back with a low moan.

“Solas… please…”

“Please what, vhenan ?”

She laughs at my devious smirk as I continue - a little more insistent this time.

“I don’t know…” she gasps and arches her back, “Something… anything…”

I chuckle as she withers.

“Ma halani, ma sa lath.” Her whimper sets my blood soaring through my body with purpose and intent. To make her relaxed and happy is all that matters in this moment.

“Ma nuvenin .”

I grin as I put down the book and lean over to kiss her, when an insistent knock can be heard at the door. Atish'an starts barking and Mona looks at the time as she frowns. She quickly gets up and runs to the door. We are never disturbed this late, which means something must be wrong. I look down over the railing and see the Herald entering when she opens.

“Edward, what's wrong?”

“I'm sorry for the hour, but is Solas here?”

“He is right upstairs. Come in.”

I get up from the couch as he comes up the stairs. He looks pale and trembles - with fear or anger. Possibly both.

“I’m sorry,” he apologizes. “Josephine… I need advice.”

“Of course. Sit down please,” I point to a chair and he pulls it up, sitting down while I sit back down on the couch. Atish’an sits down next to the Herald watching him as if she feels his distress. Clever hound.

“Do you want me to give you some privacy?” Mona asks as she comes back up the stairs.

“No, it’s fine.” The Herald shakes his head. “I’m sorry. I just didn’t know who else to turn to.”

“You don’t have to apologize,” Mona assures him as she sits down next to me.

“Josephine is engaged… to some Antivan lord. And I can’t be with her. I…” He leans forward resting his head in his hands. “I don’t know what to do.”

I frown in sympathy. I feel for my friend, but it also comes as a painful reminder of a situation I
might find myself in some day. Mona sighs and I can tell she isn’t surprised by this development.

“I know. I saw Josie earlier. I’m sorry, Edward.”

“Josephine did mention a duel… I could challenge him.”

“And what would the ambassador think of such a direct resolution?” I ask.

“She would probably kill me.” He gives me a wry grin despite his obvious pain.

“Well, it would be a swift solution at least. Provided you have the skill to win this duel of course.”

“Are you actually encouraging this?” Mona gives me a humorous look.

“I will leave the decision up to the Herald. Though, I understand his impatience.” I smile over at the Herald, who gives a light chuckle.

“Really? You would fight a duel for me?” Mona raises an eyebrow and gives me a doubtful look.

“Is that so difficult to believe?”

“Yes!” She laughs.

“Nonsense, Solas would level entire villages if it would save you.” The Herald grins.

“To save me, sure. But an outright duel? For my hand? Doubtful.”

“You don’t believe I would fight for you?” I’m not certain whether to be offended or amused.

“Given circumstances where you believed it unwise, rash or without purpose? I think you would turn your back and walk away.” She says it so casually and without pain. She even smiles as if the words she says means nothing. The Herald scoffs and calls her crazy, but I know looking into those hazel orbs she is right.

“In the end it doesn't matter what the Inquisitor or I would do,” I turn back to the subject at hand. “What choice is the one you where you can still face yourself after?”

He looks down into the floor considering my words carefully.

“I can’t lose her. I can’t face Corypheus or anything else without knowing I have her to come home to.”

“Then I would suggest challenging Lord Otranto to a duel.”

The Herald nods at me as his face becomes more determined.

“I’ll leave for Val Royeaux in the morning. Will you come with me?”

“Of course, I wanted to visit Philippe anyway.” Mona smiles and follows the Herald down the stairs. He says goodnight and Mona locks the door behind him. I smile looking down at her.

“So, I suppose I now know why you had Blackwall teach him how to use the rapier.”

“That obvious am I?” She winks as she walks up the stairs.

“Only to me, vhenan.”
Hey everyone! I hope you'll enjoy this chapter. Thank you so much for all your comments :) I'll try to update a little more regularly than I have been, but life has been crazy.

Thanks to EmberLeo and ninaninabobina for beta reading! You're such a great help :)
After the Qunari uprising in Kirkwall

POV Dubois

Working in one of the most distinguished libraries and universities in Thedas has its perks. That is, if you’re not prone to challenging establish beliefs and studying magical phenomena that bind the very foundations of our world together. “It’s better left to the mages,” they say. Well, the bloody mages aren’t really allowed to study anything of consequence either, now are they? Then there are the tranquil, of course, who do have a remarkable talent for study, but have all of the imagination and inspiration of a petrified toad. But of course, should you mention this, you end up cataloging other people’s work - again! At this point I’m merely a glorified clerk. Still, it is better than the alternative of being hanged for blasphemy, leaving my child an orphan.

The library is quiet this time of day. The early morning light shimmers on the white marble that surrounds the endless wooden spiral staircases and tall bookcases. Looking for a particular book, I’m on one of the ladders, when I hear a female voice beneath me.

“Are you Philippe Dubois?”

I don’t look down. My work is more important than inquiries from some second rate student.

“Who wants to know?”

“I’m Mona Aim. I’m a scholar from Kirkwall.”

I look down and see a human woman looking up at me. Auburn hair, green eyes, and a pale complexion. Somewhat well-endowed, but otherwise quite ordinary and unremarkable. I hope for her sake her brain can live up to that title since she cannot rely on her looks. Especially, not when dressed in purely black and white.

“And what could you possibly want with me?”

“You’re an expert on the veil.”

Well, that’s intriguing… and possibly very dangerous. If anyone were to find out… No, better not to indulge my curiosity.

“If you want information about the veil I suggest contacting the Circle.”

She releases an unamused huff.

“I did, but I’m guessing you know the answer I got. Besides, they are very limited in what they are allowed to study.”

Alright, caution be damned. This is too enthralling for me to escape. It could be a ploy of course, but there would be so many easier ways to destroy my life and career than hide behind a - well I would say pretty face, but though her features are pleasant enough, they do not warrant any special attention.
“It’s dangerous to say such things out loud... Aim was it?”

“Mona Aim, yes.”

“Why do you Fereldens always brutalize your names by making them shorter?” I shake my head as I walk down the ladder.

She grins up at me as she corrects herself.

“Monique Aim.”

“So, mademoiselle Monique, how can I help you?”

“I want to know more about the veil. All I know is that it is a magical vibration that repels the fade. I need to know how it works.”

“And why is that?”

“Because the amount of tears in the veil has increased significantly the past hundred years. I believe it’s breaking down.”

I can’t keep myself from grinning.

“Finally, someone else has taken notice! Show me your research.”

“All of it.”

That very evening I find myself in her apartment in Val Royeaux. The amount of elven artifacts she has collected is truly astounding, and though I admit I know very little of runes and engineering, her schematics are fascinating. What strikes me as odd is the number of wolves in her collection. I know it has some sort of dire significance, but I confess my knowledge of elven lore is of even less consequence than my knowledge of runes. I remark on her interest in elven and Dalish lore. It’s an odd aspect for a human to study.

She gives me a quirky smile I can’t quite interpret.

“When I gave up on the circle I started to look in to elven lore. My elven is poor to say the least, but I managed to get some help in translation all these.”

I laugh at the absurdity.

“You truly expect us to find anything of value in Dalish fairytales?”

“Not in Dalish tales no, but in true elven lore and history - the kind that even the Dalish dismiss out of hand - there is more to be found than meets the eye.”

She hands me two documents. One written in elven and the other in trade. What I read sounds like a children’s story, but the trouble is it makes complete sense.

“The veil was created... it’s artificial.”

“Also ancient and breaking down. Let us not overlook that part.”

“Very well, Professor Aim, where do we begin?” I smile at her and I’m rewarded with a charming
Eighteen months before the Chantry explosion in Kirkwall

Working with Monique has not only been enlightening, it’s been inspiring. I find myself awestruck by the complexity of her mind; how it seems to see patterns I have yet to discover. Were I prone to superstition I would claim she had the gift of foresight. To finally have someone to share my theories with is beyond anything I had hoped for. That she seems to find my sense of superiority amusing rather than taking offense is also a benefit. I’m aware of my difficult nature, but in her presence it begins to subside. She sees not the man I was, but the one I could become, and I find myself humbled by the fact.

As time progresses she becomes a valued colleague and we start to enjoy other interests together than merely our work. When we find a common interest in art I invite her to a gallery in Val Royeaux. The white marble, golden lions, and red drapes almost take focus from the rows of paintings. Not unlike Monique, who hides well among the nobility, of which I am myself a part — a very minor Orlesian noble, who has honestly put more effort into my studies than anything else. In her black dress, and with her modest temperament, she goes almost as unnoticed as an elven servant. And yet I find myself lucky that she is on my arm as we take in the marvels the evening has to offer.

That is until she is approached by a woman the court knows as ‘Madame de Fer’. A woman who demands attention with the same vigor with which Monique avoids it.

“Mona Aim, if I’m not mistaken.”

Monique turns with some recognition of the woman in front of her. Though, how Monique would know her I have no idea.

“First Enchanter Vivienne.” She bows her head politely. “It’s a pleasure to meet you.”

“Likewise. I had not expected to meet you here, but it’s a pleasure all the same. Divine Justinia has asked me to look out for you. I’m so pleased we crossed paths.” Madame de Fer looks up and down her form and undoubtedly comes to the same conclusion I did the first time I saw her. Unremarkable. Ordinary. I will forever feel like a fool for that notion.

“Clearly, you have lived too long in barely civilized conditions. If your colleague can spare you I would like to take you under my wing immediately.”

Monique gives me an apologetic look.

“If you’ll excuse me.”

I’m barely capable of suppressing my annoyance. I think I preferred it, when no one took notice of her. Now, that she walks alongside Madame de Fer the nobility are already gossiping. I can see the pressure she feels under their gaze, but she also seems to hang on the Enchanter’s every word. Mona had told me that she worked with the Divine, and ensured me that I would not be persecuted for helping her. But why did the Divine think it necessary to introduce her to the First Enchanter?

After an hour and four glasses of wine I am not nearly as level-headed as I should be. Her absence is frustrating, though I am uncertain why the absence of a mere colleague should affect me so. When
she does return, all eyes are upon her, and the confidence I have come to know is strangely absent. She takes my arm and I feel my skin shudder beneath her touch.

“I have gotten us a way in to the Montsimmard Circle. They might have some of the knowledge we seek.”

“That’s progress, but why do you sound as if you have sold yourself to a demon?”

“I might have agreed to become a protege to Vivienne. Her own personal experiment… I swear, I can already feel the strings being pulled as if I am nothing but a puppet.”

Her grip on my arm tightens and I place my hand on hers to offer some comfort.

“Should we leave?”

“Do you mind?” The uncertainty in her eyes strikes an unexpected blow at my heart.

I offer her a smile as I do not dare to speak. I wish to offer her some sort of consolation, but I’m uncertain why she is so troubled, and I’m not very skilled at offering sympathy. So, I rely on our common interest and work, as I always do — a safe subject that does not brush upon her secrecy.

“Did you manage to see the contemporary section inspired by the Divine age?”

She shifts a little uncomfortably.

“I hardly noticed, I just wanted to hurry back to you.”

“Oh, you were missing out! The creations of…” her meaning dawns on me and I swallow. “…uh… that is to say… you are also quite… I enjoy your company very much.”

Her eyes flash with that innocent amusement which I, until this very moment, did not realize how much I have come to adore. The playfulness in her nature is never cruel or mocking — indeed, I find it hard to consider her anything but exceedingly kind and generous. I lean down and press my lips softly against hers. Just as I think I might have made an error in judgement, she releases a soft sigh and leans into the kiss.

Six months before the Chantry explosion in Kirkwall

Sitting in Monique’s apartment I look into the bedroom, where she is singing my daughter, Amalia, to sleep, while her hound is sleeping on the floor. My wife died in childbirth, and though I do feel some sorrow, my relationship with her was a political one. It is not the first time Amalia sleeps here. Our work often keeps us occupied for long hours, when Monique is in Val Royeaux rather than Kirkwall or the other places she runs off to — seemingly on a whim stirred by Finn and Adrianne.

I do not let Monique know that I can hear her singing. If she caught me listening I’m certain she would throw the candle holder at me from embarrassment. When I see her with my daughter, I get the distinct feeling that she is familiar with childcare. Another reason why I do not ask about her past; I know how my heart would shatter if I lost Amalia. It is not a pain of which I wish to remind Monique, if my theory is correct.

As the lullaby ends I walk away and return to our many findings. Monique is becoming more and more obsessed with Fen’Harel as time passes. Her actions have become more desperate, as if she is running out of time. I have asked her repeatedly, but I only get half-answers. Her many lessons with Madame de Fer have certainly paid off. With each passing day I see less and less of the honesty in her eyes which first captured my attention years ago.
I return to our work, and start cataloging our latest findings. After a few minutes she closes the door to the bedroom and joins me.

“This must start to become very tiresome.” She smiles as if her words are meant as an apology.

“I cannot imagine anyone but us cataloging these marvels with the awe that they deserve.”

“Only you can manage to make arrogance adorable.” She giggles and kisses my cheek.

“And I believe only you can appreciate my charms.” I grin down at her, when her smile turns into a frown. “My darling, what’s the matter?”

“Can you feel it?” She asks with a deep sigh. “Thedas is changing. Not just political power, but there is something changing in the veil. I can’t shake this feeling that soon moments like this will feel like nothing but a dream.”

“I know…” I let my hand stroke her back. “I did as you asked by the way, and you’re right: the magical vibration that forms the veil is degrading. The mage population does seem to be increasing as a result. It is disturbing that the Chantry has not realised this.”

“Oh, they have. They just refuse to acknowledge it. Argh! No matter where I turn people are determined to be idiots. How am I supposed to make a difference when people cling so tightly to their believes?”

“My dear, the world is not yours to save on your own. You expect too much of yourself.” I kiss her brow fondly.

“Philippe, I…” And there is that look again. The one that seems to hide an entire world beneath the surface of her skin. She has never revealed her past to me, which is fine. I will not judge her by it, but I want to understand her, help her.

There is so much wit, intelligence, and kindness hidden within that beautiful mortal shell. She so often gets overlooked by her peers. She is not an obvious beauty, but now that I know her… I want to feel the warmth of her touch and the fire of her passion, but I cannot give in. Once we have been physically intimate, I know that I will not be able to pull back. I want to break through her veil of secrets to reach her, but I confess I do not know how.

“I’ve left you speechless, I see. I understand. It must be difficult not to be in my presence,” I jest. She giggles sweetly and presses a kiss against my lips. Thank the Maker that she does not take my arrogance to heart. It is almost ironic the ease with which she can read me, when I find her an ever changing enigma, her very essence fueling my curiosity and igniting my passions.

“I will marry you…” I utter softly as she pulls away. She looks at me wide eyed her chest rising and falling with deep breaths. “I-I… umm… In you I have found a home I didn’t know I was pining for… I would want for nothing more than to make you happy.”

She steps away as she swallows and walks over to the desk. My heart has stopped beating and I fear I might faint before she gives me an answer. Her hand caresses the small statue of Fen’Harel she keeps there. It has become something of a good luck charm for her. She picks it up and gives it a brief kiss before tossing it into the fireplace.

“What are you--”

“Yes.” She looks at me - more serious than I would have expected.
“Are… are you quite sure?”

“Yes!” She jumps into my arms and gives me a deep kiss. I lift her and twirl her around before capturing her lips with mine once again. My first marriage was for status and a matter of alliance. This time I will marry for something as unlikely as love.

After the Annulment of the Kirkwall Circle

Mona is sitting on the couch in my parlour back in Val Royeaux. Her hound has passed out in front of the fire and Amalia is thankfully asleep. I try to comprehend everything she is telling me, and I confess she is more distressed than I have ever seen her. Which is hardly surprising given the circumstances. I hand her a glass of wine and sit down next to her.

“So, he truly massacred half of Kirkwall?”

“The explosion was contained within the Chantry. It was relatively small, considering what he might have done. I tried to warn Elthina, so many times and I…” she murmurs with an ache in her voice.

“Hush, my sweet. I know he was your friend, but you are not responsible for his actions. You would never let anything like this happen. There is too much good in you.”

She looks up at me with despair in her eyes before she sobs violently into my chest.

“What is the matter?”

“I can’t tell you.”

We are both quiet for a while as she keeps crying violently. I know it is a tragedy, and that she feels some sort of responsibility for it. I know her well enough to know she is second guessing herself. It seems as if she blames all the problems of the world on herself. When she pulls away the look she gives me chills my heart.

“I’m not the woman you think I am.” She states with certainty, but before I can object she gets to her feet and continues. “The Divine wants me to help mediate the situation with the mages, but if all this ends with war or an Exalted March…”

I close my eyes as I hear her words. The whisper of the Divine… I wish she had never been introduced to Madame de Fer. She was so much more at ease before that meeting. Whatever the Divine has her doing it is bigger than anything that has become before. Her interest in elven lore and Fen’Harel has become all consuming - and now the trouble with the mages. I would truly be a fool if I did not see this coming.

“You want to call off our betrothal…”

She turns around to look at me, and I do see true ache in her eyes.

“Want to? No, not even a little bit, but being with me is going to be dangerous. If you and Amalia got hurt… I won’t allow that to happen.”

I love her so much, but I can’t endanger my child to be with her. The truth is often the most painful thing we can be presented with — and yet both Monique and I seek it with a relentless passion. I get to my feet and place my hands on her shoulders.

“My dear, sweet love, I always knew there was more to you than was obvious. You carry your burdens as trophies. Your sense of duty is the core of who you have chosen to become. I had just
hoped…”

“I did too,” she murmurs with true regret.

“You do love me, correct?”

“Of course, I do.”

I reach for her hand and carefully remove the ring from her finger.

“I would have loved nothing more than to call you ‘wife’, but I understand your position. I guess under the circumstances ‘friends’ would also be an appropriate nomenclature?”

I offer her a small smile to hide how my heart is twisting in agony. Tears stream down her cheeks, but even so she smiles and wraps her arms around my neck.

“I’m so sorry. In another world…” She gives a pained chuckle. “I should never have been this selfish… I promise I won’t be selfish again.”

“You have never had a selfish bone in your body.”

“I really am sorry.”

“Don’t trouble yourself, Monique.” I flash a grin hiding how my heart turns in on itself. “I imagine it must be quite difficult for you to always be in my shadow. Go on then. I have actual work to do.”

“Thank you,” she murmurs as she grabs her coat and leaves with Tish.

When the door closes behind her I collapse on the couch. I should have known it was too good to be true.

After the siege of Adamant Fortress

Despite our past, Monique and I have remained colleagues and friends. I cannot deny that I still wish things would have turned out differently, but I see now the purpose the Divine intended and molded her for in the shadows. Inquisitor Aim, a title she wears well. She is as consumed by her work as ever, and I understand that I would always have had to take second priority in her life. Poetic I suppose, as that is how I treated my wife when she was alive.

It is not all bad, however. I now get to use my knowledge to my full ability as an agent and scholar of the Inquisition. Even if she did drag me out in the middle of the desert. I take a handkerchief from my pocket and swipe the sweat off my brow.

“The sun is wreaking havoc with my visage.”

“I had forgotten how vain you can be.” She winks at me with a grin, removing any true insult from the statement.

“I’m Orlesian, does it truly surprise you?”

“Oh, self-deprecating sarcasm. That’s new!” She laughs as her eyes widen.

“I have been spending too much time with you,” I reply dryly.

I lead her across the dune to show her what we found. Going by old sightings and journals we were able to find some ruins unlike any I have seen. As we get to the top and look down over the sand she
sees what we have been able to uncover. Ruins looking like a dragon and made completely out of metal. It was almost impossible to accomplish, but the look on her face as she sees it makes the effort worthwhile. Her eyes widen as she gasps before letting out an enthusiastic laugh and hugging me before running towards it.

She doesn’t even bother to greet the workers who are currently resting in the camp, but just throws her coat and bag on the ground before heading directly for it. Tish lays down on top of her belongings as if to protect them. She begins to brush off the sand as she walks around the parts that aren’t entirely buried. She gives me a bright smile when she finds a seam in the metal. Reaching into her pocket she takes out small runes and jams them into it.

“You might want to stand back.”

We back away and she reaches out with her bracers making the runes explode and what appears to be a hatch falls open. I follow her inside. It’s dark, cramped, and far more unfamiliar than any ruins I have explored with her thus far. She takes off her glove and lets her fingers slide across the metal. She gasps when we see a corpse on the ground. The sand appears to have turned it into a mummy. It’s fairly tall, but its structure is unlike anything I have seen. It seems to have horns, no nose and a sunken chest. Perhaps the sand did not do as well as preserving the body as I would have believed. Monique releases a disappointed sigh as she crouches down. She searches the body and picks up metal pieces and belongings unlike any I have seen. She then gets up and walks over to a… table?

“Now, let’s see if there is any life still left in you. Or if I can even figure it out,” she murmurs to herself. “Philippe, would you start cataloging everything in here? I don’t want any of the dwarves getting any lucrative ideas.”

“As you wish.”

As nightfall approaches Monique is still working on something on the table. I’m startled when a bright light snaps on out of nowhere and she squeals happily.

“Yes! Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes!”

I walk over to her and see a bright orange light coming symbols of some kind on the table. She brushes her hands through the light and astonishingly it reacts.

“Shit… I can’t read this.”

“Would you like to interact with this console verbally?”

I jump as a sound seems to come out of nowhere.

“What in the name of the Maker was that?”

She reaches for my hand and squeezes it fondly.

“It’s alright, Philippe. I’ll explain later, I promise. Yes, I would like to activate verbal interaction.”

“Very well. How may I assist you?”

“A polite VI, nice… let’s see. Play audio logs.”

“Datafiles have been corrupted.”

“Is there any way of restoring them?”
“Repairing… 32% restoration of original files.”

“Audio playback.”

Another voice appears in a foreign language I don’t recognize. Neither does Monique it seems, as she frowns.

“Stop playback. What language is this?”

“Salarian. Dialect; Sur’kesh.”

“I see… Can you translate it?”

“What language would you prefer?”

“English.”

“Translating; English. Dialect; American.”

Monique starts pacing with her arms across her chest as she listens to another voice. The same one as before, but this time I actually understand it. It still sounds strange, disrupted - almost like the rush of a waterfall is drowning out the speech, but that's not quite it, is it? It's more high pitched than any voice I have heard, but it sounds male. The veil must be thin here for it to bring forth images and voices of the dead.

“... so now we're stranded here. The Krogan Mercenaries I hired have run off. Should have known better than to contract those brutes. Three weeks stranded with them and I know why we implemented the genophage. There is still no reply from the Citadel or Sur'kesh. Those idiots--”

It stops abruptly and Monique presses on several of the orange lights.

“Datafile corrupted.”

“Alright... Play the next one,” she instructs.

“The discoveries I have made so far using probes have been fascinating. When I began studying humans I would never have expected this. How did their species end up on a planet so far removed from their own? What I can’t figure out is whether the humans originated on Earth or this place they call ‘Thedas’. There are signs of an ancient civilization that dates back at least as far as the Protheans. Perhaps even further. It requires more study.”

Monique sighs and looks over at the strange body.

“Next entry.”

“Datafile corrupted. Restoring. 41% restoration complete.”

The male voice returns.

“-- and I still have received no word. From anyone. I should have listened to the professor. Studying humans was a stupid idea - no matter their genetic diversity. I haven’t been able to find much about the ancient race here. My injuries are still pretty bad, and I’m out of medigel. I don’t know how much longer the rations will hold out. I’ve tried to analyze the ship’s data to keep myself occupied. The data is… confusing. There is this… barrier for a lack of a better term, that’s pushing this planet into sync and holding back subspace. If these data are correct then this planet should be able to draw energy directly from subspace - as insane as that sounds. But if that was the planet's natural
existence, then why would anyone do this? There is the chance that the sensors were destroyed from the impact. Or perhaps I’m going insane. I could adju--"

“*No more data available.*”

Monique slides to the floor resting her arms on her knees and stares into the sand covering it. She rubs her face and I can’t tell if she is happy or disappointed. I sit down next to her and place a hand on her shoulder.

“Monique, are you okay?”

“Yes, I’m fine…” She pats my hand and gets back to her feet. “We need to dismantle all of this. I want it sent to Tevinter. I have an agent there that can store it for me until I have need of it.”

I can’t hide my surprise at her words.

“You don’t want it with the Inquisition?”

“No, I can’t risk it.”

“Monique…” I grab her gently by the arm. “You don’t trust your own people. You are keeping secrets like never before, and you come to me rather than the man we both know is far more qualified for this. Not to mention that you love him.”

The way she and Solas interact is so different than from how she is with anyone else. Her trust in him is implicit even as she does not share all her secrets with him. I should be jealous I suppose, but I understand why he can be by her side when I cannot. Not only is he brilliant, but even I can tell he is a powerful mage. He can protect her and himself in ways I would never have been able to manage. Most importantly, from herself.

She shakes her head and pulls from my grasp.

“I never--”

“Don’t deny it. I know you too well. I’m worried about you. What have you gotten yourself into?”

“I honestly have no idea. I’m in over my head, but I can’t turn back now.”

She rest her weight against the glowing table and I see her tremble.

“I have never seen you this… afraid.”

“You’re right. I do love him… so much more than I should.” She confesses, but it doesn’t sound happy. “And that’s the reason why I can’t fail, but I can’t do it alone.”

I nod with understanding.

“Alright, I trust you.”

“Thank you.” She gives me a genuine smile this time.

“No need. I get to actually use my knowledge without having to fear persecution. This is all I have ever dreamed of.”

She grins at first, but then she looks right past me with a curious expression. I turn to see a little floating ball of light.
“Is that… a wisp?”

Val Royeaux, after Frostback Basin

I’m deeply wrapped in my studies as Amalia is playing on the floor with her dolls. I adore my little girl and I try to have her near me, whenever possible. I know I’m helping to keep her world from falling apart - I must trust Monique in this - but I feel inadequate as a father.

Outside I can hear the sound of swords clashing. The Seeker Cassandra is training with the Herald of Andraste. They have been committed to it since dinner, but why a mage would need such skills I have no idea.

Monique is standing at a desk in the next room going over my latest findings from the Frostback Basin. Solas stands quietly in the doorway watching her rather than the book he holds in his hands. It seems like he is watching her from across an endless chasm that he has no clue how to cross.

“She is growing distant, isn’t she?” I ask as I walk up next to Solas.

“That is a… private matter, I would rather not discuss it.”

The ache with which he closes his eyes feels like looking at a past version of myself.

“I realise it might not seem like it, but she loves you. I cannot tell you what she is planning, but I do know she is doing it for you.”

He looks at me with surprise - an odd expression on his usually confident face. He then closes his eyes and shakes his head in the same way I have seen Monique do a thousand times. The one where they carry the weight of the world on their shoulders as their secrets seems like a noose slowly tightening around their necks.

“I know, but she should not have to. I should never have…”

“Never what? Fallen in love with her? Look, I’m the last person to believe in fate, but I do believe that struggling against the inevitable is a waste of time. We should adapt to it, not fight it. And it is plain for all to see that you falling for her was inevitable.”

Solas gives a small chuckle.

“There is some wisdom in that.”

“And yet you sound surprised.” I huff. “What are you waiting for? Applause? Go make her happy before I get nauseous.”

He gives me a knowing look as he walks into the study where Monique is working as hard as always. Solas places a hand on her lower back and she looks up at him with an adoring smile. There is an understanding between them I can’t quite grasp. Like they are two sides of the same coin. I find it an amusing coincidence that her hazel-green eyes reflect the fade, while his steel-blue matches the energy created by her bracers and runes. The notion strikes me as almost romantic.

A wistful smile tugs the corner of my lips as I watch the two of them for a few moments more before tearing my gaze away. My eyes land once again on Amalia, and a resolve takes root in my heart. I
walk up to my desk and put up my work before sitting down on the floor to play with my daughter.

Chapter End Notes

Hi everyone. Thank you so much for all your comments! I give to you the first (and only) Dubois chapter. I hope you'll enjoy it :)

Thanks to EmberLeo and ninaninabobina for Beta reading :)

Also, we're getting very close to the point where what happened to Mona will be revealed, so if you have any lingering thoughts, prompts, or things you want me to explore in that regard, now is the time :)
Differences not to be discarded

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

I admit, I enjoy staying with Dubois more than I do Duke Bastian’s estate. His townhouse is smaller, but larger than Monique’s apartment - and it offers more privacy than a tavern. Yet, I cannot deny there is a certain allure to the idea of taking Mona by her hand and going to her apartment, sharing full privacy where not even Inquisition runners and well-meaning friends will interrupt us. All I truly desire is to be locked in a room with her, where we can pretend there is nothing in the world besides us.

When I awake in the guestroom Dubois has provided I find Atish’an sleeping on her back next to me with her tongue hanging out the mouth - her slobber covering the bed. I chuckle at the sight and I can hear Mona scold me for this. Mona is once again absent; a habit that has increased as of late. Outside, I hear Cassandra and the Herald training with their rapiers. She is not skilled with such a delicate weapon, but better than the Herald. Mona had intended to bring Blackwall, but he was nowhere to be found when we needed to leave.

After getting dressed I expect to find Mona buried in notes and maps of the Deep Roads or the measurements Dubois has taken in the Frostback Basin. Instead I find her sitting on the floor playing with Dubois’ daughter. It is clear that the little girl is fond of Mona, and as I watch them I almost feel regret that Mona did not marry Dubois. The little girl deserves a mother and I can think of noone more loving than my heart. Only seven years old I think she hardly recalls how close Mona and her father used to be. She will probably never know.

“-- and now they are going out to play in the snow.” Amalia states as a matter of fact moving her dolls outside the dollhouse.

“Oh, I didn’t know it was snowing. Wasn’t it summer a minute ago?” Mona grins.

“Yes, but now it’s snowing.”

I quirk smile at Amalia’s imagination - she is every bit as stubborn as her father. I flick my wrist and cast a small frost spell above Amalia and her dolls. The little girl giggles happily and squeals in delight as the cold hits her and she quickly moves. Mona tries not to laugh as she looks at me.

“Inside, Solas?”

I’m about to reply, when Dubois enters the room looking through his mail - not even noticing the tiny amount of snow on the floor. Absent-minded, he hands Mona a letter - his greeting nothing more than a muffled “good morning”. I recognize the seal as being from Leliana. Inside there is another letter. I’m unfamiliar with the seal, but I can tell that it is dwarven. Mona gets to her feet as she reads it and rests the tips of her fingers on her lips while narrowing her eyebrows. Amalia has begun to pester her father, who has acknowledged his defeat and given in to some request that keeps both of their attention. I walk over to Mona and rest my hand on her shoulder.

“Any news on Blackwall?”

“Not yet… This is from Orzammar. There are some tremors in the Deep Roads to the north of Ferelden.”

“I see… do we know the cause?”
“The breach in the veil and a Titan,” she answers in a low voice.

“I see. Are we going to investigate?”

“Not yet. Orzammar hasn’t actually requested help as of yet. They are just cautioning us not to send forces in that direction in the foreseeable future. When they are ready we will help them.”

I give a small nod in response as Cassandra and the Herald come back inside. The Herald looks a little pale, and very nervous. Mona smiles at him.

“Cheer up, Edward. You'll be fine.”

“I hope you’re right.”

I walk over to him and clap his shoulder, before I go to get ready to leave.

In the middle of Val Royeaux the Herald is pacing back and forth waiting for Lord Otranto to make an appearance. He is getting increasingly pale and he keeps rubbing his hands together. Mona and Cassandra are somewhere on the upper levels, giving him privacy to gather his thoughts. He stops abruptly in front of me and looks at me with ragged breathing.

“This was a bad idea.”

“There is no option for retreat now if you wish to continue your relationship with Josephine.”

He gives an exasperated sigh running a hand through his hair.

“I’m a bloody coward, Solas.”

“Nothing could be further from the truth. Being afraid of losing someone dear to your heart only affirms their importance. It by no means makes you a coward. You have already proven yourself countless times and earned my respect. You have stood against everything thrown at you and succeeded - this will be no different.”

He gave a low chuckle.

“Well at least you’re confident in my abilities.”

“I am.”

I look over the side and I see a dark skinned nobleman walking towards the square. I look at the Herald, who gives me a nod and I walk up to the upper level, where Cassandra and Mona are standing. As I walk up the stairs I get the distinct impression Mona chose that spot deliberately to watch the duel. Cassandra is leaning against the wall with her arms crossed and a disgruntled expression on her face.

“I can’t believe I agreed to this,” she scoffs.

“I can. Now come and have a look!” Mona enthuses looking down at the crowd below.

“Get away from there!” Cassandra hisses.
I look down below and I see Lord Otranto throw a rapier to the Herald. I admit, I feel a little... apprehensive. Though I could not let the Herald know, I am concerned for his well-being - and not only because he carries my mark. If he gets seriously injured our hopes of stopping Corypheus die with him. Edward was right. This was an impulsive and reckless idea. I cringe as Edward manages to evade the rapier at the last possible moment.

“Ooh, he almost hit the Herald that time,” Mona says with a certain glee that catches Cassandra’s attention. The seeker rushes to the railing and looks down over the crowd below.

“Let me see!”

I can’t help but laugh at them. Standing at the ledge like school girls sucking in the drama below as if it were a heated romance novel.

“I had not assumed you were a romantic, Inquisitor,” I tease, but instead of rebuttal both women angrily hush me.

I look down and see the Herald struggling, but so far he has not given in. Noticing his opponents speed, I discreetly cast a haste spell on the Herald. Even so Mona seems to notice and gives a small smile leaning against me.

“Harellan.” She grins at me and I give her a knowing look.

Cassandra gasps as he is almost hit again.

“I told him to pay attention to his footwork,” she sneers, though there is definite concern in her voice.

What surprises me is how calm Mona seems to be about the whole thing. Though, I’m too far away to hear the conversation between the Herald and Lord Otranto, I can tell the Herald manages a rebuttal that startles the Antivan lord. I take the opportunity to cast a slight frost spell that makes him lose his footing. Mona suppresses a laugh which turns into an unladylike snort, and somehow it just makes her all the more endearing. The Herald makes a sound of joy that has the crowd laughing, but Otranto quickly recovers from his stumble.

“Unwise, Edward,” I mutter under my breath.

Just as the Lord is about to make the Herald suffer for embarrassing him Josephine appears in the crowd. I don’t need to be able to hear her to tell she is livid, but the way she completely ignores Otranto and walks straight up to the Herald is encouraging. The conversation remains a mystery until the Herald blurts out a confession on the top of his lungs.

“Because I love you!”

Cassandra’s face flushes as she stares intently at the display below. Mona blushes as well, but turns away from the edge. She looks at me for a moment, then steps towards me and gives me a tender kiss. I can hear some people around us giving small gasps, grunts, and whispers, but I cannot be bothered as I pull away and look only into her eyes. How is it possible to spend so much time in a person’s company and still miss them?

Walking through the streets of Val Royeaux I don’t believe the Herald has let go of Josephine’s hand
for even a moment. It has been hours since the duel, but both he and Josephine have been glowing ever since. Mona is walking around with a list in her hand making sure she finds all the supplies we need to bring back to Skyhold. While Josephine is preoccupied with some perfumes at a certain stall, Mona’s steps become more determined as she walks in the other direction. I almost lose sight of her, but do eventually see her talking to an Orlesian merchant. The sun is slowly retreating as dark rain clouds start to hover above us. Where the merchant seems rather confident at first his demeanour falters. She takes a step closer to him and he swallows. I feel some regret in not hearing the entire conversation, but as I approach I do manage to catch his last words.

‘Please, give my apologies to Monsieur Pavus.’

‘A pleasure doing business with you.’ Mona gives him a sinister smirk as the merchants runs off, then puts something safely in the small satchel on her side.

‘May I ask what that was about?’

‘It was nothing. Just a small kindness for Dorian. Though, he is probably going to scold me for weeks.’

‘You expect him to be upset that you did him a favour?’ I can’t contain some amusement.

‘I don’t think there is any harm in telling you, but—’ She falters as her eye catches a poster on a pillar nearby.

She pushes past me and rips it down before reading it. Her eyes widen and she turns pale.

‘Fuck! How could I be so stupid? How could I possibly have forgotten it would happen like this?’ She hisses then takes off running.

Without thinking I run after her and as we pass the Herald he kisses Josephine briefly on her cheek and then follows us. My heart grows heavy as I see we approach a gallow and a crowd is already gathering. Mona’s eyes flicker across the crowd as if she is looking for someone. A few paces away I see a familiar presence. Blackwall. I push through the crowd and manage just to catch up with Mona.

She grabs his arm stopping him in his tracks.

‘Thom, don’t do it.’

Her voice is a barely contained whisper. He looks at her with his eyes widened in shock and fear.

‘You know that name…’ He closes his eyes in painful recognition. ‘Then you know why I must do this.’

‘You are no longer, who you were.’

His expression softens as he puts a had on her chin with fatherly affection.

‘We’re lucky there are people in the world like you. You’re a good woman. Don’t stick your neck out for me.’

Her pulls from her grasp and hurries through the crowd. Mona turns to me with a flash of anger in her eyes.

‘Why must you people always be so pig-headed?’
“Are you suggesting I’m as unreasonable as Blackwall?” I quirk an eyebrow.

“You’re worse!” She hisses.

Perhaps I should take offense to that, but there is no true malice in her words, so I let them slide and then look towards the gallows. The Herald manages to catch up with us and looks confused until his eyes catch the man with a noose around his neck.

“Ah, human justice.” I sigh shaking my head.

Mona glares at me and then walks through the crowd and away from the gallows before I can stop her. I’m prepared to walk after her, when I see Blackwall take the stand - and at that moment I know. He was the man who gave the order to slaughter an entire family - including their children. And Mona knew all along.

“Well, shit…” Edward mutters as he sees the guards escort Blackwall from the premisses. “Maker… children… Blackwall ordered his men to kill children?”

“It would appear so.”

“Do you think Mona knew?”

That is a question I cannot answer honestly.

“Do you believe she would knowingly allow a murderer of children into the inner circle of the Inquisition?” My deflection turns inside me like a sickness. Despite what the Dalish may think of me I do not enjoy lying or deceiving, but sometimes it is necessary. I do not do these things because I enjoy them. I do them because I must.

“You’re right… it’s just a lot to take in. What are we going to do? I mean this is… horrible beyond belief, but he has tried to help.”

“Hearing the rest of the story would certainly be of benefit.”

“Agreed. If I go talk to Blackwall will you find Mona? She seemed pretty upset.”

I simply nod as I walk of trying to find her. The rain begins to fall which clears the streets of most of the people. It makes my search easier as I know Mona is probably not avoiding the rain. I find near at the docks nearby looking out on the water. I walk up next to her and place my arms behind my back.

“So –” I begin in a low gentle voice. “-- how are you going to get him pardoned?”

A faint smile brushes her lips, but she does not look at me.

“What makes you so sure I’m going to help him?”

“Because you’re you. Kind and far too forgiving.” I kiss her cheek. “What are our options?”

“Our options?” She turns her head with a raised eyebrow.

“You don’t think I’m going to leave this burden on your shoulders alone?”

She closes her eyes then turns towards me wrapping her arms around my waist and I embrace her. The rain is getting heavier and soaking our clothes, but neither of us are bothered by it. I suppose by now it is no longer a secret that the Inquisitor has an elven apostate lover, though no doubt there are still those who will frown on her showing her affection so obviously. After a few minutes she gives a
heavy sigh.

“If I remember correctly we have two options. One is to use the Inquisition influence to get him pardoned. The other is to use Leliana’s secrets to bribe people or break him out… I’m sure Leliana will jog my memory, when we return to Skyhold.”

“Then, if you wish, I can help you when we return.”

“Thank you… I wanted to you know… To find him and stop it. But I couldn’t remember their names, I didn’t even know exactly when it happened. If only I had paid more attention, then I could have—”

I kiss her softly to interrupt her.

“No, you could not have prevented this.”

“How do you know?” She looks up at me with a doubtful glare.

“Because, you remember so much with such detail you are able to help in even the smallest ways. If you did not intervene then I know that you did not know enough to help. Something like this would have left a deep enough impression for you to remember the details, had you known them.”

She leans her head back and takes a deep breath, blinking as if she means to hold back tears.

“Let’s find the other and return to Skyhold. I want this to be over with.”

“As you wish.” I stroke her cheek with the back of my fingers earning me a small glimpse of a smile.

It takes but a week for Mona and Josephine to get Blackwall released into the custody of the Inquisition. Mona did not want to show signs of corruption, and settled for the option that was less so. At the end of the day, however, we both know that it was corruption. I cannot fault her for wanting to help a man she knows can be redeemed - no matter how despicable I find his actions. But this was the first step towards corruption and exploitation of the Inquisitions power, and I know in my heart well enough to know it’s tearing at her.

I return to our chambers after Mona has pardoned Blackwall - Thom Rainier - but she seems distressed. She paces back and forth on the balcony. With a huff she turns towards me as she hears me approach.

“Hello I’m Inquisitor Aim. I harbour criminals and murderers with no regrets.”

I am quite familiar with her sarcasm and self-deprecation by now, and yet every single time it stabs at my heart. I know she bears no ill will towards Blackwall, but why she is so intend on blaming herself I will never truly comprehend.

“You did what you believed to be right. You need not feel guilty for offering forgiveness and compassion to those you know will repent.”

“Don’t you get it? Nothing I do changes a fucking thing! I’m a failure!”

“You are not a failure.”
She begins to pace back and forth, her fingers running through her hair in a manic motion.


“You never failed them. You are not responsible for their decisions.”

“But I let it happen! I won’t be able to change--” she spins around to look at me as she hesitates. “-- anything.”

She does not speak the name, but I know it is mine that lingers on her lips. I am the one she has devoted all her efforts to help. I know she does not mean to stop me, but I now know for certain she means to save me from myself.

“Vhenan, I am not yours to save. I must help my people. They need me.”

She shakes her head as if defeated leaning her hands on the railing. Her knuckles grow white as her grip tightens.

“So, what you’re going to become a benevolent dictator?” She gives me a doubtful look, and then chuckles. “Worst part is, that when saying it out loud, it doesn’t sound like such a terrible idea.”

She pushes from the railing with a bitter laugh.

“I never wanted worship and I do not wish to rule. All that matters is the restoration of my people.” I speak softly. I know this hurts her, but I cannot betray myself. She turns her head towards the sky with a whimpering sigh.

“I know… One problem is that every form of government is inherently flawed.”

“No organization is above corruption. Even the Inquisition will one day suffer that fate,” I agree feeling my shoulders tighten with regret.

“Yes, I know. But Solas--” She gives me a tender look I have come to know all too well: the look that tells me she is going to say something that might hurt me in some way, but isn’t meant with any malice. “-- you created this world. Thedas looks to the sky thinking their Maker has abandoned them because he stays silent. You might not have created Thedas, but you did shape the world they live in.”

“I’m not a god,” I hiss. I never wanted worship and never wanted to be viewed in such a light. That Mona would make such a comparison is disturbing to me.

“No, you’re a man. A good, if flawed one. But you shaped the reality they know. You might not recognize them as your people, but from a certain perspective these are your children. They pray to a God who won’t answer them.”

Anger starts to simmer in my veins. I cannot have her think of me this way. To her I want to be nothing but Solas. I turn from her. I must leave before I say something we will both regret.

“I’m not listening to this. At your leave Inquisitor!”

“You told me that no true God need prove himself. That anyone who does is either mad or lying.” I stop in my tracks with my back still turned to her. My people forgive me, but the mere sound of her voice is enough to render me paralyzed. She continues to speak in a voice much softer than I deserve;
“But they don’t need a God. They do need a protector. Don’t you understand? You’re not just the protector of the elves, but all of them.”

I turn to look at her, my heart begging that I do not see worship or awe in her eyes. Let there be anger or disappointment. Any emotion to tell me that she still sees me as an equal.

“And what exactly am I to you?” My words come out harsher than I intended.

“You’re the elven mage I love. I will never look at you and see a God or someone above reproach. I look at you and I see Solas. As wonderful and flawed as you are by just being yourself.” And then she smiles. That soft gift of comfort she offers so effortlessly - even to those who deserves it the least.

“You say that, but still you can not fully comprehend, what I am and what I must do.” I release a heavy sigh. How did I allow myself to get to entangled in all of this?

“And what you are is world destroyer? Is that it?” I cannot tell if she is pleading or sneering at me. Maybe both. I hear a faint quiver in my own voice as I reply.

“I truly wish you would stop making those comparisons.”

She steps forward taking my hands in hers.

“I know they frighten you. Don’t you think they scare me? Don’t you think I wish that you were just you instead of a cause? I wish we could just go and get lost in the wilderness. Travel across Thedas an unravel the mysteries together…” She pauses for a moment with tears brimming in her eyes then looks into the distance as she releases my hands. “Create an ever moving home, where we could teach our children about the world, the universe, spirits and be happy."

I can’t help myself as she says it. I see the aravel before my eyes. Our long walks and talks as we explore the corners of Thedas. Sharing each mystery and unraveling the world around us. I look into her eyes and I see our family around a campfire as we look to the stars. My people forgive me, I see it all and I know that we will never have it.

“You know I can not do that, vhenan.”

“I know... that belongs in a world of dreaming.” Her breath trembles and she swallows as if to suppress her emotions. She turns towards me with a pleading look in her eyes. “Solas, there must be a better way.”

“I see no other way to help the elves - or the world.”

“Really, you have no ideas? No, alternatives?”

I rub my face with both my hands. My heart is twisting and turning in fiery agony. My blood screams of hopes and desires that will never be fulfilled, while memories cascade through my mind like lightning. Each one sending a jolt of pain through every nerve.

“Not unless we bring the fade here so I can casually reshape reality, no!”

The look she gives me cuts deeper than any wound I have ever suffered. All hope dwindles from her eyes. I can see her changing before me - a spirit of hope and forgiveness turning into one of despair and rage. She doesn’t say a word as she passes me. She merely grabs her coat and walks down the stairs leaving me on the balcony to see her ride out of those gates below. I notice Atish’an is standing next to me looking down as her master leaves with a pitiful whine.
“Ma solas ena ma din.” I murmur to myself hiding my face in the palms of my hands.

In the fade I tell Wisdom of everything that has happened between Mona and me. Even in the fade I feel the ache like needles against my skin. It is perhaps the first time I have found we have been completely honest with each other and the repercussions are… unbearable to me. My body aches and trembles with want of pulling her near to me as my lips tingle with want to whisper any words that will bring her back to me. I want to heal the rift growing between us, but I fear it has always been there. At first we were so newly in love that I convinced myself we could overcome it. Now I’m becoming increasingly aware it might be our doom.

Wisdom looks pensive as she observes me closely.

“Lethallin, do you really believe there is no part of her that feels as you do?”


“What I meant was; she has devoted her life to studying the culture and history of the elves. She is fascinated by every spirit and the fade - enchanted by all of it. And she loves you more than I believe you understand. Do you think no part of her wishes to see you accomplish happiness?”

“You mean she wants to see me restore my people? Even at the cost of her own. She has revealed as much, but I know she will not allow it… even as she says she won’t prevent it.” I give a frustrated cry. “I do not understand her. If she is not against me, why does this feel like a war?”

Wisdom places a hand on my shoulder.

“In this you are the same, but where you feel a duty to the elves she feels it to all creatures. She is fighting herself as much as you.”

“I can’t bear the thought of fighting her…”

Wisdom releases a soft chuckle.

“Oh lethallin, you won’t. Do you truly believe that if you asked her to help you she would refuse?”

“I’m not certain…” I fall to my knees on the ground. “I cannot ask her to. I can’t bear to see her be corrupted by what I must become.”

It is past midnight and Mona has yet to return. It is not the first time she is on her own, but normally she has Atish’an with her to protect her. This time she is fully alone. I should have confidence in her abilities, but I am always wary when there is no one at her side. As strong as she is, I know she has one fatal flaw: should she end up in a fight, she will hesitate at the kill no matter the circumstances. I treasure her gentle nature, but I fear it will one day result in her death. I pace back and forth in front of the fire having long since given up any hope that anything might distract me. Atish’an is as
anxious as I, and sits vigilantly on the balcony waiting for Mona’s return.

I have not seen Cole, which gives me some hope that perhaps he went with her. I am certain he would be able to feel my worry had he remained at Skyhold. When Atish’an jumps to her feet barking happily I take a deep breath of relief. I lean against the fireplace as I tremble. After a few minutes I hear the door open and Atish’an greets her master. I’m still standing at the fireplace when she comes up the stairs - right where she left me as if my world had gone still until she was once again by my side. Her eyes are red and her body tense, but there is no anger.

“Vhenan, I’m so glad you’re safe.”

She smiles and sniffles at once taking quick steps towards me and throwing her arms around my neck. I hold her close to me taking in her scent as I kiss her cheek and neck.

“I’m so sorry,” she murmurs. “I shouldn’t have reacted so strongly. I just needed some time to think. I was angry at myself and I--”

“Hush, my love. You said no words that were not the truth.” I kiss her brow and hold her face, my thumb running across her cheekbones. She feels cold from the chill outside.

“I know, but they were also true in the beginning. I always knew all of this. I can’t blame you for it. I just wish…” She sighs and then kisses me deeply.

The kiss quickly becomes passionate, and when she pulls from me she starts removing her clothes walking towards the bed. She beckons me with a finger to come closer, and I find myself unwilling to speak. As long as no words are spoken we might pretend everything else is but a nightmare. I can easily fend off any desire demon, but never her. Never my heart. So my clothes joins hers on the floor and my body hers in the bed.

Feeling her warmth is all I need to banish my thoughts. It seems so simple, yet it means everything to me. Her moans and sighs are a hymn that chases away my fears. No words are spoken between us. They are nothing but curses and knives digging into our spirits. Nearing the end she pulls me to her and wraps her arms tightly around me as the last of her pleasure rushes through her. She clings to me and burrows her face in my neck. It has become my favourite part of making love to her. The part where I feel how close to me she wants to be - how close we have become.

“I love you,” I whisper against her ear.

She pulls back and looks at me.

“Ar lath ma,” she smiles at me.

I wonder if it sends a tremble down her spine, when I tell her in her language as it does when she declares her love for me in mine. Something pained crosses her face as she looks at me, but before I can ask what’s bothering her she kisses me and embraces me tightly burrowing her face in my shoulder.

“How can I help you?” I ask softly.

“Just love me and hold me for awhile.”

“For as long as you wish.”

I tighten my hold on her. I dare not ask about things she doesn’t share freely. It terrifies me, what it means. She said she doesn’t know of my death, but there are fates that can be so much worse. She is
the person who has seen what lies beneath my mask and I the same for her. Yet, there is still something lingering that we don’t share. We can’t. So much is so painful and I can’t reveal all about my plans, in case there are things she doesn’t know. I will not have her carry my burden as well as her own. But she protected Wisdom and she protected me. And I don’t doubt that she will always try to do so. This is the reason why I do not ask and I do not reveal.

Eventually, she falls asleep in my arms, her head tucked underneath my chin. My nose is buried in her hair as my arms hold her a little tighter.

“I wish I could promise you eternity.” I begin to whisper. “That I could give you the happiness you deserve. I wish I could be selfish, as much as I wish I had never been so to begin with. I can’t regret falling in love with you, but I can’t devote myself to my love for you either. The only thing I can promise is that my heart belongs only to you. It will always belong to you and I will never forget you.”

My heart feels like such an empty gift. Like the promise of something that can never truly be. An illusion and false hope. But it is real. And the day she dies I will find the wisp left behind of her spirit. I will nurture, protect and love it. It will never truly be her, and it will not remember me, but it will be all I have of her.

Chapter End Notes

Argh! Mona and Solas’ first real fight. I hope you liked it... well, sort of.

Thank you so much for all your support! It means so much to me and I truly love all your comments!

Thanks to EmberLeo and ninaninabobina for Beta reading :) You are both so wonderful! Thank you!
Emprise du Lion has been nothing short of a nightmare. Red Lyrium is everywhere, growing out of the villagers sold by their own mayor. I find myself relieved that the Herald did not bring Varric for this mission. It hums in the air with a sensation lingering against your skin. Even this close proximity to it you could become a ghoulish creature. I remember when Andruil first brought back the blight, how the Titan punished her. Her neverending greed had resulted in the first remnants of the blight that still plagues Thedas centuries later. And in turn Mythal killed the Titan, who was partly responsible for it all.

The Evanuris. What horror they and I brought to the world is beyond imagining. We have left nothing but misery in our wake. Endless war and death. And to think it was once all so beautiful and pure. I regret my actions more deeply than I can convey, but I know that it was necessary. And now I must save it and restore the world of my people. I owe them that at the very least.

As we return to the village, we see more Inquisition soldiers than we arrived with a few days earlier.

“I guess they caught the Mayor.” The Herald grins looking down at the soldiers, who have the woman in shackles.

“How did the boss knew we needed to track her down?” Bull scratches his neck. He is far too observant for his own good.

“From the looks of it, she has sent supplies as well. She must have acted as soon as she got the Herald’s report on the situation in the area. The Inquisitor is nothing if not efficient,” I say with calm confidence. With a little luck it will be enough to dissuade Iron Bull. He must have noticed Mona’s uncanny ability to act quickly and decisively. Thankfully, he seems less suspicious of her since he became Tal Vashoth.

“She is a wonder our Inquisitor. Almost magical in a way.” Dorian smirks at me. “Even Solas here has trouble keeping his magical energy in check in her presence.”

“And here I thought it was just good old fashion lust.” The Herald grins.

I scowl at the Herald before releasing a groan. “Do you mind?”

“Not at all,” Bull chimes in. “But from the doe-eyed look you always give her it's surprising you can stay focused in a fight. Maybe it's good she doesn’t come with us more often.”

“Aaah, yes. I imagine her form could be quite distracting - if you are inclined towards such matters.” Dorian chuckles.

Rather than giving into their prodding I walk ahead and a smile forms on my lips as I see Atish’an sitting on the ground guarding the mayor. Baring her teeth at the woman’s slightest movements. I walk over to her and her tails starts wagging, but her eyes do not waver. I stroke her head fondly as she grumbles in delight. I look to one of the soldiers.
“Where is the Inquisitor?”

“Up the hill.”

I nod and thank the man as I walk towards it. I can see the Herald grinning at me, but I pay him no mind. Up the hill I see Mona standing near a quarry looking at the red lyrium. Her arms are crossed and her black hood is pulled up around her auburn hair. I know her well enough to know what expression she wearing even from a few feet behind her.

“You’re not responsible for this,” I say with a gentle voice as I approach her.

Mona turns to look at me. Her eyes are heavy with grief, but even so she manages a small smile. I speak softly as I walk closer without giving her the opportunity to object.

“I know what you’re thinking, but you cannot hold yourself accountable for what happened here. You did everything you could to prevent it. And other people needed help as well. You could not stretch the resources of the Inquisition more than you have. It would have been dangerous to do so.”

She gives me a rueful smile.

“You know me so well now, I don’t even need to tell you what I’m thinking?”

“When it comes to your heart, I believe I know you well enough to make that claim, yes.”

She walks towards me with a smile and embraces me. I hold her tight and rest my cheek op the top of her head.

She gives sigh before she murmurs; “I’ve missed you.”

Funny how two weeks can feel like eternity when every moment is precious.

“And I you. Why are you here?”

I pull away to look at her expression. She turns from me and looks back towards the quarry.

“We needed to help the people here. I have brought as many supplies as I could. I had to see it for myself.”

I release a sigh and place my hands on her shoulders.

“Why do you torture yourself?”

“Because, I will never be brought to justice for this or any of my other mistakes and crimes. Their lives are in my hands, and I make so many decisions from a desk. I need to feel this pain, so I know I’m still human... that I still have a conscience.”

“My heart…” the words ache as I speak them and I turn her towards me. “How could you ever doubt yourself like this? You have one of the kindest spirits I have ever known.”

Mona smiles and shakes her head, but as she is about to respond, I hear the Herald yelling. I turn to see him walking towards us with hasty steps with Dorian right behind him. The Herald looks furious, while Dorian looks more concerned than I think I have ever seen him.

“What in the name of the Maker do you think you’re doing here?” The Herald scolds Mona.

“Excuse me?” Mona’s eyes harden as she stares him down.
“Get away from this! Now!” The Herald cries out pointing at the red lyrium some meters away.

“Herald, what has gotten into you?” I ask taking a step forward.

He starts to hammer a finger into my chest, which would make me absolutely livid had I not seen profound despair in his eyes.

“It’s your duty to keep her safe! You should keep her as far away from this as possible!”

Dorian puts a hand on his shoulder and gently pulls him back.

“What the Herald means, Inquisitor, is that it would probably be wise for you to keep a significant distance between you and the red lyrium.”

Mona looks at them both with her arms crossed.

“So, who of you gentlemen is going to give me an explanation in a civil manner?” She stares at the Herald like a parent would an hysterical child. When he remains unchanged she turns to Dorian.

“Dorian?”

“I’ll explain, just please, get as far away from here as possible.”

Mona looks at the three of us for a moment before nodding and following Dorian away from the quarry. As they head back towards the village I stay to appease the Herald. Edward releases a bolt of energy into a nearby tree trunk, making it splinter. His breathing is ragged and his eyes red as if on the verge of crying as he sinks to the ground and sits in the snow.

“This is unlike you. Care to clarify your behaviour?” I narrow my eyes at him.

He looks at me and opens his mouth several times without speaking before releasing a deep sigh.

“I need to tell you something. I want you to know that you can trust me, but I didn’t tell you this because I didn’t want to hurt you and I didn’t think it would matter.”

“I see.”

“Remember back at Haven, after I went to Redcliff, I asked what those elven words meant? ‘Ir al venas..’?”

The memory flashes through my mind. The emotions it invoked then are so far removed from the ones I feel now. I can’t hide a small smile as he makes an earnest attempt to not butcher my language.

“‘Ir abelas, ma vhenan. ’ Yes. You said I said them when you found the Inquisitor’s body.”

“You said they meant ‘I’m sorry’... is that true?”

“They mean ‘I’m sorry, my heart’. It’s an endearment for a loved one. I’m sure you understand why I did not reveal it back then.”

“I do… hopefully you will understand why I didn’t tell you this earlier.”

I crouch down in front of him.

“What is it?”
"When we found Mona… parts of her had started to turn into red lyrium."

"As with the others I imagine."

"No, Solas… this was worse. Far worse." He swallows and closes his eyes. "I'll spare you the details, but… she was with child."

I put my hand to the ground to steady myself. My chest feels hollow as every bit of air escapes my lungs and my vision blurs. I try steady my breathing, but I cannot speak.

"I’m not sure of course, but I’m pretty sure you were the father. The look on your face, Solas… what you did to Alexius, when we found him… I have never seen anyone so lost or so terrifying. It was a good thing Mona was the one to judge Alexius, because I might just have shredded him to pieces after seeing that."

For once I’m finding it difficult to find the words, but the Herald seems aware of my predicament and continues to speak.

"I know I overreacted, but I don’t want her anywhere near that stuff. I have no right to interfere, but you’re my closest friend. There is nothing I wouldn’t do to protect the woman you love."

I give a small smile and put my hand on his shoulder.

"I’m fortunate to have such a loyal friend, but calm yourself. That future will not come to pass. You already stopped that from happening, and for the rest I’m confident that you will defeat Corypheus, when we finally find him."

He looks at me with a determination in his eyes I have never seen before.

"I swear, I will make that blighted bastard pay."

I help him to his feet and we check the area to make sure we haven’t missed any prisoners.

It’s dark when we arrive back at the village and I can see the lanterns lighting up a few of the tents. I smile as I see Atish’an’s head sticking out from one of the tents - waiting for me. She gives a pleased rumble as I approach, but remains as she is. As I enter the tent, Mona is sitting on her bedroll with a book in her hands. She gives me a small smile, but doesn’t put the book down.

"I had an interesting conversation with Dorian… Did Edward tell you?"

"He did."

We just sit quietly for a moment.

"How are you feeling?" I place a hand on hers to offer some comfort.

"I don’t know… I’m alright… I think… It’s not like it truly happened or that I remember it, but…” She releases a sigh and rubs her face, leaving the book in her lap. "It’s… disturbing."

I can see her tremble as she clutches her stomach unconsciously. My throat goes dry as I watch her carefully.

"You’re not…?"

She looks at me with a faintly amused smile.
“No.”

“Aah…” I shift uncomfortably.

“Did you… Never mind. That question is dangerous.” She gives me a sideways glance and a smirk.

I chuckle; “Yes.”

The silence envelops us for awhile. Usually the silence between us is never uncomfortable, but this is beginning to make me feel… uneasy. Mona eventually reaches for my hand and looks at me with a tender gaze.

“Solas, are you okay?”

“I believe so. I was… troubled by what the Herald described. For you and our ch-…” I swallow as I look at her. “There is little I would not do in order to protect you.”

“I know….” She offers me a small smile before scooching closer to me, resting her head on my shoulder. “I feel sorry for him - the other you. I can’t imagine how devastating it must have been.”

“Well, thankfully that future did not come to pass.”

She chuckles sadly rubbing her face as she pulls from me.

“Guess we’re not the only ones keeping secrets. I’m not sure whether to be disappointed or relieved. Is it a good thing, when the fact that people have secrets like this makes me feel… I don’t know… normal?”

A huff of air escapes me in mild amusement.

“I honestly cannot answer that.”

“Our lives are a bloody mess.”

“I fear you are right.”

A rueful smile forms on her lips as she lays back down and puts the book to one side. She looks up at me with a smile as she lifts the blankets. I take off my coat and douse the flame in the lantern before joining her underneath the covers.

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I awake with a sudden heaviness in my chest. I’m skilled enough in the fade that I do not suffer nightmares, but I sense a presence that has me on edge. Mona is curled up against me with her face close to my chest. I carefully untangle myself from her and reach for my coat. Atish’an sits up and looks at me then turns her head listening. Whatever it is, she senses it, too.

As I walk outside my four legged friend follows me. We walk into the night until I come face to face with an ancient figure I hadn’t thought to see again. Imshael looks at me with a wicked grin as if amused by the incredulous look I give him. His human form is quite different from his elven one; his punishment for transforming back into a spirit - he and the rest of the Forbidden Ones can never be elven again. Atish’an steps in front of me and growls.
“My, Fen’Harel, your friend is very violent.”

“Simply cautious and wise. Relax, my friend. It’s alright.”

Atish’an grumbles but retreats to my side. Imshael huffs with amusement looking at the dog then turns his gaze to me.

“Did you enjoy your gift from the stars?” The demon cackles softly. “I mean, who could blame you. She is everything you cherish. A desire for knowledge, no desire for power, but has the wisdom to use it when the opportunity arises, and an indomitable spirit.”

“What do you want?”

“So much pride… I have a story for you. Do you know the tale of the wolf and the scorpion?”

“Not that I recall.”

He smirks as he begins to walk around me with dramatic gestures as he talks. My canine friend growls as her eyes stalk his every movement.

“There was a scorpion who wished to cross a river, but it was too small and could not swim. A wolf walked past the scorpion and the scorpion asked if the wolf would carry it across the river.”

He looks at me as if to make sure that I took notice of the wolf. As if such an obvious comment would slip by me.

“But the wolf was wise and cautious. ‘No’ said the wolf ‘if I do you will sting me.’ But the scorpion was a creature of reason and persuasion. ‘If I do that, then we will both drown,’ it reasoned.”

I cross my arms across my chest as Imshael keeps walking in circles around me - like a predator trying to corner prey. He has grown even more deluded than I recall if he believes it will work.

“The clever wolf considered the scorpion’s words carefully, and agreed that it would indeed be foolish to do such a thing. So, the wolf agreed to carry the scorpion on its back. When they were almost at the other side the scorpion stung the wolf. Paralyzed the wolf asked ‘Why did you do that? Now we will both die!’. Now, clever wolf, tell me, what did the scorpion answer?”

“I couldn’t help it. It is my nature.” I look at Imshael carefully. The Forbidden Ones do not use their words fruitlessly. As much as I might wish to ignore him and walk away, if I am to use any advantage this offers, then I will need to listen.

“What is it you wish?”

“Nothing, it was a gift. A secret of Anaris, courtesy of me. But you should return to camp. Your heart might awaken at any moment and wonder where you are.”

“Let me repay you with a piece of advice. Get away from here while you can. The Herald will not let you leave here alive.”

Atish’an growls at the demon as if to prove my point, then follows me as I walk back towards the camp.

I return to the tent, where I find Mona rise and looks at me for a moment.

“Ir abelas. I didn’t mean to disturb you.” I kiss her cheek softly wrapping my arm around her waist as I lay down.
“I don’t mind. It was getting cold without you. And I keep thinking about the people, the templars, and the red lyrium.”

We lay down and for a few minutes all is quiet. But Imshaël’s words torture me.

“Vhenan, are you asleep?” I whisper.

“Not yet. What’s bothering you?”

“Nothing, I just… well, I have an odd question if you don’t mind.”

A quiet, amused huff escapes her.

“No, what is it?”

“Does a scorpion carry any significant meaning for you?”

At that she turns and looks at me. Even in the dark, I can make out her frown.

“You’re right, that is an odd question. Why do you ask?”

“I…” I falter. I cannot tell her. I do not wish to frighten her.

“Oh, it’s one of those questions. It’s fine, I don’t need to know.” She smiles and strokes my cheek.

“Well, there is this belief on my world that the stars alignment affect your personality. I was born under the constellation known as the scorpion.”

My heart stills and I swallow, burrowing my face in her neck so she cannot see my expression.

“I haven’t thought of that in a long time. My mom used to believe it…”

“And you?”

“Rationally? Not at all. But sometimes it seemed pretty accurate, not enough to make me believe, just enough to - doubt. If that makes any sense.”

I swallow and try to keep myself under control. I cannot let her know this. I cannot let Imshaël’s words affect me.

“Like what?”

“Well, in addition to Scorpio, my ascendant was Libra. My mother used to tell me it meant that I enjoyed bringing things into balance so much, I would create chaos in order to have something to bring into balance.” She chuckles, but I can’t join her. “Love, you’re trembling.”

“It’s cold…” not a lie, but not the entire truth.

She turns and caresses my face.

“Whatever happened… I’m sorry. You do know you can talk to me, right? Even if you have to be non-specific.”

“I will try… Do you believe in prophecies? I mean, considering everything you have been through?”

“Hmm… I believe in causality. I think all our actions, words, and even thoughts to some extent are part of shaping the future. Some things we can change, but other things we can’t, because the actions
that caused them happened long ago. Like with Corypheus. He had already been set loose when I got here. He would have done something like this no matter what. He might not have gotten your orb and done all this, but it would only have been a matter of time before something happened.”

“Then what do you think would have happened if you had manage to get to me in time?”

“I hope I could have convinced you to find another way to unlock the orb and then kick his darkspawn ass.” She smiles and I actually manage one as well. “Solas, remember what you told the fear demon? Banal nadas. I don’t think anyone can force a fate upon you other than yourself, love.”

“I hope you’re right.” I kiss her brow and she cuddles against my chest.

Chapter End Notes

Hi everyone. I'm so sorry for this update taking so long. Real life has been insanely busy.

Thank you so much for all your comments and please, if you have any requests let me know.
Thanks to EmberLeo and ninaninabobina for Beta reading
Imshael did not heed my warning. Instead he tried to bribe the Herald and is now little more than a specimen in a jar which Edward decided to bring back to Mona and Minaeve for study. Mona gave a rueful smile when she heard of the spirit’s fate and muttered “a shame” in a voice so low only I could hear. If only she knew the harm the demon tried to do her. I know he intended to manipulate me, but why that is concerns me more. Despite our many secrets I trust my heart. So, why would such a creature care enough to force a wedge between us? Was it seeking an ally, serving a master or merely attempting this for its own amusement? I am at a loss, but I can’t ignore it.

I have been so close to telling Mona everything that happened, but I have decided it is wisest not to. Not because I do not trust her, but because I do not want her to worry. She carries so many burdens with grace, but everyone has their limits - and I fear she is slowly approaching hers. More importantly I do not wish to put her in any further danger. If someone is toying with me, then I must not play into their hand. I know this was a test to see how deep my affections for her run, my major concern is that I have no idea if I passed or failed. Did I prove how strong my love for her is? And if I did, was that a desired outcome for her and I, or for the one pulling the strings?

Back at Skyhold I try not to dwell on it - at least in my moments with Mona. Each with our own book in the bed, her head is resting in my lap as my back rests against the headboard. We have been quiet for more than an hour, yet it feels comforting and intimate. I catch her looking up at me and I confess I’m uncertain for how long she has been watching.

“What is it, vhenan?"

“Solas, can I ask you something?”

“Always.” I smile and put the book aside.

“Why is it that you’re so intent on not looking for alternatives for taking down the veil?”

There is no contempt or anger in her voice, simply a genuine curiosity. I sigh as I let my fingers run through her soft wavy locks.

“It’s not that I do not wish for an alternative, it’s that there might not be time. Through the ages there have been so many battles that have torn and stretched the veil to its limits. Even though we closed the breach it will only be a matter of time before a major rift is created - and it will be as chaotic as it is now. This will happen with or without Corypheus.”

“I was afraid of that…” A sad sigh escapes her as she reaches for my hand and kisses it. “You said that tearing down the veil will most like mean an end to this world. Did you mean a cataclysm or civilization collapsing?”

It stirs at my heart to see with what ease the question leaves her lips. As if she has resigned herself to that fate. I know it must come to this, but it still disturbs me. Not so long ago we fought because of this. Now that she is calm, I would give almost anything for her to scream at me in defiance.
“It might seem like a cataclysm,” I explain. “The spirits will be confused at first - less so than they are now as their rules of reality will still apply, but people’s reaction to it? That is what will create destruction I’m afraid. Many will give into the temptation of a spirit far too easily, while most people will attack on sight - as they do with most things they don’t understand.”

“So society will selfimplode,” she deduces - quite casually I note with some sorrow.

“That seems most likely. Tearing down the veil for good will not mean the damnation of every man, woman, and child, but the world as they know it will be gone forever. Most people's religious beliefs will be challenged or shattered. It will likely take them decades or centuries to recover from it - and to learn how to co-exist with the spirits.”

“They will need to rebuild the world from scratch... Is there a way to do it gradually? Give them time to adapt slowly over time.”

“Possibly… but it requires my orb. Only with the orb will I be powerful enough to hold back the Evanuris for the time it takes for the veil to degrade. We cannot risk letting any of them loose into this world. The carnage they will create is unimaginable.”

Mona’s complexion turns pale. She sits up and wraps her arms around her knees for the first time not meeting my gaze as she speaks.

“Isn’t there a way to protect the people of this world? No way at all?”

“Vhenan, even I can only do so much.” I reach for her shoulder. “You have shown me the value of this world and of its people, but I must remain focused on helping the elves. I have all but destroyed them. I owe it to them to restore them.”

“One day you will have to realize that your people is all of us - not just the elves.” She sighs and takes my hand. “But I understand. Everyone has limits to what they can accomplish... Could any of this be accomplished without the orb?”

“If we do not manage to recover the orb, then the path I would have to take--” my breath catches in my throat and my chest tightens. “No, I cannot think of it.”

She pulls me into her embrace and kisses my jaw and neck as I hide my face in the crook of her neck.

“I’m sorry,” she murmurs. “I’m so so sorry.”

“Why are you apologizing?”

Rather than answer she gives me a tender kiss and gets out of bed to put on her boots.

“It’s late. Come back to bed.” I reach for her wrist.

“I will - later. I just can’t sleep right now. I’ll go do some work.” She kneels on the bed and gives me another kiss. “I’ll be back soon.”

So many words linger on the tip of my tongue as she walks down the stairs, but none of them escape me. So long I have justified this secrecy between us, but one underlying fact remains - I don’t want this secrecy to be there. With a sigh I extinguish the flames and lay down to sleep not bothering to undress. I feel the bed shift and a heavy canine head is resting on my thigh.

Even as I manage to fall asleep I awake not long after - restless. However calm she seemed earlier
something about the look in her eyes bothers me. I turn and see she is still not beside me. The irony is
that I have been alone for far far longer than I have shared her bed - yet her presence beside me has
become familiar. Apparently so familiar that I sense the absence of her presence even from beyond
the fade. With a heavy sigh I get out of bed and head down towards undercroft. Skyhold is quiet and
still with the exception of an occasional guard, and as I walk down to the forge Mona is standing
there alone. Well, almost. A curious wisp hovers around her, and it seems familiar somehow. Could
it be the same as I saw in Frostback Basin? I push aside the thoughts. There are more important
matters than a stray wisp. She is deep in thought as I approach tinkering with the contraption she
refers to as ‘Reality’. She jumps when I place my hands on her hips then heaves for breath as she
scowls at me.

“Ir abelas ,” I murmur against her temple. “I did not mean to startle you.”

She hums in reply and presses her temple harder against my lips - closing her eyes and taking
comfort from my presence. I fear one day she will pull from me - repulsed by me and what I must
become.

“Any progress?” I ask still holding her tight.

“Some…” she reaches forward and activates it. An orb of light appears above the device. “It’s still
only a projection. I haven’t managed to complete the interface yet so I can program-- I mean give it
instructions and purpose.”

“I’m certain you will find a way.”

“I’m glad you’re confident in me… Solas?”

“Mmm?”

“Do you think we will ever reach a point, where you will understand all this-” she gestures at the her
work in front of her. “- and I will be able to follow your thoughts and knowledge about the fade? I
mean really understand, not just kind of grasp the meaning of it.”

I close my eyes for a moment.

“I hope so, ma vhenan .”

As I wake up the following morning I’m not surprised to find the bed empty. Mona is sitting at her
desk and the early morning light is filling the room. She couldn’t have slept more than a few hours.

“One day I will wake before you.” I chuckle as I sit up in bed.

She looks at me with a grin.

“I think you underestimate just how much of a workaholic I am.”

“I don’t believe that’s a word, vhenan .”

“Not in Thedas maybe, but just look at me. I’m the definition of it.”
“I see. So, you actually desire to be overworked, exhausted, irritable, and unable to get a full night’s rest?” I get out of bed and walk towards her desk.

“Irritable?” She lifts an eyebrow and stares at me.

“The fact that this is the term your mind lingers at should concern you more. It means you are aware of the others.”

“Hmm…” she grumbles and looks down into her notes again.

I walk to her side and let my hand travel down her back.

“Don’t stop,” she sighs and leans into my touch.

I smile and begin to massage her lightly.

“I can make you a remedy of herbs to make you sleep more soundly,” I offer.

“You’re sweet when you worry.”

“Thank you, but that is not much of an answer.” I reach for her chin and gently make her look up at me. She nods in agreement and I kiss her brow in response. I will make sure she takes the herbs tonight at least.

She reaches for a letter and hands it to me.

“I have received word from Orzammar. I’m taking Cole, Iron Bull and Dorian with me into the Deep Roads to deal with the Titan.”

She swallows as she rubs her hands together nervously. I remember our last trip to the Deep Roads, and I know her fears. I rest a hand on her shoulder.

“Is this not a task better left to the Herald?”

“There are no rifts down there, and I expect we will get word about Corypheus moving through the Arbour Wilds any day now. They will need the Herald - and your expertise.”

Still kneading her hands I rest against the desk and take her hands in mine. She looks up at me and I see fear in her eyes.

“Vhenan, why are you insisting on being the one to do this?”

She clears her throat as if she is struggling to speak.

“It’s remarkably close to where Sandal and Bodahn found me in the Deep Roads. This might be my only chance to learn the truth.”

The air rushes from my lungs. I understand the significance of it and why she feels compelled to go herself. And yet the fear of losing her hums in my chest as red lyrium would. But if she could get back to her son she would be safe - from Corypheus, from her enemies… from me.

“And if you find a way to return to your world?”

She shakes her head and pulls her hands from mine, rubbing her face.

“I… I can’t answer that because I simply don’t know. I want to get back to Sam, but that would
mean abandoning Thedas…” Her expression softens. “Leaving you. I want to hold him and see how his life will unfold. I love him more than anyone else, but I know people depend on me. I need to know what happened to him, but I can’t think about the possibility of getting back… not when I don’t know for certain… I’m rambling.”

“I’m coming with you,” I insist as I pull her from the chair and into my embrace.

“Solas, Edward will need you… If they find Corypheus before we return--”

“Will the Herald be able to complete the task without my presence?”

“Yes, but you will regret not being there.” The look she gives me is almost mournful.

“I might, but if you return to your world and I will not have had the opportunity to say goodbye… I believe I will regret that even more.”

With a small smile she embraces me and rests her cheek against my chest. I look around the room and realise that tonight might be the last time I share these quarters with her. By her own admission the Inquisition will succeed without her, my plans will still be set into motion, life in Thedas will continue without her - and I believe we will all be poorer for it.

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We’re getting closer to the destination of the entrance to the Deep Roads we need to explore. Unsurprisingly, Dorian, Cole, and Iron Bull agreed to join her without question - even as she gave them every opportunity to decline. We all know how dangerous the tunnels and chasms are. It might have been wiser to have brought Blackwall, even if he is not in fact a Warden, and Varric, but I know that Mona choose this group of people for a reason.

Setting up camp in northern Ferelden, Mona is sitting some distance from the camp on a log looking out on the sea. Bull is cooking something malodorous that I can't quite define, but it already has my stomach turning in agony. All the while he is talking to Cole about some of the female entertainment back at Skyhold. I would find it amusing if not for Mona’s fear and sorrow. I feel Dorian’s presence as he walks up next to me.

“Is she alright?”

“The inquisitor is resourceful. She will deal with this threat like any other.”

“I do not doubt her ability. I’m concerned about her well-being.” His voice is stern and even as I do not face him I know the look he gives me.

“I honestly don’t know, Dorian.” I concede with a sigh. “For all my journeys and mysteries I have uncovered, she remains a guarded one.”

“I know what you mean. She does so much for everyone, I wish I could return the favour.” He looks down in his hand where he fondles his birthright. “But she neither requires or wants help from everyone. You two really are very much alike. Though, she does have a greater talent for diplomacy than you.”

I simply scowl at him and he chuckles. Then a frown appears.
“Well, if you’re not going to cheer her up, then I am.” He takes a step, but I put a hand on his arm.

“I’ll go to her.”

“Good, then I will go back to the fire and try to make sure Bull doesn’t poison us.”

I walk over and sit down next to her.

“Would you care for some company?”

“If it’s yours, always.” She smiles and I wrap my arm around her shoulders.

We sit quietly for a while and look to the stars. Imshael’s words linger in the back of my mind, but I will not allow myself to dwell on them or the feelings they invoke. I feel her tremble slightly, but whether it is the cold wind or the prospect of the descent in the Deep Roads tomorrow, I’m uncertain. I’m concerned about what we might find, and find myself wishing Varric was here to distract us all with some far fetched story.

“Why did you not bring Varric?” I ask still looking up at the night sky.

“Varric has had so many bad experiences with the Deep Roads already and we’re not sure what we will find. More importantly, I don’t want him to know the truth about me.”

“Why not him, when you are willing to risk Dorian and Iron Bull discovering it?”

She sighs and leans her head against my shoulder.

“Because Varric wants normal. Despite all the shit he has been through the years he still longs for normality. Things he can touch and resolve. What I am and what has happened to me is probably anything but normal.”

“And you think Dorian and Iron Bull can handle it better?” I attempt not to let my amusement show.

“Yes… If they find out Dorian will be curious. Iron Bull will find it weird, but he has no religion or belief that will be threatened by it. I didn’t bring any of the others because I don’t want to make their world seem even more fragile than it already is.”

I can’t help but smile. Even in this she thinks only of others. I pull her a little tighter to me.

“I want you to know; whatever happens down there I will be here for you. And if you find a way to return, I want you to live and be happy. Try to look back with fondness and not regret, knowing that, while you might not have accomplished everything you hoped for, you did make a difference.”

She pulls back with a worried expression.

“Solas--”

“No, let me finish. I would not trade knowing you for anything. Whatever comes I will treasure this.” I stroke her cheek and her eyes filled with water she does not allow to fall.

“You sound like you want me to leave.” She gives a wry smile not allowing any pain or doubt into her words.

“Part of me does. The part that wishes for nothing but your happiness and safety.”

“And the other part?”
“You already know the answer,” I murmur resting my brow against hers. Wordless things, I can not confess, she understands with such ease. “Ar lath ma, vhenan.”

“Ar lath ma,” she whispers back.

We sit in silence and I enjoy feeling her so close to me. I try not to dwell on the fact that every moment I have with her is more fleeting than ever before. In a few days I could be on my own again. I already feel my heart withdrawing and a hollowness embrace my chest again - a defense that keeps the agony of the impending loss of her at bay. But as I’m hit by the scent of vanilla and spice my heart throbs painfully. I need to remind myself that this is for the best. My mind thinks this wise. My heart declares that I’m an imbecile. I take a deep breath and rub her shoulder.

“What do you remember of how you got here?” I ask. I have a general idea, but we never discussed the specifics.

She takes a deep breath and holds my other hand between hers tighter.

“You do not have to answer if it’s too difficult,” I murmur not wanting to pressure her any further.

“We don’t know what is going to happen. You deserve to know.” She takes another breath as if seeking for courage. “The last thing I remember from my life before was driving in my car - ehm… imagine a carriage that doesn’t need horses - then waking up in the dark…”

Mona POV - 10 years earlier

My right foot kicks forward in a panicked movement as I hit the breaks - only they aren’t there. Where I was sitting in my car a moment ago, I’m now surrounded by darkness. I’m on my back against something hard and cold. And I’m naked… What the hell did I miss? I reach out in the dark and I feel stone walls all around me. I’m trapped in something like a coffin. My first instinct is to scream, but I barely manage to hold it back. One; I’m not sure I want whoever put me in this thing to hear me. Two; I imagine the echo inside this thing would hurt my ears. I catch myself starting to hyperventilate, but I don’t know how much air is in here. I try to take deep steady breaths, but it only seems to make it worse. What the fuck happened to me?! I’m shivering and I’m not even sure if it’s from fear or from the cold. I press on the stone above me and I’m relieved to see it give away. I stop in sudden fear that dirt should fall down into the coffin I’m in.

“Fuck it!” I hiss and push at the lid.

To my relief it moves. It’s heavy but it moves with relatively little resistance, and I manage to get it moved enough so that I can crawl out. It’s till dark, but there are both a soft blue and yellow glow coming through cracks. Otherwise the room is pitch black and I can’t make out much of anything. I walk around the room and find a wall. It feels as if something has been carved into it, but I can’t discern what it is. Pictures? Language? This must be a nightmare… but it’s a very vivid one. Feeling my way through the dark my foot steps on something sharp and I bite into my own fist to keep myself from screaming. I reach down and pull it out of my foot. It feels like glass. Wonderful… just what I needed when walking around in the dark.
I stumble through the room to get to the cracks and listen carefully. If the light is on then there is a chance whoever trapped me in here is still there. I try to listen intently, but my breathing is too loud, so I hold my breath. This only causes me to hear the blood rushing through me and I’m unable to focus. I heave for breath as I become lightheaded. I think of Sam… oh no… I was on my way to pick him up at daycare. I hope he is not upset and that his father is picking him up, when I’m not there.

“Great… another thing the bastard can hold against me.” I hiss under my breath. We have been fighting so much lately, and I worry how it is affecting Sam.

But I need to get back to Sam. I need to kiss his soft little cheeks and hold him close to me. Assure him that I’m alright and that I love him. But that means getting out of whatever mess I’m stuck in right now. Adrenaline must be pumping through me like mad, because I hardly feel any fear and the pain in my foot seems to have dulled. I carefully walk back to pick up a large piece of glass as my eyes slowly begins to adjust to the dark. If there is some psycho out there I should be able to kill him with this - if I get the chance. So much for being a pacifist, I suppose. I feel around the cracks, hoping this is a bloody door, so I can escape this nightmare. Unable to find a handle and slam a fist against the stone and it moves. I start pushing and slowly it begins to open.

My mouth falls open as I look out into the next room. It looks like a giant cave. The yellow glow comes from lava far below, while the blue comes from… is that… lyrium? Alright, this is definitely some sick dream. I don’t know if I should be relieved or terrified. This doesn’t feel like a dream. I look into the room and with the faint light now entering I see a giant shattered mirror… it looks almost like an eluvian.

But if this is the Deep Roads… I’m absolutely royally FUCKED! How do I even get to the surface? Do I just pick the road that seems to go upwards? How do I know it’s not broken or a dead end? And if I run into Darkspawn…

“Shit… I need to get it together… one step at a time… Please, let me not run out of adrenalin before I’m out of here. If I panic I die.”

Okay, so keep walking up seems like the most logical solution and it’s the only rational idea I have at the moment. If anything can be called rational at this point. Thankfully, it seems like this part of the Deep Roads weren’t always abandoned and I find the remains of some long dead dwarves. There is no way their armour will fit me, but the threadbare clothing might. I shudder as I see the armour. Black with a white symbol. These belonged to the Legion of the Dead. If these badasses died down here, what hope do I have? I can’t think of that now.

I strip the bodies of the clothing and I manage to find a pair of boots that sort of fit. I rip a shirt to pieces and try to clean my foot with my own spit and some alcohol one of the dwarves had on him, before I wrap it with the ripped clothing. If there is taint on any of this I’m even more screwed. I hiss in pain as I do it and then look at the dead dwarf. How can I take the fact that I’m sitting around corpses so casually? If it’s adrenaline now I’m going to have one hell of a meltdown if I get out of here.

“Focus!” I hiss at myself as I get up and pat the dwarf skeleton on his head. “Thank you, Oghren the second.” I take a sip of the alcohol and cringe. “You had bad taste though.”

Putting the bottle aside - getting drunk down here would be a bad idea - I grab a belt and two daggers - not that I know what to do with them should I meet any Darkspawn… or Sha Brytol… I’m kind of hoping for the latter. At least it will be a quick death.

I walk for hours without encountering anything. Thankfully, the Deep Roads are large enough that
even Darkspawn are having trouble patrolling it all. My stomach rumbles and I sigh.

“Oh shut up. There is nothing edible down here and I have enough fat for you to munch on.” A
amused chuckle escapes me. “Hell of a way to go on a diet.”

I hear movement further down the tunnel and I run for a place to hide. I wonder if darkspawn have a
good sense of smell. Desperately, I smear myself in the dust and grime on the floor. I hope it will
hide my scent from them. I hear the noises and gurgling sounds. I know without looking that it’s
darkspawn. I don’t move, I don’t breathe, and now I’m terrified. Silent tears stream down my cheeks,
as my heart thunders in my chest as I beg it in my mind to be quiet. What if they can hear it?
Eventually, the movement and sounds stops, but I can’t get up. I’m lightheaded, exhausted, in pain,
and frightened. In the dark, hellish nightmare I pass out.

I don’t know how much time passes, but I’m so exhausted I don’t even move as a presence closes in
on me. Let the darkspawn have me for all I care. Let them kill me. Then I remember… darkspawn
don’t kill women. My eyes fly open and I look up at the presence before me. The blonde dwarf with
blue eyes crouches in front of me with a concerned look.

“Enchantment?” The word escapes him so softly and with so much concern that a sob escapes me. I
gather my strength and hug him.

“I’m so happy to see you, Sandal.”

He embraces me and strokes my head with the innocence of a child.

“I’m sorry,” he murmurs and then helps me to stand.

_Solas POV - Present_

Making the final journey to the Deep Roads entrance, Mona’s story from the night before still fills
my mind. The ordeal she went through. How fearless she was despite of it all. I thought maybe
Thedas had hardened her spirit into what it is now, but now I understand that it is who she always
was. Resourceful and incredibly courageous. If I ever meet this Sandal I will have to let him know
how grateful I am he found her. She told me about the months after she had reached the surface.
How she quietly, in her mind, had thought she had gone insane. She knew she couldn’t tell anyone
about who she was, and thankfully Anders, Hawke, and Varric had prevented other people from
prying, believing her to have been through a different type of traumatizing ordeal than the one she
actually experienced. Mona had been so alone in the world until she met Cole.

We approach the opening to the Deep Roads and Mona talks to Scout Harding for a while, before
walking towards the contraption that is to take us down. Atish’an walks next to her. Mona then
crouches down.

“Not this time, Tish. Stay with Harding, okay? If anything happens to us, you can help find us.”

The hound grumbles reluctantly at first, then barks in agreement.
“That’s my good girl. Remember, if anything happens to me, take good care of Solas for me.”

Atish’an gives a sad whine, but then nods in agreement. The hound approaches me and sits down looking up at me as if she doesn’t intend to move unless I say the right words.

“I’ll do everything in my power to keep her safe, I promise.”

She barks happily and nuzzles her snout against my hand before walking over to Harding. Cole, Iron Bull, and Dorian are already on the lift down, but Mona watches hesitantly. I take her hand and look at her.

“I’m right here… Are you ready?”

With a sad smile she nods at me and takes a hesitant step onto it. Her grip on my hand tightens as we descend.

Chapter End Notes

Hi everyone.

I hope you enjoy this chapter :D Things are about to get interesting. If any of you have any wishes please let me know.

Thanks to EmberLeo and ninaninabobina for Beta reading.
The ragged contraption shifts as we continue into the deep. Mona’s hand clings to mine, her nails digging painfully into my skin. Yet I do not pull away. She needs whatever comfort I can offer. I look at her as her eyes are shut tight, and I must wonder if I have lost my way. The future seems more distant than ever and nothing in this moment means more to me than her comfort and safety. I must not be this selfish - and yet I continue to be so with little regret. Perhaps she is a temptation to make me stray from my path, but I know that should that be the case she is unaware of it. The question is… should I tell her?

The lift moves and I hear Mona’s breath hitch for the briefest moment. Cole looks at her carefully as her eyes remains closed, but doesn’t say a word. Instead his gaze turns to me as if making sure I’m giving her the comfort I can. A soft smile lets me know he is convinced.

“Is it me or is this the slowest lift ever constructed?” Dorian sighs.

Mona opens her eyes with a small smile.

“Well you could always climb down. Or have Bull carry you.”

“Thanks for that,” Iron Bull grumbles.

Dorian grins as he muses; “I could do with some music. Something with a flute?”

Mona gives a small snort and looks at Iron Bull.

“Everything alright, big guy?”

“So, the Deep Roads. You think there’ll be tight spaces? Long hallways with low ceilings?” He looks over the side moving his jaw in a pensive manner.

“Don’t worry, Bull. If you get stuck I’ll just port you right out of there.”

It’s comforting to see the mischief in her eyes.

“That doesn’t make me feel any better, Boss… but thanks.”

The moment of distraction is gone too quickly as we slowly make our way into the deep. Mona’s grasp on me tightens again. A distraction… I look around in fascination hoping I might pique her unquenchable curiosity.

“Dwarves cannot dream, yet they devise the most fascinating inventions.”

I’m rewarded with a small smile.

“Not all ideas come from the fade, love.”
“True, but these designs must be inspired by something.”

“Is the fade all that inspires you?” The twinkle in her eyes is a welcome change from the phobia that dwells in her. I give her a seductive glance that makes her giggle and Dorian coughs eyeing me.

“Palms, calloused, clutching, clawing when the dust came,” Cole mutters to himself.

“Cole…” Mona releases my hand and reaches for Cole to offer him comfort, her own forgotten at the sight of his distress.

He gives her a small smile before frowning. “The stones were angry. I didn’t think stones got angry.”

Mona turns her face towards the sky as the last of the sunlight passes over her lovely features. She takes a deep breath as if it is meant to be her last before diving into deep waters.

As we reach the end of the lifts descent, Mona reaches into the pocket of her coat. She pulls out a leather mask that covers her mouth and nose - only with holes to breathe through her nose. With her face covered in such a matter she looks more like a thief than I had ever considered. She has called herself that on more than one occasion and I know she has the skills of a burglar.

“In case of darkspawn splatter,” she explains as she hands a similar one to Iron Bull and Cole.

Mona takes a few steps forward as the rest of us gather our gear. I walk up next to her as she puts on her gloves and tightens her bracers. I watch her closely as she takes three deep breaths and swallows. When she pulls up her hood the woman I love seems strangely absent as if she has been replaced by a function and a purpose.

“Let’s go,” she instructs and motions for the others to follow.

Cole walks up next to me looking at her back.

“Cold slithers like water on damp stone. Heavy, dark, dank… ‘I must be stronger’… She will not let me heal her hurt.”

“She needs all of her right now.”

“She takes in the fear. It makes her stronger, but also lesser - like the Fear demon at Adamant, but it is all her own. I don’t understand; why does she want to feel this way?”

“People cling to what they know. To her pain and fear are familiar,” I attempt to explain.

“I wish it wasn’t,” Cole murmurs with sorrow.

“So do I.”

It does not take long for us to encounter the first Darkspawn. I remain focused on casting wards and keeping my allies out of harm's way, as Dorian and Cole take on one group to the left. I watch Mona closely, ensuring she does not panic. I don’t expect her to, but trauma and phobia can make a person unpredictable. I need to keep her safe. As it turns out, that is not what I have reason to fear.

Mona portals herself behind an ogre and her bracers simmer with electricity. With force her hand slams into its back and the energy jolts through the creature. Its head turned toward the ceiling and its jaws shut tight, making it bite off its own tongue as it falls to its knees. With a she thrusts her arm forward, a switchblade springs from her sleeve and she slits the creature’s throat. The blood oozes and splatters from the creature’s neck as the Iron Bull charges behind her, drawing enemies away
from her. She turns to look at a Hurlock charging at her, but it stops in its tracks as the ogre finally falls over and to the ground.

The blue electricity simmers around her and dances across the blade of her knife. Her stare is vacant as the creature turns and runs. She opens a portal in front of it and makes it appear in front of her. The creature shrieks in pure agony as her blade enters its gut right through its spine. As it finally falls the electricity stops, but I can smell the burning flesh. Its blood covers her fist and knife, dripping down her hand into the ground. The hollow look in her eyes as she looks at me terrifies me, even as Iron Bull cheers her on and pats her back; there is no mercy.

“Well, aren’t you full of useful tricks?” Dorian grins clearly impressed, but her stare remains the same.

I walk over to her and reach into my coat for a handkerchief. Blood spatter covers face, and I’m grateful for the mask. I wipe the drops of blood from her brow and mask before casting a purifying spell.

“Vhenan…” I utter the word softly before kissing the mask where her lips hide beneath. “Come back to me.” I whisper.

She turns from me without acknowledging my words.

“Let’s move on.”

I close my eyes with a heavy sigh before I follow her farther into the deep.

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This behaviour continues the deeper we get. I have seen her wear many masks, but none of them has unsettled me. This one does. It is nothing but instinct, fear, and an utter need for survival. The most primal power brought to the surface, twisting her into a creature not unlike despair. There is a strength to it, but also a vulnerability, which makes my heart convulse with sorrow.

Meeting up with the Legion of the Dead, she is polite and helpful, but distant and cold in a way I have never seen before. I know she aches beneath the surface, but I cannot reach her. As I watch her I feel a large hand on my shoulder.

“Don’t worry, Solas. She’s still there.”

I look up at Iron Bull for a moment. For all my plans I had not expected to become friends with a Qunari.

“I know. I only wish I could do more,” I confess.

“Just be by her side. She’ll let you know when she needs you.”

I smile a little as an answer. For all his cleverness, he does not know her as I do. Some things she will carry on her own shoulders whatever the cost. In her I see my reflection, my future and my past - and none of those seem to coalesce. So they remain as fragments always at war.

It is Cole who finally manages to make this mask crack ever so slightly. He looks at her with a
The anguish in her voice chills the blood in my veins.
“It’s not your fault.” I reach for her hand, but she pulls it back.

“I shouldn’t have panicked… I’m wea--” she stops herself and takes a deep, trembled breath.

I watch her as our journey continues. The further we go the less of her there seems to be. When we make camp Mona is restless. Valta is looking over some runes inscribed into the wall as Mona walks a little further into the dark. I walk up to her, but I don’t disturb her.

“This way,” she murmurs quietly and walks ahead.

“This is unwise, vhenan.”

She walks ahead regardless and, like the lovestruck fool that I am, I follow. Her palm travels along the wall as if it speaks to her. ‘Stonesense’ the dwarves call it, but Mona should have no such connection to it. Yet she walks through the tunnels with purpose, only encountering a few nugs and a stray deepstalker that runs away, lacking the safety of its pack.

“My heart, where are we going?”

“I know this place.” She kneels in front of the bodies of some long dead dwarves.

With a quick movement she stands and turns to look at me with a widened gaze. She runs towards the yellow glow of the lava river deep below where untapped lyrium veins cover the ceiling. I follow her despite every instinct in me objecting. This is a terrible idea. She stops, looking at a stone door slightly cracked open. Petrified, she doesn’t move a muscle and it looks as if she is barely breathing.

“Is this it?”

“Yes…” her answer is so quiet I nearly didn’t notice it. “I’m afraid.”

The confession makes my very spirit ache. I reach for her mask and carefully remove it as silent tears spill from her eyes. She does not turn or waver until I softly kiss her lips.

“I’m here. I will not let any harm come to you.”

Her eyes meet mine for the first time in days.

“It’s not my heart I fear breaking.”

I close my eyes and kiss her again not trusting my words. I reach for her hand and use my magic to move the heavy door.

When we enter I ignite veilfire in a torch on the wall. It illuminates the room and runes come to life all around us. Most are dwarven, but some elvhen is written intermittently. The Deep Roads are always cool, but this room feels frigid. I see the broken Eluvian she described. It is one of the oldest I have seen. Around it are depleted lyrium veins attached to it. When it worked it must have been incredibly powerful. Now it is shattered and the empty veins look brittle to the slightest touch. In the middle of the room is a sarcophagus with an open lid. I look at the woman engraved on the lid and my heart chills. I know her. Mona reaches out and touches it. As her hand slides across the face, she touches her own with the other.

“I woke up inside this thing. Then I was so sure it was a coffin, but what if…”

“If what, my love?”

She bites her lower lip in a pensive movement as her hand runs around the inside. She reaches for the
engraving ignited by the veilfire on the sarcophagus - written by the Sha Brytol and she reads it out loud.

“There are no Gods - merely puppeteers reaching beyond their grasp. They strive for greatness, but create only chaos. They will damn this world. May Falon’din’s beauty age. Dirthamen’s secrets be revealed. Elgar’nan’s sun burn out in the eclipse. In the dark I lay, forgotten. When the moons rise so will I.”

Her breath hitches as she speaks: “It could be a mold.”

She turns to me with tears in her eyes - her voice broken as she speaks.

“Solas… what am I?”

“A mold?” I look to the floor and see the drained lyrium veins in the floor leading from the eluvian into the sarcophagus. How and why was this created?

I turn to the elven text on the wall. I read it out loud making the translation as accurate as possible.

“Beware she who aims for the sun. For her heart is true and arrow straight. Daughter of we who refuse to be forgotten. Fen’Harel ma ghilana, Vhenan’Assan.”

She trembles, her breath visible in the cold air.

“Ir abelas, vhenan. I know nothing of this.”

“Tel’abelas,” she whispers softly and touches my cheek as if I am the one in need of comfort.

She then looks to the dormant eluvian.

“You think you can repair it?”

“For you, I will try.”

As I walk over to it I realise the extent of the damage. Even I may not be able to restore this. I try to mend it regardless, but nothing works. Mona walks up next to me and sighs as the broken glass shatters beneath her boots. The shattered pieces of her former life.

“It was worth a try.” She caresses the frame. “It looks different from the others I have seen. It’s almost as if the lyrium down here has grown directly into it.”

“Indeed, it must have been powerful, when it worked.”

“Solas, if it is powerful enough, could it enter the fade? Find a spirit far away?”

“I suppose it is possible. Why?”

“Nothing, just a theory is all.”

I grab her wrist and pull her close, “Vhenan, let me help you.”

“What if my spirit was pulled from my life before? Across the fade and stars. What if the Titan took me here and gave me a body - a lyrium ghost? I’m not real...”

“You’re jumping to conclusions. This is pure speculation,” I insist and tighten my hold on her as she shakes her head. “What makes you believe this is the case?”
“I don’t know… I don’t know anything anymore. Nothing makes sense. I don’t feel real!”

I pull her closer and rest my palm on her face. By instinct she leans into it and closes her eyes.

“Feel that warmth? You are here with me. Hold on to that.”

She embraces me and leans into my chest.

“The Dread Wolf guides you, Heart of Arrows … It could be both a warning and quite literal. What do you suppose that means?” Her words are murmured into my chest.

“I’m uncertain… what do you believe?”

She looks at me closely for a moment before answering.

“That you avoid answering because something about it frightens you. Perhaps the Titan can give me some better answers. Come, let’s get back to the others.”

I would have been insulted except for the fact that she is right. I am terrified of what this could mean.

Walking into the deep I see a sight which I’m familiar: the ancient civilisation of the dwarven empire. The Titans; rivals, foes, and occasional allies of the Evanuris. Eons ago this empire was thriving. Now it is a faint echo, long forgotten, like the elves, the other half of the world I tore asunder. Even from the distance I can feel the drumming of its heart, this ancient creature. Mona looks at me from time to time, seeming to ponder a million questions without giving voice to them. Of this world I suspect she knows little. Should I tell her all that I know?

As we approach the heart it senses me. Already hostile it goes into a frenzy and attacks. The battle is fierce and it is only Mona’s portals that manage to move us around the battlefield enough that we are not harmed by it. When it finally calms, Mona’s anger seems to ignite. She stares at the heart with a vengeance I have not seen before.

“Dorian, Bull, Cole, go up there and see if you can manage to find some supplies. These dwarves must have eaten something. Solas, make sure Valta is alright. I’ll deal with this.”

Her eyes do not waver from the creature and the others merely nods as they follow her instructions. I examine Valta, but she is well. Connected to the Titan, but well.

“How the hell did I get here?” Mona asks the heart. “Answer me!” She hisses.

“You were an accident,” Valta explains walking up behind her looking at the Titan heart.

“What do you mean I was an accident?” Mona looks at her with a stern gaze.

“When the Archdemon was slain in Denerim the soul of the old god would have been destroyed. The Titan knew that there were those who tried to preserve the soul, and feared what they might do with it. So it created a host for it - created from lyrium enharbouring its spirit.”

“But… Keiran…” And understanding passes Mona’s face that I am unable to follow.

“When it tried to make the soul of the Old God latch onto it… it didn’t work. By accident it lashed
out through the fade and… took your spirit into itself.”

“What was the Titan trying to achieve?” The disbelief in Mona’s voice strikes as sharp as a blade.

“To create a champion. Another pure child of the stone.” Valta frowns and looks at the Titan’s heart. “It wanted to create… a sister to a long lost brother? I don’t fully understand, but I know it failed. When it failed it wasn’t suppose to create you.”

Mona’s eyes ignite with fury and grief.

“So what? You couldn’t find the type of spirit you needed for your purpose so you lobotomized some poor innocent woman to create me?!”

“It wasn’t supposed to happen like that,” Valta explains.

“You stole a mother from a child!” She screams at the heart of the Titan. “You harvested the essence of who she was and created me! And it was an accident?! Everything I have endured has been because of you. Every sorrow and heart broken as a result of my existence has been your doing!”

In the distance I see the others look down on us. I make a motion for them to stay where they are, and they do, though I can tell it is with some reluctance.

I look to Mona. Between her hands an energy begins to charge as she stares intently on the Titan. It’s not magic as mages understand it. It is similar to what Valta creates, but Mona still needs the bracers to do this. Valta cries out to her, but she doesn’t listen. I walk up to Mona and place a hand on her shoulder.

“Vhenan.”

She looks at me with rage in her eyes, but the energy stops. As her face changes I lean in and kiss her cheek and wrap my arm around her shoulder.

“Everyone I know… everyone I love… I’m going to see them die,” she whispers.

“Yes.”

She gives pained chuckle. “Ass. Couldn’t you just lie to give me some comfort?”

“I could lie, but it would offer little comfort, I’m afraid.”

I kiss her hair to offer her as much support as I can. She continues to amaze me. Her grasp on this world is far beyond anything I could have ever imagined. What she suspected at the cave where she awoke was the truth, an instinct she might have secretly known all along, a memory forgotten as her mind attempted to protect itself. And she understood from the moment Valta revealed the truth that her worst fear has come to pass. Though an arrow or blade may still kill her, she is unaging. Immortal. It stirs emotions in me, but it is not right for me to dwell on them. Not now. Not here. Not while she suffers.

“Let’s go home,” she murmurs.

She walks back towards the others and I turn to the heart of the Titan. I take a few steps closer looking straight into the heart of it. My eyes flare with magic and a pulse goes through its heart. My voice low and dark.
“I swear to you, if you have done this on purpose or it is revealed to me that you did anything to harm her, I will come back for you. No more trying to influence her mind through her connection to the lyrium that created her. And keep your Profane away from her or I will make you suffer in ways you cannot imagine.”

The heart of the Titan thrums with power, its objection.

“Do you hear me, Anaris?” I growl magic surging through my fingers.

Valta looks at me and swallows. “It understands.”

The thrumming stills and I nod at Valta before I turn to walk back towards the others.

“Are you alright?” Dorian asks Mona softly as I approach.

“I’m fine Dorian… I… I was reminded of what I lost is all… I lost my son… and I will never see him again.”

Tears fall freely from her eyes and Iron Bull lowers his head as Dorian embraces her. Him showing affection, even towards her or Iron Bull, is rare. Cole mumbles soft words too low for anyone to hear as his hand rests on her shoulder. He cannot truly help her unless she allows it. I wish she would let him help her.

“I didn’t know. I’m so sorry,” Dorian murmurs.

“It was long ago… I just haven’t been able to let go.”

Dorian makes a comforting sounds, but moves as I approach so that she might embrace me instead.

“Come on, Boss. Let’s get back to Skyhold. People there need us.” His voice is a low rumble offered as a comfort.

Appealing to her sense of duty works as always. She pulls from my arms and nods.

“At least the Titan is calm. And we still need to kick Corypheus ass.” She gives a wry grin.

“Yeah, this was just warm up!” Iron Bull enthuses and Dorian groans.

I look back towards Anaris’ heart. I hope for all our sakes Mona is right, and that Anaris will remain dormant.

Over the many days it takes us to reach the surface, Mona hardly speaks. Cole and I both try to console her, but she remains distant to everyone.

I wish I could help her.

Chapter End Notes

And the big reveal! I hope you enjoyed it! Please let me know what you think of it.
Thank you all for following this story and commenting. It means a lot to me and keeps me motivated :)

Thanks to EmberLeo and ninaninabobina for Beta reading.
As we exit the Deep Roads it is late and the sky is made even darker by the heavy clouds rolling in. Atish’an greets us happily after having been separated from us for days. Mona greets her wordlessly and merely hands Harding some intel and reports she has been writing on our way out of the depths. We have not walked far before it starts to pour. The icy rain is accompanied by an unforgiving wind that rushes through our clothes.

Mona has not spoken a word since we left the Deep Roads. She walks ahead with a vacant stare not bothering to pull her hood up. My feelings are intangible. I had not considered that by wanting to destroy the veil I had become responsible for her fate as well. I am indirectly responsible for killing her original body - the part of her that was forgotten - as her spirit was trapped in the fade. The mind sometimes hides what it cannot endure, yet the strength of her mind impresses me. Despite this I detect in her a deep sense of loss. Through the years her brilliant mind - her spirit - reached out through the universe - seeing possibilities to which others are blind. I do not doubt that the planet and the people she knew exists. She is not merely a creation of Anaris. In the fade she still pulls to her own world - even if she isn’t strong enough to create that connection. She reached far beyond what even I thought possible. Then again, my fascination was always with exploring the past. I never considered what lay beyond Thedas like she did.

As we reach the inn Scout Harding has already reserved quarters for all of us. I expect to follow Mona to hers, intending to offer comfort and any consolation she will allow me to grant her.

“Goodnight, Solas.” Her words are low and void of any true emotion as she walks toward her room.

“Vhenan, wait.” I reach for her, but she moves quickly. I could catch her by merely following her - or with fadingstep if I was truly insistent. But the balance is a delicate one. I can’t be forceful nor do I wish to be.

I catch Iron Bull and Dorian staring at me as I turn, then they try to go about their business as if they haven’t noticed anything. Cole is nowhere to be seen, so I can only hope he is with my heart - offering her the comfort she will not accept from me. I walk outside to gather my thoughts and get a hold on the many conflicting emotions lingering in my chest. I sit outside with the horses beneath the horse pavilion, which gives limited shelter to the roaring storm. Cole appears not long after, talking softly to a frightened horse. I stroke the horse in front of me offering it the calmness and consolation my love will not allow me to offer.

“I like horses.” Cole states as he offers it a carrot.

“They are magnificent and powerful creatures.” I offer a fond smile.

“They’re like nugs.”

“How so?” A soft chuckle escapes me.

“Nugs are kind. Almost everything is bigger than them, but they’re still happy. If you hold out your hand, they will nuzzle it. It’s how they call you ‘friend.’” He pauses for a moment. “Mona likes nugs. You think one would cheer her up?”

“Undoubtedly, but I think the proprietor might have some concerns regarding bringing ‘vermin’ into
his establishment.”

“You like animals, Solas. Even spiders. Many people are afraid of spiders. Hawke is.”

“True. Animals are pure in their intent and nature. They know nothing of deception or betrayal. They trust in their purpose and instinct.”

“Like Tish. She loves you. She would never betray you.” Cole smiles, but then turns serious. “Mona wouldn’t betray you either.”

“I know.”

“Yes, but you don’t allow yourself to believe it… She was wrong you know.”

“I fear you might be mistaken. It is a fitting punishment.”

“She said it to hurt you and make you afraid. She liked animals, too, but her changing wasn’t your fault… Wisdom understands. So would Mona if you explained.”

“I know that, too.”

The door opens and Atish’an exits, looks around, then runs directly towards me.

“Calm yourself, friend.” I crouch and nuzzle the dog as she gives a pitiful whine up at me. “Is she in danger?”

The hound shakes her head, though she is obviously still concerned.

“Alright, I’ll go to her. Will you keep Cole company?”

She gives a compliant whine, but still looks towards the tavern.

As I walk through the tavern I make certain to order her some broth and bread. We have not eaten well since we entered the Deep Roads, and though I am certain she has no appetite, I must try to encourage her. I knock on her door and wait for her answer. When there is no response I open the door. The dimly lit room has a double bed, a large stone tub and a desk. I see Mona sitting on the bed unmoving. She is still dressed in her wet clothes. She looks at me with a blank stare. I put down the tray and feel the water in the tub. It is lukewarm, but hasn’t been used. One of the tavern servants must have filled it immediately after our arrival. The candle flickers in distress at the open window is the wind howls and rain whips across the floor.

“Vhenan, you should get out of those clothes before you get cold.” I go to Mona and stroke her icy cheek with the back of my hand. “You are freezing.”

I move to close the window, but she catches my hand. She holds on to it so tight it is almost painful. The laugh that escapes her is hollow and filled with anger.

“What does it matter?”

“It matters because you could get ill.” I feel her brow making sure a fever hasn’t already set in.

“I guess even my immortality is half-assed. Just like everything else I do.” Her words come out hard through gritted teeth. “It doesn’t matter what I do, things seem to turn out the same. I’m always too late, or forgetting something. What good am I and what I know, when I can’t make any difference?”

I take her still-gloved hands in mine, water slipping from them at the lightest pressure of my hand.
“Is that what you truly believe? Your presence has meant everything to so many people. Perhaps larger events have remained the same, but you have saved and protected so many who wouldn’t have been otherwise.” I keep my voice soothing as I remove the soaked gloves.

“I know how conceited this sounds, but I always somehow thought I had a reason to be here, that there was a purpose to me being here. But there isn’t. I’m a mistake because someone else’s plan didn’t work.” Her expression is overcome by despair as her voice trembles. “I’m nothing but a cheap duplicate. No wonder I can’t do anything right! I’m a hollow shell!” She rubs her temples vigorously as tears spill from her eyes.

“You are nothing of the sort.” My objection is more stern than I intended, but Mona doesn’t even seem to register it. With a sigh I sit down beside her and softly continue. “What do you know of the creation of my people?”

Despite the tears she gives me a doubtful look. For a moment I expect a sarcastic remark, but with a heavy sigh she answers meekly instead.

“You’re like Cole.”

“Yes and no. The first of my people are like Cole, yes, but not all.”

That gets her attention as she looks at me, the tears still fall unbidden and her breath is heavy, but the sobbing has calmed. I wipe away her tears as I speak.

“Those who were not strong enough were created using lyrium.”

“That’s why there are eluvians in the Deep Roads... So... their bodies were created like this one was.” She touches her face briefly as the understanding dawns on her. “Only they were spirits of the fade... Solas, was my previous life even real? What if everything I ever knew... it wasn’t real? I remember picking up my son. His laugh. His generosity. But it was never real. It was some other woman who experienced that. And I’ll never see him again,” her voice trembles.

“No, vhenan.” I take hold of her chin and make her look at me. “It was all real. You proved to me it was, remember?”

“Well, that was the profane technically.” She wipes away her tears with a strained chuckle. “I’m sorry, love.”

“What if is was all a dream? What if I’m still dreaming? If I couldn’t tell the difference then--” she is interrupted by her own sobbing.

“It is real. You proved to me it was, remember?”

“Well, that was the profane technically.” She wipes away her tears with a strained chuckle. “I’m sorry, love.”

“What for?”

“For shutting you out, for pulling away. For breaking like this. There is so much at stake. I have no right--”

“Stop. You have every right.” I kiss her forehead. “Breathe. Relax. Listen to my voice.” I take her hand a place it over my heart. “Feel the beat of my heart. The beating of yours.”

She looks at me with a desperation that aches.
“Solas, make me feel real,” she pleads softly.

Before I have a chance to answer she kisses me and I return it with equal passion. I can feel her tongue on mine, though the tenderness which with I am so familiar is nowhere to be found. There is a raw ferocity to the way she kisses me. She pulls away and starts biting my neck while straddling my lap. I moan as I feel her pressing down on me, while I attempt to remove her clothes. We’re still covered in dirt and grime, but I could not care less. Her body, usually ignited with heat, is cold to the touch. I tear off her coat and pull the string keeping her corset together, making it fall to the ground as well.

As I push the soaked shirt off her shoulders I trace my tongue across her collarbone catching the drops of water still clinging to her skin. Her head falls back with a pleading whimper.

This isn’t right. She is broken, battered, and vulnerable. Some part of me thinks I am taking advantage of her. The other knows that she needs this, and she would not let me near her if she did not truly desire it. She rips the clothes off my torso and lets her nails rake across my skin in a primal instinct. A feral growl escapes her as she pushes me down on the bed and drags my wet trousers off. She then struggles with her own that cling possessively to her skin. She makes frustrated sound - nearly a sob.

“Here. Let me.” I offer and assist her, gently stripping the leather of her soaked skin.

“Don’t be kind.” She murmurs and I look at her in surprise. “Don’t be gentle. Just… don’t… let me think.”

There is an unspoken end to the sentence I know from experience; ‘Do not let me feel.’

Stripping her down in a rush, my lips and teeth mark her wherever she will allow as I press her down onto the bed.

Our bodies intermingle in familiar ways, but there is no harmony. The passion is equal and fuels every movement with a newfound need. But where she seeks this intimacy for release of agony and despair, my motivation is the opposite. It is selfish, but the discovery of what she is, and the nature of her, fills my body with ecstasy. Where she fears, I now allow myself to hope. Where she mourns, I rejoice. Eons passed in loneliness need not be the course of the future - my future. There is a striking irony in the nature of this. The fulfillment of her greatest fear means my own need not come to pass.

Her legs wrap around me possessively as my body presses tightly against her. I fear crushing her, but her arms lock around me tight as her nails bite into my skin. Lips are feral and full of need, as kisses are only interrupted by moans and gasps.

“Don’t stop, Solas. Don’t you dare stop,” she growls as I attempt to be more gentle.

With an egotistical need, declarations of love fall unbidden from my lips and are filled with utter relief, where they should be filled with sympathy. My touch should be one of comfort, but is instead one of worship. The fierceness with which she kisses me feels like a cataclysmic event which trembles the fragile ties binding us together. Both our world's have shattered, but where she sees pain and destruction, I, for the first time, see a future and hope.

She pushes me onto my back and presses down on me with a lustful moan, her hands resting on my chest. My hands rest on the insides of her thighs, sending a magical heat to her core. A sobbing cry escapes her as she throws her head back, and her nails dig into my chest, making me hiss.

Possession and obsession are dangerous temptations that can pervert even the purest of spirits. They
are desires hidden so easily in devotion and affection. Often mistaken for each other’s reflection, but in their very nature they are so different. They are not two sides of the same coin, they are adversaries so familiar that one might pass easily for the other. My heart looks down at me, her beautiful eyes red and begging for any closeness I can offer. I sit up and wrap my arms possessively around her, groaning at the changing sensation.

In the loneliness and isolation she feels, I have found companionship. I see the need for a sense of belonging and I wish her to know that she can find this in my embrace. She is mine.

"Ar lath ma ," I murmur as I softly bite her neck and she gasps.

"I know."

"You're not alone, ma vhenan . You will n--" I'm interrupted by a devouring kiss as her hands embrace my jaw and pull me from her neck. After a moment she pulls back to look at me.

"Do not make promises you can't keep," she murmurs.

She is right of course. I should not offer promises I can not keep. But does she not understand how deeply I wish I could? That at this moment, I understand nothing that has or will ever come to pass can keep me from this devotion. Where our time before was limited, it now has the potential of being eternal. As the thought consumes me, so does my release, and I cry out despite my best efforts. My magic soars through her, making her shatter in my embrace.

Breathless, I collapse back onto the bed with her ontop of me. She heaves for breath against my chest as my fingers travel up and down her spine. A wind rushes in from the still open window across her clammy skin.

“You're trembling,” I murmur kissing the top of her head. “I’ll go warm the water.”

She merely nods before rolling off me, her expression not unlike when I found her earlier. I close the window and heat the water with a spell before reaching for her hand. I guide her towards the tub and she follows silently. I join her in the tub, sitting behind her, she leans her back against my chest and rests her head on my shoulder. My arms curl around her waist. Her body still feels cold.

“Will you tell me about the first elves? How they were created?” She murmurs after a few minutes.

“Certainly... When the first of my people took physical form, everything was so new and unexplored. I am not certain exactly what occurred. I was a spirit at the time, and was quite happy remaining so. However, I know they desired for others to join them in their existence.”

“By force?”

“In some cases, though I presume some wished to make the transition.” I scoop up some water and pour it through her hair, washing away what still lingers from the Deep Roads.

“So their bodies were made out of lyrium?”

“Yes. The first elves discovered they could create bodies using lyrium. They started mining it without the Titans’ approval. It’s why the war between the Titans and Evanuris began. Falon’din especially got overzealous and created a vast amount of followers.”

“And then the Titans created the Sha-Brytol to fight that war?”
I wry smile brushes my lips. “How did you know?”

“Just a guess.”

“People rarely guess with such accuracy.”

“Alright, it was clever deduction based on the evidence.” The fake arrogance in her voice makes me chuckle.

“The war harbored brutality previously unknown to my people. Both sides created soldier upon soldier in order to gain dominance over the other. It had already been raging for a decade, when Mythal asked me to join that fight.”

“Did it end with Mythal killing a Titan?”

“Yes… After I was sent to broker peace between the Evanuris and the Titans.”

“Which is why the Dalish tales say that you could walk among both groups.”

“Precisely.”

She turns in the tub to give me a small kiss, then steps out of the tub. Reaching for a towel, she looks down her body with a sigh.

“You know that Titan is an asshole.”

“As much as it pains me what it did to you, I cannot hate it. It brought me you.” I reach for her hand to pull her to the edge of the tub.

“That might be, but since it gave me a new body it could at least have left out the bloody stretch marks!”

I cannot help but laugh and I bend down to kiss the stretch marks across her abdomen. A soft giggle escapes her and I look up at her soft gaze as I continue caressing her marks with soft kisses. Perhaps one day they will no longer be a reminder of something lost, but a promise of something to come. My heart clenches. I am part agony, part hope. I can no longer imagine a future without her.

Awaking the next morning, I know my love left the bed long ago. I miss those early days when she was not yet so burdened, and she could sleep for more than a few hours at a time. Once Corypheus is defeated, and I have reclaimed my orb, perhaps things will be different. My heart whispers hopes and promises on which my mind dares not linger. The indulgence the night before bordered on the euphoric. How easy it would be to escape into those thoughts again, to see only the future, leaving the past in the dust and forgotten echoes of the fade.

Exiting the room fully dressed, I encounter two human men in the hallway. They bump into me forcefully.

“Bloody knife-ear!” One hisses.

“Think they can fuck our women and get away with it.” The other adds.
“Everyone knows that though their children might look human, they will always be mongrels.”

Aahh… and there is the reason I could conceive of going through with my plans. In this world, Mona and I will never be accepted. Their insults are not spoken to me, though they clearly intended for me to hear them. A part of me is tempted to unleash my magic upon them, if only to frighten them, but patience and wisdom win this battle… for now.

Down stairs Mona is standing with Harding in a room to the side. Their voices are quiet, but Harding sees me and waves me over.

“Where can we meet up with them?”

“Near Honnleath… well, what’s left of it after the blight did a number on it. We can meet them there the day after tomorrow if we hurry,” Harding suggests.

“Alright, make it happen. Send word to Lelianna and wake the rest of our party. I would like to leave in an hour.”

“At once, Inquisitor.” Harding bows and walks passed me. “Morning, Solas.”

“Good morning.” I smile at the dwarf as she passes before I walk over to Mona.

She is looking down on a map before her. I lean over to kiss her cheek softly and she closes her eyes with a soft hum. My kisses travel along her jaw and down her neck, where my tongue caresses her pulse.

“Solas!” She breathes with some amusement - the reprimand barely shining through the mirth.

“You should not be so quick to leave the bed, Inquisitor.”

The feelings invoked the night before still course through me with a newly discovered elation.

“Not all of us are so talented in the fade that we can use it as an excuse for long naps.” The teasing glare in her eyes warms my heart. Despite all her grief my love is still intact. How she can remain so courageous is beyond me, and only makes me love her more.

“Dorian and Iron Bull need no such excuse,” I murmur against the back of her neck, where she is the most sensitive. She stiffens under my touch as I stand behind her, resting my hands on her waist. If the gentlemen from before walk past the open door, I might get the opportunity to teach them a lesson after all.

“Dorian and Bull were probably up all night making all sorts of disturbing noises.”

“So, were we,” I remind her as my hand travels up her ribs lingering beneath her breast.

She turns in my arms and kisses me.

“I despise you,” she growls playfully.

“Lies do not become you, vhenan.”

“And yet I’m so talented at it.” It’s a jest, but it does dampen some of my spirit.

“I am assuming the Inquisition scouts found Corypheus?” I step away from her and look down at the map showing troop movements.
“Yes, our forces are marching towards the Arbor Wilds as we speak. We will meet up with reinforcements from Ferelden - courtesy of King Alistair - at Honnleath. Edward and Cullen are leading the army from Skyhold with the forces from Orlais.”

“I will go pack immediately.”

I walk towards the door, when I hear her voice.

“And Solas...”

“Yes?” I turn and I am greeted by a soft smile.

“I love you very much.”

“And I you.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you everyone for commenting! It makes me so happy to know you're enjoying the story.

Next up is the Temple of Mythal. If you have any requests to this part of the story or something you want me to include before Corypheus gets beaten let me know :)

Thanks to EmberLeo and ninaninabobina for Beta reading.
Chapter Summary

Hi everyone. Thank you so much for supporting the story this far. It really means a lot. I'm going to be diving into my interpretation of the elven lore soon (more than I already have). I really hope you guys will enjoy it and please let me know what you think :) 

Thanks to EmberLeo for beta reading. You have been such a big help.

“Solas ma halam, Abelas!” = Pride ends you, Abelas!  
“Malas amelin ne halam, Abelas.” = May your purpose find a new home, Abelas 

We quickly gather our things and supplies before heading to Honnleath. Normally Mona prefers that those who have been on a mission get at least three days rest before joining another - the only exception being the Herald because of his mark - but it is a luxury we do not have.

As I saddle my horse Iron Bull leans up against one of the pillars and looks at me with an amused expression.

“Anything I can do for you, Iron Bull?”

“Oh it’s nothing, but I must say that’s an impressive love bite you got on your neck there.”

My hand flinches to cover it, but by sheer will I keep it in its place. I curse under my breath. I should have looked more closely in a looking glass this morning and healed myself. As it is I have little choice but to remain calm and continue the task at hand, as I ignore the way his mouth curves.

“I am certain you are exaggerating.”

“So you let her go all Inquisitor on your ass. Told you she’s got some fire in her.”

I feel a heavy pat on my shoulder, and though I must resist the urge to scowl at him, my voice remains detached.

“That really isn’t any of your concern.”

Dorian chuckles looking at me over the back of his horse. “Then might I suggest you be quieter next time.”

A smirk crosses my lips.

“If memory serves, I am fairly certain we have more discretion than the two of you.”

The reaction is instant as his face is set ablaze by a healthy blush.

“Oh… I had quite forgotten about that.”

“Now, that hurts my feelings, kadan.”

Mona approaches us with a firm expression, but I can see the amusement in her eyes even as she
attempts to hide it. Bull and Dorian both nod at her leading their mounts over to the scouts making the last preparations for our departure. Mona tries to suppress a grin as she looks at me.

“You’re so cute when you’re flustered.”

“Careful, or I will assume you did it on purpose.”

“And what if I did?”

She bites her lower lip not bothering to hide her amusement any further. I grumble as I reach up and heal the bruise on my neck.

“Fenedhis lasa…”

“Language, my love.”

She gives me a wry grin before turning from me. A small amount of magic gathers on my fingertips and I shock her with a small frost spell. She gasps and shudders, then looks at me making a small playful growl.

“Wicked!”

I walk past her with a smile and hear her giggle. It is a relief that despite all that has happened she can still manage to smile - even if it is at my expense. As I join the others I see a hare sitting some distance away observing us. Not an unusual occurrence, but the intensity of its gaze is…

“Solas, do you have everything you need?” Mona asks as she mounts her horse.

“I believe so, Inquisitor. But I recommend keeping an eye out for Crystal Grace as we travel south. Our supply is smaller than I would like.”

“Alright, then let us not waste anymore time.”

She rides ahead with the scouts and as I mount my horse I look back into the shrubbery. The hare is gone.

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When we arrive at the Arbor Wilds I can already hear battle in the distance. Mona rushes forward and jumps off her mount next to Cullen as a soldier takes her horse. The camp is larger than I had expected and to my surprise Empress Celene has made a personal appearance. The area is quite beautiful - even after all the ages past. To think that the Temple of Mythal is still standing after all this time. It is so much more than I ever imagined. It gives me hope that it is not too late for my people, and that I might yet restore them. And with Mona’s kindness perhaps the future will be better.

“Inquisitor! Thank the Maker you’re here.” Cullen greets her with obvious relief. “We are ready to make our siege on the temple. Our forces are already attempting to slow Corypheus’s forces as we speak.”

“Then we don’t have a moment to waste. Have the new arrivals ready within the hour. I will join the Herald and Morrigan on the advancement on the temple.” Mona reaches into her satchel to get her bracers.
“I would suggest bringing Cassandra as well as Cole and Solas, as they are most familiar with your abilities.”

“Agreed. We will advance on the temple within the hour.”

“You should know, there are also elves attacking.” As the commander speaks the words Mona turns a little pale.

“Wait, they’re attacking?”

“Yes. We believe they are some sort of cult. They wear vallaslin, but they don’t appear to be Dalish.”

“Solas ma halam, Abelas!” (Pride ends you, Abelas!) She hisses through gritted teeth.

“Then we must make haste, Inquisitor.” I look at her and she nods determined.

“Yes, you and Cole go find the Herald and Cassandra. I’ll find Morrigan.”

Within the hour we are already fighting through the Arbor Wilds to reach the temple in time. The Inquisition has done an excellent job at keeping Corypheus forces at bay. I find fighting these elves difficult. They are my people. Mona seems to have a similar struggle. She moves on the battlefield as she always does, but when putting our forces in strategic positions she hesitates. It is only for a moment, and she does act as she is forced to, but I see the hesitation. With the exception of darkspawn I have never seen my heart take a life with her own hands. But by proxy she holds the lives of many in her hands. The more time passes the more this distinction seems to blur, and it increases the guilt I know she feels tenfold. It is why her immortality is so frightening to her.

As we reach the temple and enter, Edward stops to talk to Morrigan, but Mona pays no attention and walks into the ruins. She looks around in awe and it is easy to forget she is the Inquisitor. She looks every bit the part of a scholar taking in our surroundings. I try to keep my focus on the conversation between the Herald and Morrigan, but I am far more captivated by the enthusiastic look on Mona’s face.

“When you are done debating, the path forward is this way,” Mona calls from further inside the temple.

“I had not expected you to have such little patience, Inquisitor.” Morrigan observes her closely as if trying to unravel her nature. How many times have I given Mona that exact look in the beginning, I wonder.

“It is not impatience. It is indomitable passion.” Mona grins.

“I’m certain Solas can confirm that,” the Herald teases as he walks towards her.

I shake my head following as well as we walk towards the ancient seals kept in the entrance. I must be more careful than ever. Though Mona and Cole know my secret, I have no desire for anyone else to be aware of my identity. I must conceal the extent of my knowledge like never before. Especially since Morrigan is a formidable and knowledgeable woman. If anyone is to see past my deception, it will be her.

The temple magic reacts as soon as Mona takes a step onto the tile path. The floor ignites with a familiar blue glow, not unlike the power of the runes she uses. The light shimmers around her as the tune of the seal echoes through the ruins. Almost as if the light and sound merges with her, making her appear magical.
“It appears the temple’s magicks are still strong.” Morrigan sounds almost in awe as she steps up next to Mona.

“Ancient elven… I can make out some, but it will take time for me to decipher it all.” I hear the frustration in Mona’s voice. So much time and effort has been put into understanding the ancient elves and learning both the spoken and written language. But so much has been forgotten - even among the Dalish.

“Atish'all Vir Abelasan. It means ‘enter the path of the Well of Sorrows’.” I translate and Mona gives me a small smile. Her fingers trace the inscription.

“It also mentions knowledge and something about purity. A ritual to prove our intentions are pure and show respect to Mythal most likely.”

“Shiven, shivennen … ‘Tis is all I can translate also. That it mentions the well at all is a good omen.” Morrigan appears pensive, but I suspect the witch knows more than she is letting on.

“So, we’re out of luck unless one of those temple elves drops a lexicon,” the Herald jests with an exaggerated sigh.

Mona looks at him with a bright smile. “I would kill for that. Maker, I’d eat an entire batch of Sera’s cookies for that.”

“Brave woman!” Edward laughs walking up towards the doors.

My lips curve into a sideways smile. “More so than you think.”

“Alright, ladies and gentlemen. Let’s see if my days as a scholar and tomb robber have paid off.” Mona starts to follow the path and activates the magic in her first attempt.

“Well done. Let’s see what awaits. Oh, and Inquisitor, might I suggest not introducing yourself as a ‘tomb robber’ to any elves or guardians we encounter? No need to make the journey more perilous than it already is.” Morrigan smiles at Mona as they walk up the stairs.

Inside we finally catch up to Samson and are engaged in battle with his Red Templars. When disposed of, we run towards the door next to the crater Samson and his forces created.

“Wait!” Morrigan objects and we all stop.

A hare runs past me and into a room to the side of the large door. Except for birds, we have seen no such creatures in this area, and though it is expected that some wildlife has sought refuge here this is too… familiar to be a coincidence.

“Forgive me, Inquisitor, but I need a moment of privacy.”

“Of course.” She nods with a puzzled expression, but she does not question me as she instead turns her attention to Morrigan.

As I walk towards an adjoining chamber I hear Mona and the Herald speak with the witch, but I pay the conversation no mind. I know Mona will take the cautious route rather than rush ahead. Unlike the rest of the temple, this room seems darker. Mosaics of Andruil stare down on me and I can hear her foreboding scoff as her eyes burn with rage. I can still see Mona and my companions from this room through the gridded walls. The hare looks at me from the farthest corner hidden in the dark. I reach out with my magic and I force the creature to change its shape. Before me stands a sentinel, but unlike those we have fought, this is not a servant of Mythal. She bears the vallaslin of
Andruil and half her head is shaved to reveal a tribal tattoo of a wolf whose heart is pierced by an arrow.

“You are not welcome in this place,” I point out keeping my voice calm.

The sentinel cackles softly looking at Mona through the grid wall. “Are you enjoying Anaris’ gift?”

“Why are you here?” I keep my voice and expression calm, not turning to look in Mona’s direction as I place my hands behind my back.

“To warn you. That vessel -” she nods in Mona’s direction. “- was created by a Titan and was meant for the spirit of the dragon that was slain during the last blight. When its soul moved on, the vessel was left to wallow in the forgotten depths. When a tainted child was born, the husk reacted and took a random spirit into itself. Originally that vessel was meant as your destruction.”

I give a quiet laugh which seems to take the sentinel off guard. I already know all this, but the fact that she and her master are unaware of this fact is encouraging. How they know of this is troubling, but I cannot allow myself to reveal this.

“She is not that easily manipulated. She knows her own mind and she does not falter easily. Besides, whatever plan you have concocted matters little to me. She is a mere human after all.” I keep my countenance even if my words taste like ash.

Anger flares in her eyes. She had clearly wished for this to have a greater impact on me. And it would have, had the truth not been revealed to me mere days ago. My every feeling would have shown on my body as clear as a physical wound.

She takes a step towards me as she sneers, struggling to keep the volume of her voice at bay.

“There is a reason why she made it out of the Deep Roads alive. Had it not been for Anaris, she would have died there. We both know that if he chose to save her, then there was a reason for it.”

“She is stronger than whatever compulsion Anaris thinks she will fall prey to.”

“She will be your undoing. An arrow of Andruil to pierce your heart.”

“I don’t think so. It is not within Andruil’s power to achieve such a thing.”

“She did before,” she cackles softly. “Oh, how your heart twisted in agony. Mauled by forces you could not control.”

“Thank you. This conversation has been most illuminating.” I bow graciously as her complexion pales. She has revealed Andruil’s plan and I can now guard against it. As the rest of the Evanuris have had eons to plan their revenge, but I will ensure none of them succeed. Their torment will never end.

In her anger, she charges at me, but I manage to counter the attack and throw her against the wall. I turn as I hear my companions running towards me. Mona is the first to reach me.

“Are you alright?” She examines my body and touches my cheek looking for any sign of injury. Her concern will never cease to warm my heart.

“I am well. One of the sentinels attacked, but they seem to have vanished.” I look back and she has disappeared. The scorch marks of my magic the only trace that she was ever there.
“You might just have incinerated the sentinel. Makers balls, Solas! You’re a one man army.” The Herald touches the wall and looks back at me with widened eyes.

“I don’t like this. Something isn’t right.” Cassandra frowns looking around the room. She has no idea how correct she is.

“Come, let us finish the path of petition. Hopefully we will find someone reasonable at some point.” Mona walks ahead.

After finishing the rituals - which Mona does with surprising ease - we enter the great door.

“‘Tis is not what I expected. What was this chamber used for?” Morrigan ponders as she looks around.

Sentinels appear around us with their weapons drawn.

“We’re being watched,” Edward murmurs.

“Don’t move a muscle,” Mona instructs.

On the top of the stairs appears a sentinel, who looks down upon us. The leader of the sentinels most likely - and one of the few true remains of my people left in this world. My people yet linger. It is with part hope and part dread that I watch him. A wrong word and this will end in a confrontation that will destroy what little is left of a world I left in ruins.

“Venavis,” he instructs as he steps forward. He watches us with caution until he sees Mona.

“You…” He hisses as his eyes narrow.

“Shit, he remembers…” She murmurs, then smiles up at him with obvious regret and bows. “Andaran atishan, Abelas.”

“I was not aware we had been introduced, thief,” he sneers.

“You robbed an ancient elven temple?” The Herald mutters with disbelief.

“No!... Well, not this one. I just wanted to inspect ruins and copy the text here. I never took anything.” She tells the Herald, then turns to Abelas. “I would never take anything from those who have so little.”

“You are more cunning than I suspected,” Morrigan looks at Mona carefully.

“A likely tale.” Abelas crosses his arms across his chest.

“You wanting to believe it’s a lie doesn’t mean it isn’t the truth.” Mona’s voice is firm as she looks up at him.

A smile creeps across Abelas’ lips. “Fair enough. Seems you fared better this time, intruder.”

“Well, at least that word is accurate.” She mutters to herself, then takes a step forward. “I got further, yes, but better? No. Did you get my warning?”

“Your bird arrived with your message, though I still hardly know what to make of it.”

“Wait, so you got a warning and you’re still attacking our forces? What in Andraste’s flaming sword were you thinking?” Edward shakes his head and steps forward as well.
“Herald, be cautious. They have lost their entire world and now they are threatened in what is left of it, that which they have vowed to protect.” I warn.

“You are unknown, intruders in this place. Shemlen entering our most sacred ground. And you came with an army.” Abelas looks at Edward. “Even if the mark you bear is… familiar.”

“Solas, talk some sense into him.” Edward grousing crossing his arms.

“What shall I say, Herald? Shall I sway him from a millennia of service by virtue of our shared blood? He clings to all that remains of his world because he lacks the power to restore it.”

Mona looks at me then, her expression filled with a deep sympathy and sorrow I could believe noone save the sentinels capable of. She understands. She has always understood, but it is not until this moment that I realise the extent of it. She said she will not fight me or prevent me from restoring my people. She wants them restored almost as much as I do. She sees the beauty and the pain in these ruins. This is more than sympathy, because she too has lost her world. This is an empathy that goes beyond anything I have a right to ask of her.

Mona turns from me and looks up at Abelas.

“Can’t you see what a waste it is? Time and resources we could use to fight Corypheus we use fighting each other. It is a pointless waste. We walked the path of petition and we stand before you without our weapons drawn. Neither of us wishes for Corypheus to reach the Vir’abelassan.”

“I know what you seek. Like all who came before, you wish to drink from the Vir’abelassan.”

“The place of the way of sorrows. He speaks of the well.” Morrigan whispers to Mona and Abelas gaze intensifies.

“It is not for you. It is not for any of you. You have invaded this temple as readily as the shemlen.”

“Solas ma halam, Abelas!” Mona sneers at him. “I tried to warn you of the forces that came this way. Had you listened to this warning neither yours nor our numbers would have needed to dwindled. Though it is a loss felt more bitterly by you, I imagine.”

He looks taken aback, but does not appear so much offended as curious.

“True… we have no way of replenishing our numbers.”

“I tried to warn you. I reached out to you. I know we are nothing to you, but if you could let go of your pride, then perhaps we might all get the means to preserving our world.”

“Our world? Each time we wake we find this world more foreign than before. There is nothing for us to gain by this.”

“You have everything to gain and nothing to lose! You’re not here only as a protector of the past, but as a beacon for the future. Otherwise, preserving this place would be meaningless.” The passion with which Mona speak almost makes me smile. There is a strength and wisdom in her words that could inspire faith.

“Curious that a shemlen would have the audacity to remind us of our purpose,” he remarks dryly.

“Well, you know us humans. We’re obnoxious.” Mona shrugs with a playful grin.

He smiles with some mirth in his expression.
“I believe you. Trespassers you are, but you have followed the rights of petition. You have shown respect to Mythal… and to us.” His gaze lingers upon Mona. “If these others are enemies of yours, we will aid you in destroying them. When this is done you shall be permitted to depart… and never return.”

I step up next to Mona.

“This is our goal is it not? There is no reason to fight these Sentinels.” I speak softly. I would not think her capable of it, but I also know that she acts with the knowledge she has rather than her empathy and moral compass. I can only hope she hears my plea - and that it is truly the wisest course of action.

“Consider carefully. We must stop Corypheus, yes, but we may also need the well for our own,” Morrigan urges.

“Ma serannas, Abelas. We accept your offer.” Mona bows.

“You will be guided to those you seek. As for the Vir’Abellassan... it shall not not be despoiled, even if I must destroy it myself.”

“No!” Morrigan cries and turns into a raven flying after him.

“Damn it!” Mona hisses. “I told her not to do that. Grr... well, at least there is our guide.”

“She turned into a bird,” Cole says in awe.

“I should have been taking lessons from her instead of Solas,” Edward teases as he looks at me and I merely offer him a grin.

“Are you certain of this, Inquisitor?” Cassandra asks.

“Come now, I haven’t lead us astray yet.” Mona smiles at her.

“Need I remind you of the time we ended up fighting a varterral?” the seeker grumbles as we follow the guide.

As we follow our guide, I fall a little behind. Resting my hand on Mona’s arm, she seems to understand my intention and stays a few feet behind the others, giving us some privacy.

“You were here before.” I state in a low voice.

“I was at the gate before. And I awoke some seriously pissed off elves. The only thing that stopped them from killing me was the secret greeting of Fen’Harel. Still got thrown out on my ass and elbows though.” There is some amusement in her voice despite the frown on her face.

“You did not use your runes?”

“They weren’t developed then. At least I couldn’t use them without exploding something.” She grins at me and I shake my head.

“At times I’m amazed by the fact you are still alive.”

“My too. I suppose it’s fortunate that I am immortal, not indestructible.”

My heart chills at her words.
Vhenan?

“Oh, don’t look at me like that. It’s not like I’m going anywhere right now. We still have a world to save.”

She walks ahead with hurried steps in an attempt to avoid the conversation. A behaviour so unlike her, I know I cannot let this linger regardless of the circumstances.

“Mona!” I call her name. She turns in shock. It is the first time I have ever called her by her name. Usually, I use endearments or titles that have replaced her name. “I know you too well to let this issue linger. You cannot in all seriousness be considering ending your life by your own hand?”

“Not now, but someday... perhaps.” Her voice is quiet.

I grab a hold of her shoulders and look down into her eyes. Just as I thought she had come to terms with her fate, I realise I might have misjudged the situation.

“Why? Why would you consider such a thing?”

“Solas, let it go,” she sighs closing her eyes and turning her head to the side.

“If you believe I would ever do that, then this is the first time you have been mistaken about me.”

“Life is hard. There is nothing but death, misery, and heartache. The term heartbreak is a lie. There is no such thing. No matter how great the pain is, the bloody thing just keeps beating - forcing you to live through agony. You know this better than anyone.” She has no right to speak such dire words with such softness and calm.

“And you can think of no reason to endure? Noone who might make your journey easier?” I reach for her cheek and let my thumb run across her cheek.

“Solas… this is just a fantasy. We still don’t know for certain how this will play out, if I have managed to change anything. And I’m so tired. In a century I might no longer have the strength or wish to keep going. But in the end it doesn’t matter, because it would be selfish as long as others need me.”

“Vhenan…”

“Now isn’t the time,” she pulls from me, but this time I do not stop her. She is right. This is not the time, but I will not forget this. She is mine to protect… even from herself.

We walk through the temple, when Mona stops every so often to look at the carvings, murals and statues left behind. Normally, I would encourage this behaviour and take true enjoyment from seeing this fascination. But lingering is not wise, and our conversation minutes earlier weighs more heavily on my mind then it has any right to.

The guide turns to look back at us as she hisses.

I look at her with some amusement. “I believe, she prefers we remain close.”

“I know, but... damn it… The archeological find of the age and I’m forced to rush through it.”

“I can tell you what you wish to know.”

“You can tell me your version of events. You know better than anyone that is not necessarily the whole truth.”
“Sadly correct.”

With a disgruntled expression, she quickly makes the foreign tool on her arm light up. The orange light moves across the mural and she hides it quickly. Thankfully, the others do not linger behind to see this.

Reaching the well we manage to catch up to Samson. The look on the Herald’s face as he activates Dagna’s rune borders on the sadistic. It no doubt makes the fight easier, but it is still far more difficult than I would like. Mona and Cole work together to take down most of the templars. I hope one day I will be able to anticipate her as well as he does. The havoc they can create on the battlefield it impressive and terrifying. Not to mention fascinating as off the battlefield they are both the most gentle spirits you could hope to encounter. Mona still refuses to take a life directly, and uses her abilities to protect the rest of us or paralyze others. Samson charges towards Mona from the back, but she is too far away for me to intervene. She turns at the last moment and sends a jolt through his armor making his body stiffen. As Samson falls to the ground Mona walks over to him and kneels down checking his pulse.

“He is still alive.” She sighs with relief. “You idiot! Why didn’t you listen to me in Kirkwall?”

“He was afraid. It wasn’t your fault he couldn’t listen. The song was too strong.” Cole murmurs as he walks over to her.

She looks up at him with a soft smile, then starts heading up the stairs. Abelas and Morrigan are standing at the well.

"So the sanctum is dispoiled at last."

"You would have destroyed the well yourself, given the chance." Morrigan glares at him.

"To keep it from your grasping fingers. Better it be lost than bestowed upon the undeserving."

"Fool! You would let your people's legacy rot in the shadows?"

"Morrigan, please. That's enough." Mona speaks softly as she takes the last step.

"You cannot honestly--""

"I said 'enough'. I understand, but we must respect this place and its people."

Abelas huffs crossing his arms. "Says the one, who has trespassed more than once."

"I was always here for knowledge, never to take what wasn't rightfully mine." She turns towards the well. "I know what this is even as I do not know all its secrets. Without it we are walking into the future blind - and if Corypheus wins then history will repeat itself. If Thedas never sees a power hungry maniac grasping for power again it will be too soon. This world, its people, deserve better."

Abelas turns towards the well as well. "Do you even know what you ask?"

"Yes… I do. And I know holding on to this for so long hasn't been easy, but I offer you more than release from an eternal responsibility. I offer you a future."

No… please no. I can not bear for her to become a creature of Mythal. Not my heart. I do not wish for her to become a servant, a slave to any Evanuris. Not even the echoes of Mythal that yet linger. I could object, and the spirits know how much I want to, but I must not. It is too great a risk. I struggle against the desire to reach for her. Just for a moment to have her look back at me. To silently beg her
not to drink from the well.

A small smile brushes across his lips as he looks at me. After a quiet moment he turns to her again.

"Perhaps we should have recognised it when you were last here. Had we given you the Vir’abelassan before, then perhaps this could have been avoided."

"Corypheus would have had no way of knowing it wasn't here any longer."

"There are other places, friend, other duties. Your people yet linger." I offer hoping that we can avoid a confrontation.

"Elvhen such as you?"

"Yes. Such as I."

"You have shown respect to Mythal… and there is a righteousness in you I can not deny. Is that your desire? To partake of the Vir’abelassan? To stand against those who defiled this place?"

“What I desire is to protect all of us. Regardless of origin, and what you may think of me, all of you are my people.”

“You claim kinship with all in this world?" Abelas offers her a small smile of a father - amused by a child’s dreams.

“Yes."

“Malas amelin ne halam, Abelas.” He looks at me with a nod before walking back into the temple.

I turn to the others. “Abelas, his name means sorrow. I told him I hope he finds a new name.”

“Let me drink, Inquisitor.” Morrigan pleads as the sentinels disappears from view. The Herald’s eyes widen and he steps forward staring Mona down.

“Wait, you’re just going to give it to her?"

“Morrigan and I had an agreement. I owe her a debt.”

“By giving her unlimited power?” Herald “If anyone should have this power it’s you! You’re the only one who can be trusted with it.”

Mona lowers her head in thought and I can’t see her expression. Atish’an looks up at her whining.

As she takes a step towards it I can not hold back.

“Vhenan, dirh’ena banal’ras. Ar banal tel’him.” (My heart, this knowledge leads to shadows. You will never be yourself again.) I plead and she turns to look at me. I hope she understands.

Her expression is soft and I have to struggle not to sigh with relief. I do not believe she ever intended to drink from the well.

“The well is yours, Morrigan. I think this was always meant to be yours.” Mona gives her a rueful smile.

“Thank you, Inquisitor.”

“Don’t thank me yet. You have no idea what’s in that.”
Morrigan walks into the well, but Mona does not look at her. Instead she looks around the temple as if for the last time. And as Corypheus appears only moments later I realise that is exactly why.

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Skyhold

Going through the eluvian had its advantages. Where the rest of the Inquisition has to make the long journey back to Skyhold I am lying in a warm, soft bed with my love resting beside me. It is our first moment truly alone since she discovered what had happened to her. I know she hasn’t been sleeping much lately. Whenever I drift into the fade and look for her, she isn’t there or only for brief moments at a time. I have caught her looking at me while awake. Her eyes sad. At night she clings to me. I love having her close, but I hate the ache I see in her. It has been like this ever since we went to the Temple of Mythal. The dire thoughts she revealed there do not make it any easier.

Her head is resting on my chest.

“*Vhenan*, what is it?”

“I’m afraid of what will happen. If I did enough. I hope I did enough to make a difference,”

“No one could have done more.”

She makes a humming sound, nuzzling her cheek against my chest. She does not believe me.

“I’m not so sure… I keep thinking about Abelas, the Sentinels, and you. Living forever… it seems exhausting… and lonely.”

“It can be,” I admit, then put a hand underneath her chin to make her look at me. “But sometimes you are fortunate enough to find someone to share it with. Then it can seem like a gift.”

To my relief she giggles as she lifts herself up and leans in to kiss me.

“Sweet talker.” The happiness disappears too quickly and I see tears forming in her eyes.

“What is it?” I cup her cheek and my thumb brushes away a tear.

“We’re nearing the end - and I’m afraid things will turn out just like they did before... I love you,” she whispers as she rolls me on top of her with a passionate kiss.
Devotion part 1

Chapter Summary

Everything in this chapter is based on codex you can find in the game. They are however, my interpretation of them :) I hope you'll enjoy it.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Ancient Arlathan

The palace and temple of Andruil is heavily ornamented with gold, lyrium, and trophies of every type of creature. Parts of it seem as much a tomb as a gallery. All for the glory of Andruil and her obsession with worship.

Andruil’s madness is getting more severe the longer it goes on. Though Mythal has already struck down a Titan in order to end the war - a war caused by Andruil’s crawling in the abyss - she remains unhinged and dangerous. The war with the Titans has been a bloody and brutal one, and both sides have suffered terribly. There is an uneasy truce now. A truce achieved only by Mythal’s wisdom and my own careful words of persuasion.

Even so I wonder how much longer this truce will last. The once-great heroes of the war have now become despots, believing themselves gods and abusing their people. All save Mythal. I am now her agent, her weapon, her wolf protector helping to limit the suffering with my cunning and persuasion. Having me serve Andruil is but a ploy for me to keep the mad woman in check.

I find myself tied to this creature, who lives but for the hunt and the sacrifices made to her. Whatever she was before, she has now become little else but a vessel for carnal desires. Blood spilled in her name and living creatures offered to serve her amusement have become a sexual ecstasy for her. It is so repulsive I can barely contain my rage. At night I wake to screams of people and animals killed, tortured or raped, some by Andruil’s worshippers, others by Andruil herself. And yet I must endure. Only Mythal’s anger holds her at bay, and I am the constant reminder that Mythal is watching. For all the happenings that sicken my very essence, far worse atrocities would occur if not for my presence.

An elaborate party fills the halls. Excellent food and drink, and wonderful entertainment, if you can look past the fact that most of them are slaves. I pass a golden wall fixture and see my golden vallaslin reflected on its surface. A servant dressed as a noble in my fine black, white and red clothing trimmed with golden embroidery. I am but a tool myself; more privileged and respected than those around me, but a slave nonetheless. Andruil’s nobles treat them as possessions, created solely for their amusement and carnal desires. Three nobles stand around a young girl, barely clothed and with tears streaming down her face. She is very young - certainly young enough to still be untouched.

“That is enough. Find your amusement elsewhere.” I keep my voice calm and friendly as I approach them.

“On whose authority?” One spits as he keeps assaulting the young girl.
Another turns to look at me and studies my vallaslin.

“Come, let us go find someone else,” the other urges his friend.

The nobles look at me briefly before retreating, leaving the frightened young girl behind. Her green eyes are red from crying, her brown hair tousled, her clothes in disarray, and her pale skin blemished with bruises and cuts. She whimpers and sniffles as she sits on the floor trying desperately to cover herself with the rags those monsters have made of her clothes. I crouch down and she flinches when I reach for her chin. I take a gentle hold and make her look at me so that I might examine her. I heal her swollen cheek as I speak softly.

“I will not harm you.”

She simply nods too frightened to speak.

“If you go up those stairs and go through the third door to the right you will reach my quarters. There is food and drink there, and you will be able to hide until these ‘festivities’ are over. You need not fear that any will harm you.”

She looks at me and pushes up against the wall behind her. Like a frightened critter, a hare. One Andruil’s favorite creatures to hunt. Something gentle, innocent, and agile. I close my eyes and summon a spirit. Wisdom appears next to me with a curious look until she sees the girl.

“I understand. Follow me young one. Solas would never harm you and neither will I.”

I reach out to the girl, who, with a skittish movement, finally takes my hand as I help her to stand. As Wisdom leads her away, I take a moment to myself. Anything that can keep the rage I feel at bay. Unfortunately, I sense a presence behind me and feel a pair of arms drape over my shoulders. In the reflection of the wall fixture I see Andruil. Her catlike red eyes stare back at mine in the reflection, her mohawk dark at the bottom and the tips bright red as if soaked in the blood of the many sacrifices in her name. Her skin is sickly pale and a faint red glow echoes on her skin, a result of the curse cast upon her by the Titans; a taint that lingers in her blood and the red lyrium weapons she uses. For such a vile and brutal creature, the look in her eyes strikes me as almost tender.

“We are alike you and I,” she purrs as the back of her hand strokes my cheek.

“Is that so?”

“We’re both hunters. We see what we want, stalk it and skillfully execute a carefully laid strategy. Imagine what we could accomplish together. The hunter and her wolf.”

With a smile, I grab her wrist and remove it from my face. As I turn, I look down at her, hiding my disgust behind a veil of amusement.

“I am many things, Andruil, but I am not, nor will I ever be, your pet.”

She licks her teeth as her eyes darken with sexual hunger. “You know I enjoy a good hunt.”

I lean in against her ear and whisper; “You are mistaken if you think it would be stalking prey. It is a fight for territory I will never relinquish.”

I feel her shudder and I walk away from her. I know I have not offended her - merely riled her up. I need to remain on civil terms with her. Fortunately her infatuation with me has been of some benefit in keeping her in line. But I will never lay with her. Though I am disgusted with her, that I could overcome, but toying with someone’s affection is a line I refuse to cross.
I walk outside and look into the distance as the sun is about to rise. Taking in the smell of grass and the first sounds of birds is soothing. It feels like an entirely different world compared to the party inside.

I smile, feeling a comforting presence. I turn to see a spirit in the form of a halla looking at the people inside.

“I do not understand you, Solas. Why do you care so for these creatures? They are selfish and so full of pride. Everything they see, they destroy.” Its brows narrow as it shakes its head.

I give a rueful smile. “True, but they are also capable of creating. They shape the world, where we as spirits left the world unchanged. It is truly remarkable.”

I reach for its cheek and gently stroke it. I will never cease to be amazed at how beautiful Devotion is. Its essence so pure and innocent if you never let it be twisted by pride.

“You sound like you actually enjoy your physical form.”

“It is not entirely unpleasant. Yet, had Mythal not needed my aid, I would not have changed the nature of my existence.”

“Hmm…” Devotion looks to the halla grazing in the dim light not far in the distance. “Animals are much more pure, and free of corruption. They do only what is in their nature. They know nothing of deceit, war, or cruelty. They take only what they need to survive.”

“And you have created many fascinating creatures.” I narrow my eyes with a bit of sadness. “Though some of them prey on the people. They are uncontrollable.”

It tilts its head and turns to walk towards the meadow as I follow.

“The people are immortal and far more powerful than any creature. There needs to be balance. Wolves hunt the halla to ensure they never become too many and die from starvation. This is no different.”

“Except your creatures are preying on the weak. Those the Evanuris have enslaved, rather than the powerful.”

“It is no different among the animals.” Devotion smiles at me and presses her nose affectionately against my cheek. “My sweet love, justice plays no part in nature. There is no use for it, as animals do not practice injustice.”

“I am aware.” I sigh as I sit down in the grass. “I helped the Evanuris fight the Titans. I brokered peace between them after. Now Anduril has betrayed the treaty and the Evanuris have gone mad with power. I feel as if it is all my doing.”

“You are powerful, vhenan, but not even you can overcome nature.” Devotion lays down in the grass next to me. “What of Mythal?”

“She cares for her people. Protects them. She is the only one of them worthy of worship.”

“Is that why you wear her slave markings?” Devotion’s eyes dart at me.

“It is for my protection. I have made many enemies fighting for Mythal. This reminds them that should they retaliate, they do so against her.”
“If you say so… I still miss my wolf.”

I feel her wet nose against my cheek and I smile as I transform into a black wolf. We lay side by side as the sun starts to rise.

Present

Walking through the great hall at Skyhold, I pass Josephine and Mona standing in the doorway of the ambassador’s office. Mona’s gaze is turned towards the floor with a frown, and her arms folded across her chest.

“Are you sure it’s absolutely necessary? We are so close to the end with Corypheus now - I can feel it. I don’t have time to go to Crestwood.”

“It is at Bann Teagan’s insistence, I am afraid. Besides, Lady Morrigan needs time to make sense of the abilities she has gained from the well, and is researching a way to defeat Corypheus.” Josephine speaks softly, but it is clear that she is adamant about this.

“The key is killing that bloody dragon of his.”

“I believe you are correct, but killing a tainted dragon is no small feat. And with the amount of wounded and soldiers still in the Arbor Wilds it will takes several weeks for them to return to Skyhold. We need Ferelden support if Corypheus decides to act against us. Master Tethras has also been quite insistent that we send a delegation there immediately. Something about a surprise and the influence on morale.”

Mona sighs, but gives Josephine a small smile.

“Alright, I see the wisdom in your suggestion. I will leave before the day is over so we can replenish our numbers.”

“Thank you, Inquisitor.”

Josephine notices me and smiles in my direction before walking back towards her desk. Mona smiles at me as well, but there is a heaviness in her eyes that has me worried.

“I heard Morrigan’s son went missing. Were you able to find him?” I ask.

I heard about it not an hour ago, but before I could offer my assistance in helping to retrieve the child Mona and the Herald had already gone searching for him. According to Lelianna they had gone through Morrigan’s eluvian and Cullen wouldn’t allow anyone to pursue until we knew more. A wise precaution, yet I had still been pacing the rotunda until I heard word of their return.

“We did and he is fine. He is such a sweet boy.” She takes a step towards me and lowers her voice a little. “We should talk about what happened, but it will have to wait until I return from Crestwood.”

“Or I could simply join you,” I offer with a smile, but to my surprise Mona’s face falters and she takes a step back.

“No, that’s fine. It’s just some diplomatic business. It’s better if you stay here with the Herald and prepare for when Corypheus prepares to strike.”
Her eyes evade mine and her shoulders tighten in an unfamiliar way. Had I not been concerned before I certainly would be now. This behaviour is so unlike her. I have seen her concerned, worried, and even afraid before, but this is a look of dread and pain I had never expected to see in her.

“I see… Do you have an inkling as to when he will attack?”

“None…” she admits with a sigh, the momentary dread leaving her again for a more familiar tired expression.

For a moment I consider doing as she asks, but Crestwood is only a day’s swift ride away. Getting there and returning to Skyhold will not take but three days at most. A shorter period of time than it will take for Corypheus to gather his strength and return to Ferelden, dragon or no. I reach for my pocket and I feel the handkerchief I am keeping there. There is wisdom in her words, but I need to talk with her before the final battle with Corypheus. My plans going forward depend on it. I take a step forward and take her hand in mine.

“I believe there is time, and I would like to join you, if I may.” I speak softly as my thumb strokes her knuckles and she looks at me seeming conflicted. With a sigh she holds my hand tighter.

“Of course. We have missed so much time already,” she murmurs softly then gives a sad giggle. “Damn you for being so persuasive. Get your gear, we’ll leave as soon as we are able.”

“At once, Inquisitor.” I bow with a smile as she walks past me shaking her head.

I look at her with a frown as she walks out the great hall. If only she would confide in me what is troubling her of late, perhaps I could make this easier for her. I take out the handkerchief. An old keepsake embroidered with elven writing. Last I used this, it was as wrapping when I gave Mona the framed drawing of her son. This time I will grant her another gift - the entire truth.

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Arlathan

I stand with my arms behind my back looking out over the lands of Mythal. It is a pleasant respite from my time in Andruil’s domain. Here people are treated well and protected. I have always been happy here. But it does not feel as it once did. Where I once found tranquility and happiness here, a part of me now lingers in pain and anger. All of the People should be treasured like this. It doesn’t feel right to live here in comfort while so many struggle under the rule of tyrants who imagine themselves gods. Mythal appears beside me and looks down over the lands.

“Andruil is very displeased you left her service.”

“I was never in her service… It was necessary for me to retreat. Had I not, I could not be held accountable for my actions.” I turn to her, my calm failing. “She is a monster! What she does to her people is an atrocity.”

“I know, old friend, but you need to steel yourself with patience. We will help the People yet.” She reaches for my cheek with a gentle smile.

“You underestimate the Evanuris. They have gone mad with power. Are the crimes of Falon’din and Andruil not enough? They will doom us all if we do not stop them.”
“We will always stop the others from going too far. Just as we always have. The Evanuris listen to my wisdom.”

“And what happens the day they no longer do? What will we do when they decide that they will no longer be forced into line? They turn on each other like rabid beasts. What is to prevent them from turning on you?”

She gives a chuckle. “That would require them to be able to work together without my counsel and guidance. Not to mention Elgar’nan would have to allow it. That day may come, but it is not today. Or for many eons to come.”

“But--”

“Hush now. I know you mean well, but that is not a pressing concern. This unfortunately is.”

She hands me a document. A report from one of her sentinels. My blood chills as I read it.

“This makes no sense. Why would it ever do such a thing?”

“I was hoping you would find out.”

I look at Mythal and nod in agreement as I rush towards my chamber to gather my things. Wisdom awaits me in my chambers and observes me as I turn them into a disaster in my haste.

“Solas, what has happened?”

“Someone appears to be killing many of the great creatures of this world, and somehow Devotion seems to be involved. It makes no sense. It loves creatures. It’s is a gentle spirit.” I shake my head in frustration as I gather my possessions in my pack.

“Unless it has somehow been corrupted. By jealousy and pride perhaps?” Wisdom’s words are pain and my heart stops as I look at her. Andruil… how could I have made such an obvious mistake?

“I have to stop it, before it is perverted from its purpose. There might still be time.”

“Solas, be careful. Devotion is too easy manipulated into Obsession. Especially, when the victim of wounded pride. I would not see you hurt,” Wisdom cautions.

“I know it. It will listen to me.”

“Because it loves you?”

“Yes.” I look at her closely hearing the doubt in her voice. “Speak your mind.”

“You will find only misery if you proceed on your current path. Perhaps this time not getting involved would be the wisest course of action.”

I still for a moment, but do not look at Wisdom. I shake my head and put the satchel over my shoulder. I must protect the world of the People.

“I am nothing without my purpose. I must remain true to it, so I do not become pride alone.”

“But a spirit of purpose is an ever changing one that adapts to its surroundings far more than any other spirit. You have been guided by the purpose of others long enough. Perhaps it is time you find your own.”
“I have a purpose given to me by Mythal. My purpose is to protect the people and their world. It is a responsibility I will never abandon.”

I hear a deep sigh coming from my friend as the door closes behind me.

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**Arlathan**

As I reach the coast I am struck by what I see. The winds howl in agony and rain whips around my face like devastated tears. Despite it being day, the clouds shut out most of the light. I am surrounded by corpses. Once magnificent creatures have now been driven to extinction as the ground is soaked with their blood. Demons of despair wail and moan, grinding their hands in agony. On the cliff I see a spirit halla looking out over the ocean. I step towards it, but it does not appear much changed from the spirit I love. Hopefully it is not too late.

“What have you done?!?”

Despite the anger and disbelief in my voice it greets me by brushing its nose against my face in a loving gesture.

“I’m happy to see you…” it murmurs and I cannot help but stroke its face.

“Why would you do this? It is not in your nature to evoke so much misery.”

“Devotion is often a source of misery… I did this to set the world right.”

I step back and look at it unable to contain my anger.

“You cannot create them and then merely destroy them, when they do no longer suit your purpose. They are not tools to be discarded!”

Anger flares in the doelike eyes as its nostrils flare.

“*You* were the one who berated me for creating creatures who prayed on the elvhen. Now I’m setting that right.”

“By committing genocide?!”

“For all your wisdom, you are too emotional. All my creatures were created for a purpose. Now that purpose has changed. It is the natural state of things.”

“Those creatures are loyal to you, and now you betray them?”

My thoughts wander momentarily to the Evanuris, but my heart does not allow the thought to linger. I cannot think of my love as a despot. I must trust that part of it is still faithful to its purpose. And to my relief it looks ashamed.

“Solas, I… the Cetus have to die. I take no pleasure in this, but sometimes we must take regrettable means to right our wrongs.”

I cannot allow it to do more killing. The Cetus is a dangerous creature, but it does not deserve extinction, and if I let Devotion complete this task it might finally pervert into a demon of obsession -
and a powerful one at that. I cannot lose it.

“Let these creatures live. Despite their fierceness they pose no true danger. Banish them to the deepest depths if you wish, but do not destroy them.” I plead softly as I take a step towards the spirit.

“Please, vhenan. Do not tell me that there is no longer compassion in your heart.”

It turns its head from me in shame.

“They are imperfect. It is her will that they must die. Ghilan’nain wishes it so.”

“Ghilan’nain?”

“A servant of Andruil.” Devotion turns her head from me.

“First you help create creatures that threaten the people. Now you ally yourself with a creature who serves the Evanuris who hunts them. What happened to you?”

Devotion turns from me and begins to walk away.

“Ir abelas. Ar lath ma, fen.”

It retreats, sparing the Cetus.

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**Crestwood**

Mona has been quiet on our way to the keep in Crestwood, but I try not to be too concerned as we have been in a hurry to get here. It is nearly nightfall as we place the horses in the stables. Mona and I laugh when a tired Atish’an collapses in the straw with a long yawn. Mona’s gentle expression is even more beautiful to me. It is rare for me to see a less burdened side of her, one Atish’an brings out in her easily. I reach out and brush a stray lock behind her ear.

“Ar lath ma,” I murmur and she closes her eyes with a gentle smile.

“Solas, about what happened with Keiran, we need to ta--”

“Mona!”

We turn around as Atish’an jumps to her feet and runs towards a Dalish elf with bright green eyes and dark hair. She radiates with happiness and enthusiasm as she looks at Mona, but does stop to greet the eager hound.

“Merrill?” Mona says with disbelief and then laughs as she runs towards her.

I feel a warm sensation in my chest as they embrace. It has been a very long time since I have seen her so happy.

“By the Creators! It is so good to see you!” Merrill steps back with a smile.

“Likewise. What are you doing here?”

“I got a letter from Hawke saying that he went to the Anderfels. I want to go there, but I think Varric
was worried I would get lost along the way, so he told me to wait here. I don’t think he has a ball of
twine long enough to guide me all the way there.”

Mona leans her head back with a laugh and wraps an arm around Merrill’s shoulders.

“We have some wardens who need to report to Wieshaupt. I’m sure they can take you with them.”

“Ma serannas, lethallan.”

“You’re welcome.” Mona looks at me as I approach. “This is Solas - ma vhenan.”

Merrill’s eyes widen as she looks at me.

“By the Dread Wolf!” she exclaims and I notice Mona suppress a grin with a strangled cough.

“Andaran atish’an, dalen.” I smile with a bow of my head.

“Ir abelas, I didn’t know Mona had a… why didn’t you tell me?” She furrows her brow and looks
at Mona.

“It’s still fairly new, and with everything going on, it didn’t seem that important.”

It is my turn to raise a brow as I look at her.

“Quit it, Solas. You know what I mean,” Mona hisses with a faint blush.

I make a non-committal sound as she scowls and murmurs “ass” to which I can’t help but chuckle.

“Let’s get something to eat. Know if Hawke has heard anything from Fenris?” She asks Merrill no
doubt trying to avoid the subject.

“I’m not sure. Fenris never did like me very much.”

“Who is Fenris?” I ask walking besides them towards the fire.


“You know, I always thought you liked Fenris. You seemed to get along with him. Then nothing
happened, so I figured maybe you didn’t like elves. Oh… sorry…” Merrill blushes as she looks at
me, but Mona merely laughs.

“Could you imagine? Had Fenris and I been lovers there would have been no need for uprising by
the Qunari or mages. Our domestic disputes would have torn the city to shreds long before then.”

“That sounds… well…” I pause as I look at her.

“Oh, that we were friends at all was a bit of a miracle. I think he threatened to remove my heart from
my chest at least twice.”

“He would never do that… I think,” Merrill muses.

“Perhaps. Have you met the dalish soldier stationed here? I’m sure he would be happy to meet a
fellow Dalish. Why don’t the two of you sit down and I’ll be back with him and some food?” Mona
smiles and then raises on her toes to kiss my cheek whispering “behave” before walking away.

I sit down opposite Merrill around the fire, while Atish’an rests her head in her lap.
“Are you happy?” She asks all of a sudden.

“Excuse me?”

“She seems happy. Mona, I mean. Are you?”

I smile a little. “You care about her a great deal I take it?”

“Yes. She always understood me better than anyone else. I never expected to meet a human who understood… not just my culture, but spirits… me. She always seemed so sad, but she never talked about it. Whatever happened to her must have been very painful.”

“I believe it was… Yes, I am happy.” My heart clenches unexpectedly at this admission.

“Good! It makes things clearer, takes away doubt when everything is crazy and people are dying.”

I chuckle softly. This elf is a little naive, but there is an unexpected wisdom to her as well. It is not difficult to see why Mona cares for her. And tries to protect her from the world, which is certainly the reason why she has never mentioned me in their correspondence.

When Mona returns she is followed by the Dalish elf, Loranil, we recruited in Orlais. He seems thrilled to meet another Dalish, and though Merrill seems hesitant at first they eventually start talking. I realise that it must have been a very long time since Merrill has talked to any of her people. Reading Varric’s “Tale of the Champion” I have some inkling as to what happened. As the evening progresses I find it hard to tear Mona away. Though she does not push me away she is distant. I feel a little guilty for wanting to take her away from her friend, but I need to speak with her privately. It feels as if the handkerchief in my pocket is burning, but as I am about to ask Mona to leave with me, Merrill is encouraged to tell a Dalish tale by Loranil.

“Alright… I can tell you the one Mona taught me.”

“That’s not necessary, Merrill.” Mona rubs her hands a little nervously.

“Oh it’s no trouble. Before the betrayal Fen’Harel was captured by Andruil. He had been hunting halla without her permission you see, and angered her. When she caught him, she tied him to a tree and declared that as penance he should serve her in bed for a year and a day.”

Mona reaches for my hand and looks at me murmuring an apology. I lift her hand to my lips to assure her that I’m quite alright as Merrill continues the story.

“But as she made camp that night, the dark god Anaris found them, and Anaris swore that he would kill Fen’Harel for crimes against the Forgotten Ones. Andruil and Anaris decided that they would duel for the right to claim Fen’Harel.

He called out to Anaris during the fight and told him of a flaw in Andruil’s armor just above the hip, and Anaris stabbed Andruil in the side, and she fell. Then Fen’Harel told Anaris that he owed the Dread Wolf for the victory and ought to get his freedom. Anaris was so affronted by Fen’Harel’s audacity that he turned and shouted insults at the prisoner, and so he did not see Andruil, injured but alive, rise behind him and attack with her great bow. Anaris fell with a golden arrow in his back, badly injured, and while both gods slumbered to heal their wounds, Fen’Harel chewed through his ropes and escaped!”

Mona smiles at Merrill and walks over to her, kissing her cheek and saying goodnight. I quickly get to my feet to take this chance. I manage to catch her a little distance from the fire. She looks at me with a pained expression.
“Tel’abelas vhenan. There is nothing wrong with you sharing that story.”

“I shouldn’t have… I was bursting with so much knowledge and Merrill was the only one at the time who came even close to believing anything I told her. I should have kept my mouth shut.”

“Hush,” I murmur kissing her brow. “Now, if you would indulge me I would like it if you would join me for a walk. I have something I wish to discuss.” I smile fondly at her, but for a moment she looks conflicted. Eventually, she checks on Atish’an, who is sleeping peacefully in front of the fire and nods at me. I take her hand in mine and lead her out of the keep.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you again for your comments and interest. I hope you enjoyed the elven lore I put in here. It is all based on the codex's, but it is naturally just my way of interpreting it for the purpose of this story.

Please let me know what you think :)

Thanks to EmberLeo and ninaninabobina for Beta reading.
The stories of Arlathan are all based on codices found in the game, but the interpretation of events are all mine for the purpose of this story. I hope you'll enjoy what I did with it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Arlathan

I sneer as the magical restraints hold me in place - tied to a tree on my knees. In my anger and desire to confront Andruil about her use of Devotion, I walked right into her trap. I thought her too wary of Mythal to go anywhere near the Titans’ domain, but it appears I was wrong. Bound and trapped in the forest, the chasm below is vast and treacherous. It is insanity that I am actually hoping for a Titan to take notice. While we are at peace, the truce is an uneasy one at best. Andruil smiles at me with a savage lust that has my insides turning. I do not fight against the restraints. I will not give her the pleasure of seeing my distress.

“What is it you hope to achieve by this?” I ask managing to keep my voice even.

“Well, your--” she licks her lips tasting the word, “-- devotion of course.” She cackles with satisfaction knowing I understand her meaning. She crouches in front of me and forces her lips against mine. I turn my head away and spit on the ground, but her expression remains amused.

“What did you do to it?”

“Now now, little wolf. I warned you not to hunt halla, did I not? But don’t worry. She is not far and she faring quite well.”

“I’ll believe it when I see it,” I scoff.

“Very well.”

She rises to her feet, and behind Andruil I see a golden halla appear. Where I used to see a spirit of Devotion it has now manifested itself physically. In my aim to save Devotion, my pride may have pushed her into the arms of Andruil.

“Devotion…” I look up at her, my heart wrenching in my chest as the name spills from my lips.

“So beautiful, and mine,” Andruil cooes as she strokes the halla’s face lovingly.

“She is not yours! The people are not for you to own!”

“You’re right. She is not a slave, but an equal. Which is why I have uplifted her. Ghilan’nain, come here, ma sa lath .”

My insides cringe at the name. The destruction of the countless creatures had been her own doing all along. Do I truly love her so much that it has blinded me from all reason?

“Vhenan , did she harm you?” Even now I can’t control my worry as I look at her.
Ghilan’nain steps forward and changes before my eyes. Where once stood a golden halla there is now an elven woman with ashen hair far beyond her waist, dark deerlike eyes, and golden antlers of a halla. Her face void of the vallaslin, and she is dressed in robes of white and gold. No, she is not Andruil’s slave. She is one of the Evanuris.

“No, she offered me everything. You know how I love the creatures of this world. Now I can protect them, and create new ones.” She walks over to me and kneels. “Solas, think of the world the three of us can create. We can shape it into a paradise, as we always hoped it would be. We can create perfect creatures.”

“And dispose of those who do not live up to your expectations of perfection? What of the people who already suffer in this world? You have seen this firsthand.” I struggle for breath as I look up at her. Devotion… Ghilan’nain is truly one of the most beautiful creations ever made. Everything about her is created to ensnare me. The dark tones of her skin, the depth in her eyes, long smooth hair, and petite figure.

“People are vicious and cruel. They’re not worth saving.” She releases a deep sigh as she gets to her feet.

Andruil laughs and crouches down to look at me.

“Oh, see the fear in his eyes. A fearful little wolf. Calm yourself Fen’Harel.” She ensnares the invented title along her tongue with pleasure. “But don’t despair. As recompense you may serve me in my bed.”

The lust in her eyes fills my heart with disgust, but it is nothing compared to the indifference in Ghilan’nain’s. My eyes do not waver from Ghilan’nain.

“Why? Why would you do this? I loved you!”

“Because I love you!” Ghilan’nain cries out at me. “We were happy, but you chose Mythal over me. Then you turned from me further by devoting yourself to the People rather than the creatures. You used to be a spirit of pure Purpose and Wisdom. Now you have been corrupted into Pride.” Tears stream from her eyes as she falls to her knees before me and caresses my face. “Ma sa lath, come back to me.”

I recoil from her in anger and disgust.

“I am not the only one twisted against their purpose, Obsession.”

Her eyes darken with rage as she gets to her feet.

“Too much pride,” she hisses and Anduril cackles.

“He will be ours yet,” Anduril comforts Ghilan’nain before capturing her lips in a passionate kiss.

Energy can be felt from the ground as stone and lyrium arise from it. The Profane stomps towards us, its eyes intent on Anduril.

“No! He’s mine!” The profane controlled by Anaris hisses. “You think Mythal can slaughter one of my people and get away with it? I will have her feel the sorrow of losing one of her own!” It points to me without looking. “For ages I have waited for an opportunity to get vengeance for our dead. His head is mine!” Anaris turns to me as energy crackles around him in rage. “Your silver tongue will not save you this time, wolf!”
“Are you prepared to fight us for him? That will end poorly for you.” Anduril smirks. “What do you say, Ghilan’nain?”

“Do with him as you like. I care not for the People, only my creatures.” Her voice is detached even as she turns to me. “I loved my proud wolf, but he has become perverted and impure.”

My heart hardens as I watch Ghilan’nain vanish into the forest. Anaris and Andruil are still arguing. In a moment they will engage in combat - both of them are too filled with hatred and vengeance for it to end any other way. But they are mistaken if they think they can take me alive.

Present

It was Ghilan’nain who taught me not to trust. She who showed me that sacrifices are necessary and staying detached is the only way to truly achieve an end. It is only fitting that I take the woman who helped me unlearn this lesson to a place where Ghilan’nain was once worshipped. I look up at the statues of Ghilan’nain as we walk into the grove. Mona tenses and seems more uneasy than I had expected.

I look at Mona as I remember Ghilan’nain, and she is so different. Her physical appearance alone - the curve of her figure, the tone of her skin, her eyes and her hair - that she is human is the least of it. Her personality as well has nuances Ghilan’nain never did. There is still that devotion, tenacity and love of animals, but it is tempered by thoughtfulness, kindness, and forgiveness. A paranoid part of me wonders if she was indeed created to ensnare me the way Ghilan’nain was, but Mona is not so naive nor single minded - and never as callous.

“The veil is thin here. Can you feel it on your skin, tingling?”

“Yes…” she leans into my touch, but I can sense the sadness in her. It is a sudden realisation as to why that might be, and I could kick myself for not coming to the conclusion earlier.

“I took you here before, didn’t I?”

A small, breathless, but sad chuckle escapes her.

“Yes, but we are different people this time. At least I hope so.”

“As do I. I was trying to determine some way to show you what you mean to me.”

She takes my hand and places it in the middle of her chest.

“You don’t have to, Solas. You’re my heart.”

“And you, mine... I had never expected to find someone who could draw my attention from the fade, and make my burdens seem lesser. You have become important to me. More important than I could have imagined.”

“Well, I did have some inkling.” Despite the heavy sadness in her eyes there is mirth too. Hope that this time will be different. I know her well enough to know that whatever occurred here before hurt her deeply - I hurt her. This time I must do it differently. I chuckle as I caress her cheek fondly.
“Now, that does not surprise me… So, what I must tell you… the truth...”

I pause as I look down into her eyes and I see her chest heaving. Fear and hurt lingering in her expression held back by that small amount of hope that this time I am different.

“My vallaslin… it was Mythal’s, but I was not her slave.”

The sorrow I have seen in her eyes all night turns into confusion, and I feel some hope myself. If this surprises her then this conversation has already changed and the outcome she fears may not come to pass.

“Alright… I believe there is more to it than that?” There is patience, but also some concern in her expression as she asks.

“Yes. Remember the story of Anduril having me in chains and fighting with Anaris over me?”

At that she gives a rueful smile.

“Merrill retold it not an hour ago, and I’m an expert on the Dread Wolf.” She leans in and gives me a soft kiss with that irresistible mirth on her lips. “The foremost expert, don’t you agree?”

I chuckle unbidden at her teasing and lean in for another kiss. I must tell her everything. With a sigh I lean my brow against hers and let my hands run down her shoulders and arms.

“Even an expert can acquire new knowledge,” I tease and she grins. To my relief that sorrow and grief has almost vanished. This time history need not repeat itself.

“Then enlighten me, hahren.” There is some good natured mocking to the title which makes me smile.

“Mythal had me take physical form during the war with the Titans. Then later sent me to broker a treaty with them to end the war. After Andruil went into the void, and broke the treaty eons later, I was supposed to keep Andruil in line - direct her purpose - but instead I became her slave. For a long while I was hers to do with as she pleased, and Mythal tolerated it as long as I could win back the trust of the Titans. When I broke free I removed my vallaslin and fled to join Mythal.”

“I don’t know where to start… Why didn’t you tell me?”

I lower my head in shame, but she turns her head so that her eyes meet mine.

“You’re afraid of Andruil.”

“Yes, but not for myself. You must understand, I made enemies of all the Evanuris, but none hate me as much as she. For her, the motive for revenge is also fuelled by passion. Regardless of the defeat of Corypheus, I must deal with the Evanuris. Things were set in motion long ago that I cannot stop now. I concealed my past to protect you, thinking that the less you knew of me the safer you would be if something went awry.” I reach for her cheek, and to my relief she leans into it as patiently and lovingly as ever. “She used my heart against me once before. The thought of her hurting you to get to me was too much. I assumed if you didn’t know of my dealings with her, you would be safe, that she would be convinced that I couldn’t possibly love a mortal human.”

I pull her to me and rest her brow against mine.

“But I was wrong to keep you in the dark. So wrong. Forgive me, my heart.”
Forgiveness and acceptance are all that I see in her eyes. Had the Evanuris had but a fraction for her
decency, none of this would ever have come to pass.

“There is something else I must tell you. A prophecy of sorts was revealed to me. One about a wolf
and a scorpion.” I begin trying to find the right words, but Mona interrupts her eyes widening.

“The scorpion asks the wolf for passage across a river, persuading the wolf that stinging it would be
suicide. Halfway across it does so regardless, because it could not fight against its nature?”

“Yes, how do you--”

“It’s a very old tale from my world… Who told you?”

“Imshael.”

“And how did he know it?”

“From one of Anduril’s guardians, I believe.”

“The Evanuris are already starting to influence things here?”

“It would seem so, but that is hardly surprising with the actions of Corypheus. We closed the breech
quickly, but it might have been enough time for some of the Evanuris to reach out.”

She begins to pace back and forth, but I reach for her shoulders.

“This changes nothing,” I attempt to reassure her. “My feelings for you are unchanged and I trust
you.”

“Solas, this changes everything… So we must make sure it changes nothing.” She murmurs to
herself.

“When I retrieve the orb I will tear down the veil immediately and deal with this threat. Tell me how
to save it and I can...” I trail off as I hear my words.

I cannot ask her to carry the burden of all this death. I pull back and look down into her eyes. This
was the last thing I wanted. I brought her here to show her what she means to me. What an important
part of my life she has become.

She takes a step back and I see the fear and worry in her eyes. But this is my heart and I know her.
The concern is not for herself - its for me. “Nothing has changed… and I don’t know how to save it... I can’t believe I’m doing this.” She gives pained chuckle. “You were right. This was too
impulsive.”

In her eyes I find no uncertainty. She knew this was coming long before I did. I’m realising now,
what she already knows, I have to pull away or I will have betrayed myself - my people. They need
me even more than I need her. My heart aches and I look down briefly at her lips. I could kiss her
and forget everything. It would be so easy to just turn my back on my people and be happy with her.
And yet, that is the only thing I can’t do.

“Even in this you surprise me. I’m sorry. I should have ended this long before. I never meant to hurt
you.” I hope she hears the sincerity in my words.

“So should I.” She gives a trembling sigh as she brushes my face lovingly. “How can I make this
easier for you?”

I nearly let a pained chuckle slip. Anything would have been easier to bear than her looking at me with such compassion and affection. Though she remains composed and is controlling her feelings with a remarkable grace, I can see it in her eyes. The heartbreak I’m causing her - causing myself. To know not only the extent of the pain I’m inflicting, but to know she has been expecting it - possibly for some time now… it nearly undoes my resolve. My every muscle cries out it agony wanting to pull her close. But her offer would suggest she knows this as well.

“You can’t,” I confess keeping my voice steady. “There is no way for this to end that will not rend my heart open.”

“Then let me do this, so I can spare you this burden.” She kisses me tenderly before she steps back. “A spirit denied its original purpose becomes a demon…”

She takes a deep trembled breath, and then looks up at me again. “Our goals are at odds and once Corypheus has been defeated I want you gone from the Inquisition. Thank you for pledging your aid to the Inquisition. Your help has been invaluable, Master Solas.”

“I... I shall speak no more of it. Still, know that whatever happens, you are a rare spirit in this world.”

“I will see you at Skyhold before the final battle. Goodbye,” she gives a polite nod and walks away.

I watch as she walks out of the grove with a strength that conceals her emotions. I know her too well to assume she is immune to this. I sit down into the grass leaning my back against a boulder. My hand reaches into my pocket and clutches at the handkerchief kept there as I turn my head towards the sky looking at the moon. I close my eyes to calm my heart, but I see only her eyes. In the distance I hear wolves howling as a single tear falls.

Arlathan

Tricking Anaris and Andruil should have brought me more joy, but the memory of Ghilan’nain’s betrayal haunts me. Thankfully it has not reawoken the war with the Titans, as Anaris acted on his own, but it is no longer the Titans the Evanuris should fear. It is their people. My purpose is to protect the People and their world. I should remain faithful to my purpose and not be swayed from my path. I look at my reflection in the pool of water before me - studying my vallaslin. Disgusted I turn from it and look up. Mythal walks up next to me as I look out over the mountains.

“Ir abelas, lethallin. It was never my intention for you to be harmed.”

“I know… The Evanuris have lost their minds. Nothing but greed and pride governs them now.”

“You are right… Something must be done. Ghilan’nain I fear is proving just as formidable as the rest despite her youth. What will you do?”

“The People… They need me. No one else cares for them.”

I feel her hand resting on my shoulder.

“You are already as powerful as any of the Evanuris. You’re the pride and purpose of the elven people. Give them back their dignity.”

She walks away leaving me to my thoughts. I look down at my hands as they glow with power, then brush them across my face. I hiss as I feel a burn on my brow as blood drips down my nose and chin. I look into the pool of water before me and I see my face without the vallaslin. A drop of blood falls
into the water sending ripples through the pond as a wolf howls in the distance.

Present - Skyhold

I stand on the barracks looking out over the mountains. It has been a day since we returned from Crestwood and I have hardly spoken with Mona since. What words we have exchanged have been civil, and as a result of our previous discretion I doubt most have even noticed a change in our relationship. I try to dull the pain in my chest with resolve, but it is much more difficult than I remember it being before. I miss her, I love her, and every moment feels like drowning. I hear footsteps behind me and turn my head briefly to see the Herald approaching. His expression is severe - even bears a bit of anger.

“Solas, this is likely the first and last time I will call you this, but you’re an idiot! Why would you leave her?”

“I had no choice.” I close my eyes and lower my head.

“If this is another elf thing, I’m going to punch you,” he threatens, though I know it is an empty one. “She loves you. And you are irretrievably, hopelessly, all consumingly in love with her!”

“Those words carry a lot of weight.” I try to push his words aside.

“But it’s true. And if I was clever enough to come up with a larger word it would also be true.”

He sighs and sits down on the ledge before grabbing my coat making me sit as well.

“I’m not going to pry. If you don’t want to talk about it, then it’s none of my business. But know that whatever you have to do or deal with, I will keep her safe for you.” The look he gives me is a serious one and I can’t help but feeling grateful. “And burn the living crap out of anyone trying to court her - to borrow a phrase from Bull.” He grins making me laugh.

I rub my face as I release a sigh.

“That is kind, but--”

“Shut it. I don’t want to hear it.” He pushes the flask into my hand. “So, now that I’m done scolding you, how are you?”

“You needn’t worry for me, Herald.”

“Solas, the truth. I may not be clever, but I’m not stupid.”

I hesitate for a moment before I murmur; “It feels as if a part of me has been made tranquil.”

He puts his arm across my back and pats the shoulder furthest away from him. We sit in silence for awhile until one of Cullen’s men informs the Herald he is wanted in the war room. The Herald gives me an apologetic look before following the soldier.

I stand as I reach into my pocket for the handkerchief hidden there. I hold it tight in my hand and
nearly throw it over the wall and down the slope of the mountain. I stop at the last moment. I can’t let go. I lean against the wall and open the handkerchief. Inside, I look at the two golden rings engraved in elven. The sky flares and in the distance a green light fills the sky. Corypheus has chosen his last stand.

Extra: I'm sorry! Have a fluffy picture of Mona and Solas to heal the hurt.

Chapter End Notes

I know! I'm sorry! There is a point to events going down like this, and hopefully it wont seem so meaningless down the line.
I hope you enjoyed the lore stuff though. It is completely my own interpretation, since we know so little. I hope it made sense and the hints I laid throughout the story regarding Solas' first love and Ghilan’nain made sense. If anything is unclear, please let me know.

And excuse the picture. It's not as polished as I wanted it to be.

Thank you so much for all your comments and support. It keeps me motivated to keep writing ;)

Thanks to EmberLeo for Beta reading.
Edward POV

I can’t bloody believe this. Ever since this mess began and I met Solas, it has been clear as day that he is drawn to Mona. I might have fallen head over heels for Josephine, and got the brunt of the teasing. But had anyone bothered to look at Solas they would have seen it. Or maybe I’m making it out to be more than it was. Truth is I wanted Solas to like me and for him to teach me. He is everything I never was. Clever, confident, talented, and wise, where I’m just some halfwit who just happen to pick up that stupid orb. So I wanted to learn from him, thinking that if anyone could make sure I wasn’t a disaster it would be him. I paid more attention to him than the others did. And I saw what others didn’t; a fascination and devotion that from the start seemed right. Mona understood him and he looked at her like she was the only true mystery in Thedas. When they finally found each other, it felt like something had finally gone right amidst all the chaos. I was so certain that they were going to last, that they were going to marry, as one large “go plow yourself” to the chantry. And now I hear that he has moved back into his old quarters.

I should mind my own business - I really should. But Solas is not only my friend, he is the best mentor, and only true father-figure I have ever had since my own family cast me out for being a mage. The only one who ever saw any potential in me beyond the mark on my hand. I’ll have his back whether he wants me to or not.

I walk into the Inquisitor’s quarters and find her sitting at her desk as always. Solas has few belongings, but seeing them missing from the room makes it seem empty. She looks up at me and manages a smile that doesn’t reach her eyes.

“Herald, what can I do for you?”

I walk over to the desk making sure to stay as far away from the balcony as possible. I really hate it up here. Heights is definitely not for me. I think the dwarves had the right idea staying underground.

“I was wondering how you are?”

“I’m fine.” Her smile is calm, but I know it can’t be the truth.

“I heard about you and Solas.” She lowers her head, but doesn’t say anything. “Mona, what happened?”

“Sometimes things just don’t work out, Edward. It’s life. But we’re professionals. You have nothing to worry about.”

“Don’t give me that. You love him and he loves you. There has to be more to it.”

Mona sighs in defeat and I see a distant echo of pain in her eyes.

“Alright... have you... there is a reason why Solas was a hermit before the Inquisition. You have noticed how Solas never lets anyone close. That’s because he has lost everything he has ever loved. When you have been hurt like that... it’s easier to never let anyone close.”

That makes a lot of sense. Besides Mona, and maybe Cole, I’m the one he is closest to and I barely
know anything about his past.

“I understand… it’s that way for a lot of people in the circle, too, but I thought things were different for the two of you.”

“I had hoped so, but I have lost my family… I know what he is going through… to some extent at least. But when you have been hurt like that it’s difficult to allow yourself to be that vulnerable again. And… well, when you realise that you might experience that pain again… then you might not act rationally.”

I raise an eyebrow staring at her. “Are you saying that Solas - calm, wise, who always has a plan Solas - panicked?”

She gives a wry smile, but I see a hint of unshed tears in her eyes.

“In a manner of speaking. He needs time to come to terms with everything he has experienced and is feeling. And if me giving him that space makes it easier for him, then he has it.”

“But he loves you.”

“I know… and I love him. More importantly I believe in the man he can become. But he needs a different perspective to see it himself. I can’t change him and I don’t want to. He has to be willing to change.”

I throw up my hands in frustration. “How in the name of the Maker can you be so calm about this?”

“Because I know him.”

“If you knew him you would see that this is crushing him! You would go down there right now and tell him that you’ll be there for him whatever he needs!” I take a deep sigh, but Mona doesn’t say anything. She just sits there looking serene in a way. Had it not been for the tear gliding down her cheek I would have thought her immune to my words.

“I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have said that. I know you’re hurting, but…” I trail off.

“He is your friend and like an older brother, and you’re protective of him. I understand. He is lucky to have a friend who cares about him so much.”

“Yes, well, I’m not sure I can make up for the loss of you. I’m not his type.” I shrug and Mona giggles.

I walk out the room hoping to find Solas. I hope they figure it out. While Mona is not the prettiest woman in Thedas - that honour definitely goes to Josephine - she is clever and resourceful. More importantly, she made Solas happy. There must be a way to fix this.

Solas POV

Artlathan
Being in this place of dreaming is so… disconcerting. It’s intangible, but still maintains a presence, no more real than when merged with the physical. Now, Mythal lies dead, I have sundered the world of the elves in two, and I have rendered my body immobile and unconscious. My own body and spirit divided as I divided the physical world and magic. The spirit and heart of the world are now only accessible while dreaming, its spirits confused and lost, while the People are now caught in a world torn. Marvels destroyed and our empire now a mere faint echo of what it once was. The People, our world, has faded, and these shadows are all that remains of it. This “fade” is all that is left of the spirit of an empire. And it is all my doing.

All to prevent a cataclysm caused by the Evanuris. Seven mirrors are gathered around me in the heart of this golden city that used to be a temple to Elgar’nan. From behind the glass they are hammering and shouting at me. Each of them trapped in their own personal nightmare. Crafted by their own minds to match their most desperate desires and perverted by their own atrocities.

I sit on Elgar’nan’s throne. Golden and with the symbol of the sun. Fitting as I will make sure they will never see daylight again. I dread the path that lies ahead. The prison they find themselves behind was created by me, but designed by them. I take no pleasure in their torment - not even in my desire for justice. Still, I must see the agony I have caused them. Just as I must face what I have done to the People. One day I will be held accountable for my actions, of that I have no doubt. So despite myself I need to face the Evanuris one last time. I must not forget what I became to get here. I need to remember so that I will not become it again.

I raise myself from an empty, meaningless throne and walk towards the mirrors. In the first, I see Falon’din pacing from side to side. His features are young and he does not have a single scar or blemish. His long black hair is smooth and immaculate, as his clothing is adorned in extreme detail. His vanity and need for worship earned us bloody wars, a self-obsession leading him to madness.

“Fen’Harel! What have you done to us? Betrayer!” Falon’din screams as he hammers on the glass.

“I did no such thing.” I say, unaffected by his rage. “You were the one who could not get enough power. You and the rest of the Evanuris wished to devour all the power, all the magic of this world. Killing everyone and everything in it. Tell me, what would that power be worth to you, when you no longer had a world?”

Despite his rage he laughs. “You think you are so clever. Do you really think this is the only world? Had you not been so blinded by your pride you would have realised that there is so much beyond this world. Enough worlds for us to travel from one to the next.”

“And devour each one in your passing. Seems I did the right thing after all.”

He gathers all his magic and directs it at the mirror, but as I cast a spell he recoils in terror. He touches his face again and again.

“What did you do to me?!”

In truth, I did nothing. He still looks the same, but every mirror he sees will show him a reflection of someone old and decrepit. In his eternal torment his prison has taken his beauty and accomplishments from him. The mirror darkens as I walk to the next.

Dirthamen. Keeper of secrets. He was supposed to safeguard the secrets of the Evanuris. He was a line of defence against those who would misuse the knowledge used to create and shape the world. But Mythal’s faith in him was misplaced. He guarded the secrets of the Evanuris who Mythal in her
wisdom deemed too dangerous, but not against himself. Sitting on so much power became too tempting and eventually he began using them. Sometimes to shape his domain in the way he saw fit. Other times he traded his knowledge to others in for favours. Each on their own was not a true danger, but these secrets combined could unravel the fabric of existence. By forsaking his duty, he betrayed the world. Secrets that should have been kept, to protect the People from abuse of power, he delivered to despots - just like he has become. Without this knowledge, the Evanuris could never have risen to power as they did. They would never had the knowledge of how to slay Mythal.

Dirtharamen stands proud in front of the mirror, but as he wrings his hands I know he is anxious. He stares at me with dark eyes, his brown locks hidden beneath his cowl as his being changes between the corporeal and non-corporeal.

“You think that by exposing all my secrets you have won, Fen’Harel?”

In truth I know only little of his personal secrets, but he must not have realised that he is placed in an illusion created by his own delusions.

“You,” he sneers, “are nothing but a liar and deceiver. Those are the ones who have the most secrets to hide. I will find them, and when I do I will use them against you. I will be your end.”

I do not answer him, but merely walk ahead as if I pay him no mind. However, I know that should the Evanuris ever be freed, he will find the knowledge it takes to bring me to my knees.

June sits on the other side of the mirror his back leaning against the glass. He does not move, does not scream, merely sits there calmly looking at his pale hands. June, the “God” of crafts. He lives for his creations, and there is not a thing, creature or person he would not sacrifice to complete his project. His people worked to death in order to get him enough resources. Venturing into the depths to get more lyrium - a substance that has since coloured his eyes with an unnatural glow - threatening the treaty made with the Titans. No means, no price has ever been too great in order to achieve his goal.

“I never suspected you were this talented at creation, Solas. My mistake for underestimating it. You deceived us all quite expertly.” He runs a hand through his short blonde hair.

“I would not have done this if not for your ambition.”

“I know… I have to admire these contraptions. I look at my hands and they appear gnarled and disfigured. I can feel the ache in them, and seeing them I know I will never be able to craft anything again. But it is an illusion.”

“How do you know?”

“Because you are not a torturer, Fen’Harel… No, this nightmare has to be one of my own creation.”

“It wouldn’t have to be this way. But when you crafted the weapon that killed Mythal… utilized the corrupted lyrium, you sealed your fate.”

“I’m aware… I know it means little, but I’m sorry.”

The mirror darkens and I pinch the bridge of my nose. It would be simpler were the world black and white. Not seeing June’s redeeming qualities would have been easier to bear. My steps feel heavier as I approach the next mirror.

Sylaise… her deception is perhaps the worst of all the Evanuris. She comes to her people with the promise of healing and nurture. Instead the People are mere ingredients in alchemy experiments so
horrendous and bizarre it defies any justification. The People say she granted them the gift of childbirth, after they took physical form, and showed them how to bring new life safely into the world. This is true. She researched healing magic, blood magic, and herbs, and shared this knowledge with her followers. Unfortunately, the reason for this was a need for more specimens that drove it. Sylaise would test her experiments and modifications across generations, use the bodies of infants as they were not yet contaminated. Then she modified the corrupted lyrium into pure taint. The women she subjected to it became broodmothers. Monstrous things created only to breed an endless supply of subjects for the advancement of Sylaise’s alchemy.

She is on her knees, rocking back and forth, her arms wrapped around herself as her long golden locks create a curtain around her. She doesn’t seem to notice me. She looks so small and so broken, it is easy to forget the atrocities she has committed. I am not certain what she sees. The horde of her victims? The curse she has released upon the world? Sylaise’s green eyes are swollen, her face flushed. Her tears are streaming down her cheeks, the fabric of her clothes starting to get wet from it. With a sigh I crouch down in front of the mirror and touch my fingers upon the glass. For a moment I suppress the magic creating the illusion. Sylaise looks up at me.

I expect her to lash out at me, instead she murmurs “Ma serannas.”

The words aches in my chest. No matter what she has done, I caused her this agony, and she is thanking me for this small act of release.

In the next mirror is the woman who started it all. The one who hunted in the void and crafted weapons of tainted lyrium to begin with, driven to madness by the Titans. The one who turned my heart against me. Andruil runs around her prison attempting to hide from creatures that aren’t there. Her mind was already deranged and I fear her imprisonment will make her even more so.

“What is that?” She looks around her eyes widened with fear. When she sees me she throws herself at the glass. “Fen’Harel, get me out of here! Please, don’t let it get me! I don’t want to die!”

I quickly darken the mirror sighing into my hand.

“How long do you truly think this will last, wolf? My power is greater than any other. I will break free of here, and when I do, it will be your doom,” Elgar’nan threatens from the next mirror, looking at me with sickening green eyes.

Elgar’nan’s fury is a madness that consumes and destroys everything in its path. None but Mythal could temper his rage, and, left unchecked, under his violent outbursts the People suffered. There is no justice in a world where Elgar’nan is considered a God devoted to vengeance, so resentful of the leadership of Mythal that he betrayed the woman he loved.

I look at him without fear and reply in a steady voice; “You are certainly welcome to try.”

In his rage he gathers his magic trying to burst free of his prison. While nothing about his appearance changes, he howls in agony as he beats his robes and long grey hair with his hands. For every time he will let rage consume him, he will imagine himself on fire, melting his flesh, searing his bones. I can tell by the way he looks at me that he is aware that it’s not real - even if he feels the agony of it. He stops fighting it and stares at me with a fury greater than any I have seen before.

“I will teach you pain unlike any you have ever known! You’re a monster!”

“You’re judging me?” I scoff. “You killed the woman you loved. A woman devoted to you.”

“And how are you any different?” Elganarn looks towards Ghilan’nain.
My heart tightens at his words. Ghilan’nain… for all my physical conquests, I have loved none but her. Whatever pleasures my body has taken, my spirit was always hers. The other Evanuris shaped their fates themselves, but in hers I had a part.

“You used my creations to bind us,” she murmurs from behind the glass and I turn to her.

She is still so beautiful. Her spirit translated perfectly into a physical body, her ashen hair vibrant against her dark skin. A part of me wants to plead with her, have her admit her wrongs and agree to set it all right. But I have seen what Andruil, Dirtharamen, and I have turned her into.

“You gave me no choice,” I lament, fighting every urge to go to her.

“Solas, ar lath ma,” Ghilan’nain whimpers the confession.

I do not doubt that she believes herself in love with me. Unfortunately, I am now too much of a cynic to believe in such simple wonders.

“You helped kill my friend in jealousy,” I hiss trying desperately to control my rage. “Turned my most trusted followers against me. Conspired with a woman who wanted me as nothing but a slave in her bed. You would rather see me bound than being without you. If you truly felt love for me once, then that time has long since passed. There is nothing beyond obsession and possession now.”

Rage consumes her eyes. Doelike orbs turned into an inferno rivalling even Elgar’nan’s.

“Dirthara-ma! One day you will know true heartbreak, Fen’harel!”

I take a step closer to the mirror, staring down at her with a stern expression.

“You butchered my people, murdered my friend, and betrayed me. As the eons pass I will remember the lessons you have taught me well. I shall never trust even those who claim to be my friends. Never shall I rely upon others. Nor will I ever allow my heart to swept away as I did once. I will not abandon the needs of my people - not even for love. I know heartbreak all too well, you ensured that.”

“You shall die alone!” Ghilan’nain curses me.

I walk from her with my hands behind my back.

“I know.”

Present - Skyhold

Corypheus has chosen his final stand and we all gather our gear in haste. I gather the few belongings that matter to me in my pack. No matter how this ends, I will not be returning. I hear footsteps behind me and expect the Herald. Instead I see a pair of hazel eyes looking back into mine. My breath hitch in my throat, but I manage to keep calm. I cannot allow myself to succumb to my feelings for her.

“Inquisitor.”
Mona holds up a hand for me to relax. A thoughtful gesture, but a request I can’t grant her. If I relax for but a moment, I will give into the ache in my heart and pull her to me.

“I wanted to say ‘goodbye’,” she explains as she takes a step closer.

“Inquisitor, I… Whatever comes, I want you to know that what we had… was real.”

“I know,” she says with a smile softer than I deserve. “I’m not giving up on you, Solas.”

“You truly should.”

She gives me a downcast smile. The one that lets me know she expected this all along. Why, _vhenan_? Why would you allow yourself to love me if you knew this would be the result?

“Be careful and take care of yourself. Thank you for everything. _Ma serannas, vhenan_,” she whispers and turns before I can answer.

It feels as if a dagger has been plunged into my heart. Had she hated me it would have hurt, but it would have been nothing compared to this torment. _Ma vhenan_ , forgive me. I love you with all my heart and spirit, but I’m more than those things and my purpose demands more of me. I feel my heart wither in agony and my hand rests above my chest in a hopeless attempt to soothe the pain. My mind keeps repeating two phrases; “ _Ar lath ma_ ,” and “ _Ir abelas_”. Please, _vhenan_ , understand just how much this hurts me. How much it tears at me to hurt you. Please, please, my love... Forgive me.

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*Mona POV*

From my balcony I watch over the valley through my telescope. I see the temple ruins fall back to the ground and I know Corypheus has been defeated. In a few moments Solas will vanish. Distraught by the loss of his orb. He will flee into the mountains and I will not see him until the Exalted council - if ever. Everything I ever did was for nothing. Please, my love, understand that I truly did not know how to save the orb after Corypheus got ahold of it.

“It wasn’t supposed to happen this way.”

I hear his words though he is kilometers away. It was, but it wasn’t. I should have stopped it. I should have tried harder. Been quicker, smarter, braver. The world has suffered - will suffer, but no one in this world will suffer more than you, my love. They will fear and hate you, and no matter which side wins you will be the one mourning. Even should they manage to kill you, I know your spirit will live on. Like a wisp clinging to the fade.

I lean against the wall behind me and slide to the ground crying. I embrace myself as I begin to sob. I give an audible noise releasing the pain I have felt in my chest since Crestwood. I can barely see from the amount of tears streaming from my eyes. I hear Tish come up to me and whine, then she turns her head towards the sky and howls.

Please, Solas, understand that what I do, I do _for you_ and not against you. Please, please, my love... Forgive me.
Hours later I brace myself for the reality that awaits me. The inquisition forces are returning with the Herald victorious, while my heart is already kilometers away - avoiding Leliana's spies with an ingenuity and skill only he has. I take another deep breath before I exit the main hall and I see a cheerful group of heroes and soldiers entering the gates. In a moment I will have to ask all the questions I don’t want to. ‘Where is Solas?’ ‘Tell me he isn’t dead?’ All subterfuge because I know he isn’t there. I know why. I know he is about to steal my Mythal’s essence. And I, damaged as I am, can only think of the fact that I don’t know if I will ever hold him in my arms again. Resigned to my fate, all air escapes my lungs.

Through the gates, the soldiers and the Herald’s companions all appear. Cheering and so full of joy, but when Edward’s eyes meet mine I know the charade must begin. Solas hardly ever lies. I always do.

That night I pick up my violin and play his theme from memory.

Chapter End Notes

First of all, thanks to everyone who have supported the story this far. You're so awesome. This next part of the story is going to take it's own spin going into DA4, but since we know almost nothing it's going to be wild speculation on my part. I hope you will enjoy it.

Sorry for the broken hearts. I promise I will mend them and that this story will have a happy ending. In the meantime if there is anything you would like to see please let me know.

Please let me know what you think of my spin on the lore and the Evanuris.

Thanks so much to EmberLeo for beta reading. You have been such a great help to me :)


Arlathan - beginning of the war with the Titans

I lie in the shade of the trees watching the world around me. The breeze rustles through the leaves and for a moment I imagine it is capable of doing the same to my fur. Being a spectral wolf, however, also has its benefits. I blend in with the animals, and though the smaller ones are wary of me I do not create the same fear the Elvhen do. I wonder, what made the spirits decide to take physical forms? What purpose does it serve? As a spirit I might aid others in finding or fulfilling their purpose. Guide them shrewdly with wisdom and advice that might lead them to it.

I look at Devotion, who in her spectral halla form walks calmly amongst the herd. She is so beautiful - as are the creatures she creates. Her love and enthusiasm for animal life has encouraged her to make more of them. And when she creates a new creature I help it find its purpose.

Wisdom lingers nearby as well, but in a different state of being. She has a fascination with the People I admit I do not quite grasp. She says she gains wisdom through their experiences and that they grow, change, and adapt in ways no other living creature does. She believes the world fuller for their presence in it. I can’t help but be taken in by her thirst for knowledge, and through her wisdom their purpose becomes clearer to me. Perhaps I have begun slowly to appreciate Wisdom’s fascination with them, even if Devotion does not understand my newfound interest.

The herd of halla stir and begin to move away. I look across the grove and I see my friend approaching. Mythal is wise, just and resourceful - never in doubt of her purpose. Devotion looks at her with concern and leads the halla further away. Things with the People and animals have become more strained after Andruil taught them hunting.

With a smile Mythal walks towards me, her golden amour shimmering in the sunlight. “Hello, old friend.”

“It is good to see you, even if it is unexpected.”

“It might be unexpected, but it could be either fate or chance. It’s so hard to decide.” She offers me a witty smirk to which I chuckle.

“As always, I believe you come here with a purpose. That purpose supersedes both.”

She cocks an eyebrow. “Are you certain of that?”

“As certain as one can be, when dealing with the unknown.”

She laughs, and Wisdom draws nearer as her spirit shifts with curiosity. Mythal’s expression turns grim and I sense the purpose of her visit. Sense the distress of the Elvhen people, the wrath of the Titans, and the purpose of survival ringing strong within both groups.

“I see…” I cringe my canine nose as I absorb the situation at hand. “You need more people to win the war.”

“I don’t need more people, Sulevin. I need them to have something only you can give them. The pride to stand tall in adversity and a purpose to keep fighting. They need you. I need you.”
“Hmm…”

She looks at me with a narrow gaze, something between a request and a dare to refuse her. I know she would never force my hand. I understand what this means of course. I would need to take physical form. Devotion walks towards us. As our eyes meet I see unease in her eyes.

“You are not truly considering this, are you? If you take a physical form you cannot turn back. Think of what happened with the Forbidden Ones.” Devotion’s voice is high strong, and what is meant as caution sounds like panic.

Wisdom looks at Devotion, shaking her head, while Mythal keeps her gaze focused on me.

“There is wisdom in Mythal’s suggestion, Sulevin,” Wisdom urges. “The People need you and you could prevent a great deal of needless suffering.”

I give a rueful smile at Mythal. We both know that Devotion and Wisdom’s words mean little. I had already made my decision as soon as I sensed Mythal’s intention. The energy surrounding me shifts and as I summon all that I am into being. In the air I feel my spirit flow, it's nature transformed as it guides the change. Each of them calling for my help and purpose, while sound and senses wake. Their fear, their loss, a disheartened cry without hope or cause as Mythal is a catalyst awakening. I draw a heavy breath expanding in the chest of an unfamiliar body.

I feel the heat of the sun on my face as the breeze moves across my skin making me shudder. I had never considered this… sensation. I shy away from the light as my eyes ache. The scent of the flowers makes me inhale deeper and even the sound of the birds seems… different. It feels as if everything is… simmering, beating, chilling. All sensations are in contradiction and yet they harmonize. A chuckle escapes me. I never wanted this, but it is so different from what I had imagined.

I look to Mythal. “You summoned me to aid you, now you must give me my purpose to follow.”

She grabs a hold of my shoulders and I gasp at the touch. I had never imagined…

“You shall give the People a purpose to fight for. Give them a sense of pride for who they are and what they protect. They need to have both in order to face the possibility of death and overcome fear. Both will motivate them to stay alive. You are now the purpose and pride of our people, Solas.”

Her words resonate within me, the final piece of the process, completing the transition. Where before I was purpose I now have a purpose. I look to Devotion hoping to share with her the sensation of ones purpose being embraced in a new form, but her eyes do not meet mine.

“I thought you were devoted to our purpose… Now I see that I was wrong.” Devotion turns from me and without a glance as she rejoins the halla.

I feel a gentle tingling sensation on my shoulder and see Wisdom mimicking the gesture Mythal did only moments ago. “I will guide you, lethallin. Help you adjust in any way I can.”

“Thank you,” I smile and look at Mythal who examines my forehead.

“You will need a vallaslin.”

“And what purpose will that serve?” I frown, also a curious new sensation.

“It will protect you against those who would abuse you or claim you as their own.”
With each passing day more of the People retreat to this sanctuary. The place located in a valley far from the Evanuris’ seat of power and surrounded by a lake and stripweed. The eluvians are the only way to access this remote area, and so far we have managed to keep it hidden from the Evanuris. We have even built watch towers. It is not my fortress in the Frostback Mountains, but it is better suited for our purposes and not nearly as obvious. There are many such places spread throughout Arlathan. From each of them we coordinate our efforts against the would-be-gods. Most of these sanctuaries have begun depicting me like a saviour, and I have to keep reminding them that I am not a god… none of the Evanuris are.

I stand on the balcony looking down on the lake. My followers have risen statues depicting my wolf form around the area. The reasoning is to ensure newcomers they have arrived in the right location - that they will be safe here. It’s unsettling to be depicted in a way that resembles the Evanuris even in the slightest.

The eluvian near me activates and I see Felassan coming through it. He smiles, but even so I can see the weariness in his eyes.

“Solas.”

“Andaran atishan, lethallin .”

He walks up next to me and looks in the distance where the newest group of refugees are arriving.

“There are more arriving every day. Falon’din has felt the greatest loss. He is getting desperate.” I see the glee in Felassan’s eyes as he speaks.

“It is progress, but you should not be so pleased; a cornered animal is more dangerous, not less.”

“True. I guess that explains why Ghilan’nain is aiding him.”

At the mention of her name I still see the colour of her eyes, the shade of her skin, and flow of her hair. I remember Devotion and it takes every ounce of resolve to remind myself the spirit I once knew is lost to me. I take a deep breath to harden my heart. “So, I’ve heard... However, it seems to be as a favour to Dirthamen. She has little love for Falon’din.”

“Hardly surprising since he made her creations mortal so that he might add their spirits to his own power when they die.” Felassan makes a dramatic bow. “Oh excuse me, I mean how he safely carries the lost souls of the dead to their final resting place - and then devours their spirit like others do wine.”

I would chuckled at Felassan’s snide expression if it were not for the mention of so heartless an act.

“Thankfully, his method is imperfect. But once he manages to do so, we are in considerably more trouble. I am more concerned with why Ghilan’nain is aiding him.”

“At least there I might be able to help you.”
“You found it?”

“Yes, but it wasn’t without cost.” He rubs his face hiding the grim expression I know lingers beneath.

“How many did we lose?”

“Five spies within Falon’din’s ranks. And he is looking for the rest. Should I pull them back?”

I give a heavy sigh. “No. Pulling them back will only risk exposing more of our organisation and we need any intelligence they can provide… even if they deliver it with their last breath.”

“Have I mentioned I hate this rebellion at times?” Felassan shakes his head. “But as I said, it seems that Ghilan’nain is infusing the shemlen with dragons’ blood in some ritual.”

“The humans?”

“Yes. I thought Falon’din had given up on that idea after he realised they are still too primitive to provide any true aid in the war effort… even as cannon fodder against our forces.”

“They may be primitive, but they are still a resource and they breed quickly. If he manages to indoctrinate them and make them stronger, then his army will be formidable - regardless of how quickly they age.”

“Hmm… Our reports say that the first of them are considerably taller and stronger than humans… supposedly some of them are sprouting horns. I hope he doesn’t lose control. They might go savage.”

“Not as long as they have a purpose to cling to.”

Felassan grows quiet and looks into the distance. His fingers run across his *vallaslin* with a heavy sigh. His service to Mythal is his purpose and for centuries we served her side by side. Now his purpose is torn, he aids me even as he remains loyal to Mythal. Mythal in turn helps us to the extend she can without giving herself away to the other Evanuris.

“I could remove your *vallaslin* if you wish.”

“You could, but that would make me useless when infiltrating. And Andruil is one of the last people I want hunting me. As long as I wear Mythal’s *vallaslin* the other Evanuris won’t touch me… directly anyway. I do not have your talent for escaping.”

“True, and I am grateful for your help.” As I give him a smile a bird arrives with a message. While not the fastest way of communication the birds provide something that magic can not; they cannot be traced with a mere spell. As my eyes linger at the missive I feel myself frowning.

“What is the matter, Solas?”

“Apparently, Anaris has seen this rebellion as an opportunity to retaliate against the Evanuris.”

“We expected this.”

“We did. I did, however, not expect him to turn our own people against us.”

“This day just gets better and better.” He gives a sarcastic huff as he reaches for the message and starts to read. “Red lyrium… Has Anaris lost his mind?”
“It gives him a tactical advantage. In a single moment he deprives us of a soldier, while he gains one, and makes their kin hesitate when in combat. In a sense we lose two people for every one he gains. It’s a brilliant tactic... if disturbing.”

“So, what do we do?”

“Make sure that for the moment the Evanuris are a more tempting target than we are. Thankfully, neither seems aware of my involvement.”

“Which is only a matter of time. What about Mythal? He will probably strike at her first.”

“Yes, you must go to her and inform her of the danger. We will have to be her eyes and ears in the shadows. Also, make a list of everyone unaccounted for in each cell. If they are at risk from infiltration by Anaris, then we need to know.”

“And if we find that they have been infiltrated?” He gives me an intense stare waiting my reply.

“Then they will have to be cut loose.”

“The entire cell?”

I close my eyes for the briefest moment. “Yes.”

Present

I place Mythal’s remains on the altar and seal it with magic. My oldest and dearest friend now lies dead because of my mistake. The last of her being shredded to renew me. Because she was so willing to restore the People she gave me her essence willingly. A part of me is glad of it. Having to take it by force would have been more than I could bear. This purpose of mine feels as a curse in it’s own right. It has cost me everything I have ever loved - Wisdom being the only exception thanks to Mona.

I feel Mythal’s power sizzling through me as I’m restored to what I once was, but part of me has never felt more helpless. With my orb destroyed, the steps I need to take to make this happen… it chills me in ways I can hardly describe. And those who suffer on account of me fulfilling my purpose are always those who get too close. I damn myself for my time with the Inquisition. I feel Cole reaching out to me, and I have sealed his connection to me. I left Edward behind - a young man who looked to my for guidance as a friend and mentor- with no explanation as to why. And Mona… I have abandoned her. With the exception of Cole, I was the only one she trusted with her past. I was the only one she truly let in, and it was doomed from the start. It was irresponsible of me to be swept away and care for them. Selfish of me to give in to my infatuation with Mona. Not only have I broken her heart and mine, I have made her a target for forces much larger. Forces more powerful than anything she has ever faced - even with all her brilliance.

I walk towards the eluvian as my thoughts linger on her, the way her eyes light up with enthusiasm, curiosity, and mischief. Her rare carefree smile. I close my eyes and shake my head. I need to put myself past this. For her sake as much as my own. I need closure… I need…

I stop in my tracks as I look at the Eluvian, then enter the crossroads. There I lay down and enter the fade, hoping I can find some sort of relief.
As I walk the fade, I eventually find Mona. She sits on the ground looking at a gravestone. One that carries her name and her greatest fear; ‘Living forever’. I feel a familiar presence.

“I have tried speaking with her, but she is distant. Interacting with her is so much more difficult after she had that device removed from her head. It’s almost as if she isn’t truly there.” Wisdom forms fully beside me looking at her.

“I’ll talk to her.”

“Are you certain that’s wise, lethallin?”

I pause for a moment as I look at Mona. There is truth hidden in Wisdom’s words, but I have an obligation to see this through. Be it indirectly, my past actions have resulted in her fate now.

“No, I only know that I must.”

I walk towards her as she sits there quietly. I would have imagined her dream to be more erratic and spontaneous - somehow reflecting the liveliness of her thoughts, but she seems distant… detached. She looks up as I approach and gets to her feet as if startled.

“Solas… I hadn’t expected to see you. Unless you’re a dream… or a spirit. Nothing in the fade is ever simple.” She gives me a rueful smile scratching her head.

“I’m here.” I offer her a soft smile, but I feel it vanishing as I recall what happened not too long ago. “You are aware of what has happened?

“Yes… I’m sorry about Mythal and for not telling you. I just… I didn’t want to hurt you or make you even more afraid if there was a way to prevent it.” She shudders as her face turns red. “I’m so sorry, Solas.”

“It’s… not your fault.”

We stand silently for a bit. She avoids my gaze in a way similar to when I first met her more than two years ago now. Then I didn’t have an inkling as to how important she would become to me. She eventually breaks the silence and looks at me.

“Not that I’m not happy to see you, because I am, but you wouldn’t seek me out without a reason.”

I smile at her a little saddened that the comfortable silence has ended. “You’re correct. I have a gift for you.”

“A gift?”

I reach for her hands and as soon as my fingers brush against her knuckles I feel my mistake. Letting her go is almost impossible as it is. I need to be careful.

“You’ve done more for me than you might imagine. I’ve walked in dark and dreaming sleep, both within and outside the fade. I have watched and observed, but without truly seeing… not until you. You showed me the world as it truly is and made my journey easier. Despite all that has happened I am aware had it not been for you I would have felt lost. And possibly even more frightened of what had transpired. I have walked alone for so long, but being with you gave me a solace I have found
nowhere else.” I feel my voice slightly tremble with emotion and I take a moment to regain my control. “You gave me a moment of peace. Now, I am powerful enough to do the same for you.”

The fade shifts and turns as I reach out towards it. In the waking world my body hums with magic utilizing abilities I have not been able to use for millennia. I manipulate the fade to match the surroundings where Joy took the form of her son. Drawing on those memories I can direct my purpose as I can pull at spirits and sleeping minds across the fade in a similar way to Anaris, when he drew Mona through by accident. But my efforts are directed and precise. Mona looks around as the fade shifts and a young boy, no more than thirteen or fourteen, appears. He looks at her for a moment his hazel eyes widened.

“Mum?”

Mona looks at him and walks towards him slowly. She reaches for his pale cheek as if she is afraid it will burn her.

“Is he real?”

“Yes.” I say softly. “I cannot send you home, but this I can give you.”

She takes another step closer to him her fingers running through his short curled brown hair.

“Sam, is it really you?”

“I could ask the same thing. You’re the one who’s supposed to be dead.” A wry grin forms on his lips that seem somehow familiar. “You look just like in the pictures gran has.”

She releases a sound somewhere between a sob and laugh as she pulls the young man into her embrace. He clings to her tightly as he makes a similar sound. She pulls away drying her eyes, then turns to me.

“How long do we have?”

“Until one of you wakes. I know it’s not much, but it is a chance to say ‘goodbye’.”

“Then we’d better make the most of it.” She turns to him, her hands never leaving his face. “You’ve grown so big, and handsome. How are you? Are you happy?”

He laughs his voice heavy from tears.

“One thing at a time, mum.”

I look at them for a moment before I turn and leave with my hands behind my back to give them some privacy. I stay within close proximity to maintain the spell, but I don’t intrude. This is a private moment I have no part in. Time is always a peculiar concept in the fade and it’s hard to determine if they have had a long or short time together, but he is the one to wake first. Mona turns to me, her face damp from tears, but the smile on her lips seems serene. She approaches me slowly as she begins to speak.

“Turns out I’m dead back home. Car crash… It’s those carriages without--”


A small smile brushes her lips. “Of course you do… No one else was involved, thankfully. Brain hemorrhage caused it. Like I went into a coma all of a sudden. But Sam is healthy and happy. His
father remarried and Sam is very close with my brother… I missed so much.” A trembling sigh escapes her and I have to fight the urge of offering her comfort.

“Thank you, Solas, for doing this. You didn’t have to do that.”

“It was nothing. Besides, it felt like repaying a debt owed.”

“A debt? Is that all I am now?” There is a playful sparkle in her eyes.

“Of course not.”

“I know this isn’t fair to say, but I love you, Solas.” Tears swell in her eyes. “And I already miss you, damn it.”

Instinctively, I pull her into my embrace and bury my face in the crook of her neck. I cannot trust my words or my actions. If I let go of even the slightest bit of control I won’t be able to hold back.

My lips linger at the lobe of her ear as I whisper; “Wake up.”

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_Nearly two years later_

The warm air brushes across my face as I look over the elven ruins that are slowly being restored. For now we are hidden, largely due to the fact no one thinks to look for us yet. But when the time comes, I must have a place to gather my forces. When the rallying cry comes, it will not only be able hands and bodies that answer, but their families. Children and elders who neither can nor should fight. With any luck these ruins will be similar enough to a village that we can maintain some sort of life for them.

For now, all is peaceful even if we are already preparing to wreck the very heavens, as I will leave Thedas forever changed once more. Hopefully, they will live better than as servants or slaves. Hidden enough by jungles and mountains that we may not be discovered. So far they are only accessible via Eluvians. A task made easier by Mona giving me the key for the first part of the labyrinth. She is also the person most likely to discover us. I wonder what I shall call her; foe? Adversary? None of them ring true, but “vhenan” and “ally” shouldn’t hold the same meaning it did two years ago. Yet it does. I still read every news my agents bring of her with the eagerness of a child. My thoughts are interrupted by a presence behind me.

“News from Skyhold.”

“You may leave it at my desk.”

“I would urge you to read it right away. It is in regards to the Qunari.”

This makes me turn and I take the message from her hand. As I read, the gravity of the situation dawns on me.

I frown as I continue reading. “And they have stumbled on a section of the labyrinth as well?”

“It appears so. They mean to strike during the Exalted council.” She pauses for a moment. “There are
good men and women in the Inquisition.”

“I know, so let us not give the Qunari the satisfaction.” A wry smile appears on my lips hiding the disquiet sensation in my chest.

Chapter End Notes

Hey everyone. I'm so thrilled that you guys seems to like me take on the elven gods and the lore. There will be more coming, but the next few chapters are going from in-between and into Trespasser.

If you have any requests for the Trespasser part let me know and I'll see what I can do :) Thanks again for all your support.

Thanks so much to EmberLeo for beta reading.
Three months after the defeat of Corypheus

Dorian POV

It’s quite a lovely afternoon at Skyhold. The sunlight is shimmering playfully in the snow in the courtyard, and from my window I have a rather decent view of the mountains. It’s all perfectly aesthetic - provided you can ignore the ghastly cold. How Bull can lay naked in my bed, snoring and without any covers over him, is a mystery for the ages. Seheron and Qunandar are warmer than Tevinter for crying out loud! Brute. But I suppose that’s what I get for staying up the entire night drinking with him… and… ahem… More pleasant parts of the evening drift through my mind as I look at him.

“Dorian, I need to talk to you.”

I jump back making some indigfied noise I will absolutely deny ever escaping me later. Cole is right next to me sitting on the windowsill, looking at me with those innocent eyes. I truly hope he didn’t catch a glimpse of what I was thinking mere seconds ago.

“Argh! Maker! Would you stop doing that?”

Bull sits up in bed with a start at the noise, but when he sees Cole he grunts turning his back towards us.

Cole cringes at my reprimand and hides his features underneath his hat. “Sorry.”

I look at him more closely. He is always a little unusual and difficult to read, but somehow it seems worse today. “Are you alright, Cole?”

“No.”

I sigh and sit on the chair near my desk. “If only Solas were here… Let’s hear it. What’s bothering you?”

“She won’t talk to me anymore.” His voice is a low murmur. I can barely make out what he is saying. “Not since Solas left. I can hear her hurting, but she won’t let me help. She’s afraid of hurting me. She doesn't want me to feel her pain.”

“She has been rather reclusive of late.” I nod and Cole looks at me with a hopeful expression.

“Couldn’t you talk to her?”

My eyes widen. “Me?”

“Yes. She likes you and her feelings can’t hurt you. Spinning, twisting, knots upon knots. ‘I failed. I failed them all.’ She thinks you might understand, but she’s afraid.”

“You know Cole’s right.” I hear Bull from behind me finally sitting up in bed and putting on his
pants. “She’s shutting everyone out. Probably thinks it safer that way. She won’t get hurt or hurt anyone else.”

“That may be, but I’m not exactly an outstanding example of mental stability. I can barely manage with my own problems.” I shake my head and grumble to myself more quietly. “Not without her help apparently.” I get up from my chair and start pacing.

“Kadan, listen…” He walks over and places a hand on my shoulder. ‘Kadan’, really? That bloody bastard is manipulating me. If he thinks a mere endearment could entice me, then he is sorely mistaken!

I scowl as he continues. “We both know something happened down in the Deep Roads with that Titan. Something freaky. Now, if anyone can help her it’s someone who understands magical anomalies. Solas wasn’t just her lover - he was her most trusted friend, and Vivienne is more of a mentor than a confidant. That pretty much leaves you.”

“The Herald--” I try to object.

“Is young and inexperienced. She needs someone who is an equal.”

“Please Dorian.” Cole looks at me with his big eyes. Vishante kaffas! They have joined forces against me.

“An ambush, that’s what this is,” I hiss. “Fine! But if I make an utter muck of it I’m blaming the two of you.”

Bull kisses my cheek with a smile and pats my bum to get me moving.

I walk out of my quarters and towards Josephine’s office, who informs me Mona is in the war room. I walk slowly towards the door, but I still haven’t figured out what to say. How do you even offer to help someone who is constantly watching out for others? I feel like a bloody toddler asking their mother if they are alright. Well-meant as it may be, it’s also utterly useless.

“Inquisitor?” I ask as I open the door and see her standing alone at the war table.

She doesn’t turn. “Anything I can do for you Dorian?”

“Me? No. I’m the good magister, remember? I’m respected.” I grin and she chuckles even as she doesn’t turn. I approach to stand beside her and look down at her. She seems well, but looks can be deceiving. “I know it’s none of my business, but are you alright?”

“I’m fine.” She smiles for a moment. “Corypheus is dead and now there is a southern Thedas that needs time to heal. It’s a massive undertaking, but I can manage.”

“Vishante kaffas!” And this type of reaction is why I am not a good choice for motivational speeches. “I wasn’t talking about your ability to command. You and Solas parted ways and then he left without even a word of goodbye. You’re not immune to that.”

Mona expression turn into one of amusement. “You’re not usually this nosy, Dorian.”

“Shows what you know, I am most certainly that nosy.” I try to make eye contact with her, but there is nothing. Despite her amusement, it’s like staring into an empty, soulless husk. “Maker’s breath, what happened? What had you so terrified in the Deep Roads, and why won’t you let Cole help you? I know things with Solas must have been devastating, but there are still people who care about you.”
“I don’t want them to care,” she insists.

“You honestly think you can make them stop?” I challenge and she looks at me with fire in her eyes. Not the most pleasant outcome, I grant you that, but better than talking to someone akin to a tranquil.

“You want to know what happened? Fine, I’ll fucking tell you,” she sneers. “I died, Dorian! Over a decade ago, I died and a Titan brought me back to life, the catch being that I’m bloody immortal apparently. I’m going to see everyone I ever cared about die! I lost my family… my son. And now I have to live on decade after decade, seeing everyone I will ever know die.”

My eyes grow wide and my mouth is agape - I must look like an imbecile. “How… how is that possible?”

“It took my spirit and created a new body for me out of lyrium.”

“Fascinating! If we could--” I stop myself. This is not the time. My curiosity will have to wait. “We can talk about that later… I understand why it must be terrifying, but…” I laugh despite myself. “Forgive me, I honestly don’t know what to say.”

She gives me a rueful smile. “That’s alright… I’m afraid. It’s like everything is falling apart no matter how much I try to hold on… I had to push away the man I love, because what we wanted wasn’t possible. Should I ever allow myself to love another or have a family, I will see them die. And what happens the day someone notices that I don’t age? Will I have to run away and hide? Live with the immortal elves in some temple?”

“I can’t imagine…” I swallow. What do I say to her? How do I comfort her? If only Cole… of course. Cole. I look at her with a small smile. “Cole will always be here for you, though.”

Her eyes become pained. “I don’t want to subject Cole to everything I’m feeling. I don’t want him to hurt because of me. I’m not his responsibility. He deserves to find his own path.”

“Inquisitor… Mona, Cole cherishes you. Pushing him away isn’t going to make any difference. He will still worry. I understand why you’re afraid, but this isn’t the answer.”

“I know you mean well, but leave me alone. I’m better of on my own.” She sighs. Frustrated I jump onto the table and sit with my arms crossed staring at her.

She tries to suppress a grin. “What are you doing?”

“I’m going to sit here until you succumb to my charms and agree that living without me in your life, while I’m still kicking, is simple too painful.”

“You’re such an ass,” she laughs - a heartful joyous sound I didn’t realise I had missed.

“Aaah, but a handsome and charming one. And I must admit my ass is one of my best features.”

She shakes her head and some of the mirth vanishes. “Dorian… what am I going to do?”

“Take it one day at a time. Besides, it might not be that bad. Think of all the academic marvels you can uncover with eternity at your disposal. I’m almost jealous.”

She laughs again. Perhaps I’m better at this cheering up business than I thought.

“Well, we could always try to travel to the Deep Roads again and kill you to see if the Titan would resurrect you.” Her smirk is positively devious.
“I think I’ll forgo that particular honour, but I wouldn’t say ‘no’ to a drink.” I jump off the table and offer her my arm.

“I don’t think that’s a good idea.”

“You’re right. It’s probably a terrible one, but let us do it anyway.”

She sighs in defeat and takes my arm. “I fucking hate Crestwood by the way. From now on whenever we have business there, Edward can go.”

I give her an odd look, but she doesn’t elaborate and the last thing I want to do is push. When we enter the tavern Bull and Varric are sitting at one of the tables nearby. Varric stands up, seeming excited to see Mona, and waves us over. He must have been worried about her as well. Bull gives me a slap on my bum as if to say “Good job” and laughs as I scowl at him.

Varric hands Mona an ale. “How’re you holding up, Waffles?”

“On a brood scale? I’m thinking Fenris after two bottles of Danarius’ finest.” She shrugs with a small smile.

“How’s that good or bad?” I ask pouring some wine.

“It’s fine,” Varric chuckles. “It means she not quite at the point where she wants to tear people’s hearts out with her fist.”

“Fenris always was a surprisingly pleasant drunk,” Mona grins and raises her cup before taking a gulp.

“Boss,” Bull starts in a low voice. “There is someone who wants to talk to you.”

He nods behind her and I see Cole standing a bit away watching. The expression on Mona’s face is ashamed, but she gets up right away and walks over to him. Hopefully they will both feel better after talking for a bit.

9:42 Dragon - Firstfall

Solas POV

I hide in the wilderness as a blonde elven woman in inquisition armour approaches. I’d prefer not to meet in person, but with her not being a mage I have little choice. I could have sent another agent to intercept her, but this is… personal. I haven’t seen Mona in months, and I have a need to ensure that she is safe. To make sure that, despite everything, she is… happy. When I’m satisfied that she has not been followed I let her through the eluvian that leads to my location.

“Andaran atishan, hahren.” Naya bows her head slightly as she approaches.

“Da’len.” I smile keeping my hands behind my back.

“I managed to get a position as her personal attendant,” she says with pride in her voice. Direct and
to the point - I can appreciate that, but her confidence has me concerned.

“She doesn’t suspect you then?”

“No. I had expected her to have a more suspicious nature, but she doesn’t even lock her desk drawer when she leaves me alone in her quarters.”

That proves it then. Mona is definitely aware that Naya is one of my spies. Anything she leaves there is meant to be found. It will be interesting to see how long it takes Naya to discover this. Either she will find out and actually be able to get me the information I require. Or she is in fact not very good at her task, but can at the very least offer me some insight into what Mona wants me to discover. I do not intend to point this out to Naya, however. I need to know if she is worthy of the task entrusted to her.

“That should help you in your task.” Is what I settle for.

“As you say… She is kinder than I expected, but very sad when no one’s looking.”

I keep my countenance to hide the effect her words have on me. “That is… not uncommon for her.”

“She never mentions you, and she never stops in the rotunda. She also falls asleep at her desk every night.”

Perhaps Naya is more observant than I gave her credit for.

I give a wry smile to hide the ache. “She has been known to do that.”

“How far do you wish me to go? I can try to search her room more thoroughly for where she keeps her hidden information and go down into undercroft.”

“Do as much as you can without compromising yourself, but try to be respectful.”

“As you say.” She bows her head for a moment and then walks away. Almost at the eluvian she pauses and turns to me. “You might want to know that Altus Pavus and that peculiar boy are looking out for her now that Master Tethras has gone back to Kirkwall. Pavus is returning to Tevinter soon, though, but I suspect the boy and the Iron Bull will remain. The Chargers have gotten a permanent position with the Inquisition.”

I close my eyes for a brief moment with my back turned towards Naya. “Thank you.”

9:43 Dragon - Drakonis

Fenris POV

The lyrium stings on my flesh as I plunge my hand through the slaver’s chest. He starts to gurgle and I move to the side just avoiding the spew of blood exiting his mouth. I turn to look down the forest road. Their carts have tipped over as the horses panicked when I attacked. The Tevinter slavers are scattered around, those who are not dead are drowning in their own blood. In the cage on the back of the cart the slaves are wipering. As I approach, they look more afraid of me than they did the slavers.
They press themselves to the back of the cage as I try to forcibly open the lock. I hear footsteps behind me and reach over my shoulder for my sword. As I turn the sword stops a mere inch from her throat.

Her green eyes stare at me - clearly unimpressed. “Why is it that I always find you surrounded by corpses? Couldn’t you find a new hobby?”

“What? Like painting?” I grunt as I sheathe my sword.

“I was thinking more along the lines of wine connoisseur.”

Her eyes sparkle with mischief as she passes by me and lowers her black hood. She approaches the cage door slowly and picks the lock. I stand back as she helps out the elves, and I feel annoyance simmering just beneath my skin. They feel more comfortable around a human, than the elf who freed them from becoming *magister pets*. Mona offers them potions, food and bandages, before she walks over to me.

“They’re just scared, Fenris. It has nothing to do with you.”

I scoff, unamused as a sarcastic remarks drops, “Obviously.”

Mona ignores it and looks me over. “You alright?”

“I will live. What are you doing here? Alone no less. Isn’t that reckless of the mighty Inquisitor?”

“Mighty? Since when?”

“Never, but that’s hardly the point. What are you doing here?”

She raises a brow. “What? Suddenly, concerned about my well-being?”

I fold my arms across my chest and stare at her. I *hate it* when she is purposefully sidestepping a question. Every other word out of her is either evasive or a lie. Most have a motivation or purpose they cling to. Hawke his family, Isabella amusement and coin, Varric his stories, and even the abomination had his cause. Mona is erratic, and there seems to be no pattern to any actions she takes. One moment, you will see her sacrificing herself to save a single life, the next she allows people to be murdered. I never understood why Hawke trusted her. To me, she was always as likely to save you as she was to stab you in the back. But then, there are those few moments in-between where that seems to dissolve, and then she is generous and understanding. Those hours she taught me to read, when she helped me take down Danarius, warning me of my sister’s betrayal, she was… likeable. But whatever part of her that used to have those qualities has been suppressed deeper. Right now I see only the deception.

I grab her by the arm and she gives me a warning look.

“Why are you here?” I growl.

“I’m on my way to Tevinter to meet with some friends of mine.”

“Magisters?”

“Yes.”

I pull my hand to me making a sound of disgust.

“They are not all monsters, Fenris. The Altus I’m meeting with helped me in the Inquisition. He is a
good man.”

I sneer as I sit down watching at the elves gathered some distance away. “I heard what your Inquisition did.”

She gives an unamused huff as she rolls her eyes.

“Everyone has heard what the Inquisition did.” She hands me a letter. “Varric sends his best. He knew you were coming this way and he asked me to get this to you. There is also information about Venatori movements in there. We were hoping you might be interested in ridding the world of a few of them.”

I don’t answer, but I do reach for the letter and open it. It’s a contract with a very generous advance. “Magisters… I should have known you would take pity on the mages. One day the viper will turn and bite you.”

“Is that supposed to be a kinky euphemism?” There is her evasive mirth again. She sits down and reaches into her satchel handing me a bottle of wine.

“Hmm… you take too many risks.”

“Don’t worry about that. I’m meeting up with a mercenary company not far from here. It’s run by a Tal Vashoth if you can believe it. Besides, I have runes that can blow up half of Thedas.”

“You’re a very odd human.” I shake my head.

“I told you, I’m from another world. Me being odd shouldn’t surprise you.”

It’s an evasive joke she uses often to hide her true intentions. A fabricated lie to hide the pain and agony of her past. That she dares to suppress her memories, while I had problems recalling mine - it’s infuriating.

I snarl. “Would you quit avoiding the subject?”

“It’s the truth. Not my fault you don’t believe me.”

“You’re worse than Isabella.”

“Speaking of, how is our favourite pirate?”

“What makes you think I would know?”

She raises an eyebrow.

“She’s fine,” I relent. “And you’re still avoiding the subject. You are too willing to involve yourself in the affairs of others, Mona. Each time you put yourself at risk. One day you will not be so lucky.”

“Oh luck? Is that what this looks like? I pity the poor soul that is unlucky.” She gives a huff taking the wine from me and taking a large gulp. That’s very unusual for her. I don’t recall her drinking with such… vigour.

“You should guard what you have. Keep your head low.”

“Sure. I could just take all the Inquisition funds and flee to Rivain. Find a cave and sit on it like a dragon guarding its hoard, while the world explodes. I could eat any intruders.”
“Even dragons are eventually slain. Or perhaps one day you may simply end up being rewarded with a blade in the back.” I reach for the bottle and she is quiet for a moment.

“You know, mages are not the only ones who have done horrible things. Run into any Red Templars?”

“No, but I did hear… rumours. Was it as bad as that?”

“Worse.”

We sit and talk for awhile and the elves eventually gather their strength to head as far away from here as possible. Mona tells me about what happened with the mages and the templars. While she has always been sympathetic to the mages, and distrusting of the chantry, I can hear the truth in her voice. In these tales at least, she is completely honest.

I cringe as I look down on my arms. “It seems I was lucky not to be anywhere near the Inquisition. I can’t imagine red lyrium tattoos would be an improvement.”

“Red lyrium…” Mona pauses and looks at me, then jumps to her feet. “Your tattoos are vallaslin!”

“So Merrill claimed. It never occurred to me to ask Danarius,” I sneer.

She starts pacing back and forth ranting. Talking to herself more than to me. I doubt she even realises I’m still there. This is much more like the woman I’ve known for the past decade.

“If you wanted to wage war and lose as few of your own troops as possible, then you would take over their minds. Red lyrium is a perfect way to do that, if you’re arrogant enough to think you can control it. Don’t you see? This makes perfect sense, Solas--” She shakes her head and corrects herself. “Fenris. Sorry, habit.”

“I’m glad you remembered my name… eventually.” I give her a smirk and she scowls at me.

“A slip of the tongue. It happens with parents and their children all the time. But not the point. You could have a fearless army.” She stops and looks into the night.

“Seemed to work with the Red Templars at least.” I agree looking down into the bottle.

“But where do I start looking?” She turns to me for a moment. “Danarius.”

“Is dead.”

“Yes, but his house still exists. They must have some clue as to where they found the ritual… Damn it, I feel like I’m missing something. There is something I can’t remember.” She rubs her face and mutters something under her breath I can barely make out. I do recognize the name from before.

“So… who is this Solas?”

She freezes for a moment, then evades with a sarcastic half-smirk.


“Given your friendships with magisters he can only be an improvement,” I scoff. “He doesn’t plan on blowing up any chantries does he?”

“Not Chantries, no.”
She gives me that look where I can never tell if she is being honest or simply trying to rattle me.

Her face turns a little paler. “I… could we change the subject?”

“As you wish… So, these magisters your friends with…”

She groans loudly as she walks ahead and I can’t help but give a wry grin. I pick up my belongings and walk after her. At the very least I should make sure she finds this mercenary company in one piece.

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9:43 Dragon - Cloudreach

Solas POV

In the middle of our base, I try to restore what little I can. There is still magic left in these rocks, but much of these ancient ruins have been claimed by the jungle. I almost feel a bit of sadness at removing the flower vines that have overtaken the architecture with their own beauty, or the animals who have made this place their home. But I need these old ruins to harbour my people, and give them shelter from the eventual storm I will cause. With a sigh I lift the broken pillar with my magic and raise it back into its place. I should leave this to the others, but I find it gratifying to restore this small part. Especially, when everything else has been thrown into chaos.

Mona would have loved this place. At the thought of her I lose my concentration and sit down on the temple floor claimed by grass. The sun is shimmering its warm light on my face, but I feel cold. Five months ago she was in my arms. Five months ago I still had hope. I close my eyes and journey into the fade, hoping Wisdom might prove a distraction.

Instead I hear footsteps and I turn to see Felassan walking towards me through the fade.

“Felassan.”

“Solas.”

It’s a polite greeting, but since he didn’t get the password from Brialia things between us have been tense. He isn’t even aware of my other spies, cells or sanctuaries. I do not trust him, and I should have disposed of him. It would have been wise, but something holds me back. A pair of hazel eyes staring at me, and a softly spoken plea.

I shake the memory away before it manages to manifest itself in the fade. “Anything to report?”

“She and Dubois are in Tevinter meeting with Dorian Pavus, Maevaris Tilani and Calpernia.”

This is intriguing, but also frustrating. Of all her secrets, Mona’s relationship with Tilani and Calpernia have always been some of her best kept. Whatever they found in that desert is no doubt stored in Tevinter with them. But with what purpose? Even as she says she will not act against me, I know she is doing something. I curse myself for my infatuation. I should have planned more carefully for this eventuality, but the prospect of losing her clouded my judgement. Even now a part of me struggles with the concept of trust. I didn’t share all my secrets with her then were to protect
her, but ‘till this day I am still uncertain how much she knows of my past and future.

“I see, and have you managed to discern what they are doing?”

“On the surface it looks like a friendly visit, but they have done a lot of research. Anything from Tevinter that could carry ties to Arlathan is being combed through in meticulous and immaculate detail - Dubois words not mine.”

I raise a brow. “You spoke with Dubois?”

“My informant ‘overheard’ him and Pavus talking. There are rumours about the Inquisitor, Dubois, Calpernia and a lot of rather large items disappearing into nothing in Magister Tilani’s basement. When my informant went to investigate, there was nothing but cobwebs, casks and rows of wine.”

I turn from him to hide a small smile. I should be frustrated with this, but instead I find myself admiring her determination and ingenuity. Naturally, she would be using portals as a way to conceal their projects.

“Since most of modern Tevinter is an interpretation of our ancient ways, that would take them a while.”

“To use another term from Dubois ‘a quite considerable haystack’.” Felassan chuckles and I give a wry smile.

“And have they at least determined what the ‘needle’ is?”

“Old slave traditions, binding, use of lyrium and vallaslin.”

“Why would the Inquisitor care about vallaslin?”

“Unknown.”

I hold my chin and try to think back on any past conversation with Mona that might give me an idea of her intention. “Curios… keep me informed of their progress.”

“Certainly… Also, she seems to be doing well. In better spirits from what I’ve heard.”

That makes me pause. That my agents remarks on this, without my having to ask, is troubling.

“Is the informant aware of my at… former attachment to the Inquisitor?”

“No, he has no idea that Fen’harel and Solas are one and the same.”

I close my eyes and release a breath. I can’t confirm if it is relief I feel or not.

9:43 Dragon - Kingsway

Vivienne POV
It is some comfort to be back in Orlais. Meeting with old acquaintances and partaking in proper, civilized company again has been a delight. It has also been a comfort, since Divine Victoria has already made a mockery of her position. Leliana’s initiatives are outright deranged. I suppose we should count ourselves lucky it hasn’t been a bloodbath at the very least. It has made my gathering of the loyal mages a more difficult task, and trying to rebuild a new Circle of Magi meets opposition wherever I turn. They are fools if they think they can dissuade me or think that their meddling will in any way prevent me from reaching my goal. Thankfully, my time with the Inquisition has offered my some power, which is sorely needed after my dear Bastien’s death. For a time I feared I would not even have a place to stay without having to dote on the hospitality of acquaintances - never mind a place to hold a proper salon.

To my surprise Mona was the one to aid me before I even made the attempt. I have always known her views on mages and the circle were ‘progressive’ - pure lunacy if you have any basic understanding of how the population of Thedas views mages. Her opinion on the matter only seemed to get more vocal whenever she entertained Solas’ company. But almost before Leliana had been put on the Sunburst Throne Mona had made strides for the former Montsimmard Circle to be handed over to me. Whatever remained of buildings, books and magical items were all given to the loyal mages. Something that infuriated Fiona, but Mona managed to calm her with her usual grace. I would never have predicted Mona to be a player of the game when we first met, but there is a pragmatism to her. Despite our differences I have noticed she does do what she believes is wise, even when it doesn’t coincide with what she believes is right.

I’m directing the restoration of the Montsimmard Circle, when a woman dressed in black and white comes riding through the gates.

“My dear Inquisitor, it has been far too long.”

She jumps off the horse with a bright smile and embraces me.

“It’s so good to see you. It’s amazing what you have done with this place in such a short time.”

“That’s kind of you to say, but it still needs a great deal of work. The drapings are dreadful.” I sigh. This is a greater undertaking than I expected. What a mess they have made of this place since the circles rebelled.

“They look fine to me.”

“That’s because you have no taste.”

She laughs. “True enough.”

“So, how was your trip to Tevinter? Productive I trust.”

“We made some headway. I did finally manage to get ahold of some old Warden maps. I have a meeting with investors tomorrow.”

I guide her inside to my office.

“And have you given more thought to my suggestion?”

She tries to hold back a sigh, so as not to offend me. I understand her position and her feelings, but I can’t let her know that. She needs to be convinced of my confidence in her. She has little benefit from my sympathy. What she needs is resolve and direction.

“I have, but I’m still not sure it’s the best idea.”
“The suggestion is sound… I know you were cruelly disappointed when Solas left.” My sympathy on this matter is sincere. Whatever I thought of the man, it was clear that he was clever, fairly competent, and I suspect a better player of the game than most realised. It has not been confirmed of course, but I have a feeling we have not seen the last of him. Most importantly his affection for Mona was sincere. Not exactly an upgrade from Dubois, but I can see why Mona would be drawn to Solas.

“It’s fine. I can deal with it.” She smiles at me, but I see the pain in her eyes. For all her failings she is stronger and braver than I believe she knows. Qualities that are rare enough that I can forgive her the questionable political views and horrendous lack of fashion sense.

“You deserve so much better, darling.”

“I… thank you. Help me make a list of suitable candidates and I’ll give it to Josephine.”

“Excellent my dear. You will be much better for it, I promise.” I smile reaching for paper and quill.

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9:43 Dragon - Harring

Solas POV

I look down at the report. This can’t be right.

“The Deep Roads?” I give her a quizzical look. Mona has no reason to venture there after what happened with Valta and Anaris.

“Yes.” Naya confirms.

“With what purpose?”

“From what she has told dwarven and Orlesian investors, they are finding a better solution to contain the darkspawn, and even push them further down into the Deep Roads.”

Thousands of scenarios go through my head. Each more unlikely than the next. Is she trying to contain the old gods, when the veil falls? Ambitious if true, but unfortunately irrelevant. Trying to create tunnels for people to flee through, when I accomplish my task? No, she must know that the fade will be everywhere and not just the surface. A more secure way for the Inquisition spies to travel through?

“And what have the investors been promised in return?”

“Full rights to the treasures found while excavating the area. They even have their own archeological experts and workers join the project. They are constructing some sort of towers of metal down there.”

I try to hide my astonishment. What I wouldn’t give to know what is going on in that brilliant mind of hers.

“I see. Anything else?”

“Yes, the Inquisitor is being courted by a number of Orlesian nobles.”
“That’s hardly anything new. The nobility have always sought more power.”

“No, the Inquisitor has requested it - as a way to build stronger alliances.”

My breath hitches, and I’m uncertain if I have managed to conceal it. “Do you have a list of names of the prospects so far?”

“Yes, right here.” Naya tries to hand me the document, but I act as if I don’t see it. Instead she places it on the table.

“Thank you. That will be all.”

She nods and walks out of the room. As the door closes I grab a hold on the table to keep myself from keeling over. Marriage… I turn and lean against the table reaching under my breastplate and pulling out a handkerchief. I look at the rings inside. No, that can’t be. She must be stalling, using it as a pretense to open up negotiations for her project in the Deep Roads. I close my eyes as I tighten my grip on the rings. I’m tempted to seek her out in the fade, but I can’t allow myself to do that. I have only done it once since leaving the Inquisition and it almost broke my resolve. I can’t risk it again - no matter how tempted I may be.

Chapter End Notes

Hi everyone. Thank you so much for all your support. This chapter is a little different than my previous ones, so please let me know what you think of it. The next chapter will be similar to this one, so if you want a certain POV, please let me know :)

It has a lot of time skips so I have added the Thedas calendar to this comment.

Corypheus is defeated late in 9:42 Dragon - Trespasser takes place in 9:44 Dragon.

1st month: Verimensis / Wintermarch (Annum: First Day)
2nd month: Pluitanis / Guardian (Annum: Wintersend)
3rd month: Nubulis / Drakonis
4th month: Eluviesta / Cloudreach
5th month: Molioris / Bloomingtide (Annum: Summerday)
6th month: Ferventis / Justinian
7th month: Solis / Solace
8th month: Matrinalis / August (Annum: All Soul's Day)
9th month: Parvulis / Kingsway
10th month: Frumentum / Harvestmere
11th month: Umbralis / Firstfall (Annum: Satinalia)
12th month: Cassus / Haring

Thanks so much to EmberLeo for beta reading.
Chapter 53: 9:43 - 9: 44 Dragon

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

9:43 Dragon - Wintermarch

Josephine POV

Mona’s pours me some more tea as she sits across from my desk and we go over the Inquisition business. She is away far too often dealing with projects of varying importance. Her project of exploration and securing the Deep Roads is her most ambitious. Her study of magical phenomena and elven lore in Tevinter is her most mysterious. She does take her duties as Inquisitor seriously and devotes most of her time to Skyhold, but even so both Ferelden and Orlais have started to take notice. It is only a matter of time before they will no longer tolerate a force like the Inquisition at their borders. The last matter of the day is of a more… personal nature, and one that, despite my upbringing, bothers me.

“We have received a counter offer from Count Bisset. He is distantly related to the De Monforts.” I hand Mona the letter we received earlier that morning.

“I see. And how are his circumstances?” She looks at it, carefully examining it, just as she would any business transaction.

“He has heavy investments with the lyrium trade and his metal and stone quarries are some of the largest in Orlais. He also has decent trade relations in Nevarra.”

“Sounds promising.”

“Yes, but I should warn you that he has a… suspect reputation. While it would be advantageous in getting the ore and minerals required, he is an unpleasant man in looks, manners, and habits.” I try to meet her gaze, but she merely sips her tea. It’s not that she does not take my word seriously, it is merely that it might not matter to her. I can no longer decide if this is the actions of a woman with a broken heart or a hardened one.

“Well, I would be marrying the resources rather than him.” She gives me a wicked half-smirk. “Nobles have seperate bedrooms, right?”

I raise a brow and I can’t help but frown. “That is true, however, he might want an heir. His former wife wasn’t able to give him one. It’s the reason why their marriages was eventually nullified.”

“Can’t we recruit a mistress for him? There must be a gentlemen in this pile who has one they can spare.” Mona gestures to the pile with a grin.

“Inquisitor, I do wish you would take this more seriously.” I hold back the urge to sigh and shake my head. Perhaps Edward’s romantic notions are starting to influence my priorities.

“Josephine, I appreciate the warning, but we both know that if the construction in the Deep Roads are to be finished within the next two years then we need those resources now. And with both Ferelden and Orlais starting to complain, I doubt we are in any position to ask for loans. Not to mention if and when either country begins to smell blood, my bargaining chip will have lost its worth.”
“That may be so, but I would still urge you to reconsider. I could try reaching out through--”

“How long would it take?”

“Months, possibly…”

She gives me a small smile, but there is something both apologetic and sad in her eyes.

“If I may, I’d like to add something on a more personal note.”

“You may always speak freely, Josie.”

“I think this is a poor decision. You are not necessarily suited for this type of… arrangement.”

“Oh, is that so?” There is amusement in her expression that never vanishes as she leans forward with great interest.

“No, misunderstand, you would do well in an arranged marriage if it was a husband you could respect. But this would not be the case with Bisset.”

She looks down for a moment, which lets me know that she agrees… on some level at least. Then something playful replaces it. “Then my ambassador will just have to insist on a long engagement and a good agreement, should Bisset be the one to withdraw from the arrangement.”

“What are you planning?” There is more suspicion in my voice than I would like.

“Oh, so many things, Josie.” She laughs with a wink that makes something slither down my neck. Her natural affinity for trouble only seems to have increased since the demise of Corypheus.

The door opens and Edward comes through, smiling at first, but his expression turns grim as he sees Mona and turns to walk out the door.

“Herald, this has gone on long enough. Please, let us talk,” the Inquisitor’s voice is firm, but kind.

“There is nothing to talk about. Just let me--” He doesn’t finish the sentence, but looks at. “I’m sorry, love. I’ll be back later.”

The Inquisitor sighs as he leaves. “What am I going to do about him?”

I offer a smile. “Patience, Inquisitor. He will come around soon enough.”

“It has been months. This is childish. What is going on in that head of his?”

I remember Edward’s reaction when Solas left. Edward always had some insecurities - especially in his skills as a mage - that Solas helped calm. Our elven apostate had managed to bring out the talent that lay dormant within and encouraged his confidence. He relied on him as a mentor, as a friend, and as a father figure. The latter is something he has only ever confided to me. Edward’s ties to his own family have been strained, and they have been absent in his life. Even now when they have tried to mend those ties, he refuses to be anything other than civil, something I have chosen to respect. Even with all the friends he has made during his time with the Inquisition, Solas is still the only person my love regards as family. And with that comes an intense loyalty that I sincerely hope Solas is worthy of. Because of this he has held out hope longer than most that Solas will one day return.

“Solas leaving affected him strongly.” I try to be as delicate about the subject as possible. “Not as it did you, naturally, but he still believes Solas will return. And by us negotiating possible marriage
arrangements for you he thinks we have given up. That you have given up.”

“I will give it to him, training with Solas definitely gave him a lot more backbone. I can’t remember the last time I was so fervently scolded.” She sighs shaking his head. “I miss him, too. Not a day goes by when Solas is not in my thoughts, but I have my duty… never mind. I won’t intrude any longer.” She gets up and walks towards the door, when I call for her.

“Inquisitor, her Holiness is still having her network search for Solas. There is still hope that they might find him.”

And then she gives me the look I always dread. The one that means to be polite, but shows that she has indeed given up all hope.

Not long after she leaves, Edward returns and smiles at me with such tender affection it nearly aches. The kiss he gives me is light and soft, yet it lingers and makes my heart beat a little faster-

“I’m sorry, Josephine. I just… I know he’ll be back. And I know he had a damned good reason for leaving. He is out there somewhere protecting us. I just don’t have any proof.” He sighs and kisses my temple as light as he did my lips before. I let my hand brush his cheek.

“You are always willing to see the best in everyone, my love. It’s what makes you so endearing.”

“I think you mean gullible,” he chuckles with that self-deprecation that lets me know that despite Solas’ best efforts some of those insecurities from the Circle remain.

“But the Inquisitor has a duty to protect us. She has so many different ties and networks at this point that even we as her advisors don’t know them all. She sees things we don’t, but she has lead us this far. We must trust that what she does is for the best.”

With a dramatic sigh he sits down in the chair opposite my desk and holds a tightened fist in front of his lips.

“But what if she is wrong? Mona is wonderful, protective, thoughtful, but when she was with Solas she was great. She was stronger, she took other people’s counsel. Now she is running a lone crusade, and no one is completely certain of what she is doing. Solas was the only person who could bring her back from that, and ground her. You said so yourself.”

“You are correct. She has reverted back to who she was before Solas joined the Inquisition, but she is mourning. I believe she still loves him, and she is dealing with that loss the only way she knows how. We cannot tell her how to grieve.”

“You are right. I just… I miss my friend, damn it!” He slams his hand into the armrest. “I promised I would keep her safe, and make sure she was still waiting for him when he returned… argh… I sound like a child.”

“Not a child, just very caring.” I get up from my chair and walk towards him.

“Naive,” he corrects.
“No, that you are *not*, my love.” I sit down in his lap and as he wraps his arms around my waist I give him a deep kiss, emphasizing my words.

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9:43 Dragon - Guardian

*Solas POV*

I attempt to keep myself composed as Naya tells me about the newest developments in the Inquisition. I put my hands behind my back, fighting against every instinct my body has to reveal the pain I am feeling. Bisset...

“So, there has been made an agreement then?”

Naya takes a deep breath as if gathering her courage. “Yes, though the engagement is fairly long. I don’t think the Inquisitor has any intention of going through with it, but she isn’t always predictable.”

“True enough. You may leave your findings on the altar.”

I look into the long forgotten elven ruin. We never use the same meeting place more than once. I should refrain from receiving this information in person, but as they are of a more private nature than most it does not seem right to include more people in Mona’s dealings. Not to mention that the fewer who are aware of the extent of my affection for the Inquisitor the less danger she is in.

“I’m sorry.” Naya murmurs.

I look at her with a frown. “Whatever for?”

“Well, it’s no secret that she used to care for you, and--” She places a hand on my arm. “-- it seems like you might have felt the same.”

The look she gives me is unmistakable, and not a complication I can afford - or desire. The wisest course of action would be to switch Naya out with someone else, but with the rumours stirring about Orlais and Ferelden, her days with the inquisition are already numbered.

“That will be all.” I turn from her and she removes her hand as if burned.

“Of course.”

She bows and leaves through the eluvian. I cover my face with my hand and release a deep breath. I must endure this. For my people I *must* endure.

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9:43 Dragon - Cloudreach

*Maevaris POV*

...
I stand at the port waiting for Mona to arrive, drumming my fingers on my arm with both folded across my chest. I can not tell if I am concerned or annoyed. Most likely both. When she finally arrives her black clothes are more dirty than I would have expected. She is even getting looks from some of the dock workers.

“There you are! I was starting to worry.”

“I’m sorry.” She gives me a sheepish smile. “There were some… unforeseen challenges along the way.”

I can see from the way she holds her arms that she is in pain.

“I see… I’d better have a look at that.”

“Mae, it’s fine.”

“I’ll be the judge of that.” I reach for her arm and pull of her gloves, and she hisses. I should have known something was off. Who else would wear gloves in Tevinter? I am, however, not prepared for the sight that awaits me. They are covered in oozing blisters. “Mona, your wrists, your arms… the skin is…”

“I know, my arms will never look like arms again. Why do you think I wear gloves and long sleeves all the time?”

“I attributed that to your lack of fashion sense. Those runes are going to kill you someday.”

“Don’t worry. That won’t happen until the day the world faces apocalypse.”

I shake my head looking at them. This is… not untreatable, but it will most certainly scar. Though, from the look of the ‘undamaged’ skin this it won’t matter much.

“Let us take this elsewhere so I might treat it properly.”

I put a hand on her back and guide her through the streets. As I look up, I see an elven man watching us from the alley. But just like that, he is gone again. Who are these people looking for her? Though I suppose I shouldn’t be surprised, with her being the Inquisitor.

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Solas POV

Mona is hurt… and the damage appears to be extensive this time. It has been a more and more frequent occurrence of late, but even Naya hasn’t been able to give me any details. The only information she has been able to acquire is the exact moment when Mona would be in Tevinter, something even Felassan hasn’t been able to accomplish so far. I should go, but I linger on the rooftop nearby. ‘Just one moment longer’, I reason to myself. Just long enough that I might see that this Tilani is making sure she is treated. Thankfully, nightfall has been approaching fast, which makes it easier for me to conceal myself.

A sigh of relief escapes me as I can see them through a window and Tilani is already bringing a vast variety of herbs and ointments to the table. Despite my mind urging me towards caution my heart
will not allow it. I need to ensure she is safe. I crawl to a ledge nearby and manipulate the fade around me to better conceal myself in the shadows. It is an old trick of Dirthamen’s, though to my regret I do not master it with quite the same talent. I can’t hear them, but the look Tilani gives Mona is somewhere between scorn and worry. The rueful grin on Mona’s face seems to confirm it. It is the exact same look she would give me, whenever she would accuse me of “fussing”. My breath catches in my throat as I see the full extent of the damage on her arms, and with it I’m drawn into a memory.

“Do they bother you?”

I’m pulled from my thoughts by Mona’s tender voice as her hand rests on my chest with my own on top of hers. I turn my head to look down at her as the light from the sunset is slowly dimming outside. The last embers of light cast through the Skyhold windows leave a beautiful pattern across her skin. The book in my other hand falls into my lap as her eyes lingers on her bare arms. I lift her hand to my lips and kiss her hand.

“What do you mean?” I offer a gentle smile. It’s an evasion and I can tell by her raised eyebrow that she knows it. With a sigh I look at the prominent scars on her arm from various blisters and scorch marks her bracers has caused her throughout the years. Her other arm is still covered by bandages from her last experiment.

“Solas…” she prompts, her voice a little meeker than before.

“They bother me for the pain they have caused you. The danger they represent concerns me, but no-” I kiss one of the scars on her wrist. “-- they do not diminish your beauty to me.”

She clears her throat as she blushes and hides her face in the pillow making me chuckle.

“I do wish--” I continue as I kiss her further down her arm. “-- that you would have some other way of defending yourself. What you’re dealing with… it is dangerous.”

She sighs and looks at me with a thoughtful expression.

“Come now, we both know that I rarely use them for combat. Usually it’s anything but. And I know that most here have a more… casual relationship with fighting, but I hate it, Solas. I don’t want to end someone’s life.”

“I understand. Violence is, however, a means to an end, yet I can’t say that I am bothered by you not embracing that method. For many it is easy to forget that those we fight are living men and women with loves and lives; that once you deal that killing blow all they might have been is gone.”

With a sigh, she sits up and folds her arms around her knees, wincing slightly, looking at her still bandaged arm.

“I’m probably being a hypocrite anyway. I have made decisions for years that have impacted so many lives. Just think of Kirkwall. Not to mention my decisions as Inquisitor.” She leans her head against her arms with another deep sigh, and I lean forward, letting my hand run down her back.

“You do what you believe is right, and with a great deal more thoughtfulness than most. When this is over there will be more spared because of you, not less.” I smile at her and she turns her head to return it with an affectionate gaze.

When I return to reality, Tilani is treating Mona’s wounds. She closes her eyes from the pain and I see her jaw tightening. When Tilani gives an apologetic look, Mona responds, her expression full of mirth. Spirits guide me, she is so graceful. She bears even the greatest suffering with such forgiveness and courage. I have tried to seek her out in the fade, despite my better judgement, but I
have not been able to find her. I can’t help but wonder if she has put something else in her skull. But she wouldn’t be so foolish as to try something like that again… would she?

I hear a dog bark and something stir in the night, and I vanish into the unknown once again.

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*Maevaris POV*

After I have healed Mona’s injuries we go down into the basement and she opens a portal to let us through. There was a hallway that lead to this room once. Now it is sealed off with rock, metal, magic wards and some of Mona’s runes. This ‘vault’ might be the most secure place in Thedas, and Mona is the only one who can enter it. Not that I mind, yet it makes me disquiet. It’s not the strange objects, runes or even the corpse in the corner - it’s the fact that I can’t feel the fade. Walking into this room feels like a Templar’s nullification.

“Calpernia is trying to get herself into good graces with the Danarius house. I can’t for the life of my understand why ancient ‘blood writing’ ritual is so important.”

Mona looks at me with mischief sparkling in her eyes. “Let’s call it scientific curiosity.”

“Hmm…” I cross my arms. I would push for information, but I know it will get me nowhere. I have already tried. I look up at the blue glowing ball of light in the center of the room. “I’m still not fond of this ‘Reality’ of yours either. Or having that corpse in my basement.” I cringe looking at the bizarre dried up body she has in the corner locked behind a barrier made of runes.

Mona doesn’t even look at my as she rummages through a drawer. “He’s dead. Not like he is harming anyone.”

“If anyone sees this, I’m going to be accused of doing all sorts of strange blood rituals.”

“You’re a Magister, people already do that.” She laughs, but it’s good natured and there is something apologetic in her expression as she looks at me.

“I would feel better if I knew exactly what you are doing down here.”

Her expression turns somber as she walks towards the metal table underneath the blue ‘orb’.

“The man I love is involved in something very dangerous. I’m trying to save him,” she says plainly. Her voice is remarkably calm, but I can tell the pain she is concealing.

I twirl the ring on my finger as I think of Thorold. One day I will have vengeance over all who are responsible for his death, but for now I can help a friend so that she might not lose the love of her life.

She reaches out and the runes around the room activate merging with pieces of metal and equipment I can’t even find the right words to describe what are. She rubs her temple with a frown, and I approach her with a sigh before reaching out to heal her.

“You know, it’s all well and good that you wish to save him, but you might want to consider surviving yourself for two reasons: One, so that you might actually be alive long enough to complete this scheme of yours. Two, so you can live with your beloved for longer than a few weeks, when
you succeed.”

“Such confidence. I’m flattered, Mae.” She gives me a grin.

“I find is disconcerting that is what you took to heart.”

“Now you sound like Solas.”

“Sounds like a wise man.”

“Very wise… but also very emotional… passionate.”

I shake my head as she remains focused on the task ahead. That girl is going to lead me into more trouble. I just know it… so why is it that I follow willingly?

9:43 Dragon - Bloomingtide

Cole POV

One, two, three. One, two, three. The tapping of my foot against the wood, grounded but floating. Fade coloured eyes turned towards escaping words. They are rushed and fleeting, but wind like a clock. One, two, three. Tick, tack, tick. Like the gears of reality and possibility. “What if I all I’m doing is for nothing?”, “What if I end up destroying everyone?”, “What if he dies?”, “Will he hate me?”.

“Sounds that rush over the skin. Heated and happy. Solas could never hate you. He thinks of your laugh sometimes. He misses it.”

Mona looks up at me with a soft smile. Other than Solas, she the only one who never shudders when I pull at the hurt. She knows I will never hurt her. Tish lies at her feet. She never leaves her side. She can tell she is sad too. Tish is happy she gets to sleep in the bed even after Solas is gone, but she misses him too.

I like dogs. They are so happy. They want to be. People don’t always want to be happy. Sometimes they think they deserve the hurt more.

I look up at Mona from underneath my hat. “I like your laugh. It makes other people happy. Like an infection, but a good one. They can’t help it, so they laugh too.”

“Thank you, Cole.” She looks away from my gaze. Trembling words that pull at old hurts, as heat burns on the skin like a scar. “You’re always so loud, Mona! Your laugh is so weird.”

“You don’t have to let it pull at you. They thought your happiness meant you never hurt, but that’s not true. You do care - more than they could ever understand.”

She smiles as she leans her elbows on the desk in front of her and covers her mouth with her hands. She looks at me. Warm. Bright. Safe. Solas misses that look too.

“It has been a while since I laughed, hasn’t it? I mean truly laughed.”
The hurt pulls at the past, as it pulls at him. His memory shapes - sad, but peaceful.

_Mona is dressed in nothing but her black nightgown. Sensuous, intoxicating, and a sense of danger. Her finger travels down my cheek, then down my chest to settle on my belt. She walks around me, taking in everything as if she is judging my worth. Yet when I look at her, there is nothing in her eyes but lust. When before me again, her hands creep slowly up along my chest and around my neck. She snatches my wolfjaw pendant and throws it around her own neck, the pendant sliding down her cleavage._

_My eyes narrow as my lips curl into a daring smirk. “I believe you have something of mine, Inquisitor.”_

_“Then why don’t you come and claim it?”_

_There is a playful sparkle in her eyes and when I move, she bolts, making me chase her around the room as she laughs._

“He remembers the last time too.” It was before Crestwood. A place, but also a word, a feeling, more memories of different times. The name still hurts her.

She smiles for a moment, but then it vanishes. I wish I could heal this hurt. I jump down from the railing and walk to her. She needs to say the words. Words she only tells me. Solas knows most, Dorian knows a little, but I’m the only one she allows to know it all. If only Solas could see. If only she would allow him to see. If only he had been willing.

Mona shakes her head. “I have no idea if I’m doing the right thing. What if I’m wrong? What if he is so single-minded that even this won’t change him?”

“I… I don’t know. I’m sorry... but Solas doesn’t want to hurt people. He isn’t that kind of wolf. The others… they won’t understand.” Cuts of little fears, aching, biting. There is so much hurt coming.

“Edward might… Hell, Edward might forgive him just about anything. He might love Solas as much as we do.” A soft smile brushes her lips as she reaches for my hand giving it a squeeze. To comfort. Me, but also her.

“He wishes Solas was his father. He sometimes thinks about what it would be like if Solas taught him at the Circle, but then he thinks about the Tranquil and he regrets. Then he thinks of being his mother’s illegitimate child, Solas his father, and that he had taken him with him into the woods. That he had been raised among ruins, magic and history. But then he thinks of you and regrets that too.”

Mona laughs. It’s not carefree. Not like the laugh Solas loves so deeply. But it is better and it is real.

“Edward’s head must be a confusing place.”

“Sometimes…” I sense the pulling hurt. She is so very afraid. I wish I could help, but the hurts are future and not past. I can not heal the future. “If anyone can help them, you can.”

“They are not my accomplishments, Cole. I just have the idea and have people working in the dark. I’m nothing special, and I’m no one’s last hope. I’m just… hoping that this will be enough.”

“I will help.” I smile at her and my skin warms as her expression brightens. I made her feel better.
“I know, sweetheart. Thank you. Well, the Exalted Council is next week. Then we will know.”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for taking so long between updates. I needed to spend some time with my family. I hope you'll enjoy this chapter and thank you so much for all the comments! I hope you are still enjoying the story even though it is a little heartbreaking at the moment! Next up and all Edward POV chapter!

It has a lot of time skips so I have added the Thedas calendar to this comment.

Corypheus is defeated late in 9:42 Dragon - Trespasser takes place in 9:44 Dragon.

1st month: Verimensis / Winternarch (Annum: First Day)
2nd month: Pluitanis / Guardian (Annum: Wintersend)
3rd month: Nubulis / Drakonis
4th month: Eluviesta / Cloureach
5th month: Molioris / Bloomingtide (Annum: Summerday)
6th month: Ferventis / Justinian
7th month: Solis / Solace
8th month: Matrinalis / August (Annum: All Soul's Day)
9th month: Parvulis / Kingsway
10th month: Frumentum / Harvestmere
11th month: Umbralis / Firstfall (Annum: Satinalia)
12th month: Cassus / Haring

Thanks so much to EmberLeo for beta reading.
The Exalted Council

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The exalted council. I have been dreading this for about three months. Everyone has. My beloved Josephine has been working so hard to pull favours and negotiate with as many dignitaries as possible, all to make sure the proceedings will go as smoothly as possible. The one who seems to be most calm about it is Mona. She does everything she is supposed to, but I can’t help but feeling that her mind is somewhere else. As Inquisitor and Herald, how this ends will be due to our failings and influences, and perhaps I’m being too hard on her. She has always had our best interest at heart, and perhaps that’s even why she agreed to marry Bisset. Or why she has been running around all of Thedas for the past two years. How Josephine can manage to keep track of her is beyond me. Everything is changing, but then again it has been changing ever since Solas left.

It is good to see everyone again and I stay at the local Tavern at the Winter Palace far too late. As I leave, laughing at Bull who is tormenting poor Krem about his newfound infatuation with the bard from Skyhold, I see the light at the smithy is still lit. As I walk towards it, Mona is still in there tinkering with something. Tish is right beside her as always, but when Mona does something to the dog’s neck it yelps and whines.

“I’m so sorry, Tish. My good girl. Come here. I didn’t mean to hurt you,” she coos as she crouches and embraces the dog.

“What in the name of the Maker are you doing to her?”

She turns to me with a regretful look. “It was just a prick. It’s all over now. I need to make sure my good girl is prepared for anything. Isn’t that right, girl?”

The dog barks happily the pain all forgotten.

Mona gives me a mischievous smile. “But speaking of prepared, it’s a good thing you came by.”

My heart stops for a moment. “Did you get it?”

“Uh-huh... Now get over here and see it.”

I take a deep breath making her laugh before walking over to her. She pulls out a small box and inside is the most beautiful ring I have ever seen. I asked her to go by my family, when she was last in the Free Marches, to get it for me. I take it between my hands and look at it.

“It used to be my grandmother’s. She was the only one who ever wrote to me while I was still in the circle; the only one in my family who didn’t wash their hands of me.” I give a quiet laugh. “Now if I only knew what to say.”

I wish Solas was here to help me.

“She loves you, Edward. It doesn’t matter how you say it, as long as you mean it.” Mona holds her hand on my shoulder then grabs my wrist looking at the anchor. “Now, let me have a look at this.”

“Again? It’s like every month for the past year you have been measuring my arm. Afraid the anchor is making it expand some how?”
“Just stand still.”

She has that “no nonsense” look on her face again. Some day she is going to make a fierce mother. She measures every small detail of my arm and hand. Even the size of each individual finger. When I asked her about it she simply said that since Solas left, someone should keep an eye on it. I sometimes wonder if it gives her comfort, if she does it to stay connected to him somehow.

“So, are you still going to ask her tomorrow?”

“I was planning on it, but now she wants to go to the theater and she was so excited. I didn’t have the heart to say ‘no’.”

Mona smiles at me. “That’s not a problem. Come to the harbour after; pier Lucielle. I’ll have a surprise for you there. Now, go get some sleep. And I know you’re nervous, but enjoy tomorrow. When the council starts the day after, who knows when we have a moment to breathe again.”

I look down at the ring and smile before looking up at her. There is something so soft in her expression, but as always seems to be hiding something infinitely sad as well.

Walking through the night, Josephine’s head is resting on my shoulder and her hand is nestled in the crook of my arm. My mouth is dry and I hardly speak two words, but Josephine smiles and sighs so blissfully it makes my heart break a little each time. We have fought so hard for so long, granting so many people the chance for happiness, freedom, and a life beyond mere survival. I hope that when this council business is over we might finally find this for ourselves; that our future might finally belong to us, instead of the world. Josephine gasps as we reach the pier and it takes me a moment to see why. There is no sign of Mona, but one of the elven Inquisition soldiers, Naya, is waiting there. A gondola is moored to the pier, and four thin wooden columns holds up a thin white, see-through fabric. The inside of the boat is filled with lush pillows, flowers, and candles on the railing.

“My lord, my lady,” Naya says with a smile and hands us a basket with wine and fruit. “Atisha’ll vhenan. Halam’shivanas falon lasa ghilan. Walk the path of the heart. Even during the sweet sacrifice of duty, your friends will guide you.”

“This is so beautiful!” Josephine giggles with tears in her eyes and gives me a tender kiss.

Thank you, Mona! This is absolutely perfect, and after taking it out on the open water it feels as if nothing can go wrong in my life, except--

“Damn it,” I mutter and sit up.

Josephine is sitting comfortably in the pillows watching me with concern.

“What is the matter, my love?”

I won’t be able to bloody kneel in this boat. Of course I can’t tell her that! Damn it, Mona! This is anything but how I planned it, but as Josephine’s dark eyes watch my carefully I have no choice but to continue. My heart is hammering in my chest and my mouth goes dry. I have to clear my throat twice, and drink an entire glass of wine to be able to continue.

“Josephine, I wanted to thank you for everything you have done for me… been for me. When I joined inquisition you were the first one who greeted me like an equal and as a person, not just some idiot with a mark on his hand.”
She shakes her head like she always does, when she thinks I’m being both silly and endearing.

I take another deep breath as I continue. “I’m not particularly clever or eloquent, but I love you, and if you’ll have me, I’d like to marry you. Lady Montilyet, will you agree to be my wife?”

I close my eyes and hold them tight afraid to look her in the eye as I hear her breath hitch. If she refuses me I’ll jump in the water and swim to shore in a panic. I feel her take a hold of my cheeks and gently turns my head towards hers. I take a peek not confident enough to open my eyes completely. She stares at me in chock, but with a smile on her lips.

“Yes!” She kisses me.

I pull her close to me and revel in the feeling of her soft lips against mine. My kind, clever, and beautiful Josephine. Perhaps this exalted council business will turn out well after all.

So this exalted council business did not turn out alright! The first day of negotiations and we already have a dead Qunari. Good thing Naya found him or we would have been in even more trouble. Mona looks more tired than she does surprised, and I can’t help but wonder if she knew about this. But that’s insane. If she had known about this she would have acted, and I have nothing to base this on other than a ‘feeling’.

“So, what are we going to do, Inquisitor?” I ask looking first at the Qunari body then back at Mona.

“Take a team and investigate this. I can handle the Exalted Council with Leliana and Josephine. But it might be a good thing to bring Tish. She is a good tracker.”

I look down at the dog who barks with excitement.

“Alright, come on you crazy mutt. Time to make life miserable for the Qunari!”

I grin at the dog and I should feel absolutely horrible about this, but instead I’m giddy like a little girl. I’ve always loved a good mystery.

Walking through the Eluvian, Tish charges ahead of me. The mirror closes behind me and I turn to see a small horde of Qunari turned into solid stone. I can still scarcely believe it. Solas came back. He worked to stop the Qunari. He is an ancient elf and he left to help us. It all makes so much sense now!

When I hear Solas’ voice I can’t help but smile and run towards his voice. The Virdisala better not hurt him or I will make her sorry she was ever born. When I reach them and Solas turns her into stone right in front of my eyes. I don’t know whether to laugh or...

“Solas…” His name leaves me with a relief I can’t conceal, but the pain in my arm forces me to my knees. Calmly he walks towards me and his eyes flash, calming the anchor. Figures he is the one to pull me out of the fire once again. Right there protecting and guiding me as always.
“I suspect you have…” he stops before finishing the sentence as he reveals a quirked smile.

Almost like he remembered something amusing. He strokes Tish’s head as she leans against his leg. Before he can regain his composure, I stand up and pull him into my arms giving him a big bear hug. He stiffens for a moment then pats my back as he chuckles. As I pull away there is something sad in his eyes. It has always been there, but it seems more profound now.

“Such a warm greeting might have been premature.” He looks hesitant, which is a truly bizarre and unfamiliar look on him.

“You’re the Dread Wolf, Solas. The Dread Wolf!” I laugh looking at him and he seems both surprised and amused by my reaction.

“Well done. I always said you were more clever than you gave yourself credit for.”

“Yes, well you might have to tell that to everyone, when we get back. They might not believe me.” I heave for breath as I keep ranting. It happens when I’m happy, nervous or relieved and this is a good mixture of all three emotions. “I can’t wait to see Vivienne’s face, or any of my old instructors, when I tell them that I was trained by the Dread Wolf himself. That will show all the ones who thought I was incompetent.”

Truthfully I think that if it took a bloody “God” to make me even a half-decent mage, then I was more than lucky not to have been made tranquil in the first place.

“The Inquisitor is not with you.” I can hear the heaviness in his voice and the disappointment in his eyes.

“No, she is dealing with the Exalted Council, but come back with me and explain what happened with the Qunari and it will all be forgotten in no time. She will be so happy to see you.”

“She is getting married.”

I scratch my neck uncomfortably. “You heard about that? Well, it doesn’t matter once we’re back and tell her that you left in order to save us all from a Qunari invasion, Bisset will have to find himself another trophy wife.” I pat his shoulder and turn to walk towards the eluvian. “And if you can make my own hand not try to slaughter me that would be wonderful. Oh, and I proposed to Josephine! We’re getting married soon. I want you right there as my groomsman at the wedding, otherwise I know I’m going to do something com--”

“Edward.”

Now, I have heard Solas sad, angry, and even fearful once or twice, but never like this. The pure melancholy in his voice is enough to make ice slither down my neck. I turn to look at him and his arms folded behind his back with his chest held with a regal posture. It is a pose that others often see as superior, but when I see him assuming it I know it as something else; he only assumes it when he needs to take complete hold over his emotions and remain in control over himself. It is not a pose meant to guard himself from others, but to protect others from him.

“What?” I try to shrug off that I have noticed his demeanour.

“I will not be returning with you, Herald.”

I give a strained amused huff. “Whyever not?”

He closes his eyes and turns from me as he begins to tell me everything. With every word he utters,
the joy I felt in seeing him again dies a little more. The revelations and the hurt he has gone through - not only is he ancient, but he carries burdens that make my duties as the Herald seem like a child’s tale. But it is not nearly as absurd as what comes next.

What Solas did is one thing. Bad decisions or lack of information can happen to even the best of us, but what he intends to do… I can’t believe this is the same man I knew back at Haven and Skyhold. A man I looked up to. A mentor and a father figure

And my stupid hand! The ache is piercing, and it is hard for me to think straight, much less act. I can just stand there asking one silly question after another, because it takes all my concentration not to focus on the throbbing ache. Eventually the pain is too great.

“There is still the matter of the anchor. It’s getting worse.” I bite my lip to the point of drawing blood.

He closes his eyes in shame. “... I know, and we are almost out of time.”

The mark flares, and a jabbing pain surges through me, making me cry out and forcing me to my knees.

“In the end no one but me could have worn the mark and lived. Luring you here gave me the chance to save you… at least for now.”

I feel tears brimming in my eyes, but whether it is from disappointment or the tremendous pain, I can’t tell. “You don’t have to destroy this world, Solas. I will prove it to you!”

“I would treasure the chance to be wrong once again, my friend. Take my hand.” As he takes my hand and his eyes flare, I feel the ache vanish. But not only that; all sensation is gone. The look he gives me is an apology all in its own right. “Live well, while time remains.”

Solas puts his hands behind his back and walks away. Atish’an sniffs my hand and presses her snout to my cheek, but I barely register it. I try to get to my feet, but the pain makes me keel over. I have to stop him.

“Mona still loves you!” I call out to him, and he pauses for just a moment before vanishing through the Eluvian.

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**Solas POV**

My heart tightens painfully in my chest as I reach the other side of the Eluvian. I need to hold on to its frame to prevent myself from keeling over. Hazel eyes seem burned into my eyelids as I can’t help but picture them every time I close my eyes - or merely blink. I had both hoped and dreaded that Mona would have been there, but there is a disappointment in not seeing her, I can’t deny. Edward’s words linger with me. He greeted me like an old friend even knowing who I truly am. No fear, no hesitation, and still as trusting of me as ever. To see that loyalty and trust he had in me dwindle with every revelation shames me. I have never had a truer or more devoted friend, and though I know it was a friendship doomed from the start, I feel the loss of it keenly.

That’s when I hear a whine behind me. I turn and look down into a pair of dark brown eyes filled
with worry.

“Atish’an.” I kneel down and pet the dog with both hands. “You should not be here, my friend.”

It barks its contradiction and I give an unbidden chuckle. I reach for a note tied to its collar.

“*My love,*

*Take care of Tish. She will love and comfort you as I can not.*

*Var lath vir suledin.*”

Tears fall unbidden from my eyes and I dry them quickly. The last thing I need is more complications and then she decides to give me a dog. I can’t keep myself from smiling as a wet snout presses against my cheek to comfort me. I know the dog will not leave my side, when instructed to follow. I can’t send it back through the Eluvian without Edward possibly returning in the dogs stead. He is undoubtedly waiting for me to do so. I could abandon it or kill it, but I won’t. I can’t.

I get to me feet and run a hand over Atish’an’s head. “Very well. Are you hungry?”

She barks excitedly.

“Come along then, lethallan.”

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*Edward POV*

I’m lying in bed, just staring up into the ceiling. I can hardly breathe, even with Josephine sitting right next to me on the bed holding my hand and kissing it every so often. My dearest friend is going to destroy the word. And the worst part is I can understand why. I don’t agree and I have to find a way to stop him, but I do understand. But how am I going to stop him, when I’m missing a bloody arm? Without thinking I look down at what remains of it after the surgeon removed the withered half.

“Are you in pain, my love?” Josephine asks softly as she brushes my cheek with the back of her hand.

“I’ll live.”

She merely nods in response to that before she starts speaking again. “The Inqui… well, I suppose it is Mona now that the Inquisition is disbanded. Regardless, she is creating a new arm for you.”

At Josephine’s word I sit up in bed with a jolt. Mona is making me an arm. She knew! She knew about my arm, she knew about the Qunari, and I’m willing to bet anything she knew about Solas too. I jump out of bed and try to find my clothes.

“You should rest. You have been quite the ordeal.”

Sweet Josephine. She was so distraught, when I thought I was going to die. Whatever happens next,
I made a promise to her and she almost lost me. So rather than walking around screaming as I search for my clothes - which seems to have abandoned me! - I walk over and embrace her with one arm.

“I know. I love you, Josephine, but I need to see Mona.”

“She is in an estate outside town. Just, please rest until tomorrow morning and we can go.”

It is probably the last thing I want to do - to stay here locked up with so many unanswered questions. But it’s important to Josephine, and she matters most in the world. That means trusting her, and listening to her when she has my best interests at heart.

“Anything for you, my lady.” I smile and kiss her brow and she sighs with relief.

The next day

I arrive alone at an abandoned villa near the Emerald graves. It’s dark and isolated, which means I’m certain this is where Mona is. For a moment I worry about the fact that I lost her bloody dog, in all this mess. What an absurd thing to worry about in the midst of everything.

Walking into the villa without knocking I’m greeted by an older dalish male elf with violet eyes. If Mona is working with Solas…

“Andaran atishan, Herald. My name is Fel’assan. We have been expecting you. If you would follow me.” He gives me a pleasant smile and for a moment he reminds me a little of Solas.

I have a thousand questions, but none of them seem to come out, so instead I follow him into the basement. There, Mona is waiting with all sorts of contraptions I have never seen before. I would call it magic, but I don’t sense it in any way. She gives me a fond smile.

“Hello Edward. I’m so glad you came. I’m sorry about your arm. Are you in a lot of pain?”

Whatever answer I was going to give dies on my lips. She knew! I’m certain she knew all of it and she kept it quiet! She could have prevented Solas from leaving. We could have helped him find another solution together. But she kept her blighted, lying mouth shut!

“You knew… All this time you… of course you did. He loves you. Of course he told you,” I sneer with tears brimming in my eyes. Rage is bubbling underneath my skin like hot oil and I can barely contain it.

She gives me a look I can’t place, but says nothing.

I step forward yelling at her. “And you didn’t try to talk him out of it?! To stop him?!”

A distasteful grin forms on her lips. “I promised that I wouldn’t stop him. But unlike Solas, I have no qualms with lying my ass off.”

A sickening feeling rises in my throat. There is no emotion as I look at her. Merely cool detachment. This is not the Mona I know, but some hollow husk. The Mona who is kind, just, and would protect anyone under her care - no matter what they might have done - is nowhere to be found. Solas would be sick if he saw her now. There is nothing about this woman that he could possibly love.
“He loves you! And you betrayed him!”

“You act as if I’m the one set on destroying the world.” She doesn’t even look at me as she says it.

“Solas believes he can trust no one. It’s why he acts alone, why he might do things he doesn’t have to... I can’t believe he was right.” I shake my head. I can’t believe this is happening. “There is still time. We can prove to him he doesn’t need to do this. I know Solas. He will listen to reason.”

“Solas is beyond reason.” The calm in her voice as she says it sends a chill down my spine.

“How can you say that?! Did you ever love him?”

At that she pauses. Nothing about her demeanour changes, but she stays silent. All the while the elf, Fel’assan, merely leans against a wall with his arms crossed and looking into the ground.

I step up next to her and take her arm spinning her around to face me. “How could you do this to someone you love?”

“I hardened my heart to a cutting edge,” she mutters as if she is speaking to herself rather than me.

“I don’t believe you!” I bellow. “Don’t you have any idea about what is going on?”

She cracks. Anger, pain and love all intermingle into a terrifying expression that harbours more determination than anything I could ever accomplish.

“The love of my life is out there, so distraught by grief that he can’t see reason, trying to rebuild his world no matter the cost. Not only do I have to help try and stop him, but so far I have failed again, and again, and again.” Her voice gets heavy from unshed tears she holds back with sheer will. “My heart is breaking into more pieces than I can count, so do not insult me by claiming I don’t comprehend what is at stake!”

For two years Mona has been nothing but a tranquil ghost of duty haunting Skyhold. This is the first time I see her showing any true emotion. The first time I see her acknowledging how much Solas leaving truly hurt her.

I speak again, making sure my voice and words are softer this time. “That may be, but I don’t want to stop him at any cost. I want to save him from himself. I want to prove to him that, for once, he has people who care about him enough to risk everything for him. That, for once, he is not alone.”

She looks at me with a bright smile and life seems to return to her eyes. She captures my head between her hands and kisses me.

“Edward, you wonderful man. Thank you!”

I pull back and look down at her. It dawns on me how little I know her, how little I understand her.

“You never intended to harm him. You were having me on. Testing me.”

She grins wildly. “Of course I won’t kill him. I love him. But knowing who to trust is very difficult. I needed to make sure. But I was not completely dishonest just now. I have lied, deceived, and manipulated Solas from the day I met him. Anything to keep him from discovering what I was truly up to.”

“You manipulated Solas?” The look I give her is full of doubt.

“Well, distracted him.” She shrugs.
“So, when he left…” I’m not sure I still have a jaw. It’s probably lying somewhere on the floor… slobbering with the lack of comprehension.

“I actually pushed him to,” she admits and her eyes drift to the floor for a moment as if she needs to collect herself. “I hadn’t intended to do it, but I tried so many times to change his mind and make him see the man I know he can be. He thinks the elves are his people, but he is wrong. We all are. I needed him to stop the Qunari without my interference, so he could see this for himself, see that he truly is a protector of everyone.”

“That’s it? You needed him to stop the Qunari, so you pushed him away? How did you even know? Why didn’t you stop it?”

And for the first time Fel’assan speaks up. “He is a man driven by guilt and a purpose that has long since been twisted. There isn’t room for doubt, but still he can’t help himself. He is a defender of those who need protection. It is his purpose, but guilt, honour, and an ancient promise have twisted into something unrelenting. That he has even gone this far is… surprising.”

“Solas said he wanted me to prove him wrong. He doesn’t want this.” I point out looking at Fel’assan.

“And that in itself gives me hope.” A small smile crosses his lips.

“Excuse me, but who are you?” I look at him closely.

“You met the keepers of the Vir abellasan. Imagine me as something similar. Mona saved my life four years ago and told me of her visions for the future. I have been working as a double agent for her ever since. Though not as effective as I had hoped. Solas didn’t trust me.” A blend between sorrow and shame crosses over his face and Mona places a hand on his shoulder.

“You did everything I asked of you. You have nothing to be ashamed of.” She looks at a small scar on his temple and they look at each other for a moment.

“No ill effects so far,” he says as if he means to comfort her.

I shake my head. “I’m lost here. What plans? Seeing what future? If this has something to do with Alexius’ time magic--”

“I found an artifact years ago with the capability of showing possible futures.” Mona begins to explain. “I have prevented as much devastation as I could, but I’m not omnipotent. Far from it.”

I feel all air leave my chest for a moment. “That is… incredible, but I have a feeling there is more to it.”

“I was afraid…” she murmurs in a voice so low I can barely hear her.

“Of what?”

“Of the Evanuris being released and using me to hurt him. Of Solas not going along with my crazy ideas so I wouldn’t be able to save anyone. I’m afraid that if I don’t act alone someone will find out what I’m planning and then everything I have ever done will have been for nothing, all the death I couldn’t stop will have been for nothing. If Solas or the Evanuris find out what I’m planning, then Thedas is screwed.”

“Why didn’t you tell him all this?”
“I did. I tried showing him, talking to him. I even fought with him about it. No matter what I did, he reverted back to his old way of thinking, as if he was afraid to do anything else. I don’t know exactly what happened in his past, but something messed him up.” She gives a heavy sigh and wipes tears falling silently as she walks away from me. “We’re both such messes. I don’t know how I ever thought I could save him from himself. I’m a bloody disaster.”

I stay silent for a moment letting her gather her thoughts. How long as she struggled with this on her own? I take a step towards her. “Do you know how to stop him?”

“If I had a way that would put him out of harm's way, would you help me? Even if it meant others might get hurt because it won’t work?” She looks at me as if she is trying to unravel my very soul.

“If we do nothing, Solas is going to end the world regardless, so yes.”

“Then I will include you in my plans, but first you really must rest, Edward.”

I grab hold of the table and feel a pulsating pain up the remaining piece of my arm. Fel’assan approaches me. “Let me have a look at that. There is an extra bedroom upstairs.”

I look at Mona. “About Tish.”

“Don’t worry, Edward. She is with Solas.” Mona smiles softly at me before I follow Fel’assan upstairs.

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Mona POV

I’m worried about Edward. I knew the removal of his arm would be bad and that he would be distraught, but him anticipating my knowledge took me by surprise. I feel bad about telling these half-truths. Dorian knows about my immortality, but not that I’m from another world. Edward has been told the relic story, and seems to believe it. And Fel’assan knows both these versions. These lies I tell because convincing them is too hard. Even Solas didn’t believe me at first. He and Cole are, to this day the only ones who know the truth. Mona Aim is nothing but a lie, but with the Inquisition gone, at least now I might return to the shadows where I can hide - and where I feel the most comfortable.

I bring up the omnitool and go over the lines of code again. With any luck, the towers we are building in the Deep Roads will be enough, and Reality can start to function properly. I don’t know how much time we have, but I need to start field testing and devoting all my resources to making it work. I turn to the monitor I built. It’s a projection really. Using the technology from the crashed Salarian ship has proven challenging. It is so much more advanced, but the VI has been helpful so far. I bring up the map of Thedas and look for any changes. Thank you, Salarian, for already making protocols to measure the veil before you died. Poor bugger.

“I have healed him as much as I could and offered him some herbs for the pain.” I hear Fel’assan’s voice behind me.

He walks up next to me and looks at the monitor.

“You’re tracking him,” Fel’assan remarks almost as if impressed.
“No, you’re tracking my dog,” I wink up at him and he laughs as I hand over the device controlling the monitor.

“Clever.”

“Don’t elves change their names when their purpose changes?” I give him my most mischievous grin. “What is ancient elven for dog watcher?”

“Lethallan, no.” The stern look he gives me just makes me laugh harder as I walk back to Reality.

I will need to test Reality soon, but first it needs knowledge and purpose. And what better knowledge to give it then my own.

“ I am Mona Aim.

13 years ago I arrived in Thedas alone in the Deep Roads. I was born on a different world and raised there, yet I had extensive knowledge of Thedas and the cataclysmic events that awaited the poor souls. When I knew I had no way to return to my home, I made a vow: protect as many lives as possible and change the heart of the Dread Wolf.

This vow has come at a great cost. Some events I did not prevent, for fear that it would change how things unfolded. I allowed Anders to blow up the Chantry - only making the damage less by ordering him to use less of the explosives.

I’m the unintended creation of a Titan; an accidental remnant of the Forgotten Ones. I’m the arrow that pierced the Dread Wolf’s heart. I’m not sure of what I am, but I know who I am. I will attempt to protect all of us. “

Chapter End Notes

Hi everyone.

Another slow update. Sorry about that. I hope you’re still enjoying the story as we now get to the more interesting parts. Please let me know what you think of this mostly Edward POV chapter.

Would you guys be interested in reading a Cole romance as a part of this? Not between him and Mona obviously, because that would be disturbing on so many levels!

Thanks so much to EmberLeo for beta-reading.
Hi everyone.
I'm so sorry for this update taking so long. Real life and sickness has kept me away, but I'm back.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Three months after the exalted council - Antiva

It is careless and unwise, yet the reason why I could not fight these basic urges was at Wisdom’s instance. She worries for my well-being and the increasing loneliness. Her words from a few nights prior linger in the back of my mind as I sit on the railing of the balcony.

I lean against the tree looking at Mona’s erratic dream from a distance. It flickers and fades like stray thoughts, one moment happy the next filled with sorrow. It is never clear enough for me to get a picture of what is happening in her mind, only the sense of emotion. Once she had more control over it, now it is chaotic and distant. I sometimes worry that the runes, and the device she had in her skull for so long, have resulted in irreparable harm. She is not tranquil, but she could be reverting closer to what the dwarves are. Intended or not, she is Anaris’ creation after all.

“This is not healthy, lethallin.”

I close my eyes and turn, distancing myself from Mona’s dreams. The fade transforms into a haze, not truly connecting with anything around it. It is an unusual quiet, and void of any spirits I had expected to inhabit the area.

“I know.” I place my hands behind my back and begin to walk through the fade.

“You miss her.”

“It is better this way.”

“Why don’t you go to her?”

I frown as I look at my friend. “That wouldn’t be wise.”

Is it wiser to watch her from afar without any resolution? You cannot devote yourself to the future without letting go of the past.”

The duality of her statement is not lost on me. Two futures and two pasts intertwined; the one I enact every day and the one still sealed in a pocket near my heart. I give a discouraged huff.

“I am reminded of Devotion.”

Wisdom frowns with worry. “You believe that every relationship you touch is doomed to disaster.”

They are words I will never allow myself to linger at: Devotion, Mythal, Fel’assan, Edward and Mona. Even Cole I had to distance myself from in order to keep him safe. And the only reason I still
have Wisdom by my side is thanks to Mona’s efforts. To think, that was her first concern when we met at Haven - to ensure I would not lose my friend.

I feel Wisdom’s hand on my shoulder. “What you and Mona have is nothing like your attachment to Devotion. Despite everything, your affection remains pure and accepting, but if you are ever to find yourself at peace, then you must go see her.”

I stretch my small black wings, looking down in the gardens below. The Montilyet’s wealth seems to be doing better after Edward helped Josephine regain their trading permit in Orlais. The estate is the colour of sand with a red roof and beautiful vines entangling every balcony and dark wooden column. The fountain in the middle of the courtyard is filled with brightly coloured fish that sparkle almost with the same intensity as the gold ornaments. In the distance, the last of the evening light shimmers across the endless vineyards. In another life, all this beauty would have filled my heart with serenity. In that life, I would enjoy the festivities below. I would congratulate Edward, ask him if his arm is hurting, and offer reprieve from the pain. I would tell Josephine to keep him out of any mischief. I would whisper to Mona how lovely she looks in the Antivan dress she wears. But that is not this life. In this life, I make a poor attempt at imitating a bird resting above as I observe the wedding celebrations below.

As the newlyweds make their way to the gift table, Mona is fidgeting with Josephine’s white dress, making sure it does not get dirty as it is dragged along the ground. I would smile, except birds have limited facial expressions. I am beginning to remember why I rarely took the shape of a bird in the time of Arlathan. Josephine is interrupted on her way to the table by a dignitary from Ferelden. She gives Edward and apologetic look, but he simply kisses her hand before walking on with Mona. I see him reaching for a small gift and I feel a surge go through me. How did I let Wisdom talk me into this? Giving in to curiosity I fly closer, landing above them. Mona looks up at me with a smile and my heart aches. I know she doesn’t recognize me, she simply sees a bird, and it pains me even more because I cannot recall the last time that smile was directed at me.

Edward frowns. “This only has my name on it.”

“Then open it,” Mona encourages.

He pulls out the small shrine and opens it to see the blue jewel inside.

He turns it to the side. “What is it?”

“It’s an elven tradition to bless a marriage.” Mona smiles and I am both surprised and saddened that she knows this tradition - a reminder of what could have been. “It’s a gift for you to give Josephine in the morning.”

“From Solas…”

“I would assume so, yes.”

To my relief Edward smiles a little. “I know I should find it incredibly disturbing that he knows and watches us so closely, but…”

“In reality it feels comforting. Like he is watching out for us and protecting us?” Mona gives him a wry smile.

“Exactly! I know what he said, and what he intends, but I--” he laughs shaking his head, “I must be completely gullible.”
“Or merely hopeful that there is still a chance to save our friend.”

Edward and Mona share a look that wrenches my gut. How did they both become so dear to me in such a short time that even the years apart can’t change it? When Josephine approaches Edward quickly hides the small shrine in his pocket and kisses her on the cheek. Mona excuses herself and walks towards the outskirts of the garden.

I follow her and she stops at a small bench in a hidden corner. Her face is turned towards the stars, and she has never looked more isolated… alone. She just sits there, silently observing the sky. It is not uncommon for her to distance herself in this manner - she always did prefer her solitude to crowds - but her demeanour is more burdened than fatigued. Nearly half an hour passes and no one seems to have noticed her absence. Not even her friends think to look for her. And during that time her thoughts linger somewhere they shouldn’t, as her expression turns more somber with every passing moment. Eventually, I can’t stand the sight of her looking so downhearted and alone. Despite every rational thought screaming in my mind, I change my form and walk towards her. She turns her head to see who is approaching and her mouth falls open as her eyes go wide.

“Solas…”

“You didn’t join the Herald in his search for me,” I state calmly looking at her.

“I had the Exalted Council to deal with.” She smiles at me without any pain or anger towards me, “How is Tish?”

“Sleeping in my bed as we speak,” I give her a wry grin and she groans.

“And this is where she gets all her bad habits. For such a wise man, you’re a softie when it comes to her.”

“Not just her,” I reply in a low voice and look at her.

I have missed her so. She blushes and looks down into her lap. Slowly, I walk over to her and sit down next to her on the bench.

“I’m surprised to see you,” she admits.

“I’m a little surprised to be here as well…” I pause, looking at her briefly, but her eyes don’t meet mine. “When you didn’t arrive with the Herald, I couldn’t deny my own disappointment. I wanted to see you…”

“I also disbanded the Inquisition. You can’t spy so easily on me anymore,” she teases with a wry grin.

“True, but I was glad of it. It had become corrupt.”

“I know.” She gives me a sad smile.

“Was it difficult for you? Dissolving something you had put so much time into building?”

Her eyes dart at me with something akin to surprise.

“You really just came to see if I was alright? After all these years, when you have not even visited me in the fade once since Sam—” she reaches for my face then recoils. “You’re really here. This isn’t the fade.”
“No, this is real,” I give her a rueful smile.

“Solas, how could you risk it? What if they discover you? Are you going to turn half of Antiva into stone? Worse, they could try to hurt y--”

I pull her close to me in a heated kiss. I feel her hand on my upper back pulling me closer as our lips press against each other with ferocity. For a moment it as if no time has passed. The same feelings are still just as strong, the same hopes still fill my heart, and my mind shapes possibilities of futures too tempting for me to completely ignore - even as I know I must.

“I needed to see you,” I murmur with my eyes closed and my forehead resting on hers. “Ar lath ma, vhenan.”

She gives a trembled breath and I feel her fingers tighten around the fabric on my arm. “Solas, come with me. We can leave all this behind. I’ll show you my research, everything I have been working on for the past decade. Together we can find a way to deal with the Evanuris and veil. We can leave together tonight and never look back. Focus on the future instead.”

She gives me a look so full of love and hurt, it nearly undoes every resolve. Perhaps, I could slip away with her. We could find another way together, but no matter what happens the Evanuris will be free. And when that happens, anyone I have ever cared for will be a target. I am not strong enough to protect her from all of them. I have to distance myself from those who matter to me. As brave, clever, and resourceful as they are, they are no match for the power and ferocity of the Evanuris. And as much as this distance hurts me, their suffering because of me would be infinitely worse.

“You know I can not do that, vhenan. I’m bound by purpose and responsibility that far supersedes what is right or wrong. I can not abandon my people. Ir abe--”

“No!” She holds a hand up to stop me and looks at me. “Don’t choose to stand by this so fervently and then apologize for it. I shouldn’t have said anything. It was stupid and impulsive.”

I give her as tentative a smile as I can manage. “You are many things, my heart, but never that.”

“I think we’re both sentimental fools. You for showing up here and me for suggesting we leave together. We should just accept it for what it is.” With a heavy sigh, she reaches for me, when we hear someone else approaching. As she turns to look, I shapeshift and when she turns to me again I make certain that I am nowhere to be found.

If I believed in gods, I would pray that whatever scheme Mona and Edward plan will work. Let them prove me wrong. Let them accomplish what I can not. And for all the love in the world, to never let the Evanuris harm them.

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Mona POV

Nine months later - Tevinter

I awake from another dream that ends with seeing Solas in the distance. He never speaks to me, I never catch up when I run to him, and he never, ever responds when I call for him. My eyes sting, but I refuse to let tears fall. What is the matter with me? I haven’t been with him for three years now. It’s been more than a year since the Inquisition disbanded. I should be able to let go. Though, I
suppose that is easier said than done, when my entire life for the past - what? 14 years? - has been
devoted to save as many people as possible from what he intends. I’m drenched in sweat, but that’s
not from the dream. Tevinter summer nights are tropical, and while I love the beauty of it - not to
mention Dorian and Maevaris’ company - the heat, combined with the daily reminder that slavery is
in fact a very real thing, makes me miss the south. I sit up and look around the room. A grand bed, a
desk, two armchairs near the window, and a dresser fill the room. This is a guest room in Maevaris’
estate. I have no place of my own anymore. I go from place to place, enjoying the hospitality of
others - and I hate it. I depend on others to an extent I’m not comfortable with. I hardly have any coin
to my name. Every coin, resource or contact is poured into Reality, so I’m sponging off of others for
a roof over my head - though I’m sure they don’t see it that way. Since Bisset called off the
engagement, when I disbanded the Inquisition, I’m in even greater financial trouble. When all this is
over I want my own small cottage, where I can live in peace. Perhaps I can become another legend
like Flemeth - the Asha’bellanar. Mona, the Immortal Hermit, inventor of Thedas’ first toaster and
electricity! In the middle of my musings, I see a shadow sitting on the windowsill. I can’t make out
who it is in the dark.

“Cole?” I reach for a match next to my bed and light a candle.

I jump out of bed as I see the stranger. A blonde elf with tanned skin and violet eyes looks at me. She
is dressed in dark leather with a dagger sheathed on each hip.

“Who are you?” I hiss, my eyes drifting to the dresser where my bracers are kept. How did she get
past the guards?

“Haven’t you heard that a stranger is a friend you simply haven’t met yet?” She gives a sideways
smirk, her fingers traveling through her long ponytail, but there is a sense of danger about it I don’t
trust. She throws a heavy satchel at my feet.

Carefully, I pick it up and open it. I drop it on the floor with a startled cry, making the severed head
of a man roll out of the bag onto the floor. I’m so very royally *fucked*!

“Who the hell is that?” I point to the head in disbelief. Not a rational question, not rational behaviour,
as there is a murderer in my room, and this is the first time anyone but Solas has heard me use the
term “hell”. I should be smarter and more collected, but there is a severed head on my floor!

“It’s a gift - to start a partnership.” She smiles so carelessly I nearly vomit. What kind of psychopath
is this? I would shout for help, but she doesn’t strike me as someone who scares easily. I have no
way of knowing how she would react. Please, please, please, let Cole be nearby.

“So, you bring me the head of some random man?” I stare at her with disbelief - at least I’m not
staring at the head anymore.

“He wanted you dead.”

“And you thought it a good idea to bring his head to me?”

“Well, you would have wanted proof.”

“Of him wanting to kill me, yes. Not like this!”

“This is definitive proof that I killed him. And you might want to keep you voice down. This
situation will probably be difficult to explain to others.”

“You could have brought me his birthright.”
“Wouldn’t have proven he was dead.”

“You!--” I stop myself and force myself to keep my very panicked voice down while rubbing my face profusely. “-- could have waited until it was common knowledge that he was dead. Probably wouldn’t have taken long. If anyone sees his head here, and the blood, then I will be accused--”

Then it dawns on me and I look at the elf, who has a devious look in her eyes. “I suppose you expect me to pay you to get rid of this mess?”

“Clever girl. Yes, it’s more lucrative that way. But more importantly, I wanted to show you just how good I am.”

Clever indeed. She gets paid to kill him, and then gets me to pay to get rid of it so I won’t get accused of murder. Hell of a way to make a living.

“And this was the best way of showing your credentials?” I raise a brow.

“If you become notorious or known in any way, then you didn’t do your job well enough.”

“I think the Crows would disagree,” I grin. Grin? What the actual fuck is wrong with me? Cole, if you’re going to show up, now would be the time.

“That’s because they are a business. What I do is an art. I’m unknown because I do my job right. Instead of being notorious, I’m merely a ghost. Perfection.”

“Because chopping off a man’s head is so subtle.” I raise an eyebrow and she chuckles.

“Well, he was exploring elven ruins close to a varterral and a massive spider nest. All they will find are some trinkets and his blood stained clothes.” The satisfaction in her voice is chilling.

I rub my face trying to get the imagery out of my head only for my eyes to meet those of the severed head. I feel like gagging. The next thing I know, Cole has put the head back in the bag and then stands next to me. By his mere presence I feel some of the discomfort and fear leave me. Whether it is his powers or my friendship with him that does this, I’m not entirely sure, but it is probably a combination. The elf has a dagger drawn and looks at Cole - though it she seems more curious and surprised than afraid.

“That was impressive.” She tilts her head to look at him. “Quick reflexes, astute senses, and obviously good at hiding in plain sight. I must give it to you, Professor Aim, your assassin is almost as skilled as I am.”

Cole walks towards her, but she doesn’t flinch. His voice is a soft as always when he speaks. “You are afraid. You don’t have to be. If you want help all you have to do is ask. Mona will understand.”

Her eyes narrow as she lowers her dagger and takes a step towards him. The stare she gives him is intense, and had it been anyone but Cole they would flinch.

“Mind-reading without blood magic. How is that possible?”

Ignoring the woman, Cole turns to look at me. “We can trust her.”

“Alright, we can talk--” I sigh, but then try to sound more stern, “once that head is out of here.”

“I can do that!” Cole picks up the stachel with the head.

“Cole, you don’t h--” Before I can finish the sentence he is gone.
The elf walks over to where he just was and looks around - with curiosity and awe more than fear from the looks of it.

“What is he?”

“A spirit of Compassion.”

She gives me a suspicious look. “Nothing is ever simple with you, is it?”

“No. Now, what in the name of the bloody Maker are you doing here? Cole, says you mean no harm, so I’m willing to listen, but after this display it better be good.”

She removes her gloves and sits down casually in a nearby chair with all the air of confidence in the world. I can feel goosebumps all over my skin and a shiver slithers down my spine creating cold sweat. Despite Cole’s assurances I don’t like feeling vulnerable, and not wearing my bracers, I’m defenseless. But looking at her, I know why she chose to approach me this way. There are old rope burns on her wrists. They have healed long since, but I have been in Tevinter long enough to know those are common among slaves. Cole says she is afraid, and despite her air of calm, I believe him. She is afraid, so her best insurance is to make sure others fear her more than she does them.

“My name is Alexia, and from the way you’re looking at my wrists, I can tell you know I was a slave. I was trained by my former master to be a deadly and silent killer. It also means that I have a lot more education than most of my fellow elves do. You can’t be a very good spy or assassin if you can’t read.”

“And the man you just brought here. Why did you kill him?”

“There was a contract on his life by a rival family, but that was just luck on my part. I killed him because he wanted you dead.”

I cross my arms and look down at her. “Why would you care if he wanted me dead?”

My heart flutters ubidden as I wait for her answer. It whispers hoping that Solas sent her to protect me. If she is one of his agents, then it means he is still thinking of me - that he still cares. That it is, in fact, him I see in my dreams and not just my imagination.

“Because if rumour is correct, then you oppose the Dread Wolf.” She inspects her nails as if she speaks of the weather.

My heart sinks the moment the words leave her lips, but I can’t allow myself to dwell on it. Instead I attempt to conceal my hurt behind a wry smile.

“The Dread Wolf is an elven myth.”

She scoffs. “You might want to tell that to all the elves he has recruited.”

I sit down in the chair across from her.

“Alright, let us speak plainly. How do you know I oppose the Dread Wolf, why did that magister want me dead, and how did you get involved in all this?”

“Let’s say I came across some goods sent to a woman named Calpernia, who all dealt with ancient elven and Tevinter magic - much of it tied specifically to Fen’Harel. And we all know the story the Herald of Andraste told, despite most people not believing him. But you don’t strike me as most people.” She gives another wry smile. “The man who wanted you dead is called Braccus. Lately he
has been obsessed with elven lore and the Forbidden Ones. He wanted ultimate power and was promised it if he could manage to kill you.”

“And who wants me dead?” Stupid question. Probably a long list by now - perhaps even as long as my list of creditors.

“An elven fanatic, worshipping the elven pantheon, who used blood magic on Braccus to control his mind. Now, why the elf wants you dead, I have no idea, but since he joined Fen’Harel’s ranks not long ago, perhaps they found out that you oppose him as well?”

A lump forms in my throat. I have tried to keep hidden, but obviously I have not done it well enough. I should be worried about someone wanting me dead, but I’m more concerned with the fact that Solas might not know about this. “Maybe he doesn’t care about you anymore.” I try to drown that voice inside me. It beckons and leads me, pulling at emotions like guilt, fear, and despair, like strings on a puppet. I always was my own worst enemy.

“Perhaps.” It is all I will allow myself to answer to that inquiry. “So, why did you bother to get involved in this?”

“Until a few weeks ago I was a member of Fen’Harel’s forces. Not a high ranking one, mind you.”

That makes me pause.

“That seems… uncharacteristic of him. You’re obviously skilled and clever.” I lean forward resting my elbows on my knees. “That’s something I know he values highly. You should have been one of his top lieutenants.”

“There are three reasons for that. First, you need to surpass the people above you. Second, questioning everything while in a secret organization makes them worried you’re a spy. And third, I wasn’t there very long.”

“How come?”

“I don’t know your Solas,” she says with a wink, “but some of these people joining his cause are fanatics.”

My heart skips a beat, and the small smile on Alexia’s lips let’s me know she noticed my demeanour change, but I don’t interrupt her. If she is half as resourceful as I suspect she is, then of course she would know about Solas being Fen’Harel and my relationship with him, while we both served the Inquisition.

Her smile turns into a dismal frown as she stands up and begins to pace.

“I love my people. I want nothing more than to see them freed from slavery and have the same rights as any others, but some of those people don’t want justice - they want revenge. Their bloodlust is bordering on the deranged, and they won’t stop until every human is dead.” She stops up and points at me. “Either Solas agrees with their ideals, and that’s why he is letting them join, or they’re expendable resources - in which case they will be the first to die in some pointless battle meant as a distraction. Either reason was something I couldn’t be a part of, so I fled.” Her hands close around her nose as she lowers her head with closed eyes. She takes a deep breath and gives me a smile. “And from all accounts you’re a nice person. You didn’t deserve to die at the hands of some deviant.”

Despite all she has revealed, I can’t prevent a smile from forming. The sad reality of it is that I had expected something like this to happen. Not her coming to me, but the fanatics inside Solas’ ranks.
I’m too much of a cynic to not have seen it coming - and so is Solas. I think Alexia is right - those people are merely cannon-fodder to Solas. If there is anything my love hates above anything else, it is fanatics and mindless devotion - obsession.

“So, you came to me seeking employment?”

“I came because I want to help prevent maniacal fanatics from killing innocents. When I was freed from my master’s service, I swore I would only take lives to protect.”

“Alright. I’m sending you and Cole to Ventus to help a friend of mine by the name of Dorian Pavus. You have a chance to prove your worth, and Cole will be able to tell if you’re hiding anything from us.” I narrow my eyes on her as a threat. It’s not completely true. Cole can only ‘read minds’ if someone is hurting or conflicted. And a devoted spy will often feel little conflict, but by making her think he can pick up everything, I can hopefully rattle her enough that he will sense something if she is being dishonest.

For the first time I see the fear she hides so well show in her eyes for the briefest moment. She puts her hand forward - agreeing to my terms.

Chapter End Notes

I’m trying not to rush with these chapters towards the climax, but if you want me to "get to it already" please let me know :) 

I know they have been separated for a good while and because of that the story is missing some fluff and romance. I have thought about throwing in some flashbacks. Would that be something you guys would enjoy?

And you got to meet Alexia for the first time. She is stepping into the role as the protagonist of DA4. Let me know what you think of her as the story progresses :)

Thank you all so much for supporting my story. It means so much to me!

Thanks to EmberLeo for beta-reading. You’re so awesome :) If you’re interested in more MGIT stories you should have a look at hers called: The Canticle of Dreams
Cole POV

Ventus

Her footsteps are light, like a cat. I can barely hear them as she walks. Her foot never snaps a twig, kicks a small stone, or trips. She still feels the fear sometimes, but most of the time she takes pride in it - being invisible and unseen. Like a ghost in a spire, but different.

The sunlight shimmers in Alexia’s locks and the breeze from the sea makes it dance playfully in the air.


Alexia turns her head to look at me. “Sorry, what?”

“Nothing.” I turn my eyes towards the ground. The dirt road is warm in the heat and a cat is sunbathing ahead. Cats like resting on the warm ground. It looks up as we pass, purring as it stretches.

“We just need to pass that hill and we’ll be able to see Ventus.” She wipes her forehead then looks at me with a smile. “Isn’t it warm with that hat?”

“No.” I shrug looking into her violet eyes again. Like twin flowers amidst golden fields.

“So, you don’t eat, you don’t sleep and you don’t feel hot or cold? Lucky you.”

“I feel what others feel. Heat burning on skin. Tickling, trickling, wet, but…” I swallow as I can sense the pearls tingling as they travel down her throat and collarbone - making honeyed skin glisten.

“Well, that must be frustrating. Like having an itch you can’t reach.”

“But I can help…” I reach for the water skin and soak a piece of bandage from my pack. I hand it to her. She smiles as she takes it from my hand, then sighs with a small shiver as the cold removes the drops.

Solas’ voice, warm and playful, chimes from memory: “Have you felt no interest in women since you came through the veil?”

No. I’m a spirit. I… this is… wrong… Alexia stops in her tracks before we reach the top. Hesitating before Ventus comes into view.

Big blue eyes staring up in violet. Cheeks round and full off innocence. “No, this can’t be right! ” Rushing cold makes the heart stop, as small hands reach up. “Up, up!” a small voice, but such great power. Paralyzed, a bloodied needle falls upon the floor. “No. Not this time.”
“You don’t have to feel guilty. You stopped.” I look at her as a little of what I am wraps around her heart - pulling the tangles that live there.

“That time,” she scoffs and rubs her forehead. “What about all the fathers and mothers I killed at some magister’s whim? How many children became orphans because of me?”

“No one. Bound, directed, turned against what you want. He killed them. Not you.”

“I’m not a knife, Cole. I chose to do as I was told. I could have refused.” Stomach tightens as bile gathers - “My fault.”

“Big eyes in a small face. A bright smile as small hand reaches. ‘She was supposed to be asleep! Why isn’t she asleep?’ She is happier now. They treat her well.”

“And all I did was steal a little girl from her family. All because he wanted a little girl dead.” She sighs rubbing her forehead.

I see the Master’s uncaring eyes. “Do well my little bird, and someday you will be allowed to fly free.” A promise given again and again, as empty as the look in hollow eyes. A threat. How can a child be threat? All she wanted was to play with the kittens. Alexia. Not her name. Not the one he gave her. But she chose it so it makes it her. Something beautiful. She doesn’t like killing, but enjoys the art of it. “A needle pressed to this point and he won’t feel pain.” “The right amount of this poison and she will sleep - quiet and peaceful.” Heartless. Cruel. It doesn’t matter. To her everyone deserves a peaceful and quick death - their past doesn’t matter.

“You did the right thing. She would have died if you hadn’t.” I try to assure her with a smile I have seen Solas offer Mona, when she doubted herself. Solas always understood.

“You really are too nice for your own good.” She tries to hide her smile, but I’m not sure why.

“How can you be too nice?”

“By being nice to people who don’t deserve it.”

“But everyone deserves people to be nice sometimes.”

She smiles and scratches her nose, as she did when the cook would tell her she was a good girl and give her a cookie. Smiling with feeling is unfamiliar. A secret treasure, like homemade cookies.

“A lot of people talk about wanting to make the world a better place, but I think you are the only one I have ever met who actually does. You don’t talk endlessly about it or think it takes blood to do it. You just look at a person and decide to help them make their lives better.” Her eyes look deep into mine as if she expects them to reveal something. “You’re a rare soul, Cole.”

“You want to help people too. You think you only know how to kill, but that’s not true. You don’t have to be his bird anymore.”

She smiles. “Don’t you ever worry about being used by other people?”

“No. If I help, then that is all that matters.”

She shakes her head with a smile as we continue. Bells can be heard in the distance and smoke arises from the city below. Ships fill the waters. Cold, heated - trembling as a nightmare turns into reality.

“The Qunari… They’ve attacked the city.” Alexia pulls out her mask as we hurry towards the city.
Accumulating enough power to remove the veil without tearing the world asunder is no small feat. In hidden corners of Thedas, entrenched in jungles and far from anything that is considered “civilised”, are treasures that few in this world can even imagine. In these hidden wonders are knowledge and artifacts left by my people., the secrets I need to restore them. In my pursuits, I have yet to find all that yet linger in uthenera. In stopping the Dragon’s Breath, I had to sacrifice those of my people still lingering in sleep there. So many of my own, sacrificed in that lyrium mine and left to die in a watery grave, to ensure southern Thedas would be spared the indignity of Qunari rule. I have to find what remains of them, and the resources I need to stop the Evanuris once and for all.

Walking through the ruins, the sentinels from the Temple of Mythal have been a great help. Abelas has yet to find a new name, a new purpose, and lingers in the sorrow of what was lost - much as I do. Atish’an happily follows me through the ruins, helping me search, and enjoying every new scent in her path. Covered in vines and critters hidden in every nook and corner, my friend is easily distracted from her task, but I do not mind. She is dear to me and often I leave her behind to keep her safe.

“We’d better find shelter soon.” Abelas turns his head towards the gathering clouds, removing what little daylight remains.

“We should--” I am interrupted by Atish’an barking with excitement, twirling around herself and taking off further into the ruins.

“We’d better follow her,” Abelas suggests with some amusement.

I follow her with my sentinels right behind me, and find her in what used to be a garden surrounded by a once elegant pavillion. The old marble basins are covered in grime and algae, but still, some of their beauty remains. Atish’an digs in a spot on the ground unveiling tile embedded with lyrium. I can barely hear the faint sound of it, but I suspect the harmonics are what drew my darling hound this way. I kneel next to her and stroke her head.

“Excellent, my friend. Thank you.”

She nuzzles her snout against my cheek and I can’t contain the faint smile. I can hear Abelas behind me making a small huff of amusement. A blue light flares as more of the sunlight is blocked by the clouds, but it does not appear from the lyrium engravings. I look up and a few feet away stands Mona - or something resembling her. She looks almost spectral. None of the colour is her own, but a blue phantom light as if merely her spirit is present. My blood runs cold at the implications.

Atish’an runs towards to spectre, but then stops dead in her tracks. She carefully sniffs it and Mona laughs crouching in front of the dog.

“I’m sorry, Tish. I’m not really here. Have you been a good girl?”
Atish’an gives a happy bark as she spins.

“That’s my girl,” Mona coos before getting up again.

I stare at her for a moment as the tremble inside me remains. My hands are getting increasingly clammy, but I can’t show any weakness in front of the sentinels. They need absolute confidence in me and my ability to achieve all that I have promised, but no one - not even the Evanuris - is capable of unbalancing me as she is. I fold my hands behind my back to keep the shivering sensation from becoming apparent as I step towards the spectre. She smiles softly, but with a sad look in her eyes as I approach. If she is lost to me--

“It’s alright, Solas. I’m perfectly well.”

She answers so sweetly, it is as if she can read my insecurities. But knowing her, I would surmise it is more the fact that she knows me and can predict my reactions with some certainty.

I reach for the mirage, but my touch goes right through it. Nor do I sense anything to suggest that she is a spirit. My heart starts to resume a more even pace. She is not dead. “How is this possible?”

“Salarian satellite in orbit, combined with a drone capable of holographic projection.” She points to the sky, but then looks over at my followers. “We need to talk in private, and we don’t have much time, as the weather will interfere.”

“Abelas, give us a moment please.” I instruct without turning.

“As you wish.” I hear Abelas reply before instructing the sentinels to follow him.

I do not turn from her, but instead listen as their footsteps become fainter. I wish I could reach for her, but after our last meeting I am certain that even if I could, it would be unwise. I should be concerned with how and why she found me, but a part of me takes comfort in her presence. She shifts a little uncomfortably under my gaze and looks to the ground. I had forgotten how lovable the shy part of her character makes her.

“Dorian just uncovered something disturbing in Ventus,” she says, when she finally breaks the silence. “Did you know your agents are searching for the remains of the lyrium idol Varric and Hawke found?”

I look towards the ground closing my eyes. I should have known she would discover this, even if she didn’t know beforehand.

“You knew… Solas, you know better than anyone how dangerous that thing is…” She looks at me, the blue ghostly eyes flickering as her clever mind comes to the realisation. “You’re going to use it to kill the Evanuris... But you avoided it before. You thought forming the veil was a better idea than using the red lyrium. Why would you risk it now?”

“Vhenan, you should not involve yourself in this.”

The ghostly shadow paces and ignores my words - as if I could ever deter her from anything. She stops and looks at me.

“There is one thing I still don’t understand. Why does it have to be that red lyrium? There is plenty still left after Corypheus’ escapades. But that lyrium is ancient, why is that different from the rest?”

“I will not answer that.”
She takes a step towards me and looks at me with a pleading that tears at me. “I’m worried about you. Searching for this idol, letting fanatics into your ranks... This will blow up in your face if you’re not careful.”

“I am in no more peril now than I was before. You need not be concerned about my welfare.”

She gives a short harsh laugh, her specter eyes glowering at me. “Did you know that repeating the same action over and over again, and expecting a different result, is a sign of idiocy and insanity?”

I fold my arms behind my back and return her furious glare. “Are you suggesting I am insane, Inquisitor?”

“No, I’m declaring that I am.”

My arms fall to my sides as a flirtatious remark from so long ago is twisted into something new. I fear that all our memories of our time together will end being turned into some ironic note, and the true emotions of the time we spent together will become a painful reminder.

“Goodbye, Solas. I won’t make the mistake of bothering you again.”

Before I have the chance to object she vanishes and Atish’an runs to the spot were the spectre was whining for her to return. Brown eyes stare back at me as if she is asking me to bring her master back. With a heavy sigh a crouch down as my hand strokes her head.

“I know, falon. I too wish she would return.” At least to her I might admit the truth; the only friend who I am certain would never betray me, and the only one I can fully trust.

I cast a spell on the tile and they make way for a staircase leading to the lower ruins - and hopefully June’s remaining relics.

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**Cole POV**

Mona’s fingers caresses the panel on her wrist. Filled with lights, it speak in languages no one but Mona understands. It has thoughts and listens to commands, but it’s not real. I wonder if Solas would understand.

Dorian is reclining in his chair with a glass of wine. He turns the glass, circles round and round, like the thoughts in his head. Alexia rests in the windowsill looking down on the dark streets below, shadows a comforting blanket, covering, hiding, safe.

Dorian is about to take a sip of his wine, then removes the glass from his lips. He looks at Mona, whose gaze is turned towards the floor. “You knew he was looking for it?”

“Not directly. I knew one of his agents was looking for it, and like an idiot I hoped he didn’t know about it. Just like I would like to believe he doesn’t know about the fanatics, or that elf who wants me dead.” Mona shakes her head, poison vines twisting as thoughts scream louder: “idiot”, “hopeless romantic”, “naive”, “... selfish”. I wish to comfort, but Felassan reaches for her first. Good. Better. He understands. He knows what the others don’t. Her thoughts are so loud, it takes
more than me, and what I am, to drown them out. Unless I make her forget, but she needs all of her, so I can’t.

Felassan rests his hand on her shoulder. “You should not forget either part of him. A part of him is ruthless, and a part of him is compassionate.”

“Like a slow arrow.” Her regretful smile is accompanied by a deep sigh.

“I’m sorry, the newcomer is at a loss here.” Alexia looks at them with raised eyebrows.

Mona walks to the window with her arms folded across her chest and her shoulders slumped. “In the tale of the slow arrow, a village begged for the Dread Wolf to slay a creature threatening their village. The Dread Wolf shoots an arrow up into the air before leaving. When confronted he replied ‘When did I say I would help you?’.”

I frown as I see the memories. The story is not quite right, but not wrong either. I frown as the feelings pull on Solas’ memory. “They screamed as the creature came, but just as it was about to hurt the children it fell from the sky. I don’t like this story.”

“Wait? So, he let the creature kill the adults then saved the children?” Alexia looks at me, but she isn’t afraid, or angry, or sad. She is… disappointed. “I’m not fond of that story either.”

Dorian finally takes a sip of his wine, wetting his dry tongue before he speaks. “It’s probably metaphorical. The Trickster god saves only the truly innocent, that sort of thing.”

Felassan steps up behind Mona. “How do you wish to proceed?”

“Go with Cole and Alexia to Minrathous. Calpernia can meet you there and get you into House Danarius. Fenris will be there as well, but be cautious. He has a bit of a temper.”

Blue flares that sting flesh. Markings hiding memories, but awakening pain. “A comforting smile as her hand takes mine”. He was very afraid, but she knew why. She understood, so she made it better. Mona sees and knows too much, a nightmare for anyone who wants to hide. When frightened, the little wolf bites, but she returns no matter how many times he does. “Leto.” Perhaps one day the name won’t taste bitter in his mouth.

Felassan nods, understanding the assignment, and walks towards the door waiting for Alexia and me to follow.

“And Felassan,” Mona calls to him.

“Yes?”

“Keep Fenris safe. He is risking a lot for me, so bring him back safely.”

“Anything for you, Vhenan’assan.”

“Oh shut up!” She hisses, but the bite doesn’t take as the slow arrow chuckles.

“What does that mean?” Alexia mutters to me as we walk out the door.

I look back at Mona, whose gaze is turned out the window looking to the stars, as Dorian stands next to her speaking softly. “An arrow that pierces the heart,” I translate as I look back at Alexia. “It means that he loves her.”
Solas POV

Ancient Arlathan

Another one of Devotion’s - Ghilan’nain's - creatures is terrorizing a village. The elven lords are in an uproar, and the people are being slaughtered by the creature. I feel responsible for Devotion’s lack of regard for the lives of the people. She has seen the worst of them, and knows how they treat those they consider “lesser”. It’s a tendency profound even within the people’s own society, and animals fare no better in their path. They hunt even the Halla, the most beloved creature of Ghilan’nain. That's more than enough to earn her ire, but she goes too far, blaming them for my leaving her side to join Mythal's cause. A spirit of Devotion is so easily turned into obsession, and as I am the one who caused it, I must rectify it.

Upon entering the village, I see the slaves kept by the noblemen who begged Mythal for help. The buildings are pristine and the noblemen dressed in grandeur, while their slaves are filthy, malnourished, and most very young. Some wear the vallaslin of Sylaise, others that of Ghilan'nain. My heart stills at the sight of it. I have seen her symbol before, on heraldry and creatures under Ghilan'nain’s protection, but never used in such a fashion. Devotion never cared for the People, but to know she has fallen this far sickens me.

I am approached by the noble who summoned me as I enter the gates. He tells me of the terrible beast hunting them. Its ferocity has left more dead than injured. Those who were “lucky” enough to survive the encounter are suffering and beyond the power of healing. The poison in their veins an affliction that even I cannot cure. He takes me to the building where they are being tended to. He explains that the children and mothers are kept in the building that is most heavily defended.

“We have prayed to the Creators, but they will not help us.” The noble laments. “Those who do not die are corrupted by a sickness we cannot cure. They go mad. We have left out our slaves to divert it, but the creature ignores them.”

I look to the slaves tending the wounded. They are merely skin and bones - and the smell coming from them is something I cannot even describe. Only a scavenger would see them as food. A creature such as this would not bother when there are far more tempting prey close by. Perhaps Ghilan'nain designed it this way. Knowing my devotion to those who are oppressed, perhaps this is a way to ensnare me. I long for a time when I was young and bold enough to trust.

“I cannot imagine what we did to offend the Creators so. Please, Fen’Harel. You’re our last hope. If it comes again, it will destroy us all,” the noble begs, “You can have any and as many slaves as you like. They are yours, just save us.”

I do not answer. Rage fumes beneath my skin, but reacting to it would be unwise. I crouch down in front of one of the attacked. I am familiar with the blackness tainting his blood, veins and eyes turning grey. The next few hours will determine whether he dies or is turned into an invulnerable creature. He will no longer truly be alive, but he will not be able to die.

I walk out of the building and look around the village. It is heavily defended and the lords have spared no expense on its fortification. The beast is cunning, leaving the slaves for the last, drawing my attention with their vulnerability and holding it with their innocence. But infected with Andruil's madness - perfected by Sylaise's horrific experiments, no doubt - it is far too powerful for me to confront directly. Knowing Ghilan'nain crafted it, I can not help but suspect it is designed with my weaknesses, specifically, in mind.
“So,” the noble addresses me from behind, “Are you going to save us?”

I hold my hand out to him. “Give me your bow and arrow.”

With a smile he hands me both and looks closely as I cast a spell on the arrow. I turn it towards the heavens and release the arrow. The noble gives me a baffled look as I return his weapon to him and with my arms behind my back, I walk away.

“You can’t do this to us! You were supposed to save us!” He screams at me as I walk towards the gates.

I look at their slaves as I pass and reply; “When did I say that I would save you?”

That night I wait for the creature from a distance. As the noble foretold, it prowls the village, ignoring the slaves and attacking the guards and nobles desperately trying to defend themselves. Despite its cunning, the creature is massive and looks like the offspring of a dragon and a lynx. As I feel the regret of my actions, I remind myself of the slaves they have mutilated and starved. Even had I wished to fight this creature head on, I could not. No matter my shape, the creature, and the taint roaming through it’s blood, would have posed too great a risk. As the creature turns its attention towards the building where children and their mothers are kept, I let the arrow fall. As it pierces through the creature’s skull, it does not even have time to give a howl. Its death is instantaneous.

As I’m preparing to leave, I encounter a group of slaves who have fled the scene. I steady myself before greeting them with a calm expression.

I lift my hands to make myself seem less frightening. “Tel’harel, you are safe now.”

“Safe?” One of the only elder slaves shakes his head. “We will never be safe again.”

“You are in no danger from me, and you have your freedom,” I offer in a soft voice hoping to calm the group.

“No, no, no.” A woman keeps chanting. “The gods will punish us, I know they will!”

“Without the masters, who will feed and clothe us?” Another asks staring at me with a pleading look in her eyes.

I feel a small hand pulling on my arm. The innocent eyes of a child stare up at me, but where she should have had plump cheeks, they are sickly hollow.

“Where will I go now? I have no mother or papa.” Fear trembles in the small voice even as she is courageous enough to address me. I reach down and pick her up. She is so much lighter than a child her age should be.

“You will come with me, if you wish. I will take you to a place where you will be safe.” I smile at her and she looks at me if she is afraid to trust my words. I turn to the people. “I will give safe haven to all of those who wish to stand against the Evanuris and the lords who oppress you. The rest of you, you have what the nobles are no longer using. There is enough wealth and food to provide for all of you. Build yourself a life - reclaim your lives.”

“So, you wish to take some of us as tribute for slaying the beast? To serve you instead?” A woman asks.

“No, you are free to do with your lives as you wish. They are yours, not anyone else’s.” I smile at them hoping that I can make them trust my words.
The elder frowns at me. “So, you do not want the nobles lands, and you do not want us as your
slaves? Are you so fickle that you do this for your own amusement?”

“I’ve freed you from a life of blind obedience and submission.” I attempt to keep my voice even, but
even so, some of the bitterness shines through.

“You have doomed us!” The elder cries. “If you will not help us, then take what you wish as tribute
and leave this place!”

I closed my eyes to contain my frustration. Fools! Their spirits are broken and are indoctrinated to an
extent no rational mind could ever survive. When I manage to compose myself I look at the little girl
in my arms. “And what of you? Do you wish to stay?”

She looks thoughtful for a moment. “Will there be enough food to eat?”

“As much as you wish.” I chuckle.

“Will I have to sleep on the floor?”

“No.”

Her face lights up with a smile and she nods vigorously.

“I will join as well!” A young man covered in scars and lacerations speaks up - a disobedient slave.
He turns towards those who have markings as he does. “We have nothing to lose and everything to
gain. If he wants to fight for us, then we should too.”

Nodding, a few more join him and they walk behind me to look back at the slaves. The elder looks at
me with disdain, but his eyes harbour fear as well.

“You have taken your tribute. Now leave us in peace. You have done enough.”

Chapter End Notes

Hi Everyone. Thank you so much for all your comments. I hope you enjoyed this
chapter and liked my interpretation of the "Slow Arrow" tale. I hope it gives a little more
insight into my version of Solas and what happened before the creation of the veil.

Thanks to EmberLeo for beta-reading. If you're interested in more MGIT stories you
should have a look at hers called: The Canticle of Dreams
My people. So many trapped in unending slumber, waiting for an awakening that for many never come. The ruins we trample through have nearly all broken down, much of them covered by mudslides that happened ages ago. Once this part of the land was a flourishing wilderness filled with beauty. Now it is as harsh and brutal as the people who live here. To see what the blight made of the Anderfels fills my heart with regret. My flawed attempt to conceal the Evanuris made them reach out to the ancient magisters through dreams. Masquerading as the dragons who sealed them away, men like Corypheus were drawn in by the promise of power the Evanuris offered. As a result, the taint in the Evanuris corrupted them. So much death and destruction. A pointless waste of life as the Evanuris lashed out in their madness. Attempting to destroy the dragon - now known as Dumat - they merely corrupted it. I wonder if the first slaying of an Old God was an accident or by design of the Evanuris.

With a heavy sigh, I look over the ruins. We sensed something here. Even in my dreams I felt a connection to this place, but those of my people who lingered here have long since succumbed to the scourge that befell these lands during the first blight. I, and a handful of my mages, start to uncover the coffins from the ground, but what we find is discouraging. Yeven, an older mage wearing the vallaslin of Ghilan’nain, steps forward.

“We might not find much here. This place seems to have been deserted ages ago.” He is a fairly knowledgeable individual, but pessimistic and dismissive in his approach.

In truth I do not care for him, but he is one of those I must keep close for the reason that I can not trust him. That he refuses to have his vallaslin removed does not worry me on its own, neither does the fact that he still practices Dalish rituals, but he has been conspiring against me in secret. I fear a civil war might break out among the elves when the veil falls, and I have an inkling he might be among the instigators. More importantly, he was the leader of the clan from which Mona “acquired” the Mask of Fen’harel, and I will not allow him to harm her. I should dispose of him, but I cannot afford to lose a single mage at this time.

“Much of our history has been deserted. That does not mean it isn’t worth recovering.” I give him a smile before walking ahead.

Abelas pushes one of the coffins open revealing the body of one of my people, almost perfectly preserved by mud sealing them in. I look around and I sense it. All of them died in their sleep centuries ago. Yet, I sensed activity here so strongly only a week past. There is only one conclusion I can draw from this.

I seal the coffin in front of me again. “It was a distraction.”

Abelas frowns. “But how would anyone create such an illusion? And why?”

“With Felassan’s magical talent and Mona’s ingenuity, I would not put anything past them.” I truly don’t know whether to be furious or impressed. She knew that the hopes of finding more of my people alive in uthenera was a possibility I could not resist.

“You speak of them as if they were Creators.” Yeven tries to keep his voice even. It is a very poor attempt.
“In power, no,” I confess resisting the urge to scowl in his direction. “In their combined cleverness and talent, I’d say they might even surpass certain members of the pantheon.”

“We could act against them. A swift and decisive blow,” Abelas suggests as he places a hand on the coffin, where one of our ancient brethren lies dead.

“No,” I insist. “I will not see her harmed, and while they are a nuisance their actions are well-meaning.”

“And when those well-meant actions become sabotage?” Yeven hisses. His bloodlust might as well be an odor around him.

“As of right now I am more concerned as to why they thought this distraction was necessary.” I know I am avoiding his question and he will undoubtedly have noticed. The truth is I will do what I must, but my heart can’t allow myself to even think it. Felassan is one thing, Mona is quite another…

“Heart of Arrows snaps in sad wolf’s jaws.”

I hear the voice from above and see Cole sitting on the ledge of a wall not yet crumbled. His face hidden underneath his hat while his foot taps against the stone. Next to him standing, with an arrow pointed towards us, is a short woman dressed in leathers. Her features are hidden beneath a mask and a cowl. Only her violet eyes pierce us as the arrow she is holding might. I would not be concerned, except, there is a rune strapped to the arrow, and I believe I know who made it even if I don’t know what it does.

“It’s good to see you, Cole.”

He looks up for underneath his hat with a smile. “Yes.”

“Who is your companion?”

“Oh, don’t mind me. I’m just a ghost. I’m not really here.” There is a playfulness in her tone that I can appreciate, but there is nothing about her I recognize. Yeven seems unsettled by her presence, however, but he doesn’t say anything.

“You don’t have to be afraid,” Cole stands up next to her and places a hand on hers lowering the bow. “Solas won’t hurt us.”

“Maybe…” She looks at Cole for a moment then turns her attention to me. “Can you say the same of your followers? The madmen willing to slaughter children because of the shape of their ears?”

“Hurting innocents, at least of all children, is not my goal.” I mean to sound adamant, but she scoffs at the notion all the same.

“No, merely a result of your actions.”

“I am not a monster. If they must die, I wish for them to do so in comfort.”

“Are you trying to convince me or yourself? And what is that supposed to mean ‘if they must die’? That they will die no matter what? That they will die if they can’t adapt? Or that they will have to submit in order to live?”

“Aah… I hear you have been speaking with Mona.”
“As if she is the only one who can recognize corruption and supremacy,” she sneers. “She says you support the freedom of choice, what choice have you given the world?”

I look at her, trying to observe as much as possible, but it is difficult with the way she is covered. Her eyes and height would suggest she is an elf, however.

“No wonder you stay silent,” she mocks, “It must be killing you knowing the people you love will one day see you as a monster.”

“You’re hurting him,” Cole mutters.

“Good,” she sneers her eyes not wavering from mine.

“He’s not that kind of wolf. He doesn’t want to hurt anyone. Please, don’t hurt my friend.”

She looks at him - conflicted, but then something in her eyes soften. “Alright. Just... don’t let him use you.”

Her eyes dart at me with a threatening stare as if they mean to say “Hurt him and I will skin you alive.” I can’t help but give a little smile before my attention turns to Cole.

“Why the deception, Cole?”

“To protect you from the song. She did not want you to become a slave to it.”

“The idol... she found it.” My heart stills as a chill rushes through my blood. “Where is it?”

“Hidden. She won’t get hurt. You don’t need to worry.”

“I see... and why were you waiting for me?”

“It’s getting closer now.”

“What is?”

“You will bring the dreams and reality will awaken.”

“What is ‘reality’?”

Cole chuckles, for a moment seeming infinitely wiser than the young man he appears to be. “Reality is everything depending on the eyes that see.”

He turns from me and prepares to follow his companion out of the ruins.

“Cole!” I call and he stops to look down at me. “Keep her safe.”

He gives me a smile and nods.

“So, how do we proceed?” Abelas looks at me awaiting direction.

“Quickly. We can’t afford them to gain the upper hand,” I instruct. Abelas nods and walks back to gather his men, but Yeven is not so quiet.

“She is your enemy! Surely, she has done enough for even you to realise that by now.” Yeven’s nose is flaring and his eyes burning with hatred.

I walk away without acknowledging him. Mona and Felassan know too much, and I am not certain
how. How far into the future does Mona’s knowledge go? Has anything she’s done changed the
course of events? And how does she find me? I feel a wet snout press against my hand and Atish’an
looks up at me with her tail wagging.

“And do you think we’re doing the right thing, my friend?” I murmur stroking her head as we walk away
from the ruins. In response she whines and presses herself against my leg as if meant to comfort me.

“And let me tell you a secret…” I crouch down and murmur; “Neither do I.”


It is four years to the day since I left the inquisition. Two years since I interfered with the Dragon’s
breath and almost as long since I last saw Mona in person. It’s been so long since I have held her in
my arms and all trace of her has gone. Even in dreams I cannot find her - or Felassan. My agents
have been unable to locate her whereabouts, but do run into a group calling themselves “The
Curators”. A rather diverse group consisting of Cole, an elven woman named Alexia - a former
member of my ranks -, Dubouis, Maevaris Tilani, and a handful of others. They do not sabotage my
efforts, but they do have the unfortunate habit of crossing paths with us. Like confiscating the
remains of Mythal - the lyrium idol found in the Deep Roads by Hawke and Varric - that were later
turned into a sword by Knight-Commander Meredith. It was the only thing I know that has a strong
enough concentration of taint to not merely corrupt the Evanuris, but kill them. Not even the red
lyrium Corypheus was responsible for held the strength of those remains. The first sample of red
lyrium was created when Mythal’s daughters, shaped from spirits and lyrium, were tainted by the
blight of Sylaise. In her desperation to cure them, Mythal was inflicted as well. I rub my face, as I
browse through my portfolio filled with drawings I have made in my journeys, and see the drawing
of the idol: Mythal’s mummified corpse turned into a small mass of red lyrium with her daughters
coiled around her.

I look down on my desk kept in a tower were I can look down on the ruins below. Large windows
give me a pleasant view of the village being built. Deep in a forgotten part of the Arlathan forest, my
people are hidden as we have begun to rebuild, preparing for our world to be restored, while so
many precious lives are lost. The truth is, I fear what is to come. Especially, without the idol in my
possession. Mona has always respected that people should be free to make their own choices, no
matter how misguided they might be. In preventing me from obtaining the red lyrium idol, she has
taken that choice from me. In a misguided attempt to protect me, she has denied me what I need to
vanquish the Evanuris. Is she aware of this? I am furious with her, but despite my rage and fear, I
must continue on. I have no choice. I turn the page and see a drawing I have made of Mona from
memory, and I am struck by how deep my desire is to merely see her smile again. A knock on the
door alerts Atish’an, who barks, but does not move from the comfort of my bed.

“And enter.” I call out as I shut the book.

I turn with my arms behind my back and I see Naya enter. Her blonde hair has grown longer since
her time with the Inquisition. So far she has been loyal to me, but, much to my regret, she seems to
have taken a lot of council from Yeven of late. She smiles at me as she approaches and hands me a
report.

“And everything is in place then?” I ask as I skim through it.

“Yes, the conduits are complete and a small group of Abelas’ sentinels have taken them to the
mountain top.”
“And June’s orb?”

“Abelas says it’s stable for now, but when you unlock it there is a good chance that is will create the same devastation as at the Temple of Sacred Ashes.”

“Yes, I am aware. Which is why I alone will proceed to the mountain top.” I give her a small smile to comfort her uncertainty.

She cracks her knuckles uncomfortably as she bites her lower lip. “Forgive me, but how is this supposed to work? I thought only your orb had the power to control the fade?”

“It did. June’s has very different properties, but it still has the same amount of power. That power will be channeled into the conduits that will then disrupt the veil.”

“But couldn’t it still go horribly wrong?” She takes a step closer to me, her eyes filled with worry.

“Which is why I will be there directing the process.”

“And the rest of the Evanuris?”

I turn from her and walk closer to the window to hide my fear and doubt. “When they are released they are thankfully weakened - much as I was.” Before Mythal died in my arms and the rest of who she was - that last spark - was destroyed forever to grant me the power I needed.

“Then you can kill them?” The spark of hope in her voice makes me cringe.

“Weakened they may be, but even as such, the first of my people are not easily vanquished. The remaining dragons will awaken and keep them at bay for a time, and with the veil down I will be able to restore the last of my power and finally vanquish them.”

“Before they manage to do the same, you mean.” I can hear the suspicion in her voice. Naya certainly is more adept than I gave her credit for at our first meeting.

I say nothing, but I hear Naya approach me and feel her hand on my shoulder as if she means to comfort me. I close my eyes for a moment and allow myself to imagine that it is Mona’s soft caress I feel. Hands embrace my face and before I register it a pair of lips are pressed against mine. At first, I give in until I remember that the kiss is not my heart’s, but a woman who is but a stranger to me by comparison. I take her wrists and gently push her away, looking down into her large, confused eyes.

“You should find someone who returns your affections instead of wasting them on me.” I speak softly and kindly making sure she knows I am not offended.

“It’s because of the Inquisitor, isn’t it? Even after all this time she still has such a hold on you?” Her voice is sad, but it seems to be for me rather than herself.

Naya is right. Even now my heart is deeply entrenched in emotions for a woman I have not been with for years. Devotion at its worst is obsession… is that what Mona has become? An obsession? No, she can’t possibly be. I have no need to control her and I am capable of resuming my duty. Devotion at its best is loyalty, admiration and steadfastness to that person’s wellbeing and happiness. Those are things I have always wanted for Mona, but I know these things are not for me to give to her, but for her to choose.

I take a step back from Naya. “I have no intention of repeating my mistakes, and even as lovely as you are, there are responsibilities I cannot waver from.”
She pulls her shirt over her head revealing her bare chest and I turn my head to the side to avoid the sight.

“You needn’t feel anything for me. You are with your people now. There is no reason why you can’t take some physical comfort in another.” She takes a step towards me and I look down at her with as stoic an expression I can manage - looking at her face rather than her body.

“Thank you, but I will seek my comfort elsewhere. Dress yourself, please.”

Shaking her head she redresses and walks towards the door. At the last moment she stops and looks back at me. “I can’t believe I’m saying this, but perhaps Yeven is right. How are you supposed to be the future of our people, when you are unwilling to let go of your past? How can we build a world for elves, if we feel love for the humans? I wonder if that is why you lost the Inquisitor as well.”

Before I can retort the door closes behind her, and I have to fight the urge to pick up my notebook and throw it across the room. I sit down on the bed and feel Atish’an sit up next to me, pressing her snout against my cheek. I feel Naya’s touch and kiss, and until this moment I had not realised how much I have longed for such closeness. In truth Naya’s offer would have given me comfort, but not while my heart is consumed with the wish that she had been Mona. A canine head resting on my shoulder with a pleasant rumble reminds me that affection and touch need not come merely from a lover.

“Mona is right, you are a good girl,” I praise and Atish’an rumbles happily.

I lay down and rest, looking up into the ceiling as Atish’an head lies on my shoulder - her body pressed against mine. Such faithful companions, dogs. The domesticated wolves. Still, Naya’s words ring in my mind, which leads my mind to a memory, an echo of something precious, and yet, in hindsight, a foreshadowing I should have recognised at the time.

Walking through the Hinterlands, searching for the relics that reinforced the veil, Mona has joined us for once, as Edward is injured and recovering back at Skyhold. I confess, I more than simply enjoy having her along. The enthusiasm with which she seeks knowledge and wisdom intrigues me. The way she nibbles her lower lip in thought, making them red and moist (increasing my desire to kiss them), and how her eyes sparkle at each discovery, makes my own curiosity grow. For so long I have dwelled in the fade, learning only of past events as my power dwindled, but in her company I feel my own mind expand and grow. In her presence, I am more than I was, because she inspires me.

My thoughts are interrupted by Varric, as I watch Mona walking ahead of us.

“You really spend most of your time in the Fade?”

I smile down at my dwarven companion. “As much as is possible. The Fade contains a wealth of knowledge for those who know where to look.”

“Sure, but I don’t know how you dream, let alone wander around in there.” Varric rubs his chin thoughtfully. “Especially when the shit that comes out of the Fade generally seems pretty cranky.”

“So are humans, but we continue to interact with them... when we must.”
Mona stops in her tracks and looks back at me with a glare. “If you like I can walk behind you. That way you might at least ignore my presence.”

“You know I have no objection to your presence,” I say with a smile.

“No, you just negated my entire race. Something I enjoy just about as much as you do being called knife-ear, I imagine. You condescending ass,” she hisses, “But I’m human of course. So me pointing out that racism is a problem towards all would be seen as hypocritical, which as an end in itself proves my point, since my opinion is less valued because I’m human. But as a lesser race I bow to you gentlemen. Dirthara-ma!” She hisses and walks ahead.

Varric clears his throat. “Don’t look now, Chuckles, but I think you might have pissed her off.”

“It would appear so,” I sigh, “Would you mind making camp, Varric, and wait for the others to catch up? I’ll go talk to her.”

“Sure, been nice knowing you,” Varric calls after me as I walk in the direction the Inquisitor went.

I find her walking up a hill with hurried steps. I have to run to catch up with her.

“Inquisitor-- Mona, I must apologize for what I said.”

“You know, as much as I appreciate your willingness to apologize, perhaps not acting in a way, where it becomes necessary would be the smarter option.” Her voice is stern and she keeps walking without looking at me. She is reacting much more strongly than I would have expected. There must be something more to this.

“You are right of course. It was beneath me. Seeing the treatment of the elves has… soured my opinion.”

“I do appreciate the suffering of the elves. And I will do whatever I can to help correct that, but lashing out at humans is not only hypocritical, it’s petty.” Her gaze pierces me with a look of disappointment.

“I understand your anger--” I begin, when she interrupts by stopping abruptly.

She turns around on the spot and stares me down.

“Anger? I’m not angry, I’m disappointed in you! You have the ability to rise yourself above this. Don’t be sorry because you upset me, be sorry because you lowered yourself to this level.”

She begins to leave, when I reach for her arm and stop her.

“Why does this concern you so?”

“Because I’m stupid enough to care about you.”

I can’t help but scowl. “So now caring for me is idiotic?”

“It is when you make remarks on how horrible my entire race is.”

“Would you have me lie? Or conceal the fact of the damage humans have inflicted on this world?”

Her eyes flare as if she is about to say something, but then reconsiders.

“I would have you not judge us all the same!” Is what she settles for, but, if I know her as well as I
think, she was about to point out my creation of the veil.

“Ma lath ir din’an sahlin!” I hiss in frustration.

“What the hell is that supposed to mean?!” She challenges taking a step closer to me staring unafraid into my flaring eyes.

“It means that my love for you will be the death of me!” I repeat with equal ferocity.

Her eyes are searing and her nostrils flaring as her lips are pressed into a thin line.

“Idiot!” she hisses then grabs hold of my collar and kisses me passionately.

I release a heavy sigh as my hand strokes Atish’an. I sincerely hope she isn’t correct in that assessment.

Everything is going as I have planned for once. The conduits are in place, the last of my agents have reported back and in a few moments I will finally destroy the veil so that my people may once again have a future. So why do I feel so uneasy? Edward and Mona know of my plans, so why haven’t I met any greater opposition? No, this is all too convenient and too easy, but I have neither seen nor found anything that can justify a delay. On the contrary, Mona’s ability to find me makes it more urgent that I act, while it seems that she has not yet discovered my plans.

I shake my head and look down at the jungle beneath the mountain. There my people await for me to complete my task, while so many more are still trapped in uthenera waiting for the veil to fall so that they might awaken. The sun is setting, and somehow it seems poetic to do it at this time of day. The sun sets on one world to rise on another.

I turn to Abelas and his sentinels, who are adjusting the last conduit, forming a circle around June’s orb, placed on a pedestal. Yeven looks at it as if studying it, but it seems more like worship than academic curiosity. I turn my back to them once again and reach into my coat and pull out a handkerchief with a pair of rings. When this ritual is complete all the hope I had for these will have been lost, but still I cannot part with them.

Yeven scratches his head. “I still don’t know how this is supposed to work.”

I suppress an annoyed sigh and put the rings back in my coat before turning.

“You and the other mages are going to perform a ritual at the foot of the mountain helping me contain the energy that will be released from the orb. When I unlock it, I will channel as much of the energy from the orb into these seven conduits. The conduits will connect to the artefacts the Herald activated in the south, as well as the ones our agents have unlocked in the north. These measures combined will disrupt the magical vibration repelling the fade.” I explain, trying to be patient. Yeven still gives me an uncomfortable feeling, but he is not resourceful enough to be a threat. “Now, leave me so that I might proceed.”

Atish’an sits down next to me, as if to object.

“You must leave, my friend. It is too dangerous for you up here.” Instead of heeding my command, she stubbornly lays down on the ground with a growl.
I smile to myself, then look at Abelas who walks towards the eluvian with Yeven following right behind him. After a few minutes I can see the ritual below as a green barrier forms around it. It will not contain all of the residual magic, but hopefully enough to not cause irreparable damage to the area as well as Atish’an and myself. Casting a magical shield on the hound, I reach for June’s orb and it floats between my hands as my magic pours from my and into it. My fingers are stunned as if struck by cold as a piercing pain travels up my arms. I turn my face to the sky with a cry of pain, and then for a moment everything stops as the magic grows silent. With a burst the magic is released and I focus the energy into the conduits. They light up with green magic and with a pulse a signal is sent to the elven artefacts around Thedas. The orb hums as the conduit spikes glow and then it all changes.

Slowly, I can feel the magic returning, like a scent carried by a mild breeze. Not a dramatic burst or explosion. Even as the sunlight is nearly gone the world seems brighter. I am reminded of Mona in the labyrinth. The humans who are not destroyed by internal conflict will have to adjust in order to look at it. I can feel the spirits returning, some rejoicing, some wailing in terror and others hungry as if predators on the prowl.

I hear an unfamiliar noise and look around to determine the source. A blue orb of light appears before me and shapes an image of Mona. I don’t know why or how, but I can tell it is not like she appeared before. This is an echo of her, that is not truly present, and yet in her voice it says: “A cynic is a dreamer warped by reality.”

A bolt of blue light charges into the sky and lights up the sky. Seven beams appear from the sky and go down into the distance - each in its own direction. I expect them to vanish, but they remain as steady as pillars - as if their sole purpose was to hold up the sky.

Chapter End Notes

Hi everyone,

thank you so much for all your comments. I hope you will enjoy this chapter. Things are about to happen!

This chapter hasn't been beta read yet, so please forgive any mistakes.
I stare at the pillars of light while I feel Atish’an press against me for comfort as she whines. The
Eluvian behind me activates and Yeven, Abelas and a few of his men come through. The sentinels
look concerned as they are familiar enough with this type of magic to recognise that the pillars of
blue light aren’t part of the ritual.

Abelas walks up next to me and speaks in a low voice. “I am taking it that the Inquisitor is
responsible for this?”

“Yes, but the question is, what is its purpose?”

“You mean this isn’t part of the ritual?!” Yeven fumes from behind us. “You should have killed that
shemlen!"

I spin around staring him down as I walk closer. He has exceeded his usefulness, but outright killing
him could turn him into a martyr. I will have to dispose of the body in a fashion that won't rouse
suspicion amongst his followers.

“No. No! I beg you! Mercy!” He whimpers.

In truth I do not wish to kill him, but he has long been a threat I could not afford. I have tolerated him
this far because I needed his power and expertise. Now, I must protect Mona as well as myself. My
eyes flash and Yeven stands before me petrified. A sculpture and a reminder of when the veil fell.

“Finally. His prattling was getting on my nerves.” Abelas looks at Yeven briefly before turning back
to the phenomenon.

“We would do well to determine what that is. Abelas have your men ---” I begin, but I’m interrupted
by one of the sentinels.

“Look!” he points towards the horizon, where a sphere of light is approaching.

The light hovers before us like a wisp, but there is no magic as we understand it. It transforms into a
tall being unlike any I have seen before. Big eyes, lanky body, no nose, and a hollow crevice in its
chest. One of my sentinels attacks it out of fear before I can stop him. The arrow goes right through
the being as if it was made from nothing but light. It looks at the Sentinel seeming utterly
unimpressed.

“I’m afraid that would be futile. Even should you aim for my core the chances of you permanently
disabling me will be nearly negligible.”

“W-what are you?” the Sentinel stutters and takes a step back. It’s a rare phenomenon that can give
even a sentinel pause. Even a spirit as the world as now may be harmed by an arrow.

“I’m an artificial intelligence created by Mona Aim from Salarian technology. I’m equipped with a
unique dampening field designed to suppress the unusual harmonics of this planet, and the energy
being pulled through subspace. I have a memory capacity of--”

“You are Reality.” I smile as I realise it.
It looks at me and nods. “Yes, and you’re the Dread Wolf, also known as Fen’Harel or less formally; Solas. I have been sent here to give you a message.”

“From Aim I assume.” Her name tastes odd on my lips. This formality... as if she was not part of my very chest. As if I do not sense her in every breath I take, or see her in every dream - be it waking or in the fade.

“Correct. She can no longer predict what is to come. She no longer holds that knowledge. From now on she can not protect you, and you must be wary.”

“To think Fen’Harel would need protection from a shemlen,” one of the Sentinels scoffs.

The sentinel does not know what I do. The ramifications of what this means. While my actions have been my own for a long time, a part of me had taken comfort in her knowledge. It is not why I love her, but I had come to rely on her ability.

“If you continue this destructive path you might all need her protection one day.” Reality narrows its eyes at the Sentinel. Artificially constructed, this entity should have no spirit, but to any who saw it now would at least have a moment's doubt as to if it is a person or not.

“Thank you, Reality. You may return to your Mak--” I pause for a moment at the word. I can hear Mona’s objection in the back of my mind. Creator is the next word that comes to mind, but that phrasing seems even worse. “-- Inventor and thank her for me.”

“I shall.” It turns into a bauble of light - not unlike a wisp - and disappears.

As I contemplate how truly alone I am now, I feel a snout nudging my hand. Atish’an looks up at me as if to reassure me and I stroke her head.

“Well, that was interesting if nothing else. How do we proceed?” Abelas looks at me.

“I need your sentinels to delay the Evanuris. The dragons will keep them at bay, but since there are only two left alive we do not have much time. I need time to gather the rest of my strength so that I might purge them for good. And send some spies to investigate what those pillars of light are doing.”

“Perhaps the shemlen might be of some help,” Abelas suggests and I’m certain I’m unable to hide my astonishment.

“I confess, you are the last person I thought would make such a request.”

“She has proven herself a woman of honour and ingenuity. We would do well to investigate, but since the veil has indeed been disrupted, I suspect her intentions were never hostile.”

“Regardless, I have destroyed their world and whatever friendships I harboured along with them. Proceed as we discussed and keep me apprised of your findings.” I turn and walk past Yeven’s remains toward the eluvian.

“As you wish.” I hear Abelas’ voice from behind. “But I would not count them out just yet. These shemlen are more resourceful and tenacious than any of us believed.”

A week later
I look around the abandoned Temple of Dirthamen. The sand and dust has created dunes within it, and, through the centuries, worn the many statues, artefacts and relics. Time and sand have indeed turned this place of worship into a decrepit ruin. Hidden in the night and by the passage of time seems a rather poetic end for a temple to the keeper of secrets. Here he safeguarded a wealth of knowledge of which I am in desperate need. I tried entering his vault before, but as many of the passageways were ruined parts of the labyrinth Mona calls the Crossroads, I could not restore them until now. Torn and scattered by the absence of the veil, it is only now that I can recreate the ancient passageways. Unlocking my full power should be easier and faster, but the damage is more extensive than I had thought. Even the first gate is destroyed to an extent that takes more time than I hoped to repair.

I hear a familiar voice from behind me. “You should go see her.”

I recognise Wisdom’s voice. “For what purpose?”

“She can help you.”

“I cannot have her get involved in this.”

“She is already involved!” Wisdom hisses, “You’re being stubborn for the sake of being stubborn. You should know better than to confuse it with strength!”

“I cannot,” I murmur closing my eyes.

“You fear yourself more than anyone else, and I understand why you do not wish for her to see what you are becoming. But did you ever think that she might be the one thing that can prevent you from becoming an Evanuris yourself?”

“I will never become one of them!”

“You already are. You never wanted to be one, but that is exactly what you became. You are not loved by the Dalish, but your legacy made you one of their pantheon.”

I give a bitter chuckle as I think of all that has transpired. Mona and I have both failed to save Thedas. I sense Wisdom pulling at my feelings, deciphering them in a way only she can.

“Mona wasn’t trying to control events. She was trying to change you.” Wisdom steps in front of me and rests a hand on my cheek. “Listen to me once more and let her.”

I smile unbidden as I look at my friend. “Of all the things she did, I believe helping me save you might be the decision which has had the greatest impact.”

“Dread Wolf!” A male voice calls out, and I turn to see Abelas approaching the ruins with a couple of sentinels some distance behind him.

“What has happened?”

“My sentinels went to where you said the Evanuris would emerge and guess what they found - a barrier of blue energy.” He studies me closely. No doubt to see how this news affects me. In truth I hardly know. All I can think of is Wisdom’s words. She is right. I need to speak with Mona.

I keep my back straight and attempt to reveal nothing of the turmoil inside me. “What else?”
“The last two dragons have awoken from their slumber and patrol around the barrier vigilantly. Thankfully they don’t seem to have been tainted on their way to the surface. My men also ran into Felassan and some of the Curators.”

I furrow my brow. “With what purpose?”

“Perhaps I can answer that.” I turn and see Felassan escorted by two sentinels. He smiles at me as they approach, his violet eyes filled with mischief. “Don’t look so surprised, Solas. Surely your spies informed you that I have been working with Mona all this time.”

“They did. In hindsight, I shouldn’t have been surprised. It’s an error I will not repeat.” I look at him with a playful demeanour, but the precarious situation is not lost on either of us.

“According to Mona that barrier is buying you and us precious time, but it won’t hold forever.” Felassan points to the sky. “Each of those pillars of light leads to a barrier. This one seals in the Evanuris... for now, but the rest protect the major cities in southern Thedas. The fade doesn’t exist within the domes, so for as long as they remain the Evanuris will be unable to gather strength.”

“Interesting…” an understatement if I ever spoke one. This was Mona’s plan all along, but what is she planning from this point on? I can only assume she is finding some way to deal with the Evanuris, but it would be a mistake. She does not have the power or the knowledge to deal with all of them.

“Perhaps,” Abelas hums, “but what are they planning to do? How long will that barrier hold? If they decide to start a war with the Evanuris, then we will all pay dearly.”

I shake my head. “Aim is not a person driven towards war.”

“Neither are you, yet here we are.” Abelas looks up at one of the broken statues of Dirthamen. “We need answers.”

“We do.” I turn my attention back to Felassan. “Question is, who is going to give them to us?”

“The Vhen'assan has all the answers you seek,” Felassan smirks, “but we’d better hurry. There is only so much power and sustaining all seven barriers at once is depleting it rapidly.”

The sun is almost set completely over the Amaranthine ocean. The brisk sea air carries the change of the season as winter is slowly setting in over Ferelden. Walking through a country I have become so familiar with during my time with the Inquisition is… unsettling. Spirits are flooding the areas around abandoned villages, and we have crossed paths with several abominations during our journey towards Denerim. I have tried to distance myself from the grim realisation of what my plans have cost the citizens of Thedas. From the jungle and ruins it was so much easier to forget the souls who would be perverted by demons. Entire villages have been ravaged by abominations - and not only mages have fallen victim. Now that the fade is part of the waking world anyone can be taken over by a confused or hostile spirit. All the while, I feel a dark presence watching us from the shadows. It stalks us, but never reveals itself. There is something… familiar about it.

As we walk through a village, the sea air is replaced by the smell of rotting flesh. Most of the corpses have been burned, but it has been more than a week, and rot has begun to set in the bits of flesh that remain. I find myself grateful that I did not bring Atish’an along for this journey. Though she is
always an asset, she has seemed a little weary since spirits can now be found everywhere. Kinder incarnations, like Cole and Wisdom, don’t seem to bother her, but those who might become more aggressive unsettle her. And, as with Atish’an, animals seem scarce - except for the rare few who have been possessed by confused spirits.

We pass a small body and I crouch down to look at it; a little girl - perhaps three years old. My innards turn as I’m reminded that she is the same age as my child would have been - Mona’s unborn child in another possible future that never happened. The memory of the Herald’s anger and despair as he told me of that possible future still haunts me.

“Be grateful this is all you see,” Felassan says, but without any malice, “There are those who have turned villages into slaves and cults serving them.”

My eyes dart to him. I can all too easily imagine what he is implying. A demon of desire would not care about the age of their… entertainment.

“Calm yourself, Solas. You can cleanse the world of their disgrace later. Right now we have more pressing issues.”

“You needn’t remind me of what is at stake.”

“Good, we don’t have the time.”

As we walk over a large hill, Denerim appears in the distance. I see the large dome covering the capital as well as some of the surrounding villages. All around it are tents creating one giant camp. Some sort of towers are circled around it, and I realise I recognise them. They match the drawings my agents brought me of the constructions Mona had built underground. How did she manage for them to press through the ground at the precise moment? How are they channeling the barrier surrounding the camp?

“Did she shove half of Ferelden in there?” One of the sentinels jests with a huff.

“She made the field as large as she could, knowing that the refugees would most likely seek refuge in the capital,” Felassan begins to explain, “She has done the same in Orlais, Tevinter, the Free Marches, Rivain and Antiva. They all drain power according to Mona, but they are sustainable.”

“All except the one holding back the Evanuris,” I point out as I think I’m finally beginning to understand.

“Yes. If we keep the Evanuris contained, then these fields will collapse much sooner than intended,” Felassan nods, then touches his arm. A bright orange light forms around his arm and I recognize it as one similar to Mona’s. “She will be waiting for us.”

Night is fully upon us as we approach the barrier. The blue light simmers like the stars above and I am reminded of changing lights on a distant mountain top years ago. The frozen air bites at my cheeks, but my blood warms as I see her. Behind the barrier is Mona, dressed not in her usual black, but a white suit with thin lines of glowing blue. Her hazel eyes shimmer with mischief like the sparks of fade magic drifting on the air along with the last of the autumn leaves. While the blue barrier distorts what is inside it slightly, I neither see nor sense any magic beyond it. People start to gather around Mona - most of them Ferelden soldiers who stand with their swords drawn, as well as the elf dressed in leathers. Cole is standing outside the barrier and greets me fondly as we approach. As I get closer, Mona looks towards the ground, but with a small smile. I notice faint runes are hidden within her sleeves and the blue lines seem to be liquid lyrium flowing through it.
“I suspect you have questions,” she grins at me and I can’t help but return it. I remember the first time she said those words to me, but the feelings they evoke now are so different. “How is Tish?”

“Fine. Sleeping on my bed until I return, I suspect,” I grin and she giggles, shaking her head.

“Do you want some privacy?” The female elf asks her, and Mona nods. The elf then turns to the soldiers ordering them back to their posts. I nod at my sentinels and Felassan, who also take their leave. Cole remains, but maintains a respectful distance as he smiles at me.

I step closer to the barrier, but Mona holds out a hand to stop me.

“Don’t come any closer.”

“And why not? Will you let it harm me?” I raise an eyebrow.

“No, but I don’t know what the effects will be. At best you will lose your powers once you enter the barrier - at worst you will be made tranquil.”

“I see…” I look up at the towers creating the barrier. “How did you manage to accomplish this?”

“You helped me, actually. You think I didn’t pay attention to all your notes and reports on the veil?” There is a mischief in her eyes that makes me smile. “That I only sought out Philippe by chance? That I let Morrigan drink from the well out of fear? Then there is Reality.”

“Yes, I met it. What is it exactly?”

“Remember the Krogan head at Halamshiral and the metal I found in the desert? Their ship crash landed there. Turns out there were some Salarian engineers and scientists with them. Another race of mortals.” She winks playfully. “There was a wisp beyond the fade who absorbed them, their knowledge. It began to emulate them. Very poorly at first, but when I discovered it, the wisp stayed with me. I began trying to communicate with it - with Cole’s help. I began creating an artificial intelligence based on the information I found in that wreck. That is what Reality is. Part wisp and part artificial intelligence.”

I feel my jaw loosen and my eyes widen. “You created a spirit.”

“Sort of, but it is how I did all this in the end. Everything I have done for the past 15 years have been to do this.”

I recall what she told me, when we first met. “So, what you said of Corypheus…?”

“Was all true. I did try to stop him and stop you from giving him your orb, but I needed a contingency plan. This--” she gestures to the barrier. “-- is it.”

She looks up at it and I have to admire it as well. It is a marvel of ingenuity and intelligence. I should have known she was capable of this. For all my praise of her resourcefulness, I never could have predicted this.

“Well done… This unlike anything I have seen.”

“That was the point. I don’t have your power or your talent for rebellion- and this is not my achievement. We have been using your knowledge of the veil, combined with alien technology and database to create this. Along with some more… inventive things. There is nothing magical to it. Just ingenuity and dumb luck.” She turns her gaze back to me. “The question is, what are you going to do next?”
I frown as I look at her. “Did you expect me to want to retaliate because of this?”

“No, I didn’t. I hoped a part of you would be relieved. The part that can ignore the fact that most of these people will grow hungry before long and sickness will spread. We don’t have enough land to grow what we need to feed them all.”

“Vhenan…” I take a step closer to the barrier, but she holds up a hand to stop me. “You tried to protect them,” I reason. How I wish I could reach out to her. Comfort her - at least in some small way as she shakes her head with a dismal expression.

“I imprisoned them.”

“You did everything you could for them.” It gets harder to breathe evenly and I feel my eyes fill with unshed tears. I can’t help but be touched by everything she did for the world - everything she did for me. “I am... so proud of you.”

“Thank you, but I have no use for pride,” she sighs. “Don’t you see? You and I doomed them to this fate. We’re both responsible.”

I close my eyes and release a heavy breath. “Ir abelas, vhenan.”

“Tel’abelas!” she fumes taking a step toward the barrier looking directly into my eyes as I open them, “You were supposed to be a protector for all of them. You could have let the world adjust slowly, guide them to a better future. But you were never concerned with the future only your past.”

I shake my head and throw up my hands in a frustrated movement. “Do you think this brought me joy? That this was easy for me? I never wanted to cause any needless suffering. I never wanted to hurt you.”

She releases a sigh and looks away from me as she murmurs: “I know.”

“I never wanted you to see what I had to become. I wanted you to remember me as your heart, not the Dread Wolf. I had foolishly hoped that some day you might forgive me and we would be together again.” I tilt my head to the side hoping to catch her eyes with mine as I speak softly. “Wasn’t that what you told me? Var lath vir suledin?”

Mona shakes her head and takes a step back. “Whatever I feel for you, you have just validated every racial bias among your people towards humans.” Her voice hardens as does her face. “You showed them that our lives don’t matter. That only the elves are worth preserving. Tell me, how is this world ever to evolve, how will we coexist, when that was the lesson you choose to teach the world?”

For once I’m at a loss for words. There is nothing I can say, because I know she is right. And I would still have made the same decisions. I would still have chosen my people and dedicated everything to save them.

I have no answer, so I must respond with a question: “Wouldn’t you have done the same to save your own?”

“I chose you over the world, Solas!” Her voice resonates against the barrier and behind her I see people looking in our direction. “Can’t you see how sick and twisted that is?!?” she continues as tears are brimming in her eyes, but she doesn’t let them fall.

“You forget that I could have prevented all of this had I kept my mouth shut and murdered one elf in his sleep at Haven.” Her voice is a low deadly growl and a chill runs down my spine as I realise had she loved me less she might actually have done it. She was not willing to sacrifice even a single
person to preserve the world. It is her greatest weakness, a fatal flaw - and I love her for it.

“My heart…” I reach out to her my hand lingering just outside the barrier, where the energy is tingling on the tips of my fingers. Her anger is relentless, but it is not directed at me. It’s herself she blames for all of it. She steps away as if I am actually able to touch her should I try.

“All the people of Thedas are yours, Solas. Just as they are all mine. You could have united the races if you had been patient. Instead you tore the possibilities asunder. Tell me, how do you think ‘your people’ will react to you being in love with a vile shemlen?”

My hand drops as if she had slapped it away.

“I never said--”

“You showed them!” Her voice vibrates the barrier once more. “Your words are pretty, but your actions are poison.” She releases a deep sigh and brushes away a tear.

My heart aches at her words, and I have to remind myself to hold my ground. Even after all this time she has this effect on me. The way she looks at me now is what I have feared all along.

“Goodbye, Solas.”

“Vhenan…” I try, but she keeps walking, “Mona!”

Cole appears next to me and looks at her.

“I miss her too. I can’t visit her inside.” He looks at me with a frown. “She doesn’t hate you. She loves you.”

“I know… and that is far worse.” I release a heavy sigh and hide my face in my palm.

“I wish I could help. There is so much hurt in there, but I can’t reach it,” Cole murmurs and as I look at him, I see his eyes are fixed on the elven woman with the violet eyes. “Her name is Alexia, I help her help people. She… She’s not afraid of me.”

“I’m glad to hear it. I--” I pause as I feel the presence that has followed me for days.

“I sense it too,” Cole murmurs and looks to the ground.

A Profane forms before us, but instead of attacking, it nods its head and looks into the camp - its eyes fixed on Mona disappearing in the distance.

“Such a pretty cage she has built for herself, my little arrow.” There is an amusement in its voice, and I recognise Anaris’ words in them. This is his instrument, and with the veil finally gone, his full influence over lyrium has returned - as well as the deals he made with the demons harbouring them. This is one of the Forbidden Ones - like Imshael. I avoid paying attention to the profane and the disquiet feeling it evokes.

I turn from it a look at the barrier, but I feel it standing behind me as it whispers: “Do you know what happens to a scorpion, when it’s trapped with no way out? Surrounded by a ring of fire it will sting itself - preferring to die by its own venom than allow the flames to kill it.”

I remain calm, but inwardly I shudder. It is too easy to imagine her actions should a similar scenario present itself.
Chapter End Notes

Hi everyone. Thank you so much for all your comments! I hope you enjoyed this chapter. Large chunks of it has been written all the way back in February so I'm so excited to finally have reached this point. I hope this was worth the wait.

If there are any questions you feel are still left unanswered, please let me know so I can dive into it in future chapters. Also, if there is something else you want to see more of or you have any certain wish/prompts, please let me know.

Thank you EmberLeo for beta-reading. This story wouldn't be as good if not for you input and corrections :)

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!