In the Eye of the Beholder

by A_Delicious_Torment

Summary

Arya Trevelyan wasn't raised like other Mage's. She always knew her strength, and wisdom left her destined to be a bringer of change, just not in the way she had originally thought... or will it be?

Notes

This is my first attempt at actually posting fan-fiction I have written. This story follows a similar story trajectory as the original but does have changes. If you want strict following of the original story, this is probably not a good one to read. I am open to feedback, as I would like to improve my writing skills, just please be kind about it.
It was stormy outside, I could hear the wind howling, rattling the stained-glass windows. Inside, however, was another story. The library was quiet, flickering light and warmth from the stone fireplace filled the room with the comforts I had become to think of as home. In front of me was a pile of books, a decanter of water and a plate of grapes and cheese (my favorite study time snacks). Magister Alma was talking about the dangers of blood magic, she explained that in some cases, as a last resort it can be used but only by those who are very experienced. My attention was pulled away when my patron’s son walked into the library, his royal blue robe sat snuggly on his muscular frame. It was designed to tease, leaving one arm open to the viewer. The gold of his bangles shown against his olive skin. My eyes moved slowly up his body, I could feel the heat starting low in my belly and rising slowly with my gaze. The gold in his dark green eyes held the firelight; I was entranced by the flickering for a moment before a deep chuckle escaped his lips, pulling my attention back and making me jump in my seat. “Lady Trevelyan, are you okay?” Magister Alma asked, completely unaware of the source of my distraction.

“yes ma’am” I replied sheepishly, “I apologize,” turning my gaze to the book in front of me, feeling thankful for my Antivan skin tone being dark enough to hide the blush in the libraries dim light.

“If I may interject, Ma’am,” his deep voice surprised me, “perhaps I can borrow the Lady for a lesson of a more… hands-on variety? I swear I will only take her from you for a short time,” his voice ended in a husky tone. His playful gaze met mine for an instant before I tuned to my instructor for permission. “Yes, Master Pavus,” she said with a nod. He scoffed at the title, “please, Master Pavus is my father, just call me Dorian.”

Extending his hand to mine, “My Lady?”

As if it was a question… I’d go anywhere with this man. I have been studying under the patronage of Magister Halward Pavus and the tutor Magister Alma since I came into my powers, nearly 6 years ago, at the age on 11. My parents did not want me to be taken by the Circle, so they appealed to my father’s family, within the Imperium. Master Pavus could not deny the lineage of my family, both my parents bloodlines have strong magical ties. In fact, a branch of our family in Kirkwall, the Amell’s, were almost decimated by the number of mages born and taken away to the Circle. In addition, house Trevelyan and house Pavus are distant relatives, so he was glad to oblige.

Master Pavus has two children, Dorian is the eldest and meant to inherit his father’s place on the Magisterium once he comes of age and finishes his training, and Eliza, who is 4 years younger. Eliza and I are the same age and thus have been raised together, learning to control and grow our ability to call on the forces (fire and ice). However, Dorian has always been just old enough to seem out of reach and his responsibility to take over their father’s seat, often takes him away from the Qarinus estate. Nonetheless, when he is home, he enjoys taking me away from the mundane lessons Magister Alma insists upon.

Taking his hand, I can’t hide the smile from spreading across my face. “learn something,” Eliza calls out as we leave the library. Looking back at her, she shakes her head with a knowing grin.

“It’s been awhile, My Lady, seems you have blossomed since I’ve been away,” he says.

“Well, you have been away a year next week, Dorian,” I reply. “Ah, counting the days are you my dear?” he says as he nudges my side with his hip. Feeling the blush creep up my neck I look to the floor.
“Come now,” he says, lifting my chin with his knuckle, “I am rather dashing, so I can’t blame you.” His eyes were full of laughter when I meet them. “I am well aware of your finer qualities,” I replied allowing my eyes to fill with the heat coursing through me. His gaze changed growing darker and the moment stretches longer than what would be considered appropriate. “Master Pavus, are you speechless…?” I question, still holding his gaze.

He clears his throat, as if to speak but instead crashes his lips to mine. The kiss is hungry, his tongue sliding against me, asking for entrance. As I open for him, he lifts my hips and I wrap my legs around his waist pulling us closer. He takes a few steps and before I know it, I feel the cold marble of the wall against my back. He takes my wrists in one strong hand and holds them above me. With a moan, I break the kiss to breathe and he starts moving his skilled lips across my jaw, down my neck, ending along my collarbone. “Dorian,” his name escapes my mouth just above a whisper, as I arch my hips against his hardness. He responds with a guttural growl and claims my lips once more, hungrier than the last time. He moves his hand from my hip inward, resting it against my core, another moan escapes as he pulls away from my lips. With a dark chuckle, “you are happy to see me,” he says sliding his fingers against my clit through my moist smalls. All I can manage is a whimper, my mind foggy with desire.

“Look at me Arya,” he demands, and I oblige. His eyes are filled with need and his face is flush, “Don’t close your eyes, I want to see how much you want me.” With that he releases my hands, allowing me to grasp his shoulders for leverage. Pulling my smalls aside he slides his fingers slowly inside me, titling them forward and finding that bundle of nerves, he caresses me slowly at first, then fast and faster, “fuck Dorian,” I say. He smirks, “I assure you, this is nothing compared to fucking me.”

“oh yeah? Prove it,” I retort but he muffles the last part as he pulls my bottom lip between his teeth. His thumb moved over my clit and he starts moving it in circles. I feel the pressure start to build and break away from his lips to meet his gaze one again. “Cum for me Arya,” “Do it right now.” As if my body understands his demand my cunt convulses around his fingers and I scream my release into the stillness of the hall. Bringing his fingers to his lips he sucks my wetness off them and smiles, “you taste delectable, my lady.” He slowly rests my feet back onto the ground and steady’s me with the weight of his body. Putting his fingers under my chin and raising my eyes to his he whispers, “we need to stop there for now, Amatus. We’d be a powerful match, you and I, but now is not the time.” Giving me a chaste kiss, he says, “how about a sparring lesson, Lady Trevelyan?”

“Last one to the field has to re-stuff the dummies afterwards,” I say taking off towards the training field. “Don’t say something you’ll regret,” he retorts and disappears from my side into a fade step. “Not fair Dorian,” I scream, his chuckle floats on the air, everywhere but nowhere at the same time.
2 years later, 9:37 Dragon

“Arya…Arya” I hear in the distance, but my head doesn’t want to give up the dream. That velvet chuckle, so close I could feel it on my skin.

“ARYA! WAKE UP! The templars are going to think you’re possessed,” the voice calls, its owner shaking me violently. My eyes slowly open, meeting the very worried face of my best friend. Her green eyes, glistening with unshed tears.

“Lila, what’s wrong?” I ask. “The templars are coming, they said you passed but then you didn’t wake up… I’ve been so afraid Arya,” her hand trembles as she brushes my hair from my forehead. “You look a fright, are you okay?”

Realization hit me and I jumped to my feet. My Harrowing, that’s right, I just had my Harrowing. Thanks to Lila, I had my composure set when the three templars entered our quarters.

“Trevelyan, come with us,” the Knight Commander said. Giving Lila a reassuring pat, I nodded, “Yes sir,” and followed the men out of the apprentice wing. As we passed my fellow mages, I received a mixture of looks, some relief, some fear, some excitement but nobody said a word.

“I passed my Harrowing, what is wrong,” I thought to myself. I was so lost in my own thoughts I ran straight into the templar in front of me when they abruptly stopped. He was solid like a brick wall and if he hadn’t caught my arm, I’d have been on my ass.

“Are you alright, malady?” he asked in a Ferelden accent. Meeting his gaze, I was surprised. He was quite attractive, young with dark hair and green eyes, he had the perfect amount of stubble and I almost reached out to feel its roughness under my hand when he cleared his throat and licked his slightly parted lips.

“Yes, sorry… I was thinking… spacing off…. I should learn to watch…. I’m rambling… I apologize Messere…”

“Meric” he says

“What?” I question

“My name, it’s Meric,” he replies

“Oh, right, forgive me, Ser Meric.”

“Just Meric is fine,” he says with a wink and with that, turns back to the others.

The templars had stopped in front of the First Enchanters office, I can hear her and the Knight Commander talking inside, but I can’t make out what they are saying. A couple enchanters walk by, “you think that’s her?” they whisper. Reaching out, I tap Meric’s shoulder,

“Do you know what’s going on?” I figure what can it hurt to ask… what the worst he can say.

“No not really, we were instructed to bring you straight here once you awoke from your Harrowing,” he said.
“Did something go wrong?” I asked.

“It seemed like any other Harrowing to me, you make the cutest little noises in your sleep,” he joked.

I didn’t know what to say but felt my cheeks burning.

“Hey now,” he says, “don’t be shy, it really was adorable.” Before I could reply, a female’s voice calls, “Lady Trevelyan, please come in.”

With that, all the templars leave, and I find myself alone with First Enchanter Lydia. “Arya Trevelyan, 19 summers, eldest child of house Trevelyan of Ostwick. Parents Brent and Elsa Trevelyan whom sent you to live with family in the Imperium at the age of 11, when your power manifested rather than sending you to the Circle. Patron by Magister Halward Pavus and his family, where you were trained in fire, electricity, necromancy and knight enchanter skills.”

I opened my mouth to confirm but she continued “During your 17th year, while visiting your family, an incident with your younger sibling Nicholai caused you to expose yourself and thus brought Templar action upon your family.”

“First Enchanter, I mean no disrespect but why are we going over my history?” I ask, “I am well aware that saving my little brother’s life with healing magic is how I was caught and brought in, I don’t understand.”

Her expression changed from clinical to compassionate. “Arya,” she started, “Are you aware of what has happened in Kirkwall?”

“No, ma’am,” I answer, “the last I heard of Kirkwall was that there was a devastating battle against the Qunari but with the help of Hawke, they were driven off.”

“Yes, well, that did happen but... here read this” she hands me a parchment with Kirkwall’s seal. The message spoke of an apostate blowing up the Chantry and the Circle of Magi rebelling. Hawke fought alongside Knight Captain Cullen to restore peace to the city, but the Circle was destroyed, and Knight Commander Meredith was killed.

“This is horrible news, but I still don’t understand,” I say.

“I don’t know why they keep you all so sheltered,” she said with an exacerbated sigh. “Arya, the rebellion at Kirkwall was just a start, several other Circles are following suit, thus leaving young untrained mages without support. As one of the last stable Circle’s, Ostwick is becoming a bit of a sanctuary.”

“Please follow me,” she said. “As a smaller Circle to begin with, we are being faced with an emergency of a sort.” With that she opened a door to a room full of probably 40 children, most of which were under the age of 10. They were camped out on the floor with bedrolls, blankets and the few belongings they brought with them. They all looked as if they had been traveling for weeks, dirt clung to their skin and hair, the only clean places were the streaks left by their tears and snotty noses.

“All new mages?” I ask and she nods,

“What will you do with them all?”

“Well…. I was hoping you’d help with that,” she says.

“Arya, you came into this circle with training and skill beyond most of our senior enchanter. One thing I will give Tevinter, they know how to teach and build strong, smart and powerful magi.
Protocol did not allow me to give you any standing prior to completing your Harrowing. Although, I wanted that done when you first arrived 2 years ago, the Knight Commander felt you needed to be watched for the possibility of Tevinter influence. However, now that we are in a crisis and your Harrowing in completed, I would like to promote you to Senior Enchanter. I want you to help train, support and nurture the children in that room,” she says motioning toward the door. “Will you accept this place as my Second?”

I was speechless…

“I realize this is a lot and very quick, why don’t you take a couple days to think about it. Now let me show you to your new quarters.”

Putting her arm around my shoulders she led me back down the hall to the Senior Enchanter’s wing. “This will be your new room,” she said opening the door and allowing me space to step inside. She moved aside a sheer curtain revealing a private bathing area, “I will call for them to prepare a bath,” she said with a smile.

As soon as she closed the door behind her, I ran to the canopied bed and threw myself on the fluffy pillows and silken blankets. “A private bath!” I haven’t had one of those since… since before… my thoughts trailed off to the last time I saw my family.

*It was summer and the weather was warm and humid, my mother, little brother and I were enjoying a day at the beach. It was my first day back from training and I had something specific I wanted to talk with my mother about.*

“Mama, before I left Eliza mentioned something and I am wondering if I can ask you about it’s validity?” I asked.

“Of course, darling, you can ask me anything,” my mother said with a warm smile.

“Well… I’ve heard that it’s common for families to… well Eliza has been…” I stumbled horribly over my words and felt my cheeks grow hot.

“ Ah Dorian, he sure is handsome, don’t you think darling?” she asked.

“ Well, yes… I like… I mean he is quite handsome….” My face must have betrayed me because my mother jumped forward so fast, “Arya Trevelyan, have you had relations with him?” she accused. “Well… no… yes… sorta…”

“ Arya, you aren’t even married to him yet, I sure hope you haven’t had intercourse already, the contract states you will be pure….”
Her words trailed off because my ears were stuck on the “yet” part...

So, it is true Mama, I am supposed to marry Dorian? Eliza said she saw something on her father’s desk about the arrangement... Mama is that true?

That’s when we heard the scream... “SOMEONE HELP HIM!”

Turning our heads to the sound, we see Nicholai’s limp body floating in the water not far off shore. Mother and I jump to our feet. “What happened?” I hear mother ask but I don’t stick around for the answer, I fade -step to my brother’s side and pull him from the waves. He isn’t breathing but has a faint pulse. Without even thinking I reach inside for my mana, feeling it come to my call, I push it into his chest pushing the water out, willing his lungs to move. The green glow of healing magic illuminates us, but I pay it no heed.

“She’s as mage, call the Templars,” I hear someone yell but my attention is focused on the form of Nicholai in my arms. Water is dribbling from his lips and I feel his lungs slowly move, I give one more push allowing all my energy to flow through my hands into his small body...

“Arya?” his voice is harsh, but it is probably the best sound I’ve ever heard in that instant. Pulling him into my lap, he wraps his arms around my neck “thank you,” he whispers. Mother is on us then, hugging us both to her chest, “I love you so much, my beautiful children,” she is crying. Then commotion behind us and someone calls out, “there... the mage,” I look up and meet the gaze of two Templars.

I awaken to a banging sound and a Fereldan voice “Malady, if you don’t open up, I am going to have to break the door and I really don’t want to do that... it looks painful... what is this even made out of?”

Another BANG and a curse I can’t quite make out. “I’m coming” I call, jumping to my feet and opening the door just in time to catch Meric’s fist in my hand.

“Shit, I’m sorry I was... wait how’d you do that? I had my whole strength behind that thrust, and you took it like it was nothing.”

I couldn’t help but raise my eyebrows at his choice of words. “That... uh that sounded dirty didn’t it.” He blushed at my smile, “the servants came to get a bath ready for you but when you didn’t answer they...” he said.

“Sorry about that, I fell asleep, it’s been a long couple of days,” I say.

“Alright, I will just go fetch them again, malady,” he said shaking out his fist as he walked away.

It doesn’t take long for the servants to come in filling the tub with hot water and scented oils. Removing my apprentice robe, I toss it to the floor. The servants hang a silk dressing gown next to the tub and excuse themselves. “Ser Meric is outside if you need anything, Senior Enchanter Trevelyan,” they say. I don’t correct them because honestly, I like the sound of that title. “why am I under guard,” I ask.

“You’re not, the Templar, his post just happens to be right outside of your quarters. He’s barely moved from that spot since his arrival a few weeks ago,” they say. “convenient” I reply.

They both giggle and look at each other before meeting my gaze, “he is very pretty Senior Enchanter, it could be worse, and he seems fond of you.” With that, they scurry from the room.
After indulging myself in the bath for what seemed like ages, I step out of the tub and into the silk dressing gown. It falls just above my knees, clings to just the right places and is a dark purple in color. “Why does a senior enchanter get to have sexy clothes,” I wonder to myself. My room is chilled, so I start a small fire and boost it with a fire rune to help heat the space faster.

On the vanity is a hair brush, which I grab and start combing out my long chestnut curls. The bath water is cooled now, and I step into the hallway in search of someone or something to drain it with. Meric is sitting on a wooden chair against the wall not far away. He doesn’t move when I emerge and from the even rise and fall of his chest, I assume he has fallen asleep.

Quietly, I walk over to him, his hand is starting to bruise from banging it on my door. Kneeling at his feet, I place my hand where I can tell his is tender and call my healing magic forth, to mend the broken vessels within his hand. He sighs with relief as the pain subsides, taking that as a positive, I push a little harder to get the last little bit of damaged tissue.

With unbelievable quickness he lashes out with a blast of power, propelling me though the air toward the adjacent wall. Luckily, my reflexes are also quick and I fade-step, seconds before slamming against the wall.

“Andraste’s tits, what the fuck was that” he yells, glaring at me. His eyes hold anger, fear and something else, repulsion? I can feel him siphoning my mana, I am getting weaker by the second.

“I didn’t mean to… good night Messere,” I say as I run to my quarters and lock the door behind me.

That’s when the tears come, I’m not sure why, it’s not like Meric was special to me in any way. That look though, like I was something disgusting, putrid, less-than-human, that look hurt. I had only been in the Circle for 2 years and my direct interactions with the Templars were few. In Tevinter, at home, among my peers, I had never had someone look at me like that.

It was midday when I awoke. I warmed the small basin of water with a fire rune and splashed my face and hair. The face that stared back at me from the vanity mirror looked awful. My eyes, which are usually a bright sapphire blue, were bloodshot and swollen from crying. My skin was pale, I looked sickly, probably from Meric’s siphon spell. Moving was like swimming through molasses and my head was spinning. I wanted to get dressed and go see Lila, I’m sure she is distraught with worry.

There was a quiet knock on the door and a small females voice called. “Senior Enchanter, please open the door?”


“Lay down, let me get you some food and water,” she helped me to the bed and started out of the room, “I’ll return shortly.”

“Wait? Can you take a message for me?” I asked.

“Yes, I believe so. What’s the message?”

“It’s for Lila, she’s in the apprentice wing, she’s my best friend and I’m sure is worried sick about me. Will you tell her I am fine and will come see her soon, once I feel better.”
Yes, yes, I will get the message to your friend. Now please rest.” With that she swiftly left the room.

“Wynn, Solona, Alistair and Leilana stared solemnly as the tower disappeared behind them through the fog. The companions were silent, all lost in thought for a different reason, the only noise was the repetitive whoosh of the oar sliding through the stillness of Lake Calenhad.

Once the small boat docked, they meandered toward the Spoiled Princess, all except for Solona. “I need a few moments,” she said quietly before walking to the edge of the lake. Alistair made a move to follow but Wynn and Leilana steered him in the direction of the tavern.

“Give her some time,” Leilana said, voice serene.

“How about sharing a bottle of wine with this old lady,” Wynn added, “I might keel over if I drink it by myself.”

Looking at the faces of his friends, Alistair nodded in agreement, “We can’t have you dying on us now can we,” he jests. Giving one last glance at Solona’s retreating figure, “He doesn’t deserve her tears,” Alistair says disgust evident in his voice. With a knowing look the two women pull him through the door.

The ground was damp but Solona didn’t care. The pain surged through her, from her heart out through every nerve in her body. She wanted it to go away, she wished she could be numb to it all like Morrigan. The fate of Thedas was on her shoulders and all she could think about was him. The smell of his breath against her, sweet and tinged with lyrium. His playful smirk, the one that could melt her in an instant. The surprising silkiness of his curls as she ran her fingers through them. The husky growl that escaped his lips every time he took her against the alter in the chantry. How his eyes shone like molten gold whenever she gazed into them. “I love you,” he had said it that day, that day Duncan took her from her home, that day her life changed forever.

The tears started to fall from her eyes as the memories came. Under her robe she felt the familiar weight of the amulet he had given her. It laid against her heart and had kept her going through these last few months. All this time she held onto the thought of returning home after the Archdemon was defeated. No more blight, no need for a Warden… she could go back, be with him again.

Pulling the amulet from her robe, she turned it over in her fingers, it was copper in color, smooth and worn from being hidden under his armor for so long. Templar’s weren’t allowed to have personal effects. She opened it and saw the crumpled piece of paper, she didn’t need to unfold it, its contents were burnt into her mind. “My heart ~ Cullen”

Now her home was gone and so was he. “Take back your fucking heart!” she screamed, throwing the amulet toward the lake but someone grabbed it midair. She stood, anger and flame flared in her eyes as she turned to face the intruder. It was Leilana, she held the amulet, “you may want this once the pain has eased, I will keep it for you, in case that day comes.” Leilana’s face was stubborn but her eyes were warm, and before Solona knew she was pulled into her friend’s warm embrace. Solona didn’t know how long they stayed there but Leilana didn’t let go until the tears stopped flowing.”

Out of all the stories of the fifth blight, this was my favorite. On one of my summer trips home, we visited Kirkwall and I found it in the Amell’s library. So often you hear about how the Hero of Ferelden defeated the Archdemon and fought the darkspawn at Ostegar, but she was so much more than a warrior. She was a person, a woman, a mage. I loved the stories that focused on the more human aspects of Solona Amell (not to mention, we are related). I like to believe that this specific story is Solona’s autobiography, sent to her family as a way for them to keep track of her. There are so many aspects that an onlooker wouldn’t know.
I came to but didn’t allow myself to move, who was reading my favorite story to me? Where did they even find it? I heard footsteps and a male’s voice, “any change?”

“She is stirring a little, Ser. She will wake soon,” I recognized Lila’s melodious voice. She must have been the one reading, she would have brought me my stuff from our room in the apprentice wing. “Is that a true story?” the male asked. I heard Lila’s robe as she shrugged. “Arya said she got this from the Amell library, they are related somehow.”

“Arya and the Hero of Ferelden are related?” his voice held a tone of surprise now.

“Yeah and the Champion as well, quite the family tree eh?” Lila asked with a giggle.

“Huh, you know I trained under Knight Captain Cullen briefly before transferring here. I don’t think I will ever be able to look at his molten gold eyes the same again,” he chuckled now, and I recognized it to be Meric.

“Meric!” Lila’s laughter spilled into the room. She was flirting, I could see the pink blush on her pale skin without even opening my eyes.

“Well, I better get back to my quarters before the Templars think I escaped and try giving me the Right,” she said.

“Psst, Templars are a bunch of nugs, don’t worry ‘bout them,” he teased.

Lila giggled again, “Have a good night Ser,” I heard her slippers glide on the floor as she walked out of the room, then silence.

I waited a few more moments before opening my eyes and sitting up. There was a glass of water on the bedside table, which I grabbed and downed in two gulps. Looking for the decanter to refill my cup my eyes rested on Meric, standing in the doorway. He looked relieved but kept his distance.

“Do you know where the decanter is, I’d like more water?” I asked voice hoarse. He didn’t say anything but stepped to the bed and took the glass refilling it and handing it back. I swallowed the cool liquid and met his gaze.

The moment stretched and I was about to say something when he took a few steps and knelt at my side. “I’m so sorry malady, I didn’t mean to hurt you, I was just startled… not a worthy excuse I know….,” His voice trailed off and he dropped his gaze to the ground.

“Thank you for healing my hand, malady, it may have been broken”

“Arya,” I said.

“What?” he said, “Oh, right, thank you Arya,” this time he held my gaze with his.

Being this close, I realized his eyes were a dark green, similar to Dorian’s, they reminded me of being in a forest at dusk. His light skin was spattered with freckles and he had a scar along his chin. I reached out and ran my finger along it, stopping just at the curve of his lips. I froze there, not sure how it happened or what I should do next. He smiled, “Mabari.” I met his eyes again and must have looked confused. “I was attacked by a Mabari, fleeing Denerim when the darkspawn attacked” he explained.

He moved my hand to his mouth, placing a kiss on the top of it. Clearing his throat, he smirked, causing my stomach to flip flop, “I’ll let you get cleaned up.”
I took my time bathing and drying the chestnut curls that fell to my waste. Looking at myself in the mirror, I couldn’t believe it had been 2 years since I started my role as Senior Enchanter. I still looked the same, but I felt different. My world had shifted, for so long my focus was on learning to master my magic and becoming a powerful wife to a Magister. Now, I was a teacher, a nurturer even a mother to many of my young pupils. As second to the First Enchanter, many changes were implemented into the Ostwick Circle.

Apprentices were happy and comfortable, although the rebellion was raging across Thedas, here, we seemed to have peace. Shortly after taking on my role, Lila passed her Harrowing and we have teamed up as the “best teachers ever,” according to the children. Ser Meric also got a promotion to Knight Captain. The three of us spend most of our time training the young mages and Templar recruits to be kind, focused and compassionate.

Pulling the Senior Enchanter robe over my head, I took a moment to revel in the satin feel of it. Apprentice robes were made of rough cotton, but this was soft against my skin. The fit was also more flattering, instead of feeling like I wore a potato sack, I felt beautiful. The robe was tailored to my curves and had open shoulders exposing part of my neck and upper back. It was a deep blue with silver embroidery, much better than the burnt orange robes of the apprentices. I pulled half my curls up and let the other half fall down my back. Feeling comfortable with my appearance, I stepped out into the hall expecting Meric to be sitting at his post, but the little wooden chair was empty.

Lila and I had plans to meet and discuss a new lesson around using opposite elemental forces to do more damage. I looked in all her usual haunts but couldn’t find my bubbly friend anywhere. Maybe she is in the garden, she was talking about trying her hand at potions.

On my way to the court yard, I stopped at the room from before, the one that held all the newly empowered children. Opening the door quietly, I was proud at the new state of the space. We were still getting large numbers of children coming in and I wanted them to feel safe, not like refugees. Bright cots had been brought in lining the walls but leaving the center space open.

In it, the children were all sitting in a circle. Curious to see what they were watching, I stepped inside the room. There was a templar sitting in the middle of the circle reading a book. His back was to me, so I didn’t recognize him at first. Once I was close enough to hear the familiar Ferelden drawl, I knew it was Meric. At the same moment I recognized him, a couple of the younger kids came running in my direction, “teacher!” they said with excited voices. I bent down to meet their out stretched arms and looking over their heads saw Meric turn and smile.

“Will you come listen to the story Mr. Meric is telling?” they asked.

“Of course,” I replied. They each took one of my hands and before I knew it, I was sitting in the circle looking up at Meric’s animated face as he read the story of the mighty Grey Wardens flying in on their Griffins to save Thedas from the darkspawn.

As the story came to an end, a few servants came in the room, ushering all the children down to the dining hall for supper. I stood and bid them good evening, intending to continue my quest for Lila.

“Arya, a moment?” Meric asked, the look in his eyes made me nervous.
“Sure, what’s going on?”

“I need to speak to you in private,” he said, walking swiftly from the room.

I followed and he led me into a storage room off the chantry. With a wave for me to enter, he shut and locked the door behind us. The storage room was dark, so I cast a flame, illuminating the small room with soft flickering light.

“Meric, what’s going on, this is strange?” I asked eyeing the space around me.

His eyes were moving back and forth, as if he was reading all the different things, he could say, but unsure which to choose.

“Meric?!” I put a little more force in my words, which caused his eyes to meet mine.

“It’s Lila,” he started and with that my stomach sank, “what do you mean? I was looking for her, where is she?”

“The rebellion reached a few of the mages here and they left, Lila left with them,” he said.

“She wouldn’t have just left, Meric are you sure she was with them?” I asked. “I would have known if she planned to leave.”

I started to cry, and he pulled me against his chest. “It seems abnormal to me too but the other’s, they don’t know her.”

“Knight Commander Aric and First Enchanter Lydia have been locked in the conference room since it happened.”

“A few of templars also left, saying Aric and Lydia are weak.”

“I’m not sure what is going on, but I know it’s not good.”

Putting his thumb under my chin he raised my face to meet his eyes then brushed the tears from my cheeks. “You’re so beautiful,” he whispered. I sucked in breath to speak but before I could he touched his lips to mine, a soft pressure before he pulled away, “I’m… I’m sorry that was… horrible timing” he joked. “Let’s go see if we can find out more about what happened,” he turned to unlock the door. I pressed my hand along his arm, stopping his movement. A small gesture but all the encouragement he needed. This time when his lips met mine, they were not gentle.

He sucked my bottom lip causing me to part them slightly, his tongue pushed inside, exploring every part of mouth. I couldn’t speak but heard myself whimpering as he skillfully conquered me with his tongue. He moved his fingertips slowly from my lower back, across my hips, up my side and across my breasts. His thumbs circled my nipples until they grew tight under his touch. He pulled his mouth from mine with an animalistic growl, “Can I taste you?” he asked. I couldn’t find my voice but nodded in response. Permission granted, he pulled the silken robe over my head, tossing it to the floor behind us. His eyes followed the lines of my body, starting from the ground and moving up to my face. His eyes, full of desire, shown brighter then usual. He claimed my mouth again briefly, before moving down my throat, scrapping his teeth against my skin. My skin burned with magic and need, his kisses caressed me like the first rain of Autumn, leaving a cooling sensation wherever his lips touched. I cried out as he brought one nipple into his mouth, then the other. The noise brought his attention back to my face. His eyes were reflecting an unknown light and I realized that my mana was pulsing under my skin, causing it to glow.

I felt his hand a moment before it was under my smalls. He slid his fingers inside, causing me to call
out in pleasure. The coolness of his hand and the fire burning inside me heightened my sensitivity, almost pulling me over the edge right then. “Not yet, I want to take my time with you,” he said, pulling his fingers free and removing my smalls, tossing them to the ground with my robe. He looked around the room and seemed satisfied when he saw a couch against the back wall. Picking me up in one arm and undoing his breeches with the other, he made his way to it. I felt the rough fabric against my back as he sat me on it. I heard the clank of his boots and breeches hitting the floor then the coolness of his hands on my knees.

Speeding my legs slowly apart he trailed sloppy kisses down one thigh than the other, before finally finding my core with his mouth. He sucked and feasted upon my arousal like a man starving. His hair was soft under my hands as I twisted my fingers in it. I could feel the pressure start to build, “Meric,” I whispered, need heavy on my voice. The sound of his name brought his attention back to my face, “Is this okay?” he asked. My voice was hoarse, but I managed a “yes.” Closing the distance to claim my mouth again brought our bodies close. I could feel the hardness of his cock against my core and we both moaned at the feel of it. I tilted my hips up, grinding my clit against him and he growled. Looking up at him in the golden glow of mana was a beautiful sight. His chest and shoulders were toned and hard but lean. His build was more like that of a rogue than a warrior, I wondered for a moment what his weapon of choice was.

He must have noticed my thoughts wonder off because he asked, “Are you alright?” A flirtatious smile crossed my face.

“Yes, just distracted, you are also beautiful.”

I felt his hand move between us and the hardness of his cock spread my labia. He met my eyes again, a question hanging in them. “Take me,” I demanded. He didn’t speak but kept his eyes locked to mine while he pushed himself inside. The feeling of fullness as he entered rode the edge of pleasure and pain, causing me to gasp. He froze, “I’m sorry… I didn’t know…

“Don’t stop,” I said, interrupting his rambling. This time I closed the distance between us to claim the fullness of his lips. He shuddered against me, fully sheathed and stayed for a moment so I could relax around him. His movements were slow at first, sliding himself against me but not pulling out completely. The pleasure began to out do the pain and I tilted my hips to meet his thrusting. “Faster” I demanded, and he obliged. The sounds of our bodies meeting repeatedly filled the room and my skin glowed brighter and brighter. I could see how the mana was transferring from my skin to his and remembered one of Dorian’s “hands-on lessons” about sharing mana. I knew it added immense pleasure between mage’s but didn’t know it could happen with a non-mage.

My muscles started to tense around Meric’s cock, I was close. The tensing caused him to lose rhythm for a moment “fuck Arya, I’m gonna cum” he said. Making an impulsive decision, I took that moment to push my mana into him. His body accepted it, consumed my burning flame with a heatless blue of his own. I plunged over the edge, my cunt convulsing around his shaft, the heat of his release filling me. Around us the room shone golden and blue, fire and ice, my mana and his lyrium dancing, intertwining, becoming one.

After that, we fell asleep, I came to and the small room was dark. Meric’s weight was on my chest, his soft breathing the only noise. But there was something else, something had woken me. I didn’t move but listened only to be greeted with silence. If my ears couldn’t help, I’d use another sense. Calling my necromancy from where it laid dormant, I pushed it forth, it couldn’t tell me what was hiding in the darkness, but it’d let me know if it was alive or dead. The purple wave spilled out looking for its quarry. Meric’s body lit up first with a purple glow, letting me know he was alive and well. The rest of the room stayed in darkness, but once outside blue outlines appeared, first one than another and another... blue means death… this was not good.
“Meric, Meric” I whispered. His eyes opened slowly but in an instant, he was on his feet, “something is wrong” he said, “I taste blood magic.” He started rummaging around for clothes, can you light that flame again I can’t see,” he said.

“Meric” I placed a hand on his shoulder drawing his attention to me. His eyes were wild with anxiety.

“We need to go,” he said, voice stern.

“There are bodies outside of this room, whatever is here it’s killing people,” I said, “We need to be careful, so please calm down and move slowly, if it’s demons they will sense your rage.”

He took a deep breath, calming himself. With my necromancy initiated, I could hear or more like feel, his heart rate drop. I lit a tiny flame in my hand and searched out our clothes. I pulled my robe on but left the smalls discarded on the floor, they were drenched anyway. I sent another pulse of power outward, “Maker, what is that, it smells of decay,” Meric said scrunching his nose.

“Necromancy,” I replied.

“Wait, you’re a death mage?” he questioned

“I have many talents,” I retorted heading for the door feeling assured that only the dead waited across the threshold.

“Arya,” his hand was on my arm. “Death magic is a form of blood magic… I can’t let you...”

Meric was having a crisis of faith apparently. In the safety of the Circle, the conversation of bad magic vs good magic had never transpired between us. The only time he even saw me use magic was with the students. I had a flashback to that time in the hallway, the look of repulsion he had on his face when I healed him. I met his eyes, his face was hard, nothing like what I had become accustomed to.

“Meric,” I inhaled, “I have only been a Circle mage for these 4 years we have been acquainted, prior to that I was trained in Minrathous. I….”

“What!” he said, voice raised, “you’re a, an apostate, a fucking Magister?” His heartrate was rising with his anger.

“Meric, now is not the time. Let’s get to safety and find out what in Maker’s name is going on. I promise I will explain more once we get out of here,” I pleaded for him to understand. He nodded but didn’t release me.

“Let me go first,” he said
Stepping aside, I allowed his chivalry. The door opened slowly but stopped with a heavy thud. "Something is blocking the door," he said, "You’ll have to squeeze through and move it."

I couldn’t stop the shudder, I knew what was blocking it. Before squeezing through, I placed my hand on his cheek. "We’ll get through this," I said stretching up on tiptoes to kiss his forehead. His eyes softened and he smiled at me. With that I slipped from the room.

The smell hit me first, it smelled of death, the ground was slick with blood, dark and thickening as it coagulated. Looking around, I counted six bodies on the chantry floor. I didn’t let my eyes linger, I didn’t want to recognize anyone. Turning back toward the door, there was the body of a templar crouched against it. I stepped over and removed the helmet, it was a female, her red hair covered her face and I moved it aside to reveal her youth, a new recruit. Her mouth was set in a grimace of pain and her eyes held surprise. My heart sank, "what happened?" I questioned.

"Arya" Meric called from the other side of the door. "Just a minute, I’m okay but… it’s bad," I answered.

I bent down to move the templar from the door, but she was wearing full armor and I couldn’t budge her. I sat back, I knew what I needed to do but Meric was not going to like it. We had no weapons, no armor and were about to walk into the unknown, we needed a scout. Placing my hands on the templar’s chest I called my necromancy, the purple power went deep inside of her, filled her until her eyes shone with its power. She stood and look at me for instructions, "scout the area, don’t interact, come back and let me know what you find." Once she was out of sight, I opened the door. Meric came barreling out, ready for a fight "who was that?" but his mood changed as soon as he saw the bodies. "Maker?" he said, "let’s get this bastard."

Meric took a few hasty steps toward the chantry entrance then stopped, waiting for me to follow. "Arya, Arya" he called. I heard his voice, but it was a distant echo. Everything was covered in a purple hue but through her I could see mages and templars battling one-another. I only recognized a few faces, most were strangers. "Where did they come from and why are they here?" I questioned.

"Who? Where? Meric was staring at me confused.

The sounds of battle filled my consciousness, clashing swords, ripping flesh, lightening, ice shattering, the smell of burning hair. I could sense it all as if it was me wondering the halls. As she ran from room to room, it didn’t let up. It was like something out of a horrible nightmare.

"We’re trapped," I don’t know if the thought was hers or mine.

"What do you mean trapped?" he asked again, stepping in front of me.

She opened the door to the commons, and I saw an abomination and two shades turn toward her and then nothing…

Meric was shaking me when my focus returned. "Maker’s breath Arya, what was that, your eyes were completely purple, and you were mumbling about demons."

"I was watching," I explained but he didn’t get it.

"The Circle is overrun, templars and mages that I have never seen before are slaughtering everyone. There are also demons and abominations in the commons," I continued. "We can’t fight our way through it, there are too many, but I have an idea… you won’t like it, but it will cause enough chaos that we could get out through the lyrium tunnels."

"Fucking mages and their fucking rebellion," he cursed.
“Meric, there are just as many templars participating,” I countered.

“Yeah but they are just doing their job, protecting the innocents,” he argued

“They don’t look like they are protecting anyone,” I said, “did the children deserve to be killed?”

“What do you mean?” he asked

“The children, they are dead and not at the hand of magic,” I told him

“How do you even know they are dead?” he asked

“Well, I raised a corpse and had her scout the Circle for me, I was watching through her eyes, that’s how I know what’s out there,” I explained

“Maker’s tits,” he cursed again, “this is too much.”

“What about the others?” he questioned

“I don’t know,” I said, “she was taken down by demons in the commons.”

Tears were coming now, I didn’t know what to do and his arguing wasn’t helping.

“Arya… I,” he started but I stopped him mid word, “Let’s just get out of here.”

Thought process crowded by emotions, I stepped into the hallway, straight into a wall of armor. I landed hard on my butt and looked up to the face of a templar I didn’t recognize. His sword was drawn and pointed at my chest. “look what we have here, boys” he said looking over his shoulder. Two others came up next to him, one on each shoulder. “She’s a pretty one, Captain,” one said. “Yeah, can we keep this one? You got to keep that little ginger elf girl from the kitchen,” the other added. The disgust must have shown on my face. “I don’t think she likes that idea much boys… but then again she doesn’t need to like it,” the Captain said villainous laugh ricocheting off the brick walls.

Meric came around the corner at that moment, “Arya!” he called. Looking at him, I shook my head, he was outnumbered, and I didn’t want his chivalry to get him killed. He seemed to assess the situation ending in the same conclusion as me. He adapted quickly. “Thank the Maker you stopped her, she’s a squirrelly one,” he said clamping one of the lackeys on the shoulder with a loud thump, “But she’s well worth it, if you can get her to hold still,” he jested with a wink to the Captain.

“Who are you?” the Captain asked

“Knight Captain Stanus of the Ostwick Circle,” Meric started, “And this here is our Senior Enchanter Arya Trevelyan, second to First Enchanter Lydia.”

“What do ya mean a Senior Enchanter, she’s too young and pretty to be a senior anything,” one of the lackeys questioned.

“Well don’t let her looks fool you, I have her silenced or she’d have ya’ll turned into toads by now,” Meric said, taking a few steps toward me.

I could tell the Captain wasn’t sure about Meric. “I can sense that she’s got mana, are you sure you silenced her?” he asked.

“Well I’ve been chasing her for a while maybe she found some lyrium or grew it back… isn’t that how it works… they grow it inside them?” he feigned ignorance and took another step in my
direction.

“Stop right there” the Captain challenged. His lackeys drew their blades, pointing them at Meric.

“You understand… for the sake of caution,” the Captain said.

Meric nodded in agreement, “Of course.” With that, the Captain came around behind me, I felt the roughness of the rope as be bound my wrists. He paused for a moment, face buried in my curls, I felt his hot breath on my neck and saw rage, equally hot, in Meric’s gaze.

The Captain must have seen it too, I felt his posture tense and heard his lips part before white searing pain engulfed me. My blood boiled, vision faded, and flesh scorched where his hands and mouth touched my bare skin. The last thing I heard was Meric’s scream, “NO!”
It was cold and damp and I was shivering. My wrists stung and my body ached. It took me a few attempts before my vision cleared enough to see. I was in a tent, cold wind and snow flurries were sneaking through the heavy fabric at the entrance. My wrists were still bound and from the pain, had been that way for a while. I still wore my Senior Enchanters robe, but it was torn to shreds and covered in mud.

Outside I could hear voices, but I couldn’t make out what they were saying. Where was I? How did I get here? How long had I been out? Where was Meric?

The questions started to bombard my conscious causing my head to spin. I kicked out in frustration and my foot hit something sending it flying into the side of the tent.

“Go check on the prisoner” a voice boomed outside my door, “kaffas” I thought. Just a minute later an elf came timidly through the entrance. She had red hair and looked sickly pale and thin. I remembered the Templars saying something about kidnapping an elf, this must be her.

“Oh my,” she said at the sight of me, “I didn’t think you’d ever wake up.”

She stepped towards me with an outstretched hand, “stay away,” I said.

She stopped and looked to her feet, then taking a deep breath said, “you have been sleeping for a number of weeks, malady, let me get you some water at least.”

“A number of weeks” my voice was strained, barely above a whisper.

“Yes, almost five” she said. She brought me a glass of water, her shaky hands almost spilling it. I tried to reach for it, but the bindings on my wrists stopped me, causing me to gasp in pain as stinging shot up my arms.

“Let me help,” she said voice gentle. I drank the water she offered greedily. “Let me get you another glass,” she said. After finishing the second glass, my throat felt soothed enough for talking.

“What happened?” I asked

“The templars took over the Ostwick Circle, they killed most of the mages,” her voice was sad.

“Where are we?”

“Well, I don’t know where we are exactly, somewhere in Ferelden I think, it’s cold and smells like
“wet dog,” she laughed a little at the reference.

“What have they done to me? My body is sore?”

She looked to her feet, “It’s probably best that you don’t remember” she said, “It’s been real bad malady.”

I could see the bruises, dried blood and semen on my thighs, I didn’t need her to say it to know that they had all had their way with me.

“Can we get out of here?” I asked

She met my eyes at that one. If you are strong enough, I think I know how we could escape. I’ve been watching their routines, each night I serve them ale, then they come to you, then they pass out in their tents til morning,” she explained. “I have some deathroot, I can put a little in their ale causing them to sleep deeper, but you’d have to make it through their visit. Once they are asleep, we could get away. Just know that there are a lot of others fighting all around us, it will be dangerous,” she explained.

“We need to know where we are or we will be wondering until we freeze,” I said, “have they said anything to hint at a location or a destination?”

“The Captain has been heading toward a place called Andoral’s Reach, apparently that is where the rebel mages are. He’s also mentioned someone called Lord Seeker Lambert at the White Spire,” she said.

“Ginger, where is my ale,” the booming voice from earlier.

“I must go,” she said, “I will come for you once they are asleep.”

With that, she hurried from the tent. If I was going to be escaping, I needed to make sure that I could walk so carefully I started to put weight on my knees and feet, a little at a time to get my muscles moving. I’m not sure how long it was before I heard heavy boots coming in my direction. I closed my eyes, willed my breathing and heart rate to steady and prayed for the Maker to let me escape into unconsciousness while they each hand a turn with my body.

A few hours later the elf girl and I were sneaking out of the encampment. We had raided their supplies, each of us pulling on some leather armor and carrying a pack of elfroot, lyrium and rations. My limbs were still stiff, and my body ached, but I gradually healed myself as we went. We were somewhere in the Arling of Amaranthine, according to the map and notes we recovered from the desk of the templar captain. I knew that the City of Amaranthine was a place of refuge for many travelers, so I suggested we head to the city and decide where to go from there.

It was a slow trip, we traveled during the night and laid low during the day. The rebellion had grown, surpassing just the Circles. Everywhere mages and templars fought, not caring who or what perished in their wake. Additionally, low lives of every type prowled the woods, taking advantage of the chaos. It became common for us to come across piles of dead bodies, abandoned wagons, partially burnt houses, and empty camps. Unfortunate as it was, it gave us an edge. The bodies gave me an endless supply of… well… bodies, using necromancy I raised them to act as bodyguards. We survived a few attacks, thanks to their assistance. The abandoned houses, wagons and camps gave us places to hide and rest during the daytime. There were even a few merchant wagons with food and other supplies.
It was after a fortnight of traveling that we walked through the gates of the city. On our journey, we managed to collect a decent store of silvers and even some sovereigns. Most of it we looted from the dead, but coin is coin. Thankfully, it gave us the ability to keep a low profile and seek some comforts. We stayed at the Crown and Lion Tavern, claiming two rooms and access to the bathhouse whenever we wanted.

After some hot soup and bread, we went to our separate rooms with the plan to convene in the morning. Elenora, the elf girl, seemed to want to go to Orlais but I was done with all this mage-templar fighting and wanted to go back to my family estate in Ostwick and eventually Qurinus, after I found out what happened to Meric and Lila. Thoughts of Dorian filled me with hope. It’d been so long since I was taken away. I couldn’t wait to see him again.

The hot water of the bathhouse felt amazing on my body. There was a bar of elfroot infused soap, and I used the entire thing, hoping maybe it’d ease my feelings of disgust. It didn’t and when I slept, the Maker did not protect me from the memories of those many weeks in the templar encampment.

I was being chased, the rancid smell of ale surrounding me, covering me in a sticky layer of it. I couldn’t get away, their hands were on me, in me. Their seed spilt on my chest, stomach, my robes caked in it, crusty and stiff. I woke up vomiting and drenched in sweat.

Not wanting to go back to sleep, I made my way back to the bathhouse. Elenora was there, “I had bad dreams too,” she said. We sat in silence, letting the warm water wash clean the horrible images from our minds. Looking at each other, I knew we would be parting ways but that we would forever have a bond.

I leaned over and hugged her, “if you need anything, send word to House Trevelyan.” She nodded, “I am going to Orlais, I hear the empress in kind to elves.” She left and I was once again alone in the bathhouse.
After Elenora left, I stayed in Amaranthine for another week before booking passage across the waking sea. I docked in Kirkwall and planned on staying with my cousin Sybil at the Amell estate. Unfamiliar with the city, I asked a guardsman to escort me to the estate. Donnic was his name, his wife was apparently one of Sybil’s close friends. The doorman, a dwarf named Bodan, said Sybil was away at the moment, out traveling but allowed me to stay. That night, Donnic brought his wife Aveline and the three of us had dinner. They were so sweet, and I was thankful for their company. Aveline even helped me book a carriage to Ostwick.

It took about a week, but I ended up standing in front of my parents’ estate. Looking into the gated courtyard I felt a mixture of relief and anxiety. It had been so long since I was last here, so many things are different now. Would they recognize me? Would they send me away?

Tentatively, I walked up and knocked on the door. There was a long moment of silence and my fear almost had me turning away. Then I heard the click of a lock and a young man opened the door. He was attractive, dark hair in ringlets just past his chin and the start of a beard. Blue eyes that stood out strikingly against the paleness of his skin, stared at me questionably…

“can I help you?” he asked. I froze, not sure what to say... was I at the wrong house? Who was this man?

“I’m sorry miss but we are not receiving visitors right now, we are in mourning for the loss of my sister, please come back another time.”

Then he closed the door. “Mourning? Sister? Wait… that was Nicholai!

The recognition dawned on me and I banged on the door again, hard enough to hurt myself. This time a woman opened the door. As soon as her bright eyes saw me, she pulled me to her chest, “Arya, we thought you were dead.”

My mothers smell filled my senses and for the first time in what seemed like forever, I felt safe.

It took about a month of continual care before I felt like myself again. My parents nurtured me back to physical health. My mother brought Alma in to help me control the nightmares and bring my magic back to full power. Alma, told me of how Eliza has been thriving in her marriage to Magister Tallis and is expecting their first child in a couple months’ time. She is having a salon, in celebration of the babe, which I am of course going to attend.

I asked after Dorian and Alma said that he and his father had a falling out a few years back. Since then he has been in Minrathous studying but hasn’t been home.

A few weeks later-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Vines with sweet smelling purple blossoms draped over the archway leading to Eliza’s home. I had forgotten how wonderful freedom felt. The sun shone down warming my bronze skin. I wore a satin gown in a rich copper held in place at one shoulder with a broach of emeralds and diamonds. My hair was braided and held atop my head in an intricate weave.

I stood at the entrance to Eliza’s home, bathed in the sun and for what seemed liked forever, didn’t have to hide who I am, what I am.
Eliza ran to me pulling me into a deep embrace. “I was so afraid I’d never see you again,” she said fear evident in her eyes.

“You look so beautiful,” she continued, running her fingers down my bare arm. “I have so much to tell you, but first, come enjoy my salon.”

She grabbed my hand and pulled me into a fray of finely dressed women, elaborate gifts, sweet treats and even sweeter wine. I was out of practice, having gotten used to the quietness of the Circle, so after a few hours I was exhausted.

Excusing myself to the back balcony, I leant against it, enjoying the view of the rocky shore below and the main land in the distance. I was so enthralled by the view that I didn’t notice the man who came up behind me, until he cleared his throat.

Spinning quickly, I took on a defensive stance out of instinct. “My Lady Trevelyan, I assure you I mean no harm,” Magister Pavus said a small smile crossing his features.

“I apologize Sir,” I said with a nod.

“Let’s not be so formal, you are like a daughter to me after all, call me Halward,” he said with a chuckle that brought back far away memories of chasing Dorian through the halls of their estate.

Halward must have seen the look on my face, “Do you think of him often?” he asked. I nodded in response, “What happened between the two of you?”

“Well, Dorian didn’t like the idea of an arranged marriage, he thought he could never be happy being paired to a woman he didn’t even know,” he explained voice, sad.

My heart sank at the confession, inside me I had hoped that if I ever escaped from the Circle, I’d have a husband waiting for me here in Tevinter. I was out of practice, Halward knew everyone of my thoughts. He brought his hand to the side of my face, “Arya, if he would have known that you were his betrothed, he would have felt differently, of this I am sure.”

His smile was warm and welcomed me to speak my mind. “Why didn’t he know?” I asked

“The plan was to share the news with both of you once you returned after visiting your family. Then you were taken away and Dorian was very upset. In fact, he wanted to go after you. We cautioned against it, with the tensions in Kirkwall coming to a head, it would have been seen as a direct assault from the Imperium leading to war. Not to mention, Dorian would have been killed.”

“I thought sharing the news that you were to be his bride would have made it worse, so I kept it quiet,” he looked down, ashamed, “Now I’m not so sure that was the best choice.”

“I’m not sure my dear, he has refused contact. All I know is that he left the tutorage of his patron in the Magisterium and has since disappeared. As soon as I locate him, I will send word,” his eyes were heavy with the weight of his guilt.

“It has been nice to see you again my dear,” he said and then excused himself, disappearing back inside.

I turned back to the water, staring off, thinking about Dorian and what that life would have been like. My thoughts naturally turned to my life in the Circle, Meric and the children, I could have been happy in that life. Or would the lack of freedom have eventually gotten to me?
Meric and I would never have been allowed to wed or have children of our own. Our entire life would have been inside that building, how many things would we have missed? It reminded me of the Hero of Ferelden’s story, she was happy to spend her life in the confines of Kinloch Hold as long as Cullen was there. But if she stayed, she would never have met Leilana or Alistair, she never would have loved Alistair, she wouldn’t be remembered as the Hero of Ferelden.

My thoughts were interrupted by Eliza joining me.

“Everyone else is gone,” she said, “Come let’s chat.”

With that she led me to her chambers, and we spent the rest of the night and into the next day catching up. She confirmed what her father had said about Dorian and offered to use her husband’s network to search for Meric and Lila. We ended with a promise to get together again after she settled into her role as a mother.

The journey back home was full of reflection. What was I going to do with myself now? I was an adult and thus it wouldn’t be appropriate to return to the Pavus house.

I wasn’t a resident of the Imperium, so I couldn’t just stay there without a patron.

My family would keep me but with the Mage-Templar war, I was afraid I’d bring them harm.

Outside of their home, I was an apostate with no rights and would have to live my life hiding or join the Loyalist’s and be locked back up.

My choices were not the greatest and the closer I got to home the worse I felt about it.
A Distraction: The Good Kind

Thankfully my mother was able to distract my mind with a trip to Antiva. It was glorious, the weather was warm, and the people were inviting.

We spent time getting reacquainted with one another and shopping… so much shopping.

Apparently, my mother used to be a bard in Antiva as a young woman and thus had a fair number of colorful friends. Fun facts she didn’t share, me being a child and all.

Sitting at the tavern listening to their stories of manipulations, sex, murder, dancing, scheming, was fascinating. I have enough knowledge around understanding the behaviors of others, that I easily picked up the few tips shared with me by a young bard named, Lucy.

She was the epitome of an Antivan beauty with skin the color of milk chocolate, obsidian hair that fell past her waste is silken curls and eyes a deep brown that could easily take your mind if you stared at them long enough.

It all started with her instructing me on how to use my body and voice to entrance those around me. According to Lucy, with enough practice you can stop a war with a single glance. It didn’t take us long to have the entire tavern full of patron’s, putty in our delicate hands.

However, the more we worked the tavern the thicker our desire for each other grew. It was at the end of one dance that her lips found mine. Dancing as we were, it took only a small movement to close the distance between us. Her lips were soft and tentative but easily matched mine. Her hands found their way to my hair pulling me towards her just as she slid her tongue inside, dancing with mine, mimicking the movement of our feet. She pulled away, leaving me breathless and craving more.

“Come,” she said leading to somewhere more private.

Her brown eyes darkened with desire as she slowly removed my dress. She kissed me again a little more forceful but still soft. Her fingers trailing down my spine, tracing every curve. My lack of experience showed as I froze against her touch. “Just do as I do, I’ve already taught you how to rule a tavern full of patrons, now I will teach you how to take that command into the bedroom. Learn and enjoy, Arya.” Her words purred from her throat and brought a moan from mine.

We spent two entire days exploring each other, she was a marvelous instructor and by the end of the second day, I could bring her to climax without even touching her core. Our explorations were interrupted by a knock on our door,

“Lady Trevelyan,” a man’s voice called, “I have a number of letters that came in this morning.”

Extricating myself from Lucy’s sleeping form, I pulled on a robe and stepped out into the hall. The man handed me three letters and pointed to a room across the hall, “your mother said to have you meet her once you emerged.”

Taking the letters, I gave him a “thank you” and headed to the room he had motioned toward. I was just about to open it when an elven man came out. He had darker skin than most elves I’d encountered and shoulder length white hair pulled back to reveal attractive angular features.

“My lady,” he purred in a strong Antivan accent, “your mother will be available shortly, shall I keep you company in the meantime?”

His eyes ran along the length of my disheveled body and my heart skipped a beat, excited by his
lingering stare. “Join me in the bath,” he said, and I followed, I really did need a bath.

The bathhouse was empty when we entered. He started the water, “do you mind?” he asked pointing to the slowly filling bath, “It will take too long to warm up.” I nodded and shot enough flame into the water to bring it to a steamy state. I then placed a couple fire runes under to keep it at the desired temperature. I jumped at the feeling of him behind me.

“Ah I apologize My Lady, I did not mean to surprise you,” he said as he undid my robe and watched as it fall to the floor. He had already discarded his own, grabbing my hand he led me to the now warm water. He motioned for me to sit on the small bench and grabbed the soap from the ledge, slowly he massaged it into my scalp, causing me to moan at the sheer pleasure of it.

He chuckled, deep and throaty, “I can massage other parts if you’d like,” his voice was barely a whisper at my ear and my flesh reacted with goosebumps. His fingers slid under the water and found their way to my cunt. Parting my lips, a groan came from his, as he slid them inside me, mimicking the same massaging movement within my core. It took only a moment before I was teetering on the edge of climax, “let it go,” he said and my body followed suit, convulsing around his fingers.

After getting cleaned up, we donned fresh robes and headed back toward my mother’s room. The timing was perfect, as two tavern staff entered right before us with trays of breakfast food, sausage, bread, cheese, kaffe’, potatoes, the smell was divine, and my stomach rumbled, “Ah yes,” the eleven-man said with another chuckle, “sex takes many calories, you must be famished.”

“Arya, Zevran,” my mother said as we entered the room, “sit and have some breakfast.”

“Arya have you had a chance to look at the letters you received?” mother asked.

“Uh no,” I said heat creeping up my face. “Zev, you just had to distract her, didn’t you?”

“Lady Trevelyan, your daughter is quite lovely, you can’t hold the distraction against me, I am but a man,” he said playfulness dancing across his grey eyes.

“Well, please read them Arya. I have a feeling they will be directing you to the same place I would like to discuss.”

Concern crossing my face, I pulled the letters out.

The first was from Eliza:

Arya,

my husband has heard that Divine Justina V is planning a peace talk of sorts between the templars and mages. All are expected to attend, it’s at a place called the Temple of Sacred Ashes. Perhaps your friends will be there. Please let me know how it goes.

Love Eliza

The second, in reply to the letter I sent to Kirkwall:

Lady Trevelyan,

There is no Templar by the name of Meric Stanus here currently. However, not long ago, the Right Hand of the Divine and the previous Knight Commander, took an entourage of templars to the
Temple of Sacred Ashes. Perhaps Ser Stanus joined them.

Regards,

Viscount Bran

Lastly, a reply to the letter I sent to First Enchanter Vivienne, enchanter of the imperial court:

Lady Trevelyan,

I have the loyalist mages with me and would love to have you join us. Unfortunately, none by the name of Lila have shown up. As I do not feel safe attending the Conclave at the Temple of Sacred Ashes, I have sent two of my most trusted members, please join them at the Temple or come directly to Orlais. Mages seeking sanctuary will be attending, perhaps your friend will there.

Best regards,

Lady Vivienne

“Do you know more about this conclave mother?” I asked

“I know that the Divine has called it in hopes of finding peace, the mage-templar war has caused devastation across Ferelden and Orlais, it needs to end one way or another and I want you there, to see first hand what the Divine’s plan is,” she said.

“A small tidbit of information from my sources say that if the conclave fails the Divine has called for an Inquisition led by her right and left hands,” Zevran added.

“What is an inquisition?” I asked

“There has not been one for many years but the last one founded the orders of the Templars and Seekers of Truth,” my mother added.

“Well, I guess I should head out then, it will be a long journey,” I said with a shrug. I felt unsure but I also knew that I couldn’t spend the rest of my life hiding in my parent’s home or on the run.

“Arya,” my mom said, “you will go as a representative of house Trevelyan, not as a mage and thus will be traveling for one of your standing. The carriage will be here to get you later today,” she said, “In the meantime, enjoy the company,” gesturing towards Zevran who gave a playful chuckle

“Ah yes, one can surely enjoy the company of a beautiful women,” he said.
A Journey to Nowhere or is it Somewhere?

Chapter Summary

Arya finally makes it to Haven, but does she find what she's looking for or does she find something more?

A month later-----------------------------

I arrived in the town of Haven the day before the conclave. There was a masquerade planned that evening for the guests to attend. The Haven chantry had been repurposed for the night, decorated akin to Halamshirel. The bustling energy seeped into the air around the small mountain village. Fresh snow was falling, light from the flickering touches danced across the white landscape sending their warmth into the cold air.

My mother sent me prepared, standing in the little tent that was my “quarters” for the evening, I stared at my body in the long mirror. It was cold but I put flame runes in various placed to chase away the chill. I had bathed in the bathhouse and dried my hair. It fell in chestnut curls to my hips and I decided to keep it down rather than pile the curls atop my head, as I normally would.

Laying across the cot, was a dress of white satin, it had embellishments of diamond and rubies that sparkled in the soft candle light. Next to it were blood red slippers matching the rubies and a ruby and diamond mask, designed to outline my eyes. The outfit was beautiful and the contrast of my dark skin and hair against the satin added to its allure.

I wondered if I’d even recognize Meric or him me? Was he here? What about Lila?

The templars I had seen thus far, wore full armor so I couldn’t really see any of their faces. Meric, hated his armor though, he would have chosen regular clothes or leather armor. I took a swig of the wine that sat next to me and a deep breath to fight back the anxiety. Giving myself another look in the mirror I nodded, I looked amazing and was sure he’d come to me if he was here.

In front of the chantry stood two door men dressed in templar armor. “My lady,” they said as they opened the door for me. As I entered, I felt immediately self-conscious as almost every head turned to look in my direction. The whispers started and I tried to ignore them, heading directly to the bar for a drink.

Positioning myself so I had a decent view of the room, I started my search for Meric. There were several wearing templar armor, some wore the blue and silver armor of the Gray Wardens, some wore Orlesian garb and others were dressed nicely but not representative of anything specific.

I decided Meric would be one of the ones wearing the non-descriptive attire. I searched from man to man, looking for shoulder length black curls. But it was golden eyes, shining behind a metallic mask that caught my attention.

Our eyes held for just a moment, he smirked raising a stubbled lip which made my heart flutter and then turned quickly away. “Who is that?” I though looking at blond hair styled smoothly but with a few stray curls escaping here and there. The man was tall and broad, his composure said general or something military. I was still staring when he turned back meeting my gaze again. This time
looked away as the blush rose up my neck, “I was caught ogling.”

Refusing to look up again, I stepped from my perch and into the crowd, I needed another drink. Crossing the dance floor my hand was caught by another’s, warm and calloused from sword use. The hand spun me in an elaborate twist, pulling me hard against a solid chest. The smell of sandalwood filled my lungs. Whomever this was, pulled me against his chest, hand around my waste possessively.

“I didn’t think you’d be here,” a Ferelden accent whispered in my ear. I shuddered as he exhaled warm breath against my neck.

“I must say, the only thing better than you in this dress would be it in a pile on my floor,” his words were throaty and came out as a growl, his lips found there way to my neck and kissed up to my jaw line.

“Come with me,” he said spinning me to face him. Light hazel-brown eyes full of desire met mine, full lips found mine and pulled me into a lover’s embrace. I wanted to stop him, he obviously thought I was someone else, but his taste was intoxicating. I felt my fingertips spark against his tan skin, and he pulled away just far enough to chuckle, “no turning me into a toad, the templars may frown on that.” He found my lips again and lifted me into his arms carrying me from the dance floor.

Silence wrapped around us as he moved us away from the party. Setting my feet back down, he ran his fingers through my curls and pulled me closer, deepening the kiss and angling his hips so I could feel him firm and ready against my stomach. Moaning, I broke the kiss and he answered me with a growl, claiming my lips again. The deeper he kissed me the more I lost it, my composure breaking, my carefully placed wards being torn down. I felt the mana within me burn, the familiar glow dancing just under my skin. “Who was this man and how was he tearing my defenses down so easily?”

He moved his clever mouth down my throat and across the tops of my breasts. As he licked my skin, he took the mana into himself, absorbing it. This man was a templar, realization donning, I helped the process by pushing my mana inside of him.

“Oh fuck” he called eyes rolling back into his head at the sheer pleasure of the mana filling him. When his eyes met mine again, they were oozing with need. This time, I claimed his lips and pushed him back, his legs hit the edge of a bed and he collapsed upon it. His cock was straining against the leather of his breeches and I unlaced them, freeing it.

Pulling it into my mouth he shuddered in pleasure and grasped my curls, pulling my head down as he thrust his hips up. It took only a few thrusts before he spilled his seed down my throat, his hands falling to his side in release.

Somehow, he had lost his mask and I looked up into his handsome features. Hazel brown eyes surrounded by tan skin and copper blond hair. He gave me a sideways grin as he caught me staring at him. “what is it?” he asked, “you’re looking at me like you’ve never seen me before.”

“I… I haven’t” is all I managed to stutter out before I turned to leave. “Wait,” his hand was on my arm, “Solona?” he questioned. I just stared confused, “he thinks I’m Solona?” I thought to myself but before I could say anything his fingers were removing my mask. He took a step back, “oh shit!” he said, “I… I’m such a fool, I’m so sorry,” he said falling to his knees at my feet.

Kneeling as well, I lifted his face to mine, “I should have said something on the dance floor, but in all honesty, I didn’t want you to stop,” I said with a shrug, “I should be the one apologizing, not you.” His hand found the side of my face, rubbing a calloused thumb across my lips, “who are you?”
Instead of answering him I closed the distance between us, I could smell the intoxicating taste of him on his breath and was overwhelmed with the need to taste him again. He paused for a moment, before giving into the kiss. My body reacted to him in a way I had never felt before. His tongue and mouth devoured mine, my magic surfacing again, sending sparks flying across the room. With the smoothness of a trained warrior, he lifted me from the ground, “ wouldn’t want that dress to get dirty,” he said with a wink, “ that’d be bad.” He undid the zipper and pulled the silken gown over my head, hanging it carefully nearby before turning back to me. Raising his hand tentatively he slid it along my curves from hip to jaw. “ but you are beautiful,” he said before crashing his lips to mine again.

Next, I knew, we were on the bed, he was nestled between my legs, his hardness pressing against my slick core. His eyes held mine and there was so much within them, it was like seeing a future I could never had imagined. “ Ready?” he questioned but didn’t really wait for my reply before sheathing himself deep inside me. My back arched toward him and his hand at the small of my back held me there as he pulled out and slid back in, burying himself as deep as he could. His eyes closed as he road the pleasure of each thrust, going deep and then pulling out everything except the tip of him. As our pace grew faster, our bodied fell into sync, as if they were familiar with each other. Once again, the sensation of familiarity, safety, home, was so intense it almost brought tears to my eyes. His lips found mine again, this time the kiss was intimate and covered the screams as we both climaxed.

He laid his head on my chest as our breathing and heart rates slowed. His copper blond hair smelled of sandalwood and campfire, “ who was this man and why did I feel this way about him?” I was lost in my thoughts when he lifted his head, that lopsided grin on his face again, “ will you tell me who you are now?”

“Arya, my name is Arya” I said

“You’re from the free marches?” he said more of a statement than a question, “ I recognize the accent… Kirkwall?”

“Are you familiar with Kirkwall? I asked, curious why he mentioned it specifically.

“No, I’ve only passed through there, but I have a few friends from there,” he answered

“My family is from Kirkwall, but I have been in the Ostwick Circle for the past few years.” I explained.

“Family? Do you know the Champion?” he asked

So that’s why he was curious, he must know Hawke, I thought. “ Well, yes” I said, “ she is my cousin, but I haven’t seen her for many years.”

With that he looked up to meet my eyes. “ Your cousin? Are you an Amell?” he asked excitement in his voice.

That’s when the realization hit me, he called me Solona, Solona Amell. I heard that she and I looked similar but… “ Do I look a lot like her?” I asked him, “ I have never met her.”

I felt disappointed, was I just a substitute for her…. “ Arya, you don’t even know this man, you can’t get jealous over him,” I told myself shaking my head.

He didn’t miss my inner turmoil, because he sat up and pulled me into his lap.

“ Yes, you look almost identical to her and I thought you were her at first, but I didn’t just make love
to Solona Amell, I made love to you, and even though I don’t even know you, I felt like that was what we did,” he said, “Do you… feel the same?”

He seemed sincere as the words spilled from him a little awkwardly. I was having a hard time putting my thoughts into words but managed to shake my head yes. He claimed my lips again, just as hungry as the first time. “Listen, Arya, I have to leave Haven tonight, but I will find you again,” he said before pulling on his clothes and heading to the door, “Wait,” I said, “you didn’t tell me your name?”

“Probably best if we keep it that way for now,” he said with a wink and then he was gone.

Laying back on the bed I let myself get lost in the lingering smell of him for a few moments before pulling my dress back on and using magic to fix my disheveled hair and makeup before stepping back into the main hall of the chantry.

The party was still going strong, the number of people had doubled. I made a beeline for the bar, looking down and trying not to get in anyone’s way. I failed, crashing into the cold metal of a Templar’s armor. “Andraste’s tits,” I cursed, before looking up into Meric’s face.

I couldn’t hide the girlish scream as I practically jumped into his arms. He caught me but put me back on my feet quickly and took a step back.

“Arya? What are you doing here?” he asked, voice cold.

“Meric, I’ve been looking for you and the evidence pointed to here, I came to find you of course why else would I be here?”

“You shouldn’t have come,” he said, eyes red with anger, “you are a mage and it is my duty to turn you in.” He started pulling me roughly toward the door.

“Meric, no, what are you doing, you’re hurting me.” I cried

He just ignored me, “blood magic is evil, and you are evil,” he kept repeating it to himself.

I couldn’t get free and using magic would be a death sentence, so I just screamed.

Meric came to an abrupt stop, a voice I was unfamiliar with addressed him, “I don’t think the lady wants to go with you,” the man said.

“Knight Commander, this woman is a blood mage, it is my duty to end her life,” Meric boasted.

“We are here under the Divine’s decree of peace and I will not have you break that,” the man stated, “let the girl go, NOW!”

Meric released me and I landed on my butt on the ground. Meric’s voice was venomous as he said “evil” and spat on me.

I tried to hold in the tears, but they came spilling down my face in streams. Meric had stormed off and I was left a crying mess at the feet of my protector. He helped me stand, “I’m uh so sorry my lady,” he said pulling a small piece of cloth from his pocket. He used it to wipe the tears and spit from my face.

As the tears dried, my vision cleared, and I recognized him as the man from when I first arrived at the ball, the one with the golden eyes...

He rubbed his hand against the back of his neck anxiously, “Are you uh, are you okay?” he asked.
He had a few more escapist curls hanging over his forehead then he had earlier and, in all honesty, looked so done with being there. I couldn’t help but smile, “looks like I should be asking you the same thing,” I jested. He smirked, just as he did earlier and with a half chuckle said, “these things are ridiculous, I despise them, is it that obvious?”

Shaking my head, “yes… yes, it is, would you like to get some air?” I questioned, figuring he saved me, I may as well return the favor and give him a reason to escape, even if for only a moment. Rubbing his hand along his neck again, he smiled and motioned toward the door but was stopped when a young man dressed in unfamiliar armor approached, “Commander, Leilana and Cassandra are summoning you to the council room,” the young man said.

“I’ll be right there” he answered turning towards me, “another time perhaps?”

“Of course, Commander…”

He took a few steps toward the door before stopping and looking at me again. My mind was reeling with everything and I felt insecure under his gaze. Walking back to my side he took my hand and laid a gentle kiss upon it. His lips were soft but the stubble around them tickled my hand, “Cullen,” he said, “my uh my name is Cullen.”

He was nervous and it caused his golden eyes to shine. Something about his awkwardness was endearing and I couldn’t stop the giggle as I curtsied, “Pleased to meet you Messere, I’m Arya,” I said.

“The pleasure is all mine,” he countered then with one last kiss to my hand and a smirk that would make any girl swoon, he nodded “Please excuse me, duty calls,” before leaving with the younger man.

My mind and body were exhausted, so I excused myself from the ball and ended up in the bathhouse. Standing on the edge of the tub I was torn, I wanted to clean the tears, dirt and spit from my body but didn’t want to wash away the lingering scent of sandalwood.

Eventually the call of the warm water won over and I allowed myself to sink down into the lavender infused bath. My mind reflecting over the last few hours, what had gotten into Meric? Who was that handsome stranger? And the Commander... Commander of what?

I stayed until my fingers began to prune up, then made my way to the tent, which was my home for the night. I wonder what this conclave will bring? And what I will do next?
A Journey to Nowhere or is it Somewhere? Part 2 (Cullen POV)

Chapter Summary

Cullen hates parties, why do they insist he attend.. politics hmph

Chapter Notes

This is the Conclave Ball scene from Cullen's POV. I wanted a chance to toss in some characterization from outside of Arya's mind. I will try to do this more often, I think it adds to the story. Tell me your thoughts :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Conclave Ball Cullen POV

“No, Josephine, I will not go, I refuse to parade around to impress the Chantry.”

“If not for the Chantry, do it for the Divine, she chose you as Commander, make her proud.”

Ugh these women were insufferable, I have never found pleasure in the politicking and intrigue of court. Why do they insist on bringing it into the Divine’s conclave, “because the masses want it,” Leilana had said, the masses can kiss my Andrastian arse.

“Look, you can wear a mask, no one will even know you are you,” Josephine said, holding up a dark metallic mask.

“FINE!” I said defeat heavy in my voice, grabbing it and storming form the council chambers to my room. Guess I should put on that damned finery I’ve been carrying around since Kirkwall.

A couple hours later______________________________________________

Stepping inside the chantry, I was surprised at how quickly it had been transformed. It was only a few hours ago I was in here arguing with Josephine and Leilana. The place looked completely different. And Maker save me, it was full of a lot of people.

Everyone was dressed for the masquerade, some wore armor others donned the top Orlesian formal wear, every one of them had on a mask. I felt out of place but thankful for the anonymity of the experience. Grabbing a drink from the bar, I found a spot on the wall next to a gentleman wearing the blue and silver of the Wardens.

“I didn’t know the Warden’s would be interested in Chantry politics,” I said, just to make conversation.

The man turned hazel brown eyes to me, “What can I say, without a Blight, Warden life is incredibly boring,” he said with a chuckle.

“What about you? A Templar, who isn’t flaunting his allegiance like a bird of paradise?” he asked
“Former templar” I said with a shrug

“Ahh yes, me too,” he said, nonchalantly grabbing a handful of cheese from the passing hors d’oeuvre tray.

“Its not common to meet another former, where are you…”

Before I could finish my sentence, he blurted out “Andraste’s knickers, what is she doing here?”

Following his gaze, my eyes landed on a woman across the room. She wore a white silk gown that sparked in the soft light. It contrasted well with her sun kissed skin and reddish-brown curls that fell to her hips and looked soft as rose petals. Her face was partially covered by a mask of rubies, but it did nothing to obscure her beauty or the delicate splatter of freckles that graced her cheeks. However, when my eyes met hers, I was frozen in place, bright sapphires shone through her mask causing me to look away.

I pulled my gaze free and looked to the spot the Warden had been standing, he was gone, lost to the crowd. Those eyes, I haven’t seen them since…

“I need to speak with you in private” she said walking into the little room off the Chantry. After glancing around for any possible spectators, I followed her. Sweat was dripping down my spine and I was thankful my armor hid it. She had her back to me, brown curls spilling from a high ponytail and laying against the golden orange of her mage robes. The color looked good on her, which was quite the feat, since it looked horrible on most people.

When she turned to me her bright sapphire eyes were full of emotion. She didn’t say a word, but in an instant closed the distance between us. Her lips tasted sweet, like wine and lyrium. Instinctively, my arms found her waste pulling her against the steel plate of my armor. I wanted to feel her skin against mine, I wanted to consume her, devour her, claim her as mine to the world. She pulled away, unsure, bright eyes holding unshed tears. “My heart,” I whispered before pulling her into another embrace.

No, Solona was gone, disappeared, maybe dead, maybe on some secret Warden mission, it didn’t matter. I know I shouldn’t have but nonetheless, I gave another look in the direction of the women. Our eyes met once again but only for an instant before she looked away.

I took a step into the crowd, “it won’t hurt to at least introduce myself” I thought. “Commander, Commander” a young man wearing scout armor came up to me “Commander, the Seeker is looking for you and she is angry,” he said.

“So much for anonymity,” I thought, sending one more glance at the crowd but not seeing the lovely lady in the white dress, I followed the scout out of the chantry and into the frigid winter air.

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Seeker Pentaghast was pacing across the tavern floor when I entered. “I’m sorry Commander, I tried to give her a drink, but she knocked it from my hands,” the barmaid Flissa confessed.

“That lying shit… he knows where the Champion is, but he won’t tell me,” she fumed.

“How do you know he is lying? Leilana asked, “Let me send some scouts to Kirkwall or to the Warden’s, someone must know where Hawke or Anders are.”

“We don’t have time,” Cassandra said, cheeks flushed, matching the red of her lips. “The peace talks are tomorrow, and we need an Inquisitor ready in case they fail”
With a sigh of frustration I interrupted, “Leilana, please send a couple scouts, it wont hurt,” I said. “Cassandra, we can’t do anything about it right now, please have a drink with me and tell me what you did find out from Varric?”

She let out a humph of anger but took the drink Flissa offered and sat down at the table. After allowing Cassandra to vent her frustrations and having a few drinks, my brain was moving to fast to sleep, so I went back to the party.

I didn’t know what was happening, but I could tell by how people formed a circle that something was amiss. Stepping through the formed group, I came face-to-face with a former colleague, Meric Stanus, dark curls framed dark green eyes, red with rage.

He was dragging someone along behind him, “I don’t think the lady wants to go with you,” I said trying to hide the surprise from my voice. Meric trained under me in Kirkwall and he was always light hearted and funny. Not at all like the man before me.

“Knight Commander, this woman is a blood mage, it is my duty to end her life,” he sputtered angrily. I risked a glance behind him to the so-called blood mage and was met with those bright blue eyes once again. This was the women in the white dress. A mage? I hadn’t sensed it earlier but being this close I could hear the song of her mana, dancing like a leaf in the breeze. Nonetheless, we were here for peace and she did not seem like a blood mage to me.

“We are here under the Divine’s decree of peace and I will not have you break that,” I stated, holding my ground, “let the girl go, NOW!”

I thought he was going to argue but instead he pulled the girl close to his face, “evil” he said spitting and dropping her to the chantry floor before he stormed from the room.

I took a step to go after him, his behavior unacceptable but stopped when I heard her soft sobs. Crouching down, I grabbed her hands and pulled her to her feet. Her skin was soft and warm to the touch, causing my heart to flutter. “I’m uh so sorry my lady,” I said, pulling a small cloth from my pocket.

With one hand under her chin, I carefully wiped the spit and tears from her cheeks. This close, she was even more stunning. I started to sweat and felt like the young man I was back in Kinloch Hold. “Are you uh, are you okay?” I stuttered, sounding as naive as I felt.

The moment seemed to stretch as she looked at me, hand outstretched as if she was going to touch me. Slowly a vibrant smile crossed her face, “looks like I should be asking you the same thing,” she said, laughter sparkling in her eyes. I couldn’t hold back the chuckle, “these things are ridiculous, I despise them, is it that obvious?” I asked.

She laughed and in that moment the room was silent, “yes… yes, it is, would you like to get some air?” she asked. “Thank the Maker, I’d love to get out of here” I thought, with a nod, motioning to the door. She stepped into pace beside me but before we could take a step, I was approached by Leilana’s scout again. “Commander, Leilana and Cassandra are summoning you to the council room,” he said. I sighed in exarcerbation, “I’ll be right there,” turning toward the lovely lady at my side “another time perhaps?”

“Of course, Commander…” she said with a warm smile. Returning her smile, I followed the scout towards the door, then stopped. Looking behind me, she stood there looking unsure and out of place. “Wait a moment,” I told the scout before stepping back to her, I lifted her hand to my lips and laid a
gentle kiss upon it, “Cullen, my uh my name is Cullen” I said, ignoring the heat raising up my face.

She giggled and gave a slight curtsy, “Pleased to meet you Messere,” she said, “I’m Arya.” I couldn’t place her accent but knew it was from the Free Marches from her address.

“The pleasure is mine,” I said with a nod of acknowledgment, “please excuse me, duty calls,” with one last kiss to her hand, I stepped in pace behind the scout, who gave me a knowing smile before saying “this way.”

Chapter End Notes

The flashback scene is influenced by the Cullen Romance Opton-Mage Origin mod from Cmessaz https://www.nexusmods.com/dragonage/mods/1949
Green

Chapter Summary

Arya awakes to find things have changed.

Chapter Notes

First chapter of actual game play! For those of you who are reading, thanks for staying with me while I explored Arya’s background.

And screen shots at the end! I like visuals, hope you enjoy them too :)

Green… a ghastly, sickening green, like mold on bread……

The scurrying of feet… spiders.... eyes… too many eyes and what is that light?

Climbing toward it and it’s a woman… the silhouette of a woman…… then pain, searing pain and cold… it’s so cold

The first thing I felt was the pain, my left hand burnt like a thousand volts of electricity were striking me. I opened my eyes to a green glow, "where is that coming from," I thought looking around. I heard a crack, just before the pain seared through my hand and up my arm. Looking at the source of the pain, I answered my own question. The eerie glow was coming from me, from my hand. In the middle of my palm was a gash and within it… green light…?

It crackled and the green shot up my arm, filling the cell with that eerie light. Wait… a cell? why was I in a cell, I felt the cold iron of the shackles heavy on my wrists. Where am I? What is going on? A scream escaped my mouth as the thing on my hand crackled. Then, white light from outside and the silhouette of a woman, “have I seen this before?” I thought. The woman stepped into the dungeon, anger on her face.

“Tell me why we shouldn’t kill you now,” she stated rather than questioned

Circling me she continued, “The conclave is destroyed, everyone who attended is dead. Except for you.”

My mind was in shock, “what do you mean they are all dead?” I questioned searching the woman’s face for answers but finding only hatred.
“Explain this,” she said grabbing my left arm.

“I can’t.”

“What do you mean you can’t” she spat in my face.

“I don’t know what that is or how it got there,” my eyes pleading for her to understand.

“You’re LYING,” grabbing me again and wrenching up, she would have pulled my arm from its socket if she hadn’t been interrupted by the other woman.

“We need her Cassandra,” the other woman stated, stepping between us.

Memories of the previous night filtered through my mind, “I can’t believe it… all those people, dead.”

The other woman stepped in front of me, “Do you remember what happened, how this all began?” her Orlesian accent made the words seem less angry.

I looked up at her, she wore a hood, hiding all her features except for the red hair that fell to her shoulders.

“I remember, running, things were chasing me and then a woman” I tried to explain but the fog in my head wouldn’t clear.

“A woman?” the redhead asked

“She reached out for me but then….” My head sank in defeat, nothing else came.

“Go to the forward camp Leilana, the first women said, her Nevarran accent easy to recognize now, “I will take her to the rift.”

With a nod the redhead left.

“What did happen?” I asked

Releasing me from the cuffs and raising me to my feet she said, “it will be easier to show you,” before leading me out of the dungeon.

We were in the Chantry again, I recognized the bits and pieces of decoration from last nights gala. I wondered about the people I met last night, the stranger, Cullen, Meric were they really all dead? Silent tears slid down my cheeks, as I mourned the loss of so many people.

Pushing the heavy Chantry doors open we stepped outside, my attention was immediately drawn upward, where a huge swirling hole filled with the same green light, filled the sky.

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

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“An explosion can do that?” I questioned

She turned to me, her face still stern but with fear rather than anger, “This one did. Unless we act, the Breach may grow until it swallows the world.”

Another crackle and pain shot through my hand once again, bringing me to my knees.
“Each time the Breach expands, your mark grows, and it is killing you,” she said hovering above me. “It may be the key to stopping this but there isn’t much time.”

Her eyes held a question, would I help…

If I had the key to stopping that thing in the sky from swallowing the world, I must do what I can.

“I understand,” I said

“Then?” she voiced the question her eyes held

“I’ll do what I can, whatever it takes,” I confirmed.

Her poise changed then, relief or something, she helped me up and continued leading me through the town.

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

She explained, words full of passion and disappointment. “We lash out like the sky, but we must think beyond ourselves, like she did, until the Breach is sealed,” she said. It was in that moment I saw through her anger to the wisdom and strength within. In that moment, I felt like we could be friends.

“Come, it is not far,” she said releasing me from the ropes binding my wrists,

“Where are you taking me?” I asked, curiosity winning over

“Your mark must be tested on something smaller than the Breach. We are heading into the valley to find such a rift,” she explained.

Another crackle from above and the mark on my hand mimicked it. The pain was growing less surprising but still pulled a gasp from me.

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

Still trying to wrap my head around what happened, I tried asking this woman again, “How did I survive the blast?

This time she replied, “Our forces said you stepped out of a rift, then fell unconscious. They say a woman was in the rift behind you, no one knows who she was.”

“Forces? Are you part of an army?” I questioned but before she could answer the bridge shook under our feet, giving out, we fell landing hard but without injury on the frozen lake below.

All around us the greenish light oozed, a whispering surrounded us right before two demons manifested from the ooze. “Stay behind me,” she said before drawing her sword and rushing at one of them. Looking around me, I saw a discarded staff in the rubble. I had never been much for staves, they were bulky and unnecessary really. When Dorian and I used to train, I used a combination of daggers and spells, but I didn’t see any daggers and wanted to conserve mana as much as I could. Grabbing the staff, I focused through it shooting flames forth, striking the second demon, following it with a ball of electricity, the demon dissolved into a pile of ash.
“Drop your weapon,” she said coming at me, sword still drawn.

I put one hand out, asking her to stay back, “Okay, I will disarm,” I said before setting the staff on the ground.

“Wait, you are right, I cannot protect you, nor can I expect you to be defenseless. I should remember you agreed to come willingly,” she said sheathing her sword and continued up the path. “We are almost there, you can hear the fighting”

“Who’s fighting?”

“you’ll see, soon enough, we must help them.”

Cresting the top of a hill we came across a rift in the middle of a ruined courtyard. There were several people fighting the demons pouring from its depths.

With a rallying call, she rushed into the fray and I followed shooting lightening and fire balls until the last demons disappeared.

“Quickly, before more come through” a voice called, grabbing my hand and forcing it toward the rift. The green light grew brighter and reached out toward the rift, through the tingling pain I could feel the sides of the veil, like torn fabric. Using the power of the mark, I grabbed the frayed edges and brought them back together, once they were close, they melded into one, and the rift closed, leaving nothing in its wake but dead demons and tired soldiers.

An elf stood next to me, grasping my hand, “What did you do?” I asked

Releasing me with a smug smile he said, “I did nothing, the credit is yours.”

I looked down at the glowing green spot on my hand, “You mean the mark.”

“Whatever magic opened the Breach also put that mark on your hand. I theorized the mark might be able to close the rifts that have opened up in the Breaches wake and it seems I was correct.”

“meaning it could also close the Breach itself” the Nevarran asked

“Possibly, it seems you hold the key to our salvation,” he replied.

From behind me, “Good to know, here I though we’d be ass deep in demons forever,” said a dwarf holding a crossbow that matched him in height. “Varric Tethras, rogue, story teller and occasional unwanted guest,” he said with a wink at the woman, who replied with a disgusted grunt.

Looking between the two of them, I felt tension thick as butter, these two have a history I thought to myself. Attempting to change the subject I searched for something to say, “Nice crossbow, you’ve got there,” I settled on, even though it sounded awkward.

“isn’t she, Bianca and I have been through a lot together,” the dwarf said lovingly petting his weapon.

“you named your crossbow Bianca?” I asked

“Of course, and she’ll be great company in the valley,” he said looking at the women

“Absolutely not!” “Your help is appreciated Varric but…”

The dwarf spoke over her, “Have you been in the valley lately Seeker, your soldiers aren’t in control
anymore, you need me,” he assured.

She just stormed away with another disgusted grunt. Seeker, I had read about the Seekers of Truth who lead the Templars but had never met one in person. Thinking back to earlier, in the dungeon, the redhaired woman had called her Cassandra.

My reminiscing was interrupted by an even tone coming from behind me.

“My name is Solas, if there are to be introductions, I am pleased to see you yet live,” the elf said.

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

“You seem to know a great deal about it all?” I asked curiously

Cassandra stepped in, “Unlike you, Solas is an apostate, well versed in such matters.”

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

Although his words were neutral, I still felt like he was belittling me, something in the way his face held that smug, I am better, look.

“That’s a commendable attitude,” I said, giving him the benefit of the doubt. “Merely a sensible one, although sense appears to be in short supply right now,” he said with a chuckle.

“Cassandra you should know, the magic involved here in unlike any I have seen. Your prisoner is a mage, but I find it difficult believing any mage could have this much power;” he said, eyes darting between us.

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

“Well… Bianca’s excited,” Varric commented as the four of us headed down the mountain.

In the distance I could see the entrance to some type of structure, but another rift hovered between us and the door.

“Seal it, like before,” Solas yelled as we ran into the fray. The green light shot between my hand and the rift, pulling the sides together it disappeared, like before.

“It’s gone, open the gates,” Cassandra called to the guard posted at the door.

On the other side was a bridge of some sort, people and supplies were scattered all about. I saw the redhaired woman from earlier arguing with a priest. As we approached them the priest turned to me with a look of hatred. “Ah here they come,” he said.

“You made it,” the woman commented looking at Cassandra with comradery before turning to the priest, “Chancellor Rodrick this is…” her words were cut off by the chancellor.

“I know who she is,” he said looking at Cassandra, “As Grand Chancellor of the Chantry I hereby order you to take this criminal to Val Royaue to face execution.”

Taking a defensive step forward, “Order me? You are a glorified clerk, a bureaucrat,” she spat.

“And you are a thug, but a thug who supposedly serves the Chantry,” he shot back.
“We survey the Most Holy,” the redhead jumped in

“Justinia is dead, we must elect her replacement and follow Her orders on the matter,” he argued.

Their bickering made me crazy, “Shouldn’t we be focused on closing the Breach?” I questioned.

“It’s your fault the Breach is here in the first place,” his anger turned back to me. “Call a retreat Seeker,” he said, “our position here is hopeless.”

Cassandra had her stubborn face and stepped to his side with a huff. “We can stop this before it is too late,” she said

“How,” he asked shaking his head, “You won’t survive long enough to reach the temple, even with all your soldiers.”

“We must get to the temple, it’s the fastest way.” Cassandra said

“But not the safest” the redhead added, “our forces can charge as a distraction while we go through the mountains,” she said pointing in the distance.

They all looked at me, “What do you think we should do?” Cassandra asked.

“Now you want my opinion,” I said. These people are insane first they want me dead, now they want me to lead... which one is it?

“You’re the one with the mark,” Solas said

“You’re the one we must keep alive,” Cassandra added

Thinking through our options:

1: retreat

2: charge with the soldiers

3: take the mountain path while the soldiers act as a distraction

“Take the mountain path,” I said, “Work together, we all know what’s at stake.”

Stepping up to the redhead Cassandra said, “Leilana, bring everyone still left in the valley, everyone.”

With a nod to Cassandra and myself, Leilana took off back the way we came.
We call it "the Breach." It's a massive rift into the world of demons that grows larger with each passing hour.
The mountain path wasn’t nearly as strenuous as I thought. We had to climb into an old mine and follow the tunnels through the mountain. There were a few demons but nothing we couldn’t handle. Once we were on the other side, I felt a faint tingling in my hand, there was another rift nearby.

Just as I said that to my companions, we turned a corner and saw the eerie green glow reflecting on the white snow. There was a clash of swords as the remaining members of the lost patrol fought against never-ending demons. We took out the demons quickly and I reached out, grabbing the frayed sides of the tear and melding them into one.

“Sealed, as before,” Solas said, “You are becoming quite proficient at this.”

“Let’s hope it works on the big one,” Varrice stated.

“Thank the Maker you finally arrived Cassandra,” the scout said, “I don’t think we could have held out much longer.”

“Thank our prisoner Lieutenant, she insisted we come this way,” Cassandra clarified motioning me over.

“The prisoner?” questioned the scout, “then you…”

“It was worth saving you if we could” I said with a nod.

“Then you have my sincere gratitude,” the scout said, placing her fist across her chest.

“The way to the forward camp is clear at the moment, go while you still can,” Cassandra directed.

“Yes, yes of course” the patrol members said before heading back through the mountain.

The Temple wasn’t much farther, as we approached the stench of burnt flesh filled the air. Charred corpses were scattered everywhere around what remained of the Temple of Sacred Ashes.
“That is where you walked out of the fade and where our soldiers found you. They say a woman was behind you, no one knows who she was” Cassandra explained.

A woman? I remembered a silhouette, barely visible through the endless green. Why was everything so foggy in my mind?

We made our way inside, stepping carefully over rubble and bits and pieces of what once were people.

I could help but think how like this, they all look the same. Whether mage, templar, elf, human, dwarf, Orlesian, Tevinter, Ferelden it doesn’t make a difference in the end, death is death.

In this case, this death was immense and senseless.

My boundaries were locked tight, but I could feel the souls, tickling like a loose hair blowing in a gentle breeze, against my necromancy. I wonder who was here, of all these people who was trying to connect with me?

My thought process was interrupted as we came out onto a ledge overlooking ground zero, where a huge crater now made up the main hall of the Temple. In the middle of it all hovered the the Breach, it was huge, pulsing green but no demons were spilling from its depths like the rifts we came across on our way through the valley.

“You’re here! Thank the Maker,” Leilana came trotting up to us, an entourage of solders and scouts at her back.

“Leilana, have your men take up positions around the temple,” Cassandra ordered

With a slight nod, the red-haired women issued the command, and they all dispersed.

Cassandra turned to me, face set sharp, “This is your chance to end this, are you ready?”

I looked past her to the green rift filling the sky, “I’ll try, but I don’t even know if I can reach that, much less close it.”

Solas stepped forward, “No, this rift was the first and it is the key, we must seal it and with it, the Breach.”

I couldn’t help but smile, at least Solas is confident, however I was beginning to think that was a normal thing.

“Alright, let’s find a way down,” I said, using the elf’s confidence to boost my own.

We wound our way down the sides of the crater, red crystal-like columns jutted out from the walls and the floors. The deeper we went the more we saw.

“You know what this stuff is? It’s red lyrium Seeker?” Varric questioned.

“I see it Varric,” she confirmed.

“Whatever you do, don’t touch it,” he added, a shudder clear in his voice.

As if the red and green stalagmites jutting from the walls and ground weren’t creepy enough, I started to hear a voice. It was like an echo inside my head but also all around, in the very air.

“Here is the hour of our victory,” the voice was deep and ominous, it sent chills running through me.
“Bring forth the sacrifice.”

I wasn’t sure if I was the only one hearing the voice, it was hard to tell because everyone’s face was set in horror.

Cassandra spoke up first, and I was thankful the voice wasn’t just speaking to me, “What are we hearing?” the Seeker asked

“At a guess, the person who created the Breach,” Solas answered

Jumping down to the ground directly below the Breach, other voices joined with the first.

“Someone! Help me!” a woman called, it sounded so familiar, like a word on the tip of your tongue.

“What’s going on here?” my voice echoed through the chamber.

“That was your voice,” Cassandra said stepping to my side, “Most Holy called out to you for help but…” her words trailed off as the space around us started to shimmer, images appeared, time transposed from past onto present.

An elderly woman wearing the crown of the Maker being held, arms outstretched. Her transgressors faded to darkness at her sides. A dark figure loomed over her, his form wavering in and out of reality like smoke dancing around a campfire. A noise and both the woman and figure turn in its direction. It’s me, the noise was me interrupting whatever was happening. Even seeing it transpire in front of me, I couldn’t remember it in my own head, every time I tried fog crept in like magic, something was stopping me form remembering.

“Run while you can, warn them,” The Divine called to me.

“We have an intruder… kill her,” the figure's deep voice demanded whomever was there with him. Then a flash and the images disappeared, lost to time.

“What are we seeing here,” Cassandra said, voice angry, “You were there, what happened, where is the Divine, are these visions real?”

“I don’t remember,” I retaliated, despite knowing her frustration wasn’t really directed at me.

“Echoes of what’s happened here, the fade bleeds into this place” Solas replied, as if that clarified it all.

Looking at the huddling soldiers he began spouting directions. “The rift is sealed but not closed,” he called, “we will need to open it and reseal it correctly. However, doing so may draw attention from the other side.”


Once the soldiers were in place, I reached in and pulled the flimsy thread holding the rift closed. It unraveled, as it did so, a Pride demon crawled out, whipping a chain of lightning which caught Leilana in the shoulder. She flew across the space and I ran in her direction, aiming to cushion her fall with a ward. It wasn’t needed. Like a cat, she twisted mid-air, righting herself and landing crouched, bow drawn. With a wink at me, she littered the demon with a rain of fire arrows, jumping back as it took another swing at her.

I positioned myself directly beneath the rift and behind the demon. It had strong protection wards that
only faltered for the few seconds the rift was dispelled. We fell into a pattern, I’d disrupt it, breaking the wards and we’d all throw our full power at the demon. Cassandra and the soldiers going after it with swords. Varric and Leilana arrows. It absorbed electricity so Solas and I alternated, him ice and me fire.

After several attempts to tighten the threads I finally had a good enough grasp, just as Cassandra fell the Pride demon with a blood curdling scream and slash of her claymore.

“Now,” she shouted.

Reaching up into the green depths, I pulled the threads, the green fire consumed my body, boiling my blood. My vision clouded with white, my outstretched hand completely covered in the green light. Around me everything faded away, consumed by green and then white and then black.
Sealed, as before. You are becoming quite proficient at this.
Consciousness came to me slowly. I was laying on a bed in a small hut. I could hear the crackle of a fire nearby and felt its heavy warmth, chasing away the cold. I took a mental note of my body, no pain but I felt stiff, like I’d been in the same position for a while. Memories of green light and demons flickered in my mind, causing me to jump to a sitting position, “The Breach!”

I heard a crash and jerked my head toward the door. A young elven girl was standing there staring at me, white with fear. “I’m so sorry my lady, I didn’t know you were awake,” she said before falling to her knees on the floor.

“Why are you afraid,” I asked

“Oh, I said the wrong thing didn’t I, I am but a humble servant, they are saying you saved us all,” she stammered

“So, it’s over?” I asked, “We’re safe?”

“The Breach is still in the sky, but it is stable now, like the mark on your hand.”

“Seeker Pentaghast will want to know you have awakened, she said at once, at once.”

“Where is she?” I asked

“in the Chantry with the Lord Chancellor, at once she said,” then the girl ran from the hut leaving me alone and only slightly less confused then I was before.

Sitting back on the bed I stared at the “mark” on my left hand, the green glow was still there but faint. “what is this thing?”

“Where did it come from?”

“Why do I have it?”

I had so many questions and so few answers. Perhaps Solas knows, he seemed familiar with it. But something about him caused me to hesitate, I couldn’t help but feel like he was hiding something.
He uses “I’ve seen it in the fade,” as an explanation a lot. I’ve spent a fair amount of time in the fade but have not been able to control where I go or what I see.

He expects ignorance from me because I am a “Circle Mage,” but I am not a Circle Mage. He is Somniari, a Dreamer, I studied the Somniari in Tevinter. Is that what he is hiding? I considered confronting him but decided to allow him to underestimate me for now, I just don’t feel comfortable showing more of my hand.

Pulling myself from my thoughts, I better make my way to Cassandra before she comes and gets me. I opened the door to the small hut and was faced with a crowd of people lining the pathway to the Chantry. They didn’t speak to me directly but as I walked, I heard the whispers,

“they say she saved us.”

“It was Andraste in the rift behind her”

“she has been sent by the Maker.”

My pace quickened to a jog, I was feeling really uncomfortable with all these people watching me. Stepping through the heavy chantry doors I lent against them, thankful for silence. Sisters milled around the small space, minding their own and not interacting with me.

At the far end was another heavy door, a light shining from beneath it. As I approached, I could make out angry voices, that Chancellor from before, directing them to take me to Val Royaeux for a trial. Cassandra, countering by sending the soldiers away.

Stepping through the door just as the soldiers left, “I am still a suspect than?” I asked "Even after everything we did?"

“YES!” from the Chancellor

“NO!” from Cassandra

“I saw what happened at the Temple, the Divine called to her for help,” Cassandra said, dropping a heavy tome onto the table between us. “This is the Divine’s directive, rebuild the Inquisition of old,” her voice filled with passion.

“Restore peace amidst the chaos,” Leilana added. Recognizing defeat, Chancellor Rodrick stormed from the room, muttering to himself about blasphemy.

“We aren’t ready. We have no leader, no forces and now no Chantry support,” Leilana mused.

“But we must, and we must do it with you at our side,” Cassandra’s heavy gaze fell on me.

The Inquisition of Old, I knew this as a holy war after the First Blight and Andraste's Exalted March, before the founding of the Chantry. Around 100 Ancient, it was formed to protect the people from the tyranny of magic. It is what started the Circles, the Templar Order and the Seekers.

Looking at the Seeker in front of me, I wondered if she was aware of the history of her own order. Would building it again really change things? I had an unsettling feeling about it.

“You want a Holy War?” I asked
“We are already at war, you are already involved, it’s mark is already upon you,” Cassandra stated, “It being Holy is still unknown.”

She wasn’t wrong, as a Mage, I was involved prior to the mark on my hand. As I had realized on the journey back from Eliza’s estate, I could not just hide in the Imperium and ignore the rest of Thedas.

“We aim to restore order, what that looks like…” Leilana added sensing my hesitation, “but it starts with getting rid of the Breach completely.”

Something needed to be done, and at present, I was the only one able to close the rifts. That being the case, assisting was the right thing to do and more importantly the ONLY thing I could do.

I nodded to the women before me, “for now, to close the Breach and restore order, I will stand with you.”

This seemed to please them and they both left to spread the word that the Inquisition was alive once more. Dropping my gaze to the tome, I was filled with the weight of what I had just agreed to. The table beneath the large book was a map of Thedas and now it all sat on my shoulders.

Shit, I needed a drink.

**The Singing Maiden**

“Oh you’re her!” the bar tender squealed as I approached, “I’m Flissa, I manage the Inquisition’s tavern.”

“Oh nice to meet you Flissa, give be whatever is on special,” I said claiming a seat at the bar. “Right, of course,” she said with a grin.

I sat in silence my back to the tavern, I was hoping it’d keep me from being noticed. Flissa prattled away with the patrons, mostly gossip and I didn’t pay much attention to it, stuck in my own head.

I was struggling with this idea of an Inquisition or The Inquisition; the original was against magic but really it was against the Imperium. Will Cassandra still want to partner with me once she learned of my connection to Tevinter? Or will I become a way to blame the Imperium if this whole thing fails? Should I tell them or keep it to myself? Perhaps allowing them to see me as just another Circle Mage would be good, at least for now.

“Did you see the Commander, training the recruits on the field?” a female’s voice questioned. Their mention of Commander, reminded me of the conclave gala and Commander Cullen, I never found out what he commanded, I wonder if he survived the explosion?

“Maker he is easy on the eyes,” another replied giggling uncontrollably.

I must have been smiling at their conversation because Flissa approached me, “He’s out there on the field right now, if you want to see for yourself,” she winked and handed me another mug. I just shook my head, “Another time perhaps, this brew is all the company I need right now.”

Thoughts of that night pulled me back to it. I felt tears well in my eyes as Meric’s face flashed before me. The sparkle within his dark eyes when he laughed. How he animated the stories while reading to the Circle’s children. His touch, a soft caress, on my bare skin. What had gotten into him? Perhaps he was brainwashed or reeducated as the Qunari call it. The Meric I knew and loved, wouldn’t have spoken about mage’s like that, he wouldn’t have treated me in such a way. Whomever that man was, he wasn’t the man I had known. My Meric must have died when the Ostwick Circle rebelled.
I took the last swig of my drink and hailed Flissa to bring another. Just as she sat it in front of me
Farren, the young elven girl from earlier, came running in, “Thank the Maker I found you,” she said
gasping for breath, “Seeker Pentaghast is searching for you, probably best she doesn’t find you
here.”

Hmm, what was wrong with me being here, I wondered. Standing, I motioned for Flissa, “I’ll have
to come back for that last drink later, I am being beckoned apparently,” I said handing her a stack of
silvers. “I look forward to it, my lady” she said with a small curtsy.

Cassandra met me at the door to the chantry, “There you are,” she said with a huff. I followed her
inside. “Does it bother you?” she asked me with a nod to the mark on my hand.

“I just wish I knew what it was and how I got it,” I replied.

“Our first priority must be closing the Breach, and Solas believes that with enough power forced
through that mark, we can close it for good. After that, we will find the source, this I promise you,”
she pledged.

“Yes, lets play with immense power that we can’t even comprehend, sounds fun!” I jested
She actually smiled, I think it was the first I’ve seen, “I hope you hold onto that sense of humor.”

With that we stepped through the far door into the room from before. Three people stood on the other
side of the table map.

As soon as we entered Cassandra started with introductions, “I want to introduce, Commander
Cullen, leader of the Inquisition’s forces,”

“Pleased to…” he started to say then stopped once our eyes met, “Arya?” he questioned, face turning
a bright shade of pink, hand going to the back of his neck, “I assumed you… uh well…” he stuttered
turning even more pink,

“died,” I completed his sentence for him, “I thought the same thing about you.”

To my left I heard a girlish giggle and turned to see Leilana, her curious eyes shimmering with joy.

“Ugh” Cassandra’s classic disgusted grunt

“Lady Josephine Montilyet, our Ambassador and chief diplomat,” Cassandra continued, ignoring
Cullen’s obvious discomfort and Leilana’s giggling.

“I’ve heard much, it’s a pleasure to meet you at last,” the dark-haired ambassador said, voice heavily
Antivan.

“and of course, you know Sister Leilana,” Cassandra continued, looking to the giggling redhead who
shifted to all business once she felt the weight of the Seeker’s gaze.

Clearing the laugh from her voice she said, “my position here involves a degree of…”

“She is our spymaster,” Cassandra interrupted

“yes, tactfully put Cassandra,” annoyance clear in Leilana’s tone.
I couldn’t help but grin at the dynamic in the room and a part of me couldn’t wait to spend more time with this mysterious, giggling spymaster.

“Pleased to meet you all,” I said

Cassandra quickly moved the discussion to business, “As I mentioned, Solas believes that with more power your mark can close the breach.”

“which is why we should approach the rebel mages for help,” Leilana said.

“I disagree, the Templars could serve just as well,” this from Cullen.

“We need power Commander, enough magic poured into that mark…”

“Could destroy us all,” he interrupted, “The Templars could suppress the Breach, weaken it so…”

“pure speculation,” Leilana interrupted

Cullen’s gaze fell heavy on me, “I was a Templar,” rubbing his neck anxiously, “I know what they are capable of.” His voice was almost a whisper.

I was about to say something to stop the bickering, but Josephine beat me to it. “Unfortunately, neither group will even speak with us, the Chantry has denounced the Inquisition and you specifically,” she said nodding in my direction.

“Can’t we just ignore them,” I asked

“The Chantry still holds much weight with the people, it is their hope,” Leilana added

“There is a bigger picture here,” Josephine’s voice of reason, “some are calling you, a Mage, the Herald of Andraste, this frightens the Chantry. The remaining clerics have declared it blasphemy, and we heretics for harboring you.”

“Just how am I the Herald of Andraste,” I asked, it makes no sense.

“people saw what you did at the temple, how you stopped the breach from growing,” Cassandra explained, “They have also heard about the women seen in the rift behind you. They believe that was Andraste.”

“Even if we tried to stop that view from spreading,” Leilana started “which we have not,” Cassandra finished

Leilana sighed with frustration, “the point is, people everywhere are talking about you.”

“Quite the title, isn’t it” Cullen added, of the group he seemed the only one who thought of how I was handling all this, “How do you feel about it?” he asked.

“Honestly, I’m not sure how to feel about it,” I said giving him a thankful smile for at least asking me.

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

“Bouncing off of her comment, Josephine added, “and for others a symbol of everything that has gone wrong.”

Inhaling deeply “what can we do then?” I asked
“there is a Chantry cleric by the name of Mother Giselle who has asked to speak with you,” Leilana said, “she knows those involved better than I, her assistance would be invaluable in making peace with the Chantry.”

“It’s at least a place to start,” I added feeling a hint of relief.

“Mother Giselle is in the Hinterlands, near Redcliffe attending to the wounded,” Leilana said pointing to a location on the map.

“While you’re out, look for ways to spread the Inquisitions influence, we need all the help we can get,” Cullen instructed.

“The best way to extend our reach beyond this valley is for you to be out there showing the world you are not something to fear,” this from Josephine.

“In the meantime, let’s look at other options, I won’t leave this all to the Herald,” Cassandra said, motioning to the door and releasing me from the meeting.
An Adventure in Haven

Chapter Summary

Feeling overwhelmed by the weight of responsibility, Arya takes some time to explore the small mountain village and spends quality time with a mysterious elf.

Chapter Notes

Screenshots are more inline with the last chapter, in the war room.

The afternoon sun was waning towards evening, reflecting on the bright snow as I approached the abandoned hut. Once inside, I noticed the walls were lined with books and scrolls filled all the tables. In the kitchen nook there was an alchemy stand in one corner and an oven in the other. A small feather bed sat against one of the walls, above it was a portrait of a young woman. Next to the fireplace was an armchair and a bottle of wine. I sent a bolt of fire into the logs and watched as the orange light grew into a nice fire, chasing the chill away.

Feeling overwhelmed, I decided to stay for a while, hopefully Cassandra wouldn’t be able to sniff me out here. Popping the cork of the wine I sniffed it, still good, and took a long drink, it was sweeter than I like but I enjoyed the warmth of it in my belly.

A notebook sat on the table, picking it up I learned that it belonged to Master Teigen, the alchemist who died during the explosion. Adan, Haven’s interim healer had mentioned him. I stuffed the notebook into my pack, I’ll drop it off later.

My thoughts drifted to the task in front of me, “Rebuild the Inquisition of old, restore order among the chaos,” not a hefty thing in the least bit, I scoffed out loud. How much did Cassandra, Leilana and Josephine even know about what was happening out there? The explosion was only a few days ago… do any of us really know how vast that goal is? The more I thought about it the more my stomach churned and ached.

“Think happier thoughts Arya,” I told myself and the first thing that came into my mind was how pink Cullen’s face had gotten in the war room. The memory made me giggle, through another swig of wine.

A Templar huh-after what happened with Meric, I wanted to avoid any further entanglement with a Templar… “you didn’t mind it from that stranger at the ball” I reminded myself… true but that was prior to being spat upon by the man I loved.

“Well, Arya, you can’t say you don’t have a type, toss on some heavy plate armor, a hatred for magic with a side of lyrium addiction and you have my ideal man…” wonderful I thought.

I finished off the bottle of wine and grabbed my pack, I still needed to find some iron so Harrit the
blacksmith could craft my daggers and a logging stand for that vial quartermaster Thren.

Throwing a burst of ice into the fire, it died quickly, and I stepped out into the evening air. At this point the sun was low on the horizon. I could hear the clash of blades from the Haven training grounds and headed toward it. Iron was everywhere and I didn’t need much so that was an easy find.

The logging stand was a bit more of a challenge, I had to venture into the forest a little. Moving aside a hanging pine branch I caught the glimpse of an arrow taking down one of the rams. I wasn’t alone out here. Not wanting to get shot, I called out “Hello, who’s out there?” I heard nothing but silence and jumped when the familiar voice of Solas came from behind me,

“The chosen of Andraste, a blessed hero sent to save us all” he said

“Should I ride in on a shining steed?” I asked

“I would have suggested a Griffon, but sadly they are extinct,” a smug smile crossed his face. “I’ve journeyed deep into the fade in ancient ruins and battlefields to see the dreams of lost civilizations. I’ve watched as hosts of spirits clashed to reenact the bloody past in ancient wars, both famous and forgotten. Every great war has it’s hero’s, I’m just curious what kind you will be?” he asked.

I didn’t have an answer, so I decided to ask him something instead. “Will you tell me more about your experiences in the fade?” I wanted to confirm my suspicion but didn’t want to ask outright.

Solas talked about sleeping in ancient ruins and on old battlefields. He spoke of how he could see the memories of what happened there. He told me of sleeping at Ostegar and seeing the Hero of Ferelden and Warden Alistair light the beacon, just as Logain called the retreat. His tales were fascinating, and I was quickly entranced by all he had seen and experienced.

“That sounds amazing,” I told him, which seemed to catch him off guard, “Didn’t the Circle teach you that all nontraditional forms of magic were evil and to avoid them?” he asked.

In that moment, I wanted to spill my guts about not being trained in the Circle, it’d been so long since I could share the true depth of my ability with anyone. At the Circle, if they caught hint of my necromancy, I would have been deemed a blood mage and made tranquil. If they saw me focus elemental forces through daggers rather than a staff, I would have been branded the same. Curbing my desire, I stood to wonder back to the village, it was getting late and my stomach grumbled out of hunger. “There is more to me then being a Circle mage,” I replied. He stood as well, and his facade of pride faltered for just a moment. “I am sorry, Herald, I didn’t mean to come off as crude. It is a rare thing that I find another who sees my ways as valuable in any way.”

“Call me Arya, I don’t want to be some icon of a religion that has done nothing but oppress me,” I spat, tone bitter.

He raised his brows at my confession but didn’t comment on it. “stay and share this meal with me?” he asked motioning to the ram at our feet, “I can hear your stomach and I know you haven’t eaten for several days.”

“I would like that,” I said

“Wonderful, prepare the fire and I will tend to the animal.”

Wood was littering the ground which made it easy to have an armful in no time. I formed the snow into a deep bowl and placed the sticks within it. Solas was leaning over the ram, saying something in elven that sounded like a blessing or an acknowledgement. Then he ran his fingers along the creature, removing pelt, bones and organs with magic. I couldn’t help but be impressed, “that’s
useful, perhaps you can show me sometime.”

“I’d be delighted” he said bringing over the prepared meat just as I called a flame, catching the wood and starting a roaring fire. We sat in silence, watching the ram roast of the open flame, it smelled wonderful and I was thankful for stumbling upon him in the forest.

The silence stretched but wasn’t uncomfortable in the least bit. Solas was laying on his cloak, resting his head on a small pack. I was sitting on my cloak, resting against the trunk of a tree. I wondered if he was sleeping and almost reached towards him with my mana. He would have felt it and could have been offended. In Tevinter, “tasting” another was almost as casual a greeting as a handshake. But here, in the South, people find it intrusive.

“Solas, tell me about yourself?” I asked. “Why” he replied. Taken aback a little I tried to make up a reason more sensible than, I’m curious. “I respect you and I’d like to know a little more about you is all,” not great but something. “right, of course, I apologize, I am not accustomed to all the ins and outs of human interactions,” he said. I felt like he was talking down to me a little, like when we first met but pushed it away. “What would you like to know,” he asked

“Where are you from” an easy first question

“I was born in a small village north of here but there was little to interest a young man, especially one gifted with magic, so I took off in search of knew places to dream.”

“Have you always traveled alone?”

“I am never alone, I am always surrounded by spirits of joy, compassion, friendship, wisdom, these spirits have become my friends and companions over the years.”

“You can make friends with spirits?”

“Yes, just as you and I could be friends, within the fade there are spirits who talk and think just as we do, it is not so very different.”

“Do they not try to possess you?” I asked

“No, not all spirits have a desire to enter our world, most are content to exist just as they are. For those who do, I have learned to protect myself, thus the more aggressive spirits keep their distance.”

“That’s fascinating,” I said really intrigued by his perspective, “Could I become friends with spirits?”

“With a little guidance you could, perhaps I will introduce you to a few of my friends one of these nights,” he said, a genuine smile crossing his features.

That’s it, there is the confirmation I needed, offering to introduce me was him admitting that he can shape the dreams of others. Now should I ask the direct question or go about it more indirectly. I felt like he would appreciate me being direct.

“I would like that Solas, I have always been intrigued by the abilities of Somniari.”

He froze then, mouth open, he didn’t expect me to put that together. “I believe the ram is ready,” he said reaching toward the steaming meat and cooling it with a gentle Winter’s Grasp. Reaching in his pack he pulled out two plates and some utensils. He split the meal in half and handed me a plate. My hunger taking charge, distracted me from his obvious subject change. The ram was so tender and
juicy it melted in my mouth releasing little sprits of flavor with each bite. Satisfied and full I leant back against the tree and fell asleep.

**A trip with Solas**

I felt his presence before I saw him, an outline of his body against the darkness of my sleeping mind. “Can I enter?” he asked. I appreciated him asking for consent instead of just barging in. “Yes, Solas” I answered. His outline materialized and, in a moment, we were standing next to each other outside of Haven. It didn’t look like the fade here, it looked just like the waking world.

“I want to show you something,” he said offering his hand to me. I took it and it felt warm and solid. “Are we dreaming, it feels real?” I asked.

“Real is relative,” he said guiding me toward the gates of the village. “Look,” nodding toward the huge gate of Haven.

But this gate was different then the one there now. I heard the familiar sound of chain lightening and the steel-on-steel clash of blades. I took a step toward the gate just as they burst open, revealing a large number of gnarled creatures, they looked almost like corpses, but they didn’t move like them.

“Darkspawn,” I heard Solas say behind me. An arrow came from behind, then another and another, taking out one of the blighted creatures with each hit. I felt the charge of electricity in the air as bolts of lightening shot from the sky, jumping from one to the other bringing them to their knees. Taking advantage of their stunned state, two men one elven with daggers and the second human with a sword finished them off.

“I think we work well together,” the human said, high fiving the other over the mangled bodies of darkspawn. “You two wouldn’t have had a chance if Solona hadn’t shocked the piss out of them first,” a familiar Orlesian accent floated from the entrance. I couldn’t see her face, but I know the voice belonged to our redheaded spymaster.

I glanced at Solas, recognition dawning, “Shh, just watch,” he said.

Two women stepped into view, fingers entwined like best friends. Leilana, looked the same as she does now, other than her hair being shorter and her armor much more revealing. Once my eyes fell on the second women, I had to rub them in disbelief, the second women looked like me, almost exactly like me, she had chestnut hair that was braided into a long side braid, and blue eyes that almost seemed too bright against the paleness of her skin. Outside of the skin tone, the only difference was in the face, her features were slightly more angular than mine.

“Of course, you’d say that, you ladies just can’t admit to the full extent of my manliness,” the human man said.

“I don’t know Alistair,” an Antivan accent belonging to the elven man purred “if anything can be said about the extent of your manliness, I think we all heard it last night coming from Solona’s tent.”

The girls cracked into a flurry of giggles and the man, Alistair, blushed, “Solona, you didn’t ward against sound?” he asked.

“Hmmmm I guess it slipped my mind, your manliness is just so distracting” she feigned innocence and Leilana went straight into another giggle fit.

Alistair rushed to Solona, lifting her into the air spinning her. Solona’s laugh echoed off the mountain tops and seemed to fill the area with joy. “I’ll show you distraction,” he said lowering her and claiming her lips in a fiery embrace.
Leilana, watched them doe eyed and awe struck, “all you have to do is ask and I will gladly oblige,” the elven man said to her. She playfully shoved him away, “Zevran, it’s never going to happen,” she said. “Ah but you see my redheaded temptress, I know it will.”

Zevran, wait I know him, my mother’s friend in Antiva. I was surprised by how many people overlapped my and Solona’s life.

“Now, now love birds, don’t we have some dead lady’s ashes to find, so we can create a nonexistent cure for an uncurable poison or something,” Zevran said patting Alistair on the back.

“In a minute I’m proving my manliness,” he replied, voice muffled by the kiss.

“She is Andraste, Bride of the Maker, not just some random dead lady,” Leilana said.

“Ah my dear lady, you can try to hide behind that chantry sister facade, but I know the real you. I know how the feeling of your dagger digging deep or your arrow hitting its mark excites things low in your body, the song of death sings so sweetly, we are the same, you and I. You just need to embrace the pleasure, I will happily help you along my dear.” Zevran said rolling his tongue in a way that made my insides tighten.

I expected a spirited come back but Leilana fell silent, eyes distant.

“What are you all just sitting around for,” Solona teased, “We’ve got darkspawn and cultists to kill, an old man to track down, so much to do,” she counted the list off on her fingers, as they fell into step next to her and headed back into the village.

I took a step, wanting to follow but the image shimmered before fading away, being replaced by white tents and a group of soldiers sparring one another close enough to cause me to backstep before I got hit. The pair of soldiers nearest me sheathed weapons and stepped away, leaving a clear path to broad shoulders bare to the mountain air. Blond curls free of their careful style framed golden eyes and flushed skin. It was Cullen, sparring with one of the scouts. I stood entranced by the way his toned body moved.

My memories flashed back to the Circle, Lila and I hiding behind the lilac bushes as we watched the Templar’s train in the garden. We would giggle and swoon over them. They were forbidden, and that made them all the more appealing. My envisioning it moved us to the Ostwick Circle, Lila’s blond hair and light green eyes met mine, “that one,” she said pointing out the red-haired recruit that caught her fancy.

“His name is Austin and he tastes like Antivan brandy,” she said with a sigh. I smiled at the memory, from so long ago. This was when I first got to the Circle. Lila had a secret affair with a brand new Templar. They were adorable and very much in love, but I was a little resentful of it.

My other self looked at her friend, sadness in her eyes. “Why are you sad?” Solas’ voice asked from behind me. Taking myself back to that moment I remembered Dorian’s green eyes and flirtatious smile watching me from across the Pavus estate library. Alma was talking about the Magrallen, but I wasn’t listening, Dorian and I just stared at each other, he liked this game though. Holding my gaze with lustful eyes, smirking from the corner, building the anticipation until it felt like I’d be crushed under the weight of it. Then he’d ask Alma to release me and we’d disappear to some private place and let the desire consume us.

“where are you?” Solas asked, confused by what he saw.

“Arya,” Alma’s voice, she used the common tongue, but it was heavily accented in Tevene, “Are
you listening, this is very important.”

“Sorry, ma’am,” I apologized, swishing my hand as if pushing Dorian away. His rich chuckle filled the room and my tummy did flip-flops.

I pulled away form that memory back to me and Lila at the Circle, “I was missing home,” I answered Solas’ original question. The other me pulled herself out of her self-pity, it wasn’t Lila’s fault. “Come Lila, lets go say hi,” I smiled at my friend and she hugged me, “I really like him, Arya.”

“That’s enough” Solas said from my side, “we must go back.”

With that, my sleeping mind fell into darkness.
IT'S QUITE THE TITLE. ISN'T IT? HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THAT?

4. I like it.
3. They're wrong.
6. I don't know.
1. It's unnerving.

WHAT HARM COULD THERE BE IN POWERING UP SOMETHING WE BARELY UNDERSTAND?
After a night of dreaming it’s time for Arya to prepare for a trip to the Hinterlands.

Chapter Notes

This is a short chapter, important characterization so I wanted to keep it separate.

“Makers tits, Arya, everyone has been looking for you,” a man’s voice said pulling me from my slumber. My eyes fluttered open to Cullen’s face, eyes full of concern. He was so close, I reached out and touched him, rough stubble under my palm. “I was sleeping… Solas,” my thoughts weren’t quite coherent yet.

His hand rested over mine on his cheek, “You were sleeping with Solas?” he questioned, disappointment flickered through his eyes briefly. Finally awakening, I jumped up “What? No, well not like that.” I clarified. He chuckled, and I saw tension leave the set of his jaw.

“Cassandra is ready to head to the Hinterlands and Leilana wishes to see you,” he said. “How is it that you didn’t freeze out here?” he asked. “fire runes” I answered as if it was obvious, “What?” he questioned Moving the cloak aside I exposed the strategically placed runes. “I place them and set them to warm, it doesn’t take much mana and once they are placed, they release a constant level of heat.” I explained. “that’s convenient” he said with a smirk. Extending his hand, I gladly took it and allowed him to pull me to my feet. “I’m uh, I’m glad you are okay,” he stuttered. Smiling I said the same, “me too, about you... I’m glad you are okay.” He blushed and busied himself putting snow over the fire and grabbing my pack, “Um, do you think, I mean, would it be inappropriate to, uh take you up on that offer for an evening stroll still?” he was so red, “Maker’s breath,” he said, “I’m sorry.” Placing a comforting hand on his arm I caught his avoiding eyes,

“I’d like that,” I said

“me too” he added, 

“you said that,” I replied, I had to give him a little trouble

He just smiled and headed toward Haven, I followed, stopping briefly to mark the logging stand on my map for Thren.

Once at the gates Cullen excused himself to tend to the troops. I made my rounds, giving the alchemist’s notes to Adan, iron and the logging stand location to Thren and the materials Harritt needed in order to craft my daggers.

Leilana’s tent was next to the quartermasters, Cullen said she wanted to speak to me. As I
approached, she was kneeling, praying. “blessed are the peacekeepers, champions of the just, blessed are the righteous, the lights in the shadow. In their blood the Maker’s will is written. Is that what you want from us? Blood? To die so that your will is done? Is death your only blessing?”

Angry eyes looked at me, “you speak for Andraste, no? what does the Maker’s prophet have to say about all this? What’s His game?” she asked, eyes haunted.

“How is this a game?” I asked

“Do you see the sky? What about he Temple ruins? The bones lying in the dust? Even if you don’t support the Divine, you wouldn’t call this right, who could? So many innocent lives, the faithful, murdered where the Holiest of Holies once stood. If the Maker willed this, what is it, if not a game or a cruel joke?” she despaired.

“I cannot speak for Andraste, I speak for nobody but myself, and I have no answers for you.” I said, I wanted to be supportive but didn’t have what she sought.

“The Chantry teaches that the Maker abandoned us. He demands repentance for our sins. He demands it all, our lives or deaths. Justinia gave Him everything she had, and He let her die!”

“Shouldn’t the blame fall on the one who murdered her?” I asked

“If the Maker doesn’t intervene to save the best of His servants, what good is He,” she continued. “I used to think I was chosen, like you, chosen to work with the Divine, to help people, but now she’s dead and it was all for nothing, serving the Maker meant nothing.”

“Maybe you have another purpose, I could help you find it,” I offered unsure of what else to do.

She smiled, eyes far away, “I had a friend once, she found me when I was at a low point, and she offered me the same thing, an opportunity to find a purpose.”

Stepping to me she placed a hand against my cheek, “I am sorry that you had to see me like this, but I am thankful you did,” her smile warmed, “Now I had a message for you didn’t I,” she mused out loud.

“I sent scouts out searching for the Wardens and they have come back empty handed. It seems the Wardens have all gone missing. I am not saying it has something to do with the explosion, but the timing is curious. I have heard word that a lone Warden, by the name of Blackwall, has been seen in the Hinterlands. While you are there, will you seek him out?”

“Weren’t there Wardens at the conclave?” I asked, “I saw people wearing their armor.”

“The Wardens are still thought of very highly, especially in Ferelden, they may have been donning the armor for the masquerade, it symbolizes strength of character and valor,” she explained.

Seeing an opportunity to ask about her traveling with Solona I asked, “can you tell me about them?”

“About the Wardens or about the Hero of Ferelden?” she asked, catching me off guard. “It is not unknown that I traveled with her. I fought beside her against the archdemon and acted as her support through all the trials and tribulations of that time. Solona and Alistair were both new to the Wardens and neither knew much about the organization really. The man who recruited them, Duncan, had shared some history but they had no idea what it meant to be a Warden. Alistair loved the idea of being a hero and having a purpose above himself. But for Solona, the cost was large and the weight heavy, she was conscripted, meaning forced to join against her will, whereas Alistair begged for it.”
“why was she forced?” I asked

“Well you know she came from Kinloch Hold right?” she questioned, and I nodded, “you are related, so I’m sure you’ve heard that she was taken at a young age from her parents,” she was trying to get a feel for my knowledge.

“Yes,” I said, “despite aunt Revka’s attempt to outmaneuver the Templars.”

“Right!” she sounded excited now at the chance to share a story.

“Solona, knew nothing outside of the Circle and despite being curious of the outside world (as all mage’s are) she was content. She had lifelong friends, teachers who cared for her, the ability to use her magic safely and unlimited access to books (Solona loved to read). In addition to all those things, she was in love and…” her eyes darted behind us and her voice lowered “he was in love with her.”

Turning to see what caught her gaze, I saw Cullen pass, heading to the Chantry. So he is the same Cullen, disappointment started to build inside me. Leilana knew I put it together, so she continued, “Cullen was stationed at Kinloch Hold shortly after he completed his Vigil. According to Solona, he would watch her, lurking in the shadows, she thought it was creepy at first. Then one day she was trying to grab a book from the top shelf and managed to pull the shelf down in the process. Cullen grabbed her, rolling her to safety before she was crushed. That was the first time she actually saw him up close and from that moment on, they were inseparable.

The Knight Commander and First Enchanter tried keeping them apart, but they always managed to figure a way around it. Until….” Her voice changed to a darker tone. “One of Solona’s friends, Jowan, was going to be made tranquil. He found out through a Chantry initiate whom he was sleeping with. The couple approached Solona for help, they had a plan to destroy his phylactery and escape the Circle. Another mage, Anders had done it like 7 times, and they were sure with her help, they could pull it off.

Solona wanted to help her friend but she also didn’t want to risk herself getting caught. She went to First Enchanter Irving for help, she trusted him and thought he could help them come up with a different solution, “why not just prove Jowan isn’t a blood mage?” But her trust was misplaced, and Irving instructed her to go along with their plan, setting them up to get caught in the act. Solona refused, “I will not betray my friend.” But Irving was a cruel man, “you will obey, or I will have Cullen sent to Aeonar for fornicating with one of his charges.” Irving used her relationship with Cullen to blackmail her into obedience and so, to protect her love, she did as she was instructed, leading Jowan and the Sister into a trap.

Once the trio emerged from the phylactery chamber, they were met by Irving, Knight Commander Greagoir and Duncan the Warden who was looking for recruits to join the war at Ostegar. Afraid, Jowan slit his wrist and called on the power in his blood to incapacitate them, allowing for his escape. The Chantry sister, Lily, was condemned to Aeonar. Solona spoke up saying she was only following instructions and Irving confirmed this to be true, however Greagoir was sure she had been tempted by the blood mage and wanted her punished. Duncan stepped in at that moment, invoking the Rite of Conscription. Solona begged Irving to not make her go, this was her home, but he wouldn’t. “you are meant to do great things, this place will only crush you,” he told her. And that was it, that’s how she was recruited into the Warden’s. She told me how Cullen was part of the entourage that escorted her to the tower exit, the last thing she saw was him whispering “I love you” as she left.

“That’s horrible,” I said, taken aback by the similarities in our stories. “I must get going before Cassandra drags me out of here, can we talk some more at another time?”

“Of course,” Leilana said with a smile “Back to work than.”
Stepping from Leilana’s tent I found myself filled with awe. The Divine’s left hand, questioning her faith. But at the same time, her history of espionage and storytelling. I couldn’t wait to spend more time getting to know the full depth of her. Then Cullen, he really is the same one from Solona’s story. What does that mean? I wouldn’t have thought of it but now that I know, I wonder... his awkward flirtations, are they because I look so much like her? He probably hasn’t seen her since she liberated Kinloch Hold from the abominations. Could it be that I am a surrogate for Solona?

Cassandra strode from the Chantry almost slamming into me in her haste. “Herald, there you are, we have been looking for you. In the future if you wish to disappear you must come tell me,” she chastised.

“Cassandra, usually when someone disappears, it is because they don’t want to be found. Telling you would kind of defeat the purpose....” I defended

She just looked at me eyes puzzled, as if the very thought was foreign to her. She gave a small snort but her eyes warmed. “Well if you could tell someone, whomever you’d be more comfortable with, that’d be appreciated. You needn’t tell where you will be, just that you will be taking some time to think. I do understand, we have put a lot on your shoulders and I want you to feel supported,” she placed a gloved hand on my arm, “Now we need to get to the Hinterlands, reports are troublesome.”

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