## Lady Barris

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### Summary

August 9:42, Skyhold, a year after the Conclave explosion.

(MGiT is not the Inquisitor, doesn’t fight and doesn’t have magic.)

What could the Inquisition offer a modern woman whom they determined not to be a threat when she ended up in Thedas? Marriage of convenience to hide her identity and to protect her.

Who would agree to wed the stranger to keep her from harm? A dutiful former Templar, Captain Delrin Barris.

To the outside world, Delrin and Mira are regular newlyweds. Few know the truth. Mira struggles with being in Thedas while Delrin is uncertain how to help a woman who is
formally his wife, especially as work calls him out of Skyhold.

Despite the world of difference, Mira and Delrin have more in common than not.

Follow two good hearted people as they find more in each other than they have ever anticipated.

Notes

The first chapter, in which we meet Captain Delrin Barris, our hero of the story, and learn about his background up until the August of 9:42. It is a slow beginning, but it is necessary.

I have over 150 000 words of the draft written. ;) It does get more exciting.
The crackling noise of thunder woke up Captain Delrin Barris abruptly. He sat down in his cot, hand extending to grab his longsword, body prepared to cast if necessary, but something didn’t feel right. He opened his eyes, looked out of the window, took a deep breath and felt his heartbeat slowing down.

It was just an ordinary storm after all, and he could see the lightning brightening the sky through the window of his small bedroom in Skyhold. He didn’t even need to look at the clock to realize it was still the blackest night. He settled in the bed again and wiped the sweat off his forehead.

Delrin knew he would not go back to sleep, not today. Today marked the anniversary of the Divine’s Conclave destruction. The Most Holy had perished tragically alongside everyone but one survivor. He knew many Templars that had died there, and he knew few mages as well. He was supposed to attend the Conclave himself, but at the last minute his squadron got deployed to investigate the possibility of abomination in the small Orlesian village of Montpellier at the Nevarran border.

The abomination was real, and it had killed eleven people before they dealt with it. It was the worst kind, too. The person possessed turned out to be just a child who had recently come into her magical abilities. Since the beginning of the Mage-Templar War those abominations increased in occurrence. Children who suddenly got magic had nowhere to go when the Circles fell. That day Delrin cried for the child lost.

The next morning he received the news about the Conclave, and soon afterwards there came the orders from Lord Seeker Lucius to rush to Val Royeaux.

The feeling of uneasiness had not left him since Montpellier. He followed the orders and came back to the capital only to witness a Templar assaulting Mother Hevara and Seeker Lucius ordering him to stand now in the face of that horrendous injustice. Even today the bitter shame filled his mouth because he had listened to that command. Afterwards, Seeker Lucius ordered all the Templars, including Barris himself, to leave for Therinfal Redoubt. Delrin followed and doomed his men to death.

By the time they settled at Therinfal Redoubt, Delrin was convinced something deeply sinister was lurking in the shadows. A fortress itself had been previously abandoned. The given orders seemed lawless, and the behavior of the Lord Seeker bizarre. The new lyrium - red lyrium - appeared and many Templar leaders had taken it, and, as it turned out later, many Templars had been forced to take it as well. It did not take long for Delrin to commit the unthinkable act and reach out to the Inquisition, begging for assistance. The betrayal seemed so preposterous that no one from Templar leadership could foresee it.

As much as Commander Rutherford later praised him for being a model Templar, Delrin was aware that the only reason he was able to rebel quickly was the fact that he spent most of his career largely outside the bounds of the Circle.

It was a rarity, indeed. He had been given more freedom than most. It led to more ignorance on his part, yet another reason for his shame. He had had not participated in most of the regular Circle activities. He rarely had interacted with Circle mages per se, never partaken in administrative duties. His privilege of being away, constantly traveling and investigating had made him blind to
the corruption and the abuse within the Circles. He should have done more. He should have been better.

It all began when he was eighteen years old, a decade ago, just a year after the end of the Blight. Everything was shitty, tensions high in Ferelden, and the reconstruction efforts were chaotic. None of it mattered to him back then, because he was proud and excited for his first official assignment as a Knight-Templar. He was lucky to always had been considered level headed and mature. This time, it was perhaps his swordsmanship skill that led to him to be chosen to participate in that mission. The same old story as always, the rumors of apostasy, this time at Dragon’s Peak, not far from the capital itself. The same story as always, the truth behind the rumors turned out to be much more complicated than rumors themselves. Not only there were apostates, but there were true blood mages summoning Pride demon to control the group of Tal-Vashoh. There were two Seekers so astonishingly useless that they could not even begin to take control over the situation. There was that poor Dalish tribe, accused of many things amidst it all, completely innocent of all of them. Knight-Lieutenant Malcolm who led the mission was, to put it mildly, a careless idiot. Delrin was sorry when Knight-Lieutenant got killed. Perhaps less sorry than he should have been, but Knight-Lieutenant Malcolm had carelessly endangered the whole squadron and his actions had led to the death of one of the Dalish and two of the Templars.

Delrin could never pinpoint the exact moment where the leadership had fell on his shoulders, and how that happened. Among the panic and quarreling between the Templars more experienced than him, he was the one who devised the plan of action. They actually managed to listen to him without question. It took a lot more convincing to get the Seekers on their side and implore them to inaction. For some reason they thought they still should be in charge. The plan worked. It took them three days, and they lost one more man, but it worked. It worked better than anyone had anticipated. All things considering, blood mages got either killed or subdued. The Qunari got freed, impeccably grateful. The Dalish could feel safe in the forest again, and could mourn the hunter they had lost. The victory appeased the Seekers. It was his first mission, and it was a successful one. It garnered Barris a lot of respect among the Templars, and he quickly got promoted to Knight-Lieutenant himself. He started commanding the small squadron of the Templars to work all over Thedas.

It was an unorthodox solution, but squadrons like that existed to deal with most difficult investigations or hunts for maleficarum. Delrin enjoyed immense operational freedom even though he still technically fell under the command of the Circle. He was allowed to be given enough lyrium supplies to travel for nearly six months with no need to come back for more. All Templars were leashed, but his leash was the longest. The truth was that many Templars simply did not develop skills to investigate effectively. There was a vast difference between managing mages and being able to conduct the thorough inquiry that required interviewing locals and managing other players in the field. Delrin knew a lot of great Templars. He also knew a lot of great Templars who got killed because they took part in missions they were not prepared for. Frankly, the job he was doing was supposed to be done by The Seekers, but they always were far too secretive to be reliable when needed.

He spent years of his life traveling through most of Thedas - first Ferelden, then, for a short while, the Free Marches, and then Orlais to conduct his work. The people under his command changed, but his last squadron before the Conclave had been with him for three years.

There was a downside to his freedom. Even though he was a Knight-Lieutenant, Barris was fully aware he would never be promoted within the Circle hierarchy. He was never there, so he would never been considered. The advantage was that he was outside of competition for power, and there was a competition indeed. There always were. No one felt threatened by his work. Truthfully, he never cared much either. He preferred to be in a field, as cruel and ungrateful the job was at times.
Perhaps this lack of ambition for formal success was the reason it took a while for Knight Captain Denam to realize he had betrayed the Lord Seeker’s command. He did realize it, in the end. Barris received the letter back from the Inquisition, and the letter informed him that the Inquisitor would not be able to arrive at Therinfal Redoubt, and they could send only a small group of reinforcements. The letter advised Delrin to gather his men and get the fuck out of there. Well, it wasn’t phrased quite that way, but the meaning was clear.

He was fully aware it was impossible to leave with the many Templars unnoticed. He wasn’t surprised when Knight Captain Denam confronted him. He wasn’t surprised when the fighting started. He was surprised where it turned out that the former leadership turned into corrupted red lyrium tainted monsters. He was even more surprised when he broke through to the Lord Seeker Lucius only for the Demon to pull him into the trap. He should have known. He should have felt it. When he thought about it later, there were signs.

Envy tried to possess him. It wasn’t the first time the demon tried that, but it had never been difficult before. Envy was powerful and cunning, and Delrin felt lost in the shadows of illusion. It was then when he heard another voice. He didn’t even know when he decided to trust Cole. For all he knew, he was just another demon, but something did not feel right and he took the leap of faith, the last leap of faith and leaned on Cole’s advice. He was tired, too tired, and too weak. “I’ll ask my friends to help you”, Cole said, and Delrin nodded. “Yes, help me”. He felt on his knees and prayed and felt his strength rising again.

The illusion broke and the small but surely welcomed reinforcements from Inquisition arrived after all. A squadron of Templars under Knight-Captain Rylen, The Right Hand of the Divine Seeker Cassandra Pentaghast, Enchanter Vivienne and the mercenary group The Charges under the leadership of The Iron Bull, a Qunari all came to help when almost all hope was lost.

They defeated Envy together, and Delrin knew he’d died otherwise. They would all die otherwise, or worse, they’d all turn into monsters without that help. He had seen the Right Hand of the Divine Seeker Panthegast was exactly as he’d always imagined a Seeker should be. Her swordsmanship was beyond excellent. Better than his, to be fair, and he was great himself. Her Seeker abilities were extraordinary, superior to most Seekers he had encountered. Madame de Fer was as deadly as she was regal. In Orlais they mostly knew her as the previous Court Enchanter and a mistress to Duke of Ghislain. Seeing her combat skills though clearly had shown that Enchanter Vivienne was a mage of immense ability. It was unusual for a circle mage to be that well trained in combat, but she was a Knight Enchanter after all. Iron Bull was a force of nature.

They won, but all of Delrin’s men from his squadron perished. So many Templars died that day. Once again in life, he found himself a leader when he wasn’t seeking leadership. He surrounded the Templar Order to the Inquisition, thus formally ending its existence. All the remaining Templars became conscripted, himself included. It was the only choice that made sense at the time.

It took him a week to realize something was deeply wrong with him afterwards. Regardless of how large his last lyrium drought was before the battle at Therinfal, he should have felt the lyrium song rising in his veins. Instead, he woke up in the camp in Hinterlands feeling nothing. There was no lyrium in his veins, the part of his being erased. He did not remember how it felt without lyrium. It was then when Cole told him that the Spirit of Faith had touched him, and Delrin panicked.

He could still close his eyes and bring the memory of the tightening chest and not being able to breathe. It was Iron Bull’s strong hand that grabbed him and his voice that guided him through. The next thing he knew was Cassandra entering the tent and Delrin telling her he thought he was possessed. Cassandra assured him he wasn’t possessed. He told her she was wrong. She grunted, irritated and made various threats to anyone who claimed to argue with her expertise. He felt his
panic rising again, and that was when Cole told them that they were “both touched by faith, not knowing.” Cassandra’s murderous feelings shifted towards Cole, but miraculously he got spared. She also didn’t kill Delrin, but assured him once again that a demon had not possessed him. She tapped his arm few times awkwardly in what was supposedly a reassuring gesture, ten minutes after she threatened him. Iron Bull tapped his arm a few times too and told him he needed to either bed someone or kill something to relax.

It was the same day that they spotted a dragon roaming over Hinterlands. They sent the remaining Templars and the Inquisition forces to Haven, but Seeker Panthegast, Iron Bull and Enchanter Vivienne remained to kill the dragon and to his own surprise, he stayed too. Iron Bull was smirking at him giddily like a child.

It was his first dragon. Unlike fighting Envy, which was brutal and disgusting, that fight was formidable but beautiful. It did make him feel better, and it did make him proud when the dragon finally fell. Iron Bull growled with satisfaction and Cassandra laughed openly wiping the blood off her face, and even Madame de Fer smirked looking at her disheveled mage robes.

They arrived in Haven after another six days of travel. He met Commander Cullen Rutherford, the former Kirkwall Commander who considered himself a Templar no longer. The Seeker, the Commander and the Spymaster interrogated him in relation to the fact that his lyrium song seemed to have entirely evaporated from his body, but he still could cast effectively. Everyone agreed he wasn’t possessed. Cassandra remarked that she had the ability to cast many Templar spells herself without ever taking lyrium, due to the Seeker ritual. Cullen - he wasn’t Cullen to him then, he was merely the Commander - patted him on the back. They promised secrecy, and Cassandra promised to watch him, and then shockingly he got released to serve the Inquisition.

That was the only night in years where he actually got drunk. Not shamelessly drunk, but drunk enough to agree with the Iron Bull that redheads were indeed the hottest, and sing one dirty song in the tavern, and decide on a duel the next day. He won the duel, probably because Bull harbored a massive hangover. Weirdly, it made Bull really happy, and they stayed close friends ever since.

Delrin was not a prejudiced man, or at least he tried not to be. The only time he really fought Qunari was in the Marches, and very briefly. The Tal Vashoth he occasionally met, mostly in Orlais, were usually reasonable and willing to step away to let the Templars handle demons. He knew Chantry disapproved of close ties with non-believers, but the Chantry sisters were not prancing the forests and meadows hunting abominations. Friendship with Bull was different though, because he was the first Qunari Delrin met that still followed the Qun. Yet somehow the friendship worked, it worked then, and it worked when Bull became Tal Vashoth himself too.

Once the mages arrived in Haven from Redcliffe, both mages and Templars worked on closing the Breach. He was there himself. They haven’t lost a single person during that moment. The deaths came later, after celebrations. Delrin did not drink much that night, still feeling ashamed by the last time he touched whisky. He would never forget the moment where the bells started ringing, and he would never forget what followed later, the sight of both Venatori and Red Templars attacking Haven without warning.

They lost so many people that night, including civilians, including one child. It was a miracle anyone had survived at all. They escaped through the mountain path, and everyone thought Herald got buried in Haven under the avalanche. Miraculously, Maxwell Trevelyan lived, they found Skyhold, and thus the Herald of Andraste became the Inquisitor.

It was shortly after the move to Skyhold when Cassandra requested him to join her on the mission. Cassandra, not Seeker Panthegast anymore, because after Haven they gave up the pretense of
formality. The Inquisitor and few members of Inner Circle joined them and they all traveled to Caer Oswin. Perhaps no one was more shocked than him to find the actual real Seeker Lucius there, alive and well. Delrin was certain that Envy had killed Lord Seeker. Only Cassandra’s fury could have matched his shock. It turned out that Seeker Lucius had given himself to Envy willingly. Barris could taste his own anger once the shock had dissipated. There were over two hundred thirty templars at Therinfal Redoubt when they had first arrived. The commanders and captains got all corrupted. Out of brothers and sister left, not even fifty had survived. When Lord Seeker Lucius tried to sway Cassandra, Delrin needed to use all of his willpower to remain calm.

“It is the Maker’s will,” Lord Seeker Lucius said.

Lord Seeker Lucius died that day at Cassandra’s hand.

That day was the only time he saw Cassandra cry. He had no doubt that tears she shed were not for Seeker Lucius, but for the Seekers of Truth, and maybe especially for those whom she knew. Delrin felt sick to his stomach. Templars, Seekers… the evil was everywhere, and so was the corruption.

Cassandra requested his presence several days after they came back to Skyhold. She read “Book of Secrets” and told him things she found out that shook him to the core. Tranquility was reversible. Seekers themselves had undergone the Rite of Tranquility to be touched by the Spirit of Faith. Her working theory, especially after making sense of Cole’s rumblings, was that although Delrin had never been Tranquil, not even for a second, he still got touched by the Spirit of Faith at Therinfal, which ended his need for lyrium while retaining his abilities.

By some standards, it meant that he was almost an abomination.

He had never felt more faithless, but he did not waver. After that talk he spent three hours in the Chantry reciting Canticle of Trials, all the verses. He could see Chantry Sisters looking at him confused. Back then the Skyhold Chantry was cold and undecorated. It did not even have the statue of Andraste. None of that mattered to him. Afterwards he raised up from his knees, he felt his resolve steeled. He marched to Adan and asked for potions to help with anxiety he was experiencing.

He was raised to the rank of a Captain and made Cullen’s Second-in-Command, undoubtedly to appease the post-Therinfal Templars. He didn’t mind. He didn’t care for the rank much, and the Commander was bad at delegating duties in the first place. What Delrin cared about was the enormous undertaking of integrating mages and Templars into elite squadrons, offering a chance of cooperation. Offering the chance to defeat Corypheus. Offering the chance for the change, perhaps, for the better future. It was Cullen’s idea in the first place, but Delrin was the men who put this vision into practice.

They started with expert units, with only several Captains commanding them - some Templars, some mages, some highly experiences officers. Delrin handpicked his own team himself, and he deliberately decided to include some young and inexperienced people. He believed that to make a change, sometimes eagerness, passion and conviction outmatch experience. It was the proudest achievement of his life. He loved his squadron. He still couldn’t quite let go of the feeling that he let his previous one down at Therinfal where they all died.

This was another chance, a change he could guide himself.

His current squadron had eight people under his direct command; mages, Templars, a former Kirkwall city guard and two rogues with questionable past. He handpicked them all himself. Since then, they had performed many difficult missions for the Inquisition, and were one of the most
successful elite units to deal with nuanced threats. He was very proud of them, and he was proud of himself, too.

Delrin himself got better. He didn’t need potions anymore, he could sleep without problems and without being disturbed, he felt more joy and content. There still was the part of him that hurt, and maybe that part had been there even before Therinfal. He had seen horrible things happen in his life. He had never tried to be cruel, but now he wondered if every order he ever gave was the just one. He wondered many things, and he did not consider himself a Templar any longer. The big part of him believed he should have done more. That part of his soul sought redemption. Not desperately, for Delrin never had been too extreme in his emotions. He sought redemption prudently and ordinarily. He wanted to be ready to answer any call necessary.

Some days were still hard.

He looked outside the window again. The dawn had come.
Chapter Summary

Mira ends up in Thedas, and things are scary, tiresome and confusing when it turns out that monsters are real.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

mid-August, 9:42 Dragon, Ferelden, the unnamed territory between the Hinterlands and the Korcari Wilds.

The first thing Mira felt was the violent sense of falling. The horrible feeling of falling down, head light and dizzy, heart in her throat, eyes shut. Then the falling stopped, but she didn’t hit the ground. She blinked few times and saw yellowish green light, sickly and unnerving. Her heart was thudding in her chest, her whole body sweating profusely, and Mira just realized she seemed to levitate midair.

And then she fell again, fast.

This time, she did hit the ground hard. She hit her side first and the pain spread quickly bringing tears to her eyes. The wet earthy smell of the the ground underneath her assaulted her nostrils. She pulled up on her knees. The pain subsided a bit, but Mira felt it throbbing anyway and she hissed. No broken limbs though, thankfully.

And then she heard the scream, or a shriek, as it would be more accurate to say, and she opened her eyes.

She barely registered what was happening. All she saw was a green vortex twisting above her head, and monsters. They were moving and searching, and they all seemed to notice her at the same time. Before Mira could do anything else, her brain signaled her to flight.

Her reactions took over, and without even thinking and reflecting, she got up and started running.

She never ran so fast in her entire life, she ran without stopping while screaming for help. The fear was overwhelming and suffocating, the most primal fear one can imagine. Her legs felt like they were made of steel, knees weak. The shrieking sounds were so close, so Mira ran, and ran, and ran through the woods as far as she could.

The pain in her chest was sudden and strong she thought of a heart attack. She collapsed behind the tree, knees close to her chin, and froze in silence. Her heart pounded so hard she imagined anyone close would be able to hear it. She was completely drenched from perspiration.

She sat and trembled for a while, but nobody came for her. There was nothing around, just the gentle rustling of the leaves in the trees and birds chirping above.

What the fuck happened, her first thought was. You’re not dying, it’s not the heart attack, calm
down, was the second. She took deep breaths, releasing the air slowly, trying to control the breathing. Her hands were shaking a lot and she felt her wet shirt clinging to her body. The chest pain seemed to dissipate little by little though. She wasn’t going to die, not from that at least, and not now. With no immediate danger in sight, her mind overflowed with various questions.

What was that? What if they can move without sound? Are they searching for me now? Where am I? What happened? Am I dreaming? The thoughts raced through her head very fast, but she still had not dared to look back. She managed to glance at the sky, and it was glaring brightly. *Fuck.* She didn’t have her backpack. She wasn’t even sure if it fell through with her, and she wasn’t about to turn around and face *monsters* to retrieve it. *Monsters. Monsters* do not exist. And yet she just *saw* them.

Anyway, she had no phone, no backpack, no water. Nothing except the clothes she wore and a decent pair of trekking shoes on her feet. Thank God for the shoes. Those shoes just saved her life.

She must have been sitting there for a long while now, and yet she didn’t hear any suspicious noises. No steps, no swishing, no screeching, no flapping, no fluttering. Nothing but the sweet soothing sounds of nature. She stood up, her back still leaning against the tree. She found her footing on the ground, prepared to run again. And that’s when Mira looked back.

The green vortex was still there behind her. Surprising as it was, she seemed to have run uphill. At least that explained why she had gasped for air so desperately. The vortex was maybe a kilometer away, not even. The creatures circles around it, like they were guarding it. None of them seemed to move much further from the vortex itself. She couldn’t be *entirely* sure, but after few minutes of observation she deduced they were somehow bound to the green-whatever-floating there. Mira took a deep breath and felt a little better.

If one thing was certain, she wasn’t going back that way.

*What happened? Where was she now?*

The thing was, it didn’t really feel unreal. She dreamed before, and no dream has ever been this vivid and visceral. In no dream her chest was actually hurting, her knees were scraped and her hip badly beaten. In no dream she sweat that profusely, and no dream ever has provided such detail everywhere she looked around.

And she did look around, beyond the green monstrosity on the horizon. It was a beautiful day, as absurd as it was. The trees were large and thick and mesmerizing, yet something about the forest did not feel right. It certainly did not seem the same forest she camped at. Mira was not a botanist, but the plants and trees looked… off.

She was alone, and scared, and without her backpack she nothing to use to survive. Wait. Her pocketknife.

She reached to her jeans pocket and found her red Victorinox. This wasn’t much, but at least she had a blade, and one pocketknife was much better than nothing. Mira realized that before doing anything further she needed to find water and some shelter or someone to help her.

Behind her, there were *monsters.* In front of her, there were hills, but the choice was easy. Everything was better than monsters, and if she gained some height, she could at least look around, and find somewhere to go, someone to help her.

Mira was never the greatest trekker, but she walked enough to be relatively fit. Not too fit to run for long, she thought bitterly, but fit enough to be able to cover some ground. Her hip hurt a lot,
and she needed a drink. All that sweating made her incredibly thirsty and her lips were definitely 
chapping.

She tried to find path, *any path*, but there were none, so she simply carefully started going 
forward. The climb wasn’t too steep, it was merely hilly, but she understood she would be 
exhausted sooner or later, and she wasn’t going to spend the night *near that thing*.

The walk seemed incredibly slow, and incredibly long. Mira could see the sun descending lower 
and lower. She stopped only to relieve herself, and she her anxiety started spiking again at the 
thought of not being able to find water soon.

*Inhale and exhale. Inhale and exhale. Inhale and exhale.*

Her mind raced, jumping from songs to pleading prayers. She briefly thought of her friends - what 
happened with Aidan and Ida?

Her legs were shaking, and she was so tired. She would not stop without water. Finally, when the 
sun set to low enough for it to be the late afternoon, she could hear the sound of water. She saw 
few deer passing by, which was weirdly reassuring. Deer were much better than monsters. Deer 
were normal.

What Mira found was not a river, but merely a creek. All the better for at least she wasn’t afraid to 
cross it. The water was splattering joyfully. She kneeled and drank hastily, wishing she had a bottle 
to fill. There was no shelter here, a lot of trees nearby, but no caves and no crooks, nowhere to hide 
from predators or worse.

She washed her hands and face, cold water invigorating her, and she briefly thought about 
cleaning her scraped knees, but the thought of undressing seemed far more vulnerable than leaving 
her wounds dirty. Who knew what lurked in that creek water anyway.

Mira decided to follow the creek downstream. She had maybe two or three hours before the dusk.

She couldn’t have walked more than fifteen minutes when she froze at the image in front of hair. 
She saw a rugged campsite by the riverbank, and then saw a…person? She walked closer. A 
person lying very still. The cold shiver when down her spine, and her heart started thudding again.

She stood there for maybe five minutes before deciding to move forward. Her nose confirmed the 
worst. Yes, that definitely was a human body, and a badly decomposed one. A man, it would seem, 
a young one. Five thoughts hit Mira’s head simultaneously. First, *oh my God*, a dead body. Second, 
he was *mauled* to death by something. Third, he was *weirdly* dressed. He looked like escaping 
from a renaissance fair. He wore a dirty tunic from something that seemed like very raw linen. His 
pants seemed some sort of  leather material, now shredded. He had a breastplate on his chest. 
Fourth, there was a sword on the other side of the campsite. A sword. And actual sword. Her fifth 
thought was that she was going to die, and the rising panic followed.

She took a deep breath again, and fought the urge to scream and run. She was pretty sure he was 
mauled by an animal - like a bear - although the thought of monsters was still lingering at her 
brain. She hadn’t seen any signs of bears, but clearly neither did the poor man.

She forced herself to look around, and she noticed a leather sack behind the sword. She slowly 
approached it, and picked it up, and put it around her neck. Hesitantly, she picked up the sword too, 
but it was too heavy for her to carry if she was to get away. She wouldn’t know what to do with it 
anyway. She needed to stay as close to the creek as possibly to have access to water. She wanted to
go far from the dead man, and she needed to hurry.

Her whole body ached. Mira felt exhausted. She still pushed forward.

She made the sign of the cross mid-air for the dead man, a force of habit, really.

She walked and walked and walked, her hip becoming more sore with every passing minute. The dusk was approaching mercilessly, and the riverbank was becoming more precarious and mountainous, with deep woods all around. Her heart was thudding again, faster and faster, when she looked up and saw what appeared to be cave opening. It seemed steep, and she was afraid she was gonna fall once climbing, but steep also could mean safer.

The last rays of daylight shone at the opening and she saw the small cave, tiny even, but there was no animals inside, no dead bodies, no monsters, nothing. This would suffice for now and Mira felt the sense of relief.

She wished she had anything to start the fire, but then again, she probably didn’t want to draw unnecessary attention either. She sat down and opened the dead man’s sack. Maybe she would still be able to use last minutes of daylight to see if he carried anything of use to her.

There were several objects in the sack. A flask, now empty. She decided to wash it tomorrow and fill it with water. Then she found a corked bottle with clear liquid substance inside. Pocketknife became handy. The liquid smelled of alcohol and tasted like vodka, burning her throat. She made a mental note to use it later to wash her hands and her scraped knees. He also had a small blanket tucked in the sack, smelling badly, and she took it anyway to cover herself. There was also a weird device that seemed to look a bit like matches… and yes, when she used it, it sparked. Perhaps she would start that fire after all.

He carried no wallet, no cellphone, nothing she could easily identify. She pushed the panicky thoughts aside.

Her knees hurt, and her hip ached incredibly. The whole day of walking made it worse. She decided to sit and lean her back at the side of the rock, but then the wall moved.

It seemed she had found a secret passage.

She peeked in hesitantly. The room was pretty lit, the last rays of sunshine falling through the skylight whole. She grabbed the sack and all the objects she already unpacked and decided to go in.

“Hello? Is anyone here?”, Mira whispered, and no one answered.

Someone definitely was staying at this hideout at some point though. She saw markings on the walls, several containers and chests. It seemed to be abandoned though. Nobody was here in weeks. There were no signs of fire, no signs of plates, utensils, or any sleeping arrangement. But there were things.

The sun was rapidly disappearing off the horizon, so Mira knew that she must start he fire to be able to look around. The skylight in the cave should have provided enough ventilation, or at least she hoped so. There was wood already inside, neatly stacked near the chest. The weird match mechanism worked well.

The fire burst out, providing immediate light and warm. She realized that someone could notice the smoke though the skylight, but perhaps the darkness of the night would cover it.
Mira proceeded to examine the chest and sacks here. Someone definitely left them here, probably to hide them. It wasn’t a good cave to live, the skylight opening didn’t prove to be a good protection from the elements. The wood on one of the chests looked slightly rotten. It could have gotten wet when the cave filled with the stormwater. Someone was smart to place the burlap sacks higher, on stones, so they seemed to be in a decent shape. Using her pocket knife, Mira opened the sacks.

Food! It was food inside. Mira’s stomach growled and she couldn’t believe her luck. It was weird looking food, some sort of dried crackers or bread, and between linens she found hard cheese and some sort of jerky. She both felt relieved and felt the creeping fear growing in her again.

This was not normal food. As in, it wasn’t modern food. Nothing was canned, nothing was packed in plastic. She would never ever tried to eat unknown jerky or cheese, but she had a sinking feeling that nothing was going to be normal now, and she had no choice.

She smelled the food carefully, and it seemed fine. Not the greatest test for food safety, she thought bitterly, but better than nothing. She bit a little bit of cheese, and it was sharp and good. She ate a good amount. The fire was cracking right behind there, warming up the cave pleasantly.

Mira had trouble opening the chest and her Victorinox came in handy again. The chest was wooden, and giant, really, if she curled, it could have held herself.

Inside there were several cloaks there, lots of fabric, little colorful phials filled with strange looking liquids, and a several carved canes with jewels on top that looked like something… magical. Staves? Did they look like staves?.

Mira shook her head rapidly. She was a reasonable person, she was technically a doctor, for goodness sake, even if she graduated just a couple months before. She did not believe in magic or monsters. She did believe in God, and that was the farthest Mira could take it. She believed in sacred, not exactly supernatural.

She sat by the fire and started thinking.

What happened? They camped for a weekend with Ida and Aidan. Mira had know Ida for six years, since the beginning of their medical studies, and Ida was the closest person to her in the entire world. That girl always had always been adventurous and fun. Ida met Aidan a year ago, and he was from across the pond, but now he visited her in the UK for few weeks, and Ida insisted they go camping so Aidan could bond with her friends.

There were supposed to be more than just three of them, but two people had to suddenly cancel, the joys of adulthood. It still was a nice and lovely trip, until yesterday, when Ida fell and sprained her ankle. They decided for Aidan to escort Ida to one of the seasonal clinic, and then come back to help Mira carry the tent and the backpacks back. Not a big deal. They weren’t exactly in the middle of wilderness. It was a popular tourist spot.

In fact, as far as Mira could tell, she indeed had a lovely few hours on her own, wandering a bit, taking photos, laying on the blanket and reading and relaxing. The weather was beautiful and the world was quiet and she felt safe.

Then, something weird happened very fast. She was walking back to the campsite, when suddenly everything went dark, very dark. She felt the chill closing on her body, and wind speeding up, and she didn’t know what to do, so she did the first thing her body told her to do.

She fell on the ground, curled in fetal position and covered her head.
Very loud voice of thunder penetrated her ears.

And then Mira started falling.

_____________

Five days had passed since Mira found the cave. She was only leaving it twice daily. Overwhelmed by her anxiety, she still wasn’t brave enough to start going further downstream, although she knew that this was the best way of finding someone, something, some sort of civilization. The food sustained her, and the creek was a good source of water she gathered each morning, and it allowed her to wash her hands and face. She marked each passing there with a pocketknife on the rock face, and Mira felt she was going fucking insane.

She was convinced she was somewhere else. As in, in another world. In another dimension. Somewhere else. With each passing day, with each pang of pain she grew more and more convinced that whatever this was, it was not on earth. It was absurd, literally the stupidest thing she had ever thought of, but somehow it was also the truth. She discounted the time travel idea because of monsters and then laughed panicked at her own process of thinking.

She didn’t know what happened to Ida and Aidan. She did not know what happened to her. She knew she did not die, because her body felt a little bit too real.

She knew she needed to start moving. If this was anything like earth, the weather would get colder. She would run out of food. Something or someone would find her. Nonetheless, Mira couldn’t quite bring up the courage to leave. Her hip and legs were initially too painful, but now she felt slightly better and she knew she was stalling.

Perhaps she was stalling because she wasn’t sure where she was, whether she would even be able to explain anything. It was a generous assumption that whoever was inhabiting this… reality would be able to understand her. There was a dead man in the woods who carried a sword. Who knew what was happening here exactly?

She slept irregularly, and wept quietly each day. Her curls have matted from not being washed, but she couldn’t bring herself to wash more than the strategic parts of her body, and she didn’t have soaps. Her body ached from sleeping on the ground in the cave. Mira was in despair. She hadn’t prayed in the last two days.

So on the fifth day, after gathering water Mira finally started packing the sack. She put the cloak coat on herself - it was gray and rough in fabric, nothing fancy but at least it covered her. She carefully packed as much food as she was able to, when suddenly she froze, hearing the voices outside.

There was no time to block the entrance to the secret room without making tons of noise, and Mira wasn’t about to risk that, so she just grabbed her pocketknife quickly. She clung to the rock wall, hiding in the shadows.

The footsteps were coming closer.

“I didn’t realize we were going hopping uphill like mountain rams.”, a male voice complained, “What are we even looking for so close to the wilds?”

“For someone who claims to be an avid adventurer, Varric, you sure don’t seem to enjoy nature”, another male voice, lighter and softer, observed.

First thought: Fuck. Men. That was not a good news for a lost woman in any world she could think
of. Another: How, just how were they speaking English? She tried to make her breathing quieter, an absurd endeavor in the first place.

“Scout Harding mentioned that there might be an apostate stash somewhere in the area. We can’t quite pass up on that.”, the light soft male voice added. “I am amazed that we still find rogue templars and apostates in the woods. It had been months since the fighting officially stopped. And templars without their lyrium…”

Mira did not comprehend half of his words.

“It seems an awfully long detour. All I’m saying”, a man called Varric sighed, “is an even terrain too much to ask?”

Fuck. They were definitely coming to search that cave. Also, mages? Inquisition?

“Is there a problem, dwarf?”, a serious voice, undoubtedly female, questioned bitterly.

*Dwarf?*

A woman. That made Mira feel slightly, slightly bit better.

“You might be used to traipsing through the countryside—punching dragons, interrogating people, or whatever it is you did before this. I’m from the city”, Varric complained.

*Dragons?!!*

A woman laughed in response.

“All right”, she said. “We should make sure no one is there. I’ve had enough combat for one day.”

“Don’t be paranoid, Seeker. There’s no one there. Surely that apostate four nights ago…”

“Footprints on the ground”, the woman’s voice got low.

*Fuck.*

There was no escape, Mira had realized that. And whoever those three individuals were, they already mentioned combat. And they did notice her footprints already. She had no chance, and it probably was better if she was as upfront as she could be.

The individuals stopped talking, and Mira imagined they gestured to ambush and attack her. There was no point in waiting. She took a deep breath, and said:

“Wait! I’m here.”

There was silence and then she heard the female voice speaking. The female definitely seemed to be a leader.

“Are you armed Are you a mage??”

“I…, uhm, I have a small knife in my hand. I’m… I’m not a mage”, Mira swallowed the saliva slowly, “is it all right if I drop it and walk out?”

“Yes”, the female voice sounded a bit surprised, “Do that. But do it slowly.”

Mira put her pocketknife carefully on the ground and kicked outside. She slowly emerged from the
hidden cave room into the cave with her arms raised, and then she walked out of the cave entirely. The sun was shining brightly, and she blinked several times.

In front of her eyes where indeed three individuals. The woman was dressed in an armor, an actual medieval-like armor, with some eye symbol on her chest. The armor looked heavy, and she carried a shield and a sword, readied for the attack now. The woman was tall, much taller than Mira, with short hair, and one braid crowned around her forehead. She looked very impressive, and very serious. The other men made her gasp. One was actually a dwarf, like a fantasy stories dwarf. He had a huge necklace on his neck, and his shirt was heavily unbuttoned, revealing hairy chest. He was undoubtedly holding what seemed like a crossbow, not aiming at her just yet, but if he wanted, he could kill her that instant, she had no doubt. The third men was thin and bald. He had a long tunic and long vest, and he was undoubtedly holding a stick just like the ones she had found in the cave. His ears were long and pointy too,

“Where am I?”, Mira’s voice came out high pitched and scared, more scared than she hoped.

“Who are you?”, the short haired warrior asked at the same time.

“I…My name is Mira”, she replied, “and I don’t know what happened to me or where I am”.

The woman was looking at her sternly. Mira felt the tears coming to her eyes. They wouldn’t believer her. She was going to die. Mira fell on her knees and started crying, tears frantically falling on her cheeks, her nose snotty. Her body finally released all of the stress of the last few days.

“Seeker”, the dwarf interjected, “she looks terrified.”

“Solas”, the woman replied, “move and use your barrier. I just want to…”

Mira started hiccuping from crying so hard. She put her hands to her face, and closed her eyes. She didn’t even want to what was coming.

And then, nothing happened. All was still except the loud cries and breathy hiccup.

“She’s not a mage”, the terrifying woman said.

“No, Cassandra, she’s not”, the voice belonging to an elf said, “I believe we should talk with her. Mira, was it? Mira? We’re not going to hurt you. We just need to ask you few questions.”

Mira’s cries were dissipating a little bit, the whole wave of emotions calming now. She was still terrified, but she calmed herself down enough to speak.

“Sure, just ask.”

“We will sit with you”, said the elf, gesturing at his companions, “My name is Solas. This is Lady Cassandra and Varric. Tell us how you got here. Tell us everything”.

And Mira did just that.

She told them how she spent time with her friends, got left alone, walked around the woods on the beautiful day, and suddenly it got dark and she started falling despite being on solid ground. She told them how she fell, and hit her hip, and how she saw the green vortex above her head and monsters around it, and how she started running. She told them how she walked uphill far away from where the monsters where, how she found the creek and followed its path, and how she found a dead man’s body and took his sack, and how she camped here for few days after finding food. She told them how she found objects she couldn’t understand, and how she didn’t understand
almost anything of reality surrounding her. She said all of that completely hopeless, thinking there was no way they would ever believe her. The woman tried to interject many times as Mira was speaking, but a man named Solas, *the man elf named Solas* kept gesturing for her to remain quiet. She seemed discontent but she listened. The dwarf, named Varric just stared at Mira very intently.

Mira could feel her cheeks hot and inflamed from crying. She felt dirty and sweaty, and her voice trembled, but she looked them in the eye as the told them her story. When she finished, the companions seemed to be speechless.

“That shit is bonkers”, Varric said.

“Varric…”, Cassandra started.

“No, Seeker. This shit is fucking bonkers, c’mon.”

“She said she fell through the rift”, Solas gasped, “no one fell through the rift except…”

“Except the Inquisitor”, Cassandra added. “Solas, is it even remotely possible?”

“I… I am honestly not sure. Perhaps, actually. Perhaps. We never knew if our world was the only one despite what your precious Chantry suggested and some sources I encountered in my journeys across the Fade…”

“Or she could be lying”, Cassandra bitterly interrupted

“I am here”, Mira interrupted, “And I swear to you on everything I know, I am not lying to you. Look at me.”

She took of the cloak she was, and revealed her outfit, the one she still wore after five days. Blue washed straight jeans, beige Timberlands and her beloved sweatshirt with bird print.

“Do I look like anyone you’ve seen?”.

They all three just stared at her.

“I admit I have never seen an outfit like yours but I am sure…”, Cassandra started.

“Andraste’s tits, Seeker!”

The warrior sighted.

“Are your things inside?”, she asked.

“I mean… There’s only one thing I have from my world. The pocketknife you took. But I have a dead man’s sack I have been using. He was dead when I found him, he seemed to be mauled by some…”


“Bear”, she finished, eyes wide open.

“We killed that bear this morning”, Varric noted, “He attacked our campsite, little shithead. Solas staggered him and I run into Cassandra’s tent…”

“VARRIC.”, Cassandra growled, “Go grab Mira’s sack, and go grab the loot we came for. Solas, help him. Mira, you’re staying with me. I won’t give you your knife, but I won’t shackle you
either. Behave, and nothing bad will happened, and we’re reach Skyhold in few days if we start walking now. I won’t shackle you…”

“What a change of attitude”, Varric’s voice muttered from the cave, and The Seeker made a face, but ignored Varric’s words.

“I won’t shackle you, but disobey me, and I will not hesitate to kill you. Understood?”

“Yes.”

She wasn’t going to try to ran away from three armed people in the middle of wilderness in the world she had no idea about. Prisoner or not, the journey meant she at least stood some minor chance of survival.

“Put that cloak back”, Seeker ordered. “It’s better that way”.

They didn’t give her the sack back, but they didn’t order her to carry anything either.

“We couldn’t climb here with the horses, but we left them by the campsite. We walk for couple hours and then ride. Are you injured? Are you able to walk?”

“Uhm”, Mira started, “I am fine. My hip improved greatly in the last few days. I can walk.”

“Good. Let’s go then”.

Chapter End Notes

Things will slowly be speeding up when Mira reaches Skyhold.
Mid to later August; 9:42 Dragon, Skyhold

Solemnity surrounded Skyhold as they reminisced the first anniversary of the Conclave’s explosion. The Chantry was so full they couldn’t fit everyone that wanted to be there. The dinner followed, gathering the guest and the Inquisition’s command. Delrin attended as it was his duty. The Inquisitor gave the speech about remembering the fallen, the importance of the united effort to defeat Corypheus, and the hope for the world to come. It was a good speech, without the shadow of a doubt written by the Ambassador, showcasing her talent for words. The nobles nodded, impressed. Barris felt drained that day, in body and soul. He definitely did not get adequate sleep.

There was still so much to do. The Inquisition invested a lot of time to develop relationships to secure funding and alliances. The work was tedious. They had managed to rebuilt Skyhold by Wintermarch 9:42. It took a lot of effort of the army and the scouts to find and haul all the resources to the fortress, from masonry stone to logs of wood. The roads were constructed or rediscovered, establishing proper trade routes and allowing to receive dignitaries.

The pace was relentless and yet everything dragged on at the same time. Progress was hard to track, but at least there was progress, thank the Maker. Delrin had been on close to a dozen of assignments since they had found the Frostbacks fortress. He participated in some missions alongside the Inner Circle at first, but later he had found his own squadron to command. There was one job in Ansburg where he deployed alone and got the city guards to lead. He much favored ordering the men and women he had a chance to train the proper way himself.

Several days after the anniversary of the Conclave explosion, the training for the next assignment was at full speed, and Delrin was assessing his squadron with a sharp eye. He admitted a certain pride while looking at them. So much had changed since the first time he led them out of Skyhold gates. Back then, they were a group of diverse people with backgrounds so different that the cooperation seemed borderline impossible. Now they were brothers and sisters in arms. He had known only two of them beforehand, the two Templars that survived the nightmare at Therinfal Redoubt.

Clarissa Thornhall was his official Second-in-Command. Originally from Jaiden Circle and Fereldan through and through, she was a cautious and empathic Templar with extraordinary control over her magic-negating abilities. That control surprised Delrin because he knew she used smaller doses of lyrium than allowed. Clarissa never seemed to struggle with her intake. The Templar showing resilience to dependence was invaluable in the light of the existence of the red lyrium and dangers that came with it. Red lyrium persisted in the areas where they fought. It was hard for
the Templars, but Clarissa handled it better than most.

Arthur Oswin, a relative of Bann Loren, came from an affluent family in Eastern Ferelden. Barris had met Arthur during the Dragon’s Peak mission, although they had never worked together afterwards, until the Inquisition. Arthur stationed at Kinloch Hold for the last several years, but he had also lived in the Free Marches before that. Thanks to his noble origin, he was one of the few men within the Order that received permission to marry. His wife was a Kendell, and her family provided for her even after the wedding. They had two small children. The man was a cautious fighter, a good tactician, and he brought enough experience to never be careless in the field.

The last Templar in Delrin’s squadron was no other than Simon Trevelyan, the Inquisitor’s own baby brother from the Ostwick Circle. Barris was sure that many thought he chose Simon for his connection to Maxwell himself, but nothing could be further from the truth. Simon passed his vigil just two years ago, and he was inexperienced. He had a lot of talent and eagerness, but the most important trait he possessed was his lack of fear towards magic. Delrin recalled that day when he was walking around the fighting grounds, observing the mages and the Templars practicing together under Cullen’s watchful eye. The tension was undeniable. The fear and resentment showed on the faces of many Templars. Training with combat magic, allowing it, teaching it had been unthinkable in most Circles aside of exceptions made for Knight-Enchanters. He saw Simon working with one of the Senior Enchanters. Simon did not flinch and did not get angry when he got hit by the spell. He observed the Senior Enchanter relax over the course of training. Men like Simon were to guide the change if it would last beyond the Inquisition.

Zuzu Lavellan was another young and unseasoned member recruited to the squadron. Zuzu got uprooted as a Dalish child and forced into the Circle at the age of six, one of the youngest children he had ever heard of. She had no vallaslin on her face, the mark of being taken away early. All her magical education revolved around the Circle tradition. If Delrin hadn’t read her file, he would have never assumed the Dalish heritage. She arrived from Ostwick Circle just like Simon, but had interacted a little with him before. When Ostwick Circle ultimately rebelled, she escaped. Zuzu told Delrin that she considered finding her clan, but she had no idea where to start, and it all seemed too late and too daunting. Simon encountered her in Kirkwall while trying to find passage to the south to join his brother and recruited her for the Inquisition. Simon and Zuzu were lucky to not be present for Haven’s destruction. Instead they arrived right to Skyhold, being among the first recruits to do so. They grew to be close friends after several months under his command, and he wondered if he should concern himself with the possibility of romance flourishing between them. The Inquisition did not outright forbid fraternization though, even though the implications could be serious. Zuzu had a lot of power and her magical expression came to her naturally. The force of her casting stunned even him, but she needed to control it better. Delrin was sure she could become one of the most capable combat mages he’d ever seen. Lavellan also was the most cheerful and optimistic person in the squadron, and as much as everyone would deny it, she lifted the mood all the time.

Beau Monfort was another mage in the group, from Ghislain Circle. The Junior Enchanter when the war erupted, Beau carried himself as a confident man, cautious and considerate in his magic, complete opposite of Zuzu. Those two mocked each other mercilessly. Beau was a rather conservative Aequitarian. He needed little guidance during the battle. Quick and witty, he made independent decisions and he almost always chose the correct actions. Many Circle mages struggled with using magic in combat, the aftermath of not being allowed to for so long. Beau’s qualities were uncommon, and his commitment unmatched. He always kept track of his companions positions at all times, and he had never cast on accident, nor had he ever allowed his teammates to negate his magic.

Two rogues under his command; true rogues, not Templars with archery abilities Delrin was used
to; were twin surface dwarf brothers, Merle and Morve. They both worked for many mercenary groups, including Tal Vashoth at one point, and undeniably had some criminal experience too. The Nightingale could have recruited them, perhaps she even had, but Delrin did not care. He trusted them enough, and he definitely needed that particular skill set for his squadron, anyway. Every rogue in Skyhold was Leliana’s agent or had experience far more precarious than petty theft and questionable mercenary work. Morve was a small archer, an expert at subterfuge and stealth. Merle was a dagger user, and one of the fastest Delrin had ever seen. They were both men of few words. Merle fancied a server girl at Herald’s Rest, Agatha, and he would try to bring her gifts from each of their missions. Zuzu made it her personal quest to help, something that made Merle scoff at her and show gratitude at the same time.

The last member of his squadron and the one that Delrin depended on the most was Kirke Janion. Kirke was older than him by a decade or so, and she had twenty years of experience as a guard around various Marcher cities. She was transferred to Kirkwall after the Gallows blew up where she met Cullen during the restoration efforts and followed him to Haven. Her swordsmanship had a mark of excellence, but years and years of investigative experience made her skills shine. City guards worked differently from soldiers and mercenaries. They took part in fewer battles but conducted more investigations. Kirke was observant, inquisitive and smart, seeking innovative solutions during their missions. Cullen got pretty irritated when Delrin snatched Kirke for his squadron. To be honest, the Jims of the Inquisition had nothing on her. He leaned on Kirke so often. Surprisingly, she had shown no interest in leading herself. He would recommend her gladly to run her own squadron. She had a brain twice as big as Fletcher’s. Thank the Maker, for some reason she wanted to stay in the squadron.

“Argh,” Zuzu’s light voice distracted Barris from his thoughts. She was gasping for air. “Running… is… torture.”

“You won’t complain when we’ll be running from the Red Templars, Zuz,” Simon noted, poking at her. “Remember the Coast? It was pretty dicey there at one point.”

“It’s just your job to… protect me? I am but a little mage…,” she winked at Simon whose face turned red. Kirke rolled her eyes. Just like Delrin, she was not fond of the two kids flirting, but to be fair, they had never progressed beyond the playful banter.

“Hey there! Less talking, more running. Few more laps!” he shouted trailing behind them.

He put a large emphasis on physical fitness and endurance after recent events. Their last mission was around the Storm Coast, and as Simon said, it became dicey. Mages were not prepared for marching and climbing in the mud. Red lyrium seemed to have given the Red Templars impossible speed and stamina. The whole operation took them over a week longer than he had planned for, so he decided to include more physical exercises in their training, particularly for speed and stamina.

Now they were running around the whole training grounds at too early of an hour. It had barely dawned. Even the Commander had not gotten to the grounds himself, and Cullen never slept.

“That is our punishment,” Kirke hissed. “And dare I say it, well fucking deserved.”

“The rain was a bitch,” Morve joined the conversation. “I hate rain.”

“Yeah, it’s never the bad guys bothered by the weather,” Kirke laughed, “Darkspawn, Red Templars… At least I hope the Venatori complain about running around soaked.”

Clarissa and Arthur never complained. The Templar training did not allow for such foolishness, Delrin knew that very well. As an experienced field officer he recognized that allowing some
whining and banter was good for the morale. When they deployed for their first mission together to Val Colline nobody talked with each other, there was no understanding, no trust. After three weeks of travel, fighting and trying to keep each other alive, distrust changed into respect, and respect changed into appreciation. He pretended to scoff at some talks between his squadron, but secretly he was glad they felt comfortable with each other.

Every leader within the Inquisition had their own style of commanding. Cullen was stern and strong, and he would not fraternize too much. Delrin drank ale and played chess with the Commander quite the few times, but you wouldn't catch Cullen drinking with Scout Jim. Cullen’s job was the hardest, he was the general for the whole Inquisition. Delrin realized it could be his job had anything happened to the Commander, at least in theory. They had attended the war meetings together. In all honesty, Barris preferred to be in the field with fewer people, dealing with specific threats.

Rylen was a friendly chap, perhaps the only one who allowed his men to call him by his first name. Enchanter Ellendra, one of the mage leaders was friendly and warm, but she preferred to keep it formal, and so did Delrin. To his men, he was always “Captain Barris” or just “Captain”. To his friends, he was “Barris”. No one called him by his first name.

“All right!” they stopped at last. Everyone was drenched in sweat, him included. Zuzu was hyperventilating. “Good job. You’re still keeping a steady breath… most of you.”

“I am sorry that I haven’t trained physically in the Circle, it’s not like I—”

“It’s fine, Zuzu,” he calmed the girl down. “Keep up your energy. We’re dueling today one on one. Captain Fletcher’s men.”

“Yesss,” she hissed, satisfied. “That’s what I need after this senseless and cruel… Sorry, Captain. Sorry. It wasn’t senseless, I guess. Maybe a little cruel. Sorry. Sorry. Ha! Can we choose who our opponents are? I have a score to settle with—”

“Me and Captain Fletcher decide that to amplify your training, as usual,” he emphasized the last word.

Arthur tried to hide his smile. The man had to remember the strong tradition of dueling among the Templars within the Circles, one of the few sources of entertainment they could partake in. Barris knew that when Arthur was Zuzu’s age, he was asking the same questions as her, with equal enthusiasm. They all were.

“Having said that,” he looked at his squadron, now invigorated by the perspective of the duel. Playful rivalry was the biggest source of motivation, and for many young recruits it was also the source of pride and satisfaction. Perhaps a source of gambling on the side, too. “We fight until we yield, so you don’t have to restrain yourself too much. As your commanding officer, I would rather implore you—”

“To kick their asses?” Zuzu’s innocent voice interrupted him. He should have scolded her for that.

“To kick their asses,” he agreed instead, hiding his own smirk.

Chapter End Notes
I do realize it's a lot of original characters. They do appear throughout the story though regularly as mine characters with their own sense of development.

Also, patience. Mira and Delrin will meet soon.
Chapter Summary

The chapter in which Mira meets many from the Inquisition and makes the choice regarding her future in Thedas.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Late August, 9:42 Dragon, Skyhold

They arrived at Skyhold in the middle of the night. Nobody paid attention to Mira when Seeker told her to cover her head with a hood. No guard stopped them; no one even tried to question Cassandra over who Mira was. The same thing happened when they met other soldiers or scouts during their journey. No one gave her the second look once Cassandra explained she was escorting an important prisoner.

The road was long and tiresome. Mira stayed quiet the whole time. The nightmares plagued her dreams even though she couldn’t remember them upon waking up. She slept poorly. There were many questions lingering in her head, but silence seemed safer after all.

She missed Ida so much. There was this hidden fear deep inside of her that she would never see her friends again. That she would never see the people she loved again. That she would never see her world again.

The only person who seemed to want to start a conversation with her was Varric, but Cassandra interjected every time, giving him a very stern and terrifying look. Solas studied Mira in a way that made her uncomfortable, and the Seeker seemed just irritated the whole time.

Nobody was cruel to Mira, no one was even rude, but the mood was tense enough to be palatable. No doubt Seeker was the one calling the shots, and while Mira couldn’t overhear the words, the warrior sometimes pulled either Varric or Solas away from the camp to exchange opinions or maybe simply to order them around.

And now Mira was keeping her head down, her hooded cloak limiting her visibility. Cassandra was leading her somewhere, probably to the dungeons or whatever prison existed here. Mira expected to remain under arrest or for them to at least interrogate her. As long as she was alive…

That no one mistreated her so far gave her some semblance of hope.

They seemed to pass through the area that could have been the prison. She could see the rough stone on the floor, and she could see the bars on the side of the jail. They didn’t stop there though and spent a good ten or fifteen minutes going up in a circular motion. Mira started getting dizzy, but she followed Cassandra’s instructions carefully. At this point she was certain that it was cooperation, not resistance, that was her best bet to survive.

When they finally arrived, she was led into the room and Cassandra took off her cloak. The room
was spacious. Furniture were made of light wood with intricate carvings. The rug and fabric were cream and plushy. Huge windows made from stained glass lit the space very well. The stain class represented the same symbol that Seeker wore on her chest. The symbol of the Inquisition, presumably.

Two women awaited them. The first one, dressed in silky grays and purples, had straight red hair up to hair chin. Her face was slim and pretty, her eyes betrayed a formidable and unapologetic spirit. The second woman was a classic beauty, with olive skin and dark wavy hair flowing around her face. She smiled, and there was something very personable about that smile.

The redhead - The Spymaster, as she called herself, or maybe that was the threat - ordered Mira to sit down and tell her story in excruciating details. She did, once again, feeling tired and growing anxious.

The three woman looked at her, scrutinizing her, as Mira imagined. She thought she should feel rather grateful she was talking to other women though. The world seemed very medievalesque, and she didn’t wish to be sent back into the past if this was earth. Except this wasn’t earth, this wasn’t the past, it wasn’t anything recognizable, and there was magic here and monsters, and Mira didn’t quite know how to model her behavior to respond to this environment. Apparently women could be in power here though.

They explained that she was to remain under guard until further interviews. The brunette assured her she would be comfortable and under care, and later they would provide her with an opportunity to bathe and groom herself.

It’s been nine fucking days without a proper bath and in the same clothing, Mira thought bitterly. She knew she smelled terrible and sitting in those nicely decorated quarters made her even more self conscious. Sure, she camped before, but she never was afraid to take care of basic hygiene. Cassandra did not allow much moments of privacy except to allow for quick wiping or washing her face. Mira’s hair felt matted and in clumps, her fingernails were black, and her clothes crusted from sweat. She tried to take the least space sitting on that plushy chair and trying to make herself disappear. They gave her tea and light snacks though, and Mira studied her dirty hands while adding sugar to the exquisite and dainty teacup.

It was all beyond ludicrous. She would laugh if she wasn’t so scared.

She felt her heart race again, and her eyes filled with tears. Cassandra was looking out of the window, and Mira turned her head to hide herself. They sat in complete and awkward silence.

It seemed like an eternity, but then the door opened and others came in, and the series of interviews followed. At first it was Solas and two other people whom Mira had never seen before. Solas was nothing but courteous, but he didn’t seem particularly warm or encouraging. He addressed her by her first name and she clung to it as a sign of hope that maybe they see her as a person.

“Oh my, what do we have here?”, another man asked, “They promised a creature from another world, and yet here I see… you. And you’re an ordinary woman. I feel almost disappointed”. The man’s voice was sarcastic, but he didn’t seem scary. The eyes looking at her were curious, and his whole face was classical handsome, and he himself was groomed, with pomade in his hair and styled mustache. He flinched, his nose standing close to Mira, and she felt her cheeks burning in shame. And yes, he carried a staff too. He must have been one of the mages.

“Don’t be crude, Dorian, the girl is clearly terrified. One would hope that they teach manners in the Imperium. Or is savior-vivre gone alongside proper magical precautions?.” The woman remarked coolly. She wore an elegant and revealing outfit, with elaborate headpiece. Dorian muttered
something sarcastic in response, but Mira got distracted in her thoughts yet again.

She was asked to repeat the story again. Her throat hurt. The mages wave their hands over her, and Mira felt tingling on her skin, but nothing seemed to happen beyond that. The result satisfied them though.

“You’re not a mage. Not a demon either. Not a spirit either, if you insist on making that distinction right now, Solas.,” Dorian remarked as if it was some news to Mira. Her supposed magic seemed to be their main consideration.

She just looked at them, puzzled.

“She fell through the Rift,” Solas remarked as she wasn’t there. “She claims to be from another world, as in… beyond the Veil.”

“Truly,” Dorian sighed, “I wish I could protest and say it wasn’t possible, but the last year provided a spectacular amount of impossible already. I cannot discount that. And look what she’s wearing! To think you have insinuated that this might be the clothing produced in Tevinter, Cassandra. I feel personally wounded. Wars had been started for lesser offenses.”

“You’re a rift mage, Solas. I admit that it is your area of expertise, even for an apostate,” the mage woman rushed, “the Fade is your specialty, as you incessantly claim. How is that even possible?”

“I have encountered nothing like that within journeys in the Fade, but I presume it’s possible in theory. The Elvhen believed in multiple worlds, with impermeable barriers, not what your precious Chantry claims nowadays. Could the Breach cause minuscule tears on the other side of the Veil and break those barriers? Is Veil even two dimensional, or does it function outside of what we imagine? This is all very theoretical, but…”

“Ugh. What we need to know is if this could happen again and if Corypheus could use…,” Cassandra glowered at the mages while gesturing at Mira.

Mira did not know what the fuck were Venatori and Corypheus. She actually did not like that they talked so openly in front of her. What if she overheard something they regret sharing later? Would they kill her? Her heart was racing again.

“In theory, of course. But the probability of such an event is miniscule. We’d rather see the next Blight today, I am afraid. I have no doubts Corypheus and Venatori would show interest…”

“Wait,” Mira heard her voice shake, “you don’t know why I am here, and there’s no way, not even with your fucking magic, for me to ever go back where I came from?”

They looked at her like they saw her for the first time.

“No, my darling,” Vivienne said. “I am afraid none of us could even theorize how to do it, assuming your story is true.”

And Mira cried. Sitting in the plushy chair in the luxurious room, interrogated by three mages, with Cassandra as the witness, she burst out crying, cheeks red, hands covering her face, snot coming out of her nose. She didn’t even care if they saw that. She was already stinky and dirty, so what if they saw her agony? She stopped paying attention to the outside, covering her face with her hands. The mages left and Mira continued crying, and more people came to ask her questions, and it became difficult to answer them. There was a warrior with a scar on his lip, looking very uncomfortable as he listened to her story, then mumbling something about Cassandra how “his silence didn’t work on her”, whatever that could mean.
There was yet another one, sending like a proper British gentleman, nodding as she mumbled words while wiping out her nose using the handkerchief the previous man graciously gave her.

Then there was... Mira screamed when he came in. A giant, a horned half-naked giant with tattoos all over his chest, looking like he could kill Mira with his bare hands. Mira's crying intensified when she looked at him.

“I gather you did not warn the poor girl,” he scoffed at Cassandra. “I’m the Iron Bull. I won’t hurt you, kitten. It’s just a little talk. Have you ever seen a Qunari?” He had a warm, nice voice.

Mira shook her head. “I don’t what Qu... nari is.”

“It’s me. I’m the Qunari. Now I know you’ve answered multiple questions already, but bear with me here and try to do it once more. It’s the last time, I promise.”

Mira calmed down a bit and repeated everything she knew once again. She avoided looking at the... Qunari, was it? He was looking at her the whole time.

“I am sorry,” she said at the end. “I’m sorry I screamed looking at you. I didn’t mean to be disrespectful or to dehumanize you...”

He laughed. “Dehumanize? That’s rather a compliment. She’s good.” He remarked that Cassandra. “My word.”

And that was it. It was her and Cassandra alone again. Mira’s eyes were so puffed up from crying she could barely open them to look at the Seeker. Cassandra tightened her lips and looked frazzled.

The door opened again, and the Spymaster appeared.

“Vivienne said she can watch over the girl in her quarters. You can escort her, and then we meet up,” yet again they talked about her as she wasn’t there.

Another few minutes of walking, and she ended up in yet another luxurious suite. There were two large rooms, furnished in creams and pale blues, silver as decor. Mira scanned the sitting area with a desk, coaches and chairs and a coffee table, and the big double door revealed a spacious and luxurious bedroom.

Vivienne turned out to be the woman who took part in her interrogations. She introduced herself as “Enchanter Vivienne” and took over Mira, scrutinizing her. Mira tried her best to stand tall and not look disgusting, although she knew she was disgusting at the moment.

It was then when Vivienne led her through another door to... the bathroom. The proper bathroom. There was a recognizable toiler, a shower sculpted from copper-like metal, the giant free standing tub in front of the room, and...

“There’s plumbing. Plumbing exists,” Mira remarked, shocked.

“Of course there’s plumbing, darling,” Enchanter frowned. “It pleases me that you know what it is”. The Enchanter then gave her soaps and shampoos and conditioners and oils and towels and combs and even razors, just about everything Mira needed. Regardless of how scary Enchanter Vivienne seemed, to Mira she was the single most precious person in the world at the moment.

“Take as long as you need,” the mage added and left the room, leaving Mira alone.
Mira stood still for a minute and then walked to the large mirror standing near the sink and inspected herself. She did not recognize her own reflection. Her hair matted and dried out. It did not even look copper anymore, just grayish-brown from all the dirt and dust. Mira couldn’t even comprehend how she got so dirty. Her face was somewhat clean, but she had few small cuts on it, and her eyebrows were full of mud too. Her clothing looked disgusting, and she took it off. She lost some weight in those short nine days, although her figure remained curvy. Her hip bruise was prominent, almost covering the large tattoo Mira had in that area. She had more bruising and blemishes alongside her legs and hands. Her back looked good, but one of her sides was covered in marks too.

Mira did not even want to think what they’d think of the ink adorning her body, although The Iron Bull seemed to have some on his chest. She had four prominent tattoos, but they all were in places generally invisible underneath the regular clothing.

The worst change that Mira saw in herself how lost and terrified she looked.

The water was warm and fresh, glorious. Mira took the shower first to get rid of all the yuck, and then soaked in the bathtub, conditioning her hair. The cosmetics Madame de Fer gave her smelled wonderful; she recognized honey and… something like lemon or verbena, fresh and tangy.

She combed her hair, getting rid of all the knots. After putting on a robe, she glanced at herself yet again and finally recognized the face looking back at her.

Mira did not know what future would hold, but she hoped that she would face tomorrow stronger, at the very least clean and dignified.

“You certainly look much better, darling,” the Enchanter approved. “You’re welcome to take my bed for a few hours; the sheets are fresh. The Inquisitor will ask you to the meeting today, I am sure, so you should rest.”

“I…,” Mira hesitated but said less than more yet again. “Thank you, Enchanter Vivienne. I appreciate it.”

Mira was sitting across the table from the Inquisitor Maxwell Trevelyan, the Spymaster named Leliana and the Ambassador Josephine Montilyet and the Seeker Cassandra Pentaghast. This time they introduced themselves. The Inquisitor was a man with that spoke what seemed the proper BBC British. He was the man who tried to be comforting yesterday. Mira did not cry today, and she felt more like herself, responding to questions coherently.

It took a lot of control and willpower to remain calm, and Mira put an effort. Everyone seemed to be more respectful towards her too. She sat through two hours of explanations of where she was exactly and what was happening. She learned about Thedas and it’s few countries, though she couldn’t quit retain all the details. Ambassador Montilyet did most of the talking, with the Spymaster and the Seeker adding few remarks here and there. The Inquisitor remained silent, preferring letting others handle the situation. A lot of details were blurry and confusing, but the core information was that Thedas was facing the world-ending threat linked to the existence of vortices like the one she fell out through. They called those rifts, apparently. The main bad actor, Corypheus, tried to tear the Veil to walk through the Fade for… well, he had some reason that Mira still didn’t grasp. She barely comprehended the concept of the Fade or what the Veil was. What she could understand was that she crossed the Fade landing in Thedas, and thus she might be of an interest to this Corypheus or his minions. That message was clear. It was also clear that there was some war that just ended between mages and Templars, and that Templars had nothing to do
with Templars of her world. There was also another civil war happening in some French-sounding country too. Thedas soaked in bloody conflicts. Oh, and the monsters were not monsters, they were demons. The only hope to stop all of this was the Inquisition, and God - the Maker- as they called God here, chose the Inquisitor to save the world. By some grace nobody thought what happened to Mira was divine intervention. It was more one time cosmic event resulting from the perfect storm of improbable circumstances relating to the fact that the Veil tore and demons were falling out of the sky. Needless to say, the world was in peril and dangerous, and Mira was told that hiding her identity was imperative, and that she needed to hide her identity forever.

Mira was getting a headache as she listened to the Spymaster listing all the things that she should not do, aware how unprepared she was to navigate Thedas. It was a miracle they even spoke the same language.

The Spymaster just listed all the reasons Mira could not pass for a kitchen maid or a servant. The Spymaster also said that Mira was pretty. Three times. Now, once could be construed as a compliment, three times was rather a warning that she would be noticed. She doubted the Inquisitor caught that, but she certainly understood.

“Looking at you, it’s clear you have never worked physically…,” the woman continued.

It wasn’t entirely true, since medical training required physical skills and the job was taxing on the body, but it was true in this world where they meant farming or being servants or… Yes. Mira wouldn’t be able to do most of those things in Thedas.

“You carry yourself as a noblewoman,” the Ambassador added. “Your hands show you’ve never used the sword, and I presume you have no training with daggers or archery…”

Indeed she did not. Was that normal here?

“The world you described to us is very different.”

Yes, Mira shared some very generalized version of where she was from. She was nodding, listening to the three women, while The Inquisitor seemed to become more uncomfortable. This whole lecture was definitely going somewhere…

“Please don’t be alarmed,” the voice of lady Montilyet was soft and gentle, but Mira became instantly alarmed.

“Marriage,” the Spymaster did not lessen the blow, “We could marry you off.”

Oh. Marriage. The full weight of those words suddenly fell on her shoulders. Of course it was marriage. Mira wasn’t even that surprised, considering the history of her own world. Marriage. Such a… timeless solution, wasn’t it?

“Listen to me carefully,” Leliana continued, “Marriage will give you status and protection, and a proper name and a title. Being married will offer you protection from advances or propositions, and you don’t know how courting works, and trust me, I look at you and you would get that attention sooner or later. Marriage with a noble will give you the freedom. Nobody will question why you’re here and what is your role.”

Mira had trouble swallowing her saliva, but she managed.

“Would he know…?”

“Yes. I don’t think it would work otherwise. He would be someone we trust, and he would know
who you are. He would help you learn about this world.

She felt her face flushing.

“What about… uhm… the marital debt?”

“The what?” the Spymaster’s face looked puzzled.

They did not know that expression. Perhaps for the best.

“Would I be expected to, uhm, lay with him?”

“Maker, no!” the Inquisitor gasped horrified, quickly understanding her meaning. “It’s a… political marriage. That… We wouldn’t…”

“So… it’s not a real marriage?”

“It is a real marriage,” The Spymaster answered. “It has to be real to protect you until you die. It’s the only way that works. Marriages are forever per Chantry law, blessed unions. It’s just… real marriage need not involve any… intimacy. You would share a life, and quarters here, and if anything happened to him or if the Inquisition ever ceased to exist, you’d have his familial protection. I know what we’re offering you. I might be cynical, but I that know. But we cannot protect you as we stand. You would be too visible. This is the best option you have, and the sooner you take it, the better. Ideally, you would get married tomorrow morning. We’d come up with a backstory of your love, who you are, and no one would ever suspect a thing.”

“Do you know who you want me to marry?” Mira couldn’t believe that she was considering that option.

“Yes,” Inquisitor answered. “We have few options”.

“Will you order him to do it?”

“No. It would be his free choice. We can arrange the marriage, but we cannot force either of you for it to be valid before the Maker.”

Mira closed her eyes and thought of everything she ever hoped for and believed it. The image of demons chasing her returned with full force. The thoughts of some demigod magical creature harming her if they found out her true identity appeared in her mind. There were so many thoughts racing through her head. This was all so absurd and disturbing, but… Was it, really? Wasn’t it what the humanity did throughout most of its history?

She took a deep breath and looked at the four people in front of her.

“Fine,” she heard herself speak. “Fine. I will do it.”

Chapter End Notes

and yes, she still doesn't meet her future husband. Only two chapters until the wedding.

Btw it always made sense to me that MGiT would be advised to hide her identity. Marriage seems like such a strategic choice.
How do you think Delrin will react once he is offered to marry a stranger?

Thank you for reading and all the kudos!
Late August, 9:42 Dragon, Skyhold

When Captain Delrin Barris was asked to meet the Inquisitor in the war room he fully expected receive updated orders for his next mission. Instead he found himself sitting across Maxwell Trevelyan, the Ambassador and Sister Nightingale. Cassandra was present as well. He wondered if they wanted to discuss some updates regarding him being touched by the Spirit, or perhaps they had issues with his leadership… What followed was the last thing he ever expected.

Delrin coughed few times, his throat suddenly dry.

“Forgive me. I don’t believe I heard that correctly. Could you repeat yourself, please?”

He spent the last thirty minutes listening to the story of a woman from another world who fell through the Fade and found herself in Thedas. He did not even pay t attention to plausible explanations of such event, and it didn’t matter. They told him that she was here, at Skyhold, and that her identity had to remain entirely secret in order to protect her from Corypheus or Calpernia, or, frankly, anyone else. They told him she knew very little of Thedas, and came from a place without magic. Delrin listened politely, not being entirely sure what was expected of him. Finding new identities certainly seemed more like Leliana’s occupation until they just blurted it out.

“Captain Barris, it really is a very simple concept”, the Spymaster sighted irritated.

“We absolutely cannot order you anything”, Maxwell added quickly. “Barris, I’ve grown to consider you a friend… You can absolutely refuse.”

“We’re proposing you marriage. Tomorrow.”, Leliana completely ignored the Inquisitor’s remark and continued her tale. “You would marry her, protect her, guide her and provide for her. If anything happened to the Inquisition, she would be your responsibility. If anything happened to you, she would be your widow, we’d provide her with benefits and hopefully your family would take care of her at least for some time. I really wish you could have been given more time to reflect upon that, but you’re our first choice, and if you refuse we really need to consider our options…”

“Really?”, That one remark caught him by surprise even more. “Why?”

“That’s a fair question”, Maxwell looked tired and resigned. It must had been another long night. “No one excepts the Inner Circle knows about her. Well, you do, now. We’d like to limit the possibility of any breach of cofidentiality.”

“Still, there are men like the Commander… ” Perhaps it was unbecoming to bring it up, but Cullen
was single, handsome, and his job was more prominent than Delrin’s.

“He’s on the list”, Cassandra said bitterly, “But for many reasons it would not be perfect. Moreover he hadn’t left Skyhold even once, so I am unsure how he could have met someone.”

He wasn’t going to argue with that.

"Ser Barris”, Ambassador Montilyet interjected politely. She was always soft spoken and gentle, but Delrin knew that her words might carry more weight than his sword when it comes to gathering favors for the Inquisition. “Permit me to speak very plainly right now. You’re young, you’re handsome, and you have excellent position within our cause. You had the opportunities of travel to meet someone. And… there’s a matter of your title.”

In theory, Templars were supposed to lose titles when joining the Order. In reality, it still could have carried weight, and he was a Templar no longer. It’s been a long time and he didn’t even think about it, but she was right. He had a title. He was the second son, and he would not inherit any land from his father, Bann Barris. But he still held he title now that the Templar Order fell. Which meant his wife would have a title, too, as insignificant as that title seemed.

“Wherever she is from”, Josephine continued, “The thing she described… It’s unlike Thedas, to say the least. She’s never carried the weapon. She said she learned to be a a medic of sort… Her hands don’t show signs of physical work the way we know it. You know as well as I do that it’s easier for her to pretend to be a woman with a title that to try serving as a common girl without any knowledge of what to do. And there’s also a matter of…”

“She’s pretty”, Leliana was impatient and snappy today, like she wanted to be just done with it. “She’s quite pretty, and people will notice that, and men will notice her, and marriage offers her protection from… advances, or questions or any kind of attention. A love story is the answer to many questions. This is another reason why we approached you. She already showed some concern that she would be required to consummate the…”

“Maker’s breath”, he interrupted her. “I would never…”

“You would never”, Max Trevelyan sighted, “but would every man say that?”

Delrin rubbed his temples and suddenly felt very, very tired.

“For what is worth”, the Spymaster added, “this could save her life.” The not so subtle manipulation left Barris with the feeling of distaste in his mouth, but Leliana wasn’t wrong either.

“I…”, he hesitated, “would she even agree to such solution?”

“She already did”, the Spymaster noted.

“She was given as much of a choice as you are now.”, Maxwell added.

“How will people believe I’m in love when I never even mentioned…” he started, acutely aware that he has never mentioned any woman to anyone here. He hasn’t taken a lover in… two years. “Where could have I…”

“Ansburg”, Leliana answered. “You traveled to Ansburg alone. Through Ferelden. You had plenty of opportunity to fall for a pretty face. And Captain… If there’s anything I know about men, and I know more than I’d like to… No one will question you for wanting someone to warm your nights during this grim and horrible time we found ourselves into. Trust me. No one will even blink.”
Once again, Sister Nightingale wasn’t entirely wrong. People grew more desperate for companionship and intimacy during the wartime.

“You need to understand that she will be your responsibility. You will be providing for her from your wages and you’ll be responsible for her safety and wellbeing. You’re both under the protection of the Inquisition for now, but if it ever ends…” The Spymaster apparently decided to make sure he truly understood the weight of the proposal he was given.

“I gather that”, he replied courtly.

He sat there and thought about it for a while. He thought of all the men and women under his command that he led to their death. He thought that as a Templar he never considered marriage to be a part of his life, but now it didn’t really matter, and the Order didn’t even exist anymore. He thought how much he longed to be given the opportunity to do something good. Perhaps this was sign from the Maker to repay for the gift of his own life. He should have died at Therinfal. Perhaps it was simply the right thing to. Perhaps…

“I’ll do it”, he nodded and saw visible relief on the faces of everyone involved. “Just… Can I meet her before we step to the Chantry? Her name is Mira, right?”

“You’re welcomed to come to my quarters tonight. Mira will be staying with me.” The Ambassador replied. “This reminds me… We will be moving you to different quarters though, the same area where my own quarters are. It’s a quiet corridor, and suitable for your station given you’re going to be married. It’s a large room with an ample bathroom, and no, please, don’t even try to refuse, for Mira’s sake. The Inquisition will cover the cost of your wedding rings so please visit Harrit and give him the specifications as the tradition commands. It’s the least we could do.”

“Should I…”, he hesitated for a moment. “In the Western Bannorn women do wear flowers in their hair when they marry.”

“That is a very lovely and considerate idea”, lady Montilyet smiled approvingly. “I think that is all and I will see you tonight. I… well, I figured the Inner Circle could attend the Chantry service tomorrow and I can notify…”

“I’ll tell my own squadron”, he sighted. “It will be for the best.”

“Absolutely.”

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It was the first time he made his squadron completely and utterly speechless. Barris was aware that the news of the wedding will spread tonight quickly anyway, and he needed them to hear it from him. There had to be some honesty there, he thought. Thankfully he was always rather a private man, so the idea that he hid his betrothed until she safely arrived in Skyhold was not that unconceivable. He invited them to the Chantry service, of course, it was the right thing to do. He also cancelled any practice for the day.

“Congratulations, Captain”, Clarissa was the first to break the silence as the eight pairs of eyes looked at him confusingly. “That’s… wonderful.”

“If you said anything earlier, we’d even get you a present”, Kirke smiled at him amused. “Otherwise I’m afraid you’d have to wait…”

“It’s not needed”, he smiled back politely.
“Well, it would be for lady Barris, not you, so…”

Lady Barris. The only Lady Barris he’d even known was his mother.

“I have so many questions! Simon, did you know? If you knew and didn’t tell me I will set you on fire…”

“Zuz! Of course I didn’t know. I thought I already told you that my brother never tells me anything…”

“I am really happy for you, Captain Barris” Arthur’s grin was genuine and bright, “and I probably have more advice you’re willing to take, as the only other married person here”.

“Uhm, thank you…” Delrin didn’t know quite what to say to that.

“We’re happy for you, Captain”, Beau was ever polite, and Merle and More also offered their congratulations.

“But how! And when!” Zuzu was incessant.

“Zuz, leave the Captain alone”, Kirke never failed to offer to scold the young mage. “It’s rude to ask for details”. Barris could have sworn Kirke actually winked at him.

“But what is she like? Is she pretty?”, Zuzu still wanted to know.

He took a deep breath and smiled, hoping it would come off very naturally.

“She’s very pretty.”

Truthfully, he had no idea who future lady Barris was or what she looked like. Sister Nightingale called her pretty, and he was certain she was by all accountable standards. He only knew her name and circumstances, nothing more.

The blessed and welcomed distraction to this sudden focus on his personal life came in the form of duel, of course, for he finally allowed Beau and Zuzu to fight each other. Maker’s grace, at least the incessant strive for competitiveness never failed when it comes to dealing with soldiers. He closed his eyes and relaxed listening to different kind of banter.

“She’s a natural firecracker. She’ll win.” Merle muttered to his brother. “You’re an idiot. Watch and learn.”

“Dumbass. Dream on. Look what Beau is about to do…”

The Undercroft was by many revered more then the Skyhold Chantry, perhaps because soldiers tend to rely more on their weapons than their prayers. Harrit was an excellent blacksmith if not too busy, and Dagna was definitely a genius, but there usually would be a delay if Delrin wanted anything enchanted. Thankfully this time it was just the rings, though truthfully he could be thinking about upgrading his shield soon. Harrit was entirely prepared to get the ring order done in time. He must have been told… something, at least. He also had Mira’s finger measurement ready.

It was customary for Delrin as a groom to choose the wedding bands, and he wished the Ambassador suddenly appeared and told him what to. He already decided to forgo the neutral gold ring route, at least for himself, since the metal was far too soft to be worn during combat.
“The Inquisitor offered the dragon bone. We have small supply left from the High dragon that I believe you fought, ser Barris.” Harrit suggested.

Beyond generous. Maxwell Trevelyon simply had to feel guilty, but Barris would not quite say no to owning the dragon bone war ring, and it should still look presentable for Mira. Frankly, he didn’t know if she cared at all given her circumstances.

“That would be great, thank you, Harrit.”

“Names?”

“Excuse me?”

“It’s customary to engrave something on the inside. First names?”

“Oh, sure. Mira.” He just realized he wasn’t entirely certain how to spell that.

“I have lady Mira’s name already written down. It was sent to me with her measurements”. Delrin thanked the Maker, although truthfully he probably should be thanking the Ambassador herself. Harrit still looked at him puzzled and then just sighted.

"I don’t know your first name, Captain Barris."

“Oh, right. Apologies. Uhm, Delrin. D-e-l-r-i-n.”

“Fantastic. I can have them sent to you tomorrow morning, so you don’t need to worry about anything.”

He probably could have asked Josephine for assistance when it comes to covering the matter of the floral wedding crown, though she must have been busy handling matters of more importance. It’s just… Delrin did not even know what to suggest to Sister Hellanore when she started asking questions like what herbs would be best to be included. One thing was certain, Sister Hellanore did not question the rush with the wedding, no one did. They were at war, after all, and the Spymaster was right. He knew there were soldiers who asked for the Maker’s blessings for their unions too.

“How long have you known your sweetheart?”, Chantry sister asked sweetly, undoubtedly trying to make regular conversation.

What was the answer he was supposed to give? Since Ansburg?

“Just few months”, he replied almost embarrassed.

He finally managed to get himself out of the garden by promising Sister Hellanore that he trusted her with the flowers as Andraste trusted the Maker.

“I am sure the Maker will bestow many blessings on you both”. She waved goodbye to him.

He needed to eat something after all that, and a small ale wouldn’t hurt either.

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“Barris! So I heard”, Iron Bull’s hand landed on his shoulder when Delrin stopped at the tavern to eat his dinner. “Congratulations. You’re getting married. Now follow me, my man.”
They sat in the private dining room, the one that Iron Bull liked to use, further from prying eyes.

“So it seems.” He admitted. “I hope I’m doing the right thing.”

“You know we don’t have marriage under the Qun, Barris. The whole outwollder thing… That’s messed up. And I know she is not lying. I don’t think she can lie, to be honest.”

“Wait”, Delrin gasped, the spoonful of soup freezing midair. “You actually met her?”

“Pshhh”, Qunari scoffed, “Of course. Who do you think was questioning her? You didn’t think they wouldn’t ask Ben-Hassrath to verify her story?”

“Frankly, I didn’t think much about the fact she was interrogated. Maker’s breath, am I getting stupid as I get older?””, he scoffed.

“Everyone kept nice, do not fret. She still was terrified and scared. She looked like a shaking cat. The girl could be your type, though.”

“I can assure you with utmost certainty that I do not pursue women who are terrified and scared.”


Delrin decided to ignore his remark and not fall for that obvious trap. “So, what can you tell me about her?”

“She was in rough shape, and definitely needed a bath. She cried upon seeing me. She had never even heard of a Qunari. At the end she apologized for her crying causing offense.”

“Ha.” That seemed kind, at least.

“She’s my type too, you know”, Iron Bull winked at him.

Barris sighted loudly. Bull would just not let it go.

“What could you mean?” He raised his eyebrows. The Qunari laughed way too loudly.

“Barris, couldn’t help yourself to ask, could you? Very sweet face, that one. And she is a redhead.”

Sweet Andraste.

“I’m so sorry, Ser Barris”, Josephine slipped quietly through the door, “but Mira fell asleep. I don’t think she slept much the previous night and she seemed so utterly exhausted. Do you wish me to wake her? I can do it, if you want me to…”

“Maker, no”, Delrin replied immediately, slight disappointment befalling on him nonetheless. “Let her sleep. From what I gathered, she’s been through enough, and tomorrow is not going to be easy”.

He stood there for a second, not knowing what to add. The ambassador looked conflicted, as if she wanted to say few words but she wasn’t certain if she should.

“That’s a brave thing you’re doing”, she finally looked him in the eyes. “And quite noble too.”
He didn’t know how to respond. He didn’t feel brave or noble. He tried to be cautious and reasonable in life, but this was… just standing to the task. As a Templar, he never thought he was going to marry. Marriage was not entirely forbidden, but it wasn’t encouraged, either, and the only relationships he had were more casual. He certainly liked the women he’s been with, and there weren’t that many of them. He had never allowed his feelings to progress to love though. Delrin was always aware that his calling was to be the Templar. That changed last year, and he traded the Order for serving the Inquisition. He hasn’t considered much beyond his work in the last year.

He was given so many chances at life himself. He surely should have died at Therifnal Redbout, but he didn’t. He was supposed to be bound to lyrium for the rest of his life, but he got freed, though through no virtue of his own. He could have died at Haven easily, but he still survived. Perhaps it was silliness to think it was his duty to marry that woman, but that’s how it felt.

“Come back tomorrow morning”, he heard Josephine’s kind voice. “I know you don’t want to meet at the altar. Moreover, I have some documents for you to sign.”

She disappeared behind the door and came back with several papers. “It’s the marriage contract, and your updated will including Mira as your beneficiary. It’s only customary…”

“I’m aware”, he simply said.

“I can arrange to send the copies to your family…”

“I’ll write them myself” He replied, taking the papers from her. “Thank you, Ambassador.”

“Please, call me Josephine. We’re practically neighbors now. I hope you’re going to find your quarter adequate.”

“Josephine”, he bowed gently, “Call me Barris”,

“Barris”, she repeated. “Before you go… I spent half a day with Mira. She’s really nice.” Josephine’s face twitched with empathy.

“I’m sure she is”, he replied before finally leaving.

His new quarters were more than adequate. The room had a large window and a comfortable big bed. It fit a desk, an armor and weapon holder, a dresser and an armoire. He realized though that with giving up the bed for his wife, he would need to sleep in his bedroll on the floor, which would be exactly like in the field. Not too pleasant. The servants moved his things already - some clothing, some books, some weapons, and he tried to occupy his mind by arranging it somewhat presentably.

The room still looked bare, despite him trying. With the exception of small collection of books he really didn’t possess many personal items. A notebook or two, some civilian clothing, both formal and casual.

Delrin hoped that she… He needed to start thinking about her using her name. He hoped that Mira would find the accommodations adequate. He wished for her to be comfortable, it was the least he could provide. What was the life like where she came from? What standards of living was she used to?

He opened the door to the bathroom and noticed that it had both shower and a bathtub, certainly the welcomed improvement over the shared bathroom in the barracks. Mira would probably need few
things, would she? Perhaps Josephine…

The knock on the door stopped his train of thought.

“Ser Barris”, He opened the door to see the familiar wrinkled face. “It’s me, Karla”.

Ah, Karla. Karla was a kitchenmaid in Skyhold, and previously, in Haven. Karla’s daughter was killed in Haven attack, and Delrin personally carried Karla’s grandson when they were fleeing for the mountains. Micah must have been… four now? He knew Karla settled well, but he hasn’t seen much of her.

“I heard you’re getting married”, she smiled, her eyes wide with excitement. “That’s so wonderful”.

“Thank you”, he smiled back. He slowly was getting better at accepting congratulations.

“I wish I’ve known sooner”, she complained, shaking her head. “And I don’t wish to interrupt you tomorrow, but let me at least bring you dinner. I know you’re not having any party and most Skyhold newlyweds don’t, but you’ll still need to eat something and I thought you might prefer for me to bring dinner here… I presume you both don’t want be disturbed”, she added with a knowing grin of a woman that lived many springs.

Of course, Barris thought. Of course the expectation would be he was not going to let his young bride out of bed tomorrow. They probably should avoid trying to dine at the main hall or go to Herald’s Rest. Maker bless Karla.

“How thoughtful”, he replied graciously, “That would certainly be most welcome”.

Her infectious smile widened. “I apologize for being forward, but truthfully I am happy for you, Ser Barris. I’ll never forget what you did. You’re a good man and I am so glad you found love. Dinner at sixteen hours would be acceptable?”

“That would be splendid. Thank you, Karla”.

Barris revised the documents provided with Josephine and he dreaded the letter he certainly needed to send his parents as soon as possible after the wedding. He wasn’t very close with his family… It was hard to maintain closeness when he left home at the age of twelve and saw them only a handful of times ever since. They still exchanged letters and he still thought of his childhood very fondly. He couldn’t quite imagine what their response would be to the marriage itself. Bann Barris struggled with accepting the current state of the Chantry and the fact that Templar Order ceased to exist. Father was a conservative man, like most of the Banns. Barrises served in the Chantry for generations. Preoccupied with issues of harvest and quibbles with among the Bannon, Father couldn’t fully comprehended what actually happened with the Order. And his Mother… She probably would be very interested to meet his wife. Would they approve? It didn’t matter much, but he still wondered.

He decided to sleep on the floor instead of messing up the bed. Falling asleep proved more difficult than he anticipated. Was he… scared? Delrin certainly felt nervous with anticipation. Maker’s breath, how terrified Mira must have been. She was the one who got displaced and uprooted. He chastised himself for whining the whole day and promised himself to focus on making her more comfortable tomorrow. Sweet Andraste. He might as well just say it. He would focus on making his own wife feel safe. As it was his duty.
And they will finally meet in the next chapter, I promise ;)}
Chapter Summary

Delrin and Mira finally meet in most ordinary circumstances. It's as awkward as you can imagine.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Late August, 9:42 Dragon, Skyhold

Mira woke up early, far too early. It was still very dark, and her stomach churned at the thought of what today would bring. That wasn’t a dream. Each morning she thought she’d wake up to the familiar view, but it never happened. She wasn’t even reminiscing much. She could feel the tension in her body preparing to survive right here right now.

The room was nothing like her tiny bedroom in the small flat she shared with Ida. She did not wake up to white walls and dresser stacked with plants. It’s been… two weeks since this became her reality? At least right now she was safe and sound, surrounded by walls. Two weeks. Such a short time, but it felt like eternity nonetheless. Mira felt as if the person she truly was got trapped behind the calculated effort to not say or do something wrong.

Perhaps she chose wrong. Perhaps she should have been be braver. Perhaps… But Mira agreed to it all yesterday. The plan was set in motion. A part of her rationalized her choice. It wasn’t unreasonable in the circumstances. But there was another part that was deeply ashamed that she said “yes” so easily. A part of her wondered if it would have been better to pretend she was given no choice entirely.

There were demons in this world. Demons, and magic, and swords, and dungeons, everything was real and brutal and vicious, even when hidden behind nice teacups and trying on shoes encrusted with stones.

Today was the day of her wedding. She was about to marry a man she didn’t know.

She let others guide her yesterday and she followed obediently. She stood half naked as the Ambassador and Madame Vivienne gasped at the sight of her tattoos adorning her back, sides and hip. She told them they were just flowers, without meaning, simply a decoration on the flesh. They argued about the fabric for the wedding dress, the most refined argument Mira has ever heard, for neither of them dropped their perfectly choreographed etiquette. Each word uttered had been most polite and she felt the energy in the room change.

Mira must have cursed hundreds of time in the secrecy of her own mind. She might have had slipped once or twice during the interrogations, but not since. Her own behavior was more cautious, and that’s because her need to make it through felt almost primal. Her body was tense. She could feel she was on edge despite everyone being nice towards her.

They finally settled on a cream silk brocade, apparently available in abundance since it was ordered as curtain fabric for the Inquisitor quarters until it was discarded in favor for gold brocade.
Lady Josephine made the tiniest victorious smirk when she recounted that story.

It was Enchanter Vivienne tough that surprised Mira the most. After all the measurements and decision making they found themselves alone in the room, and the mage pulled Mira on the side and quietly offered to enchant a magical glyph on her body to prevent pregnancy. The fear that was just there behind the surface emerged, and it did not escape the Enchanter’s attention.

“Don’t think that, darling”, Vivienne whispered, the look on her face guilty, “It’s not what I meant. I figured you might prefer not to deal with monthlies, and it wouldn’t hurt to have options, should you want to.”

Mira couldn’t imagine wanting to, but the doctor in her agreed, for so many reasons. She examined the faint symbol on the inner side of her arm. How did it work, exactly? The magic was engraved in her body now, yet Mira wasn’t entirely sure what she believed about magic, except the crushing and breathtaking realization that in Thedas it was as real as physics.

The worry and unease were still there, bubbling inside of her veins.

In the afternoon, around dinnertime she sat with the Ambassador to learn the details of her supposed past. To explain her lack of faith knowledge, they told her she grew up in the small Andastrian cult. Apparently there were more than a dozen around Thedas. Her father was a traveling preacher, whatever that meant. He died during the Mage-Templar war, at the beginning, one of the many accidental victims. Mira was instructed that this information was about to be spread around, but she shouldn’t advertise it herself. Religious freedom seemed a precarious idea in Thedas, and Mira shuddered.

She didn’t know where her own faith was. She took of her miraculous medal when still in the cave, when she felt angry at God, and put it into dead man’s sack. Cassandra took the sack away.

Now Mira just felt empty. What could she believe when she lost everything she knew at once?

The thoughts about her faith got buried deep inside, alongside with thoughts about Ida and other friends and the job and the hospital and her plans for the future.

This was the reality now. Josephine took her time to repeat some information about both Thedas and the Inquisition, mostly to teach Mira about him, her future husband. Mira knew that Ser Delrin Barris was the Second-in-Command to the Inquisition forces, and that he held a title of a Captain. He was formerly a Templar, whatever that meant. His father was Bann Jervin Barris of Barrfield, his mother’s name was Adriana. Bannorns were the areas of land governed by particular banns. “The Bannorn” itself was the area of rural Ferelden. Ser Delrin Barris had an older brother, Calvin, the heir to Barrfield. The family crest was quite pretty, two lillies-of-the-valley on the red background. It all meant that Mira would become a noble by marriage, even if just formally, since her husband would not inherit the land. Lady Mira Barris.

She didn’t dare to speak her former last name, the Spymaster told her it’s better for everyone if it was never ushered. They only ever knew her as Mira. She didn’t dare to speak her native tongue after that one time when she mentioned it to Leliana and the Spymaster said to never use it again as it didn’t exist in Thedas. So Mira did not. She was an immigrant before anyway, she was used to the slight discomfort of learned fluidity. Half of people in the Inquisition spoke with an accent anyway, Cassandra’s or Josephine’s being quite strong. Josephine assured Mira that no one would care, and if they did, she can mutter something about it having hint of Nevarran.

So many layers that made Mira into a woman she was had to be hidden. The art of losing wasn’t hard to master after all.
Mira tried not to cry thinking that she didn’t know anything remotely personal about Captain Barris. He was an accomplished soldier, and excellent swordsman, by all accounts noble, brave and devout, or so she was told. But what did he believe in exactly? Was he kind? Was he smart? Was he patient? Did he like dogs? Did he get angry when he drank? Was he afraid of anything? She knew nothing of importance. They gave her nothing, and she was too afraid to ask.

He was supposed to come that evening, but the last thing Mira remembered was lying on the sofa of Josephine’s sitting room and listening to the Ambassador describing every step of the wedding ceremony to her. She must have fallen asleep. She was awake now, covered with a blanket, still in on the sofa, still wearing the same simple shirt and skirt she did yesterday. It was dark outside.

Josephine was nowhere to be found, and Mira even dared to peak into her bedroom.

It took Mira good fifteen minutes to ponder whether she could leave the quarters and go to the kitchen that she passed yesterday walking Josephine. She could grab something to drink, perhaps tea. Do something on her own. Be alone.

She braved herself. She was not the prisoner anymore, after all. The door was heavier than she expected, but it wasn’t locked. There was no one to be seen, not a soul. The corridor was lit with torches hang on both sides of the walls. There were no guards or servants to be seen, and the castle seemed perfectly still, as if enchanted.

She walked there barefoot, the stone cool and pleasant underneath her feet. The kitchen seemed large per Mira’s modern standards, but Josephine referred to it as tiny yesterday. Tea or something warm to drink would be indeed soothing, but for all temporary bravery Mira mustered she did not take into account the fact that she had no idea how to light up the chandelier or the oil lamp. She couldn’t boil water, because the stove was positively medieval, attached to the overwhelmingly large furnace, now cold to the touch. It was so bloody dark.

Was she even allowed to be here? Would Josephine be angry? Would they think she escaped?

She finally found a mug to at least pour some water when she heard the male voice ask softly: “…Mira?”

The next thing she registered was the sound of the mug splitting into many pieces on the stone floor. She turned to the door.

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Delrin woke up far too early again, still before the dawn. He put on leather breeches, shoes and the simple linen shirt and decided to go to the kitchens and maybe make himself a cup of tea. This area of Skyhold was indeed much peaceful. As far as he could tell, aside of him, only Josephine had her quarters nearby, in the same hallway. He was surprised to hear the rumbling in the kitchen when for all accounts it looked like the lights were out.

He pushed the door gently, walked in and saw the woman facing away from him and pouring water from the sink. Curly hair cascaded below her shoulder blades. She was barefoot No dignitary would allow themselves alone to the kitchen barefoot, and Delrin didn’t think there were any staying in Skyhold currently. Could it be…?

“…Mira?”, he asked almost shyly, and the woman’s body jerked quickly and the cup fell out of her hands on the floor, breaking in many pieces, the large puddle forming right by her feet.

“I—“ she turned around to face him and started mumbling something, but he interrupted her first.
“Do not move, you’re barefoot, you could get injured —“

“I am sorry —“ He moved in and squatted down to pick up the pieces of the mug. He was definitely sure it was actually her, but he still didn’t see her face. She spoke with a slight accent he couldn’t place. He wasn’t warned that Trade wouldn’t be her first language, although it wasn’t surprising.

“I am sorry”, he said gently, “I didn’t mean to scare you.”

“I… Well…” she clearly wasn’t sure what to say. He tossed the remnants of the mug and wiped up the floor. His brain registered that her feet were small. What a weird thought. Did she even knew who he was?

“I’m Captain… I’m Delrin Barris”, he stood up to finally look at her. “Are you all right?”

“Oh. Oh.” The more confused she sounded, the more certain he was it was her. “It’s you.” She added, and then her face twitched a bit. “I apologize, I… Uhm. Hi?” She finally settled on the word.

“Hi”, he responded, looking at her. The first thing he noticed was that she was much shorter than him. Her head wouldn’t even reach his chin. The second thing… Bull wasn’t exactly wrong. Even in the dusk he could see that the face looking back at him was indeed quite sweet.

“I—“, she hesitated again.

“Are you all right?”, he repeated. “You’re here in the dark—“

“Oh. Right. Sorry” The wave of empathy fell over Delrin. The poor girl was positively jittery. “I woke up and I was quite thirsty and I thought about getting tea but I couldn’t quite… make the lights work?” Every sentence she said sounded more like the question.

He glanced at the furnace and noticed that the fire wasn’t started. This kitchen must have been used infrequently and probably no one bothered much during the summer. Where was the fire striker? He found it easily and lit up the chandelier candles. The room lit up immediately with a soothing orange light. He turned towards Mira. She was still standing in the same exact spot, frozen. There could be… There it was, the pyrophite kettle, sitting on butcher’s block counter. He brushed his fingers gently against the metal and almost cursed. It was still hot, undoubtedly thanks to the heating runes. Circles used kettles like that all the time to keep the water hot for drinks, very useful invention, and the version without heating runes that worked best for shorter period of times was popular among nobility. Tea wasn’t difficult to find, and infusers were right there too.

“There’s only one blend—”

“Oh. That’s fine. Thank you.” He was curious what her world looked like when she struggled with lighting up the chandelier. Especially given that her world didn’t have magic.

“Would you like to—?” His hand moved to gesture at the small table and chairs tucked in the corner of the kitchen. She just nodded and followed him. He brought sugar and honey, the only things he found.

Finally, they were seated and for the first time he could really look at the woman. The soft light of the candles illuminated her copper hair, curly and long and a bit wild. The eyes looking at him keenly were blue and clear. She had smooth skin, without any blemishes or freckles, and now she was blushing heavily. Delrin wasn’t stupid, he knew she must have been afraid, and probably afraid of him, too. She bit her mouth in the nervous gesture. He definitely noticed her lips, full and
with perfectly defined upper lip. There were few very faint cuts on her face and neck, probably from wandering through the wilderness, and he could see bruising on her forearm. She was wearing a simple linen shirt, the top button unfastened, probably accidentally. Sweet Andraste. Even with the tiniest glance, and he wouldn’t allow his eyes to linger, he noticed that the cleavage revealed full, soft and by all accounts probably exquisite breasts. He wasn’t going to ogle her, and the look on her face was so painfully awkward that the mere passing thought about her curves made Delrin feel bad. By all accounts the Spymaster was right, his betrothed was indeed pretty. He wasn’t certain what to say to make her more relaxed. He swore to himself to not ever comment on her beauty to avoid making her uncomfortable. She was already worried, that much was clear to him. It wasn’t difficult to read her.

“The tea is very good, thank you. ”, Mira said to him, clearly making an effort to start the conversation.

“Oh, I’m glad. You’re most wel—“

“I’m sorry I fell asleep.” She blurted out without letting him finish. “I know we were supposed to meet—“

“That’s… alright. I didn’t want to wake you up—”

“I… , she scoffed, “I don’t what to say. It’s all so awkward. Although? Is it awkward for you too.?“

He couldn’t help but to chuckle slightly. “Indeed it is.”

“I apologize in advance for whatever ignorant remarks I can give.”

“Please, I… don’t apologize. I’m not easily offended.”

She was definitely observing him very carefully, and he could see that her arms were a little bit tense. Part of him wanted to assure her that he wouldn’t hurt her, that she was safe, but he was certain that it would make her more scared and guarded. There is no way for a stranger to say “I won’t put a finger on you” without it being just a little creepy.

“I…“, he hesitated, “I could probably answer some questions. If you have any—“

“Are they really dragons?”, she blurted out again so suddenly that he couldn’t help but smile a little. Dragons. Why would she ask…? “It’s just that when the Inquisition first found me I overheard them talk about dragons. But no one else mentioned them afterwards and I…”

“There are dragons. That’s even the name of the age we live in. The Dragon Age. It’s 42nd year of the Dragon Age right now. It was named precisely because High Dragons were again observed.”

“Dragons? Like… real dragons? Flying” - she made a gesture with her hands to symbolize wings flapping and he caught himself thinking it was quite cute, “and breathing fire?”

“Not all them breath fire, some of them kill with the frost or lightning powers…”

He stopped because suddenly he could hear footsteps on the corridor walking very fast and surely a second later the door to the kitchen opened and Josephine came, looking a bit out of breath.

She blinked few times looking at them, but collected herself quickly. “I see… you’ve already met.”

“Yes”, he took over responding, realizing the absurdity of the situation. “We’re… drinking tea.”
“I see.”, the Ambassador responded faintly. “I will make sure… Mira, are you barefoot?”

Josephine gasped but continued without letting Mira answer. “Never mind. Ser Barris, would you please escort your bride straight to my quarters after you finish your tea? No later than in an hour? Apologies, and you could join in later, but we still have so much to do…” Josephine looked rather excited, not terrified at the prospect. “Everything will be ready in time, I promise. I’ll leave you two alone for now.”

He noticed Mira got quiet. She was playing with the spoon, as if she couldn’t keep her hands still. He wondered what he could say to make it better.

“Anyway, what I have been saying?” He pondered out loud.

“Dragons are real?”

“Thank you. Yes. They are.”

She looked terrified at the prospect.

“They are pretty far away. There hadn’t been any sightings close to Skyhold.”

“I feel very reassured.” She did not sound reassured at all.

“I killed a dragon once, they are certainly possible to defeat”, he said, feeling suddenly silly he did. Was he trying to impress her in some way?

“What?” She dropped the spoon but her hands were still fidgeting. Maker’s breath, she was so nervous this whole time.

“To be entirely fair, I wasn’t alone. Actually, Cassandra, madame Vivienne and Bull were there too. I believe you’ve… met all of them.”

“You killed a dragon?” Her eyes were wide open.

“I think it was Cassandra who landed the final blow. The Panteghast family was famed from being dragon hunters.”

“I see.” Mira’s respond was almost faint. “Dragons.”

“Can I ask you something?” he changed the subject.

“Sure.”

“How do you make light where… you’re from?”

“Oh”, she looked embarrassed yet again, and he cursed himself that maybe it wasn’t the safe question he thought it was. It must have reminded her of where she was from. She continued nonetheless. “It’s… difficult to explain. We use electricity and I am not sure… Let me think.”

“Mages use lighting in their casting”, he wondered if that could help guide her. He knew the term “electricity”, he didn’t know what she meant by it.

“Goodness, really?”, she shuddered. “Well, thinking of lightning… You know how the real lightning strikes and it can kill you, or burn the tree, or cause devastation? It’s an immense release of energy. In my world, we have learned to harness that energy, sort of. You have plumbing here, so… we have a similar series of not pipes, but conductors within the walls of our building where the energy flows through and you simply pull the switch on the wall and light generated by that
energy appears. We don’t use actual lightning. You can generate that energy using other ways. I wish I could explain it better. It was never my area… Well. It’s not magic. It’s just… technology. I don’t know what technological advances you have here, aside from plumbing, obviously.” She spoke fast and fluently, and he quite enjoyed the way she was pronouncing words. He was pleased to notice that she looked a little bit calmer once distracted by the question.

“There’s steam powered mechanical thresher that I’ve heard of, in Nevarra. I read about it once.”

“Really?”, she was genuinely curious, “steam engine? That… is a lot of potential.”

Whatever her society was like, it was clear it was pretty advanced in many ways. And without magic. He couldn’t even grasp the idea of the world without magic. In some sense magic defined so much about his own identity.

"How tall are you?”, she suddenly asked and it was so random and bizarre.

“Uhm? Pretty tall? 190 centimeters?” He replied puzzled and she just shook her head.

“Ha. You’re using metric system. I know it. I just don’t comprehend how it’s possible there’s the same language and same concepts or systems where I’m literally in another dimension. Or something.” Oh. That was why she asked.

“I do find it bizarre that you have the concept of a dragon, but no real dragons. Or a concept of magic, but not magic itself. But nothing surprises me more than you clearly speaking the same language as I do.”

“Exactly”, she agreed readily, still sipping her tea.

“How old are you?”, he decided to go for more personal question.

“Oh. I’m twenty four years. You?”

“Twenty eight.”

“Wait, by a year you mean…?”

“Twelve months in a year. Each of thirty days”

“Ha. Similar. Twelve months in a year, but their length varies, usually between thirty and thirty one days.

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He was so very tall. It was the first thing Mira noticed after he carefully collected broken ceramics from underneath her feet. The second one was that his voice was deep and warm in timbre, and had some softness to it. He spoke like an educated man. He lit up the chandeliers and he made her tea without hesitation.

Mira was nervous. She could sense her own nervousness coming to the surface and she tried to squash it. If he was nervous, he hid it much better than her.

He was much younger than she expected, in his twenties. Why did she have this image of a middle age soldier with mustache? Captain Delrin Barris was nothing like that, and of course she noticed how handsome he was. Objectively, he was incredibly good looking, tall and strong, with dark skin, high cheekbones, full lips and those green eyes. How did he manage to have such soft green
eyes? He looked well groomed too, part of his hair shaven off in a careful manner. For some reason, it made her a bit more anxious, because sometimes handsome men are more… entitled. He hasn’t looked at her creepily though, and he has not made any remark that would be inappropriate. He hasn’t mentioned the wedding at all, even when Josephine came in. Nevertheless there was some quiet confidence surrounding him. He was calm and collected. Quite frankly, Mira didn’t know what to feel.

“… and the person of the faith would be called Andastrian”, her thoughts returned to his warm voice answering her few questions about the Chantry. After all, she would marry in the Chantry soon.

Goodness, they would kiss.

“Is it a problem that I’m not Andastrian?”, the boldness of the question surprised even her. It was of a different layer than whatever they discussed previously.

“For me, or for the Chantry?”, there was curiosity in his voice.

She felt her face flushing again and wanted to curse. Would he be offended if she did? Thankfully she knew how to act professionally thanks to her training, but she really wanted to speak more freely.

“Both, I suppose?”

“No. It’s not the problem for you to take vows in the Chantry, if that’s what you’re asking. You do swear by—”

“Yeah, I know”. She didn’t want to dwell on the fact that from her own faith’s perspective it was not as innocuous. Her faith was… buried and hidden so deep down. Mira still felt angry and resentful and for the last week she was building the walls around the topic higher and higher.

“It’s not the problem for me either, I knew that about you right away. I am curious though, do you believe in the Maker? ”

She hesitated. “I do believe in God. I guess the argument could be he’s the Maker.” It was the most she could give him. Some part of her was happy he pried. He clearly was a man who had convictions. It all became so real. He stopped being this scary shadowy figure of The Husband she had in her mind and became… a man of flesh and blood, and thoughts and feelings, probably. Still scary, but on a different level.

“Can I ask you something else?”, he looked at her hesitantly. If this was something suggestive, she would probably burst our crying right here and there. She actually relaxed slightly during the conversation and shuddered the moment where it would go so horribly wrong. “You… were you treated well? By the Inquisition?”

That was a different type of question. Was he testing her? Or was he genuinely interested.

“Yes”, she replied carefully. “Everyone was polite. No one harmed me.”

“Good”, he whispered but there was still something that bothered him. “They did not… force your hand?”

Was he asking…? He was certainly asking if she was forced to marry him. She could feel her face flaring again. The answer to this questioned bothered her, and to admit it out loud…
“No.,” she decided. “You?”

“No.”

The big mystery was why would he agree to the marriage. He seemed handsome and capable. If she dared to hope, he seemed rather kind. Definitely quite intelligent. He must have had… options. Should she asked about that? Could she? Well, if he was about to become her husband, did she have the right…?

“Are you… Were you involved with someone?”, she asked finally and it was the first time she thought he was truly taken aback during their conversation.

“No, I wouldn’t be able to make my vows tomorrow…”

“Me neither”, she added quickly. It was true and she didn’t want to suggest she was not going to honor her vows. The part of her that contained her deeper fears didn’t want to make him angry at her, too.

Mira felt so conflicted. She agreed to play her part. She would. Maybe it wouldn’t be bad. Maybe it would be a nightmare.

“I should probably make sure you get to Josephine’s quarters on time. She’s never anything but nice, but I wouldn’t risk getting on her bad side. She could overthrow kingdoms just by carefully choosing the seating chart for the party.”

Did he just… make a joke? Was he trying to be funny?

“Believe me, I gathered that”, she smiled faintly, and got up. “I was there to witness the… debate concerning the fabric of the wedding dress between Josephine and madame Vivienne. There were no threats made that I could recognize, but I still felt like tossed in the middle of the battlefield.”

He laughed. His laughter was surprisingly warm, and Mira couldn’t help but notice he had nice teeth.

"I can quite visualize that”, he replied. “No, let me do it.”, he added when she lifted her cup. He cleaned up and washed the mugs himself.

Mira couldn’t deny that he seemed polite and courteous.

They walked towards Josephine’s room in silence. It was a very short walk indeed. She could hear the chipper inside the quarters, and she could identify the regal tone of madame Vivienne’s voice, Josephine’s laughter and Leliana’s soft and bright words.

Mira took a deep breath. She should make some effort, shouldn’t she? After all, they were supposed to marry in just few hours. She turned towards him.

He really was so much taller than her.

“I…”, she started, then hesitated. He waited patiently. She took a big breath and shook her head. “Delrin”, she started again, saying his name for the first time. It rolled on her tongue easily. “Thank you for the tea and the talk. It was nice.”

“You’re welcome, Mira. It was.” It was the first time he used her name too. “I will see you later.”

He opened the door for her.
She was still afraid.

But perhaps not as much as before.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading, for all the kudos and comments.

Delrin I write is a good observant, and quite considerate. He is not without faults - you will see them eventually - but he is definitely not stupid. I like that about his character.

Poor Mira, she really is shaken.

Next chapter - THE WEDDING.
The Wedding

Chapter Summary

Delrin and Mira marry.

Things are not necessarily very easy for either of them.

Chapter Notes

Note on religion - There won't be any proselytizing in the story, don't fret. I mention faith because it is something formative for both characters - and they both come from completely different faiths. Expect religious imagery and some talks, but nothing too detailed or theologically heavy. It's about what makes Mira and Delrin who they are, not particular theology.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Late August, 9:42 Dragon Age, Skyhold

The second Mira passed through the door leading to Josephine’s quarters, she found herself pushed towards the bathroom, and then dressed and coiffed by three surprisingly invested women with varying opinions. She put her foot down and demanded they leave her hair curly, so they left it down, just taken slightly on the sides, much to the Ambassador visible disappointment. It felt silly to suddenly grow a spine, but Mira wanted something that was true to herself, even if it was a stupid hairstyle.

Once again, she stood just in her undergarments as they put the dress on her. Mira closed her eyes. It felt clinical, just this time she was the patient. She didn’t feel embarrassed, not of the three women around her. They didn't call any servants, for obvious reasons, so now arguably one of the most powerful women in the Inquisition was lacing the back of her gown. Small graces, the corsets didn’t seem to be part of attire in this world, so the only thing squeezing Mira’s waist was the fabric itself.

The dress was prettier than she anticipated, it had that vintage charm to it. The fabric was soft and silky, and not too shiny as artificial satin. The brocade showed pattern of leaves and plants, and Mira had always loved that, hence the tattoos on her body were all botanical. The dress was long, but had no train. The round neckline showed just a bit of her cleavage and the sleeves reached past her elbows. The ivory shoes came from Leliana’s personal closet, as apparently her and the Spymaster shared the same shoe size. Perhaps even in the word full of magic it was quite impossible to make new ones within a day.

The floral crown adorning her head was big and full of wildflowers and herbs, and Mira sense the same scent as there was in the soap she used that morning. She recognized some of the wildflowers; buttercups, pansies and cranesbills. Mira would never admit it out loud, but when she looked at herself in the mirror, she almost regretted not wearing the veil. She always wanted to wear a veil for her wedding. Then again, nothing she ever imagined about her wedding would
become true.

Still, she felt her heart beat faster as she studied her reflection, and for a different reason than merely fear. She looked pretty, beautiful even, and for a split second Mira allowed herself to enjoy that feeling.

Madame Vivienne smiled at her knowingly.

They left her alone in Josephine’s sitting room to wait for her future husband, sign the documents and then, soon, proceed to the Chantry.

If Delrin thought she was attractive, he didn’t let her know at all. He came in wearing an armor, most likely not the one he actually used for fighting, and probably not the complete set of it. He looked formidable with all that shiny metal covering his chest, and he carried his sword on the belt or whatever that particular garment was properly called. She was fully aware that it must have been the customary, but how peculiar that he was fully armed for their wedding while the only thing protecting her body was a piece of silk.

“My lady”, he said and bowed, and of course she didn’t know how to follow that, because with all the focus on learning about Thedas nobody made sure she knew how to behave within society, they probably expected for it to be obvious. It wasn’t obvious. Should she curtsy? Mira curtsied in what she imagined to be the graceful, and realized she did not quite know how to address him.

“I… don’t know what should I call you now”, she whispered sheepishly.

“Mira,” he used her first name this time and she breathed a little bit easier, “you can simply use my name as you did before. We should probably sit and review the papers, if you do not mind.”

She said on the armchair by the coffee table, and he took the sofa, the one she slept on. Delrin took of his gloves and carefully put them on the table.

He looked at her hesitantly. “I presume you know how to read and write?”

She blinked few times, trying to process the question and she had just realized that she hadn’t actually read anything since arriving in Thedas. Had she even paid attention? No, because she assumed it was the same language.

“I do, obviously.” She replied, “Assuming… can I see?”. He handed her the first paper, a piece of parchment that felt coarse underneath her fingers. He had already signed it himself. The relief flooded her, she could in fact read and understand everything.

The writing was the bigger problem, because she saw an inkwell and sighted. He noticed and faintly smiled at her.

“I do, obviously.” She replied, “Assuming… can I see?”. He handed her the first paper, a piece of parchment that felt coarse underneath her fingers. He had already signed it himself. The relief flooded her, she could in fact read and understand everything.

The writing was the bigger problem, because she saw an inkwell and sighted. He noticed and faintly smiled at her.

“I presume you’re used to different writing tools?”, he asked gently.

“Yes.”, she answered apologetically.

He gave her an empty piece of parchment to practice the signature. She tapped the tip of the pen in the ink and signed her name and…

“It’s Barris”, he said softly, and she just looked at the prominent “G” her hand just wrote. The first letter of her last name. Until now.

“I apologize.” She swallowed the saliva hard and hesitated. “B-a-r-r-i-s, right?”
“Yes.”

She signed her name, her new name, trying to control both the ink and her own horrible handwriting. That was it. She signed the marriage certificate, all three copies. She didn’t even know if that meant they were legally married already, or was the Chantry part necessary.

He passed her another document.

“That’s my will.” She looked at him surprised. Goodness. “If anything happens to me, you inherit everything I own, and you will receive the beneficiary from the Inquisition. I…”, he gathered his thoughts a little, “it’s not very much, but it’s not nothing either, and it could keep you safe. My parents would take you in if need be, and I’ll make certain they receive copies of all the paperwork.”

She didn’t know what to say. What do you say to a man you just met who is preparing you for his eventual death and making sure you’re provided for? Should she thank him? Should she acknowledge what had just been said?

Delrin still looked calm and not very bothered by contemplating his own mortality. How many times had he considered his death? How many times had he been close to dying? Could he die? Would she become a widow? He couldn’t have become The Second-in-Command by not having military achievements, and some of them probably came at cost.

She signed the three copies of his will too.

***

Sweet Andraste, if he had thought Mira was pretty before, now in the full light of the day she simply radiated beauty. She looked so Fereldan with all those flowers in her hair that it made his heart pinch, bringing memories of his childhood, of Barrfield meadows, of music and feasts at the Barr Castle. Her features were soft and kid, and she seemed both shy and serious. Her hair had the most gorgeous shade of light red, shining like dragonbone. No wonder Bull decided to tease him. The dress only accentuated her figure, and his brain definitely registered more than just a hint of cleavage before he clenched his jaw and averted his eyes. He saw nothing wrong with appreciating female beauty, but perhaps not when said person was afraid, especially when she was afraid of that exact type of attention.

He called her “my lady”, and it seemed she did not know how to respond.

Her eyes pierced him when he talked to her about the will, like she truthfully hadn’t consider he might die. He certainly had given thoughts to the state of his own mortality given the events of the past year. Delrin had always grew up knowing that he won’t inherit his father’s estate. As a Templar, money held little value to him, although the pay was not awful for a Knight-Lieutenant of the Order and he did not have a lot of personal expenses. The Inquisition valued taking care of their soldiers, and thanks to the incessant efforts of mostly Josephine they had money to pay fairly. He could certainly afford taking the wife, even without owning any land or property.

He would do right by her, as it was his duty, as… Not merely a duty. It was the right thing to do. That was more than merely being dutiful. Nobody ordered him to do it. He chose it. He would say his vows, and stick to them, because of who he was.

***

The chantry was cool inside, only one stained window letting the light inside. The walls were
carved out of stone, and the place felt serious and solemn. It would almost pass for a church from centuries ago. Almost, because nothing sacred was recognizable, and yet it all looked disturbingly familiar. There was no cross, no savior, no saints. They stood by the figure of a woman, undoubtedly Andraste. Her beautiful marble face did not reveal any emotions. Mira wished she could still her emotions just like the statue. For her, God was silent and suddenly she felt overwhelmed with guilt.

Faith was a part of Mira’s life as long as she could remember. She scoffed and rebelled many times but regardless of that she still searched for connection each Sunday. She worshipped imperfectly, she sung passionately, she never let that part of herself disappear. Now it was gone even if she still believed. Now she would take a vow in faith she did not share.

The man she was about to marry in just few short moments stood in front of her, tall and proud, holding her bare hands in his gloved ones. Mira realized that she was trembling and there was no way to hide it from him. The wave of embarrassment flooded her, because she truly wanted to seem strong and collected at least for a moment. Her heart thudded in her chest but she barely noticed. It happened so often in the last few days.

Mira was certain that her voice was going to shake.

“I swear unto the Maker and the Holy Andraste to love this woman the rest of my days. I will be true to her for as long as I live.”, Delrin’s voice was strong and composed, echoing from the stone walls of the small chantry.

Mira took a deep breath.

“I swear unto the Maker… and the Holy Andraste… to love this man… for the rest of my days. I… I will be true… to him… for as long… as I live”, her voice was trembling and slightly breathy, but at least others could have easily attributed it to bridal jitters.

The words of the vows were so simple and so profoundly and universally recognizable, as if the same promise was shared by anyone who has ever married.

Mira always took pride in her integrity and truthfulness. She wasn’t quite sure how to even begin to live out the words she just publicly stated. What would he ask for? What could she give, really? How would any ordinary day look after today?

Who did he think she was? Did he find her quiet and demure, awkward and ungraceful? Part of her wanted to scream and say she was bolder, braver and harsher than she presented herself to be so far. That she was smart, and capable, and so different from a person who could not light a lamp or sign her name on a piece of paper. That she had seen people die, if only the few, and she helped save lives, if only the few too. That she knew how to work with her hands even if they have shown no signs of it. That she had done things and seen things that would astonish them all equally as fighting dragons and demons astonished her. That he would probably tremble too if he somehow ended up on earth, even though at that moment Ser Delrin Barris seemed invincible in her eyes.

She did not say any of those words, clearly. Instead she just looked into his green eyes and quietly wondered if he was even a little afraid.

“And by the Maker and the Holy Andraste I join you both in marriage.”, the Chantry Sister said with a warm smile.

He removed one glove when they exchanged the rings in silence, and she knew she would have a hard time getting used to wearing the wedding band, especially on her right hand. He put back the
glove and Mira sincerely couldn't understand the sensibility of wearing an armor to the wedding.

That was it. The words were spoken, and she was married. *Married.* For as long as she lived. She pledged herself to that man, and whether by fear or desperation or weakness or whether because it was clever and reasonable, the deed was done.

Please be kind, she thought. She could take anything else, but she couldn’t survive if he wasn’t kind.

God, if you’re even here and haven’t forsaken me, please let him be kind, she prayed despite herself.

“And with that blessing, you might kiss”, the Chantry Sister beamed.

Mira expected the kiss. Josephine was considerate enough to make sure she understood every part of the ceremony. Looking at Delrin’s face though, she wasn’t sure if he thought about that before. He looked apprehensive for the first time during the ceremony.

They had to kiss. There was no way around it.

Mira lifted her hand and touched his arm gently, the part not covered by metal, and squeezed it. It was a subtle gesture, unrecognizable to anyone but him.

He placed his one hand around her waist, and buried another in her hair. Instead of fingers, she felt the smooth leather behind her ear. The gesture was bolder than she anticipated and she slightly lost balanced as he carefully pulled her towards himself. She stood up on her toes. He really was so tall… He leaned close, so very close she could hear and feel him breathing and she instinctively closed her eyes in anticipation of the familiar rhythm of a kiss. He barely audibly whispered “forgive me” and then she felt his lips on hers.

It wasn’t just a peck, and it wasn’t too long or passionate either, but it was a proper kiss. The kind of kiss that joins the man and his wife. Delrin’s lips were full and soft, and she did kiss him back. She could feel his cold metal breastplate pressing on her breasts. She briefly wondered if his glove would entangle in her curls. Still it was something else that flooded her senses. He smelled so very nice she actually wondered how she didn’t notice it before. The smell was bright and green, with wood and citrus tones. She almost wanted to bury her face in his neck and inhale it.

Mira didn’t register much else that happened. The kiss made her cheeks blush, and she felt slightly out of breath. She wanted to curse her pale skin and red hair.

She probably looked like a blushing bride.

Truthfully, she was a blushing bride.

Mira was nervous. She really wanted to trust him.

The kiss ended the ceremony, and the wave of congratulations and small talk followed, and faces and words all blurred inside of her mind. She leaned on Delrin’s right arm and let him do the talking while she maintained faint smile.

Lady Mira, the voices whispered amidst the celebratory chatter.

Lady Mira. That was her now.
Delrin clenched his jaw looking at his bride. She certainly tried to be brave, but he could sense her anxiety. The guilt once again flushed over him. He outright asked her if she was forced into marriage. They talked privately. He could feel her hands shaking and he could see her chest rising up and down and she deliberately tried to slow her breathing to calm herself down.

He didn’t know what to say or do. He wanted to let her know that he wouldn’t hurt her, he wouldn’t touch her, he would not require anything from her at all, that he was not that kind of a man.

He could not deny he noticed her beauty. She looked like spring morning in Ferelden. But he noticed her beauty the same way he noticed beauty of other attractive women. It didn’t mean anything. It didn’t mean anything at all.

Sweet Andraste, how the fuck did he forget about kissing? Surely, the last wedding he attended was when he was ten years old, but to ignore that it was the kiss that sealed the promise in the Chantry? He did not want to kiss her. She trembled, and he could think of few things worse than placing his lips on someone who was afraid and not…

She touched him and squeezed his arm to prompt him. He guessed that the Ambassador prepared her for all the aspects of wedding ceremony, and he almost wished someone did that for him, too.

He still asked for forgiveness.

He towered over her so easily, and she seemed so vulnerable in his arms. He damned his armor and gloves and he was worried he pulled her in too harshly. Her hair smelled of herbs and honey. Her floral crown tickled his forehead. She tasted of elfroot toothpaste, her lips warm and gentle. She kissed him back softly, and squeezed his arm harder. His pulse quickened slightly, because despite everything, he still was kissing a beautiful woman.

Afterwards, Mira was shy and quiet, and she clung to his side. He wasn’t even sure she noticed that she did not let go of his arm for even a second.

There was not a lot of people in the Chantry, but still a lot more than she could possibly recognize. He was certain the only thing say she managed to say was “thank you” repeated over and over again when hearing congratulations.

It was over quickly, and now she was standing in the middle of their quarters, looking around as he placed his longsword on the weapon’s rack and removed parts of his plate armor and turned to look at her.

Maker’s breath. He felt the gulp in his throat. She looked at him quietly, and he had just realized that from her perspective the first thing he started doing was to undress, even though taking off the plate armor was always the first thing he did upon entering his private quarters. He still was fully clothed in his gambeson.

“The bed is yours”, he simply said, “I am sleeping on the floor. On my bedroll.”

The relief on her face was almost too much too bear.

“Please, make yourself comfortable. The servants brought some clothing for you and it’s already stacked in the dresser or the armoire. The dinner will be brought here since it’s… our wedding day.”

Since everyone who doesn’t know surely thinks we won’t leave the bed, he thought.
She merely nodded.

The wedding gifts brought to the room were stacked neatly on top of the desk and on the floor. It was considerate given no notice for the wedding, and he was certain that Josephine decided to prompt the Inner Circle and the advisors to do that for Mira. He offered to open them right away.

She hesitated for a second.

“I’ll change first”, she decided, “that dress is not very comfortable.”

“The bathroom is right behind that door”, he offered, hoping to reassure her further.

She collected some clothing and disappeared in the bathroom, and he took the time to take off this blighted padded gambeson. His linen shirt felt much cooler and pleasant. He took a deep breath. Their conversation that morning seemed easier than this. This was excruciating, he almost would rather be on the battlefield.

He needed to notify his parents as soon as possible, and attach the copies of the documents. He could swing by the rookery tomorrow morning…

“Delrin?” Mira walked out of the bathroom still wearing the wedding dress. “I think I… I need help unlacing the dress. I… I tried but…”

Sweet Andraste.

She turned around facing the wall and moved her hair out of the way.

The dress was tied in Orlesian fashion knots, no wonder she had issues. Orlesian knots were not supposed to be unlaced alone, but with a help of a servant or a lover. He worked carefully removing the ribbon, and he couldn’t quite avert his eyes because he needed to see what he was doing. The dress was heavy and separated a bit as he worked on untying it, and… Maker’s breath, he froze. There were flowers tattooed between her shoulders blades. He suddenly felt like he knew something about her that he had no right to. Few more loops and he handed her the ribbon and finally turned away.

***

Delrin unlaced her dress easily. He certainly had done it before, his hands moved swiftly and without hesitation. He must have noticed her tattoo because he stopped for a second, but he didn’t say anything. She was finally able to change into much simpler clothing.

Mira knew she did not help him with carrying the conversation. He actually seemed a bit less confident now, and perhaps even slightly nervous. He must have gathered what she was worried about, because he was quick to assure her they would not share the bed.

Taking off the armor and putting the sword away made him seem a bit more like a regular person, not merely a formidable warrior.

She needed to show a little bit of good faith. He did nothing but had been considerate.

The first thing she noticed when she left the bathroom were not gifts, neatly packed in white parchment, but the sack. The dead man’s sack. The same one she found her first day in Thedas. She gasped audibly.
“That’s basic Templar satchel”, Delrin furrowed his brows, “I don’t understand…”

“It’s mine”, she replied quickly and he looked at her puzzled. “I mean, it’s not mine. The first day in Thedas… I found it. I’m sure you’ve heard the story…”

“I know of your… circumstances.” he replied. “I don’t know the details. Please don’t feel obliged to share”, he quickly added.

“I found it on the dead man the first day after I landed here. I guess he was a Templar. He got… mauled by a bear. I think Cassandra, Varric and Solas killed the same bear before they found me.”

“I’m sorry”, he said quietly.

She opened the sack impatiently and found all the items still there, including her pocketknife and her miraculous medal.

“I can’t believe they gave it back to me. I… guess I would have died without that sack. I had nothing to hold water and I wouldn’t be able to start the fire without it. When I landed here, I only her my pocketknife on me.” She handed him her red Victorinox. “I thought they would surely dispose of it.”

“I have never seen a pocketknife like this”, he examined it carefully. “That’s pretty… impressive. And that red material is unlike what I’ve seen.”

“We have… Well, where I come from there are means to produce items differently and in massive quantities. Without that stupid pocketknife I’d have struggled to open the food I found. You know, I was so focused on surviving it didn’t even register in my brain that I really almost died.”

“I’m so sorry, Mira,” he whispered.

“It’s fine. I was… lucky, I suppose. Isn’t it horrible? I was lucky I found that dead man in the forest. Then I was lucky I was found by the Inquisition after five days because…”

“Five days near Korcari wilds?”

“I… don’t know the name of the location. I spent five days in the cave that was some mage stash or whatever until they found me.”

“That’s… a long time on your own.”

“Yeah.”

Mira picked up the miraculous medal, her only other thing from earth, and a gift from of the two people that ever truly loved her.

“Is that woman your mother?”, Delrin’s voice was soft and gentle, and Mira shivered.

He had no idea. Her heart broke in the million pieces and she closed her eyes for a second.

“That’s… the mother of God. From my faith. We called her virgin Mary.”

The look on her face was so confused it actually made her chuckle.

"If you want to ask me how a woman could be a virgin and at the same time have given birth to a child that was also God, it was a one time miracle deal.”
“I… see.” He replied bewildered.

Mira looked at the necklace and felt her anger and sadness resurface. She wouldn’t wear it. She couldn’t wear it. She couldn’t bring herself to toss it either.

She placed the miraculous medal into Delrin’s palm and whispered, “Can you take it? I…can’t bear it.”

He looked like he wanted to say something, but obliged without saying the word and placed it inside the shirt pocket on his chest.

“Thank you.” She looked at him again, his handsome face still slightly confused. Suddenly he seemed much more approachable. “So, do we open those gifts?”

***

Delrin thanked the Maker that Mira seemed to be more relaxed now, especially after seeing her finding the Templar’s satchel. He knew they found her north of Korcari Wilds, near Hinterlands border. He had no idea she survived five days in the area completely alone. He had no idea she encountered the body of a rogue Templar. She wasn’t wrong when she said she could have died so easily.

Delrin would never say it out loud to her, but he was convinced that the dead Templar would have killed her himself if she had the misfortune of encountering him alive.

She gave him the necklace that was clearly important to her, because the sorrow on her face as she looked at it made his throat dry. She gave him no instructions what to do, and so he wouldn’t toss it, he would just keep it out of her sight.

Truthfully, he needed to thank Josephine for arranging the gifts, because it provided the easiest topic of conversation. Varric gave them the full set of Genitivi’s books and Delrin actually wondered how in the void did he have the rare set available right away. Probably something related to Wicked Grace winnings, but he was not about to pry. Mira actually seemed to be excited about books, and he encouraged her to see if she wanted to read any of the ones he already owned. Madame Vivienne procured the whole small chest of beauty products, and Delrin fully realized he had never lived with a woman before. Surely, he had spent nights with lovers before, he had fought alongside women and traveled alongside female soldiers, but that was quite different. Mira mentioned that she spent her first night at Skyhold in Vivienne’s quarters. He told her that people called Enchanter Vivienne Madame de Fer, the Iron Lady, and she actually giggled in response. She giggled! It was fleeing, but she giggled nonetheless.

Delrin discovered Mira spoke Orlesian when she had no trouble reading the labels on the bottles of wines from Dorian. She spoke fluently but not perfectly, unlike him. He could pass for an Orlesian, if only linguistically, truth be told. Other gifts constituted of, among other things, set of teas and spices, a leather notebook and a bow, which Delrin was certain Sera looted somewhere from someone. The most unexpected present was a note from the Inquisitor offering Mira a horse of her choosing from the Skyhold stables.

“I presume”, he looked at her carefully, “that your world did not use horses for transportation and you don’t know how to ride.”

“You’re not wrong on the first count”, she replied triumphantly, “but I happen to be a good rider myself.”
Mira was starving by the time Delrin opened the door to collect their dinner. She had been so tense the last few days she barely ate, and she couldn’t swallow anything this morning even though Josephine made sure that food was available amidst the preparations. Now the bronze trays were filled with plates offering different types of food items and the smell of meat penetrated her nostrils. She could identify mini pies, probably meatpies, pieces of roast, roasted potatoes and root vegetables. Mira felt like crying happily seeing potatoes. Josephine served much fancier and daintier cuisine, but was there a better comfort food in the world than roasted potatoes with tons of butter? And there was a cake, too. Small yellow cake, adorned with tiny purple flowers.

“Would you like to open a bottle of wine?”, Delrin asked almost shyly.

Mira didn’t mind at all. Few hours ago she might have not been willing to drink with a stranger, even if he happened to be her husband, but so far he had been kind, polite and incredibly appropriate. Moreover, she fully intended to enjoy the dinner.

He poured one of the bottles that were gifted to them.

“I know Ferelden cuisine is rather simple —”

“It’s perfect”, she replied firmly while slathering large chunk of butter on top of her potatoes.

The food was indeed excellent, and the yellow cake turned out to be honey flavored, quite exquisite. Delrin took the trays and dishes back to the kitchen himself, and they spent the rest of afternoon talking about the calendar, celebrations and holidays in Thedas and he told her a lot about Skyhold itself.

By the time the evening came Delrin was sitting at the desk and working, and Mira settled herself in the bed reading “Thedas: Myth and Legends”. She actually felt quite well for a change.

Delrin woke up hearing the faint cry in the dark of the night, and he wasn’t sure he should speak up. Even though they talked quite a bit yesterday, he was still a stranger to her, and he still remember her being actually afraid. What words could he use that would not alarm her? Would he embarrass her if he spoke up? She clearly tried to muffle the sounds of her crying. He decided to not say a word.

He spent the evening struggling to find the words to write his parents to explain that he had taken a wife. He finished the sickening amount of reports for Cullen too. That man’s need of control was insufferable. He was a very talented tactician and a great commander but Delrin was certain that the amount of paperwork he required was entirely counterproductive and useless.

When he turned to see how Mira was fairing, she was already asleep with the book open on her chest. She looked both so vulnerable and peaceful, her red hair spread out on the pillow. He gently took the book away and put it on the nightstand and extinguished her reading candle. She stirred a little and then settled again.

Now she was awake, crying and probably desperate to keep quiet and he didn’t think he was able to help her at that moment.

It was only when her cries dissipated within the night that Delrin was able to fall asleep again.
Thank you for reading! This is such an important chapter of the story.

I truly hope I did justice describing varying emotions they both faced that day.

I also think of Delrin as a man who is observant enough to grasp why a woman who doesn't know him might be afraid of him without getting defensive and self-centered. He is more worried about her wellbeing than himself.
Late August, 9:42 Dragon Age, Skyhold

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Dear Mother and Father,

Let me begin my letter by asking for forgiveness for my prolonged silence. The assignments for the Inquisition took me away from Skyhold for most of my time. I was glad to learn you are all in good health and that Barrfield still prospers aside from recent turmoils. Father, I am sorry about your problems with Bann Darby, but I am afraid things are unlikely to change. You have been complaining of the same in each of your letters. Let Calvin handle it best, it is his duty after all, and spend more time resting and enjoying fruits of your labour.

What I am about to say will come as a surprise so please tell Mother to sit down before you tell her. Mom, if you are reading my words yourself, please be seated.

I am happy to inform you that I got married today. I met Lady Mira during my travels, and I swore myself to her by the Maker’s blessing. If this comes of as haste, it is because of the circumstances of the war surrounding us. I do not wish to be separated from the woman I love for a moment longer. If it comes as shocking, please remember that there is no Templar Order anymore, and any promises that I was bound by before no longer apply. I am free to govern my life as I see fit, and I made a choice to share my life with her.

I am aware you might have questions about her heritage. My wife is not of noble origin, and you wouldn’t have heard of her family. She grew up in unusual circumstances and traveled extensively. She doesn’t have any living family members.

I have attached the copies of the important documents I wish to remain with you at the Barr Castle. It is both the marriage certificate and my will. I plead with you to take care of Lady Mira in case anything happens to me. I would sleep better knowing she has the family she could turn to aside from me.

I hope you can be happy for me.

Please inform Calvin. He never writes me anyway.

I hope Barrfield harvest this year is bountiful and you are healthy and not too troubled. Father, please be careful this hunting season. There’s a still a lot of unrest, and I am afraid even the Bannorn is not as safe as usual.

Please sent my greetings to Lady Catherine and give my love to the children.
Remember that even when I stay silent you are all in my prayers.

May the Maker be your light,

Your loving son,

Captain Delrin Barris

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The next two days were the same. Her husband wasn’t there when she woke up, he was presumably working. It was already late when Delrin was coming back to their quarters, and both times she was already in bed and reading. They would talk for a while, he’d spend some time at the desk writing, and then he would go to bed after she fell asleep. Mira could see he was busy and tired.

She knew that most likely her cries kept waking him up. She wasn’t sure if he was irritated or simply trying to give her space, but neither of them brought it up.

The nights were difficult. During the day, Mira would occupy herself with reading and learning and she spent all of her time in the quarters, just sneaking to the kitchens twice a day. The only person she chatted with was Karla, the kitchenmaid who knew and praised Delrin, but that was more of a small talk than anything else. During the night, Mira would find herself flooded with all the emotions she tried to bury in the light of the day. She couldn’t comprehend how she ended up in Thedas. Worse, she couldn’t comprehend if she was the only person snatched by whatever cosmic mistake that brought her here.

Mira needed with all of her heart for Ida to be still safe on Earth. She had made herself believe that because the alternative was too painful to allow. Truthfully though, she couldn’t be certain. She knew that well. There was a possibility that Ida died. There was a possibility that her whole world got destroyed, if she allowed herself to theorize. It did not seem likely, but it wasn’t impossible either.

Whatever happened, it was as if the Earth died for her, or if Mira died herself, except that she was still breathing here in Thedas, and she would fight to continue to breathe.

If Mira was anything, she was a survivor.

The good news was that her everyday fears largely dissipated. Either Delrin was the most sophisticated and malicious man in the world in hiding, or he simply was a decent person. Mira had always been of an opinion that malicious men were usually not best at hiding if one knew the signs, so she chose to believe he was indeed rather good. How else would she continue to go on without completely falling apart?

It was peculiar to share quarters together. Even when they barely spoke, there was something intimate about that reality. She couldn’t take two steps across the room without learning something about him.

Delrin was neat and organized. Not a surprise since he was a soldier. Whenever she woke up, his bedroll had been already cleared off the floor. The paperwork was always neatly stacked on the desk, the inkwell and pens on the right side. Like her, he was right-handed. His razor and something that looked like a trimmer comb were tidily arranged in the metal cup on the right side of the sink. She had seen him carefully take off his plate armor, and she had seen him clean and
polish it once, and she could even recognize the scent of clove in the oil he was using.

Meanwhile Mira could also see that it was rather her that invaded his personal space, not vice versa. She made an effort to make a bed each morning, even though she had not done it in years. If Delrin had one bar of soap by the shower, Mira had several bottles of her cosmetics. If all Delrin had were his toothbrush and shaving supplies by the sink, Mira had lotions and creams and toners, thanks to madame Vivienne. Despite any efforts to minimize her presence, Mira knew that it was spreading.

The only thing she had fewer of were clothes, and she definitely needed more, but she was embarrassed to ask. Not once in her adult life had Mira relied on anyone but herself to get whatever she needed. Not since she left her parents. Definitely not since her grandmother died. Moreover, she felt that any conversation would involve private, invasive questions. How much did he earn? If the will mentioned that, Mira had not paid attention. What could she even purchase and when?

Thankfully, when she woke up on the third morning, she found a heavy coin sack by the nightstand and the note. “Mira, I just noticed your clothing drawer is virtually empty. Please accept my apologies for not thinking about it earlier. Get whatever you need, spend it all if need be. I’m sorry I’ve been so absent and provided you with no help. I got my orders and we’re leaving in a week. There’s a lot of practice and war meetings, and I truly could not get away. Delrin.”

She definitely felt slight shame rising in her chest, but frankly at that moment she mostly felt gratitude. When it came to husbands it seemed she truly lucked out. Obviously, she still had no idea where to go to actually find clothes, or what was appropriate or customary to buy. She dressed in her last fresh shirt and the skirt she wore for the last two days and proceeded down the hallway. It was the first time she walked anywhere besides the kitchen by herself, and she didn’t know where to turn.

“Mira!”, the familiar voice called her and she turned away to see Josephine walking up the stairs, dressed in golds and ruffles, her hair braided today. “How… how are you doing?”

“I’m doing well”, she replied carefully, and it did not seem like a lie. It could have been much worse. “I need to purchase some clothing. Do you have any idea—?” She did not finish the sentence because Josephine gasped with visible excitement.

“I have tons of letters to write and a dreadful meeting with Marquise de la Motte in two hours. However… if you let me accompany you I can take you to a great merchant and seamstress, Camilla. She really is quite good regardless of your style preferences…Come, come, let’s hurry. Tell me, what is your favorite color?”

It truly was an easier process than Mira anticipated, and either clothing wasn’t as expensive or Delrin was generous because she did have no problems paying for anything. Not everything could be picked up immediately, but few items were ready to wear, and Mira was assured the rest of her new wardrobe would be delivered to her quarters within few days. More importantly Mira got pants! She liked dresses and skirts, but perhaps not ankle length, and pants were so much more comfortable anyway. It seemed that the style of available clothing was incredibly varied. When asked about style preferences Mira said “Ferelden”, the first thing that came to her mind. Delrin was from Ferelden, so it felt fitting and appropriate, and truthfully, she did not want Josephine’s ruffles. Everything was bespoke, and Camilla was able to make few corrections right away. Mira also purchased few sensible pairs of shoes, because three pairs that Leliana gifted her were definitely more on the sophisticated side.

Back in the quarters, Mira put on a new outfit and felt the most comfortable and confident since arriving in Thedas. Soft caramel leather breeches fit her like second skin. They laced in the front,
because obviously they did not have zippers here. Blue wrap linen blouse embroidered with flowers completed her look, alongside sensible leather shoes. Surprisingly modern outfit aside from rustic fabrics and folk floral patterns.

Thanks to all the books she devoured in the last two days Mira was aware that Thedas truly was different than what she could conjure in her mind based on her limited history knowledge. It was no Medieval Ages. Yes, there were swords and dungeons. There were demons and dragons too, though Mira tried hard not to think about it. There was limited technology. Perhaps because the main religious figure was a woman herself, there definitely was more equality among sexes than she first anticipated. Genitivi wrote that while it hadn’t been a topic openly discussed within society, there had been little rules surrounding sexuality, and there were no expectations of waiting until marriage. The matters of modesty itself did not seem to preoccupy Andastrians much. Pregnancy prevention was not a matter of controversy either. Fidelity was expected, at least outside Orlais, at least in theory, especially given that marriages were considered unbreakable.

Mira knew she needed to let go of any prejudices of Thedas in order to immerse better. It wasn’t the past. It wasn’t Earth either. It was a completely new reality where quite modern ideas or technology could coexist with those seemingly of the past.

Genitivi had little to say about medicine itself, but enough for Mira to grasp that aside from magic, and she had no idea how magic worked, things were pretty grim. The so called mundane medicine was essentially based on humorism and that there was some social taboo against cutting the flesh because of associations with blood magic, whatever blood magic was. The good thing was that there was plumbing and thus access to water and thus decent sanitation, probably the biggest saving grace of this world aside maybe magic. There was also alchemy and herbalism, heavily magically influenced, and it could have been quite effective too, who knew. It was not like she could become a doctor in Thedas or do anything outside of existing medical system. She not only had no tools, but she barely had any system of references. She had just became a doctor on Earth, provisionally licensed, her first year of Foundation Programme. There was no point musing about medicine. Still, it was hard to stop thinking about the topic that preoccupied most of her thoughts for the last five years.

The knock on the door stopped her train of thoughts. She opened the door and saw a young man in some hooded garb.

“Uhhhh. Lady Barris? I am Scout Jim.”

“Yes?”

“Captain Barris sent me to collect the reports he accidentally left here. Could I…?”

“Ah, sure.” She let him in.

He came in and collected some papers left on the desk. Mira hesitated, but she had been copped up inside for so long...

“I will walk with you”, she announced firmly to Scout Jim.

“Certainly, my lady. Please follow me.”

***

Delrin leaned himself on the large table set before the fighting arena. How could he forget the reports? He felt tired. Frankly, the last two days had been draining. Simon got himself into an
altercation at the tavern two nights ago with one of Belinda’s Templars and Delrin considered suspension. It was Belinda who pulled Derlin on the side and said that she was almost entirely certain her man Johan was the instigator. There were tensions among the Templars given the fact that many struggled without the direction of the Order, not to mention that some struggled with the freedom that mages enjoyed under the Inquisition. Simon’s friendship with Zuzu, a mage and an elf definitely could make someone angry. Delrin wasn’t naïve. He knew there would be problems. He still was furious. Even if he had not surrounded Templars to the Inquisition, he was certain that Maxwell Trevelyan would have forced his hand anyway. That wasn’t the point. The point was that corruption was so massive, so ingrained that there was nothing to save. Perhaps there was a pathway to start anew, but truthfully Delrin did not think he would want to be the part of the Order ever again.

He did not sleep well at night because of Mira’s crying. She clearly struggled a lot, and Delrin couldn’t blame her. She lost everything she knew. He did not see much of her those last two days but when he was in their quarters she did not seem that tense. They conversed freely. The nights seemed far worse.

He focused his eyes on the fighting grounds. Arthur was dueling Rowan, one of Rylen’s fighters. Rylen came back from Crestwood just yesterday, and immediately accosted Delrin after the evening debrief with Cullen to have a sparring session today. Maybe Bull was right. Maybe hitting things would provide much needed distraction. First things first though. He wanted to see Zuzu’s progress over her magical control, and he needed to double check if Simon fucked up his hands during the fight. Drunken angry fist fighting was a bad idea when one’s work relied upon their dexterity. Explaining that to the young recruits somehow never went over well. He wanted to see Merle showcase his new subterfuge move too, that could be very valuable strategically.

“Rowan! Legwork, lass, legwork! Parry! He’s and old man, ye certainly can tire him up! Easy there!”, Rylen yelled towards his fighter and then eyed him grinning. “Barris, mate! You look tired. Yer lassie keeping ye up at night? I heard she’s bonnie. Good for ye, good for me as well, it’ll be easy to defeat ye!”

Sweet Andraste.

***

Mira was astonished how massive Skyhold truly was. It was her first time outside. The only other time she left the main castle was through the gardens to enter the Chantry on her wedding day. Truthfully she was not focused on her surroundings then. Moreover when she first arrived at Skyhold it was during the night. Now the sun was shining and the skies were clear. What a beautiful day.

She walked with Scout Jim through the main hallway, where she briefly saw Varric scribbling furiously, then through the main courtyard; through the inner gates separating inner ward from the outer one. The outer ward was surrounded by battlefields, the first layer of the fortress defense, aside from its geographical location. The area was massive, much larger than Mira anticipated. Scout Jim pointed out the stables and the paddock on the left, and on the right there were massive fighting grounds with multiple fighting arenas. Soldiers lived in the barracks adjacent to the inner walls.

Mira was astonished how loud everything seemed, the sound of metal hitting metal. She observed the blonde man with a scar on his face, the same who interviewed her and gave her a handkerchief as she cried. He was yelling at some poor chap. “Boy! There’s a shield in your hand! Block with it!” That definitely was the Commander, Delrin’s superior. What was his name? She did not
remember. They passed Cassandra training alone and Mira felt astonished how powerful and swift the Seeker was. It looked surprisingly beautiful. Mira noticed the Iron Bull too, he was easy to spot. He had to be easily over two meters tall. He was the only person who noticed her back when she was passing, and Mira waved to him without thinking, feeling suddenly silly afterwards. She knew him and Delrin were friendly, but still, did she need to wave? He was kind enough to wave her back and smile.

Finally, after passing multiple arenas she saw Delrin. He was facing away from her as he was leaning on the large wooden table set just outside of the fenced arena. He was carefully watching someone fight, accompanied by one man by his side and few other people scattered around the ring. Weren’t some of them present at the wedding? She would not be able to recall their names. Her heartbeat quickened.

“I can give him the reports myself”, she said to Jim. He might have not liked it, but just bowed down in response and handed her the envelope.

No one noticed her as she approached. Their eyes were fixed on the ring. Suddenly Mira felt very small walking up towards all those armed and armored people. She placed the reports on the table and wondered what to say when Delrin just automatically muttered “thanks, Jim” without even looking at her. She quietly chuckled.

“Well…”, she started and he immediately turned to her, very surprised.


“Hi”, she said shyly, suddenly very aware that there were others looking at them. Should she say something more, something endearing? Touch his arm? Kiss him on the cheek?

“I sincerely hope Jim did make you do his job for him.”

“Oh. No. I insisted to come.”

“Ah.” His gaze was drifting between her and the arena. Mira suddenly felt incredibly silly bothering him at work, as if she was not enough of a burden already. He praised the man leaving the fighting ring. “Good fight, Arthur. Great parry as always.”

“I am really sorry for disturbing you…” she whispered.

“No, no, you’re not…”, he turned towards her again. “I am glad you came. Let me introduce you properly or my squadron will never forgive me.”

***

There was something in Mira’s eyes as she watched the mages fighting… He would rather look at her than assess Beau’s combat skills. This had to be the first time ever she has seen magic. The primal school, the foundation of magical combat, the type of magic that he felt hit his body too many times. Delrin expected her to be afraid, but if she was, it was not the main emotion written on her face. He eyes widened when Beau casted Tempest. She looked… curious, fascinated even. Mira also seemed more relaxed. There was not nearly as much tension in her body as when they first met. He was pleased to notice she wore new clothing. He seriously should have thought about that earlier. She did not seem comfortable asking for anything. Her outfit was much simpler than he anticipated, and she stood out amongst all the warriors. She wore simple breeches and a blue linen shirt. The embroidery around her blouse was certainly Fereldan. He could see the outline of her figure much better than when wore a dress. He really did not intend to, but he definitely noticed
her full breasts and the curvature of her hips. He could not deny she truly was an attractive woman, and he certainly was not the only one to think that.

Rylen’s eyes glimmered in an unmistakable way when Delrin introduced his wife to him. Captain Rylen Creagach had a well deserved reputation of a womanizer. Thankfully Mira did not seem to pay attention when Rylen’s eyes stopped a second too long on her cleavage. Delrin certainly did.

Mira definitely did not seem to recognize his squadron even though they all came to the wedding, but he expected as much. She was much less frazzled today though, and exchanged pleasantries with everyone. He shot a warning glance towards Zuzu who certainly wanted to ask thousand questions. Simon was on his best behavior though, undoubtedly aware that he already was in much trouble for getting into that blighted tavern fight. It was Simon’s turn next on the arena anyway.

What was he doing now? He was fumbling with his left hand and Delrin caught the glimpse of the bandage cloth. Trevelyan swore to Barris he was not hurt besides some scraped knuckles and Delrin decided to trust that assessment. Now he felt his irritation rising and he was seconds away from pulling him from training when he heard his wife addressing Simon herself:

“There’s a better way to do it”

***

It was loud at the fighting grounds, loud and windy and it smelled of sweat, but Mira did not mind. It was rather interesting, to be honest. There was a huge difference between reading about Templars and mages in Genitivi’s books and actually observing something she had never seen before.

She flustered a bit when she realized that Delrin’s squadron was there at the wedding and she had no recollection of their names or faces, but it truly wasn’t that bad. She could do small talk. She found out that Ser Arthur Oswin was a father of two little girls, Keira and Kayla. Regardless of the universe, the proud parent would always be eager to answer few questions about their kids, and Arthur was no exception. Kirke and Clarrisa also engaged in the short conversation, and the young Elven mage looked like she had to stop herself from bursting with questions. Her pretty face with big blue eyes and little nose and a head full of light blonde hair reminded Mira of Ida, and she immediately took liking to Zuzu.

Another person she met was Captain Rylen Creagach. It was his squadron that Delrin’s people sparred with. He had peculiar facial tattoos, surprisingly well made. It was his accent that almost took Mira’s breath away, so familiar for someone who lived in Scotland the last five years of her life. Mira really tried not to obsess how it was even possible for two separate worlds to share so many common features, including man-made languages. There would be no way for her to figure it out. Regardless what caused it, it was was certainly better for her. If she couldn’t communicate, she probably would have already been dead.

Mira turned her head slightly and that young boy Simon caught her attention. What was he doing? He looked like he was still a teenager, a bit awkward and shy, but she was certain she he had seen his face before… Oh yes. Simon Trevelyan. Maxell Trevelyan. They had to be related, probably even brothers. Of course. He seemed to be fumbling with his hands, and Mira could recognize that he was trying to wrap his wrist. Did he strain it? Was it the hand he used for sword fighting or the one he used to hold the shield? Anyway, whatever he tried to accomplish did not look remotely correct. Should she…? She couldn’t… Oh honey, no. That would certainly affect his circulation. Why would he even…?

“There’s a better way to do it”, she could hear her own voice.
“I’m fine”, he replied flustered, clearly shocked why she was even speaking to him.

She really could have left it at that. She sighed. He was just a kid.

“What are you trying to accomplish?”, she still pried.

Simon flustered even more and looked embarrassed. Slight guilt settled in Mira’s stomach. It really was none of her business, and she certainly had no intention to play the part of the medic in Thedas, but this was not medicine. It was just… common sense, honestly.

“I… well… just… my knuckles are a bit scraped…” He mumbled.

“I can wrap it for you”, Mira took few steps towards him.

“I…”

“May I?”, she asked and he merely nodded. She untangled the mess he created and looked at the fabric. Was it cotton? It was better than she anticipated, enough elasticity to work with easily. “Did you fracture it? Does it hurt now?”

“Nah, nah, I just thought it would help…I had a thing at the tavern and uhm…I am fine I just…It’s just bit tender, that’s all.”

“That’s the hand you use to keep your shield?”

“Yeah.”

If it was the hand he used for sword fighting, she would probably hesitate, but shield holding… She could wrap it the way hand combat fighters do. The force wasn’t necessarily dissimilar, and she could pad his knuckles. Whatever. It certainly would be much better than whatever he tried to do himself.

“Keep your hand like that for me. Open up your fingers. That’s fine. I start here… around the wrist, three times, now the thumb, now mid-knuckle, now I can layer it like that… you got to make sure it’s smooth. That layer… That’s to protect your knuckles. The padding will lessen the impact and thus protect you from injury. Now around here, and now here between fingers, now knuckles again… Do you see how it’s stable but not tight? You can’t do it too tightly or you’ll affect your circulation and that is very bad. Now back to the wrist, and I can go up with it a bit… Yes. Alright.” She finally felt satisfied with her handiwork, and Simon put back his glove. “Now tell me if it feels more stable.”

“Yeah.” The kid nodded approvingly.

“Good. Just remove it after practice and do not forget about it”, she instructed and then realized that Delrin, Rylen and at least few other people were looking straight at her and she felt her cheeks flush. The best way was to provide the explanation closest to the truth without being suspicious. There were demons falling of the skies. Her knowing few things was hardly bizarre. They had some semblance of medicine in Thedas after all. She sighed and spoke carefully. “I can do some… things. Wound care. Stitching. Some joint or bone setting. Some… illness care. Deliveries. Things like that. Kind of.” She mumbled few things probably done in Thedas without magical assistance.

It was Rylen who broke the silence. “So, were ye like a surgeon or what?”

Definitely not, she thought to herself bitterly. She realized he simply meant being the doctor, but still, she would rather not refer to herself as a medic at all.
“I dabbled”, she shrugged. Five years of medical school, five fucking years of incessant studying that would be of no use in this world. It was not a lie though. She did dabble.

***

Delrin glanced at his wife, sitting on the bed and reading. Today was both surprising and…nice. He was truly glad she came to the training grounds, and he would even risk saying that she did have a decent time watching the practice. She watched him duel too, and perhaps it was foolish, but he felt satisfied he defeated Rylen quite beautifully. After the practice ended he was able to finally show Mira around Skyhold, and then they ate dinner at Herald’s Rest, practically empty in the afternoon. Mira still seemed reserved, but she no longer seemed to be afraid. Her hands did not fidget anymore and she even smiled few times.

It was very interesting to see Mira deal with Simon’s hand and using cloth bandage to wrap it so carefully. Her hands moved quickly and confidently, and she was talking the whole time to the Trevelyan kid. He remembered now that he was told she was “a medic of sort”, but he had no faintest idea what that could mean given the little information he had about her world. She said she was able to stitch and dress wounds, and set bones. Those were useful skills. He was quite intrigued by the whole idea of hand wrapping too, he had never done it like that, he just used gloves. Simon said that he felt less impact on his hand when blocking. He had various sets of bandaging cloth anyway, he could just…

“Mira?”

“Yes?”, she looked up at him immediately.

“The wrapping you did for Simon… would you mind showing me?”

“Oh”, she looked at him curiously and put the book down. “Sure, I’d love to.”

Mira sat at the edge of the bed and instructed him to sit on the chair across her, quite close. She examined each cloth carefully.

“Just so you know”, she smiled to him, “There is no sword fighting in my world, not like that anyway. I have never done it for someone like you, so I am not sure what will work and what won’t. But taping or wrapping is used for… well, hand combat, which is, before you ask, mostly an entertainment. I am pretty sure what I did for Simon does work for blocking with a shield, since you position your hand similarly and it’s about absorbing the impact… When it comes to sword handling, I am honestly not sure and I wound’t want to impact your dexterity, and you’re already waring gloves when fighting anyway. But let’s try and see what happens.”

“Sure.” Her hands were small and soft, her nails were trimmed shortly. Even in the Chantry, he couldn’t feel her hands since he was wearing armor gloves himself. Her touch was gentle and warm, and there was no hesitance in her movements.

“That’s what I did for Simon. The idea is that the layers of padding can protect you from the injury when you hit something, like with your fist. I hope it can absorb some force when you’re holding the shield.”

It did feel comfortable and he would certainly try it out tomorrow. She guided him through the process of doing it himself adding some general instructions and concerns.

“Do you have any pain in your wrists when you fight?”

“No”, he looked up to her and she smiled.
“That means you’re doing it right. I’m sure I don’t need me to tell you that though. I watched you fight Rylen and it was… impressive. You’re… really swift and fast.”

He smiled at the praise, and it was pleasant to hear.

“Thank you… Rylen got cocky. That’s a common mistake, one that many men make.”

“Not you?” She looked at him curiously.

The price of cockiness in the field could be death, either his of his squadron’s. Delrin had lost people under his command before. He lost his whole squadron at Therinfal, although not because of his over confidence. This was purely his choice and his mistake to follow Lord Seeker Lucius, and the one that cost his men their life. But Delrin never made a mistake of being over confident in his command. He would not be cocky just sparring either.

“I try not to be. I’ve seen it end up badly enough times, and not during duels. It’s not only my life out there too, it’s my men and their safety.”

“They do respect and like you.” It made him incredibly proud to hear her say it.

“I try”, he chuckled. “And I do like leading them, even though Maker knows managing Zuzu and Simon can be a handful.”

Now Mira laughed openly. Her smile was bright and gorgeous. Her whole face lit up.

“He might have said something about… a thing in a tavern.”

Delrin scoffed and sighted. “Managing that was one of the reasons I came so late one night. I have low tolerance for people under my command engaging in ridiculous fights. I don’t spend my days preparing for the assignment to be comfortable with losing a soldier because he hurt his wrist in drunken altercation. He is very lucky the other captain insisted her man started it.”

“He looks just like the Inquisitor.”

“He’s the baby brother. Despite of what I just told you, he really is a very talented fighter and he’s very reasonable most of the time. Mages like him. I don’t know how much you know…”

“Enough to gather your meaning, I think. I was given a lecture about… last year’s events.”

“My squadron is one of the first where mages and Templars equally in its ranks. I’ve been leading them for over six months now.”

“I’m sorry I did not remember anyone from the Chantry.”

“Oh, do not fret. They did pry about you though.”

“Did they?”

“I received some unsolicited advice from Arthur.”

“Well, what did he have to say?”

“He said few things about not daring to make you angry, and how important dutiful letter writing was. Now that I think about it, he does send tons of letters home.”

“Will you… Will you write me when you’re away?”
“Certainly. I… had assumed…”

“Oh. I must just warn you my handwriting is absolutely atrocious, and that is without trying to use
inkwell. What should I write about?”

“Anything you wish, just… well, not your… circumstances. It’s a rare chance but if the letters
were intercepted…”

“Sure. Just so you know, hand written letters are not commonly done where I come from, so it will
be something new for me.”

“Oh? Truthfully, I can’t even begin to picture your world.”

“Yeah”, she whispered. “It’s… different.”

“I think I was told you were some sort of a medic?”

She rubbed her arm and looked up.

“Yes. I was a doctor, but just freshly out of school, and honestly, I don’t think I have a lot of usable
skills here. The medicine we used… it was different, and it virtually all relied on tools that are not
available here. Here I only have my hands, and that’s not a lot. Moreover, I don’t even understand
your medical system. I know there’s magical healing, and I’m thinking it’s the more effective sort.”

“Yeah, it can certainly effectively heal many things, for sure.”

“And the mundane medicine is…ekhem… humorism.” She raised her eyebrows in a way that
made Delrin think she definitely heavily disapproved.

“I have never used much of the mundane medicine, besides wound cleaning. I always try to be
supplied with healing potions. I know Iron Bull and Qunari generally consider humor theory to be… utterly wrong. Bull relies on his own man for medicinal care.”

“Really?”, she looked up to him interested. “Well, so do I. Utterly wrong. I know I don’t know
much about Thedas. I know magic clearly exists here, even though it would be unthinkable in…
where I am from. I can accept dragons and demons and magic but I just cannot comprehend any
world in which humors would be true. That’s just…an inelegant theory, at the very best. It doesn’t
make any sense. I just know it’s not true.”

“You’re not the only one. I never gave it much thought, but there are certainly some that avoid
infirmary unless they have no choice, like amputation.”

“I know it’s impossible when you’re away, but here in Skyhold…Please do me a favor and send
for me if you or any of your men get hurt. I mean it. I… Well. There’s still some things I could do,
I guess. And I certainly would not wish for you to undergo needless bloodletting. If anyone ever
offers you bloodletting just outright refuse, I implore you.” Mira spoke fast and passionately, her
cheeks slightly colored, and there was something in her eyes that he had not seen before.

Delrin never thought of himself as a stupid man. He understood enough to deduce that her society
seemed advanced in many ways.

“I… can certainly do that, if you wish to.”

She looked at him once again and blushed a bit more.
“I…”, she sighed, “I forgot to thank you for the coin and… well, I definitely feel more like myself…”

“Oh, no, please, well… It’s yours too. I truly am sorry for not assisting you more. I always keep some coin in the desk drawer on the right or you can simply add thing to my tab at most vendors and the tavern. I… Sweet Andraste, where did you eat for the last two days?! I haven’t made sure…”

She shook her head and he could see some of her curls falling over her face.

“I do realize what impression I might have given you, Delrin, but I assure you I’m quite capable of going to the kitchens and feeding myself. I also know now where the fire striker is and how to use it for the lamps. Karla showed me how to start the fire at the stove too. I’m fine.”

“Very well, it’s just… It’s my duty to help you, and I have not even make sure you’re clothed and fed. I am sorry Mira, I really am bad at this.”

She chuckled slightly and shook her head again.

“Our situation…,” Mira did not use the word marriage but Delrin knew that’s what she meant, “is… unconventional, to say the least. We do what we can. And… you’re not exactly bad at this. You have been very… kind.”

Delrin felt the wave of relief spread over his chest. Mira called him kind. He still remembered her fear on the day of the wedding and how she looked at him then.

There was perhaps the tiniest thread of understanding between them now.

Chapter End Notes

If you’re surprised Mira graduated from medical school at the age of twenty four, it is direct entry in most of Europe. You start it right after high school but it lasts longer depending on the country.

Mira is originally from Central Europe.

Also Delrin might be relatively relaxed in his command, but he does not tolerate carelessness. Banter, whining? Sure. Do anything that will affect your performance and you’ll be in trouble.

Our favorite Captain Barris will be deployed soon, and Mira left to her own devices.
The Starry Night

Chapter Summary

Delrin and Mira navigate their marriage before Delrin's mission.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Early Kingsway, 9:42 Dragon Age, Skyhold

Delrin Barris was not inexperienced when it came to women. Templar life did not allow much romance, but it allowed to steal moments of pleasure. He would never lie with anyone that was his protégé, and even seemingly consensual mage-Templar love affairs left him opposed. He was not an ignorant man, and he wasn’t careless either. He knew the impact of power imbalances. He would never buy companionship either. Many Templars did, but he’d never accept the possibility of a woman not enjoying his affections. He had several lovers in his life, starting with a sweet Templar recruit at his first Cirle when they both were just teenagers. His first time ever, but not hers. They were both curious and clumsy and neither were in love. He was still so incredibly saddened to hear she passed away at the beginning of the Mage-Templar war. After the Vigil there were few dalliances in Delrin’s life. Fereldan widow seeking temporary consolation he was willing to provider, the Seeker of Truth with whom he crossed paths several times during his missions and his longest on and off affair with the Orlesian Chevalier. She was the longest relationship he has ever had. It lasted two years and ended good several moths before the Conclave’s destruction.

Delrin Barris knew how to flirt, and charm, and dance, and to make sure that a woman wouldn’t leave his company unsatisfied. He has never been in love, and he has never sought love. Being Templar wouldn’t allow it, not for him. He still considered himself comfortable in the company of women, and he certainly respected and liked each of his past lovers.

The one thing that Delrin never experienced much before was intimacy. His affairs were affectionate and pleasant, but passing. Both him and the women he entangled himself with were always aware it was temporary.

Now he was married. Surely there was nothing remotely romantic or sensual about their relationship, but he was married nonetheless. He swore himself to Mira before the Maker and took a vow he knew was forever. He would respect her, provide for her, protect her.

He had never lived with a woman before. Surely he had shared his bed before, but not his whole life. Now he felt thrown into Mira’s private space and he wasn’t entirely certain what to do or say. Regardless how much he tried he still didn’t know how to help her adjust to the new reality that bound them together.

The heaviness that fell on his heart when he still heard her crying at night was astonishing. He did not know what to say. Everything he could have said seemed… invasive. It also felt wrong to remain silent.

Delrin wondered if his absence was going to help her or quite the opposite.
Mira… she wasn’t avoiding his company. Thy definitely had grown slightly comfortable with each other. She came few times to see him practice, and he was glad that she seemed to enjoy it. She’d wait until they were done and then he’d be able to spend some time with her. They ate dinners together. He showed her around Skyhold as much as he could.

She liked the gardens, the massive inner courtyard filled with trees, vines and flowers alongside the contemplative Chantry statues. There was that one time when he was explaining some Chantry teaching and Mira leaned herself against the tree, closed her eyes and let the sun fall on her face… He caught himself once again noticing how sweet her face was, and how beautiful were those long red curls reflecting the afternoon sun. There was much hidden behind her soft beauty though, something sad and maybe even something bitter behind her clear blue eyes.

They chatted enough for him to realize she truly was an intelligent woman. He never considered Mira ignorant but now he was seeing more of her intellect, and she definitely was well educated. Perhaps more opinionated than she allowed to be seen. She was definitely thrown into circumstances that made her far more helpless that she would have been otherwise.

Mira read a lot and she read very fast, and she already had learned so much about Thedas. Her quest for knowledge was insatiable, but it was one of Varrie’s crime novels that kept her awake past him falling asleep. He could hear her made tiny noises as she read it, from hissing to chuckling and it was the first time he saw her react so strongly to the written text. To be entirely fair, “Darktown’s Deal” was his favorite, although he would never admit it to the already smug dwarf. Varrie didn’t need to know that Delrin read it at least once a year.

There was honesty in Mira. The kind of honesty that probably make her a horrible liar. It was not lies she used as a defense mechanism. It didn’t quite mean she was an open book either. Despite their conversations, and despite the time they spent together she certainly was still pretty guarded. Mira was was sincere and cautious and polite and unsure of herself and intelligent and careful.

He wondered what else she was, because there was more.

Mira’s favorite part of the day was to stop by to see Delrin train his crew. Not only it was genuinely pleasant to watch him at work but also because no one knew about her circumstances. She was just the wife of their Captain. The conversations she managed to have with the squadron were soothing because they were so benign and meaningless. As if everything was normal. As if she was normal.

Perhaps it wasn’t entirely appropriate, but she couldn’t help herself but to rejoice in listening Zuzu narrate her flirtations with some mage boy, and to watch Kirke who was probably twenty years older roll her eyes in response. Zuzu reminded her of Ida when they first met.

Ida also had the energy that could light up the room, and Ida was also flirtatious and bubbly and horribly inappropriate at times. Ida was also fast with her hands and quick with her movements and brilliant. Somehow watching Zuzu do magic brought back memories of third year wards with Ida and seeing her run around the hospital.

It was also purely entertaining to watch the fights. The noises were loud, the fighting could be spectacular and even though she didn’t understand the techniques she knew enough about anatomy to be able to notice quite few things and it made her proud. She had no problems following Delrin’s shouting about the wrist positions or proper posturing from the outside of an arena.

It was easy to see how much he cared about his men. He was professional and not overly warm,
but he clearly enjoyed spending time with them.

Truthfully she probably learned more about him by observing him than by their conversations.

It was the first time ever Mira has been that quiet.

Quite a different perspective.

Delrin knew that he needed to make sure Mira had a familiar face to turn to when he was away. Just in case she needed anything. He wasn’t entirely sure how to go about that given the fact that those closest to him were exactly people that interrogated her before. Of course he was certain that Mira could turn to Josephine at any point, and the Ambassador was certainly most approachable, but there had to be someone else.

Truthfully, he needed to get her properly acquainted with Bull. He truly was his closest friend, and Delrin would trust the Iron Bull with his own life.

He found Bull sparring with Cassandra, both of them formidable warriors. Nobody could swing that giant greataxe but Qunari also left himself uncovered a lot. His style of fighting was not very defensive, but at the same time he was faster than he seemed and he did brutal damage. Cassandra was simply technically the best sword fighter Delrin has ever seen in his life, and he had seen many that were good, himself included. Both Iron Bull and Cassandra loved fighting, although Bull would be far more eager to admit it than the Seeker. He watched them for a while enjoying the show.

Cassandra won.

“Solid work there, Seeker”, Bull turned to Cassandra.

“You as well.”

“You hit better than Cullen”, he winked to her and she laughed in response.

“So I have been told”, she replied with palatable sense of satisfaction.

“Barris!”, the Qunari smiled at him.

“Cassandra, Bull”, he welcomed both of them.

“I’d ask you to spar with me”, Cassandra said to Delrin, “but I am drained and I dream of taking a bath…”

“Frangipani, trust me.” Bull remarked playfully and Cassandra laughed at him. Delrin was used to their meaningless flirting. Nothing would ever happen but they both flirted when fighting. Again though, Qunari would admit it more readily.

“I wish I could take you up on that sparring offer, Cassandra, but I’m deploying in three days and there’s a lot to do.”

“Dales?”

“Emerald graves.”

“Ugh”, she glowered. “My condolences. You’d think you’d have enough of Orlais after Exalted
“I have enough of Orlais”, he admitted, “but I also have my orders.”

“How is your… wife?”, Cassandra hesitated before using that expression to ask about Mira, and Delrin hesitated in answering. Truthfully the only people he talked about Mira lately where people who didn’t know. Cassandra knew.

“She’s… doing well”, he decided, “but since I am leaving I hope I can tell her she can reach out to you if need be.”

“Certainly”, Cassandra looked at him surprised, “if she’d even want to… But yes. Please assure her she can, anytime.”

“Thank you. I appreciate that.”

After Cassandra bid her farewell, Bull looked at Delrin curiously.

“So, Barris… You’re here to ask me to the same and watch over your redhead, am I right?”

“Her name is Mira”, Delrin scoffed and Bull just laughed in response, “and I actually thought we could arrange some dinner together maybe. I know you met her before but it was under different circumstances.”

“To put it mildly”.

“And since we’re close…”

“Awwww, Barris.”

“I still fail to see why”, Delrin laughed loudly, “you’re quite the worst.”

“And yet you want me to check up on your wife when you’re away. Quite an honor. You love me.”

“Well, I want her to have the option to reach out to you should she need anything.”

“Fine. Just so you know, I think Dorian will have to be there. He doesn’t care about you in the slightest, but I know he wouldn’t pass the opportunity to meet Mira properly.”

“I figured as much. Just maybe try to tell him to… not be pushy with questions.”

“Oh, yeah, sure, that will go over well for me”, Iron Bull laughed. “So, the tavern? I could reserve the private dining room.”

“That would be perfect. And Bull?”

“Yeah?”

"I am begging you…”

“Oh, look at yourself, Barris, behaving all knightly and protective already. You were just about to lecture me on how I am not to scare off your shy bride by my imposing and inappropriate ways.”

Delrin rubbed his temple and couldn’t help but laughing. “I just wanted to remind you…”
“It’s really quite adorable that you remind me how to talk with people. I’m people’s person. Ask anyone. Do not worry kid, I won’t quite tell her she’s exactly your type.”

“Please don’t make me regret it.” Delrin scoffed and looked at his friend. Qunari warrior seemed quite bemused indeed. Deep down Barris knew that Iron Bull was careful and considerate to read the room and adjust his behavior. Bull mocked and insulted only those who wanted it, and flirted only with those who wanted it too.

Mira wasn’t quite certain if she truly wished to meet both the Iron Bull and Dorian for dinner at the tavern, but it was the only request Delrin made since the wedding, and she didn’t feel she could refuse. He told her he wished for her to be at least somewhat acquainted with his closest friend, and that person was the Iron Bull.

For Mira, it was facing the reality that aside from the wedding day and then passing them by it would be the first time she talked with them since…the interviews. She probably shouldn’t call what happened interrogations. The last time she talked with Dorian he made the face when she smelled badly. The last time she talked with Bull she started howling because she saw a Qunari for the first time in her entire life.

Herald’s Rest was much more packed at night than during the day, suddenly filled with tons of people. She could hear see the bard playing and singing. What a sweet soothing voice that was. Mira loved music. Mira missed music. She wouldn’t dare to sing when she could be overheard, and there was always that possibility. The tavern song was sweet and nostalgic.

The tavern was also loud, bursting with singing and laughter and drinking. Mira did not mind drinking, but one thing that she did mind indeed were drunken men, and she felt herself clinging closer to Delrin’s side. There was a chance he sensed her discomfort because he put his arm around her as he guided her through the main room to enter one of the private rooms in the back. He certainly looked quite different tonight, it was the first time she saw him without his armor on aside from the privacy of their quarters. He still carried his sword, the privilege the tavern allowed only to those in command. He wore a sage green linen shirt, sleeves rolled at the elbow. The shirt had small embroidery across the neckline. Honestly, he looked really nice. She could catch the twinkling eyes of one of the barmaids glaring at Delrin approvingly. She was close enough she could smell his perfume.

Why was she so nervous? She had no problem chatting with his squadron, but this somehow felt different. Perhaps because both Dorian and the Iron Bull had seen her at her most vulnerable and undignified. Mira wasn’t ashamed per se, it was not her fault, any of this, but… She felt exposed, and she hated that.

The initial welcome was warm and sure enough, soon afterwards she was sitting right next to Delrin at the big table lit by candles, set with food and drinks and listened to the conversation passing fully knowing that she herself was rather silent. The person talking the most was the mage himself, describing his latest excursion to the place called The Fallow Mire.

“No, Bull, I won’t stop complaining. I’ve been here two weeks only, and I am not going back to the Fereldan wilderness by any means. Frankly, I’d rather not leave Skyhold at all. It’s been horrendous. A whole month in the Fallow Mire with Maxwell, Sera and Blackwall. I almost voluntarily drowned myself in the bog, believe me, it was sometimes preferable option than listing to Sera and Blackwall talk. A “bog” is far too lovely of a word to describe what essentially ware fields of mud crumpled with undead and I say it as a necromancer. There was also plague there. Plague and undead! Undoubtedly my necromancer skills where why I was chosen to accompany
Maxwell. Or maybe because somehow our lovely Inquisitor wouldn’t dare to ask Vivienne to join him there, vishante kaffas…”

The thought of encountering communicable disease was definitely one that troubled Mira a lot. Seriously, she could only count on warm water and soap, and well, maybe magic after all. Curiously perhaps their alchemy would provide some answers regarding antimicrobial agents… They did have healing potions that seemed to be remarkably effective, at least temporarily as they were used in combat profusely. Perhaps it wasn’t surgical precision that would guide mundane medicine, but pharmacology. Though the question would be be how could successful pharmacology be construed if the whole premise behind the mundane medicine was wrong. When one’s focus was on managing supposed humoral imbalance instead of countering…

“Mira?”, someone said and she suddenly returned her attention back to the table. She could see all of them looking at her. She took a deep breath.

“Forgive me, I got lost in my thoughts. Yes?”, She replied politely, suddenly tensing. She still tried to be in control and not come off as rude or antagonistic, but it was certainly difficult to try to be constantly on guard.

“It was probably my handsome looks that distracted you”, Dorian remarked triumphantly and she actually laughed and sipped from her glass of whisky.

“Is that so?”, she pondered. She felt she knew Dorian’s type of personality, and his flirting, aside from the fact that he clearly preferred men, was not threatening. It was just fun. “Why not? Let’s go with that”.

******************************************************************************************************************************

Delrin almost regretted asking Mira to accompany him to the tavern. The evening was seemingly pleasant and even Dorian was on his best behavior, but he could just sense her discomfort and she was definitely even more guarded tonight.

She was certainly well mannered and kind, but he really wished he would be able to make her a little bit more comfortable, and part of him wondered how she’d fare alone.

It wasn’t that Mira was not engaging at all. She still laughed at Dorian’s innocuous flirtations. That certainly did not make her uncomfortable, perhaps because she knew Dorian would not pay her any real attention. She smiled and chuckled listening to some of the Bull’s stories about his work with the Charges. She drank one glass of whisky and complimented the food.

But she also sat very close to him and he could literally feel her body tensing up, her arms being strained. She played with her hands a little bit more again too.

“You certainly look way better than when we first met”, Dorian eyed Mira and she flushed with so much embarrassment that Delrin wanted to kick him underneath the table.

“It’s remarkable what regular bathing can do”, she responded calmly though he could hear her voice shake. What the fuck, Dorian. Reminding her that she spent days in the wilderness and then she was interrogated.

“I’m trying to tell that to some”, Dorian exclaimed satisfied, “but few listen”, he turned his eyes towards Bull.

“We both know you love it”, Bull responded confidently.
He could feel Mira smile faintly and he could sense she relaxed just a bit. She was not uncomfortable listening. She was uncomfortable when she was the one receiving attention.

Overall, the evening wasn’t entirely unpleasant. He just wished she had more fun.

The tavern was still bursting with laughter and song when they left. They walked a while before the sounds quieted down. The night was dark and still, the stars fully visible on the night sky. They walked slowly in silence and he chose to go upwards, though the inner battlements. They could still access the main castle that way and the view was nice.

“‘You know’, she said quietly, “I hated the night sky here when I first… There was a skylight in the cave and every single night I would see the view I couldn’t recognize. Now I look at it and I couldn’t hate it even if I tried. It’s beautiful. Where I’m from… It’s very bright. The cities are bright and there’s so much light you don’t see anything like that.”

He looked at her curiously. It was the first time she revealed any similar sentiment. She rarely started their conversations in the first place, not to mention to say anything like that. She was not looking at him, she was standing with her arms crossed around her chest and looking up. She seemed serious but there was something more to it.

She appeared even more vulnerable and delicate when bathed the darkness. Delrin wasn’t able to see the expression on her face.

“It’s a nice night. Would you like to stay here for a while and look?”

“Sure.”

Mira leaned on the wall and looked through the crenels, touching the stone. The walls were practically empty, and even if there were guards no one would dare to say anything to Captain Barris. He took two steps further and joined her, not too closely, but just enough to have a quiet conversation.

“You’ve been quiet tonight”, he said gently after a moment of silence.

“I… I’m sorry.”

“No, it’s… you don’t talk much about yourself.”

“Neither do you.” He was taken aback by her words and she turned her face towards him. “The most conversations we’ve had were about Thedas. The majority of the questions you ask me are about my world. It’s only natural, it’s just… You probably say less than you think. You talk about Thedas but not much about yourself.”

He found himself quite stunned at her words. She wasn’t particularly wrong. It was true he was trying to get to know her mostly by learning about her circumstances. It was also true he was treating his role to help her immerse in her new reality seriously.

“Don’t get me wrong”, she added after a moment. “I am not criticizing. It’s just… I’m… more than my circumstances. Otherwise…,” she did not finish her sentence.

The shame and confusion that appeared in his chest was so sudden that he found himself lost for words.

“Sweet Andraste”, he finally admitted, “I…You’re right and I… I apologize.”
“Don’t, please, that’s not… I haven’t been asking you much either. It’s just… I don’t intend to be awkwardly silent. I don’t actually enjoy how I come off most of the time. I’m not… stupid. It’s just…”

Delrin never thought she was stupid, not even once, but perhaps he did not quite realize how aware she was of her own nerves and what others might perceive and how much it bothered her… Was it the reason why she was much more comfortable talking with his squadron? Because they didn’t know where she was from and what happened? Was the conversation was free of those questions and concerns? He could… Well. He could at least try.

“I like drawing”, he heard himself say and she turned to him, furrowed her eyebrows and then smiled. It wasn’t a big smile, but it was honest and her eyes glimmered.

“Drawing?”, she repeated. “Like with… a pencil?”

“Yes”, he admitted. “There’s a notebook I always take with me on my missions and when I have a moment to myself I draw random things, whether it would be landscapes or people or simply things I encounter… It helps me relax.”

“That’s…”, she hesitated. “I would have never guessed.”

“Well, I do more than fighting”, he chuckled softly.

“That I figured. You clearly like reading and you abuse your books. They are in horrible shape. You clearly read them multiple times and you clearly read them in some… field conditions.”

“What? That’s…”

“Admit it. You definitely like to eat while reading. You could have told me. I spent the whole week making sure to drink tea before touching the pages of the books we’ve been given because I wasn’t going to spill anything considering how neat you are. Then I opened one of your books and… well. They are clearly… what would be the polite expression? Well loved. Not to mention that I think I found one blood smear across the page too. And the parchment smelled of camp fire.”

“I…” He laughed embarrassed, “I read in the field too. It’s not exactly… Please, eat and drink whatever when reading if you wish to.”

“I will now.” Even in the darkness he could see her body relax a little bit. “I like music. Tonight was the first time I’ve heard it since… you know. It was nice. I… I sing too.”

He wouldn’t mind to hear her sing, not at all.

“I don’t sing, but I’m a decent dancer.” It was true, and while Templars did not have balls, he did live in Orlais for a while.

“Really?”, she eyed him. “I’m a horrible dancer myself.”

“I love dogs. They were big part of my childhood. We’ve always had Mabaris.”

“Spoken like a true Ferelden or so I’ve heard.”

“Yes”, he looked at her with a smile. “Indeed.”

“I really like dogs too, but I’ve never had one. I have a sweet tooth. Emarrassingly so.”

He certainly could bring her nice chocolates when was passing through Jader or Val Royeaux at
some point.

“I miss good food when I’m traveling. I really really do.”

“That leak soup at Herald’s Rest was very good. The food is better than I initially assumed.”

“I’m glad.”

Mira looked up the night sky and then shook her head in the gesture that was already surprisingly familiar to him. She turned her face towards him once again.

“I’ve noticed… I am the only person that calls you by your first name. Why…? Generally first names are used here commonly, but everyone calls you Barris.”

“There was another Delrin at the first Circle I trained at. The Knight-Captain training us tossed the coin and I simply became… Barris. I got used to it now. I… like that you call me Delrin. That’s why I didn’t say anything.”

“Well… good.” He could hear her take a big breath and then let the air out. It really was so quiet around them. She did not look at him when she whispered her next words. “I am afraid of a lot of things.”

I know, he thought, his heart pinching slightly. I know, and I swore to the Maker to take care of you, he thought, but did not say that out loud.

“Me too”, he admitted and it was true. “More than you think, probably.”

The silence surrounding them was not uncomfortable. They stood like that for a while, until Delrin noticed the chill of the wind on his own body, and Mira rubbing her arms.

“It’s getting cold”, he whispered, “let’s go.”

Mira couldn’t quite decide how she was feeling at the moment. All she could notice was the gulp in her throat wasn’t as tight as before.

This was her new reality. This was her new… place to live. She could either completely shut down or open up slightly, at least to Delrin who truly has shown much kindness and consideration. She chose this. He would always be a part of her life now. What other way there was but to get to know him, and getting to know him meant allowing him to get to know her in return.

She imagined him sitting in the tent and drawing trees after the battle, and as absurd that image was, it made him seem so much more… She couldn’t find the right word. He was a warrior and he certainly was well mannered, even noble, but finding out those small details made Mira feel… she failed to find the proper word yet again.

He opened all the doors for her carefully. His gestures and his manners were so well ingrained in him, Mira was certain he was not giving it much thought whether he was walking with her or pulling the chair for her or pouring her whisky or a glass of wine. He was well-spoken and well-mannered but he never tried to be charming. Not with her anyway.

Their quarters were basked in the darkness, and the first thing he did was to light one reading candle by the desk. He sat down on the chair and examined his sword, reaching out for the box with weapon cleaning supplies.
She has seen him done it before, and soon the familiar scent of clove reached her nostrils. He would not lie down to sleep before taking care of his weapon and his armor if need be.

He would leave in just three days, for a full month or slightly longer. Longer than they’ve known each other. Longer than she was in Thedas. He would face… Mira theoretically could imagine what he would face, but only as much.

She didn’t know how she’d fair entirely alone, although she wouldn’t say it out loud. That was his work. It would always be like that. That was a part of their… oh for fuck’s sake, she would not run from those words within her own mind.

Their marriage.

“Any words of wisdom for when you’re not here?”, she asked suddenly.

“What do you mean?”, he gave her just a passing glance.

“Something I shouldn’t do, somewhere I shouldn’t go…?”, she did not know how to ask.

He looked at her surprised.

“You’re… you’re not a prisoner, Mira. I’d rather you wouldn’t leave Skyhold unaccompanied, obviously, but within the gates…”

“What about… like the tavern or walking around in the evening…?”

“Wait, are you asking me if you’re safe here when I’m away?” He turned back towards her frowning and she felt her cheeks slightly flush. Truthfully, this was exactly what she was asking about. She had never walked around Skyhold after dark without him. She had certainly never went to the tavern alone. She only went to the training grounds during the day, and always when he was practicing there already.

“Uhm, you know, being alone…”

His green eyes were piercing at the moment. “Mira”, he spoke with firmness rarely present in his voice when he addressed her. “I’m one of the men that command this organization. You’re my wife. Everyone knows that. You can certainly go anywhere you wish and expect to be safe within Skyhold walls. We had put a lot of work into vetting our troops and maintaining proper conduct. There are agents here who watch for more than you realize. Every man walking around Skyhold knows that if they hurt you I’d kill them. Whether I’m physically here or not, it is my duty to keep you safe and I will. Please don’t worry and do whatever it is you wish to do in your days.”

Mira’s cheeks burned and her throat suddenly went dry. It was the first time she heard Delrin refer to her as his wife when they were talking to each other. Surely, he said that to introduce her to other people, but never in their private conversations. Moreover…He said he’d kill anyone who hurt her. Certainly men expressed similar sentiments on Earth to women in their life, but… Mira knew it was different. In Thedas those words were real, it wasn’t just an expression. He meant his words, and he meant them literally. Thedas was more brutal, more bloody of a world in which physical strength mattered so much more. Skyhold was under no jurisdiction aside that from the Inquisition, and it was likely that the law anywhere from Ferelden to Marches to Tevinter allowed to defend one’s family in such way anyway. Delrin wasn’t boasting. He was not trying to come of as scary either. In the several days she had spent with him he never lost his calm. He did not seem to have a temper. He stated it as a fact. He would keep her safe. He would kill to keep her safe if circumstances required it, not out of passion, but out of duty, because she was his wife.
He still sat there cleaning his weapon, calm and focused. He couldn’t possibly realize how much his words impacted her. Mira saw him spar and duel. She saw him command too, even if it was just the training session. He seemed very good at his job. He was good at his job.

Perhaps it was the first time it dawned on her that it was not merely the protection of his title or his name or his status that protected her. When he married her, he offered so much more. He would protect her with his strength. With his body.

There was something so primal about idea that it made her heart beat faster for a second. He really was so very strong. If she was honest with herself, he was incredibly handsome too, and for a second she allowed that thought linger in her mind before dismissing it as one of those passing thoughts you let go of as soon as they appear.

“Thank you”, she merely whispered and he just looked at her and nodded.

Chapter End Notes

Definitely more of Mira's personality emerging here.

"I am more than my circumstances."

Thank you for reading!
Floodgates

Chapter Summary

Mira falls apart.

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains the description of a well managed panic attack. Just take it into consideration when reading.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

*Early Kingsway, 9:42 Dragon Age, Skyhold*

Mira woke up abruptly to the sound of the world ending. It was dark… She couldn’t see. The sounds were loud and scary. Where was she? The memory… The dread… She sat down and tried to get out but couldn’t move. The sudden sense of doom exploded inside of her body. She couldn’t breathe! She tried, she tried so hard, but she just couldn’t. Her throat shut down. She felt tears streaming down her cheeks. Her heart thudded in her chest. She wanted to breathe, she had to breathe, and she just couldn’t. She felt her body sweat. She felt her body shake. She couldn’t breathe, she couldn’t scream. She knew it was a panic attack, deep down she just knew, she recognized it. Her body still took over and she couldn’t ground herself, she couldn’t grasp anything, she couldn’t even breathe, and without breathing…

She felt a hand touching her shoulder.


The voice was warm and quiet and right there. Delrin, her mind recognized.

“Breathe out.” He said gently and she listened. Yes, breathe out. She did that. That felt better for a second.

She extended her hand forward and felt him right there, and she grabbed his shirt. Something real. Something to anchor herself on. The linen was coarse and it felt warm. She did the same with her other hand.

She felt another touch on the back of her head, and then she heard his voice again, even closer, just by her ear.


She felt her temple rubbing on something rough. His face. His stubble. She focused on the feeling...
of the fabric between her fingers. She focused on all physical sensations.


She felt her face touching the warm skin. It radiated heat. She took a deep breath again and felt the smell flooding her senses. The smell. She focused on the smell. She clung onto that smell.


She listened and she followed his voice. The smell was green and woody and warm. What was it? Cedar? Sandalwood?

“Breathe in. Breathe out.”

Mira felt her breathing getting steadier, calmer. The tears were still pouring down her cheeks. The touch of linen. The scent of sandalwood and… amber? And something tangy and citrusy.

“Breathe in. Breathe out.”

Delrin’s hand was still touching one of her arms, another still on her hair, stroking it gently. He was very close and he was still whispering.

“Breathe in. Breathe out. You’re safe.”

It was rhythmic, melodic even, as if he was chanting a prayer.

“Breathe in. Breathe out.”

Mira could feel her heart rate slow down, the tightness in her chest gone. She could still sense her body shake, but her world was opening up again. She was slowly calming down.

Delrin was still talking to her, but she stopped paying attention to the meaning of his words and just focused on the rhythm itself. His voice was warm like worn leather. Soothing.

It was nice to be touched by another person. Not in any romantic notion, just… it was nice to be touched. It felt good to have that human connection.

Mira knew she should probably speak up, but she didn’t know how to face whatever would come after. She was still gripping his shirt, and he was so close she was able to touch his neck with her nose.

She allowed herself to take comfort in his presence perhaps longer than it was necessary.

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Delrin could feel Mira’s tears on his neck. She was still holding his shirt tightly, and he was still kneeling in front on her bed and guiding her through breathing to calm her down. The thunder outside woke him up too, the lighting could have hit one of the Skyhold towers and Mira panicked. He had seen it happen to soldiers under various circumstances. He had it happen to him, after Therinfal, when he couldn’t hear the lyrium song in his veins anymore.
She must have listened to him because she adjusted her breathing to match the rhythm of his voice, and he could feel her slowly calming down. She was still trembling, but definitely appeared calmer.

Fortunately the worst of the thunder seemed to have past, and what was left was just a violent rain hitting the window.

He only looked up at her when she let go of his shirt. Even in the darkness he could see her face was puffed up from crying.

“I’ll bring you water”, he said and she just nodded in agreement.

She drank carefully, taking small sips and avoiding his eyes.

She was ashamed and he wanted nothing more but to make it better.

“Mira…”, he started.

“I’m sorry”, she whispered, looking to the right, away from him.

“There’s nothing to be embarrassed about”, he whispered back.

He could tell she did not quite believe him. He tried again.

“I’ve seen it before. It happened to me once, too.”, he added. “After… After Therinfal Redoubt.”

She looked at him surprised.

“You had a panic attack?”

“Yes. Bull helped me through.”

“I didn’t… I’m sorry,” she bit her lip. “I… I’ve had some anxiety in the past. I’ve had few panic attacks before when I was much younger. I’m not even sure what caused that one. I… think it was loud when I ended up here in Thedas. I don’t know. I don’t like storms but I’ve never…”

The feeling of sympathy flooded Delrin’s heart. She just seemed so ashamed.

“Listen… I…”, he took a deep breath, “You have been through a lot. There are potions you could try, I’ve taken them before. I… I could hear you cry at night.” Her face flinched. He could hear his own voice crack. “I’m sorry I haven’t said anything. I thought I would make things worse. But I should have said something and offer to take you to the alchemist… Adan refused to be a part of the infirmary and he’s not a medic, but there are potions he knows that can be helpful. I could probably just go there myself and get something for you.”

He could see hesitation written all over her face.

“Does it really help?”, she asked quietly.

“It helped me when I needed it. And I know I am not the only one.”

“Fine,” she whispered barely audibly. “Are… are you not really busy though…?”

“If I have learned anything from years of commanding people it’s that they tend to rejoice every single time you cancel the practice. Especially on a rainy day. It doesn’t matter how dedicated they are. I have a war meeting in the evening that I have to attend, but that’s it.”
The faintest shadow of a smile appeared on her face before it disappeared under the wave of embarrassment. Maybe they weren’t complete strangers, but they still barely knew each other after all.

“I don’t presume you want to go back to sleep? I don’t feel I can fall asleep again myself”, he whispered.

“Me neither.”

“I… How about I bring us some tea?”, she liked tea, that he knew. “You take yours with honey, right?”

“Tea would be nice”, she looked at him gratefully.

“Sure.”

“Delrin?”

“Yes?”

“I like lots of honey. If you’re uncomfortable thinking how sweet it might be, that’s how I like it the most.”

“Honey with the hint of tea”, he smiled to her. “I can manage that.”

She actually smiled back.

Mira looked at her reflection in the bathroom mirror. When she was naked, out of her Ferelden clothing, she looked… the same as always. Any lacerations already disappeared, and so did most of the bruising with just the faint yellowish marks on her hip and the side. Soon there would be no signs of trauma on her body, no visible mark that from the day she ended up in Thedas and her journey through the wilderness.

She wasn’t even that surprised she fell apart for a moment. It wasn’t entirely unexpected, she just anticipated some smaller anxiety attacks. Not something so… visceral and sudden. What Mira wasn’t sure of it was how to move pass that.

Delrin was very kind about the whole ordeal. To be honest, he was kind about everything and as much as Mira appreciated that kindness in some bizarre way it made her feel worse. She felt ashamed of all the emotions bubbling underneath her skin. As much as Mira could guard herself she felt that one step too far would release all the hurt and anger she was carefully storing inside.

Delrin was not only kind, but he guided her through breathing and effectively calmed her down without any hint of judgement. Mira judged herself, despite knowing better, despite being trained better, despite being a doctor. Delrin also offered to request some potions for her, and the idea of what was essentially self-medicating with weird magical concoctions didn’t feel as absurd anymore. After all, it was the medicine they knew here. Even if it was just a placebo, it could be what she needed and the risk of trying seemed fairly low.
When she walked out of the bathroom Delrin was lying on the bedroll on the floor, some pillow and clothing tucked underneath his head, and reading a book.

Maybe she could just talk with him. But she felt she would not know how to stop if she started. She would cry again, probably.

She still needed to thank him, at the very least.

“I haven’t had a panic attack in years”, she finally said, carefully weighing her words. “I… thank you for helping me this morning. I’m actually… you said all the right things and it helped. And… thank your for the tea, and the breakfast, and for the alchemist…”

“Mira…”, he started and then hesitated.

“I know you didn’t quite sign up for needing to…”

“I believe I actually did”, he replied slowly, not allowing her to finish.

Something cracked deep inside of Mira’s soul. It was as if the waters started rising and no dam could hold them in. He was still looking at her patiently, waiting to see whether she’d answer at all.

She sat on the bed, legs criss crossed. As much as she tried to stop, she felt the tears welling up in her eyes.

“… Can I tell you something?” Her voice came out softer than she anticipated.

“Sure”, he put away his book and sat down too.

And then the dam broke.

Mira was angrily wiping out the tears falling out of her eyes. He was waiting without saying a word. She rarely started their conversations, and it was clearly important…

“Before I fell through the Fade and ended up here… I was in the forest camping and I wasn’t alone that day. I was with my best friend, Ida, and her… beloved, I suppose. Ida hurt her ankle and Aidan helped her to the seasonal clinic, and he was supposed to come back and help me carry the tents and all of our things, and we had far too many things. Anyway… I spent few hours alone just enjoying myself and then… everything happened. I remember the weather getting weird, and I remember the sound of thunder, and then there was nothing except the glimmers of green and yellow and then I fell out on the ground in Thedas and… well, I’m sure you know the rest. That’s not the point. The point is that I have no idea what happened and how it happened and I don’t know if I was the only person affected by it, and I don’t know what happened with my world, but more importantly, I don’t know if Ida is… alive.”

The words were coming out so fast her accent became slightly more prominent. The words… so many words. She wasn’t crying anymore, she was just talking, and he just nodded to let her know he was listening.
“I have no idea what happened. Whatever theories I have, they are so wild and crazy I can barely
breath while thinking about it, but the worst notion by far is not knowing what happened to the
most important person of my life. I hope she is safe and sound, and she’s with Aidan, and if that’s
the case, then I could live with that. But I don’t know. I will never know. She has to be alive,
because every single time I even consider the other possibility I can’t breath. I… didn’t have a lot
of people in my life, my family… it’s even pointless to mention. Ida was my family. I would visit
her home for every holiday. We studied together. We worked together. I feel… I’m so fucking
motherfucking mess. Sorry. Sorry. I… I apologize. I can control how I speak, but… well, I guess
the honest thing would be tell you that I curse like a sailor sometimes and I’m sorry, I promise…”

“Mira”, he interrupted her this time, “I’m a soldier. I… don’t mind. I curse too, sometimes. Just…
don’t worry about it now.”

“I’m sorry”, she still repeated those words. “This is exactly what I was trying to avoid. I just… I
feel like I’m drowning. Like everything around me is quiet but deep inside I just want to scream. I
don’t even know how to begin to grieve. I don’t know how to move on. I don’t know… It’s as if
my whole world ended and everyone died, except that if they didn’t die, then at least I can hope
they will move on and be happy. But I don’t know. There’s no knowing that. And it’s as if I died
except I didn’t. And I don’t want to die. I… I really don’t. I never wanted to die, not for one second
and I feel ashamed just by how strongly I want to stay alive, it’s… It’s overwhelming. I… I don’t
know how to even begin to deal with that.”

She was speaking so fast she had to stop to catch her breath. Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes
glimmered with fire.

“I wish I could show you how far removed this is from everything I know. It’s… I know that
certain things are the same and we speak the same language and I can read and… but it’s all
different at the same time. I… I know I’ve already learned a lot but I still feel so lost and unsure.
Almost everything I’ve known is utterly useless here, which makes me feel utterly useless and… I
just don’t know how to live with that.”

Crushing wave of empathy hit Delrin’s heart. He could imagine before how Mira struggled, but it
was still so very different than to hear her voice everything, and to see her do it. She was sad and
she was angry at the same time, and she was frustrated and she was lost, and he wondered if he
would be able to say or do anything to make it even remotely more bearable for her.

“I don’t know… There are so many things I don’t know anymore. Things that were part of my life.
I don’t know what I believe in anymore, and I’ve had faith before. So many things I took for
granted are no longer here and… I almost said that I don’t know who I am anymore, but that’s just
fucking stupid. I am the same person I was before, I just… Everything is different. It’s not like I’ve
miraculously changed. If you asked me what values I have and what principles I believe in, I’d still
probably give you the same answers as before. It just don’t know how to be myself here. I don’t.”

Her gaze suddenly softened and she shook her head again and sighted.

“I’m sorry. I realize that… I just completely unleashed on you. I… I wasn’t lying to you before
when we talked. I… I don’t lie in general, well, not usually. I was just more quiet than usual
because I didn’t know what to say. I don’t know what to say. I have no faintest idea what how to
even begin to talk to you or anyone else. I… Have you ever felt like your whole world ended and it
came crumbling down?”

There was no mockery or sarcasm in Mira’s voice. She was looking at him with blazing intensity
and clearly waiting for an answer.
“Let me just start by saying how sorry I am for your loss, Mira. I really am. And I’m especially sorry about Ida. I cannot imagine what you went through. I can’t. No one can. But to answer your question…”, he started carefully. “It’s nothing like what you’ve experienced, of course. But…” he shifted his position and measured his words. “It was difficult for me to deal with last year’s events and what happened at Therinfal Redoubt and leaving the Templar Order and then finding out… It’s a long story really, so I am not sure…”

“Oh”, her voice was much softer now. “I certainly don’t want to make you share something you don’t want to just because I decided to suddenly unleash this emotional word vomit on you. But… well, it’s not like I’m going anywhere, so if you’d like to say anything, I can listen. I really can listen. Most of the time. If I try.”

He actually smiled at her now. Seeing her so emotional and raw made him want to share his experiences with her too. Besides, this was a person with whom he’d spent the rest of his life, as unusual as the circumstances were.

“Just so you know”, he started, “I will tell you some things that very few people know, so…”

“Oh”, she flushed, “I just assumed it’s private.”

“Yes”, he assured her desperately, “it’s just… it’s easier to just tell the whole story. I know you’ve been told about how the Inquisition came to existence so I won’t repeat that.” She just nodded in response. “When the Conclave exploded I should have been there, but I had a sudden assignment. I got orders to come to Val Royeaux, when I met the Lord Seeker who took command over the Templar Order. I witnessed a Templar hit a Chantry Sister during a shameful altercation and I should have left with my squadron right then and there. I didn’t. I still followed Lord Seeker Lucius to the Therinfal Redoubt fortress. Needless to say there were a lot of… extremely worrisome things happening. I reached out to the Inquisition and I’ve decided to lead some Templars out of the there. The fighting broke out, the Lord Seeker turned out to be a particularly nasty demon that tried to possess me… Anyway, we got some reinforcements and ultimately we have defeated the Envy demon, but… my whole squadron died during the fighting. All of them.”

He saw tears appearing again in Mira’s eyes and she just whispered “I’m so sorry.” Everyone knew what happened at Therinfal, but to see someone from the outside to respond so emotionally… He was used to talking with other soldiers, but somehow seeing her reaction tugged at his heart.

“I was their Knight-Lieutenant for a long time and they all trusted me to lead them, and I made a mistake, and led them to their death. It’s… I had lost men before, but never like that, and never my whole squadron at once, and believe me, I am not careless with the lives of people under me. There’s a part of me that will never forgive myself.”

Her blue eyes were full of empathy and care, and she was crying.

“Do you know how Templars take lyrium?” he asked.

“Yes.”

“Well, I… don’t. I don’t have to. Apparently during the events at Therinfal Redoubt I was… touched by the spirit of Faith and needless to say it disrupted any dependence on lyrium. My panic attack was when I woke up and realized I don’t hear my lyrium song at all. Bull helped me through. This… Not taking lyrium and not needing it is something not many people know about. Leliana knows, Cassandra knows, Cullen knows, certainly and of course the Inquisitor does. Probably Josephine. Iron Bull does, and Cole and well, now… you. The rest of them… They don’t. My squadron doesn’t. It’s just…”
“You don’t have to explain”, she said softly.

“You have to understand that for some it’s almost like becoming an abomination, though not quite. I was so panicked I told Cassandra I was possessed. I was lucky it was her, because I’m sure that if I told some Templars they would kill me instantly, and I would let them. We now know much more about how that works exactly and I... Actually I feel like I got off easy. I’m not dependent on lyrium at all, yet I still cast without any issues. I just still feel... conflicted about it. What happened at Therinfal was the worst day of my life.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Haven was a massacre but of a different kind. It was just… rough. But then we found Skyhold and things got better.”

“So… what helped you?”

“Actually”, he chuckled to his memories, “after my panic attack Bull decided that killing a dragon would take away a lot of my stress and misery. He is a firm believer that hitting things can be quite healing.”

She snickered suddenly. “What?”

“There was a dragon roaming around the Inquisition camp and Bull, Cassandra, Vivienne and me killed it.”

“Did it work?”

“For a second”, he smiled, “then I chose the saner course of action, of course. I got some potions to help me manage, and I just… slowly rebuilt my life. Work helped and my new squadron helped me a lot. It gave me some… purpose.”

“That sounds more… reasonable than the dragon. Dragon, really? Remind me to not listen to the Iron Bull’s advice.”

“Actually”, he raised his hand and pointed towards the ring on his finger, “That’s the same dragon.”

“Wait, what? I thought it’s metal...”

“It’s a dragon bone.”

“So you’re saying that I’m wearing a wedding band created from the bone of a dragon you yourself killed? That’s very… poetic.”

“Well, thank you, I suppose?”

Mira smiled towards him. “Well, I suppose you wouldn’t advise me to start killing dragons to make myself feel better.”

“I’d strongly advise against it. But... well, the day I had a panic attack, the day we fought that damn dragon... I did something you could do, too, if... if you want to.”

“What?”

“I made a friend”, he said.
Mira looked slightly different now. She was still reddened from crying, and she looked quite miserable, but there was some warmth and passion about her he couldn’t previously see. She was sitting more comfortably. She was looking at him more confidently. She talked more openly, and she listened to him, and not only listened. She empathized and responded.

“Sure”, she said gently. “I could do that.”

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It was the day Delrin was leaving Skyhold. Mira stood before the gates and the raindrops were falling on her face. Delrin told her she didn’t need to come to see him leave, but it felt like the right thing to do. He was going to war. Her… husband was going to war.

It was early, barely dawning. The morning was cold and grey, and the earth smelled very intensely, the way it always does when it rains. It was peaceful too, only Delrin’s squadron deploying at the time. The Skyhold still seemed largely asleep, it would be another hour or so before the training grounds would fill with the recruits. Mira knew she would come back to their quarters and sleep for few more hours, probably.

It felt bizarre to watch him prepare to leave. She felt… surprisingly sad. They were married for just short ten days, and now he was leaving for four weeks or so. Mira would never say it out loud, but she really didn’t want him to go. He was the only person with whom she talked and spent time with and maybe there was more than that.

He wasn’t a stranger anymore. Perhaps he wasn’t a friend just yet, but he was… someone important. Actually, the closest person she had in all the Thedas. They shared enough with each other that Mira knew they couldn’t be strangers anymore. Some conversations just alter the relationship forever. She now knew about things that most didn’t, and he opened up to her. He saw her at her lowest point, and helped, and listened to her and cared. She wanted to cling to him and keep him, but that was impossible and he had a duty to fulfill.

The pain in her heart was real and Mira worried. She wanted him to be safe. She wanted for his squadron to be safe. She didn’t even want to think about the things he’d see and the things he’d do. She didn’t know what she would do herself, honestly. She kept watching him going over final preparations.

Delrin’s face was entirely covered with raindrops and so was his polished armor. The rain was gentle, but it was still falling down mercilessly. Mira wondered if they all would be completely wet within few minutes of leaving Skyhold. No one seemed to mind the rain that much though. Delrin was busy, double checking the inventory and equipment, and preparing his whole unit to deploy. She could hear his voice, confident and clear.

“Trevelyan, when I say you need to double check your sack, it means you’re double checking it right now, not giving me the vague response saying how you did that last night. Don’t test my patience before we leave. Merle, have you made sure we have enough knock out powder…?”

“Yes, Captain!”

“See, Simon, this is how you respond. Clarissa, can you…?”

“Yes, Captain”. 
“Thank you. Perhaps there will be a day when we can make sure that Zuzu or Simon are able to pack our medical supplies, but so far that day hasn’t come yet…”

“Captain…”

“You know I’m right, Lavellan. Do I need to remind you…?

“Ugh. One time! One time! Fine, Captain.”

“Arthur, the horses…”

“Ready, Captain. All ready.”

He really was good at his job, and it truly gave her a sense of… satisfaction to watch him do it. He was meticulous and organized, and he was caring too. Now that Mira knew what happened to his previous unit she could see that care even more. He wanted to keep them safe. He wanted to prepare them for everything. He wanted to make them better, to train them as proficiently as he could. He truly was a man who found much pride in his work. And he certainly cared about the people under his command.

She wasn’t the only one watching them, because clearly there were other people that came to say their goodbyes. Petite girl with a face full of freckles and soft brown hair had her eyes fixed on Merle. Kirke was whispering something to the tall blonde woman, while a young mage couldn’t look away from Zuzu. Zuzu’s spirit seemed completely undefeated in the rain and she was as loud as usual.

Her chest tightened when Delrin walked towards her to say his own goodbye. What could she say to him? He was the first to speak.

“If you need anything just ask Bull when he’s here. I know he might seem a little bit… intense but he’s a really good guy and he will help you with anything and I trust him explicitly. There’s coin in the desk, and you have access to the treasury as well. I’m certain you can approach Josephine too and as hesitant as you might be, Cassandra would not turn you back either. Write me. And I will write you too.”

“I will”, she responded.

He furrowed his eyebrows. “You’re going to be all wet.”

“I’m not made from sugar. That’s… There’s a saying from where I come from. Not… not in the Common language. I’m not made from sugar so I won’t melt from the rain.”

“That’s…”

“Sorry. I’m mumbling,” she laughed nervously.

Delrin stood tall and proud in his armor. He really looked like a warrior. He was one. His green eyes were gentle when he was looking at her. He was really… kind. How did his face became so familiar already?

“What do you say to a man who goes to war?”, she asked and he took a big breath but didn’t respond. She took a step closer towards him and put her hand on his breastplate, where his heart would be. “Delrin. May… the Maker… watch over you.”

The blessing she has always known, barely altered.
He gently cupped her face and kissed her on the forehead.

“Maker guide you, Mira.”

“So, no big romantic kiss for goodbye?”, Zuzu pried mercilessly. “I was hoping to witness that!”

The rain finally stopped about an hour from Skyhold. Everyone was slightly irritated but he really didn’t want to allow for any delays. The Dales weren’t exactly very close.

“Some of us keep our private life private, Zuz”, Beau couldn’t help himself from taking a dig at the other mage. “When some, I suppose, are escorted by a different person every single time we deploy”.

“Oh, you’re just jealous.” Zuzu snorted. “I simply enjoy my youth and freedom. Breathe in, and feel the smell of the earth, Beau. The world is quite a remarkable place and I have never felt more alive!”

“Says a girl as we march into the war-torn country while the world is possibly ending”, observed Kirke sarcastically. “Your incessant enthusiasm still shocks me, Zuz. But then, I guess I’m simply not twenty years old anymore. Although Simon is even younger yet he is less… optimistic in his approach.”

“I am an old soul. And I’m freaking freezing currently. That kills my mood any time”, Simon muttered.

The incessant banter meant that Delrin knew he really didn’t even need to address Zuzu’s question on why he wouldn’t kiss his own wife properly when leaving for a month. He had a prepared answer, but it was more comfortable to not talk about it at all.

He was still surprised that Mira was there to see him leave. He told her last night she didn’t need to but she insisted on coming. And she stood there, rain and all, patiently waiting just to say goodbye. It was the first time someone was actually there for him like that. It felt… nice.

Something changed between them since they had that conversation. Mira now talked more and more freely than ever before. She was definitely a talker, a trait hidden until that moment. It was… nice, too, to be honest. She seemed warmer. More… just more of everything. When he shared his past with her, she listened and she empathized. She cried, too, for him and for his men.

He felt guilty about leaving, and wondered how Mira would fair alone. She was a fast reader and knew more about Thedas now than probably majority of Skyhold residents. She was smart and observant. He was also aware though that she was hurting more than she was willing to reveal. It took a lot for her to open up a little towards him.

Delrin had to leave though and they had a job to do. The War of Lions wrecked the Dales and the Inquisition received the information about refugees needing help. The Orlesian deserters started taking over and plundering and killing people. Many of them were former Chevaliers, certainly skilled in combat, deadly to civilians. They were called the Freeman. The Inquisition agents were approached by the man called “Fairbanks” who requested help and protection to fight the Freeman. Maxwell was currently near the Dales himself dealing with the rifts too, and he diverted a lot of
resources to solve other problems. Such a needless, useless, horrendous civil war in the region that already witnessed so much bloodshed throughout history. Delrin was certain that as always, it was the common folk that suffered the most.

Chapter End Notes

This was difficult to write, but it definitely was needed. I hope you enjoy it.

I'm a strong believer that difficult conversations are absolutely necessary part of any human connection.

Next: Mira and Delrin will be on their own, each of them dealing with different things. Yes, the story will include the times when they are apart, too. Expect more of Delrin's squadron in those chapters.

Thank you for reading and for the comments. It means a lot to me.
The First Letter

Chapter Summary

Mira tries to occupy herself while Delrin reaches the Emerald Graves.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Second week of Kingsway, 9:42 Dragon Age, Skyhold

Skyhold felt empty without Delrin’s presence. Even though he spent so much time during practice and taking meetings, he was still there every single night in their quarters at the very least. Now Mira was completely alone and it didn’t take even two days for her to run out of things to do.

Mira finished almost every single book they’ve owned, including the whole “Darktown’s Deal” serial, and to her surprise that particular series moved her to the core. It was the first time in Thedas that she was touched to the point of crying by something not relating to her life. It wasn’t her own fate or Delrin talking about his past. It was merely a book. She cried over a book. Over fictional story and fictional people. It was both peculiar and liberating.

It was easier to start her letter to Delrin thinking about it. She tried to write carefully and diligently but soon enough the words started free flowing on the paper and it was too tiresome to try to rewrite the whole page. She wasn’t sure how the letter was supposed to look like and what it was supposed to contain except not revealing where Mira was from. Anyway, writing still seemed less difficult that talking. She felt more confident asking questions or sharing her opinions.

Mira realized that she needed to venture further and find things to do aside from locking herself in the prison of their room. She couldn’t remember the last time she had so much time to herself. It would be nicer if she struggled less with sleep, and she sincerely hoped the potions would eventually help. Still, Mira felt the boredom began to suffocate her. She was used to living fast paced life. Besides reading and letter writing, she had no specified plans.

The easiest choice was to simply follow the similar routine as always, just without Delrin there. Nobody paid much attention to her when she visited training grounds before. Everyone was busy with their own practice. Mira could move through different arenas and watch. She wasn’t sure if everyone knew who she was, but it wasn’t entirely improbable. Skyhold was massive, but not that massive, and Delrin was Cullen’s Second-in-Command after all, and they have been seen together before he left.

Whether it was the anonymity or being known as Captain Barris’ wife, the reality was that no one was bothering Mira. People nodded and bowed to acknowledge her presence, but that was the limit to their interaction when she walked through the grounds, listening to the familiar sounds of sword fights and watching some of them. It still relaxed her. Some things remained the same. She could still see The Commander standing and yelling at the recruits, she could see Cassandra training ferociously, she could usually spot the Iron Bull and few other familiar faces. After a couple of days of being essentially invisible, it was the Qunari warrior who eventually stopped her.

“Hey, Mira.”
“Hey, the Iron Bull,” her own voice sounded slightly unsure.

“So… how you’ve been?”, he asked measuring her carefully and Mira actually wondered if Delrin asked him to check up on her when he was away.

“I’ve been doing well”, she replied cautiously. “How are you?”

“Well, well. A bit slow now so I spar a lot or drag the boys though the mud.” He laughed. “It’s been what… five days now since Barris left? He almost reached the destination then.”

“Yes, I sent him a letter yesterday so he should receive it by the time he arrives at the forward camp.”

“Oh, that’s nice. Listen, I don’t mean to bother you, but if you ever wish to grab a drink or eat together or ask me questions about the Qun… I’m always at the tavern or here basically. I could introduce you to the Charges, too.”

“That’s so very nice of you”, Mira started, still uncertain how to deal with the invitation, when the loud scream suddenly caught both of their attention. The scream came from the nearby arena.

Bull immediately headed in that direction and Mira instinctively followed. A young man dressed in mage robes was now partially disrobed and sitting in the middle of the fighting ring with three people tending to him. He was definitely injured and couldn’t have been older than twenty, if that. Once again Mira felt astonished by the youth of so many soldiers serving the Inquisition.

“What’s up, Krem?”, The Iron Bull asked.

“Chief! The poor chap fell down when when Dalish casted the…” the young man answered.

“I didn’t cast anything, Krem…” a blonde Elven woman warned.

“Chief, he just dislocated his shoulder…” another voice joined in.

“What’s going on?”, another woman in Enchanter outfit approached them. The injured mage whimpered.

“Enchanter Ellendra!”, Bull yelled. “Stitches says your kid dislocated his shoulder.”

“What else is new. Ah, that’s not good. All right, Petri, you know I can’t just try to heal you, we’ll need to try to fix it.”

“Stiches”, Bull addressed the man who made the dislocation diagnosis, “let’s just yank it…”

The boy whimpered pitifully once again. It indeed looked like typical anterior shoulder dislocation, most likely. No way to get an x-ray, ugh, but then again, horses not zebras, right? Wait, Mira thought, wait a moment. Wait. Wait. Just how do they even plan to reduce it?

“No pain, no gain”, Bull sighted to the mage boy. “Sorry kid, it will take just a moment…”

“Wait! Don’t move!”, Mira yelled at them and they all finally looked at her. “If you yank it, you risk further damage. Don’t reduce by yanking. Just… there’s a way to at least try to do it painlessly too.”

“Listen, I’ve been a surgeon…” Stitches started, “who are you, even?”

“You’re Bariss’ wife,” Enchanter Ellendra stated, looking at her curiously. “Any medical
experience?"

“Some”, Mira responded firmly and Stitches huffed a little. “Listen, Stitches, was it? You don’t yank shit, ever. You do it gently and carefully.”

“I wasn’t going to merely yank it, just place my foot there…” Stitches proceeded to describe Hippocratic maneuver.

“Yeah, I got it. All I’m saying is there are other ways that are safer and painless.” Mira shrugged even though her mind was restless. Of course there weren’t X-rays here or anything she’d use to check for fractures or confirm the type of dislocation. Well, whatever she could try was still safer than what they intended, and much more comfortable for the poor guy anyway. “Let me try it my way.” She turned to Enchanter Ellendra, clearly the person commanding the young mage.

“A safer method that’s painless? Sure, I will take you up on this offer, lady Barris.”

“I need a chair”, Mira stated and Krem got up to bring it. She turned to the injured mage. “Petri, is it?”

“Yes.”

“I am…”, she started and stopped herself, as she almost introduced herself as a doctor. “I’m Mira… Barris.”

It still felt wrong to say it. It would be even worse to pretend she was a medic though, when in fact… she wasn’t. Not here. Definitely not here.

“Before we start anything, I want to assure you that the procedure is not supposed to be painful. It might feel strange at times, but you definitely shouldn’t feel pain. If you do, please let me know immediately. However, this technique will only work if you cooperate with me. It’s not something I do on your body as rather it’s something we both do together. The way you position your body is absolutely crucial. I will be here explaining everything and talking to you, and you can always ask questions. Is that alright, Petri?”

“Ye…Yes.”

“Try relaxing and taking big breaths, Petri. I can tell you that I’ve done it before and had a great success with that method. I am very gentle and I won’t hurt you, I promise. Now, the method will require a lot of touching around your arm and shoulder area, but it won’t be painful, just few minutes of massaging. Is that alright with you?

The mage nodded and Krem came back with the chair. They helped helped the kid to sit comfortably.

“Petri? Sit back to the best of your ability and pull back your shoulder blades. Perfect. You’re doing great. I’m going to kneel in front of you and you can place your forearm on mine… Don’t worry, relax, there will be no pulling. It’s just comfortable for me to support you in the proper position as I massage you. Alright, Petri, relax your shoulders… Very well. Yes, take some deep breaths and remember to keep straight. I will stop if you feel any pain so just use your words when needed. Fantastic. Alright, ready? I will start here, that’s your trapezius… Well, that’s what we call the muscle right there. Does it feel alright? You can just nod. Great.”

Mira almost stopped being aware that other people were present until she heard Enchanter Ellendra’s voice on her side: “Petri is a very talented young man. Excellent at elemental magic.”
Mira smiled gently because the boy seemed to relax even more at the praise.

“Elemental magic?”, Mira repeated without much idea what that was, “That’s very impressive, Petri.”

“Enchanter Vivienne praised my Winter’s Grasp”, the boy added somewhat proudly.

“That she did indeed”, Ellendra added and Mira immediately took liking to the woman.

“Doing well, Petri?”, she asked and he nodded. “Good, now I’m moving downwards towards your… well, the muscle you have here. Straighten your back more if you can. Great, very well. Very well.”

Ellendra continued grasping Petri’s attention as Mira moved towards his biceps, and surely enough, the shoulder seemed to reduce successfully.

“Alright”, Mira whispered, “now, with this method there’s no popping sound, so let me just check… Can you gently bend your elbow more and touch your other shoulder? Oh yes, that’s great. How does it feel?”

“Actually… good”, Petri replied quite surprised.

“Now”, she turned to Ellendra, “It’s probably all fine and there are no fractures but…”

“I can heal him preemptively with my magic later on. How long should he be out of training?”

Mira had no idea how magical healing would impact anything so it would be the safest to follow the somewhat standard practice anyway.

“I’d really like to check his shoulder in few days again, just to make sure it’s still in place. And I’d say four weeks minimum? I wouldn’t want to risk further injury though honestly I have no idea how healing magic can impact that. I know that the way mages use their staves is quite taxing moves on the upper body though, all those shoulder movements…”

“Better safe than sorry”, Enchanter Ellendra agreed, “and it’s not like we’re on the battlefield. Well, this was really interesting. I’ll walk Petri to the quarters. Thank you, lady Barris.”

“Please, call me Mira. Just Mira.”


“Very well. Nice to meet you, Ellendra.”

“Likewise.”

Mira saw them walk slowly towards the inner gate of Skyhold and then turned to face the Iron Bull and his men.

“Ha”, Stitches mentioned, “That really was indeed interesting, and it only took few minutes. No popping sounds but it clearly was in position at the end. I… Does it always work well?”

“No”, Mira said truthfully, “If you have a panicked patient who wouldn’t cooperate and sit in the proper position, it wouldn’t. I still would have chosen a different method over what you intended though. Actually…”, she hesitated, “if you ever need to, I could probably show you…”

“I do”, he said firmly. “And I apologize for my first reaction. I’m always happy to learn.”
“So am I”, Mira replied with a smile. “Now, if you’ll excuse me, I should probably go…”

“I’ll walk with you”, she heard the Iron Bull say slowly.

They began walking towards the inner gate as well, passing many fighting arenas.

“What other skills do you have?”, the Qunari asked and Mira didn’t even know how to begin to respond to that.

“I… honestly don’t know. This is so far removed from what I consider normal and typical that I don’t even have the framework to begin to describe what I could or couldn’t do.”

“But you are a surgeon.”

“I was barely a doctor. Trust me, it’s nothing…”

“Alright”, he sighted, “forget about the titles and their meaning. Just give me few examples of what you are able to do. I’m merely curious.”

“Well, basic stuff. I can clean and dress the wounds. I can stitch. I can do some things like what I just did. Close reductions to deal with some dislocations… Although trust me, it's still different”, she added thinking of no x-rays in Thedas. “I could deal with some broken bones. Reluctantly. I could I don’t know. Probably still do some diagnostics and assessments, but it’s only based on palpation and what I see and interviewing the patients. It’s… less than what I’m used to. I could maybe guide someone through physical exercises from an injury. I don’t know if diseases here are the same or similar, but there are at least some principles that I could follow… Listen, I am not the medic here. I have no idea about magical healing, and not the faintest, slightest idea about alchemy or potion making or herbs or anything. All I basically know is that there are no fucking humors in your…”

She stopped talking when she caught the big bright grin showing on Bull’s face.

“Pardon my language”, she added embarrassed.

“Listen”, he started amused, “Qun also finds the whole humor theory to be bullshit.”

“Delrin might have mentioned it.”

“Did he? Good. Anyway, I am interested to hear more about what you know and what you can tell me. You know something that Stitches doesn’t. If there’s more that can help my boys, I’d be interested to know.”

“I…” she thought for a second. “I probably would need couple of days to try to figure out more about how medicine is done here. I know that Genitivi says that Qunari have the most advanced techniques…”

“I can tell you what Qun does when we talk.”

“Great. I still need to learn more to even begin to phrase my thoughts. If it were normal circumstances… Do you think Skyhold library has any books about medicine?”

“Talk to Dorian. He unofficially took over managing it. He could probably tell you few things about magic too.”

“Well… I suppose I can do that.”
“Listen, Mira. I don’t mean to put you on the spot…”

“That ship has already sailed”, Mira bit her lip, “but honestly, I wouldn’t be able to stop thinking about it either way. It’s been on my mind already. And I have nothing to do with my days anyway. Give me… three, four days and we can…?”

“Right, great.” Iron Bull smiled and Mira decided he had a warm smile. “Dinner’s on me then. You did nice with that mage kid, too. You helped him relax.”

“Thank you.”

By the time Mira came back to her quarters her mind was full of questions. She picked up the leather notebook, one of the gifts she received for the wedding. Fucking inkwell. She couldn’t even write efficiently. And she wouldn’t be even able to write lying in bed cause it would all spill… Oh well. She sat by the desk where Delrin always wrote his reports and started noting all of the questions she wanted the answers for.

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Second Week of Kingsway, 9:42 Dragon Age, Emerald Graves.

They arrived at the Emerald Graves forward camp area early evening. Despite some loud protests, Delrin still insisted on holding the meeting with Clarissa, his Second-in-Command, and then organizing the debrief alongside dinner with everyone else. They didn’t need to hunt this time since they got supplies from the Inquisition scouts for tonight. Delrin was able to receive intelligence reports and… the letter from Mira. As much as he wanted to read it immediately, he needed to get going with planning the course of action immediately. There was no time to waste.

The gathered reports mentioned that Fairbanks and his people, the vast majority being civilians, had to retreat to the hidden shelter in the old Elven ruins. The Watcher’s Rest became their refuge after the Freeman took over Villa Maurel and at the Argon’s Lodge complex in the area. The information suggested that the Freeman numbers weren’t very high, but Barris was fully aware that Chevaliers had immense skills in combat. Many of the Freeman, including all the leadership were in fact former Chevaliers.

“So, Captain…”, Clarissa started, staring at the map. “…what are we going to do?”

“The best course of action would be to hit those two”, he pointed at Villa Maurel and the Argon’s Lodge, “at the same time, wouldn’t it? No possibility of reinforcements…”

“But it would stretch us thin”, Clarrisa looked at him. “or should I say, it would stretch you thin.”

“I have one man more than you”, he replied, but he knew what Clarissa meant. When they split and he let her command half of the team, she definitely had very good and experienced people under her. He had Kirke and Merle, but he also had unexperienced Zuzu and Simon who still needed quite a lot of attention during combat.

“We both know what I mean”, she sighted. “and I presume you’d take over Villa Maurel? Listen, I can take that lodge fort easily. Look at those drawings. That’s nothing, and the terrain seems to be very favorable to move in swiftly and still protect ourselves. As long as we’re not horribly outnumbered, and nothing points towards that, I can manage that easily. Now whether you can
clear the Villa with only five people is another matter to consider entirely.”

“Yes”, he agreed. “Indeed. I know you’re right.”

“I hate deserters”, Clarissa shrugged, “and forgive me for saying this, but I am not fond of Chevaliers. Family history. And they are good. They have been trained well.”

Not surprising, Delrin thought to himself. Clarissa, Arthur and him were all Fereldan. There were always a lot of history with Orlais. Barris himself lived in Orlais for a while and struck friendship with several Chevaliers, but he understood his Second-in-Command’s sentiment very well.

“They are good”, he admitted, “but many of them are tad too heavy and tad too slow and we’re not in the Templar armor anymore ourselves. Our techniques diversified. Say what you want, but we’ve gained both speed and skills.”

“I’d say to cast on them”, Clarissa smiled slightly, as if despite herself, “but it’s harder to do when you fight alongside mages.”

“Smiting non-mages in combat to drain stamina. Things we consider in this day and age.”

“Yes”, she agreed heavily. “It’s funny how it works.”

“Are you confident in the team you’ll lead?”

“Oh, most certainly. You know that. It’s as if Arthur can read my mind. I am still not sure how he does that. He’s the proof that you indeed can teach an old dog some new tricks. Beau barely needs managing during the battle. He’s always where I need him. Rare talent if you ask me. You know he’s great, that’s why you chose him for the squadron in the first place. And you know the twins do not disappoint, and I like working with Morve. He’s surprisingly good at following orders for someone… of his past.”

“Very well. We’ll start tomorrow by meeting up with Fairbanks and seeing what information does he have. The more intelligence we gather the better. I don’t want to wait too long before moving in on it though. It would do us well to have some element of surprise at least. Now what is that?” he pointed at the corner of the map.


The shiver went down Delrin’s spine. Such a familiar feeling. Clarissa looked up to him.

“You’re thinking demons,” she didn’t ask, she stated.

“A large estate in the middle of the war that hasn’t been claimed despite being abandoned for a long time? Of course I’m thinking demons, and that’s not even my experience talking.”

“Will we have time?”

“I’ll write the advisors, but gaining control of an asset like that is not entirely meaningless. What else do we have here in the notes?”

“A particularly vicious bear, I think. The scouts weren’t keen on hunting it themselves.”

“Could be good exercise for the youngsters as we stand down and watch”, he chuckled. It wasn’t a bad idea to let Simon and Zuzu handle it together with some oversight. “Is there anything else? Where’s the Inquisitor now?”
“Prancing through the north here and closing the rifts. I know they are planning the expedition to Din'an Hanin. That river basically marks their territory. I don’t think they’re planning on needing our assistance.”

“Very well” Delrin nodded. “Alright, let’s get up early and deal with the bear. It will not only make the scouts appreciate our efforts but the bear itself means a lot of meat and supplies. We’re seeing Fairbanks later tomorrow and we’ll see where it leads us and we’ll take it from there.”

“Certainly, Captain. The food should be ready, by the way. We can debrief then.”

They left Barris’ tent and he was pleased to notice that the camp had been set out nicely. Still within visible and walking distance from the Inquisition’s forward camp, but far enough to offer privacy, and that was the way Delrin preferred.

As the Captain, he had his own tent. He could conduct any one on one meetings if necessary or simply write reports or make preparations in peace. The rest three tents belonged to the crew, and they usually shared them in various configurations. Kirke passed him the bowl of stew, and he briefly explained the goals for tomorrow.

“Bears?!”, Zuzu asked with her eyes wide, “why is it always bears? Never lost kittens needing our help, but hoards of bears needing killing?”

“One bear”, Clarissa clarified, “that’s what the report said. Actually Captain thought that you and Simon could take down the bear alone.”

“Really?”, Zuzu beamed. “Alone?”

“Well”, Delrin chuckled, “we’d be there and watch and intervene when necessary…”

“It won’t be necessary”, Lavellan said firmly while Simon furrowed his brows.

“Excuse me, Zuz, but last I checked I’m the one fighting close range with my sword. I can’t just position myself on a comfortable rock and shoot fire from my hands.”

“I can stagger the bear for you and then you’ll do what necessary. And you know I still use my staff although I guess I could use my hands if need be.”

“Actually, I have another idea…”

Delrin could watch Kirke smiling to herself and Arthur raising his eyebrows as they listened to Trevelyan and Lavellan’s plans to neutralize the animal. Truthfully, he could have chosen more experienced people for the squadron than a nineteen year old Templar and twenty year old Circle mage who still had a lot to learn. However Barris himself was just eighteen when he first took command and not a year older he was already a Knight-Lieutenant with very little oversight over himself. There needed to be initiatives to allow those young to learn and practice, Delrin knew that. It was worth it in the long term. Even if it required a lot more work during the battle. Zuzu already surpassed some Senior Enchanters in many aspects despite still needing lots of guidance. Simon had an endurance of a teenager, he rarely got physically tired. Mentally… they were both still full of enthusiasm and energy, guided by the need to do better and the belief that they could really change the world. Simon and Zuzu believed with their whole hearts that their work had meaning.

Delrin wondered if he still held the same belief. Probably yes, in some sense. After all, he truly believed in the everything he has been doing for the Inquisition. But he also fully realized that his expectations were more… measured. Careful. Considered. Some of his convictions remained the same, but they have been tried and tested cruelly. Some convictions changed and evolved. Delrin
never felt squirmy around the mages. Even when his work meant that he was almost solely hunting maleficar and killing abominations. He has never believed that all mages were bad or dangerous. Perhaps it was because of his work that he never felt threatened by typical mages. Truthfully, he didn’t struggle at all with freedom that mages enjoyed in the Inquisition, though he certainly fully understood how destructive magic could become.

Leading the mages under his own command was still such a drastically different experience. He liked to think that his Templar experience meant he knew a lot about magic, but last several months have proven how little did he know until training both Beau and Zuzu. It wasn’t his job to silence or control their magic. It was his job as their Captain to help them use magic as efficiently as possible in combat. Including against the Templars themselves. He couldn’t do everything alone, for he had no magical skills himself. He couldn’t go into details on how to use spells better. He consulted Madame Vivienne few times or asked other Enchanters for assistance. Still, Delrin sincerely hoped that the fact that both Beau and Zuzu seemed to improve was the proof enough that he was doing something right. He hoped he was better at leading than a year ago.

Thinking of mages and Templars, there was one thing particularly absent from the reports presented by the Inquisition scouts. No mentioned of Venatori or Red Templars, and that was unusual. He sincerely hoped it meant that their reach did not extend as far. This could be wishful thinking though.

By the time he went back to his tent, his thoughts were no longer about his work. He finally would be able to open that letter from Mira. The last week of traveling he spent each night drawing something to include in the letter he’d write in response to hers. It felt a bit silly, and the sketches were mostly quick and random. The landscape of Frostback peaks. The silhouette of Onyx, his stallion. Quite the detailed study of Crystal Grace. Trees of the Dales. It was almost the same as when he was just drawing in his notebook, except that this time it was clearly intended to be viewed by someone else. Mira.

He opened the envelope impatiently and the first thing he noticed was that her handwriting was indeed quite horrible even with the effort she clearly put in it. There were few visible inkblots along the lines.

____________________________

Delrin,

Let me start my letter by hoping that your travel to Emerald Graves was quiet and peaceful. I do realize that you went there to fight, but my continuous hope is that amidst it all you and your squadron remain safe.

Please forgive my handwriting too. I’ve tried.

If you’re worried about me, let me just assure you that I am fine. I really am. It might be a struggle to keep myself busy, but… Well, I just realized it’s an utterly pathetic complaint given your current circumstances. I am doing fine.

Alright, maybe this one thing has been bothering me and I merely need to write you about it. I finally finished reading the “Darktown’s deal” and I am just flooded with so many emotions. I can’t believe how that serial progressed, and I simply need to know your thoughts. Is it your favorite book? I noticed you do have your own copy, and when I opened it there were a lot of marked paragraphs. I thought it simply was a dark adventure portraying thieves and murderers and ghastly political circumstances surrounding the Coterie. And then… I was completely blind sighted by Tomir’s quest to redeem himself. In fact, I probably didn’t even notice it at first. It was
so used to his villainous charm and his sore lack of remorse I missed the subtleties in his shifting attitude. I actually went back and reread some chapters. That scene when he starts donating coin here and there? Even when he knows others take advantage of him? I think I only started pondering about his motivation when he spared that guard’s life. And his whole relationship with Vala… She wasn’t the reason why he tried to change, because he was already changing when they met. I just don’t know if her love for him made him better or actually made him believe he was inherently unworthy or undeserving. And when he died, we don’t know why Tomir sacrificed himself. I don’t even want to ask Varric what was his motivation because I’m afraid he will ruin the book for me. Why do you Tomir did what he did? And also, was it sufficient to redeem himself, and does it even matter if he did or not? And why didn’t he tell Vala about any of that? He never let her know all the good things he did. The ending made me both so sad and angry.

Honestly, as much as I am grateful for the incredibly prolific writings of Brother Genitivi, I still think about Tomir and his motivations. But to give Genitivi his dues, he seems like a gentle man not eager to judge. Otherwise the only thing bothering me about his writing is that he never seems to account for his own presence and how it influences the people he talks to and the places he visits. Surely the fact that he is a Chantry scholar is not benign. It would be only fair if he considered his own impact. Or if he gave the voice directly to those he writes about. Sometimes they disappear behind his narrative. Perhaps I am being too harsh. Unlike Genitivi, I tend to be pretty judgmental and for that I can already apologize. Less gentle too, I’m sure.

I have been walking around Skyhold a bit. I went to the fighting grounds once, and I’ve been visiting the gardens. I haven’t explored much on the inside. I have to confess I am still getting lost. It seems my sense of direction becomes utterly unreliable whenever I’m inside. I am pleased to inform you though that I have succeeded in locating the rookery so at least you’ll receive that letter. I also know where the library is and going there is probably my next course of action.

When it comes to more prosaic matters - some of your laundry has been returned washed and folded. Do you mind if I put it away in your drawers? Also, I see you have a hamper full of dirty clothing, would you like me to make sure it gets washed before you return? I do not mind, I just don’t want to touch your things without your permission. I am also very grateful we don’t need to handle the laundry ourselves.

I have no idea how quickly this letter is going to be delivered. I didn’t want to ask too many questions for… reasons. I’m hoping it won’t take too long.

If I have any right to make any demands of you, let me just make this one: please take care of yourself.

Yours,

Mira Barris

He couldn’t deny that the letter made him smile. The letter was… perhaps less careful the he imagined it would be. It was similar to the way Mira spoke for the last two days before his departure. It was peculiar to see her use her last name… his name. It made it seem so formal and official. He realized that her “yours” that ended the letter was because of social covenance as she understood it. He pondered for a while what words he would use himself, and then began scribbling his response.
Mira performed the Cunningham maneuver on Petri.

Prepare for a lot more action for Captain Barris in next chapters.

Also the letters will be part of this story.

If you have trouble remembering who's who in Delrin's squadron, chapter 3 addresses it. There's eight people under his command and they all feature in the story.

Thank you all so much for reading! I know this has been a slower chapter.

I am always grateful for all the kudos and comments.
Chapter Summary

Delrin meets Fairbanks and fights the first of the Freeman and Mira tries to learn more about Thedas.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Second week of Kingsway, 9:42 Dragon Age, Emerald Graves

Fairbanks certainly seemed like an honorable man doing whatever he could to help his people. His options were limited, for the vast majority of his men were simply peasants. They all lacked not only weapons, but more importantly the skills to fight. Apparently over a dozen of them got slaughtered by the Freeman bandits. The Freeman claimed to fight the nobles, but it was the regular folks they hunted, abused and killed.

“The Freeman are colluding with your enemy.” Fairbanks ended his talk, and Delrin simply knew that counting on deserted Orlesian soldiers being the only problem was a mistake.

“Which enemy might that be?”, he asked, his Orlesian as smooth and dependable as always.

“The Rogue Templars. My men have spotted them through the woods, setting some deliveries. I can assure you that destroying the Freeman will lead to the Red Templars.”, Fairbanks replied seriously.

Blighted Red Templars. Delrin wasn’t entirely surprised, but fighting them definitely required more consideration than going after a handful of former Chevaliers. Red Templars were quick and strong. Unnaturally quick and strong, able to replenish their lyrium easily and effectively. By all accounts they were physiologically superior at least for the short while at the peak of their lyrium intake, before it would inevitably poison and kill them.

“We’ll deal with that”, he promised Fairbanks, “You have my word. I would ask you to share all the information you have with me, no matter how small and insignificant it might appear.”

“Thank you, Captain Barris. Certainly we will. I am indeed very grateful for the Inquisition’s assistance. You can see that we’re barely able to survive here.”

Barris pulled out the coin purse and handed it discreetly to Fairbanks. “It’s not that much, but the Inquisition will appreciate if your man stay put as we do our job here. I wouldn’t want any more victims until the matter is settled. Do you have enough resources?”

“Barely”, Fairbanks admitted shamefully. “It’s food that I could use over the coin.”

“We hunted the bear today.”

“The one…?”

“The same. There’s plenty of meat to share. Once it is portioned and salted, I will make sure that
the scouts deliver some to the Watcher’s Rest.”

“The Inquisition has my gratitude, Captain Barris.”

“Speak nothing of it. We both aim for your people to be safe. Reach out to me if you require any immediate assistance.”

Delrin signaled to his squadron that it was time to go. He knew that while he was interviewing Fairbanks, his crew conducted their own observations and he was curious if they found out more. Beau was Orlesian himself, as were Morve and Merle. Clarissa spoke the language fluently as well. Even though everyone generally spoke Common tongue, having the ability to communicate in Orlesian certainly could facilitate eavesdropping or just gaining trust.

“Have you learned anything?”

Morve smirked. “There’s a rumor circulating… that Fairbanks is of noble birth.”

“Interesting”, Delrin responded casually. “What does the rumor say about Fairbanks reaction to it?”

“He doesn’t like it and implores people to stop talking about it.” Morve responded.

“One woman said that she wished he would be of noble birth because he would be able to do more with that kind of power.” Merle added innocently.

Delrin felt sympathy for Fairbanks, but he also was quite aware this was the sort of information that he needed to report back to the advisors. They could decide what and if anything should be done about it.

“We’ll see how it all goes. Fairbanks mentioned some of his people missing after going to the Veridium mine. Apparently one of the Chantry Sisters decided to galavant as a warrior during the war. By all accounts she appears to not be that violent, and has been distancing herself from the rest of Freeman leadership in the area. We could tackle it today and pay her a little visit. Maybe we’ll convince her to switch sides. If not… Trevelyan, Lavellan, how are you feeling? Great job with the bear this morning. Your hard work will help feed not only us and the scouts, but also the refugees. Are you ready to fight again if need be?”

“Certainly, Captain”, Simon responded politely.

“The little Old Scarred Paw had nothing on us! I feel sorry about the cubs though, they were… Alright, Kirke, stop laughing at me. Anyway, yes, Captain, I certainly can fight again.”

“Very well. Let’s not delay then. We’re going to try to resolve the matter with the Sister peacefully, but if it doesn’t work… Just be ready. How far is it from here?”

“About an hour of riding”, Clarissa was ever prepared.

“Let’s mount up.”

The Veridium mine wasn’t exactly difficult to find. It was clear that Sister Costeau operation banked on the fact that the people of Emerald Graves had nothing to fight with. The Mine’s defenses were rudimentary at best, few archers. They unmounted in advance and approached
cautiously.

“I’m Captain Barris from the Inquisition! We wish to speak to Sister Costeau!”

“No nobles, no crown, no Inquisition!” one of the man shouted and Delrin used his shield to protect himself from an arrow.

“Well”, he signaled to his squadron, “you heard the man. Let’s fight!”

The archer engulfed in flames the second he gave the order. Lavellan, without the doubt.

“Remember”, he warned his team, “there might be live prisoners still inside. I’d avoid fire once we enter the mine.”

“Sure, Captain”, Zuzu’s voice was bright and calm. “but for now…”

“Do what you do best. Everyone ready? We’re closing in!”

The fight had been easy. Too easy, honestly, and Delrin wished the deserters hadn’t attacked in the first place. His squadron moved swiftly and methodically, and they certainly had more than enough numbers to kill the Freeman who looked rather inexperienced. Sister Costeau might have fought in her youth, before giving her life to the Maker, and she might have left the Chantry a year ago, but that still was a minuscule experience in comparison to the combined years of expertise he had on his side. She was fought with a mace, not the most refined weapon, and she simply wasn’t fast or good enough for any of them. Barris let Simon take the lead on the Sister, signaling Clarissa to hover around, while they took on the rest of the Freeman. Simon did well, and Delrin could see the boy’s confidence rising up. First the bear, now the leader of their enemy forces.

“Great work, Trevelyan”, he made sure to mention it.

They did manage to find prisoners still alive and unharmed, and Delrin sent Kirke, Simon and Zuzu to accompany them back to the Watcher’s Rest. The kids had done enough for the day, and he could already sense the presence of red lyrium around the mine. Simon definitely struggled the most whenever they encountered it.

As for Barris himself... it was very bizarre. He could sense the smell, the sensation, like a memory deeply buried in his body, but he couldn’t hear it in his veins at all. His mind recognized it, but his body didn’t respond. He could see both Clarissa and Arthur’s attitude shifting, and he knew it was so much harder for them. He still hasn’t told them that he didn’t need lyrium anymore. He hasn’t told them his skills were retained by the Spirit’s touch. He still hasn’t told them he was free of dependence for over a year. Perhaps he should have, but then again, Cassandra still hasn’t revealed what she learned from the “Book of Secrets” publicly, and he merely couldn’t disclose his secret without endangering her careful preparatory work.

“Beau?”, he turned to the mage, “can you...?”

Beau destroyed the deposit before Delrin managed to finish his sentence. The presence of red lyrium still lingered for a while though.

“Merle, Morve, we need a thorough search. Every paper, note, document. Clarissa, Arthur, Beau, can you collect any weapons and valuables we might deem useful? We could give them to Fairbanks.”

Sure enough, soon he was checking the notes and documents confirming many of the intel they already possessed. Auguste was the former Chevalier currently leading the Freeman cell in the
Argon’s Lodge, while Commander Duhaime and Maliphant occupied Villa Maurel. Sister Costeau’s notes complained about Commander Duhaime attacking refugees and hunting and hurting them for pleasure. She seemed to be committed to the idea of only responding to violence, not enticing it. If her men hadn’t attacked his squadron, she probably would still be alive. Such a shame.

Delrin knew of men like Duhaime. For such men, it wasn’t merely an ideological dissent that made them fight. They craved power. They craved violence. They sought whatever cause that gave it to them. Even other Freemans seemed horrified by Duhaime’s horrendous cruelty.

They burned the bodies of the fighters, the act of kindness that Barris felt was necessary. He sighted looking at the flame, the smoke and stench tearing his eyes. He chanted the first and only verse that came to his mind.

“Here lies the abyss, the well of all souls.

From these emerald waters doth life begin anew.

Come to me, child, and I shall embrace you.

In my arms lies Eternity.”

They all stood in silence for a minute before Beau extinguished the flames with his frost and they carried the loot to drop at the Watcher’s Rest.

Back at the camp when Clarissa sat with him over the daily reports, she took a deep breath and whispered. “It was easy today.”

“Yes, it was.”

“I’m afraid it won’t be like that for long.”

“You’re absolutely right, Clarissa.”

“Captain, if I may…”

“You certainly may speak freely”.

“They do have communication between the cells. I do think it might be worth it to take risk and separate. If there’s too many of us fighting inside, it might create problems too. I just… would you like to take Arthur? I can…”

“No”, he responded firmly. “I know that you can, but there’s a reason I’ve divided us the way I did. Neither Beau nor Morve have any experience commanding. I have Kirke, you have Arthur. That’s the deal. I won’t change that.”

“Very well, Captain.” She sighted. “When do we attack?”

“The day after tomorrow? The notes suggested that the next communication with Costeau cell wasn’t until three days from now. Tomorrow we can rest and prepare.”

“I’m comfortable with that. Simon and Zuzu did very well today.”

“They did. Let’s hope they did not give Kirke more gray hair with their banter”

“I strongly suggest you don’t tell her she already has gray hair.” Clarissa smirked amused and he
“Duly noted… Dinner?”

“Beau is on the cooking duty. At the very least the old bear should be palatable.”

Right before falling asleep Delrin thought of Mira. He was surprised how well her face was etched in his memory already. He could close his eyes and see her looking at him, her copper curls tumbling down. He could hear her slightly rolling “r” when she pronounced his name. He could see the way she shook her head when something was on her mind. He could draw her so easily if he wanted to.

Dear Mira,

We have arrived unharmed, no trouble at all. I really do appreciate your concern about our safety. Please don’t apologize for your handwriting again. It is decipherable, and your letter brought me joy.

To get prosaic matters out of the way - I don’t mind you putting away my clothing or doing anything, really, or sending my laundry to be washed. Please don’t feel obliged though. I’m perfectly capable of doing it myself when I come back. The only thing I’d ask of you is to not reorganize the reports I keep in one of the desk drawers. Believe it or not, there’s a method to my madness there.

Please, do share any concerns you have. If anything, it provides a welcome distraction from my daily tasks. Have you thought about visiting the stables? You once mentioned you knew how to ride. Master Dennet is a very nice man, though I must warn you he’ll probably want to see you in the saddle before allowing you to choose a horse. The Skyhold stables hold many breeds. I wish I took you there myself before leaving. Most Inquisition mounts are Fereldan Forders, good breed, but you could do better if you manage to convince Master Dennet of your skill. My own war horse is the Amaranthine Charger named Onyx. I’ve attached the sketch I’ve made of him.

I’ve actually decided to draw some things for you. You said you’d never guess that’s what I do to relax, so I suppose the easiest way would be to show you. I added a little description on the back of each sketch.

“Darktown’s Deal” is indeed one of my favorite books. You’re right, it’s not the simple story it seems at the beginning which is precisely why I appreciate it so much. I would like to believe that Tomir truly strived to be a better man. Are you disappointed he never told Vala? I don’t think that he merely felt unworthy of her. He was a part of the Coterie, and he knew he would never be able to leave that life without getting killed. I think the reason he never told her nor did he act on his feelings was because he tried to keep Vala safe. And because he couldn’t be with her, he wouldn’t burden her with his declaration of love. I like to think that Tomir made a conscious sacrifice the
day he died. It might not have been the most reasonable choice, but it was a choice of a noble and honorable intent and I admire that. Are you asking if it mattered since nobody would ever find out the truth? It mattered to him, and I suppose I believe it would matter to the Maker as well.

My initial reaction was that you are a bit harsh towards poor Genitivi, but I don’t think you’re entirely wrong either. As an Andrastian I can freely say that the Chantry does not seem to realize her own impact far too often. I’m glad reading his books helped you.

The letters should arrive quickly, within a day or two. I might not always have the time to respond so quickly, but I’ll try my best. There’s a lot to do here and limited time to pursue it. The Dales are probably one of the regions of Thedas where the most blood had been spilled historically. Have you read the story about the Emerald Knights and the events of the Red Crossing? I don’t remember if Genitivi describes it in his “Myths and Legends”.

The Dales used to be an independent Elven kingdom. There was a growing resentment between Orlais and the Dales, with Dales being isolated from the affairs of the rest of the world, its borders patrolled by warrior called Emerald Knights. The legend says that Elandrin, one of the Knights, fell in love with a human woman living in Red Crossing. The rest of Emerald Knights suspected that he would try to leave and convert to Andastrian faith for his lover, Adalene. His sister Sona ventured into the town to try to bring him back and accidentally killed Adelane. Elandrin refused to leave her body and was slain by humans who tried to retrieve her. The legend says that this event was what sparked the full blown human-elven conflict, which then led to the Exalted March. It’s been said that each tree that grew in the Emerald Graves afterwards symbolizes the Elven people lost during the March. The woods here are astonishingly beautiful. I have seen a lot of Thedas, but such green can be only found here. It’s painful to think that beauty came from horror and heartbreak. As Templars we’re taught obedience to the Chantry, and we’re rarely taught of her mistakes. I… forgive me if it was too grim to mention. I find it impossible to be here and not think of the history of this place, now torn and broken again.

You do have that right. I promise to be careful.

Take care of yourself as well, Mira. Please let me know if there’s anything you need. Anything at all.

I hope to hear from you again soon.

Faithfully,

Delrin Barris

Mira received the letter first thing in the morning, delivered underneath the door by the messenger bringing Josephine’s correspondence to her quarters. She read it several times so far, examining the sketches attached to it. Unlike her own, Delrin’s handwriting was neat and elegant.

He also certainly did not lie about drawing. His sketches were… beautiful, actually. Some were more detailed then other, but… It was actually a lovely image in her head, thinking how he sat down after the whole day on horseback and spent his time meticulously drawing the flower signed at the back as “Crystal Grace”. Mira shook her head smiling because something about that was pure and sweet and surprisingly vulnerable. She carefully stacked his letter between the pages of the book.
The Skyhold library was not that impressive by modern standards, but it still contained many bookcases. The last two times Mira went there it was practically empty, and she merely walked around. Today she was hoping to actually find Dorian, even though it meant engaging in a conversation that would probably be somewhat awkward and exhausting. If the dinner at the tavern was the proof of anything, it was that Dorian liked talking, and he liked asking questions, and he liked asking personal questions. In some way, Dorian seemed more intimidating to Mira than the Iron Bull himself.

He still wasn’t there, but someone else was. A tall young woman with a sunburst mark on her forehead…The brand of Tranquility. She was a Tranquil. Mira read about Tranquils, and honestly, the concept did not make any sense to her. The Rite of Tranquility was a punishment for serious crimes that rendered the mage unsafe, as Genitivi wrote. The Rite cut their ability to enter Fade and thus use magic. However… Mira simply couldn’t understand how it affected the mages emotions not only so vividly, but in such peculiar manner. Tranquil were supposed to be free from emotions even as basic as fear. Fear. Fear was evoked by amygdala even without having a conscious response. How was it even possible to make someone not afraid? If compared to anything Mira could think of, Tranquility would be like conscious sedation. It was a gruesome, cruel and deeply disturbing concept, and something in Mira rebelled at mere idea. How can a person, with thoughts and feelings and emotions truly become someone like that, someone whose most primal responses are gone? It wasn’t possible. It couldn’t be possible. Could it?

Mira hoped that the sources she read exaggerated, that the lack of emotions was a hyperbole, that it was impossible to rid someone of that.

The woman noticed her quickly.

“Greetings to you”, she nodded gently. “I am Helisma Derington and I am the creature researcher for the Inquisition.”

“Hi”, Mira responded uncertainly, “I… I am Mira Barris and I… Well. I am interested in medicine, I suppose. Do you know where I can find any medical books?”

“The bookshelf to the right had been organized to store the tomes regarding medicine.” Helisma responded politely, her voice sounding very monotone and bleak.

“Can I just take some books with me?”

“Nobody will stop you”, the answer came and Mira put five random books into her bag. It did feel a little like she was breaking the rules, but there was no one to oversee the library, except maybe Dorian, and she did intend to give them back.

“Thank you”, Mira hesitated before asking another question, “so what does the work of the creature researcher entail?”

“I receive the samples of various creatures or animals and analyze them in order to find information usable in combat or alchemy. My skills are exceptional.”It sounded as if Helisma was stating the fact, not praising herself.

“Do you like animals, Helisma?”, she decided to ask, her heart beating fast.

“I remember being fond of them, but I don’t remember why”, Helisma responded in such a detached manner that it took Mira’s breath away.

“I haven’t met a person who was Tranquil before”, Mira said, a statement true, honest and direct.
She didn’t want to lie to Helisma about the nature of her questions, it didn’t seem right.

“Many people are uncomfortable with Tranquils.”

“How can you tell if people are uncomfortable?”

“I can recognize it.” That was unusual and unexpected for Mira. She had so many questions… and almost no one to ask.

Brother Genitivi compared the Tranquil to the inanimate objects that speak. Frankly, now that Mira reminded herself of that sentence she felt angry. Surely, Mira couldn’t imagine being herself without every emotion buzzing through her body. Surely, maybe she’d admit it defined her in some way, but… she also understood it didn’t. As a doctor, as a fucking doctor Mira knew that it was absolutely imperative not to take away someone’s personhood in any circumstances, be it disability, dementia, and well, Tranquility had to fit there too. Whatever Helisma felt or didn’t feel, she was still a person. She wasn’t less than. How cruel and horrendous Tranquility was though? It wasn’t the unlucky draw of the genetic lottery. It wasn’t something that happened to mages, it was something done to them.

The sudden thought that Delrin could have participated in The Rite felt like the punch in the gut. Would she ever even dare to ask him? He was not a Templar any longer, as he said. He had been one for a decade though. Mira was very aware that he definitely killed many people during his life. But… somehow killing, especially in the context of war or protecting someone felt less morally murky than… things like this. Things that seemed just evil. She knew of Mage-Templar war. She was given the account of everything that led to the founding of the Inquisition after all. Somehow seeing Delrin as the side to this conflict was… hurtful. Especially when standing in front of a Tranquil. She knew that Delrin had mages in his own squadron though. She knew he rebelled against the Lord Seeker. Delrin… Mira felt almost ashamed how invested she was in the notion that he was kind and good and noble and brave, and he truly seemed to be all those things. Maybe…

“Mira!”, she heard a voice filled with curiosity, “and here I thought you were avoiding me. Greetings, Helisma. Mira, follow me. We simply must talk.”

“It was nice to meet you, Helisma. Dorian, I was actually looking for you…” Mira started, walking alongside him.

“I could have sworn you came here few days ago and escaped before I managed to talk with you.”

“Truthfully, I was avoiding everyone”, Mira sighted, “so please don’t take it personally.”

“How relieved I am! Someone avoiding me as the part of the collective, not singling me out as the mage from Tevinter!”, Dorian smirked.

“Well… yes.”

“That’s oddly reassuring,” he looked at her sharply. “You said you were looking for me? Do you want to go somewhere private?”

He led her to the corridor adjacent to the library and opened the door to a nicely decorated bedroom, definitely filled with more items than the quarters she shared with Delrin.

“I didn’t come barehanded”, Mira sighted and reached out to the bag she carried and pulled out a bottle of wine.
“Is that the Ghislaini I have given you for your wedding?”, Dorian smiled satisfied, “Well, well. You’re far more devious than I anticipated. Allow me.” He poured the wine.

They sat across each other and Mira sank into the plushy armchair. If only she wasn’t feeling that awkward and uncomfortable.

“So?”, he nudged a little.

“I have questions about magic. A lot of questions. Magical healing, mostly, and how it might work.”

“Healing? You brought wine to ask me about healing? Here I was counting on discussing other people’s affairs!”

“I don’t gossip”, Mira protested faintly.

“Shame”, Dorian answered, “for it is my favorite pastime.”

“Coming back to the topic of healing…I used to be… a medic”, she explained. “Actually, the Iron Bull had some questions to me. It would be at the very least easier to answer them if I knew more about medicine in Thedas”

“And now you’re bringing my lover into it. Clever.”

“I…”, Mira scoffed a bit. “I am afraid you’re overestimating me here. I’m merely being truthful.”

“Well, I couldn’t say no to you even if I tried, because I’m far too curious where this is all going. Ask away.”

Three hours and three wine glasses for Dorian later and Mira had only slightly better understanding of magical medicine. It was all… bizarre. Extraordinarily bizarre. The spells seemed more general than targeted. When used in combat, healing magic could effectively make sure someone would be able to fight longer. It could heal superficial wounds or retain stamina. Outside of the battlefield, healing magic could deal with most things like bruising or cuts or lacerations or minor diseases, but the cost for the healer pretty high so it was done rarely. Healing magic drained tons of mana. Magic could mend broken bones, though it seemed that they needed to be set beforehand, so that’s what was also required in cases of other misalignments like dislocations.

Dorian was from Tevinter, where blood magic seemed to flourish and slavery was a crucial power that fueled the Imperium. Unsurprisingly, there were medical experimentation on the slaves, just as there were historically on Earth. She learned a bit about blood magic, more than Genitivi provided. She learned about Spirit healers, and how rare they were.

Tevinter didn’t rely much on mundane medicine, for the simple reason that non-magical advances weren’t that often pursued, aside from maybe art or fashion or good cuisine. But not medicine, not when magic seemed to fill the need. They still would set the misaligned bones before healing, or there still would be people to do amputations, or clean wounds and stitch, or deliver babies, but aside from rudimentary tasks there was little done about so called mundane medicine. The actual medicine as Mira understood it.

Mira was curious how the healing worked exactly. Was it some sort of acceleration of the healing process? But if it was about cell growth, then how healing magic did not increase the risk of some conditions like cancer? It could cause malignancy in the first place. Was there a supposed default state that magic wouldn’t cross? Could it mend but not transform? If proximity influenced the ability to cast spells, and it did seem to, would cutting the distance between the mage and the
patient help? Would placing one’s hand on injured body part be more effective than waving the
staff nearby? Would diagnosing the problem beforehand improve outcomes? And if so, would
surgery to repair the internal wounds be possible with magical assistance? Genitivi wrote that there
was a social taboo about cutting flesh, at least in the southern Thedas. They burned their dead here.
Mira understood why, but to this day and age there was simply no better way to learn than on
cadavers. No book and no machine and no simulation can replace those first years of learning
anatomy. The taboo without the doubt was tied to the fears of blood magic, the threats of demonic
possession and Mira understood that. In theory. Practically speaking, Thedas could easily have
moved from humorism by now.

Another big issue was that magical medicine wasn’t widely available. In the South, mages lived in
Circles up until the war. The average peasant or city inhabitant did not come in contact with mages
ever in their life. All they depended on was humorism and herbalism, the latter being certainly the
better idea. In Tevinter, non-mages were the lower class anyway, with slaves at the bottom. Mira
could imagine how little thought was given to their medical needs besides the mere survivability of
stock. That was… treating people like cattle. Worse than cattle. Fucking slavery. If Dorian noticed
her discomfort discussing it, he did not point it out. To be fair, he was nothing but helpful today.

On her way back to the quarters Mira passed through library again and smiled to Helisma who just
nodded in response. Sudden need for air grasped her lungs and Mira found herself running down
the stairs and going for the door, and then… Finally, the breath of fresh air.

Thedas was a cruel world. There was no doubt about that. It valued strength and power. It was
largely built on blood, like the Dales described in Delrin’s letter. Tevinter was built on slavery. The
South was built on control and oppression and the little that Genitivi actually mentioned about the
Qun… It was all a lot. But perhaps the worst sentiment burning in Mira’s chest was the raw
awareness that she couldn’t say that Earth was better. She wanted to. She looked at everything
today and judged, and she wasn’t wrong in her judgements either. Tranquility was horrible.
Slavery was always shameful. There were so many things… But… If she looked at her own world
with fresh eyes, with the privilege of being an outsider, what would she see? The history that was
at least equally bloody? The raging disparity and children dying of hunger? Weapons that could
literally destroy the whole planet? The greed that already killed it in the first place, the oceans, the
seas, the forests tainted? Slavery that still existed in some places? If she was honest, and Mira took
pride in her integrity, she couldn’t turn away from that. I was so easy to walk around Skyhold and
feel outraged. It was harder to realize she was looking in the mirror. It was easier to judge them,
harder to judge… us. And Mira was not the woman who went easy on her own heart.

She looked around. The sun above was indicating the late afternoon. The mountains looked
beautiful, the peaks snowy, the sky blue and clear. Mira thought of Delrin’s letter once again and
decided to head to the stables. If evil on Thedas and on Earth were analogous, then goodness and
joy had to be analogous too. What could be more soothing than touching a horse, not to mention
riding one, if Master Dennet found her trustworthy enough. The stables were large, which made
sense given that they supplied the needs of the many of the Inquisition soldiers. The sharp smell
hit her nose, and Mira didn’t mind.

“My lady?”, the voice asked. She recognized the face, Delrin made sure she could identify the
members of the Inner Circle. After all, they were the ones who knew who she really was.

“Warden Blackwall”, she finally remembered.

“Master Dennet is in the back. I know the Inquisitor gifted you a horse, my lady. Have you ever
ridden before?”
“I have. I used to regularly, as a young girl. And… my name is Mira, so if you could call me that, I’d appreciate it.”

“Lady Mira…”

“Mira, “ she insisted and Blackwall actually smiled.

“Mira,” he repeated her name. “Allow me to escort you to Master Dennet.”

When Mira came back to the quarters few hours later, her spirits were lifted. Master Dennet allowed her not only to greet and help feed the horses, he also let her exercise one, standing at the side of the paddock and observing Mira. She didn’t mind at all. Horses were part of her life once, until she left her childhood home. She used to ride weekly if not more often. Since then… not much, but it was deeply ingrained in the memory of her body. There were few feelings comparable to the sheer joy of horse riding. Mira has never been an athlete, but horse riding gave her the ability to borrow from the horse’s own power, and it felt… mesmerizing. She was absolutely certain that she would feel her own muscles ache tomorrow. Still, it was worth it, and Mira’s felt genuinely proud when Master Dennet approvingly nodded:

“You’re good. I know a rider when I see one. Follow me, there’s a horse I’d like you to meet.”

And then Mira fell in love. All of the pain, and crying, and suffering, and longing for what was lost, and missing Ida and others, and… Apparently Mira’s heart was was still intact, because the second she saw that horse, her own horse now, she fell in love.

She lied on the bed to reread Delrin’s letter once again. He was the one who suggested the stables, and she needed to thank him. More than that, though. Even after everything she thought about today, his letter still meant something to her. It did seem honest and open. He has shown her a lot of patience and kindness since the day they met. They were… well, formally married, as absurd as it still seemed. As her husband, Delrin deserved for Mira to put some faith in him.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all for reading, and kudos, and the comments. I really appreciate it so much.

Next chapter: Delrin fights at the Villa Maurel, and Mira learns more about medicine she initially anticipated.

Do you know what I love about Mira? She might cry a lot, she might seem weak and she might struggle, but I’ll be damned if she's not principled.
Wounds

Chapter Summary

Mira learns interesting things and Delrin fights at Villa Maurel.

Chapter Notes

TRIGGER WARNING: This chapter contains referenced torture and sexual violence and murder. It is not described graphically, and it does not reference the main protagonists.

I will never describe certain things graphically, but this is still a mature work and it describes the world and the times that can be dark and cruel. The topics of abuse, the cost of war, the suffering will appear. I will try my best to treat them with much sensitivity and respect.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Second week of Kingsway, 9:42 Dragon Age, Skyhold

The first four books Mira borrowed from the library predictably turned out to be utter and complete bullshit. Alright, maybe if she was entirely fair there were some sound ideas mentioned there. Clearly surgeons in Thedas had a bare understanding on how to cut someone’s limb off. Amputation, the ever dependable strategy to save lives in battle. Mira actually the book down to ponder if she could perform it it herself and ligature the vessels. What were the time records for amputations in Victorian times? Thirty seconds? Pointless folly for modern doctor. Meanwhile the humor theory was just as senseless as it was on Earth, and tragically, it seemed to be the guiding principle at least in Southern Thedas. It definitely seemed to be the principle guiding the Skyhold infirmary. Why didn’t they let mages run the infirmary in the first place or join in with mundane healers? It seemed like such an obvious solution to the problem.

The fifth book however was a complete revelation. “Theories of Disease Origination” by Ensel von Beust. Mira had no idea how that volume ended up in Skyhold and whether it remained completely unnoticed by others. It undoubtedly contained the ideas that she knew were true. Ensel von Beust was not a mage, but he was an assistant researcher to one Mortalitasi in Nevarra. Mira reminded herself that indeed Genitivi mentioned that Nevarra was the only place in Thedas where people where mummified and then buried… Mira wasn’t sure how magic was involved in the process, but reading von Beust treaties it quickly became very clear that mummification itself was at least partially performed manually. Which meant that cadavers were opened. Which meant that the organs were removed during the process. Which naturally meant that Nevarrans possessed more knowledge regarding anatomy than possibly anyone else. It inevitably lead to disregard for humor theory.

Mira decided she indeed liked Nevarra. Wasn’t her fake background supposedly somewhat Nevarran due to her accent?
Ensel von Beust noticed several things. Firstly, the humor theory was clearly contradicted by observing the systems of the body. Secondly, some diseases could be “transported” from one person to another. He obviously meant transmission and communicable diseases. One of the such of diseases described definitely seemed like cholera. If she could only write back and mention the ideas of John Snow… Thirdly, von Beust wrote about the Qunari practices around wound cleaning he noticed observed around Tal-Vashoth mercenaries. That made Mira think that Qunari had to know a lot more about wound antisepsis than she anticipated.

The book changed something. First of all, it meant that the groundwork for evidence based medicine was already present in Thedas, however limited. The knowledge was already there, just for some reason unaccessible in Skyhold. Once the paradigms presented by von Beust would be considered… well, that opened the door to many possibilities. Mira wondered how Mortalitasi faired with magical healing. Did they include their anatomical knowledge in the process? Would there be a way to contact anyone from Nevarra? Whom should she tell?

Mira was pacing around the private dining room at Herald’s Rest, the Iron Bull sitting at the table and observing her keenly. Dorian was not there, he left for Hinterlands, something about the Venatori from Tevinter. The Qunari warrior was slowly drinking the ale that Mira refused. Nevarran medical book laid open in the middle of the table, alongside with Mira’s own leather notebook.

Mira’s passion overshadow any initial awkwardness surrounding the meeting. She spoke relentlessly about everything medicine could do in her world, and how most of it was untranslatable, but some… some of it could be. Some of it already has been. She talked about germ theory, about disinfection, sterilization and antisepsis, infection prevention, surgical procedures, bedside manners, charting, checklists… The lecture was more coherent in her mind than the words coming out of her mouth, but Bull didn’t stop her even once. He seemed to follow her stream of words.

Mira stopped to grab the pitcher and pour herself a glass of water. Her throat tickled from talking.

“If it makes you feel better”, Bull took the opportunity to speak, “Qun finds humor theory bullshit, as I said before. And no, I didn’t know particulars about those *germs*, but I already follow most of the premises you describe as “sanitary measures”. Genitivi didn’t know the details, but he was right that Qunari are slightly more effective at medical knowledge than most of the Thedas I’ve seen. I’m not a medic myself though, as you know. The Qunari social structure is very rigid, and they don’t share the knowledge with outsiders…”

Mira took a deep breath to start talking about how vital exchange of information was concerning the topic that could save lives but he gestured her to stay silent. She breathed out loudly.

“Qun doesn’t share their knowledge with outsiders, but I am Tal-Vashoth. I promised the Inquisitor to share everything that could be helpful. I promised Barris to assist you should you require it, though I am certain that is not what he had in mind. ”

Mira felt her cheeks flushed but didn’t say anything. It was Bull’s turn to talk, so she finally allowed herself to sit down.

She found out that Qunari used alcohol based products to sterilize the medical tools. He said that Qunari themselves rarely stitched their wounds and that their healing was naturally exasperated,
and he wasn’t certain why. The Fereldan man called Stitches Mira already met did most of the actual first aid job for the Charges, and there was also a mage (but don’t call her that!) on the team who could cast few spells. Mira was more interested in potions and the extensive knowledge about antidotes used by Qun. It all seemed rather sophisticated. The most curious though were the premises of germ theory without knowing what pathogens actually were. Apparently Qun had their own brilliant minds because they did know that diseases could be spread between people and they used cordons and quarantines when necessary. People of Thedas were also incredibly lucky to actually have invented plumbing, because Mira was certain it helped with curbing disease spread as well.

Bull didn’t stop at that in his lecture. Looking straight at Mira he told her how Qunari sown the mouth of their mages, how they fed them only liquid diets, how they immobilized their arms while using them as tools. He told how Qunari used sophisticated tools for torture, and what they knew learned about physiology in the process. Mira felt the cold sweat breaking on her body. She was literally discussing torture details with a man who considered himself a part of that society until very recently. It didn’t escape her attention that Bull made no effort to try to reassure her. It probably wouldn’t have worked anyway. Truthfully he didn’t rush to defend the practices either. Still, Mira could feel the fear rising inside her, and then she could hear Delrin’s words “I trust him explicitly” at the back of her mind. Did he really? There was no shift, no change in the Iron Bull when they talked. He had the same soothing, calming voice that she always heard before. It was what they discussed that made her uncomfortable.

On another hand, Mira wasn’t ignorant. Throughout history, medical advances were achieved because of torture, oppression and abuse. Uncomfortable as it was, it still was a valuable information on what was known about medicine in Thedas. So many advances of scalpel on Earth were literally carved out on bodies of those who couldn’t consent. Bull wasn’t wrong to tell her. She needed to know that. She wanted to know that.

She tried taking notes and she hissed when inkblots inevitably appeared on the pages of her notebook.

“So Qun doesn’t use healing magic at all?”

“No. Sarebaas are only used for destruction.”

“And Qunari possess some innate abilities that others do not? You said you heal better and faster? Some poison resistance?”

“Yeah it would seem so. We also use the paint called vitaar to strengthen our skin. You can dose yourself with antidotes preemptively. I’ve been doing it for a while.”

“Hmmm”, she eyed the Iron Bull again, “have you thought about reconsidering your stance on stitching? Advantage or not, it still would heal much better.”

He actually laughed in response and handed her the small package that she unwrapped. It looked like a suture kit, although few elements seemed lacking, like no needle holders… They probably just held the needles by hands. Ghastly.

“Does everyone in the Inquisition carry those?” Mira questioned curiously.

“No.”

“Do you know how to stitch?”
"I guess I could, crudely."

"Would you hold the needle in your hands?"

'Is there a better way? That’s for you, by the way. Keep it."

"Really? Thank you so much. There is a better way. What’s that?"

"That’s the Royal Elfroot poultice. Stitches makes it. We use it to clean wounds. The other bottle is the Elfroot extract mixed with alcohol we use to clean the tools and our hands."

"Interesting." Mira knew she needed to expand her knowledge about herbalism. Perhaps she could talk to Stitches… but she couldn’t reveal who she truly was, so any conversation needed to be thoroughly researched beforehand.

"Mira, can I ask you something?", Bull asked suddenly.

"Shoot", she said almost absentmindedly.

"Are you planning to do something with your knowledge?"

"I don’t know”, she answered earnestly. "At the very least the book”, she pointed out “Theories about Disease Origination”, “should be read by people in charge. Just anything to stop the bloodletting absurdities. But… I don’t know, honestly. I don’t know even know why I’m doing it.”

"Maybe it’s who you are."

"No”, she denied sternly and then sighted.

"It was just a thought, kid. Don’t mind me."

"Can I ask you something as well, Bull?”, the eyes looking back at her seemed warm and honest.

"Yeah, sure,” he replied with no hesitation.

"How did you become friends with Delrin?"

"How much do you know already?"

"I know you went to Therinfal. I know how you fought the dragon together,” it wasn’t a lot of information but Mira was quite certain Bull understood her meaning.

"He told you a lot. Barris… He has a good heart matched by his actions."

She didn’t expect the answer to be so… touching.

"He is a good leader. He is still a good leader," the Iron Bull continued, “He’s not a bad sword either, very tactical. Though I prefer sparring with Cassandra. Or was your question about how the Qunari spy could befriend the Chantry Templar?"

The blush of embarrassment showed on Mira’s face.

"I…", she hesitated, “That’s not who either of you are."

"Yeah”, Bull agreed readily. “I think so too."

“Well, I have to go and see where this all takes me”, Mira got up from the table, “but… thank you
for today. I mean it.”

“Sure thing.”

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Second week of Kingsway, 9:42 Dragon, Emerald Graves

Delrin had only Kirke, Zuzu, Simon and Merle with him when they quietly approached Villa Maurel. Clarissa, Beau, Arthur and Morve were attacking the Argon’s Lodge at the same time. The plan was risky, and they would be outnumbered. At the same time his Second-in-Command wasn’t wrong that invading the building with too many fighters would surely create its own set of problems.

The landscaping around the villa, now overgrown, certainly provider tactical advantage as they were able to sneak in pretty closely without being noticed. Commander Duhaime was standing outside, surrounded by the group of Freeman fighters. Maliphant and the rest had to be inside of the villa.

“The big question”, Kirke whispered to his right, “is whether the reinforcements come out of the villa. I know it’s not that many people, but I don’t want to fight them all at once.”

“I don’t think they will”, he replied. “They would be stupid to get rid of strategic advantage. They don’t have that many fighters either. They will probably close the gates and lock themselves in. Look, the villa isn’t even that protected.”

“Bastards are clearly used to not worrying about being attacked.”

“Are you surprised? All the nobles from the area retrieved to the safety of the cities like Val Royeaux. It’s only common folk that remained, entirely defenseless”

“Aye”, Kirke agreed bitterly, “isn’t it always the same story? Will Clarissa join us?”

“When she manages.”

“So, what do we do?”

“Alright”, he gestured to his squadron. “Listen to me carefully because I want it to be executed perfectly. Merle, stealth. Those two sword fighters to the right? Get them out of the way. Zuzu? Obliterate the snipers. I don’t want them to have any long range attack options. Use barrier on Simon or Merle. I can do without. Kirke, Simon, you both take the three man in the front. I’ll take Duhaime. Zuz, don’t waste your barriers on me. And to all of you…Stay away from Duhaime. Give me all the space to move if you can.”

“Well”, Kirke said slowly, “scream if you need help, Captain.”

He snorted. “On my signal… now!”

Delrin felt the rush of the battle hit his body. He has done it so many times, the movement was almost subconscious. It required a lot of willfulness to remain fully present and aware of his surroundings. His job wasn’t merely to defeat Duhaime. It was also to know what his men were doing and to guide them when needed. Perpetual exercise in focus and determination.
Duhaime was strong and technically very skilled, and he was very heavily armored, no inch of his skin unprotected. Barris knew a lot about fighting in heavy armor from his Templar years. When he left the Order he chose to remove as much unnecessary weight of his armor design as he could while still remaining protected. Duhaime was stronger, and he had a greataxe. If he managed to get a hit, it would hurt. A lot. Delrin was faster, and he blessed all the time he spent sparring with Bull, because now he felt very comfortable dodging the giant weapon. He still hasn’t made contact, but he could see Duhaime getting impatient.

“Fucking coward”, Duhaime hissed.

The footwork was the most important physical aspect of fighting. It always had been. Each time Duhaime lunged forward and Delrin retreated, Duhaime would still close the distance just a bit. The key was to always be aware of what the distance was until Barris was sure he wanted to engage. But Delrin was experienced, and large swath of his expertise came from fighting enemies that defied physical limitations. Like abominations. Captain Barris surely knew how to dance. He advanced and retreated, just enough to give Duhaime false impression of uncertainty.

“Fucking poor piss coward”, Duhaime seethed again.

Yes, Delrin thought, become angry. Become frustrated. Think I’m hesitantly trying to close on you. Swing your greataxe multiple times. Roar if you want.

Duhaime lunged again and Delrin could have blocked with his shield and counter attack, but he dodged again.

“Fucking weakling! No strength and no honor!”, Duhaime taunted.

Delrin caught a quick glimpse of Zuzu safely out of distance, keeping the barrier on Simon and Kirke. He could’t see Merle, which was a good sign.

“I’ll chop your head off, you fucking coward. You think I don’t know what you’re doing?” Duhaime shouted, “Fight me like a man.”

Duhaime certainly knew what Delrin was doing, but it would work anyway. He already started moving just slightly more desperately, slightly more confidently seeing the uncertain lounges Barris made. Delrin purposefully threw himself just tiny bit off balance before finding his footwork again. Perfectly crafted illusion.

“Tssssss, fucking wimp”, Duhaime hissed.

It would work. It would always work for men like Duhaime, the man whose ego burned so brightly it blinded them. Men so convinced of their power they failed to consider it would be their undoing. Men who were good fighters, perhaps even brilliant ones, but had no humility.

Duhaime swung his greataxe again, moving forward, aggressively and strongly. And there it was, the force and speed Delrin just needed to end the fight. He moved out of the weapon’s path, passed forward, just the few steps, and pushed on the enemy’s side with his shield. It wasn’t much force, Duhaime himself did all the work, but it was just enough. The Freeman commander fell on the ground, and Delrin sunk his blade in the opening between the armor and the helmet.

Just like that, it was over. Done.

Barris had always shown great promise when it came to fighting. His first trainer, Knight-Templar Reeva always praised his swift footwork as his best asset. He’s always been fast as a kid. Knight-Lieutenant Cuthbert always praised his dexterity. Knight-Templar Harlow always praised him
being smart. Since becoming an adult, since that first mission on Dragon’s Peak Delrin knew they all had been wrong. Different warriors draw their strength from different places.

He always relied on his composure.

“Everyone good?”, he asked his team.

Kirke nodded halfway amused, Simon took of his helmet and wiped out the sweat off his forehead, Zuzu gave him her most brilliant smile and Merle just raised his eyebrows.

“I’ll take it as a yes. Anyone injured? Anyone needed potions?”

“We’re all good.”, Kirke wrinkled her nose. “It’s just the beginning. They are watching us, no doubt. Are we waiting…?”

“No”, he shook his head. “We’re pushing through. We’re beyond waiting now.”

They did not have issues getting into the villa. It seemed that the Freeman have retreated to one side of it.

“Maker’s balls, this place had to seen better days”, Kirke remarked.

“They are waiting”, Merle noticed grimly.

“They are”, Barris agreed, “but we’ll still break through. Now, Lavellan, focus on the barriers. We have much less space to dodge and retreat here. Don’t stay too far back. We don’t want to become suddenly ambushed from the back. There’s a lot of doors here. Merle?”

“I can drop some traps if you promise to not retreat where I’ve placed them.”

“Everyone heard it? We’re keeping together. We’re not separating. We’re going in room by room if need be. Kirke?”

“I’ll go first. Cover me, Captain.”

The rooms on the left side seemed empty. Delrin inhaled the air and could sense the presence in the corridor on the right. He signaled to prepare for the attack. Kirke did the honors of bashing the door and they charged, pushing through methodically. He didn’t want to rush, but he also didn’t want to risk the chance for Maliphant to escape. He thanked the Maker that not every Freeman was a skilled Chevalier. Killing the draft soldiers who probably barely held their first weapons when the war erupted was physically easy… Any difficulties would come afterwards.

They passed through several rooms. Villa Maurel, typically Orlesian in size and style, was truly a respectable estate. Still beautiful even with the signs of abuse and chaos and piss on the floor and the stench of alcohol in the air. Freeman were no army, that was clear as day. They were deserters.

Suddenly he sensed it. The feeling both so familiar and now disturbingly alien. Lyrium. Red lyrium, to be precise. He glanced at Simon whose lips twitched.

“Red templars”, Barris said bitterly. “It seems few of them are already here.”

“Just what we needed.” Kirke scoffed. “Alright, two more and we’re pushing towards another corridor. How many corridors does this blasted manor have?”

Delrin felt the fire of Zuzu’s spell slightly hit his arm before immolating the Freeman rogue.
“Careful there”, he yelled to her watching as Merle took down another fighter.

“Shit, shit, shit. Sorry Captain. I hate fighting indoors. There’s no space here!” Lavellan gasped, holding her staff nervously.

“Just keep the barrier on continuously then. The swords will do the job.”

He hoped that Clarissa had easier time than this because he slowly started regretting splitting his squadron. Especially if Red Templars were already at the villa.

“What else is new”, Kirke looked at him knowingly, as if reading his mind, “it’s always us stuck with the youngsters amidst the…”

“I am trying!”, Lavellan yelled furiously. “Here, a fucking barrier for you!”

“Maker’s balls, Zuz”, Kirke rolled her eyes, “Not all my remarks are about you. I was talking about Trevelyan in particular”

“Thanks, Kirke”, muttered Simon quietly, leaning against the wall, breathing loudly.

“How did our intel not reveal the Red Templars inside?”, Kirke wondered angrily, “we knew they have contacts, but we didn’t know they were already inside… and the Villa was watched.”

“They could have been holing up here before the surveillance”, Barris growled, “too late for second guessing the work of the scouts.”

Red lyrium was vile, and it was particularly tempting for Templars. He could see Simon struggle, and the boy had never been reckless with his own lyrium intake. Still, the song must have been loud. The kid was sweating and slightly shaking.

“Hanging there, Simon?”, Delrin grabbed his arm and looked into his eyes.

Simon looked guilty. “Yes, Captain. This is bullshit. I’ve been around red lyrium before”.

“That’s still the red lyrium bullshit”, Merle remarked, tired, holding onto his two daggers tightly. “We need to break through and we need to do it fast. Tell me the leader is not the Red Templar himself.”

“I don’t think so”, Kirke wiped the sweat from her forehead. “I think we managed to interrupt some sort of negotiations. It’s our shit luck. I wish Beau was here with his precise…”

“I can make fire rain!”, Zuzu was shaking out of anger.

“Enough! Barrier!”, Delrin yelled. “Barrier and that’s it, Lavellan. You’re not doing anything else. They’re Red Templars and you’re our most vulnerable member right now. Stay back and keep that damn barrier up. We’re just gotta break through with our blades.”

They bashed the door and broke through, fighting intensely. It was so loud, Delrin thought, it was always much louder than anticipated. Even when he had done it thousands of times before. Him and Kirke moved to the front, able to take most of the damage, while Merle used his artificer techniques to cover their moves and confuse the enemy. The knockout powder burned the eyes, but it worked, Delrin thought, dipping his sword into the Freeman warrior.

Deserters. One one hand, he felt sorry for them, fighting the war that was senseless, and horrific, and the regular soldiers were little more than meat. On another hand, deserters were oftentimes not
only desperate, but cruel. Once they committed an act of treason punishable by death, they had
nothing to lose, and they turned to evil, attacking and abusing local population.

He finally saw the inner courtyard through the window, the Freeman fighters ready for them,
Maliphant among them, few Red Templars also present. This was the last stretch.

“Keep the bloody barrier, Zuz”, Kirke shouted.

They won.

Nobody was celebrating. They found two deceased Dalish women, perhaps younger than Lavellan,
undoubtedly taken and abused by the Freeman. Kirke covered their bodies in curtain fabric,
beautiful and lush silk, gently, as she was putting them to sleep. Merle didn’t say a thing but got up
to search through the Villa before Barris issued any orders. He was a man of very few words and
he might have seem cold, but Delrin was certain he wasn’t indifferent to what they found. Zuzu
cried and Simon held her in his arms, looking completely and utterly beat.

“Dalish”, Kirke sighted angrily. “They have Vallaslins. I think one was for Mythal. Their camp
couldn’t be that far away… We should take them home if we can. I can’t bear to think we’d leave
them here. I… I don’t think Dalish burn their dead.”

“They don’t”, Barris replied shortly. They buried them and planted trees, that much he knew. “And
we will, Kirke. We will.”

The girls had to be alive until recently. Perhaps they were alive when his squadron entered the
villa. Delrin cursed in the privacy of his thoughts.

They all heard the noises coming from the outside.

“Position!”, he hissed to his team. Zuzu face was still covered in tears, but she got up and readied
her staff.

“Clarissa Thornhall, The Inquisition forces!”, the familiar voice shouted clearly.

They all immediately relaxed.

“We’re here!”

Clarissa, Arthur, Beau and Morve where in considerably better shape than them.

“Blighted bloodbath.” Arthur whistled, “you’ve been far busier…” he stopped himself looking at
the silhouettes of dead women covered in thin fabric.

“Red Templars were here”, Kirke spat out, “and we found two murdered Dalish girls. We need to
find their clan if it’s even possible.”

“The scouts are guarding outside, they should know if there are Dalish camps around Emerald
Graves”, Clarissa noted sadly. “We faced no difficulties, Captain. Fairbanks met us at the Lodge
after we were done.”

The Scouts provided information on small Dalish clan passing through the Graves. Barris strapped
one of the Dalish women to the back of his horse. That type of evil was so vile, so impossible to
reconcile with any notion of decency. And yet Barris was not ignorant. It was not uncommon either. How many mages were abused by the Templars within the Circles? How many things he should have noticed himself? How women and children were victimized during the wars? How many elves had suffered in alienages and outside of them?

He thought of Mira. He briefly thought of what would happen if the Templar she encountered in the wilderness wasn’t dead. He thought of the fear in her eyes when they were first in their quarters alone, right after the wedding.

The anger welled in his chest and turned into sadness. He killed Duhaime, but nothing would bring those two Dalish girls back.

The camp was set up among the most beautiful trees and Barris noticed how unusually small it looked. They’ve been decimated. Their Keeper picked up her staff but lowered it immediately when she noticed the bodies strapped to his and Kirke’s horses.

He let Kirke do the talking. She was a city guard with extensive experience of communicating with families and she was a woman, too, and he knew it mattered. Kirke carried the burden with grace and gentleness. One of the Dalish broke down in tears. She probably was the mother of at least one of the girls if they weren’t sisters. The camp had less than fifteen people now, including children. They looked scared, and hungry, and powerless.

The War of the Lions decimated them even though they were no part of it. Elves were not loved in Orlais, and when deserters hit the woods, some of them hunted Dalish for resources, or just pleasure, just like the Freeman did. Truthfully the same probably happened during peace just on the smaller scale. Keeper said she sent them to forage and never saw them again. She also mentioned they planned to seek Keeper Hawen of another clan and ask if he’d take them in. He knew enough to understand what immense task it was for one Keeper to submit to another.

He reached for the coin pouch attached to his horse when Keeper Dranna hissed:

“I don’t want your charity. I know who you are, and I smell lyrium on some of you. You have my thanks for bringing my girls back, but I give you nothing else and you give me nothing else. The Templars raped and abused more of us that the common bandits. You’re no better than them. You disgust me.”

The woman standing close to the Keeper protested faintly: “Keeper, we can’t say no…”, but was shushed immediately.

Keeper turned to Zuzu and spat: “And you… you disgust me the most, Shemlen. You’re running with those who would kill us all if given the chance. You’re standing on the ground soaked with blood of the ancestors that would be ashamed of you.”

Before he could say anything, Kirke grabbed his arm and squeezed it so hard it hurt, and he saw her grabbing Zuzu’s hand too. Lavellan broke free and walked away furiously.

“Understood, Keeper”, Kirke responded calmly, no hint of any offense in her voice.” Forgive me for asking, but I noticed this” she pointed at the rack with handmade jewelry. Some Dalish clans engaged in craft and sold their goods around cities and villages. If this clan did that, than the war destroyed their livelihood. “Are you selling? I have a lover who’s fond of pretty little things.”

Everyone froze at Kirke’s remark, seemingly so inappropriate and ill-timed. Nothing she did was ever ill-timed though.
The Keeper looked at Kirke for a while and finally relented.

“I’ll allow it” she said and walked away.

The shadow of relief fell on the Dalish who tried arguing with her Keeper before. Kirke walked to the rack full of jewelry calmly and without hesitation, and muttered loudly. “I’m choosing something for Brigita. She certainly deserves it. Merle, isn’t purple Agatha’s favorite color? Look at this dawnstone beauty.”

“Indeed it is”, said Merle, obediently coming closer and looking at the delicate arbor blessing shaped brooch.

“I will get something for the girls”, Arthur volunteered. “Well, and maybe Katya too. Kirke, help me choose.”

“This is rather dainty”, Clarissa murmured softly. “I like it”.

Beau, who certainly wasn’t the one to need inexpensive homemade jewelry picked a thing too, and so did Morve.

“Captain, I am sure your bride…” Kirke gave him the sternest of looks.

“Of course”, he said. “Yes, indeed.” He walked there himself and picked what seemed the most ornamental item there, a necklace. It was dainty and made from different metal scraps, forming tons of beautiful small flowers. “This?”

“I’ll get something for Zuzu”, Simon added quickly, picking the bracelet.

It was all theater. They knew it, and the Dalish knew it too. Careful and precarious performance ordained by Kirke. They left the same amount of money as he would have given them, but this wasn’t charity. This was a transaction.

It mattered.

Kirke would honestly have made a better Captain than him. Sweet Andraste, she was invaluable.

“You know, Simon”, she just turned to Trevelyan and smiled, “I’m going to pay for that bracelet for Zuzu. As a thank you for keeping the damn barrier today.”

It was late when they got back to their own encampment and everyone was utterly drained and devastated.

“You’re a better leader than me”, he told Kirke quietly when they both worked on starting the fire. Beau was chopping food with Clarissa, Arthur was cleaning the weapons, Morve and Merle were bringing the loot to the Inquisition scouts camp. Zuzu was sitting in Simon’s lap crying and he was whispering things into her ear.

“No”, Kirke responded sharply, looking at him with her deep black eyes. “No, Captain. No. I am that good precisely because I am not the leader. Drop it. I know what you’re doing. Drop it now, because we need you.”

She was right. Not every day brought doubts in his abilities, but he has failed before, and today
was especially taxing. They had to carry on. He looked at his squadron. Everyone was pale and quiet, entrenched in their own thoughts. Zuzu suddenly broke the uncomfortable silence.

“Those girls were my age and now they are gone. Murdered. They looked like me”, she said furiously, “but you know why I am selfishly crying? Because of what the Keeper said to me. She didn’t even know I’m Dalish too. Nobody knows. Nobody knows because I was born Dalish, but I’m not truly Dalish. It was taken from me forever. I will never find my family, and I will never meet them, and I will never…How fucked up is that this is what I’m thinking about right now?”, she continued angrily. “And I know she wasn’t wrong about the Templars. They were rumors in Ostwick about Templars who liked finding young Elven girls in Marches forests. Like what they did to us mages wasn’t enough.”

They all looked at her in silence, Arthur covered his face with his hands and Clarissa averted her eyes for a second. They sat in the silence for a while, weighting the accusation between them.

“We know”, Clarissa finally spoke up, grabbing Zuzu’s hand. “None of us here can deny it. None of us ever will.”

There was that unspeakable understanding between Barris and Clarissa and Arthur. The three of them were there at Therinfal Redoubt. They all survived it. They all witnessed the literal embodiment of the evil and corruption of the Templar Order. None of them would defend the Templars against Zuzu’s words, because the Order turned out to be indefensible, even if they all knew many Templars that were noble and good.

Something broke on Zuzu’s face and she breathed a little bit easier.

“I know”, she finally said. “I just wish that this”, she gestured alongside the campsite, “had happened earlier. Instead…”

Instead there was a war. Yet another horrendous, cruel war with many unforgivable atrocities committed. The whole circle in Dairsmuid got annulled. What happened at the White Spire… He should have never ended up at Therinfal in the first place and lead his men there.

“And now there’s another war,” Zuzu continued bitterly, “those Dalish girls weren’t even a part of it.”

“I had had no idea”, Simon suddenly added quietly, “about those rumors about Templars at Ostwick.”

“You were a young Templar, Simon”, Zuzu explained, the sparks in her eyes. “I suspect your experience of Circle is drastically different than mine, and I never had it that bad. I was taken at the age of six to the circle, six, you understand? I was the youngest mage child in the history of Ostwick. Younger than Vivienne, did you know she was initially at Ostwick too? From the age of six Knight-Captain Roland would tell me how lucky I was, and what happened to the Dalish girls in the wild”.

Barris wondered how to even begin to frame his thoughts.

“I don’t say it against any of you”, Zuzu sighed, “and you know that. But Circles and Templar Order… it really was bad.”

To Delrin’s surprise, it was Arthur who spoke up.

“I never understood it fully until I had my own kids. I’ve been the part of the Order for years now, and my Vigil was way over a decade ago. Knowing what I know now… We never had a mage in
my family, and I still wonder what I would do, but taking children from their families, ripping them away with no means of contact, preserving the relationship…There has to be a better way.” he turned to Lavellan. “I am sorry you went through it, Zuz. I really am.”

“I have a lot of regrets from my time as a Templar”, he himself added bitterly, “and there’s a shame that will never go away. I was eighteen when I first heard the rumors about the fellow Templar harassing mages. Elon shared my quarters. I reported him, and he was gone when I came back from my first mission. I thought to myself that the issue had been dealt with appropriately and gave it no thought afterwards. It wasn’t until much later when I realized how many things I should have seen much earlier and how I should have reacted. It remained ignorant for far too long. Elon faced no consequences aside from being transported to Kirkwall, and we all know what happened there.”

“Fucking Kirkwall”, Kirke blurted out, “I came there after the destruction of the Gallows. Kirkwall is a special case of complete and utter shitfest, and the things that happened before my time… Cullen tried to make it better afterwards, but I am not surprised he left. He recruited me. I know he’s still haunted about his role in it. And I know many Templars are too. My only hope is that this means something going forward.”

“Ghislain wasn’t bad”, Beau sighed, “but it wasn’t good either. Elder mages tried to shelter children. There was a Templar who liked grabbing little boys, and the First Enchanter was creating those elaborate plans on how kids could avoid him because Knight-Commander didn’t believe the accusations. It was humiliating to be so powerless. Some think I’m a loyalist because Ghislain hardly rebelled. But with what happened at the White Spire, everyone was terrified. Both Templars and Mages. I don’t know where I would go if not for the Inquisition, given the fact that Fiona literally sold the mages away to Tevinter. Still, it was hard to fight alongside Templars at first”.

“I used to be wary of magic and I had no idea. You both are first mages I’ve became friendly with“ Morve said and Merle just nodded in agreement. “We were in Denerim when Kirkwall exploded, and everyone hated mages as a result. But if everyone heard you now, they would see things differently”.

“Thank you, guys”, Zuzu whispered. “It actually makes me feel better.”

“Wait”, Clarrisa interrupted, pale and serious. “Can I just share something? I never told anyone. The rest of Templars here are men, but I am a woman… I was forced to attend the births at my Circle. We as women were tasked with it since it was intimate and private. It was deemed inappropriate for a male Templar to attend births, although half of those children were fathered by Templars themselves. We were ordered to rip newborn babies from their mothers’ arms and threaten the moms with the Rite of Tranquility if they disobeyed. The women were crying so hard. It was the worst thing I’ve ever done in my entire life. It’s my biggest shame. I hated it. I hated every second of it. I never participated in the Rite, but it felt as I made those women Tranquil myself. And then I wasn’t even able to assist those babies with transport to the orphanage. My Knight-Commander kept telling me I was too sensitive.” Clarissa started crying, and Delrin’s heart broke. She was always so calm and composed. He knew what happened to children born at the Circle, but there was a difference between merely knowing and than facing the reality.

It was Zuzu who suddenly got up and fell into Clarissa’s arms, embracing her.

There was no going back from revealing so much.

“I love you”, Zuzu spoke passionately. “I love all of you. I don’t care that you find me ridiculous. You’re the only family I’ve ever had. Even Beau.”

“Well, thank you Zuz”, Beau chuckled. “I won’t ever say those words again, but I love you too, as
I would love one immensely annoying little sister.”

The air became just slightly easier to breathe.

“Captain”, Kirke stopped him before he went to his tent. “A word?”

“Certainly”, he gestured her inside. How he wished to fall into his bedroll.

“I will allow myself to speak freely”, she sighted heavily. “When you said I am a better leader than you, I denied it. I should have told you why. You know my background from Kirkwall after the Gallows… I spent most of my late twenties and early thirties in Wycome. I eventually got promoted to the position of Guard-Lieutenant. Needless to say, I made a mistake and two men under my command died and I couldn’t deal with that. I can’t deal with that. The price is too high for me. I know what you did at Therinfal, and I know what you lost at Therinfal. There are men who deal well with the deaths of those underneath them because they don’t care. You do care, and yet not even a year afterwards you have managed to build and lead the squadron that might just be the most dependable one in the whole Inquisition. We even like each other, although don’t tell Lavellan I admitted that. I think it takes both courage and strength and heart to do that. That is why you lead, and I follow.”

He did not know how to respond. “Kirke, I—”

“Don’t say anything”, she got up and looked at him. “I’m not good at sentimentality. Open the letter from that pretty wife of yours. Write her back. It will make you feel better after today.”

Barris finally laid down after the cruel and unforgiving day. His whole body ached after the fighting and he knew they all needed a day of rest. The pain wasn’t merely physical though. There was something else, the pinch impossible to ignore.

He would write reports tomorrow, wait for the orders on how to pursue the rest of the Red Templars. The work could wait, but what he really wanted was to read the letter from Mira.

_______________________________________________________

Delrin,

Let me start by saying that I am very impressed how swift the letters seem to arrive. Not what I anticipated at all.

Thank you for your drawings. Perhaps I haven’t expected you to be so good at it. The sketches are simply beautiful. Would it be presumptuous to request more in the future?

I visited the stables as you suggested. Thank you for that, because it truly made me feel better. Master Dennet approved of me enough to offer me what he said was one of the best horses in his care. I was told she is an Anderfel Courser, and that she was one of the horses abandoned when Grey Wardens disappeared from Orlais. It might be love talking, but I have never seen more beautiful horse in my entire life. Snowflake is a beautiful tobiano with a star marking on her head. She’s actually a quite challenging and she definitely seeks to exploit my weakness towards her. She doesn’t know yet that my will can easily outmatch hers. But she will find out soon. Needless to say,
I am in an embarrassing amount of pain this morning, but I also feel... good.

I agree with you regarding Tomir’s sacrifice. I think our actions and choices matter even when there’s no one to witness them. Even when there’s little left - or nothing - there’s always a man facing himself at the very end, at the very least. I am not sure how I feel about the fact that Vala never knew. Your words certainly help me understand his choice.

I remember reading about Elandrin and Adalene, but it feels different when you write about being in the place where it actually happened. I catch myself sometimes thinking that what I read about is merely a story. Whether it actually happened exactly the way you describe, it’s not merely a story, right? It’s an illustration of the divide, heartbreak and missed chances. And a loss that can never be replaced. I now look differently at the sketch of the forest you sent. When you come back, just remind me and I’ll tell you a story too. I’m glad you wrote me about it.

Forgive me for writing this, but please remember at the very least to clean your wounds and cover them and change the bandaging daily. Ideally I’d just ask you to not get injured at all, but that seems a little patronizing. I know you’ve been doing it for a long time. But I haven’t. It’s easy to imagine you’re away, it’s harder to realize you’re at war, but when I do, there’s so many thoughts passing through my mind.

Stay safe.

Yours,

Mira Barris

____________________________________________________________

The warmth spread through his chest and it reached the places that hurt as well.

Chapter End Notes

This was such a difficult chapter to write but it's been the part of this story from the beginning. I always thought there's not enough discussions in the came about it, to be honest.

Can I also say I love the women in Barris' squadron?

And don't worry, it's not that long until Delrin and Mira meet again.

Thank you so much for reading and for the comments. I am so glad that people take time to read and comment my work. It really means a lot for me!
Chapter Summary

Mira finds herself playing the role of a medic and Delrin prepares for the final battle with Red Templars.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Third week of Kingsway, 9:42 Dragon Age, Skyhold

Mira imagined many scenarios in which she acted as the medic in Thedas, and the scenarios weren't about stitchings or basic wound tending. She fantasized about using her skills to save a life, about using her skills at all. Her mind focused on possibilities like tending to victims of fire magic or removing armor shrapnel from the flesh, or stopping the hemorrhage. Those thoughts were foolish and stupid and she wouldn't admit them out loud. She had bare understanding of mundane medicine, bare understanding of magical healing, she had no tools, no tests, she had no authority, there were thousands of ethical considerations... She still secretly entertained those ideas despite the acute awareness that being a doctor on Earth didn't translate into being a medic in Thedas. Frankly, she barely just became a doctor on Earth to begin with.

Perhaps if she was smart about it and someone listened, she could push for certain public health changes by sharing her knowledge. Perhaps she could stitch here and there or clean some wounds. Perhaps she could advocate for systemizing charting or establishing protocols for treatment if it wasn't done already. Those were the things that would improve any system.

Obviously life had other plans, Mira thought bitterly. She did help to save a life, and it was nothing like her fantasies, not like that at all. It never was, was it? It had nothing to do with combat or magic. It had nothing to do with war, or with Thedas in particular.

It could have happened on Earth. I did happen on Earth, many times.

It was morning and she started her day by going to the stables for riding exercises with Snowflake. Mira's plan was to go to the infirmary afterwards and see it for herself, check the tools that were used, check the sanitary conditions, ask about privacy, about diagnostic criteria, about patient communication. She was too curious to let it go. After all, she rationalized, at the very little she could be a patient one day. Delrin certainly could.

She did end up at the infirmary and it was nothing like what she initially planned.

She just walked out of the stables. The air was crisp and pleasant to breath. Mira could see Cassandra discussing something passionately with Iron Bull and another man whom Mira met briefly before. Krem was standing nearby and listening. Master Dennet and few helpers were still inside of the stables. Blackwall was exercising his horse on the paddock. The fighting grounds were visible from afar and she could hear the faintest sounds of battle. Other than few children running and laughing there was no one else on her path.

She walked almost leisurely, thinking how she could introduce herself to the Skyhold surgeon
without sounding too antagonistic or too bizarre. Would simply saying she was Delrin’s wife and wanted to check the infirmary would be enough? It almost felt wrong to…

Her mind barely registered the splash of water coming from behind, one of those sounds that do not raise suspicions around the watering station near the stables. She heard the child’s voice asking something shyly…

It wasn’t instinct. Perhaps it wouldn’t have been training either unless it wasn’t for a very specific association inside Mira’s mind.


She turned around so quickly and before even fully realizing what she was seeing she screamed “help!” and bolted towards the tub.

There was a child inside, face down, with two other standing around confused, too confused to scream or ask for help, instead just repeating the boy’s name shyly.


“Get me a mage who can heal”, Mira ordered, “get the rest of the kids out of here and help me carry him.”

It was Bull who took the kid in his arms and they all ran to the infirmary, Mira trying not to panic at the thought of the boy possibly not breathing again. She ignored the surgeon, she ignored everyone else when they laid the child on the hospital bed. Pulse. Tachypnea. Fuck.

“Shut the fuck up, all of you.”, she hissed to everyone around and they listened for a second.

She barely heard the surgeon mention something about phlegm and pushed all those thoughts aside. What next? What next? There was nothing here, nothing to do but watch unless…

“What’s going on?”, she recognized another voice entering the infirmary.

“Ellendra! Here!”, she shouted at the Enchanter approaching the bed quickly with confused look on her face.

“What happened?”

“Drowning. Near drowning, I hope.”

“I don’t know what I could even… I’ve never dealt with drowning. What…”

“Try”, Mira said firmly, “Place his hands around his chest and try.”

“It will use all my mana, just so you know.”

“Are there other healers?”

“Fiona”, Ellendra said confidently, “Vivienne, but she’s not here. There’s several…”

“Send for Enchanter Fiona”, Mira heard Cassandra order someone. “Will the boy be alright?”

“I don’t know”, Mira replied earnestly. “The first forty eight hours are quite critical and there’s
little we can do now except of magic.”

“I must protest”, the surgeon interjected, “you cannot just barge into my infirmary and allow mages…”

“I don’t give a fuck”, Mira barked.

“How dare you! I don’t…”

“Leave us”, Cassandra ordered the surgeon who huffed furiously stepping outside. The door slammed.

Mira watched Ellendra’s hands touching the boy and igniting with the faint glow as she ran her fingers across his chest. His pulse stabilized a bit, his breaths became normal, the color appearing on his cheeks seemed healthier.

“Ha”, the mage noticed. “Something worked.”

“Is it permanent or…?”

“I’d repeat the healing in few hours. You can never be too careful…”

“Will you stay with me?”, Mira asked the Enchanter.

“I’ll stay as long as you need,” Ellendra turned away to Bull and said, “Cancel my training. Cancel my everything.”

“Thanks, Ellendra.”

Mira finally turned to see who was there in the room with her. The Iron Bull was looking at them quite perturbed. Cassandra’s face was flushed, her eyes scared. Blackwall was just standing still with his head down, looking at his feet. He was afraid, Mira realized.

“We need to notify the kid’s family. They should be here,” she nudged softly.

“Blackwall”, Cassandra didn’t need to say anything more.

“Certainly. I think I know the kid.”

“Where are the other…?”

“Fletcher brought other children to the tavern to be picked up by their families,” The Iron Bull replied. “You made that kid breath again,” he added surprised.

“What?!” Ellendra turned towards Mira. “He wasn’t breathing? How is that possible?”

“It was luck and some skill”, Mira said grimly. Unlike in the movies, it failed more than most realized. She was lucky. The boy was lucky. And without magic later on most likely none of what she did would have mattered anyway.

“I have never seen anything like that”, Cassandra remarked.

“Well”, Mira said bitterly, “I strongly suggest making sure that water sources are unaccessible to children because you could be seeing it again.”

“I…”, Cassandra seemed taken aback.
“I’m sorry”, Mira sighted. “I didn’t mean it like that.”

“So what now?”, the Qunari asked.

“Now we sit and watch and wait. Thanks to Ellendra’s magic he might as well live. And can someone bring me some clothes to change?”

Mira and Ellendra didn’t talk much, both sitting at the side of the bed and watching the boy when the door to infirmary opened and the crying woman entered. Karla, the same sweet kitchen maid who knew Delrin and who taught Mira patiently how to use the stove and how to start the fire in the furnace. Karla was the grandmother, the boy lying on the bed was named Micah and he was four years old. Karla was very much trying to stop herself from panicking, crocodile tears falling down her cheeks.

“I leave him with one of the girls, I pay her! I don’t even know how he ended up there! I don’t know what happened, o Maker, hear my cry, I cannot lose him too, my sweet sweet boy.”

Mira bit her lip. Ellendra’s eyes were wet.

“Karla, look at me”, Mira said gently, “He is stable now. I cannot guarantee you that he will be fine, but so far we’ve been incredibly lucky. Enchanter Ellendra was able to stabilize his condition.” Mira could see Karla’s hesitation looking at the mage. Perhaps the relations with mages weren’t as normalized as Mira assumed looking at Delrin’s squadron. “Thanks to her magic he is breathing well and his heart seems well. He’s very weak and tired but I haven’t observed any dangerous signs either.”

“It was my…”

“It wasn’t your fault”, Mira replied firmly.

“Lady Barris, I lost my daughter in Haven. It was almost a year ago… I would have lost Micah as well. Your husband carried him through the mountains, I’m sure he told you the story…” He didn’t. Karla certainly seemed fond of Delrin and praised him a lot, but Mira didn’t realize it was because of something quite as impactful as that. “I cannot lose my sweet boy. I just cannot, not after everything I’ve lost already. They told me you noticed him first.”

“Yes”, Mira said softly.

“I… I cannot even express how I feel.”

“Sit down, Karla. We are all here watching him.”

“O Creator, see me kneel:
For I walk only where You would bid me.
Stand only in places You have blessed.
Sing only the words You place in my throat,” The grandmother chanted pleadingly.

Mira turned to her own prayer. She hasn’t prayed a lot since ending up in Thedas. She prayed at her wedding for her husband to be kind. She didn’t plan for it, but she prayed for Delrin’s safety once or twice, the words just appearing in her mind. And now, the more urgent and conscious
Enchanter Fiona joined them shortly afterwards alongside Cassandra. She was a petite elven woman with grey eyes and brown hair. Her looks were delicate, but nothing else about her seemed fragile. Mira sensed the intensity of her character immediately. She introduced herself, smiled curtly to Karla and sat down on the chair as well. Ellendra explained the treatment plan. Magical treatment plan. It sounded so absurd, and yet the boy still lived and looked… pretty well.

Cassandra gestured the mages and Mira to move to the corner of the room, further from Karla’s ears but still close enough to watch over Micah.

“Surgeon refused to come back to the infirmary as long as you all are here.” Cassandra explained angrily, “and forbade her assistants to come back as well. It’s utmost foolishness on her side, that irresponsible… Ugh. I am afraid we have little means to convince her otherwise.”

Mira felt anger rising in her chest. She knew better than to erupt, but the idea that the surgeon’s ego was so fragile it threatened the best care option for the child… and why the opposition to the magic and mages in the first place? Clearly it had been the most effective route of treatment for most conditions.

“Frankly, I don’t understand why magic isn’t used in this infirmary on regular basis”, Mira said openly. There was no point to hide how she felt when she was the one to request magical assistance.

“Lady Barris, was it?”, Fiona’s voice was bitter, “Aren’t you married to a Templar? You should know how tense relationship with mages is, even with full alliance. Alliance that wasn’t met with warm welcome by everyone, might I add.”

“Fiona”, Ellendra warned, “you very well know that Captain Barris has never advocated against the alliance. And you know there are no more Templars. And we all know that there were reasons for the distrust following…”

“Yes”, Fiona flushed, “I know. You have my former position. And you know that they are still Templars, even if they don’t call themselves that.”

“Fiona…”

“It’s not the time. Anyway, lady Barris…”

“Mira.”

“Huh?”

“Please call me Mira, Enchanter Fiona.”

“Very well. Just Fiona suffices. I suppose I am surprised that a noble woman married to a… former Templar holds such unconventional views regarding healing.”

“Enchanter Fiona”, Cassandra interjected brashly, glowering at Mira. “There’s…”

Mira glowered back at Cassandra. No, she would not stupidly reveal her true identity after everything she went through to conceal it. However thanks to the Ambassador and the Spymaster efforts Mira could actually provide a sensible answer.
“My father was a leader of a small Andrastian cult”, Mira said openly for the first time, referring to her fabricated backstory. “I have ties to Nevarra. We moved a lot for obvious reasons.”

Fiona raised her eyebrows and Mira knew that she needed to say those words. Despite the fact that she avoided it this whole time, despite the fact that it felt wrong and fraudulent, that it was wrong and fraudulent, despite everything…

“I am a medic”, her voice came out strong and clear, “I have many views about medicine. Some could surprise you.”

“Very well”, Fiona relented, “And I certainly am glad helping this child. That’s the mother?”

“Grandmother’, Mira answered, “mom died in Haven.”

Fiona shook her head and Cassandra lowered her gaze.

“Do you want me to stay?”, the warrior asked.

“Do we need to be overseen by the Seeker?”, Fiona replied and Ellendra hissed in response, visibly irritated. Surely the tensions were much stronger than Mira could have ever predicted. Cassandra turned towards Fiona angrily, and it was quick glance at Karla that stopped her from saying anything.

“There’s no need for you to stay, Cassandra”, Mira replied calmly, “but if the surgeon is not here, are we just supposed to take over incoming patients if there are any?”

“Could you?”, Cassandra asked seriously, without any mockery.

“Well, for some things, I suppose,” Mira sighted.

“This reminds me”, Ellendra whispered, “I could get Petri to come tomorrow for you to check his shoulder.”

“Sure.”

“Very well then. Do you need anything?” The Seeker inquired.

“Food and drinks. We need something liquid for the kid when he wakes up. Can you actually find the alchemist? Can he come tomorrow? Delrin mentioned one from Haven. Also some comfort items and toys. Karla would know. She likely won’t leave his side.”

“I’ll give the orders”, Seeker nodded. “I’ll come later. Perhaps the surgeon will be willing to listen to reason and come back.”

Micah woke up after Fiona healed him for the second time. He was just a typical four year old, confused and upset and thirsty and hungry. Mira wouldn’t be keen on giving him anything but there were limited ways to replenish fluids and the magic’s effect was… astounding. He looked completely normal. No wheezing, no coughing, normal pulse, and as much as she could listen to him which was frankly very little without stethoscope he sounded alright. Fiona decided to go take some rest and come back to switch shifts with Ellendra later on.

Karla was over the moon, smiling and feeding the boy soup and entertaining him with few simple toys. Mira felt amazed and relieved, and scared and tired, all at the same time. He lived.
survived. He not only survived, he was fine after the event that could have easily cost him his life. It wouldn’t have happened without magic. This was a miracle, except that… it wasn’t. Not in Thedas. Here, it was merely a pathway, a solution.

A solution that was apparently criminally underutilized.

The surgeon still hasn’t returned to the infirmary and Mira cleaned few minor wounds from sparring that didn’t require much further care and she drained one small sebaceous cyst using the kit that Bull gave her.

“I was told to avoid eating meats because of…” the young patient started babbling something about humor-related instructions she received from the surgeon. Mira listened politely and blinked few times.

“Eat whatever you want, normal diet”, she finally sighted heavily to the patient delighted at the news. Ellendra just looked at her curiously.

“I’ve heard”, Enchanter said cautiously later on, “that there are those who reject the humor theory…”

“That would be me, yes”, Mira saw no point in denying it especially as she definitely would bring von Beust theories to few people in charge. Not to mention her own knowledge.

“How interesting”, Ellendra noted quietly.

The Seeker came in the evening to check up on them and have the servants deliver more food and drinks.

“Mira?”, Cassandra gestured to talk privately.

“Yes?”

“Once Micah is able to leave infirmary, Leliana and Josephine and I want to talk to you.”

“Am I in trouble?”

“No”, the warrior looked at her surprised, “Why would you…? No, not at all. The Iron Bull might have updated me about your… recent interest in medicine and I think we should all have a conversation about it.”

“Fine”, Mira knew that there was no sense in trying to argue, especially given the opportunity to talk about “Theories of Disease Origination”. “Whenever you want.”

“I also bring you this”, Cassandra extended her hand holding a letter. “I stopped by the rookery. I thought you might to read it as soon as it arrived. There were two letters to Barris too, I slid them through the door to your quarters.”

“Thank you”, she said graciously. It truly was very considerate of Cassandra. She indeed was waiting to receive a letter from Delrin.

When Micah fell asleep again with Karla snuggling him in the bed and Ellendra focused on reading some giant book tome, Mira finally had a chance to sit down and open the envelope.
Dear Mira,

I apologize in advance for attaching no drawings to that letter. I could have waited few days before replying you and I could have taken my time to comply with your request, but I really wanted to write you sooner than that. And thank you for your kind words. I don’t think I’ve shown my sketches to many people.

Today was a difficult day. Please rest assured that we are fine. I am fine. Nothing worse than muscle ache and few minor bruises. That’s not where the difficulty lies.

Today was one of those days when we have seen so much cruelty that everything is hard to bear. This is not fighting demons and this is not fighting darkspawn. It’s not a proper war either. We’re fighting other people. Perhaps in some way people are worse than darkspawn or demons. After all, both darkspawn and demons act within their nature. We don’t expect anything else. With people… at some point there was a choice. It’s disheartening to realize that. Sometimes that choice is so inexplicably evil it’s difficult to feel remorse after stopping the man who made it. But then many of those who stand behind the man like this do it because of lies and threats, and that’s a loss that makes me sad. It could have been different. So many missed chances, the expression you used in your last letter that I find remarkably accurate.

I believe in the work I do. I wouldn’t have done it otherwise. But if I’m honest with myself and with you, I’m spilling a lot of blood too. Sometimes the blood of men who deserved it, sometimes of those who probably don’t understand in whose name they are fighting and for what purpose. None of this stops me from my duty, but I don’t want you to think that I’m careless with life and blind to the reality.

Forgive my ramblings. There are so few opportunities to share such thoughts openly.

I will follow your instructions if necessary. I find your concern for my safety heart warming.

I am so glad you found yourself a horse, and I am quite impressed Master Dennet entrusted you with an Anderfel Courser. I promise to take you out of Skyhold for a proper ride if you would like to.

I must admit that receiving your letter softened the pain of today. I’m grateful for that.

Take care of yourself, Mira.

Faithfully,

Delrin Barris

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Third week of Kingsway, 9:42 Dragon Age, Emerald Graves

The Spymaster arranged to contact the Red Templars under the disguise of impersonating the
surviving Freeman fighters, even though there weren’t actually any. They still waited for details, and Barris decided to investigate the Chateau d’Onterre. The Ambassador strongly encouraged doing so while Cullen wrote him that he left the decision up to him. Leliana’s agents were also able to confirm Fairbanks’ noble lineage. Delrin pondered what it would mean for Fairbanks himself, but this was out of his hands and Fairbanks already became affiliated with the Inquisition.

Chateau d’Onterre could become a big asset, an asset that could be traded for political favors. The estate was hauntingly beautiful. It was also full of undead. Undead themselves had limited abilities and were easy to kill, but they were a definite proof of demonic involvement.

Fighting demons was easier than fighting people in so many ways. There was no regret, no consideration for how different it could have been under any other circumstances.

They moved through the large rooms of the mansion comfortably, and it quickly became apparent that Lord and Lady d’Onterre had a mage daughter whom they decided to hide away. They provided the child with no training.

It ended up exactly as he thought it would.

Barris had little problem admitting that there were apostates who never spent a day in the Circle and yet had proven to be excellent mages and strong enough to withstand demons. They all however had training. This child, that poor girl was left alone with her magic ignored, and magic could never be ignored.

Zuzu was the one who found the torn journal belonging to the little mageling.

“It’s not fair… I want to go outside… I have a new friend now…” Lavellan read loudly and shivers went down his spine.

“Isn’t that what you did, Captain?”, Simon asked out loud and part of Delrin wished he didn’t. Children cases were the hardest.

“Searching for abominations? Yes,” he replied simply.

“Templars always made it seem like it was very common,” Beau murmured.

“Abominations are not that common, but perhaps they are not as rare as some would like to believe”, his voice was bitter and heavy, “I’ve seen more than my fair share of abominations of children who received no training. There was a surge in them as Circles rebelled.”

“Which is why Skyhold hosts mage children now and the allied mages provide training”, Clarrisa added softly.

“Many peasant families have limited means to find help in such situation especially with Templar Order not existing anymore, and the Chantry being in shambles.” Delrin added, “You realize I am not in favor of bringing the old order back. I do know very well though that children born with magic cannot be abandoned. When the Templar-Mage war erupted I have investigated at least several killings of children with magical abilities when there were no signs of them being possessed. In most cases they were killed by family members.”

“Dalish seem to handle magelings by themselves well”, Zuzu noted.

“It’s true, but those are usually secluded communities with clear hierarchy. It’s easy to form one on one apprenticeship”, he observed. “but yes, Zuzu, I won’t deny that it is possible for excellent mages to be trained outside of the circles. The Champion of Kirkwall is one example. Solas is
another. Dorian would be yet another, because Imperial circles are so different than those in the
South. There has to be some form of education and discipline. Children tend to be more emotional
and they can struggle with understanding the possible consequences of their actions, which is
exactly why those who aren’t being trained and cared for are in risk of possession.”

“How many abominations have you fought, Captain?” It was Simon who posed the question.
Barris heard himself sigh in response.

“Over a hundred in my Templar career. I’ve also investigated a lot of suspected abominations that
turned out to not be true.”

Arthur whistled in response. Truthfully, most circle Templars saw maybe several abominations in
their lifetime. Some saw enough to be scared and hateful, and perhaps not enough to be confident in
their skills. Delrin knew that some Templars, especially those with limited experience were jumpy,
too jumpy and too eager to use their swords without using their brains first. Clarissa and Arthur
were trained better than that, but Simon needed to learn. Thankfully for every ineptitude Trevelyan
showed, his attitude wasn’t ever the issue.

When they finally were able to draw the Arcane Horror in, Barris readied his sword but stayed
back. He would have engaged if that became necessary, but being a Captain sometimes meant to
retreat and let others do the job so they would practice and learn.

They defeated the abomination and he didn’t even break a sweat.

He ordered for the manor to be swiftly searched before going back to the campsite. The area would
be later on taken over by Cullen’s soldiers as the Inquisition’s spoil. It was good policy to do a
search just in case they found something of significance to use immediately. They found few
amulets and an Elven artifact, and spent the rest of the time roaming through the library.

“Oh”, Lavellan gasped softly, small book open in her hands.

“Anything interesting?”, Merle asked.

“No, no, it’s just a folk song, but I think it’s about the Dales. Listen to it…

Too long I have traveled, soon I’ll see her smiling,
The girl in Red Crossing I’m longing to see.
O, I know she is there, daisies in her hair,
Waiting by the chantry to marry me.”

The song was definitely about Elandrin and Adalene, but for some reason Delrin’s mind drifted
towards Mira. Perhaps because he wrote her about that before. Perhaps because it brought back the
memory of their wedding and the flowers she wore in her hair, and how they reminded him of
Barrfield meadows. He didn’t know her then, but he knew her now, even if just a little… maybe a
bit more than a little, even though it’s only been a short while.

Her letters truly have been a source of comfort. The last letter he sent her, the one she probably
already received was more bitter than he initially intended. Something about her made it easy to
open up. Mira was certainly smart and thoughtful, and opinionated, and she has shown him more
care than he anticipated. If he was honest with himself, he certainly developed much fondness
towards her. He sketched her portrait two times in his notebook, each time feeling incredibly silly
afterwards. Harvestmere was approaching soon, the anniversary of Therinfal Redoubt and then just
ten days after it, the anniversary of Haven. He felt more raw than usual and Mira was sweet and kind. He pushed away all the thoughts about becoming infatuated. Still, her face was the one he saw each night before falling asleep.

“Are you thinking of lady Barris after hearing that song, Captain?”, Zuzu pried gently.

“Yes”, he saw no point in denying it. After all, to them he was a man in love who just left his wife after ten short days of newlywed bliss.

“It must be hard”, Kirke remarked.

“I won’t complain. Arthur hasn’t seen his wife for six months now. We’re coming back soon.”

“I would complain”, Arthur laughed, “I do complain. Don’t let me be the reason to stop you, Captain.”

‘Fine”, he relented trying to find the right words to describe both the illusion and the truth, “I… long to see her.”

Arthur gave him a pat on the back and Zuzu did the “awwwwww” sound, few other squadron members smiling.

He really didn’t lie, he realized as soon as he said it. He wished to see Mira.

Later at the campsite he read the orders from Cullen and all the additional notes from Leliana. They were supposed to meet the Red Templars at Lion’s Pavillon. There was a chance that the rogue Templars would suspect the ambush, but it was still worth pursuing to finally clear the Emerald Graves from their presence. Afterwards it would befall the Inquisition soldiers to patrol the area, at least until the War of Lions was over. Fairbanks would be able to provide shelter to a lot more refugees, too. Barris was curious how the advisers decided to handle his nobility, but the letters made no mention of it.

He felt the pinch in his heart once again when he realized he recognized the name of the Red Templar leading the forces. Carroll. When Delrin was a child they both lived at Kinloch Hold. He saw him once or twice since then. He knew Carroll was eventually promoted and then he heard few rumors throughout the years, some as bizarre as Carroll helping the Qunari get their sarebaas back. It was very likely that the man struggled with his lyrium intake for years, and now he has chosen the path of pure evil. In two short days it would be Barris’ mission to end it.

The most tragic aspect of fighting the Red Templars was fighting people he once knew. People who once were his brothers and sisters in arms. People who now were against everything the ideals of the Order strived for. It was a lie though, he knew that. For a long time, perhaps since the beginning of its existence there was a divide between the ideals and the reality of the Templar Order. Perhaps it was bound to fail. Now no one knew what future would bring and how differently the world would look afterwards. Would it even be different? Could it really change?

“Alright”, he spoke to the squadron upon leaving his tent, “Two days and we engage the Red Templars. I do not want any surprises, and I’d like to send Morve and Merle alongside the scouts to track their movements. You’d leave tomorrow morning and meet us at the Pavillon.”

“Yes, Captain”, the twins nodded.
“Very well. There might be quite a few of them, and I cannot discount the presence of the behemoth either. The rest of us take a break tomorrow. I want everyone to wear as much armor protection as possible for the fight. It might slightly slow us down, but frankly the Red Templars will always have physical advantages anyway. I do not want the risk of being hit with red lyrium projectiles. Now, Beau and Zuzu…”

“Yes, Captain?”

“I will keep you on defense…”

“But…” the elven mage protested.

“Lavellan, I strongly advise you not to argue with my direct orders”, he said sharply, “this is not a discussion. Those are the Templars, and red lyrium enhances a lot of their abilities. If you’re needed closer I will bring you closer, but I am not risking you getting silenced and us getting distracted trying to save you. You’ll stay further back with Beau and Morve and provide us with barrier and some long distance attack. The second the Red Templars advance on you, you’re to retreat further.”

“Yes, Captain”, Zuzu relented.

“The good news is that this is our last assignment here and we’re even slightly ahead of schedule, thank the Maker. The Inquisition soldiers are on their way, and there will be enough of regular forces to keep this region stable. We’re going back to Skyhold soon.”

“Splendid”, Kirke smiled, “I can already taste the meatloaf at the Herald’s Rest in my mouth at the mere thought.”

“Yes”, he smiled back. “Don’t let your guard down though. This is the last part of our mission and we must remain as vigilant as ever. We’ve done really well up to this point and I’d like to keep it that way. But… good work so far. I am proud of all of you.”

He really was proud.

Sweet Andraste, he was also really tired.

Chapter End Notes

The folk songs comes from the Codex: The Girl in Red Crossing.

Only one chapter left of Delrin and Mira being apart and I promise you there will be a lot of content of them together.

Mira can definitely step up when there’s a need to do so.

I feel for Delrin. He is brave and strong and dutiful, but a man who cares is not a man who shies away from the questions of morality.

And yes, the anniversary of both Therinfal Redoubt events and Haven is approaching.
As always I thank you so much for all the kudos and comments! It's such a treat.
Chapter Summary

Mira finds employment and Delrin fights the Red Templars.

Chapter Notes

TW: There is a child's death mentioned in this chapter in one of the letters. It doesn't pertain to any character I've described earlier.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Fourth week of Kingsway, 9:42 Dragon, Skyhold

The conversation with the Spymaster, the Ambassador and the Seeker gave Mira a serious case of déja vu. The Inquisitor wasn’t present, but truthfully, even if he was, he probably would have been overshadowed by the three women. It brought back the memories of the first interrogation she went through in Skyhold, and then the further talks leading to her betrothal.

Something has changed though. It wasn’t the same type of conversation. Mira still felt fear sitting across the war table, but she knew her position wasn’t the same. She wasn’t as lost and confused. She wasn’t as shy either. The women were more open towards her too.

“You want me to work at the infirmary?”, Mira raised her eyebrows after Josephine finished her speech.

“Yes”, Leliana answered immediately. “Clearly you have put some thought into your own research, too”, the Spymaster picked up the von Beust book.

“That is a bad idea”, Mira protested, “there’s very little I can actually do and very little I know, not to mention the ethical considerations…”

“We have no surgeon now, Mira”, Josephine countered. “It will take weeks to get a replacement after surgeon Tasha decided to leave the Inquisition alongside her two assistants.”

“Moreover”, Leliana added triumphantly, “the mages will lead the infirmary, which is what I’ve always thought should have been done since the beginning.”

“The situation was complicated and the Inquisitor didn’t want to risk further alienation of Templars…” Josephine faintly protested.

“I know, Josie”, the Nightingale said, “but now that Enchanter Ellendra agreed to lead the infirmary herself, it could be a step towards assimilation of mages within the society. A step where common folks stop being afraid of magic and start valuing its gifts. A step towards what the Inquisition could offer the world aside from defeating Corypheus.”
As much as Leliana scared Mira, she actually agreed with that reasoning. As little as she knew about Thedas, she already formed some opinions about mages and attitudes towards magic, not to mention the fact that magic truly was a medical saving grace.

“There might be resistance”, Cassandra muttered bleakly.

“Which is yet another reason why we’re asking you, Mira”, Josephine’s voice was gentle and softened. “Not the main one. You do have skills that are quite unusual and you did save that boy’s life. Believe me, the word will spread about that. You bring knowledge with you that we didn’t possess before and there are things we could could improve at the infirmary.”

“I bring less than you think”, Mira replied bitterly, “and there are many things that I haven’t studied… let’s just say that injuries I can see from combat in Thedas are tad different than what I’m used to seeing.”

“I suspect you are a fast learner”, Leliana shrugged. “The infirmary was not functioning properly before. We haven’t prioritized it. Everyone knows it. If it’s fear that you’re going to make it worse stopping you, then just let it go.”

“I have serious ethical reservations…”

“Mira”, the Spymaster cut her off sharply, “we need someone to fill in now at the very least. Mages don’t have unlimited mana and they certainly don’t have all the knowledge about medicine. Is it really more ethical if you refuse?”

Mira sighted. It wasn’t. Perhaps it wasn’t. Still, it was a tremendous risk and she was frankly surprised the women were so keen on having her do it. The Inquisition could probably even reach out to von Beust himself or acquire other like-minded people from Navarra if they wished to. They certainly had influence and mages were already allied with the Inquisition, surely Mortalitasi… There it was. Now Mira understood the full scope of reasoning behind being asked to join the infirmary. And to not only join it but essentially lead the mundane medics at the clinic.

“You want me to do it because I’m married to a man who lead the Templars,” a former Templar, Mira added in her thought. “You think that infirmary lead by mages will be somewhat more palatable if also ran by a noble woman married to Captain Barris.”

“Yes”, Leliana looked her straight in the eye.

“I am afraid the backstory you gave me might give you less leeway than you think”, Mira sneered, “People know I was not raised Andrastian. I’m hardly the perfect…”

“You’re what we’ve got”, Josephine simply replied, “and you carry yourself well enough. And yes, Captain Barris commands respect. He worked well with Ellendra as well. They are both open in their views. Ellendra herself likes you. She was very eager to have you.”

“Do I even have a choice in that matter?”

“Yes”, Leliana scoffed as if she regretted it, “your marriage gives you one. I might have been able to order you if you remained single. I cannot quite order around the wife of the Second-in-Command of the Inquisition forces. I am honest with you, Mira. And I know you know mages are needed in this infirmary. I also know you know this is the right choice.”

“I have seen many things”, Cassandra added tentatively, “but I’ve never seen what you did with that boy.”
Mira knew that she would say yes. She couldn’t refuse, not truly. Leliana was right, the fact that surgeon left and they needed someone immediately forced Mira’s hand. Someone needed to be there. And deep inside Mira wondered what could achieved if she brought in some changes. Few times she interacted with Ellendra, the Enchanter was very reasonable and curious and open minded.

What could one do when one was given a chance to influence a completely new medical system? There were still things Mira could do, things beside wound tending and basic care. There were principles of ethics in medicine only recently used on Earth. Here, they could be implemented right from the start. She had a framework for writing guidelines and protocols. She could make sure that policies to avoid human error and medical mistakes were put into action. It was a massive, insane undertaking and Mira knew she wouldn’t be able to resist it. Not really.

Despite being worried and apprehensive and really skeptical, Mira’s heart ignited with passion, just the low burning fire spreading throughout.

“Of course I’ll do it”, she finally admitted.

“Wonderful”, Josephine clapped her hands, “Now, Ellendra doesn’t know and doesn’t need to know your true identity. There is one person than has to know though. A person that can help with making things for you or translating solutions from your word to this one. You simply need to meet Dagna.”

Dagna was a Dwarven woman with a pretty face and a cheerful, delicate voice.

She was an arcanist, a person who enchanted runes on weapons and armor. She studied magical theory. She was an inventor and scientist, which became clear after first ten minutes of the conversation.

Dagna was also impossible and terrifying, and her most terrifying trait was definitely her eagerness. She was so excited.

Mira thought her head was about to explode after what seemed like eight hours of talking, and she barely managed to get a break to eat and drink. It wasn’t that Dagna was inconsiderate. Far from it. It was that Dagna was far too engaged in the conversation and her own thought process to think of something as prosaic as eating or drinking. Mira was a talker herself, but this was something else indeed. Dagna asked million questions and was writing notes with impressive speed. How could one tiny woman contain so much energy?

So far they managed to cover von Beust theories, Mira’s basic description of medical achievements on Earth, Mira’s theories on how to improve medical care in Thedas. They covered the basics of germ theory, which led to trying to explain the microscope, which lead to Mira being forced to make crude drawings with even worse explanations, which led to Dagna talking to herself and pinning the pieces of parchment to the giant wooden board. Then they talked about surgical tools and practices, and Dagna’s voice got higher as she got excited at the possibility of creating runes and enchantments that could render the tools more effective or hygienic. Then Mira listened to Dagna’s fast paced lecture about how Chantry’s hesitation about dissection was stalling progress but she didn’t even have time to agree because Dagna demanded sketches and ideas for building an autoclave.

Mira had a massive headache and her mind was drifting away.
“Mira?”, Dagna prodded shamelessly while snapping her fingers to grasp attention. “Focus right now and tell me of that trumpet that amplifies sound and makes it possible to listen to a heartbeat with high accuracy.”

Well, she definitely wouldn’t say no to a stethoscope in Thedas.

“By the way”, Dagna continued with the same enthusiasm after all those hours, “Just so you know, I am the only arcanist in Skyhold. I’m the best arcanist in Southern Thedas, perhaps. They love me. If you ever need anything, from funding to equipment, please let me know.”

Sly, brilliant genius Dagna. Mira should have known. Practicing science on Earth meant writing grants and acquiring funds. Perhaps Thedas wasn’t as far off. With all her quirkiness Dagna was far more practical that Mira had anticipated.

“Really?”, Mira asked curiously.

“Really”, Dagna nodded with satisfaction, “and my special orders do not need approvals like regular requisitions. Trust me, running anything through the regular chain of command is beyond frustrating. Sister Nightingale created a loophole for me. I have a separate budget.”

“That’s… good to know.”

“Meet with me regularly, and I promise that half of the inventions will go to the infirmary. Believe me when I tell you that the budget you get is never enough. Most funds go to the military efforts. I improve weapons and armors, hence I am considered essential as well.”

“Ha.”

“I will certainly think about some of the things you have mentioned. I haven’t been smithing in quite a while but this could actually be fun. Pretty intricate work, I gotta say, some of the tools you’d like to receive.”

Mira was offered a personal set to basic tools alongside the supply the infirmary was about to receive. Frankly, maybe the whole idea, as ridiculous as it was, would bring some good. There were ways to improve medicine in Thedas. Some of them were very simple. Administrative, as one would say. Checklists, guidelines, systematization of care, training and practice, drills. Things that always work. But even more sophisticated work… Mira could write von Beust and even reach to Mortalitasi. Even better, Ellendra could do it herself as a mage healer.

With Adan recruited to run the apothecary at the infirmary, perhaps they stood real chance to truly improve outcomes and save lives.

If only there would be a plan to teach first aid and basic life support on the battlefield… What about every single squadron having kits like the one that Bull’s Charges carried? What about each team having at least one mage who knew how to cast healing spells?

Granted, there were lot of other issues to consider. The issue of experimentation. Essentially everything they would do turned Mira into a maverick, and she didn’t appreciate it. Every treatment proposed would be an experiment. It crossed so may lines of what Mira believed in, but at the same time it was Thedas, not Earth, and there were very few alternatives.

At the very least people of Skyhold wouldn’t be told anymore to avoid spicy foods to regulate their humors. Morale should be higher with less nonsensical rules.

“Mira?”, Dagna’s bright voice once again interrupted her train of thoughts, “would you kindly give
me a sample of your flesh?"

Fourth week of Kingsway, 9:42 Dragon, Emerald Graves

The Red Templars were prepared for an ambush, but Barris didn’t underestimate them. Carroll’s reinforcements were plenty, two dozen easily, including one behemoth whose body was literally oozing red lyrium shards. That was a man once. A man. The thought was both disturbing and maddening.

It all brought back the memories of Therinfal Redoubt.

The fight was both physically draining and more importantly, quite tricky to navigate. He had three Templars among his ranks, all three sensitive to the red lyrium song. They needed to be very careful around it. Then of course he had two mages under his command as well, Beau and Zuzu, fighting defensively. Those least affected would be him, Kirke and Merle and Morve. Morve was an archer, he couldn’t fight close range. It essentially left him and Kirke to carry on most of the offense.

They fought in the the front, slowly pulling through the enemy ranks while relying heavily on their shields. He didn’t want anyone to be hit with a fucking red lyrium shard. Arthur and Simon flanked from the side, supported by Morve’s arrows, and Merle and Clarissa attacked from another one, alongside Zuzu’s fire. Beau was on a barrier duty and to be fair, he performed phenomenally. He was more focused than Lavellan, more technically adept, more collected. Zuzu wanted to smash and destroy, to let out all the fire she had inside. As long as she stayed far away, he preferred to allow her to do that.

Knight Captain Carroll parried Barris’ sword easily and countered while Delrin blocked with his shield. He could feel his own shoulder getting tired, and he cursed to himself. He must have killed at least six red Templars up to this point.

“You need the lyrium”, Carrol seethed, “You’re nothing without it.”

Delrin didn’t respond. He never bothered. What was the point? Indeed, Carroll seemed faster and stronger. Barris rarely felt frustrated in combat, but fighting Red Templars always caused him to worry. The way their abilities got twisted and enhanced was unnatural and bothersome. They were both stronger and broken, the worst combination imaginable. They also had ability to channel the red lyrium to regenerate.

He retreated a little. One thing was certain, this was not a fight to be won by endurance. They wouldn’t outlast the Red Templars.

“Change of plans”, he shouted to his squadron, “we’re going all offense. We’re getting tired too easily. Once we finish Carroll, we focus on the rest more easily.”

“And how do we do that exactly?”, Kirke shouted back, fighting two Red Templar Guards at the same time.

“We drop our defenses and bring Zuz and Beau closer”, he responded, “and we do it fucking quickly and swiftly.”
“Maker fucking balls”, Kirke yelled in response, “Clarissa, did you hear that?”

“I agree”, his Second-in-Command successfully finished off another Templar, “I don’t see any other choice either.”

“Beau!”, Barris called the mage, “Cast one last barrier and get in here and do your thing. Yes, the thing. Zuzu, same. Merle, blind or distract the enemy and get out of here. Lavellan, I’ll cover you. Clarissa, cover Beau. Ready? Now!”

He hid behind his shield, Clarissa, Simon, Arthur and Kirke doing the same. It was a risk to be so close to where magical explosion was going to happen…

The thud was incredibly loud, but they all managed to stay unmoved. Carroll was down and it was Trevelyan who stuck his sword into Knight-Captain’s throat. Beau’s and Zuzu’s combined spell staggered the Red Templar, fire and storm merged together.

“Sight to behold”, Arthur laughed while beheading another enemy, “Remind me to never piss you off, Zuz.”

“Progress”, Barris heard Kirke hiss through her teeth, “I call it progress. Three more and we’re getting the fuck out of here.”

Indeed, Delrin couldn’t wait himself.

They were back at the camp. They didn’t avoid all injuries. Clarissa had few lacerations and Simon had slight burns on his body, but they largely remained unscathed. Exhausted, depleted, but unscathed. Delrin sat by his tent and poured the whole bottle of water on his face.

“Wait until you’re nearing forty”, Kirke sat next to him, closing her eyes, “I kid you not, it only gets worse from now on.”

He laughed loudly in return. “I am not even thirty. Look at those kids”, he gestured towards Simon and Zuzu who looked tired but still had enough energy to playfully threaten each other. “What fuels them, Kirke?”

“Stupidity”, she replied such a certainty in her voice that he couldn’t help but to laugh again. “Weren’t you stupid when you were nineteen?”

“I wish I could say I wasn’t”, he chuckled, “but I was definitely less careful than now, even if I still was quite reasonable. Most of my scars are from that age.”

“Mine too. Maker’s breath, I felt invincible back then.”

“You know I’d still bet on you against Trevelyan, right?”, he smirked.

“I would certainly hope so”, she furrowed her brows, “My bad middle aged form still beats boyish recklessness. I’ll be damned if those stupid kids aren’t talented though.”

“They are.”

“The whole assignment turned out so much better than the Storm Coast.”
“Yes. We get better”, he agreed proudly.

She patted him gently on the arm. “I fucking can’t wait to go back. Please tell me you’re planning on giving us at least four days off.”

“At least two”, he corrected and she rolled her eyes.

“You have a wife now”, Kirke shook her head amused, “you’ll want more than two days.”

When Delrin finally took off his armor and laid down in his tent he just wanted to fall sleep, especially as they would leave first thing in the morning. His arm was sore and painful, and he was glad to take a break from fighting. If he was lucky, maybe they’d remain in Skyhold for a while.

Duty before sleep. He opened the orders and reports sent to him first and he wrote a short reply confirming success of the mission and their plan to leave tomorrow. Then he noticed several letters marked as private, from Mira, which was unsurprising, but also from Leliana, Bull and Cassandra. That was unusual and quite worrisome.

His heart beat faster as he opened them.

__________________

Captain Barris,

I am quite certain that Leliana or Josephine will write you as well. I’m sure you remember Micah, the grandson of that lovely kitchenmaid Karla from Haven whose daughter Lisa died during the attack? He almost drowned. Mira was the one to get to him and she helped save him. The boy received magical healing as well. Mira is quite a tenacious woman, and very firm and stern when needed.

The surgeon resigned over the dispute at the infirmary regarding the difference of opinions regarding treatment. Mira has graciously agreed to took over that role. She seems more than capable.

I thought you should know. After all, I gave you my word to make sure I would be there for her.

I know you’ll be returning to Skyhold soon. You owe me that sparring match.

Cassandra

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Captain Barris,

I hereby inform you that Lady Mira Barris is now employed by the Inquisition’s Infirmary as the First Surgeon. The infirmary itself is under the leadership of the Enchanter Ellendra. Lady Barris’ wages will be deposited to the treasury account existing under both of your names.

Sincerely,

Leliana

__________________
Barris,

I know you’re receiving a lot of letters right now. I just wanted to let you know that Mira seems well. She has interesting skills. Stitches works at the infirmary now as well, at least for the time being.

That kid Micah is completely fine, and it was dicy at one point. I was there for the whole ordeal. Now he’s up and running. Krem knitted him a nug.

Your wife has grit, Barris. I like her.

See you soon,

The Iron Bull

Well, that was certainly an interesting development and he wondered what Mira had to say about everything that transpired and more importantly, how she felt about it. He opened her letter expecting more details.

Delrin,

Let me start by saying that I am truly glad you are safe and uninjured. I hope you remain that way by the time you receive that letter.

I am not forgiving anything, because none of what you wrote could be classified as “ramblings” and there is nothing to forgive. I know I’ll probably write something that is completely and utterly wrong, but I have so much to say to you right now.

First of all, if we’re meant to talk with each other for the rest of our lives, you should share your thoughts openly. And second of all, if you’re stopping yourself out of concern for me, please don’t.

You know what I used to do for work. And because you’re a smart man, you can clearly imagine that I’ve seen quite a lot of pain, sorrow and evil. I do not mean to claim I know much or anything about war or that I have experienced things you did. I would never dare to say that to you. But I know of cruelty, and violence, and death, and neglect and pain. I know what it feels like to witness it, to have your heart broken over and over again and to feel that you cannot stop it or prevent it. I’ve seen many horrible things, as every medic does. Things that are always somewhere at the back of my mind.

I am not naive, Delrin. I do realize your work entails not only killing demons and darkspawn, but also killing people. And I know enough that I am certain you are right, some of the people you kill die not because they deserved it in any way, but because they were unlucky enough to be drafted or forced to fight or seduced by an idea they couldn’t understand before it was too late. I also know that killing and murder are not the same thing, and I know you know it too, because otherwise you wouldn’t be doing the work you’re doing.
I have never thought of you as careless, not ever for a second. And I think I understand how it feels when your heart is being chipped away precisely because of the task at hand. For whatever it’s worth I find it hopeful that there are man like you in this world who fight while still caring so much. I don’t think it’s a weakness, and I don’t think having a heart goes against your duty. Frankly I feel that the reason why you are trusted with all that you do is precisely because of who you are.

I am sorry it’s been so difficult. I really am. I truly wish I knew the perfect words to say, the words that would take some of it away. The only thing I can truly give you is merely what I think and what I feel. I feel that you will probably always in some way feel the way you feel know, which is to say you will always feel conflicted over things you do. The only answer is carefully navigating between letting your heart break thousand times and yet never allowing it to break so much it wouldn’t mend again. And not letting the guilt poison you.

Perhaps it is too brazen of me to say, but you are a good man. And that means you will always hurt, but it won’t break you, it will build you up, as I suppose it did already for the last decade or so.

I do have some words of my own to share right now. I received your letter while sitting at the infirmary looking over the boy Micah that you know (Karla’s grandson) who nearly drowned today. I was able to help a little bit, and thanks to Enchanter Ellendra and Enchanter Fiona’s magic he seems to be doing fine. We still need to wait to make sure he will fully recover. I genuinely thought he might die, Delrin. The first time ever I’ve witnessed a child die was actually the case of drowning. I honestly don’t remember most of the patients whom we lost, but that one I’ll never forget. It was horrendous. I still remember the noises, the smells of the day, how the mother collapsed and howled when we told her. I came home that night and I wondered if I was cut out to do that work in the first place. It’s the feeling of hopelessness that’s the worst. Despite any skills or training or circumstances, there is more hopelessness than not. This time, Micah was lucky. Not the first time, I hear. I feel lucky. I feel so lucky and relieved that I’m currently sitting and shaking. You can probably tell by my writing, it’s even worse than usual. It’s dark now aside from just one small candle at the infirmary. Everyone else is asleep and it’s the first time I start feeling my body react to everything that happened today. I know I’ll cry as soon as I walk through the door to our quarters. My hands don’t shake when I actually provide care for my patients. It all happens later when I’m alone.

I know very little of the burden you carry. But I know how it feels to carry on throughout the day and then feel more when you’re alone. It’s healthy to talk. You have been there for me when I needed that and I can be there for you when you need it. There are few things as corrosive as grief and pain that are suppressed. I would know. If my letters are helpful then I am really glad.

Someone much smarter than me once wrote that a true warrior fights not because he hates what is in front of him, but because he loves what is behind him. Just remember that.

I’d love to take you up on the offer of a proper ride, by the way.

Stay safe. I sincerely hope the rest of your days there are less difficult.

Yours,

Mira Barris

He reread the letter at least ten times. It was… He expected Mira to be sweet and kind after he
revealed his struggles. This wasn’t merely sweetness and kindness. It was almost chilling how much that letter spoke to his heart. It was as if she truly saw him for who he was. It was as if she saw his biggest fears and doubts and somehow responded so directly and openly it genuinely took his breath away. It felt both painful and yet more soothing than he could ever imagine. He felt understood. He felt known.

Sweet Andraste.

Mira was tenacious and gritty, and yet warm and caring at the same time. He felt… He really wished to see her. He wish he could comfort her.

Somehow the tiredness of the day immediately went away and he found his own quill and inkwell to write a reply.

Fourth week of Kingsway, 9:42 Dragon Age, Skyhold

There were four mages working at the infirmary now, including Ellendra and Fiona, with prospects to hire more. There were also three mundane medics, including Mira and Stitches.

Ellendra was a remarkable leader. She read the “The Theories of Disease Origination” with an open mind and she quickly agreed that mages needed to be taught the basics of mundane practice, from stitching to joint and bone settings to lectures in anatomy. They were busy. The patients were few and between so far, many of them probably wary of magic in the first place. At least that quiet period provided an ample opportunity to reform the infirmary pretty quickly.

They all agreed on proper rules of conduct. It was clear that enchanters were relieved to welcome those as Circles violated every possible notion of autonomy. Mira wanted it to be different here, for everyone. She wanted their work to be guided by the principles of medical ethics. Autonomy. Justice. Benevolence. Non-maleficence.

It was curious to work with others. Fiona was an enigma. She seemed collected and polite but somehow Mira couldn’t shake the feeling that perhaps Fiona wasn’t her biggest fan despite the fact that they agreed more often than not. Maybe it was simply influenced by everything the Enchanter went through last year. It seemed hard to believe that the small woman with such affinity for healing magic could have been the one leading the mages during the war and then selling them to Tevinter. As much as everyone else at the infirmary was free, Mira wondered if Fiona was actually given a choice, and whether infirmary work was her punishment or at least penance. Whatever it was, even to Mira’s untrained eye she could see that Fiona’s magic was impressive.

Setting up the new infirmary was a hard work, but there was something abut it that felt exciting, perhaps even revolutionary and Mira couldn’t quite entirely quench the fluttering in her heart thinking it might just work. Maybe, she allowed herself to dream, maybe she would be able to do something good.

She also eagerly awaited Delrin’s response to her letter. A lot has changed since he left. She felt like she knew him so much better now. She also felt more like herself. She still grieved, but there was something more in her heart. More than just the need to survive. There was hope that there was a beginning of a purpose.
Mira wondered how it would feel to see him again. They were married… for over a month now. For some reason, it felt longer. She almost jumped out of excitement finding the letter waiting for her.

The parchment was slightly dirty with earth and mud and… well, she certainly hoped it wasn’t his blood. There was a sketch attached of woodland glade filled with flowers. He was busy, and she shouldn’t have asked, but it was so nice at the same time.

_____________________________________________________

Dear Mira,

It took me several tries to find the right words to reply to your letter and I am afraid they eluded me anyway. Thank you for everything you’ve said. It means more than you can imagine.

You give me a lot of credit in your words and I do hope to be worthy of that.

I am beyond relieved to find out that Micah is doing fine after such a scary accident. When we escaped from Haven caring for children and wounded was the hardest part in the snowstorm. Please give my well-wishes to Karla and the boy. She’s such a good and loving woman who already lost so much. I’m glad you were there for him. I wish I could be there for you.

I have to be honest with you that despite knowing you’re a medic it hasn’t crossed my mind until now about just how much you yourself have experienced. I should have realized sooner. I can imagine it now, especially after what you wrote. I’m sorry, Mira. I suppose it’s easy to look at you and discount the burdens you’ve carried because they are not visible. I won’t do it again. And… I think I can understand you as much as you understand me.

I got letters from Leliana, Cassandra and Bull regarding the infirmary. I have to confess it’s the first time Bull has ever written me. The letters were understandably short and I hope to hear more from you. I shall congratulate you on your employment in person.

We’re coming back, Mira. I’m so glad it’s over. We’re done with our mission and we leave for Skyhold tomorrow. It will take us six days to get there.

I managed to draw something for you in the last few days.

I’ll see you soon.

Faithfully,

Delrin Barris

_____________________________________________________

He was coming back. Mira’s heart beat just a little bit faster at the thought.
Next chapter - Captain Barris returns! We'll be back in Skyhold.

Also, as sad and difficult some topics Mira and Delrin discuss, I've always thought it was impossible to truly develop intimacy without having those type conversations.

Also, I can't be the only person who thinks Dagna is a total badass.

Thank you so much for all the kudos and comments and thank you for reading in the first place!
Captain Returns

Chapter Summary

Delrin and Mira finally see each other and spend the evening together after a long time apart.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

First week of Harvestmere, 9:42, Skyhold

They made it to Skyhold in five days, not six, and they finally arrived at the fortress in the late evening. After short debriefing Delrin was finally able to walk to his quarters. It was empty. Mira was probably still at the infirmary. He imagined that her schedule would probably be as taxing as his now.

Delrin lit one small candle at the desk. He put away his weapon and shield and his armor. Perhaps it was time to finally get that new shield after all. He rejoiced at the thought of finally being able to take a proper hot shower when he heard the steps approaching the door.

Mira walked in fast and froze at the sight of him, dropping the large leather bag she was carrying. Then she smiled. She smiled so brightly and openly, her whole face brightened. The whole room seemed to lit upon that smile. The warmth rushed through his body. He has never been welcomed by a smile like that upon his return.

“Hi, Mira”, he smiled back at her.

“Hi”, her smile grew even wider, if that was even possible, “you made it early. Oh, I’m sorry, I haven’t made the bed and I was supposed to…”

“It’s… good to see you”, he said without letting her finish. She blushed a bit.

“It’s good to see you to. I’m glad you’re safe. How are you feeling?”

“I’m feeling good”, truthfully, now he was feeling great, “nothing but few bruises and a sore shoulder.”

“Hmmmm”, she eyed him carefully, “mind if I take a look at that shoulder?”

“I…”, he felt sudden wave of embarrassment of how dirty and stinking he had to be after a month of washing just in streams and quite a fast paced journey afterwards, “I do need to shower first.”

“Oh, of course,” she shook her head and her curls tumbled down her shoulders and he realized how
much he missed that sight, “you do look a bit… rugged. That’s definitely more facial hair than I remember”, she chuckled lightly.

Mira looked different too. He thought he knew her face by heart, but she just looked more comfortable and relaxed. Her eyes twinkled with joy, and she truly had the most heartfelt smile he has ever seen. She wore a simple leather breeches and simple white linen shirt with rolled up sleeves. She just emanated warmth.

Between the fighting, the struggles and the letters, the thoughts of her simply brought him respite and he figured it was rather a soothing fantasy. Now it was real, she was real, she was standing right there in front of him and he wanted to embrace her and kiss her. Sweet Andraste.

“I…”, he started, “I’ll go and take that shower unless you want to use a bathroom first.”

“Oh, no”, Mira moved passed him and placed her bag on the desk, “Go on. I imagine how much you must have missed it. All of your clothing is washed and put away, by the way.”

“Uhm, thank you”, he said and took off his gambeson and opened the drawers.

“I didn’t know how you like your clothing arranged so I did it by color”, Mira replied somewhat flustered moving closer to him, “I hope you don’t… oh.”

She gasped so suddenly that he turned towards her. Her face was more serious now and she was definitely looking at him intently.

“My…”, she tapped the skin just below her neck, “you’re wearing my medallion.”

He completely forgot about it. He wasn’t sure what to do with it before leaving for the Emerald Graves. He promised to keep it out of Mira’s way, but he wasn’t going to throw it away, and this felt like a good idea at the time.

“Heh, yes”, he replied embarrassed, “I am so sorry, I can take it off…”

“No”, she blushed now, “I gave it to you. It was a gift. I was just… surprised to see it, that’s all.”

He kept it on.

The hot water felt wonderful as he was washing all the yuck and grime off his body. He leaned on the stone wall and let the water fall on him as he closed his eyes.

He definitely felt attracted to Mira. Perhaps he shouldn’t be so surprised, but he also felt guilty. She was entrusted into his care… No, that was not the right expression to use. She entrusted herself into his care and protection. He wasn’t stupid and careless. When they got married, she was afraid of that type of attention, and now she trusted him at least somewhat. He wasn’t going to do anything to shatter that carefully built trust. He wasn’t going to cross any boundaries, and he wasn’t even going to let his mind wander. He was going to deal with it like a man of honor and valor would, and it would eventually pass.

***********************************************************************************

Delrin went out of the bathroom fully clothed, with his head freshly shaved on the sides and his stubble definitely trimmed. Mira could smell the faint scent of his perfume. Now he looked exactly as she remembered him.
“I need you to take off your shirt to check your shoulder, if you don’t mind”, she said nonchalantly proceeding to the bathroom, “just let me change and wash my hands first.”

“Sure.”

Mira walked out of the bathroom and her eyes fell on Delrin who stood between the bed and the desk, wearing just the leather breeches. He certainly was in excellent shape, there was no doubt about it. He had… many scars. He had more scars on his body than she anticipated. She could only see the faintest traces of scarring on his face, the tiny ones on his forehead and even smaller one on his left cheek. It was almost unnoticeable, but his body certainly told a different story.

He had a large scar across his chest and a large fractal pattern on his whole right arm. There were some burn markings on his side, and smaller scars all over his torso. She swallowed her saliva. He was bruised now too, at least in few places.

“You can sit on the bed”, she said softly while turning to open her medical bag. She needed at least the Elfroot salve.

It was bizarre to see Delrin like this. There was so much physical struggle and pain written on his body. He was definitely strong and powerful. His body told a story of someone who was active every single day of his life. She could the lines of his muscles. But there was something more too. There were times when he got hurt. There were times when he was perhaps even close to dying. The scar that ran across his chest seemed pretty deep. It had to be terrifying when got it. His body revealed that despite all his skill and toughness he was vulnerable too. Mira realized how much she was concerned about his safety when he was away. There was a pinch in her heart seeing all of his past and present injuries.

“Do you mind being touched?”, she asked softly. “I could apply the salve to your bruising before dealing with your shoulder. I also want to check if your bruising heals properly.”

‘I don’t mind it at all.”

“It might be slightly uncomfortable when I push on the bruise”, she added and he chuckled slightly.

“I guarantee you I’ve been through much worse. Do what you need to do.”

He felt warm underneath her fingers. The bruising was haling nicely, she couldn’t feel any worrisome sings of hematoma. She applied the salve to his side.

“You have a lot of scarring”, she said softly.

“It comes with the job. Most of it comes from my younger years. I’m more season and careful now. The chest scar was from fighting an abomination when I was nineteen.”

She pointed the the branch-shaped Liechtenburg figure on his arm. “Lightning magic?”

“Yes”, he replied surprised, “how do you know?”

“The actual lightning strike causes them, too. Some other electricity discharges as well. I… I have never seen it myself on a patient before. Alright, which shoulder was it?”

“Left one.”

His back was less scarred, but she still could see some marks. She examined his shoulder
thoroughly.

“Does it hurt?”

“Not really, it’s just slightly sore. It’s really nothing…”

“You know I am the medic, right?”, she joked slightly and he looked at her embarrassed.

“You’re right”, he admitted, “by all means, go on.”

She palpated him thoroughly and then required him to move his arms a bit to test his range of motions.

“How much can you tell by doing that?”, he asked curiously.

“A lot more than you think”, she smiled gently, “To be fair, I have less tools at my disposal than I’m used to. Sometimes what I don’t observe is more important than what I do observe. There’s little pain, no laxity. You’ll be fine. Let me slather you with this Elfroot salve. Apparently it helps with almost anything.”

“It does soothe pain pretty effectively.”

“Adan now works at the infirmary and the first thing he always says is whether I’ve tried the salve on bruising or burns. My hands smell like Elfroot all the time now, regardless how often I wash them. You’re all done.”

“Thank you”, he was looking right at her and she felt her cheeks flushing even more. Mira certainly prided herself in her professionalism, but this wasn’t exactly infirmary. He was her husband and they were in their private quarters and he was sitting half naked on her bed.

“Anytime”, she patted his shoulder ever slightly, “are you hungry?”

“I’m hungry but I’m frankly very tired too.”

“I can fix us something quick”, she shrugged, “it won’t take long. You can join me in the kitchen or just wait here and I’ll bring it for you.”

“You don’t have to…”

“Are you serious?”, she looked at him sharply, “you’ve traveled for a whole day straight. I’m not letting you eat stale bread or crackers, that would be preposterous.”

He smiled at her while buttoning up his simple linen shirt. She would be damned if he wasn’t a sight to behold. Mira brushed that thought aside.

“I’ll join you, if you don’t mind”, he said.

“Not at all.”

******************************************************************************************

Standing in the kitchen brought the memory of the first night they’ve met. Mira seemed so afraid and shy and fragile back then. She couldn’t even light up the chandelier. Now she grabbed the fire striker the second they arrived in the kitchen and lit up the candles effortlessly. There was a fire in the furnace already, warming up the portion of the stove as well.
She moved through the kitchen confidently, prancing swiftly between the cupboards and the larder and the pantry. It was such a stark contrast to what he remembered.

“Tea? Water?”, she asked him while washing her hands.

“Both?”, he replied, “Mira, can I help with…?”

“Just relax, you can sit down or something”, she brushed him off.

He leaned on the counter and couldn’t quite take his eyes off her.

“There are more blends of tea here now”, she said amused, “do you have any preference? There’s this nice one with raspberry…”

“That would be great”.

She put the glass of water and the burning hot mug right in front of him.

He watched her hands cut the bread and the pieces of dried and smoked meat. She buttered the bread thoroughly and Delrin felt his stomach churning. He was definitely hungry.

“You’re not picky, are you?”, she looked at him keenly. “Is there something you don’t eat?”

“I am soldier”, he chuckled, “I eat pretty much everything. I… didn’t know you cooked.”

“It’s just a sandwich”, she scoffed, “although it’s a great sandwich, dare I say. But yes, I cook, and bake. Those are common skills where I come from. Wait… you don’t know how to cook?”

“Well”, he started, “My squadron does the cooking. They told me that as the Captain I have the privilege of not doing it, but truthfully, I think it’s because of that one ram stew dinner during our first mission.” Mira shook her head and giggled. Sweet Andraste, she had such a joyful laughter.

“Don’t get me wrong. I’ve traveled alone extensively too. I can hunt something and roast it, it just… likely won’t be that good.”

“That is very sad”, she placed the buttered bread on the pan “life is too short to eat bad food, that’s what I’ve always thought. I can make it pretty spicy, by the way. I’ve noticed you tend to like your food spicy when we ate together at the Herald’s Rest.”

“Uhm, yes, I do. Dorian might tell you that Fereldan food is tasteless but don’t believe him. I grew up in the Western Bannorn. It can be pretty great.”

“Oh, I’ve had Karla’s cooking”, she laughed while using the mortar to create a paste of various pickled vegetables and herbs, “I know.”

“How are they doing, by the way? I should have asked.”

“Micah is doing great. I can’t see any signs of what he went through. Drowning is…”, the shadow fell on her face, “very tricky, because even when you rescue someone they can easily develop life threatening complications afterwards. I wouldn’t be able to manage it if not for magic. He’s doing really great though. Karla is so relieved. Blackwall made sure that watering stations for horses are less accessible to children now. Skyhold is not the most kid friendly environment.”

“I can imagine.’

“Karla might love me more than you now”, Mira smiled at him, “I know your carried Micah the whole way from Haven.”
“Few of us helped with children. It was just…”

“I get it.”

“And now you work at the infirmary.”

She sighed a bit while taking the bread of the pan and working to assemble the sandwiches.

“I suppose I do. The surgeon resigned on the spot and… well, truthfully, as hesitant as I was, there’s something about it that is fulfilling. I like Ellendra a lot. I enjoy working with Stitches. He’s very non nonsense too. We have another mundane healer, Isanna, she’s a city elf from alienage in Val Royeaux,” Mira looked at him apologetically, “Truthfully I know the part of the reason I was asked to work at the infirmary was because we’re… you know. Leliana outright said it might be more palatable to some if someone like me works there alongside mages. She meant someone married to a former Templar. I’m sorry I didn’t write you more about it…”

“I don’t mind, really”, he replied quickly noting that Mira was likely correct in her assessment. “Please don’t ever worry about it. I’m… well, I’m glad you found some… purpose? Is that the wrong thing to say?”

“No, it’s not wrong”, she handed him the plate with two enormous warm sandwiches, “do you want to sit in the kitchen?”

“After you”, he gestured.

They sat down and once again he thought of the night he met Mira, how her hands fidgeted and how she asked him about dragons and how shy she was. She didn’t seem so shy now. Her cheeks were slightly blushed, she was looking straight at him with some intensity. Maker’s breath. Even in the dim light of the candles he could see how bright her eyes were. Her eyes glistened, her lips were perfect and he could just see the slightest cleavage… Sweet Andraste, no. He couldn’t and he wouldn’t.

Mira was still looking at him just slightly raising her eyebrows.

“Uhm”, he started uncertain.

“I’m sorry”, she covered her face with her hands. “I was just waiting for you to take a bite. I know, it’s horrible and intrusive but there’s just something about making food for someone… I just hope you like it.”

She did fluster just a little bit and he once again felt some tingling around his heart. It felt nice. It felt nice to be welcomed back, to be taken care of, and fed… The sandwich was indeed delicious, the spiciness mixed with saltiness of meat and the crispness of bread.

“I’m sorry again”, she laughed slightly, “I swear I don’t mean to stare. It’s fine if you don’t like it, by the way. Just be honest.”

“It’s amazing”, he answered after finally chewing down and swallowing a bite. “Thank you so much.”

“My pleasure.”
She finished her sandwich and sipped the warm raspberry tea sweetened with honey. The sudden memory of how she broke the mug in the kitchen when they’ve met for the first time returned with full force. Weirdly, the kitchen has become now one of the places she frequented, being here everyday to either make some food or, at the very least, brew copious amounts of tea.

That first night she was more than scared. It felt as a nightmare back then. It felt unreal. Now, there was still much sadness in her heart. Some anger. Not at Delrin, not even at anyone in particular, just in general. But there also was more Mira found within herself. Resolve. Maybe a bit of acceptance. And Delrin was… honorable and kind, and smart, and considerate. Surely it all could have ended up much worse. It really could have. She felt so much more comfortable around him after the month of being apart and everything they’ve shared in their letters.

“You know”, she noticed, “it’s been over a month since… well”, she lifted her right hand to showcase the wedding ring and he looked at his hand as well.

“Yes,”, he coughed a bit, “it seems so.”

“When Josephine first told me about you”, Mira continued, “she really did present you in good light and she mentioned your military record and how virtuous and chivalrous you are…”

“Well”, he said hesitantly, “That’s… nice?”

“And I imagined you being way older for some reason. Like twenty years older. With a mustache.”

“Really?”, he laughed openly now, “Sweet Andraste.”

“For some reason she didn’t mention that you were in your twenties.”

“Not for long, not even a year and a half.”

“When is your birthday?”

“28th of Guardian. What about you?”

“I’d need to do some serious calculations to be sure, so let’s just go with 18th of… Bloomingtide? That’s the fifth month, right?”

“Yes. Springtime, how nice.”

Mira looked at Delrin, sitting across her in his simple shirt, drinking his tea. He didn’t look intimidating at all. It was funny how everything changed. What she felt now was an aura of familiarity, even after not seeing him for so long. Perhaps because of that and because of the words they’ve shared with each other. His eyes were warm and kind. More importantly, Mira knew him. She knew things about him that probably not many people did. Things that were important, that truly touched upon the kind of a man he was.

“So”, she said softly, “how are you feeling?”

He looked at her carefully and put his mug back on the table.

“I’m well, really”, he replied slowly, “there’s an anniversary of Therindal Redoubt events coming in two days, actually. It will be hard. Two weeks after that there’s anniversary of what happened in Haven.”

“I’m so sorry”, she looked at him emphatically, “is there anything planned?”
“There will be a Chantry service for the fallen Templars at noon. Outside of that… No. I’m sure there’s more planned to commemorate Haven.”

“Delrin, if you need anything…”

“You’ve already helped a lot. And for what it’s worth… I’m glad to be back.”

“Good”.

“Thank you for your letters. I truly appreciate everything you wrote.’

“Well”, she felt her cheeks blushing again, “I only wrote what I myself think but I’m happy it helped sometimes. For whatever it’s worth, I’m glad you’re back and safe too.”

“I’m sorry my last letter was so short, I could have addressed what you wrote about yourself more thoroughly, I just wasn’t sure—”

“Oh, please, don’t worry—“

“Anyway… do you mind telling me how you saved Micah? Iron Bull said you have interesting skills and a lot of grit.”

“Did he now?”, Mira heard herself chuckle nervously. “Well, fine, I… he was face down in the watering tub. I pulled him out and he… wasn’t breathing. I did something called cardiopulmonary resuscitation, which was… well, I breathed into his mouth and then I pressed onto his chest to sort of restart his heart. It did work, mostly because he wasn’t under water for that long and he didn’t have that much fluid in his lungs, but believe me, it would have ended up very differently if it wasn’t for magic. There’s a lot that I know, there’s little I can effectively do, but my world… Delrin, if I could just show you a little bit of it you’d be possibly more stunned than I was with dragons or demons or whatever else is there. I come from a world where a baby can be born two months too early and be fine. Where you can take a heart from a man who just died and give it to another, without magic. Where we have machines that can breathe for you if need be. And now you just give me that look of… disbelief.”

“I do believe you”, he protested, “it’s hard to imagine though.”

“I know”, her voice shook a little.

“How are you feeling, Mira?”, he asked kindly, his voice warm and gentle.

“I feel…”, she bit her lip a bit, “I still feel sad sometimes, but… I’d like to believe I’m resilient. And I don’t always feel sad, I feel… I feel a lot more than that. And now I’m busy, which is how my life had been for such a long time before. I feel physically tired and somehow that helps. I both hate it and love it. I don’t know how to express it. Most of what I do is mundane, repetitive and boring, but it’s an honest day of work and my hands are tired at the end of it and I’ve always liked the physical aspect of the job, as exhausting as it is. I feel like I’m doing something. I need for my hands to be distracted so I don’t overthink.”

“I think I get it.”

Mira picked up the plates despite Delrin’s protests.

“At least you should let me do the dishes”, he said, “since you prepared everything.”

“Charming”, she replied swiftly, “but no. You’re not doing anything tonight. Aren’t you tired? Just
try to relax, please. You can go and rest.”

“I’ll keep you company at the very last, if you don’t mind”, he chuckled, “Cassandra wrote in her letter than you were… stern and tenacious. You certainly are.”

“Did she?”, Mira actually smiled to herself, “Is it awful that I feel quite flattered?”

“Not at all”, he smiled, "not at all."

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They came back to their quarters and Delrin felt relaxed and just peaceful. He couldn’t deny that he truly enjoyed Mira’s company and the flair of domesticity surrounding their evening together. Mira truly was very warm and smart and just caring. He almost felt guilty about how much her presence comforted him.

“Before I go take a shower myself”, she turned towards him while collecting clothing from the dresser, “you’ve received two letters. I put them in the drawer became I didn’t want to accidentally displace them.”

Delrin could hear the water coming from the bathroom as he prepared his bedroll on the floor. He knew the letters had to be from Barrfield, and to be honest, he wasn’t as eager to open them. He could recognize the handwriting of his brother, Calvin, and then there was a letter from the Bann himself.

Calvin hasn’t written him in ages. He was twelve years old when Delrin was born. Delrin was just ten years old when his brother got married, and eleven when his nephew Tristan was born. This was largely a reason why Bann Barris gave his second son to the Templar Order. He already had two heirs to the estate. Because of the age difference the brothers were never too close.

Brother,

I heard about your marriage. Father almost passed out. Personally, I don’t know why he scoffs so much, although Catherine was pretty scandalized. I married a woman who embodies all the Bannorn conservatism. I admit I have never imagined my little Templar brother getting wed, but here we are. What times we live in.

Please accept the Maker’s blessing from both of us. May the Andraste be your light and may you enjoy many happy and fruitful years together.

Take it from someone who’s been married for eighteen years now. It’s more difficult than you imagine. Respect and love her. Whatever you might say about our Father, he has always provided the best example with how well he treats our Mother.

I know it’s taken me almost a year to reply to your last letter, but I resent the accusation that I never write you. Things are busy here. Tristan is nearing adulthood and he completely doesn’t understand the responsibilities of running Barrfield. Somehow he doesn’t grasp that he will inherit the estate one day. Lucille is a typical fourteen year old girl and to her mother’s horror she found the whole notion of you marrying a commoner incredibly romantic. Did I mention I’m going gray? Take it as a warning for when you have your own children.
The letter was certainly as good as it could be, considering all of their differences. Calvin was very similar to Bann Jervin Barris, their father. Delrin knew their father was a fair and honorable man, but he was very focused on running Barrfield and completely preoccupied with Fereldan inner politics. He said few unpleasant things when Delrin surrounded the Templar Order, although he did try to make amends later. Bann Barris was a proud man, sometimes too stuck in the old Bannorn ways. He did eventually pledged his support to the Inquisition and he did provide them with supplies like honey or barley, and occasional coin.

There was no point delaying the inevitable. Whatever harsh words his Father had for him, the crucial matter was making sure he would agree to take care of Mira should the need arise. Deep down in his heart Delrin knew his father would never refuse him that, and that he would keep his word no matter what.

The envelope contained two letters and a small piece of cloth. Delrin smiled to himself. It meant that his Mother decided to write few words of her own and probably brought the letter to the the rookery ourselves.

Son,

I have to admit your Mother and I were quite shocked to learn about your wedding. You haven’t mentioned a woman in your life in any of the few letters you’ve managed to send lately.

I don’t know what to say, my Son. Things have changed so quickly. A year ago you were a respected member of the Templar Order that now no longer exists. You’ve joined the organization that was initially denounced by the Chantry. I realize I was wrong in my judgement, but now you have married without even decency of telling your own Mother beforehand? She cried when she found out. She wished to at least have met your bride if not attended the wedding.

You don’t need to remind me that you can govern your life as you see fit. I am quite aware of that. I am the one who sent you away to join the Order.

I wish you would have thought about how your marriage might reflect on your family. Now that the Order doesn’t exist, you’re Bann’s son and you’ve married outside of your station to a woman who wasn’t even raised as Andrastian. The rumors do reach Bannorn as well. Being haste is so unlike you, Son. I am begging you, if the wedding happened because of pregnancy please just let us know. Your mother would not survive the heartbreak if you didn’t tell her she was to be a grandmother again. I suppose what’s done is done. May the Maker provide you both with many blessings.

Obviously your wife is welcomed at Barrfield should anything happen to you. I hope you realize that regardless of our differences we would never turn our backs on our family.

Sincerely,

Bann Jervin Barris of Barrfield
Delrin clenched his jaw. He expected as much, but it was still difficult to read such words. He felt angry. He was not his Father’s responsibility since the age of twelve. He had never asked for anything, and now his own father did not manage to show enough respect to call Mira either by her title or her name. At least Delrin was right about Mira always having a place to stay. As harsh as his father was now, he would never dare to speak that way to Mira directly.

His heart beat faster when he opened the letter from his mother.

__________________________________________

My Dear Son,

You know how your Father can be. I did cry, but it wasn’t exactly how your Father portrayed it. He has been so focused on his role as the Bann and the reputation of this family, but I am your mother and for me you will always be my dearest boy. I don’t want you to feel only disapproval from us. Your Father should still remember how it feels to be young and in love.

I am certain Lady Mira is indeed lovely, and I’m grateful that you found some solace and respite despite the dangers you’re facing each day. Please know that I will always rejoice in your happiness.

I am begging you, do not delay the news about grandchildren if there’s any. I wouldn’t forgive that quite as easily.

I’ve attached something to give to your wife. Perhaps you remember, this was your great grandmother’s ring. You were always her favorite, and she always chastised your Father for sending you away. She would have liked your wife to have it. I also wish for you to have a piece of home and history to give Lady Mira.

Lady Mira is always welcomed at Barrfield. Always. So are you. I realize it might not be possible now, but please visit us when you can. I would love to meet her and welcome her as my daughter.

I love you more than words can express.

Lady Adriana Barris

__________________________________________

The warmth spread around his heart. Mom. She was a kind and loving woman, and he missed her. He hasn’t seen his parents in several years now. He really should write her more, at the very least.

“Are you alright?” Mira stepped out of the bathroom in her simple white linen nightgown and eyed him as she prepared to go to bed.

“Yes, just letters from my parents.”

“Oh”, her cheeks turned red yet again, “I… I can only imagined how shocked they were at the news of the wedding.”

“Yes”, he said carefully, “they were surprised.”

“Well”, Delrin could observe Mira’s embarrassment rising, “I am quite aware that the backstory that Leliana invented for me doesn’t help your… reputation. Commoner, raised in a cult—“
“Mira”, he interrupted her, “I have never cared about that. Please, I’m begging you, do not concern
yourself with it even for a second.”

She was still looking at him somewhat hesitantly, as she wanted to say something.

“Actually”, he added after a moment of silence, unpacking the cloth around the ring, “my mother
sent this for me to give you.”

Mira walked towards him now and stood right in front of him. He lifted the ring. It was just as he
remembered, a golden ring with a small emerald set in the centre. He could almost picture the
wrinkly hands of his great grandmother caressing his face when he was little.

“It was my great grandmother’s.”

“Oh”, Mira gasped softly.

“You could get it resized at the Undercroft if it doesn’t fit, but… I know my mother really wanted
you to have it, so it would do me an honor if you wore it sometimes if there’s ever a suitable
occasion.”

“It’s… very pretty”, Mira whispered with some effort, and he realized how bizarre this whole
exchange was. “Uhm… which hand would I wear it on?”

“I believe it’s on the left since we’re married”, he replied back and sighted. “May I?”

She gave him his hand and he slowly put the ring on her finger.

“Well, it does fit perfectly”, Mira smiled faintly and looked up at him.

Sweet Andraste, he suddenly realized how close she was. He could see the pattern of her irises. He
could smell the herbal scent of soap lingering on her skin.

“I actually have something for you”, she turned towards the desk and he breathed the air out, “let
me just find it. Oh, there it is,” she handed him a piece of parchment.

“Captain Barris is entitled to one full set of armor, one longsword and one shield free of charge -
Dagna.”

“Whoah”, he looked at her surprised, “how did you manage that?”

“Dagna wanted a lot of things from me. She offered a lot of things too, and I didn’t even negotiate
with her. She’s terrifying and exhausting, so feel free to profit from my suffering and get whatever
you want. Trust me, Dagna can make it happen quite easily. I’m both in awe of her and terrified.
She does like me though, a lot. I hope it’s useful.”

“I’m definitely getting myself a new shield maybe even tomorrow”, he smiled at her. “Thank you.”

“It was Dagna’s idea, but you’re most welcome.”

“I actually brought something from the Emerald Graves the was Kirke’s idea, but there’s a whole
story behind it and I don’t want to keep you awake…”

“It’s you who’s tired”, she smiled, “I can stay up a bit. I’m not working until the late morning
anyway.”

“Very well”. 
They sat down. Delrin didn’t go into many details, but he told her about the Dalish girls they found and how they brought them back to their clan, and how Kirke had the idea of buying their jewelry to help out.

“I hope you don’t mind I got you this”, he handed her the necklace, “I would not… I’m not asking you to wear it or anything…”

“What if I want to?”, she asked, letting the necklace run through her fingers.

“Of course. It’s yours.”

“I like flowers”, she said simply. “Kirke is a damn amazing woman, by the way.”

“She is”, he admitted, “I’m very lucky with my squadron.”

“I hope you gave them some time off.”

“Three days free of training. I will need to sit through painfully long debrief with Cullen myself tomorrow.”

“I work until late but I anticipated you arriving so I could probably join you for lunch or dinner if you want to.”, she looked at him with much care in her eyes, “You do look so tired. Why don’t you finally go to sleep?”

“I think I will.”

She blew out the candle as soon as he lied down.

“Goodnight, Delrin.”

“Goodnight.”

The last thought he had before falling asleep was that Mira was indeed somewhat wonderful.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading and kudos and comments <3

They finally saw each other and and spent some quiet time together.

Next chapter: the anniversary of the events at Therinfal Redoubt.

Delrin is quite smitten, but sometimes being married does make things harder.

I am so glad to finally be writing them together.
Consolation

Chapter Summary

Mira and Delrin spend the anniversary of Therinfal Redoubt together.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

First week of Harvestmere, 9:42 Dragon Age, Skyhold

Delrin woke up relatively late, at least per his own standards. Mira was already gone to work at the infirmary. He didn’t even want to get up, but he needed to. Some part of him dreaded today. It was going to be hard. It was supposed to be hard. It was supposed to hurt.

It was a sad and shameful anniversary. The lives they lost. The remembrance of the deprivation, the dysfunction, the fall of the Templar Order. What a cruel irony it was, that the Order that was supposed to protect people from anything evil magic could bring ended up being overtaken by the demon.

There would only be a small ceremony at the chantry. The chantry was small in the first place, and he guessed that the only people attending, aside from some of the Inquisition leadership, would be the former Templars who survived the nightmare at the Therinfal Redoubt.

He dressed up in his nicest gambeson and proceeded to The Herald’s Rest, where he was supposed to meet Arthur and Clarissa before the service. He still had some time, but unsurprisingly they were both already there sitting at the small table and chatting and drinking and barely nibbling on food.

“Captain”, Clarissa welcomed him and Arthur nodded. “Cabot recommended this raspberry cordial and for some reason it seemed like not the worst idea today. Would you commiserate with us?”

“I would”, he pulled the chair and sat down. Both of them looked completely beat. Clarissa's skin slightly grayer and paler than usual, her long brown hair barely braided. Arthur appeared suddenly older and beyond exhausted. He poured a small glass of cordial for Barris.

“To our brothers and sisters no longer with us”, Arthur raised the cup, “those on both sides.”

Those that died at Therinfal perhaps received more merciful fate than those who were forcibly turned into monsters. Barris had no doubt he would prefer death himself.

They drank in silence.

“We could each drink a bottle of this and not feel a thing”, Arthur said at last.

“I think that’s the point”, Delrin noticed soberly. “It is before noon and we are heading to the chantry.”

“I dread the sermon”, Clarissa sighted heavily, “for some reason I don’t believe there are words to describe what happened.”
He just nodded quietly. He retained his faith, but it wasn’t the same as before. He loved the Maker, but the Chantry was a different matter. The disillusionment was too raw, too severe. He still prayed the Chant each day though.

“We lost so many people”, Arthur’s voice broke, “and the command… Few Templars that trained me before the Vigil where at Therinfal. All turned. All dead.”

“Yes”, Delrin’s throat went dry. He knew very well whom and what he lost that day. He could never make up for that loss, even moving forward. “I still feel sickened that I followed the Lord Seeker there. Or rather whom I thought was the Lord Seeker.”

“If you hadn’t, we’d all likely be dead”, Clarissa muttered somberly while pouring more cordial. He glanced at her sharply. He never thought about it from that perspective. “And we still saved some people. I will drink to that, and you’ll raise your glasses with me.”

They both abided.

“I don’t want all of their deaths to go in vain”, Barris admitted, “There is no way to change what happened. Going forward… I hope we do better. We must.’

“We have.” Arthur simply remarked and Delrin looked at him with gratitude.

“And we will.” Clarissa added.

Mira got up in the middle of the night to go to the infirmary, just so she would be able to leave and attend the chantry service in the memory of the Templars fallen at Therinfal Redoubt. Delrin told her about it two days ago when he came back and she figured it was her duty to show up. More importantly she simply wanted to support him. She felt that respect demanded that she would be there as his wife. She wanted to show him that she cared. When he first told her about what happened, she cried. He suffered a tremendous loss. He suffered trauma. He called what happened at Therinfal the worst day of his life. Delrin was the closest person she had in Thedas, without any shred of doubt. The least she could do was to show up.

Mira managed to stop at their quarters to take a quick shower and change into a simple navy dress that had the subtlest embroidery around the sleeves. The color was dark enough, the cut was simple enough and yet it definitely felt more respectful and formal than her regular outfit.

Now she looked proper and presentable.

It would be the first time she’d step foot in the chantry since their wedding, and part of her worried about how she would feel. It was similar enough to what she knew from earth to rouse the feeling of longing and loss. Mira had much better grasp of the Andrastianism now, and she even read many verses from The Chant of Light. It was still far removed from the faith she knew. The idea that Maker turned on his children… She could never comprehend it. But there were ideas and symbols and even just the language that were similar and it hurt. She missed the sense of belonging. But today wasn’t about her. She was doing it for Delrin.

She noticed his tall silhouette immediately, standing outside of the chantry entrance and talking with Arthur and Clarissa. He looked serious and sad and a little bit tense. The three of them were engaged in a conversation and Mira didn’t want to just walk up there and disturb them. It was Clarissa who noticed her.
“Lady Mira”, she addressed her.

“Arthur, Clarissa”, Mira wasn’t quite sure what to say, “I just wanted to say how sorry I am for your loss”, she finished somewhat lamely.

“Thank you. We’re going to head inside.” Clarissa gestured for Arthur to follow her and suddenly Mira was alone with Delrin. She tried to gather her thoughts on what to say to him when he furrowed his eyebrows and asked sharply.

“What are you doing here?”

Oh. Oh. She blinked few times. Could she really misunderstand the situation so badly? He never really invited her to come, but she stupidly assumed… She could feel the slight pain and then the wave of shame followed through.

“I’m so sorry”, she managed to say, “I thought… I can leave. I can go. I will go.”

“No, wait”, he gently touched her arm, “Maker’s breath, Mira, I didn’t mean it like that.”

“I thought it would be… appropriate if I accompany you”, she finally disclosed. She couldn’t quite bear to say that she wanted to be there for him. “I am sorry. I should have asked. I thought that by telling me the time and date… It was foolish. I didn’t mean to intrude.”

“I assumed that you wouldn’t want to come to the chantry service because of…you know”, he lowered his voice, “your faith.”

Somehow it made her feel even worse and more embarrassed. She looked at the ground avoiding his gaze.

“I thought… I mean…We already… I still can attend some functions. I mean, am I not allowed to be here? I’m really sorry, Delrin. I know this is a difficult day for you and I’ve only wanted… I don’t know I was thinking.”

He pulled her closer as more people were passing them on the way through the door.

“Mira”, she felt his voice so close that she could hear him breath as well. “Stay. Please.”

Part of her wondered if Delrin truly meant it or if he said it because he was chivalrous and well mannered. She did as he asked, of course. After all, the whole point was to support him. Mira still felt like she did something wrong, like she intruded on his personal space and interjected herself into something she had no right to. Clarissa and Arthur were here. People who actually survived Therinfal alongside him. Why would she even think Delrin would want her here today?

He politely led her to the pew and they sat in a complete silence. The chantry somehow felt smaller than she remembered from the wedding, perhaps because now there were many more people present. She still recognized the figure of Andraste in the center, as beautiful, cold and enigmatic as ever.

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The Reverend Mother decided to forgo the traditional sermon and instead read the names of every Templar who lost their life and Therinfal Redoubt. It was a tasteful and considerate choice. It was also excruciating to hear. So many lives.
Delrin could feel the grief overcoming his senses when the names of the people he lost were spoken out loud by Mother Giselle. Margot Dubois, Alenna Tamarina, Georges Pelletier, Brandon Shelley. They were all seasoned and experienced Templars. Alenna hasn’t met her youngest baby nephew who was born mere weeks before her death. Brandon had never revealed the identity of the woman he loved, so Delrin couldn’t even write a proper letter of condolences. Margot’s own brother was among the Red Templars they fought at Therinfal. Georges once told him he never wished to join the Order, but he found sense of pride in the work they were doing. If only… But he failed them. He did.

He stirred a little and sighed, and then he felt Mira’s palm just barely touching his. He moved it away to...

“I’m sorry!”, she whispered embarrassed and immediately took her hand away.

Maker’s breath, he didn’t mean that. He just wanted to actually feel her touch.

He used his teeth to remove his glove and then placed it on the side.

“I just wanted to take it off”, he whispered back holding out his hand. Mira glanced quickly at his face and placed her hand into his and gave him a little squeeze, as if to reassure him. Her hand was so small in comparison to his and he could feel the hardness of her wedding band. It felt nice.

Delrin was glad he wasn’t alone. Mira did not move her hand until the end of the service, and neither did he.

She waited for him at the back of the chantry as he kneeled and prayed and lit the candle in the memory of his squadron. She looked serious and solemn and she was a sight for his sore eyes. They walked out together and headed into the main courtyard area.

“Listen”, Mira stopped and looked at him, “Delrin, I am so very sorry for intruding today. I will let you spend the day the way you want to, just know that…”

Sweet Andraste. She genuinely thought he didn’t want her there. She couldn’t be further from the truth.

“Are you free this afternoon or do you need to work?”

“Excuse me?”

“I wondered…”, he took a deep breath, “would you like to go on a ride with me?”

“Oh”, he could see her hesitating, “Yes, I’m free. You don’t have to… I am fine, you don’t need to.”

Maker’s breath.

“I am not fine”, he admitted, “and frankly, I don’t want to be here at all. There will be a lot of sad drinking and… I’d rather be with you. If you’re fine with that.”

“Of course”, she was watching him carefully, “I’d just need to change.”

“I can go to the stables and have the horses ready. You can join me there.”

“Sure”, she smiled slightly.
Mira felt very comfortable in the saddle. Despite the several years of break, horse riding still had been a big part of her life for such long time beforehand. The bridge leading out of Skyhhold was terrifying though, she could peak and see the valley underneath. There was no surviving the fall from that. The mere thought made Mira want to close her eyes.

“Ugh”, she sighted, “we’re… up high.”

“You don’t remember the bridge?”, she could hear surprise in Delrin’s voice.

“It was a nighttime when I arrived, and… well, Cassandra didn’t exactly allow me to look around.”

“Right, sorry”, he muttered, “of course.”

Finally the damn bridge was behind them and Mira relaxed a bit.

“You know”, she said slowly, as they moved into trotting, “it’s the first time I’m outside Skyhold walls since… well, then. Suddenly it seems so scary, there’s demons and darkspawn and giant spiders and bears.”

He chuckled slightly. “I… well, believe me that we’re not going to encounter either demons or darkspawn, and it’s really unlikely to stumble upon a bear in the middle of the day, not to mention giant spiders…”, his voice softened. “Are you really worried?”

“Well”, Mira admitted slowly, “maybe a little. It’s different here. I know you probably don’t feel it, but Thedas is a scary world.”

“And yours wasn’t?”

She scoffed. “It was in many ways. But it was familiar. I was familiar with it. And not through books, it was… It was the only reality I knew. This is the reality I’m moving around very consciously. Nothing feels truly natural. Almost everything I do is maybe not completely foreign, but slightly different, just enough to throw me off. It feels weird.”

“In any case”, Delrin said gently, “you’re not alone.”

That was true, and of course he still had his sword on him. Was he ever unarmed outside of their quarters?

“So”, she asked, “where are we going?”

“Just an hour away. Not that far. By the way, there are watch towers up to two hours away from Skyhhold. The road might be tricky in the wintertime, but it’s not unsafe, especially so close to the fortress. There are agents and soldiers stationed there too, and there’s active trade between Skyhhold and Jader, and the rest of Thedas. We’re going to stray from the path a little bit, but not too far.”

They finally hitched their horses near the road. It felt as if they went a bit lower when it comes to altitude, the air felt almost easier to breath although Mira was used to Skyhhold at this point. The sun provided much warmth but Mira was still glad she wore a wool sweater. It was a bit windy.

He guided her through the small path leading to the rock formation. Would climbing be involved? She seriously hoped Delrin realized that he was in much better shape than her. Mira always thought she maintained the basic decent level of fitness. She always walked a lot. But she wasn’t nowhere near the Thedas level of fit, where so much relied on physical strength and agility. Here, she felt out of shape.
Wonderful. They weren’t climbing per se but they were definitely walking upwards. Just few minutes and Mira felt the sweat breaking on her forehead. Thankfully she had a satchel and water to drink if needed.

Some of it brought memories of how she climbed to find shelter the first night she arrived in Thedas, but she wasn’t going to say that out loud.

“You do realize”, she finally said exasperated, “that your physical abilities and stamina are so much better than mine, right?”

He looked at her carefully. “It’s not far, I promise. Actually, you know what, go first.”

They finally reached the small boulder. Relatively small, as Mira could only reach the top with her chin.

“Alright”, she noticed dryly, “there’s no way I am getting up there if that’s what you have in mind.”

“Of course there’s a way”, he scoffed.

Delrin obviously had no problem pulling himself up in one swift motion. He kneeled and extended his hand towards her and Mira looked at him skeptically.

“You know it’s actually really hard to pull someone up by one hand…” she started and he just laughed. He laughed.

“Trust me?”, he whispered.

“Fine”, she relented and grabbed him by the wrist. He pulled her up much more easily than she anticipated and she landed on his chest somewhat awkwardly.

“Sorry”, she flustered a bit.

“You’re alright?”, he made sure while smiling.

“Yes. So, why are we…” she started while looking around. The view. The whole valley was right there, the trees both green and already yellowed and reddened with autumn foliage. Skyhold was visible from afar, so tiny now yet still so formidable. Mira could see the river that went up to the fortress, and she could see all the mountain peaks surrounding the valley. It was magnificent.

Thankfully, they also weren’t sitting on the edge of the cliff. There were still rock formations in front of them, so it didn’t feel dangerous. It was simply beautiful.

She looked at him and grinned, she just couldn’t help herself. He smiled back. He really had such a nice smile.

“It’s a gorgeous view.”

“Yes. It is. You obviously see Skyhold right there. And there”, he pointed to the far right, “you can see the watchtower.”

“And what we see… is it Ferelden or Orlais?”

“It’s technically neither. You likely see at least the portion of the route you must have taken to get to Skyhold.”
Mira settled herself into a comfortable position, legs criss crossed.

“Well, thank you for dragging me up here. Quite literally.”

“My pleasure”, he murmured.

Mira looked at Delrin. He was sitting with his knees bent and legs spread and looking around. The sun glistened on his skin around his cheeks and temples, showcasing his bone structure. She could hear Ida’s voice in her head telling her how handsome he was and Mira actually smirked to herself. There was no point in denying, he was objectively very attractive. There was no way he wasn’t aware of that either. He just radiated this calm confidence of a man sure of himself and he never seemed too awkward or too embarrassed.

There was nothing wrong with him. Quite the contrary, he was good looking, intelligent, noble and kind. It was no secret why Mira agreed to marry. It seemed… well, it was not an unreasonable solution. It was a calculated decision. As horrifying as it sounded, despite assurances that she would be safe, she figured that dealing with one man to whom she was bound by legal marriage provided her with more protection than dealing with different type of attention without any privileges marriage could have afforded her. She agreed to do it because it made sense.

And she knew she was very lucky. She really liked Delrin as a person. She would have liked him if they met in any other circumstances.

Why would _he_ agree to marry her? He gained nothing by it. He clearly could have other options. There was simply no way he wasn’t desirable. She heard the giggles from the patients at the infirmary. Funnily enough most of them were servants at Skyhold, maybe because of Karla spreading the good word. When Mira introduced herself as Mira Barris, she heard the few “oh, you’re so lucky” followed by more giggling. Many women and probably at least few men could have easily pined after Delrin.

“What?”, she had to have stared a bit too long for him to ask that question.

“I was about to ask how you’re doing”, she replied empathically embarrassed at her own thoughts.

How was he really doing today? He felt so many things at once, but the pain wasn’t burning as much as a year ago. He still moved forward. That didn’t mean he forgot or could shake away the shame of his mistakes.

“I…”, he took a deep breath. “I led my men to their death. Not deliberately, I know, but ultimately their death was how it all ended. You know Mira, whenever we go into a battle I’m aware that death is a possibility. What happened at Therinfal was not a battle though, it was something else. It was a betrayal and… forgive me for being so blunt. It was a slaughter.”

The expression on her face was so serious and sad as she was looking straight at him.

“Don’t get me wrong”, he continued, “I am glad to be alive. I have no wish to die. And I admit it could have ended up even worse at Therinfal. However… I failed. And nothing will ever bring their lives back.”

“Do you want to tell me about them? Your men?”

Mira’s question surprised him. She didn’t flinch or cry or fluster. She just observed him carefully.
Her voice was calm. For someone who could be so vulnerable she truly was very direct at times.

He thought how to answer for a moment while she patiently waited.

“Sure”, he finally said. “I’m actually not sure how much you know about my work for the Templar Order. I was leading the specialized squadron to deal with the most serious cases of maleficar or to hunt apostates or to track abominations. You have to understand that most Templars truly spend their lives in the Circles. Few were allowed to live in cities or villages. They usually helped with recruitment. Moreover there were few units like mine, who had very specific tasks to fulfill. We had many privileges other Templars weren’t afforded. I could carry few months of my lyrium supply at the time, and I knew no Chantry or no Circle would refuse to supply me with more.

The people that died… They had been with me for three years prior, since I relocated to Orlais. Margot and Georges were assigned to me at the White Spire, though Margot was formerly of Montsimmard Circle. Alenna was from Nevarra, and I requested her after reading some of her accomplishments. I had known Brandon for a long time.”

His throat was slightly dry and he coughed up a bit. Mira still didn’t say anything, but he could tell she was listening.

“Margot had this witty, snarky sense of humor that could come up at the most inopportune times. She was an excellent fighter but there was still one mission”, he actually smiled, “where she insulted the local Orlesian noble so badly it took me a week of calling personal favors to even continue with the investigation. If a Fereldan shared jokes she had it wouldn’t be considered such an affront, but you have to understand that Margot otherwise carried herself as proudly as typical Orlesian. It’s just… she really had no subtlety at the Game. I don’t even remember what she said in particular except that it cost me twenty letters to move past it.”

“In her defense, I find Orlesian Grand Game terrifying, and that’s just from description.”

“I think Margot was surprisingly amused by how seriously it was treated by her own compatriots. When it comes to Georges… Georges always cooked for all of us. I think in some way it brought him joy. We could have been in the worst ditch in the middle of nowhere, and he would still have made an effort to make sure our food was good. He was a truly decent man.”

“I would have like him.”

“You’re right”, he looked at her warmly, “you would have. He never seemed to treat himself too seriously, or treat the Order too seriously, yet he always gave every task his full attention. Honestly I think he embodied the qualities of a good Templar better than most, perhaps because he never allowed himself to be seduced by an idea that never existed in the first place.”

“I’ve always admired that quality. The everyday work above heroism.”

“Yes”, he agreed, “and yet we don’t sing enough songs about it.”

“We should”, she simply answered.

“There was also Alenna. Alenna was brave and courageous. Not careless, she just genuinely had more understanding than fear. Mages in Navarra have always had more freedom than most, and I think it made Nevarran Templars better. Alenna was never too hasty or brash. She was one of the five siblings, and the only Templar in the family of farmers and tradesman. Writing them was… horrendous. She loved all of her nieces and nephews and was always sending them packages of sweets.”
“That’s adorable.”

“Yes, it was. Brandon was… He liked to tell stories. He would always create those poetic and weirdly endearing tales about the girl he liked. He never shared her name or where she was from. We just knew she had long black braid and her eyes shone like starts.”

“Well, isn’t that the sweetest”, she chuckled slightly.

“I have never managed to find out her identity. I am not sure if he ever told her how he felt, if she had any idea about his devotion. I tried to find out to send her a letter with condolences but all my efforts were in vain. Maybe she had no idea.”

“That’s sad.”

“Yes. It is. You know…”, he said quietly, “no one really asked me about my previous squadron before. No one here in Skyhold.”

“Really?”

“Yes. It actually feels… good to talk about them.”

“Anytime. And I’m glad. It’s always tricky but I found out in my work that not asking can be worse. That remembering and acknowledging the memory is better than just letting it all turn into dust.”

Mira carried her own hurt inside. He looked at her for a second before she faced him again.

“Would you like to say something about your friend?”, he asked in the gentlest voice he could.

She furrowed her eyebrows and the pang of pain appeared on her face but then she relaxed.

“Ida”, she said softly. “Her name is… was… Ida.”

“Ida”, he repeated.

“I didn’t like her at all when we met”, Mira laughed to herself. “I thought she drank too much, flirted too much and was a bit reckless. That was my first impression. I assure you hers was not much better. She thought I was boring and judgmental and cold. We met at the university party during our first year. We were both from the same country, both studying medicine and someone introduced us thinking we would get along. We talked for five minutes and I think we both realized that we would never be friends. Two hours later she accidentally spilled wine all over my dress and we talked some more and for some reason something… clicked. Don’t get me wrong. She truly did drink slightly too much and she definitely flirted with a lot of men quite unworthy of her attention. But it’s also true I can be judgmental, and I’m not always fun. Anyway, Ida was… one of those people who are unbelievably charismatic. She was very easy to love, you know? Whatever faults she had, it didn’t matter. She was good and kind, and she was a great doctor by the time we graduated. She had so much joy in her. She was passionate and open. She fell in love easily and she accepted people for who they were. She loved dancing and going out. I still hear her voice in my head so often and I still recall her laughter. You know… when I was coming to watch you train, Zuzu reminded of Ida a lot.”

“Hmmm”, he smiled, “that’s a very telling comparison, certainly. I know you must miss her.”

“Terribly”, Mira said. “I… She was the closest person I’ve ever had in my life.”
It didn’t escape Delrin’s attention that Mira has never mentioned her parents. Should he ask? Did he have any right to?

“You… have never mentioned your family.”

The shadow fell on Mira’s face and he could see her tense up.

“I… the medallion you’re wearing, the one I gave you was actually my grandmother’s. She died when I was eighteen, few months before I started my studies abroad.”

“I’m sorry”, he whispered.

“Her name was actually Mira and I was named after her. She was a lovely woman. I remember her being very old and gentle and fragile”, Mira took a deep breath, “as of my parents…They are still alive. I… well, I haven’t talked to them in years. I’d rather not go into details.”

“Sure”, he would never dare to press, but he certainly realized there was something deeply painful behind her words. “By the way… thank you for coming to the chantry today. I was glad to see you.”

“Truly?”, her blue eyes drilled into his.

“Truly. I wouldn’t lie to you. And I hope you know you are welcomed in the chantry. I merely tried to say that I’d never insist you attend, but you can go there whenever you want to.”

“That’s reassuring since I already got married there”, she noticed amused.

Something about her words hit him. Married. She definitely said “married”. Has she ever even said those words out loud or written them? He couldn’t remember for sure. All he knew was that she usually used gestures instead and avoided saying it so directly.

The warm afternoon sun illuminated her skin and her fiery hair. He couldn’t deny how much he liked looking at her, but more importantly, he genuinely enjoyed her company. There were so many things he wanted to talk about or show her. There were so many things he still didn’t know about her, but at the same time he had a sense of who she was.

“Mira?”

“Yes?”

“Can I ask about your last name?”

She blushed suddenly.

“Well”, she said carefully, “I don’t want to be the bearer of bad news, but I was assured it is indeed Barris.”

“I know that”, he shook his head laughing. “I meant… before.”

“Leliana might have threatened to kill me if I ever reveal it”, she replied only half jokingly.

“There’s no one here”, he noticed gently, “besides, whatever threats Leliana made she lost the ability to act on them the minute we got… married.”

“Fine”, Mira breathed out, “Don’t tell anyone.”
“I wouldn’t…” he didn’t finish the sentence because she leaned towards him very close. Her hair tickled the side of his face and he could smell honey and herbs. He felt her breath on his ear and it sent the shiver down his spine. She whispered the words.

“Can you repeat that?”

She did.

“That sounds…”

“Whatever you say, I’ve heard it before,” she giggled, “remember I spent the last several years of my life as an immigrant.”

“I was just going to say it sounds unusual, that’s all.”

“For what it’s worth, I got used to introducing myself as Mira Barris.”

He wasn’t even sure how to respond. Everything would seem so inadequate or inappropriate.

“You know”, Mira thankfully changed the topic, “I actually read the Chant of Light. Well, the parts you own.”

“Really?”, he looked at her curiously. “Is it even remotely similar to your own faith?”

“There is enough familiarity to give me that bizarre feeling in my stomach whenever I cross the threshold of the chantry. But it’s also different enough that it’s hard to find a sense of familiarity and comfort. Some words of expression used are the same, but I’m not sure if they mean the same, if it makes sense. The idea that there is one Creator who made the world is the same, but the rest… It’s more complex than I could ever express with my words. I… I know you’re pretty devout.”

“Yes”, he admitted. “I still have faith. Maybe less in the Chantry itself for obvious reasons but I do believe in the Maker. I still pray the Chant daily.”

“How much do you know by heart?”

“A lot. That’s a big part of Chantry education. I was twelve when my parents sent me to the Order.”

“That’s… so young.”

“That’s the common fate of children in noble families who wouldn’t inherit the land from their parents, second sons and so called spares. My brother Calvin is twelve years older than me. I was ten when he got married and eleven when his son was born. A year later I was sent away. My father thought I would do well as a Templar. I’ve always shown promise when it comes to the sword fighting.”

“Were you afraid?”

“I was twelve year old. Of course I was afraid. There was a sense of adventure as well though. It wasn’t a bad experience. Anyway, aside from physical training and fighting, the large portion of studies was obviously religious education.”

“I feel almost envious of the fact that you know the Chant so well. I… there is so little I know by heart. I never needed to. I never thought it would even be possible for me to be in this situation. It’s not even faith, and to be honest I feel too conflicted to even phrase my thoughts about faith right
now. It’s also… music, literature, poetry.”

“That’s very hard”, he said empathetically. She lost her whole world.

“The art of losing isn’t hard to master”, she sighted. “It’s… it’s actually a quote from a poem. One I cannot fully recall, of course. The art of losing isn’t hard to master. So many things seem filled with the intent to be lost that their loss is no disaster.”

“I presume it’s ironic.”

“Yes”, she smiled. “but there’s always things ahead. You know it yourself.”

“Indeed”, he agreed, understanding her reference to what he had been through.

They sat for a moment in silence.

“Is it awful”, he started, “that I actually regret not bringing food?”

“Do not dare to mock me”, she looked at him sharply but with a smile on her face, “but I might have something.”

******************************************************************************

“I would never dare”, Delrin said with such exaggerated reverence that she couldn’t help but giggle as she searched through her bag.

“It’s hard to eat while working at the infirmary and I do have a sweet tooth… I actually have water too.” She handed it to him. “Two apples and… well… all of this”, she took the metal box out and opened it.

“Is that fudge?”, he asked with amazement, “where did you get that?”

“Main kitchens. Have you never been there?”

“No”, he looked at her surprised. “I either eat at the canteen at the barracks, the Herald’s Rest or the main dining hall. I never went inside the main kitchens.”

“We’ve had few patients from the kitchens at the infirmary, probably thanks to Karla. What followed through are all the various treats whenever we want them. The fudge is really good. I would have brought you some before but it honestly didn’t occur to me.”

They ate the whole box pretty quickly.

“You’re very easy to talk to”, Delrin remarked and Mira felt the slight tingling in her heart.

“I suppose the moral of the story is that you can’t judge a girl by her first days in a completely new world”.

He laughed so sincerely and the tingling spread even more.

“I really did not judge you though”, he finally said, “I knew you were scared. I’m just happy you’re more comfortable now.”

“You’re kind and honorable”, Mira answered earnestly, “it’s not that difficult to trust you.”
He looked at her seriously now, his brow slightly furrowed.

“Thank you. We should probably go now if that’s alright with you.”

“Sure.”

Delrin helped Mira get off the boulder by simply picking her up by her waist. He certainly was very strong. And careful. He grabbed her immediately when she slipped and lost balance while they walked back to their horses.

“I got you,” he muttered.

How quickly things changed, Mira thought as they rode back to Skyhold. He made her feel safe.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! I am so happy someone is following the story, and I always appreciate the comments.

I realize it’s a more quiet and slow chapter, but I promise you there are things to follow. Soon there will be more around tensions between Templars and mages around Skyhold, there will be more about Mira's pasta there will be parties and tavern drinking. There will be more canonical characters as well. There is a lot to come - I promise.
Blushes

Chapter Summary

Mira attends the dinner with Inner Circle present and doesn't have a good time.

At all.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

First week of Harvestmire, 9:42, Skyhold

___________________________________________________________

Dear Father,

Thank you for promising to take care of my wife in case of my premature death. It means everything to me and I shall forever remain in your debt.

I kindly ask of you to speak of her with respect that she deserves. My marriage has no influence over the dealings of estate. Taking care of Lady Mira is the only request I have ever made. I asked you as my Father, not the Bann of Barrfield.

I wrote a separate letter to Mother.

Thank you once again.

Sincerely

Captain Delrin Barris

___________________________________________________________

Mom,

Thank you so much for your kind words and thank you for the ring. I did not expect that, and yes, I do remember great grandmother wearing it every single day. It’s very heart warming that you’ve decided to pass it onto Mira. She thought it was beautiful.

I do realize it must have been hard for you to be informed about my betrothal after the fact. Please understand that waiting longer to get married wasn’t an option for multiple reasons. I did not intend to make you cry, Mom. Sometimes the precautions I need to take around my work make it impossible for me to share news right away. We’re not expecting a child and that is not why I wed.

It might be a while before we’ll meet and I’ll introduce her to you. I realize what rumors you might have heard. I can tell your that Mira is warm, caring and smart. She dedicates her time to work at the infirmary and help our cause. She has no family left except now myself. It means so much to me you’d accept her as your daughter. I know you will become fond of her. It’s impossible not to.

I have attached the portrait of Mira I sketched one evening. Believe me that she’s lovelier in
Dear Brother,

I am glad to finally hear from you.

Thank you for all your blessings and words of wisdom.

I can understand the busyness of your life, trust me. I have plenty to occupy me as well. I can’t quite believe Tristan is already seventeen. I counted that twice just to be certain. He will grow into his duties, both you and the Father will make sure of that. How amusing that my fourteen year old niece found my nuptials endearing. I can thoroughly imagine Lady Catherine finding it far less endearing as well.

I can confidently tell you I am not going gray anytime soon, Brother.

I sent the letter to Mom. When it comes to our Father, I’ve grown used to his disapproval as of late. He did agree to provide care for my wife should anything happen to me. I hope you’d do the same in his place. I know you would, Calvin.

Please give my respects to Lady Catherine and my love to the kids.

May the Maker be your light,

Captain Delrin Barris

Barris really liked his boss, Commander Cullen Rutherford. The Commander was a proud and intelligent men, if not slightly too controlling. Perhaps it was understandable considering he essentially was the general of the Inquisition’s Forces. He was the one to ultimately decide troops movement, prepare battle plans and on top of that he still ran the regular drills.

Being his Second-in-Command was honestly not that challenging given the fact that Cullen was truly bad at delegating. Perhaps it came with the territory of leading the army consisting of so many recruits who didn’t wield weapons until a winter or two ago. Perhaps it was just his personality.

They spent many evenings together standing in the war room debating the best course of actions. Specialized units were definitely Barris’ expertise and he drafted many action plans himself. Still, Cullen had the more responsible job of always looking at the big picture.

The only issue Delrin had with the Commander was his pathological need to oversee every little aspect that made the troops function. Cullen wanted every requisition go through him, he wanted every report details, he wanted to be aware of anything and everything. There was simply no way for one man to do all that.

Truthfully, Barris tried to be understanding. He knew what made his superior that way. After all, Cullen used to be a Knight-Captain at the Gallows, the worst Circle, under the leadership of the
most despicable Knight-Commander imaginable. Perhaps it would leave every man on edge, striving to remain in control, to never repeat the same mistakes.

It took Delrin six months to convince Cullen that they would be able to have some conversations while playing chess, not stuck in the office looking at reports that should have been take care of by lieutenants. The game today was particularly intriguing, and they both took time to consider their moves carefully without playing too defensively. There was no fun in that. Finally, Barris saw a beautiful opening and executed it perfectly.

“The game is yours, Captain”, the Commander smirked, “I have to admit that was the most entertaining challenge I’ve had in a long time. I will expect a rematch. Honestly, Barris, that alone improved my mood today.”

“Likewise, Cullen”, he relaxed in a chair. “It is thankfully a quiet day so far.”

“We’re attending the dinner with the Inquisitor”, the man remarked. “It won’t be that quiet much longer.”

“Doesn’t Maxwell leave again soon?”

“He does. He said he wanted to visit the Hinterlands once again and detour to the Rift your…”

Cullen coughed slightly while running his hand through his hair, “wife fell from.”

“Huh”, Delrin remarked.

“They want to see if there was anything unusual about that particular Rift. Solas doesn’t think so, I was told. He doesn’t think such situation is likely to ever happen again. Maxwell is taking Solas, Sera and Blackwall and Cole, I believe.”

“Interesting. Tell me, is the Western Approach where I’m going to deploy next?” Barris asked the Commander. “It is, right? The blighted desert.”

“Don’t tell anyone yet”, Cullen sighted, “I’m planning on sending a lot of reinforcements. All the most capable elite squadrons. Those are tricky missions there. We’re also aiming to get the Keep.”

“Wonderful.”

“Rylen is going to take command at the Keep”, Cullen fixed his mantle, “You’ve recently married so I’ve decided…”

“I appreciate that. I truly do.”

“Do you? I wasn’t sure given your circumstances…”

“I do”, Delrin steeled his voice. “Thank you.”

************************************************************************************************

It was an informal tradition at Skyhold that when the Inquisitor came back after long absence, the whole Inner Circle would eat dinner together at the main dining room. Mira wasn’t sure if Delrin always attended those or whether invitation came just now thanks to Josephine’s insistence. All she knew was that she was hungry, tired, and horribly late because of how busy the infirmary had been today. She even made sure to get up in the middle of the night and work half a night shift just to get the afternoon off, but life had other plans. It was now close to the evening and she barely crossed through the main castle’s entrance when the messenger stopped her.
“Lady Barris, if you follow me.”

Mira sighted and took few deep breaths. The truth was she didn’t know many people from the Inner Circle well. The person she interacted the most with was obviously Delrin. Then people at the infirmary, then probably Dagna. There were many in the Inner Circle whom she met only once or twice and has barely talked with since. Now they all were supposed to be there, and while the dinner was apparently informal, Mira was still nervous inside.

There was nothing like arriving three hours late. She knew everybody would stare at her. She could feel her own moves being ungraceful as she carried her large leather medical bag walking through the main dining hall.

The messenger opened the door to the alcove style room adjacent to the main area and just as Mira predicted, all eyes where suddenly on her. Everyone was there. The Inquisitor himself, Josephine at his right side, then Leliana, Cullen and Cassandra, Vivienne, Dorian, the Iron Bull, Blackwall, Sera, Varric, Cole, and then finally Delrin and Solas.

“Hi”, she said almost shyly, “I apologize for the delay.”

“We might have taken bets on why you’re late”, Dorian remarked, “Some of us thought you decided to escape our company.”

“No one thought such things”, Cassandra scoffed.

“I worked”, Mira placed her leather bag on the floor and sat on the only empty seat between Delrin and Solas. “For sixteen hours straight. Believe me I did not plan to be that late.”

“I thought Stitches was quite capable on his own”, Bull remarked.

“Stitches is very capable, usually. We’ve had a very nasty old wound to deal with that needed all of our involvement. I will spare you the details of wound debridement since we’re at the dining table”, Mira sighted.

“Thank you, Darling”, Vivienne nodded approvingly.

“And then I spent far too long working to dislodge a small pebble from child’s nose. Stitches is fearless with the exception of trying to care for children. It astonishes me but no one seems to have experience with small kids except Isanna, but Isanna is still just learning the techniques and is shy around the medical tools” Mira explained. “Anyway, I’m here and it’s nice to see you all”, she added clumsily at the end.

“Likewise”, Josephine shot her a supporting glance.

Thankfully they seemed to come back to the topic at hand quickly, which was Varric’s fascinating tale of fighting three giants at once. Mira could disappear into comfortable silence and focus on eating, drinking and surviving the next hour or so. She just wanted to go to bed.

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Delrin could see how tired Mira was. The last three days she was leaving for the infirmary very early. He would wake up each time to hear her mutter quietly “sleep, it’s the middle of the night” to him and then he would close his eyes and catch few more hours of rest. She certainly worked very hard, and she’d need to cover her yawns by the time they ate dinner. He did try to make sure they spent that time together, and they’d usually go to the Herald’s Rest. Then they would go back to their quarters and get ready for the night. He would write reports, she would read a book and try to
stop herself from falling asleep and ultimately fail.

He really enjoyed their daily companionship. He could have rationalized it by thinking that it was merely because he has never experienced anything like that before, but Delrin was not a man who would try to delude himself for too long.

He enjoyed her. That was the truth.

He did not expect her to feel the same way about him, and he had no right to. However he also wasn’t blind and he could see that Mira did seem open and comfortable in his presence and that made him happy.

She was quiet now, surrounded by so many people, some of whom she only met during their wedding.

“We haven’t had a game of Wicked Grace in ages”, Varric suddenly complained. “I know it’s impossible to get some of you to the tavern”, the dwarf bowed to Madame de Fer who smiled to herself, “but the rest of you? Seeker, Hero, Ruffles, Tiny, Knight, Inquisitor, Buttercup, Curly, Sparkler, Kid?”

“I’d rather not repeat my act of humiliation”, Cullen coughed and Darlin couldn’t hide his smirk at the memory of the Ambassador stripping the Commander of both his clothes and dignity.”

“Never bet against the Antivan”, Josephine whispered the now famed phrase with such a strong sense of satisfaction that it earned her a few chuckles here and there.

“What is Wicked Grace?”, Mira suddenly asked, “And what those… are those nicknames?”

“Knight didn’t tell you?”, Master Tethras touched his hairy chest with feigned shocked, “I am heartbroken.”

“Wicked Grace is a card game”, the Ambassador added excited, “And I could certainly teach you how to play.”

“Varric here has a habit of construing reductive nicknames for all of us. They are below his literary talents, if you ask me”, Dorian interrupted.

“Shush, Sparkler”, the dwarf quieted him.

“So”, Delrin saw Mira’s gaze landing on him, “Knight?”

“So it seems”, he rolled his eyes.

“Is it because of the Templar thing, or is it because you’re chivalrous and gallant?”, she asked seriously which evoked few “awwws” from the crowd that immediately made her fluster.

“Chivalrous and gallant?”, Varric raised his eyebrows. “I might steal it for my book.”

Mira blushed quite heavily.

“I’ve always assumed it’s the Templar thing”, Delrin responded and smiled at her. “But thank you.”

“What would Mira’s nickname be?” Dorian demanded to know.

“I have few ideas…” Sera coughed and Delrin gave her the most murderous look to stop her from
saying the inevitably inappropriate comment. “Alright, Ser Knight, I won’t share them, no need be so… chivalblabble. Stupid word!”

Thank the Maker. Barris had enough conversations with Sera to know that whatever her ideas were, they were hardly something Mira would appreciate. He had few guesses about what the archer had in mind. He probably should not be thinking about it right now himself either.

“Could I hope for something relating to my profession?”, Mira asked almost pleadingly.

“Not after the whole chivalrous comment”, Varric laughed.

“Who’s Curly by the way?”, Delrin could see Mira glancing through the crowd. “I… couldn’t guess, honestly.”

“It would be me”, said Commander dryly.

“Really?” She raised your eyebrows. “Forgive me for saying that, but your hair isn’t that curly. Mine is.”

“It was at one point, Blushes”, Varric responded and Delrin could see the sudden realization befalling Mira’s face as the flush on her cheeks deepened.

“Please don’t”, she whispered to the dwarf seriously.

Delrin certainly noticed her blushing before, and frankly he did find it somewhat adorable himself. Most people with her skin tone flushed easily, but he could clearly see that Mira was now genuinely embarrassed. He never realized it might bother her that much.

“I… have no control over it”, she added faintly.

“I see certain charm in it”, Dorian added even though Barris wish he didn’t, “Knight and his blushing lady.”

Mira certainly got quiet after that comment and Delrin wanted to throttle the Tevinter mage.

“If it makes you feel better, Mira”, Blackwall looked at her empathically, “half of us thoroughly hates our pet names.”

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It took at least ten painful minutes for Mira’s cheeks to feel cooler. Fucking Varric. As much as she loved his books, that truly stung a bit. First of all, the teasing about the words she used to describe Delrin was… slightly uncomfortable to say the least. Second of all, yes, she blushed. She was a redhead with a pale skin and slight social anxiety in a new environment. Of course she blushed. The polite thing was to never ever point that out.

She certainly wanted to remain as quiet as possible for the rest of the evening to spare herself from further embarrassment.

“So, Knight”, Mira noticed Varric leaning towards Delrin, “how long are you staying and when are you going next?”

“You know I can’t tell you”, he replied, “ask Cullen though he will be as tight lipped as I am. Why don’t you go and pry Maxwell? He is your best bet.”

“Captain Barris is staying until Satinalia”, Leliana interjected firmly.
Satinalia, Mira thought. That was slightly over a month away. Somewhat the thought he would be here at Skyhold for that long made her feel better.

“We’re hosting the proper Ball”, Josephine’s eyes glimmered with clear enthusiasm, “It is imperative that we show thanks to our supporters.”

“Ugh”, Seeker rolled her eyes, "We’re the Inquisition started by the Holy Writ…”

“None of this brings coin, Cassandra”, the Inquisitor noticed, “we receive them thanks to Josephine’s efforts. Holy Writ alone doesn’t fund wars. We don’t rely on taxation because we have no one to tax. We rely on our allies. Believe me when I say this is necessary.”

“You all know very well this is necessary”, the Ambassador added gently, “we’ve had continued support from Marquise Hedinelle who has visited us before, for example. The Satinalia Ball is a very appropriate way of garnering more allies.”

“I am forever grateful I’ve escaped this life”, the warrior remarked dryly.

“I bet you attended some balls in your days”, Dorian answered amused, “didn’t your family throw suitors at you?”

“They did”, Cassandra scoffed, “I just had more sense than to pledge myself to a stranger in marriage just so I can be secure…”

“Cassandra!”, Leliana scolded the woman.

Oh, the prickle in Mira’s heart was so sudden and unexpected. She flushed heavily again and it did not help that everyone immediately looked at her.

Seeker turned red herself. “I didn’t mean…”

“It’s fine”, Mira answered flatly.

“I am truly—“

“It’s fine”, she repeated more sternly.

It wasn’t fine. She suddenly felt so exposed, ashamed and hurt.

Of course the powerful warrior Cassandra undoubtedly was would look down upon Mira’s choice of letting herself to be married off for protection. Seeker wasn’t talking about their marriage in particular, but it fit, didn’t it? Even if Mira didn’t really give herself away, not entirely. Was Cassandra ever powerless?

How many of them felt slightly awkward, embarrassed at the decisions she had made? They all still were looking at her.

Mira didn’t regret her choice. Maybe if it was any other man she would. She likely would. But whatever their marriage was, it wasn’t meaningless to her. Leliana made sure to explain that it was forever, and real and binding. So Mira tried. Despite how absurd it all was she genuinely tried to get to know him. To be kind. To open up. To try to make it as bearable as possible for both of them. To build some connection. To build friendship. He had certainly tried doing the same. It wasn’t like they had any other choice at this point except to try living their vows with some decency and kindness towards each other.
Delrin meant something to her. He was the closest person she had here. Perhaps he was even the only person. She was friendly with her coworkers, but it was still superficial. Clearly it would be hard to form friendships with the Inner Circle given what they all seemed to think of her.

It also hurt because Mira admired Cassandra. Cassandra was there when Micah got hurt, and she was instrumental in allowing Mira to do her job, checking up on them, managing the surgeon, listening to Mira’s directions. Cassandra was bold and direct, and she was honest and principled at the same time. There were few things in life that Mira valued as much as honesty and virtue. When Seeker said the words she did, it hurt more for that reason.

Mira chose to stay silent. She knew the words to express her feelings, but it was too risky to say them out loud. She wasn’t going to try to carry the weight of that conversation. What could she say to them? None of them knew her heart.

Except Delrin. Delrin who just sighted heavily by her ear. Mira could guess he didn’t appreciate the comment himself. To be fair, no one probably considered him weak. He chose to carry a burden of their marriage, for whatever reason. She was the burden. They probably considered him noble, Mira thought bitterly. He was noble and kind, her thoughts softened immediately. And he must have liked her in some way for them to have all the conversations they’ve had. He didn’t avoid her company, he seemed to rather enjoy it. She knew he wasn’t pretending when he said she was easy to talk to.

Damn. Why did it hurt so much?

“Lady Mira?”, Solas spoke first and she turned to him.

Why the title? She winced internally.

“Mira,” she managed to say quietly as she cleared her throat from emotion. “Please.’

“Mira. I’ve been very curious to ask you about your skills and abilities. We’ve all heard how you helped save that boy. I also chatted with Isanna from the infirmary. She remarked how unusual your scope of knowledge is and how much you seem to know about bodies and their functionality.”

It had to be an act of kindness to distract her, but Solas also looked genuinely intrigued. Maybe focusing on her work would bring back some sense of competence and power in her.

“Well”, she stated carefully, “I studied medicine at the university. The education of a medic continues our whole life. The studies are very thorough and challenging, and there’s plenty of time to practice.”

“I was meant to ask how did you study to get so familiar with the body?”

“Oh”, she shook her head awkwardly, “that.”

Delrin was sitting right next to Mira and he could literally feel her body next to him. She froze after Cassandra’s awful comment and hasn’t relaxed since despite speaking calmly. She was playing with her fingers as she always did when she was nervous and he wondered if there was anything he could say or do to make her feel better. He wanted to touch her hand as she did for him at the Chantry, but in the present company and in the light of Seeker’s words it seemed like a bad idea. He wouldn’t even be able to whisper anything into Mira’s ear since everyone was sitting so closely.
He could feel Mira’s body shifting as she took a deep breath to steady herself. Cassandra at least had the decency to look horribly guilty. He truly liked the Seeker but her sense of tact and decorum sometimes just wasn’t there. She shot him an apologetic glance.

“Well”, he heard Mira’s voice just at his right side. She was looking at the table, not at anyone in particular. “The training consists of various elements, but I suppose what you’re asking for… I’ve dissected a lot of cadavers to learn about human bodies before ever touching a live patient.”

“Oh that’s morbid.” Varric noticed amused while Dorian raised his eyebrows.

Delrin didn’t know that detail either but somehow it did make sense.

“The bodies are donated voluntarily, just so you know. You can state your wishes in your will”, Mira added heavily. “Nobody is doing anything nefarious. Honestly, I don’t imagine you can learn as much any other way. The fact that Navarra is the place in Thedas with most advanced anatomical knowledge is exactly due to that reason. They dissect.”

“Darling, that’s just really unsavory to imagine”, Vivienne grimaced her beautiful face.

“It is unsavory”, Mira shrugged. “The smell is the worst. The worst physical aspect of being a medic is the smell for me, hands down. Medicine is unsavory in general. There are graceful moments, but overall it’s tedious, mundane and disgusting. You cannot learn it merely from the books. You need to know all the theory at the back of your head, but that’s not really how you become a practitioner. My job is largely about recognizing the patterns, diagnosing, following the guidelines of care. I depend on my senses. And to see and recognize means that I had to have seen it before. To know how and where place my hand or tools, what to look for, what to notice. To rotate the bone or a joint I need to know how the body is supposed to move in the first place. I depend on my eyes and hands. I’m grateful for what I’ve learned and I’m grateful for the way I’ve learned it. Thedas doesn’t have many things I’m used to. In many ways it’s more difficult here. The way I was trained means that maybe I won’t maim you or kill you if you end up under my care.”

“I feel thoroughly reassured”, The Inquisitor raised his glass with a smile on is face.

Delrin reminded himself of Mira’s tracing her fingers on his body while gently pushing in some places. She never said exactly what she was looking for, but it was clear that she had a very clear idea what to ask of him and what to do. She didn’t seem flustered or shy at all. She never did when she was discussing medical matters.

Solas was right to ask. Just this short conversation made Mira slightly more sure of herself.

“Why medicine, if you don’t mind me asking?”, Solas wondered. “You’re clearly an educated woman, Mira. Why did you choose that area to devote yourself to?”

“Yeah, that’s so creepy, innit?”, Sera added.

Mira bit her lip and looked unhappy again.

“There were many reasons”, she responded simply.

She was guarded again, her walls now higher. He finally managed to catch her eye and her glance was sharp at first but then immediately mellowed. He suddenly felt the warmth spread over him. What then followed was the slight pinch of shame because he did absolutely nothing to help her in any way.

“I’m quite tired”, he said, not feeling tired in the slightest, “it’s been a trying day”, it truly hasn’t,
“and I’m going back to the quarters. You could walk with me if you would like to.”

The relief and gratitude fell on her face so rapidly that he was sure that anyone at the table could see it. He didn’t care.

“Yes”, she responded quickly, “I hope you can all forgive me but I truly am exhausted.”

They said their goodbyes and left.

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The second they crossed the door to one of the hallways leading to their quarters Mira immediately felt like the weight fell off her shoulders. She still felt all the places where it prickled and hurt, as if she had tiny wounds on her heart. Surely how she felt was only exacerbated by her sense of fatigue and exhaustion. She just wanted to take a hot bath and finally relax.

“Can I carry that bag for you?”, Delrin asked gently, as if unsure whether he should have.

“Could you? I would appreciate it. It’s heavy.” She handed it to him. She carried a lot in it. She certainly felt her right shoulder slightly ache. “Thank you, really.”

“No problem.”

They walked to their quarters surrounded by comfortable silence. Delrin’s presence was familiar and soothing, and Mira felt like she didn’t need to pretend with him. He was seeing her every day and every night. There was a level of ordinary intimacy they’ve shared. To Mira’s surprise she never felt annoyed by his company. He knew how to be quiet without being awkward and she liked their talks as well.

They finally reached their room and as usual, Delrin started by quickly examining his sword and hanging to on a weapon rack. They haven’t known each other for long and most of the time they’ve been apart but it tugged at her heart how quickly his routine became so recognizable. She liked watching him doing all that.

He looked particularly handsome tonight, Mira realized suddenly. She was too distracted during the dinner, but now she could see he was not wearing any of his jackets or armor. He wore a simple gray wool sweater and a pair of black leather breeches. If those were jeans, he could honestly walk the streets of any city on Earth without looking out of place.

It would be so nice to hug him. She loved the feel of wool.

Maybe the wool wasn’t the reason.

“Mira?”, he distracted her from her thoughts. “I… I’m really sorry for tonight.”

She furrowed her eyebrows slightly and felt the uneasiness once again settle in her stomach.

“It’s fine”, she simply repeated the phrase she used before and watched him hesitate.

“May I be blunt?”, he finally asked and she simply nodded. “I’d like to think that I know you at least a little at this point. I can tell when you’re uncomfortable or upset.”

She blushed slightly, although it wasn’t that surprising. He was smart and observant. They were living together.

“I’m so much better now when we’re alone”, she whispered.
“Good”, he simply responded. “Listen, I know Cassandra and she can be horribly tactless and say things without realizing the impact of her words. I’m sorry…”

“I’m ashamed”, Mira blurted out suddenly without even thinking.

“What?”

She could feel her face warming up rapidly and she covered it with her hands. “Fuck Varric. Now I feel so self conscious.”

“It’s alright”, he said gently.

“I am ashamed of how they might see me. How they see me.”, Mira finally looked back at him. “I am ashamed because I know that even though Cassandra didn’t mean me by her comment, her comment did fit me and what I did. And it’s hard for me to reconcile it with how I perceive myself. But it’s not only that. I am angry. I am angry because it was my choice and I feel they have no right to judge me for it. Then… Don’t take it the wrong way. I don’t mean anything inappropriate by it. But I don’t regret it. I... I like you. As a person. Perhaps it’s selfish to say but you’ve certainly made everything much more bearable. I like you.”

“I don’t take it the wrong way”, he responded calmly, his green eyes looking at her warmly. “I like you too.”

Mira felt like the knot in her stomach slowly dissipating. She could suddenly breathe easier.

“Thank you. Do you want to shower? If so, can you go first? I intend to sit in the bathtub for an hour or more.”

“Sure, I can do it now”, he collected his clothing and stepped towards the bathroom as Mira took off her shoes.

“Mira?”, he whispered half-way. “I don’t regret it either. Just so you know.”

Her heart didn’t really skip a beat but it sure felt like it.

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Mira already fell asleep. The room was covered in darkness except one tiny reading candle by Delrin’s bedroll. He felt completely awake and decided to get his chess set and practice by himself. He hasn’t done it in a while, but playing together with Cullen today brought him much entertainment, and that seemed like a good idea to pass the time. He was so focused that his body jerked slightly when he heard Mira’s voice.

“I didn’t know you played chess”, she sounded curious while looking at him, her voice slightly lower than usual.

“Did my candle wake you up?”, he asked concerned. “I could move to the kitchens…”

“No. I can’t fall asleep for some reason.”

“Sorry to hear that. I do play chess, but not too often. I won with Cullen today and the game was pretty good. It’s a lot like planning the battle.”

“Is it really like planning the battle?”, she asked with some amusement in her voice. “So you think you’re good?”
“I am decent.”, he eyed her curiously. Her eyes were twinkling. “Do you play?”

“I do. I am decent too”, she laughed. “Would you like to…? I could use a win to improve my mood after today.”

He smirked to himself. “You’re challenging a man who battles for a living.”

Mira moved to sit down across him on his bedroll. It felt much more intimate for some reason. He has seen her wearing the nightgown many times before but not like this. Now her silhouette was fully lit by the candle. He could see her skin glow. He could see the shadow of her curves underneath the white linen.

She chuckled softly. “I know better than to challenge you to a sword fight, but it’s a chess game, Delrin. And you just revealed your weakness.”

“What is that?”, he raised his eyebrows thoroughly intrigued while cleaning up the board, “Black or white?”

“White. Well… a smart man once told me that getting cocky is a common mistake, one that many men make”, she slightly bit her lip smiling as she was setting up the pieces.

He said that. He used those exact words after he won his spar fight with Rylen, the first day she saw him training. It was surprising enough she remembered it so well, and even more surprising that she now would use his own words against him. He laughed loudly.

“How convenient that losing in chess doesn’t kill you. I can be more competitive now.”

“Perhaps you’re entirely wrong then. Perhaps chess is not like a battle, and perhaps what you do for a living doesn’t matter as much. You don’t have the same stakes.”

Her wittiness was beyond adorable. He could feel his own cheeks getting warmer. She wouldn’t notice, but he could feel it.

Mira looked at the board way more than at him, which allowed him to look more at her in return. Sweet Andraste. He really liked her. She was so focused on every move on a chessboard, her brows furrowed slightly and her lips twitched gently. Whether she was truly good at chess would remain to be seen, but she surely would not be able to play the Wicked Grace well.

“Mage to G4”, he moved his piece.

“Wait”, she looked at him confused, “you call it a Mage? It makes sense, I guess, but can you just name the pieces just so I am sure?”

“Tower, Knight, Mage, Queen, King…”

“Got it.”, she sighed. “Hmmm, is there castling in your rules?”

“Sure there is.”

“Good.”

She played surprisingly aggressively, but not in a bad way. She lost both knights relatively quickly.

“Your poor Knights”, he murmured. “That’s my favorite chess piece.”

“Is it?”, she laughed, “that’s not common, though maybe not unsurprising. And now I think again
about Varric’s nicknames.”

“I can certainly commiserate with you.”

“I really thought yours was rather fetching”, she said almost absentmindedly, focused on the game. Delrin wanted her to think that he was rather fetching.

Maker’s breath.

She leaned over slightly and he could see a bit of her cleavage, enough to slightly distract him.

“Mage to B4. Check”, she announced.

He wasn’t that distracted. He covered his King with a Knight. She did queenside castling. Interesting. He moved his Tower closer to the King.

“Are you getting defensive?”, Mira asked playfully while taking the Knight with her Tower.

“You are the one who just sacrificed your Tower”, he said as he used his Tower to take over hers.

“Well… Tower to D1”, she covered her own King with the remaining one. He moved his Queen.

“Mage to D7. Taking your Tower. Check”, she continued.

Another check that couldn’t be fulfilled but she definitely tried.

“Knight to D7, taking your Mage”, he responded.

“Aww, your Knights are always there for the King. It’s endearing”, she grinned amused. “Queen to B8. Check.”

“Why… My knight is right there. Knight to B8.”

“Tower to D8”, she announced satisfied. “Checkmate. Tower is my favorite chess piece, by the way.”

“Fuck”. She had another Mage on G5, and he couldn’t move. He laughed. “I can’t believe I didn’t see it.”

“I know it probably will be much harder to win next time, but this feels… Quite satisfactory”, she beamed. “It’s the first time I’ve heard you curse, I think. And that certainly improved my mood.”

Mira looked so happy in that moment that he felt his heartbeat quickening. Maker’s breath. All he wanted to do was to take her in his arms and kiss her and make her laugh more.

You’re kind and honorable. It’s not difficult to trust you. That’s what she said just few days ago, and she meant it. Sweet Andraste, Mira wasn’t the person to say things she didn’t mean. Which was precisely why he certainly couldn’t entertain any thoughts about acting on his attraction. She hasn’t even flirted with him, he was just… so foolishly smitten. So utterly and foolishly smitten. She was always there, and he couldn’t avoid her presence. He didn’t want to either. Every day they spent together he became more fond of her.

“I’m glad”, he finally smiled to her, “losing to you did not ruin my mood.”

“Well”, she looked at him warmly, “That’s good. I wanted to win, not to crush you.”
“I will demand a rematch, just so you know.”

“Well, you know where to find me”, she whispered sweetly.

Delrin felt his heart beat faster. He knew where to find her.

Right here.

“Yes”, he finally managed to answer.

“I think I might sleep better now”, she said and slightly leaned it and gently touched the necklace he wore. “It’s nice to see you still wearing it.”

“It was a gift after all”, his voice came out slightly coarse, “if you ever want it back…”

“No”, she said. “I like seeing it on you.”

There were so many things he wanted to say in response but somewhat none of them felt right.

“Alright”, her voice was gentle and quiet. “I really need to go to bed now”. She placed her hand on his shoulder for just a second. “Goodnight, Delrin.”

‘Goodnight, Mira”, he brushed her palm with his fingers.

“Thank you. For being there for me.”

“Anytime… You know where to find me too.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading and commenting. You guys are the best. Truly.

I have to admit I actually love both Varric and Cassandra, but I completely see them being hurtful without the intent to do so.

Poor Mira. That was certainly a rough day for her.

Don't worry, she will develop some friendships eventually as well. ;)

Next chapter: Delrin finds out more of Mira's past and family.
Catching Breath

Chapter Summary

Delrin learns a lot about Mira's past.

Chapter Notes

TRIGGER WARNING: Description of domestic violence. It is brought up in the conversation.

Also, a reminder: the relationship between the main protagonists is and will always be safe.

I always try to be sensitive when touching upon such topics.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Second Week of Harvestmere, 9:42 Dragon, Skyhold

When Mira was focused, her whole body changed. She was in charge. The seriousness manifested on her face. Her eyes where glancing at various points of his face and body, without ever stopping for longer than a second. Her hands worked very swiftly. Even her hair were tied up now, only one loose curl falling down. Any awkwardness or clumsiness that she sometimes displayed was long gone at the moment.

Mira was confident in her work.

She was trained well. She had to have done it thousand times. It showed.

Delrin liked seeing her like that.

They were both on the cold stone floor of an otherwise empty indoor training room. Apparently there was a factor that Mira has never encountered in her practice, one she needed to familiarize herself with - the armor.

“Remember when I told you about the rescue breaths and the chest compressions I performed on Micah?”, she asked.

He remembered.

“Well, there is no way I or anyone can do it on someone who is wearing a breastplate. Moreover, in case of most hemorrhages or many injuries I need to be able to swiftly remove… the other parts.”

“You could just cut the leather straps holding…”

She glowered at him so sternly he immediately stopped talking.
“Thank you for providing that obvious answer, Delrin. I know. I am not planning on fidgeting with unbuckling anything. Still, I need to know whether it’s faster to cut it from the top and just pull it, whether I need to completely remove it, whether the torso part gets in a way as I try to do the compressions, whether the scissors I have are strong enough or whether I need a dagger or perhaps a scalpel, whether I need assistance of another person at any moment. They key is not whether it’s possible. Of course it’s possible. My aim is to find the most effective way for specific purpose of providing life saving care, to standardize the approach. First and foremost I need to check how efficiently I can roll you from your stomach to your back when you’re essentially covered in metal. It’s not the weight that’s my concern, it’s that it might be more difficult for me to grab you. I don’t know. I haven’t done it. Maybe it will be easier than I assume. Which is why it’s so crucial to me to try it. Anyway, thanks for helping.”

So they practiced, or rather Mira practiced, since his role was to be “essentially a dead weight”. Those were the exact words she used to scold him for apparently assisting her too much with the rolling. She was good at reprimanding, he had to give her that.

She practiced removing the breastplate using various blades and various techniques. Delrin wondered how in the Void did Harritt agree to provide all of this leather to be essentially destroyed but Mira didn’t seem to be concerned about it at all.

“Ouch”, he complained when she tried to take off the helmet he was wearing.

“You know”, she said somewhat amused, “for a man who’s not supposed to be breathing you are indeed quite expressive.”

“Forgive me for rather not getting decapitated.”

“Believe me”, she was gentler in her approach nonetheless, “if you were truly not breathing this would be the last of your worries. Some of those helmets are idiotic. This has no mouth opening, just the narrow whatever here.”

“I don’t like them either. That’s an enclosed type of helmet. The opening is wide enough to sneak potions through.”

“Narrow enough to make it impossible to place one’s mouth on another person though. Not good for me. That’s what I need to do provide rescue breaths.”

“Like… kissing?”, he asked without even thinking.

She laughed, the seriousness on her face suddenly evaporating for a moment.

“Not when you do either of those right”, she chuckled and something about that response made him feel warmer, “Put that one on. I’d like to see how that flap works.”

It was his time to smirk.

“It’s a bevor, not a flap.”


“Open the visor first”, he instructed, “then pull down the bevor.”


“You know I could see you through the visor this whole time, right?”
“Shhhhh”, she furrowed her brows, “don’t distract me from saving your life.”

He swallowed his saliva. He knew that what they were doing had a purpose, an important one. He would be furious if any of his soldiers did not appreciate the gravity of the work they were doing. Still, she was kneeling by his side with her hands on his face. That one loose curl reached his cheek and she apologized for that while tucking it behind her ear. Sweet Andraste, he could study the perfect shape of his lips, that’s how close she was.

“I think we’ve done enough for today”, she patted him on the chest approvingly, “thanks for the help. It’s somewhat a shot in the dark but my goal now, aside from regular work at the infirmary, is to create a set of guidelines on what to do in specific life threatening situations in the field. I think that using mundane medicine alongside magic is the most effective approach. I can’t do proper research, obviously, so it’s all the guess work and common sense… It seems worth trying, at the very least. We need to invest in some sort of first aid. It hasn’t been long at the infirmary but we haven’t lost a patient yet despite at least three close calls. But it matters little when they mostly die in the field.”

He felt suddenly incredibly guilty over his own thoughts from a second ago. She was thinking about saving lives, he was thinking about her lips. Sweet Andraste.

“We do have some training in regards to wound care and managing the injuries”, he observed.

“I know”, she shrugged. “Stitches showed me. I have discussed it extensively with Ellendra as well. There is a lot of place for improvement. Which takes time, but some things are worth pursuing. Where I come from, combat medicine is truly something. Something I have never trained in, sadly, beyond the very basics of emergency care. It requires a different set of considerations and different decision making process too. I have a lot to learn about how to even begin to do it here.”

“So, how does the learning look like?”

“Well”, she looked at him curiously, “I suppose overall it’s not unlike what you do. A lot of it is having drills and practicing. That’s how you hone any skills. Some things for me are now just… muscle memory, even. I don’t even think much when I stitch. But sometimes, as it seems, it all starts with you and me and this small room. Thanks for today, really.”

“No problem. After all, since I am a soldier, any improvement on safety is for my benefit as well.”

“Yes”, her blue eyes studied him intensely, “That thought had crossed my mind as well.”

They packed all the equipment they were using and finally unwound by sitting on the floor. Mira lifted her hand and let her curls come down as she shook her head. Delrin loved seeing her like that, relaxed and comfortable, with her fiery hair wild and disheveled. She was very careful with other people, as she was very careful around him at first. He was truly relieved to see that things had changed. She talked quickly and eagerly, telling him stories, and he couldn’t help but smile a lot.

“…anyway, Dagna thinks that this is entirely feasible”, Mira finished triumphantly, “Even Sera seemed borderline impressed. I think she actually likes me now. I think I actually like Sera.”

“Wait, Sera? What is Sera doing at the Undercroft in the first place?”

“Sera and Dagna are together, you didn’t know that?”
Delrin laughed so loudly his voice filled the whole room.

“Sweet Andraste”, he finally admitted, “Now that you’ve said it it does make the perfect sense. But Sera? I find her… difficult to converse with.”

“Once we have moved beyond bees and peaches, so to say, I found that… I don’t know. Sera is weird and inappropriate and arguably annoying, but she’s also non threatening - not in a serious way. She cares about a lot of things. And she’s just… She said to me that being scared of things that are scary is normal. A lot of things are scary for me here and most of my time is spent pretending that I know more about this world than I really do. Sera doesn’t judge people for their fears. She empathizes, however weirdly she tends to show it.”

“I never thought about her that way. Doesn’t she find what you do… creepy?”

“Maybe she did at first. We’ve had few chats and I think she now finds me… tolerable. I know it might be weird to you but what she says really resonates with me sometimes. Skyhold is full of mages and Templars. Goodness, even spirits are involved, but from Sera’s tales I see a different Thedas. Different than Genitivi presented as well. People who have never seen magic and are terrified of it. People who don’t know the difference between various organizations. After all, does it really matter if the sword they are threatened with belongs to a Templar or a city guard or a Seeker?

“I suppose not.”

“Even you”, she added gently, “I presume you don’t feel that way about yourself. How… intimidating you might seem to some people. I have never seen you without your weapon outside our private quarters. Ever.”

“It’s my job as a Captain…”

“Yes, I know. But believe me, for some that sword embodies who you are. It… becomes you. It’s not. It shouldn’t. But it is that way for many people and Sera has the grace to know that.”

Mira was right, and he knew it. During his work as the Knight-Lieutenant he visited many villages and cities, and he was certain that the way people viewed him was entirely through the Order he represented. The Templar Order. As welcoming as people were when demons were wrecking havoc, his arrival almost always meant there would be some suffering, loss and pain involved.

“I see what you mean”, he whispered, “and it’s easy to forget about it. When it comes to my weapon… I didn’t even think to consider how bizarre it is for you. I just thought… Would you like to see the sword I’m carrying? Would you like to wield it?”

“Really? You’d let me? Isn’t it very… heavy?”

“Not at all”, he smiled standing up and extending his hand to help her, “It’s less than a kilogram. Now stand in front of me. It’s not that I don’t trust you but it’s a good practice to avoid pointing the weapon at someone unless you fully intend to use it”, he unsheathed the sword, “and now just grab the pommel as you’d give it a handshake. Not bad. Maker’s breath, your hands are small. Alright, straighten your wrist a bit and move your thumb here. Good. How does it feel?”

“Ha”, Mira’s voice was quiet and, to his surprise, full of wonder, “that is really much lighter than I expected. I… I can actually feel the balance with how the weight is distributed.”

“Do you? It’s an exquisite sword, I have to admit. It serves me well.”
“Does it have a name?” She asked so seriously that he couldn’t stop himself from laughing.

“No”, he finally responded, “did people in your world do that? I… don’t know anyone who would name their sword. The inlays or inscriptions are somewhat common. I… well, I have a part of Chant inscribed on my blade, here. I… realize it might sound…”

“I shall endure”, she whispered as she read the inscription. “That’s beautiful.”

“It might seem a bit foolish…”

“It doesn’t”, she handed him the sword back and he sheathed it again. Her bright eyes glistened with warmth and sympathy, “and those are certainly words that have meaning. Anyway, thank you. Familiarity always helps.”

He turned his mind instead to the sudden idea on how to help Mira feel more secure and comfortable here in Thedas.

“You know, Mira”, he started thoughtfully, “I have been training people my whole adult life. I’m versed well enough in a lot of combat techniques. I could show you some self-defense or teach you how to use…”

“No”, her refusal was so stern and sudden that it caught him by surprise. She tensed up momentarily, just for a split second. Something dark and painful appeared on her face, something he hasn’t seen before. The change was so rapid and fleeting he didn’t even know what to say. She looked down before lifting her head up again.

“Thank you”, she finally muttered. “That’s very… thoughtful, but no. I can’t. I know it’s done all the time in sparring and training, but I just… don’t want to. Not with you. I don’t doubt your abilities, it’s just… I don’t want an image of you lunging at me or restraining me even in training. I just…”

‘Sure”, he replied with his throat suddenly dry, “It’s fine. Mira, it’s fine.”

The cold shiver went down his spine. Delrin was not an ignorant man. He could imagine the likely reason behind that refusal. She had certainly seen enough soldiers train and spar. It was physical, there was no doubt about that. Every training required a dose of pretend, of being hit, hitting back, being hit again, even in the mildest form. Every self-defense required practicing, being grabbed and restrained or pulled and then at the very least fighting to escape.

Mira didn’t want that, not with him.

The sudden tension and nervousness, the shift in her expression, her eyes, her body, her voice… All of it told him that someone did hurt her in the past. He wouldn’t dare to ask. That certainly was not something he had any right to ask directly. The knowledge that it had happened was enough. He felt the mixture of anger, sadness and a huge wave of protectiveness completely flood over him. He tightened his jaw and took a deep breath.

“Would you… Can we go and eat something?”, she asked the question before he could even open his mouth.

“Of course”, he said softly, “Herald’s Rest, the dining hall…?”

“Dining hall?”, she looked up to him, still serious and quiet, “I heard from a very credible source
that there are pancakes for lunch today.”

“Pancakes”, he smiled at her gently, “as you wish.”

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Delrin was far too decent to ask questions and Mira was entirely aware of that. He was also far too intelligent and observant to not consider the implications of what she had said. Countless thoughts crossed her mind about what he could be imagining and she cursed internally. This felt so... stupid and humiliating. Part of Mira wanted to say “fuck pancakes” and grab Delrin and go back to their quarters so that she could tell him everything. But the guarded and careful part of her, the one that usually won, compelled her to do nothing.

At least she had enough sense to refuse his offer to train together. This could likely end up badly. It wasn’t that Mira thought Delrin would hurt her in any way. He made her feel safe. She believed she was safe with him. That feeling of security was so wonderful, so valuable that she wouldn’t risk anything to ruin it. He has never been anything but gentle and considerate. I was reassuring, perhaps even healing.

The dining hall was not as empty as Mira wished, but at least they truly served pancakes. She stacked her plate with apple and cinnamon ones. They sat down alone, in silence.

“Would you mind if we join you?”, the Solas’ voice called. He was accompanied by Cole.

“Sure, sit down”, Mira said very quickly, before Delrin could even respond. He definitely glanced at her quietly and she wondered if he noticed she was avoiding the conversation with him.

Anyway, it worked. It allowed her to guard up and stay silent. She didn’t want to talk, not now, not when the memories came back with full force. Delrin asked about it before, once, when he asked about her family and how she never mentioned them. He didn’t pry, but he had to ponder, especially now.

Mira wasn’t ashamed. She wasn’t afraid to say “I come from abusive family”. She wasn’t certain if she could stop herself at that. Thedas gave her anonymity, the blank slate. The illusion of no past. No one knew her father. No one knew anything. It was easy to push some things aside. She thought of Ida every single day being here. She only thought of her parents when Delrin asked, and today. She was used to treating them as if they didn’t exist, but now all her memories had flown to the surface. All those horrendous, crippling memories.

“Forgive me for asking”, Solas turned towards her after a while, “I was actually wondering if you’ve given any thoughts on how you crossed the worlds exactly. I suspect that with your education you could have at least few theories.”

“I have a few”, she responded absentmindedly, her mind distracted and confused. “Mostly just ramblings.”

“Amuse me?”, he said gently and Mira looked at him sharply, suddenly bothered.

“I am glad one of us finds it amusing”, she countered coolly. The shadow fell on Solas’ face and he quieted his voice more.

“I have offended you. Forgive me. I should have shown more compassion around what had to be the worst day of your life”, Solas bowed and she just muttered another “I’m fine” while playing with the rim of her cup of tea.
The truth was, it wasn’t the worst. The day she found herself in Thedas wasn’t the worst day of her life.

“It wasn’t”, Cole unexpectedly announced and Mira spilled the tea all over herself, jumping up. “She tried catching her breath, clawing and fighting the darkness.”

“No”, she said so coarsely and so desperately. “No, no, no, no.”

“I want to help”, Cole whispered.

“No”, she repeated once again feeling the tears coming into her eyes, the familiar pangs of nausea and chest thudding, and she pushed her chair away and left, quickly and suddenly, without looking at anyone at the table.

“Mira”, Delrin’s voice called once she found herself in the quiet corridor. He must have followed her. She didn’t turn away, and she didn’t look at him. Mira didn’t want to face him, because she wouldn’t be able to hold it all in. Not with him.

“Don’t”, she barked, “come near me.”

“I… I won’t”, he responded faintly and the feeling of guilt appeared in her mouth.

“I’m sorry”, she whispered trying to hold her tears in, “I want to be alone now. I…”

She didn’t finish and for five long seconds Delrin stayed silent.

“I’ll bring the things you left back to our quarters”, he finally said calmly. “I… will see you later, Mira.”

She didn’t even realize she left her bag in the dining room.

“Mhmm”, she just muttered in response. “Tha… Thanks.”

Without looking back, she marched straight ahead and than just ran, wherever her legs led her.

Delrin didn’t follow. She knew he wouldn’t go against her wishes. He wasn’t that type of man.

She was certainly in the part of the castle she had never been before and frankly, Mira was lost. She was not crying anymore, just slightly whimpering. There was no one on the horizon. Everyone was probably either training or otherwise working. Suddenly one of the doors opened and she collided with a person walking out of them.

“Mira!”, the woman exclaimed.

Cassandra. Fuck.

Before Mira could respond with anything, Seeker gently grabbed her by the forearm and pushed her inside the room. That had to be Cassandra’s quarters. The bedroom was tiny, almost austere, with one door more probably leading to a bathroom. The bed was small and tidy, the nightstand was filled with books and papers. The second Mira found herself inside, she started crying again.

Cassandra sat down on the bed and gestured Mira to do the same.

“What happened?”, the warrior’s voice was direct, but not without concern. Unlike Delrin,
Cassandra was clearly not worried about appearing brash or forceful. “You can tell me anything.”

Even if Mira wanted to, she didn’t even know how to start.

“I… I was with Del… Delrin,” she started clumsily.

“Barris?!” Cassandra looked sounded aghast and stood up, “if he ever did anything to you, I will kill him myself.”

Goodness gracious, Mira believed her in an instant.

“No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no,” she shook her head so rapidly, “Cole was there…” Cassandra sighted with sudden understanding and sat down on the bad.

“Just tell me what happened”, she looked straight at Mira whose cries dissipated a bit.

“You can’t just demand from people to share their deepest feelings. That’s not how it works”, Mira noticed surprisingly dryly. “Do you have a handkerchief?”

“Yes”, Cassandra got up and gave it to her. “Ugh. You’re right. I have always been bad at this. I also realize that our last interaction was… bad as well.”, she sighted heavily.

“I told you it was fine.”

“It wasn’t fine and I am aware of that. I am not heartless.”

Mira looked at the woman in front of her. There was honestly and determination in Cassandra’s eyes. Everything she found admirable about her was still there and there was a hint of vulnerability as well, as if Seeker really cared what Mira thought of her.

“I was ashamed after what you said”, she finally admitted. “I don’t want anyone to see me like that. I know you could find me meek and pathetic…”

“I don’t think that”, Cassandra denied. “I don’t think that at all. In fact, I admire you.”


“Because you’ve been nothing but honest since the beginning. You’ve never lied about who you were. You’ve never lied about what you know. You’re a truthful person. That is rarer than you think, sadly. I consider it… noble.”

“I can’t lie well. It wouldn’t even be able to. Perhaps it’s not as noble as you think.”

“I can’t lie well as well, but it’s never just that, is it? We both know there’s more in it.”

It was true. They both sat in silence for a couple of minutes, not looking at each other. Mira’s eyes wandered around the room. There were a lot of books set up on the nightstand and then on the window sill. Aside from that, there was a weapon rack in the corner, then a small armor rack. Tiny dresser, no wardrobe. Cassandra lived simply.

She clearly waited for Mira to speak. It was obvious how much Seeker strained herself to not pry further.

“My father was abusive”, Mira admitted bluntly and without any warning “he beat and humiliated my mother, and hit me several times as well, although he mainly called me names. He was a powerful man. Cole revealed some of my memories out loud. Some… bad ones. That’s it. That’s
the story.”

“I’m really sorry.”

“I left after one night that was particularly bad. I never spoke to my father or my mother again. She stayed with him. I haven’t spoken to them in… seven years. Since I was seventeen years old.”

“Was something… done? About what your father did?”

“No”, Mira steeled her voice. “I didn’t tell anyone at the time. My mother begged me not to and I… I was too afraid. I knew they would deny it. There was never any… justice. I dealt with it. Mostly. It’s been a long time ago. I just… Sharing a life with someone, even just like that, it brings things to the surface. Delrin offered to teach me some self defense skills but I refused because I can’t… I can’t have him hit me. Not even like that. I just can’t.”

“I can teach you if that’s what you want”, Cassandra shrugged, “At least when I’m at Skyhold. At least very basic things.”

Mira looked at her. Cassandra was brash, harsh and probably not the most patient teacher. There was still something about her that made Mira think it was a good idea. Not to mention that she was a woman, and that alone made it feel different.

“Yes, if you want to”, Mira said. “I’ll do it. Thanks.”

The awkward silence fell upon both of them. Mira looked around the room once again, and the cover of one of the books by the nightstand caught her eye. The cover showed a… bare-chested man and it just seemed so… impossible. Was that…? Among this… austerity?

“So”, Mira couldn’t help but to giggle, “what have you been reading lately, exactly?”

Cassandra’s face turned red and she covered it with her hands, but then she laughed. Mira didn’t think she ever heard Seeker laugh like that.

“It’s "Sword and Shields". A romance written by Varric.”

“What?! Varric wrote a romance novel and no one told me? I read all of his books!”

“Clearly not all! You simply must read that one. It’s passionate, and romantic, and full of suspense and just perfect.”

Couple hours had passed and Mira still wasn’t back at their quarters. Delrin was worried. He was more worried than he wished to admit. He tried to busy himself and finish all the paperwork but he couldn’t sit still. He cleaned the floors just to distract himself from his thoughts.

It took him twenty minutes to talk to Cole and remind him to never ever reveal someone’s thoughts and feelings in public or anywhere for that matter, while Solas was making his useless comments about how denying Cole’s identity as the Spirit caused all that. Barris has rarely felt that irritated but he truly wanted to throttle that man.

The words Cole said lingered inside of his mind persistently. It wasn’t merely that though, it was also Mira’s reaction. He had seen her upset and he had seen her panic. This was different. Darker. The way she had told him to not come nearer…
Mostly he just wanted to know she was safe and well.

Finally he heard the steps in the corridor and his heart immediately started to beat faster. He stood up and waited.

She opened the door gently.

Mira definitely had been crying a lot. Her beautiful face was reddened and puffed up, her eyes glossy. She was carrying a book and she was still just her white linen shirt stained with tea.

“You’re cold”, he observed and she just nodded. He passed her the small blanket and she put the book down on the desk. She wrapped the fabric around her arms and just asked if they could sit down.

They sat on the floor at the foot of the bed, leaning against it. Mira crossed her arms. He wondered if he should say something himself, but he didn’t want to come off the wrong way, especially not after what she said in the corridor.

“I…”, she started, biting her lip, “I need to tell you something.”

“You don’t”, he replied slowly and carefully, “You don’t need to. You don’t owe me an explanation. You don’t need to say things you don’t want to say.”

“Cole had no right to say those words”, she growled quietly, “and I know he didn’t mean to. I know you warned me about it but it seemed so …impossible. Anyway, I know he didn’t mean to, Cassandra explained it once again.”

“You saw Cassandra?”

“I bumped into her and she dragged me into her bedroom and we… talked. I spent this whole time with her. Anyway…I feel it’s worse for me to imagine what you might be imagining than to tell you the truth. If… if you want to hear it. I don’t want to burden you…”

“Mira”, he interrupted her, “you don’t ever burden me. You can tell me anything you want.”

“Just give me a second”, she whispered, “I… don’t know how to start. I will probably cry again at some point.”

“That’s alright”, he said softly.

“Did… did you think I was hurt by someone I’ve been with?”

“The thought might have crossed my mind”, he admitted.

“I… I’ve never had bad experience like that da… uhm, courting. I’ve never had a lot of experience in the first place. It’s not that.”

It might have not been that, but there was something, and Delrin had a sinking feeling it was very serious. His heart thudded in his chest looking at the woman sitting next to him who appeared just so vulnerable covered in the blanket, with her arms crossed over her chest in defensive gesture.

He just waited. She took a deep breath.

“I grew up in a relatively wealthy home. My father was a doctor, like me. A medic. A surgeon. Whatever word you would use. My mother was one too, but she never worked after giving birth to me. Actually, my father was a doctor, but he was nothing like me and it’s not only because I am
young and inexperienced. My father was a brilliant doctor. A genius. I don’t say it to compliment
him, it’s just the fact. The things he did, Delrin… He was performing surgeries on babies’ hearts.
He saved countless of babies and children. Countless. He was loved, praised, blessed and adored
by his patients, his co-workers, everyone around him. He was treated like god. He essentially was
like a semi-god since I could have remembered, and I am entirely sure that’s how he has seen
himself his whole life.”

He could slowly imagine where this conversation was heading, and he braced himself. Men with
ego like that were more likely to… hurt others.

“My father was abusive”, she finally said, looking ahead. “Towards my mother and, to a much
lesser extent, towards me. He was very controlling. He would get irritated if something was not up
to his standards. My mother tried to anticipate his whims and wishes but of course that was
impossible. Our home felt always so tense and I had this sinking feeling in my body each time he
came home from work. He was my father and I loved him and I desperately wanted him to love
me, but at the same time I’ve hated him as long as I remember.”

Delrin fought his own wish to rub her arm in a reassuring gesture. He left his own home early, but
his childhood was a very happy one. Bann Barris was strict but he was a very loving father at the
same time, and he never hurt neither Delrin nor his brother, not to mention their mother. Ever.

“I’m sorry”, he only whispered.

“He liked drinking.” Mira continued, “I don’t think he was getting drunk at work, but he would
drink a lot after getting home. A lot. He would drink, he would become even more agitated than
usually, he would accuse my mother of being unfaithful, call her a whore, and then he would or
wouldn’t hit her, depending on the day.”

The quiet rage started brewing in his chest. He could hardly think of more dishonorable and
despicable behavior than hurting one’s own family. He took a deep breath to steady himself.

“He would go into those rages and accuse my mother of infidelity. It was absurd, and I doubt she
was ever unfaithful. She really was so focused on pleasing him. Everything about my mother
revolved around my father. She gave so much into this relationship that I feel I’ve never even
known who she really was. She loved horse riding, that I can tell you. Maybe the only time I saw
her fully happy was when we were at the stables. She was afraid of my father, and his reactions,
and in some way she would take it out on me. She was always suggesting I wasn’t good enough or
pretty enough or polite enough or thin enough. I was afraid of my father, but I’ve never been afraid
of her. Once I had reached my teen years our relationship got particularly horrible because I would
fight her on so many things. Never too drastically. I was always a good girl. Still, she would
threaten me with telling my father but she never did, either because she was afraid of what he
would do to her or she was afraid what he would do to me. I am… I am ashamed of it now. I know
how domestic abuse works. But in some way, when I was fourteen or fifteen I hated her more than
him. I hated her for being passive, for tip toeing around him, for never protecting me. She’s been
with him since she was twenty years old. He was the only thing she knew, and don’t get me wrong,
he had this… charm around him. People liked my father.”

Delrin knew the type of man Mira’s father was. The thought of her being a child and trying to
remain as safe as she could pierced through his heart. No child, no spouse, no person should be
going through abuse. Sadly, he was also aware that those things happened. Thankfully his own
father worshipped the ground underneath his mother’s feet. As it should be.

“Anyway”, Mira voiced was shaking at this point, “it got bad at one point. I left my parent’s home
when I was seventeen and I stayed with my grandmother. She never knew the truth. Maybe she
suspected it but we never talked about it. I’ve never spoken to my parents again. And… and perhaps not because I fully chose it myself. I couldn’t… but if they tried, I probably would not cease all contact. My… my mother stayed with my father. They cut me off. My grandmother died a year later and I moved abroad to study. I got help during my time at the university. I was… managing fine. Honestly, I am fine, most of the time. I actually was a part of a society for medical students that dealt with spreading awareness and combating domestic violence. Doing that was probably the most empowering thing I have ever done and… believe me, I’ve seen a lot of it as a doctor. Mo… Mostly women and children hurt by mostly men. Any.. anyway… I just… That’s… that’s why I didn’t want you to train me. I know you’re not… it’s just. I don’t want to even pretend, even like that.”

“I understand”, he whispered as gently as he could, “I really do. I am truly sorry you went through all of this. It’s… heinous.”

He could use many more words to describe the abuse Mira and her mother suffered. The anger was still there, bubbling quietly. How could a man… Fuck. He wasn’t going to waste his emotions on Mira’s father, who was a fucking coward and evil… Enough.

“There’s more”, Mira added suddenly in a tone that froze the blood in his veins. “There’s one thing more. I only told that story once, to… to a medic that dealt with… mind issues. Ida knew my family was abusive, several people did but I never… I have never told her what I’m going to tell you. It’s…” the few tears fell down Mira’s cheeks and Delrin’s heart broke, “it’s about the night I left home. And… it’s about what Cole said.”

She cried a bit more before angrily wiping her face and Delrin felt the lump forming in his throat.

“I rem… I remember it was winter, and it was snowing and I woke up to the sounds of my mother screaming. The noises were coming from the kitchen. I ran downstairs and she was laying on the floor and he was… he was just sta… standing there, slurring some words, completely dru… drunk and he was ki… kicking her so hard. I… I… I grabbed him to pull him away but… he was too strong. I took some pan or whatever and hit him… enough for him to stop hurting mom. And… and… well. Then he grab… grabbed me by my throat.”

The anger simmering in Delrin’s chest broke out and reached every fiber of his body. He clenched his jaw and ground his teeth. Mira was crying and whimpering and he wanted to comfort her but he just didn’t know how. He didn’t want to cross any of her boundaries, especially not after what she just told him.

“He grabbed me”, Mira added after a moment, her voice breathy, teary and quiet, “with both hands and he started… strangling me. That’s… that’s what Cole referred to. I… I only remember the fear and the feeling of not being able to breath and scratching his hands. I… I did not pass out and he did let go of me eventually and just… walked away. Went to sleep. I wanted to call for help, and my mother… she begged me not to. I just… left that night. I packed some things and left. My throat… everything hurt for several days and I had trouble swallowing food or talking. But it passed. And I’ve never talked with my father again. My grandmother did. I… I have never talked with my mother again either.”

Maker’s breath. Her father could have killed her. She could have died. Delrin certainly was experienced enough in combat to know how easy it was to kill someone by strangling. She certainly could have been killed that night and… the thought just left him breathless.

She buried her face in her knees and covered herself with her arms and he knew he had to say something eventually.
“I… I don’t know” she added barely audibly without lifting her head up, “if… if he wanted to... to… to kill me, ever for a second. I… don’t know if that even matters. I know none of what happened was my fault. But… it’s just…. I can’t even understand it.”

He shifted his body to get up and grab a handkerchief from the desk but as soon as he moved to his side Mira suddenly lifted herself as well and just… fell into his arms, wrapping her own around his neck and burying her face into his body. Her crying only intensified. He froze for a split second and then shifted back to lean himself on the side of the bed and gently scooped her as she landed on his lap. He hesitated slightly but then he embraced her gently and steadied himself, letting Mira cry her heart out.

She was shuddering. Her hair was all over the place. He could feel the weight on her body. The anger inside of him was overpowered by the sense of relief and gratitude. She could have died, but she didn’t. She survived. She was alive, and she was well, as well as she could be. She was capable, and kind, and intelligent, and full of ideas. She had the most beautiful laughter he has ever heard. She survived.

He hoped this was comforting for her because it certainly had been bizarrely soothing for him. Her hair smelled of elfroot and honey and she was hugging him so tightly.

It was good to hold her.

“Some…sometimes”, she breathed into his chest, still crying, “I feel so… like I’m un…unlovable. Like…like there’s something wrong with me.”

Oh, Mira, he thought as his heart clenched in pain. No. No. No.

“There’s nothing wrong with you”, he said firmly, but the words in his head didn’t stop there. There’s nothing wrong with you, he thought, on the contrary. You’re kind and sweet, but there’s nothing trite about the way you comfort people. You’ve been through so much and yet you seek and see good in others. You are sometimes guarded but you don’t hide yourself. You’re cautious when you don’t know someone but you’re braver than you think. There’s nothing cold about you. You’re warm and passionate. You can be surprisingly direct at times when you’re sure of yourself. You’re witty and smart, and I never get tired of talking with you. You’re… wonderful. “Nothing”, he added after a moment of silence, just to emphasize his words.

She clung to his body even harder. He wasn’t even sure if he felt her heart beat that fast or was it his own.

He didn’t know how long it lasted for, but they sat like this for a while, until her cries dissipated.

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Mira cried until it felt like there were no more tears left.

The sudden realization hit her.

“Are you…” she whispered still glued to Delrin’s body, “I am sorry, I basically threw myself into your arms…”

“I don’t mind at all”, he responded calmly, “if you’re comfortable.’

“I just don’t want you to think…” she couldn’t finish the sentence.
“I don’t think that”, his voice got even more soothing. “Stay as long as you like.”

So Mira did. She shifted slightly in his lap, and settled her face comfortably into his neck. The woody scent of his perfume mixed with the subtle smell of his body overwhelmed her nostrils even though her nose was stuffy from all the crying. His body felt warm, warm and safe, as if she buried herself under the covers on the coldest day of the year. Delrin’s arms were still wrapped around her, but his embrace wasn’t suffocating. She could easily pull away at any time.

Everything about Delrin embodied physical strength. He was tall and certainly could be imposing. He was built like a warrior. He was a warrior. She saw him spar and train, she knew how fast and fierce he could be. He had slaughtered many monsters, quite literally. He had killed people, too. His power and toughness were visceral part of him, flesh, blood and bone. She felt safe in his arms. It felt almost primal, the sense of protection offered by his touch. Despite the flutter of embarrassment at her own thoughts, Mira still allowed herself to cloak in his strength, just for a little bit.

Delrin wasn’t merely strong. He was also calm and gentle. Mira couldn’t even imagine him losing his temper. She saw him raise his voice during training, but she had never seen him furious. He was courteous and soft spoken, with voice warm and smooth. He didn’t seem to put much effort into being considerate, it was a part of his nature. When they got married she prayed for him to be kind, and whether anyone had heard the prayer or not, he truly was. It was easy to trust him. Easier than most people.

Still, neither of those - strength and tenderness - made Delrin the man he was. He was honorable. Honor was never just bestowed at birth, it was a result of choices made in life. He was devout, and despite Mira’s uncertainly about her own faith there was something both familiar and noble about his beliefs. His faith was tested, and shaken, and changed, but he pushed through the dark night of the soul and it told a story about his heart, the same story that was etched into his blade. He endured. Delrin was a man of duty, but that duty wasn’t blind or bound, it was chosen and carried bravely. His letters revealed a strong set of principles guiding him, and vulnerability around the choices he made, because he didn’t want to lead himself astray, or lead his men astray.

Perhaps it was easy to see his goodness considering they were joined in marriage. He was the man she vowed to spend her whole life with, and whatever guided her in that moment to make that promise, the only thing left now was to honor it.

Perhaps there was a minuscule piece of her heart she has already given him.

He was just right there, holding her patiently and asking for nothing.

“Are you ever angry?”, that was a stupid question, but she still wanted to hear the answer.

She could hear him swallowing before giving it.

“Yes”, he replied quietly, “I think everyone is sometimes angry.”

“I don’t think I’ve ever seen you angry.”

“Believe me”, he whispered somewhere right above her head, “I am angry now. At what you went through.”

“And yet you’re so gentle.”

“I… don’t see the opposition between the two.”
“Is it because you control your emotions so well?”

“Is that what you think?”, he moved slightly and she could feel his cheek rub on her forehead. “I can channel my anger relatively well. Control and composure are what makes me a good fighter. I know how to use my strength. But I honestly don’t think that alone is enough. And I am not… I have feelings like anyone else.”

“What do you mean when you say that control over emotions is not enough?”

“That is something I’ve learned in my years of commanding others and doing my work. I’ve seen my share of things. I’ve seen many men and few women who were violent and who acted cruelly or committed atrocities. Sometimes they lacked control, sometimes they were always in control, yet they still chose to use their power to hurt others. I have vetted countless soldiers and I know what qualities I am looking for. I value my own composure. It’s not necessarily the thing I’m looking for in others. I think it is much more important not to be controlling of those around you. You give a controlling person power over others and it is a recipe for disaster. I…”, his voice suddenly broke, “I realize how hypocritical it sounds from the mouth of someone who was a Templar for almost a decade.”

“I don’t think it sounds like that”, she whispered softly. “And I see what you mean.’

“Well”, he continued, “I look at people from my own squadron. Zuzu has poor impulse control. She is much better now, but it’s not within her nature. It will always be a struggle for her. But her temper doesn’t make her unsafe because of the fact that Lavellan is full of care and empathy. I want her to control herself better to not be reckless and to improve as a fighter, but I never worry about her hurting others needlessly. It’s not her personality that determines that. There’s more. There’s choice. That’s… that’s what I believe in.”

Words like these were the reason why Mira trusted him.

Still, there were thoughts lingering around her head that tried to sully it, to scare her, to make her hide away.

“I…” she started very quietly but he was so close he would undoubtedly hear her, “I dread the moment we’re going to fight.”

His whole body slightly shuddered once she said those words.

“Mira”, he pleaded, “can I see your face?”

She pulled away slightly and looked into his eyes. They were so close to each other she could vividly see the tiniest marks of his face. The green of his irises was surrounded by the prominent limbal ring. His eyes were beautiful and kind. Mira was certain her own face was red, puffy and shiny from all the crying but she didn’t mind him seeing that.

“I know words are hardly ever enough”, he spoke up again, “and I have wondered about that too, thought perhaps not the way you do. I know there might be times we disagree or argue. But… I will never harm you. Ever. I wish it was the most obvious thing in the world. I am sorry that it isn’t. You… It doesn’t matter what you say or do, I will never harm you.”

“But you could”, she barely managed to reply and there was an immediate horror appearing on his face which then turned into understanding.

“I know what you mean. And I couldn’t”, he said very sternly, “and I am sorry no one apparently told you so, because they should have before you stepped foot into the Chantry to marry me. If I
hurt you, if anyone did that to their family here in Skyhold they would be tried and judged for that. The laws in Thedas might slightly differ depending on location but I can tell you the punishment in Barrfield would be more severe than you think. I couldn’t. And I never will.”

The lump in her throat was so painful she was barely able to respond: “Thank…”

“Don’t”, his voice cracked, “I am begging you, don’t thank me. Don’t ever thank me for anything like that.”

Mira wouldn’t be able to say anything she wanted to say without crying yet again. She leaned in and kissed him gently on his cheek, right where he had the tiniest scar, just barely visible.

“Was that a thank you?”, he asked raspingly.

“No”, she cleared her throat. “That was just a kiss on the cheek.”

Before he could respond she buried her face into his neck again. They spent at least several minutes in silence before another question reached Mira’s ears.

“Would you like some of that sickeningly sweet tea you enjoy?”

“Yes”, she smiled, “I would like that a lot.”

Chapter End Notes

This was a difficult chapter to write, even though I've drafted it a long time ago.

If you're experiencing domestic abuse currently, please know that there is help available and that it's not your fault.

Also, you don't owe your past to anyone, including romantic partners. It can be healing to share, but it shouldn't be forced.

It is a very long chapter but I feel it was necessary to write it that way.

I don't think that experience define who Mira is, but I think it certainly shows some of aspects of her personality and who she is.

Thank you for reading, all the kudos. Remember I always love your comments as well. Also, we have reached 100 000 words! I didn't consider it a super slow burn time wise, but it's definitely slow considering the word count. Well. I hope you will be reading along. :)
Camaraderie

Chapter Summary

Mira makes a friend and Delrin spends time with his old one.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Second Week of Harvestmere, 9:42 Dragon Age, Skyhold

The war room felt cold and dark inside. Barris sat down at the Commander’s right side as Cullen announced the plans for taking over the Western Approach. It wasn’t going to be easy, and more importantly it was going to require a lot of resources to maintain the forces on such large territory and on such difficult terrain. Several elite squadrons were to be deployed right after Satinalia, alongside some regular troops. The Inquisitor was joining them as well, to close as many rifts as necessary. It was going to be a long deployment but Delrin at least hoped that the number of units alone would speed the mission. The division of labor was to provide challenging, each elite squadron was used to working individually. Fletcher, Rylen, Belinda, Rion, Sidony, Hall and himself were going, alongside the Iron Bull and his Charges. Including Cullen’s scouts and soldiers, there were easily over a hundred men and women just to secure the area. Scout Harding was already there setting up the forward camp and monitoring threats.

Blighted desert. Barris had been to Western Approach twice before and never to the worst part of the wasteland. He hated it both times. Currently the desert was hosting a High Dragon, multiple ruins that needed securing, Venatori running around, bandits, a Keep to take over, and tons of unfriendly beasts. Moving through the desert, not to mention fighting there would incredibly taxing and would provide unique challenges. They needed to update armors and equipment, and he knew that his squadron needed training to prepare for scorching heat and punishing dust and sand.

The Inquisition required more funding, pretty desperately. The Satinalia ball was certainly approaching, but the Ambassador decided to also throw an intimate soiree for the few distinguished Orlesian guests who already funded the Haven remembrance monument. Undoubtedly that was a subtle fundraising opportunity as well. The sooner the coin arrived, the better for the whole expedition. Barris never enjoyed politics that much, but he understood the value of diplomacy. The Inquisition was costly. Some things simply needed to be done. The soiree was to be held the day after tomorrow, and he was compelled to attend with Mira.

Finally, the meeting ended and Delrin bowed his head to people leaving the room. Sidony growled with disapproval. She never showed much sympathy for Templars, even though Order no longer existed. Belinda rolled her eyes seeing that interaction and waved to him instead. Sweet Andraste, he already had a torturous vision of holding war council in the middle of the desert. Trying to hold the peace among themselves would be a challenge in itself.

Bull waited for him outside.

“Barris!”, he stopped him immediately, “I say we get the dibs on that High Dragon. You fared well with your first one. It was magnificent.”
Delrin scoffed. “We had Cassandra. And Vivienne. I am still amazed you managed to convince Madame de Fer to detour to fight a dragon.”

“Nah, she loved it. There is undeniable beauty in those beasts.”

“Undeniable danger as well and this time we have the Chargers and my squadron, not the most accomplished Knight Enchanter and Pentaghast blood. And it’s the desert. Have you ever fought in the desert? There is sand everywhere. Your eyes, your balls, everywhere.”

“I’ve been to Anderfels”, the Qunari shrugged.

“Then I am surprised by your relentless enthusiasm.”

“But don’t you want to impress the girl?”, Bull asked innocently.

There it was. Delrin chuckled and rubbed his hair. There was no point in denying the truth.

“You have noticed”, he simply responded.

“I did. But good effort on your part. I don’t think she did.”

“Well… Would you like to grab dinner at the tavern tonight? I need to go to practice now, but we haven’t spent much time together since I got back to Skyhold from the Dales.”

“Well, you are a newlywed after all. I shall forgive you.”

He sighed. “Will Dorian spare you for the evening?”

“He will”, the Iron Bull winked at him. “But you’re buying.”

“Fine with me”, Delrin smiled. “See you there.”

************************************************************

“Sword and Shields” was more erotica than merely romance, and Mira actually shook her head few times reading it. It certainly wasn’t Varric’s best work, to put it mildly. On another hand, it was quite the diversion from reading medical texts, botanical compendiums or anything else Mira had been getting her hands on lately. As much as Mira rolled her eyes, the undeniable and shameful fact remained that she finished the book in less than two hours.

“It’s terrible”, Mira announced to Cassandra the next day after their first practice, returning the tome. “Utterly terrible.”

Cassandra flustered. “It’s not terrible at all. It’s full of passion—”,

“Do you have another chapter?”

“I knew it!”, Seeker remarked with full satisfaction.

“It ended on the cliffhanger! It is all your fault anyway. You literally told me I must read it. I claim that as my defense.”

“It is as futile of defense as what you’ve shown at practice”, the warrior actually giggled and Mira’s own laughter followed.

“Hey, Cassandra”, she added almost hesitantly, “would you like to grab something to eat or drink?”
“Right now?”

“Yes. Or anytime, really.”

“You’re not eating dinner with Barris?”

“No. I told him I would try to invite you. I’m pretty sure he already made some plans for the evening as well.”

“Sure…”, Cassandra smiled slightly, as if she was suddenly uncertain, “Herald’s Rest?”

“After you.”

They ate in the private dining room. The food was delicious as always and the conversation was just tiny bit awkward at first. The warrior opened up a lot more when Mira asked several questions about the Seekers of Truth.

“I fear everything is corruptible”, Cassandra sighted. “I am not certain whether the Seekers are redeemable, although I want to believe it. Was the core rotten from the start or has it become rotten over time, fed by secrets and legitimization of evil? I have always tried to be righteous, and I have made more mistakes than I wish to admit.”

“But you do admit them anyway. And then the Inquisition was born because of your efforts, Cassandra.”

“Yes. And it is outside of my hands now. I follow more than I lead. The Inquisitor is Andraste’s Herald. I have faith in that, and I have my faith in him. Do not think otherwise. Still, I find myself… more cautious than I’ve anticipated.”

“Doubt is part of faith”, Mira observed softly. “It has to be.”

“Blessed are those who do not falter”, Cassandra responded dryly and then softened her voice. “I do agree with you though, Mira. Faith is not merely following blindly. It cannot be. It becomes distorted and cruel when that happens. It couldn’t be tested without it, it couldn’t be chosen. What about you? Do you have faith?”

Something moved inside Mira’s heart. How could she even begin to address that question when she carefully stepped around it this whole time, even with Delrin?

“I did. I didn’t always agree with the… with our version of the Chantry. But I had faith, and it was real and tangible, and it guided me in many ways. Now I feel… displaced. I have been displaced. There is no practicing of my faith here, so I find myself… it’s more than questioning and doubt. I don’t feel like I’ve lost my faith, although I feel angry and confused. It’s been taken away from me, in a sense. So right now, I don’t know. It’s not like I have changed much either. If you ask me what I believe in when it comes to love, courage, suffering, helping others… none of that changed, really. There is so much about the Maker that is different from God the way I’ve seen Him my whole life. There are some things that are so similar. Not believing is very popular where I come from. It never threatened my own faith, my own thoughts about the world. However, this here… Cassandra, I have no words to describe it. There’s more loneliness than I’ve ever anticipated. My faith had this emphasis on being loved by God, or the Maker, however you call Him. It just feels like another loss, but at the same time I still sometimes pray despite myself. I suppose my heart got broken in a way and I feel as if I’m drifting across the darkness. But as I have said, regardless of all that, my faith still lingers inside of me, even when I try to push it down. I never thought I would
experience such loss. Regardless of how I felt, faith was always there, like a cold stone, unmovable. I could argue, I could fight, I could debate but it was there. It was there. Now it only lives through me and to be honest, that is terrifying.”

Cassandra’s brows were furrowed and her eyes were full of empathy.

“You have my sympathy. I cannot even begin to imagine. You seem to have some understanding about the Chantry, have you perhaps read the Chant of Light?”

“I have read the copy that Delrin owns. I… I have to admit that sometimes I look at him and feel jealous of faith he has. I’ve seen him pray several times at this point, usually at night in our quarters. There’s something about seeing it that moves me to my core. He’s so… I don’t know. He’s principled but he’s not dogmatic. He truly embodies so much of what I find… virtuous, I suppose. He surely has faith and his faith endured and I am jealous. I am so jealous. As… as complicated as it might be. I feel ashamed to even admit it.”

“Don’t”, Cassandra looked at her curiously, “I… I think I understand. I am truly sorry for your loss. For… all your losses.”

“I suppose Leliana’s backstory for me truly fits. An Andrastian heretic”, Mira shrugged bitterly.

“See, I don’t see it that way. Forget about the Chantry for a second.”, the warrior spoke quietly. “Don’t you think every world had been made by the same Creator? Chantry teaches ours is the only world, but it clearly is not. So…”

“I don’t know”, Mira replied cautiously. “But… I find some semblance of comfort in that thought.”

“Me too.”

******************************************************************************

Barris and Bull sat down comfortably inside the Qunari’s private quarters at Herald’s Rest.

“I had no idea that the only reason you sought my company tonight was Mira ditching you for Cassandra. And the Seeker had the sense to claim the dining room for the night.”

“She only told me she had practice with Cassandra and that she might ask her to grab something to eat. I still wanted to see you, you old sap.”

“Yeah, kid. Don’t worry. We’re going to spend a lot more time together in that desert, believe me.”

“Don’t remind me”, Delrin growled in frustration. “I had to reprimand my squadron today for whining at the news while truthfully I share their attitude entirely.”

Bull laughed in response before sinking his teeth into the large piece of meat.

“So”, Barris cut into his own roast, “how is everything going with you? How’s Dorian?”

“Hmmm”, the Qunari warrior swallowed the food. “He is here every night. We spend time together. Truthfully, he is a bit apprehensive. Something is holding him back.”

“Something like the fact that he is an Imperial mage and you’re a Qunari?”, Delrin asked gently.

“I thought we moved past that, especially considering I’m a fucking Tal Vashoth now.”, Bull sighted. “I don’t think it’s merely that. We shall see, anyway. The sex is still amazing.”
“Thank you for telling me”, Barris laughed. “I clearly wanted to know that.”

“I know clearly what or whom you want”, the Iron Bull roared happily while Delrin rolled his eyes.

“I should have proposed playing cards or drinking instead of dinner and talking, clearly.”

“I will be serious now”, the Qunari promised. “How is Mira doing?”

Delrin wasn’t about to reveal her secrets or her past or her struggles. Besides, as hurtful as the last two or three days had been, she seemed… well. As well as she could have been given the circumstances.

“She’s doing well”, he finally responded. “She is very resilient. Intelligent. Pretty resourceful.”

“Beautiful”, Bull added gently.

“I might have noticed”, Delrin sighted.

“The second I saw her I knew she’d be your type.”

“It’s more, Bull”, he muttered. “Plenty of women are attractive. Believe me, I know how lovely she is. I notice everything about her. It’s more… The way we talk, the way we discuss everything. I told her things I haven’t told anyone before, and she was warm, compassionate and… She’s witty. We share similar values despite the fact that there is a world of difference - literally - between us. I like being with her and the way she—”

“Oh, shit, Barris”, the Qunari cursed. “Well…Shit.”

Delrin winced internally. What he felt was more than just a little infatuation, and Bull was undoubtedly an observant man.

“Yes”, he answered quietly. “I did not quite foresee that scenario when I married her. I really care about her.”

“Does she feel similarly?”

“I… don’t think so. Sometimes… I am sure that’s just my imagination. Mira’s more guarded and cautious and… Bull, if she wasn’t my wife I swear to you I would have tried pursuing her already.”

“Do you realize how ridiculously that last sentence sounds?”

“I know. It’s the truth though. Mira trusts me. She agreed to this marriage to gain protection and hide her origin and to survive here. I know she was afraid of… receiving attention. If I try pursuing her, I would be breaking that trust and there is hardly anything worse I can imagine. I… understand my responsibility.”

“Yeah, Barris. I got it.”

“Moreover, there’s no… We live together. We are married. There’s no flirting that could be innocuous in circumstances like that. We would still always retrieve to the same quarters. There’s no… trying. Not to mention that she could feel obligated to… I can’t.”

“Would you prefer she wasn’t your wife?”

“If she wasn’t, she would be married to someone else, like Cullen…”
“Well, yes, he is indeed very easy on the eye.”

“Fuck you, Bull”, he scoffed. “I don’t wish to even think about it. I don’t regret my marriage. I just… foolishly want more.”

“I suppose it’s not entirely foolish”, Qunari shrugged. “What would you do if she just… threw herself into your arms in an unmistakable way?”

He knew exactly what he would do.

“I… well”, he sighted. “It seems rather torturous to pointlessly consider it at the moment.”

Bull eyed him carefully, his face expressing sympathy and compassion.

“You’re a good man, Barris”, he finally said. “Better than most. It is very obvious that Mira is comfortable around you and that she likes you. Hey, she said you’re chivalrous and gallant.”

Delrin couldn’t help but smile. “That is true.”

“I know why you don’t do more and I know why you can’t do more. I understand why you don’t want to even consider it at the moment. You already grew close and you will grow closer. Just… let it be then. See what happens.”

Barris rubbed his head and growled.

“I suppose it is a very sound advice.”

“I am a very sound guy”, Bull noticed smugly.

“Now you’re pushing it.”

“I can offer you a distraction now that we’ve talked. Cards and ale. Rylen and Fletcher and few others are playing Wicked Grace tonight. We could easily buy in and we haven’t played in ages. You know that Fletcher cannot bluff for shit.”

“That is true, but Rylen is pretty good.”

“More of the challenge”, the Qunari winked. “I actually think Krem is playing with them tonight as well. What do you say?”

“Sweet Andraste, why not?”

**************************************************************

Mira didn’t know how it happened but suddenly she was standing in the middle of the room and intensely gesturing as she was describing the synopsis of the Hamilton musical.

It was ridiculous and glorious and so much fun given how quickly Cassandra got into the story.

“So what happened next?”, Seeker’s eyes were full of both passion and terror. “What did Alexander do?!”

“Lord, show me how to say no to this

I don’t know how to say no to this
But my God, she looks so helpless

And her body’s saying, hell, yes

Cassandra, this piece of shit slept with Maria and then continued the affair.”

The Seeker made a very disgusted noise before speaking up.

“That worthless scum!”, the warrior cried out, “after everything Eliza had done for him?! After bringing in the money, the support, the children, after all those years of loving him?”

“I know! I know!”, Mira’s eyes twinkled dangerously. “He truly was… Ugh. Then it turned out that Maria’s husband knew about it all along and blackmailed Hamilton to pay him to keep the affair secret.”

“If he stayed true to his vows this wouldn’t be a problem, wouldn’t it? Urgh, the dishonorable little shit.”

“I know, Cassandra, but believe me, this is not the worst of this story. It’s not. Remember what I told you about Hamilton’s political dabbles? Now his relationship with Burr is deteriorating because he defeated Eliza’s father, then Jefferson and Madison are envious over the sway that Hamilton has with the President. Anyway, they start plotting against him…”

“Do you realize how envious Josephine would be to be missing all of this?”

Mira giggled. “Alright, but listen. There’s a new President. Hamilton gets fired and writes a very public critique of the new power. Burr, Madison and Jefferson accuse Alexander of embezzlement and treason, which in reality is just about the payment that Hamilton had been giving to the Reynolds. He tells the men the truth and they promise to keep it secret but the threat remains… Anyway, do you know what this cruel cheating asshole decides to do?”

“No! Tell me now!”

“He decides that it’s better to come clear—”

“Perhaps,”, Cassandra admitted thoughtfully, “perhaps that’s not the worst—“

“And he publishes the correspondence between him and his lover for everyone to see thus humiliating his wife publicly.”

“That conniving disgusting menacing worthless…”

“I know, right?”, Mira lifted her hands furiously.

“So how did Eliza react?”

“Oh Cassandra. That is the most heartbreaking part of the whole musical. This would require proper singing and I don’t want anyone overhearing us…”

“This room is completely sound proof. You didn’t know it? That is why the Inner Party gets to use it as we see fit.”

“Really? So I can scream my heart out and no one will hear me? Goodness, I’ve been here before, I’ve discuss Qunari torture practices here with Bull, you’d think someone would have told me.”

“Do I even want to…? Anyway, you can sing if you choose do. Is that what you wanted to do? Do
you sing?”

“I do sing”, Mira stretched herself and coughed up a bit. “And I haven’t done it since arriving here, so…”

Mira had sung Burn probably hundredths of times before, but never like this, and never to anyone who wouldn’t even heard of the musical and had no other context, aside from very universally moving story of broken promise and heartbreak.

Her heartbeat quickened the pace and she could feel the excitement in her veins.

How she missed that. Being vocal, being loud.

“…The world has no right to my heart
The world has no place in our bed
They don't get to know what I said
I'm burning the memories
Burning the letters that might have redeemed you
You forfeit all rights to my heart
You forfeit the place in our bed
You'll sleep in your office instead
With only the memories of when you were mine
I hope that you burn…”

Cassandra looked stricken with emotion at the end of it, her face was reddened and her eyes were glistening.

“That was…” she finally whispered, “I am angry now. Furious, even. Angry on her behalf. Men are worthless. Now I want to hit something. We should have done it before the practice, not after.”

“Yes”, Mira sipped on her cider. “I know what you feel. Wow, I have to admit that it feels good to be singing again though. It’s very… liberating.”

“You don’t even sing in your quarters?”

“I hum when I’m taking a shower and Delrin is away but I am still afraid of singing loudly because I’m afraid someone will overhear me. This felt good. Really good.”

“Leliana sings”, Cassandra muttered. “Perhaps not as much lately. Her voice is delicate and bright, but yours is… deeper, warmer and so… different.”

“Thank you, I guess”, she smiled. “I had singing classes when I was young. I was a painfully shy child and this helped me to gain some confidence. Some. I always had a lot of extracurricular
activities. I also play two instruments, though nothing that exists here, so add it to the long list of things I used to be able to do and now I am not. I miss music. Thank you for indulging me enough to tell you my silly recap of the musical. Believe me when I say this Cassandra. You would have loved seeing it played out in the theatre. It’s wonderful.”

“Frankly”, the woman glanced at her almost shyly, “this was very entertaining as it was.”

“Really?”, Mira looked at her with sympathy. “I enjoyed it too. I really did.”

There it was, the sudden vulnerability showing on Cassandra’s face. She had to be a decade or so older than Mira. An unstoppable warrior, a woman of faith, the force behind the Inquisition. Now she looked shy and uncertain.

“Varric says I am horrible at making friends”, Seeker whispered with so much anticipation in her voice that Mira felt it reaching right to her heart. “I am brash and I say things before even thinking them through. You are already aware of that, I suppose. And I’m apparently terrifying, according to some.”

Cassandra was clumsily trying to find out if… she could be liked? If they could become friendly?

“I’m guarded and judgmental and slightly awkward myself”, Mira heard herself say. “And I’d love to do it again.”

“Truly?”

“Yes.”

“I promised Cullen I would see him before the setting for the night”, Seeker stated. “I know tomorrow is Haven anniversary, and the day after tomorrow is that soiree that Josephine forces me to attend—”

“We’re going too”, Mira replied. “but I actually have the whole day free beforehand. I work the full day tomorrow just to give the opportunity to those that survived Haven to not be bothered. But the day after tomorrow, I am free until the party. Well, until Josephine requests me at her quarters for the whole… preparation thing.”

“Practice in the morning, then breakfast?”

“Can it not be extraordinarily early though? I have been working too many nights lately and I want to sleep in.”

“I’ll be up early and practicing at the grounds anyway, you can find me whenever you’re ready.”

“Thanks, Cassandra. I appreciate it.”

“I’ll bring the Varric’s sequel as well.”

Mira laughed and felt the unbridled joy spread through her body.

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Delrin honestly couldn’t remember the last time he was sitting in the main area of the tavern. When he and Mira would come to eat dinner, they would go to the quiet area upstairs. There was nothing quiet about Herald’s Rest right now. He could hear the sounds of drinking, the laughter. Meryden played songs in the background. The night was lively. Perhaps because no one was practicing
tomorrow due to Haven’s anniversary. Perhaps because people wanted distraction.

He looked at his cards. His hand wasn’t bad at all.

“So, Barris”, Fletcher started, “I haven’t seen you in ages.”

“What are you talking about? We had a meeting in the war room together. Then our squadrons literally sparred today, Fletcher. We sparred”, he scoffed. “I know for certain I haven’t hit you that hard for you to not remember.”

“He means we’ve barely seen ye since you’ve been married to yer lass”, Rylen rolled his eyes.

“Well”, he answered amused, “I am here tonight, am I not? Better tell me what’s new.”

“Aside from the fact that we’re all being sent to the desert?”, Krem raised his eyebrows. “All peachy.”

“You’re being sent to the desert, I am to stay in the desert”, Rylen hissed. “Forgive me for not feeling much pity for ye.”

“Surrounded by hyenas and varghests and no tavern girls”, Fletcher added satisfied. “I admit I don’t envy you, Rylen.”

“I don’t understand all of your vendetta against the sand”, Bull laughed. “Doesn’t bother me that much.”

“Perhaps because you’re not wearing much armor, Chief”, Krem laughed earnestly. “The rest of us do, and believe me, sand does get everywhere.”

“I’ll start with silver, by the way”, the Tal Vashoth announced.

“You do realize that some of us are not mercenaries, Bull?”, Fletcher sneered. “We don’t earn that much, sadly. Ehhh, have it your way.”

“I would consider hiring… some of you”, the Qunari replied amused. “Losing Stitches still hurts my heart.”

“Stitches is happy where he is, Chief. He says he is doing good work. I am sure you have all heard the tensions around the infirmary though.”

Delrin certainly had. Less from Mira herself, who focused way more on taking care of current patient needs and her own ambitious projects, more from gossip around the barracks and training grounds. The fact was that some soldiers, including some Templars were uncomfortable with the infirmary being taken over by the mages. As much as Barris hated the fact, there were a lot of tensions still remaining, especially considering that Fiona herself worked at the infirmary.

“I have heard indeed”, he replied heavily. “Every change needs time, as we all know it. I’ll raise the bet, by the way.”


“Pass”, Krem raised his eyebrows.

“I’ll match as well”, Bull drank his ale.

“You’re shitting us, Bull. Yer hand is not that good.”
“Wait and see. Wait and see.”

“You would think that with all the time that passed since Haven the tensions between mages and Templars would decrease. I think it’s actually getting slightly worse.”

“No, Fletcher”, the Qunari looked at him sharply. “It’s been a year since Haven. The wounds are there, but they are partially healed. We have a quest ahead of us, but everyone here at Skyhold feels relatively safe. There’s a moment of breath. A moment to think beyond mere survival. That always breeds conflict. I expected it and I expect it to get worse. It’s not only mages and Templars. We just need to… deal with it. Weather through.”

As usual, Bull was right. Just yesterday Cullen needed to ban the group of former Tantervale city guards from the Inquisition after their bigoted anti-elven stance was revealed. One of them had a rank of Lieutenant within the Inquisition Forces. Now that the cause had grown considerably it was particularly necessary to manage such instances swiftly and sternly.

“Alright, alright”, Delrin muttered, “I believe it’s time to show our hands.”

The Qunari won and celebrated loudly much to Rylen’s dismay.

“Bugger off”, the Marcher hissed. “I still don’t know how you do it.”

“Easily”, Bull laughed. “I’m merely a… people’s person.”

“Captain Barris”, Krem noticed something in the back. “I believe that’s your wife standing by the door and… laughing loudly with… Seeker Pentaghast?”

They all turned to watch Mira and Cassandra chat together with big smiles on their faces. They both looked so happy at the moment. Their time together must have gone well, and frankly, Delrin was truly glad she tried to bond with other people. She certainly needed that, as much as he liked spending time with her himself. Both women noticed them and Mira smiled and waved to him. Sweet Andraste. He would always be warmed by that smile.

“Lucky bastard”, Rylen chuckled and Barris glanced at him glancing at Mira.

“Stop staring at my woman”, he scolded the man playfully.

“All I’m saying is that I understand why ye have been so… busy lately.”

Not like that, Delrin thought to himself. Not at all like that.

Cassandra only bowed down to them and left the tavern but Mira walked towards the table for a little chat. She placed her hand on his shoulder to stop him from getting up and patted him gently.

“I’m not going to disturb you, don’t fret. I just wanted to say hi”, she smiled to everyone. “I need to go and catch some rest before tomorrow anyway.”

“I’ll join you”, Delrin announced, “before I lose more money to Bull. It was good seeing you though, guys.”

“We wouldn’t want to keep ye both”, Rylen coughed, “from catching rest.”

Fucking Rylen. He certainly got the innuendo, and judging by Mira’s unmistakable blush appearing on her cheeks, she did too.

“Well”, he decided to entirely ignored the man’s remark, “I’ll see you.”
“Have fun”, Mira added politely and Delrin slightly hissed. He looked at Rylen very sternly and he could see the man fighting against himself.

“You two… have fun as well”, the Marcher finally responded, and Delrin could see Mira’s blush deepening.

The last thing he needed his mind to focus on was… fun with Mira.

Enough.

Sweet Andraste.

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The crisp cool air of the night hit her warm cheeks the second they stepped out the tavern. She certainly heard some comments about being a… busy newlywed herself here and there, but never in Delrin’s presence. His hand brushed against her back when he opened the door for her and Mira felt the pleasant shiver going through her spine.

The content of the page eighty nine of Varric’s stupid novel appeared in her head suddenly and Mira brushed the thought aside very quickly. No. No. No.

“I am really sorry for Rylen”, Delrin was courteous and well-mannered as ever, “He can be… inappropriate at times.”

“It’s fine”, she replied partially amused. “It’s… bound to happen. Believe me, I’ve heard things too.”

“Wait, what?”

“One time I came to the main kitchens after working half a night to get coffee and beg for something to eat and I might have said something along the lines of not getting enough sleep, being utterly exhausted, feeling every muscle of my body and let’s just say that it got interpreted… “, she coughed, “not through my work.”

“Sweet Andraste”, Delrin chuckled nervously.

“Are you apprehensive about tomorrow?”, she changed the subject as they walked through the corridors of the castle.

“No”, he replied thoughtfully. “Haven was horrible, but it didn’t impact me as much at Therinfal.”

“I am sorry I won’t be there. I just figured I would give time to those that lived through it to… I don’t know. At least rest if they felt too drained.”

“I understand entirely”, he glanced at her. “How was your day with Cassandra?”

Mira couldn’t help but smile. There was just something empowering about bonding with another woman. It was great to just talk and laugh together.

“The practice was… painful and dull, but Cassandra said that perhaps I am not entirely hopeless and my fitness level is not the worst she has ever seen.”

“For Cassandra, that’s surely a high praise”, they both laughed at that.

“The rest of it was… great. Unexpected. I suppose I never thought I would like Cassandra her as
much as I do. But I do.”

“I am glad. Truly.”

“I miss Ida”, Mira sighed, the pang of pain hitting her heart, “I will never stop missing her, ever. At the same time, Ida was always the person to push me to meet new people. I know exactly what she would tell me to do here, so… It felt good today. It was a good day. How was yours, aside from losing money to Bull?”

They reached their quarters and Delrin took his armor off before responding.

“Actually, Mira”, he turned to look into her eyes, “I can officially tell you that I’ll be leaving Skyhold the day after Satinalia. There are a lot of units being deployed to Western Approach.”

Oh, her heart pinched yet again. She was of course aware that he would be gone again, and probably soon, but still, to hear that suddenly made her slightly emotion. She liked him. She liked their time together. She felt better when he was here, she felt safer. He certainly was safer here, and outside he would face danger again and…

He clearly waited for some sort of an answer.

“Oh”, she whispered. “That’s far, isn’t it?”

“Farther than the Dales. The letters will take longer to arrive, too.”

“How… how long you’re going to be away?”

“I can’t tell you. Likely longer than the last time.”

The sadness gripped her throat.

“Well”, she took a deep breath, “thank you for telling me. I suppose we still have… more than two weeks.”

“Almost three”, he looked at her softly.

She excused herself to take a shower and as irrational it felt, she stood there feeling the water fall on her. She just wanted to cry. She closed her eyes and the image of Delrin’s body marred with so many scars appeared in her head.

That was his job, that was his mission. Of course he would leave again and he would fight again and she would wait for the letters to know he was safe.

She would come back to empty quarters each night.

Mira didn’t want to be selfish. She understood the importance of his work. The importance of the fight. It was also who Delrin was as a man. He was a warrior. He would always leave.

It was just so nice to have him here.

She slipped underneath the covers of her bed and blew the candle off after they told each other simple and quiet goodnight. She needed to go to sleep… Still, Delrin was sitting at the desk with the sleeves of his shirt rolled up to his elbows and he was meticulously cleaning parts of his armor. He was focused and his hands moved so carefully. She allowed herself to watch him for a minute,
just to memorize the image.

She finally turned and closed her eyes.

She could still smell the clove oil in the air.

“Delrin?” she whispered sleepily.

“Yes?”

“I’ll miss that clove scent when you’re away.”

I will miss you, she thought to herself right before falling asleep.

Chapter End Notes

Over 2000 views! How exciting. Thank you everyone for reading and for the comments.

Yes, I 100% headcanoned that Mira would introduce Cassandra to Broadway, sappy 90s ballads et cetera. C’mon. Of course it would happen and Cassandra would love it.

I am entirely sure that Delrin is not doing anything about his attraction not because he is shy. I see him as a really confident man but the situation is... really tricky to navigate.

I also think that Mira is more cautious and confused about her own feelings.

Next: the soiree. We're going to party! It is going to raise issues that haven't been touched upon yet, so, stay tuned. ;)

Fidelity

Chapter Summary

Delrin and Mira attend the soiree. Barris proves to be comfortable at the party while Mira is being paid too much attention by certain Marquis.

Chapter Notes

It's a long one.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Second Week of Harvestmere, 9:42 Dragon Age, Skyhold

Mira prepared for the soiree at Josephine’s quarters, relying on the Ambassador’s expertise to button up the gown. She watched her reflection in the same mirror she looked at the morning of her wedding. The gown was ordered by Josephine herself and Mira had to admit it was beautiful. The plunging sweetheart neckline finished with lace revealed the deep cleavage just appropriate for the evening wear, and a-line silhouette of the dress accentuated her waist. The sleeves reached past her elbows, trimmed with lace as well. The fabric was a deep blue silk brocade.

Josephine expertly braided half up French crown on her head, leaving most of the curls loose and tumbling down. It looked beautiful and polished at the same time, while still allowing Mira to keep her hair down.

Mira knew she was quite attractive, and even though she sometimes wished to be taller or thinner, she has never been too uncomfortable with her looks. The society would always pick women apart, consume them and chew them out. She consciously tried to like herself and accept herself. For the most part, it worked. She certainly felt quite lovely tonight.

Delrin had never told her she looked beautiful. Or pretty. Or merely nice. Not even once. It felt silly and foolish, but she hoped he would compliment her tonight. Josephine used some shiny powder that made Mira’s skin glisten with gold shine. Her lips were rouged. She made sure to wear the ring that Delrin’s mother sent for her.

“Oh, Mira, you are beautiful”, Josephine purred, looking like a Disney princess herself in her golden yellow ballgown. “I am very grateful that you’re coming. Orlesians are difficult guests to entertain, and most of the Inner Circle couldn’t attend. The Inquisitor himself is away accompanied by few of them, so I am really counting on your charming and pleasant presence.”

That sounded more like an assignment than entertainment, but Mira understood that being the wife of the Second-in-Command of the Inquisition Forces would mean occasional social obligations.

She didn’t wait for Delrin to pick her up, but walked back to their quarters to see him. She entered
the room full of hope and he looked at her, and she could swear his eyes slightly twinkled, but he still didn’t compliment her.

“Do I look appropriate?”, she finally asked.

“Very much so”, he said glancing at her softly.

“Well, you certainly look very handsome”, Mira remarked.

“Oh, thank you.”

He did indeed, wearing navy velvet jacket himself, black breeches and black leather boots reaching up to his knees. He still carried his sword, which caught her entirely by surprise.

“Why are you armed? What kind of soiree is this exactly?”, she joked and he laughed in response. His laughter had such a wonderful warm timbre to it.

“It is customary”, he smiled, “There is no added defense to soirees like that and it shows that we’re the hosts and this is the fortress after all. It’s also a non dancing event. You can expect me and the Commander and Cassandra to be armed. Shall we?” he offered her his arm.

Delrin tried avoiding looking at Mira’s cleavage in that gown. It revealed more than he has ever seen before. He truly was very focus on proving he indeed was an honorable man. She looked radiant tonight. Her lips were darker, reddened. Her hair looked slightly different, but the curls were still loose. She was more than lovely.

When he met her, he vowed to never comment on her physical beauty to not make her apprehensive or uncomfortable, but now that she complimented him he felt a bit like an arse and he wasn’t sure what to do.

They were seated across Josephine and Marquis Etienne, one of the distinguished guests. On Delrin’s left side there was Comtesse d’Arnee, then the Commander himself. Mira was placed next to Madame de Fer, and Cassandra and Leliana were seated near Josephine. The Ambassador certainly played the role of host in the absence of the Inquisitor himself.

“Ser Delrin Barris, the Second-in-Command of the Inquisition Forces and his wife, Lady Mira Barris. Ser Barris had spent several years in Orlais”, the Ambassador introduced them.

The second Marquis Etienne looked at Mira, his eyes flushed with approval and desire. He looked at her, and he hasn’t stopped looking at her since. It wasn’t appropriate, even by Orlesian standards and Delrin slightly gritted his teeth. He would not say anything, certainly both the etiquette and the rules of the Game suggested that the best course of action was to ignore it. Moreover, Delrin Barris had never been a jealous man. He worried mostly about Mira’s comfort.

To be entirely truthful though, it was slightly irritating for Marquis to dare to ogle so openly and shamelessly. The damn Orlesian was definitely looking at Mira’s breasts.

Barris glanced at the Spymaster and something told him that the table placement was not accidental. Marquis was supposed to be relish in the company of a beautiful woman for the night. That woman was his wife. This was not uncommon at court, but Delrin didn’t need to like it even a little bit.

On another side, Comtesse d’Arnee was clearly delighted by the presence of two former Templars
by her side. Within five second it became apparent that Cullen not only didn’t speak any Orlesian, but also had absolutely no Game. Or flair. It was actually surprising to see the Commander who was so confident at work suddenly reduced to such nervousness.

It would be a long night.

Marquis was asking questions, Josephine and Madame de Fer were chirping, and Comtesse was certainly demanding attention while Cullen was acting useless.

“Certainly, your ladyship”, he replied to Comtesse banal remark about art. “What a unique perspective you’re presenting.”

Meanwhile Marquis was clearly paying all his attention to Mira.

“The Ambassador mentioned you’ve been helping at the infirmary, my lady?”, the man asked.

“I am a med, your grace.”

“And where did such gorgeous woman manage to acquire medical skills?”, Marquis pried.

Delrin could feel Mira just slightly tensing by his side.

“Lady Barris’ father was a traveling scholar. She learned a lot of skills under his tutelage”, Josephine answered reluctantly, thus revealing that Mira was not born into nobility. Perhaps for the best, considering inevitable questions that would have followed otherwise.

Comtesse d’Arnee demanded placating with conversation once again after Cullen completely failed to even try to be charming. Barris smiled, gave innocuous compliments and shared one of mild war anecdotes that were always suitable for such occasion. The Commander would die helpless in Val Royeaux, that as much was clear.

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The food and wine was excellent, but Mira still felt bitterness in her mouth.

She was angry.

There was a difference between a man’s approving glance and what Marquis Etienne was displaying tonight. He had barely spoken to her so far, instead chatting with both Madame de Fer and Josephine, yet his eyes lingered on Mira’s breasts long enough to be shameless, as if he wasn’t at all concerned it would be noticeable to those around him. He was watching her like prey, like an object to possess.

Marquis was entitled, and there were few things Mira hated more than entitled men.

She wasn’t sure how to behave. This was Thedas, this was a banquet with Orlesians, and some of it perhaps was indeed the Grand Game. She wouldn’t be comfortable calling him out on his behavior, she certainly couldn’t simply walk away, so Mira simply decided to ignore Marquis’ inappropriate reactions and remain silent. She could feel the contempt floating through her veins, and she could feel her anger spreading. Her will steeled. Marquis wanted recognition and flattery and he would receive none of it from her.

Delrin barely seem to notice Marquis aside from initial introduction. He was busy entertaining Comtesse by his side, and Mira could clearly hear how suave he could be. Comtesse fluttered her
eyelashes, longing for attention. Did marriage mean anything to Orlaisians? Was flirting part of the Game? Genitivi mentioned intrigue, seduction, scandal, but it all sounded so different on the pages of the book. The reality was difficult to navigate. At least at Skyhold the guests decided to forego the masks. She couldn’t quite imagine the court in Val Royeaux.

There was a prickle of pain and irritation seeing Delrin talking with Comtesse. He clearly wasn’t flustered or uncomfortable, and he was quick and confident in his answers. He sounded polite and courteous, but perhaps not overly charming. Even so, Mira still felt… bizarre inside. It was one thing to be ogled by Marquis, quite another to see a woman pine after her husband.

Her husband. How easily those words went through her mind.

She finished her glass of water, and as soon she put it down Delrin lifted the pitcher and poured her more while glancing at her quickly. He… well. Maybe he did pay attention after all.

“Has anyone ever told you that you smell very nicely, Captain?”, Comtesse asked sweetly and Mira bit her lip.

He did. His scent was warm, green and woody, with the hint of tang and musk. She could smell it right now and it was so familiar and comforting, but also just sensual.

“My wife has”, Delrin replied without hesitation.

Mira smirked to herself. Truthfully, she never did tell him he smelled nicely. He undoubtedly said it just to remind the Comtesse his marital status.

Perhaps his words were simply the Game, but the flutter Mira felt was certainly real.

“My lady”, Marquis Etienne requested her attention and any smile Mira had on her face immediately disappeared. “Have you been married long?”

“Few months, your grace”, she replied.

“How lovely”, Marquis’ eyes focused on her lips. “How did you meet? Do tell, my lady.”

Mira froze for a split second.

“We met during one of my missions, your grace”, Delrin spoke up and Mira glanced at him. He clearly was perceptive.

Aside from Leliana providing vague timeline to when this was supposed to have happened, they never sat down and discussed the circumstances. There was never any need.

“Ser Barris”, Marquis raised his eyebrows. “Surely there’s a tale behind marriage like yours.”

Mira’s cheeks flushed. If she wasn’t mistaken, Marquis Etienne just publicly announced her marriage being the mésalliance. She felt Delrin’s hand gently touching hers, and she placed her own into his palm. He certainly had warrior hands, strong and hardened from holding weapons. He lifted her hand and placed it on his chest, just for a split second. It was the same gesture she used when he first deployed to Dales.

“There are things I like keeping just for myself, your grace”, Delrin answered calmly.

Another flutter appeared in her chest, but this time she pushed it aside. This was merely a social convenance, the reality of what their marriage required in public, and Mira found it suddenly
uncomfortable. In all the time they were married, she never pretended. Even the vows themselves she treated seriously. This was the first time she couldn’t quite read the situation easily and it worried her.

If she was honest with herself, she wanted Delrin to notice her tonight, even just slightly, and he wouldn’t even compliment her. Now the situation felt romantic, and it moved something within her, but she knew the reality was more complicated.

It wasn’t his fault, really. Delrin wasn’t manipulative or careless. He gave Marquis as little as possible, and Mira understood the topic couldn’t be avoided. Still, it bothered her. It bothered her, because she felt… something. For him. Something new, something warm, something fragile.

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The dinner finally ended, and the party moved to the sitting room where the desserts were served. Delrin was able to move away from the conversation with Lady Vascot and Lady Sennova. Truthfully, he hated always telling the same stories of fighting demons that nobility demanded of him. He had done it many times when working as Knight-Lieutenant to form connections that helped with investigations, but he had always loathed some part of it. The fascination that nobility showed towards fighting felt exploitative. It was exploitative. He had never shared anything that was truly meaningful.

He scanned the room. Josephine and Leliana were chatting up Marquis Etienne in the corner. Mira was standing alongside Cassandra and talking with Lord DesRosiers whom Delrin knew relatively well from Val Royeaux. He was a decent sort. Without the Marquis there, she seemed more relaxed and comfortable. She laughed at whatever Seeker just said, tilting her head just slightly.

Barris sipped on his bitter dark coffee.

“Barris”, Cullen approached him looking like he had a headache, “is this thing going to last much longer?”

“Commander”, Delrin sneered, “You have barely participated in any exchange tonight.”

Cullen’s face slightly reddened. “I fail to see how any of this…”

“Each of the guests here had already supported the Inquisition in the past. Each of them has coin to spare.”

“We are fighting against the Corypheus, there is not time…”

“Cullen”, Barris looked at the man sternly. “Do you value the Ambassador’s work?”

“What?”, Commander flustered. “Of course… of course I value it.”

“Then try doing your part.”

“I… have never been good at any of this”, Cullen sighted and Delrin wondered how many non-Templar interactions the man experienced in his life until the Inquisition. He spent most of his career in Kirkwall, the most problematic Circle of all. Aside from it being a complete shitshow, the Marches themselves were less formal and traditional. He likely hadn’t interacted with nobility like the one in Orlais.

“Tell a tale. It doesn’t need to be too deep, it merely needs to be interesting. Orlesians are not after
your soul, they are merely looking for a little shine…”

“I don’t like it”, Cullen groaned.

Barris glowered at his superior.

“It’s just another battle, Cullen. You learn where to step because some mistakes might cost your life. That is the Game. I don’t like it either. I am Fereldan as well, remember? But I had lived in Orlais as well.”

“I thought Templars are above the Game.”

“No one is above having their blood drawn on the battlefield. Maker’s breath, Cullen, you can afford to spare five minutes of mindless conversation with Comtesse who can singlehandedly fund the cost of our mission in Western Approach.”

The Commander chewed on his words while Barris finished his coffee.

“You are good at this”, Cullen finally remarked.

“No”, he responded. “I am merely passable at this.”

He scanned the room again. Mira was sitting on the sofa accompanied by Madame de Fer.

“If you excuse me”, he said to Cullen and took few steps to the dessert table to pour a cup of tea which he then sweetened with honey. He arranged several petit fours on a small plate and walked up to his wife.

She looked up at him surprised and smiled when he placed the teacup on the side table and handed her the sweets.

“Thank you”, her smile grew even wider.

“My pleasure. Madame Vivienne, is there anything I could get for you?”

“Aren’t you most charming, dear?” Madame de Fer glanced approvingly. “I have everything I need. I am afraid though that Lord DesRosiers is trying to claim your attention now.”

“We have been met before. Please excuse me, ladies”, Delrin bowed down and allowed his eyes to linger on Mira’s sweet face. “I will talk to you later, Mira.”

“You know where to find me. Thank you for… for the tea.”

“Always.”

He walked to meet Lord Pierren DesRosiers and he remembered the last time they saw each other in Val Royeaux.

“Barris!”, Lord Pierren DesRosiers exclaimed joyfully. “It’s good to see familiar face among this crowd and to finally talk to you. I’ve met your delightful wife, congratulations.”

“Thank you, Pierren”, he smiled to the man. Lord DesRosiers had always been one of the few nobles advocating for change and improvement in Orlais. “I am truly glad to see you. How is Lady Caroline?”

“I have actually become a father over the summer. Little boy.”
“That’s fantastic, congratulations as well.”

“Thank you. Thank you. Now, shall we talk business?”

“As you wish.”

Barris knew what Pierren meant. Des Rosiers family didn’t have a massive estate, but they did possess the largest foundry in Val Royeaux that regularly supplied Chevaliers.

“You know me”, Pierren grimaced slightly. “We have profited from the War of Lions. Let’s cut the chase and discuss what I can do for you.”

“Let us find the Commander and involve him in the talks, if you don’t mind.”

“By all means, lead the way.”

Mira tasted the vanilla flavor melt on her tongue as she put the third petit-four into her mouth. She felt invigorated after eating all the sugar and drinking the tea. It was indeed sweet of Delrin to bring it for her. Enchanter Vivienne was by her side explaining quietly who were the various people in the room and what were their connections.

“You’re doing well, dear”, the woman murmured quietly.

“I… don’t think so”, Mira replied. “It’s all very confusing to me. I don’t know the Game. I don’t know what I should and shouldn’t do and Marquis…”

“I have watched you”, Vivienne whispered. “Marquis has been trying to elicit a smile, an approval, even anger or embarrassment. You have given him little aside of polite coolness. You have already won.”

“I suppose that means that I was right to interpret his question about my marriage as an affront? He clearly implied out loud I wasn’t born with the title. For a man who seems to want me, he surely is eager to offend.”

“Don’t let it bother you”, Vivienne mused.

Mira tried, but it all simply was bothersome.

“I… don’t even know what I am doing. Or why. And I certainly don’t enjoy it.”

“Beauty can be a weapon, dear.”

“I don’t think I’d like wield it.”

“But you do regardless. I was just eighteen when I first stepped into the Orlesian Court”, Enchanter mentioned gently. “I have learned much since.”

Mira pondered those words. There were women in The Inquisition’s leadership who were well versed in the Game. How many times was young Vivienne accosted for her beauty? What was it like for Josephine when she had less experience? What was it like for her now? Mira couldn’t imagine it was easy to be the Ambassador. She never knew Josephine as anything but sweet and soft spoken, but she certainly employed a lot of skills. Was managing attention always the part of the game? Were there always some lewdness and leeriness involved?
“He’s doting on you, darling”, Madame de Fer remarked casually and Mira furrowed her eyebrows.

“You are not using that word to describe Marquis’ behavior, are you?”

“I am talking about your Captain.”

“Oh”, Mira blushed. “We’ve barely talked tonight.”

“Perhaps”, Vivienne raised her perfect eyebrows with slight amusement, “it’s not his words you should look at. Moreover, I know the Templars and he had been one for a long time. They always employ the same technique to look throughout the room. It is very subtle, but if you look clearly… Every minute or so he glances at you to see how you’re faring. See for yourself.”

Mira looked ahead and saw Delrin deeply engaged in the conversation with Lord DesRosiers and Commander Cullen. He looked both serious and busy, and very focused.

“And…”, Enchanter purred and few seconds later Delrin’s head turned and surely enough, Mira locked eyes with him. She couldn’t help but to grin and he smiled back before returning to task at hand.

“Well”, Mira said to herself, trying to squash the rapid wave of affection. “He is a courteous man.”

Madame de Fer smiled to herself. “As you say, darling. Now excuse me, but someone needs to inform Comtesse d’Arnee that red is not her color.”

Mira shook her head and couldn’t help but to think about what Vivienne said about Delrin, about him doting on her. He was always very considerate and well mannered. He would open doors for her, offer to carry things for her, make her tea, bring her food and drinks to the table at Herald’s Rest. It was simply who he was. Even… Even here, at the soiree he was the one to pour her more water or wine, or bring her dessert. That didn’t mind that much, and certainly wasn’t the proof of doting, was it? She wasn’t naïve. He might have never told her she was pretty, but she wouldn’t be entirely surprised if certain thoughts had crossed his mind before. It crossed her mind once or twice. She could catch the tiniest twinkle of approval when he was looking at her. Still, that was different from… having feelings.

He was also there for her during her worst moments, holding her in his arms. Well, he was good and kind hearted.

They talked so much.

Could he…

“My Lady”, she could hear the familiar voice of Marquis Etienne and cringed inside. “A woman like yourself should not be sitting alone.”

“Your Grace”, Mira replied coolly.

She could see the effects on alcohol on his face. The redness, the certain haziness behind the eyes. He wasn’t very drunk, he wouldn’t slur words, but he certainly wasn’t entirely sober either. He had a lot of wine throughout the evening. Mira did not like drunk men. Even less so drunk men who were trying to get her attention. Even without having the experience of an abusive alcoholic father, she had a lot of tales from emergency room detailing the behavior of men under the influence.

Marquis made himself comfortable in the armchair, leaning back and watching her. She could sense her body tensing slightly, but she looked him straight in the eye. This was a room full of
people, including her own husband who carried a weapon. She was safe. Marquis was an irrelevant bug who’d leave Skyhold tomorrow.

His eyes stopped somewhere around her lips.

“You are”, his voiced rasped, “the most beautiful woman in this room, my lady.”

She wouldn’t thank him. He could fuck himself.

“Your Grace”, she barely acknowledged him.

There was something in his eyes besides lust and besides greed and besides entitlement. Irritation. The hint of anger.

“My Lady, I must say, ”, he shamelessly looked at her breasts, “that it is unusual for a noble, even a Fereldan one, to marry outside of his station. You clearly must have impressed on Ser Barris for him to graciously make you his wife.”

Was it alcohol that made him bolder and crueler? He certainly just told her she used sexual skills in order to advance her social status. She had never even… He said all of that out loud knowing she would understand his meaning. The impertinence, the fact that he surely have imagined it. Was he trying to proposition her or merely remind her where she supposedly came from and how unworthy she was? Was it the Game or him just being a pathetic excuse for a man? Was it both?

“You would need to ask my husband, your grace”.

“It must be difficult”, Marquis continued, “to be married to a soldier. The long absence, the loneliness, the danger…”

When did the conversation become so venomous? Should she stand up and leave?

“There is a saying we have in Ferelden”, Mira looked at Marquis. “The longer the wait, the sweeter the kiss.”

“Charming”, Marquis closed his eyes and smiled. “I am not sure many warriors wait.”

The words cut like a knife.

“I am sure I don’t know what you mean, your grace”, she managed to reply.

She looked at Delrin. He was still talking with Lord DesRosiers and Cullen, but now Comtesse d’Arnee joined in the conversation and Mira could see her playfully tapping her husband’s arm. He wasn’t doing anything inappropriate, but she still felt the pang of pain going trough her heart. The pang of doubt and uncertainty.

The truth was they have never discussed fidelity. Oh, Mira surely had talked about it with Leliana and Josephine before the wedding. There was an expectation of fidelity in Andrastian marriage, of course. The union should be monogamous, respectful, faithful. Still, back then Mira was much more focused about the possibility that her stranger husband might want her to even entertain the thoughts that he might actually want somebody else.

Now he was not a stranger, and the mere thought hurt in a way it shouldn’t. Or maybe it should. The marriage was real, as she had been assured, so why wouldn’t she require fidelity as it was required of her? What was her right, exactly?
What could she realistically expect?

He was young. He was certainly very handsome and there was no way he wasn’t aware of that. He was confident. He had never tried to charm her, but she had seen him tonight talking with others and he was smooth, never embarrassed, never hesitating. He wasn’t boastful or entitled like Marquis, but he was confident.

When he unlaced her wedding dress, he did it expertly.

Was she just foolish and naive?

When she asked him before the wedding if he had someone, he told her that he wouldn’t be able to take his vows if he did. But did he… Did he really enter what was essentially a chaste marriage just like that?

He also signed each of his letters “faithfully”. Every single one of them, and he was a man of his word.

Mira knew Marquis succeeded in hurting her. She tried not to show it on her face, but he was the one who knew how to play the Game, not her. Perhaps he was watching the pain on her face right now.

Thankfully Josephine and Vivienne decided to join Mira on the large plush sofa and took over the conversation.

Mira looked up at Delrin again at the same time he was glancing at her and there was so much tenderness written on his face.

Her heart was in turmoil.

Barris stood alone for maybe ten seconds before the Spymaster appeared by his side.

“Sister Nightingale”, he acknowledged her presence using the famed moniker.

“Captain”, she responded sweetly. “Good work with DesRosiers.”

“He would have given the donation anyway.”

“Perhaps you’re right”, she said. “But Lord DesRosiers is the man of ideals. He wants honorable people in charge.”

“He liked Cullen.”

“Yes”, Leliana smiled to herself gently and looked throughout the room. “Your wife is a lovely woman.”

He gritted his teeth ever slightly. “I presume you have seated her across the Marquis not on accident.”

“Captain”, she replied leniently, “there is nothing I do on accident.”

Yes, he was aware of that. That is why she was the Spymaster in the first place.
“I wish to have spared her from that”, he admitted.

The Spymaster glanced at him sharply. “Do you suppose it’s the first time she is being noticed for her looks? I guarantee you it’s not. That is why I offered her marriage. Mira knows how to behave, more than you’re willing to admit. Your union has made her a nobility. There is no sparing her from that.”

“Fereldan nobility of unimportant sort. No land, no estate.”

“You have a high position within the Inquisition”, Leliana whispered. “Mira won’t avoid the court entirely. Believe me when I say that I take no pleasure in Marquis’ behavior, but he is a powerful ally. If he threatened her in any way…”

She didn’t need to finish the sentence. He let out a deep breath.

“I have to admit, Captain”, Leliana looked at him amused, “that marriage suits you.”

She didn’t wait for his response before trailing across the room.

Before he could decide what to do next, he was joined by Lord Avery who proceeded to tell him the story of his research on the fate of Ser Brandis, The Silver Knight. Barris listened gladly, allowing himself to watch Mira a bit more.

She looked regal and breathtaking, if not just a bit uncomfortable. Her back was straight, her hands placed on her lap. She looked as if she was carved out of marble. The timeless beauty. There was a peculiar look on her face, the forced distance, the aura of unattainability.

How different she seemed now from all those times he saw her sitting barefoot on the bed with her legs criss crossed. How different she seemed from the moments he shared with her.

Derlin was aware how close he and Mira have gotten. Perhaps it was unavoidable because they have literally lived together. He saw her bracing herself to face stressful situations, he saw her embarrassment. He watched her being both direct and bold, and shying away. She had cried in his arms and told him things she had never told anyone else. He knew many of her opinions and he could easily discern her mood just by looking at her. He heard her laugh many times now, and he would never tire of it. He saw her fall asleep and rise up in the morning, drowsy and quiet.

Her walls were high in the Marquis’ presence.

He knew the woman behind those walls and she was warm, kind, smart and compassionate. She was never cold towards him.

Leliana was certainly right, this wasn’t the first time Mira received such attention. The coolness was not unpracticed, and even from afar he could sense she was not scared, she was… angry. Delrin was sure that while she might have been coy at times, she knew she was physically attractive. Why wouldn’t she? She was beautiful.

Still, should he have told her that at the beginning of the night?

He finally managed to focus his attention more on Lord Avery. This was proving to be an exhausting night.
Mira still felt angry because of Marquis’ behavior. She pondered whether she should simply get up and walk away, but something in Josephine’s eyes made her stay. She wasn’t naïve. She realized how hard everyone worked to maintain connections.

Perhaps she should have walked away anyway. If this was Earth, she would have done it a long time ago. But this was Thedas. Whenever Mira felt she got used to the new reality, something new appeared to throw her off balance. Maybe it would forever stay this way. Maybe that was just life.

“I am a man of art and culture myself, you see”, Marquis continued another one of his tales. “I have to admit I was very disappointed when Duke of Ghislain outbid me for that beautiful harp made during Blessed Age.”

“Ah, I remember”, Madame de Fer replied fondly. “It seems you simply must visit to hear it being played.”

“I would be delighted when times allows”, Marquis bowed in return.

Mira wondered if Vivienne enjoyed the Game or if she secretly hated it. She was always so glamorous and powerful, but her remark about being eighteen at court showed just enough vulnerability. Orlais seemed so utterly exhausting Was there anything that moved Orlesian imagination besides physical beauty and power? It felt tiresome and redundant, and frankly downright humiliating.

“My lady”, the damn man just had to address her again. “Do you play any instruments?”

She did. Just not here.

“I am afraid not, your grace”, she replied politely. “I did not receive a formal musical education.”

“Ah”, the slight disappointment showed on Marquis Etienne’s face. “Forgive me. After all, I realize you were not raised among nobility.”

Third time, Mira thought to himself. It was a third time for Marquis to remind her of her status. She certainly had no complex over being considered a commoner before marriage. She was from Earth, for goodness sake. It was the fact that he purposefully used it as the mean to keep her in line that bothered her.

“You’re right, your grace”, she answered without a hint of emotion in her voice.

“My dear Marquis”, Vivienne interjected informally, certainly on purpose as well, “perhaps you would be kind enough to tell us your patronage plans for the spring. I have heard you have funded certain Opera in Val Royeaux.”

Enchanter was smart, that question certainly caught his attention.

Meanwhile Mira looked at Delrin yet again. He was talking with DesRosiers again. The flutter appeared again. Ida would have liked him. It wasn’t the first time for that thought to appear, but something about tonight made the memory of her best friend so raw. Ida was essentially her sister. Mira could imagine her friend raising her eyebrows and moving her lips in familiar mannerism while whispering “just look at him, Mira”. It wasn’t just the looks her friend would have approved of. She would have approved of him.

“My lady”, the damn Marquis just had to address her again. “Do you sing? This doesn’t require formal education.”
“I do sing”, her mind was still preoccupied with thoughts of Ida and Delrin before she fully returned to the present conversation. “I am afraid I do not know the type of songs that would be played at court, your grace.”

“My lady, you simply must sing for us all. I won’t take no for an answer.”

Marquis looked drunk at this point.

Fuck you, Mira thought to herself.

She had more sense than to say it out loud.

“I am afraid—“

“I insist”, he countered.

It was just another way he wanted to showcase his power. First it was a dab about her heritage, then it was a dab about her marriage, and now he would try forcing her to entertain just because he could.

“Your grace”, Josephine tried once again, “if I just may…”

Marquis ignored the Ambassador and stood up and coughed up before speaking up.

“If I may have everyone’s attention”, his voice was loud and jovial, “Lady Barris was shy to comply with my request to sing for us, but I believe I broke through her resistance.”

Mira actually loathed him.

Josephine shot her an apologetic, begging glance and Vivienne simply had a look of distaste on her face.

Mira stood up, straightened her dress and walked few steps to stand closer to the fireplace. The room was lit with candles and she hoped her blushing would not be that visible. Small consolation. Everyone got quiet and looked at her. There would be no instruments, no accompaniment.

She could feel her heart beat fast, but Mira had sung in public many times before. She could do it, if only she found the appropriate song.

Marquis looked very pleased with himself, and she suddenly thought he probably found this whole display of power arousing. She took her eyes off him. He was just a bug. A cockroach.

“What would you sing for us, my lady?”, he asked triumphantly.

“Simple folk songs is all I know”, she replied calmly.

That was the point, wasn’t it? Not only to hear her, but to showcase how plebeian she was. Well, then.

What she could even sing? Think, think, think, there was not much time to think. Something that would pass as a simple commoner song, something without the improbable vocabulary. Church music was definitely not the right choice, most popular songs wouldn’t work either. Quickly, quickly, quickly.

She tried to ignore the fact that everyone was to stare at her and judge her. She found Delrin’s face to settle her eyes on.
He certainly had to know it wasn’t her idea, and he gave her the slightest, barely recognizable smile of support.

For fucks sake.

If Marquis wanted to hear her, what else was there to do but to sing a love song for her husband?

Delrin was in the middle of the debate about the military advancements during Steel Age with Lord Pierren DesRosiers when Marquis Etienne called for everyone’s attention and announced that Mira would sing. The way he phrased it immediately told Delrin it wasn’t her idea. Admittedly, at this point he simply imagined breaking Marquis’ face.

Mira looked determined and rather calm, which surprised him. He expected her to seem more jittery and nervous in such circumstances.

He reminded himself that she once mentioned she liked singing.

She stood by the fire that shone the warm orange light on her, making her hair flicker in copper and gold. The gown she was wearing truly showcased her curves, including that wonderful cleavage he avoided looking at the whole night. She carried herself remarkably well, although he knew her enough to notice the she held both of her hands together, most likely to avoid fidgeting.

She locked eyes with him and he couldn’t help but to smile slightly. She instinctively smiled back.

And then he heard her voice.

“*One I love*

*Two he loves*

*Three he’s true to me*

*All of my friends fell out with me*

*Because I kept your company*

*But let them say whatever they will*

*I love my love with a free good will*

*One I love*

*Two he loves*

*Three he’s true to me*
They tell me he’s poor
They tell me he’s young
I tell them all to hold their tongue
If they could part the sand from the sea
They never could part my love from me

One I love
Two he loves
Three he’s true to me

When I’m awake, I find no rest
Until his head lies on my breast
When I’m asleep I’m dreaming of
My own, my dear, my one true love

One I love
Two he loves
Three he’s true to me

When the fire to ice will run
And when the tide no longer turns
And when the rocks melt with the sun
My love for you will have just begun

One I love
Two he loves
Three he’s true to me"

His heart beat faster with every line she sang. He knew she didn’t mean those words, and he could imagine why she chose to sing it, but her eyes have never left his face, and at the end his throat was slightly dry.
Her voice was warmer and richer than he expected. Mesmerizing.

The song was simple, definitely not the type to sing at court. It was sweet and innocent, but also so bold given where they were and in what company.

Everyone clapped and he could see the blighted Marquis trying to get closer to Mira and place his hand on her back as she was stepping away from him.

“Excuse me”, he bowed down to Pierren and got there quickly.

Marquis fingers barely brushed against Mira’s spine when Barris grabbed his hand.

“Your Grace”, he warned him quietly and the man immediately relented while Delrin pulled Mira closer. She touched his arm and squeezed it gently.

He glowered at the noble, but he didn’t say anything to him. He was certain that Marquis received the message anyway.

“My heart”, Delrin spoke to Mira. It seemed appropriate to use some term of endearment in public after she essentially sang him a love song. “Come with me.”

“Gladly”, she sounded relieved.

“You’re stealing the beautiful lady from our company”, the Marquis dared to complain and Delrin clenched his jaw.

“Your Grace”, he steeled his voice just enough, “I am not stealing. The lady is my own wife.”

He didn’t even wait for the response, just lead Mira through the balcony door to let her catch some breath.

“Thank you”, she leaned on the barrier overlooking the Skyhold gardens below. “Just… thank you.”

“Of course”, he said softly.

“I apologize for the song, I realize how—“

“You sing beautifully. I… did not expect your voice to sound like that.”

“Truly? Well, thank you. I took lessons when I was young and…”, she was still slightly nervous. “I don’t even know where I was going with this. Thank you. And I am sorry again.”

“I could have requested your company before. I am sorry. The amount of attention that Marquis Etienne have given you…”

She made a frustrated sound. “He’s a disgusting, entitled, rich man who think it gives him the right to… I’ve met the type before. I am still shocked he displayed all of that with you in the room.”

It probably added to the excitement, Delrin thought bitterly, but he wouldn’t say it out loud.

“I am really sorry”, he repeated. “Are you alright now?”

“Yes”, she finally looked at him and there was something else in her eyes. “No. I don’t know.”

“We absolutely could leave…”
“No”, she said. “I realize how hard everyone works for the cause. I can stay and smile and look pretty if need be. Just… not to that man. And… Can you stay by my side?”

He did feel as if he had failed her.

“I’d love to”, he muttered. “Are you cold by any chance?”

“No”, she replied. “I think I am way too angry to be cold. How long can we stay here?”

“Another ten minutes and Josephine would come looking for us, most likely.”

“I feel so… confused and bizarre. Is it always like this in Orlais?”

“Not quite, but perhaps not as different as you’d hope.”

“What about Ferelden?”

“More simple feasting, music and… brawling perhaps. If the night goes badly. Or well. Depends whom you’d ask.”

She giggled lightly and he felt his heart warming up just at the sound of that.

“Then I’m glad we’re Fereldans”, she said confidently and then immediately added, “I don’t mean…”

“I get it. You’re one of the few people who express positive attitude towards Ferelden here. You should hear Dorian’s insults.”

“The place were I am from originally… It was a bit like that. Supposedly worse. Less cultured that the West. Less… civilized. Maybe I simply don’t know what I’m talking about, but I actually feel certain fondness towards Ferelden. Maybe it’s all those floral patterns I wear on my clothing. Or the fact that I like potatoes and they are a big part of the cuisine. Or, I don’t know, the dogs being the national obsession instead of weird social masquerade that kills people. Maybe… maybe it because it brings some good associations.”

“I didn’t know that”, he whispered softly.

“Also, Orlais did not present itself in a favorable light tonight.”

“I assure you that the art and architecture are nicer than nobility”

“I am sure”, she chuckled.

The silence befell on them, but not in an uncomfortable way, not for him, anyway.

“You’re… good at this. The talk, the party.”

“I have learned”, he responded cautiously. “I lived in Orlais for few years, worked there for more. All land belongs to someone. During a lot of missions we’d have to attend the obligatory dinner at some noble estate. It was not the crucial part of work but it was there. Moreover I stayed at Val Royaux in between assignments. I’ve seen the Game played there.”

“I see.”

“You have carried yourself very gracefully.”
“Have I? Because damn, I don’t know if I ever want to do it again”, she replied nervously. “It didn’t make you uncomfortable?”

“Why would it?”, he asked and she flinched a bit.

There was certain something in this conversation he didn’t pick up on, and it bothered him.

“Delrin”, she finally whispered, “I need to ask you something and it’s… oh well.”

“By all means.”

“Don’t think that… It’s just… Marquis made a comment. I just want to know. I don’t know if I have the right to know though.”

“Alright…”, he felt his throat slightly drying again because he just couldn’t grasp where it was all heading.

“He made some remarks about you being a soldier and he mentioned that most… don’t wait.”

“Don’t wait for what?”

It was dark, but he still could see the frustration and embarrassment growing on her face.

“I suppose what I am asking is”, she turned her head away, “Oh for fucks sake. Will you have sex with other people?”

The question was so unexpected and so direct it certainly took his breath away. First of all, what the fuck did Marquis dare to suggest her? Second of all, he knew that Mira was told the expectations for Andrastian marriage, so why would she even think that, and third of all… Before he could think anything the balcony door opened and Josephine’s head popped in.

“I am truly sorry”, the Ambassador simply said. “It’s time.”

Mira immediately headed towards the door before Delrin could even answer the question. He needed to answer it. What just happened anyway?

He held the door for her. There were so many thoughts running through his head as she walked through it. He gently touched her arm to stop her, just for a second. He leaned in close enough to know she would hear him, but not anyone else.

“No”, he breathed into her ear. “Never.”

***************************************************************************

His voice still rasped in her ears as they made it to the sitting room again and Mira was entirely certain she was blushing. They didn’t even look at each other, but he didn’t leave her side, not even once. His hand touched her back very gently whenever he wanted to guide her to follow him, and they moved through the room flawlessly, talking with various nobles and guests, passing few friendly faces.

They saw Marquis again at one point, and it was clear that he indeed overindulged in wine. Delrin wrapped his hand around her waist and Mira wanted him to never let go of her, as foolish and indulgent it seemed.

“My lady”, Marquis Etienne said drunkenly, “now I know how the Maker felt when he heard
Andraste’s voice.”

It was a blasphemous, distasteful compliment and Mira shuddered when she heard it. Being compared to essentially a religious figure was uncomfortable on its own, but in Marquis analogy he saw himself as the Maker. The audacity… He still was looking at her with a mixture of greed, desire and contempt.

She could feel Delrin’s other hand touch her forearm in a protective gesture.

“‘My Lady’”, he started and suddenly the expression didn’t sound bitter, it sounded soothing and kind, “would you like to retire for the night?”

“I would”, she responded not even looking at Marquis.

“Your Grace”, Delrin bowed down and she curtsied. They said their farewells to few other people and finally left.

This time, the silence loomed over them heavily and Mira felt nervous and ashamed and she knew there was no way Delrin wouldn’t bring up the question again.

He spoke first, the second the doors to their quarters closed after them, the second he put his sword on the weapon rack, before even lightning the candle.

“Mira”, Delrin began, “about what you have asked me—”

“I apologize…” her voice was slightly shaking.

“Why?”, he interrupted. “Why are you apologizing?”

“What?”

“Why are you sorry? Is it because you think you have no right to ask? Is it because you think I’m offended you did? Is it—?”

“Why did even you marry me?”, she replied suddenly with the question that had been hanging over her head since the start. “Why? We both know why I said yes, but why did you? I get so much more from this than you. You didn’t need to… It’s clear you could have… Well. Women like you. It’s not like… Is it penance or…?”.

Even in the darkness she could see his eyes blazing intensely.

“I suppose”, Delrin said quietly, “it was my faith. It felt like… a sign from the Maker to protect a life. I agreed to it because it felt like the right thing to do. I also fully admit I didn’t take hours to think it over, it was a leap of faith. But… It’s not penance, Mira. You’re not some act of redemption for me.”

It sounded… true. For someone like him, it would be faith, it would be the choice guided by his principles. Mira bit her lip and tried very hard to to come up with the right words to say.

“You’re not my penance”, he whispered. “You’re a person. That’s how it’s always been for me.”

This was also true, and she knew it, the second he said those words out loud.

“Leliana and Josephine explained to me what was expected of me in marriage. But we never discussed this. We have discussed a lot of things, but not this. And at first I was simply afraid of… things…”
“I know”, he said gently.

“But hearing Marquis today… There are things I believe about marriage. Things I always believe in. Fidelity is one of them. Our… circumstances are not… I don’t know what I have the right to require of you.”

“You have the right to require of me to keep my vows”, he replied simply. “I am a grown man, Mira. I know what I vowed. I don’t make promises lightly. You always keep alluding to the fact that somehow I have sacrificed more, but all I can think of was that I was fully aware of my choice. I was never afraid. I was never confused. I was never lost. I always fear it’s you who didn’t have much choice. It didn’t even occur to me that you weren’t sure about what you’ve asked.”

Her cheeks were surely burning. They felt like on fire and Mira was grateful the room was dark.

“It’s…It’s about who I am and how I view myself”, he added carefully after a moment. “I… I view myself as a man of honor.”

“I know”, she gasped.

“I will always be true to you, Mira.”

He repeated part of his vows. His words made her heart flutter rapidly. They were both standing in the dusk close enough for Mira to see how serious his face looked.

“Me too”, she said quietly. “I… didn’t realize you fear that I didn’t have the choice. I… did. But even… I already told you I don’t regret it.”

“I just wish for you to be…happy.”

Mira felt the walls around her heart crumbling. She didn’t say a word, because she simply didn’t know what to say. She wanted to touch him, to run her fingers across his chest, close to his heart. Maybe she did have the right to his respect and fidelity, but that didn’t mean she had the right to anything else.

“Can I light the candle now?”, he asked.

He would see her blushing, he would see emotions on her face.

“Yes”, she said. “But I am afraid you need to help me with the dress as well.”

*************************************************************************

He took off his velvet jacket and felt the pleasant cold air hit him. He lit up the small reading candle by the desk.

The light was faint, but the room suddenly brightened up just enough. When Delrin turned towards Mira, she was already facing away from him, with her hair pulled to the front. The gown wasn’t laced but it had a long how of buttons that he would need to unfasten one by one.

Maker’s breath. It felt different from the wedding day. She was no longer a stranger. She certainly wasn’t afraid. And he… Maker preserve him. He could feel the heat of her body, the smell of her hair, and he very much tried to fight his own body’s reaction.

Those blighted buttons.

Once again he could see the flowers behind her shoulder blades.
“I…”, Mira whispered nervously. “This is the reason why I have never used the help of a maid to dress or undress. I have four tattoos on my body and… well. I know tattoos exist, especially facial ones but… Uhm, Josephine was slightly scandalized by mine, so…”

Delrin tried very hard not to think where the other three were placed.

Sweet Andraste.

She showered first. When he finally emerged from the bathroom the room was completely dark again and she seemed soundly asleep.

He lied down on his bedroll on the floor and thought about everything that happened tonight.

She cared if he was faithful.

This didn’t mean… It was a matter of honor, respect, loyalty. But Mira cared, and she looked at him with such expectation in her eyes that it made his pulse quicken.

She was pushy, he thought and then he immediately realized that he loved that about her. Behind that awkwardness and bashfulness she was courageous and relentless. No one has ever asked him as many question as she did. No one has dug that deep to find out what he thought, what he believed in, what he stood by. Whether it was about honor, death, violence, suffering, faith, their own marriage, Mira was relentless to know what was in his heart.

She cared what kind of man he was.

As unusual as their situation was, he was never pretending with her. He certainly tried to be worthy, to be kind, but at the same time he was himself in her company.

What he told her was true. He professed his vows, he would keep them. It was about honor.

What Mira didn’t know, what he never said out loud was that she was the only woman he desired. This was more than merely an infatuation. So much more.

He wondered if he would even be able to fall asleep now.

“Delrin?”, her voice was quiet but she sounded completely awake as well.

“Yes?”

“Are you asleep?”

“I…just answered you?”, he observed amused.

“Right”, he could hear her nervous chuckle and the sound melted something in him. “Right.”

“Did you want to say something?”

“How…How much of mésalliance our marriage is?”

He shifted uncomfortable in his bedroll.

“Mira”, he finally said, “what did Marquis tell you exactly?”

He could hear her rolling as well.
“Well”, she whispered embarrassed. “He… uhm. He said few things. He said it must be difficult to be married to a soldier. He certainly implied you would be unfaithful. He also said that even in Ferelden, most nobles do not marry outside their station and that I must have… impressed upon you in some way.”

Delrin was not a violent man, but he did regret not punching Marquis in the face.

“Mira, I am so sorry”, he said desperately. “If he even—“

“You know”, she sighted, “for a man who spent the entire evening staring at my body he surely had managed to show enough disdain for me. I think I made him angry.”

“He is a despicable, dishonorable man—”

Marquis would be smart to avoid him until leaving.

“I know”, she simply said. “Let’s just… not talk about him anymore.”

“Of course.”

The silence felt thick with anticipation.

“Have you ever been in love?”, Mira asked quietly and he felt his heart in his throat.

She had never asked anything like this before.

“No”, he replied very carefully. Maybe… not until now. “I was a Templar, there was not much… Each time I was with someone it was… informal and fleeting. What… what about you?”

“I’ve never been in love either”, she whispered. “I have… never been that close with anyone.”

“I can certainly relate—“

“I’ve never had sex”, she added quickly and then flustered so badly. “So… well, that’s uhm, because. Well. I have never been in love.”

Oh.

“I am sorry”, she added desperately. “I know that’s not what you have asked—“

“Mira”, he said firmly. “It’s fine. Don’t… don’t apologize. Just please, don’t—”

“I… have a gift to make things awkward.”

“I…”, he hesitated. “I have never talked with anyone the way I talk with you.”

“Well”, she chuckled embarrassed, “there you go?”

“No, not like that”, he countered, his heart thudding in his chest. “I have never talked with anyone so openly about anything. About the important things. Your letters and then… I don’t think anyone has ever cared as much to hear my thoughts.”

“Oh”, she breathed out. “Really?”

“Yes.”

“I suppose it is good news since you’re stuck talking with me for the rest of your life”, she joked.
Was she guarding herself again? Was she using humor to let him know to stay away or... the opposite?

“Mira”, he finally said. “Any man worth anything would be proud to keep your company.”

He could swear he was able to hear her breathing.

“You are”, she finally said, “the nicest man I’ve ever met.”

Part of his heart surely just melted and he grinned to himself.

“Uhm”, she added, “I do need to get up in probably like four or five hours…”

“Sure. Sure. Goodnight, Mira.”

“Sweet dreams”, she whispered.

She had never said that before either.

He prayed the Chant before settling for the night, but as he drifted into sleep, he could hear her voice singing.

He dreamed of Mira in his arms, her hair smelling of honey, her soft curves, her lips on his.

Chapter End Notes

There are three version of One I love you should listen. Mira would sound differently to each of those, but you can get the feel of the song. The lyrics slightly differ.

Jean Ritche - One I love (the original version)
Karan Casey - One I love
Meave - One I love

I really wanted this chapter to emphasize the uncomfortableness of the subtle harassment women experience so often in life.

I also feel slightly guilty that this is such a slow burn, but I drafted the story long time ago and you have to trust me that things will happen when they should happen and that I don’t intend to drag anything needlessly.

Thank you all for following the story. It gives me so much motivation to continue writing and uploading it. I love reading your comments and I am always grateful for views and kudos.
Mira and Delrin spend the evening at the tavern with Varric, Dorian, Bull and Cassandra.

It's fun. And flirty?

And we all get to tease Barris. ;)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Third Week of Harvestmere, 9:42 Dragon Age, Skyhold

Mira soaked her whole body into the giant bath of steaming hot water and titled her head back.

“You are”, she whispered, “officially my favorite person.”

“Ha!”, Cassandra noticed satisfied. “I can’t believe no one told you about the Skyhold bathhouses.”

“And I thought that plumbing in itself was a luxury. The oils smell divine.”

“It’s different than just a regular bath, isn’t it? I come here each time I go back to Skyhold or after a particularly difficult day.”

“Mhmmm”, Mira closed her eyes. “I know a particularly long shift at the infirmary is not the same as the battle, but I still feel like I deserve this.”

“Yes”, Seeker agreed. “And you needn’t to sell yourself short, Mira. Everyone knows how hard you work.”

“I try”, she shrugged. “I know I was reluctant to—“

“For valid resons.”

“I know. I also knew that once I started, I wouldn’t be able to stop. Agh. Enough about work for today, shall we?”

“Agreed”, Cassandra nodded leisurely.

Friendship with Cassandra might have been new, but Mira certainly found much joy and comfort in it. From singing songs and exchanging silly books, to practicing self defense, to doing things like this, just enjoying the time together... It was great, and Cass was not only an incredible fighter and an intelligent women with convictions. She was honest, and once she let someone see underneath her armor, she proved to be a sensitive and caring woman who loved romance, art and a just a bit of luxury.
“We’re friends, right?”, Mira eyed her seriously.

“Certainly”, the warrior replied solemnly. “I… I hope you feel that way too.”

“I do”, she smiled. “Since we’re friends… Can I tell you something in secret?”

“Absolutely”, Cassandra was looking at her curiously.

“I…”, Mira giggled embarrassingly. “I… think I… I might… have feelings… for Delrin?”

Seeker jumped up in her tub spilling water all over the cold stone floor. She looked at Mira with a bright grin on her face.

“No way!”

“Is that really that hard to believe?”, Mira frowned. “He is… quite the man.”

“How… how serious are those feelings?”

“I don’t know”, Mira responded and it was the truth. “I… have spent way too much time thinking about kissing him for the last two days. I have to say, reading romance novels does not help my predicament. At all.”

Cassandra’s eyes were blazing with fascination.

“Does he… feel the same way?”

“No”, Mira replied sternly and then shook her head. “I… don’t know? He had never flirted with me. Ever. I think. But… Vivienne told me at the soiree that he was doting on me. I don’t know. Sometimes I think he might be? He told me… he told me after the party that any man would be proud to keep my company.”

“Aww”, Cassandra couldn’t help but grin. “That is very romantic. How is that not flirting?”

“But then”, she sighed heavily. “He… he is a confident man. I know he is. If he was interested, wouldn’t he let me know in some way? Sometimes I think he does, but none of it is that obvious. Moreover, we… the situation we’re in. We’re… married. Forever. I can’t just… risk making things awkward, you know? And… well, even if he wants me in some way, which I am not sure he does, would he want me in a way I want to be wanted?I don’t even know what I want in the first place. He is so nice and respectful, and whatever we’ve built so far means something to me. I know… I know he respects me and likes me in some way. I feel bad even wanting more. It could disrupt everything and what if it didn’t work or…? Part of me already feels like I’ve been this horrible burden for him.”

“He certainly doesn’t look unhappy in your company. Quite the opposite”, Cassandra remarked confidently. “Even I have noticed that.”

“Maybe. I don’t know. All I know is that I look at him and I certainly feel… so many things. And then… He’s my husband and I have feelings about that too and we’re living together and he’s leaving again in two weeks and… I don’t know. I just had to tell you.”

“I am honored you did. So… will you do anything about it?”

“No”, Mira replied slowly but then she giggled. “Would you judge me if I told you I brought a low
“Cut shirt to change into?”


“Are you serious?”, now it was Mira’s time to get excited. “Who? I assume it’s not—“

“I… I haven’t told anyone.”

“Well”, Mira hesitated. “I certainly won’t force—“

“If you truly insist”, Cassandra didn’t let her finish, “it’s… Cullen.”

“The Commander?”, she gasped in response. “Oh. Oh. Oh.”

“We have become… friends, I think”, Cassandra twitched her lips. “But… nothing more, and I can’t foolishly expect…”

“Why?”, Mira asked. “Dare I point out you’re at least not married to the man?”

“I suppose this could serve as consolation”, Cassandra chuckled and then immediately got serious. “He depends on me professionally.”

“You’re not his superior though.”

“No, but it changes little. And… I am not sure if he’d even want me.”

“Well”, Mira raised her eyebrows playfully. “If you ever need to borrow a blouse…?”

“Once we leave those baths, this conversation never happened”, Seeker narrowed her eyes feigning intimidation.

“Hey”, Mira pointed out. “Lucky for you it’s not Cullen we’re seeing tonight. And yes. Never happened. No words were uttered. We don’t even discuss men in our free time. Not at all. Never ever. We’re way above it all. We strictly talk about medicine, combat, music and literature.”

“Mira”, Cassandra looked at her fondly. “You truly are my friend.”

*************************************************************************

Delrin was sitting at the private room at Herald’s Rest and playing cards with Varric, Dorian and Bull. The evening was still young, and there were supposed to be joined by Mira and Cassandra… as of now, actually.

“Where are ladies, anyway?”, the dwarf asked as if he read his thoughts.

“I think they are actually together”, Delrin explained, picking up the card from the deck. “They should be here already.”

“Dorian, don’t even think about cheating!”, Bull roared in the corner.

“I resent this abhorrent, malicious…”

“Nice try. I saw that too”, Barris smirked.

“Argh”, the mage rolled his eyes. “Of course you’d stand by your brute friend…”
“I fail to see how you think you can get away with it. It never works”, Delrin raised his eyebrows in amusement.

“It does work on some!”, Dorian countered.

“Curly”, Varric clicked his tongue with satisfaction. “Curly is literally the only one it works on. And even with him, I think he knows you’re cheating, he just doesn’t call you out on it.”

“There was this one time…” the mage started while Bull cut him off with laughter.

“I let it slide.”

“Sure you did.”

“Knight”, Varric smacked his lips with anticipation. “I have heard of Blushes serenading you in public—“

Delrin glowered at the dwarf. “Don’t tease her tonight, alright? It took me a minute to convince her to come in the first place. It is bad enough you still insist on using that nickname.”

“Everyone’s critic”, Varric complained. “Don’t worry though, I have the perfect gift for Blushes that will get me in her good graces. I feel comfortable taking on bets on that, if anyone’s willing.”

Ha, Barris wondered. What could that be?

“I am pretty sure that Mira is not the easiest to bribe”, he chuckled gently.

“I believe you”, Varric looked indeed very pleased with himself. “But acquiring this hasn’t been easy, and I dare to say I used a lot of my resources to track it down.”

“Well, now I am intrigued as well”, Dorian observed. “Do we all get to see it?”

“Yes”, the dwarf responded smugly. “Indeed.”

“Why do I suddenly have a bad feeling about this?”, Barris pondered loudly when the door opened and Mira and Cassandra came in, both looking pretty happy and amused. Mira’s cheeks were reddened presumably from the cold outside. The nights had become quite cold lately, and she was wearing a dark blue coat he had not seen before.”

“Hi”, Mira smiled shyly.

“Aren’t you a bit late?”, Varric’s remark was certainly aimed at the Seeker.

“Please”, Cassandra sneered. “As if you usually make it on time. You are the one to be late, typically. It’s not like you have waited for us with the game either, I see.”

“We were very busy”, Mira announced mysteriously and Seeker giggled slightly. Delrin wasn’t sure if he had ever seen her giggle like that before. He knew that the newly found friendship certainly made Mira happier, but it definitely brought much joy to Cassandra as well. “But we are ready to relax now.”

“There’s certainly a game you could join”, Varric welcomed them both.

“There’s plenty of food, as you can see.”

“I’ll get you something to drink”, Barris got up. “What would you both like?”
“Decent ale”, Cassandra responded amused. “Not the swill.”


He knew her well enough to know she always took a long time to choose what she wanted to eat or drink. He chuckled. “As you wish. Anyone else?”

“Another round of ale? The good Fereldan one”, Iron Bull answered for everyone.

“I’ll make that sacrifice”, Dorian sighed even though everyone at this point knew of his affinity for Southern beer.

“Put it on my tab, Knight”, Varric added. The dwarf surely was in a giving mood tonight.

By the time Delrin came back with the round of drinks Mira was out of her outerwear and sitting on the bench. He handed her a drink, and sat down right next to her. She smelled… slightly differently, more intensely, as if she added something unusual to her bath. He still sensed that familiar hint of honey. She seemed comfortable, certainly not tense at the very least. Her simple white shirt clung to her body and he could clearly see that it was very loosely laced around the cleavage, and the Dalish necklace he brought from Emerald Graves dipped into the valley of her breasts.

Sweet Andraste, he really needed to stop doing that.

“Is it whisky?”, she picked up her drink to examine it and then sniffed it.

“No”, he replied, “it’s—“

“Mead”, she gave him a lovely smile. “Huh.”

“Well, I know for a fact that you like honey, so…”, he explained.

“Mead is famous from… the place I come from.”, she remarked. “A thousand years of tradition making it and drinking it as well.”

“Really?”, Bull asked interested.

“Yes. Sometimes it’s also flavored with various fruit juices. It’s usually pretty strong”, she took a small sip. “Whoah. That one is strong too. Really good though. Good choice.”

“I am glad you like it.”

“Anyway, Blushes”, Varric started ceremonially and Delrin could see Mira wince, but she did not fluster this time. “Yes, I will remain calling you that. Author’s prerogative.”

She just shook her head in response.

“However”, the dwarf continued without any hint of bother, “I do have a gift for you.”

Mira looked at the writer curiously, slightly raising her eyebrows.

“Do you really think that a gift is going to appease me?”

“Yes”, the dwarf reached to his sack. “Because I am giving you something to torture your husband with.”
Alright, what in the Void this dwarf had come up with.

“You know”, Mira replied amused, “He…he’s not that bad. I quite like him. I’m not sure I would want to torture him.”

The feeling of warmth and comfort appeared around his heart yet again.

Barris watched Varric triumphantly reveal the small booklet and everyone at the table seemed suddenly confused. Except Delrin, who immediately recognized what it was. No. Seriously? After all this time? He growled and rested his forehead on his hand embarrassingly. He could feel his own face becoming warmer.

“Wait a moment”, Dorian exclaimed with palatable excitement. “What in the Void is this. Give me!”

“Well”, Mira’s voice vibrated with curiosity as she gently brushed her fingers against Delrin’s arm, “now I am intrigued.”

The touch certainly felt surprising and nice. He didn’t even lift up his head but he heard the small struggle and Dorian exclaiming “ouch!” at the end of it.

“That’s for Blushes, not you. The rest of you will have to wait”, Varric scolded the mage.

“I have never seen Barris react that way”, Cassandra sounded entertained. “Are you alright there, Captain?”

“I am fine”, he lifted his head up and laughed. “How the fuck did you get it, Varric? I forgot all about it. It’s been years now and it was only ever sang in Eastern Ferelden.”

“I have my sources”, the annoying dwarf replied smugly.

He looked at Mira who was looking back at him and beaming. Sweet Andraste, that smile was certainly worth it all.

“Do you want to tell me what is it?”, she raised the booklet.

“No”, he chuckled slightly. “You can… Just read it.”

“I…”, she hesitated. “I don’t have to—?”

“Come on, Blushes!”, Varric cried out desperately. “If you only knew how hard it was to come by and how much it cost me!”

“It’s fine, Mira”, Barris replied amused. “Go on and… enjoy my humiliation. I will handle it as a man should. Clutching to the rest of my dignity.”

“So what is it?!”, Dorian repeated frustrated.

“Thunder Upon the Mountains! The Battle for the Heart of Dragon’s Peak!”, Mira read the title out loud. “What’s with the exclamation marks?”

Iron Bull laughed loudly, suddenly understanding what could it be indeed while Delrin glared at him.

“Ha?”, Cassandra asked. “I know your military record and Dragon’s Peak was—”
“Alright, alright”, Barris rubbed his temple. “Let Mira read it and then you can mock me forever, I suppose.”

Mira had certainly tried to deliver the lines as seriously as she could muster.

“The thunder roared upon the mountain, the lightning split the sky!
All hope had died and left the hearts filled with little more but fright!
Still not defeated, the Templars rose to answer the call of battle-cry!
The Maker’s light shone on Ser Barris, the young and handsome knight!
He drew his blade and bravely led the Templars to face the demon’s horde!
His Vigil was a month ago and yet they followed him into the bloody fight!
The Templars battled boldly, the Maker’s blessing upon Ser Barris’ sword!”

The booklet was a ballad apparently describing the battle that Delrin ended up commanding at the age of eighteen. The text itself was… peculiar, and every sentence indeed ended with an exclamation point. It was adorable. Hilarious. Beyond wonderful.

The most wonderful aspect was, of course, Delrin’s own reaction. She had never seen him so flustered, although he still controlled it relatively well. Nonetheless he suddenly was touching his face a bit more or looking away. He was laughing as well, of course. It was impossible not to after hearing it. Oh, that crack in his usual smoothness and composure just melted her heart. There was something undeniably attractive about that.

“Oh my, my”, Mira waved her hand in a playful gesture. “I think I need to fan myself after reading all this.”

Delrin rubbed the top of his head and looked away chuckling.

“By all means, mock me. I humbly accept your teasing.”

“I mean, think about it, Delrin”, Mira giggled way too loudly. “You are a handsome… with an exclamation point! That’s—“. She couldn’t even finish the sentence before erupting into hysterical laughter, trying very hard to calm herself. She could hear Cassandra’s roaring as well.

“Is that you… disagreeing with Bard Philliam’s assessment?”, Dorian’s voice was also layered with merriment.

“Oh no”, she finally managed to say, “he certainly wasn’t wrong. But… those… exclamation… points!”

Cassandra made a shrieking noise burying her face in her arms while Bull was wiping tears from his face. Varric looked beyond pleased with himself, savoring the reactions of others.
“Sweet Andraste”, Delrin shook his head. “You know, it was actually a very rough battle and my
first mission.”

“Oh”, Mira gently caressed his shoulder in reassuring gesture. “I am truly…”, she really tried
suppressing her giggling. “…sorry.”

“I can see that”, he looked into her eyes warmly. He really had the most gorgeous eyes and the
hilarity of the situation did not change the overwhelming attraction Mira felt.

She bit her lips realizing her hand was still touching his biceps.

“This is far better than Wicked Grace”, Bull coughed happily. “I think I might want a copy for
myself.”

“This could be arranged”, Varric gulped down his ale. “Albeit it will cost you.”

“I promise you all”, Delrin finally announced trying to fight his own amusement. “That the reality
was quite different. We had an idiot for the Knight-Lieutenant at first and mistakes were made, and
I did not… It really did not happen the way described here. At all. Anyway… You should have
seen how self-righteously eighteen years old I was at the time. I was so serious and convinced of
the importance of the Order. I think I gave the poor Philiam a stern lecture about divine mission of
the Templars I might have included a lot of verses from the Chant. I actually wonder now if the
bastard wasn’t simply sarcastic.”

The table erupted into laughter and giggles once again.

“So you’re saying”, Bull roared, “that you deserve it! Ha!”

“Alright”, Delrin grimaced. “I don’t think I deserve a punishment to last forever for being stupid
while barely being a man. Maker’s breath. I haven’t thought I would see that again. Believe me,
I’ve been mocked about it before. I don’t even want to know how you found it.”

“I have my contracts”, the dwarf winked.

Mira looked at Delrin once again. Damn. Every time he laughed, she felt the tingling on her spine.
He was sitting close enough for every sound to feel borderline intimate. He emitted warmth and he
smelled as good as always.

“I can’t believe you never told me”, Mira joked. “I feel this is the sort of information that should be
shared when you’re married to someone.”

He covered his face with his hands once again and she could see his shoulders shaking. She rubbed
his back reassuringly.

“Don’t worry”, she said. “I won’t bring it up everyday. Just special occasions.”

He laughed even more. That laughter…

“Blushes”, Varric looked at her triumphantly. “Does this… appease you?”

“Forgive me, Delrin”, she giggled once again. “But yes, it does. I will cherish it”, she tapped the
booklet, “forever.”

After what felt like an eternity but could have been maybe twenty minutes, everyone at the table
finally calmed down. Well, almost. Mira still giggled slightly each time he looked at her. Sweet Andraste, it was both little embarrassing and completely heart-warming at the same time. Especially given the fact that she clearly really tried to stop. She looked so amused and elated that he would truly gladly suffer through listening to the words of the blighted Philliam just to see her like this. Especially considering how taxing some of the latest days were.

Maker’s breath, he loved looking at her. Her cheeks were blushed, her eyes sparkled with mirth and she was simply radiating joy.

She looked back at him and chuckled yet again, and then leaned her face onto his arm. Was it his imagination or was she touching him more tonight?

“I am sorry”, he could feel her breathing as she spoke. “It was the last time, I promise.”

“Yes”, he replied. “I almost believe you.”

He had to admit that it felt good to have her buried into his shirt, and Barris actually caught Bull’s knowing glance before Mira lifted her face again. It wasn’t like that, he thought. Maker, he wished it was like that.

The topic finally changed. Varric shared few funny anecdotes and so did Bull. Cassandra was humorous without trying, loudly disproving every part of the dwarf’s account on his interrogation and their travel to the Conclave together. Dorian shared stories from Tevinter, and he himself shared quite the few from his work. Mira stayed quiet, and Barris just realized that everyone at the table was carefully tiptoeing around the fact that she was not from Thedas.

He wanted to ask her something, but someone cracked first.

“So, Mira”, Dorian posed the question. “How much better was your world than Thedas?”

That certainly was a bold of him, and Delrin found himself truly interested in what she would say. He had some ideas about her world, but he had never asked anything like that before. Perhaps because in part it seemed slightly cruel, reminding her what she had lost. In part because he was afraid what the answer might be. She never judged him and she wasn’t naive, and she knew of suffering, but Barris was perceptive himself. She wasn’t used to weapons of any kind in daily life, and she commented on that frequently. She had seen death, he had no doubts about it, but she had no direct experience with war.

He saw Mira’s face getting slightly confused and then very serious.

“It was… not”, she replied slowly, weighing each word carefully. “And… I am sorry if anything I said or did has given you the impression that it was.”

“Even with Corypheus and the end of the world?”, Cassandra frowned.

“Tsssk”, Mira made a sound. “Believe me when I say this. My world had found its own ways of destroying itself. Perhaps even less reversible than demons falling from the sky.”

He knew her well enough to realize that there was no exaggeration in her words. She truly meant it.

“Come on, guys”, she took a deep breath. “It’s all different but it’s all similar at the same time. I am sorry if that disappoints you. I wish I could tell you of a far away place that is less cruel, less damaged, less torn apart but I am afraid that’s never the case. I don’t even want to compare. Some things are different. I… I have lived in a part of the world that was safer than most and in the time
that was… not the worst time in history. Still… There had been wars, slavery, cruelty, greed, the devouring greed… I am certain I am biased myself, but in all honesty, I would not dare to say to you that my… previous world was better. I can’t. I would be a hypocrite. Moreover, evil seems very dependable regardless where you are.”

Her last words were slightly bitter.

“So… do you believe that change for the better is possible?”, Cassandra seemed very solemn herself.

“Despite everything”, Mira smiled slightly, “I always do and I always will. Despite how rare and hopeless it might seem, I personally will always believe that change is possible. I also know that there’s always going to be evil, cruelty, suffering and pain, but that shouldn’t stop us trying to make the world a slightly better place. Even just a little bit. As much as we can. I think it matters. I’m a medic, Cassandra. Better is always possible. I believe in diligence. I certainly believe in trying.”

He himself certainly shared those beliefs and once again it struck him how accurately she described his own convictions. She never shied away from questions like that and it was clear she had given it thought before.

“Ha”, Dorian mused.

“I don’t mind”, Mira bit her lip, “if you tell me how naive I am.”

“Perish the thought”, the Tevinter mage shrugged. “It might be nonsense, but there is a reason I am here. The same reason we’re all here, ultimately.”

“We have to drink to that”, Varric. “To…”

“Someday better. Someday soon?”, Mira proposed.

“You didn’t come up with that right now, did you, Blushes?”, the dwarf looked at her curiously.

“No”, she responded quietly. “Like most words that move my heart, they are not mine. It’s from the song, actually.”

“We all have heard about your singing…” Bull coaxed.

Mira blushed in the loveliest of ways. He knew she hated it, but he found it endearing at times.

“I presume you’re referring to the damn soiree. Yeah… well. That did happen. Anyway…”

“You could sing for us, since you have already quoted the words”, Varric added gently.

“I have heard you sing many times now, Mira”, Cassandra mentioned somewhat proudly.

Delrin felt Mira’s body shifting as she lifted her index finger and looked at the dwarf. “Don’t push it! I was already forced to sing—”

“Did Seeker chain you for her amusement?”, the rouge asked innocently earning himself being hit in the arm by the the warrior. “Ouch! All I am saying is that you have a tendency—“

“Cass is my friend”, Mira grinned at the woman. “I will always sing for her.”

Barris observed Cassandra’s face lit up with a somewhat shy and embarrassed smile. Also… Cass? That sounded…
“Cass?”, Dorian voiced Barris’ own disbelief out loud.

“Only Mira can call me that”, Cassandra glowered at the rest of them.

“That is slightly unusual”, Varric observed. “Out of all the people here, you two… have become friends. How do you even spend your time together? What are you talking about? I just need to imagine—”

“Cassandra introduced me to… the less refined of your literary works. The one that you did not include in your wedding gift”, Mira laughed loudly.

Wait, what? Delrin’s memory returned to the previous evening when he asked Mira what she was reading and she flustered slightly and mumbled that it was nothing. Really? That was it?

“No”, the dwarf shook his head in desperation. “Seeker, how could you do—“

“She liked it”, the woman replied confidently. “When is the next chapter coming? We both want to know if Knight-Captain…”

“Cass!” Mira protested giggling. “Alright, you know what, I will sing for you after all.”

Dorian shook his head in disagreement. “Well now I’d rather continue the convers—“

“Someday…” Her voice filled the room cutting the mage off and Delrin felt shiver on his spine sitting so close to her.

“When we are wiser
When the world's older
When we have learned
I pray
Someday we may yet live
To live and let let live

Someday
Life will be fairer
Need will be rarer
Green will not pay
Godspeed
This bright millennium
On it's way
Let it come someday
Soon”
“Shit, that is quite beautiful”, Bull said.

The warmth of Mira’s voice still vibrated in Delrin’s ears. Was it really that mesmerizing or was it more that it belonged to her?

She enjoyed hearing praises for her singing, he could see that clearly. She straightened herself a little bit and her “thank you” came with the hint of pride and satisfaction. She certainly seemed like she was having fun tonight, and he sincerely was grateful. Whether it was the fact that she developed friendship with Cassandra, whether it was the blighted bard Philliam and the silly ballad, whether it was the fact that there were less people here or that she had interacted with most of them several times before, she truly seemed… content.

It made him happy to see her like that.

Cassandra started quipping about something with Varric much to Dorian and Bull’s amusement.

Mira turned towards Delrin and he could see her gently playing with her necklace. He glanced at her cleavage for just a second before averting his eyes. Was she…? He could see her smiling and he couldn’t quite squelch the thought that just passed through his head. Could she…?

“Can I get something for you?”, he asked and her smile widened.

“No”, she replied. “But I will gladly get something for you.”

The feeling only intensified.

“Those trays can be heav—”

“Ser Barris”, she raised her eyebrows. “It might not have occurred to you, but I have worked as a wai… a barmaid in my time.”

“Really?”, he eyed her amusingly. “You never told me that.”

She brushed her hand against his arm again. It was a small gesture, almost nonchalant yet Delrin couldn’t help but wonder.

“It seems there’s a lot more you can learn about me”, she responded and the feeling that he really tried not to grasp onto grew stronger.

Was she being flirtatious? Was it the alcohol? She only had one drink. Or was it something else? “Uhm”, he swallowed saliva in his mouth. “It seems so.”

“What would you like?”, she asked and it took him a second to realize that she meant the drinks, because his mind definitely drifted away.

“Just another ale.”

“Sure”, she got up and asked everyone. “Drinks?”

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Mia didn’t know what she was doing, and the feeling of embarrassment fell over her. She had flirted many times before and she had kissed quite the few men, but when it came to relationships,
Mira had always been cautious.

Frankly, Mira didn’t know what she was feeling except that she was feeling a lot at the same time. She replayed Delrin’s voice telling her he would always be true to her countless times for the last two days. She remembered how he was looking at her when he told her she wasn’t his penance. How he truly was the kindest, nicest man she has ever met. How he had always made her feel safe. How he was always so honorable.

She wanted to… Damn it. She wanted to bury her face into his chest and smell him. She wanted to kiss him. She wanted to run her fingers through each of the scars she had seen on his body. Goodness, she spent the last two days imagining kissing him, touching him, feeling his stubble on her cheeks, hearing his warm voice calling her his wife.

It was… a silly fantasy. Even if he felt some sort of attraction it still didn’t mean it was possible. Not… not the way Mira imagined. She wasn’t even sure he would be… willing. Even after he said all those things, he didn’t express any clear interest in her as a woman. He had never even told her she was beautiful. It could be because he was cautious. Now, was he cautious because he was honorable or was he cautious because his eyes twinkled like it probably twinkled for many other women and…

Oh, Mira knew she was in trouble.

She could hear Ida’s laughter in her mind. Ida would tell her to just… do it. Make a move. Ida was a risk taker in love, and Mira could remembered several situation when she was there to mend her friend’s heart. And one situation when heartbreak wasn’t the only pain caused.

No one broke Mira’s heart. There were few painful moments, but she never gave her heart away enough for it to be broken.

However, Mira also didn’t want… what was the expression that Delrin used? She didn’t want anything informal and fleeting.

Now she was spiraling inside her own head. He was sitting right there, his knee was touching her leg. The sleeves of his shirt were rolled, and she could see his strong biceps underneath that shirt. Seriously, one could study anatomy…

“Mira, Mira, Mira”, Dorian called for her with peculiar look on his face. “Did something… distract you?”

“I do work very hard and I’m quite tired”, she replied even though she could feel her face flushing again. “And I got up very early today. What… Was there some other question?”

“I just asked you why you have chosen medicine of all things in life.”

"Oh”, Mira pondered. “You know… My parents are… were… both doctors. Medics, I mean. My father was a famous surgeon. I… suppose some part of me always thought I’d become one myself.”

“So it’s family heritage. How Imperial of you.”

She chuckled.

“Did your parents support your choice?”, the mage pried and Mira knew she wouldn’t avoid the answer. Thankfully that sort of answer was well practiced.
“My father…”, she glanced at Delrin and could see him visibly tensing up. “He was an… asshole. I haven’t spoken to my parents in years. I rarely give them much thought at all.”

“I am sorry, Blushes”, Varric muttered while Dorian’s eyes were piercing her.

“Mine too”, he simply said and Mira looked up at the man, the emotion behind his intelligent eyes. “An asshole father.”

“Here’s to surviving them”, she raised the glass calmly and the mage smiled.

“That certainly doesn’t explain your feelings about medicine”, Bull looked at her curiously. “I was right here when you paced this exact room asking me questions.”

“Well”, she measured her words. “Dorian asked me why I chose medicine. Not how I became a medic. Or what drives me now. I mean… You didn’t all become warriors in one day. And some of you might not even had a choice. You didn’t choose to be a mage, Dorian. Templars are recruited as children. There’s always more, isn’t it?”

“So what is it?”, Cassandra asked.

“I…”, she shook her head. “That is tough to answer, you know? Illness and death are perhaps the most dependable facts of life. I am sure you of all people know it all very well. There is something about trying to provide care, comfort and cure that is… profound to me. Do not get me wrong. It is boring and repetitive most of the time. It is less impactful than people realize. There is often little I can do, especially here. I am constantly tired. When you’re a medic, people die on your watch and that is both devastating and normal at the same time. Sometimes what I do is interesting but I don’t get a thrill out of it, not usually. But the idea… No. Not the idea. The reality that between illness and death there is a way to help someone, to save someone, to win over it, even temporarily… It is not about what I can do. It is not about my skills. There are infinite possibilities in medicine to find ways to save people and that is tantalizing to me. There is a way if you find it and it’s not easy. But when it works, it changes everything for that one person or for the group of people. Death and illness have such a grip on life and it’s so tight and cruel that every time I think of the way to say ‘fuck you’ to it all… It is very fulfilling. So, I suppose that is why I… uhm… like medicine?”

“Shit, Mira”, Bull laughed to himself. “Yes, that was somewhat what I imagined.”

She laughed and sipped on the second glass of her mead.

“So, can we now ask you some questions about your world, Blushes?”, Varric asked coaxingly.

“Earth”, she replied amused. “It’s called Earth. And yes, you can.”

Suddenly she was flooded with multiple inquires, but she really didn’t mind. Tonight was quite fun, actually. They asked about military, and they couldn’t quite grasp the drones, or planes, or guns. They asked about transportation, and how many countries there were, and they seemed to be in some disbelief about that. They asked about customs where she lived, the food, the education, the medicine, the world without magic.

“What about the weddings”, Cassandra sighed dreamily. “Was your wedding similar at all to what would happen on Earth?”

Damn it, Cass, Mira thought to herself. The same night she told her she was infatuated with Delrin, Seeker just needed to ask that question.
“Aside from”, Mira coughed, “my circumstances?”

“Uhh. Yes”, the warrior looked at her apologetically.

“Well”, Mira couldn’t help but glance at Delrin who was back to being his usual calm and confident self. “The vows were… almost identical. It was taken aback by how quiet it was. There was no music, nothing even in the background, although I am not sure whether it’s always like this or is it because Skyhold is in the middle of nowhere. And of course there was nothing after, so I can’t judge how weddings are normally celebrated. On Earth it… it depends. Where I originally come from, the weddings are this big huge affair and the party can last for two days. There is a lot of alcohol, a lot of food, loud music and a lot of dancing and frankly it is a bit terrifying. There are a lot of customs that are just… Some of them are silly. Some of them are endearing.”

”Nothing after”, Dorian coughed and she gave him a murderous look.

“I meant the party”, she flustered.

“What else could you mean?”, the mage raised his eyebrows.

“Don’t make it awkward”, Mira bit her lip. “And… there was a cake, so… What was I? Anyway, I am answering Cass’ question. It’s not my fault you insisted to waste your time with valid and smart inquiries about science.”


“Alright”, Mira pondered and smiled. “So, when the newly married couple leave the church… like, the chantry after the ceremony, the guests toss flower petals or rice on them.”

“Rice?”, Bull asked with disbelief in his voice. “Rice? Really?”

“Yes, rice. It is supposed to bring you luck though I wouldn’t wish to remove rice from my hair. Anyway, what else… When newlyweds appear at the wedding celebration, they are welcomed with bread, salt and two shots of vodka… It’s a strong alcohol. The bread and salt have religious symbolism as well. Both bride and groom are supposed to drink the alcohol and toss the glass behind their right arms to break it. For luck.”

“That is so… not at all what I would have imagined.”

“What else… There are a lot of toasts and there are wedding chants to make the newlyweds kiss…”

“Chants to make the newlyweds kiss?”, Dorian raised his eyebrows. “That certainly sounds barbaric enough to be Ferelden.”

“It’s not”, Delrin noted amused. “I haven’t been to a wedding in almost twenty years aside from… mine, but I sincerely don’t think it happens anywhere in Ferelden.”

“So what is being chanted?”, Varric asked.

“Bitter bitter”, Mira giggled and they all looked at her confused. “The guests chant ‘bitter bitter’ because the alcohol is said to be bitter until the newlyweds kiss and make it… sweeter, I suppose.”

“That is oddly charming”, Varric couldn’t help but smile himself.

“That is…”, Cassandra frowned. “I can’t decide whether it’s romantic or deeply embarrassing. Is
“Carrying the bride through the door threshold? A long time ago it had been considered back luck for the bride to trip entering her new home, so the custom is for the groom to carry her through it. So yes, I hope that satisfied your curiosity, Cassandra.”

“I suppose we could raise a toast for both of you now”, Varric’s eyes glimmered as he raised his glass.

“I know for a fact there is no other ballad you can gift Mira”, Delrin warned the dwarf while Mira blushed.

“May… it never be bitter, but always sweet”, Master Tethras announced ceremonially and she laughed.

“Alright”, she raised her own glass and glanced at Delrin. “I suppose that is fine.”

For a split second she could have sworn he certainly was looking at her… as a woman. His woman.

There was no point in trying to suppress the fluttering around her heart.

The night was starry and beautiful and and the air was crisp and cool. It certainly was getting colder, and he knew he was going to miss it when being stuck on the desert.

To the Void with it. It was not the cold he was going to miss. He would miss her, and tonight Mira was chatty and happy and… He wasn’t imagining it, was he? She was flirtatious. As subtle and casual as it seemed, she had touched him more times than ever, her glances lingered… If those were different circumstances, he would certainly try to kiss her tonight.

The reality was still the same. He wasn’t walking her to her quarters, they were coming back together to theirs, to their routine and… It was different. He was perceptive, but he wasn’t necessarily objective, was he? He could have misread the situation. It could have been the atmosphere of the night. She could have been flirty simply because she was relaxed and she felt safe with him. She had sent him so many signals earlier that he couldn’t quite forget about. When she was crying in his arms, she was worried he might take it the wrong way and he reassured her he wouldn’t. It would be improper to try to act on his feelings just because she caressed his arm several times.

On another hand, he didn’t want to not respond at all if there was a chance she was indeed trying to show him she was…interested.

“Do you still like the night sky?”, he stopped her gently by placing his hand onto her back. He still took his hand quickly.

“Yes”, he couldn’t see her face and he was certain she smiled. “Is that… the same spot?”

“Yes”, he replied chuckling. “The one where you called me out for not asking you any meaningful personal questions.”

“I have no regrets doing that”, she mused. “I… honestly, I barely remember not knowing you.”

“Me neither.”
“So”, she wondered. “Can you point out some constellations?”

He stood right behind, close enough that he was almost touching her. She seemed so small now. His chin was above the top of her head.

“Let’s see”, he whispered, “Something easy. Alright. Do you see… To your right, below that bright star. There is a sword, it’s called the Sword of Mercy, or Judex.”

“I… wait, where?”

He placed his hand on her waist and felt the coarse wool of her coat underneath his fingers. He stepped even closer and pointed out the sky extending his other arm.

“Here it starts, and then—“

“Oh, I see it now.”

She leaned back just slightly and suddenly her whole body rested on him. He did not move his hand this time, just enjoyed the sensation and the scent of her hair.

Nothing else happened that night.

Still, it all made him more convinced that Mira indeed might have felt… something.

He was also convinced he was in love with her.

Chapter End Notes

Yes, Mira has a crush on Delrin. It's official. She does.

And yes, of course she told Cass. She is so used on relying on friendship.

And you know what? When you read one of the Bioware books it mentioned the damn chapbook written about Barris' first mission but we get no codex, nothing about it.
Of course I needed to remedy it. Forgive me for my butchered verses, but I just thought it was too hilarious and adorable concept to pass on it.

It is a slow burn, so I can only promise you that it will happen. Someday. ;)

Thank you so much for reading and for all the comments and kudos. You guys are the absolute best.
Nocturne

Chapter Summary

Mira and Delrin spend the evening together as she has the unexpected chance to say goodbye to her past.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Third week of Harvestmere, 9:42 Dragon Age, Skyhold

It was a mid-afternoon, but Mira had been up since the middle of the night. Tomorrow would finally be her day off, and she could sleep and sleep and sleep. Goodness gracious, she needed to sleep. She desperately needed the rest. The work at the infirmary wasn’t that difficult, but it was relentless, especially the last several days. She had barely spent any time with Delrin. Perhaps tomorrow she would come and watch his practice. Maybe he would even take some time off.

“What are you still doing here?”, Ellendra saw her standing by the door. “Go! You’ve been working insane hours this week. I don’t want to see you anywhere near the infirmary until the day after tomorrow.”

“I love you, Ellendra”, she replied trying to suppress yawning.

“Shoo! We’ve got this under control.”

“If someone’s dying…”

“Yes, Mira, I will send for you.”

When she reached their room, it was empty. Delrin had to be at the practice or one of the countless war meetings he attended. When was the last time she managed to get to the quarters in the middle of the day? Part of her wanted to collapse on the bed, but she needed to clean herself first at the minimum. She took a shower, washed her hair and some of the sleepiness subsided. Perhaps she could go to the kitchens and eat something…

The knock on the door startled her. It almost never happened.

“Uhm, yes?”, she asked without opening the door.

“It’s Scout Jim, Lady Barris. Inquisitor is asking for your presence in the war room.”

Seriously? For some reason she felt nervous. She didn’t even realize Maxwell had returned already, and she had never been summoned to see him beforehand. She had always interacted with female advisors or Cassandra.

“Just give me a minute.”
She quickly put on breeches, a simple shirt, socks and boots. Her hair were still completely wet. She could already feel her shirt soaking. Scout Jim politely didn’t say anything upon seeing her dressed so casually.

What was it all about? Did the Inquisitor want to talk about the infirmary? Truthfully, she had no idea. Scout Jim led her to the large double door leading to the war room but wouldn’t even enter with her.

“I was asked to stay here, Lady Barris.”

She pushed through the entrance and the first person she saw was Delrin who looked pretty somber and serious. Then she noticed both Maxwell Trevelyan and Solas standing on the other side of the massive mahogany table. It all seemed incredibly bizarre until Mira glanced at the objects laying on the table and suddenly felt weak.

She froze completely, not being able to move.

Her… things were there.

_Her things._

Her backpack, her small dark blue backpack with a North Face logo. The contents of it neatly assembled in the row, staring at her. Her wallet. Her phone, now certainly dead. Her Ipad. Did she really take an iPad with her that day? The water bottle. The small first aid kit she carried out of obligation. The sunscreen. The lip balm. The still unopened pack of Jeżyki biscuits, the only thing left uneaten. Funny how now she remembered that clearly. The keys, fuck, the keys to their apartment with that silly syringe and stethoscope keychain Ida got her.

It wasn’t a big backpack, not the one she would used to carry her clothing in. It was more of a handy bag with most few important items.

Now they were all here and Mira struggled to catch her breath.

Her knees felt weak.

“I have to…”, she panted frantically trying to hold onto something, “sit down…”

She felt Delrin’s arms grabbing her immediately as he led her to the chair. He pulled a second one for himself and the Inquisitor and Solas sat down too.

Mira was sure her heart would jump out of her chest.

Delrin took her hand and she closed her eyes and slowly calmed down, working on her breathing. The temperature suddenly seemed to have dropped and Mira felt so cold as her wet curls clung to her blouse.

_Those were her things._

“We… closed the Rift. The one… the one you came through. And… we have found this… sack. It was right underneath the rift and thus it remained unaffected by the elements.” The Inquisitor spoke slowly. “It does confirm that everything you said was true.”

“For fucks sake”, Mira managed to hiss. “Seriously?”

“I am sorry”, Trevelyan had decency to be embarrassed. “It’s not… We didn’t have doubts. I just…”
wanted to make that clear.”

Delrin squeezed her hand but Mira was certain it was to reassure her rather than to stop her from saying more.

“I have checked”, Solas added, “that the items are not corrupted.”

“There is no magic where I come from”.

“Anyway”, The Inquisitor sighed heavily. “I… we need to destroy those objects. They… they are powerful evidence of your identity and I… already have ordered for them to be destroyed by Dagna, tomorrow morning.”

Mira knew he was right. She knew it. It still felt… It felt so surreal, first of all. Her things. Here. In Thedas. The phone had certainly lost its battery because it was on but… the Ipad… could it be? If it wasn’t exposed to the elements, could it still work? Could she then…?

“Tomorrow?”, she just asked.

“Yes.”

“So, can I take my things right now?”

“Uhmi”, Maxwell hesitated. “Sure. Just… bring them to the Undercroft tomorrow morning. I apologize but we cannot risk—”

“Is that all that you wanted to tell me?”, she asked sharply, feeling the tears welling up in her eyes.

“We thought you might want to show us and explain—“ Solas started but Mira cut him off.

“No”, she shook her head. “I am sorry, but I want to… be alone.”

“Understandable”, the Inquisitor nodded. If he was disappointed, he wouldn’t show it. “There’s a sack you can put everything in to carry it discreetly out of here. I… anticipated you might want to do something before it gets destroyed.”

Mira let go of Delrin’s hand and stood up and frenziedly packed everything. She knew her whole body was slightly trembling, but what she felt was not merely sadness. It wasn’t merely anger either. She was a little bit sad, a tiny bit angry, a whole lot confused but also very excited because if she was right, she knew exactly how she wanted to spent the night.

She picked up the sack and put it across her shoulder.

“Can… we go now?”, she questioned impatiently.

“Yes, of course”, Maxwell answered.

“Well… thank you, I suppose”, Mira replied dazedly and grabbed Delrin’s hand again and dragged him out of the war room.

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Delrin just bowed down to Maxwell and Solas before Mira lead him outside. She was still squeezing his hand. Scout Jim was dutifully waiting outside the door, and it was Mira who addressed him.
“Jim”, she spoke directly. “Can you give Captain Barris and me a minute? But… don’t go away?”

“Certainly”, Jim looked at Delrin just to get that tiny confirmation and then walked away to give them space.

It was the first time today that Mira actually looked him in the eyes. He expected her to be sad, but he found something else instead. Her eyes were glassy, but they also burned with intensity and excitement.

“I…”, she started. “Can you please cancel whatever you had planned for tonight and tomorrow morning? I know it’s a big ask but—“

“Of course”, he answered. “I’ll order Jim to find Clarissa and let her run the practice.”

“Thank you”. She still had not let go of him.

“You have to… let go of me so I can do it”, he smiled softly.

“Right... Sorry”, she flustered a bit.

He gave the order and then they walked to their quarters in complete silence. Mira stopped by the entrance to the kitchens and hesitated. She handed him the sack.

“Can you take it to the quarters and wait? You can… I don’t know. I’ll bring some food and snacks for later.”

“Can I take a shower?”

“Sure. Make yourself comfortable.”

Barris washed off the grime and sweat and changed into simple clothing. The sack was on the bed, daunting him. He certainly never anticipated to see other items from her world, and it seemed so impossible. He couldn’t quite imagine how Mira must have been feeling about that.

She came in maybe few minutes later, but those few minutes seemed like an eternity. She carried a tray of cheese and meats and bread and some fruit, two empty glasses and a bottle of white Ghislaini wine.

“I…”, she suddenly blushed heavily. “I didn’t ask you if you want to do it. Those things… I can show you a lot of my world and I only have tonight. So if you want to—“

Maker’s breath, of course he wanted to learn more about her.

“Absolutely”, he replied. “Whatever you need.”

She eyed him carefully. “It’s going to be a long evening and night if… if am able to do what I think I am able to do.”

He watched her kick her shoes carelessly to the side of the room. She took some pillows from the bed and set them on the floor against the footbed, and prepared few blankets as well.

“Do you want me to roll out my bedroll”, he joked before he could bite his tongue and realize how inappropriate this could have sounded.

She didn’t seem to notice. “Could you?”, she responded seriously. “It would be wonderful.”
He obliged and she created the whole cozy sitting space out of it. It was endearing. She gestured him to sit in a way that was both adamant and stern. Barris could see her nervousness and anticipation and excitement. More than anything else, it was excitement.

“Can you pour us some wine?”, she asked. “Or… at least some for me. I am not forcing you to drink.”

“I certainly don’t mind—“

“I might get tipsy”, she chuckled. “And I’ll probably cry at some point.”

“I’ve seen you cry before, Mira”, he reminded her gently. “It’s alright.”

She looked him straight in the eye.

“You know how sometimes I tell you things about my world or past and in response you tell me it is hard for you to imagine?”

“Yes”, he replied slowly.

“Well”, she started, “if am not mistaken, tonight I might be able to… show you.”

“Show me?”, he measured his words.

“Just…”, there was seriousness on her face. “Trust me? And ask any questions you have?”

“Sure”, he replied. “I am… getting oddly nervous now, Mira.”

“I am sorry”, she giggled. “I realize I am very cryptic. Let’s start with something easy.”

She tossed all the items on the the blanket ahead of them, without any warning. Most… he couldn’t identify the absolute most of them. It felt so bizarre just looking at them.

She grabbed the crinkly light blue box covered with material he had never seen and laughed loudly. He couldn’t help but smile.

“I am sorry”, she shook her head. “I realize I sound completely bonkers, but I am just so so excited”. She ripped the box and handed it to him. “Grab a biscuit.”

A what? His face must have betrayed his confusion because she added:

“It’s a biscuit with chocolate and caramel and coconut and it’s delicious. Trust me.”

“How”, he hesitated, “is it supposed to be fresh after over two months—“

She giggled once again. “It’s… preserved. Believe me, it’s good. The packaging and the ingredients we use… Just… I won’t make you, but consider taking a bite.”

He did, just the tiniest one. It truly was delicious, full of some nuts, chocolate and caramel. She grabbed one too and closed her eyes while chewing it.

“It’s very… tasty”, he admitted, eating more.

“Yes”, she whispered once she swallowed hers. “It was one of my favorite treats. Anyway, what else do we have here? Look, that’s my wallet. It’s what we used for money and documents. We… we rarely used coins, just mostly banknotes, like those.”
“Parchment money?”, he raised his eyebrows.

“Right”, she sighed. “My world also didn’t use gold standard anymore.”

He couldn’t even imagine how it was possible, but Mira was too preoccupied with other things to explain.

“Those are”, she handed him few small pieces of something harder than parchment, “my identification documents. Various ones.”

“That is…”, he gasped at the perfect image of her face, as if perfectly drawn. “That’s… you.”

“Yes”, she answered, shaking her head. “This what we call a photo.”

“Is… your middle name Stefania?”, he examined the writings carefully.

“Oh fuck, you actually picked up on that?”, she shuddered while giggling. “Yes, it’s after my other grandmother. I have never liked that name, so graciously keep it to yourself. There’s a reason it’s just Mira Barris now. I presume… do you have a middle name?”

“No”, he replied.

“Damn”, she laughed. “Let’s pretend I don’t either.”

“What’s that?”, he pointed at another object.

“My hospital badge. It’s the identification for my… previous work. I… I can show you. Alright”, she whispered. “I am pretty sure it should still be charged since it was turned off but….”

“I… don’t even know what you’re talking about.”

“This”, she picked the black rectangular object with a bizarre shine to it. “It’s a machine… a device through which you can see the images of my world. We had the way to capture… photos. Like the one of my face. Thanks to special lenses… I can’t explain it. I mean, I could try, but I think it’s easier to show you. It might be really weird. Let me just tell you it’s not magic, it’s not dangerous and it cannot hurt you.”

“Alright…”

“I feel that with every sentence I say you become more tense.”

“You are very cryptic. And I am not… Mira, you have to know I am not easily afraid.”

She looked at him and smirked. “How could I forget that you’re the warrior who fought a dragon.”

He covered his face. “That’s not what—“

“I know”, she smiled. “I also know that seeing things you could not have imagined existed is quite disconcerting, so I am trying to prepare you in some day. Surely though, we can just dive in. Let me know if you need me to hold your hand through it”, she winked.

“I am certain I can handle—”, he didn’t finished because suddenly something appeared on the black glossy surface and then….

It was her face right there, on that thing, alongside some pretty blonde woman, both of them laughing. It wasn’t a drawing. It was… it was her face, frozen in time, exactly as she was. He
couldn’t look away. The same features, the same beautiful, bright smile he loved so much, suddenly just fixed, unmoving. He felt his heart beat faster and he was both dazed and in awe.

Delrin felt her hand gently rubbing on his shoulder.

“Are you alright?”, she whispered gently.

“I… yes”, he replied, taking a sip of wine. “I simply… don’t know what to say. Is that… Ida?”

“Yes”, Mira’s voice broke suddenly and he saw tears falling out of her eyes.

“Oh, Mira.”

“I’m fine”, she wiped out her tears quickly. “I don’t want to cry. She wouldn’t want me to cry. I just want to… Show you. There’s a lot more to see. That’s Ida. I never thought I’d see her face again.”

Mira did something and the surface changed. She did it again and more images appeared.

“Let’s see”, she smiled softly.

And then she showed him so many things. She showed him the place she lived in. The small quarters, or the flat, as she called it, with bizarre furnishings. Her small bedroom with lots of plants and white walls. The city… Maker’s breath, the city. It was unlike any city he had seen before. The things they used for transportation, the buildings taller than the White Spire, the lights. He remembered when she told him that her world was bright, and it indeed was so bright. He suddenly felt almost embarrassed, because this was so different than what he imagined and so intimidating at the same time. He remembered how she couldn’t light the candle chandelier or how wide her eyes had gotten when she asked him about dragons or how she couldn’t write proficiently using inkwell… He thought he understood, but until now, until that very particular moment, he truly had no idea.

He saw more of Mira herself too, and Sweet Andraste, she looked both the same and yet so different at the same time. She dressed differently, and a lot of photos showed her wearing dresses, but they were short, like nightgowns. He saw Mira with other people, laughing in the crowd. Mira with Ida, both of them smiling brightly or making faces. The friendship and affection were noticeable at the first glance. Mira in a large garden, wearing bottoms so short it revealed most of her thighs. Mira by the sea, her legs again uncovered, her hair loose and wild in the wind. On one image… He turned away.

Maker preserve him.

“I am sorry”, Mira seemed slightly amused. “Did I just… embarrass you?”

“You’re… barely clothed”, he responded quietly.

“Well”, she laughed. “That’s… a swimsuit. That’s what people would wear to swim. What do you wear to swim here?”

“Smalls or… nothing?”.

“You’re not quite making an argument for modesty in Thedas, you know?”, she giggled.

“Most people can’t swim. It’s… not that common. I can because I grew up near rivers and Lake Calenhad and Templars at Kinloch get training when it comes to swimming but I’d say that’s the
“Well, I can swim well”, she shrugged. “Don’t worry, I can go through those photos—”

“You don’t have too”, Maker, his face certainly was flushed now. “I thought I was merely being… appropriate.”

“Ever so chivalrous”, she murmured almost playfully and something in her voice warmed him up.

He looked. Maker’s breath, perhaps he shouldn’t have, because he surely knew the images would stay in his head. It was as if she was wearing just undergarments except that her midriff was covered too. The fabric was green, her breasts looked luscious, he could see the outline of her waist and the curvature of her hips, and her round thighs and he really didn’t want to let him mind wander. Sweet Andraste.

Mira just poured herself a second glass of wine and he guessed it wouldn’t be her last. Tonight… with everything going on, it certainly was not the right time to consider doing anything.

Since the night at the tavern they had barely seen each other. Between Mira’s job at the infirmary and preparations for Western Approach, they were both swamped with work.

The images changed again and he saw the bright corridor and more lights than he had ever seen in his entire life. He saw Mira wearing loose and light green outfit. She looked both beat and tired despite still smiling.

“This was one of the first photos during the first year as the junior doctor. I just started the second one when I ended up here. I…”, she chuckled to herself, “Look at me. I was so terrified, and rightly so, and so so exhausted. The tiredness never ends, but it sort of… becomes a familiar part of life.”

“You do work a lot”, he muttered quietly. “I almost wonder whether I should add additional practice to my day.”

She laughed so loudly the sound vibrated in his ears. “Honestly we are understaffed at the infirmary and… there is a lot of guesswork regarding what to do and frankly I feel like such a fraud. I know in some way I am the most qualified person, but on another hand it would have taken me another… seven to nine years of training in my world to bear the responsibility I bear now. There is no explaining it to anyone here. It is daunting and I am afraid of the inevitable time I will fuck up. I am so scared of encountering the case that would be not a big deal on Earth but here in Thedas…”, her voice cracked. “Well.”

“Hey”, he tapped her arm. “You’re… trying. I know you are. And I know that what you do makes a difference.”

“Thank you”, she looked at him softly. “I… honestly, I always feel torn between taking pride in what I do and being utterly horrified by the responsibility and the uncertainty of medicine. Even with magic - and I don’t think I would be able to do almost anything without magic - things still can be grim. I am so glad”, she covered her yawn, “to finally have a day to myself tomorrow.”

Maybe she would prefer to spend the day alone.

“Well”, she smiled shyly at him. “Unless you are free…”

“Yes”, he answered immediately. “I am.”
There were so many images. She never thought she would see everything and everyone again. There were so many photos with Ida and Mira felt the gulp in her throat looking through each of them. Ida sipping on her cocktail, Ida laughing loudly, Ida dancing, their selfies from the trip to London.

Mira actually frowned how many silly photos of herself she had on her Ipad. At least this wasn’t her phone, she thought to herself, otherwise it would only be selfies, embarrassingly.

Thankfully Delrin looked far too confused to pass any judgements, and honestly, Mira knew exactly what he was feeling. To see that emotion written on his face seemed almost cathartic. It validated every single time she struggled here. Maybe it was selfish, but part of her truly relished in watching his reactions.

Moreover, there was no point denying how adorable it was.

She definitely should show him some videos.

“Mira?”, his voice was low and quiet. “You are staring at me.”

“I know”, she admitted while her cheeks got warmer. “Don’t make me lie. I am not even sorry. It’s… I have never dreamed I would be able to show you all of that and it feels… I lack words to describe it properly. I am no longer the only person in the whole Thedas to truly know. You have always been nothing but supportive and you’re a great listener. But now that you’ve seen even just a little bit, somehow it feels… different.”

“Yes”, he simply agreed.

“You know, aside from the images frozen in time my world also could capture… movement. I think I should have some videos here.”

She was right. There were at least several. Christmas with Ida’s family, few short videos made around her birthday, few of her singing, few other silly and random ones, the walkthrough of the apartment they rented after graduation. How could she even begin? How weird it all seemed in the context where she was now. She clicked on the video showing her blowing the single candle off the cupcake for her birthday and laughed.

“That’s…”, Delrin’s voice cracked. “I can’t understand.”

“I know”, she giggled.

“So making this was just a daily occurrence? And everyone could just… create it?”

“Pretty much.”

They watched her strumming the guitar and singing and she explained how the lute or zither or any other plucking instrument she had heard about here in Thedas was different. She couldn’t play those. She showed him the one video where she played the piano, at Ida’s house. They watched so many things and Mira drank more wine.

She saved one particular video for last, the one that would be the hardest to watch, the most heartbreaking. The one where Ida recorded her birthday wishes.

“This one… you won’t understand the language but I still want to listen to it.”

“Do you want a moment for yourself?”
“No”, she looked at him. “I… Don’t go.”

“I won’t.”

Her mind could never fully recall the sound of Ida’s voice, but the second her friend spoke the first word it was as if the memory had never left her. Everything about Ida that she had stored in her mind was suddenly tangible and real again. Her pretty face with big blue eyes, her light blonde hair that reached past her chin. The dimples in her cheeks as she smiled. Her humor, her witty jokes and all the inappropriateness that she was glad Delrin would not understand. And then, the words of support and encouragement and wishes of love.

For Mira, Ida was the only family she had. She was more than a friend, she was a sister.

Surprisingly, she didn’t even cry although she felt that one word could tip the scale and she would start bawling. She replayed the video several times before she finally leaned back and sighed.

Delrin did not say the word. He truly had the gift to not overstep, in any situation. He just sat there with her, and somehow it made it all better.

_**I hope you find the knight in a shining armor,**_ Ida joked on the screen just a second ago. Damn. Mira did, didn’t she?

Suddenly, she laughed so loudly and so freely, and once she started, she couldn’t quite stop herself for a minute, despite the fact that it must have looked completely and utterly ridiculous. Ida could always make her laugh.

She looked back at Delrin and he was smiling at her and there was just so much warmth in his eyes it almost took her breath away.

“I am happy”, she explained, “to have seen her one more time.”

“I can certainly see that.”

“Ida would have liked you”, she added softly.

“I feel honored”, he looked emotional.

The sudden idea popped into Mira’s mind.

“You know”, she started slowly. “We could take a photo of us. Right now.”

“Really? How… how does it work?”

“Do you want to do it?”

“Sure”, he chuckled somewhat nervously. “Does it… take a long time?”

“No”, she laughed. “Only a second. You’ll see. I just need to…”

She moved her body closer to his side.

“Can you… put your arm around me?”

He did, without hesitation.

“Alright”, she turned the camera on. “And now… smile.”
And there it was. She had to admit, they did look good together. Something deep in her heart moved, and she took a deep breath.

“That is”, he finally said after a good minute of silence, “very bizarre and quite nice at the same time.”

“Yes”, she agreed. “It is.”

Delrin was still sitting in the same position, his back leaning at the foot of the bed.

Mira was laying down on his bedroll listening to music and humming with her eyes closed at the same time. The music was bizarre, but not necessarily unpleasant, just… unexpected and new. It certainly did not escape Barris’ attention that Mira had five glasses of wine while he had one. She certainly didn’t seem drunk, but perhaps she was not entirely sober either.

Sweet Andraste, she was so beautiful and the whole image of her among his bedding was far more sensual than it should have been. Her curls were all over the pillow. Her shirt was slightly lifted and it revealed the small portion of her stomach and now he knew where one of her tattoos was placed. The small flowers and larger leaves were visible on the right side above her breeches and Delrin really did not intend to imagine how low that tattoo went. Except that he just did. Maker preserve him.

He wondered if his pillow would smell of herbs and honey later, just like her curls.

She was so absorbed by the music it tugged at his heart. He never thought he would be able to see her like this, to see her past and her world. He thought he understood her loss, but to see it with his own eyes was something else. He certainly did imagine Earth multiple times from her stories, but none of it came even close to how strange and extraordinary were the images she had shown him. The fact that those images existed in the first place was staggering enough.

“What?”, she looked at him softly. He couldn’t tell if what he saw in her eyes was more of the wine or just tiredness.

“I was just thinking”, he replied, “about how different seeing everything you’ve been telling me about is from merely imagining it.”

“Yeah”, she said quietly. “I… I am really glad I was able to show you. So… what do you think?”

“I…”, he hesitated. “I don’t know. It is both exactly as you described and unlike anything I have envisioned. And you… In those images you are dressed differently, you sometimes speak in a language where I can’t understand a word of, you… There’s so many little things that are different, but you’re always… yourself.”

“Eloquently put”, she laughed at him.

“Eloquently?”, he raised his eyebrows. “You might be less inebriated than I had just assumed.”

“Inebriated? Goodness, Delrin. I am not drunk. I’m just a little…”, she giggled, “I feel the wine buzzing. I wouldn’t trust myself to stitch you beautifully at this point, but I can certainly hold a little conversation. I spaced it out. I’ll have you know what I am a very responsible—“

“I got it, Mira”, he smiled. “Anyway, is that how you feel all the time? I mean… I feel dazed and overwhelmed after what I’ve seen.”
“Well”, she frowned and her voice broke slightly. “Not now, usually. But the beginning… it was this constant vigilance to not say something wrong or do something wrong or introduce myself the wrong way. I… thankfully I’ve been using Common for years now but… it’s been two months since I spoke my native tongue. I… have a new name”, few tears fell down her cheek, “I did not know how to do almost anything when I arrived here and it felt—”, she stopped abruptly.

“Mira…”, he spoke gently.

“I am sorry”, she replied shakily. “I really didn’t want to cry.”

Maker’s breath, what was he supposed to? He moved closer and lied down next to her and gently touched her arm.

“May I?”, she asked sheepishly.

“Come here”, he whispered and pulled her closer.

She placed her head on his chest and wrapped her hand around him. ‘To you, I’ll give the world, to you, I’ll never be cold’, sang the woman’s voice in the background and he couldn’t help but to smile to himself. Mira was gently weeping and he caressed her back a little in a soothing gesture. He still felt slightly uncertain to not overstep, but this seemed right.

Her crying stopped after just a couple of minutes.

“Delrin?”

“Mhmmm?”

“You really do always smell so good.”

He chuckled. “Uhm… believe me, not always. I spent half of my time strapped in the middle of nowhere with no baths.”

“Well”, he felt her face close to his neck, “seriously, where did you get that scent?”

“There’s”, he shifted his body slightly, “there’s… well, there’s this perfumer in Val Royeaux—“

“Damn Orlesians”, Mira laughed. “Apparently they do something right after all.”

“Mira”, he answered amused. “The way you just said it… You do make Ferelden proud. My parents will adore you.”

“Really?”, she asked hesitantly, suddenly serious and he felt the pinch in his heart. “I know they don’t necessarily approve—“

“I am sure of it”, he interrupted her.

“What… what are they like?”

“Well”, he thought about it for a second. “I have not seen them in a while. Actually, I have seen them only several times since I was twelve years old. My father is a proud, stern man. He embodies being the Bann. We have never been that close but he is a good person. As a true Fereldan he loves his Mabari hounds. I know he hunts a lot, even now although he is not that young anymore. My mother is very devoted to her family. I know it was hard for her when I was sent away to the Order. She still calls me her baby whenever she sees me.”
“Was your childhood happy?”

“Yes”, his voice was confident. “Barrfield is beautiful. Especially for a child. There was always a lot to do. My father struggled with trying to keep me around the castle when the weather was nice. I had a friend named Holden, and we’d go run around the meadows. My father would sternly forbid us to go to some parts of forest, or too close to the river, but we would do it anyway. Honestly, even now when I ride through any area of the Bannorn in the spring or the summertime I feel certain… nostalgia. The smell of grass during haymaking when you see everyone working with their scythes. The fields, the trees… The soil is so rich they say that the Bannorn feeds the whole Ferelden, which is not far from the truth. I've always loved the berry picking time.”

“That sounds lovely.”

“You know”, she felt so fantastic in his arms, “It’s not all lovely. The Bannorn politics can be brutal and it is a very conservative area in many ways, but… Despite having left so young, and despite my recent years in Orlais I still feel something thinking about Barrfield. I haven’t been there in… it was quite some time before the Conclave.”

“That’s a long time.”

“I know”, he admitted. “I… I really will be glad to show it to you one day.”

“Barrfield?”

“Barrfield, Ferelden. Anything you want.”

She definitely smiled and he realized how content he felt around her.

Then, with the odd outwardly music playing in the back, they started talking, and they talked about everything they could think of.

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The wine still buzzed in her head, just slightly.

“I think that had always been my biggest fear”, she whispered. “After everything that happened, I’ve always been scared that someone would hurt me. Not… not a stranger. That can always happen. But that I would trust someone and then turn out to be horribly wrong.”

She could feel his body slightly tensing up and he immediately stopped caressing her back.

“I…”, she added, suddenly taken aback by her own honestly and its implication, “I don’t think that about you.”

His hand started moving again alongside her spine, and it felt tender and warm and wonderful. She could feel his heart beating so loudly with her head on his chest. Lub-dub-lub-dub-lub-dub-lub-dub-lub-dub.

“I think”, he said quietly, “that my biggest fear has always been to hurt others. Not… not like that. I would never—“

“I know”, she answered softly.

“But”, he took a deep breath. “The rest of it… I have hurt many people. I wonder”, she could hear him swallowing, “how right were some orders I’ve been given regarding escaped mages or blood
mages. I… don’t know. I suppose I just need to accept that reality. I am proud of what I can do. I take a lot of pride in that. I am not… proud about killing. I have… a lot of feelings about that.”

“Of course you do”, she murmured running fingers through his chest. “It would be odd if you didn’t.”

“It is easier with the Inquisition”, he said, “I know who gives my orders and why. Maker preserve me, I make my own decisions most of the time. But given what I know about the Templar Order, I…. I question every single order I fulfilled.”

“I am sorry”, she instinctively clung harder to his side, “Anyway… there is this term. I know from… from my own medical work. I sincerely do not want to compare. I’ve never killed a person. Not… not even by accident though I’ve surely missed things or made mistakes. Anyway… there is this term. It’s called a moral injury.”

“Moral injury?”

“Yes. It’s an injury to your conscience when you have done something that you consider a transgression against your morals. It… it might not have not been voluntary, even. A soldier might follow the order believing it was right, and then it turns out it wasn’t. The betrayal, the guilt, the pain… that is what is described as moral injury.”

“Mhmmmm.”

“I… I believe it was first used to describe soldiers. Obviously military work requires chain of command. You know you have to trust the orders you’re given, unless they are blatantly evil. The same goes for every person under you.”

“Yes.”

“But then there are horrible things happening aside, or… That’s the moral injury. It feels wrong when I say this to you as if I lecture you or—”

“Mira”, he was still caressing her. “I have never talked about it with anyone before. It means more than you know.”

“All I meant to say is that some wounds are not visible. Some are not on the body. Some might even be on the soul… I think I remember reading the Chant mentioning the soul, although—“

“Whatsoever passes through the fire
Is not lost, but made eternal;
As air can never be broken nor crushed,
The tempered soul is everlasting”

“Yes”, she chuckled. “See, I think some things can hurt us so deeply they hurt who we are as people. Like the soul or however you would call it.”

“Does it ever… go away?”

“I… don’t know”, she whispered. “I don’t think most things just go away. I think it is possible to mend them. Or endure, at least. But… there will always be some cracks or scars. That’s not necessarily a bad thing, is it?”
“No, it’s not”, he replied softly.

“How…”, she started and then hesitated. “How do you feel otherwise?”

‘What do you mean?’

“Do you sleep well? Do you feel sad or angry? Do you have… flashbacks or—?”

“I am fine. And I do really mean it. I know what you’re asking and no, I… I have nightmares sometimes, but rarely and they are not that bad. I feel normal.”

“Good”, she whispered, gently tapping her fingers on his torso.

“How… do you feel? I know there had been a lot of… difficult moments. Including today.”

“I feel…”, she started and couldn’t finished. “I am so full of cracks. But… I also feel. I feel. I feel so much. That sounds foolish—”

“No”, he interrupted her. “It does not.”

The way he was stroking her back was soft and soothing.

“I love music”, she mused. “A lot of different types of music. But there is music that is capable of piercing through my heart and it’s both sorrowful and beautiful. It is a sad feeling, but it’s not a bad one. It means I am not empty and that is somehow… I can just show you.”

He sighed and then chuckled very gently. “You would like to make me feel sorrow through music? How could I say no. What… if I don’t feel that?”

“Well”, she giggled. “I suppose you’re soulless then.”

“So, no expectations?”, he laughed as well.

“Just… listen”, she picked up her IPad and found The Symphony no. 3.

“Arlgh—-”

She shushed him softly. “Ten minutes of silence.”

Mira was certain that not ever, not even when she heard it for the first time had this music been so profound. Perhaps because now it was undeniable that this would be the last time she would ever hear it. It felt bitter and it felt sweet and she could imagine her heart bleeding out slowly, drop by drop. It was a gift. It was a goodbye.

It was a memory of incense in the church. It was history and heritage flowing through her veins. It was the breath she took when she got away from her father’s grip. It were her mother’s tears. Her grandmother’s fingers, so white and frail and crooked. It was the first time she cut through the human flesh. It was Ida’s face when she was sad and when she was happy and when she laughed so hard. It was the first time someone died in her presence and the first time she saw a child being born. It was the language she hasn’t spoken out loud since coming here, and because it only lived in her, it was already gone, but now, for the last time, she heard it, and she heard it in a prayer she had said thousands of times.

It was her heart cracking, and fracturing and blistering and Mira felt the tears streaming down her cheeks and she didn’t even make a sound, she just let them flow.
All of this, and yet there was a space in her heart for something else as well. Even tonight, she had laughed, and talked about her work here, and her plans, and her fears for the future, because there were things she was looking forward to.

Lub-dub-lub-dub-lub-dub-lub-dub-lub-dub. Delrin’s heart was beating a little bit faster now.

The music ended, and Mira actually tapped for the playlist to stop, to let them sit in silence.

He lifted his hand to his face, and she wondered… did he shed a tear? She felt the pain and sorrow drowning, flooded by affection and closeness.

“Well”, she whispered gently, wiping her own tears.

“It turns out”, his voice sounded raspy, as if he was restraining his emotion, “I am not soulless. The words… what was she singing?”

“It was a simple prayer”, she traced his chest upwards until she felt the little oval of the medallion he was wearing and tapped it. “To her, actually.”

“I don’t know what to say”, he breathed. “Mira… There are no words for your loss—“

“It’s alright”, she replied. “It’s alright, really. I’m… good. Can you… can you do one thing for me though? Can you… can you be the one to bring it all to Dagna?”

“Yes”, he responded immediately. “I will do that.”

“Thank you. Is it alright if we listen to more music? It will die down on its own in… an hour or so.”

“As you wish.”

The music resumed and she didn’t even need to check to recognize Chopin’s Nocturnes.

“Delrin?”

“Mhmmm?”

“Thank you. For being here.”

“The honor is mine.”

Mira shifted her body and settled herself comfortably. He didn’t merely smell nice, she thought. This smell became him in her mind and she was certain she would always recognize it. His chest was broad and his arms were strong but Mira felt safe in more ways that just physically. She let herself be completely vulnerable tonight, in every possible sense. One world might have ended - for her at least. The other one was threatened, but right at this moment, despite everything, the pain, fear, sorrow, grief, she felt at peace.

She closed her eyes and focused on the sensation of touch alongside her spine. He still has not stopped.

And then, she drifted away into the night.

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The music was still playing. This time it felt bittersweet, some of it sad, some of it joyful, all quite subtle and unlike anything he had ever heard.
Delrin felt Mira move and pull even closer. It took only couple of minutes for her head to become heavier when resting on him. She radiated pleasant warmth. The deep breaths she was taking now were unmistakable. She fell asleep.

He could try to wake her up and lead her to the bed, but decided against it. Somehow he thought she didn’t mind, and she certainly seemed comfortable now. He fixed the pillow underneath his head and grabbed one the blankets lying on the side and then he simply relaxed as well.

How odd it all had been. Just few months ago, he not only had no idea about her existence, she wasn’t even here. Now, he wondered if there was any person who knew him better or if he knew any person better. She was a stranger when she became his wife, and then suddenly everything about her became familiar. The way she talked with her indiscernible accent. The way she smiled and laughed with her whole self. The way she squeezed his arms. The face she made when she was thinking hard or reading. Even seeing her images from the past he could recognize everything that had been etched into his heart already.

She was his wife. To the world, she was already his and he was already hers. Their bond was permanent and unbreakable, and providing for her and protecting her was his duty. He couldn’t even recall when that duty turned into devotion. Yet truly nothing had happened between them at the same time. Maybe not entirely nothing, given the fact that she was asleep in his arms.

He knew he was cautious, perhaps abundantly so. This was different from anything he had known. It was not fleeting, and could not be fleeting, they were married. He didn’t want it to be fleeting either. When Mira said she had never had sex or had never been in love, it was very clear that she certainly had always been cautious. He had never been so afraid to kiss someone, because that kiss would never be just a kiss. Not with the vows and the promise already between them.

Tomorrow… Tomorrow they would finally spend the day together.

He closed his eyes and realized he was still caressing her back. He stopped but still kept his hand on her.

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She moved slightly and realized that she wasn’t alone. Delrin. Her head was on his chest, her leg was basically wrapped around him, her hand was around his waist and he was embracing her with his arm. Her mind quickly went over the events last night. The wine she drank, the music they listened to, the talk, his warmth, her tiredness… She must have fallen asleep like that, and so did he.

Why did she wake up? It must have been so early…

Someone knocked at the door and Delrin stirred.

“Hi”, she whispered, still dazed from sleep.

“Hi”, he looked her dreamily and suddenly seemed completely awake. “I am sorry—“

“Someone’s… knocking at our door”, she murmured. “Let me…” She sat down on the floor. “Who is it?”, she asked loudly.

“For fucks sake, Mira, it’s Fiona”, the irritated voice answered. “Listen, I know Ellendra promised you won’t be bothered—”

“Fuck”, Mira hissed under her breath and suddenly the haziness and the dreaminess went away.
“Just… a second, alright?”

“What is Fiona doing at our quarters before sunset on your day off?”

“I don’t know”, Mira replied quickly getting up, “but fuck it, my things are all…”

“Yes”, he rubbed his head lifting himself up. “I got it”, he quickly pushed them underneath the bed. “I will… take care of them, if you still want me too.”

“Yes”, she muttered going for the door it, “I have to—“

“Of course”, he rubbed his forehead embarrassingly.

“You don’t need to get up”, she mumbled while reaching the door. She opened it and immediately felt this encompassing feeling of dread.

Fiona looked a decade older and Mira knew the look very well. Everyone who had ever worked in healthcare knew the look.

“Is someone dying or dead?”, Mira asked quietly. “I can go now—“

“No one is dead”, the Enchanter waved her hand in a resigned gesture. “And no one is dying as of now. You… you will see. You will understand why we called for you so early.”

Fiona eyed her up and down.

“You can…”, the mage coughed up, “change before we go.”

“Sure”, Mira let Fiona in and realized what their quarters looked like. The empty bottle of wine and the glasses where on the floor, the bed was completely messed up and empty, all the covers and blankets on the floor. Delrin was still sitting there, both adorable and somewhat embarrassed.

“Enchanter Fiona ”, he mustered with much dignity.

“Captain Barris”, Fiona thinned her lips and raised her eyebrows while looking around. “I truly apologize for… disturbing your private moment.”

Mira went to the bathroom and stopped abruptly.

“I drank last night”, she looked at the mage. “I… what time is it?”

“It’s six in the morning”, Fiona replied. “How much and when did you start?”

“Five glasses of wine and—“, she looked at Delrin.

“Before six in the afternoon”, he replied slowly.

“You’re fine”, Fiona shrugged.

Mira knew there could be still trace of alcohol in her blood, but not too much and it should get to zero in couple of hours.

“Do you need me to stitch or—?”

“No. Just brush your teeth, wash your face and let’s go”, the Enchanter sighed.

Mira felt the shiver going through her spine once again.
She refreshed and changed in the bathroom, in less than couple of minutes. When she walked out, Delrin and Fiona tried to engage in a polite small talk that seemed absurd for the situation.

Something was wrong and Mira knew that. She just had to wait to find out how bad it was. The fact that Fiona approached her in her personal quarters very early in the morning was telling. Too telling.

“I—”, she turned to Delrin. “I am sorry for having to—“

“It’s fine”, he said.

“I need to—“

“I’ll see you later.”

He looked so warm and handsome. She took few steps to the door, and then she turned back, walked up to him, leaned down and kissed him on the cheek.

“Have a good day, Delrin.”

“You too, Mira.”

It turned out to be anything but a good day.

Chapter End Notes

I've always planned for this chapter and for Mira to show all of it to Delrin.

Next chapters will bring angst and conflict.

Just so you know, the whole story had been drafted quite some time ago and I had planned for it to be that slow.

There is so much to happen. We're still somewhat early in the story, as crazy as it seems given the word count.

I hope you stay reading it, but I feel compelled to write it that way.

Also - I totally think Delrin did shed a tear listening to the music.

Thank you so much for still reading and commenting. It means a lot to me that
someone reads it.
Chapter Summary

Mira meets her new patient and it brings out a lot of feelings in her - as a medic and as a woman and as a wife of a former Templar. Delrin gets caught in the middle of that.

Chapter Notes

TRIGGER WARNINGS:

This chapter has mentions of: sexual assault and trauma of a teenager (seventeen) and pregnancy resulting from that. It is not graphic, and the assault is brought up in the conversation, not described.

This is a difficult chapter. As usual, I can only promise I try to bring such topics with gentleness and sensitivity.

Also: angst.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Third week of Harvestmire, 9:42 Dragon Age, Skyhold

It was still dark outside and the cool crisp air hit Mira’s face. The morning was quiet, the day at Skyhold wouldn’t usually start until the sunrise when the fighting grounds would fill with soldiers.

She turned to follow the path to the infirmary where Fiona suddenly spoke up.

“Not here. Ellendra waits for us at the Mage’s Tower.”

Mira could feel her heartbeat fastening. She could think of only few reasons why Ellendra would ask for her that urgently despite it not being life threatening emergency. Fuck. She felt the pang of anxiety in her stomach, and she truly wanted to be wrong.

She really did not get enough sleep last night and she drank slightly too much as well. She should have been more careful. She was fully awake but she could feel the old tiredness aching in her bones. Out of all the days, it had to be today.

“Do you have coffee in the tower?”, she asked, feeling her throat dry.

“Yes”, Fiona answered. “There will be time for that as well.”

Fiona came to fetch her from the quarters herself instead of simply sending a messenger, Mira realized. She shuddered once again, more from the dreadful anticipation than the temperature
She had never been in the Mage’s Tower beforehand. To her knowledge, most non-mages did not frequent there. In fact, some mages themselves did not even live there, choosing to stay in communal barracks when fighting for the Inquisition. Still, it was supposed to be the safe, secure place for the allied mages and the Tranquil. The home to the children, the elderly, anyone who was not willing or could not battle.

Did it look like a proper Circle, Mira wondered when Fiona led her through the heavy wooden door and up the stairs. It was oddly quiet inside. They have passed only one of two other mages, and Fiona made no effort to explain Mira’s presence.

Finally they reached the end of a long and dark corridor and Fiona simply opened the door without even knocking. It was an office-like space, and Ellendra was pacing in the middle of it, pale and deeply distraught. Mira swallowed the saliva in her mouth. Her throat felt almost painful.

“I really apologize—“

“Just tell me what’s going on”, she cut off the Enchanter impatiently, “because I already have some ideas.”

“Apparently I have a pregnant mage under my care. I did not know about the pregnancy until literally couple of hours ago when she came into my quarters in the middle of the night crying.”

Fuck. Mira bit her lip. All the possible outcomes came through her head at once.

“How old and how far along?”, she asked sharply.

“The girl turned seventeen several months ago. I don’t know how far along, but far. She hid it too well. I’ve seen few births at the Circle but I have never trained as a midwife, Mira. Neither did Fiona. And asking Stitches or Isanna… those are not the only considerations.”

Teenage pregnancy with zero prenatal care up to this point, of unknown gestation. For f*cks sake. Mira sensed her headache dulling, replaced by a worry of a different kind.

“You were right to call for me”, she took a deep breath. “I will try to assess the gestation. Was it… consensual?”

“I don’t know”, Ellendra replied.

“But we doubt it”, Fiona added, her hands clutching so hard until her knuckles were white.

The mages allied to the Inquisition over a year ago. The calculation inside Mira’s mind were clear as the day.

“Do you think someone here…”, she started.

“I don’t know”, Ellendra repeated. “She wasn’t at Redcliffe. After Circles fell, not every mage joined the fight”, the woman’s voice sounded bitter and Fiona winced. “She’s from Ghislain Circle. There was no typical rebellion there and there was a group of mages, including elderly and children that were led here by several Templars. I know that two of the Templars from that group died working for the Inquisition. One woman, Sara, was under my command when I led my elite squadron. Belinda has another one under hers and another two serve in regular army under Cullen. It could have been another mage as well and it wouldn’t necessarily make it consensual either. Could have been some puppy love, but somehow I don’t think so. She’s very frightened and tight-
“Does she want the child in the first place?”, Mira asked.

“Yes”, Fiona answered sternly. “And that is another issue we need to thoroughly discuss. Do you have any experience—?”

“Yes”, Mira replied reluctantly. “I have delivered children before and I have dealt with pregnancies.”

She had less experience than she wished to possess but the truth was that Mira had planned on being an obstetrician-gynecologist. It mattered little at this point, except that she remembered her rotations quite well. The problem was that this was fucking Thedas, where she had very limited tools for proper prenatal care. Not to mention the reality of a heavily pregnant teenager who had not received any up this point. For fuck’s sake, this was a nightmarish scenario.

She couldn’t quite mention that, but during her studies Mira had received some training in sexual assault trauma care. This was so fucking common it had to be a consideration that any doctor needed to remember about when examining any patient. Especially in obstetrics, when everything seemed invasive. It was invasive. There was touch, there was possible discomfort and pain, there was nudity. The potential to frighten and scar the patient was innately there, and identifying survivors could facilitate communication and care.

Damn though, this girl was a minor. A teenager still. A teenager who hid her pregnancy for the majority of her time at Skyhold.

“She will let you examine her”, Ellendra noted quietly. “I explained who you are and what you do. She is quite skittish but she is not an unreasonable.”

“She’s unharrowed”, Fiona added grimly and even though Mira was not from Thedas, she wasn’t completely unaware of the possible implications.

She rubbed her temple and sighed, and picked up her medical bag.

“Lead the way.”

They walked into the small bedroom further down the corridor. The girl looked young, younger than seventeen and Mira instantly felt the shiver go through her whole body, the mixture of sadness, anger at the injustice. The girl sat on the bed, thin and pale as paper, nervously biting her nails.

“Hello”, Mira smiled lightly. “My name is Mira Barris and I am the medic. What is yours?”

She sat down on the chair and gestured for the mages to sit down as well.

“Madeleine”, the girl replied nervously. “Madeleine Laisné.”

“Madeleine. How can I help you today?”, Mira asked and sent the sternest look towards Fiona who was ready to open her mouth.

Madeleine vaguely gestured towards her abdomen, visibly risen underneath her pink nightgown.

“I see”, Mira responded slowly. “Do you want both Enchanter Ellendra and Enchanter Fiona in the room as we talk?”
The girl nodded immediately.

“Alright”, she continued. “I just want you to know that the details of what you say here will remain private. I also want to tell you that I won’t do anything without you agreeing to it, and that you can tell me when you don’t want something or you’re uncomfortable. It is not a bother and it is not a hassle for me either. I want you to be comfortable. You are safe here.”

Madeleine nodded once again, this time looking into Mira’s eyes.

“How are you feeling, Madeleine?”

“Uhm… Now I feel tired and my legs get swollen. I had a bad headache tonight as well. But for the most part I have been feeling alright.”

“I see”, Mira’s mind immediately jumped to several scenarios. “Do you know how far along are you?”

“Not sure”, the girl’s lips trembled. “It’s been more than one time, but not since I’ve come here.”

“When did you arrive to Skyhold?”

“Beginning of Cloudreach.”

“Do you remember when was your last monthly bleeding?”

“Guardian, I think.”

“Alright”, Mira smiled reassuringly. “I have few questions I’d like to ask you that I always ask every single pregnant patient. If you’re uncomfortable with any of them, that is fine.”

“That’s fine, I guess”, the girl bit her lip nervously.

“Have you had any pain except the headache? Anything around your belly or private parts?”

“No.”

“Any fainting or dizziness or feeling just horrible, something more than regular tiredness?”

“I don’t think so. I got weak and dizzy one time when I skipped breakfast. Badly dizzy. I try to eat something before I get up and it helped.”

“That can happen”, Mira nodded. “And that is very smart of you to do that. Have you had any alcohol since becoming pregnant?”

“No, I… I don’t drink.”

“How is your eating? Have you had nausea or any trouble keeping food down? Do you have enough to eat?”

“I…”, Madeleine hands started shaking. “I was afraid to eat at first to not get too big but then I felt bad so… I try to eat well.”

“I see”, Mira felt her heart reaching her throat. “This is also the question I always ask. Have you ever been touched when you didn’t want to?”

“I…”, Madeleine’s eyes suddenly widened. “Yes.”
“Have you ever been pressured or forced to have sex when you didn’t want or you weren’t sure?”

“Yes”, her voice cracked. “That’s how… that is how it happened. But the Templar… he’s dead now.”

“I see”, Mira whispered softly. “I am really sorry it happened to you. I really am. It is not right—”

“I want the baby”, Madeleine interrupted her desperately, “Don’t let them take it away from me, they are going to take it away from me and make me Tranquil—“

The mage broke in tears, curling in the sitting position on the bed. Mira felt the rage welling up around her heart, burning fast.

“That won’t happen, Madeleine”, Ellendra spoke up passionately, getting up and sitting by Madeleine’s side, hugging her. “The Mages are free. Please, believe me, believe us that it is not going to happen. You have my word.”

Fiona looked so distraught that Mira felt sharp pain just catching the glance of her facial expression.

“I will do anything I can”, Mira added after the girl calmed down a bit, “to make sure that both you and the baby are safe and healthy. Have you felt any sharp pain, contractions, have you ever felt like you were leaking fluid or peed yourself?”

“No”, Madeleine frowned confusingly through tears. “Is that what happens?”

“Well”, she smiled in response. “Many weird things happen around birth which I will surely tell you about, just so you know. For now, would it be alright if I touch your stomach? It would be best if you lifted up your shirt. It might not be very pleasant but I can use my fingers and feel how the baby is positioned and at least guess how big the baby might be.”

“That would be fine.”

No wonder she could hide the pregnancy well, Mira thought. She was very small and carried in a way that made it easy to conceal. Damn it. There were so few things she could to in comparison to what should be done. She palpated the abdomen carefully, finding the fundus of the uterus. Just like the last menstrual cycle suggested, Madeleine could be anywhere from what… late preterm to early term. Mira would lean on early term already. Of course it was fucking impossible to accurately assess now.

“Do you feel the baby move well?”

“Yes”, Madeleine actually smiled softly. “Actually the baby moves a lot each evening at the same time as well.”

“That’s good”, she returned the smile. “Very good indeed. Do you have any names chosen?”

The sudden shadow fell on the girl’s face.

“I didn’t know if I would be able to… keep it.”

Mira felt her heart shattering.

“Of course you are”, she replied softly.

“Maybe Rose, if it’s a girl. I like flowers.”
“That’s a very pretty name”, Ellendra mentioned gently.

“Alright”, Mira sat down back on the chair. “Let me just tell you as much as I can about what will happen now, what I will be looking for, what are the things for you to look for and when to call for someone immediately. Let me tell you a bit about the birth and newborns. Just… ask me anything you want. I can promise you, there are no foolish or silly questions. It’s all fine and I will try to answer everything to the best of my ability. Also, are you hungry? Would you like something to drink or eat while we talk? I am sure we can…”

“Yes”, Ellendra looked suddenly frazzled. “Of course. That can certainly be done.”

Madeleine put her hand on her stomach. “I guess I could probably eat.”

It had taken them good three hours to discuss everything with Madeleine and make sure she was as informed as possible. Fiona, Ellendra and Mira reached Ellendra’s office again. Mira could feel the tension suddenly thickening. Her headache only increased. Fiona was shaking out of fury and Ellendra’s eyes were wet.

“Do you both realize”, Fiona sneered, “that you gave the promise that you don’t even know you are able to keep?”

“I told you to stop it!”, Ellendra raised her voice. “We have alliance with the Inquisition. There are no Circles anymore! There is no Templar Order—”

“As long as they take lyrium, they are Templars and you know it! You know very well that the tensions are only increasing! Even more so now that you run the infirmary! I can guarantee you that some Templars are very displeased—“

“I know you have no respect for my leadership, Fiona”, Ellendra hissed, “and I know you don’t appreciate the fact that I was chosen to replace you, but if you think for a second that I would allow someone to take Madeleine’s baby—”

“You know as well as I do that the pregnancy of an unharrowed mage is going to cause problems and you know as well as I do that it already seems as we have hidden it for months!”

“Stop interrupting me, Fiona! Do you think I am careless and stupid?”

“Those are Templars we’re talking about. You were originally from Kinchold, weren’t you? May I remind you—“

“You don’t get to fucking remind me what happened at Kinchold where I was the one to live it.”

“All I am saying is that you don’t know if you could keep that promise and once the Templars find out—“; Fiona abruptly stopped mid-sentence and pointed the finger at Mira. “You cannot tell your husband.”

“For f**k’s sake”, Mira rubbed her head. “Do you think that I have no care for my patient’s privacy? Do you think I have no care for ethical guidelines I fought to establish? He doesn’t ever ask and I don’t ever tell.”

“We need her, Fiona”, Ellendra was angry. “And we have to tell someone. You’re right, it already
looks bad and we cannot hide the pregnant mage not to mention the concerns about… the delivery.”

“What concerns?”, Mira suddenly asked. “Because I have tons of concerns but somehow I think yours is different.”

“I gather you have never delivered a child of a mage?”, Fiona’s voice was palatably bitter. “Let me think. There is one thing that Templars are always afraid of and those are abominations. The emotion of the delivery and having the child taken away is supposedly one of those moments everyone expects the mage to become possessed, you didn’t know that? I presume you also didn’t know how many mages had been turned Tranquil after delivering children just to hide the deeds of the Templars. Madeleine’s fears are not ramblings of a teenage girl, her fears are valid because it did happen to many women beforehand, especially in some Circles. And if she did become an abomination or something happened during birth? This could break the Inquisition and any chance of freedom for Mages. So forgive me that I was not eager to blatantly reassure the girl when in reality there is so much that is unknown.”

“I see”, Mira said heavily, covering her face with her hands.

“What are your concerns, Mira?”, Ellendra asked quietly, not acknowledging Fiona’s words but not denying them either.

“Just… the medical side of things”, she replied. “She is young and that is riskier. She is so skinny and tiny and I am worried the growth of the baby could have been impacted. I am worried about her headache and her swollen legs. It doesn’t seem pronounced now but it could be the sign of trouble, it’s impossible for me to say. Have you heard of… eclampsia? Toxemia?”

“No.”

“Have you heard of a woman suddenly getting seizures late in pregnancy or during or after birth?”

Ellendra paled. “Yes. Once.”

“Well”, Mira suddenly felt very weak and very tired. “I am worried about every fucking thing that can go wrong. It’s birth. Most of the time it works just fine, but when things go wrong, they go wrong quickly and drastically. I… There are always concerns but we simply need to do out best to prepare. There’s nothing else to do, really.”

Ellendra shed few tears and Mira felt so nauseous she knew she would vomit sooner or later.

“Who do we tell?”, Fiona asked heavily.

“Cassandra”, Mira replied without hesitation. “She is not the Templar, but she has the abilities. She was the Seeker of Truth. She effectively outranks every single Templar here. She started the Inquisition. She is essentially one of the most powerful people here and she is a woman.”

“She is a harsh woman”, Fiona suddenly sounded tired and weak.

“She is the Seeker”, Ellendra repeated. “She might be harsh but she is just. And she did not hesitate to let us provide care at the infirmary. Mira, can you talk with her? I know you have rapport, and it would be best if it came from your side, not ours.”

“Are we really sides now?”, she asked painfully.

“I only meant… you’re not a mage”. 
“I’ll do it.”

“We need her for delivery too if anything happens”, Fiona added. “However small the risk of abomination seems and however ridiculous it appears… We have to consider it as a possibility.”

“I will talk with her. We should also make sure that Madeleine has everything she needs for the baby. I mean, we could use an empty drawer as a cot but diapers, cloths and all those things…”

“I’ll gladly give money to order some things from Jader”, Ellendra sighed. “Or have some of it made her.”

“How”, Fiona barked. “How? How is that not going to raise questions?”

“Order it for the infirmary”, Mira shrugged. “Or in my name, for that matter. I don’t care. I am married. Nobody is going to bat an eye.”

“Fine”, Ellendra shot her the glance of gratitude.

“I can also try securing some stuff for now. I need to visit Dagna and ask her to create some items for the tool box as soon as possible. I want to be as ready as possible if things go badly. We should… we should practice for some scenarios. And I think we should tell Stitches and Isanna…”

“No”, Ellendra shook her head. “Too risky.”

“We might need more hands”, Mira sighed. “Think about it. Also, if anything happens, if Madeleine feels anything that we have previously discussed, I want you to send for me immediately and communicate clearly—”

“For fucks sake, Mira”, Fiona was visibly shaking. “Your husband is a Templar. Do you want me to send a messenger to you quarters to say that the pregnant mage is giving birth?”

“He’s not a Templar”, Mira couldn’t help herself. “And no. You don’t need to be that direct. Just tell me immediately if it’s a headache, pain, waters, or it it had begun. I fucking need to know what I am walking into. More importantly, I am not a Templar. I get that you don’t trust them but I thought you can at least trust me—“

“You are so naive”, the Enchanter countered. “What do you think he would do if your child was born a mage?”

Mira felt as she was punched in the gut and her reaction surprised even her. There was no child of course, that was… The pain still felt real. Too real. What was the answer to that? The Circles were gone for now. Delrin left his own home at the age of twelve. That was Thedasian reality. All the things Fiona mentioned… he was the part of the Order for years before leaving.

“I trust him”, she replied faintly and probably unconvincingly.

“Of course you do”, Fiona’s words were like poison. “He likely made your life better. You went from belonging to a cult to being protected. Tell me, how quick were you to warm the bed of the Inquisition’s Templar—“

“Stop”, Ellendra’s voice was full of fury. “You have no right, Fiona. No right at all. I loved a man who was a Templar myself. I warmed his bed willingly. Leave her, Fiona. That is an order. Both as your leader at the infirmary and as your superior here. How can we expect the Inquisition to survive if we cannot stand together? You should be ashamed of yourself. Just… don’t dare saying another word. Mira, I’ll walk you out, I know you want to reach the Undercroft probably as soon as
“Yes”, Mira replied with her voice shaking.

They walked side by side in silence until they reached outside. This time, the sun was shining beautifully on the horizon.

“Listen”, Ellendra stopped her gently. “There were many abuses in the Circles, including rapes. The same happened during the war,” the Enchanter’s eyes were glassy. “And I hate it. But I had friends among the Templars and I loved one too. You don’t need to explain to anyone whom you love, whom you share your bed with and whom you decide to have children with. There are no Circles anymore and we don’t know what the future holds. Fiona had no right to say the words she did. I understand and share her fury, but she doesn’t get to take it out on you because you’re available. She had no right to shame you. Don’t… Don’t dwell on it. You… you did well with Madeleine today. Thank you for coming in. And I am sorry. But mostly… thank you.”

“Ellendra”, Mira took her deep breath and then shook her head. “Will you watch over Madeleine? I don’t want to miss anything, not with this.”

“Yes, I will speak with you in the evening at the infirmary?”

“I will be there.”

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Delrin slept for few more hours after Mira left. Her smell still lingered on his bedding and on his own shirt or perhaps it was simply his imagination that made everything fragrant with honey and herbs. When he woke up the second time, his first thought was that he wished she was still there. He wished the morning would have been different. He wished to have hold her so mellow and sleepy and warm, when her body seemed melting into his.

He hesitated, hoping she would come in any minute, but eventually he got up, understanding that whatever called her to work today would likely keep her busy.

He had enough duties to occupy himself.

Still, his mind couldn’t quite cease thinking about what could have been.

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Mira was very busy and preoccupied the whole day, her mind entirely focused on Madeleine and her pregnancy, and the desperate attempt to try to prepare for the birth. What an oversight, truly, that she did not anticipate the possibility of needing to attend the delivery so quickly. She thought that when the pregnancy happened, she would have time. The priority had been given to emergencies, the combat medicine. Not this.

What a mistake.

Mira had nothing. She ran to the Undercroft right after leaving the Tower, and begged Dagna to make something akin to suction catheter or bulb syringe. It was almost a fruitless effort, but she also challenged the dwarven woman to create the pinard hord. They had few prototypes of laennec stethoscope already. Still, even if it worked, the information and what she could do with it would be limited at best.

She had nothing for almost any bad case scenario. Most births were manageable and non-
threatening but Mira still witnessed one patient bleeding out to death in an excellent teaching hospital on Earth, with specialists working diligently on site. It only took minutes, and right now, she had almost nothing. Nothing for newborn resuscitation, nothing for active management of fourth stage, nothing to deal with hemorrhage, no medications, nothing for pain, none monitoring or very little of it, nothing to check mother’s pressures, no labs, nothing.

Just some cloths, some tools, and her own hands, her knowledge and the likelihood it would end up well.

And magic, and the hope it provided.

She had treated child patients in Thedas before, Micah included. The youngest one was two. This was different, both because birth was such a grand event, however ordinary. Birth was precarious. The first rite of passage in the dole of existence. So brutal and bloody, and fragile and vulnerable, and beautiful and moving at the same time. There were no guarantees in medicine, there was always uncertainty and there were always mistakes and failures. The difference was that on Earth, she wasn’t as alone and she wasn’t walking as blindly as here, relying on guesswork, having to decide what was the best pathway without the information she’d otherwise have. There were no guarantees in life, and Mira knew that, she really did.

She had seen the life being victorious. Most of the time it had been and when that happened, it was glorious. She had seen death, and that nothingness it left.

It wasn’t about her. Mira was a doctor, and she had faced mortality before, and she had won and she had lost, and she would lose again, many times. There was no escaping that, not ever.

It was about Madeleine. It was about her child.

Madeleine was afraid of losing the baby, although it was clear that her fear was around what would happen after birth, not what could happen before or during.

Mira already talked with Cassandra who guaranteed that the baby would remain with their mother. To be honest, she would never forget how aghast Seeker seemed when she told her. This was done and the second Cass made her promise, Mira ceased worrying about that.

Now her worries turned into something far less negotiable, something far less certain, something scarier and darker.

Life and death, and between them, the place that could become a battleground. The work of a medic.

At the end of the day Mira simply felt exhausted and sickened. Every single emotion she had been restraining that whole time was bubbling and trying to reach the surface, her anger increasing with each step she took closer to her own quarters. Mira knew how to be calm when needed, she knew how to be professional and she knew how to be reassuring. That was the part of the training and that was part of the job.

It didn’t mean she didn’t feel anything throughout the whole day. She felt so much. So much. The blazing and burning anger because of the injustice, the crawling and creeping fear of what might be, the guilt of not being able to provide the care that she should be able to provide, the unsettling indescribable feeling surrounding Fiona’s words from this morning that she pushed aside and
buried up until now.

It was all floating just underneath her skin and Mira could almost taste her own bitterness when she pushed through the door to their quarters.

“Hi”, Delrin said examining her carefully, his smile fading very quickly. “What’s wrong?”

“Infirmary”, she replied cautiously. “A rough day.”

“Do you need anything? Tea or something?”

“No”, she shook her head. “I will just take a shower.”

“Sure”. His voice was so kind and soft and for some reason it only made her more irritated.

The second the bathroom door closed Mira let the water run and sat down on the floor and cried. This was not sadness or melancholy. It wasn’t fear.

Mira was angry. So very angry. She was angry about what happened to Madeleine. She was angry that the girl felt the need to hide it, that she didn’t feel she could trust anyone to reveal it earlier. She was angry that the man was never brought to justice, although wasn’t that the painfully common scenario? She was angry because Madeleine was so young, too young. So unprepared, and so confused, and yet she was so full of love and hope. Madeleine was afraid someone would take her child. Her own flesh and blood. That was the embodiment of wrongness. Fiona was right that Madeleine’s fear wasn’t irrational. The girl didn’t hide because she was stupid. She hid everything because she was afraid, and she was afraid of the thing that had happened before multiple times and it would have happen to Madeleine as well if Circles still existed.

Why? Why have women needed to share this commonality of fear and pain, in any of the worlds?

The memories of her patients from Earth and their stories flooded her yet again. Her own memories, and she was very lucky indeed. The comments some of her father’s friends made when she was fifteen. The stress of passing by a group of men while walking the streets. The whistles, the comments, the advice of where to go and where not to go, the constant reminders of what to do and what not to do, the unspoken sisterhood of watching whether another woman was being harassed or not, the medical training, the stories she heard from the patients, the stories they didn’t share but their bodies did for them. The constant drill during OB-gyn rotation, the awareness that her own touch as the doctor could cause a flashback for someone.

Her own fear when she was in the cave and she heard Varric and Solas talking, and the relief upon hearing Cassandra’s voice just because she was a woman. Her fear on her wedding day, her thoughts when they crossed the threshold of those quarters and how she held her breath when Delrin unlaced her wedding dress even though she was the one to ask him to do it. The knowledge that she was lucky, and the anger that safety should not depend on luck. It should be a given. Some deeds should be unthinkable. And yet they happened. And yet they weren’t uncommon, either.

She finally stepped underneath the shower, hoping to wash away her thoughts alongside the sweat. It never worked that way.

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Delrin certainly knew something was wrong the second Mira stepped into their quarters. She seemed exhausted, but that wasn’t the only thing. She looked both sad and angry, in a way that he had not seen before. She brushed him off as well, in a resigned voice. Laying in his bedroll, he
could hear her crying in the bathroom and he had to fight his own need to knock on the door and try to comfort her. This time he was certain she didn’t want any company.

She came out of the bathroom pale and shaking, her arms crossed. She sat on the bed in a complete silence and Delrin wondered if he should even speak up.

“Mira?”, he whispered uncertainly. “Do you want to talk?”

“No”, she replied faintly and avoided looking at him. Her chin was trembling.

He really wasn’t sure whether to try to reach her or to simply leave her alone when he heard her voice.

“I learned today that Templars were taking away newborns from mage mothers”, she whispered and the pain he felt was sudden and sharp. Maker’s breath. That was a type of conversation he did not anticipate tonight.

“Yes”, he answered quietly. “Shamefully.”

“Have you ever done it?”, another question followed and with that came all the guilt and all the shame.

“Not personally”, he realized that he felt the shudders go through his whole body. “You know I have spent most of my life outside the Circle. But… I knew. That was the way it’s always been done and I feel ashamed—“ he didn’t finish because she buried her face in her hands and started crying.

His heart pulled into two different directions. He wanted to hold her like he had done before, but this time he simply knew that she was crying precisely because of what the Templar Order had done. What they had done. What he had done, directly or not.

“I can imagine only few things worse”, she whispered, “than your baby being ripped apart from your arms. That is blatantly evil. I don’t even want to imagine how broken those poor women were. Fiona said that some were made Tranquil because of supposed risk of abominations or the gossip of blood magic but can somebody fucking explain to me how was taking away a newborn from their mother’s arms not the easiest way to make someone completely break apart? Newborns. I don’t understand. As much as I disapprove, I can understand why children were sent to Circles. I can see that. But why send away the babies? There already was a structure inside the Circles to allow raising children, so why couldn’t the moms keep them? Why?”

“I honestly don’t know how to answer that”, he replied. It was the truth, as shameful as it was. He knew of the practice, he remember Clarissa’s tears describing it, but he certainly had never given it much thought considering that it was not a part of his own experiences.

“That was cruel, and disgusting, and evil and unjustifiable.”

“Yes”, he agreed.

“And most of those children were fathered by the Templars.”

“Yes.”

“And Templars used the Rite—”, her voice cracked but she didn’t need to finish.

“Yes”, he admitted. “I am certain that happened.”
“And in most Circles, no one even questioned neither the abuse nor the separating of babies from mothers.”

“Yes”.

They sat in silence for a few minutes. Delrin could hear his own heart thudding in his chest, and the painful pinch that followed each of her whimpers.

She finally met his eyes, glowering. He was the one to look away, rubbing his face and leaning back to the wall.

“Would you give up your own child to the Circle if they were a mage?”, she whispered and the question almost took his breath away.

“I… there are no Circles anymore. And no Order”, he answered lamely.

“I know”, he didn’t look but he could hear another wave of her crying. “But that’s not the answer, is it? Fiona asked me that today.”

“Frankly, that is a very rude and invasive—”

“I know”, she repeated frustratingly. “That’s besides the point.”

“I”, he coughed because he couldn’t quite speak up. “I have never even considered… This is all so theoretical—”

“Yes”, there was a clear irritation in her voice now. “I am aware how theoretical it is. I can’t even imagine… Parents couldn’t even visit children in the Circles, Delrin. Why? Why was it done in the most cruel and horrible way possible? I can’t imagine to just… send my child away and not see them.”

I was sent away and haven’t seen my parents for years, he thought bitterly but didn’t say it out loud. It wasn’t the same as what happened to the mages, and he knew that. Not to mention that as a Templar he himself enjoyed more freedom and privileges than most.

The rest of it… He closed his eyes and saw the images of the abominations he killed. The journal Lavellan found inside the Chateau d’Onterre. The innocent lives lost to the demons because the children had no training and…

“I…”, he hesitated but then decided to speak freely. “I couldn’t imagine it either. But I also could not imagine having to kill my own child because they got possessed. Or losing… I am not a mage, Mira. I train mages who are capable adults but that is different. I could not ever train the child myself and I am very aware of that. I… I have killed many abominations in my life. More than an average Templar. Way… way more. The… the worst were those that started with children and believe me…”, his voice broke. “That is something that never left me. And what do you think happens when a mage is born to a peasant family with no means and no one to train them without Circles? I have seen innocent children murdered by their parents because they were afraid of magic. You have no idea, no idea how the reality looks beyond those walls—“

Her crying only intensified and he felt the pang of guilt mixed with discomfort and then the wave of his own emotions.

“Listen”, he added more softly. “I am not… I know how corrupted the Templar Order was. Believe me, I know. I realize the abuses that happened in the Circles and I am not… There is a reason mages got allied with the Inquisition and we were conscripted. But magic can be dangerous.
Abominations do happen and they real and… If I ever had a child it would my duty to ensure their safe—"

“How do you know even know you don’t? Have a child somewhere?”

“What…?”, he was completely taken aback by the question. “Why would you…? There had not… I’ve always been very careful and… I am… I am certain.”

“Have you ever been with a mage?”, she then asked quietly.

“No”, his reply was automatic before his mind even registered the unspoken behind the question, and that hit him straight in the guts, to the point where he suddenly felt weak.”Fuck, Mira, did you just ask if I have ever forced anyone—“, he could not not say those words. He wouldn’t.

“No!”, she protested and through the sounds of her tears he didn’t know if she sounded ashamed or worse, afraid.

“That is what you implied”, he noticed dryly, his tone harsh. “I am not even mad, I just feel—. Nevermind. I can assure that any woman I have ever been with had been a very willing partici— It’s pointless to even say out loud, isn’t it?”

He stood up very abruptly, and paced through the room and then stopped, suddenly aware of his own size and how tiny and weak she seemed sitting in the middle of the bed, with her arms around her, her legs close to her chest.

She started mumbling but he couldn’t understand a word. Between her cries, the words that had been said and hanged between them like a guillotine blade it all felt suffocating.

“I need to go”, he announced, furiously putting on his shoes and then grabbing a gambeson and his sword and heading to the door.

“Wait!”, she cried out desperately and he stopped for half a second.

“Don’t”, he begged. “Don’t. I need to clear my head. I am sorry, Mira. I really am.”

And then he walked out the door, her cries fainting as he moved fast until he felt the cold air of the night.

He suddenly became aware that he was wearing only sleep breeches and a thin cotton shirt besides the outerwear and the footwear. No one would question him as the Captain, but he didn’t need the gossip. He looked around and walked to the barricades, letting himself just stand there and cool down.

He was not even that angry. He did not give himself the right to be angry. He was hurt, and badly, and the worst part of it was that Mira wasn’t wrong. Aside from her last question. Still, did he even have the right to feel so crushed when she wasn’t wrong about the things she said about the Order and the Circles. Perhaps she was judgmental. Perhaps she was harsh. But she was not wrong, and he felt ashamed.

The magnitude of her statement… Never before had they ever talked about anything she’d call blatantly evil with such certainty.

Sweet Andraste, she cried so hard the sound of it did not want to leave his mind.

“Who’s there?”, the sharp voice interrupted his thoughts.
“Captain Barris”, he barked in response. “Move, soldier.”

As he had thought, no one would question him. Should he go back? Maybe he was a coward, but he couldn’t. Not now. He could not see her tears, face her anger and disappointment. Not right now.

He continued walking alongside the inner barricades, and he knew that if he tried, he would not be noticed that easily by anyone else. There were few patrols there. He leaned himself and jumped down on the roof of Herald’s Rest, and quietly descended to the right window. He knocked gently, few times, and if he was lucky… There it was, Bull’s confused face appeared as he opened the window pane.

“Barris?”, he rubbed his forehead.

“May I come in?”

The Qunari made an inviting gesture and spoke. “I have so many jokes about midnight visits done this way—“, he stopped abruptly seeing Delrin’s face. “What happened?”

“Do you have any water?”

“Yes”, he handed him a waterskin. “Talk?”

Delrin sat down on the armchair, hanged his arms in a resigned motion and recounted the events.

“Shit, kid”, Bull muttered to himself.

“You know the worst part of it? She is not wrong, for the most part.”

“She was unfair. And you do not carry the responsibility for every single act committed by every single Templar.”

“Perhaps not. But I think I am passed the point when I simply think of those as actions of few rogue Templars. Bull, all of the leadership with very few exceptions became corrupted.”

“It is not you.”

“I have made many mistakes.”

“Yes”, his friend shrugged. “You have. I was a a Ben-Hassrath at Seheron forefront for a decade. Do you want to know what kind of things I have done?”

“I am not stupid, Bull”, he cut him off sharply. “I know the things you have done.”

“You are not stupid. You know things I have done, you know things you have done, and I sure hope you also know the things you haven’t done. Atonement only matters if it for something you are responsible for.”

Delrin pondered those words for a second, rubbing his temples and feeling the headache rising.

“I fucking love her”, he finally said, his voice cracking. “Maker preserve me.”

“I know you’re not oblivious, so I know you have noticed her flirting.”

“I have”, he admitted.

“Have you—?”
“No”, he sighed. “And now—“

“Tell her”, Qunari looked at him. “Tell her that she had hurt you. I understand your caution in regards to love, but you have to be honest about everything else. Especially pain. Regardless of what is or what isn’t there between the both of you.”

“Can I stay here until the morn? I’d rather—“

“Take the sofa”, Bull shrugged. “And don’t you fucking dare complaining about my snoring.”

The second she said those words Mira could visualize the damage done, and in her mind it was as visceral as if she inflicted it on the tissue and the muscle and the bone. All her anger and all the fire in her extinguished, and what was left was cold and bitter, and tired and sorrowful. There was no way to hide from her own words, there was no way to ignore what just happened. It was an injury, and she was the one to cause it.

Her anger might have been righteous at one point, the anger on behalf of her patient, all women, all mages, the inherent systemic injustice. Any righteousness evaporated quickly when for some strange reason he stood at the receiving end of it. He had not even tried defending the Order. He had not tried defending himself, either.

The shame burned her cheeks and she could barely stand her own tears, because they felt deceitful, even when she was just by herself. His warm low voice echoed in her mind, saying that his biggest fear was to hurt others, and she knew that the wound she caused was poisonous. It envenomed every other thing she had ever said.

It was, as her grandma often repeated, the spoonful of tar that spoiled the barrel of honey.

All this time her selfish focus was on all the ways she could end up hurt that she did not foresee she would be the one to cause harm.

She wanted to get up, to search for him, to tell him all of that and more, to clean the wound, to stitch it, to dress it, to kiss it, but she couldn’t.

She couldn’t. She was already tired, too tired.

In my practice the care of my patients will be my first consideration, the words rang in her head.

Right now she had a patient who could be needing her at any moment, and no one that could effectively replace her.

Because of that, Mira collapsed on the bed, covered herself with a blanket and tried her hardest to calm her mind down. She fell asleep eventually.

She slept until the knock on the door. She only glanced at the bedroll to know Delrin had not made it back, and the sharp pain shot though her heart at the memory of last night, and another one at the thought that she didn’t know where he was spending the night. How long has it been? She opened the door immediately.

It was Isanna.

“We think it had started.”
Mira put on clothing, grabbed her bag and rushed through the door, her mind effectively blocking the rest of the world out.

Chapter End Notes

I am sorry! I really am. I know it's a lot to take in, and a lot of heaviness.

Thank you all for reading and for the comments, and I promise you all that the angst does not last forever.
Birth Pangs

Chapter Summary

Mira attends the delivery.

Chapter Notes

Trigger warning: Childbirth and trauma.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Fourth week of Harvestmere, 9:42 Dragon Age, Skyhold

This time they were heading to the infirmary, not the Mage’s Tower, both because of the resources and because of discretion. If anything happened, if Cassandra’s assistance was needed… The infirmary was a neutral ground, far enough, protected not only by the distance and the thick walls, but mainly by the principle of noninterference.

To be entirely fair, that principle was also ensured by Cassandra’s word.

By the time Mira arrived at the infirmary, both Ellendra and Fiona were there, alongside Stitches and Isanna. Ellendra had listened to Mira’s pleas and told them. Stitches, for obvious reasons, was there to hold the fort, to cover all the other pressing matters and upcoming patients, if there were any. Isanna, just barely older than Madeleine herself provided another pair of hands that would dispense cloths, bring water, update on the progress. Isanna might have been young, Mira noticed, but she was kind and there was maturity in her kindness. The type of maturity that only came from experience. There were many things Isanna likely had seen in the alienage.

Madeleine was nervous but brave, the anticipation written on her face. She frowned and whimpered slightly with each contraction, and Mira knew that this was merely the beginning of a very long process. Thankfully they had at least some time to talk yesterday and Madeleine knew what to expect. There was grace in that. It was a gift. Mira was aware that there would be moments to overwhelm and hurt, in more ways than one. Still, for the time being, for now, it all seemed to be going as smoothly as possible. Mira explained once again the process of doing the internal exam, and they took it slowly and gently. She had to check, and Madeleine understood that, but it did not change the fact that she winced as Mira pushed her fingers inside, and she winced from more than pain and discomfort.

The memories would come. They would sidle around the room, just enough taint to make it harder for Madeleine. Birth was always such a primal, physical and uncontrollable experience.

Three centimeters, fully effaced, -1 station. The pinard horn Dagna managed to create proved somewhat useful in that there was a good fetal heartbeat, so at least Mira could reassure herself. She still wished for proper monitoring.
Isanna was the one to stay in the room to hold watch, to murmur to Madeleine and to support her. Both of them immediately developed a strong bond and Mira didn’t feel like interfering.

Cassandra dropped by, already awake and fresh faced despite the brutal hours of the morning, bearing gifts of coffee and fresh buns from the kitchen, slightly surprised by her own generosity.

“I stopped by the main kitchens and simply mentioned coming here, and somehow they bestowed all of those on me. Does that happen often?”

“Yes”, Mira muttered, shoving the cinnamon roll into her mouth and drinking hot coffee despite the temperature already irritating her palate. She put away some for Isanna for later. Sitches discreetly grabbed his share. Seeker, Ellendræ, Fiona and Mira made it to the office to deliberate together.

The buns were iced and sweet, the coffee strong and bitter, but nothing surpassed the emotions already in the room. Ellendræ sat down by the desk, Mira criss crossed on the floor, Fiona and Cassandra sharing the settee together, both slightly tense.

“Thank you, Cassandra”, Ellendræ was the first to speak up. “For everything.”

“Who knows?”, Fiona licked the sugar off her fingers, not even trying to appear subtle.

“Leliana”, Cassandra did not bother beating around the bush either. “And Cullen, but he does not know many details. He knows enough just in case. He knows no Templars are allowed here.”

The coffee really burned Mira’s mouth, and for a second she thought that Fiona would explode at the news, but the Elven mage only nodded, as if she fully expected the development.

“Good”, Fiona simply said. “What about the Inquisitor?”

“He left yesterday”, Cassandra shrugged. “I am more than capable to make decisions in his absence. He will be informed of everything upon his return.”

“Very well”, Ellendræ’s voice betrayed much relief.

“How is the girl?”, Cassandra didn’t know the name, and she never asked such details, understanding the need for privacy.

“It’s just the beginning”, Mira sighed. “But so far so good.”

“Am I needed here the whole day?”

Mira knew this was a question she personally couldn’t answer. From the medical standpoint, she had no use for Seeker’s skills. Fiona raised her eyebrows and Ellendræ hesitated.

“We have talked about it”, the First Healer lips twitched in discomfort. “You know that there is no perfect answer. And frankly, you know our abilities as mages. I don’t want to sound overconfident —“

“You could kill the abomination”, Cassandra noted carefully. “Most abominations, at least.”

“Yes”, Fiona agreed, sipping on her coffee. “And believe me—“

“I know”, the warrior looked at the Enchanter. “You would. That is enough for me.”
“I expected more resistance, Seeker.”

“Why, Fiona?” Cassandra said dryly. “Do you think I inherently place myself above the mages? That I would deny the fall of the Seekers and the Temp—“

“No today”, Ellendra pleaded, not allowing the argument to erupt.

Cassandra made a disgruntled noise, but she did not say anything else.

Mira was the one to walk her friend to the front door. Cass’ face got very serious.

“Listen, Mira”, the warrior lowered her voice. “I do trust you. You have, as the Orleans say, my carte blanche to invoke my authority if need be.”

That was indeed a gesture of paramount faith.

“Thank you”, Mira squeezed Cassandra’s hand.

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Delrin left Bull’s place very early to get back to the quarters, but by the time he arrived there, Mira had already left. He looked around the room. His bedroll was still spread on the floor, the same as he left it. The pain from the argument was still there as well. Did they even argue? He was not certain what to call it, and he was even less certain if anything he did last night was right. His emotions confused him, and he wondered whether it was this combination of both intimacy and careful distance that was between him and Mira. He cared for her way more than he had ever let her know, but he was still afraid that there was no option to tell her that without pressure, without irreversibly altering what they had carved out of the impossible circumstances. Still, they were already close, and it simply was impossible to avoid becoming invested. There was nothing outside of death that could change the bond between them. That felt precarious.

He had never struggled with wooing women, not that much. He had never felt awkward flirting, he had never been too shy to kiss someone. It all was very different back then. If it didn’t work, it could be a shame, but there was no damage. Not really. Nothing was supposed to last.

This was marriage. He might have kissed Mira only at the altar, and they might have never shared more than few innocuously sweet moments, but nothing matched the intensity of the vows he made, especially given the unprecedented nature of how it all came to be.

There was a bond between them, and inside, there were just two people trying to cope, to get to know each other.

He was not sure of anything at that point. Should he be cautious, letting them to slowly get to know each other? Would he miss something because of that caution? What if that caution made the communication harder? Should he just say it, offer her his all without any expectations and hope it would not shatter the trust between them?

More importantly, how would yesterday affect it all? Had her opinion of him changed? Was she angry, disappointed, sad? Before daring to think of anything beyond, he realized the most pressing matter was the present. The words she said. The words he failed to say in return.

He was not even sure when he would see her again, long enough to talk.

He cleaned up their quarters before leaving to the practice. His time could easily be filled with work as well. He would always find things to do.
The day he would need to leave for his next mission was mercilessly approaching.

There had never been enough time. Perhaps there never would.

He still needed to find it.

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Madeleine’s body was opening up slowly and gradually. Everything was progressing in the right direction. Madeleine was irritated, flushed, hurting and they had been trying many techniques to relieve the pain. Walking, applying pressure and massaging, encouraging vocalization. Madeleine supported herself on Isanna’s shoulders and Mira was frankly impressed how much strength and patience the little Elven girl had in her. How many births had Isanna attended at the alienage? The pinard horn worked again, the fetal heartbeat seemed perfect, but the information was still limited, and this was a primipara who had not received any care prior. This birth was something else, something difficult to comprehend. Even homebirth looked different on Earth, with more tools and more options in case of emergency.

If I had a child here, Mira thought for a second, and then felt the sudden nip of pain in her heart, and before she could dismiss the thought, she reminded herself about Delrin telling her the things he did last night, Delrin leaving and not coming back. She quickly compartmentalized and pushed it all aside. This was not the time.

Madeleine and her baby. This was the focus.

“This hurts”, Madeleine whimpered with tears in her eyes, both upset and angry.

It will hurt more, sweetheart, Mira thought, but did not say those words out loud.

“I know”, she simply whispered, rubbing girl’s arm in a soothing manner. “But you will meet your baby today.”

“What if I can’t do it?”, Madeleine’s voice cracked, now full of doubt.

“You can”, Isanna’s calm was indispensable. “And you will.”

“What if I can’t be a good mom?”, the girl repeated, tears falling down her cheeks.

“Madeleine”, Mira said passionately. “You are a good mom. You have protected your baby this whole time, on your own. You have the capacity to love your child. It is scary, and it will be scary, but you are enough. You are. And you won’t be alone either.”

Madeleine didn’t release her grip on Isanna’s body, not even for a second, and when the Elven girl nodded, Mira left the room quietly, gesturing that they would be right outside, when needed. At this point it was Isanna who gained the most trust with the laboring patient, and so they decided to let the birth progress in peace.

The noon came and passed. Mira rubbed the temples on her head, trying to ignore the building headache. She was still tired, the exhaustion had lasted for several days now and never got better. She was entirely certain that she looked absolutely horrendous. She was sipping on another coffee, this time brought by Adan who seemed to know what was going on even if he didn’t say it out loud.
“You look horrible”, he frowned at Mira and she rolled her eyes. Adan had never been too subtle. “Consider Elfroot tea over ridding Skyhold of its Antivan coffee supply, perhaps.”

“Elfroot tea tastes like shit”, Mira replied confidently and Adan chuckled slightly, delivering the poultices and the salves to the apothecary and then disappearing again. Fiona locked herself in one of the examination rooms to fold the baby’s diapers, clearly unable to handle the anticipation, while Stitches got called to the fighting grounds to deal with some cuts.

There were only Mira and Ellendra left in the office, waiting for another check up or the bell of the main door that would inevitably ring if anyone entered the infirmary.

“You do indeed look quite horrible”, Ellendra glanced at her warmly.

“I know”, Mira admitted quietly. “I still haven’t got that day off, remember?”

“Yes. But… is that all?”

No, Mira thought, that was not all. She said something last night she truly regretted to the man she cared abut and he left. The more she thought about it, the more confused and upset she was. He said he needed to cool off, but he left and did not come back. He left and she did not know where he was and where he had slept and he did not come back. He practically ran away the second they had an argument and… She did not think he would just get up and leave.

“It’s alright if you don’t want to talk about it”, Ellendra patted her hand in an awkward gesture.

Was it wrong to simply say it? She had known Ellendra for a while now, and even though they weren’t very close, she had always valued Enchanter’s warmth, kindness and honesty. Moreover Ellendra certainly was not the type to gossip.

“I had a fight with my husband”, she finally admitted and the full realization of those words hit her.

She did not say more than that. She didn’t say she had a fight with her husband and she said things she shouldn’t have, and he left when he shouldn’t have. She couldn’t say she had a fight with her husband whom she had not even kissed outside of the altar because there was nothing between them. Nothing except the door to her heart got opened and now she couldn’t close it even when she tried.

“Oh”, Ellendra said. “Fiona’s words got to you?”

Of course they did, she thought, but she wouldn’t admit that either. They did, both in regards to the past and what the Order had done, and, more importantly, in regards to the future, the future that she foolishly and carelessly allowed herself to fantasize about. And now he left.

She knew she was spiraling in her mind. He didn’t really abandon her, did he? But it felt… he left nonetheless, and was gone the whole night. Was what she said unforgivable? The guilt flowed in her veins alongside sadness, but there was something more, the flickering of anger, a different kind this time, more measured, more quiet. He left.

Would he be back? Would he be back out of duty or—. Would he still want to—? Had he ever—?

“Oh”, Ellendra mused gently. “I was in love with a Templar. In a Circle. I won’t ever judge.”

“What happened?”, she asked, dreading the answer.
“He died”, the grief that struck Ellendra’s serious and kind face was sudden and fleeting, but the moment was so vivid it took Mira’s breath away. “In that blighted, useless war. We were on the opposing sides of it, even though we did not want to fight at all, and he couldn’t get to me despite having my phylactery. He killed himself, afraid of possession. Such a waste. Such a fucking waste.”

“I am so sorry for your loss”, Mira’s heart clenched painfully. “I had no idea. What was his name?”

“Mattrin”, she flinched saying his name, but then smiled. “I know how it looks, the Templar and the mage from the same Circle. He was sweet, and kind, and I kissed him first. He would bring me flowers from outside. I loved him. Every single day I wish he didn’t die, because here, we could be together openly.”

Mira looked at Ellendra with empathy, but what she felt in her heart was more than that.

“It’s not my place”, the mage started and scoffed. “You know what? It is my place. The war is always horrible and excruciating, and believe me, without the Inquisition, we would all be in ruins. Fiona might scoff but she had failed. All I would say to you is that war is horrible, the time is limited, and Barris could have died at Therinfal. Perhaps should have died at Therinfal. I would give up so much to have what you have. Don’t let him of the hook for things that matter but don’t punish him for belonging to the side he never chose for himself. Templars couldn’t just leave, Mira. And he did leave the moment he could. And don’t punish yourself for falling in love. What good does it all bring if we cannot even do that?”

Mira sighed, her whole body filled with emotion. Ellendra, of course, didn’t know the truth, but it didn’t mean her words were wrong either.

“Thank you”, she finally said, because nothing else seemed right in that situation.

The evening came and everything was going smoothly but slowly, very slowly, although this wasn’t surprising for the first time mother. Ellendra was able to go to sleep in the office. Stitches napped on the chair by the front desk. Isanna was still tending to Madeleine, comforting her, supporting her and encouraging her, and Mira was in awe how relentless the Elven girl was. And how full of energy. Isanna had all the hallmarks of a great medic.

Madeleine was in pain, sweaty, fighting through contractions, her body slowly doing the work. Nothing unexpected.

Everything was going smoothly until it wasn’t.

By the time Mira entered the room to do the second and hopefully the final internal exam, it seemed like a textbook birth. Madeleine was complaining and whining, but she was communicative and open, and relentlessly braving through the waves of pain as her body was opening, millimeter by millimeter. She was nodding, listening to Mira explanations about the next check up, step by step, and how it might hurt or be uncomfortable.

And then, two things happened at the same time. As Mira moved her hand between Madeleine’s thighs, the sound of clank from behind followed, and Mira turned immediately to investigate. The only candle lighting the space fell down, the flame extinguished, the room suddenly covered in a complete darkness. It only took a second, less than, and Mira was about to reassure Madeleine and instruct Isanna to light a new one when the sudden sharp freezing pain brought her to her knees,
literally. She collapsed by the bed, breathing heavily, not knowing what was going on, hearing the sudden screams all around.

Fuck.

It happened so fast. The ruckus by the door, the sound of people barging in, the sudden faint glow covering her body, the hand pulling her closer.

Fiona.

“Are you alright?”, the Enchanter hissed by her ear.

Was she? Mira took two deep breaths and that was it. She was.

Fuck.

“Yes.”

The gentle greenish light illuminated the whole room now, encircling them away from Madeleine. The girl’s eyes were wide open, her forehead sweaty, her body shaking, her breathing fast and interrupted, wheezing, the look on her face wild and scared.

“Is it—?”, Mira asked quietly, whispering to Ellendra who was miraculously already by their side as well.

“No”, Fiona was the one to answer, sharply. “I would sense the demon. She’s not—”

“She’s panicking”, Mira gasped. “She’s panicking and her magic—“

“—is uncontrollable”, Ellendra added quickly.

“Madeleine”, Isanna tried gently, her voice most familiar, only for the barrier to repel the wave of frost and ice befalling them.

Madeleine screamed as if in pain, putting her hands around her stomach, more magic coming out of her hands.

“I need to get to her, now”, she barked at Fiona who grabbed her by both arms.

“Even the barrier won’t allow you to touch her safely”, Enchanter sneered in response. “Well, I suppose we did not take this into account when planning for today.”

“Cassandra last reported she was going to the main castle”, Ellendra clenched her teeth.

“That’s thirty minutes both ways, twenty something if we run”, Mira could barely contain her own rising fear.

“Get Cullen”, Ellendra shouted. “Get Cullen now, Cassandra is set to come to the infirmary later anyway.”

“You don’t seriously want me to get the Templar after she—“

“Mira”, Fiona squeezed her arm so painfully, the same arm where the magic fell. “She wants the baby. She wants the baby to live. Go, now! We’ll hold the barriers.”

“Tell Stitches to run to the office”, Ellendra instructed. “Mira, check the tavern, he’s rarely there
but I am not wasting our time if he is.”

Then they ran. Mira felt the shuddering cold of the night, the punishing pain on her left arm, the memory of cold still digging into her chest. She could feel her heart thudding, her breath fast, but she still had enough sense to let her hair down and push it all on the side before entering the tavern. Nobody would notice where she got injured. Herald’s Rest was very loud, both the music and the sounds of merry drinking all around. No Cullen on sight, unless…

She barged in through the door to the private dining room the Inner Circle used and suddenly came face to face with a table full of men. Varric, Iron Bull, Fletcher, Rylen, Cullen and Delrin. She glanced at him only to see the puzzled look in his eyes before she drilled her own into the man she came in for.

“Blushes”, she heard Varric’s voice. “What’s wrong?”

She ignored him, just to utter one word only.

“Commander”, she said.

For fucks sake, she did not even know how much he knew because she had no idea what exactly had Cassandra told him. He blinked at her once, confused, and then the realization hit him, and with that, the dread.

“You need a Templar”, he only growled before standing up, grabbing his weapon and walking out the door, all of his man immediately trying to follow through. She blocked the entryway with her body, furious at Cullen for not realizing they would all try to go there, and placed her fist on Delrin’s breastplate, as he was the first one there.

“Stand. The. Fuck. Down”, she whispered angrily and she could see his jaw tightening, the fire in his eyes. Of course he would not listen to her, not about this. “Cassandra’s orders”, she added with all the confidence she could muster. “Stand down, don’t come near the infirmary and don’t waste my fucking time to make Cullen go back to tell you that himself.”

He relented, and Mira breathed out and just brushed her hand against his arm before walking out and closing the door, any sounds from the room blocked.

It all happened so fast and she caught up with Cullen outside of the tavern. He was marching quickly in the direction of the infirmary.

“You didn’t tell your men to stay”, she complained desperately, suddenly feeling completely overwhelmed by the situation.

“Shit”, he stopped abruptly for a split second. “Are they following?”

“No”, she replied angrily.

“What’s going on?”, he barked. “I only know… a little.”

“Patient’s panicking and attacking us”, Mira sighed. “And we’re… almost there. It’s time.”

They walked in urgently, going straight into the room. Madeleine was screaming, and panting, and clawing, and crying on all fours. The greenish aura was still around the mages and Isanna, flickering and floating. There was no time to even fully understand what was happening. Mira
knew that this situation was so above her and her experience, her competence.

“Smite her”, Ellendra shouted at Cullen the second they walked in. “Smite, not silence, she’s too panicked—“

Before Mira could even think what that meant, she felt the glow of magic surround her like a cloak, and then something sharp and painful went through her as well, the feeling of drainage and tiredness suddenly spreading, her knees weak again.

Madeleine was now laying silently on the bed, Cullen was leaning on the wall, Ellendra panted and Fiona just screamed something but Mira wasn’t listening. Despite her own body feeling limp she ran towards the bed, as fast as she could. She gently rolled Madeleine into supine position. The girl felt heavy, as if she was unconscious.

“I am sorry sweetheart”, she whispered, “I am so sorry. It’s almost over.”

To say that Mira felt horrible was an understatement. They incapacitated Madeleine using Templar’s abilities. Given her past, it felt even more perverse and disgusting, and Mira felt disgusted, but there was no time but to work. There was no time and yet the time seemed to stop as she looked between Madeleine’s legs, as she saw the baby’s head crowning. She splurged the hand disinfecting poultice on her hands and she touched the baby’s head.

Please, be alright, she prayed.

“I am so sorry, Madeleine”, Mira said, the girl looking at her silently as if she was stunned, only blinking, the tears falling out of her eyes. “You’re doing so great. It’s almost over, I promise.”

There was no sense in any pushing guidance, Madeleine’s body was literally expelling the child anyway, and she wasn’t even sure if the girl would be able to follow instructions. The tearing was inevitable.

She felt the nuchal cord immediately, wrapped tightly around the baby’s neck. No way to slide it over the head. Don’t tighten the noose, don’t tighten the noose, she thought, pressing the palm of her own hand on the baby’s occiput and pushing the newborn toward Madeleine’s thigh. Oh, what a perfect somersault. It always surprised her how simple the maneuver was. The cord got unwrapped, and Mira could look at the baby, the immediate assessment following.

“It’s a girl!”, she shouted.

The sound of the sudden high pitch cry filled the space. Someone appeared by her side, more hands to help. Good. Isanna was tending to Madeleine, Fiona helping to hold an infant, Ellendra shoving the laennec stethoscope in Mira’s hand. It was not her Littman, but it worked anyway. Good heartbeat. Tone - perfect, reflex -perfect, skin color - perfect. Clamp the cord, cut it. Done.

“She’s perfect”, Mira announced, her own voice shaky at the moment. “Madeleine, your girl is so perfect.”

No time. Fiona took over the baby, gently wrapping her in all the cloths she had prepared, the tiny hat placed on the head while Mira delivered the afterbirth and massaged uterus, administering the tincture the Adan brought. Bleeding managed, nothing retained, stitches done and finally, finally Ellendra was able to place her hands all over Madeleine and use her magic to heal and rejuvenate, and then three things happened at exactly the same time.

Another cry followed. The loudest, strongest cry that turned into shouting came out of Madeleine’s mouth, tears floating from her eyes, but there was way more the sound than trauma and sadness.
The girl lifted her hands desperately, not being able to say a word but Fiona was ready. She was right there holding the little baby girl and gently placing her on her mother’s breast. And then all of a sudden every single woman in the room was bawling, except the baby herself, who was only whimpering softly.

Mira turned her head. The Commander had to leave at some point.

The crocodile tears were falling down Madeleine’s cheeks as she looked at her sweet girl. It was such a sight that it took Mira’s breath away, her own face completely wet. Fiona’s ears where shaking as she hid behind her hands. Ellendra sobbed silently. Isanna laughed and cried at the same time, now full of energy again.

That right there, Mira thought to herself, was a miracle of life.

She assessed the Apgar score the second time, this time with a baby safely in her mom’s arms.

“Perfect”, she repeated once again, happy and then saddened, whispering. “I am sorry how it all—“

“I understand”, Madeleine answered, her voice trembling. “She’s here!”

“Yes”, Fiona agreed, bawling shamelessly at that point.

“What’s her name?”, Isanna couldn’t help herself.

“Rose”, Madeleine smiled brightly. “Rosie.”

Mira managed to assist with the first feeding, Rosie latching eagerly and without problems, Madeleine beaming. Right after that Ellendra pulled Mira away.

“Go”, she ordered in a quiet, soothing voice. “We’ve got this. You’ve been hit and…Just go. That’s an order. Let Barris take care of you.”

Mira didn’t want to, but she listened, suddenly feeling the weakness spreading all over her body. She just managed to clean up her hands and her face and change shirts before walking out. The sting in her heart at the mention of Delrin’s name was more pronounced now. Today she just added another layer of things to explain and talk about. She knew she had no right to order him around except Cassandra’s words, and he didn’t need to believe her. Would he be back at their quarters? Her heart reached her throat, every insecurity surfacing as she walked slowly. The blackness of the night was overwhelming, only the flicker of the lights surrounding the walls up high and the tavern in site.

The pinch appeared again because he was at the tavern, playing cards and not looking particularly upset… She wanted to hide behind her own walls, but her heart was treacherous tonight, already wide opened after everything she had witnessed.

She was halfway from the infirmary now, near the entrance to the gardens, Herald’s Rest far on the right.

Then, the sound in the darkness, the shiver that went through her spine as she froze. What was—?

Fuck.

Cullen was sitting right underneath the tree, barely visible.
“Commander?”, she stepped in closer, noticing the sweat on his forehead, the paleness. He didn’t answer.

“Cullen?”, she shook him gently, tapping his face. “I will get help—“

“No!”, he grabbed her by the wrist, fiercely, the sudden pain surprising her as she freed herself while her heart beat faster.

“Cullen”, she repeated, this time less gently and with much irritation. “You’re not well. I need to be able to help you.”

“No”, he barked and then sighed. “Do you have a potion?”

She did, in fact, she always carried a couple of health potions in her medical bag. She gave it to him, and to be honest, it did not seem to do much.

“Cullen”, she frowned her eyebrows. “Do you need lyrium?”

“No!”, his denial was so sudden and strong for a second she was worried he would become violent, but the spark passed. “I… don’t take—.”

Could it be—? How could he not take lyrium? The only Templar she knew who wouldn’t was Delrin himself, and just because the Spirit of Faith had touched him. The Templars, as Genitivi said, were dependent on lyrium for life, unless…

Fuck.

Cullen tried getting up, clearly emboldened by some relief potion provided, but after few careful steps he stumbled and leaned towards her.

“Help me”, he said quietly, “to my office.”

How, she thought, feeling the heavy weight of his body resting on her shoulder, the same one that got hit with the ice spell. The Commander certainly tried to not be a burden, but he was a strong and a tall man, covered in metal. They took few steps and Mira felt the droplets of sweat appearing on her own forehead, the chill and nausea climbing up mercilessly, and she simply knew there was no way she would be able to walk with him that far.

“Mira!”, the familiar voice called, and the relief she felt was almost instantaneous.

Delrin.

“Help”, she only managed to whisper before she felt the weight literally taken off her shoulders.

************

The second Mira crossed the door to the room at Herald’s Rest, Delrin knew something was wrong. He noticed the faint ice in her curls, her hair parted differently, covering the shoulder and then she called for Cullen. He just knew that there was trouble.

Then she told him to stand the fuck down, which was entirely inappropriate on its own, since she had no right to be dispensing orders. As she mentioned Cassandra, and Cullen himself, he knew she was right, even though technically he didn’t need to believe her. So he made a call. He made a call that resulted in him needing to pull the rank over Fletcher, which he had never done before on any other Captain. Fletcher eventually stormed out of the tavern, after much yelling and debating.
Rylen was easier to appease, probably because he knew Cullen so well and he was aware that if they were needed, they would be called for. The whole debacle took close to an hour, and Barris was thankful that both Bull and Varric stepped down and left the room to let him handle it alone. It turned really ugly. Many words had been said.

Delrin was not going to come close the infirmary after what had been said, after he had already listened to Mira, but he was not going to do nothing, either. He sat down on the grass leaning on the barricades and waited, knowing she would pass here sooner or later. Finally, he could see her silhouette appearing, walking slowly, illuminated faintly only by the stars and the moon. And the she stopped and diverted into the trees, and he knew something was wrong again. As he started walking in her direction, he saw another person he was familiar with. Cullen. He must have ended up there before Delrin even left the tavern himself.

What happened?

“Mira”, he called for her, and she looked very dazed and confused and only managed to whisper the plea of help before he took over Cullen and leaned him over his shoulder.

He was about to lead him back to the infirmary when he heard the Commander hissing. “Office. That’s an order.” What the fuck happened?

They walked slowly, Mira and Cullen quiet, Barris not prying. Not yet. By the time they reached the stairs to the tower, the Commander was nearly delusional and the second they entered his quarters, he merely collapsed on the floor, with Mira immediately kneeling by his side, checking his breathing and then removing parts of his armor.

Delrin climbed up the ladder and pushed the blankets and bedding on the floor.

“He’s breathing fine and he’s not dying”, Mira muttered in a tired voice. “I already gave him the healing potion, but he is so weak… I think he’s just out now.”

“He needs lyrium”, Delrin muttered without the doubt, opening the desk drawers and searching for the philter.

“He said no lyrium”, she whispered and Barris looked at her sharply.

“What?”

“I…”, she hesitated. “I don’t think he takes it.”

Barris looked back at every single moment he thought that Cullen looked sick. How once he saw him retching the contents of his stomach down the barricades. He thought it was stress, the lack of sleep, too much work. *Maker preserve him.*

The Commander gave up lyrium. On his own. How long—? Had to be before Haven. *How—*

He stopped because he glanced Mira as she stood up, and her skin was paper white, all color drained from her face… He managed to catch her before she fell.

“Mira”, he muttered while assessing her. She did not faint, not yet, anyway. He pressed her closely to his chest and sat down with her. “What happened? You look horrible.”

“Just what a girl wants to hear”, she tried cracking the joke, but he did not laugh. He looked at her face closely and there were droplets of sweat all over her forehead. She was shivering and her teeth were chattering as if she was cold.
“I am serious”, he touched her cheek, watching closely. “You almost fainted. I know you were hit by magic. What happened? I already have my suspicions. I know you can’t talk about—“

“You will find out anyway”, she responded very slowly. “We had the patient giving birth. Mage, young. There were… complications. She was scared.”

Sweet Andraste, his mind immediately went to their discussion yesterday and suddenly everything became clear as a day, the puzzle coming together. The mage patient giving birth.

“How is the baby?”, he whispered and he could feel Mira’s arms wrapping around him, pulling closer.

“Perfect”, she answered and he felt the relief falling over him. “The mom… is alright too. I don’t…”, she was full on shuddering now, “why… do I feel so bad?”

She needed a Templar, Delrin thought and suddenly understood. She needed a Templar, and Cullen went there, and casted something using the last possible trace of lyrium that could still be circulating in his blood. But Silence wouldn’t work on Mira, unless…

“Mira?”, he asked sharply. “Did Cullen use the Holy Smite?”

“I think so”, she answered and now he knew.

“Well”, he spoke softly. “I am afraid you might feel even worse later.”

“There was a barrier”, she protested.

Without the barrier she’d pass out and most likely not yet wake up as a non-warrior, non-mage.

“I know”, he murmured. “I am afraid you still will feel it. Chills, shuddering, shivers, nausea, vomiting and numbing weakness.”

“Lovely”, she panted. “I really… feel so cold.”

He helped her out of her thin coat, took of his sweater and put it on her and then wrapped his arms around her.

“I am sorry—”, she started and couldn’t finish, covering her mouth.

“Shhh”, he said.

They sat like that maybe for five minutes before someone knocked on the door.

“Who is it?”, Barris asked loudly and the door opened, Cassandra appearing in them, both terrifying and terrified.

She looked at Cullen, she glanced around the room, she looked at Mira and then finally she looked into Delrin’s eyes.

“I am coming from the infirmary”, she sighed. “I was told everything. Cullen—“

“We brought him here. He was quite adamant”, he answered bitterly.

“I see”, her lips thinned. “Have you—“

“He doesn’t take it”, that was a statement, not the question. “He told Mira, at least in some way.”
“Yes”, Cassandra was never the person to deny the obvious. “And now you are the only one to know aside from me, Leliana and Maxwell himself, so—“

“I know”, he interrupted her, still feeling Mira’s chills.

“Mira?”, Seeker questioned. “Are you still alive?”

“Somewhat”, came the muffled response. “How are—“

“Good. No problems. Ellendra and Stitches are taking the night, Fiona and Isanna will be there in the morning. I know things got… complicated.”

“Yeah”, she whined, clinging to him and the feeling of protectiveness completely overflowed him.

“Mira came to the tavern to grab Cullen and…Fletcher and Rylen were there. I had to pull rank—“

“Consider it solved”, Seeker rolled her eyes. “I will talk to both of them tomorrow.”

“You were… right, Cass”, Mira noted shakily. “About your authority.”

“Who did you need to use it on?”, Cassandra asked with the faintest trace of amusement.

“Me”, Delrin admitted. “Alright, can I take her home?”

“Yes. I’ll stay here and watch over him.”

“Delrin”, Mira tapped his arm. “I don’t think I can walk.”

“I know”, he shrugged, getting up with her in his hands, “I will carry you.”

“You cannot—“

“I have carried men wearing full armor from the battlefield”, he settled her across his shoulders, adjusting her weight and gesturing towards Cassandra to pass Mira’s medical bag, “I’m taking you home.”

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Delrin had carried her the entire way to their quarters. It felt very uncomfortable, and the waves of nausea and chills were crushing over her, making her dizzy and exhausted and sweaty. It felt awful. Her head was bobbing each time they passed the stairs. Mira felt as she was going in and out of her consciousness.

“Bed?”, he asked when they finally arrived.

“Bathroom”, she replied and the second he gently placed her on the floor she crawled to the toilet and started vomiting while he held her hair out of the way.

The tears appeared in her eyes, the acidic taste in her mouth. It came in waves and at the end she felt completely and utterly depleted. There was some vomit on her clothing, on his sweater that she wore. Goodness, she felt so so sick.

Delrin got up, wetted the towel ad wiped her face carefully, tied up her hair and rubbed her shoulder gently.

“Oh Mira”, he whispered softly. “I am so sorry.”
“Mhmmm”, she leaned herself on the wall.

“Drink”, he gently pushed the glass of water near her mouth and she grimaced. The last thing she wanted was to drink. “You know you can’t get dehydrated.”

She took careful, slow sips, flinching the whole time. “I… am a bad patient”, she murmured.

“I see that”, he smirked gently.

“Your sweater. Sorry,” she muttered apologetically, being too sick and tired to feel more embarrassed.

“Please”, he reassured her. “You should have seen Lavellan vomiting all over me during her first mission. I’ll bring you something fresh to wear.”

He did, but not before he made her drink a health potion. Oh, what a vile taste, she almost thought she would vomit again. But no. It did provide certain relief.

“Can you help?”, she whined desperately trying to undress but her hands simply felt too weak. “Please.”

He first took off her sweater - his sweater - and tossed it aside into the hamper.

Then she asked him to take off the shirt, now damp from the cold sweat. She was still so pale. She turned slightly and gestured towards her back, and he unclasped her brassiere, and then, avoiding to look anywhere but on the wall, he blindly helped her putting a fresh shirt on.

There was less awkwardness than he imaged. Perhaps because it was like during combat, where suddenly the context changed, the modesty evaporated. He had seen people at their worst and most vulnerable. He had helped to remove the armor and clothing from men and women alike, with no hesitation. He tended to those under his command.

Still, the things he discovered about Mira during the process still felt intimate. He could see the tattoo on her back in all its glory in the bathroom candlelight. He could notice the shadow of flowers and vines on one of her sides, and then thorns and grasses on another. He had wondered in the past where her tattoos were located or what they looked and now he caught the glimpse. He certainly did not ogle her, but now he knew she had dimples on her lower back.

She stood up gently, her legs shaking, and she turned and grabbed onto him just to steady herself.

“Pants”, Mira whispered, and he unlaced them and pulled them down, the leather resisting, clinging to her sweat. He put on another of his sweaters on her and it fell down her tighs. She still looked so weak and miserable, as if she was about to faint. She tried to take one uncertain step, but he just shook his head and lifted her up as she embraced him.

“I’ll start the fire to make the room warmer”, he told her softly as he tucked her in.

“Thanks”, she whispered. “I am sorry for—“

“Just sleep”, he interrupted her gently, caressing her hair, squatting by the bed.

“Will you leave again?”, the quiet, sleepy and faint voice asked in the last flicker of the wakefulness.
The burst of guilt was sudden. Was that what she thought? Sweet Andraste, they would certainly need to talk tomorrow.

“No, Mira”, he reassured her. “I won’t leave.”

Chapter End Notes

I am sorry for those of you who did not anticipate the heaviness of the previous chapter - and this one, probably. This story is a primarily a romance and there is and there will be much warmth and sweetness, but the characters still experience difficult things and face ethical dilemmas. There is still war and suffering and violence.

I try to not be flippant whenever I touch upon some subjects, and I certainly try to not use those tropes to shock or to terrify anyone. It's simply that Delrin is a soldier and Mira is a medic. Those are not only their professions but in some respects their callings and they influence who our protagonists are and how they think or connect to one another.

This chapter was always to end happily for Madeleine and her baby.

And don't worry, Delrin and Mira will have a conversation about their argument and everything that happened as well. In another chapter. ;)

Thank you for continuing to read this story, and thank you so much for your comments and your kudos. It really is a privilege.
Aftermath

Chapter Summary

Mira and Delrin face the aftermath of the events of the day before and discuss their fight.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Fourth week of Harvestmere, 9:42 Dragon Age, Skyhold

Delrin woke up multiple times that night just to check how Mira was doing. After the first time, he simply moved his bedroll onto the floor directly across the bed. He only needed to sit down and touch her face to feel how she was faring. Her breathing was steady, her chills were dissipating and each time he could feel her becoming warmer. By the time the morning came, he was satisfied that she was indeed alright. He placed the tray with fresh water and a covered plate of freshly baked goods he got from the kitchens on the nightstand. She would certainly feel hungry upon waking up. He wished to be able to stay, but he was painfully aware that there certainly would an aftermath to the events of yesterday. He wanted to check in on Cullen or at least to talk with Cassandra.

He stumbled upon the Seeker when he was going down the stairs. She must have been coming to their quarters, probably having a similar idea to the one he had.

“Barris!”, she gasped in surprise and then collected herself. “How’s Mira?”

“Asleep”, he replied. “Last night was rough. How’s Cullen?”

“Awake”, she responded tentatively. “He knows you know, by they way. I told him. Believe it or not, I was actually coming to see you, not Mira. Fletcher brought up the formal complaint regarding what happened yesterday. I have signed the official policy regarding family separation and the protections against it this morning as well. I haven’t talked with either Fletcher or Rylene, but the war meeting is scheduled for late afternoon today. All the advisors will be there, and then me, you, Fletcher, Rylene and Ellendra and Mira.”

“Wonderful. Just what I needed before deploying, other captains doubting my command skills”, he gritted his teeth, angry at his own failure to contain Fletcher’s reaction. “What time? Mira really deserves the rest.”

“I know”, the look on Cassandra’s face was undoubtedly guilty. “I know. I hate to be doing that, but believe me, I know she would want to be there. She is the First Surgeon and she does make most of the medical decisions at the infirmary. Do you mind joining me as I deliver the paperwork there? I know they are eager for the Inquisition’s official assurances.”

“I can certainly walk with you”.

It was funny, he thought to himself. He distinctly remembered how he was the one to ask Cassandra to watch over Mira when he left for the Dales. Now her and Mira became friends and from what he could tell, pretty close ones.
“Just out of curiosity”, Delrin muttered quietly as they walked through the gardens. “Given that Fletcher out right challenged my orders thinking that I have made a mistake because of my… personal bias. What exactly did you tell Mira in relation to your authority?”

“Oh”, Cassandra’s lips formed the tiniest smirk. “I simply told her she had a carte blanche to invoke it.”

“Sweet Andraste.”

“You were right to listen, if that’s what you’re concerned about.”

“I wasn’t insecure—“

“Still”, she cut him off leniently. “You were right.”

They finally reached the door to the infirmary, and Barris realized he had never really ventured inside to see it after all the changes. The thought made him uneasy, as if he should have paid more attention to Mira’s work, although they certainly did talk about it a lot.

“Come inside”, Cassandra gestured. “A lot has changed.”

He glanced at the small Elven woman walking away into a small corridor and he recalled from Mira’s stories that her name was Isanna. He also certainly heard Adan’s voice as the man was huffing to himself somewhere in the back. The last time they met was when he was getting potions for Mira. Adan had quite a lot to say about being interrupted in his private time, but he had helped Barris nonetheless. Now the alchemist was working at the infirmary, producing poultices and salves.

Cassandra disappeared behind the office’s doors and Delrin stood there awkwardly in the middle of the room, looking around until the Elven girl appeared again.

“Captain Barris, right?”, she smiled brightly.

“Yes”, he smiled back. “You must be Isanna, if I am not mistaken. Mira has mentioned you.”

The girl’s smile widened and reached her eyes. “Well, she has certainly mentioned you as well.”

It was such a tiny and insignificant remark, but something about that still managed to warm his heart.

“Make sure to tell her that everything is going great here”, Isanna added. “Great, not well. She will worry otherwise.”

“I… certainly will”, he noted somehow amused. He obviously knew how much Mira cared about her work and how invested she was, but now he was witnessing it with his own eyes.

Isanna excused herself and disappeared once again while he sat down on one of the chairs, presumably placed there for those who waited to be seen by a medic. At that moment, there was no one except him, examining his surroundings. The infirmary got completely reorganized and it looked different as well. Mira told him that they had devised a completely new system for overseeing patients and storing appropriate information. He did not know much about medicine, but he certainly knew enough about management to appreciate what a monumental task it all must have been. It had only been several weeks but then again he certainly was aware how hard and how much Mira worked throughout that time.
Delrin heard the steps coming close again and then he saw Isanna slowly carrying a small bundle of cloth. No, that was not merely cloth. Could that be… Oh. She was marching right at him.

“I told Madeleine you were Mira’s husband and she wanted you to meet Rosie”, the Elven girl grinned. “Now, use the poultice that we have set on the table right there on your hands. Good. Don’t stand. Sit down again.”

Barris was frazzled. “I have never—“

Isanna on another hand seemed completely unbothered. “Just cradle your hands right near your chest… Very well. Support the head”, she carefully placed the baby in his arms and Delrin suddenly felt so unprepared to hold someone that was so small and fragile.

“She is so tiny”, he whispered, looking at Rosie’s face. She truly weighed less than he anticipated. The hazed eyes of a newborn were looking back at him and he experienced the surge of emotions appearing in his chest. He gently stroke the baby’s cheek with his finger and Rosie yawned in return. He smiled softly, completely disarmed.

“Captain Barris”, Fiona’s sharp tone and Orlesian accent were unmistakable. His first instinct was to get up to properly welcome her, but then he simply didn’t know how to while holding Rosie. He also still remembered the look in Enchanter’s eyes when she examined their messy quarters after he fell asleep with Mira on the floor. Maker’s breath.

“Enchanter”, he bowed to her and then his eyes returned to the baby in his arms, so innocent and new. Mira’s tears and words buzzed in the back of his mind, the noises slightly louder now that baby was staring at him.

He had seen children in his life, of course. He was still at Barrfield when his nephew was born, although truth to be told, he was a child himself and he did not recall much. He traveled a lot and had seen mothers with newborns at their breasts sitting on the steps to their cottages or carrying the babes in slings to work the fields. But he had never held one like that. He most certainly had never considered the question of fatherhood except that he had always taken careful steps to ensure it wouldn’t happen.

Now the thought sparked in his head, the thought bright and bold like a flame, and even though he extinguished it, it would linger around his mind far longer.

_This is all so theoretical_, he told Mira when she pushed him with her questions. He wondered if she wanted to have children before she ended up in Thedas, but he was almost certain he could guess the answer.

Now the image, as transient as it was, left the mark. The image of holding his own child.

Sweet Andraste.

*******************************************************************************

Mira woke up in the afternoon feeling like she had spent the last night vomiting, which was actually exactly what had happened. Ugh. The aftertaste in her mouth, the body odor after sweating so profusely, the coming realization of the sequence of events of yesterday. She sat down on her bed shakily. Her legs were entirely uncovered and she remembered Delrin gently helping her undress. Oh yes, he put on another one of his sweaters on her. The sleeves were reaching way past her wrists. He was so caring and sweet last night, making sure her hair wouldn’t fall into the toiler bowl or carefully wiping her face. Was he back?
Mira noticed the tray on the side table and her heart fluttered. How could it not? He made sure she had everything she needed. She took careful sips of water and ate some food before getting up.

It felt so wonderful to take a bath and refresh. She still felt a bit weak and her muscles were slightly shaky and her skin paler than usual, but none of it could compare to yesterday when she was not able to even walk.

Mira carefully stripped the bed and placed new sheets and covers getting a little bit winded in the process when the knock came on the door.

Please, don’t let it be another emergency, Mira thought. Please.

It was Josephine, smiling softly but there was seriousness written on her face as well.

“The war meeting had been called for today”, the Ambassador said quietly. “Regarding the events at the infirmary. I suppose the news got out. Few Templars insisted with Fletcher representing them and apparently they are not… pleased.”

Mira thought that the tiredness would surely never leave her body again. There would be no rest. She sighed.

“You are expected to come”, Josephine continued. “I have heard what happened and I realize how badly you might feel——“

“Oh, no”, Mira reassured her immediately, the anger stirring up in her heart. This time, her response was not unchecked. This was not what had happened between her and Delrin. This was about the principles, about justice. “I will gladly be there. I have a lot to say.”

They went to the Ambassador’s quarters for tea, snacks and to have a conversation, which was a subtle way of Josephine ensuring that Mea was indeed prepared for her first war meeting. Mira had never been a quick tempered woman, but there had been times where she was bold and outspoken, usually when something moved her to the core. She brushed off Josephine’s gentle and careful reminders that both Rylen and Fletcher didn’t know her origin and that it would be best if they find out. Mira had given herself away in marriage to secure her identity. She could not imagine anything, anything at all that would be able to make her slip after doing that. Still, Josephine insisted on running some talking points, letting Mira practice her answers regarding her medical skills. The ambassador also made sure to go over all the recent history regarding Mages and Templars relations to clarify the context. To be fair, she was pleasantly surprised given Mira’s knowledge.

“You have not been been idle with your time”, Josephine complimented her, taking a careful sip of her tea.

No, Mira thought. I have many vices, but I have never been been idle about anything in my life.

They finally left the Ambassador’s suite only for Mira to almost bump into Delrin who was about to attend the same war meeting.

“Hi”, she said gently, now her heart slightly mellowing.

“Hi”, he responded, much care in his green eyes. He had the loveliest eyes.

“I’ll leave you to it”, Josephine raised her hand and walked ahead, allowing them to move on a
slower pace and actually chat for a little while.

“How are you feeling?” Delrin asked.

“Fine”, she responded, feeling the blush on her cheeks. “Thank you for taking such a good care of me.”

“Anytime. I visited infirmary with Cassandra today. Isanna told me to let you know everything was going great.”

Mira chuckled. “Well, thank you. That’s reassuring. I can’t believe you actually—”

“Just so you know”, he whispered impatiently, “that war meeting is not at my insistence. I would not dare—”

“I know”, she brushed his arm with the palm of her hand. “Josephine explained everything. I know that Fletcher filed an official complaint with Cullen regarding the infirmary.”

She could see his jaw tightening and his body tensing. “The infirmary is not under the authority of the Forces. Fletcher has no right in trying to influence how it is run.” He took a deep breath. “He filed a grievance with Cullen regarding my behavior. He insinuated that I should not have listened to your words and the reason I did was—”

“Because we’re married”, she added quickly, the bitter taste of guilt appearing on her tongue. “Delrin, I only did what I thought was necessary for my patient. I did not consider—”

“You did nothing wrong”, he said firmly. “And just so you know, I did not listen because you’re my wife. I listened to you because you were clearly very aware what was going on, and you invoked both Cullen and Cassandra’s authority and I know you would not overstep. You were right. I was not going to waste your time insisting on having Cullen speak to me. You did nothing wrong. I want you to know that before we enter the war room. And I certainly trust my own command.”

Mira looked at him. She should have realized it before. Delrin had always been so calm and composed. He had not hesitated to admit his mistakes or talk about painful moments. He had always shown a lot of humility. Still, there was a part of him that was proud. He had been commanding people for a decade, and he had always been in some position of power, and he was used to leading. Even given all of his doubts and struggles, he emitted that steady confidence. He took pride in his work. She bit her lip. Everything was getting so messed up, their private life intertwined with the professional one.

She could see the massive door leading to the war room right ahead of them. To think that just few days ago she came there for her things, now long gone thanks to Dagna. This time, she could see a lot of people standing there, and everyone looked very serious. Ellendra smiled slightly to Mira, Fletcher scoffed quietly seeing Delrin. Cullen… Goodness, she remembered Cullen’s state last night. He looked tired and pale and slightly irritated, but not unwell. Cassandra was at his right side, and Josephine and Leliana chatted quietly. Rylen seemed careful and a bit confused.

It daunted on Mira that considering the nature of Fletcher’s complaint, them approaching together must have looked almost challenging, but Delrin seemed as composed as ever. He brushed his hand on her back as they entered to room, but then they all sat down around the table and the symbolism was clear.

They were, even if just formally, sitting on the opposing sides.
She took a deep breath and steadied herself.

Delrin knew that he made the right call and he had no doubt that both Cullen and Cassandra were aware of that fact as well. Still, he was leaving for the Western Approach in less than a week, alongside Fletcher and Rylen themselves. The last thing they needed were any issues regarding the chain of command. Maker preserve him. He seriously was not looking forward going to that blighted desert at the end of the world.

Truth to be told though, the bigger issue mentioned were the Templar attitudes. Given the Inquisition’s hard stance over defending mage rights which today included added family protections, many Templars dared to raise some complaints. Barris felt irritated. The seeds were there since the beginning. He knew that there were those who opposed the fact that he surrounded the Order and now, over a year later, anything served as an excuse to grip onto more power. There were certainly some not pleased with the fact that mages took over the infirmary, which was only exacerbated by Fiona’s role in it, even though it was Ellendra who had the highest authority. The wounds of the war were still there, though Delrin knew mages had far more right to bleed. The word of a child being born got out, though not the circumstances. He did not know the details himself, but he could deduce much from Mira’s emotional response the day they argued.

The color certainly came back to Mira’s face, and she looked much healthier in general, though she should be resting. Still, he could see the fire burning in her eyes, and the anger cloaking her as she was eyeing Fletcher through his explanations.

“All I am trying to say”, Fletcher sighed, “is that some Templars feel uncomfortable with what happened at the infirmary.”

“What part”, it was so abundantly clear to him that Mira was restraining her fury, “are they uncomfortable about?”

“The part where you delivered a child of a mage without proper assistance! The risk of possession alone! And you ended up needing the Templar, didn’t you—”

“We needed an assistance of a Templar for medical reasons, not security reasons, Captain Fletcher”, Ellendra replied calmly. Barris had never seen her lose composure, and she was indeed moderate in her views as well.

“What medical reasons could that be?”, Fletcher pried and Mira tapped her fingers on the table with clear irritation.

“Captain Fletcher”, she responded slowly. “Those are private medical records, and the infirmary won’t discuss the patient’s detail—”

“How very convenient, lady Barris”, Fletcher hissed and Barris felt the surge of anger rising in his own chest.

Josephine looked like she wanted to stop the exchange but Mira answered first, looking Fletcher straight in the eye.

“Surgeon Barris”, she emphasized coldly, measuring her words. “Perhaps you will feel more comfortable with my expertise once you start addressing me properly and show respect for the work that I do, Captain Fletcher.”

Cassandra couldn’t hide her smirk, although she certainly tried.
“All I am saying”, Fletcher relented only slightly, “is that we have the right to know about the events that transpired.”

“No”, Mira shook her head firmly. “You do not have that right. In fact, the Inquisition guarantees its non-interference regarding the work that we do at the infirmary.”

“Surgeon Barris”, Rylen added gently. “I think what Fletcher merely tries to say is that some of the Templars, and some of the soldiers would really feel reassured if there was more transparency —“

Ellendra wanted to say something, but Delrin could see Mira gently touching her hand.

“No”, Mira repeated, her voice colored with the timbre of disbelief. “Do you realize how unjust your claim is? Do you expect me to forego the policies that keep the patients safe because some soldiers feel uncomfortable? Do you expect me to violate the privacy of a woman regarding one of the most intimate moments of her life to reassure the Templars? Do you even hear yourself right now?”

“There are no Circles anymore”, Ellendra added coldly. “You do not have the authority over mages’ bodies. And you are certainly not owed comfort either.”

It was clear that Rylen eased off. “Listen”, he stated quietly. “All I want to know is what to tell people who come to me with concerns. For many, it’s hard to bear the fear.”

“We cannot be responsible for what is hard to bear for soldiers”, Mira sighed. “And it is so wrong to ask us to bear that responsibility. The infirmary cannot control the fear of your soldiers. The mages certainly cannot control the fear of the Templars. And the fact that you feel their fear gives you any right to demand of us to abandon the crucial values is concerning. I don’t know what the solution to the tensions might be, but I am not giving an inch of what the infirmary had achieved. I am not sacrificing any patients to make soldiers comfortable. The idea that someone’s comfort might infringe on someone else’s basic rights is inequitable and unjust. It simply cannot stand.”

“I don’t know”, Fletcher muttered as if to himself, “why you have so much disdain for the Templars.”

Barris wanted to kick the man, but he only resorted to the frustrated growl that escaped his mouth. Mira’s face flushed and he could see how much that remark hurt her. Fletcher certainly was very aware that Mira was married to a former Templar herself. This was a personal jab.

“Do not dare to say that to me”, she still answered, although her voice was shaking slightly. “I have no disdain for the Templars. I have no disdain for the soldiers fighting for the Inquisition either. Contrary, I think they are strong enough to endure their own discomfort and to move pass it without demanding the the others to sacrifice on their behalf. It is not a disdain to refuse to feed the privilege. And rest assured that I would defend your privacy and your rights with the same fervor.”

The war meeting continued for a while afterwards, but Fletcher and Rylen gave up on trying to gather more information about the details of what happened. Both Cullen and Cassandra reinforced their statements regarding the last night’s events, and the tireless work of Josephine managed to at least find some mutual understanding despite the fact that the infirmary did not agree to change any of their rules.

Overall, it was a productive meeting, and Barris seriously hoped that Fletcher would get over it before they deployed. They already had their work cut out managing the tensions between various squadrons.
Sweet Andraste. At least Bull was going to the Western Approach as well.

Delrin glanced at Mira and he could certainly sense the fire still within her. Without a thread of doubt, she was a very principled woman and that was one of the things he admired most about her. Still, he knew that the events of the last few days took their toll and sadly he did nothing to help.

They needed to talk.

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It was Delrin’s idea to stop by the main dining hall and to eat dinner there and she agreed readily, knowing that the second they’d step into their own quarters they would need to face everything that happened between them and the aftermath of it as well. They still conversed while eating, but of nothing important.

They both kept quiet until they reached the door. Mira felt emotionally drained. The last few days have made her feel so raw. Her heart chafed from the constant irritation. Everything ached just slightly, and she needed to talk with Delrin. She took of her shoes and sweater as he removed his armor and hanged his sword. The image was so dear and familiar that she just wanted to come closer and wrap her hands around his waist and bury her face into his back.

That certainly was not appropriate, and she still had not apologized for her words during the argument.

He lit up a candle.

“Delr—“

“Mira?”

They spoke at the same time. She gestured for him to continue.

“I’d like to talk with you”, he finally said. “But we don’t need to do it right now. I know you’ve been through a lot and I imagine you’re tired…”

“Now is fine”, she replied with a faint smile much braver than what she felt inside.

They sat down on the floor by the bed, as they had done many times before. Including the last time, before Fiona came here and then everything got more complicated.

“Fletcher is an idiot”, he muttered, his green eyes looking at her softly and she chuckled. “And I disagree with everything he said.”

“Thank you”, she replied and then bit her lip. “Delrin”, all the guilt and sadness started climbing up to the surface very fast. “I am… I am really so sorry for the words I said to you. I wasn’t angry at you and yet I lashed out at you and it was unfair and… I am sorry.”

The few seconds it took him to reply dragged like eternity and Mira felt as if her heart stopped beating.

“What you said about the Templars wasn’t wrong”, he finally responded carefully.

“There’s way more to you than the Order”, she said passionately even though her voice was not steady. “I… I stand by what I said about taking the babies away, that is never—“

“I know”, he interrupted her. “And I do agree. I want you to know that.”
“But”, she continued anxiously, “I shouldn’t have said anything to make you think… You don’t carry every sin on the Order on your back. And I have no right to self-righteously demand that you do. I know how much you care to not cause harm to others and I know that my words have hurt you deeply and I truly am sorry.”

“Mira”, he began gently and then covered his face. “I feel so ashamed because you weren’t wrong. I mean, I have never and would never—“

“I know.”

“Nonetheless, I know what the Order had done and I can’t proclaim innocence either. It is the shame I will carry with me for the rest of my life.”

“Delrin—”, she felt the emotions surging.

“Let me finish”, he sighed. “Please. It’s important to me. I have never tried to be anything but forthright with you. I don’t want to pretend and erase my past. I realize there are limits of my responsibility. I also realize how lucky I have been. Not only I am still alive, but I do certainly possess a lot of privilege and power. I… I suppose I feel hurt because I… well, I genuinely care what you think of me. I try to be a good man, Mira. I can promise you that I have always tried that, despite the magnitude of mistakes I have made. Sadly, intentions are not enough, are they? I don’t want you to think that I don’t see that.”

“I don’t think that and I know I was unjust. Believe me, I felt it the moment those words left my mouth. I know I hurt your feelings. For that, once more, I am truly very sorry. Please forgive me.”

“There’s nothing to forgive”.

“There is”, she insisted.

“Well… then I forgive you”, he said with an embarrassed look on his face. “I want to be worthy of the praises you so often give me.”

“You are”, she simply whispered. “And I… I am usually not careless with my words. So… you are.”

“I shouldn’t have reacted the way I did”, he looked at her seriously.

That. Mira felt her pain and insecurity spilling out of her soul. Why, why did it hurt so much? She bit her lip and looked at her hands and wondered how to even phrase what she meant to say without completely exposing her heart and letting it all bleed on the floor.

“You have given me all your strength and all your kindness”, her voice treacherously trembled, “But I have given you all my generosity in whatever I am and sometimes”, she took a deep breath, “sometimes I am self-righteous and judgmental. I am harsh and I can be even cruel, I know. And when I am around you… I find it hard to hide any part of me. I do not know how to be reticent. It’s not an excuse for what I did. I really am sorry. I just… didn’t think you’d leave.”

The way Mira said those words not only went straight to his heart, but something about it made Delrin pause, especially considering what she said last night, just before falling asleep. Will you leave again, she asked drowsily.

The thought that appeared in his mind felt as the blunt hit of a hammer.
“Mira”, he gasped, “Did you think I would leave you?”

Her whole face flushed suddenly and she tried to cover it with her hands.

“No”, she finally answered but then she hesitated. “I don’t know what I was thinking. You said you needed to cool off and then you didn’t come back and I still do not know where you spent the night.”

He did not even think about that and the sudden shame burned in his chest.

“Maker’s breath”, he drew his breath sharply. “I… I spent the night at Bull’s. I was here first thing in the morning and… “

The hurt on her face was so visible it choked him.

“Mira”, he whispered. “Did you think I would not be back?”

“No”, she replied and he sighed with relief, but then she added. “I know how dutiful you are. I just… I suppose I thought you might not want to be back.”

No, he thought. That was so untrue, so far from anything he felt he did not even know how to immediately respond.

“Maker preserve me”, he turned to her, “for how I failed you. Mira, I shouldn’t have left in the first place. It was my shame and I was selfish. I… Please, please believe me that such thought has never even crossed my mind. I am so sorry.”

Mira’s blush deepened even more and her eyes were glassy.

“Marriage. Our marriage”, she said barely audibly as her curls covered large portion of her face as she looked down. “It means something to me.”

Even the guilt he was feeling now couldn’t stop the warmth that filled his whole body.

“It means something to me as well”, he replied quietly.

“Do you ever just stop and ponder”, she chuckled slightly, “at what we have done. We’re married. That is such an extreme circumstance.”

“It is”, he agreed. “And I do stop and ponder. Quite a lot, actually. How could I not?”

“I was not prepared”, her voice was filled with emotion that vibrated in his head, “for everything I am feeling.”

He loved her. He certainly was not prepared for that.

“I don’t think one can prepare for anything like… this”, he replied slowly, “I surely—“

“You don’t understand”, she looked at him, just for a second, and he could see the tears welling up in her eyes. “I don’t know what I imagined agreeing to this. Perhaps I haven’t imagined much because of my singular focus to survive. I know this was a dangerous choice to make. I know you know I was afraid. I was afraid of all the things like you being cruel and unkind and demanding. But then I got to know you and you’re just so… And suddenly I am still afraid, only… Now I am afraid that the more you get to know me, the more disappointed you’ll be. That you’ll uncover all there is to me and you’ll only want to run away and—”
Delrin could feel his heart bursting.

“Mira—”

“Wait”, she was nervous and she was speaking fast, her accent slightly harsher. “I feel… well, if I am entirely honest, sometimes… I feel I have been such a burden to you. I have impacted your daily life, I know your father doesn’t approve of our marriage, and now even your work and your colleagues… I know you’re a dutiful man. I know you won’t break your vows. And I know how kind you are. I just… This is your sacrifice. You have never needed me, it’s me who have needed you.”

“Mira”, he sighed slightly at the realization. “Believe you, you don’t need me. You are capable and smart, and you don’t need me to survive here. And truth be told, I see it very clearly now that you have never needed me and I am sure you at least suspect it too. You would have been fine without me. In fact, if you left, you would be fine.”

“Is that what you want?”, the hurt in her voice and on her face was so obvious now.

“No”, he denied vehemently, his voice low and firm. “Maker’s breath, no—“

‘Then don’t ever mention that again”, she wiped out the few tears that fell down her cheeks.

The icy pain spread around his torso realizing his words were the cause of her crying, but then, he also felt relief they had been spoken out loud because now they could move past them.

“If there was a sacrifice”, he murmured, touching her hand. “It was when I made the choice before knowing you. This is not my sacrifice. There is duty in what I have promised you, but that duty is my privilege. I am really sorry for leaving during our argument.”

Mira was still looking down, not at him. Her arms were wrapped around her stomach. She was guarding herself.

Oh, Mira, he thought. Just few days ago she was lying on his chest as if she belonged there. Now the conversation was as forthright as ever, maybe even more so, but the walls around her were a bit higher.

As much as she became slightly withdrawn, she could not hide her feelings. She had always been wary and careful, but she had never been cold. Even now, the wall between them was not a barricade. It was merely an admonition and he certainly took it to heart.

“Mira”, he whispered again. “I don’t want you to be reticent with me. I know I have shown you otherwise and I apologize for that, but… I wish for you to know that you don’t need to keep any part of you silent when you’re with me.”

He was very aware that this certainly was not the time for love confessions and Mira was not a woman whose heart could be won by a grand gesture of any kind. This was not a challenge, this was not a conquest. This was about the rest of their lives. They were on a tiny boat in the middle of the great sea and they just patched the first leak. He could not and he would not expect her to fall into his arms instead of examining the rest of the vessel or looking at the sky and anticipating the clouds.

Still, he had been cautious in the past, to the point where almost every interaction that crossed another threshold of ever approximating intimacy had been initiated by her. Perhaps in the past he was justified to give Mira all the space and all the control. Now it merely felt cowardly.
There had to be an equilibrium, even if it was a precarious one.

“You matter to me”, he added, his heart thudding so loudly he wondered how it was possible for her not to hear the sound.

Mira finally looked at him, still curled in herself. He knew it was one way to merely say it, another way to convince her. Her eyelashes were wet and so were her cheeks.

“You matter to me too, Delrin”, she murmured breathily, and then she blushed and bashfully turned away, just a little bit. She squeezed his hand nonetheless.

He hesitated for a split second, but then he lifted her right hand to his mouth and kissed it, feeling her wedding band underneath his lips. She lifted up her eyes at him again and then gently rubbed her face into his shoulder. He caressed her hair, running his fingers through her curls.

“Do I have your forgiveness?”, he asked quietly.

“Yes”, she answered with no hesitation.

“Thank you.”

Silence surrounded them softly. There still was a slight distance between them, most visible in Mira’s increased shyness and apprehension. Tonight had made demands of vulnerability, and they both met those demands and they both faced the reality of their circumstances with unfettered honesty. That, he realized, was a necessary step.

When they talked about what their marriage meant to both of them, he no longer felt foolish for his previous caution. The bond they shared certainly made the circumstances unusual, hence why it all required care and patience and thought. He needed less hesitation, but no less reverence. There would be no mere flirtation, no casual kiss. They could only give each other their all and that was both dangerous and brilliant.

“I could start the fire tonight too”, he mused after few minutes of quiet. “The nights are getting colder.”

“Sure”, she responded and he got up to bring more wood from the kitchen.

When he came back, she stood by the dresser picking up a nightgown to prepare for bed.

“Delrin?”, she stopped in the middle of the room as he placed the dried bark and wood shavings into the fireplace.

“Mhmmm?”, he murmured in response.

“You can sleep in the bed.”

*Oh.* He turned around and looked at her sharply.

“It’s silly to insist you sleep on the cold floor”, she shrugged. “The bed is large enough.”

He certainly would be much more comfortable, but he knew that it was more than that. It was symbolic.

“If you’re sure.”

“I am”, she remarked and then said just one more thing. “I do expect you to sleep there every night
when you’re not away.”

He lit a flame using a fire striker and smiled to himself.

“Certainly.”

“Good”, she said and disappeared in the bathroom.

After four weeks of sleeping on the bedroll on the floor, the bed felt absolutely glorious, soft and warm. Delrin settled just near the edge, not wanting to take up too much space. He tried to focus on studying “Qun, Gurns and Steel: Military Conflict in a Post-Blight Thedas” that Cullen recommended. “Any army wishing to produce trebuchets or catapults must be funded and organized well enough to procure both the necessary materials and the military experts to construct them.” He read the same sentence at least thrice at this point. He glanced at Mira. Her side of the bed was darkened and she was fast asleep, but thanks to his candle and the fireplace, he was able to see her face. She was lying on the side, one hand underneath her cheek. Her lips were slightly parted, her hair wild and all over the place. He didn’t mean to stare, but she was so very lovely and his heart was full tonight.

Chapter End Notes

I have no doubt that there would be an aftermath regarding everything that happened.

I also think that Delrin holding a newborn baby is the absolute most heartwarming image one can conjure. ;)

And Mira and Delrin finally voiced some of their deepest fears regarding whatever there is between them. That is basically almost a love confession. ;)

I knoooow it's a slow build.

Thank you for reading and commenting! You are the best.

Today marks TWO MONTHS since I've started publishing this fanfic. I have a draft but it's just a lousy draft. I wrote over 150 000 words in those two months. How did that happen? I don't know. ;) But it's fun and I will certainly continue this story until the end. Please forgive me for butchering English. And thank you for all of your support.
Delrin and Mira finally catch a break from all the work at Skyhold.

The first thought that plagued Delrin’s mind upon waking up was about leaving for the Western Approach in three short days. The second one, much sweeter, was the realization of Mira’s warm body right next to his and her face burrowed into his armpit. He could feel her steady breathing. She was still asleep. He didn’t even want to stir to avoid waking her up.

The last couple of days had been incredibly busy. This deployment was different than just leaving with his own squadron due to sheer amount of troops being sent out. The scorching heat of the Approach required armor modifications and new equipment. Everyone was on edge. Just yesterday Sidony almost immolated Fletcher during the meeting and frankly, Barris had enough already. They haven’t even started fighting the Venatori that according to Scout Harding’s reports were roaming all over the blighted desert.

If he was honest with himself, Delrin had to admit that his reluctance to leave was less about the difficulties of the task and more about whom he was about to separate from. He would miss Mira terribly. He couldn’t see her face right now, just her wild mane of light red curls that reminded him of a sunrise. The scent of her soap tingled his nostrils and each night he settled in bed her presence was so visceral and so intimate.

Unlike him, she would move during sleep, and this was not the first time she ended up so close. One of her thighs pressed to his leg. She was like a little furnace, radiating heat and he wished he could embrace her and cling to her body.

She moved a little bit, her nose nudging the sensitive part of his underarm. She raised her hand to move the locks out of her eyes and looked at him so dreamily he felt his heart melt. She blinked few times, furrowing slightly.

“Hi”, he whispered slightly amused.

“Hi”, she mumbled apologetically and much to his chagrin, she shifted away, but only a little bit. “It seems I have ambushed you.”

“I don’t mind”, he said softly and even though it was still dim inside their quarters he was certain he saw her blush in response.

They had not managed to talk much since the conversation they had in the aftermath of their argument. They were both very busy, not even seeing each other during meals, only at night, in the bed. Even then Mira would usually fall asleep quickly. Delrin was not naive. He knew she cared.
about him, she tentatively admitted as much. He certainly made her subtly aware he cared for her. Other than that, nothing happened and Mira seemed more bashful than usual. Nonetheless, there was something between them, even if it was still understated.

Today was finally the day they could spend together. The only day they could fully spend together before his deployment aside from the Satinalia ball itself.

“What do we do today?”, she asked.

She looked so lovely wearing that morning sleepiness on her face.

“Do you have any wishes?”

“Honestly”, she chuckled, “I wish to disappear from here because I am otherwise afraid there will be just another task to do or an emergency to attend.”

“Well”, he smiled, “this certainly can be done if you’re up for riding out of Skyhold.”

“Really?”, her eyes glistened with excitement.

“Really”, he replied. “But I advise we get up soon and not waste the day. I can go prepare the horses if you wouldn’t mind stopping by the kitchens to pack something to eat. I’ll make sure we have water.”

“I can do that”.

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Mira was certain she would regret horse riding tomorrow, but for the time being, it seemed perfect. The feeling of her muscles moving, the cold frosty air on her cheeks. It was clear that winter would come rather sooner than later, especially that up high in the mountains. They traveled further than before, past the watch tower until the road turned into a small path among the wilderness.

“It’s the trail the hunters use”, Delrin remarked.

“Is there anything in those woods that can hunt us?”, she joked though the thought had crossed her mind before.

He raised his eyebrows and smirked.

“No”, he said. “You know, I am very good with that sword. I am entirely confident I can keep you safe.”

The fluttering around her heart was so obvious. She couldn’t deny that there was something alluring about having this strong, capable warrior - her husband - say those words.

“Where are we going?”, she smiled coyly.

“You’ll see”, he replied mysteriously.

They couldn’t see Skyhold anymore, and they certainly descended a bit. The thick coniferous forest surrounded them on both sides until Mira finally saw the shiny mirror of the water ahead. It was a lake, surrounded by the mountains from three sides with sways of spruces and firs on the shoreline. There was a lot of exposed bedrock as well. Even in the cold gray weather at the very end of Harvestmere it looked beautiful.
“How did you find this place?”, she murmured to him.

“It was around a year ago”, he mused, setting up their things on the rocks and collecting the twigs for the fire. “I came here few times with the hunters where we first reached Skyhold. During those first weeks we got enough meat to last us the whole winter. I believe that yesterday was the last day of a big hunt before Satinalia.”

“I didn’t know you hunt.”

“Not very well”, he assembled the wood and added pine needles to the pile as well, “but I can certainly survive on my own. Even with my poor cooking skills. My father first took me hunting when I was seven years old.”

“Isn’t that… awfully young?”

“Yes”, the fire sparked. “I still remember how angry my mother was when she found out. You can lay out that leather on the stone. I will keep out any wetness.”

Mira smiled to herself at the image while setting up a large piece of strong leather as a blanket. Delrin got up to his horse and picked up few sleeping furs from his saddle. He helped her putting the cauldron over the fire.

“I picked up a tenderized rabbit, already portioned”, she muttered, washing her hands in the icy cold lake water and then generously rubbing the Elfroot poultice on them. “And some vegetables. We can have the stew for dinner. I brought spices as well. We also have bread and something for dessert as well.”

“I will never cease to be impressed with how effectively you have infiltrated the kitchens.”

“Ah”, she smiled. “You see, there are certain perks of being a medic over being a soldier.”

“I can certainly see that”, he smirked at her and Mira was sure that the warmth she felt spreading all over her body was because of that, not the close proximity to the flames.

She cleaned up her hands again after adding all the ingredients to the pot, liberal amount of spices included.

“You don’t even measure anything”, he frowned.

“It will be good, believe me”, she laughed, sitting next to him on the furs. “I never measure anything. And now we wait.”

“Who taught you how to cook?”

“Hmmm”, she wondered. “My mother was a decent cook, and I’ve always knew the basics and I was able to fix a meal since being a child. By the time I moved in with my grandma she was so frail she had trouble preparing meals so I simply started doing that almost every day and than it stayed like that. Being here in Thedas means I don’t have to cook and I’ve been far too busy. Moreover cooking on Earth is slightly… more convenient at times. Easier. Quicker. Who failed to teach you?”

He laughed loudly and openly. “It was not the priority in the Order, though some Templars I knew were decent cooks.”

“Who’s the best in your squadron?”
“Beau, without the doubt. We always try to nudge for him to take over the meal prep duty but I think he secretly enjoys.”

“Ha”, she said. “I understand. I don’t like the bad food either.”

Mira looked at the horizon. It was an early afternoon and the sky was gray and sunless. The mountain peaks were covered in snow, and she imagined how the true winter would look upon Skyhold.

“How come the Western Approach is a hot desert when everywhere else in the South it’s nearing winter at this time of the year?”, she asked quietly.

“The Blight”, he replied grimly. “It stayed that way afterwards. Meanwhile, the heat and the wind are there only during the day. When the night comes, it cools down pretty rapidly and the wind dies down. The Darkspawn comes out at that point.”

Mira swallowed the saliva, not even wanting to entertain the thought of everything he would face in such a short time.

“You’ve been there before?”

“Yes”, he glanced at her. “Twice. And believe me, I am not looking forward to be there again. We’re leaving with many men so hopefully I won’t be stuck there too long.”

Her heart clenched at the thought. The shadow of his deployment was looming over everything and it amplified both her want and her caution. She wanted him. She wanted to lean it, grab his jacket, pull him closer and feel his lips and his tongue. She wanted to touch and kiss every scar on his body, and tell him to be careful to not get more. She wanted his strong large hands on her and she was quite certain he wanted those things too. Since their talk after the argument, since that kiss on her hand, since expressing more than they’ve shared before Mira assumed he certainly felt something for her.

Maybe if she was a different person, the fact that he would leave in three days would make her bolder, but in reality it only made her more cautious. Who knew how long they would be separated afterwards and… Well. She needed to be sure. She needed for both of them to be entirely sure and not influenced by any excitement of a moment.

“What?”, he murmured still eyeing her and she felt her cheeks blushing.

“I was just…”, Mira wasn’t sure what to say, “thinking that I will miss you.”

The tenderness that fell onto his face was evident. The blood in her veins turned into honey, thick and sweet.

“Mira”, he spoke with the voice as soft as the supplest leather or the warmest fur, “I will miss you too.”

She couldn’t hide the smile that followed those words.

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The lake would be more beautiful in the spring, but there was something mesmerizing about the misty water and the cool surrounding them. Mira was wrapped in her jacket with a fur collar, and her hair were the same color as the fire and she had just told him she was going to miss him.
Delrin asked her about her work, not wanting to talk himself about the current events concerning his work. He told her more about visiting the infirmary and holding the baby.

“You know”, she mused, “on Earth the medics had specialties. There was so much knowledge and various skills to possess that you simply weren’t able to do it all so eventually each medic would choose something to specialize in. I would choose… well, the medicine of female reproductive organs”, she scoffed. “When I say it like that here, it does sound a bit peculiar.”

“So”, he hesitated, “like… midwifery?”

She sighed frustratingly. “A bit, but the medics in my world could do a lot more. You know, we delivered some babies through the incision on the abdomen.”

“Oh”, he groaned. “That sounds ghastly. Does it kill the mother?”

“Not when you have the means to do it properly. And actually, we also had the ability to relieve pain pretty much entirely while still keeping mothers conscious in the process. We would tap a needle into the person’s spine and inject the proper medication and it would make them not feel pain below the navel. There was always a special doctor to deal with that. Making someone unconscious of relieving their pain. It was tricky and dangerous and required monitoring that is impossible in Thedas. But it was amazing. And the whole surgery to deliver the child wouldn’t take that much time. Stitching everything back was more bothersome.”

“You miss medicine”, he whispered quietly.

“I do, although magic can do incredible things. I still am not sure how to harness some of it. But yes, I do. I was terrified of attending birth precisely because here there is so little that can be done in some cases. We were very lucky it all went pretty smoothly.”

“How does it feel”, he asked, “to witness a child being born?”

She bit her lip. “The best I can answer it… There’s no innocence in medicine. I know the worst that can happen. The best that can happen. I’ve seen it. When it goes bad, it is most devastating. When it goes right, and thankfully, that is the majority of cases… I have to admit it is quite amazing to be a part of that.”

“I know it is so different than Earth. I’ve seen the images. Do you still like what you do at the infirmary?”

“Yes”, she replied softly. “I’d rather limit the chances of attending births again so my current initiative is to make sure there’s good access to means to prevent pregnancy. Apparently there is not enough witherstalk to have a steady supply both for our medical needs and for the tonic. I know this is the most common method to avoid pregnancy so… I requisitioned more witherstalk with the quartermaster and to my shock I found out that apparently said requisition couldn’t go through until it was personally approved by the Commander.”

“Maker preserve me”, Barris hissed under his breath. “That man will be the death of me. I feel bad saying it—“

“Don’t”, she chuckled. “What is the point of marriage if you can’t whine to your own wife?”

His own wife.

Despite the cold, his neck and ears got warmer.
“Very well”, he smiled. “I think Cullen is a brilliant strategist. He is also painfully controlling and he doesn’t delegate nearly enough. I am his Second-in-Command and believe me, I had no idea he was personally overseeing such requisitions. That should be lieutenant’s job and… why would the Forces control the requisitions from the infirmary?”

“It’s because the troops collect the ingredients if they aren’t acquired by trade. If I make a requisition to buy something, Morris doesn’t bat an eye. But the Inquisition doesn’t buy witherstalk, we grow some of it and forage the rest.”

“Did Cullen sign it?”

“Well… yes. He was so busy all my requests to meet at his office were denied so I might have stumbled upon him in the main dining hall eating breakfast.”

“You didn’t!”, he chuckled.

“That’s not the end of it, Delrin. He asked me if the requisition was truly necessary.”

“Sweet Andraste.”

“So I explained it to him… needless to say, he signed it very quickly. I think he was… embarrassed.”

Delrin laughed loudly, the image of Mira’s fiery eyes as she was standing over Cullen and telling him why maintaining proper supply of witherstalk portion was a prudent idea was almost too much.

“Oh, Mira”, he finally managed to say, shaking his head. “I am not worthy of you.”

She blushed so brilliantly but looked pleased with the compliment, as usual when they discussed work.

“That’s not all”, she confessed. “I also managed to convince Vivienne to come and and help with administering glyphs for the same purpose. Apparently she perfected some of the magic when she was still in the Circle and she also might make some soldiers more comfortable than Fiona or even Ellendra.”

“How did you manage to get Madame de Fer into the infirmary?”

“Well”, she started amusingly. “She agreed readily, to my surprise. Five minutes later, after all the planning and scheduling she asked me what I was wearing to the Satinalia ball and somehow she decided to take over and needless to say, I might have agreed to have her dress me however she wanted.”

He truly tried to suppress his laughter, but it was simply too hilarious.

“I hope”, he couldn’t catch his breath, “that you like feathers and ruffles and tulle and sequins galore.”

She scoffed. “I don’t, but I don’t really have high expectations in the first place. Forgive me, but my experience with Orlesian-style events is… not that great.”

He fully remembered the damn Marquis ogling Mira the whole night and trying to make his advances.
“I promise you”, he murmured looking at her profile, “that it won’t be like the last time. It is a much bigger affair and I will be there by your side. There will be music and dancing as well.”

“Oh”, she looked down. “I don’t dance.”

“What?”, he looked at her surprised.

“Didn’t I tell you once that I am a horrible dancer? Besides, I am certain I don’t know any dances from here.”

He stood up in one smooth move and extended his hand.

“Dance with me.”

“You must be joking”, Mira chuckled embarrassingly, her cheeks flushed. “You don’t understand. I really don’t know how…”

“I can teach you.”

“I am very awkward”, she whispered but gave him her hand as he helped her on her feet. “Utterly graceless.”

“We’re in the middle of the wilderness”, he led her a little bit further from the fire, but close enough to still feel the warmth of it. “There’s no one to see you.”

“Except you”, there was a tinge of vulnerability in her voice admitting that. “Where did you even learn to dance? It does not seem like a part of Templar training.”

“No”, he turned to face her. “But I did live in Orlais for several years.”

“What do we now?”, she looked at him. “I am wearing a warm jacket, how do we even—?”

Mira was standing before him, her coat still unclasped in the front as they were sitting just a second before, her cheeks tinged with color and her lips pinked, presumably from the cold. He let go of her just to open his palm right again for her to place her hand in it properly.

“You other hand on my shoulder”, he murmured and she chuckled, getting closer.

“You are much taller than me, you know that?”

He was. She still had some way to go to reach his chin with the top of her head. She needed to be closer to him just to grab his shoulder, and he adjusted his forearm to not make it too uncomfortable for her to hold his hand.

“I could”, he hesitated, not being certain how to phrase it appropriately. “I could put my hand on your back underneath your coat.”

“Oh. Alright.”

He wiggled his fingers gently below the coarse and thick wool of her jacket. He could feel the fluffiness of the sweater she was wearing underneath.

“Step back with your right foot”, he instructed, “then step sideways with your left foot and bring your right foot there as well. Then do the same forward starting with your left foot.”

Mira wasn’t wrong. She felt a bit stiff and awkward, and she certainly tried to look down at her
feet. Still, there was something entirely endearing to have her in his arms like that. She confused the steps few times, but he managed to not trample her feet.

“I am sorry”, she said awkwardly. “I tried to warn you.”

“Look at me”, he demanded softly. “Just let me lead.”

“How come you’re so good at it?”

“I am a sword fighter”, he smiled, moving comfortably, “I always know where my feet are. Footwork is critical.”

“That would make a dance floor a battleground, I suppose”, she couldn’t help but chuckle.

“Certainly in Orlais”, he said while she made a face, “but not now.”

“I am sure you’re used to dancing with more capable partners”, her voice was soft and quiet.

There was a tinge of insecurity in her tone, something he had not caught before. Delrin knew Mira as shy and bashful, but that seemed different. He couldn’t help but let his mind consider all the things he had more experience with and he wondered for a second if that made her more cautious.

“I’m happy just to dance with you”.

He couldn’t see her face because she leaned in and place her head on him. That was certainly not the formal way to dance, and yet this was the part that brought him most joy.

The breastplate that he was always wearing felt very cold on her cheek, but she didn’t care. The rest of her certainly was warm and cozy in his arms. Even now he still managed to smell the same wonderful way he always did.

It was a middle of an otherwise drab fall day with gray dull sky above them and they were in the middle of nowhere dancing on the bedrock by the lake with no music except Mira the song in her heart. She was a tentative and careful woman, but she wasn’t oblivious either.

Those careful steps of the dance were certainly the careful steps into romance as well.

Mira had not been entirely inexperienced when it came to relationships, and she certainly was very experienced when it came to dating. What modern woman wasn’t? That felt unlike anything she had known and the man holding her was the one that she would spend her whole life with.

“You’re humming”, he noticed with mirth.

“Oh”, she flinched. “I suppose it makes dancing easier.”

“So, how is it?”

“Dancing?”

“Yes. Is it… as bad as you expected?”

“Not like this”.

“Good”, he moved his hand on her back in one gentle caress.
Mira closed her eyes, enjoying the moment. *Before this dance is through, I think I’ll love you, too. I’m so happy when you dance with me.* The music appeared in her head and she just knew she was falling in love.

She couldn’t say how long the moment lasted for, but they eventually sat down talking and waiting for the stew to be done. Delrin made approving sounds while eating, and she smiled to herself satisfied. The frail and shaky voice of her grandmother popped in her mind saying that a way to a man’s heart was through his stomach. She would always roll her eyes at this old fashioned sentiment, but in reality, doing nice things for the man she cared about simply felt good. He certainly had never hesitated to be giving and caring himself. It was easy to show affection to Delrin who was so affectionate himself. This felt right.

He was very respectful and considerate. Ida would certainly roll her eyes at the slow pace between them but Mira liked it. It made her feel safe. She had a space to breathe and to consider everything. Perhaps if it was merely a date… But it wasn’t. What they had was both much more and just barely that, astoundingly at the same moment in time.

As the sun got lower, it also got colder, so Mira ended up sitting between Delrin’s legs, her back leaning on him, his hands and the sleeping furs covering them. The fire was still going strong, and the air surrounding them smelled like pine and smoke. His body provided a safe haven. She could stay like this for hours.

“Is that something you like doing? Just roaming around the wilderness in your free time?”

“Sometimes”, the voice muttered just above her head. “Don’t get me wrong. I like civilization. But there’s a difference between traveling for work and between doing something like that.”

“I bet”, she replied.

“I’ve always loved nature, since childhood. Forests, meadows—“

“Mountains…”

“Anything but a desert”, he laughed warmly. “I don’t do it often either. But I do like some quiet time in a beautiful place.”

“What do you do when you’re alone? Do you draw?”

“Often. Or I just sit in silence and not think of anything.”

He mentioned silence twice by now. “Delrin, do you want me to stop talking and just be quiet for a while?”

“What? Maker’s breath, no… not at all. I love talking with you. I’m really glad you’re here with me.”

“Me too. Thank you for bringing me here. It’s lovely.”

“My pleasure”, he whispered into her head.

“You’re very thoughtful.”

“I try.”
“I... take notice.”

He chuckled slightly and the sound set her heart aflame.

“That is my intention.”

“Delrin”, she took a deep breath. “Can I ask you something?”

“Sure”, he answered solemnly and then laughed. “You know, every single time you ask me that I know now that the question is going to prove to be... interesting.”

“I am sorry”, she flustered.

“Don’t be”, he tightened his embrace just slightly. “Go on.”

“No, no”, she scoffed quietly. “Now I can’t.”

“Fine”, he relented. “Can I ask you something instead? You don’t need to answer, of course. I’ve been wondering about it for a while.”

“Please.”

“What do you believe in?”

Mira pressed her lips together quietly and took a deep breath. He pulled on every little stitch she used to mend her heart and soul after arriving in Thedas, but there more than pain. That was a profound question and she wasn’t certain she knew how to even begin.

“Damn”, she finally whispered. “That is the question.”

“As I said—“

“My first instinct was to say that I simply don’t know”, she wondered. “but that’s not entirely true. I don’t know what I believe in regarding my faith. The loss burns within me but I know there is a lot more that dwells there as well. My faith was always questioning and it was always just a lot of fumbling in the darkness. I suppose for me the measure of religion would be the love it compels us to have for one another. As people. How odd. It is clear to me I still believe most of the things I’ve always believed in.”

“Such as?”

“I believe there’s truth and goodness, though I don’t claim to be always able to recognize it. I don’t think... I don’t think there’s truth that ignores suffering and injustice. I’m a medic, Delrin. I know there’s no painless existence. I know that things are unpredictable and life can be cruel. But to the core of who I am, I believe in trying to relieve the suffering, fight the injustice, mend what is there to mend. I don’t believe in heroics. It’s always far too grand and I am afraid that grand ideas oftentimes overshadow the mundane and daily work that can make the most impact. I believe in empathy. It is necessary in what I do. I also believe in strong will that compels to act. I have strong convictions but it’s not about holding them or debating them, isn’t it? That is easy. The hardest part is doing what’s right in the face of the challenge. I hope - because I don’t dare to say I would - that I would be able to do what’s right in various circumstances. I guess... that’s my answer. What would be yours?”

“I believe there’s right and wrong, though I know there’s something between them as well. I believe in honor, dignity, courage and I believe in demands those place upon us. I... I hope there’s
a path to redeem oneself.”

“Oh. But there is. I have no doubt about that. Do you remember that we talked about it in our letters?”

“Oh yes”, he rested his chin on her head. “I do remember. So, what were you going to ask me?”

“Well”, she mused innocently. “Nothing quite as intense. I was merely going to ask you what you think love is.”

She could feel his body tremble as he laughed.

“I need to think for a minute”, Delrin finally managed to utter.

“You cannot claim that my question is more difficult than yours.”

“You might be right”, he admitted.

He knew that Mira’s question was serious, and that the answer to it was important for both of them. She was resting in his arms and this time he was certain that it wasn’t merely comfort she was seeking. There was closeness extending beyond the physical proximity and there were words they both said out loud. He certainly should be able to tell her what love was for him. It certainly was fair for him to do so before he could even begin to tell her how he felt. She had the right to know, and he knew Mira enough to know she never shied away from difficult questions. She answered his after all, without much hesitation.

“I don’t know how to begin to answer that”, he finally replied, shaking his head. “What I can say… I suppose I’ve always had an idea. I’ve always felt loved as a child. And I always knew my parents loved each other. I am certain they still do. I’ve always believed love existed. No one has ever asked me to define it though.”

“I would honestly struggle to answer that as well.”

“That is somewhat reassuring,” he breathed out. “It is more than any word I find. More than mere emotion. More than duty. More than affection. More than attraction. More than commitment. It is all those things, somehow. It’s harder to answer than I thought it would be.”

“That is quite compelling”, she responded thoughtfully.

“Well, thank you”, he chuckled.

“I think… I would only add that is to know and to be known. Or rather to continuously get to known and to continuously become known. Love has to stem from truth about who we are as people.”

“You are better with words than me”, he nuzzled her hair with his jaw.

“I don’t know about that. I quite enjoy things you say.”

“You are so very sweet.”

She stretched slightly and then placed her hands on his own that where wrapped around her waist. She seemed so perfectly content in his arms, and he certainly enjoyed the feel of her body so close and the trust and affinity it revealed. He knew Mira well enough to know the meaning and the
weight behind the gestures tonight. The touch of her fingers intertwining with his own was somehow both subtle and profound.

Surely, he yearned for more. At the same time, right now he was perfectly happy.

Mira started giggling and laughing loudly so suddenly it both taken him by surprise and amused him as well.

“What?”, he asked several times before she finally calmed down.

“I just realized”, he saw her wiping her face before she leaned back and settled on his chest, “that maybe we shouldn’t reveal our perfectly reasonable opinions about love given the fact that… what was that? We were supposed to decide to get married after three days of knowing each other? Isn’t that the story?”

He shook his head as well. “May I raise the point of contention?”

“Most certainly.”

“You did marry a stranger in reality, you do realize that?”

“Oh”, she sighed. “You got me there, I guess. It’s still different though. The motivation—”

“I know”, he said, “but you gave more than was asked of you. That still was a leap of faith.”

“You’re my husband. Common courtesy demands I have faith in you.”

“Is that what it is?”, he joked. “Common courtesy?”

She titled her head to look at him and her eyes were bright and wide open.

“No. I’m sure you know that as well.”

He kissed the top of her head, smelling her curls.

“I know I am very careful”, she murmured, looking away again, her hand clutching on his. “It is because I care, not because I don’t.”

“Mira, I know”, he suddenly felt slightly ashamed for his teasing.

“I’m not frigid or cold—”

“Mira”, he interrupted her. “I have never thought you were, not even for a second. Not ever. I am —”

“You don’t mind?”

“I… don’t. More importantly, it would be entirely wrong to mind. I will never ask for more than you’re comfortable giving me. Believe me, I am really happy to be here with you, exactly as we are.”

“How did we even arrive at those conclusions at the end of the day?”

“I suppose”, he smiled, “that there was another leap of faith somewhere along the way.”

“Delrin?”
“Mhmmm?”
“I don’t believe in fate.”
“I don’t think I do either.”
“I don’t think everything happens for a reason.”
“I most certainly don’t either.”
“I do believe in opportunity and finding meaning though.”

“Are you trying to say you’re glad to have met me?”, he asked and there was so much warmth spreading around his heart.

“Perhaps I am.”

“In that case, I am truly glad you’re here”, he looked around and they were covered by complete darkness all around them. “We should think of heading back to Skyhold though. It’s already pretty late.”

“I was actually about to tell you that I find the prospect of riding through the wilderness in complete and utter darkness terrifying”, she whispered sheepishly.

Oh. He did not think about that and Mira was an excellent rider in general.

“You can ride with me”, he answered apologetically. “And I do have an oil lantern, and we could pony Snowflake—“

“That sounds even more terrifying”, she sighed. “I’ll brave myself. Can I be hold the lamp and lead? I don’t want something to snatch me from behind—“

“What would even—“, he did not finish the sentence while they both got up and started cleaning up the camp. “You are in safe hands”, he finally added after setting furs around her saddle to make Mira more comfortable.

“It’s always nice to hear that”, she gave him the sweetest smile as he passed her the lantern.

They made it to Skyhold certainly a bit slowly, but Delrin did not complain even once. It was already late evening when they arrived, and by the time they drank tea and snacked on food in the kitchens they both felt tired. He showered first, and Mira decided to take a hot bath after that much riding.

She could feel her heart melting as if it was made from ice. All her defenses came down after everything they had talked about and everything they have confessed to each other. She needed to be sure before, but now she was and she was certain it wasn’t merely excitement or spur of a moment or him leaving or even the fact that today was perfect.

Her heart was a secret garden, and the walls were very high, as one of the books said. The walls might have been high but the gate swung open and the garden was in bloom.

He was probably asleep, she thought to herself before finally leaving the bathroom.

He wasn’t. He was sitting on the bed, propped with a pillow, reading a book. They had done their
evening routine many times before, even though now they shared a bed. The small flame was flickering in the fireplace, and one candle was lit on his nightstand.

Mira slipped underneath the covers with her heart beating fast. She lay down her head on the pillow.

“I had the loveliest day”, she murmured, settling on the side.

“I’m truly glad. Sleep well”, he glanced at her softly before returning to his book.

“Goodnight, Delrin.” She did not move for couple of minutes, looking at the ceiling and then at him.

He was still reading his book, the one about sieges or something. The white linen shirt he was wearing was thin, the sleeves rolled up. He certainly was serious and busy at the moment. Why wouldn’t he be? They barely talked at night lately and she would always fall asleep so quickly.

Her heart thudded.

Mira raised up to the half kneeling, half sitting position.

“Are you uncomfortable?”, he looked at her briefly, the damn book still open on his lap.

This was completely foolish, ill-timed and ill-placed.

“No, I’m fine”, she said as he started reading again.

She shook her head and rubbed her hands alongside her thighs.

“Mira, are you sure you’re alright? Are you cold or—”

“Well—”

After all, it was a leap of faith.

Mira leaned closely, her eyes locked on his. Sill far enough to see his whole face, close enough for it to be unmistakable. She grabbed and squeezed one of his arms.

Delrn’s eyes widened slightly as he tossed the book to the side and touched her face and her curls, placing his hand somewhere behind her ear, just as he did at the altar and yet this was completely different. He smell was so sensual it left her dizzy.

He moved gently and stopped right as she was about to close her eyes.

“May I—“

“Yes.”

And then he kissed her.

****************************************

Maker preserve him.

He was kissing Mira, burying his hands into her hair. She was definitely kissing him back, grasping onto his shoulder and touching his face. Her lips felt warm and soft but he could still feel the
pleasant coolness of the toothpaste. She shifted her weight to be more in his lap and she moved her hands to embrace his neck. He could feel her breasts pressing to him, her whole closer body than ever. Her curls tickled his neck. The kiss started slow and gentle, but now it changed as well. She was more forward than he had anticipated, her tongue brushing on his, her mouth gently nibbling on his.

It was perfect.

Mira burrowed her face into his neck afterwards and he could feel her smile. He wrapped his arms around her.

“I am not cold”, she whispered into his ear and her voice vibrated with joy.

Delrin laughed with so much of unrestricted happiness. “Mira, you’re—“

She kissed him, running her palms across his head. That kiss was deeper and more passionate, her breaths heavier and slower.

When they pulled apart, he could see the flush on her face and cleavage, her lips reddened and slightly swollen and her eyes looking at him so sweetly it nearly took his breath away. She was still holding onto him when she beamed, radiance all around her.

He smiled too.

“I really care about you”, he simply said.

“I care about you too”, the affection and tenderness were so evident.

She moved away from his lap and lied down, guiding him to follow.

Sweet Andraste. He settled himself above her and he was just about to kiss her like that when she frowned.

“What’s wrong”, he asked, his hand rubbing her side.

“I just realized you still haven’t told me I’m pretty.”

Maker’s breath, was she truly correct? He stroked her cheek.

“I have always found you most beautiful.”

“You’re so chivalrous that I have barely noticed you looking at me.”

“Mira”, he whispered into her ear before claiming her lips once again, “I might be chivalrous, but I certainly am not blind.”

When they finally settled for a night, Mira was in his arms, and this time not by accident. Her body felt hotter than usual or maybe he was merely really aroused. She purred happily when he run his fingers across her spine.

“Now I truly had the loveliest day”, she said dreamily.

“Me too”, he kissed her forehead.
“Goodnight, Delrin.”

“Goodnight, Mira.”

Chapter End Notes

Well, then... ;)

This happened.

Thank you for all the kudos and likes and comments. You are the best!
The last night before Delrin's deployment to the Western Approach, him and Mira attend Satinalia ball.

There are some surprises.

The slightest subtlest NSFW. Nothing is really happening but maybe don't read it at work - sexual tension and attraction is there.

This is one long chapter as well.

First week of Firstfall - Satinalia, 9:42 Dragon Age, Skyhold

Since their first kiss Mira was truly anticipating the dreaded worry that she had made a mistake, that they had rushed into it, but it never happened. It actually felt right. It felt fantastic. The only worry that remained was the fact that Delrin was leaving tomorrow for unknown period of time. Tomorrow he was leaving for war.

It was scary the first time he deployed, when they didn’t know each other that well. Now Mira felt as if a part of her heart would surely depart with him as well.

Delrin had been so busy for the last couple of days. Given the importance of the Satinalia ball tonight with the marching out the next morning everything needed to be set in stone before celebrations began. Especially considering the fact that he wasn’t only concerned about his small squadron, but everyone else who was leaving with them. Over a hundred mounted soldiers altogether would reach the Western Approach before two weeks time.

Delrin and Mira had not seen each other since yesterday morning. She had a night shift at the infirmary to be able to spend the whole day of Satinalia with him. The war meetings took such a long time that he had not come back to their quarters before she needed to go to work.

It was an early morning right now, still dark outside, and she just pushed the door to enter their room. He had a light sleep of a warrior. He would always wake up whenever she entered or readied herself to leave.

“It’s me, I’m going to take a shower”, she rubbed his arm passing him on the way to the bathroom. “Sleep, it’s still early.”

“Mhmmm”, he mumbled dreamily, his eyes still closed. “Fine.”

Mira tried to be very quiet. Wearing only a nightie, her feet bare, she tiptoed around the bed to
quietly slide underneath the fluffy comforter. Delrin was lying on his back, on of his hands underneath his head. It was certainly not the first time for Mira to be struck how handsome he looked. More importantly, his face was just... his. She spent the last couple of days learning so much about him. She knew how his cheekbone felt when she was trailing her fingers down to his strong jaw. His lips were perfectly kissable and she couldn’t get enough of that. She loved the contrast between the clean shaven skin on his head and the patch of the coarse, shortly trimmed her. His facial hair slightly itched when she rubbed against it, but the feeling wasn’t unpleasant. The slight roughness seemed more sensual and sexy. The roughness was there on his hands as well, with some callousness and hardened skin from sword fighting. Still, those hands were also extremely tender and gentle when he was caressing her face or body. Delrin was still very respectful and careful, and Mira was certain they would not move further beyond kissing and gentle touching until she wanted to and specifically asked for it.

“You know”, his voice sounded almost huskily, even if it was just sleepiness, “you’re not nearly as quiet as you think you are.”

He opened his eyes, still slightly hazed from slumber. Mira moved her foot to rub his ankle underneath the covers.

“You can’t quite blame me for admiring my husband”, she purred and he smirked.

“Come here”, he scooped her into his arms as she giggled and she could feel all that dreamy warmth emitting from his body.

The way Delrin kissed was subtle at the beginning before it deepened into more something more passionate. Mira felt her body responding and mellowing immediately. He moved slightly on top of her and she run her hands across his shoulders and back, feeling the hardness of his muscles beneath the linen shirt he wore. His whole body was strong and hardened, the difference between modern fitness and using one’s stamina and endurance for a living.

“Good morning”, he whispered after placing one tiny kiss on her nose, positioning himself straight above her, the medallion on his neck reaching her skin.

She covered her yawn and he laughed.

“It might be rather a goodnight for me”, she smiled apologetically.

“I know. You should certainly get enough rest before the ball.”

“What will you do?”

“I’ll stay here. I’ll write a letter to my parents, I’ll pack for tomorrow, I’ll rest and read. I’ll look at your sweet face. Maker knows I do not get enough of that.”

She could feel the emotion overflowing as she stroke his cheek.

“I know you hate that I’m leaving”, he added quietly, looking at her keenly and caressing her arm. “Even though you have not mentioned a word about that.”

“That’s because once I do, I’ll start crying”, she confessed gazing into those lovely green eyes. “And I’d rather spend my time kissing you, so be kind and indulge me.”

“Well, if my lady insists.” He lowered his face and gently brushed against her lips, barely touching them.
“You’re so mean”, she protested lifting herself up slightly to catch his mouth but he managed to slightly turn away, placing the kiss alongside her jaw and then just below her ear.

“Is that alright?”, he asked, his warm breath sending a shiver down her spine.

“Yes”, she murmured happily, sighing as his lips trailed her neck.

It truly felt right. It was simply wonderful.

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Barris felt happy. The happiness was not new. It came sometime alongside Mira, but now it settled itself for comfortably for good. It didn’t shake the earth or make him feel dizzy, it simply felt peaceful and warm and good and perfect. It still apparently made him hum to himself at the war meeting, raising Cullen’s eyebrows and making Bull laugh at him later.

“So…”, the Qunari poked him with an elbow as they left the room.

“Sod off”, Delrin scoffed jokingly and then said. “I don’t kiss and tell.”

“Varric tried starting a bet”, Bull added innocently. “About which one of you would kiss another. Hardly can blame him after your flirting at the tavern.”

“And who did you bet against?”

“How could you, Barris”, Bull feigned the sadness. “The bet never happened. Too much need of discretion concerning your situation, and Cassandra threatened the dwarf as well.”

“Good then.”

“I would bet against you, but after seeing your smug happy face I am not so sure now.”

“I am not telling you anything”, he laughed.

“Very well”, the Iron Bull patted him solidly on the back. “Is she as happy as you are now?”

“I certainly think so.”

“Good for you, kids.”

Delrin looked to the side at Mira sleeping peacefully, her whole body rising and falling slowly. She sincerely was the loveliest of sights. She definitely seemed happy, he was sure of that and that made him feel both proud and accomplished. There was no tentativeness in Mira now, there was only overwhelming sweetness and warmth when they were together. He fully expected her to be more shy and bashful, but her kisses were forward and ardent and just wonderful, and he was aware that the flush on her cheeks was not from being coy. He loved watching her pupils widen as he was touching her gently, her lips parting a little, her breath becoming heavy and the sighs she made when he was kissing her neck… He would never ask for anything from her, but those days he allowed his mind to wander more freely without any guilt attached. He wanted Mira, and she wanted him, and there was just so much to anticipate in the future, so much to look forward to.

Mira certainly kept a very brave face. When she told him she would cry talking about him leaving he was sure she was right in her assessment. She gave her emotions freely, both sadness and joy, both smiles and tears. He wanted to leave even less than before, but of course the duty called. That was his job and the world was in peril, and now he had even more motivation to help salvage it as
much as he could. At least they would write letters. There were a source of comfort and hope before, and he could imagine how delightful it would be for them to become more romantic.

Delrin still hadn’t told Mira he loved her. He didn’t want to be too bold too quickly, and instead opted to wait until the next time they would see each other. Sweet Andraste, he hoped it wouldn’t be ages until then.

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Madame de Fer certainly knew how to party, Mira decided as she stood completely half naked in the Enchanter’s quarters while sipping on the glass of wonderfully chill sparkling white wine. The mirrors were set all around and chitter and chatter of the servants filled the corridor behind the door. She heard Vivienne’s rustling and dispensing orders, and than the familiar sound of a disgusted growl.

Cassandra entered without knocking, stopping abruptly at the sight of Mira’s bare breasts flashing her and then she laughed. Truly, between the baths and the training there was nothing the Seeker wouldn’t have seen earlier. This was still the first time Mira was able to talk to Cassandra in several days.

“I know why I am here”, Mira muttered amusingly, “but how come you are?”

Cassandra glowered at her but they were far too close for it to work on Mira, so the warrior resorted to the frustrated sound escaping her lips. “It was a folly, nothing more, a temporary act of sure madness, there is simply no other way to explain it. I was reading the Winter’s Tale again and somehow Vivienne appeared and told me she could find me a perfect dress and something came over me and I actually”, she gasped, “agreed. Am I to understand that I am joining you in that display of nudity?”

“I am afraid so. But there’s delicious wine.”

“I thought you liked dressing up”, Cass frowned.

“I do”, Mira laughed but then she lowered her voice conspiratorially, “but Orlesian fashion is, well, you know…”

“Maker preserve me, do you think we’ll be put in Orlesian gowns? I might be called for an important business in the dungeons—”

Cassandra didn’t finish because Vivienne entered the room looking at them both sternly while carrying multiple boxes and the armful of various fabrics and to Mira’s own amusement they both immediately straightened their backs.

“Your skin looks perfect, darling”, the Enchanter glanced at her approvingly and Mira felt the mixture of emotions between being proud at the compliment and feeling slightly as a prized mare.

“I still use the products you have given me”, she responded dutifully and Vivienne nodded with satisfaction.

Once they put on the robes, the maids were invited in to help with the make up and to coif their hair. Mira was pleased to notice that it wasn’t all too absurd, the maquillage was more akin to what Vivienne wore everyday. Her face looked brightened, glowing subtly. To her relief, the Enchanter did not mess with her curls too much and just ordered them to be half up half down, secured with pearl pins.
The chambers emptied for Mira to put on her dress, undoubtedly to not let the servants see her ink. After all the jokes and teasing with Delrin she expected all the puff and ruffles sown into an over the top creation, the embodiment of Orlesian extravaganza and opulence. This was nothing like that. She wouldn’t call the gown exactly simple, the fabric was carefully bejeweled and reflecting the light with every move. Still, it looked like something that could be worn on Earth. The back was high enough to cover the back tattoo, the front revealed the slight cleavage and the sleeves were hanging just over the shoulder. The dress was tight, so tight in fact that Vivienne absolutely insisted to forego any undergarments as to avoid the nasty lines. It hugged her like a second skin past her hips and then flowed enough to make movement comfortable, though Mira worried about the possibility of dancing as it was. She turned around and examined herself critically in the mirror, suddenly insecure. She wore form fitting clothing before, starting with the leather breeches themselves, but this seemed to be on another level. Was it the color? The blush of the dress almost melted with her skin. The lack of jewelry, except the wedding band and Delrin’s great grandmother’s ring only in amplified the effect.

The gown didn’t show too much skin, but…

“I look naked.”, she finally looked at Vivienne, exacerbated.

“Nonsense, darling”, the Enchanter scoffed. “It’s hardly scandalous. You should see what I am wearing. I guarantee you will see more revealing dresses at the ball.”

Vivienne’s attention turned towards Cassandra, sporting a black dress with high cleavage and bared back and a slit showcasing her long legs as she walked. Goodness, Cassandra was fiercely pacing across the room, which frankly made her look even more stunning.

“I can’t walk out of here like this!”, Seeker protested.

“You look absolutely stunning”, Mira said firmly without the shadow of the doubt.

“You complain about your own gown”, Cassandra countered.

“Oh”, Mira looked at Madame the Fer. “Temporary moment of doubt over appropriateness standards, still foreign to me. The dress is gorgeous. Thank you, Vivienne. Delrin teased me that you would put me in feathers and masks.”

Enchanter sighed dramatically. “He might be cultured, but he is still a soldier, darling. We cannot expect too much of him. You’re Fereldan nobility. I am not making you into an imitation of Val Royeaux debutante, dear. I am far better than that. Now, if you both excuse me, I need to make myself dressed, just in time to be fashionably late. And I will be wearing feathers.”

“I am supposed to see the Inquisitor and enter with other advisors”, Cassandra sighed, eying her naked back in the mirror. “Do you truly not find it all too much?”

“I think you look absolutely spectacular”, Mira said earnestly, impatiently waiting for the right moment to reveal the most important thing to her closest friend in Thedas.

“I don’t know what Vivienne—“

“I kissed Delrin”, she finally blurted out, not being able to hold it any longer and then giggled like a schoolgirl. “Or rather… he kissed me. We kissed. We’ve been kissing a lot.”

“No!”, Cassandra’s reaction was exactly what she hoped for. “He did seem a little giddy when I saw him at the armory. I had no idea! How was it? How is it? How did it happen?”
“I’ll tell you tomorrow”, Mira promised, grabbing her friend’s hand. “For now, we have a ball to attend and I have a husband to smooch.”

“Ah!”, Seeker visibly blushed with excitement. “Alright then. Tomorrow.”

Mira was about to meet Delrin in the corridor down the stairs leading from Vivienne’s quarters to the ballroom. She wasn’t sure how long he waited, but she could see his tall silhouette facing away. To her amusement, he certainly was dressed Fereldan, wearing the formal black and gray gambeson with a gray fur mantle across the shoulder. Not as ridiculous as the mantle Cullen normally wore, but still, so Fereldan. Was it a wolf?

“Don’t turn away!”, she yelled and could see his shoulder jerking suddenly.

“How bad is it?”, the hilarity in his voice was unmistakable. “Are you completely covered in feathers or ruffles? Wearing a cat-shaped mask, or worse, a swan one? You know I lived in Orlais for quite some time. I don’t think I could ever be surprised. Just admit that I guessed at least one of those things right.”

“No”, she chuckled, biting her lip as she stood beside him. “Nothing like that.’

“Now I am intrigued.”

“Well.”

He turned around and froze, his eyes moving on her body, top to bottom, slowly. Mira had never seen him look at her that unabashedly. She blushed, and the warmth tingled across her body. He didn’t say anything.

“You really are horrible at paying compliments. You look great. I like the fur. The Fereldan ruggedness suits you.”

“I killed the wolf myself”, he raised his eyebrow and Mira couldn’t help but smile.

“Of course you did. You simply exude manliness.”

He laughed, shaking his head.

“See”, she added. “Not that hard.”

“Maybe”, he leaned in slightly, placing his hand on her waist. “You simply leave me speechless.”

“Good save”, she whispered, her heart fluttering rapidly like a captured bird.

The steps at the top of the stairs distracted them, and Dorian appeared, dressed in various velvets and silks, the part of his chest exposed, the faintest kohl around his eyes.

“My, my” Dorian clicked his tongue looking at Mira. “You are a vision tonight. Barris, on another hand, you look positively Fereldan.”

“Thank you”, she replied politely. “And you look quite dashing yourself.”

“Very… Imperial”, Delrin added.

“Indeed”, the mage winked, fixing his mustache. “I am hoping to scandalize a Chantry sister or
two. Shall we?”

The Skyhold ballroom was crowded, the middle of the room set as the dance floor, the sides occupied by the guests, both foreign dignitaries and Skyhold residents. Barris didn’t even want to think how much it cost the Inquisition to get the musicians here. They all seemed Orlesian, dressed richly. This was a proper affair, a way to thank for the support and the contributions, and certainly a path to ensure continuous alliance. The party was rarely merely a party, the intrigue and politics behind the scenes. Tonight he himself intended to focus on Mira and not leave her alone, and just try to enjoy the occasion without getting caught up in the charade.

He thought she looked beautiful when he saw her for the first time tonight. Nonetheless, it was when she walked in front of him that he took notice of how for fitting the gown was around her hips. He had seen Mira wearing many different outfits or even not wearing a lot before, like when she got sick, but he had never seen the line of her backside quite so vividly. The fabric clung to her body tightly and Delrin’s mind filled with thoughts of varying levels of decency.

His mind was reminiscing the image of those lovely backside dimples he observed several days ago was they were interrupted by the sudden appearance of Josephine whose perfect smile betrayed nervousness and worry she did not usually display. He furrowed his eyebrows watching the Ambassador put her hands together anxiously.

“I only knew about it since this morning when they had arrived”, the Ambassador said in the calming tone that immediately put Delrin on high alert and from the look on Mira’s face, it had the same effect on her. “Fereldans are notorious for not confirming their attendance but aside from the very few dignitaries that had visited I had not expected…”

He stopped listening because Mira suddenly grasped his arm and squeezed it so hard it hurt.

“Our two o’ clock”, she said weakly as if her voice almost left her. “Is that your…?”

“Father”, he finished her sentence completely shocked. “Indeed. The tall woman in the green dress next to him? That’s my mother. Josephine, why in the Void wouldn’t you send a messenger?”, he glared at the Ambassador who flustered under his stare.

“They immediately went to rest after the journey, and I wanted to spare Mira from not getting any sleep after her shift.”

“I consider myself spared”, Mira groaned , “but I might faint right now.”

“Are you really—“, it was easy to put his own feelings on hold when he pulled her closer, securing her waist.

“No, stop”, she cut him off sternly. “So, what happens now? Can I just run away for just a few—“

She was certain Mira ceased talking because she saw what he did, exactly at the same time. His father, Bann Jevrin Barris looked him straight in the eye and nodded slightly while his mother’s face erupted in a smile. Delrin could feel Mira’s hand holding onto his arm desperately and he was sure beyond the shadow of the doubt that she was far more stressed than him.

“Come”, he coaxed her gently, the protectiveness washing over him. “Let me introduce you properly.”
Whenever Mira was truly anxious, hundreds of thoughts would invade her head, some rational and some beyond silly. If those short twenty or thirty seconds it took them to reach the other end of the ballroom there was a lot of things going through her mind. Mira hated feeling unprepared, and this was certainly a moment she couldn’t prepare for. Those were Delrin’s parents! Of course, they talked about them, she knew they existed, she knew their names, she heard few stories about them, she wore the ring that his mother sent to him to give her, but this was different. His parents, her in laws were here. Delrin looked so much like his father except those green eyes that he definitely inherited from his mother.

Goodness gracious, every slight worry she had in the back of her head concerning the fact that she knew his father did not approve of their marriage just floated to the surface and she didn’t even have a minute to gather herself. Her cheeks were surely red although maybe the make up helped with that a bit. One could hope. The dress felt even tighter than before and Mira managed to entertain the thought that her in laws could literally see the shape of her—

And then they reached them.

No wonder Delrin was tall. He was slightly taller than his father, but his mother also towered over Mira who suddenly felt so small and inadequate in every possible way and everything that couldn’t be revealed about circumstances of their union got mixed with the flourishing romance between them and—

“Mother, Father”, Delrin’s voice was composed and calm, not a hint of concern. “I would like you to meet my wife, Lady Mira Barris. My heart”, she could feel his hand gently stroking her back in reassuring manner, “my parents, Lady Adriana Barris and Bann Jevrin Barris.”

Inhale and exhale, Mira thought to herself trying to steady her breathing.

“Lady Mira”, Bann Barris nodded coldly and any confidence she mustered evaporated quickly.

“Jevrin”, Lady Adriana Barris seethed and then looked at Mira and smiled warmly, suddenly embracing her. “My son was right. You are much lovelier in person than in any drawing. Oh, sweetheart, I am so glad to finally meet you!”

What drawing, Mira’s mind grasped onto the random piece of information before she was able to collect herself enough to reply.

“I am very honored to meet you both. Bann Barris, Lady—“

“Please just call us ‘mother’ and ‘father’, sweetheart”, Lady Barris beamed with excitement that left Mira completely and utterly overwhelmed.

“Perhaps you would let my wife breathe for a moment”, Delrin stepped in carefully, embracing his mother and kissing her cheeks. “It’s good to see you, mom. You look lovely. The same as several years ago.”

“My boy”, Lady Adriana tapped his cheek in a loving gesture. “Always so nice.”

“Father”.

“Son.”

Both men just bowed to themselves, the tension palatable to everyone around.

“Forgive me, I had no idea you were coming to visit. I wish you’d have let me know, we’re
certainly surprised to see you”, Delrin said calmly. “I am actually lea—“

“Well, we wished to have known before you got married”, Bann Barris stated bitterly and the whole world stilled.

“Father”, Delrin finally said and Mira could hear the anger in his voice.

Lady Adriana Barris had daggers in her eyes, glaring at her husband before glancing at Mira and putting her arms around her. “Come, sweetheart. Let’s move to the sitting room and chat for a little bit while the men bring us wine.”

Nothing else seemed like a better option so Mira followed her mother in law, her heart thudding in her chest, like a lamb to the slaughter.

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Delrin felt the anger simmering all over his body. Fereldans’ notoriety for not following Orlesian etiquette was one thing, but he knew very well that his parents could have written many times but deliberately decided to surprise them. The difference was that while he could entirely believe that his mother’s intentions were pure, he had no doubt that his father’s aim was to teach him a lesson he had no authority to teach. He could live with that though. To say what he did out loud, in Mira’s presence was simply an entire matter altogether.

“I can’t believe you just said that in front of my wife”, he finally collected himself enough to speak up again. “Whatever you want to fault me for, this is all my doing. She had done nothing wrong. I assured her once that my father would never take any disagreements he had with me on her because that’s what I think of you, and you just made me a liar in the eyes of a woman I love.”

The spark was there in Bann Barris’ eyes before it extinguished and suddenly Delrin noticed that his father looked much older than few years ago when they saw each other the last time. He was still a tall, proud man with lean long legs but there more wrinkles on his face, more gray hair and he looked weaker.

“You’re right, son”, his father finally conceded, sighing deeply. “I will apologize to lady Mira. Your mother will surely send me to sleep on the sofa tonight, believe me.”

Delrin couldn’t help but to chuckle at the statement, some tension leaving him.

“I was going to say that I am deploying tomorrow morning for Orlais with my squadron”, he finally said. “I presume you’re staying longer.”

“Four more days starting tomorrow”, Bann Barris admitted heavily.

“I wish you have written me not for my sake but for Mira’s. She works long hours, too.”

“It was my idea. Not your mother’s.”

“I figured.”

They looked at each other for a minute. Delrin was fully aware that his father’s willingness to seek forgiveness from Mira was the best scenario possible to achieve tonight. There was still so much left unsaid between them and part of him thought he would never reach understanding with his own father, not truly. He also knew that Bann was not a heartless man and that there were gestures he made to show his care. He donated coin and supplies to the Inquisition, including lots of honey from Barrfield apiaries and lots of barley. He did more than most noble houses and most likely for
personal reasons. He was also painfully aware that since leaving home at the age of twelve for the Templar Order something had ruptured between him and his father and it never healed and then the wound only widened. It took a lot for Jevrin Barris, an ardent Order’s supporter and the Chantry benefactor to come to terms with his son’s actions to dismantle the Order and join the Inquisition in the leadership role.

“Are you happy, son?”

The question surprised him as he looked sharply into his father’s eyes.

“I am very happy, father”, he freely admitted. “She makes me very happy.”

“I have known your mother for forty two years now and I still feel like I am the luckiest man in the world. Don’t fuck it up, son.”

“Never”, he gritted his teeth.

“Well then”, Bann Barris placed his large hand on Delrin’s shoulder. “Let’s find some wine for our ladies before your mother decides that forty two years had been enough for her.”

Delrin’s mother was a resourceful and persuasive woman, Mira quickly assessed. Before she realized what was going on they were both sitting on the pale blue velvet sofa and Lady Adriana was holding Mira’s hand.

“I am sorry for the oaf that my husband proved to be tonight”, her mother in law stated apologetically. “I can assure that we arrived here to simply see you both and I am so glad we did.”

“I am glad to meet you as well”.

There were so many questions she wouldn’t be able to answer. They never even discussed the details of how they supposedly met. How he asked her to marry her. The reality was so far from any acceptable response she could give—

“There’s so much I want to ask you, sweetheart”, the woman across her stated emotionally, her green eyes so similar to Delrin’s glistening with tears. “I want to know more about you, I do, but before that, allow this mother to just ask this. What kind of man is my son? I’ve seen few times since he was twelve and there is no one that knows him more than you.”

Oh.

Mira was so focused on herself and the situation that she didn’t even think about the fact that in reality Delrin’s own parents had not spent much time with him except since his childhood. Since they sent him away. That had to be so difficult.

“I am hardly objective”, Mira smiled. “He’s my husband. I can certainly try though. He is… very caring and kind. He cares about people under his command. A bit like mother hen, to be honest.”

Lady Adriana chuckled, few tears falling out of her eyes.

“He’s tender and warm”, Mira continued carefully. “It comes easy to him. Since the moment we met he has been so considerate and sweet. He’s smart and thoughtful, and brave and strong. He likes to draw but I think you knew that already. He’s hopeless at cooking though I haven’t dared to try it. He’s good at dancing, you should definitely dance with him tonight.”
“Do you think he’d like that?”

“Yes”, she said with utmost certainty. “He would.”

“I gave birth to Delrin twelve years after his older brother. I never thought I would have another child, it just wasn’t happening until one day it did. Aside from the birth I’d like to forget, he was the sweetest child. We already had an heir and then Calvin got married and had his firstborn son… Sending children to the Order was something the family had always done. But I cried for months when it happened and then I’ve never seen much of him.”

Lady Adriana Barris tried wiping her face and Mira felt a surge of emotions run over her as well. This touched her more than she could admit. It touched what she believed about having family although she never truly experienced that. It touched upon every opinion she had on separating children from their parents. More viscerally though, this woman was her mother in law crying about the fact that she had not seen her son in ages.

Mira did what felt like the simplest thing to do. She hugged her, letting few tears fall down her face as well.

“It’s alright. I wish you had more time”, she added. “He’s leaving tomorrow.”

“Is he?”, lady Adriana cried in response. “We should have notified you.”

“It’s fine.”

The woman pulled away from her, gently shaking her arms.

“Thank you, sweetheart”, she whispered, “for allowing the old woman this. I’ve been so emotional about this. Oh! You’re wearing the ring I sent!”

“Oh, yes”, Mira lifted her hand and then sniffled a bit. “Thank you so much. It is very lovely.”

“I am so glad”, Delrin’s mom smiled warmly. “Now you can finally tell me how you and Delrin met.”

For fucks sake, Mira thought. After all this, all the emotions and the stress of the evening, after being completely shocked and after meeting his parents she would have to say something that was convincing and believable but also romantic enough and—

The door to the sitting room opened and both Delrin and Bann Barris came in carrying the drinks. The relief fell upon Mira, because she just knew she couldn’t carry the weight of it any longer. Delrin placed the wine glasses on the coffee table and pulled the armchair closer.

“Lady Mira”, Bann Barris monopolized her attention. “I truly apologize for my earlier words, I was inappropriate. I am glad to get to know you better.”

“Likewise, Bann—“

“Please…”, Bann Barris caught his wife’s stare. “Call me… ugh… a… well… father.”

Goodness, she really needed to take just a moment to breathe. She had not spoken to her own parents for years. Her memories were dark and bitter, the concept of calling her in laws that was bizarre and old fashioned and yet refusing certainly would not help the situation.

“That’s… an honor”, she replied carefully, her hands fidgeting.
She suddenly felt a hand on her own, pulling her very gently. She half stood up and landed in Delrin’s lap, his arms wrapping around her. They were right in front of his parents but even now, the closeness of his warmth was already reassuring and Mira allowed herself to rest on him, literally and figuratively.

When his mother repeated the question about how they met, he took it upon himself to answer it.

Delrin was not the type of a man who would remain surprised for too long. The whole situation was absurd, but here he was, talking with both his parents and holding Mira in his lap at the Satinalia ball in Skyhold. Perhaps it was his personality, perhaps it was his military training but he was conversing confidently, without the initial awkwardness.

His father still looked uncomfortable, but his mother was beaming, the emotions showing on her face as she couldn’t take her eyes off him and Mira, grasping onto his words, clearly torn between trying to not come off as too intense and wanting to ask many questions.

He had just finished telling them the very basic overview of how he and Mira supposedly met and the thing that saved him from further inquiry were the reinforcements when Josephine and Maxwell decided to join them for the courteous conversation.

“How are you doing?”, he whispered into her ear and felt her tremble slightly.

“I’ll survive”, she answered barely audibly as she met his eyes.

As much as she likely tried to hide it, he could recognize how frazzled and nervous she was. Truthfully, the situation was incredibly awkward. I would have been awkward in any circumstances, but the reality of what was between them and where Mira was from only complicated everything.

This was not how he imagined the last night before him leaving, and a wave of guilt washed over him, though nothing that happened was his fault and part of him was truly happy to see his parents, especially his mother who radiated happiness and excitement at the moment.

“You should ask your mom to dance with you later”, Mira murmured softly. “She will like that.”

Delrin did just that much to his mother’s delight and they danced through five changes of the music playing. He had to have seen his mother dance when he was a child, but he had no memory of it, and of course, there was never any occasion on the rare chances he visited Barr Castle.

“Mira was right”, she smiled. “You are good at this, just like me. Your father is not one to dance willingly. You get it after me.”

“Thank you, mother”, he laughed openly.
“She’s very sweet, you know”, his mother continued. “I am sorry for your father—“

“Mom, you don’t really need to apologize for father”, he interrupted her.

“I can see why you two got married”, she tapped him on the back. “I have always been of opinion that marrying out of love was important.”

Heh, he thought to himself. The reality was slightly more complex here.

“I know I didn’t seek your approval”, he answered, “but it doesn’t mean I don’t enjoy it.”

Mira stood at the side of the ballroom with her father in law watching Delrin and his mother dance. Bann Barris did not ask her to the dance floor, and she was both relieved and troubled by that. Despite the effort he made, it was still clear he did not warm up to her much.

“How was the hunting season, Bann… uhm… fath.. uhm”, she mumbled awkwardly, not knowing how to behave.

“We don’t have to…”, he looked at her hesitantly than sighed. “I’ve had most success this year with bears. I hunt with Mabaris, and the newly matured bitch I bred last year showed much promise.”

Well, that certainly was the longest sentence he uttered towards her and now she wasn’t sure how to respond.

“Delrin told me a lot of stories of Mabaris from his childhood”.

“I am glad he still remembers how to be Fereldan after all those years in Orlais”, Bann Barris noted and Mira couldn’t quite tell if that was a joke or a harsher remark.

He still had not ask her a single question. She didn’t know how to carry the weight of the talk for much longer. Delrin was busy twirling his mom, and who else could come to the rescue? She would honestly welcome any distraction—

The sound of shattered porcelain on the stone floor followed that thought immediately and she could see a very tall and a very large man putting his hand on the throat and desperately grasping for air. There was no wheezing, no coughing. His face turned red immediately.

“Poison!”, some Orlesian woman exclaimed in feigned shocked, creating ruckus and panic.

For f**ks sake, Mira heard her own thoughts as she ran towards the man. That was no poison, it was merely choking.

“Step away”, she barked at the crowd blocking her access. “I’m the Skyhold medic, get out of my way.”

“Can you talk?”, she asked the vicim and it was clear he couldn’t get any sound out.

She stood behind him, wrapped her around her waist and used force to bend him down and forcefully slapped him behind the shoulder blade five times. Nothing, and the man was huge, too large for her to be able to perform abdominal thrusts like that. She could try to put him on the ground or push him against the wall or—

“Hey you”, she harshly grabbed the arm of the tall man near her. Her own father in law. “Do
exactly as I say.”

He listened.

“Grab him across the waist. Find his navel and pull and thrust upward.” She instructed while guiding Bann’s hands. She looked at the poor man still fighting for air. “You will be alright.”

The blockage flew out of the man’s mouth after three solid thrusts and she could see the relief on the man’s face as he finally took his breath.

“Sit down, sit down”, she instructed the lucky bastard grabbing him by the arm and leading him to the chair. “How are you feeling?”

The sweat was covering his forehead and he had tears in his eyes. He certainly looked shaken, but not unwell.

“I’m feeling… alive”, the man responded with disbelief and Mira smiled while squatting in front of him.

“That’s good”, she reassured him, patting him on the shoulder. The complications from abdominal thrusts were exceedingly rare when the blockage was resolved so fast but she still needed to make sure. “Any pain? In your chest or abdomen?”

“No, no”, the man shook his head.

“Do rest a bit and calm down, my lord. Perhaps the cup of tea in several minutes would sound nice.”

“Where… where is the man who saved my life?”, he inquired while Mira finally looked around only to see her father in law still standing by her side.

“Bann Jevrin Barris of Barrfield, Ferelden.”, he introduced himself calmly, “but it is the lady you should be giving thanks. I merely did as she told me.”

“Lord Edmund Orrick of Tantervale. There would be no way for me to repay the debt for tonight.”

“Please, just enjoy the rest of party”, Mira answered watching in the corner of her eye the servants carrying the tray of tea, both Josephine and the Inquisitor following them. Somehow she was certain that Lord Orrick could be reminded of tonight at the opportune time, but this was surely entirely out of her control.

The crowd around them dissipated and the chatter came back to the ballroom, though Mira could still see some faces observing them closely.

“Good job”, she praised Bann Barris as they walked back to the corner they previously occupied.

His eyes flickered and he actually chuckled, the first change from his serious and stone cold demeanor. She saw Delrin and his mother standing a bit further down and Mira waved at her husband.

“Good guidance”, her father in law simply said and she allowed herself to smile.

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Once Delrin realized that the emergency was of medical nature, *not the poison of any sort*, him and Cullen and the rest of the Inquisition leadership present quickly rushed to calm down any panic
around, which mostly consisted of the Commander calmly talking to the Orlesian woman who clearly rejoiced in the sudden attention. Delrin didn't stick around to watch the events unfold but of course he expected Mira to be there. He escorted his mother to the side and waited with her after any unrest was under control.

The tale that followed after Mira and Bann Barris joined them was more curious, but he was pleased to see the slight thread of sympathy his father displayed towards her for the rest of the night. Mira herself seemed to be more confident and assured. The next couple of hours were not as awkward and there were certainly quite the few good moments.

Delrin was still mindful that he didn’t spend almost any time alone with Mira, and that tomorrow was coming mercilessly.

“We should retire for the night”, he announced to his parents and he could see the shadow of disappointment falling on his mother’s face.

“The night is still early”, she objected.

“Adriana”, to his surprise it was his father to spoke up with the hint of amusement in his voice. “The boy wants to spend time with his wife before leaving.”

They said their greetings and he promised to see them tomorrow at the gates while Mira made plans for dinner at the main hall. Sweet Andraste, she would be expected to see them everyday until they left. That was not a benign task and he knew it would be a burden.

She was quiet as they walked to their quarters and he could only imagine how many thoughts and questions were going through her head. More importantly though, he wanted and he needed the time alone with her. Not quite the way his father implied, but he wanted it to be only about them. Maker only knew when he would see her again.

“Mira”, he stopped her as they reached the corridor. “Would you like some tea? We could talk about tonight and my parents but after we enter our room I don’t want to mention them.”

“To the kitchens, then”, she smiled faintly, clearly slightly dazed from the whole evening.

Tea was never a bad idea, and it brought memories of how they truly first met. How different everything was that night. He thought he knew what he was doing, but he had no inclination back then just how his life would change.

“I am sorry about tonight”, he looked at her ad shook his head. “I know you were quite nervous.”

“Well”, she took a deep breath. “That certainly was a surprise. Your mom is very sweet. Your father is, uhm”, the blush came onto her face. “I am not sure he likes me at all.”

“I am not sure he likes me either”, Delrin tried joking but he could see the uncertainly on her face. “Listen, Mira. I think he warmed up to you. More importantly, I don’t seek my parents’ approval. It’s nice to hear, but it is not necessary and I don’t depend on it over anything. The last thing I want is for you to stress every single day that they are here.”

“They are still your parents”, she murmured, “and you love them. Of course I will stress.”

“You’re my wife”, he looked at her. “You are the most important person in my life. I just want you to know that.”
She buried her face into his chest, wrapping her arms around his waist and taking deep breaths.

“Can we go to our room?”, she whispered quietly.

Maker’s breath, yes, he thought to himself. He had been wanting to kiss her the entire night.

Mira thought that Delrin’s request about dropping the subject of his parents would be difficult to fulfill, but the reality proved simpler. The second the door behind them closed he pulled her into his embrace and kissed her. The height difference meant that there was both bending and standing on the toes involved and Mira lost her balance and leaned her back against the stone wall. Goodness, that was quite the kiss, with his hands stroking the sides of her waist and the warmth of his body covering her. That was the kiss of a man who was leaving tomorrow and who would miss her. The heat rushed through her body. Her senses awakened and somehow his warmth intensified, his touch seemed more, the kiss was sweeter, his scent fell all over her.

“You’re so beautiful”, he whispered when he finally pulled away and she smiled.

“You’re very handsome”, she touched his face grinning. “I am barely catching my breath.”

The wonderful thing was that he didn’t need to tell her he wanted her and she didn’t need to say it back. It was obvious, and what was obvious as well was that nothing more would happen tonight. Not like this, not without having more time, not before she was ready. Still, as bothered as it left them both, it also felt quite delectable.

“It is a very inopportune moment to make such request”, her cheeks flushed, “but I certainly need help with that gown as well.”

“Of course”, he laughed softly. “I can promise I am very chivalrous.”

He took of his jacket and lit one small candle on his nightstand as she waited.

“Eye and hook clasps this time.”

“Maker’s breath”, he joked. “Every single time the difficulty level increases. Let me—“

“Ouch.”

He accidentally tugged on her skin.

“Forgive me”, he added sheepishly.

“Be careful”, she closed her eyes and winced. “I am not wearing anything underneath, so just… don’t look.”

Mira could feel his fingers freezing for a second before he replied.

“I won’t”.

“It’s not that I don’t want you”, she breathed out quickly before thinking, “I want you, it’s just—“

“Mira”, he pleaded in a low soft voice. “I know. When you say you want me as I undress you it’s only making it harder—“

She giggled loudly, covering her face.
“Maker preserve me!”, he exclaimed amused. “I didn’t mean it quite like that.”

“I know”, she finally composed herself, fanning her face. “I know.”

“Just… try not moving”, he begged and slowly unclasped the gown.

They kissed more upon lying in the bed and Mira wanted to memorize every part of Delrin. She wanted to hold on, to keep him, to have something linger when he would be gone. There hadn’t been enough time and perhaps there would never be enough time aside of those carefully crafted moments.

Each of his caresses were deliberate and mindful, not crossing the boundary of an already established closeness. Even so, his mouth seemed hotter and more demanding, and there had been a newly found urgency on his tongue as if he needed her taste in his blood and it all made her toes curl.

Mira had kissed quite the few men in her life but with Delrin her heart swung open, the vulnerability of the emotion permeating her sighs. Her body turned into open seas, wet and salty and every touch hinted at the promise of what would await upon his return.

It would seem that nothing could shake his composure, and that in part remained true, but as her lips trailed the scar on his chest and as her fingers shyly brushed his abdomen she could feel his heart hammering, his breathing quickening, the soft growl escaping him. She smiled at the sight of him, at her own power and he smiled in response, not minding any torment she was putting him through.

They did cool down, eventually, letting the fire between them subside while the tenderness remained. Everything got quiet, the night surrounded them. Delrin’s hand was softly moving along her spine through the thin layer of her nightgown. Her head rested on his warm bare skin. His heartbeat slowed down and steadied and the respite finally got to her. The tears started flowing quickly and uncontrollably, wetting her face and his torso at the same time.

“Oh, Mira”, he whispered softly, using his thumb to dry her cheek.

“I am sorry”, she muttered, her voice shaking. “I’m really sorry.”

“It’s alright”, he lifted her chin up to make her look at him. “You can cry.”

“I don’t want to flood you with all of my fears and worries and emotions…”

“Mira”, he stroked her face. “I want all of you. Your tears and your worries too.”

“I just…”, the tears were streaming down. “I am afraid you’ll die.”

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He held her close. Delrin had faced his own mortality more than several times, but that was different. The look in her wet eyes, the affections she had bestowed on him tonight, the words she said now and everything else she had said in the last few days… She was his. He was hers. To worry was her right, and his duty placed that burden on her heart.
“Mira—”

“I am sorry”, she repeated, “It’s just… You’re going to war. And you will fight and face danger that I can’t even imagine.”

“Don’t apologize”, he pleaded, “please.”

“Fine”, she sighed, wiping her tears away. “I am afraid you will die. And because of my work, my fear is vivid. I don’t think of death as abstract. I’ve seen it. Less than you, certainly but at times maybe more intimately. I’ve seen people die. I know the most likely ways you could die, even though some are as foreign as the blight sickness. I know some of them would be fast and some of them would be agonizingly long and painful. I know you were close to dying at some point because I see that scar on your chest and I know where it’s located and how deep it went. I know all of that because I recognize the familiarity, even though everything is different here. And it hurts. That is not the fear that I find paralyzing. It won’t affect my daily work and I can control it. But there are moments like right now when there’s only you and me and what tomorrow brings and I’m scared of breaking open and I can’t hold it in. You deserve my support and you certainly don’t need to worry about me when you’re out there, and I don’t want you to think that I can’t handle what you do or that I am not proud. I just… I lost every single person I have ever cared about. Every single one. I don’t”, her voice broke, “I don’t want to lose you.”

His heart reached his throat and choked him before he was able to regain control.

“I am not going to die”, he said firmly. “The least of all places in the fucking Western Approach. I am not going to die. I promise you.”

“You can’t promise that”, she winced painfully. “And you yourself said…”

“I am not overly confident”, he interrupted her sternly, raising himself up slightly above her, searching her face. He then let out a deep breath. “Listen, I know I can’t really promise you that I will be back. I know you will challenge me on every vow I shouldn’t make. The way I feel about you is unlike anything I have ever felt. I won’t make any judgements on your feelings. I… I cherish how you feel about me. Whether I deserve it or not, it is a gift. Sometimes I do think of what would have happened if someone else had found you in the wild or if you turned and walked into another direction…”, his voice got so low it cracked. “I can’t and I won’t do that. I once imagined what would have happened if you were in Haven when it got attacked… I know you’re safe here and this is such a source of comfort of me when I am there. I understand your fear. I… I fight smartly. And I want nothing more than to come back to you.”

She listened, not ever averting her eyes, her hands touching his back.

“You’re so brave and strong” she said quietly. “And yet I want to protect you from harm.”

“Mira”, he murmured, kissing her forehead. “You are my solace. You are my home.”

She pulled herself to kiss his mouth again and her breath was still warm and needy. She was a meadow in the summer, flowering and buzzing with life.

“Come home”, she whispered solemnly. “That’s all I ask.”

“I will. Maker, I will miss this. I will miss everything about you, Mira.”, he laid down on his back and pulled her into embrace.

“I will miss you too, Delrin.”
The next morning was busy. She theoretically had to get to the infirmary before the soldiers marched out, but Ellendra kicked her out immediately and told her to not come back until they left through the gates. It was nothing like the last time. There were so many warriors, so much noise, so many people saying goodbyes to their loved ones. Bann Barris watched it all with seriousness on his face that did not betray any other emotion. Delrin’s mother was trembling and Mira knew that few hours were not enough to spend with her son.

Still, even after last night, Mira wanted the moment alone, just a minute or two.

He was focused that morning, debating something with Rylen and Belinda, checking the inventory, dispensing orders to the lieutenants, gesturing something to the Iron Bull. This was more than just his squadron. The Inquisitor himself was joining them, taking part of the Inner Circle, only Cassandra, Varric, Vivienne and Solas remaining in Skyhold.

Finally, Delrin shook hands with his father, embraced his mother and pulled Mira away to the side.

“I am sorry”, he looked at her remorsefully. “There’s so much—”

“I know”, she reassured him, squeezing his hand.

That goodbye was the world away from the last one and the thorny vines surrounded her heart.

“You have the sweetest face I have ever seen”, he looked at her softly and tenderly, and Mira felt the surging emotion. “Can I kiss you here, in the—“

He was fully armored, the metal clanking and yet she still managed to grab him and pull him down until his mouth covered hers.

He lifted her up and twirled in the air and she wrapped her arms around his neck.

“I am sorry for all the plated—“

“I like it”, she replied hastily.

“I have to go soon.”

“I know”, her voice broke but she wouldn’t cry. Not now. “Stay safe. Come back.”

‘I wiill”, he cupped her face and place the last final kiss on her forehead, “Write to me, Mira. I always await your letters.”

“Write me back when you can. Draw something if you have time. Just not the giant spiders.”

“Not the giant spiders”, Delrin repeated solemnly. “Mira, I… you have my heart. All my devotion.”

“You have my heart as well.”, she smiled to him, holding his hands, looking into his eyes.

And then there was time. He left.

Mira didn’t know when she would see him again.
Delrin and Mira are separated again. :( Well, war doesn't stop for love, sadly.

I've always imagined their intimacy would develop quickly once they revealed their feelings - they live together, they are married, they share the same bed. It's not quite "let's carefully court" dynamic even though they are still cautious and tender.

Expect more letters, more plot, more war and much longing and yearning until our couple meet again - and don't worry, I write less chapters when they are not together than when they are together.

Thank you so much for reading and for all your comments and kudos. It is such a motivation to know that there are those following the story. I can promise you that things do not end here. As with real relationships, this is just a beginning of romance.

Btw, the most current choking protocol does have back thrusts intertwined with abdominal thrusts. Just FIY. ;)
Mira copes with being without Delrin while he reaches the Western Approach.

First week of Firstfall, Dragon Age 9:42, Skyhold

Mira had to admit that spending four days with her parents in law was a peculiar and anxiety-inducing experience. Bann Barris barely uttered ten words to her whenever they saw each other, and lady Adriana was kind and lovely, but just tad intense. Despite Derlin’s assurances Mira still cared to make a good impression. Part of it was probably pride, but part of it was caring for her husband and wanting to be liked and accepted. She still did not address them as ‘father’ or ‘mother’, though she did forego titles. She just… avoided addressing them in the first place.

Delrin’s mom had no qualms providing Mira with care and affection. His father remained closed off the whole time, but she still had hope he at least stopped disapproving of their union. Mira believed Delrin’s words when he said that he did not seek his parents’ acceptance. He had been independent for a long time. Even so, she was also aware that his childhood was full of love and gentleness, and Bann and Lady Barris were decent people. If she was honest with herself, part of her longed for some familial connection after her own family home fell apart. She found that with Ida’s friendship and her relatives, but It was all gone now. To think that she could have people to rely on here, in Thedas… she would not admit it out loud, but Mira cared so much.

Despite the constant business at the infirmary she managed to switch schedule to work mostly nights so she was able to eat breakfast with her in-laws, then sleep for a while, and then spend the later portion of the day in their company and have dinner together before heading back to the infirmary. It was utterly exhausting, but she survived far worse.

The last afternoon before they traveled back to Barrfield, she showed them Skyhold gardens. The foliage was almost gone from the trees, but glimmers of red, orange and yellow remained, surrounded by the gray mist. They also stopped by the Chantry and Mira was certain both Bann Barris and his wife recalled that this was the place their son got married without their knowledge. They both lit the candle in whatever intention they had while Mira waited politely. On their way back to the castle, they stumbled upon Madeleine slowly walking with Rosie wrapped across her chest, accompanied by two middle aged mages. Mira had to admit that Madeleine got excellent support system. The girl waved at them vigorously, her lips widening into a grin. She looked great for someone who gave birth less than two weeks ago and little Rosie thrived as well.

“Surgeon Barris!”, Madeleine welcomed her proudly and looked uncertainly at Delrin’s parents. “Rosie gained so much weight!”

“I have heard”, Mira smiled. “She’s doing splendidly and so are you. Those are my parents in law, Bann Barris and Lady Barris.”

Bann merely nodded, but his wife’s face brightened at the sight of the baby. Mira could see that
lady Adriana could barely contain herself, cooing cutely at Rosie.

“How I miss having little ones around”, her mother in law sighed later and then asked. “Do you like babies, sweetheart?”

That question was certainly loaded. It was definitely slightly early to discuss it and to consider it, but Mira wondered if Delrin would even want to have children. The bitter aftertaste of their fight filled her mouth before she swallowed and pushed it away. Moreover, pregnancy and birth in Thedas was much more risky than on Earth. It was not the same. Cultural differences were probably pronounced as well. Were men even present for childbirth and would they change diapers and be expected to soothe and feed their children? And Delrin was away so often—

“I love babies”, she interrupted her own thoughts by replying. There was no sense in lying. “I have delivered quite the few of them. I’m pretty good at that.”

The hope that sparked in lady Adriana’s eyes was so blatantly obvious that it clenched Mira’s heart.

They dined at the main hall, in the private alcove. Skyhold felt half empty anyway and Mira had a great rapport with cooks and servants. Bann Barris surely took notice.

“You seem to know everyone”, he remarked. “They care for you.”

“I am the medic”, she explained carefully. “There is some familiarity that naturally follows my line of work. There is knowledge and connection necessary to help. There is only one infirmary in Skyhold, and the word gets around. I know my patients and they know me. The kitchens provide a lot of support for us, too.”

“After witnessing your expertise at Satinalia”, Bann looked at her, “I can imagine why you are the First Surgeon.”

“Thank you”, it was the second compliment ever that her father in law provided her with. “That is very generous.”

It was during that dinner that Bann Barris offered to give them a Mabari puppy, and Mira was too taken to wait to consult with Delrin so she just accepted the gift graciously. She might have been an outsider, but she understood Fereldans well enough to be aware of the honor bestowed on them. It might not have been a sign of affection, but it certainly was a sign of acceptance.

When she said her goodbyes to them the following morning, Delrin’s mother cried while hugging her, referring to Mira as her own daughter. She requested to keep correspondence, and she opened the door to Barr Castle for them anytime they wanted to visit. Bann Barris was back to his quiet and proud self, but he did embrace Mira awkwardly in a fatherly manner.

It was all so new and bizarre, and yet she couldn’t help but to feel glad.

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Second week of Firstfall, Dragon Age 9:42, the edge of desert wilderness, Orlais

Moving over a hundred of mounted soldiers was infinitely more tiresome than merely traveling with his squadron. It was also less discreet. Barris was painfully aware that this proved to be the largest group of the soldiers they led through the Orlesian territory. The civil war between the
Empress and the Duke had been halted, at least temporarily. Still, he knew that the Inquisition needed to thread carefully. So far both Celene and Gaspard had shown ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ attitude regarding all the missions the Inquisition had fulfilled in Orlais. Nonetheless, any unrest and there could be more complications awaiting them. They were smart, avoiding the cities, traveling through back roads until passing Val Fermin. However any camping with that many horses and that many people would visible from afar. Once they reached the wilderness everyone breathed a little easier.

That did not make war meetings more civil. The conflict between Sidony and Fletcher somewhat changed from occasional snarling into a battle during which they had exhausted everyone around and Delrin would’ve gladly sent them back to Skyhold but Maxwell himself intervened. The situation was not helped by the fact that Sera insisted on pranking the Nevarran mage who did not appreciate such attention in the slightest. Truthfully, Barris wondered about his own biases, with Fletcher still sending him looks of disappointment and Maker only knew what thoughts Sidony had about each one of the former Templars. It had been too tiresome and he selected to take all his meals with his squadron just to catch a break from the rest of the leadership. He was certainly pleased to notice that his men carried themselves with much professionalism. Clarissa was always there to make sure of that whenever he was busy. They also all stayed closed and ate together, Beau preparing dinners without prompting. Barris could say that the company weighed on them too. Being a part of an army was different than being a small, independent unit.

The argument between Sidony and Fletcher was not the only one that arose in the first week of riding to the Western Approach. The gossip about the fight erupting between Dorian and the Iron Bull spread like wildfire and Barris was not surprised to find the sad looking Qunari by his tent that afternoon, holding onto his sack and bedroll.

“Are you homeless?”, Delrin raised his eyebrows.

Bull scoffed and then sighed. “I can bunk with Krem but I wondered if you might miss company.”

“All for my sake, huh?”, Barris smiled and gestured his friend to come on in. “There’s always a place for you. Let’s hope your snoring won’t keep me awake.”

“Thanks. I told my boys to move their tents closer to here as well.”

“Don’t let anyone piss Clarissa or Kirke—“

“Krem knows.”

“Or Beau. He is cooking for us. Be nice to him and you’ll partake. Be an arse and we’re all going to lose.”

“You run a good crew.”

“So do you”, Delrin gestured Bull to sit down. “So, do you want to talk about it?”

“How much have you heard?”

“You know I try not to listen to gossip. I’ve heard you argued and, well, you are here now. What happened?”

Qunari put his face into his hands. “Believe me, there are things even a former spy doesn’t know.”

“We both know you are more observant than that.”
“I still make mistakes”, his friend added grimly. “We’ve had a lot of fun for quite some time now. When Dorian left with the Inquisitor the last time before Satinalia they went to meet with Dorian’s father, that fucking scumbag— Anyway, Dorian did not ask me to come with him. Which is his right, it’s just…”

“He didn’t ask you.”

“He came back and told me what happened and I thought it was actually a good thing. His father… he apologized. Something shifted. Dorian is a sweet guy and he’s gentle and cares more than he shows to others. I thought I was doing everything I needed to do, but it seems I have failed along the way. I don’t know, Barris. Qun doesn’t have—“

“Oh, for fucks sake, Bull. We both know you had been out of Qun for longer than you’d like to admit. You lost your eye for Krem. You treat your Chargers like you’re their father. Don’t give me that self-pitying bullshit of not knowing what love is.”

“Look at you, kid”, the Iron Bull groaned and then chuckled. “You got the girl and now you’re acting all superior.”

“All I am saying”, Delrin smiled, “is that you can trust yourself on how you feel. What you have failed to show could be one thing. But you know how you feel.”

“Is that all the price of sharing your tent?”

“Yes. But I don’t pry or badger. Consider it done until you bring up the topic again.”

“Thanks, kid. Now, how are you doing? Besides sulking whenever we’re at the war meeting?”

“Ugh. Don’t even.”

“For a man who was a Templar for a decade you surely have little patience for political badgering.”

“Well, most of that decade I spent in the wilderness, far from that. I am almost inclined to say that I can’t wait to reach the desert and start doing separate missions.”

“You know everybody expects us to handle the dragon.”

“Maker preserve me.”

“I am your best friend. My heart is bruised. It would improve my mood tremendously—“

“You are a tremendous manipulator”, Barris noted amusingly. “Let’s go eat and they play chess or something before making grand plans to start killing dragons, shall we?"

The mealtime was peaceful enough. Skinner controlled her bellicosity, Beau stopped his snarky remarks, Zuzu managed to keep her jokes at the appropriate amount, Grim and Arthur volunteered to dispense the food, Krem and Kirke definitely put some effort into integrating the two teams. Truthfully even though Barris had fought by Bull’s side before, their teams had never merged for the quest before. He already knew that if there was anyone he would be willing to fight alongside, it would be his closest friend and the Bull’s Chargers.

Maxwell Trevelyan came in after dinner when they were having a chest match by the fire, quietly enjoying the evening.
“Don’t mind me”, the Inquisitor said. “I am here just to check on my idiot brother.”

The three men eyed each other and Barris opened the flaps to the tent, gesturing to go inside and sit down.

“Simon and Zuzu just reported for their three hours of the guard duty”, Delrin answered slowly, completely aware that Maxwell knew his younger brother’s schedule.

“Cut the shit, Boss”, Bull laughed, opening the small bottle of whisky. “We all know you’re here for me. How is he?”

“Dorian will be fine. Just give him time.”

“I am doing exactly that”, Qunari frowned. “Am I not?

“Yes”, Maxwell took a sip of his drink. “I know. You will both figure it out, I know you will.”

“Simon is doing very well, by the way”, Barris remarked almost casually.

“I know that too”, the Inquisitor chuckled. “I am not worried about him. He has certainly matured. I can’t even begin to imagine the amount of work that went into that.’

Delrin laughed earnestly.

“He’s good with a sword. Even better with his teammates.”

“I am pleased to hear that. Anyway, Barris, how are you? I noticed your wife certainly seemed eager to kiss you goodbye.”

The wave of warmth and longing flooded Delrin’s body and he couldn’t hide the smirk on his face.

“We are… together”, he replied carefully, guarding his own emotions.

“Boss, he is beyond smitten”, Bull giggled warmly. “It’s sickening.”

“Good things should happen to good people”, Maxwell raised his glass to toast. “I’ll drink to that.”

The night came over them. Bull shifted on his side of the tent, looking over the reports from Cullen and possible plans for attack. Delrin sat on his bedroll, his notebook open, sketching Mira’s sleeping face from memory.

“No fucking way”, Qunari roared. “You are much worse sap than I anticipated.”

“You are welcome to share the tent with the Chargers”, Delrin did not lose his calm at all.

“Come on, kid. That is a great drawing. You’re completely helpless, aren’t you?”

“I miss my wife”, he shrugged. “I won’t be ashamed of that.”

“I bet you will really miss her after all this time in the desert”, Bull looked at him knowingly and Barris groaned frustratingly.
I have much to look forward to”.

Something flickered in Bull’s eyes as he smiled to himself.

“What?”, Delrin probed.

“Nothing, kid.”, his friend responded. “I am just genuinely happy for you.”

Second Week of Firstfall, Dragon Age 9:42, Skyhold

Unsurprisingly, Mira was spending a lot of her free time in Cassandra’s company. Seeker would train her a bit, although that was a hopeless effort. They would eat their meals together and they would hang out at each other’s quarters quite a lot. Mira would whine about missing Delrin, Cassandra would whine about her crush on Cullen, though the last few days her thoughts seemed to be preoccupied with something else. Cass was simply more on edge. At first Mira assumed it was merely about being trapped inside the fortress while everyone was doing missions, but there was additional tension there.

“Spit it out”, Mira demanded her friend. “I can see it all over you. You’re just like me, horrible at hiding how you feel.”

“Varric is avoiding me”, Seeker stated with a mixture of deep hurt and anger that took Mira by surprise.

The was always a lot of irritability between the pair, but it appeared to be the natural part of their dynamic.

“Oh”, Mira said. “Why… why is that such a big problem?”

The fire in Cassandra’s eyes was definitely of a dangerous kind.

“The Inquisitor is needed in the Western Approach to close the rifts. He is the only person capable of doing it. I was tasked with staying here to meet an important contact. As it turns out, it is Varric’s contact. If that is who I think it is… Maker preserve me, I will murder the dwarf in the cold blood.”

“Murder is immoral”, Mira rubbed Cassandra’s shoulder.

“Must you too remind me?”, Seeker groaned frustratingly.

“That is certainly what true friends are for”, she replied softly and Cassandra finally smiled.

“Barris is certainly not the only one who got lucky.”

“If you deploy, I will write you letters too.”

“I will hold you to that promise. How are you doing? I know you miss him much.”

“I do”, she answered tenderly. “The letter will be delivered to the forward camp, so this is the longest I haven’t heard from him. But, you know… I keep busy.”

It was easy to say those words when she was with Cassandra during daylight. The nights when Mira worked were also easy. The nights that she had off were hard. The quarters were cold and empty, with all the signs of his presence carefully tucked away and hidden. Even when Mira
started the fire, the room still seemed cold without him. The bed felt empty. The hadn’t even shared it for a long time, but his arms were her own safe haven. The rush of the fresh infatuation, the carefully crafted trust and intimacy and desperate longing mixed in together and Mira realized the obvious. She loved Delrin.

They had never used those words, but they had used other ones. He told her she had his heart. He told he she was the most important person in his life. He told her she was his home. He was her husband, she wanted to give him everything, and she loved him.

The boldness of that statement, the audacity of it would perhaps scare her otherwise, but in the quiet solitude she couldn’t deny herself the truth, even if it was bold and daring and wonderfully frightening at the same time.

Third Week of Firstfall, Dragon Age 9:42, The Western Approach

Finally, after two weeks of riding day by day, all the forces managed to reach the Western Approach. Scout Harding welcomed everyone at the first forward camp with her cheery voice and concerning news about Warden activity far to the West. Barris already knew that this would need to be investigated but at first, they needed to clear the territory of other enemies, including the Venatori, the bandits and brutal wildlife.

“In short”, Lace ended her speech, “this might just be the worst place in the entire world.”

It sure sounded like that. He loathed the desert.

Barris picked up his correspondence from the forward camp’s provisional rookery. He immediately recognized Mira’s handwriting but there was no time to sit down and read. He carefully hid the letter in his armor. The first camp was too small for everyone’s needs so Bull, Delrin, Rylen and Belinda decided to go west and carve out some way forward to start another encampment. Maxwell and his party headed in similar direction but taking a different route, planning to deal with at least two rifts nearby, marked on the maps provided by the scouts.

The travel was not too difficult. To be entirely honest, neither the captains nor Bull broke any sweat. All the hyenas encountered by them got slaughtered by their soldiers, and Barris was curious to see how other squadrons were faring in battle in comparison to his own. He had training sessions with both Belinda’s and Rylen’s men, but working together was a different challenge. The templars from each group seemed to find themselves most comfortable with the situation. This was not entirely surprising, those who used to be a part of the Order were trained to fight collectively. The mages needed to suddenly account for many more bodies onto the battlefield. He wasn’t worried about Beau but he was pleased to notice that Lavellan definitely restrained herself successfully and provided support to anyone who needed. They were not the same group as months ago when he recruited them. Even Simon and Zuzu got enough experience to develop good habits by now. He didn’t need to remind anyone about barriers. He didn’t need to provide too many orders at all. They knew what they had to do and when.

“Look at that”, Kirke mused by his side, not even bothering to unsheathe the sword when all the youngsters took over the pack of hyenas. “Your children have grown.”
“Tssssk”, Belinda clicked her tongue with satisfaction. “And now we’re mortified of teenage rebellion.”

“They have no idea”, Rylen muttered, “how this desert will punish them.”

“Give it three days”, Barris chuckled.

The canyon from both sides protected them from the winds and the sand getting into their eyes, but Delrin knew that they were at height disadvantage. He wouldn’t want to be ambushed in one of the corridors between the cliffs. Sure enough, they spotted Venatori patrolling portion of it. Still, their combined forces had almost unfair advantage. The rest of Tevinter mages had to be hiding in the ruins visible in one of the canyons.

“Not today”, Bull said when they decided to pass it.

“We have already made our presence known”, Rylen pointed at Venatori bodies.

“That was unavoidable”, Belinda shrugged. “We could go in but now securing the encampment is the priority. Something tells me that Venatori will be there when we’re back.”

The sun was already low when they reached an open desert. The sudden coolness sent the shiver down Delrin’s spine. They would need to keep a careful watch after dark given the risk of darkspawn attacks. The Griffon Wing Keep, an old Warden outpost glistened on the horizon. The scout reports have said that Wardens had disappeared from there, and now the fortress have been occupied by the Venatori. Barris knew that this would be their goal as soon as possible. Securing it was the necessary step to provide optimum safety and means for other objectives.

“That is my new home, I suppose”, Rylen examined the building from afar as the soldiers worked on setting up tents and preparing provisions. “They can’t see us from here?”

“No”, Delrin responded confidently. “But they will find out sooner than later. I’d rather attack as soon as we can.”

“Maxwell should join us tonight. Normally I’d say to attack in the dusk but with the darkspawn…”

“I agree”, Barris nodded. “I’d rather do it during the day, especially as we have more people than usual.”

“No siege equipment thought”, Rylen noticed.

“Magic should be enough to breach the gate. It’s an old outpost in the middle of nowhere. We could send few rogues tonight—“

“But darkspawn”, the Templar finished. “I don’t think there’s any need. We have taken keeps before.”

“Not from Venatori, but there’s always first time for everything”, Delrin chuckled. “Let’s create the guard shift schedule while we eat and wait for the Inquisitor.”

The Inquisitor arrived late, accompanied by Dorian, Sera, Blackwall and Cole. He approved the plan for tomorrow’s attack on the Keep with the forces they had and the soldiers were notified of
the orders. Nobody stayed up tonight, every person eager to catch some rest before the crucial task that the daylight would bring.

There was little sound except the wind and the sand hitting the fabric of the tent when Delrin laid down to read the letter from Mira before going to sleep. He was too focused and too busy to think about her during the day. He knew that as quests would appear, most days would be like that. That short time of rest before drifting away into the night was the time when yearning took over his heart.

Before he even tore the envelope, his mind brought up so many memories. Since the moment they kissed, Mira spent each night in his arms, her body melting into his, so trusting and warm. Without the weight of her head on his chest he felt as if there was a part of him missing.

He opened up the letter.

Her handwriting became slightly neater, with less blots, though still pretty horrid. She must have gotten used to the inkwell at this point.

____________________________________________

Delrin,

I have thought about maybe adopting a term of endearment for you, but pretty much no one else calls you by your name, and that feels endearing enough.

I tried taking notes to not forget everything I wanted to include in my letter but I am afraid I failed miserably. The last several days had been busy and between spending time with your parents and the work in the infirmary I kept myself occupied. By the time I send it, you will be halfway through your destination. By the time you’ll receive it, it will be waiting for you at the forward camp and I hope it will bring you some comfort.

Your parents left three days ago. Your mother was certainly eager to spend time with me and your father remained indifferent for the most part. I have to say that at this point I know your family history reaching the Storm Age. I was also told a lot about your brother and his family and even any distant relatives that you might have. Thankfully I was spared from being asked too many questions but I certainly listened to many stories. The most adorable ones were surely those from your own childhood.

I am not sure if you could even remember that but apparently at one point in your childhood when you were four of five you disappeared from the castle. It was wintertime, and the days were short, the dusk arrived early. Your mother came into your bedroom to check up on you and you were gone, nowhere to be found. Your mother panicked, thinking you went out of the castle and froze somewhere or decided to step on the frozen river and the ice cracked underneath your weight and you drowned. Needless to say, your father called for the search, your brother and the guards were sent into the woods and the meadows and the village, your mother and the maids were frantically looking through the whole castle, searching every room. Do you have any recollection of that? I wonder, since you were so young. They did find you, eventually, sleeping in the Mabari kennels, tucked in with Shara, your favorite dog. Your father said that Shara was neither the smartest, nor the strongest, nor the most obedient Mabari, but she was surely the one who loved you more than any other person, and you loved her more than anything or anyone. You loved that dog certainly more than you loved your brother, as your mother added.

I have to say, I did enjoy all the anecdotes about the little you. You were apparently the sweetest kid and somehow I do actually believe that. Goodness though, your poor mom. The amount of
times you wandered away somewhere is actually terrifying. It amazes me she has not even one gray
hair after everything she went through.

I like your mom a lot. She was very kind and warm towards me and she certainly was talking about
you non stop. I think she had been missing you for the last sixteen years. She asked me so many
questions about you. It actually made me realize I know more about you than I thought. Your father
was more reserved and quiet and barely spoke to me during the whole stay. He did ask me one
question though on the last night as we dined together before they left.

He asked me if we would like a Mabari as a belated wedding gift. I might have slightly panicked
and I know what Mabari mean in Ferelden and I didn’t want to say anything offensive so needless
to say, the next time your father breeds a litter we will be getting a Mabari puppy. I do feel slightly
guilty for agreeing to it without asking you first, but you are a dog-loving Fereldan and I just spent
four days alone with your parents while also working twelve hours shifts so I feel you would not
fault me too much.

The truth is that I try to keep myself busy, and I do, The work is plenty, and there are new
challenges coming, new implementations for our methods. More research. Now that most troops
are gone from Skyhold and spread all across Thedas for various missions there is more time for
various projects and I certainly cannot complain about the lack of things to fill my day.

Still, there’s always that one moment when I come back to our quarters and find them empty. Each
day I open the map and try to guess where you might be, and each time its further away from me.
When the daylight subsides and I am alone, I think of you. I had to learn how to start a fire in our
fireplace because the nights are chilly and the bed feels cold without you. Even at our busiest, your
mere presence made all the difference. I miss everything about you. I miss kissing you goodnight. I
miss how warm you are. I miss the way you smell. I can’t believe I am admitting it willingly but I
took out your dirty shirt out of the hamper and I have been wearing it to bed, just to feel your scent
covering me. How foolish to admit it in writing, but perhaps it will make you feel cozy in the
evening when you’re reading my words.

I hope your travel to the Western Approach had been uneventful. Boring, even. Is it wrong for me
to hope for things to be boring for you? It probably is, and I know I can’t selfishly expect for you to
not get in harms way. Still, my heart always hopes that you are safe. My mind gets plagued with
those stupid mundane thoughts that never accompany me when you’re here. Are you eating well,
are you sleeping well, are you warm enough? I know you can take care of yourself. I know you can
take care of others, too. Even so, I want to be the one to take care of you after a long day of travel
or work. I would love to kiss your tiredness away, to become your solace whenever you need me. I
am here, and there are mountains and forests and even a desert between us, but I am here, and I
am waiting for you to come home and rest in me.

Stay safe. I know you will, but please allow me to still write that to you.

Write me back when you can, however brief your letter might be. I know I would be notified had
something happened, but it’s your words I eagerly await. Whatever else you might add to your
letter, I will treasure it. That all reminds me - have you drawn a portrait of me before? I am
guessing you have from your mother’s comments. You certainly have never admitted that to me
though.

Write me about anything you want. I want to hear whatever you’re willing to share.

You have my heart, so carry it with you.

Yours,
The outpouring love made him feel anew, washing away the frustration, the tiredness, the anticipation of the fight.

For a moment, until he fell asleep, Delrin at peace.

It was a gift.

Chapter End Notes

This is a transition chapter, the next one will have more action. As usual, there will be at least one letter per chapter when they are away.

Next time: Assault on Griffin Wing Keep and we get to meet Varric's contact at Skyhold.
Longing

Chapter Summary

Barris fights for the Griffin Wing Keep and Mira meets Varric’s contact.

Chapter Notes

Slight NSFW at the end of the chapter - very subtle

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Third week of Firstfall, 9:42 Dragon Age, Western Approach

The plan of attack on the Griffin Wing Keep was not complicated. Use magic to breach the gates, use the long distance fighters to secure the perimeter despite the height disadvantage, charge with the warriors. Between Barris, Rylen, Belinda and the Templars under their command they could successfully use Templar powers as long as the mages fighting on their side were kept further away, out of harm’s way. If Venatori had any disadvantage, it was the lack of familiarity with the powers behind the southern Templar Order.

Funny, Delrin thought to himself. It had been over a year since the last time he took lyrium and since then he got freed from it, though not through any effort of his own. His mind felt clearer, his emotions purer, but he was never sure whether it was freedom from lyrium or just freedom from the Order, freedom to pursue goals he truly believed in. Casting seemed different as well, easier and brighter, and even the fact that it was only due to the touch of the Spirit of Faith had stopped bothering him as much.

What bothered him now a bit was the Templar-dominant approach, just for the sake of the mages fighting under their leadership. After all those months, they did not seem uncomfortable. Nonetheless, they were witnessing the reality strengthen all around them as the Venatori got struck by Silence or the Smite, followed by sharp slashes of the unforgiving metal. The reminder of the Mage-Templar War was clear for anyone involved. Two years ago, some standing together today were standing opposite of each other. How quickly the world had turned.

The plan was solid, though as per usual, planning was easier than executing it. There were elite Spellbinders among the Venatori able to conjure the superior barriers, making Templar casting less effective than Barris wished for it to be. The biggest problem proved to be the issue of who was in the command. They did everything they could to prevent it, and unanimously decided to give the final say to Rylen. He was after all the one to stay as the Griffin Wing Keep commander. The only person who seemed to ignore it on the battlefield was the man used to being in charge.

The Inquisitor Maxwell Trevelyon himself.

Trevelyon was a very good swordsman. That was certainly true. Nonetheless, Maxwell was used to fighting alone, supported only by few members of his Inner party. This was a serious military operation. The Inquisitor lunged forward twice already when Rylen wanted them to step back,
forcing their hand. Rylen seemed seriously pissed.

“Belinda, and I will cover the right. Barris, Bull—“

“We got it”, Qunari shouted, gesturing to his Chargers while Delrin signaled his squadron.

“Maker’s breath”, Kirke panted on his right side, running up the stairs while shielding herself from the enemy’s spells. “I never thought I’d say those words but it seems we got the cautious one of the Trevelyan brothers.”

Barris snorted, glancing at Simon few steps behind them. “Don’t tell him that.”

“After all this running I might not speak ever again. It’s a keep! It won’t escape when we take our time!”

“Well, we serve at the pleasure.”, he replied frustratingly.

Truthfully, Kirke was probably the only one allowed to complain as much during the battle. She was the oldest out of everyone under his command and had invaluable city guard experience. Clarissa Thornhall was his official Second-in-Command, but Kirke Janion was his right hand.

He gestured towards Simon, who thankfully paid attention. They cast Silence together, breaking through the barrier right for Kirke to thrust her sword forward. In the corner of his eye he saw Clarissa and Arthur do the same for Krem who bludgeoned Venatori’s head with the war hammer. Bull’s laughter roared somewhere in the background.

It was the Inquisitor that got to Macrinus first, accompanied by Dorian, the only mage permitted so close. Rylen quickly joined them as well, while Barris, Belinda and Bull dealt with the remaining Venatori guarding their leader. The marksman’s arrow almost brushed against Bull’s neck while Krem huffed at his Chief disapprovingly.

They lost no one, though it came close for Johan, the Templar from Belinda’s unit and Giovanna, the former crow fighting in Rylen’s squadron. Before anyone even gave the orders, Barris could see Zuzu and Beau rushing in to help, aided by two other mages.

Lavellan’s hands were quick to tie a tourniquet around Giovanna’s leg as Beau used his hands to heal the wound. Delrin knew that Ellendra invited many mages to volunteer at the infirmary, and he was also aware that Mira provided basic instructions relating to first aid to anyone who listened. To see it used in a real fight, and to see it work efficiently felt quite different. It was impressive.

The Inquisition’s flag finally waved over the keep. It was a clear signal for the scouts in the field. The reinforcements from regular troops would come later.

Winning over the fortress was one matter. After helping the wounded there was little time to rest. They needed to transport and burn the cadavers, inspect the premises, procure new temporary gate, plan for the guard watch, set up the living spaces and produce a meal. The water well inside the keep had been contaminated by corpses, so now the alternative solution was needed because they only had resources for just three more days. Surely there were also reports to write. That was Rylen’s responsibility now, and Barris focused on more physical and prosaic tasks.

Dorian could proclaim Imperial superiority in many aspects, but from Delrin could see here, this horde of Venatori proved to be rather filthy and disorganized. There was a lot to do.

The rest of the soldiers arrived later in the evening, and suddenly the work got quickly finished, but Barris realized that it meant that their needs became more pressing and there would be a mountain
of work in the next several days on top of fighting their way further.

The Inquisitor was gone the next morning to travel to close as many rifts as possible. That would make their operations that much easier. Barris and Bull went out and helped securing the water source, which required killing a very pesky wyvern and dealing with a bunch of angry varghests.

“Warming up for the dragon”, Bull’s remark was indeed very telling.

“Ugh”, Delrin growled, “don’t say it out loud. I bet some in my squadron would be very eager.” He glanced at Simon and Zuzu. There was no way Simon wouldn’t want to impress upon his brother.

“He’s right”, Bull laughed. “That’s the way to get the ladies.”

“Sweet Andraste. You can get the ladies—“

“Remind me”, the Qunari interrupted him, “what is your wedding band made from?”

Barris sighed. It was made from dragon bone of the beast he killed, and Mira called it poetic at one point.

“Have you talked with Dorian?”, he conceded and changed the topic.

“Yeah”, Bull’s face got serious. “We talked. It’s been good but he’s cautious. He needs more time, and I respect that, and meanwhile I think of ideas that can show him my care.”

“Please tell me”, Barris suddenly gasped at the thought, “that none of those ideas revolve arounds dragons.”

Bull only chuckled in response.

“Captain!”, Lavellan’s excited voice disturbed their conversation. “I think we spotted more varghests!”

“See”, the Qunari poked Delrin with an elbow. “That is the spirit.”

“You do realize you’re not twenty years old anymore?”, he teased his friend.

“Oh, fuck off, Barris”, Bull tapped him on the shoulder. “I could still kick you ass.”

“We share a tent now, mate. I know you have weak knees and issues with your back.”

Bull roared with amusement. It was a good day.

It was evening when Delrin could finally sit down on the fortress walls with his notebook and his drawings. He reread Mira’s letter once again, feeling the yearning spread over his heart. It was three weeks now since he last kissed her, and the end of their separation was not in sight. Why didn’t he simply tell her he loved her? He certainly would now upon seeing her again. He sketched the desert landscape quickly, cliffs visible in the distance. He sealed his letter and found the raven to deliver it. By the Maker, he couldn’t wait to hear from her again.
Mira spent the last several days working with Dagna. Today’s morning she sat down with Ellendra and Helisma discussing points of inquiry necessary to improve their work. It was Ellendra’s idea to start writing everything down to hopefully publish a tome one day to further the medical sciences all over Thedas.

“It seems greedy to keep it ourselves when we do achieve results”, the Enchanter remarked proudly.

It was certainly a way to help mages integrate with the society as well.

Mira cringed at the quality and ethics of any research they could undertake. It was bound to be full of anecdotes, but at the same time, knowing what was beforehand… It was certainly worth the effort. If she hadn’t read “Theories of Disease Origination”, she wouldn’t be working at the infirmary right now. It mattered to share what they knew, even though Mira still sometimes struggled to explain to her co-workers how exactly she came into her knowledge. Still, this was the world where ancient beings threatened its existence, where sickness that could end it came from beneath the earth and where the demons fell off the sky.

Today was expected to be another rather quaint and peaceful day at infirmary, when they be able to diverge their attention towards more theoretical musings. Mira was supposed to draft the letter to Cassandra’s uncle and later get Josephine’s help in editing in.

It was not a quaint and peaceful day. It had barely begun and everyone at Skyhold already heard how Cassandra almost murdered Varric at the barricades and how Cullen came to the dwarf’s defense. It meant that Cass was right about whomever Varric’s contact was. She needed to find her.

Mira’s heart almost stopped when she opened the door to her quarters and saw the letter on the floor. Finally! She knew they were alright from the general news the Inquisition was receiving, but still, after three long weeks, she would finally read his words. She ripped the envelope standing, not even managing to sit down.

There were several drawings inside. The image of the desert, and she wished it wasn’t black and white. Few detailed sketches of the flowers, probably from before Delrin reached the Approach. Then, the portrait depicting her wearing the Satinalia gown. It was—

Goodness.

The love burst inside her and she couldn’t stop from smiling. That was, well, a love letter if there ever was one. How long would it until they saw each other again? The longing flowed through her veins. She kissed the parchment without thinking and placed it carefully on the nightstand.

Cassandra needed her now, and it couldn’t wait any longer. Mira went straight to Seeker’s quarters, hoping to find her there. She knocked on the door to hear the angry voice in response.

“Go away, Leliana!”

“It’s me”, she replied gently and waited.

The door opened and Mira saw Cassandra’s face covered in tears, her nose red, her cheeks puffed up. Oh. Before Cass managed to say anything, Mira gently embraced her.
“I heard about Varric”, she whispered.

“I am certain the whole Skyhold did”, Cassandra muttered bitterly.

“What happened?”

Cassandra sat down on the disheveled bed and hid her face in her palms. Mira rested on the floor, leaning her back on the wall and looking at her closest friend.

“I am sure you know by now how Varric ended up in the Inquisition.”

“He might have mentioned shackles few times, indeed.”

Cassandra grunted irritably but then her features softened.

“The Most Holy planned for the Inquisition to happen even before the Conclave. We hoped for the Conclave to be successful, but we prepared for it to fail. I was tasked with finding both the Hero of Ferelden and the Champion of Kirkwall in hopes of getting either of them to appear at the Conclave and potentially leading the Inquisition. When I was in Kirkwall I recruited Cullen for the cause, and it was then when I… captured Varric. And yes, the bit about me putting the knife through his book during the interrogation was true. The shackles happened only for a short period of time. He does exaggerate, Mira. I am not some careless monster and Varric didn’t seem to understand what was at stake! I asked him repeatedly if he had any knowledge about where the Champion was, and he denied it, and I took him to see the Most Holy anyway, hoping for some resolution. After the worst happened, after the explosion, he remained with us willingly and with time I foolishly have grown rather fond of this lying piece of shit. I thought… Do not ever tell him that, but I trusted Varric and I thought I was his… well, a friend of sort. And now I found out that he knew where the Champion was this whole time! Perhaps if I did a better job explaining myself… Perhaps I am the monster Varric makes me out to be in his stories. I feel I failed… I feel that that was my chance to save the most Holy and I failed. I know it is impossible to say, but could the Champion change the outcome? I don’t know. It does no longer matter. Now I feel betrayed by Varric and that stings more than I thought it could. We had been here for a year now! Varric said he wrote Hawke only a couple of months after arriving in Skyhold but there had been delays of unforeseen nature. I think he wanted for Maxwell to be here as well.”

“Oh, Cass”, Mira patted her friend’s arm. “I am so sorry. That is so much. I can’t be certain, but I am not sure if Hawke could have stopped what happened to the Divine. And you did not fail. You carried on and started the Inquisition. You trusted others to lead and delegated when necessary. You have built something that has meaning. The cause is worthy. That is not benign.”

“Thank you”, Cassandra looked at her tearfully. “There had been many mistakes. I thought… Why do Varric words hurt so much? I have tried to do what was right. I know my faults. I am not personable but if I had explained it better…”

“Cass, if anything in the “Tale of the Champion” is true, Varric would protect Hawke no matter what. Especially after how Kirkwall ended. I don’t know if Conclave was preventable. I don’t know if there was any other outcome than this. I know that Varric should have told you the truth sooner, and I know why you’re upset.”

Cassandra chewed on her words carefully, and sighed.

“Varric lied to me and I believed him. I should have known better but I still believed him. I failed as…”
“It’s not wrong to believe friends, Cassandra.” Mira said gently. “You cannot distrust everyone forever. That’s not the way to live a life… especially when you’re a good person.”

“I still feel like murdering the dwarf.”

“Is the damage irreparable?”

“I hope not”, Cassandra admitted heavily.

“Did he say why he lied?”

“He said he wanted to spare the Champion. That the Chantry had used him and abused him before, and that he deserved better.”

“Ah.”

“Varric is not entirely wrong”, Cassandra acknowledged embarrassedly. “The Chantry… We talked about it few times. I am sure you and Barris discussed it as well. The Chantry did little if anything to deserve trust. Varric blasphemes with every word but he is Andrastian at heart. I lost it on him today. More than he deserves but he made our… friendship or whatever it is meaningless. He clearly doesn’t care.”

“I don’t know if that is true”, Mira mused. “I didn’t know you cared as much about him.”

“Mira?” Cassandra looked at her.

“Yes?”

“Would you mind checking up on Varric? I think he might be at Herald’s Rest, avoiding stepping the foot inside the castle.”

“Of course I will do. And wait, does it mean that I get to meet the Champion? Have you met him?”

“No”, Cassandra flushed. “I only talked with Varric, we never actually made it to… There’s a war meeting tomorrow morning. I am certain my next mission will be alongside Varric, but I can’t bare to try talking with him today.”

“We can talk about something else if you want to.”

“Did you get any news from—“

“Yes! I got letter from Delrin today.”

“Did you?”, her friend’s eyes were full of warmth. “I know how long you’ve waited for it. How is he doing?”

“He’s fine”, Mira answered softly. “You know that. You receive the news from the field, don’t you?”

“Yes, but that is different, isn’t it? You already knew he wasn’t injured or dying either.”

“It is different”, she smiled and looked at Cass’ face lightning up as well in response.

They spent another couple hours talking about anything but Varric and by the time Mira left Seeker’s room, Cassandra was tucked in bed with a large mug of blazing hot tea and the assortment of pastry sitting on the nightstand and the two romance novels she had no chance of reading yet.
She promised that she would calm down and relax until the next morning.

When Mira finally got into Herald’s Rest, she was both hungry and pretty tired. Skyhold was truly quite empty with most forces gone on the missions. There were maybe one or two tables full at the tavern in the afternoon. She ordered a small cider, soup and a roast with horseradish sauce and told Cabot to deliver it to the private dining room. By the look on his face, Varric was certainly occupying it right now, so Mira decided to bring more ale with her just in case. She knocked on the door, and dwarf’s face shyly popped out.

“I come alone and I come in peace”, she said jokingly, walking in.

The man sitting at the table stood up. That had to be Garett Hawke, the apostate mage who became the Champion of Kirkwall. He was handsome in a roguish way, with a dangerous smirk on his face and a head full of disheveled black hair. Mira never had a clear image of the hero of the Tale when she read it, but somehow it wasn’t at all difficult to imagine this was the man.

“Blushes, this is Hawke”, Varric announced more shyly than usual. “Hawke, this is Blush… This is Mira. Hawke is my friend and the…”

“I know who he is, Varric”, she couldn’t help but chuckle. “Mira Barris. Please under no circumstances call me Blushes.”

He smiled in response. “Garett Hawke. Please avoid calling me Garett.”

“Nice to meet you, Hawke.”

“Nice to meet you too, Mira.”

“Mira is working at the infirmary”, Varric explained to his friend. “She has all those ideas about medicine that I mentioned to you—“

“You have been telling tales about me?”, she raised her eyebrows and felt her cheeks warming up.

“Curiously, not that many”, Hawke eyed her keenly. “I would appreciate you sharing some of those ideas. I’ve heard that there are mages working at Skyhold’s infirmary.”

“There are”, she answered calmly. “You cannot heal effectively without magic.”

“Chantry would disagree with you”, Hawke countered.

“And yet, here we are”, she shrugged.

“I knew a mage healer with grand ideas once”, the Champion mused and took a sip of his ale. “I did not end well.”

Cabot knocked on the door and brought Mira her dinner and some snacks for the two men.

“I read the book”, Mira tasted the soup which was as delicious as always. “You’re welcome to visit the infirmary and see for yourself. It’s not the rebellion, but I admit it is a bit of a… revolution. There is transparency in what we do and we try to systemize our approach. You cannot heal effectively without magic but believe me, I know very well that there are things that magic cannot do and you cannot heal without mundane medicine either. We have mundane medics in training, surgeons, mages and an alchemist. If you want to discuss the magical side of operations, it is best
you talk to Ellendra.”

“And if I want to discuss the mundane aspects?”

“Come find me tomorrow at the infirmary. I am there the whole day. I can show you.”

“Coming back to the more pressing matters, Blushes”, Varric sighed dramatically. “Is Seeker—?”

“You’ll live”, Mira responded calmly.

“I know you two are friends but you have to admit—“

“I am not discussing Cassandra with you, Varric. It’s between the two of you and you have to sort it out yourselves. She asked me to see how you were doing.”

“She did?”, Varric looked almost distraught.

“Just… give her some time and talk to her later.”

“I must admit”, Hawke smiled mischievously, “that I am most curious to meet the famed Seeker Pentaghast. Hero of Orlais. The woman who led shackled Varric halfway through Thedas.”

“I am not certain all of it is entirely truthful”, Mira defended her friend while the dwarf feigned shock and hurt of his face.

“Don’t believe everything you have read in Varric’s book about me, either”, the mage chuckled. “I suspect it is not the most accurate account.”

“You’ve never read it?”, she raised her eyebrows in disbelief.

“No”, he stretched himself a bit and then took another sip of the ale. “It seemed too self-indulgent to read about myself.”

They spent the next hour in casual conversation, listening to many of Varric’s stories.

It took Mira good ten minutes to properly start a fire when she came back to her quarters. She wanted the room toasty and warm after she was done with her bath. The pace of the day was almost leisurely, but somehow days like that seemed even more exhausting, especially with everything that happened.

She wore Delrin’s shirt to bed again, although his smell was unfortunately fading. She still could sense it when she closed her eyes, the perfume mixed with the scent of his body. For the split second it felt as if he was back here. She unfolded the letter again and reread it several times, letting the flutter spread throughout her heart.

___________________________________________________________

My dearest Mira,

I am safe and so is my squadron. We have captured the keep that is now the base of the Inquisition’s operations. The rookery is being established here, and I am finally able to write you back and attach every drawing I made during traveling and that includes one of your portraits.

You are correct, I have drawn you before, and I do enjoy looking at the images of your beautiful face when I am away.
Your letter provided more than comfort. Perhaps that is selfish to admit, but my life is infinitely better with you in it. You are so wonderful and caring and warm. I love your incessant will to communicate and connect and I always feel like I can bare my soul to you. I am so fortunate to call you my wife.

I am glad that you had decent time with my parents and I am still sorry for the burden of you going through it alone. My father often seems indifferent, but you must have impressed upon him in some way for him to offer a Mabari pup as a gift. It’s been over a year since I am no longer a Templar and my father could easily bestow me with a dog from his kennel but he never did until he met you. I do not fault you for accepting, by the way. I actually feel very excited. As you well know now, I have always loved dogs and I have always wanted one. Mabarirs are fantastic and I think you will enjoy owning one, too. It’s been years but I don’t think I ever forgot how to interact with dogs.

I don’t recall the events of escaping to the kennels but I have been told this story once or twice by my mother, believe me. I do remember Shara, though. I think some of the earliest memories I have are about playing with her and giving her food underneath the table and the feel of her short fur as I petted her. I think for quite a while all Mabarirs were much taller and bigger than me. I clearly recall that in my mind Shara seemed like the largest dog in the world. I can also certainly confirm that I loved her more than my brother. My brother was twelve years older and he was an arse who never wanted to play with me, which hurt when I was just four or five or six. Obviously, he was always more interested in horses and hunting and girls than his baby brother. By the time I left for the Order he was married and had a child. We never managed to have that much in common, whether because of age difference or our different life experience. My nephew is seventeen now, my niece is fourteen. It’s hard to imagine they will soon be adults.

I know I am not very close to my family despite there never being anything bad happening. I had a great childhood, but the distance later on was quite unforgettable. I mean what I said to you. I know my parents’ ambush was not the subtlest but I also know that meeting you meant a lot for my mother. Still, since you enjoyed their company I would certainly be very happy to take you to Barffield and to introduce you to everyone. I feel like I should have said more when we talked about it. It’s not merely that I don’t depend on parental approval. I am proud to have you by my side and I try to be worthy of you. I am proud to tell anyone that we’re married and I don’t ever want to make you feel unappreciated, because I do appreciate everything that you are. You’re smart and capable and I truly have never talked with anyone the way I talk with you. You’re very kind-hearted. You stand by what you believe. How could I not be in awe of you?

I am glad you’re keeping busy and I know how valuable the work you’re doing is. Actually yesterday both Zuzu and Beau helped with tending to the wounded using the skills they learned while visiting the infirmary. I know you’re worried and I can’t say things are uneventful but please rest assured that so far everything is going smoothly. I eat well, sleep well and I am certainly not cold.

Still, there is nothing that can replace the warmth of your body until I get to have you in my arms again. Forgive my boldness but I imagine you wearing my shirt to bed and that certainly makes me feel… cozy. Mira, I miss you so much. Your kisses make me feel alive. I miss you putting your head on my chest and clinging to me. I miss the moment when your breathing slows down and I know you fell asleep. I miss your laughter. I love hearing you laugh, I love making you laugh, especially when you’re very close and I can feel it all over you. Part of me will never rest until we are together.

I’ve always said that I hate the desert and I still do. However, I am sitting on the barricades and watching the sun going down. The sand and the cliffs suddenly glow with that copper and gold light that reminds me of your red hair reflecting fire. I suppose I truly haven’t told you enough how
lovely I find you. There’s so much I want to say to you when we’re together again. There’s so much I am looking forward to.

I never thought I would marry. I never anticipated finding what we have. It hasn’t been that long, but now I barely recall not knowing you. You are etched into my heart, my soul, my conscience. I truly am a lucky man. I’ve had more luck than I deserve and yet you make me dare to dream and hope for so much more. It has always been right to fight for that world and to fight against evil, and it certainly has always been right to try to change it for a better. Mira, I thought I poured all of me into that task beforehand but I was wrong. Remember what you wrote me in your last letter when I was still in Emerald Graves? I want to give you the world. I want there to be a world to give you. I want to offer you a future.

Everything I am is yours.

Always and truly,

Delrin Barris

Mira imagined Delrin lying in his tent at night, thinking of her and missing her just as much as she missed him. He had always careful and so respectful and more than considerate. He felt safe to be around. His hands never moved beyond her back or her waist and Mira was so certain he would never touch her until he was sure that was what she wanted.

Well, she wanted it. She wanted him.

Of course she felt desire before. After all, she was made of flesh and blood, not stone. It all paled in comparison to everything she was feeling at the moment. The yearning for his presence, the concern for his safety and wellbeing, the sweetness coursing though her veins after reading his words, the totality of the vows between them and the anticipation awaiting his return.

It was not like that when she made her promise, but it was like that right now, and she was his wife and he was her husband, so why wouldn’t it be easy to admit she wanted to give him everything and take everything in return? How could she not want him with all she was, her mind, her heart, her body? It felt so natural, so unquestionable.

She imagined Delrin coming home. Home. Somehow unexpectedly it became home. An imperfect home, built upon loss and pain, but home, filled with love and warmth and so much hope for the future.

The hurt was still there and it would always remain there. Loss would always leave a scar and Mira’s heart was marred with many. What she had imagined for her future was so different than this. There were people missing that should have been a part of her life. Still, what she found in Delrin was true, and and it was simply… love.

She imagined his warm breath by her ear, telling her things he wrote in the letter. She imagined touching him all over his body. She imagined all the things she secretly hoped he would say upon seeing her naked. She imagined his hands, both rough and hardened and so gentle at the same time. His mouth, everywhere. Her thighs wrapped around him.

It would be so —

Oh. Wonderful.
Mira had always been patient. The world was ending, the fight was necessary. There was so much to do, so much that needed to be done. The war didn’t stop just because she fell in love.

Nonetheless.

Tonight she was just a woman longing for her husband.

Chapter End Notes

Next time: Mira spends time with Hawke while Delrin might or might not encounter a dragon. ;)

Thank you for reading and commenting. I love the comments! I really have the most thoughtful readers and I really appreciate you so much.
Dear Mother and Father,

I hope your travel back to Barr Castle was pleasant and comfortable. I am honored that you took the effort to visit us and to meet me. I truly enjoyed the few days we spent together. I just wish you both had more time with Delrin,

I imagine that preparing for the wintertime will keep you both busy. I hope the rest of the hunting season remains successful and that Barrfield stays safe during this difficult time.

Please send my kind regards to Lord Calvin, Lady Catherine and their children. I am hopeful that one day I will meet them as well and see the beauty of Barrfield with my own eyes.

I have faith that we will remain in touch.

Warmest regards,

Mira Barris

Mira sent out the letters to Delrin and his parents first thing in the morning, then rushed to the infirmary. She let Isanna deal with the two recruits requiring wound cleaning after a vigorous sword practice and locked herself in the office with Ellendra and Fiona to start assembling the list of books they needed to further their own studies and expand their point of references.

“‘You know what we truly need?’”, Ellendra tapped her fingers on the desk.

“Access to the White Spire library that no longer exists?”’, Fiona winced painfully.

“‘A visit to Nevarra City and contacts with Mortalitasi’, the Enchanter replied. “Mira, I know you have Nevarran roots, do you have anyone to write to?”

Hardly, Mira thought to herself. Neither Ellendra nor Fiona knew the truth. Most people didn’t.

“I grew up in a cult”, she replied bitterly, sticking to the cover story. “There is not anyone to contact.”
“You know what they say about you sometimes”, Fiona gently scooped the cream from her coffee and licked the spoon.

“What?”, she barked impatiently.

“That you must be”, Fiona clearly relished at the thought, “a daughter of an apostate. Maybe a blood mage. Maybe, as I even recall, a Nevarran witch of the wilds.”

Mira growled. “I do not know who my mother was. I doubt she was anyone unusual. I also do not have any magic as you very well know.”

The bit about not knowing her mother was obviously a lie, and despite the fact she had not seen her in seven years, the pain in her chest was real.

“You do have knowledge that surpasses what most medics possess”, Fiona countered.

“I have knowledge that comes from not being bound by Andrastian superstitions regarding cutting human flesh, Fiona. You read the Nevarran book yourself. I am hardly the only one with such ideas. I would think that you of all people would not listen to gossip. Anyway, Ellendra, I doubt we could manage to travel to Nevarra at this time, but perhaps Josephine could extend an invitation to one of the Mortalitasi or at least some of their assistants? Perhaps von Beust himself?”

“I am going to presume that you did not manage to catch the Ambassador’s attention to send out that letter to Vestalus Pentaghast?”

“No, not yet”, Mira admitted cautiously, “but don’t be surprised if the Champion visits us here today. Also, Cassandra wrote a personal note that ensures her uncle writes us back.”

“Really?”, Ellendra raised her eyebrows, “the Champion of Kirkwall?”

“It seems that some of us who had seen the havoc around Thedas like to watch some mending happen from time to time”, Fiona sighed. “A healthy tendency, if you ask me.”

“He was interested in what we do”, Mira shrugged. “He might or might not come, but if he does, I am sure you can answer all his questions about magic. Meanwhile let me write up some requisitions. Everyone is in the field and we might as well restock properly. I’ll stop and chat with Helisma and visit Dagna. How are the new medics doing?”

“They will do”, Fiona actually smiled to herself. “Stitches certainly takes great pride in providing training.”

“I approved the raise for both Isanna and him, just as you requested”, Ellendra added. “With the new hires we might be reaching our budget constraints soonish.”

“I know”, Mira frowned. “This was a necessary step.”

Mira crossed the threshold to the infirmary several hours and one lunch later and froze at the sight. The sour-looking Cassandra and terrified Varric were both right there, accompanied by Hawke standing with his hands crossed while Ellendra clearly tried to engage them in a polite discussion.

“Oh”, Mira gasped surprised while they all turned towards her.

Cass gave her the look that was a mixture of her typical glowering and silent pleading.
“How can I be of assistance?”, Mira tried joking. “None of you seem to be wounded.”

“Yet”, Varric added grimly as Cassandra groaned loudly. Hawke chuckled without making hardly any noise.

“Hawke insisted on stopping by”, the dwarf explained, glancing at Cassandra from time to time.

“We’re all leaving for Crestwood tomorrow”, Cassandra added, uncomfortably shifting from one leg to another, clearly trying not to look into Varric’s direction at all. “Solas is coming with us.”

Cassandra, Varric, Solas. The three of them who found her in the Fereldan wilderness. The recollection hit her like a ton of bricks. Truthfully, Mira focused on everything but avoided reminiscing about those few days when she was alone and barely surviving. Between trying to assimilate, between the loss of everything from Earth, between her growing feelings towards Delrin it was not difficult to bury some of the memories.

She was not stupid. She knew she would have died there if they didn’t find her.

“It had been suggested”, Cass’ irritated voice interrupted her thoughts, “that me and Varric—“

“Prepare for the travel together”, the dwarf tried maintaining some dignity.

It meant that Josephine and Leliana forced them to fix their issues immediately.

“I was thinking”, Hawke eyed her curiously, “would you mind showing me around the infirmary? I have nothing to do today, as it turns out.”

Mira did not mind at all, especially when Isanna was still around to take care of any incoming patients. Hawke proved to be a great listener. He didn’t talk that much, but she could notice he was interested in he words and he had no problems following the concepts she presented. Eventually Mira simply led him to Ellendra and Fiona, fully realizing that there were questions she herself could not answer as a non mage.

He found her again thirty minutes later.

“It seems that it is the mundane medicine that I am interested in after all. I already know quite the few things about the magical healing.”

She thought about it for a second. The day was slow paced again. Cassandra and Varric were at least trying to maintain some civility before heading out for what she guessed was an important job. She could help out by showing the famed Champion of Kirkwall few things.

She popped her head into the office and asked Ellendra and Fiona whether she could a day off to teach Hawke about first aid. They didn’t mind. Honestly, it was a welcoming distraction. Hawke certainly seemed to be more attentive that the poor recruits.

Mira grabbed her medical bag and they headed to the castle finding one of the training rooms. With so many soldiers gone, Skyhold truly seemed empty.

She took a deep breath and started describing the basics of the combat first aid protocol the infirmary managed to establish for the troops, and then she got Hawke to practice. She even taught him several stitching techniques and gave him a neat first aid kit with all the necessary tools, modeled on the one that Bull presented her with when they first talked about medicine. Hawke was quicker with his hands that most mages she have met, but then the Tale itself mentioned that he was a skilled dagger fighter as well and he successfully hid his abilities during the first years of
“You’re not half bad”, she praised him after examining the piece of pig skin showing a very evenly done continuous suture.

“I will consider a change in career”, his eyes twinkled, “once certain ancient darkspawn drops dead for real this time.”

Mira laughed.

They finally sat down on the floor and Mira passed her water bottle to Hawke.

“Where are you from, Mira?”, the question came unexpectedly after he took several sips and gave her the water back. She flustered a bit and felt the sudden heat hitting her face. She never enjoyed lying, and part of the reason it worked so well in Thedas was simply due to the fact that very few people asked her specific questions.

She provided him with the standard answer.

“You’re lying”, he said quietly. There was no accusation in his voice, but it was the first time someone challenged her and the cold shiver went down her spine. They were completely alone, he was a powerful and experienced mage who achieved so much and Mira simply didn’t know what to say. What was the point of denying the truth? He already knew she was lying.

She swallowed the saliva.

The guilty frown fell upon Hawke’s face.

“Listen”, she knew he made his voice softer and gentler. “You don’t need to say anything. I don’t… I asked Varric some questions about you last night and he lied to me. I can always tell when he’s lying. It’s… bizarre. I am perceptive, and there’s something bizarre about you, too.”

“Well, thank you”, she raised her eyebrows.

“The Veil is thin in Kirkwall”, he added as if he was talking to himself. “I have few theories… Anyway, I’ve seen some shit. I might be completely wrong, but I sense the tiniest, the faintest trace of Fade from you. It’s… weird.”

She sighed loudly and closed her eyes while leaning her head onto the wall.

“Only few people know”, she eventually said. “Don’t—“

“I would not tell anyone”, he promised. “I don’t need to know myself either. I am mostly curious about if it’s only bizarre or truly fucked up.”

“The demons fall from the sky”, she replied grimly. “Do you really count on it being merely bizarre?”

“Well”, he hesitated.

“I fell out of the fucking sky too”, she interrupted him quietly. “I am not from here. I am from… beyond the Fade.”

Hawke had to be prepared for some answer, but there was still much shock on his face.
“You’re not lying”, he remarked and it again was not a question.

“No.”

“Well, shit”, the mage muttered to himself. “Fuck. And Varric knows?”

“Varric, Cassandra and Solas are the ones that found me”, Mira could feel her heart thudding inside her ribcage. “I fell out of the rift south of Hinterlands and then just… tried to survive in the wilderness until they literally stumbled upon me. No one knows how or—“

“So, your world—“

“I don’t know what happened. I assume it still exists, it’s just… out there, far far away. I don’t know if crossing the worlds affects time but it probably does. I know enough about physics to know it’s not merely a door that can be opened from both sides. I know the Inquisitor went though Fade, but… it was not just the Fade for me. It was more. My world didn’t even have magic. It didn’t have dragons, it didn’t have dwarves—“

“You just listed my favorite things”, Hawke joked quietly and Mira couldn’t help but to smile.

“So different”, she whispered and wrapped her arms across her chest.

“Well, shit”, Hawke repeated and looked at her. “So the things you know, medicine—“

“Yes”, at this point she could be as open as she wanted to. “I was a medic and our medicine was more advanced in so many ways. I’m just trying… Ellendra and Fiona do not know either. Just… assume almost no one knows. The Inquisitor does.”

“I won’t tell anyone”, he promised and she felt she could trust his word. “How the fuck did they hide your identity? I mean, just how did you—“

“They married me off”, she answered and felt the shame spread around her chest. Those words were certainly not enough to describe what she and Delrin had, but at the same time that was how their relationship came to be.

“Fuck”, Hawke certainly did not mind the ornate language. “I guess that could work.”

“I try to tread carefully”, she noted. “No one has ever challenged me until you. When Cassandra found me I simply told the truth. It was after that… well, I had to hide where I am from. I want to. I’m just a regular person, Hawke, and I was told that Venatori or Corypheus could be very interested in someone who physically crossed through the Fade even though there is nothing special about me.”

Hawke messed his hair. “Did I scare you?”

“Well, yes”, she looked at him surprised. “And now you basically said you sensed the Fade on me and—“

“No”, he interrupted her. “It is the faintest… if it was not for Varric and his lies I wouldn’t have noticed and believe me, even with all I actually have noticed I still did not think you were from another world.”

“I suppose that is some consolation”, she let out a deep breath.

“I am sorry. That was an asshole move to corner you like that.”
“It’s fine”, she replied calmly. “I’m just a bit shaken.”

“Are you hungry? Let me at least buy you dinner as an apology.”

“Sure”, she smiled. “Do you think the tavern still stands after Varric and Cassandra spent some time there?”

“We shall see”, Hawke laughed openly, revealing his sharp teeth.

Neither Varric nor Cassandra were anywhere in sight, so they decided to grab food and drinks on their own. Hawke became more talkative and shared quite a few stories from his time at Kirkwall. The food was delicious, the ale was good, and Mira actually felt herself relaxing even though the uncomfortable feeling of being discovered remained. She did not fault Hawke. If anything, he did seem honest and forthright. Still, Mira did so much to ensure her identity would remain hidden. Could what happened with Hawke happen again? Lying to him would be complicated, and he was friends with Varric. He had more knowledge than most people. Perhaps lying to someone else would prove easier. Nonetheless, the evening turned out to be nice and she could clearly see what made Hawke such a compelling protagonist in the Tale. His real life persona seemed calmer and more reserved that his literary counterpart but perhaps he himself changed over the course of the last few years.

At the end of the evening he walked her out of Herald’s Rest and Mira felt the frosty air of the night suddenly hit her face.

“We’re leaving the first thing in the morning, so I won’t see you tomorrow. Thanks for today. It was nice meeting you, Mira.”

“It was nice meeting you to, Hawke”, she replied and she meant it.

“Unless you want to spend the night with me”, he added casually.

Oh.

It did catch her by surprise. He did not seem flirtatious, he had not paid her any compliments beforehand and there was no tension between them. Now there was a spark in his eyes, but nothing more. Mira was quite aware that he was not proposing romance, or even an affair, but just a few hours together.

She blinked few times.

“I’m married.”

“I know”, he acknowledged dismissively. “I don’t mind if you don’t.”

“Well, uhm... Thank you, I guess, but uhm, no”, if the response came out weird it was due to the whole thing being so unexpected.

Hawke did not press and did not ask for any explanations. He merely respected her refusal and bid her friendly and polite farewell. Mira was not offended by his advances. She had simply not anticipated that and she knew she certainly was not flirty or encouraging today.
The fire flickered gently as Mira lay in her bed to settle for the night. She hoped to catch Cassandra tomorrow morning to at least ask her about her day with Varric. With Delrin and Cass both gone, Mira imagined that Skyhold would feel even emptier than currently.

The flush of warmth and fondness fell over Mira when her thoughts turned towards Delrin. Hopefully he would receive her letter quickly and respond right away because the yearning in her heart was overwhelming. She wanted to take him far away from the war, from the desert, from Skyhold. Somewhere far, somewhere safe, somewhere where they could be alone, just the two of them, for a few days. The place where she would whisper things into his ear she had not ever told anyone else. Her cheeks reddened as she reminded herself what she already included in her letter. It would still feel different to say it in person. She would whisper that she loved him, all of him, his heart, his mind, his body. She would kiss him everywhere just to prove it. He would smile and laugh happily as she would tell him how much she wanted him, needed him. She wanted to bare her soul, her heart and her body. It would be just them, Delrin and Mira. The world would never stop turning, the war would not cease, but for a moment the only thing remaining would be the wonder between them.

***************

Fourth week of Firstfall, 9:42 Dragon Age, Western Approach

In the least surprising development, they ended up needing to hunt the dragon. Two men patrol got ambushed when they diverted too close to the beast’s hunting grounds. Something needed to be done, and Bull raised the good point that they actually had the most experience, however small it was. Nonetheless, Barris was slightly worried about bringing his squadron into the battle, even though both Lavellan and Trevelyan seemed beyond excited. Perhaps that excitement was the cause of Barris’ concerns.

“Don’t worry”, Bull chastised him as they left the safety of the Keep. “You worry too much about them.”

“It is my job to keep them alive”, Delrin replied and the weight of his past suddenly felt so heavy. Bull’s face immediately became serious.

“Barris”, Qunari lowered his voice. “Do you think me careless with the lives of my boys?”

“Never”, he answered truthfully.

“I fight the high risk reaver style”, Bull admitted, “but that is me. I don’t command recklessly, and you certainly don’t either. It’s one dragon. I would prefer to have Cassandra or Viv here instead of you but you’re not half bad with that sword, and your squadron is not half bad either.”

The tiny smirk appeared on Barris’ face. “Half bad? My men are certainly more disciplined than yours.”

“Don’t push it”, Bull’s gave him the amused look. “Today is a good day. Today is a very good day indeed.”

“Captain!”, Clarissa’s stern voice interrupted them. “I think this is the tent of that Orlesian professor whom we have received reports about.”

Delrin squinted his eyes, and surely, there was a hut near Nazaire’s Pass and a lone figure paced around in. The Inquisitor and his party met him when they were closing the rifts in the area, and helped with few things. The report suggested that Frederic was certainly dedicated to his work,
perhaps recklessly so. It seemed he had been left alone by both the Venatori and the White Claw bandits, presumably because they were more interested in the dragon itself.

They approached the man calmly. He did not seem to be surprised seeing the Inquisition’s crest on their armor.

“Professor Frederic?”

“You came to kill her, didn’t you?”, the Orlesian muttered sorrowfully.

“I’m Captain Delrin Barris and this is the Iron Bull, from the Inquisition. Two of the soldiers were killed yesterday”, Barris measured his words but Bull gestured towards him to shut up.

“I know they were”, Frederic sighed heavily. “I saw her flying out there. The hunting patterns of the high dragons were never really studied, and I wish I could give you more. I… It saddens me it came to this. I understand, but she is… beautiful.”

“Majestic”, Bull interjected dreamily and Delrin raised his eyebrows while Krem gently coughed into his arm. “We will give her the fight she deserves.”

I fucking hope not, Barris thought to himself. He wished for the fight to end very quickly, for all of their sakes.

“I gave your Inquisitor the idea for the bait, but—“

“We have it all”, Delrin reassured the man.

“I think the White Claws have set out their own bait in the south. Obviously that did not work. You’ll need to destroy it and they might interfere. They have never bothered me but I have seen their fighters few times.”

“Consider it all done”, Bull placed his hand on the arm of the professor. “I am sorry it had come to this, my friend.”

They listened to everything that Frederic could share about the Abyssal High dragon and headed further south.

“I am so glad that you are so concerned about the dragon’s wellbeing, Chief”, Krem complained. “Not us. The dragon. The fight she deserves! It is not a tournament duel, you do realize that?”

“You might whine”, Bull grinned. “I am going to enjoy that fight!”

“Perhaps it will make you rethink your wardrobe choices”, Kirke looked at Bull’s exposed chest. “That thing does breathe fire, you know?”

“Some like it hot”, the Iron Bull winked and they all laughed.

They sent out few people to destroy the traps while they assessed the terrain to try to come up with the battle plan and watched for the signs of the White Claws. Sure enough, the raiders eventually appeared, but stood no chance against their numbers. Both Bull and Barris remained in the back, issuing rare orders and assessing each other’s men. The difficulty lied in merging both of the groups together, but they had done several joint missions at this point and Delrin had to admit that everything was going relatively smoothly. The bandits were not highly trained, just one of the
hundreds of mercenary groups for hire available in poorer areas of Thedas.

“Simon improved his technique by far”. Bull noticed quietly and Barris’ chest filling with pride.

“He did, didn’t he?”

“I give him five years and he will be better than you”.

“Well, that is the goal, isn’t it?”, Delrin chuckled. “I see Dalish still refers to her staff as a bow.”

“Old habits die hard.”

“She does seem to have a wider range of spells.”

“Believe it on not, but it was Vivienne who apparently told her that bow hunting was her pastime in Ghislain. This is the result.”

“The Iron Lady indeed”, he laughed loudly, his eyes still focused on the battlefield.

“Tell me it doesn’t get your blood going, kid. The fight, the dragons…”

“Of course it does. But you know what else gets my blood going? My wife whom I promised I will be back.”

“I am sure she will appreciate you and your mighty sword—“

“Sweet Andraste!”

Bull roared until their men returned, and then just muttered to himself. “Today is indeed a very good day.”

The allure of fighting the almost mystical creature proved to work, because both the Chargers and his own squadron looked genuinely excited, even though the more experienced members certainly knew how to tame their enthusiasm. Bull was not wrong though. Even Delrin felt the tingling in his veins, muffled only by the concern fo those under his command.

“Listen to me and remember the plan”, he told his unit. “and remember to keep your defenses up. That thing breathes fire and you can get burned so easily. Morve and Merle, you focus on providing us with subterfuge. The more the dragon is confused about our location the better. Try keeping your distance. Remember that fucking beasts flies, and this is a desert, there is very little terrain advantage. Use any rocks or ruins to cover yourself. Lavellan—“

“Keep the barrier”, she rolled her eyes at him.

“Cut the tone now and no, I want you to rain the ice spells on that dragon. Throw a barrier here and there when it’s advantageous. Beau—”

“I will certainly provide you with superior defense”, the mage stated while glaring at Zuzu. Their rivalry was well known within the squadron.

“Very well”, Delrin sighed. “Clarrisa, Kirke, Arthur, Simon and I will do most of the offense. Trevelyan, don’t rush and do anything stupid. Stay on the tail side and keep your shield up high. I will try attacking more from the front. More importantly, do not get into anyone’s way, especially Bull’s. Krem is covering Simon, so that’s good. Clarrisa, you’re with Arthur, and Kirke and I will try to cover Bull—”
“I am not certain he is aware of that concept”, Kirke frowned gently.

“You have seen him fight and I’ve fought with him quite a few times myself. He’s a risk taker but he is very good. Concern yourself more with your own protection if need be. He’ll do fine.”

Bull gestured towards them and they all split, setting themselves behind the stone boulders and waiting. It could take several hours, but Frederic was pretty adamant that this bait would be quite irresistible for the Abyssal High Dragon.

“There is”, Qunari breathed the hot air loudly, “something sensual about the anticipation, isn’t there?”

“I am personally partial to a candle lit dinner”, Kirke muttered heavily. “We’ll see how sensual you’ll find it when we’re almost fried.”

“Ha! I have always liked your practicality, Kirke. If you ever get bored under Barris' command, let me know. We do actually have casual Fridays unlike you guys.”

“No fucking way”, Barris gritted half amused, “you’re not stealing my best fighter.”

Kirke smiled to herself, clearly enjoying the compliment.

“And here she comes”, she announced and then they all heard it. The loud thudding noise split the sky open, the heavy flap of the wings lifted up the sand around them and Delrin lowered the visor of his helmet to not let it blind him. He first noticed the giant shadow, and then looked up and there she was, the biggest dragon he had ever seen.

They waited patiently. Barris sensed his pulse quickening and his heartbeat getting faster. He didn’t love fighting. That did not mean he never enjoyed it.

The earth shook as the beast landed.

“NOW”, Bull yelled and they all run into the fight.

They killed the dragon. It was tough and took agonizingly long, but they did it and nobody died in the process.

Simon’s arm got badly burned even with the armor on. Zuzu managed to heal it quickly, but the scarring would remain forever.

“Don’t worry”, Bull said approvingly, “now you’ll certainly get all the ladies.”

Trevelyan’s cheeks got red and it did not escape Barris’ attention that he glanced at Lavellan at those words. Zuzu seemed to have pined for Simon at the beginning but now she was rather busy with other people and stopped the flirtations. Delrin always thought the two of them were merely friends but the look on Simon’s face was both helpless and painfully obvious.

Barris would worry about all the consequences if it actually happened between them. For now, he would just keep an eye on the situation.

“Let’s source what we can from the dragon for now and carry the valuables with us back to the Keep. We’ll send the regular troops to gather everything else.”

“I am taking one tooth”, Bull announced and it made Delrin ponder, but he raised no objections.
“Great work, all of you”, Barris praised the fighters. “It was tough, but we made it and you officially earned the bragging rights.”

“I would be fine to consider it one and done type of deal”, Kirke stretched herself.

The horses waited for them quite a walk away, near Frederic’s camp. The professor had tears in his eyes.

“Don’t judge my sadness”, he whispered. “The loss of beauty is always tragic.”

“She was a marvel”, Bull bowed seriously. “And I will drink to that tonight. Come with us, Professor. The Inquisition could use you.”

“I suppose there is nothing left for me here.”

“Tell me”, Bull mused to the Orlesian while Delrin smirked to himself, “have you ever drank Maraas-Lok?”

Bull was apparently quite well prepared, having managed to offer two large bottles of what essentially was the Qunari moonshine. Poor Frederic was not ready for the burning sensation in his throat, and Delrin actually smiled at the sight of Lavellan trying to sniff the alcohol before taking a sip. They did not even have the proper glasses. They certainly would not be in any shape to work the next day, but after today they deserved a celebration. It was nice to hear the laughter and the morale lifting. The Western Approach was rather depressing for everyone, and the end was still not in sight. Barris took couple sips of Maraas-Lok and stayed for an hour of conversation before he excused himself and checked the rookery. It would be early, but perhaps…

The letter was there, waiting.

He retreated to the small room and lied down, feeling every single muscle in his body ache. Most of the soldiers remained in the tents but the command got access to proper bedrooms, even if they still had to share them. He poured so much of his heart into the last letter he sent out. He did not want to overstep, but he was also done hiding how he felt. Still—

______________________________________________________

Delrin,

You once said that I am better with words than you are, but after your last letter I cannot agree with that. I can hardly find words to follow that up but I will certainly try. I was so relieved and happy to finally hear from you. I knew you were alright, because I know the advisors are receiving news from the front but to read your own words… Nothing can match that.

I am very happy if the infirmary was able to provide training to help those wounded in the field. In fact, first aid training for troops and squadrons is what we’re trying to do now, practicing on new recruits since everyone else is away. It is not the easiest, but my hope for every soldier is to have the knowledge and the tools to help himself and those around him when needed. It is a slow process, but we’ll see. Thankfully the infirmary expanded and we have more healers in training and more mages working. It’s more quiet now hence we put most of our efforts into improving our system and building upon it. I really hope that what we do can make a difference, especially for men and women fighting out there.

I am sure it is not a secret but the Champion of Kirkwall is in Skyhold. Cassandra and Varric are
currently at the stalemate, and even the castle seems not big enough to contain the tension. I am quite certain that they will all leave for a mission soon and after that Skyhold will truly seem empty as the winter approaches. Do you think I will see you before the year ends? I am trying very hard to stop myself from putting a timeline on your absence but it doesn’t mean I stop hoping to be able to see you soon.

I am very glad you’re excited about the prospect of getting a Mabari. I know it might take a while for it to happen but I am actually eagerly anticipating it now. I wrote a short letter to your parents. It seemed appropriate and I know your mother wants to stay in touch. I surely would not mind visiting Barrfield whenever there’s time, but I do understand how little time there really is, especially for leisure. With all my heart I wish for this war to be over and for this world to be saved. Delrin, I truly share your hope for the future and everything you want, I want it too. Most of all, I simply want you.

You’re not selfish for your words, and I feel the same. We met by chance and it was indeed unexpected and random but that does not change the fact that I cherish you and what I have found in you and what we have found in each other. I have never given my heart away before. Truthfully, I have given very little of myself, and not because I didn’t want any of that, but there had been no one with whom I felt such connection. I feel I can bare my soul to you too, and in fact I know I have quite the few times. I feel so safe being with you, in all ways that matter and since the very moment we’ve met you have shown me how caring, trustworthy and considerate you are. You make it easy to be caring and warm towards you. All that I am, I am giving to you and it is supposed to be quite scary, but I don’t feel scared. I feel happy and frankly, I feel braver than ever, too.

Delrin, I know we’re at war, even though I am aware I am sheltered from it. I know you didn’t choose that war. I know how strong and capable you are, and I know you have trained half of your life to have those skills. I also know you don’t seek glory in fighting, and I know you don’t love it for the sake of it. You’re an honorable and dutiful man, but there’s more than that. There is duty that comes from following orders and there is duty that comes from the commands of the heart, and you have more than enough heart for it to guide your path. Of course you fight for this world. And yes, I know what you meant in your letter. I am always slightly worried when you’re away facing danger each day, but I know why you’re there. I have hopes and dreams for the future too and you are in all of them. You’re my husband and I wait for you, and I long for you, and I pray for you.

There’s nothing to forgive, Delrin. I want you to think of me when you’re away. Imagine me with your shirt on. Imagine me without it. Imagine more. I think about you so often and I truly can’t wait to be in your arms.

I sleep worse when you’re away. It’s not that I feel unsafe in Skyhold, but your presence is so very reassuring and the way you hold me makes me feel protected and cared for. I know my presence provides you with comfort and joy as well. When you wrote that a part of you won’t rest until we are together… That is exactly how I experience it. You unlocked the place in my heart that now only you can access. Unlike you, I imagined that I would meet someone and marry but it all seemed very hypothetical and now it’s all real and tangible and serious and that makes it better than any fantasy. You are better than any fantasy. I know I would feel this way if we met under any other circumstances as well.

When you finally come home, I will show you just how much I missed you.

So stay safe.

Yours,
Mira Barris

____________________________________

Maker preserve him. Sweet Andraste.

That was certainly a letter full of promise. Delrin could not stop grinning.

Today was indeed a very good day.

Chapter End Notes

Hawke taking a casual interest in Mira was always in my draft. I wanted to portray a man who might be forward but is not entitled.

I figured that it would be easy for both Mira and Delrin (perhaps especially Mira) to be bolder in their letters, especially as they truly miss each other.

Two more chapter and our lovers meet! I won't spoil any details, but I certainly hope you will enjoy it. ;)

I decided to be brave and opened the comment section for non-registered users. If you have been reading this story and want to say "hi" or leave a comment, please do so. :) 

Once again, thank you all for reading. I remain committed to this story and there will be many more chapters to come, and the pace will pick up too. Sadly, the current separation was unavoidable.
Anticipation (Reprise)

Chapter Summary

Mira and Delrin receive some news ;)

Chapter Notes

Am I updating the second time in less than twenty four hours? YES I AM.

Don't miss chapter 31 if you haven't read it yet!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

First week of Haring, 9:42 Dragon Age, Western Approach

Finally Delrin would have the room all to himself. Following Maxwell’s return to the Griffin Wing Keep with his party, Bull and Dorian certainly seemed to make up, and the next morning Bull was packing his things to share the quarters with the mage again. Barris noticed half of the dragon tooth pendant hanging from the Qunari’s neck.

“That is very cute indeed”, he remarked to Bull who was humming to himself as he folded his pants.

“Dorian thought so as well, though he added that the leather rope is unacceptable and we must have the dragon tooth properly fitted once back in Skyhold. Preferably into a dawnstone chain.”

“I am certain Harritt can help you with that.”

“Barris”, Bull looked at him keenly. “Are you sad that I’m moving out?”

Truthfully, he was slightly bit sad. It had been the longest since he had seen Mira, and having his best friend’s company at almost all times was certainly a good distraction.

“Am I going to miss your snoring?”, he wondered out loud. “I think I will finally get a good night’s sleep.”

The door opened without knocking, and Dorian marched in.

“I have to agree with Barris here, Amatus. The snoring really grates on one’s nerves.”

“At yet you missed it, Kadan.”

“Have you heard?”, Dorian sat down on Bull’s bed and eyed the Qunari’s pants collection critically. “Garett Hawke visited Skyhold.”

“Mira wrote me”, Delrin said while Bull merely nodded. He always seemed incredibly well informed anyway.
“Apparently Cassandra threatened to toss Varric over the bridge because of this, among other things. It will be interesting to see them. Anyway, the Champion of Kirkwall…”

“He defeated Arishok in a duel. That is quite impressive, even though that Arishok was quite an idiot”, Bull admitted with some admiration.

“If the ‘Tale of the Champion’ is to be believed, he did it for a woman he was involved with, the pirate. Quite the image. I would be really interested to meet him and Maker knows we could use allies”, Delrin added.

“Everything had been dragging lately”, Dorian sighed.

“It takes a long time to take control over a large swath of terrain”, Delrin shrugged. “I know what you mean.”

“Josephine finally managed to acquire the invitations for the ball at the Winter Palace. We know where we’ll be at the end of Guardian at the very least.”

“Wonderful”, Barris snorted, rubbing his temple. “I am sure I will miss the desert by then.”

“Anyway, we’re leaving in thirty minutes so do hurry up”, Dorian scolded them. “Your units are all ready.”

“Something I’ve always dreamed of”, Bull complained, “getting into an ancient Tevinter prison.”

“Well, nobody promised it will be all sunshine and rainbows, Amatus”, Dorian gently patted his lover on the shoulder. “It also seems that darkspawn is the biggest problem and Venatori retreated somewhere else. We did not want to enter there alone, so you’re coming with us.”

“I bet you insisted it was us!”, Bull frowned.

“Excuse me, do you think I want to hear Sidony’s sneering for hours or deal with Fletcher? Belinda and Rion had already accompanied us to the Still Ruins. It’s your turn.”

“We are glad to serve”, Barris chuckled.

“Baby Trevelyan is slightly pouty to do missions alongside his big brother. Clarissa seemed to be issuing threats on your behalf as I passed them”, Dorian smirked.

“Ugh”, Delrin groaned painfully. “Let’s go then, shall we?”

The Coracavus was indeed an ancient structure, and it honestly seemed as it could fall apart and bury them beneath the ground at any moment. The stone crumbled throughout and the recent excavation efforts the Venatori undertook did nothing to help. In its time, before the Second Blight, it had be a remarkable build. With more than enough manpower, at least they were able to search the place as thoroughly as possible and take any interesting finds with them.

The darkspawn was there as well. Delrin did not enjoy battling darkspawn and honestly he disliked overseeing such fights as well. The risk of blight was real and if one was not cautious enough, things could end tragically without even getting that badly wounded. His squadron was protected by an ingenious laminar armor that remained relatively low weight while still protecting the skin. Today, all mages were put on barrier duty. Even Dalish did not protest when Bull issued the order. Aside from the chance of catching blight, darkspawn in small numbers were usually not that
difficult to kill as they were rather chaotic and disorganized, driven only by the primal desire to taint the whole world.

During the Fifth Blight, Delrin was not even an adult yet. He hoped the sixth one would not happen for a long, long time.

“Blackwall”, Maxwell Trevelyan turned towards the Warden, “can you sense where they are coming from? We need to seize the entrance.”

“Uhm’, the man replied. “I believe we just need to keep pushing through.”

It was a relief to have a Grey Warden with them, although truthfully Barris imagined Blackwall to be more helpful than he really was. His sword technique was excellent though. Delrin wished he had sparred with the man before. His style was remarkably Orlesian. He knew enough Chevaliers to recognize the patterns. There was a story behind every Warden, and Gordon Blackwall was one since Delrin was a toddler. Even if he had Chevalier contacts from the past it was unlikely to be anyone Barris could recognize.

The note they found on the Venatori’s corpse suggested that the Tevinter mages were using giants to help with excavation efforts.

“Madness”, Blackwall muttered to himself and Barris had to agree.

“Does it mean we’re going to fight the giant?”, Simon asked hopefully earning himself a glare from his older brother.

“I have fought giants before, brother, and I assure you the only excitable part is the ongoing fear that you might die. If we happen to fight them, let the archers do their job.”

“You’re not my commanding officer”, little Trevelyan snorted while Delrin raised his eyebrows.

“I am”, he hissed. “Now go to the back of the group, Simon.”

“Tell me”, Maxwell turned to Barris with a faint smile on his face, “is it him being twenty or is it the Lavellan girl that makes him so touchy and eager at the same time?”

“He has the Inquisitor for an older brother”, Delrin glanced at Maxwell. “Cut him some slack. He’s trying to find his own identity aside from the Order or you, for that matter. Don’t worry, I’m keeping an eye on the kid.”

“Bull is right, you know”, Trevelyan said jokingly. “You are a mother hen.”

“I am his commanding officer”, Barris tried very hard not to sound too defensive. “I do deliver results, too.”

“Ah, believe me”, Maxwell smirked, “my mother loves you more than me at this point.”

Delrin couldn’t help but laugh.

They finally found the hole in the prison wall leading to the Deep Roads, and quite a number of hurlocks, including an alpha, emerging from it. The barriers and the armor protected them from harm. Blackwall bravely put himself in front of everyone and he was so successful at engaging the enemies that Barris felt almost useless.

“This happens often”, Maxwell yelled to him. “It’s even worse when Cassandra is with us as well.”
The entrance was closed. Beyond the next door, they found a giant and this was the time for the rogues and the mages to shine. Morve glanced approvingly at Sera’s abilities, and Barris had to admit he rarely had seen such talent among the archers. Sera goofed around, but she was an incredible marksman. She blinded the giant effortlessly by shooting straight into his eyeballs. Few spells and the beast fell on the floor.

“Well, that was satisfactory”, Lavellan remarked happily while putting the staff away.

It was clear that this was the route the Venatori took escaping Coracavus. Surely enough, the small fort was visible on the horizon. It was hardly an ambush, with them coming through the desert visible from afar, but the Venatori had no choice but to engage. There was nowhere to escape. Their leader also did not seem willing to give up his life for the cause.

“I yield! I yield!”, Crassius Servis screamed.

“Fasta vass”, Dorian hissed to himself.

“We can take him back to the Griffin Wing Keep”, Maxwell decided, “and then we’ll see.”

They had to spend the night camping in the wild before taking a whole day to return to the keep, but the mission was a success.

The next morning Barris was called to the Inquisitor quarters. It was slightly odd that Maxwell did not want to use the established war room in Rylen’s offices, and what was even odder was Cole accompanying him. Delrin must have looked puzzled because the man immediately addressed his concern.

“I don’t want anyone to know about it. It’s a delicate task”, Trevelyan explained.

“I know you wouldn’t hurt them”, Cole added mysteriously and Barris did not even want to take any guesses of what that task might be.

“Cole did not want to involve the Inquisition in the first place”, Maxwell sighed heavily, “but I managed to convince him. Remind me, Barris, you were stationed at the White Spire for a while?”

“Formally”, Delrin shrugged. “You know the amount of freedom I was given. I barely even slept there, even when I actually stayed in Val Royeaux. Most of the time I was traveling anyway.”

“But you do know of Knight-Captain Evangeline de Brassard?”

“Of course”, Barris frowned. “She was the second-in-command to Knight-Commander Eron before losing the rank, I believe. Wasn’t she presumed dead when the Spire fell?”

“She’s not dead!”, Cole protested. “She’s with Rhys!”

“Who’s Rhys?”, Delrin asked weekly, wishing to get a clear and coherent explanation for once.

“Enchanter Rhys was one of the mages who managed to escape from the Spire. He was aided by Evangeline, apparently and they both ended up in Andoral’s Reach and decided not to attend the Conclave. Leliana tried locating them for quite some time and the latest news is not good. They have been captured by the group of Red Templars near Val Firmin.”

“Ha”, he said. “You want us to retrieve them?”
“Free them and let them go. If they want to come to Skyhold, they are welcomed to. If they don’t want to have anything to do with the Inquisition, it is fine too. Provide them with what is necessary, including coin.”

“I see why you have asked me alone”, Delrin raised his eyebrows. “That is an unlikely order.”

“It’s a request”, Maxwell eyed him intently. “From your friends.”

Barris was humble enough to know he owed his life both to the Inquisition, but more importantly, to Cole himself.

“And Barris?”, Trevelyan added. “Leave today. I will notify the advisors and pass the information to your wife. Afterwards, send your men to Skyhold and go to Val Royeaux.”

“Alone?”, Delrin clarified.

“I don’t want you to garner too much attention. This is the official business for the Inquisition. Leliana’s agents will provide assistance. The War between Celene and Gaspard reached the stalemate but it is far from over. We are increasing our presence in Orlais, not to mention we just took over the whole Western Approach. I know you have contacts among the Chevaliers that can be explored. I want to extend the invitation for joint military missions but I don’t want to seem to be undermining the Empress herself or Orlesian self-governance and autonomy.”

Maker preserve him. That required quite a bit of diplomacy. They were constantly undermining self-governance and autonomy of Orlais.

“Well”, Delrin started, “I can certainly try—”

“Josephine and Leliana laid all the groundwork for you, but I do believe there is a man who knows you personally and would be willing to sit down with you. General Jean-Claude Beauregard.”

“We were friends during my time in Val Royeaux”, Barris admitted freely. “He is a good man. Very reasonable. Better than most Chevaliers.”

“He managed to stay as neutral as possible. He might be supporting Grand Duke but he has favors with the Empress as well.”

“I will gladly sit down with him.”

“Barris?”

“Yes?”

“Thank you. And after all this, I am sending you to Skyhold.”

Sweet Andraste, there was a timeline. He could see Mira in three… four weeks time, maybe. He couldn’t help but smile.

“Thank you, Maxwell”.

“You are an excellent captain. I am glad my idiot brother fights under your command. Truly.”

The praise was pleasant to hear, but Barris was aware that the warmth spreading through his chest was because he finally knew when he was coming home, to Mira.
It had been several days since Cassandra, Varric, Solas and Hawke left for Crestwood, and Mira had barely done anything outside of work, completely dedicating all of her time to the infirmary. Between teaching recruits about the basics of first aid and writing letters to various educational institutions or just sitting down and trying to create the guidelines of care or describing everything she knew of anatomy and physiology took a lot of time and effort. She entered the quarters after the quiet night shift. No patients appeared so she was able to nap a bit and then spent the rest of the night vigorously debating Fiona. Mira felt there was some level of mutual respect there but she had no doubt that Fiona overall did not have much sympathy for her.

Mira was functioning on such autopilot she barely noticed the letter waiting for her by the door.

Her heart responded immediately once she realized what that was.

_____________________________________

My sweet Mira,

I truthfully could not wait to receive a letter back from you. It doesn’t matter what is going on here, I start and end each of my days thinking of you and how I wish I was with you. I am safe and sound, and although I cannot tell you how long I will remain in the Western Approach, please rest assured that we’re making progress and have already gained control over the majority of the territory.

We managed to kill an Abyssal High Dragon yesterday. No one got seriously injured and I remain unscathed. Before you ask, it was absolutely necessary, the dragon was a threat to our soldiers. I am attaching a quick sketch of the beast. As Bull would say, she was majestic. We used the advice of the draconology professor who was doing research in the area. After the fight, Bull insisted on celebrating and the poor professor got entirely defeated by the Qunari alcohol, Maraas-Lok. If Bull ever offers it to you, I advice caution. I have to admit, as much as you might disapprove, fighting the dragon was a very good morale boost for my squadron. Simon carries himself taller and Zuzu is smiling more. I had to draw another dragon for Arthur who insisted on including the image into the letter to his daughters. Even Kirke seemed excited, as much as she would deny it. The Champion of Kirkwall? I think I can imagine what the conflict between Cassandra and Varric is all about. They will figure it out. To me they have a bond that is stronger than it appears. In some ways, despite the remarkable differences between them, they are very similar people. Both loyal until the end, they just understand the loyalty differently. I have to admit I have always been curious to hear what type of man Garret Hawke truly is. I know you have read the Tale yourself. Varric also tells stories sometimes, and I know Hawke is his closest friend. The Champion’s appearance means the Inquisition will likely see more of him and I would be happy to shake hands with him.

Mira, your words are like water in the desert and they provide invaluable comfort. This war chips away the pieces of my heart but you mend it with your kindness and warmth. You are righteous and honorable, and reading how much faith you have in me makes me feel grounded in my principles and the path I am following. I do trust myself, and I have strived for goodness and honesty before, but the Order provided me with a broken compass and tainted values. I did a lot wrong. Since then I have come to doubt so many things I once believed in. The newly found freedom can be lonely and the weight of responsibility heavy. I thought it had to be this way, but then you appeared in my life and suddenly the burden seems lighter. I am a better man for knowing you. There are no words that can describe the honor of having you give your heart to me.

Mira, I can be stupid and foolish at times, but I will never do you wrong and I will always remain true to you. To hear that you feel happy brings me insurmountable joy, especially considering everything you’ve been through. I really want to be able to bring you happiness.
I won’t ask for forgiveness this time as I assure you, I do think of you when I am away. I only think of you. I am just a man yearning for my beautiful wife. Mira, everything about you simply delights me. Believe me, I do imagine more. Whichever of your charms you wish to bestow on me, I will gladly surrender.

I do want all of you. I miss how your body feels. Your skin is so soft and you’re always so warm. I miss your lips and your kisses. I miss smelling your hair. Somehow you always smell like honey and herbs and I can’t get enough of that. I miss the wonder of your sighs when I kiss your neck. I miss how you grasp onto my back when you’re enjoying something. I don’t even know if you’re aware of doing it. I know how you dislike your blushing, but I love when your skin flushes under my touch. I am careful, and patient and I would never pressure you or rush you into anything, but don’t doubt how much I desire you. You are mesmerizing. I am entirely at your mercy.

Can I just say at the end how much I appreciate that you underlined the word “yours” in your letter? It was so sweet. You are so sweet.

I really really can’t wait to see you, Mira.

Unabashedly yours,

Delrin Barris

Oh, goodness. Was it the dragon killing or her encouragement that made Delrin so bold? Her face burned after reading the few paragraphs at the end but at the same time she could not stop smiling. It felt… wonderful. The anticipation was humming all over her body and the sense of amazement filled her heart. She knew she would reread this letter many times, over and over again. She felt nearly dizzy right now, and it felt almost foolish but who was there to judge her? No one. She was in love, she was married, she was desired by a man who had lovely eyes, strong body, softest voice and surely the most beautiful heart. She had the right to feel dizzy, she had the right to feel sweet, and she would not deny herself all the excitement.

What would she even write in response to all that?

She was just about to take a shower when someone knocked on her door, brutally bringing her down to earth. What now? To her utter shock, it was Vivienne herself.

“We’re having breakfast at Josephine’s quarters. If you could join us, darling.”

She followed the Enchanter obediently to the Ambassador’s suite further down the corridor. Josephine and Leliana were both in the sitting room, nibbling on canapés. The smell of freshly brewed Antican coffee penetrated Mira’s nostrils.

“There you are”, Leliana remarked softly, “I thought I heard the steps in the corridor and the door opening.”

Mira had never managed to learn to be fully comfortable around the Spymaster though Leliana had never issued threats against her. Still, there was an aura of danger around her. Vivenne could be openly hostile to some but Mira actually thought the Enchanter liked her, and Josephine wielded a lot of power but was genuinely one of the kindest people she had ever met.

“Thank you for inviting me”, she accepted the cup of coffee from Josephine’s hands. “I would not say no to delicious food.”
“Try that cheese with cranberry topping, dear”, Vivienne instructed. “It is almost as good as Val Royeaux.”

All this politeness and there was just the tiniest sense of being the only sheep among the wolves.

“Speaking of Val Royeaux”, Josephine added politely, “I am aware that the infirmary is in need of educational resources.’

The Ambassador was the one that helped Mira edit the letters.

“Yes”, Mira sweetened her coffee. “Indeed, we certainly need more current resources for our research. I am still waiting for the reply from Cassandra’s uncle. We have written to several universities. Basically we’re trying to reach anywhere aside from the Qun and Tevinter itself.”

“We’re leaving for Val Royeaux tomorrow. The trip was planned after the First Day but some dealings made it imperative to move it earlier”, Leliana’s voice was like steel. “We think it would be a good idea for you to join us. There are quite the few of my agents stationed there and you would be able to check the university resources yourself.”

Hmmm, that certainly sounded interesting but it also seemed to be more than the polite request.

“Moreover”, Vivienne said innocently, “of course you would need to attend the fittings.”

“The fittings?” she only managed to repeat.

“At the end of Guardian, there is a famed ball at the Empress’ Winter Palace at Halamshiral”, Josephine explained. “It is the event of the season and of course the political talks happen behind the scenes. We have finally garnered enough support to attend it confidently, and of course you will need to make an appearance.”

“May I just ask why? I hardly have any experience—“

“Darling”, Vivienne sighed leniently, “you have done well during the dinner party and the Satinalia ball. Captain Barris is the Second-in-Command of the Forces, both him and Commander Cullen will be expected there. Moreover, there is a certain Marquis that would be glad to see you. *I know*”, the Enchanter raised her hand. “I dislike that ridiculous man as well. I know for a fact that there had been gossip about how you captivated Marquis Etienne, both spread by Marquis himself and the other guests. Curiosity is power, and quite the few nobles would be curious about you.”

“Believe me”, Leliana added, “the Inquisition will need all the help we get, and all the distraction.”

Mira rubbed her forehead. “I am really bad at this and it is humiliating—“

“I know”, Leliana replied resignedly. “*We* know. I am afraid some of it is unavoidable. As Vivienne said, you are not bad at this. You do realize that we need to put Sera on the guest list for the ball?”

It made Mira chuckle. “Well, that certainly is a task.”

“In all seriousness, Mira”, Josephine said solemnly, “the Inquisition is aware that we have asked so much of you. I know you did not anticipate any of that. The duties that would be placed on you for being Captain Barris’ wife. You fulfilled our request to become Skyhold’s surgeon most admirably and completely transformed the infirmary—“

“It’s fine”, Mira interrupted her, slightly uncomfortable. “There was no grand plan except to
survive, so I don’t… I did not anticipate much. I will do my part at the Winter Palace, if it’s necessary but I have to tell you I don’t intend tolerating Marquis if he behaves the same way—“

“He won’t”, Lelianna rushed in. “The court does not forgive drunkenness. He will be cautious and on his best behavior. Our agents will be there too.”


“You will enjoy it”, Vivienne responded with firmness in her voice. “You only experience the lack of civilization here—“

“Vivienne!”, Josephine protested without much conviction.

“Josie, we both know that even the best seamstress we have in Skyhold is nothing like the boutiques in the capital”, Lelianna confessed and glanced at Mira. “Val Royeaux has its charms. You might find exactly what you’re just looking for.”

“I don’t—“

“Captain Barris’ next mission sends him there”, the Spymaster added innocently, taking a bite of her canapé.

Mira blushed heavily. Of course everyone knew at that point, especially after their kiss in front of the troops before he deployed.

“Well”, she couldn’t stop the bright smile from appearing on her face as the three women watched her with the varying degree of warmth in their eyes. “I suppose it would be pointless to deny that I am very eager to see him. Does he know—?”

“He left the Grffing Wing Keep today and has one mission in between. He was told that you would be notified. I am sure you exchange letters regularly but I am afraid you won’t be able to contact him until he reaches Val Royeaux. He does not know you are traveling there”, Josephine made everything clear.

“I see.”

“I am sure that anything there is to say is much better said in person”, Vivienne purred.

Mira felt her blush deepening as she shoved a canapé into her mouth and simply nodded.

She let the excitement flood her the second she returned to her quarterns and fell onto the bed. Val Royeaux. Not counting the two times that Delrin took her out of Skyhold, this would be the first time to venture outside, and the first city in Thedas to see. She had read so much about Orlais, both from Brother Genitivi and other sources, but her own experience was extremely limited. Honestly, the thought of finally traveling was thrilling. The capital of the Empire, the heart of Thedasian culture, if most authors were to be believed. She might have joked about the Orlesians or complained how horrible the Game was, but now she felt the pleasant fluttering in her stomach.

Certainly the biggest source of joy was the fact that she would see Delrin. It would take two weeks or more, but she would see him, and she would see him sooner than if she waited here, in Skyhold.

To see him again, to look into his most gorgeous green eyes, to kiss his lips, to tell him she loved him, to feel his strong large hands on her body, to fall asleep by his side… That filled her with
delight. Despite working the night shift, Mira was not tired at all. She simply could not stop smiling.

Chapter End Notes

How hard do you think Mira will blush when seeing Delrin after everything they've included in their letters?

Do you think Barris would be eager to meet Hawke and shake his hand if he knew about him making advances towards his wife?

Do you think it will be slightly awkward when Delrin and Mira see each other again?

Also: change of scenery! Mira needed to leave Skyhold at some point.

Next chapter: Rhys and Evangeline, Mira's impressions of Val Royeaux.


Thank you for reading, and for all your comments.
All roads lead to...

Chapter Summary

Barris meets Rhys and Evangeline and Mira passes time in Val Royeaux

Chapter Notes

Make sure you didn't miss any chapters! I have been posting a lot lately.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Second week of Haring, 9:42 Dragon Age, Val Firmin

It was raining. The air in the forest of Val Firmin was moist, so unlike the desert. The cold mist penetrated the trees. It was both uncomfortable and a relief after several weeks in the Western Approach. The smell of the dying forest floor surrounded them, but it still did not cover the sharp scent of the red lyrium.

Today was the third day when they were tracking the Red Templar group led by Captain Vernon. Morve and Merle were sent upfront to gather any intel quietly. The brothers managed to confirm that Evangeline de Brassard was still alive and apparently uninjured, held in a cage at the main encampment. They would need to kill every single one of the Red Templars, there was no way around it. There were two behemoths guarding the place, and around twenty Red Templars, not counting the patrols spread around the forest. Some of them they already had taken care of.

Everyone was tired, and the lingering presence of the red lyrium was hard on the Templars. Simon was quieter than usual, Clarissa slightly bit irritated and Arthur was sweating despite the low temperatures. The rest of the squadron was faring better but the tiredness was getting to them as well. They were forced to had left the horses in the city stables and venture into the wilderness on foot. No one was happy.

“Simon”, Lavellan snapped her fingers in front of Trevelyan’s face with concern. “Are you alright? You look horrible.”

“I am fine”, the poor kid muttered and flushed heavily.

“ Seriously”, Zuzu unceremoniously placed her hands on his face and neck. “You are all warmed up. Are you sure you’re feeling all right?”

Simon’s reaction was obvious, but Delrin actually wondered if Lavellan’s sudden thoughtfulness and care were signs of having feelings for him.

“Perhaps he is warm because you’re fondling him”, Kirke scorned.

“Don’t be silly, Kirke”, Zuzu scoffed. “We’re like siblings.”

Simon’s ears were crimson red and he looked so unhappy that Barris took pity on the boy.
“Perhaps you both can help me”, he turned to Kirke and Zuzu. “Since I am going to Val Royeaux I wanted to get my wife something for Wintersend. Any ideas?”

Kirke rolled her eyes at him, clearly understanding his intent but Lavellan’s eyes brightened as she started talking.

He half listened, half mapped out the plan for the attack.

It had to happen today, but first they needed to find Rhys. He was somewhere in this forest, Barris was sure of that. If Evangeline was a woman Rhys loved… The thought of it being Mira and what Delrin would feel and do in that situation clenched his throat shut. Rhys was not stupid. He could not take out twenty Red Templars on his own. Still, he would not abandon his lover and he would likely wait for the perfect moment to help Evangeline escape. If they freed her, she would probably be able to help with further fighting.

Now he had to hunt the mage in the forest full of Red Templars before Rhys considered moving in on his own. The enchanter definitely should have noticed their presence, but made no contact so far. Delrin left Kirke in command and gathered Clarissa, Arthur and Simon. As crude as it was, if Rhys decided to attack them, the four of them could silence him easily, regardless how talented of a mage he was.

Hopefully it would not come to this.

Rhys certainly had to know he was being searched for. The tracks became more obvious, at least for Delrin, with his years of experience. This was a mage who was tentative, but did not want to entirely disappear. This was a careful reconnaissance and Barris guessed that Rhys was trying to decide whether he could trust them.

Delrin forbade anyone to unsheathe their weapons. Thankfully, none of them were jumpy, even Trevelyan seemed extremely composed at the moment. The tiniest glimmer of light showed in the undergrowth on the far right.

“I’m Captain Barris from the Inquisition”, Delrin spoke clearly. “I know you’re there, Rhys. We’re here to help you rescue Evangeline de Brassard. She knows who I am.”

Nothing happened. The forest seemed perfectly still.

“Cole sent us”, Barris added.

The twigs and leaves started moving, and soon enough, a tall man walked out of the bushes, his staff readied to fight despite the fact that he stood no chance. The tiredness and pain haunted his face, and Delrin could only imagine what he had been through, desperately trying to find a way to help his beloved.

“Cole?”, Rhys whispered with a voice of a broken man.

“Cole”, Delrin repeated. “There is much I will tell you, but I suggest we rescue your lover first. Are you injured?”

Rhys shook his head. “No, just… weak.”

“Come. I am sure you know by now that there are mages in my squadron. We have potions, food and water. Evangeline is fine and alive. We’ll get her tonight.”

“I do not know what to say”, the mage breathed out.
“It is strange times we live in”, Delrin muttered.

Rhys was indeed a very reasonable man. After getting quickly acquainted with the rest of the squadron, he allowed Barris to take a lead on the attack. Smart choice, considering that Circle mages had very limited tactical experience, and he had been doing this literally his whole adult life.

“We’re used to fighting alongside mages”, Delrin assured him. “You do not need to be worried about any of Templars accidentally silencing you. The second we attack, try to get closer to Evangeline and place a barrier on her and yourself. Merle will assist you with your visibility and breaching the lock. There is no reason to wait with getting her out. Take this dagger, I don’t have a spare sword for her, but later she can take her loot. If you need help, just scream, but we do try to keep a good eye on each other.”

“Have we met?”, Rhys frowned at him. “I certainly don’t remember you from the Spire but your name does sound familiar.”

Barris sighed. “Have you heard of Templar units exclusively tracking blood mages or investigating abominations?”

“Like the abomination at Kerhinet that wiped almost the whole village in 9:37 until such squadron arrived? Believe me, the Templars at the Spire couldn’t stop talking about it. I always thought they exaggerated. That was you?”

“They probably did exaggerate, but I was a Knight-Lieutenant leading that unit at Kerhinet.”

“And now?”

“Now I am a Templar no longer”, the truth of those words could not be brighter. Without lyrium, with every choice he had made since, he really was free from the Order. “I am the Captain of the Inquisition forces.”

“You truly do know what you’re doing”, Rhys seemed relieved, “I have never anticipated… It is strange times we live in, indeed. I am grateful—”

“Let’s get her out first.”

“Well, take your lead, Captain.”

The sneaked in as close to the encampment as they could. All the communication now relied on tactical hand signals. Barris could see Clarissa on the other side of the camp, hidden in the trees, waiting for him to start. She let him know they were ready.

*On three*, he gestured and she signaled understanding.

*One. Two. Three.*

The swaths of ice slashed the sky as they ran into the fight. Barris and Kirke rushed towards the Behemoth, now at least a bit weakened by magic. Despite its size, the creature was agile and fast, and both him and Kirke danced swiftly, trying to avoid taking the hit. Even with the shields, the sheer force could hurt their wrists, not to mention the dangers of crystals. The barrier fell on them and Barris could see that it was Rhys who casted it.

“Kirke”, he hissed. “Feint.”
“Sure!”, she cried back.

It worked. The behemoth became focused on her movements, and Barris quickly rotated his body to move behind the beast’s back and slashed the hough of its knee. Red lyrium or not, it couldn’t move without functioning legs.

“Kirke, retreat”, he yelled.

He himself moved fast to the back. The behemoth fell. Kirke, being closer, chopped off his head. Barris looked around for a second and saw Rhys wrapping his arm around Evangeline. The battle continued.

He offered Rhys and Evangeline a place to sleep in his tent. It gave the three of them the opportunity for a discreet conversation after the nighttime meal. The woman had only minor abrasions and injuries that immediately got healed. He passed her a steel cup of warm tea.

“Knight-Lieutenant Barris”, she looked at him and rubbed her head. “We’ve only met few times.”

“I’m as much of a Knight-Lieutenant right now as you are a Knight-Captain”, he replied calmly.

Rhys sipped on his drink without talking much.

“You’re not going to ask me how I survived all this time without access to Chantry lyrium?”, Evangeline challenged him.

Ah, the irony. There were only few possibilities, and none of them mattered anymore. Not after what happened to him at Therinfal.

“Just between the three of us”, he raised his eyebrows. “I don’t take lyrium.”

The woman’s eyes opened widely. “How…?”

“I was touched by the Spirit of Faith”, he shrugged. “At Therinfal. I am sure you’ve heard what happened there. I was fighting the Envy demon and Cole said his friend can help me. I did not realize until few days later.”

The mixture of shock, grief, sadness and curiosity pained Evangeline’s face.

“The Inquisition kept you alive?”, Rhys’ eyes scrutinized him.

“They made me a Captain, and the Second-in-Command”, he answered calmly. “I do not disclose it to most, so please—“

“Yes”, Evangeline rushed to assure him. “I… it was… something similar.”

“I figured”, he whispered. “It does not matter to the Inquisition.”

“So, Cole”, Rhys’ voice was laced with disbelief. “I had no idea… Is he a spirit? I think I always knew, but—”

“He certainly was, at one point. The spirit of Compassion. But there was Cole, too, a mage, which I am sure you know as well. And now, Cole is… more human than a spirit, I suppose.”

“How is he?”, Evangeline asked cautiously. “How is he doing? When I finally met him…”
Something had to change.”

“He is a bit odd”, Barris smiled, “but he is not dangerous, not now. A bit of an odd kid now, that’s it. He’s a member of the Inquisitor’s party and they often travel together. He’s searching, but aren’t we all?”

“And Cole told you to find us?”

“Well, he told the Inquisitor. I was merely given the assignment.”

“I am grateful”, Rhys spoke solemnly.

“You are welcome to travel to Skyhold if you choose to, but you don’t need to do it. I have some coin and supplies for you to send you on the way. The Inquisition provides an open door but you can choose your own path.”

“Have you found… your path?”, Evangeline asked. “In the Inquisition?”

“I found a cause when the world is threatened. A change, hopefully.”

“Noble purpose.”

“I also got married. That is a path that would not be possible in the Order.”

“No, it would not”, the woman squeezed her lover’s hand and something about this gesture reminded Delrin of how Mira squeezed his arm. “Thank you, for everything.”

“I was glad we were able to help. Truly.”

Evangeline and Rhys left the next morning, given enough coin to be able to at least procure horses. The former Knight-Captain came from nobility, just like Delrin, and she still had friends among them. They planned on using their contacts to not only stay afloat, but also engage in efforts to combat Corypheus. It was a good mission. So rarely they had a chance to saving someone, not merely sow more destruction.

Barris sat down with Clarissa for a moment. Now that they were separating, she would be in command until he came back from Val Royeaux. Honestly, his trust in her skills was immense. She was leading half of the squadron whenever they split to fight. Still, it was his job to ensure everyone else knew theirs. They briefly went over possible issues facing their travel back to Skyhold, and training schedule for when they reached it.

“Don’t worry”, she seemed amused, “I won’t let the kids get away with anything.”

“Honestly”, he admitted, “you could all probably just take the few days off when I’m away. It is going to be the First Day soon. Everyone has been working hard.”

“We’ll see how they behave”, Clarrisa winked to him and he smiled.

“Very well.”

“How long will you be gone?”

“Not long”, he sighed. “Believe me, I want to rest too.”
He bid farewell to his squadron and mounted his horse. He would reach Val Royeaux in three days.

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Second week of Haring, 9:42 Dragon Age, Val Royeaux

Truth be told, Mira had always enjoyed traveling. She never sought anything extreme, but she considered herself adventurous just enough. The university years and the cheap flights across Europe provided more than ample opportunities.

None of the travels of the past could prepare Mira for the reality of doing it in Thedas. Despite being a decent rider, three days on mountainous terrain through the frost and the snow were rough, and sharing a tent with Josephine, Vivienne and Leliana was intimidating at best, even though everyone seemed little less scary after seeing them sleep and witnessing their morning slumber. Madame de Fer literally purred with approval upon watching Mira slathering the facial cream on herself before exposing her skin to the cold.

Apparently during the summertime, they would simple take a carriage or two, but in that weather, it was impossible. They were supported by a small entourage - a soldier and an agent, though Mira strongly suspected that Enchanter Vivienne and Sister Leliana were more dangerous themselves. Vivienne carried her encrusted staff, and Mira was certain the Spymaster was always armed.

The travel by sea was slightly better than Mira anticipated. Madame de Fer insisted on the most expensive cabin, and covered the cost, so despite the constant nausea and dizziness Mira was able to rest on fluffy pillows in quite the luxury.

Mira had seen the drawings of Val Royeaux and she had read the stories, but the reality proved different. The city was enormous, and the facade was beautiful. Mira who always lived in cities knew that all of them had the hidden parts, the places that were less enticing for the visitors, places that could break someone’s heart or were straight up dangerous. She knew enough about alienages to imagine what poverty and what suffering hid in the plain sight.

She recognized her own privilege. Perhaps because it had always been there, just enough to give her some semblance of security. Mira knew her own adversity, but that was private, hidden. It was not visible to anyone until she showed them. She had never known true hunger. She had grown up well cultured, well educated. Even when she moved abroad, she was a medical student who could afford her studies. Mira was smart enough to realize that despite all her insecurities and all her shyness, she fit in more than not.

Thedas was no different. It was largely luck, but not only that. Marriage to Delrin gave her everything the Inquisition promised. Of course, it gave her far more than that, but even aside from love and wonder, it gave her status, security, stability, roof over her head, clothes on her back, food in her stomach. She was not lost in the wilderness long enough to be truly hungry, and all things considering, she had faced minimal danger. It was scary, monumentally so, and the loss she faced was grave, but overall… She was incredibly privileged.

There was no doubt in her mind that the freedom she was allowed in Val Royeaux resulted from all of that. The Inquisition trusted her enough and respected her enough to know that while she was a stranger to it all, she needed only little guidance and she would not do anything extraordinarily stupid. Of course, they assigned her a bodyguard, or just an agent to watch over her. Weaver, as she was called, was a slender Elven woman and Mira was thoroughly assured that she was extremely skilled. Besides, as Josephine noted, it would not be unusual for a noble foreigner to be accompanied by their Elven servant.
It was true. Mira was certain she didn’t look Orlesian, but no one paid that much attention to Fereldan looking young woman accompanied by a personal maid. She didn’t seem rich or poor enough to catch anyone’s attention, and Orlesians, at least in that part of Val Royeaux, did not bother to give her a second look.

Mira and Weaver managed to visit the Val Royeaux University few times, where a young researcher Moreau helped them with searching throughout the library. The University had received Mira’s letters, and while there were little interest in what the infirmary was doing, no one stopped them either. Josephine had mentioned that once Mira compiled the list of interesting tomes, there were ways to have them sent to Skyhold as a part of collaborative agreement.

Vivienne, Josephine and Leliana were insanely busy so in the several days they had already spent in Val Royeaux Mira had much time to do whatever she wanted.

“Lady Mira”, Weaver asked quietly the first time they left the University buildings. “Where do you wish to go now?”

“You can call me Mira, Weaver.”

“That would be inappropriate”, the Elven woman responded.

“I was born a commoner and I work at the infirmary. So many people call me by name.”

Weaver’s lips curled into a faint smile. “Trust me, lady Mira. This is the Empire. It is much better and safer this way.”

“Very well”, she sighed. “What are my options?”

“Anything you want.”

They went to the Val Royeaux Orangerie. The scent of orange blossom permeated the air and the greenery inside seemed unstoppable, a stark contrast to the mild winter outside. The volières were filled with exotic birds and the tropical species of flowers were forced to open despite of the season. It was not the modern conservationist approach Mira approved of, but it was mesmerizing. Perhaps all Orlais was like this. They loved beauty, but they also devoured it, entirely insatiable, not wanting to accept things as they were. It was all a bit precarious, a bit too much, but what a sight nonetheless.

Weaver’s facial expression said it all, silently observing the extravaganza.

“Do you enjoy it, lady Mira?”

“It’s both pretty and cruel.”

“Ha”, Weaver became more curious but did not make any further comments. “I know a place where they sell excellent pastry.”

“Lead the way.”

Couple days later, Weaver escorted Mira for the fitting. Instead of going away, the seamstresses came to them. The three carriages arrived to the Fézensac Estate, where they were all staying. Marquise Gabrielle Fézensac was apparently a sister of Duchess Nicoline who was married to Duke Bastien de Ghislain. Vivienne was Duke’s mistress, which seemed to be the official title.
After everything Mira had learned about Orlais, it did not seem that scandalous.

Vivienne referred to Duchess Nicoline as “her darling friend”, and it seemed to be true, because Marquise Gabrielle appeared overjoyed to see Madame de Fer and to help the Inquisition. The estate itself was enormous. Mira occupied a private bedroom with adjacent servant’s room, where Weaver slept. The bathroom had a claw foot tub that could properly fit four adults, with a crystal chandelier hanging right above it. Everything was lavish and rich, and this was the type of opulence not easily found on Earth anymore.

The drawing room was transformed into an impromptu boutique, and the Ambassador and the Enchanter battled greatly over fabrics and color schemes. The smirk on Leliana’s face showed she enjoyed watching it, only pushing for solutions when needed. The slight blush appeared on Josephine’s cheeks while Vivienne was raising her eyebrows slightly.

Funny, Mira thought. She had seen them like that once, the day before her wedding. This time the Inquisition uniforms were the topic of contention. They finally settled on soft velvet in midnight blue for the jackets, and the supplest black leather Mira had ever seen for the breeches. The Inquisition crest in metal would adorn the outfits. Truthfully, between all the fast paced talk, Mira barely kept up. She watched the show slightly overwhelmed, as in trance.

Since everything was bespoke, the process involved trying on various sample gowns to choose the cut and then selecting the fabrics and finishing details. No gown was to be exactly the same. The dresses were heavy, and putting them on was a chore. Weaver was allowed to be present, and Mira suddenly felt vulnerable knowing that the agent was seeing her vast tattoos and how unusual they were. Unusual, true, but thankfully not impossible, not with her backstory.

Mira liked fashion and she liked beautiful gowns, but at that moment she truly had no idea how the final product would look like. All she knew was that the process was as exhausting as a vigorous work out and at the end she was hot and covered in sweat. Another fitting would happen in Skyhold, in several weeks, leaving time for alterations if need be.

Truthfully, Mira was not excited about the Winter Palace. It would be an assignment, and likely an unpleasant one. She did not care what she would wear.

She was, however, very excited to see Delrin and there were few things she couldn’t find in Val Royeaux that she couldn’t find in Skyhold.

They always ate dinners at the Estate. It was an official affair, something completely foreign, with countless dishes served individually. Between all the remarkable ladies of the Inquisition, Mira could safely retreat towards few casual and safe remarks and polite smiles at the table. Truthfully, without salacious guests even the Orlesian nobility seemed a little less imposing. Something about successfully avoiding attention increased her confidence.

Garrett Hawke might have discovered her identity, but here in Val Royeaux she was merely a minor Fereldan nobility, lady Mira Barris. Unless she attracted another man, like Marquis Etienne back at Skyhold, she would remain completely unbothered. It suited her.

She knocked on the door to Josephine’s quarters after dinner, not being sure if she would catch the Ambassador alone. She was lucky.

“Oh, Mira!”, Josephine smiled kindly. “How are you? Is there anything you need?”
“Actually… may I enter?”

“Sure, of course. Has something happened?”

“No, I just have a question and I thought you would be able to help me.”

“Of course! How are you finding Val Royeaux? Is Weaver a good companion? I can have words with Leliana—“

“Weaver is great”, Mira assured her quickly. “I just have some questions about shopping—”

“Remember, we are visiting few boutiques tomorrow afternoon. Vivienne might take offense if you don’t come.”

“I am coming”, Mira blushed. “I just have a question for you. There’s little choice in Skyhold and I would like to get some lingerie. Something nice and fancy but maybe not outrageously expensive.”

“I see”, Josephine could not hide her grin. “I certainly know a place or two, and actually… I could go with you, tomorrow morning. If you do not object. I could get few items as well.”

“I… That would be nice”, Mira said truthfully. “Thank you, Josephine.”

“Speak nothing of it”, the Antivan winked. “I quite understand.”

It was not merely a boutique. Mademoiselle Nina, a woman running it was a proper corsetière, able to make the most fantastic creations. Thankfully for Mira, there were a lot of items in hundreds of sizes and styles to choose from. Apparently there was something that Brother Genitivi or Revered Mother Laeticia could not prepare her for. Orlesians loved their undergarments. Mira happily ran her fingers through the laces and the silks of negligees.

Finally, after months of owning just simple cotton brassieres, she would wear something more beautiful and intricate. Something that could be properly appreciated.

Honestly, it was more for herself than Delrin. He seemed very eager grasping onto her boring and shapeless linen nightgown and the goal would be to take it off eventually. Still, new lingerie made Mira feel more beautiful and more confident. Even if Delrin did not care what she wore, he would still notice a nightdress trimmed with lace that clinched at her waist and showcased her breasts. Mira settled on several sets of undergarments and several negligees, feeling both happy with her purchase and happy about the future.

She did not know when he would finally arrive in Val Royeaux or how and where they would meet, she was only made aware that he was supposed to reach to one of Leliana’s agents and so far the Spymaster was telling her nothing. But it would be soon and her heart felt as it was about to explode at the thought.

“You look so happy”, Josephine noted. “You’re genuinely glowing.”

“Stop it”, Mira felt her face warm up and then corrected herself. “Oh, you know what? I really am happy. I know it’s odd and maybe greedy—”

Josephine’s smile lit up her face. “It’s good. Maker knows we need that in this world, don’t we? Something to live for.”
Mira looked at the Ambassador’s face. She seemed a little paler and more tired than usual, the lines of worry spreading over her face.

“How are you doing, Josephine?”


“I’m sorry for taking your time”.

“Don’t say that!”, Josephine looked at her sharply. “This was fun. In fact, why don’t we eat luncheon tomorrow? I have some free time ad I’d like to spend it in friendly company.”

“Oh”, Mira mumbled surprised. “That would be lovely.”

“I know a great place”, the Ambassador smiled. “You will love it.”

The rest of the day turned out nice. Weaver took Mira to visit some stores, including the one belonging to Bianca Davri, a famous inventor. Why was this name familiar, Mira could not recall, but the store was incredibly interesting. Mira spent an hour looking at various items. She needed to discuss it with Dagna, but she actually wondered what medical equipment was Bianca Davri able to potentially build. At this point, Mira simply picked up an great looking multi-tool that she could gift Delrin. He liked her pocketknife from Earth, and he obviously could not carry it, but this was the next best thing.

She then spent far too long at the bookstore searching for something for Cassandra, for whom she also picked several scented candles and bath oils.

It was getting a bit silly, but something about the mundane going around and looking through things brought so many memories from Earth. Maybe part of it was because on Earth, it would be December now, and it would be Christmas soon, and even though Mira tried to bury it all deep down, she couldn’t.

So she picked few small silly gifts for two people she loved. It felt… right. It felt normal.

Despite the nostalgia, it was a good day. She laughed more at the dinner and even exchanged several remarks with Marquise Gabrielle.

The grief came later. It would still come in waves, like an old friend. She refused to allow herself to feel guilty for finding love and joy, but there was always some longing in her heart. Skyhold was a fortress, a place so powerful and sure of its identity it did not bring any associations. She had never lived in a castle before. It was Thedas, it was her new reality, nothing seemed blurred.

Val Royeaux had parts that simply looked like an old town of a city she knew and even in Weaver’s presence, even with all the Orlesian opulence, there were things that simply brought the memories back. There was always a rhythm to the city life, the familiarity of it, however bizarre or different a given city was. Just walking the paved streets was an experience she could easily identify, not to mention looking through the window panes or getting luncheon at the restaurant.

It still felt odd how well she adjusted to Thedas. It did not mean her heart did not hurt from time to time. When Weaver took her to see the Grand Cathedral, Mira did not anticipate for it to be so
similar to what she knew from Earth. The agent knew she was not Andrastian, it was never a secret. They did not even go inside, Mira wouldn’t want to. Nonetheless… The Grand Cathedral had something that Skyhold’s chantry did not, and that was music.

Maybe all sacred music in some way sounded the same, but Mira felt her soul being torn and mended at the same time. It was beautiful. It was perfect. Maybe even divine.

She spent the rest of her evening thinking of Delrin. She never admitted it out loud, but sometimes she fleshed out a different fantasy, the one in which they would not be in Thedas, but on Earth. She did not spend too much time thinking what would happen if he got transported there, because it was likely he would have far less luck than her. Still, what if he simply was from Earth?

He was never a soldier in her thoughts. Somehow, the modern warfare made it impossible for her to imagine. In those fantasies, he would be a graphic designer, an artist. He’d still keep himself fit, and he would have a dog. They would have a dog, a large, slobbery one that he would adore. He would still not cook, so they would order a lot of take out because she would surely be too tired after all the hospital shifts. He would not cook, but he would clean, just as he made their bed each day now that they shared it. They would live in a small old apartment with high ceilings and a tiny kitchen. His art would be on the walls, and there would be an old oak floor creaking underneath their feet. He would still stir when she would get up for work early in the morning. He would like wearing sweatpants around the house and probably owned hoodies instead of wool sweaters. They would stay up too late watching tv, but sometimes they would end up making love on the sofa instead. They would go on double dates with Ida and Aidan. They would go to the park with their ridiculously large dog. They would get sushi once a week.

Some details about those thoughts changed but Delrin was always just himself. Smart and sensitive and brave and kind. Tall and handsome with the nicest eyes and the smell she could never erase from her memory. He would text her sweet messages just as he was sending her sweet letters now. He would hold her close when she cried, just as he was doing here. They would talk just as they did now, about everything that mattered.

It did not matter what Mira imagined and how, driven by melancholy and longing. What remained was the fact that the only reality she could conjure was the one in which they were together.

Love. What a daily delight.

Chapter End Notes

The next chapter: our lovers are reunited, though perhaps not in the circumstances they imagined.

Nice lingerie makes everything better. ;)

I definitely feel Mira would periodically struggle with memories from Earth and the change of scenery would bring those back, but it would not all be painful, some of it would be bittersweet.

I know most people do gifts for Satinalia, but somehow my mind clung to the in-game dialogue between Varric/Vivienne mentioning Wintersend gift list. Let's consider it regional differences.
I am already writing another chapter. Hopefully you won’t wait too long! Thank you for reading!
Barris arrived in Val Royeaux so late in the night that he only got couple hours of sleep before the morning arrived. He showered and groomed, and left to meet his contact. One of Leliana’s agents, Bailiff, was waiting at the tavern nearby. They talked briefly and Bailiff handed Delrin a set of instructions from the Spymaster. General Jean-Claude Beauregard offered a luncheon at his own residence, likely due to privacy concerns. Barris knew Jean-Claude well enough to walk there confidently.

Val Royeaux held a lot of memories for Delrin, and and most of them were good, even great. Some were horrid. It was here when he made a choice to follow the orders of Lord Seeker Lucius and led his squadron to Therinfal Redoubt for slaughter. The most haunting decision of his life. Thankfully he wouldn’t stay in Val Royeaux for long. if the meeting today was successful he would be able to get on the ship tomorrow to travel to Skyhold and to finally see Mira.

He knocked on the heavy dark wood door to the small residence in the prestigious part of the town. The Elven servant opened it and the first things Delrin heard was the very loud cry of a child. He was led through several rooms to the large office. General Beauregard stood up upon him entering. The cries in the background fainted just a little.

“General”, Barris bowed politely.

“Stop it, Barris”, the man demanded and shook Delrin’s hand. “Forgive the noises, I have a little girl. She was born a month after Conclave.”

“Congratulations”, he smiled. “I had no idea.”

“Let’s sit, my friend”, Jean-Claude gestured to a small table where the luncheon was served. “I have already talked with your Spymaster and exchanged one missive with Commander Rutherford, but I wanted to speak to you personally. The situation, as you can imagine, is still unstable and somewhat precarious.”

“The Inquisition readily admits it, Jean-Claude. I am sure you know that we already have a military presence in Orlais. The Inquisitor is the only one who can close the rifts. Moreover, we have completed missions in almost every part of the Empire. You know what the Inquisition achieved in the Exalted Plains. I spent some time in the Dales myself not so long ago. I know I can be forthright with you. The Empire not only is not able to carry the burden alone, it simply
doesn’t.”

The heavy sigh escaped Beauregard’s mouth. “You speak the truth, Barris. I am ashamed to admit that ambition and greed pushed quite a number of those in command into unreasonable and destructive positions. It is quieting down. No more than a stalemate for now, but the peace talks at Halamshiral might provide more permanent resolution. I know the Inquisition is coming.”

“I heard that. We need to act sooner.”

“Gaspard is many things, but he is not careless. He would not oppose joint military work, especially with him wanting to win favors with the Inquisition. You do know that most chevaliers do support him. The Empress… There is a political push to do more. There is nobility that had seen the damage from Corypheus forces or just rifts causing havoc on their lands. It has to be discreet, but it’s not impossible.”

“I am very glad to hear it.”

“Any military presence in Val Royeaux will never happen. The clerics would not have it, the court would not have it. Val Chevin… maybe, if the cause convinces Gaspard to allow units there. The borderlands are the safest bet.”

“We have done much work there already.”

“I know. I was told you were coming from the Western Approach. How was it?”

“Miserable. I have slain a dragon though.”

“That, my friend, is rather impressive”, Jean-Claude smirked. “I definitely could gather troops to support the Western Approach and further, but there is one area that might fit both of our interests. Your Commander have mentioned it already. Emprise du Lion. There are worrisome reports. The nobility left Sahrnia, the town is completely isolated and there are no incoming news.”

“Emprise in the middle of winter”, Barris rubbed his head resignedly. “It does not get better, does it?”

“It would take some time to coordinate troops there. I cannot give you the details yet. From my side, I would just appreciate consideration and concern. I do have a family and a small child, Barris. If things go awry, I cannot afford to take risk to endanger them. It is critical to not enrage the both sides of this political conflict before the peace talks.”

“Understood”, Delrin looked at Jean-Claude and perhaps for the first time in his life he could truly grasp the meaning of such worry. “I don’t have children but I got married few months ago. I really do understand. I have never anticipated being so concerned about another person’s wellbeing.”

“You got married?”, the smile appeared on Jean-Claude’s face. “There is still good happening all around us. Let’s eat as you tell me about your wife and later I will introduce you to mine and our little daughter.”

“I would be delighted.”

The meeting was a success and even though it probably was not even necessary, Barris knew that it made Jean-Claude more convinced and confident. That mattered greatly if they would truly run joint military operations, whether in Emprise of somewhere else. Delrin left the note in a
previously agreed upon place for one of Leliana’s agents and considered what to do with the rest of his day. He was painfully tired, but he did not lie when he stated that he wanted to get something for Mira since he made it to the capital.

He started with something obvious. Her sweet tooth was not a secret and he purchased few boxes of chocolates and pralines, whatever could survive the trip back to Skyhold. It was actually smart to ask Lavellan for ideas, because now he had plenty in his head. He had never purchased many gifts in his life, since the relationships were so casual and temporary, but now he was in love and married, and it felt different. Zuzu mentioned perfume as a possibility, and Delrin thought it was brilliant considering how often Mira remarked on how good he smelled.

The store remained unchanged since the last time Delrin visited it. The middle aged man welcome him.

“A recurring customer”, the perfumer announced satisfied. “I can smell it.”

It was both amusing and slightly disconcerting.

“I am looking for perfume for my wife. She likes how I smell, so I thought it could be somewhat similar just more… feminine?”

He sniffed several samples before settling on the one that he liked the most. The perfumer explained the notes of cedar, white amber, rose, fig leaf and pink pepper and something else, but Barris stopped listening. It smelled beautiful, and he certainly hoped Mira would be happy to receive it. He imagined her wearing nothing but that scent on her body, and, well, the thought was beyond mesmerizing.

Perhaps it because of that thought that instead of walking towards his hitched horse he decided to enter the store with female undergarments. It felt odd, and he would not have not dared otherwise but the gentle seduction in the letters certainly made him feel braver. Besides, he would not give it to her immediately, just when the time was right. He would not step foot again in Val Royeaux for a long time, so when would he have another opportunity to do this?

The elegant woman sized him up immediately. She could not see his hands as they were gloved but she still asked the question.

“Let me guess, newly married”, she smiled encouragingly.

“Yes”, he said somewhat nervously.

He was married to a woman he had not seen naked. Yet. Of course, he did not share that with the seller.

“Do you know your wife’s size?”

Surely he did not and any descriptions that came into his mind would probably not help. He had to look slightly embarrassed because the woman smirked again.

“Don’t worry, I recommend a negligee in that case. Is the lady rather curvy or petite?”

“Curvy”, he managed to answer, grateful that his blush would not be much visible.

Was it inappropriate to do so? Would Mira feel offended that he took his time to clearly envision the whole situation? Several items were laid across the counter for him to look and they all seemed very pretty. He would like all of them. What would she like? He had never seen her wearing black,
so he dismissed it upfront. Flowers. She liked flowers. The flowers were literally covering her body, so… He took off his glove and touched the white nightgown with his fingertips. It looked like a dress, a bit taken in the waist, except that it was short and entirely see-through, just tiny flowers adorning it here and there. The intent of that lingerie was quite unmistakable, it covered absolutely nothing, but… Well. He did buy it, alongside the matching panties made of flowery lace. It was so frilly but so pretty at the same time.

He came back to his tiny bedroom at the inn quite pleased, took a shower and collapsed in the bed. Tomorrow he would travel to Skyhold and see Mira in just several days.

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The luncheon with Josephine was lovely. They went to a small Antivan place that Josephine used to frequent as a young gentry student in Val Royeaux. The food was excellent, the dish resembling paella melted in Mira’s mouth. Josephine still looked a little more perturbed than usual, but she was also smiling and laughing a lot. It was easy to dismiss Josephine, she was the embodiment of kindness and politeness, but Mira was aware how much wit and skills went into her work. She was a charming conversationalist and a pleasure to be around. Weaver stayed away, allowing them to chat freely and without inhibitions. Vivienne had found out about their plans at breakfast and insisted on fetching Josephine later straight from the restaurant to attend an important meeting. They still had some time before she would arrive and Mira just finished devouring a delicious chocolate soufflé.

“I needed this”, Josephine whispered pleasantly, tugging some loose hair behind her ear. “It was quite the week and the next one will likely be the same.”

“Are you sure you’re doing well, Josie?”, Mira nudged gently. “You take care of everyone but is anyone taking care of you?”

“No you sound like Leliana”, the Ambassador laughed.

True, she had to admit. Leliana seemed the softest around her friend. To see the famed Spymaster like that was one of the most intriguing aspects of the whole excursion. As much as she still appeared intimidating, the Nightingale treated Josephine as her sister. Mira knew enough of friendship to be certain that those feelings were genuine and there was no calculation there.

“I bet she would be pleased to hear me say that.”

“It’s nothing, I am fine”, Josephine muttered.

The sudden noise came from the alcove above and Mira noticed Weaver walking up the stairs to investigate.

What happened next was too sudden for Mira to fully register. The waiter appeared, carrying the bill on a silver platter, placing it on the table. Josephine acknowledged it by nodding, and then high pitch shriek filled the place.

Mira stood up so abruptly the chair fell down. Her brain could not keep up to process the image in front of her eyes. The waiter was holding Josephine to force her to stand, and the dagger was placed in her thigh, blood flowing slightly through the wound. He looked Mira straight in the eye, cold and composed.

“Contract fulfilled”, he whispered and she could not move her legs.

And then he pulled out the knife.
The bright red blood gushed Josephine collapsed on the floor, seemingly lifeless.

Mira’s mind got flooded with all the information coming in by milliseconds.

Josephine got hit in the artery. She would bleed out in mere minutes. Mira moved towards Josie and the attacker hesitated for a second, as if he was unsure whether to attack her as well.

He fell on the floor abruptly as Weaver took him out, her eyes wild and petrified. Mira could barely register that he died before she was kneeling by Josephine, applying direct pressure to the wound.

“Table cloth”, she yelled in the air and she heard much noise and then someone, most likely Weaver, handed it to her. She added the cloth, pushing on the wound. Josephine was so pale. Fuck. Fuck. Fucking fuck. The blood would start clotting sooner or later, but how the fuck she was supposed to fix a severed artery? That was above her training on Earth, and certainly above her abilities now. Which artery was that? God, please, let this be a minor branch… She kept the direct pressure right where she needed. That she certainly knew how to do. Think. Think. Her mind still raced and she felt the panic rising in her, though Mira was not the one to panic in medical situations. But this was Josephine, this was a catastrophic bleed.

Her face felt wet and she was not sure if it was Josephine’s blood or her own tears.

“**Weaver**, she hissed, “I need Vivienne. Now.”

“On it”, the Elven woman replied and Mira could not even look around at what was going on, her own visibility limited.

“Another cloth”, she barked and someone passed it on her.

The door to the restaurant opened again, and Vivienne kneeled by Josephine’s side, her glamorous outfit soaking the blood around them.

“I don’t know which artery he hit”, Mira told her.

Vivienne ran her hands atop of her and Mira felt the tiniest tingling.

“It’s alright darling. I don’t know if I can heal it but I can certainly try.”

“**Weaver**, there should be a small kit in my bag. Open it and pass it to me.”

The Elven woman did as told.

“What now?”, the Enchanter asked, unsure and terrified. Mira had never seen her like that.

“I apply pressure until it starts clotting and we… think of ideas. Vivienne, if this was a minor branch we could just… cauterize it. It would not need to be fixed. If it was a main femoral artery than I don’t think I can do anything.”

“Well, we **have to** try something.”

“Do you think you can use your magic to burn the artery and cauterize it like that?”

“If anyone can, it is me.”

“I am afraid that if I let go of my hands, she will gush and go in shock.”

“Do you have lyrium potion in your kit?”
“Yes”, Mira said. “A health one too.”

“I have some on me too. I’ll entangle my fingers there. You will need to take your hands off or I will burn you horribly.”


“I will just do it”, Vivienne said impatiently, scared and Mira felt a surprisingly strong fingers wiggling in and shoving into the wound.

“I will move slightly upwards to still press on the artery”, she announced. “On your signal.”

“Now!”

The pain still reached Mira, even with the movement and it was so sudden she almost peed herself.

“Did it work?”

“I don’t know”, Vivienne said faintly. “I think so. I cannot undo it now.”

“Can you heal her?”

“Yes, but I will need lyrium potion right away.”

Weaver readied everything and Vivienne’s hands glowed again. Mira felt the cool, soothing sensation reaching her as well. Madame de Fer gulped on the lyrium potion in a very unladylike manner.

Josephine was still breathing.

“Can you feel if she is bleeding internally?”, Mira asked.

“I don’t think she is”, the uncertainty in Vivienne voice was painful.

“I will move my hands. Heal her again.”

The Enchanter followed the instructions as Weaver handed her another lyrium potion. The pulse on Josie was faint, but not tragic. The breathing was there. There was no seeming sign of shock, but now they could only wait.

“Darling”, Vivienne whispered to Josie, stroking her cheek. “It will be fine.”

Mira hoped for nothing more.

“I will send the message out to the Nightingale”, Weaver announced and stood up, commanding several things at once to bystanders. Mira noticed a clean table cloth and wiped her face and hands, then handed it to Vivienne and finally looked around.

The place was empty, few tables turned. The body of an attacker was lying right there. Mira had seen cadavers many times. She had seen people die. She had never seen someone killed in front of her. She had seen severed arteries, coming in the ER or on the operating table. She had never seen anything like that.

The faintest color returned to Josie’s face and she hoped that at last this was a proof of circulation working properly. This had to be minor branch after all, which was either luck or divine intervention.
Vivienne’s eyes were like steel, watching Josephine like a hawk.

“For fuck’s sake”, Madame de Fer announced loudly and Mira simply knew even she reached her limit. “I think she’ll live.”

“I think so too”.

“House of Repose”, Vivienne muttered hatefully. “They were sent for me back in the day. I had more tools to defend myself.”

“I don’t know…”

“Assassins, darling. This was a professional assassin.”

Mira’s heart raced so quickly and she did not know what to say.

Half of Vivienne’s body was covered in blood, and she was sure she herself looked even worse. Mira felt the skin on her hands and her body tighten, as if she had a clay mask on her face. The had had clotted and dried.

They waited, monitoring Josephine who was still unconscious but breathing steadily. Leliana ran inside accompanied by several agents and soldiers and the look on her face was pure terror and despair, and guilt.

She was no longer the Spymaster who new everything. For a minute when she first laid eyes on Josephine, Leliena was a friend. She was family.

“Secure everything”, she ordered her agents, steeling her voice. “I want all evidence.”

It took them another two hours and few doses of healing magic before they felt comfortable with transporting Josephine to the Fézensac Estate. The agents filled the corridors now. Weaver took Mira to the bathroom. She was completely soaked in blood. The now dark red stains were on her face, on her hair, on her hands, on her body, on her shoes. Weaver used the scissors to cut the clothes off, now stiff as over starched bedlinen.

Mira still could not let out a single cry. She stood underneath the shower until the water was clear and then washed herself, again, and again, and again, and again, repeating the process multiple times. She picked new clothing mechanically, brushed her wet hair as usual and headed to Josephine’s quarters.

By some miracle or the power of Vivienne’s magic, Josephine was awake. She looked like death, but she was awake, sipping on water. Mira examined her thoroughly, but aside from an unsightly burn wound Josie seemed alright.

“Thank you”, the Ambassador looked at her gently grabbing her hand, “you saved my life.”

“It’s… Josephine, I am so glad you’re here with us.”

Vivienne patted her on the back and sat down on the side of the bed while Leliana pushed Mira aside.

“I…” the Spymaster coughed and then embraced her while Mira’s body stiffened. The surprise of the hug made it terrifying though she did not doubt Nightingale’s good intentions.

“I am in your debt, forever”, Leliana whispered and Mira did not even want to entertain the thought
of what favor she could invoke for this. “Mira, listen to me. The danger is still there. I know Vivienne told you it was the guild of assassins. There is a contract on Josephine’s life. It would take too long to explain. It’s a ridiculous situation, the contract had been drafted literally generations ago. We never thought that they would try to invoke it, especially like this. Either someone else is profiteering from it or the guild internal machinations caused it… It will be solved. We have to stay here for a while, the Inquisitor himself was notified. Barris is in Val Royeaux. You will be safest with him, far away from this place.”

“What about the need for a medic?”

“It’s slim and you are an added target to protect. We have Vivienne’s magic, she is a good healer. I know it’s sounds—“

“No, it’s fine”, Mira sighed. “Really.”

“Go pack. Weaver will escort you. I assure you… None of us intended for it to happen.”

“I know.”

“They will pay dearly. I wrote a note to Barris. He does not know you’re here, I had no chance yet… We’re in chaos now. I do not think you’re in danger once you’re away from the Estate, but it would be best if you both left Val Royeaux tomorrow. I am sure he will take care of it.”

“It’s fine.”

Mira knew she was sounding a bit indifferent but she was aware that once she would start feeling everything that happened today, she would collapse, and she was not ready for that. Not ready at all.

************

Delrin was sleeping when the loud knocking on the door woke him up. What time was it? It was dark outside, but it couldn’t be outrageously late. The noise startled him, because he certainly had not anticipated company and agents tended to communicate more subtly. He walked to the door quietly, the dagger in his hand.

“Who is it?”, he asked loudly.

“Weaver, the Nightingale network”, the person responded.

“The code?”

“Delrin, it’s me”, another voice interrupted, the one he was certainly familiar with.

*Mira*?!

He opened the door. The Elven woman bowed her head, but he barely even looked at her, because right in front of him stood Mira, in her own flesh, looking pale and distraught. Why was she…? What happened? The thoughts collided into his brain and he was not able to say anything.

“Can I come in?”, she asked quietly and he finally moved.

“Sweet Andraste, yes”, he put away the knife and picked up her sack and placed it behind the door. He let her in, quietly watching her remove the coat and the shoes. He was still so stunned.

“Captain”, agent Weaver said. “I will need to head out, so if this is fine—“
“Yes, yes”, he thanked her and then turned towards Mira with so many questions in his head. Aside from the fact that she was here, really here there was something very wrong, he just sensed it.

“What just—“

“Here”, she handed him a note and he realized that she was shivering, whether from the cold or something else.

“Mira—“

“Just read it. I can’t—“

He lit the candle by the small table in the room and open the piece of parchment.

_________________

Captain Barris,

There was an assassination attempt on Josephine today by the House of Repose. The contract was drafted over a hundred years ago and it was involuntarily triggered recently. The attack was almost successful. Mira was present when it happened, alongside agent Weaver herself. The efforts to save Josephine were not in vain. She is awake and I assure you the matter will be dealt with accordingly. I do not believe Mira to be in direct danger but out of abundance of caution I would recommend leaving Val Royeaux tomorrow. There are three agents outside of the inn, including Bailiff.

Maker’s Blessings,

Leliana

_________________

His hands started shaking lightly as he read the note. He then read it again. Delrin felt both furious, shocked and sad. Not at Mira, but at everyone else. Assassins. Assassins almost killed Josephine and Mira was right there. How close was she—? How—?

“Delrin”, she whispered in a breathy voice and then he felt her face on his chest and her arms wrapping around his waist. He was wearing nothing but loose cotton breeches and a linen shirt, and suddenly her breath was on his sternum and he felt her whole body so unbelievable close.

The anger and fury exploded into thousands pieces and faded momentarily. His heart thudded in his chest as he embraced her.

“Maker preserve me, you are really here”, he whispered and kissed the top of her head.

He could hear her wail as she started crying, clinging closer to him.

“Mira”, he repeated, leading her so he was able to sit at the edge of the bed and he pulled her into his lap. Her hair was slightly damp and cold, she probably left in a hurry. The hurt pouring out of her was so clear and it pierced through his heart. All this time, he relied on Mira being safe, and today she faced mortal danger.

Every single fear he had surfaced as he was hearing her whimpering. He failed to protect people he was responsible for before, but Mira… Mira was not a fighter. That was not to say she wasn’t strong, but she was not a warrior, and she would not become a warrior. In the face of physical
threat she was fragile and vulnerable. Maker’s breath, she smelled exactly the same as always. The feelings in him churned, touching on every wound and every insecurity.

His greatest fear, he realized, was that something would happened to her. She was his wife. He loved her. He would lay his life for her.

She moved her hands around his neck, pulling herself into a tighter hug.

“You feel so much better than I remembered”, she murmured through tears.

“How are you doing?”

“I…”, she took a deep breath. “Today was… harrowing. But I am so happy to be with you.”

“You’re shaking”, he noticed, rubbing his hands across her arms.

“It’s just… shock, I think. I held it all in until I saw you.”

“Can I see your face, please?”, he pleaded.

She lifted herself and looked straight at him. There was sweetness and pain on her face. He run his thumb on her cheek and she breathed more steadily.

“I am so glad to see you”, he said quietly. “Mira, we’re leaving here tomorrow. I will… You are safe now. You are.”

“I know”, he felt her fingers touching the line of his jaw. “I know I’m a sniveling mess—“

He kissed her without hesitation, slowly and gently, as she moved to caress the top of his head. Maker’s breath, he missed those lips, he missed all of her. He let her take a breath and she smiled at him, the first time this evening.

“I missed you so much.”

“I missed you too, Mira. Maker only knows how much. You’re really here.”

“You were sleeping before we came, weren’t you?”

“Yes. I got here so late yesterday that I got only couple of hours of sleep. I wanted to rush to Skyhold. How… how did you end up in Val Royeaux?”

“Leliana, Josephine and Vivienne thought it was a good idea. I was able to find some important resources for our research at the University and there was a fitting for the ball at the Winter Palace. I wanted to see you sooner. That was quite the selling point.”

“I had no idea you would be here.”

“Leliana said there was no way to contact you.”

Leliana could have tried harder, he thought but decided not to say it out loud.

Instead, he simply kissed her again, feeling her slowly relaxing and mellowing.

“Are you hungry?”, he asked. “They serve food at the tavern, I can pick something up.”

She tensed up just a little. “Can I go with you?”
“Sure”.

Mira was certainly nervous. He could see it in the way she moved or looked around or how she did not let go of his arm. Maker’s breath, if he witnessed what she did today, he would likely feel quite similar, even with all of his training. He just really wished to help her. They came back to the room. The small side table was not large enough for the tray and there were no chairs, so Barris simply set the food on the floor and they sat down. She did not have much appetite but she drank a lot of tea and still managed to nibble on something.

“Do you want to talk about it?”, he asked cautiously, watching her keenly.

She frowned just a little. “I don’t even know what I’m feeling. A little shock. It was… I’ve seen people die, you know that. I’ve seen people bleed out too, once in childbirth, few times in emergency care, during the surgery… I’ve seen people who were stabbed or treated them. I have never seen someone being stabbed in front of me. It happened so fast and he looked straight at me. I… And then Weaver killed him. I’ve seen people die but I’ve never seen anyone killed right in front of my eyes. Then it was… Josephine. I’ve never… not someone I knew.”

“It does feel different”, he said calmly and she glanced at him sharply.

(Of course you know that”, she murmured. “I was so scared to the point where I feel… not ashamed, but odd, you know? On Earth, I was never alone as a medic. Not like this. Here there is so much I don’t know. Everything happened so fast and I am usually really quick, but it was so overwhelming. I can now reimagine it much more slowly. The assassin… he obviously knew what he was doing, and he removed the dagger right away.”

Barris stomach tightened and he felt the icy shiver on his spine. There was no way of being sure, but the assassin at least considered attacking Mira. The thought— He thought of Rhys and Evangeline, then of Jean-Claude thinking of his family. This… The feeling was almost desperate.

“The blood gushed and I knew he slashed he artery, it’s always—“

“I know how it looks”.

Mira winced. “I know you’d seen people die in combat, a lot. I know you killed them yourself. I thought me being the medic made me more prepared. In some ways I am sure it is true, but… That was just more vivid. And Josie… she is the nicest person I have met. I know she is very skilled and smart but there is genuine kindness about her.”

“I know. I am sorry.”

“Vivienne panicked too. She got there quickly—“

“You were alone when it happened?”

“Weaver was there, although there was some sort of distraction… Yes, I was there with Josephine, we were eating luncheon. Vivienne was about to join and pick her up for one of the countless meetings they needed to attend. I spent most time in Val Royeaux either at the University or just walking around with Weaver. I don’t know what would happen if Vivienne didn’t get there as fast. Or rather, I know what would happen. I could not even cauterize the wound on my own…It would not work. What I know about emergency is about speed but there is always another step. Transport to the well equipped hospital. So many people. Here in Thedas I need to modify my approach drastically because there is no system in place. I’m just one person, and with limited experience.”
I’m not a genius or—I would be a decent doctor on Earth, I know that, but here I am suddenly so much more than I should be.”

He rubbed her shoulder, letting Mira speak and trying to ignore his own emotion and the worry that burned his stomach like acid.

“Do you ever feel like that? That you’re doing things you’re not ready for?” She asked.

“Constantly”, he chuckled bitterly. “In some minor way it is a constant fear that just never leaves me. I just… It is always there, but it’s not always pronounced. To answer your question, yes. You know what happened at Therinfal. You know I was made Knight-Lieutenant at a very young age. And now we’re fighting against a completely new threat. I know I can’t fully grasp how you feel but a lot of what you’re describing is not foreign to me.”

Mira moved herself closer and sat into his lap again while he leaned on the side of the bed. He covered her with his arms, wrapping them around her waist. He would ever tire of this, of the feeling of her being so near.

“I always talk with you so openly. I… Delrin, you make everything better. From the way you hold me to the way I am always just myself with you.”

He buried his mouth into her curls. It really smelled like honey and herbs. He tightened his embrace. There was so much he felt, and the thoughts of what could have happen still had not left him.

“Mira”, he broke. “I… The thought that I could have lost you…”

“I am here”, she turned to face him. “Delrin, I am here.”

“I know”, he pulled her close and she rested her face into his neck. “Just let me… Let me stay like this for a minute.”

He did not know how much time had passed, but it was longer than merely a minute. Mira was gently caressing his shoulder, and he could feel her warm breath tickling his neck as he cried.

*************

Mira changed into the nightgown while Delrin was taking a quick shower. The events from today still weighed on her, but she felt more peaceful and collected. The most important thing was that they were finally together, and the hope and comfort it brought was almost indefinable. Mira never believed in soulmates, two halves just drifting apart to find each other. Delrin was his own person, just like her. For her, that made it more astounding. They had different temperaments, upbringing, faith, culture, experiences and yet they built togetherness that was more than anything she had known before.

He opened the door to the bathroom and she could almost feel the steam coming out of it.

“Can I come in and brush my teeth?”

“Sure, I was just about to do the same.”

Regretfully, he was already wearing the shirt. Well, that could be remedied later. He glanced at her quickly and not averted his eyes. She was wearing one of the new negliges. It was hardly scandalous, but still quit the change from the shapeless linen she wore to bed in Skyhold. The pink silk was delicate and thin, and the cut was rather flattering.
“You’re lovely”, he smiled.

“I hoped you would notice.”

He laughed, putting the toothbrush in his mouth and Mira was almost struck by how good this domesticity felt.

“I missed all of this. I missed you. Skyhold without you is horribly boring.”

He brushed his hand on her shoulder, definitely on purpose.

“Really?”, he murmured. “It couldn’t be entirely boring, you met the Champion. I’ve always—”

“Fuck”, Mira said suddenly. “Fuck, I completely forgot and I wanted to tell you.”

“What?”

The blush came to her cheeks, of a different kind. “I… well, Hawke knows about where I am from. Apparently he can tell when Varric is lying and he just asked me directly and it seemed a better idea to tell him the truth.”

“Do you think he would tell anyone?”, Delrin got serious but did not seem that bothered. “From what Varric has shared I would think Hawke to know how to keep a secret.”

“No”, Mira breathed out. “I don’t think he would tell anyone. There’s one additional unrelated thing…”

“Yes?”, Delrin washed his hands.

“Hawke asked me to spend the night with him.” Mira said and watched her husband freeze.

“He asked you… what?”

“He just randomly asked me at the end of the day. I thought I should tell you.”

The look on Delrin’s face was quite unreadable.

“I hope you don’t think I encou—“

“No”, he interrupted her. “Mira, I would never think that. Not at all. It’s just… Was he… pushy or —?”

“No. It was literally just a question that I felt completely blind sighted by. He was not even flirtatious. It just… happened.”

“Well”, Delrin looked at her warmly. “You are a very beautiful woman.”

“So very married”, she touched his chest through the shirt he was wearing.

“Your husband is a very lucky man”, he placed his hand on her waist and the pleasant warmth filled her body.

“He will be in trouble if he doesn’t kiss me—“

He did and set her heart afame.

Mira had to stand on her toes and lean on him. Delrin held her close, and his tongue tasted of
elfroot and need.

“Let’s go to bed and kiss more”, she whispered.

“Yes”, he grinned.

It was easy to lose herself in his caresses. He had the perfect lips, the epitome of kissability and he did not rush. He placed his leg between her thighs and the heat coming off his body was more than enough to warm her despite the low temperature in the room. He did not need much convincing to lose the shirt and she was running her fingers on his back, feeling the changing texture between his smooth skin and the scars from all the battles. Her own desire spread, bubbling in her veins. She loved the sensation of having him above her, the warmth, the closeness.

When they broke away from the kiss Mira could hear him breathing and he did not move away. She touched his face gently, feeling his stubble and just looked into his eyes. All of this was good. So good.

“I love you, Mira”, Delrin said as if it was the most obvious thing in the world.

Maybe it was. She smiled so hard that her cheeks hurt and she pulled him for another kiss, clinging to him so hard that he almost collapsed on her.

“I’m going to crush you”, he chuckled.

“No”, she protested and after few seconds she gently pushed him away. “Actually, yes.”

He laughed and settled himself close, supporting his head with his hand.

“I love you”, she whispered, tapping her finger onto his chest.

It felt wonderful to say it out loud.

“I know”, he lifted her hand to his mouth and kissed it.

The struggle of the day did not miraculously disappear. The worry did not vanish entirely. It did not change the world around them.

But this? This was home.

Delrin’s tiredness was clear. He held her in a spoon hug and Mira could feel his body mellowing enough to know he was going in and out of slumber. Just his familiar, wonderful scent brought comfort.

“Will you be able to fall asleep?”, he asked softly.

“With you like this? I think so.”

“Good”, he mumbled into her hair.

“Delrin? I love you. Sweet dreams.”

“Sleep well, Mira. I love you, too.”
This chapter marks some milestones: 200 000+ words (in less than 3 months), 300+ kudos, 4000+ views. I had a draft for this story before and I don't have a beta, so that speeds things up, but I genuinely feel proud of writing so much. Having readers, especially regular ones is a wonderful source of motivation so I just want to express how much I am grateful for all your comments and support.

I never intended for the 200 000+ mark to coincide with their first official "I love you", but I quite like that it turned out like that.

I do realize that since there's so little about Barris in the game, this is essentially almost two OCs here, so it means a lot that you've decided to click to start reading and stayed for the ride.

There is more to come - it does not stop just because they are together. I certainly fully intend to lead this story til the end. I am not running of ideas, at least for now.

I know that what happened to Josephine was horrible and brutal. There was very very subtle foreshadowing that something was going on, but Mira would not be privy to details and no one anticipated that.

I think Delrin is a man who is really calm and composed in his demeanor in general, but it doesn't mean he doesn't have emotions or expresses them, including crying, even if it's rare. I also am aware that I describe Mira crying quite a lot, but I imagine that is her way of releasing tension, and the things she had been through are really hard. She is the type to come home from incredibly hard day of work and cry for an hour and the go back and do her job again. I also think that at this point, they both feel very comfortable with each other emotionally.

Now, what will Mira and Delrin do during the several days of travel and upon going back to Skyhold that is now almost empty? Well, I am sure they will find something to pass the time:)

Sorry for the novel at the end, it seemed a good chapter for a bit of that.

Once again, thank you so much!
Snow on snow on snow

Chapter Summary

Mira and Delrin get stranded in Jader due to snowstorm.

;) 

Chapter Notes

NSFW. NSFW. NSFW.

It is not *overly* graphic - it's "mature", not "explicit", mostly a showcase of intimacy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Third week of Haring, 9:42 Dragon Age, Jader

Delrin couldn’t get out of Val Royeaux fast enough. He knew that the Spymaster was likely correct and that Mira was in no further danger. Still, the mere knowledge that she could have been attacked, that she could have died, she would have died— He felt more frantic than usual, though he managed to remain calm in front of her.

Mira was nervous. The time when they said they loved each other was wonderful. She was melting in his arms. That negligee she wore was both pretty and distracting. Mira was warm and wanting, and even though they merely slowly kissed, the anticipation of everything about to come in the future was fantastic.

He was tired and fell asleep easily, holding her body tightly. She might have fallen asleep easily too, but she remained restless for the whole night, waking up multiple times. Each time, he roused as well, pulling her close and whispering ‘I am here, you are safe’. He was smart and experienced enough that there are traumas that cannot be mended merely by the presence of a loved one. Still, he hoped that it helped.

They found the ship very easily, and he purchased a nicer cabin than if he was traveling alone. It took them a long time to help the horses on board because Mira’s mare, Snowflake spooked and needed a lot of coaxing and calming. Clearly, the horse picked on Mira’s own anxiety.

By the time they ended up inside of the cabin and Mira collapsed on the bed, she looked paled, exhausted and slightly sweaty. It was evident she was not made for sea travel.

“How bad was it when you were coming to Val Royeaux?”

“Not that bad”, she whined with her eyes shut. “I’m just feeling miserable.”

“I can see that.”
“Well”, she opened her eyes and looked at him, “we’ll how much you’ll love me after all this travel.”

He chuckled. “I’m going to procure some tea. Unless you want to go on the deck—“

“No”, she protested, covering her face with a pillow.

“I didn’t think so. Don’t worry, Mira, I will gladly take care of you.”

“You have to know I usually make a horrible patient. The worst. Many medics do.”

“Believe me”, he gently patted her arm, “between Simon and Zuzu, I’ve seen way worse.”

“You are”, she laughed softly, “very good at this whole marriage thing.”

Delrin’s heart swelled with pride.

Mira felt constant nausea and slight dizziness. She barely moved from the bed, allowing Delrin to continue bringing her tea the whole day alongside the occasional snack. As much as she wished to be spending their time kissing and caressing, it felt really nice to be taken care of. They fell into the familiar routine very quickly, and she marveled how natural everything felt. She was rolling around half miserably, trying to focus on reading one of the romance novels she purchased for Cassandra. Delrin was analyzing some reports and writing short missives, keeping the piles of paper meticulously organized.

“I hate paperwork”, he groaned at the end, placing it all in his sack.

“I feel you”, she replied. “You should see how we chart at the infirmary.”

“What are you reading?”, he asked casually.

Mira blushed heavily.

“It’s a romance novel I got for Cassandra.”

“Romance novel? For Cassandra?”

“You don’t know about her affinity towards Varric’s ‘Swords and Shields’?”

“Varric’s what?”

“Varric’s romance novel. You don’t know about it? Where were you this whole time?”

“I don’t… I mostly spend my time with Bull. I spar with Cassandra but I can’t say that topic came up.”

“Anyway”, she lifted a book, “that is what I’m reading. The romance novel I got as a gift for my friend.”

“Heat of the Desert?”, he laughed loudly. “Really? As someone who just spent two months in the Western Approach I admit I don’t find the premise that enticing.”

“It’s set in Anderfels and it depicts the story between one of the traders and a daughter—“, she playfully punched him on the shoulder. “Stop laughing, you horrible, judgmental—“
“I’m genuinely trying”, he looked at her reddened face as she grinned at him.

“So”, she touched his face, “am I to understand you’re more of the… ‘Melting Snows’ type of man? Because that is the title of another book I got for her.”

“Well’, he lowered his voice slightly. “It is winter now.”

“Yes”, she murmured, moving closer.

“Will you feel more nauseous if I kiss you right now?”

“Mhmm”, she squeezed his arm, “Probably. Let’s do it anyway.”

Every worry that’s been on her mind evaporated when she felt his lips on hers, his hand wiggling in into her hair.

*************

By the evening, to Delrin’s relief, Mira felt a little bit better. The thin fabric of her nightgown barely covered her tights and he could feel how warm they were when she slightly slid her leg over his side. She nestled herself on his shoulder and played with the medallion on his neck.

“I like that you’re wearing it”, she said.

“I like it too”, he lazily stroked her back.

“This is the time of the year when there would be a major holiday in my faith.”

“Oh”, he whispered in response. “That must be hard. I will gladly listen if you want to share anything. I know this is the hardest topic for you.”

“It’s just so grand and impossible to explain. So odd and bizarre. It transcends beyond the words I have and there is so much doubt I am in that I still have not wrapped my own head around it. It’s not that I want to keep anything from you—”

“I know”, he kissed her head.

“I pray for you sometimes”, she confessed. “I don’t know if it means anything anymore but I still believe in something, and I love you, so I pray.”

“I think you mentioned it in your letters. It means… It means a lot to me.”

“Does it feel odd to be with someone who’s not Andrastian?”

“It doesn’t feel odd to be with you at all”, he replied, pulling her closer. “That is the best way I can explain it.”

“I know there is so much that is different between us. From faith to… everything else. And yet, I don’t think I have ever felt so connected to anyone. It’s not merely attraction or my love for you. It’s the understanding between us. It really reaches the deepest parts of my heart.”

“I love you so much, Mira”, he inhaled the scent of her hair. “You’re just—“

“We should talk about sex”, she said, not letting him finish his sentence and the sudden change of topic was no unexpected Delrin froze.
He rubbed his forehead as she moved a little to face him and look him in the eyes.

“I know”, she flushed heavily, “that is not the smoothest transition between the conversation topics —”

“I would say”, he replied amused.

“But I’ve been thinking about it.”

“I gathered from everything you wrote—“

“That too”, she chuckled. “I meant the conversation.”

Delrin was not entirely surprised. First of all, Mira talked about everything. Second of all, it certainly would give him a clearer picture of what she wanted or expected, and he still did not make any move to touch or kiss her beyond what they’ve done before he left from the Western Approach. He didn’t want to rush her and he didn’t want to do anything to make her uncomfortable, but Maker’s breath, he really wanted to be with his wife.

“Sure”, he responded gently. “Let’s talk.”

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Mira had never had sex, any type of sex. She was also a medical professional who was not only well educated, but who had counseled patients on sexual matters before. She had seen literally thousands of naked bodies. She was hardly a blushing maiden. Well, she was blushing, she was a maiden, but she was not a Victorian bride.

Between the anticipation, the letters they had exchanged, the ‘I love you’, the preparations in Val Royeaux, the fact that Delrin smelled irresistibly and that last night she was so aroused that it ached, she knew she didn’t want to wait much longer. They were young, they were in love, they were married, and he was here.

She could not imagine not talking about it all beforehand. The attitudes in Thedas differed vastly among various people from what she had learned at the infirmary. Both Ellendra and Fiona shared her aptitude for practicality and honesty, and the mages were usually well educated. Stitches certainly did not feel comfortable discussing too much with female patients, likely because he simply lacked training and experience. Isanna had no problems being open and completely unashamed providing care. The patients themselves…

There was a wide range of differences in attitudes among their patients. There was a lot of sexually transmitted diseases among soldiers too, and while Adan’s potions seemed to cure them rather effectively Mira knew that this was the subject she would need to bring up, although none of the modern measures existed when it came to testing or prevention. She knew that Delrin would not be offended by any question but he might find it a bit bizarre.

Moreover, their conversations had always made her feel better. This was new and wonderful, and she was filled with anticipation and slightly nervous as well.

Her faced was surely very warm and flushed. She knew how to be composed and professional at work, but this was the most private and intimate setting.

“I want to…”, she whispered, gently touching his hand. He looked so serious and calm. “Sometime, when we arrive at Skyhold, I want to… I want to make love with you.”
His eyes were looking into hers deeply, and Mira could watch Delrin swallowing as he reached out and touched her cheek.

“Mira”, he smiled softly. “I would love nothing more.”

“Sometime soon”, she purred and his grin widened. “There’s just no way I’m having sex for the first time in a boat or in a tent.”

“I would not dream of it”, he laughed and then searched her face. “Do you have any questions about sex or—”

Now it was her turn to laugh. “You are beyond adorable”, she patted his chest. “You do realize I am a medic. I should be asking you if you have any questions, I am entirely certain I could answer all of them.”

He covered his face for a second. “I do know you’re a medic, I just didn’t think—”

“Cleary you’ve been distracted.”

“Clearly”, he agreed readily.

“I do have some questions that I need to ask, especially as a medic—”

“Ha”, he interrupted her. “I’ve never had a venereal disease if that’s what you’re wanting to ask about. There have not been that many women—”

“You don’t really need to explain. I just want to know what pertains to my own health and, well, I’ve seen my fair share of diseases at the infirmary and it is quite common, especially among soldiers who frequent—”

“I certainly have never been with a working girl”, he coughed out a slightly awkwardly and Mira rubbed her forehead.

“I’m sorry—”

“Don’t”, he placed his hand on her waist. “I just did not expect such questions. Mira, it’s fine. I am glad we’re talking. Is that what people did on Earth?”

“Well, that’s what would be advised, at least. Anyway, there’s one other serious matter—”

“Go on.”

“I have the glyph to prevent pregnancy.”

“Oh”, he looked at her. “You had Ellendra do it?”

“No”, she sighed. “Vivienne placed it on me before we got married.”

The frown on Delrin’s face was rather painful.

“I… I am sorry”, he muttered. “I know what you must have been thinking and I hope that Vivienne—”

“She said nothing to doubt your noble intentions. She just offered it to avoid monthly bleeding and she told me she wanted me to have options—”
Delrin let out a deep breath.

“Hey”, Mira gently stroked his stomach. “Look at us. She was clearly right.”

He did smirk a little and then leaned closer and hugged her.

**************

It felt so nice to have Mira so close after such a long time of being apart. Especially now when Delrin could be open about how he felt. He loved her, she loved him in return, he desired her and she certainly made it very clear that she desired him as well. How great was that. How fantastic.

“There’s more”, she lifted her head up.

Sure there was. That did not come as shock.

“Yes?”

“I’m don’t want to bring it up too early but it’s also important to me and I need to hear it from you. I was being thoroughly assured how effective glyphs are but— If anything happened and I got pregnant, would you be angry? Disappointed? If you are completely against having a child—“

“Mira, Mira”, she always talked faster when she was nervous and he wanted for it not to escalate. “I thought about it, actually. After our fight. I really did. I’ve never imagined getting married, not to mentioned having children but I am not against it at all, uhm, we certainly can revisit it later but I do want you to be sure that I would not be angry, or disappointed and I would care for you and our child and—”, he felt his throat drying.

Mira kissed him on the cheek.

“Can I ask you something too?”, he said quietly. “Don’t answer if it makes you uncomfortable. I know you’ve never had sex but have you…?”

“I’ve never gone further than what we’ve done together, basically. Does it bother you?”

Bother him?

‘No”, he frowned. “Why would it bother me in any way?”

There was a little bit of shyness around her, and a lot of vulnerability in her eyes.

"What if we have sex and it’s horrible?"

He chuckled at the thought but then saw the expression on her face.

“Mira, are you really concerned about that?”

“No”, she whispered. “I don’t know. Maybe. I think my expectations are realistic but what if…?”

“Well, I can certainly promise you that I will do whatever I can to make sure it’s good and pleasurable for you”, he swallowed his saliva, “and I really think—“

“Oh”, she gasped. “I meant… I can’t believe I’m saying it out loud. What if you are disappointed?”

The thought was both ridiculous and it took his breath away at the same time.
“Impossible”, he said softly, “I love you. You’re my wife. You’re the only woman I want. I love kissing you, I love holding you, I love when you touch me. You think I don’t realize that it will be slow and careful and maybe slightly awkward? It won’t be horrible, Mira.”

“Well”, she sighed, looking down.

Sweet Andraste.

“Fine”, he relented, stroking her arm. “If it’s horrible, we’ll simply do it again, and again, and again, and again until it’s great.”

Finally, Mira smiled at him and pulled him into a kiss. “Without the doubt, you are the sweetest man. So patient and generous—“

She was the sweetest, he thought, tasting her lips and moving onto her neck and hearing a moan escaping her mouth.

“I can be very patient and very generous when it comes to a lot of things”, he whispered into her ear and felt her hand grasping a little bit harder onto his body. She was very responsive to his touch.

Delrin was indeed quite confident it would not be horrible, not at all.

“I might have, uhm, been thinking about it for a while and”, her breathing slightly quickened, “and I got some lingerie. I hope you will enjoy the view—Oh”. He nibbled the skim near her clavicle.

“I’ve been thinking about it for a while as well and I got you something too”, he breathed and she wiggled herself away a little.

“Really?”, she eyed him curiously. “You bought lingerie? For me?”

His face and neck were truly warm now.

“Yes, a negligee. It’s more— Well.”

“Ha”, she mused. “Well, when were you going to give it to me?”

“When the time— It’s really very— It’s not like what you’re wearing now, although it’s pretty too—“

“Alright, give it to me now”, she nudged him. “I am so very intrigued.”

“It’s very revealing”, he started explaining but she just told him to hurry.

*****************

Mira opened the flat white box quite impatiently. First of all, it was undeniably thrilling that Delrin actually had purchased something for her and that he had imagined her wearing it. Second of all, lingerie shopping was never easy so she was very intrigued what he actually got. Third of all, there was this adorable hint of embarrassment on his face that was both rare and precious.

The fabric of the negligee was white. She lifted it up and chuckled slightly.

“It’s beautiful”, she whispered.

It was. It was made of sheer silk tulle, entirely see through, just little floral embellishment here and
there. There was only one purpose for lingerie like that.

“You have ceratainly been thinking”, Mira laughed, watching Delrin looking at her with mixture of desire, amusement and uncertainty. “You will definitely see me in that.”

“Believe me”, he stated unabashedly, “I am so looking forward to it.”

If she was less nauseous and the boat did not make her dizzy, it would be indeed difficult to stop after that statement.

**************

They arrived in Jader in the middle of snowstorm. Unlike Mira, Delrin was not cooped up in the cabin the whole time, and he could guess the conditions ahead. It still surprised him how harsh the snow had hit the Orlesian city. He would hesitate to head into the mountains in that weather alone, and he would never do it with Mira by his side, even with the Inquisition’s tent being magically enhanced. That seemed just too precarious.

It certainly looked beautiful though. Jader was white, covered in snow. Mira actually gasped when they left the ship. Horses were slightly less happy. They rode to the Inn right by the southern city gates. The Inquisition had used it before and he knew the place was decent. Moreover, the Inkeeper was under Leliana’s thumb. She passed Barris the correspondence awaiting him. The woman warmed up upon looking at Mira.

“Newlyweds?”, she guessed eyeing them both.

“Yes”, Delrin responded.

“I will you give you a bedroom on another side, upstairs. No one will disturb you, lovebirds”, the Inkeeper announced happily.

“We might stay here for few nights to wait for a weather to improve.”

“Certainly, Captain.”

They ate dinner downstairs at the small tavern, and then they both headed to their quarters.

The room was indeed very nice, all covered in cedar. The fireplace was already lit, he would just need to add more firewood later. The large bed looked soft and comfortable. Mira seemed happy to finally not be on the sea, and he was happy that she felt better.

He opened the letters. There was a bunch of reports that Leliana had sent from Val Royeaux concerning his meeting with Jean-Claude, the note from Clarissa that his squadron had reached Skyhold safely, the missive from Cullen updating him on the situation in the Approach. The last letter contained notes from Leliana, updating on the progress of dealing with House of Repose and informing of the Ambassador’s health. He passed a note about Josephine to Mira, and she was visibly relieved.

Barris was unsure whether he was supposed to do more to help Mira cope with the attack on the Ambassador. He was a soldier, he was used to violence and death. It still sometimes haunted him. She was not a fighter. She was, however, a medic, and he didn’t want to come off too patronizing. They had already talked about it. To witness such a brutal attack was a rough ordeal and he wondered whether he should try harder. Mira always seemed both very sensitive and very resilient.
She cried often, but she was also able to deal with pain and tragedy quickly.

He loved her so much. There was no doubt in his heart, and he treated his duty to care for Mira and to protect her very seriously.

“How long we’ll be staying here?”, she asked.

“Truthfully, I don’t know”, he replied. “I will write out some missive and letters on my own. I am definitely not dragging you into the mountains in such snow.”

“Oh”, she looked at him hesitantly. “Am I slowing us down?”

“There are very few people I would advise to travel in such conditions. Any slowing down is simply a responsible course of action. We might stay a day longer than if I was on my own but honestly I wouldn’t leave tomorrow myself given the weather.”

“Alright. Can you shower first? I would love to soak in a bath for quite some time.”

“Sure”.

He wrote back few short notes to Skyhold and to Val Royeaux, wondering where would he be deployed next. Given everything that he had been told, the mission to Emprise du Lion was certainly a high possibility. He hoped for some time in Skyhold to train and recuperate, but he doubted he would get a whole month, like last time. He longed to be with Mira more, especially now. It weighted on him that he would leave her again, likely soon. It was necessary, he knew that. They had been fighting the war for over a year, with no end in sigh.

For now, he would have couple of days with Mira here in Jader, courtesy of Frostbacks’ harsh winters.

************

The bath was wonderful. After two days of continuous dizziness, this all felt like heaven. Mira chuckled that not so long ago she had hoped for some time with Delrin far away from everything, and now they were stranded in this Inn until the weather got better. Perhaps it was not far away like her fantasy, but it was still removed enough to be able to forget about the reality surrounding them.

She still had moments of panic and stress when thinking about what had transpired in Val Royeaux, but leaving immediately helped and Delrin presence certainly provided her with more than enough distraction.

Maybe distraction was a wrong choice of words. It was more about finding home in his arms, knowing she was safe, allowing herself a moment to breathe, a moment to enjoy.

Mira put on a negligee and panties that Delrin got her. She did not say anything to him when she went to take a bath, mostly because she wasn’t sure how she would feel later. The travel was long, they still weren’t in Skyhold.

Somehow, the sheer white fabric made her look more naked than if she wore nothing at all. It fit her perfectly. She pushed aside any anxiety around her body aside, though the thought how fit Delrin was in comparison to her had crossed her mind before. No. She would not focus on that at all. She looked beautiful and he would find her beautiful.

Maybe she should have told him something, anything, just to give the slightest hint. He seemed engrossed in the reports sitting by the bed and writing furiously. What if he wouldn’t be in the
mood? She would definitely do not appreciate a surprise, but at the same time it had been obvious that any decision on how slow or how fast they would move forward would be up to her. Each night they spent in each other’s arms. Tonight would not be different, they would just move slightly further than before.

Mira run her fingers through her hair, messing them a little bit and then she opened the door.

Nothing happened. Delrin was squatting in front of the fireplace, adding more wood. For a split second, Mira wanted to both laugh and run back to the bathroom because she wasn’t quite certain what to say. She took just few steps into the room, standing right in front of the bed.

“How was your ba—“, he stood up and turned, and saw her.

She couldn’t imagine he could have looked at her any more intensely. His eyes moved from her face towards her body, slowly, then back to her face again. He had always been cautious to not overstep, to not make her uncomfortable, but now he was gazing at her shamelessly.

She was blushing everywhere.

“Mira”, Delrin said quietly, his voice warm, “you are more beautiful than I’ve imagined.”

“I thought”, she smiled, “that we could do a little more than just kiss tonight.”

He grinned openly and took few steps forward to kiss her. The kiss was softer than she anticipated, almost innocent. He gently brushed his lips against her, his fingers barely touched her waist. He unbuttoned his linen shirt, removed it, took her by the hand, sat down on the bed and gently pulled her onto his lap.

Much more comfortable, though even like that he was still taller. They kissed more deeply. Mira could feel one of his hands on her waist, another one moving up and down her thigh.

“I love you”, she finally said, caressing his body.

“I love you, too”, he replied, definitely taking a moment to look at her again.

**************

Sweet Andraste.

He did not anticipate it tonight, but it was a wonderful surprise. That little negligee was indeed lovely, but the most beautiful thing was to see Mira naked. He had been dreaming of those breasts far too many times, and now the only thing covering them was a see through fabric. He could see everything, the lacy bottoms he got her to the tattoos he had only caught glimpses of previously.

“Is it bad”, he whispered, running his finger on the tulle strap of her nightgown, “that despite how pretty it is I just want to take it off?”

“It was made to be taken off”, she responded eagerly.

He dropped both straps down as Mira helped to release her hands, and then he pulled the whole negligee down to her hips, baring her body waist up. Maker preserve him.

When she kissed him next, her naked flesh pressed against him.

Right now he just wanted to touch her. She gently moaned as he felt her breasts for the first time, soft and heavy and perfect.
Mira was more impatient than he was, he could sense it in both her kisses and the way she touched him. It would be easy, so easy to rush in, but Delrin knew how to patient and he would take his time to please his wife.

He loved watching her reactions. He noticed so much before and now everything was amplified. Mira was happy and excited and she actually smiled each time she found something particularly enjoyable. It was the loveliest sight.

She fumbled with his breeches, struggling to untie them, and she looked adorable being all flustered and eager at the same time.

“I can just—“, he offered.

“I know how to do it, I work with my hands, it’s just—“, she laughed embarrassingly.

She was a bit nervous.

At the end, he undressed himself and then her. She lied on her back and lifted her hips to help him as he slid the negligee down, followed by her smalls.

Maker’s breath. That was his wife. His beautiful, hot and eager wife, looking at him with love and want in her eyes.

He took few moments to enjoy the sight. He was so lucky. Her red curls were already completely disheveled, she was smiling, her heavy breasts slightly spilled to the sides, her hip was covered with flowers and—

“Do you like what you see?“, she asked softly.

She knew he liked it, but she wanted to hear it as well.

“I love everything about you”, he said, lying next to her and leaning slightly above her. “Can’t you tell?”

“I certainly can”, she laughed lazily and wonderfully, moving her hand down his abdomen.

“Mira”, he groaned into her ear and could hear her shiver in return. “I love you. I want to make you feel so wonderful.”

“Delrin”, she whispered, grasping onto his back. “I love you, too and—“

The way she reacted to him kissing her neck fantastic, but it paled in comparison to all the sounds she made when he put his mouth on her breast. He took his time, kissing her everywhere, caressing her.

She was melting under his touch, all warmed up and mellow.

When he placed his hand between her knees, Mira trembled.

“Is this alright?”, he asked.

“Yes”, she replied, closing her eyes.

“I can’t wait to touch you”, he said teasingly, moving his fingers up and down her inner thigh.

She spread her legs a bit further apart, so willing and trusting.
“Delrin, please”, she breathed.

Oh, yes.

He felt so happy.

***********

She was warm and wet and the way Delrin kissed her body was just as good as she expected.

The way he touched her was just as good. Better. It was all better than she imagined. More intense, more intimate, just… more. He was slow and tender, and his voice alone could turn her blood into honey.

“Is there something specific you want me to do?”, she could feel his breath tickling her neck while he moved his hand between her legs, stroking gently. “With my hands, my fingers, my mouth, my tongue?”

“I… I don’t know”, she replied earnestly, thoroughly distracted. “All. I don’t know. Maybe not all at once.”

He chuckled happily and kissed her.

“Delrin?”, she asked hesitantly. “It might take a really long time and—“

“Mira”, he interrupted her. “So what? I am not rushing.”

“I know, but—“

“Mira, seriously, I promise you. I don’t care how long it takes. I don’t tire easily, not at all. I work with my hands every day. I don’t tire. Believe me. And if there’s anything I would love to do it is to taste you.”

“Yes”, she blushed more, “Let’s do that.”

“Get yourself really comfortable.”

The anticipation alone could kill her as he kissed her thighs and run his hands on her stomach and hips. She closed her eyes, focusing on all the sensations.

Her whole body jerked and Delrin held her hips in place.

“Too much?”, he asked.

“No”, she breathed out, her heart beating fast. “It’s just… I did not anticipate for it feel quite like that. Do it… do it again.”

It felt different than fingers. Just so… Oh. Oh, fuck. That indeed felt great. She was completely relaxed and yet her body tightened and twitched with building pleasure at the same time. His stubble brushed against her gentle skin and it was both slightly rough and scratchy and just wonderful.

“Could you just go a little higher— Oh. Yes.”

More. It was more than great.
Maker preserve him, this was so good.

Mira’s thighs were trembling a little and he used his arms to steady her. He loved the smell, the taste, but above all he loved hearing her pleasure. The moans and sighs reaching his ears were so much better than any fantasy, and he could feel her body getting warmer and moving more, her breathing changing, the shaking of her legs increasing… She made such a sound when she came, suddenly arching her body. Delrin felt the legs around him go limp. He smiled to himself, feeling stupidly proud.

She looked completely undone, flushed, little sweaty, dripping wet in places, and happy. She covered her face with two hands and laughed. “Wow.”

Void take him. It was beyond exhilarating to see her like that. He moved closer and kissed her. She was still trembling a little, and her body felt mellow and hot.

“I don’t know what to say”, her amazement was so sincere and wonderful he probably had never felt so smug in his entire life.

“By all means, continue saying this”, he basked in her afterglow.

“You’re so wonderful”, she leaned to kiss him sweetly. “Most wonderful.”

“You sure know how to make a man feel appreciated.”

“Give me a moment and I will appreciate you more.”

Delrin laughed joyfully.

He was in love, and he was happy. So happy.

***********************

She raised herself up to look at his face and leaned herself onto his chest. He was all warmed up, the blatant want written on his face as he placed his hand on her waist, securing her.

“My turn”, she smiled to him.

“You don’t have to reciprocate. I just wanted to make you feel good”, he assured her, stroking her cheek and running his thumb over her lips.

Of course she knew she didn’t have to. There was no sense of obligation.

“I know”, she whispered, searching his eyes. She wondered if he was silently pleading to the Maker at this moment. She lowered her hand and brushed against his erection. Delrin groaned slightly and she could sense his anticipation. His body was buzzing with heat. “You don’t want me to?”

“Maker”, he chuckled breathlessly, “Of course I want it.”

“Good”, she leaned her face closer to his ear. “I love you so much. I love all of you. I want to make you feel good, too.”

He tightened his grasp her waist.
“Mira”, his voice was soft and low. Tender.

“You have the nicest eyes” she purred while gently nibbling his ear. “The nicest mouth”, she lowered onto his lips, “The nicest everything”, she trailed the kisses down his neck and then down his chest, while moving her hand up and down.

“Mira”, he repeated,

She kissed his stomach, going down further and further.

“Mira”, he begged.

“Tell me if I’m doing it wrong”, she whispered. “Or, you know, tell me if I’m doing it right too.”

“Yes, I—I will“

Well, he definitely sounded like she was doing something right.

When they finally looked at each other again, Mira couldn’t stop smiling.

“That was so great”, Delrin pulled her into his embrace, claiming her lips.

“I rather enjoyed it too.”

“I am certainly very lucky indeed.”

“We are both lucky, aren’t we? To have each other”, Mira placed her head on his chest.

Delrin moved his hand to stroke her back, naturally. This was what they would always do lying like that.

“Mira, you are my greatest joy. I am so looking forward to everything.”

“Is that the innuendo?”, she joked happily.

“Maker’s breath, woman. You’re impossible. You know I need to rest, right?”

“I am actually feeling hungry”, she laughed.

“Well”, he sighed gladly, “I can go downstairs and get us something. Or we could eat one of the boxes of chocolates we still have from Val Royeaux.”

“That”, she inhaled his scent, “is a tremendous idea. In a minute.”

“In a minute”, he agreed.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the wait! It's still less than a week. Truthfully I was a little bit nervous about writing this chapter. Writing about sex is much harder than I anticipated. I wanted to showcase interactions between Delrin and Mira that would be in character and
believable. I will let you be the judge of how it turned out.

I know that in most stories there is no big "sex talk" beforehand. But there is simply no way I can imagine a woman like Mira who is a doctor and inexperienced not wanting to discuss it beforehand. With her personality it is simply impossible. Delrin and Mira talk about everything. That is their thing. I just think they would talk about all it too.

Thank you so much for reading this story and all the comments. Today marks exactly three months since I started this story.

If you are interested in more of my writing, I recently started another one (spontaneously) about Cullen and a kitchenmaid in Skyhold. It is different, still written by me.
Snowmelt

Chapter Summary

Mira and Delrin travel back to Skyhold.

Chapter Notes

****NSFW, NSFW****

As usual, it's not overly graphic.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Fourth week of Haring —> First week of Wintermarch, 9:42—>9:43 Dragon Age, Jader —> Skyhold

The time had blurred slightly in Mira’s mind. The room became their whole world, and they barely left the bed. After the first morning, when they arrived much too late for breakfast, the Inkeeper sighed and told them she would send the meals to them instead. It was indulgent and wonderful, and the knock on the door to announce the delivery of food was the only tangible mark of passing time.

They lay between the sheets and talked for hours. They stayed naked, for the most part, slowly learning each other’s bodies and exploring the newly found intimacy. Mira was amazed how quickly her body adjusted to Delrin’s hands, how his touch felt both so good and so natural. Any awkwardness easily passed, and it didn’t matter that Mira was inexperienced and he was not. All that remained was comfort, trust, excitement, pleasure. The embodiment of love.

“I’ve seen few tattoos on soldiers”, Delrin mused, tracing his fingers on the side of Mira’s ribs towards her hips and pelvis, “but I have never seen anything like that. The lines are so thin and the tattoo is so detailed. It’s lovely. I think I recognize some flowers. Is that myrtle?”

“Look at you”, she giggled.

“What can I say”, he kissed her forehead. “I was raised in the countryside. You have a scar here”, he tapped on the lower side of her abdomen, covered in leaves. “I felt it before.”

“I had my appendix removed as a child. It’s a small pouch that sits close to intestines and sometimes it becomes infected. It’s from a surgery.”

“I don’t see any other scars on your body”, he moved his fingers upwards while lowering his mouth.

“This”, she pointed to her left arm, “is from my childhood vaccination. It’s a preventative measure that helps the immune system fight a disease. It’s complicated to explain when... You’re not even
listening. I do… I do realize you can’t know what I am talking about, but I am too distracted for a lecture when you… kiss me like that.”

He laughed warmly, nibbling on her ear. “I must admit, I do thoroughly enjoy distracting you. Sometimes it renders you speechless.”

It was all it took for the desire to spread over her, the familiar anticipation building.

“Speechless”, she guided his hand onto her breast, “but not quite soundless.”

He smirked.

“Indeed”, he agreed eagerly, “definitely not soundless. That is my favorite part.”

She moaned under his touch and pulled him for a proper kiss, tasting the trace of mulled wine they had with dinner on his tongue. Her fingers stroked his chest, then his side. He coaxed more sighs and noises out of her.

“Just like that”, he whispered into her ear. “Mira… I can’t get enough of you.”

“Well”, she breathed out, “that’s good because… mhm, uhm, we still haven’t…”

“Believe me”, he laughed slightly. “I am very aware of what we haven’t done yet, but I really loved everything we have.”

“Me… too. Oh.”

She let herself get lost in pleasure, closing her eyes, grasping onto his body, trembling under his touch, enjoying the kisses. He never rushed. Maybe one day he would… But certainly not now, as he was circling his thumb patiently around her clit. When his fingers finally reached inside, she inhaled sharply, burying her face into his neck, his scent cloaking her.

“Mira”, he murmured longingly.

She opened her eyes and saw his, looking at her with love and want.

“You’re staring”, she whimpered as the heat kept building up.

“Yes”, he admitted readily, his gaze not leaving her face. “I do love the sight, you know? You’re so beautiful. Especially like this.”

“Del-rin”, she managed.

“I love you”, he said softly.

“I…lo—ve… you…too”.

She was right there, right at the edge.

“My sweet, sweet wife”, he hummed.

Her orgasm hit like lightning, setting her body aflame ad Mira’s moan turned into a guttural scream as she grasped onto Delrin’s back. She then laughed a little and kissed him, still feeling the slight trembling all over.

“My dear husband”, she beamed, “you are quite wonderful, you know that?”
“You always smile so much after you come”.

“You know how to make me happy.”

“Good. You know what? I am very grateful for the snow”, he grinned at her, pulling her into embrace.

She was grateful for the snow as well, for the room, for the time they had together.

“Delrin?”

‘Mhmmm?’

“Let’s make love”, Mira whispered, searching his eyes and touching his face. “Not that we— and it’s been great. You know what I mean— I need, I want… I want all of you. I want you inside of me, I want—”

“Maker preserve me”, he rasped and kissed her deeply. “Yes. Yes. Yes.”

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Sweet Andraste.

Delrin knew how to be patient. He wanted to be patient, he wanted to make Mira happy and comfortable, he did not want to rush her. Mira had never been with a man before, he expected easing into it slowly, but by the Maker, he would lie if he said he had not been been thinking of this moment a lot, as great as everything else was.

He pushed the books off the nightstand while frantically searching for the bottle of the intimate oil, which Mira brought with her. Just in case, as she explained shyly.

Her touch was sweet as ever, and it had grown more confident over the last couple days. Honestly, Delrin didn’t even need any of it, he was more than ready and more than eager, and he had wanted this for so long.

She was so giving, so wonderful, so willing, so loving, and it was all for him.

He kissed her mouth slowly, his tongue flickering on hers, tasting her lips, listening to her gasps. Patience, he told himself. Patience.

He really did not want to wait any longer. He knew she was drenching wet after earlier, and—

“Listen”, he said calmly, pulling away and touching her cheeks. “We can stop at any time, I promise—“

“I know, Delrin”, she breathed out. “I know.”

“Just tell me if you’re uncomfortable…”

“Delrin”, she smiled brightly. “I know. I don’t think we have any problems with communicating. Are you… are you nervous?”

Was he?

“I don’t know, maybe a little”, he said earnestly after a moment. “What if you’re uncomfortable or
in pain or—I want you to feel as good as you can, I really do."

“I know. I know. Let me…”, she flushed a little more, both bashful and brave, “I want to be on top. And, well, I’m so so turned on… It might hurt a little but it might not hurt at all. Don’t… don’t worry. I want to make love with my husband, I want you, right now.”

Focus, focus, Delrin chastised himself.

“Uhm”, he hesitated, shifting on the bed, “let me sit up at the edge. You can hold on to me that way and I can kiss you—”

“Sure, sure.”

He pulled Mira into his lap and warmed up the oil in his hands.

Her expression was full of anticipation, desire and slight nervousness as he traced his hand down her soft stomach. Maker, her body felt so ready. His body certainly was.

“I love you”, he kissed her and she wrapped one of her hands onto his neck. “I love you so much, Mira, with everything I am.”

“Delrin”, she gave him one of those dreamy smiles, “I love you. I want you. I need you.”

He caressed her back gently, and watched her lovely, blushing face. Every muscle in his body twitched and tightened. Maker preserve him, she definitely took it very slowly, and he clenched his jaw to not move at all, to rescind all control. The pace was almost torturous, but it all felt good too. So, so good. And the view… the view was exquisite. She furrowed her eyebrows once, but otherwise did not seem to be in any discomfort, and she didn’t seem to be tense. She took a deep breath and moved a bit more, and he suddenly groaned at the sensation of being fully united.

“Breathe out”, he reminded her softly, and she chuckled slightly, which he could feel as well.

Damn.

“How… how is it?”

“Full”, she murmured. “And… and warm. And so so close”.

It was more than merely a physical sensation, because at that moment Delrin was certain he had never been so close with anyone before. This was the woman he loved, his beautiful wife.

“Good”, he brushed his lips against hers. ‘You feel wonderful.”

“I need a moment to adjust…”

“Take your time”, he assured her. “Whenever you’re ready, you can move however you like. I can match whatever you’re doing.”

“Always so courteous”, she laughed a little again. “I love that, you know?”

He was glad to let her lead. At first, Mira rolled her hips hesitantly, but she quickly became more comfortable, bolder. Her bare breasts rubbed against his chest, her breath tickled his neck, and the feeling… Maker’s breath, it felt so good for him.

He wiggled his hand between the intersection of their bodies, confident he knew what she liked.
“Oh”, the familiar moan escaped her mouth.

Yes, he thought, groaning a little. Just like that.

“Courteous”, he growled with satisfaction, “is one word for it.”

**********

The feeling was so intense that Mira thought she might cry if she only dared to say anything out loud. She buried her face into his chest, hearing his heartbeat, still elevated after what they just had done, but slowing down steadily. Her own heart thudded, her thighs trembled. She was sweaty too, goodness, that was more work than she anticipated. The was a little soreness between her legs that she didn’t feel during. His hand moved gently up and down her spine. The silence around them was intimate and loving. The smell of his body mixed in with his perfume was both soothing and intoxicating. That was her husband, so strong and steady, and kind and sweet, and warm, and real. She traced the scar on his chest with her fingertips.

“I don’t think I have ever told you that”, he said warmly. “That is because there has never been a shadow of the doubt in my head regarding our vows. If we weren’t married, I would have asked you already. I would have wanted the same thing. I would have wanted you. I want you, always.”

Her throat clenched and even though Mira didn’t want to, she felt the tears flowing down her cheeks, one by one.

Are you crying?”, he asked softly.

“Well…”

“You know I can always tell?”, he dried them, caressing her face.

“I’m just feeling so much right now”, she mumbled quietly. “I would have loved you in any world imaginable.”

They stayed like that for a few moments, surrounded by the words just spoken.

When Mira left the bathroom, clean and refreshed, the room felt warmer, the fire blazing a bit brighter. Of course Delrin took care of that, as always. Even her pillow seemed fluffed. She slipped underneath the covers and clung to him, joining in what surely was a thousandth kiss in the last few days. She rubbed his cheek with her nose, feeling the facial hair. Delrin smiled, happy and sated.

“How do you feel?”


“Let me do most of the work next time”, he grinned, grasping on her thigh. “Well-loved? I do like that.”

“I did not expect for sex to feel so good so quickly.”

“I really try”, he looked at her with care.

“I know”, she nestled herself comfortably in his arms. “You are sweetest.”
“Good”, he murmured softly. “Do you want to sleep?”

“I think so”, the drowsiness fell upon her suddenly. “But not before you tell me how you feel.”

“Possibly the happiest I’ve been”, he laughed.

“Good”, she purred. “Sweet dreams, Delrin. I love you.”

“I love you too, Mira. Sleep well.”

*******

The weather improved, the sun shone brightly, and it stopped snowing two days ago, but Delrin was fully aware that once they ascend the mountains, the temperature will drop and the snow already there will slow them down.

He felt guilty dragging Mira through such harsh weather conditions, but there was simply no other way to Skyhold. He made sure she was properly clothed, wearing multiple layers below her coat, and he gave her his fur mantle.

“Let me know if you’re really cold”, he looked at her with concern. “It might be quite the journey.”

“I am pretty sure I can’t wear anything more”, she giggled. “Don’t worry, Delrin, if you saw where I come from you’d know I’m familiar with harsh winters.”

He was less reassured by that than he wished to be.

“I don’t believe you”, he raised his eyebrows smiling. “You cover yourself with blankets even if the fire is blazing in the room, and you love to snuggle.”

“Fine”, she admitted reluctantly. “I’ll tell you if I am freezing.”

The first day of riding was brutal, and the wind was blowing around them. The road from Jader to the mountains wasn’t that difficult, and Mira was more than a decent rider, but the second they got higher and the cold hit, Delrin noticed her quieting down and just silently pushing through. He knew her well enough to be able to read all the emotions on her face. He had to nudge her to drink and to take a bite of food. He tried not to stop, they had to get high enough for the winds to die down. From then on, the journey would be slightly easier.

“Mira”, he called for her from his horse. “Just a little bit more, alright?”

She gave him a slight smile, tugging at his heart. He should have shown more restraint the night before they left, and certainly the early morning of. She might have been less tired right now, but couldn’t say no to those eyes full of need, and her sighs alone could bring him to his knees.

When he finally found the right place to set up camp, Mira tried to help, but could not. The ground was so frozen that he struggled to bash the nails in with his shield, and he was stronger than most men. Starting a fire in the middle of the frost was not an easy task either, but he was prepared for that and soon enough he saw Mira thawing while drinking hot tea.

“Rough day, huh?, he sighed, looking at her sitting next to him, bundled in all the furs he could find.

“Rougher than I anticipated”, she muttered guiltily. “I thought that because of my ability to ride I
would have an easier time, but I just feel utterly drained. I don’t know how you do it. You don’t even look tired.”

“It’s practice and experience, and years of it. Besides, I am in a very soothing company”, he wrapped his arms around her.

“You can be so charming. Such a shame we’re spending the next two nights in this frozen wilderness. No bathing…, no— am I even supposed to take off my boots to sleep?”

“Don’t. It’s way too cold.”

“I have to admit”, Mira laughed a little, “it is such a drastic change from our little warm love refuge in Jader.”

“Love refuge? Seriously?”, he looked at her with amusement.

“Don’t mock me”, she warned. “My brain is half frozen.”

“Believe me”, he kissed her forehead. “I utterly enjoyed our… love refuge.”

“Me too”, she whined. “I want to lie with you naked in warmth instead of this…”

The wolf howled in the distance and Mira grimaced hopelessly.

“Please don’t let anything eat me here”, she joked uncertainly.

The wave of protectiveness flooded over Delrin. The faint memory of what happened in Val Royeaux pinched him, and he knew he would not be able to verbalize all his feelings. He cared for the soldiers under his command, he certainly put his life on the line for them. He cared for his friends, he cared for his family. Nothing could match the intensity of how he cared for Mira. He was her husband, and to love and protect was his sacred duty. He would stand against any enemy, he would face any harm, he would shield her with his own body to keep her safe.

“You’re safe with me”, he simply said. “Let’s get some sleep. Tomorrow is another day of ride.”

*********

Mira woke up in a tent alone, uncomfortable, but still somewhat rested. The second she crawled out of it, Delrin passed her a steel mug of honeyed tea and bread, cheese and dried fruit to munch on.

“You should have woken me up”, she kissed him, “I could have help. You readied the horses, too.”

“Please. I am used to doing all those things and I wanted you to get your rest.”

“I don’t think you’re doing it all yourself as a captain”, she smirked.

“No”, he chuckled. “Admittedly, there are benefits to leading the squadron, but as a husband, I enjoy doing things for you.”

The pleasant warmth filled her heart.

“Besides”, Delrin added innocently, “you’re a bit cranky unless warm and fed.”

“Oh, you wound me”, Mira joked. “Here I thought that this was the time in our lives where you surely would see no faults in me.”
“I see everything and I love all of it.”

“That”, Mira took a sip of her sweetened tea, “is a perfect response.”

“Good. Let me pack the tent and we’ll leave as soon as you’re done.”

The second day of travel was equally exhausting. The views were spectacular, with the snow fresh and untouched on the road. Still, the ride was hard and Delrin was pushing to make a decent time and to find another good camping spot. Mira knew he was surely right in doing so, but the whole day in a saddle in this punishing cold drained her, and she simply couldn’t wait to be done. She was only grateful that horses were properly shod for winter, because the iciness on some part of the trail made her nervous. The whole experience was a vivid reminder how more exposed and vulnerable to the elements she felt in Thedas, whether it was a correct assessment or not. The memories of being completely alone in the wilderness returned once or twice, but she was not by herself this time, she was with a man who would do anything for her. She felt like a brick of ice when they finally stopped to spend the night.

“I am so sorry”, Delrin glanced at her while quickly starting the fire. “Oh, Mira, you look so miserable.”

“I won’t even try to deny it”, she whined. “I am cold, everywhere. And tired. And I’m hungry. And thirsty. And I feel so dirty and I’m so over how gross is it to pee in such weather and I’m never grossed out by anything, because I’m a damn medic. I just want our room and a bath and our bed.”

“I’m heating the water right now for the tea, at least.”

“I am sorry”, she grimaced. “I know I am complaining a lot—“

“It’s fine”, he reassured her. “If anything, I feel like an arse for doing it to you, but I didn’t want to delay leaving Jader if this is just a break in a weather. Believe me, Mira, the last thing I wanted is to put you through that much discomfort after our time together—”

“I know”, she sighed. “And you still are doing everything for me and I’m useless.”

“Sit down and drink”, he gestured to the leather and furs, “I’ll set the tent. Tomorrow we’ll be in Skyhold, probably in the later afternoon. I know I pushed it today but I know you don’t want another night here.”

The blazing hot tea helped, even though it burned her mouth slightly.

“I am not good at it, am I?”, Mira turned to watch him. “At living in Thedas.”

“Mira”, he didn’t even look at her, “Most people living in Thedas don’t live in the middle of the Frostbacks, and normally the routes look very different, you know that. I am willing to bet you didn’t feel that way traveling to Val Royeaux in a better weather. Believe me, no dignitaries are coming to Skyhold in the next month or two. We won’t even receive many traders and merchants. There is a reason why Skyhold is so safe and that is because it’s fucking hard to get there, even during the most favorable conditions. I can hardly imagine anyone doing better in your situation.”

“Does the weather mean you’re likely not to deploy soon?”

“I would not count on it, honestly. I know it’s busy out there.”
Perhaps it was the general mood of today, or perhaps she was simply a woman madly in love with her husband, but it gripped at her heart hard.

“Hey”, Delrin sat next to her. “I certainly hope to have as much time with you as I can. I —“

“I’ll always wait for you”, she whispered. “Always. My heart is never empty. But I don’t like my bed cold either. Especially now, when I know warm and wonderful it can really be.”

He smiled and passed her food. “Believe me, I certainly can relate. You know it’s the last day of a year?”

“Really?”

“Tomorrow is the First Day.”

“Ha”, Mira’s mind turned towards everything lost and everything gained, the shattering bitterness and the exploding sweetness of life.

“It was an odd year”, Delrin remarked and she giggled.

“An odd year?”

“I still can’t imagine how it was… how it is for you. It’s so easy for me to love you and to consider your presence in my life as the brightest blessing, but I know that for you—“

“It’s easy for me to love you too, Delrin”, she remarked. “That was never a hard part, nor was finding my own blessings. I miss… a lot. But there is no part of myself I haven’t given to you, and it’s no accident, no fate, it’s a gift and grace and it’s a choice, too. An easy one.”

“I wonder sometimes how it would be to visit Earth”, he confessed. “Not that much but… I know I’ve seen the images, but I know that doesn’t even come close.”

“I think of that too”, she admitted. “But I never imagine any world without you in it too.”

“If someone told me a year ago I would be married”, he chuckled. “I might have not believed it.”

“If someone told me I would end up in a completely different world”, she started. “I would find them completely delusional, and yet here we are.”

“Here we are and I barley comprehend my luck.”

“I would change this”, she pointed out to the frost around them. “But never the company.”

“Tomorrow”, he wrapped his arms around her. “Tomorrow we’ll be home.”

Home.

Yes. It was home.

“Tomorrow”, she agreed.

*****************

They reached Skyhold in the late afternoon. It was dark, and the air was still. The fortress definitely seemed quiet, Delrin thought. Master Dennet took care of their horses, tired from the journey.
“I need to report to Cullen”, Delrin muttered. “I am afraid that cannot be postponed. I’ll join you in our quarters.”

“That’s alright, I’ll check in with the infirmary myself. See you later”, Mira blew him a kiss.

Barris went past one of the soldiers patrolling the barricades and knocked on the door to the Commander’s office.

“Come in”, the tired voice replied.

“I see you’re as lively as ever”, he joked, entering the room.

“Thank the Maker, Barris”, Cullen’s face showed visible relief. “That blighted snow blocked everyone. I have not anticipated you here for another two days.”

Damn. He could have stayed in Jader longed.

“You know my dutiful self”, Delrin shrugged, sitting down. “Any news from Val Royeaux?”

“Maxwell is there right now, he rushed to help with the House of Repose issue. We’ll see how much of the guild remains once Leliana is done. How is your wife? I know her help was essential to keep Josephine alive.”

He wondered if there would ever be a moment his spine would not shiver at the thought of what might have been.

“Mira is doing fine”, he answered tentatively. “All things considering.”

“Listen”, Cullen rubbed the bridge on his nose. “There have been some developments I did not want to include in correspondence. Hawke’s contact informed Cassandra that the Wardens hear the false calling, likely incited by Corypheus himself. Look, there’s no other way to say it. Their Warden-Commander is planning the blood ritual to end the Blight. Cassandra is reaching the Approach now, and Maxwell will be coming back there too.”

“You’ve got to be fucking kidding me”, Barris hissed.

“I wish”, Commander sighed.

“Do you need me back in the Approach?”

“No”, Cullen shook his head. “It doesn’t make sense, does it? Rylen can handle the troops. Harding is scouting Emprise as of now. I am in contact with General Beauregard regarding our plans for joint operations. He seems an honest man.”

“He is”, Delrin admitted. “There’s hardly anyone I’d trust more in Orlais, and that says something.”

“I thought so. The Empress is largely going to ignore our… machinations as long as we stay away from the capital. At least until Halamshiral. The Grand Duke is not stupid, he knows the danger we’re facing, but he’s hesitant to commit. He wants to start our cooperation by clearing Val Chevin of Venatori.”

“His turf”, Barris said calmly. “I would have done the same. He really is not stupid.”

“I need you there. Between the Approach and the missions in Ferelden there’s no one else, and you have necessary credentials and experience.”
“When am I leaving?” Delrin asked with a heavy heart.

“Three nights is the longest I can give you”, Cullen muttered. “If your wife was not accompanying you, I would just send you straight away from Jader.”

“We latch onto small blessings.”

“That we do. We needed to grind for so long, and now we’re finally getting somewhere.”

“I dare to hope there will be a world left standing at the end”, Barris smiled faintly.

“So do I”, Cullen looked at him. “So do I.’

“How is my squadron doing?”

“Please. You know you have an excellent Second-in-Command. I wish mine was that dutiful”, Cullen joked.

“Very funny”, Barris laughed. “Don’t push it. I am already sour for leaving my wife yet again.”

“There is mandatory medical training for all units. I presume you both will be scheduled to work together, so at least there’s that.”

“Thanks, Cullen. I’ll see you before I deploy.”

“Enjoy the time you have.”

He stopped by the barracks to inform Clarissa of his return and of their upcoming mission. They chatted a little, before he finally had a chance to walk to the castle.

Telling Mira he was leaving again would be hard, Delrin knew that. As much as she always supported him in his work, he was aware how much she craved their time together. And given their newly discovered closeness, it was particularly difficult to put the distance between them.

She was not in the room, but the fire had been started an there was a note on the desk. “In the kitchen”. He showered thoroughly and put on a simple outfit. It felt nice to be out of the sweaty bundle of clothing.

The door to the kitchen were slightly ajar, and Mira stood by the sink, her long curls falling on her back. That was exactly how he saw her for the first time ever, but this time the lights were on, and when he called her name she just turned and gave him the most beautiful smile.

Sweet Andraste. He was so lucky.

He needed to tell her now.

“You’re leaving”, she searched his face. “When?”

“Three days”, he whispered and saw the pain appear as he walked towards her. “I am so sorry—“

“It’s not— Delrin, I know”, she blurted out while wrapping her hands around his waist. “I just feel like I barely got you back and it’s been so lovely and I don’t want it to end.”

“I hear you”, he hugged her tighter. “I feel the same, believe me.”
“Well, at least it seems I’ve managed to cook for you once.”

“You didn’t need to do that.”

“I seriously rather not bother going to the main dining hall, or worse, venturing out in this cold to Herald’s Rest. Can you pour us some wine?”

“Your wish is my command”, he chuckled. “What are we eating?”

“Hungry, are we?”

“Starving”, he admitted, venturing into the small cellar where all the alcohol was kept.

“I’m putting the meat in the oven right now. Potatoes are already in. The main kitchen gave me the steaks to use, since it is the First Day. There’s also a beet salad with cheese and nuts.”

“Just perfect”, he opened the red Antivan. “Both you, and the dinner, from the sounds of it.”

**********

There was something shamelessly enjoyable in watching Delrin devour the food she cooked. I was one of those acts of care she had little opportunity to do, but she always enjoyed it.

“I’ve heard we might work together”, he mentioned.

“Yes”, she nodded. “I talked with Fiona and she put me on schedule for your squadron. You’re leaving early so it will take all your time. No sparring, sorry.”

“You’re very comfortable giving orders”, he smirked warmly.

“I actually can”, she sipped on the wine. “Cullen let all the unit leaders know that medical training is compulsory and gave us the power to dispense consequences liberally if we choose to. I am not sure how you would fall into that being his Second-in-Command but believe me, Fiona had made soldiers scrubbing floors in the infirmary before.”

“I would never dare to undermine your authority. Besides, I’ve seen what proper training can do and I definitely want my squadron to be prepared. I want myself to be prepared.”

“Beau and Zuzu both got some lessons from Ellendra at one point, a while ago, but there’s still so much from mundane medicine to teach. I wish we had more time, but I’ll do what I can. I’ll need to do a quick run to Dagna tomorrow morning but then I am yours. Training rooms indoors? I’ll need help carrying things, too.”

“Of course.”

“The recruits can be miserable but I have high expectations for your unit.”

“Sweet Andraste”, he smiled. ‘I will give them a talk beforehand tomorrow to not embarrass me in front of you.”

“Don’t scare them too much”, she warned. “It is a very hands on experience. I promise I’ll make sure to teach you as much as I can. It’s quite hard to be honest.”

“Because it’s different here?”

“That, for sure. It’s like walking blind. But it’s also rough because it’s combat medicine and the
decision making process is different. I can’t tell you whom to prioritize on the battlefield when you there are factors to consider I have no idea about. I know what I follow at the infirmary, but you might decide to save a different soldier in the field depending on the needs and the safety of the whole squadron. It’s medicine, but it’s still war, and that is something I know very little of. I know there’s only as much as I can do. I just hope to give you all something that can help just a little bit.”

He looked at her for a while before saying. “I am not looking for you to take away my burden as the captain. I think most of us understand that it’s impossible. I still want the knowledge so I can make the best decisions. Honestly, it’s never perfect. I wish it would be more reliable and less subjective, but in precarious situations… It’s never like that. That doesn’t mean that you’re not changing the world around you. I saw an injury that would have been lethal that was tended to quickly because of what the infirmary is doing. That is remarkable.”

“Thank you”, she whispered.

“Thank you”, he raised the glass. “For that, and for the dinner.”

Delrin just finished washing the dishes while Mira sat on the countertop, finishing her wine.

“You must be tired”, he muttered, washing his hands at the end.

“Just a little bit”, she replied and grinned.

“You smile a lot lately”, he noticed softly,

“You make me smile. Come closer.”

He stepped closer, touching her knees. “Like this?”

“Closer”, she spread her thighs pulling him in. He claimed her lips and Mira instinctively closed her eyes.

“Maker preserve me, Mira”, he breathed into her ear. “I don’t to want to ask, after all the difficult journey and everything you’ve done and—“

“Please, ask”, she pleaded.

His fingers found their way underneath her sweater, and Mira did not feel tired anymore, not at all. She moved her hips just a little bit.

She had noticed it before in Jader during the few short days of their lovemaking. Delrin was certainly careful to not seem pushy, or demanding or too eager. Nonetheless, she would not mind if he was more forward, more needy.

“Delrin, I love you. Just tell me what you want.”

“Mira”, his voice cracked, low and husky. “I want to… I want to pick you up, carry you to our bed and make love to you and have you moan underneath me.”

“Yes”, she gasped, finding his lips and wrapping her arms and legs around him. “Yes.”

He picked her up with no visible effort, grasping onto her butt and she giggled happily.

“I guess I’m carrying you over the threshold”, he teased. “Wasn’t that a thing you mentioned
“Oh, indeed”, she agreed lovingly. “Take me to our bed and I’ll show you the place that never gets cold.”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for over a week between the chapters, but I was a little sick and writing dragged for ages.

There won't be NSFW in every chapter, just when I think it's important for the story or the character development.

It's 9:43! As you can see, that is certainly canon divergence, but honestly with travel times I don't see how the Inquisition could wrap up in 9:42 anyway.

If you're sad that Barris is leaving again soon, don't be. Trust me, there will be developments and Mira and Delrin won't always be apart. ;)

Thank you for reading and commenting! It means so much to me.
First week of Wintermarch, 9:43 Dragon Age, Skyhold

Mira woke up in the early morning to the smell of coffee. She sat down and looked to her right, seeing the steel cup full of blazing hot liquid waiting for her alongside few cinnamon buns. The wave of gratitude fell over her, because that was one of those hundreds little things Delrin would do for her. There were also two letters on the nightstand. She could hear the water running in the bathroom. He was showering. She took a sip of coffee and sank her teeth into the bun, and opened the first letter.

_____________________________________________

Dearest Daughter,

We have arrived at the Barr Castle safely. I speak for both me and my husband when I say that we were overjoyed to meet you. I wish I had more time with my son as well, but I gained a daughter, and that means more than I can put into words.

I realize that the way we met was not perfect, but please believe me when I say how truly happy I am that you and Delrin found each other. The news of your marriage came as a surprise, but I understand more than ever why Delrin wants to spend his whole life with you. I remember being young and newly married, and I did not want any well meaning advice from old ladies, but now I cannot help myself but to write you this: love is important, and it takes work. I have been married forty two years, and there were many tears during that time, but we have always managed to love and respect each other, and that’s my wish for both of you.

It is a peculiar thing to have a child that leaves home as early as Delrin did. I do not know if I can claim that he turned out to be the man he is now because of me, but I certainly hope that at least in part some of the praises you shared about him are thanks to our efforts.

There is constant longing in my heart to know my youngest son better. There are things I have always imagined about his life as a Templar, there was an image I had from the letters and seeing him every few years, but nothing compares to meeting you, the woman he loves, the woman who shares his life. Not only you are a lovely, smart and caring person, you gave me a gift of learning more about my child.

I feel such pride and joy thinking of you both, and please know that you remain in our prayers and that Barrfield is your home, too.

Sweetheart, I know I am more forward than you are, but I am hoping you respond to this letter in less formal manner. I will be glad to hear from you about anything, really.
I know we live in precarious times but I certainly hope to see you both here in Barrfield. Jervin can’t quite stop himself from talking about the breeding plan for the Mabari litter. He is a quiet, proud man, but he is happy for you both, I assure you.

You have greetings from all the family, and they cannot wait to meet you as well.

Please try to encourage Delrin to write us from time to time, and please stay safe.

May the Maker guide you both,

Love,

Lady Adriana Barris

The words of Delrin’s mother moved something in her heart. She grew to like lady Adriana, and she wanted to be accepted and appreciated. That letter certainly was a sign of that, and she felt glad. Hopefully there would be time when they could just go and visit his family… their family. Such time when she would worry more about whether her in laws would scrutinize her behavior, not what could happen to her husband during another deployment. Peace, not war.

The second letter was from Cassandra, and Mira was eagerly awaiting that. Being at Skyhold alone again was going to be challenging. She couldn’t wait to let Cass know about the books and gifts she bought for her. Hopefully she would see her rather sooner than later, too.

Mira,

I am not good at writing letters, or writing in general, truthfully, but you are my friend and I miss you, and the present company proves to be quite difficult.

The news we have uncovered are worrisome. I can no longer claim to be surprised, but there seems to be no end to the depravation that spreads over Thedas. It is difficult to retain faith when I realize that perhaps the roots of this evil have been there since the start. The world is in peril, but if we win, when we win, what do we leave behind? What do I leave behind? What seeds do we plant right now?

I do not mean to sound too despondent. My faith carries me through, as much as it shakes at times. The Inquisition won’t let the world fail, and we are not losing. We’re in the middle of the fight, and believe me, Mira, I am giving it everything I am, however flawed.

There is danger laying in Orlais, and we are rushing to the Western Approach. Whenever you write a letter back, please send it to Griffin Wing Keep.

I do not mean to overwhelm you with my worries, but you are my closest friend, and I know I can trust in you and I know you won’t give me empty words of comfort.

We are accompanied by Stroud, the Warden from Orlais. He is a decent, noble man, friend of the Champion. Champion’s presence is pleasant, I admit, even though he never leaves Varric’ side. I have managed to not murder the dwarf, by the way. He avoids me, and we have barely talked except one night after he got wounded by the dragon that we were forced to fight in Crestwood. I did something reckless and careless that night. I kissed Varric.
Don’t tell Barris. Actually, go on, tell Barris, he’s decent enough to not tell anyone else and I just imagine the look on your face now. Was I possessed? Under demonic influence? No. It was just must me and the bottle of whiskey we found, and that dwarf’s stupid whining after Hawke and Solas went to sleep. I don’t know what to think, and worse, I don’t know what to say and how to move past it. Varric ceased all the bickering, and I have never seen him that quiet. Stroud and the Champion might not know, but we talk only about the task ahead of us, and I don’t know how much longer I can continue conversing with Solas about the Fade to pass the time. I am sick of the Fade.

Please tell me what to do. Tell me anything. Distract me.

I miss you, my friend.

Cass

“Aaaaa!”, Mira half gasped, half screamed. The door to the bathroom opened quickly and Delrin bolted out, naked and wet, and a little on edge.

“What the fuck happened?”, he asked quickly and Mira got flooded with guilt. “You screamed, I thought something—"

“It’s just a letter from Cassandra”, she explained. “I am sorry, I didn’t mean to startle you.”

“What happened?”, he repeated and rubbed his forehead, and Mira wondered if his mind went back to everything that happened in Val Royeaux.

“I can’t tell you”, she glanced at the letter. “Actually, Cassandra says I can tell you. She kissed Varric and he doesn’t speak to her and that is all I know, because she has no epistolary gift and somehow she included no details, so… I don’t know what happened.”

The expression on Delrin’s face changed, and it was hilarious to watch.

He chuckled, and waved his hand, and went back to the bathroom, leaving the door open.

“Sweet Andraste. I would have screamed too”, he muttered in disbelief, reemerging with a towel hanging from his hips. “I don’t— No. My brain simply doesn’t follow what I just heard.”

“Well, thank you for understanding”, she giggled. “The view was better before, by the way.”

“Hold that thought”, he laughed. “For the next… six to eight hours?”

“More like ten or twelve”, she warned him. “Believe me, I don’t want to leave our bedroom but I will, in the name of medicine, and I have only two days to cover what we need to cover. How early is it?”

“Really early”, he dressed quickly. “I know you want to stop by the Undercroft and I wanted to prepare the room ahead of time. I am meeting my squadron in a moment, I thought about taking them to breakfast to the tavern before we start and at least make sure they are sufficiently fed. They better pay attention to you.”

Mother hen, Mira thought to herself amusingly, but that was one of the sweetest aspects of Delrin’s
personality.

“You are the best, you know that?”, she looked at him with love. “Thank you for the coffee and for the cinnamon buns.”

“I wouldn’t want to leave you… starved”, he winked at her, putting on his gambeson. “I don’t think you want us fully armored, do you?”

“No, but make sure to pick the training armors from Harrit. I don’t think I can carry that myself on top of all the first aid kits I am bringing”, she got out of the bed and picked up the clothes for today. “Your mom wrote me, too.”

“I saw the envelope.”

“It was very endearing”, Mira whispered gently. “It made me feel a part of the family.”

“You are my family”, Delrin looked at her warmly. “And I knew she would like you.”

“She told me to remind you to write sometimes”, Mira sighed.

“Of course she did. I will. I’ll see you later”, he cupped her face and kissed her properly. “I love you.”

“I love you, too”, Mira answered, joy and sadness spreading over her body at the same time.

The daily delight of the ordinary.

Except that the world was fighting for survival, except that Delrin was leaving again, except that she was literally about to talk about the topic she barely knew anything about in the hopes it would save lives.

There was nothing ordinary about it, and yet shockingly it felt almost normal.

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The tavern was almost empty at that hour with so few people at Skyhold, but that meant that the service was very quick and soon enough the table filled with various breakfast items and Delrin dug into the pile of eggs and sausages on his plate.

His nights were busier and more tiresome lately, and he was famished upon waking up.

“Captain”, Lavellan muttered, licking her fingers, “breakfast for all of us! What did we do to deserve it?”

“Aww, Zuzu”, Kirke rolled her eyes. “This is neither a praise nor a thank you. I suspect this is a warning for us to behave.”

“You deserve both praise and a thank you”, he glared at Kirke, “for everything you have done in the Approach and Val Fermin. I am quite proud of you. Don’t screw it up by embarrassing me in front of my wife.”

Arthur could barely contain his chuckles and Clarissa let out a slight sigh while Merle and Morve exchanged looks.

“Combat medicine is crucial”, Beau announced so seriously that Delrin was sure there was humor behind that statement too.
Kirke patted him on the shoulder. “Kids, you heard it. No private questions to surgeon Barris.”

“I would never”, Lavellan feigned shock and disappointment. “Kirke, when have I ever—?”

Everybody at the table laughed loudly, and Delrin watched all of them thinking how much they meant to him. He learned long ago that it was impossible to detach emotionally. He hoped for many things, but his major concern was for everyone to survive that blighted war.

There was no such things as the perfect medical system and Mira knew that. There certainly were thousands of pressing issues around healthcare on Earth. Her own education was imperfect, the hospital she worked at was imperfect. Every doctor, every nurse, every technician, every provider were aware of that, but at the same time, there was a system in the first place.

Recognizing patterns, following guidelines, implanting checklists, optimizing outcomes. So often the narrative about medicine scoffed at the loss of individual approach, the art of medicine. Nonetheless, now more than ever Mira was fully aware that standardization of practices overall saved lives.

There was no medical system in Thedas, they were trying to create one, painfully and slowly. The infirmary functioned well enough, but they were not providing true combat emergency care. Mira recognized that the absolute vast majority of deaths happened in the field, way before the injured and wounded were able to come back to Skyhold. It was easy to pat themselves on the back.

Somehow amidst all this everyone at the infirmary tried to come up with solutions that would save more soldiers, that would stop preventable deaths.

Mira felt like a fraud. She had too much power. There was no one to oversee her. Yes, it was true that she debated everything incessantly with Ellendra, Fiona, Stitches and Isanna, but there was no one who overall had better sense of mundane medicine than Mira, and it terrified and frightened her. Such a fucked up, ridiculous notion.

The point of medical system was to decrease improvising, but now it was at the heart of everything Mira was doing. She had no experience in providing medical care in resource lacking environment, she had no experience with combat medicine, period. All she had was half a mind to stick with principles that would work in any circumstances, and few ideas of what could be potentially helpful.

She comprehended more about magic and how it worked, but she still had no understanding about the underlying mechanisms guiding so many of the tools she used every single day. Despite extensive reading alchemy still left her confused, but the results with potions and poultices were reassuring. Goodness gracious, she herself trusted magic etched into her body to not get pregnant.

She wished she could dedicate more time to trying to uncover why, but they were at war, so all the whys were pushed aside when there was a need to save a life.

For fuck’s sake. Those thoughts always left Mira slightly tense, and trying to give something to Delrin and his squadron to ensure they survive made it more personal, more difficult.

She took a deep breath, hearing the steps outside the room.

“Hi”, she smiled faintly to the people walking in. Aside from watching them train months ago, she barely interacted with Delrin’s squadron. Zuzu and Beau came to the infirmary few times, but they mostly spent time with Ellendra. Otherwise, she did not know them that much. Between work and
private moments with Delrin there rarely was time for anything else.

How peculiar. Those were the people watching his back, literally. The people ensuring he was coming home safely. The people whom he cared about so much.

“You can sit down and relax”, Mira began. “Sadly we have less time than we need, so forgive me, but it will be a very long day. Before we start, just let me tell you that by no means I intend to pretend that I fully recognize how combat looks like. I’ve never been on a the battlefield. I merely know enough to try to give you some tools that help you and those around you to survive. Feel free to stop me at any point and ask me questions, but remember that our time is limited and while we could do just this for months, we have only two days before you leave. Beau, Zuzu, I heard that you used your skills to help other soldiers during the assault on the Griffin Wing Keep. Good job.”

Lavellan beamed at the compliment, and even Beau, usually serious and composed could not hide the satisfaction that appeared on his face.

“Good to know that captain brags about us”, Zuzu announced loudly.

“Sweet Andraste”, Delrin murmured from the back of the room and Mira could not help her own chuckle.

He had bragged about them. He would make a good father one day. Damn it. Not the thought to distract herself with now.

“There are injuries that are lethal, even with magic and medicine. We won’t be focusing on those. Wear proper armor. Listen to your captain. We are focusing on the injuries that can be treated, including most serious ones. I wish we had more data, but until now there was little done to collect it. I strongly suspect many wounds are survivable upon receiving proper care, especially with the help of magic.”

Magic, the saving grace of Thedas, the supposed corruptible force that could help thousands of people.

“What we will do today”, Mira continued with feigned confidence, “is to consider the most likely ways each of you could die in the field, and how can we prevent that, what to look for, and what treatments to use immediately, and what problems might stand in your way.”

They all were looking at her so solemnly, with great focus. Their lives were on the line. Her guesses will be tried and tested and people will die despite them or because of them. Mira shuddered gently, trying to stop herself from thinking she could make things worse. They have had little training so far, surely any efforts to systemize the approach could only aid.

“Listen, guys’, she breathed out. “The truth is that battlefield medicine is complex, and I am sure you know it better than me. It’s not because injuries are complex. Many of them aren’t. It’s because that unlike what we do at the infirmary, you are facing tactical concerns as well. There are situations when applying the best medical care could get you all killed. I cannot be the one to tell you what to do during those moments, as I am not a soldier. What I can do is to teach you how to do possibly manage with very limited or no equipment, with no source of light, in a very short time or when you’re facing extreme weather conditions. You came back from the desert, and now we’re in the middle of the harsh winter. Just imagine the implications on some injuries. There is a difference between providing care while you’re still under attack and after the battle is over. We have also come up with improved first aid kits, so each of you will get one. Make sure it’s properly resupplied each time. Thanks to Dagna’s effort there are few new tools there.”
She tossed the small satchel to each person present.

“Alright”, Mira sighed. “Who wants to tell me what are the most common causes of death in the battle?”

********************

Thinking about death was nothing new to Delrin. In some way, it was a part of his daily routine. It was his job to kill, it was his job to preserve life of those under his command, it was his job to defend. There were moments he was afraid, even for himself, but the fear usually lied dormant, obediently tucked away behind his training.

He had always been rather cautious when commanding, but Therinfal Redoubt heightened his carefulness.

Derin liked being prepared. He liked detailed planning, he liked double checking everything, from equipment to battle movements, he liked maintaining open communication.

He was eager to incorporate more medical knowledge into his approach. In many ways, as Mira herself just noticed, they had already done it. The insistence on wearing proper armor was certainly one way to prevent injury and death, and Delrin was incessant that his squadron is protected.

He had ideas about wound management from his Templar training and from crude field experience, but it did not come close to what Mira was presenting now. The infirmary had to put quite an effort into all this.

He took notes, and was pleased to notice that others were writing as well. He was aware it would all require repetition, and it was a good idea to bring it up each day of their deployment. Mira had two days to explain as much as she could for now, but it would be up to him to make sure his squadron retained any of that.

There was an aura of tenacity and determination around her. It was always there when she talked about medicine, even though Delrin knew how uncertain she was at times given her unusual circumstances. She easily admitted how much of what she was presenting was rather a guess than a fact, and she did not pretend to have a clear answer to every question, though she had few suggestions to every single problem they asked about.

Delrin had no doubt that her lecture was mostly for him. He was the one to issue orders and make decisions during the battle. It would be up to him to recognize whether life saving care was possible or not.

They talked about death before. They talked about medicine before. Nonetheless, seeing Mira like that made him acutely aware how much she knew, how much she understood. It was the first time he witnessed her work. Now they were discussing details of what could be happening during the fight, and the slight lump formed in Delrin’s throat because she knew.

They both knew everything that could happen, viscerally and vividly.

Mira was lying on the stone cold floor, talking about extremity hemorrhage and how bleeding could easily be missed underneath the plated armor. Trevelyan, red in the face, was kneeling in front of her as she was demonstrating direct pressure and tourniquet placement before the magic healing would be possible.

*Sweet Andraste*, was Simon shy because Mira was his wife? He was certainly a bit dainty with his hands, and Delrin rubbed his forehead. He could have predicted that at least one person on his team
would behave like that.

“Trevelyan”, Mira hissed irritably, “what the fuck are you doing? Move your hand upwards. You’re a soldier, are you trying to tell me that you have never touched another person’s thigh?”

“No”, Simon mumbled coyly, “it’s just, well, lady Barris—“

“Surgeon Barris”, Mira corrected the kid. “You’re supposed to learn, Simon. This is not a social situation. I need to see that you know how to properly manage the bleeding, but if you need another motivation, fine. You can explain to your captain how you let his wife bleed to death because you were afraid of being inappropriate. I am sure he would be grateful.”

Few people chuckled, including Trevelyan who finally followed the instruction.

“That went well”, Delrin told her later in the evening as they walked towards Herald’s Rest. It was beyond cold, and he couldn’t wait for the bowl of hot soup.

“You think so?” she asked quietly. “I can never tell. I was not made for teaching, which is a bad quality for a medic, to be honest. Damn.”

“You’re more than fine, Mira”, he assured her.

“You’re more than fine”, she laughed. “You have patience. You have more patience than anyone I know. You trained them well.”

“I chose them well”, he countered. “It is harder to do what Cullen does with regular recruits. I would struggle more teaching a man who has never held a sword instead of honing the skill of a decent Templar kid.”

They ordered mountain of food and retreated to the private dining room.

“Today seemed easier than my time with the recruits”, Mira admitted, “but it was partly what made it difficult, too. Your squadron truly listened. And I still question my expertise and authority.”

“Mira”, he whispered, “you know you are the best we got.”

“Talk about pressure”, she said quietly, eating her soup.

In a way, she was like him. Cautious and careful, tossed into the situation that was impossible to begin with. She was doing well but it did not make it easy. Sometimes he would almost forget she was from another world. There was no possibility for him to imagine all the implications. No amount of conversation, no imagine could make him fully realize the change in her life.

Mira tried. She gave this world all she was, despite the loss, despite ambivalence, despite everything.

She gave *him* all that she was, as well. It was greatest gift of his life, the most treasured one.

There was tiredness on her face, the mixture of an early wake up and a long day, but she was lovely nonetheless, with those messy curls and the blush on her cheeks and that serious, pensive face signaling her mind being occupied.

“You’re still thinking about work”, he chuckled.
“Yes”, she shook her head. “I am always unsure how to balance the mundane and magical side of medicine. There are techniques I could use, maybe even tell you how to use, but they are pretty invasive and very risky, like establishing airway ventilation through cric— emergency airway puncture. It’s hard to do, I couldn’t teach you in a day, but the thing is how am I supposed to know whether it’s ever needed? Whether our efforts should be about just dumping healing magic on people. We discuss it endlessly at the infirmary, and Fiona and Ellendra talk about limitations of magic, not to mention the mana cost in the field, but I still wonder—“

“Let me guess, it’s all different on Earth. You had no magic.”

“Yes, but also… yes and no. It’s massively different and medial equipment is different. We have disposable equipment and the materials are pliable and the risks of infection are different, even though the alchemy here seems to control infections alongside magic pretty well. I don’t have basic tools at my disposal, and what Dagna makes is just a… guess. I hate guessing. That goes against my training. I am trying to recreate the past, but it’s not that either. I don’t know what I am doing. I cannot believe I am taking guesses about saving people’s lives.”

“Educated guesses”, he watched her with empathy.

“Yes”, she swallowed. “You don’t seem that bothered. I know one could say what is the harm in trying, but sometimes there could be harm in trying. Needless pain, and pain management is poor. Suffering. In tactical situation, just wasting time and energy and endangering everyone.”

“I see your point”, he slathered his roast with spicy horseradish sauce. “Believe me. But I have seen the reality of what you’re talking about and I can personally assure you that the things you presented today are helpful. Hemorrhage is the main concern. Proper wound care saves much trouble later. The dressing you have shown today is surely impressive.”

“Thank Dagna and Helisma for managing to come up with a type of occlusive dressing. This is just one of the examples of things I would never be able to do alone. Dagna is… a genius. I don’t say it lightly.”

“Does she still like you?”

“Oh yes”, Mira laughed. “Can’t you tell? She tries to make each one of my ideas into reality.”

“Good”, he smiled. “Do you have any tips for me? I am sure you realize it is my job to make decisions in the field.”

The shadow fell upon her face. “Honestly, Delrin, I don’t know. I am definitely aware that I cannot tell you how to do it. You are the one who is able to assess the situation you’re in from military perspective, not me. I wish there was more I could give you. The more I think about it, the more difficult it is, because you don’t have any infirmary set up in the field to transport soldiers to. The care you provide to each other is likely the only care received. Without magic, I don’t even know how it could work. All experience I have means little in the face of that. I know you’re smart, I know you’re careful, and I know you’re calm. You have all the qualities that help. I also know how much you care”, the crack in her voice touched his heart.

“I do care, a lot”, he said quietly. “I know you understand that. The weight of making decisions about someone else’s life, to send them into danger. I have been doing it for a long time now. I have made… the worst mistakes. I am not insecure in my choices, though. It’s impossible to be when you do this job.”

“I can imagine”, Mira winced. “Poorly, but I can. In medicine, there is space to reflect, and plan,
and ponder, and decide and practice until suddenly you’re in the situation when the time is limited, and you have to act now, and every single move you make needs to be certain. It’s the oddest feeling. To be so painfully aware of all the uncertainties, and yet retaining enough confidence at the same time to cut someone’s flesh or crack someone’s ribs. There is inherent dualism surrounding the job.”

“See?”, he raised a glass. “You do understand, more than you realize. It’s quite freeing to talk about it so openly.”

“Good”, she chuckled. “I am ready to talk about something else, though.”

“I can find ways to distract you”, he offered eagerly and the blush on her cheeks made it seem like a good idea indeed.

It snowed when they walked back to their quarters, and he chose to go through the barricades. The memory of the first time they went to Herald’s Rest returned, when they had dinner with Bull and Dorian.

“Do you remember”, he stopped and asked, “when we were walking here before I left for the Emerald, and you called me out on the fact that I was merely discussing Thedas with you and not sharing anything personal?”

“Ha”, Mira immediately pulled closer. “I do. It was not even that long ago. It feels like a lifetime away though.”

“It does”, he whispered, squeezing her hand.

“I was pretty quiet. I do recall distinctively thinking what a false idea of me you must have been creating in your mind.”

“I honestly don’t think I was doing that”, he laughed. “I just wanted to do something to help you not be so nervous.”

“Quite the ordeal. I tried, you know? Maybe it did not show back then, but I really did try to get to know you.”

“Well”, Delrin coughed out, wrapping his arms around her waist. “It must have worked out somehow.”

“Somehow”, she agreed eagerly, standing on her toes and crashing her lips into his.

“You can’t do that here!”, the voice of a tired patrol soldier reached Delrin’s ears and he chuckled.

“It’s Captain Barris”, he shouted back.

“Oh!”, the soldier flustered. “I am so sorry, Captain. Uhm… do carry on.”

Mira hid her face into his jacket to muffle the sounds of her laughter, but it barely worked. She laughed so hard that everyone on the barricades could hear them, so hard that when she lifted her head he could see tears flowing out of her eyes. She laughed so earnestly that he wanted to capture that moment forever.

“I am sorry”, she finally managed, catching her breath. “But he did actually tell you to… carry on!”
He would never tire of hearing her laughter.

“Would you like to… carry on in the privacy of our quarters?”, he smiled.

“Yes”, she dragged him by his hand. “Very much so.”

The next morning, Mira joined Delrin and his squadron for breakfast and it was quite a lovely distraction. The energy and atmosphere were great, and Mira felt better seeing how close everyone seemed to each other, even though they bickered and bantered quite a lot. Nonetheless, it was easy to tell that they knew each very other well. Even the way they passed food around the table had that perfect rhythm to it.

She wondered if Delrin even noticed, or was it simply natural to him.


“You can call me Mira when we’re outside the infirmary”, she grinned.

“Don’t look at me”, Delrin scoffed at Trevelyan. “That is not my decision to make, and I don’t care as long as you all remember to address me properly as your captain.”

“So, Mira”, Kirke started, “how was the trip to Val Royeaux?”

The news about the attack on Josephine was kept in secret. Mira was not sure how Leliana managed to achieve that given that there were witnesses, but aside of the leadership no one breathed the word of it in Skyhold.

“Relaxing”, she replied calmly, trying to hide the sudden tension in her body. “I am still waiting for the delivery of books from the University of Orlais. I hope it won’t take months because of that snow.”

“The travel is going to be difficult”, Merle sighed.

“Could be worse”, Arthur eyed Delrin carefully. “We could be going to place like Emprise du Lion.”

“I told you already”, Delrin shook his head. “There is no word yet where we might be heading after Val Chevin, and we’re to travel back to Skyhold first anyway.”

“Orlais again”, Clarissa sighed.

“The last time we visited Ferelden, it was the Storm Coast”, Delrin pointed out. “I don’t think you all miss that.”

They all laughed at the memory, and Mira felt some warmth spread around her heart. It was evident that as much as Delrin cared about his squadron, they cared for him in return and that brought a semblance of peace.

They spent the day talking about managing more conditions that could prove lethal in the field. She discussed tension pneumothorax, and as much as magic could heal, Ellendra and Fiona were rather adamant that it could not remove the air from the body. Thanks to Dagna, they finally had needless to do that more easily. Even the language Mira tried using was imprecise given the
superficial knowledge of anatomy. “Collapsed lung”, she was merely saying instead. There would be no x-ray, nothing in the field, just relying on physical symptoms and sounds. If the lung was already collapsed and the pleural space was filled with blood instead or air there would still be no harm coming from proper needle insertion. The risk and benefit ratio was clear. If there was no pneumothorax… well, they could create one, but likely not threatening. The key was not to do anything majorly stupid, like hitting the heart.

They discussed head injuries and cognitive impairment, they covered burns and blast injuries because of magic, and Mira struggled with effectively discussing something that did not exist in the same way on Earth. The truth is, all the serious wounds she was able to see at the infirmary were already partially healed. She would have to be there in the field to be fully able to see what was going on.

No war was the same, and warfare in Thedas looked different than on Earth as well. She had seen few machete injuries during her rotations. She had seen many stabbing wounds, but sword fighting and arrows, and crossbows, not to mention magic? Mira was drowning and desperately trying to hold onto the common sense and emphasizing universally good ideas, like checks and proper communication.

No universe was the same, apparently, and Thedas couldn’t simply rely on the practices transplanted from earth. They needed reinvention, reimagining, and Mira was barely a physician. Certainly not a maverick.

Still, she tried to give them something. Something to keep them safer.

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Delrin was feeling both sated and like he would never get enough of Mira. He embraced her in all that flushed, hot nakedness, and the echo of her pleasure still vibrated in his ears.

“I won’t lie”, he admitted softly, “I will miss this quite a lot.”

“I agree”, she laughed, placing her hand on his chest. “You know you have all my support, always, but part of me hates that you’re leaving again.”

“I know”, he kissed the top of her head. “Believe me, I hate it too. I also know you’re more worried than you’re currently letting me know.”

“Am I? The last time you left for the Western Approach I cried and told you not to die.”

“I fulfilled my promise, by the way”, he swallowed his saliva. “Mira, can I be honest?”

“Aren’t you always?”

“Yes”, he sighed. “I am. I simply did not want to bring it up too much. Since the moment we met, I have always had the confidence that you are safe. Until Val Royeaux. Believe me, I don’t expect you to always remain in Skyhold, that is not what I mean. You know that I worry about my squadron, about everyone I am responsible for, but you are my wife and I worry about you the most. It does not plague my thoughts, but Val Royeaux definitely left a mark that I can’t get rid of. Sometimes I wake up and just watch you breathing by my side. You know that loss is not a foreign concept to me, but it chokes me up to even imagine anything happening to you. I thought I could understand how me leaving to fight feels to you, but I don’t think I had any clue until very recently.”

“It’s peculiar, you know? It gets easier, but it doesn’t. You’re a soldier, I am a medic, we both have
the ability to keep our emotions in check as perform our tasks, but you know as well as me that it’s not foolproof. There are cracks, and there are moments when it hits me. I haven’t seen war. But I have seen death, and I can imagine so vividly anything that could happen to you, and I know you can imagine exactly how the situation in Val Royeaux could have turned out differently.”

He could. It still made his stomach tighten in dread.

“Yes.”

“Do you think there’s a difference between knowing and knowing? Or does it always feel the same when you love someone? My worries turned graphic and specific whenever I think about what you might be facing. I look at your body and I can map what you’ve been through.”

“I don’t know. Maybe. I have seen so many people die. You can guess how many at my own hand. The things I see when I think of you in Val Royeaux… It’s hard.”

“Hey”, she pulled closer and rose above him. “I am fine.”

“I know”, he gently touched her face and stroked her cheek.

“It’s you who’s leaving into danger again”, she whispered, a little frown appearing between her eyebrows.

“I know that too.”

“I will cry tomorrow”, she confessed.

“You will”, he kissed her lips. “It’s very touching, you know? To see all your feelings and emotions so vividly. I know it hurts, but it's such a gift to be missed. Until I met you, I have never felt like I had a home, and now I do.”

“You’re about to make me cry right now”, she complained and Delrin embraced her tightly.

He closed his eyes and inhaled her scent, he focused on the feeling of her warm skin on his, on her breath on his chest, on the closeness and the love between them.

“You’re my home”, he murmured. “And I’ll be back.”

Chapter End Notes

With all that medical talk, who can guess what I am foreshadowing? ;)

And what did Cassandra do?! 

Forgive me for taking longer than usual to update the chapter. Those transition chapters are always difficult, and writing fake medicine in fantasy setting is actually much harder than I initially anticipated especially when I am striving for some semblance or realism And combat care is really quite distinct in the first place. Oh, well. I try.
Even the definition of DEATH for all practical purposes has to be different in Thedas.

Poor Delrin certainly struggles with the fact that Mira encountered assassins in Val Royeaux.

There will be a lot of interesting things happening soon. Delrin is going to encounter friends from the past, Mira is going to face challenges she has not anticipated, and the plot is going to move further.

I will *never* abandon this story. It will be brought until the very end, which is still very far away. Forgive me all the mistakes along the way.

Thank you for reading and for kudos and for all the comments. I hope you stick with me until it's done.
Past and present

Chapter Summary

Delrin meets a familiar face while the Ambassador and the Spymaster return to Skyhold

Chapter Notes

TW: Some slight NSFW mentioned in the letters.

There are a lot of letters in this one.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Fist week of Wintermarch, 9:43 Dragon Age, Skyhold

Dear Mother,

Thank you for your kind and warm letter. I apologize for the formality of my previous one. It has been a long time since I was a part of family.

I know that there is much that Delrin has retained from his childhood, and believe me, he has many fond memories. He has told me stories about Barrfield and he has always spoken of you - both you - affectionately and lovingly.

My biggest hope is for this war to end soon. I managed to see Delrin very briefly before he deployed again and I am not sure when will I see him again.

He is very good at what he does, and I can assure you and myself that he is careful in the field, both for his sake and the sake of people under his command. I have never seen him act reckless or hot headed. Please take some solace in that. I repeat that to myself every single day he is away.

I am still so honored that Father decided to gift us a Mabari puppy. I truthfully could use a dog to keep me company, though I am sure that Delrin will take over and train the pup as he sees fit. He was delighted to find out we would be getting a Mabari.

I am still uncertain what I should include in my letters. Please, if you have any questions of me, just ask. I will respond gladly.

How are you both feeling? How is the family, including Tristan and Lucille? How is Barrfield faring during the winter? Is the weather harsh and difficult? Is the area still relatively safe or have there been any trouble? Do you have any plans for Wintersend?

May the Maker guide you.
Love,

Mira Barris

Cass!

You are absolutely horrible at writing letters. That has nothing to do with your penmanship and everything to do with the fact that you don’t include enough details. You cannot just drop the information like that and not follow up. It’s against every single rule in the universe. It’s unacceptable.

I certainly forgive you, provided your next letter contains everything I need. I won’t judge.

First of all, let’s focus on what we are all thinking about. Cassandra, I don’t think I know a person more righteous than you. It is not because you’re flawless or don’t make mistakes. You do, and you are brash, and harsh, and abrasive, but you always reflect on your words and your actions, and you care so much. Everything that you are stems from a place of passion, faith and responsibility. Whatever seeds you plant, Cass, if any of them turn out to be weeds, you will pull them out with no hesitation, and there are always weeds. That is the nature of things. You cannot avoid it. The question is what will you do when they appear. Cass, you would not hesitate to strip this Inquisition to its bare bones if necessary. Of course you are giving it everything you are. That is you to the core, and I love you.

I can’t tell you what to do about the kiss when I don’t know more about it. It’s one thing if it was an awkward drunk kiss between companions or friends. Even friends who happen to be arguing. That happens, and eventually it becomes a passing joke or it is never brought up again. It’s quite another story if there was something behind that kiss. Something more, like a feeling.

I know you once said you had a crush on Cullen, but I also know you have never acted on it. I know Varric’s friendship means more to you than you are willing to admit. I can’t answer any of that for you, Cass. Is there more between you? Has there been more for quite some time? It’s true, you always bicker, but I have seen both of you, and you also always communicate as well. Whatever it is, you need to talk to Varric at some point, after you figure out your feelings. There’s no way around it.

Just so you know - in case you were wondering. No, it would not be wrong if you felt anything for him. Nothing at all.

There is much I want to tell you, but a lot is not suitable for the letter. I visited Val Royeaux. Maybe you’ve heard the details, I presume you will once you’re at the Griffin Wing Keep. It was difficult but I got to travel to Skyhold with Delrin, and there was a snowstorm, and we got stuck in the loveliest inn in Jader for several days. That I is as much as I can say for now to distract you.

Another good news is that I managed to find some new romances to read and I actually finished both of them so I am up for a detailed discussion the second you start reading them. They are actually pretty great, to be honest. Much better than Varric’s writing.

I also have other gifts to bestow on you once you’re back here. Whenever that happens, let’s just say there will be baths and candles and long talks involved, and I will sing whatever sappy songs you want to hear until you beg me to stop.

I miss you, Cass.
Love,

Mira Barris

Mira hated the emptiness of their quarters after Delrin left. It didn’t matter that she made sure that the fire was blazing through the night, she still felt cold in their bed without him. If she was less tired, she would surely struggle with sleep. As usual, she tossed herself into the familiar rhythm of work, trying to distract her mind from worry and longing.

She would never fully adjust to being a wife of a soldier. Perhaps it was futile even to attempt it. She would go about her day as usual, but that incessant tugging reminding her that Delrin was in danger was always there as well. It could be concealed by her daily routine but when everything quieted down, it would inevitably get louder.

She barely talked with anyone aside from her co-workers at the infirmary, and the loneliness wore heavily on her heart.

She needed to wait to find out how he was doing, to find out whether he was safe, to find out when he would back.

Mira rarely lacked patience, but that type of longing challenged everything.

**************

Second Week of Wintemarch, 9:43 Dragon Age, Val Chevin

It had been six day since he left Skyhold and they finally arrived in Val Chevin. The city was under the rule of the Grand Duke Gaspard de Chalons, but just like Val Royeaux, it had not suffered much from the War of the Lions and its aftermath. It seemed calm here, and Barris knew that Grand Duke ruled with an iron fist, with the help of his Chevaliers. Privilege and wealth surrounded the part of the town where the nobility lived, but like all ports, Val Chevin had its crime, its secrets, and its spies.

He knew he was about to meet with the Chevalier contact, Maurice Valois-Anjou to discuss the operation, but to his surprise, it was the very familiar face that greeted him.

Jeanette Toussaint. His former lover.

She did not appeared shocked to see him.

She looked the same as the last time he saw her, over two years ago. Her hair was shorter, but she kept the bangs. She smirked upon seeing him.

“Dame Toussaint”, he said calmly.

“Knight-Lieutenant Barris. Welcome to Val Chevin.”

“It is just Captain Barris now. I am sure you are very well aware that the Order no longer exists.”

“So I have been told, but I have always assumed it was impossible for Templars to truly stop being Templars. And yet, here we are. I have a new rank as well, actually.”

“Here were are”, he repeated. “Corporal?”
“Indeed”, she grinned.

There were few women among the Chevaliers, and Jeannette was smart and tenacious and excellent with her sword. Very technical. Moreover, he was aware of the struggles she faced as a female trying to rise rank, and that she had to work thrice as hard as any man.

“Can you tell me anything about Valois-Anjou? I have not anticipated to be working with you, too.”

“Apologies”, she sighed. “Valois-Anjou is one of the chevaliers that acts as a contact between the Empress and the Grand Duke. He used to be Celene’s pet but she cast him aside. Now he tries to be as middle ground as you could imagine, but it is Val Chevin we are talking about—“

“And it is your hub”, he finished for her. “I know how good and efficient you are, Jeanne. Just keep me in the loop, please.”

“Listen”, she tapped his shoulder. “No side wants to fuck it up, believe me.”

Barris had heard snippets about Maurice Valois-Anjoy, a very stern and serious man, famous for being very demanding of people under his command. They sat together to discuss the plans for the mission. Delrin could rely on the Nightingale’s agents, but the trick to running joint operation was to share just enough to build mutual trust but not too much to undermine each side. Honestly, he was sure that agents themselves could handle eliminating Venatori cells, but military operation had a benefit of visibility.

People would see the Orlesian forces cooperating with the Inquisition. At least he was certain it would not be a difficult task. It was supposed to end in success, it was supposed to cement this alliance. Both the Empress and the Grand Duke wanted the influence of the Inquisition at Halamshiral, and Barris knew that the Inquisition wanted to be able to march its forces through Orlais openly, without being accused of violating its borders.

It was the Game. Less exhausting than the one nobility plays at court, but the Game nonetheless.

Still, if there was anyone among Chevalier he trusted aside from General Beauregard, it would be Jeanne. He disagreed with her more than a few times, but he knew her well enough to feel she would not be ruthless, and that she ultimately strived for peace.

“I know you’re relying on the Inquisition’s intelligence, Captain Barris”, Valois-Anjou muttered, “and we’ll be relying on ours. Let me be frank. We are prepared to discuss the plans for the mission extensively before venturing into the field and negotiate said plans. I propose we are to be honest and open with each other.”

To the point, Barris thought. No wonder he the one was chosen for this.

“Agreed”, he said smoothly. “The efficacy of our mission and the safety of my men are paramount to me.”

“Your reputation precedes you, Captain. I have heard of your achievements, and they are quite impressive.”

Those praised would never stop feeling bitter. Not after Therinfal.

“Thank you. I have heard of yours as well”, Delrin noted politely. He still hated the Orlesian tendency of immediate competition and obsessiveness with rank and prestige.
Could he really complain though? He knew the reputation surrounding the Chevaliers, the worst of it, but was it the different from every deplorable thing the Templar Order had done?

“We had been acquainted before”, Jeannette explained to Corporal Valois-Anjou somewhat amused. “Captain Barris lived in Val Royeaux for a while. We were…friends.”

Well, that was one word for it. Were they ever truly friends? Jeannette never sought anything more meaningful than occasional sex and intimacy, but he did spend more time with her than any other woman in his life before Mira.

“Spire?”, Valois-Anjou remarked. “Your record never indicated you spending much time in the Circle.”

“I did not. I am sure my record indicates all the investigations I have done.”

“Maker’s work, indeed”, Valois-Anjou noted, and Delrin noticed the pinch in his heart. He still struggled with the realization that some orders he followed were wrong. Perhaps even some of the apostates would fare better without being hunted down at all. It brought back complicated and nuanced memories. “And now you lead the squadron with the mages in it.”

“They are very good at what they do.”

“That is definitely...a novelty”, Corporal Toussaint added not that subtly and Delrin gritted his teeth. “But it won’t pose problems. Right, Maurice?”, she prodded Valois-Anjou who only heavily sighed.

“No. It won’t,” he admitted.

“I have undertaken many missions with my squadron. I can assure you that they are excellent and disciplined soldiers.”

“You actually fought Venatori before? Val Colline?”

“Many times, including the mission in Val Colline”, he replied proudly.

“That was you?” Jeanette asked. “I have always wondered. I know you stayed a bit to help with relief efforts, which was badly needed considering…”

“Dame Toussaint”, Maurice Valois-Anjou’s voice was like steel. “Orlais had been caught in the civil war...”

“I hope to not expect trouble here”, Barris announced sternly.

“No”, Valois-Anjou answered. “The fighting has halted. The Exalted Plains had bled enough. You might see some hostility towards some of us on the streets of Val Chevin, but there won’t be any problems, I assure you. There has been too much blood spilled already,” he remarked somberly. “Now if you excuse me, I will see you tomorrow morning for debrief and planning.” Corporal Maurice bowed down and left the room.

“I trust you agree with his assessment”, Delrin turned to Jeanette.

She took a deep breath. “Maurice speaks earnestly. The Inquisition already got involved. The join mission is a sign of mutual interests aligning. Gaspard appointed me alongside Valois-Anjou to mark his position, true. Nonetheless, he chose me, the one Chevalier that you have a strong history with. That is not a sign of distrust. Neither am I here to cause trouble.”
He relaxed slightly, still not letting his guard down. “The war had been costly. I saw the Exalted Plains. I saw the Dales, too. The ground is soaked with blood, all while the true evil endangers all of us.”

The pang of pain appeared on Jeanne’s pretty face.

“You know I fought in this war, right? You do not need to lecture me, Barris. I damn hope the blighted peace talks lead us somewhere.”

“Do you sincerely wish to see Gaspard on the throne?”

“It is the best thing for my country”, she crossed her arms defensively.

Not the best thing for Ferelden. When his parents married, they did so still under the Orlesian occupation. His brother was as old as the Fereldan independence. Gaspard was not the idiot, and waging war with Ferelden would be madness, and yet Barris knew the appetites of certain Chevaliers and the nobility.

“Let us hope that whatever happens it is in the best interest for all of Thedas”.

Jeanette looked at him inquisitively. “I know what you are thinking. The war with Ferelden is a folly, and so is any idea of Orlesian expansion after everything we have been through. Don’t count on me to apologize for supporting the Grand Duke. You know how it works.”

“How is your family?”, he changed the topic to something less politically charged.

“Decent, all things considering. My father is an old and proud man. He tried to convince my mother he still has it in him to pick up the sword. I suspect she’s been spiking his wine to render him more defenseless than he really is. My idiot baby brother decided to fight, so now I worry constantly.”

“Adam? Isn’t he just a kid?”

“He is nineteen and he joined Chevaliers one year ago.”

“Well, if he is as gifted as you…”

“He is not. He is a moron that can barely hold a shield.” She huffed and could not hide the worry in her eyes.

“I am sorry”, he whispered sincerely.

Jeannette loved her youngest brother more than anything in the world.

“Never mind all that”, she eyed him up and down. “How long has it been since we last saw each other? Two… two and half years?”

“Something like that.”

“I have a stash of wine in my quarters. How about you join me and we reminisce for the old time’s sake.”

He was not entirely surprised by her proposition, and he would lie if he said he was not flattered.

“No, Jeanne”, he replied calmly. “I actually got married.”
She laughed so loudly that he got taken aback a bit, but then she caught his glance and immediately got serious.

“Wait, you are not jesting?”

“I am not”, he took of his glove and showed his wedding band.

“You got married? When did it happen?”

“Several months ago.”

“Have your parents arranged it?”

He could not quite tell her the whole truth.

“No”, he furrowed his eyebrows. “I met my wife while traveling and we married shortly after.”

“Maker guide me. Knight-Lieutenant Barris—”

“Captain Barris”, he reminded her gently.

“Forgive me. Captain Barris finding love at the end of the world. I suppose it is not more shocking than the hole in the sky and the world ending. I do not know what to say. How does it even work? Did you send her to your family to wait for you until it ends or—?”

“She works as the medic for the Inquisition.”

“A medic? You married a commoner?”

For fucks sake, Delrin thought.

“I did”, he answered impatiently.

“Interesting”, she chewed on the information. “I would say you could join me anyway, but I know you well enough to gather you are not into that kind of fun. Anyway… Congratulations, I guess. Ha. See you tomorrow at the debrief?”

“Certainly. For what it’s worth, I am glad to be working with you, Jeanette.”

“I would hope so. It must be refreshing to see someone so level headed and organized in comparison to seeping ego and entitlement you can encounter with some of the Chevaliers”, she rolled her eyes. “Maurice is not half bad himself. It could have been far worse. But trust me when I say that this conflict brought out the absolute worse in all of us. I am relieved it is Venatori we are fighting instead of my fellow compatriots.”

“The Inquisition is glad to help.”

“Good. Goodnight, Barris. It was nice to see you”, she patted him on the cheek.

“Take care, Jeanne”, he did not return any physical affection.

Maker’s breath. Surely he needed to tell Mira about all that, too.

He joined his squadron for supper, and Clarissa passed all the correspondence awaiting him. There
were orders from Cullen and reports notifying him of the progress in the Western Approach. There was one private letter among them, and he opened it impatiently the second he found himself in his quarters.

_________________________

Delrin,

Every single time you leave I miss you, and then I think that it would be impossible to miss you more, but then you leave again and my heart feels more, because my love for you changes and grows every single day.

As always, I hope your travel went well, and I wish for you and your squadron to stay safe and come back quickly. I really hope there won’t be any need to use those medical skills you’ve acquired.

Infirmary keeps me busy, or rather we keep ourselves busy at the infirmary. There are significantly less patients now that almost everyone is still deployed.

I thought it would become easier, but the more my love for you deepens, the more I grasp whom you are fighting and what you are fighting for, the more pressing is my yearning to just be with you. Those last days before you left were like a dream. I will never forget that room in Jader, the snow outside, secluding us from the rest of the world and just us, together, so close.

I miss being with you. All of it. I miss how you look when you’re asleep. The sight of you sleeping so peacefully melts my heart. You’re so warm and cuddly. I miss eating our meals together and talking about our day. I love our talks. I miss just keeping each other’s company, even if we do our own things. I like watching you work. There is this tiniest frown between your eyebrows when you’re focused, and you don’t even notice how you sometimes huff dramatically when writing reports. I miss all those little moments when I am reading a book and then I glance at you and catch you staring at me and then you kiss me on the forehead. Remember the times when I was scared and woke up at night? I miss your reassuring whispers. You can be so exhausted, but you are never too tired to take care of me.

I miss making you laugh and I do miss the moment when you use it as an excuse to bury your face within my breasts. I miss the feel of your skin on mine. I feel like I know your body by heart, every line and every scar. I miss you so much. I miss how you grasp my waist when you want me. I miss touching you and kissing you and how wonderful you sound when I do that. I so miss making love with you. I hope I make you feel as incredible as you make me feel, because whenever I am with you, I feel beautiful, and comfortable, and safe, and sensual, and sexy and so loved.

I love you. I don’t think I will ever tire of saying that or writing that. I love you. I admit it freely and with no reservations. You really have all my heart and there is nothing I keep away from you. Every single fiber of my being loves you and it’s terrifying and mesmerizing and yet so obvious and unsurprising.

I still don’t believe in fate and I most certainly don’t believe in soulmates, but you and me... We fit together, don’t we? There is something wonderfully ordinary about our marriage and we share a life together. It makes sense. It fits.

I know there will be days and months and maybe even years much harder than this, and there will be struggles and arguments but there is no one else I can even imagine spending my life with. I know that life can be unpredictable and scary and downright cruel, but I also know it is better with you. You make it better. You make me better.
There’s no amount of time I wouldn’t wait for you, but please, don’t let it be too long.

I can’t wait to be in your arms.

You have all my love,

Mira Barris

__________________________________________________

Sweet Andraste.

Love and longing filled his weary, tired body and Delrin felt like he could finally take a deep breath and rest.

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Second week of Wintermarch, 9:43 Dragon Age, Skyhold

Josephine and Leliana arrived in Skyhold and Mira was furious she was not notified. Cullen surely had knowledge that this was happening. Instead, she just heard the news while working at the infirmary, and had to wait several hours before Stitches relieved her of her duties.

Josephine was in her quarters, sitting elegantly on her sofa, accompanied by the Spymaster herself.

“Mira”, Leliana gave her the tiniest smile. “It is good to see you.”

“It is good to see you both”, she replied earnestly. “How are you feeling, Josie? Can I examine your leg?”

The slight sigh escaped the Ambassador’s lips but then she chuckled softly. “Just straight to the point, I see. I feel fine, really. The magic worked, and I think I am completely healed. The scar is perhaps not the prettiest sight, but then again I will take that over the alternative. Come on and look, if you insist.”

Mira had concerns about the burn scars left by Vivienne magic, not any scarring due to stabbing. She worried more about scar contracture than esthetics, but astonishingly the tissue looked pretty much healed. Beautiful.

“Any pain?”, she asked. “Any discoloration aside from the scaring, any discomfort? Does the leg seem heavier or warmer?”

“Everything seems fine”, Josie rushed to explain. “Believe me, Vivienne made sure to heal me over and over again, just in case.”

“Where is she? I only heard that you two are back.”

“She has some private dealings in Ghislain”, Leliana said calmly. “The Duke’s health is getting worse, I believe.

“Oh”, Mira gasped. “Do you keep correspondence? It is likely that I can’t offer anything, but I would like Vivienne to know that I am here if she needs anything.”

“I will make sure to tell her that”, Josephine patted her on the hand. “Now, will you be joining us for dinner?”
“Are you sincerely asking or out of politeness? I barged in here…”

“As if we did not foresee it happening”, Leliana mused. “The food will be brought from the main kitchen.”

“Lovely”, she replied.

“Besides”, Josephine beamed, “we need to talk about you dance lessons.”

The food was delicious enough to almost appease Mira, who stuffed her face with pasta and listened to the whole lecture of the importance of etiquette and dancing during the ball at the Winter Palace.

Oh. Mira hated dancing. Well, truthfully, perhaps she enjoyed the one time she danced with Delrin, but that was certainly very different from the social dance at the royal court.

“Please, do not give me any trouble”, Josephine announced with utmost pleasure. “I would be sorely disappointed.”

“Our dear Commander tried protesting”, Leliana laughed. “Josie threatened to show him her thigh.”

“I saw your thigh, so that is hardly threatening to me”, Mira shook her head amused. “I was there, remember?”

“You can ask whatever favor you want”, lady Ambassador purred, “but you still need to be able to dance at the ball.”

“I suppose you need to me to share my schedule with you.”

“That would be preferable. Leliana, can you pass me— Thank you.”

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Second week of Wintermarch, 9:43 Dragon Age, Val Chevin

The quantity of contradicting information was both the upside and downside of receiving the intelligence from different sources. If Barris had to bet, he would choose to rely solely on the Nightingale’s network but finally they all seemed to be reaching some compromise on how to proceed with the mission.

Delrin chose Clarissa and Kirke to accompany him, and both Jeannette and Valois-Anjou had members of their teams with them as well.

“There is no point in moving in if we do not hit all the targets at one”, Jeanne’s long fingers tapped the city map.

“That is doable once we receive confirmations on our intelligence. We cannot wait too long, Dame Touissant, because our presence is not entirely invisible.”

“There is a chance that Venatori think we are here because of the peace talks and the ball happening”, Valois-Anjou pointed out. “I am sure the Venatori realize we might know about some of their activities, but I am not certain that they expect us to do something about it now.”
It was not a faulty argument, but Delrin had no intention on sitting for weeks on what was essentially a very simple mission for political gains. So far both Gaspard and Celene tolerated the presence of the Inquisition forces on Orlesian territory as long as it stayed away from the capitol and major cities, but the situation could turn more precarious any minute. The latest news he received from the Western Approach were worrisome, and he fully expected the need to engage most of their army.

“Venatori are not like Carta or most criminal organizations”, Kirke sighed. “They are foreign spies with ties all over Thedas. Who’s to say they will stay in Val Chevin if they catch a whiff of possible trouble? They can move their warehouse to the closest port city, like Cumberland in no time.”

That was indeed an excellent point, and he shot Kirke a glance of approval. He liked having her and Clarissa speak up, because it allowed him personally to remain distant and he liked the control it gave him.

“We can move in once we confirm final locations of Venatori affiliates”, Jeanne spoke up. “This is the important part, to attack discreetly, all at once. The docks will cause most problems but I want the gentry involved arrested. Do we need more men? There is Valo-Kas we could hire—“

“It is discretion we are after, are we not?”, he gently interjected.

“Yes”, Valois-Anjou breathed out. “I would rather we do not hire anyone unless necessary. It is not the number of fighters that worries me, it not having enough leadership to run the operation.”

“Clarissa Thornhall is my Second-in-Command and more than capable to run a mission by herself”, Barris stated confidently.

Being able to do that when necessary was surely one of the biggest advantages of his unit. He would trust Clarissa with everything. He could see her nod with satisfaction.

They finally agreed on few subtle maneuvers before lunching a proper military operation.

Val Chevin reminded him of Val Royeaux, and Delrin had not missed Orlais in the slightest. There were palatable tensions stemming from the civil war, and Barris could barely keep up a straight face chatting up the privileged nobles who barely paid any price during the conflict.

It would end soon.

Finally, they had all the locations marked. Whole warehouse at the docks to clear, one ship to take over, and two noble houses that collaborated with the Venatori.

They divided chose three teams. Clarissa, Arthur, Beau and Morve would cover the search and arrests at the smaller residence while Valois-Anjou would take over another one. Barris and the rest of his squadron alongside Jeanette and her unit would go for the docks and the ship.

He did not mind. He had sparred with Jeanne enough times to know how she fought. She had always been level-headed and smart. Besides, he trusted her a little more than Corporal Valois-Anjou.

The fight was rather quick due to the element of surprise. Him and Trevelyan used a lot of casting, mainly to prevent the Venatori from burning any longs and documentation. Securing the evidence and not letting it simply be taken by the Orlesians took far longer than the battle itself. Leliana’s agents and archivists appeared when needed, and so did the members of the network the Chevaliers used.
“So much for trust”, Jeanne shot him her brilliant, flirtatious smile while wiping off the sweat from her forehead.

“It is a precarious equilibrium”, he responded. “It comes with the job. I do not treat it personally.”

“Neither do I, Barris. Neither do I. Good work. I have always assumed the Templar fighting style is rather unsophisticated, but you know what? You do know how to move.”

“Thank you”, he remarked and covered his yawn. “I think we are done here.”

He was tired when he finally reached his room at the inn. He could not wait to leave for Skyhold tomorrow. He wanted to sleep, but first, he really wanted to finally write Mira back. Her letter was so sweet and loving, and Delrin wondered if he should mention Jeannette in his, or whether he could just wait and talk about it in person. He finished the first paragraph when he heard the knock on the door.

It was Jeanne, dressed casually and holding a bottle of wine in her hand. Delrin knew what that meant and he gritted his teeth. She never valued commitment much, which was fine than, but certainly not something he appreciated at the moment. Of course she was a beautiful woman, looking at him longingly with her hazel eyes. Back when he was living alone, he probably had never told her ‘no’.

He sighed and she grimaced.

“I suppose you’re not happy to celebrate our successful cooperation.”

“You do know I am married”, he replied. “What are you doing here, Jeanne?”

“No one needs to find out”, she bit her lip.

“I do love my wife, Jeanne. I take my vows seriously.”

“Like your Templar vows?”, she scoffed gently and then shook her head. “I apologize. That was uncalled for.”

“Listen, just because we share a past—“

“Please, don’t fucking say that”, she pleaded. “You are not hurting my feelings. I have been with plenty of people after you. I just wanted to check if I still could— It is fine.”

“Fine”, he replied a bit shortly, uncomfortable with the conversation.

“It is time I go. I guess I might see you around one day, Barris. Farewell.”

“Goodbye, Jeanne. It was a good day of work.”

“Indeed”, she placed a quick kiss on the corner of his mouth. “Goodbye.”

He closed the door to his bedroom and rubbed his forehead. He felt oddly unsettled by all of it, and he wondered how to tell Mira. The letter did not seem like a right choice. Truthfully, they never discussed past relationships much, and Mira never asked any detailed questions. He told her once that he had never been in love with anyone, and that was true. He obviously had feelings for his lovers, but it was never love. Nonetheless, the thing with Jeanne still lasted for a while until it ended amicably.
Maybe that was what made him slightly uncomfortable. He had never heard Mira casting any judgements, but surely he was aware that for her sex was intertwined with love. She had always seemed very certain of her own beliefs and anything remotely sexual between them happened only after they confessed their love. He did not mind, but he recognized that he would gladly sleep with her much earlier if she had initiated it.

He was overthinking this. Several days, and he would see her again, he would tell her everything and they would both forget about it, just like they forgot about Hawke and his proposition.

Few days, and he would finally be again with beautiful and loving wife.

He started scribbling on the piece of parchment again.

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Third week of Wintermarch, 9:43 Dragon Age, Skyhold

My beloved Mira,

We are safe.

Every single time I am far away from home, far away from you and receive a letter from you I hardly believe my luck that you are the one waiting for me. I miss you so much, too.

We passed through Jader on our way to Val Chevin and my mind immediately turned to those wonderful days and nights we were able to spend there. I am attaching the only sketch I managed during all this time. It is Jader in snow, just for you. Mira, you are the most wonderful woman and you capture my heart completely.

Your words mean so much. I have never imagined to be loved like that, or to love like that. It is life changing and I meant what I said before leaving. You are my love, my wife, my home. I know it hasn’t been that long but I barely remember not knowing you, and truthfully, I barely remember not loving you either. I can’t recall the one single moment when it happened, and now my heart is intertwined with yours.

I miss you. Maker preserve me, how much I miss you. The days might be tiring and sometimes I am unable to write even few words, but believe me, I think of you so often. I think of you each time before falling asleep. I miss your hair getting in my face. I miss watching you sleep, too. You’re always lovely but when you’re asleep you just look so sweet. Of course I remember the times when you kept waking up, and Mira, I will always protect you and strive to keep you safe. I certainly want to deny that I huff while writing reports but honestly you are likely right. I need to finish one for Cullen now and I already feel the irritation rising. I wish you were here. Truthfully just seeing your face makes everything better. Do you even realize the ways you take care of me? I miss the feeling when you massage my scalp after a long day or when you constantly make sure that I am not in pain, injured of otherwise sick. I love all the ways you touch me, and I miss your hands on me.

Maker’s breath, now that you have mentioned it, I do miss your breasts. I miss all of you, so soft and warm and just perfect. I miss the flowers and tracing them with my fingers. I miss how you wrap your arms around my neck or my back. I miss your sighs and your moans. I love hearing you. I love seeing how good I can make you feel. I love how you close your eyes and gasp. I love how your thighs shake when you’re close. Believe me, Mira, I miss making love with you, too. I can’t
wait to be with you again, to tell you how much I love you, to kiss you everywhere, to have you fall asleep on my chest. I miss you with all that I am.

I don’t believe in fate either, but perhaps I believe in finding blessings and you are the greatest one I have ever received. I knew my life would change forever on the day of our wedding, but I couldn’t have possibly realized how much. Mira, there is no one else I can imagine being with. No one. Every moment I am filled with gratitude to have you by my side.

Remember when you said that love requires knowing someone and letting them know you? You know me, the good and the bad, the shameful and the proud. I don’t even ponder whether I deserve it or not, because I look at you and I know you love me the way I am, and that is such a gift, and I just let it wash over me, hoping I give back equally to you.

I am coming home, love.

I know I left that little bit until the end, but I hope you are smiling now.

You will be in my arms soon.

Your completely enamored husband,

Delrin Barris

Mira could not help but to squeal out of joy reading the letter and finding out that Delrin was coming back. It was not a long absence, but love made her slightly greedy and she craved his company. In some way, this was their honeymoon and they were torn apart so soon. Nonetheless, Delrin was returning home, to her.

The happiness spread around her, adding a spring in her steps as she walked towards the Skyhold ballroom.

The dance lessons would be more pleasant if Commander Cullen, who was also obliged to attend them was in a better shape. Mira found it difficult to remember the steps and trying to focus on gracefully swirling across the room when the man she was dancing with continuously seemed nauseated and sick.

“Commander? Cullen?”, she nudged him when they were leaving the room. “Can we talk privately?”

He looked at her sheepishly, but thankfully he just nodded. The last thing she wanted to do is to try to force a reluctant man to receive medical care. She had no private relationship with him. As a medic, she had little right to approach him. Still, Mira remembered that night few months ago when she found Cullen passing out outside of the infirmary, so perhaps she could say something.

They walked into his office in silence, and Mira just took a deep breath when it was the Commander who surprised her.

“You’re here to talk about my lyrium withdrawals?” he sighed, sitting behind the desk and gesturing her to sit, too.

“Cullen”, she swallowed. “I have no right to compel you to talk about anything. I just... You do
look worse lately. Is there something I can do for you?”

“I doubt it. There’s no lyrium in your world, is there? And I know there is no magic, and demons —”

“You are correct”, she said softly. “Still, there are things that can be done. We have pretty effective potions if you need to manage nausea, or headaches, or even stress. Adan is really good. Massage of the head might relieve some pain. Creating a schedule to follow and making sure you eat and sleep…”

“There is no time—“, he started protesting, turning red and Mira felt as if she made a mistake overstepping.

“Can I say just one thing?”, she whispered. “I was a medic in my world too, you know that. You also know that in some ways, my world was more advanced when it comes to technology and research. Cullen, overworking might allow you to distract yourself, but it does not help people under your command. We medics do it constantly, but when you are sleep deprived, tired, and exhausted, you are more likely to make a mistake. You are only a man, and you can’t escape your body. I have been taking my potions for months to help me manage my anxiety and stress, and I think they have helped. I know I have no right to badger you. I am not here as a surgeon. I just… I see you each day for those stupid dancing lessons, and I notice things, whether I want to or not. You are Cassandra’s friend, and she would not forgive me if I let you perish on my watch.”

He looked at her with a mixture of irritation, tiredness and perhaps a hint of relief.

“I don’t feel comfortable going—“

“I can examine you here, drop your portions after lessons and give you some tips. It likely won’t solve your issues, but aiding some of the symptoms can alleviate your discomfort.”

“Fine”, he relented.

“You can say no”, she bit her lip uncomfortably. “You can kick me out at any time.”

“After you brought up my responsibility towards my men?”, he shook his head and laughed darkly. “I am no fool, Mira. I know that you are right, so I will do it. I just ask you to keep it discreet—“

“I never discuss my patients”, she assured him. “With anyone. Delrin included.”

The glimpse of guilt fell on Cullen’s face.

“What?”, she frowned, looking at him. “I just received a letter that he is coming home. If something happened to him—“

“Nothing happened to him”, Cullen interjected. “It is just… I sent the orders to Jader directing him straight to Emprise du Lion instead.”

The rush of pain hit her heart so hard that Mira froze in place. Oh, the hurt. Damn it.

“I am sorry”, Commander murmured.

She was a grown woman. She understood why this was happening.

“Thank you for telling me”, she said quietly. “I will see you tomorrow, and I will bring whatever is necessary.”
She allowed herself a good cry in a bath after returning to her quarters.

Third week of Wintermarch, Dragon Age 9:43, Skyhold

The Inquisition agent was waiting for them at the docks in Jader. It meant that something happened. He quickly broke the Commander’s seal on the letter and read his updated orders.

Maker preserve him.

Captain Barris,

I just received a note that General Beauregard is ready to march for Sahrnia. You are to move there straight from Jader and take the over the command and cooperate with the Orlesians. Fear not, the reinforcements are coming, and so is the Inquisitor himself.

Good luck,

Commander Cullen Rutherford

Emprise du Lion.

Now he needed to break the news to his squadron, but more importantly, he needed to write Mira that he was not returning to see her after all.

That stung painfully.

Just as Delrin vividly imagined Mira’s joy upon receiving the previous letter, he imagined the tears flowing down her cheeks reading this one.

Emprise du Lion. Joint operation, under his leadership. It could take months.

Blighted war.

He scribbled quick response to Cullen, and a longer one to Mira.

My darling Mira,

I just arrived in Jader and received new orders. I am so sorry but I will be going to the Emprise du Lion now, Maker only knows for how long.

I can only imagine your hurt and disappointment, and before you feel the need to reassure me, yes, I am aware that you support my work and the Inquisition. I never have doubts about that, you’re working every day for the cause, just as I am. I still know you are sad, and I am sad too.

I miss you so much. I really do, and I was so excited to be with you again. There will be a day when this war ends and even though it won’t solve everything, I promise you, there will be time to take a break and there will be time just for me and you, together. I will show you Ferelden, and we’ll do nothing of importance, at least for a little while.
Send the future letters to the Emprise du Lion forward camp.

I do not know when I will see you again, so please just open your Wintersend gift. It is inside the desk drawer on the right. I hope you will enjoy it.

I apologize again.

I love you with all that I am,

Delrin Barris

Chapter End Notes

Do not worry, maybe Mira and Delrin won't be separated for months now, maybe.

Jeannette uses 'Jeanne' among friends. You pronounce both names the French way.

Of course Delrin would not be unfaithful.

I won't lie - it does mean a lot to me to receive the comments, so if you want to, please leave a word if you like the story. I know you don't get the perfect material, but you receive my honest effort and I try to update regularly.

It is my first story written in English that is my second language, so it means quite a lot. I still get extremely embarrassed by the mistakes I make sometimes, so it is a constant battle with myself to believe that my stories are worth sharing.

Thank you so much for reading! It means a lot.
Mira had already known that Delrin was not coming home by the time his second letter arrive, but the pain resurfaced sharply as she read his words. She could imagine his concern and his effort to make her feel better by mentioning the Wintersend gift.

She opened the desk drawer and found a little paper bag. Inside there was a large bottle of perfume in a very pretty, heavily decorated glass alongside an empty smaller one, presumably for travel. Oh. Such a romantic gift, especially— She poured few droplets on her wrist and smelled it. Her heart melted entirely. She definitely sensed similar notes to what Delrin wore himself. There was still something woody and green about it, but then she felt more floral notes and… fig leaves? Whatever it was, it was exquisite. She rubbed the perfume on her neck and behind her ear and let the scent cover her. Well, it certainly beat her gift of a pocketknife that she had yet to give him. He was such a thoughtful person.

She tossed and turned in an empty bed, thinking of where he was and what he was doing at the moment. Perhaps he was already asleep in his tent. Perhaps he was still awake, thinking of her at the same time.

“I love you”, she whispered into the blackness of the night, feeling a bit silly.

She could not wait to be able to whisper it into his ear again.

Mira woke up to the sound of knocking on that door. That was never a good sign. She got up frantically. Was there any emergency at the infirmary?

“Yes?!”, she cried out.

“It’s Scout Jim. You are asked to the War Room for a meeting.”

That was enough to turn her knees into water. Something happened. Something bad. Something very bad. She put on her clothing with shaking hands, still half asleep. How early was it? She had an afternoon shift, so it could have been quite late already.

“Scout Jim”, she opened the door. “Let’s go.”

*Delrin died*, Mira thought for a split second and her heart shuddered. No, he did not die, she chastised herself immediately. If he was dead, Josephine or Leliana would come into her quarters themselves. They knew better than to send a messenger. This was not it, it couldn’t be. Was Delrin injured? He could be injured. Severely injured.
Hundreds of thoughts went through her mind before she reached the War Room. The last time she was called here the Inquisitor presented her with her backpack. She had no idea what this meeting could be about aside.

She must have entered the room looking terrified, because Leliana spoke upright away.

“Captain Barris is fine.”

Mira breathed out loudly, visibly relieved.

“*By the Maker*”, Cullen remarked, “If I expected you would worry that much, I would instruct Jim to mention that instantly.”

“I do not come here often”, Mira said dryly. “Of course my first thoughts would be about my husband.”

“Please forgive us”, Josephine smiled remorsefully. “I assure you, it is nothing like that.”

“Well, what can I do for you then?”, she looked at the three advisors.

“I have received the news from Sahrnia and the new orders from the Inquisitor who is traveling there with the Inner Party from the Western Approach. Captain Barris is about to reached the town in two days followed by the group of Chevaliers. I am awaiting his reports. The information we are receiving from Sahrnia so far is worrisome. The Templar attacks are frequent, the cold is punishing, the local population fraught with hunger and disease. Scout Harding is foreseeing a lot of combat related injuries, especially given the fact that Red Templars are the enemy”, Cullen explained nervously.

The feeling of anxiety seeded in her stomach.

“As you know there is a squadron of Chevaliers arriving today here in Skyhld as well”, Leliana added. “This is also a part of the joint military efforts in Emprise du Lion that Captain Barris is coordinating. Most of the Chevaliers are traveling straight to Sahrnia, but there is one unit visiting Skyhold first and then leaving tomorrow through the mountain path alongside our own reinforcements.”

Mira inhaled and exhaled slowly to steady herself and counted to ten.

“The Inquisitor ordered that we send a medical team as well”, the Commander continued slowly. “I know this is an extremely short notice—“

“It does not need to be you”, the Ambassador added quickly and Mira scoffed.

“It has to be me”, she whispered. “Who are you trying to convince? Who else? You know it was largely me that designed the new combat care guidelines.”

“You know the most”, Leliana said, “but it doesn’t have to be you.”

Mira was painfully aware that regardless of circumstances, she still had the superior technique of many procedures or maneuvers. Most importantly, she had a better grasp on how to try to systemize care. Being in the field would be groundbreaking. The whole framework of references, the whole research—

“It will be me”, she tightened her lip. “You all know it, don’t you?”
“The Inquisitor requested you”, the Spymaster eyed her. “Nonetheless, I do owe you a favor.”

For saving Josephine’s life. Mira could not ever imagine calling it in.

“Don’t”, she grimaced. “In some way, I suppose I am not entirely shocked. I presume there will be a mage from the infirmary coming?”

“Yes”, Leliana nodded. “It is your and Ellendra’s choice—“

“Fiona”, she responded with no hesitation. “I will talk with Ellendra myself, but it has to be Fiona.”

“Very well.”

“Mira”, Cullen hesitated. “See Harrit and Dagna today. You need a proper armor. They will outfit you quickly in something suitable. Spare no expense.”

“Right”, she swallowed and then the thought hit her like a ton of bricks. “Does Delrin know about it at all?”

The look on the Commander’s face told her everything. “I am sending the the updated reports tomorrow after the Chevaliers arrive here. You are welcome to add any personal letter to the official correspondence. It will arrive in Emprise before Captain Barris himself.”

“Thank you.”

“Mira, if you have any—“, Josie started gently but she just shook her head.

“No, I understand perfectly”, she cut her softly. “I will go and… deal with everything. Uhm. Breakfast. Armor. Packing. I still have a full day of work today.”

“Remember about the tonight’s dinner”, the Ambassador shot her an apologetic look. “I am truly sorry, but you are a lady and those are distinguished guests and there is almost no one here. It is a chance for you to meet them before tomorrow—”

“Yes, yes.”, Mira replied faintly. “I… I have to go if that is all.”

“I have a list here”, Cullen handed her a piece of paper, “that might help with packing and… well, whatever medical equipment you need transported, our soldiers will handle that. I already informed Dennet to ready your horse.”

“Thank you. Now if you excuse me…”

“Of course. We will see you tonight”, Josephine smiled reassuringly.

Mira was going to war. Maybe not entirely, but close enough to actually be in the field. The thought frightened her more than she was willing to admit. War. Obviously, she had a concept of war, and she certainly had a concept of how it looked in Thedas but still, it was nothing in comparison to actually seeing it with her own eyes. The image of blood gushing out of Josie’s thigh suddenly assaulted her mind and Mira shut her eyes. Damn it, she was trained to keep her cool in any circumstances. She was needed. Despite everything, she was still the best person for the job.

She wanted to curl up into a ball and cry, but she marched straight to the Undercroft instead to have her measurements taken for the armor.
Even the thought of seeing Delrin again was not enough to assuage her fear. She was afraid of what she would see. Even more, she was afraid of everything she would need to do.

She grabbed some rolls from the main kitchens on her way back and focused on packing to the best of her ability before there was a time to step foot into the infirmary.

The infirmary was not busy, at least. The vast majority of her shift was spent discussing the Emprise du Lion with Ellendra and Fiona. She was right that Fiona would join her. They created a long list of necessary supplies and packed two large chests of potions, and salves, and bandages, and cloth, and tools. It would be a lot to transport but there was no other choice. Medicine required supplies.

She was writing various instructions for both Stitches and Isanna who were stay in Skyhold when the only patient of the day arrived.

She had to be one of the Chevaliers with whom Mira would travel tomorrow. The fact that it was a woman was oddly comforting. Unsurprisingly for Thedas, she seemed young, probably in her early thirties. She exuded the Orlesian charisma and confidence.

“Welcome to Skyhold”, Mira smiled politely. “I am surgeon Barris. Is there anything I can help you with?”

“Just looking to replenish my pregnancy preventative”, she replied.

“Of course. We have mages that can provide glyphs—“

“Witherstalk potion will be fine”, she interrupted her. Mira understood. There were many people around Thedas still wary go magic and what it could do.

“Is there anything else?”

“Actually, can you check the bruising on my side?”

“No problem.”

The Chevalier carefully took away her armor and then bared her upper body. Her side was bruised rather heavily, but it seemed to be healing.

“Can I touch it?”

“Sure”

Mira applied the tiniest pressure. “Does it hurt?”

“A bit, but nothing too bothersome.”

“It looks pretty nasty but it seems to be healing well. Not to brag but our alchemist makes an excellent salve. I can apply it now and give you the fresh jar. Do you mind sharing how it all happened?”

“You know how it is. We’re at war. There was a mission. I am sure you have seen a lot of it.”

“I suppose”, Mira chuckled. “Quite a lot. Was it a success?”
“Indeed. Good work, too. I actually managed to see my former lover again after few years.”

“I dare to hope they were not on the opposite side”, Mira murmured emphatically, gently spreading the layer of Elfroot salve on the the woman’s skin. “It should have cooling effect that most find rather pleasant, by the way”

“Thank you. I am Corporal Jeanette Toussaint, by the way.”

“Nice to meet you, Dame Toussaint”, she remembered the proper way to address the female Chevalier. “I am surgeon Mira—“

“Barris. Yes. You have no idea who I am, do you?”

The question was so bizarre that Mira froze in the middle of washing the salve off her hands. She turned around slowly. Goodness, did she offend her in any way? Perhaps she did not recall some of Josephine’s careful instructions after all.

“I am afraid do not understand what you mean. I know you are one of our guests—“

“I knew your husband pretty well”, Dame Toussaint answered calmly. “When he was still Knight-Lieutenant Barris. We were… close once.”

Oh.

Mira felt her cheeks turning red. She was certain that the woman could see it as well. What was her first name? Jeanette?

“I thought that maybe he would mention me in a letter”, Jeanette added. “We finished an assignment together not so long ago.”

Oh. He most certainly did not mention that in a letter.

“I do not recall”, Mira said calmly. “Now if you excuse me and wait a second, I need to get your potion and your salve.”

She took few deep breaths outside the door and quickly grabbed whatever she needed.

“There you go”, she gave Dame Toussaint her most professional smile.

“How much do I—?”

“Absolutely nothing.”

“You are very kind”, Jeanette smiled as well.

She was a very beautiful woman, Mira noticed with a slight pinch in her chest.

“The duty of a medic”, she remarked in return.

“Are you attending the tonight’s gathering, lady Barris?”

“Yes. I will see you there, Dame Toussaint.”

“Likewise.”
Mira buried any hurt and anger deep inside until she was able to leave the infirmary and reach her quarters to prepare for the dinner. Today was just... Ugh. Not great. She looked at her half-finished letter to Delrin that she was supposed to give Cullen in the morning and she gritted her teeth. She took a quick shower and wept angrily for a minute before returning to more reasonable state.

The most likely explanation for his silence was that he wanted to tell her in person, but suddenly detoured to Emprise du Lion. It was perfectly rational to think that. She loved Delrin, and she knew him, and she trusted him. The thought of him doing anything remotely inappropriate crossed her mind for a second before Mira furiously pushed it aside. He would not. He had always stayed honest and true, and she had seen him being like that in every area of life. He met his former lover during the assignment, chose not to mention her in a letter. That was it. The stinging pain she felt inside was merely from being surprised. She was stressed. It was a difficult day. Delrin had always been honorable, and trustworthy, and kind, and sweet, and she loved him. It was just a month ago since he told her he loved her for the first time and less than that since they made love for the very first time. It was wonderful.

Fuck. Mira felt exhausted, and she knew was spiraling. It was foolish and entirely undignified. She had never been a jealous or possessive person. This just tapped into every possible insecurity she might have had and added to the pile worries of the day. She sat down and finished the letter before she searched the armoire for a gown to wear. She chose the green one with lily-of-the-valley flowers embroidered all over the corset. The lily-of-the-valley was on the crest of house Barris, and the cut of the dress was unapologetically Ferelden.

After all, she was lady Mira Barris of Ferelden.

Mira tried to warm up to Jeannette Toussaint but something about the way they met still bothered her. Dame Toussaint was certainly charming enough to carry the conversation around the table easily. She apparently recognized Josephine from few events, she exchanged pleasantries with Cullen who looked slightly invigorated tonight. By all accounts, she was the star of the evening.

Mira remained rather quiet. She was tired, and upset, and afraid for tomorrow.

“I did not realize until the meeting with the advisors that you will be joining us in the Emprise du Lion, lady Barris”, the Chevalier remarked casually, sipping on her wine.

“It seems so”, Mira replied carefully.

She did not even have the opportunity to discuss her fears and worries with anyone. Surely Josephine would lend her ear, but Mira was too frazzled to seek that in the morning, and now it was simply too late.

“How did you gain all your medical skills?”, the inevitable question followed.

It was Josie who immediately responded. “Lady Barris’ father was a traveling scholar—“

“My father and I belonged to the Andrastian cult that eschewed traditional taboos surrounding medical practice”, she answered bluntly instead.

This was not just one evening at the party. Dame Toussaint either already had the information anyway, or she would hear it sooner or later.

“You are not Andrastian?, Jeanette gasped. “And you married the Templar?”
“Former Templar”, she emphasized for Delrin’s sake more than hers. “I married in the Andrastian faith, and my husband is not the one to hold prejudice.”

It was true. Delrin certainly had faith and she could hear him reciting the Chant of Light many times. He had never tried to force her or even encourage her to adopt his religious practices. He also had no issues wearing her miraculous medal on his neck. He was open minded and respectful.

“Did you court for a long time before your wedding?”, Jeannette kept asking relentlessly.

“Not for a long time”, Mira blushed, fully aware of the actual truth.

“How romantic”, was it her imagination or was Dame Toussaint’s tone rather condescending?

There was always part of Mira bothered by the cover story for their marriage. It made their relationship seem rushed, and ill-considered, like a lapse of judgment caused by the circumstances of war and the need to be comforted by the warm body at night. Perhaps the truth was not better or kinder, given that she wedded a stranger for safety. Still, the vows they exchanged were profound and serious from the beginning.

“It was a beautiful wedding”, Josephine took over, glancing at Mira. “Witnessing true love is such a glimmer of hope in times like this.”

“I am sure it is”, Jeannette nodded politely.

Just an hour or so more of it. No. Sadly it would not end there. Three more days trying to reach Emprise du Lion through the mountain path, and then however long after that.

The tension had not left Mira when she finally returned to her quarters. She could not fully decide if it was Jeanette Toussaint herself, if it was the task ahead of her, or if it was merely the unexpected of it all. She always preferred to be prepared, and this time, she was not prepared for any of it. She barely had any confidence in training the soldiers or working at the infirmary. Treating actual combat injuries in the field? That was so different.

There would be deaths. Worse, there would be deaths she could have easily prevented on Earth. It would chip at heart heart, because Mira was not careless, and it would chip at it even more because there would be no anonymity. Sahrnia was small, the Chevaliers reinforcements could provide be thirty to fifty people. The Skyhold recruits knew her already, not to mention the Inner Circle and of course Delrin and his squadron. She would get to know those people, by names. She would hear their prayers, their pleadings, they last words. She would write down the letters to send to their relatives.

What if she would need to treat Delrin himself?

_Delrin_. Mira still held onto that tiny flicker of anger when she thought of him. She was certain he did not deserve it, but she felt it nonetheless. Her discomfort was strong enough that she almost did not care. It would surely pass before reaching the Emprise to Lion, but tonight she felt _angry_ for both being ambushed and being so alone. She felt angry at how obviously smart and attractive Jeanette was. She was angry at all the remarks that were intended to prickle a bit, because they did.

Three days. Three days and she would do her best to try helping people. Three days and she would see so many familiar faces. Three days and she would see Cass. Three days and she would see her _husband_, even if it was in the least desirable circumstances.
Barris thanked the Maker for Scout Lace Harding, because by the time they arrived in the Emprise du Lion the forward camp was already not only established but expanded to accommodate incoming military units of both the Inquisition Forces and the Orlesian Army.

Thankfully Delrin and his squadron got here first, ahead of everyone else.

“‘You are Andraste’s sent, Lace’, he muttered, sitting in her tent, impressed by the detailed plans on how to best protect the town.

“You approve?”, she sighed, rubbing her head. “I am glad, Captain. Truthfully, I wish we could do more for you in the matter of investigation, but the Red Templars are all around, likely surrounding the local quarry. Between them and the rifts I could not utilize neither scouts nor the agents, so I thought you would at least appreciate the more mundane preparations for this whole joint military operation.”

“You have no idea how much I appreciate it. You save me so much time, and once the others get here we will be able to act right away.”

“Thank you, Captain”, she breathed out. “I really want to squash those bastards. What they did to Sahrnia alone…”

“Are you staying?”

“Yes”, she handed him a pile of reports from Cullen. “There is nothing else that is the higher priority now and the Commander feels that the more we do before the Inquisitor attends the ball at Halamshiral, the better.”

“I agree”, he nodded. Scout Harding was one of the most competent and dedicated people within their ranks, with very specific skillset. “I am very relieved you are here.”

She seemed glad to be praised. “Whatever you need. You have the command here.”

Before Cassandra and the Inquisitor get here, at least. In reality he knew that he would still be responsible for most of the military movements. Moreover, he was in charge of the communication with General Jean-Claude Beauregard. He did not anticipate difficulties. He knew Jean-Claude well, but this was a large scale mission, and Beauregard was bringing few squadrons of Chevaliers.

“Any other news?”

“There is one lone Chevalier hiding in the town. Michel de Chevin. He wishes to talk with the Inquisitor. My only worry is how the rest of the Orlesians react to his presence. I do not know the details. He knows how to be discreet. Everything is in the reports I prepared for you, but this is one of the major points aside from what we have already discussed.”

“Very well. Thank you, Scout Harding”, he got up to retreat to his own tent that by now would be set up and ready.

He let Lace schedule the guard duty and instead focused on reading the reports to prepare as much as he could to oversee this whole operation. The communication was always a little disrupted while traveling so he was grateful for a moment of peace to catch up.
Unsurprisingly, Scout Harding’s reporting was as detailed as he expected. Nonetheless, as she herself admitted, there was no possibility for proper exploration with only few men that she had under her command. He traced the maps to become familiar with the territory, trying to foresee how to move in quickly and effectively. The forward camp was at disadvantage, terrain-wise, but he hoped that the Red Templars would not be unreasonable to launch an attack now that the Inquisition increased their numbers.

He opened the correspondence from Cullen. The Inquisitor and his Inner party were a day away, General Beauregard should arrive today by the evening alongside his Chevaliers and—

_Sweet Andraste._

Corporal Jeanette Toussaint was to get here tomorrow afternoon, aided by the reinforcements from Skyhold and—

Delrin was rarely surprised, by this punched him straight to the gut.

_Medical reinforcements_. Enchanter Fiona and _First Surgeon Mira Barris._

He felt sick. Mira was arriving _here_. To the fucking Emprise du Lion that was crawling with Red Templars. Here, in the middle of the war. Here, a month after what happened in Val Royeaux. Mira, _his Mira_, the woman he swore to protect from any harm. She had no preparation for not only combat, but the physical demands of war. She even struggled during their travel from Jader to Skyhold.

_Fuck_. He rubbed his forehead furiously, truing to calm himself.

_The Inquisitor himself requested that_, the Commander mentioned.

Delrin was furious. Fuming.

He took several breaths just to steady himself and read more. There was a detailed note written by Mira’s hand, detailing how the field infirmary was to prepared. He would pass it to Kirke and let her oversee that. There was a perfect place for the infirmary between the Orlesian tents and those of the Inquisition, allowing both armies to receive help while needed while keeping it far enough to provide comfort for the injured and the rest for the soldiers who did not need the screams of the wounded disrupting their sleep.

Maker’s breath. Mira would come here, and she would work here, and she would see the war, she would witness the immediate aftermath. If the Red Templars attacked—

He could not allow himself to think that. That was precisely why he was against any fraternization within the ranks. He was not supposed to let it distract him or change anything, but how could he not to? She was _his wife_. He loved her more than anyone, he cared for her differently than for anyone else. He knew how to command, but now the question would loom over him and taunt him.

Barris was not stupid. Mira was the most capable mundane medic Skyhold had. As much as he wanted to punch Maxwell Trevelyan straight in the face, he understood his reasoning. They anticipated injuries, and Scout Harding’s report suggested that people of Sahrnia could use help as well.

It might have made sense, but it did not reassure his worries. He _witnessed_ her anxiety after Val Royeaux, her cries and waking up at night. He knew her fears and worries, and he had seen her at most vulnerable. _Everything_ in him, every little part of his body wanted to shield her from harm,
and now she was coming here.

There was a letter from Mira, and he broke the seal with a thudding heart.

___________________________________________________

Delrin,

Thank you for both of your letters. I was so happy after receiving the first one, and equally as sad after the last one, but I do understand. Do not apologize. You are needed elsewhere, and my hope is that you know that I love you and support you.

There will be a future. I fully believe that. There will be time when we will spend days and nights together without you leaving to fight like you do now. I know you will fulfill your promise.

Thank you for the loveliest and most thoughtful Wintersend gift, I absolutely adore it. The perfume is wonderful and it does smell a little bit similar to yours. That was on purpose, was it not? I would say that is the single most romantic thing I have ever received, but my mind still goes back to that little bedroom in Jader and the negligee you took off my body. It is a close second though and I hope you will like it, because it will be the only thing I am going to wear when I welcome you home.

It is peculiar how few patients we have at the infirmary now. We are able to focus on more research, and at least the fact that almost all the troops are outside Skyhold mean that I can monopolize Dagna’s attention. I feel at times like I am grasping at straws. That are so many ideas and so many changes to implement, and it is a constant fight to maintain order amidst the chaos. It is years of future work, and so far we are barely stumbling through the darkness. I suppose things will be quiet for a while now, until Halamshiral.

Apparently I made a mistake of rushing with saying that things will be quiet. They won’t. You are supposed to receive my letter amongst the correspondence from Cullen, and I know you will open the orders first, so you already know that I am coming to the Emprise du Lion with Fiona and you have already read my own instructions on how the field infirmary should be set up. I am still unsure on how to deal with it all, but I will certainly try to keep our private life separate from work, so right now I am writing to you as your wife, not the medic. I should have anticipated that one day I would be needed in the field, but I think I was a little blind sighted that it happened so soon. We are leaving tomorrow, and if the advisors are accurate in their assessments, I will see you only a day after you read my words.

You know me too well so I have no choice but to admit that I am really quite nervous, for many reasons. I don’t know. Today was a trying day and everything that happened was unexpected. Frankly, I think I am still slightly dazed from it all.

I met Jeanette Toussaint, by the way. She clearly knew who I was, I clearly had no idea who she was until she made it quite obvious. I presume there was a reason why you have not mentioned her in yours letters.

Delrin, I truly am happy to be seeing you shortly, although I have not imagined it happening under such circumstances. Forgive the change in tone halfway through the letter. I found out about it all only several hours ago and I just came back to our quarters from my shift at the infirmary and now I am required to attend the dinner I have no desire to attend. I would write more, but I am in a rush and we are leaving first thing in the morning.

I will see you soon.
I love you.

Your devoted wife,

Mira Barris

Maker preserve him. Delrin could easily see the change of the tone of the letter. Of course she was nervous. He could close his eyes and see that mixture of seriousness and anxiety on her face. Mira had never lied about her feelings, and he loved her for that. That largely was what made her so compassionate and caring.

If he had any inclination that Jeanne would be sent to Skyhold, he would definitely write Mira about her. Damn it. She did not appear angry in the letter, she seemed… overwhelmed and a little resigned, and his heart hurt. In some way, that was worse.

Fuck. He could bet Mira did not know that Jeannette propositioned him twice in Val Chevin, and he would certainly need to break it to her as soon as she arrived here, which did not make for the greatest welcome topic in a situation that was already stressful for myriad other reasons.

So far every single time he came back to Skyhold, he had enough time to see her, to give her undivided attention whenever the door to their quarters closed. It was never like that in the field, and it would be a challenge to find the quiet moment or two.

Delrin knew how to be a good husband. He knew how to be a good Captain either. Now him and Mira were thrown into extreme circumstances that demanded so much, and he already worried. He hoped he would be able to perform his tasks and take care of his wife at the same time.

It was such a stark contrast from traveling with Delrin who was always eager to do things for her and to gush over her. There was no gushing now, and Mira felt horribly embarrassed at her own tiredness and ineptitude. Even the clumsy recruits somehow turned into soldiers after couple of days of traveling. Mira could appreciate that the Commander’s yelling apparently yielded results. It became painfully aware that she was the only person with no appropriate physical training.

At the very least she was a good rider and Snowflake was a tremendous horse. Still, every single muscle in Mira’s body ached. The armor she wore was heavier and more restrictive than clothing she was used to. It was cold she could not feel her thighs. By the time they stopped for the night there was more work to do, from setting up tents to cooking. She readily volunteered with meal preparation to not feel entirely useless, and the sight of soldiers eating the stew with appetite was the highlight of her day.

Fiona was rather a quiet travel companion, and while Mira could not imagine Enchanter being intimidated, she seemed slightly uncomfortable around the Chevaliers and vice versa. Perhaps it had to do with her being a mage, or perhaps it had to do with her being an elf. Mira painfully realized that most of her knowledge about Thedas came from sources like books. It was the Chantry perspective, the perspective of the historians working at the various universities. Delrin and Cassandra themselves were both privileged and intertwined with the Chantry. The little snippets she heard from Isanna or Fiona painted less forgiving picture. Weaver explained more when Mira was in Val Royeaux. She would not dare to ask Fiona questions, but she sensed the tension easily.

Just as much as Fiona kept to herself, Jeanette Toussaint sought conversation in the evening, much
to Mira’s irritation.

“Lady Barris”, the Chevalier sat next to her by the campsite.

“Surgeon Barris”, she replied. “But you could call me Mira, if you prefer so.”

“Jeanette.”

“Jeanette”, Mira repeated mindlessly.

“I never took Barris for the marrying type”, the woman said. “I have to admit that once I received the orders to go to Skyhold I was very curious to meet you.”

She called him by his last name. The bizarre sense of satisfaction settled around Mira’s heart.

“Well, now you have”, she tightened her lips, struggling to find the right words.

“I have indeed”, Jeanette agreed. “Barris has always been a nice man.”

“He is very nice.”

“You are a lucky woman.”

“I have no issue admitting that”, she swallowed uncomfortably.

Perhaps there was nothing wrong with that exchange but Mira could not shake off the feeling that it was intrusive. Maybe she was slightly jealous and unreasonable. People met their former… what would be the right word to use? Partner? Lover? People met them all the time. In most circumstances it would not bother her that much.

“There are not many women among Chevaliers. I was not treated seriously in Val Royeaux for a while because of that and my Corporal at the time was quite a bastard. Have you been to Orlais?”

“Not much, I am afraid”, she replied cautiously, relaxing slightly. “I speak the tongue well enough to communicate… I am afraid my knowledge of Chevaliers is limited to what I have read, but I will never understand people who claim that women are unable to hold the same positions as men.”

“Chevaliers are more open in their hostility but it still permeates all of us. If you look around, you will see that the vast majority of Skyhold recruits are still men.”

“It did not escape my attention.”

“What about the infirmary?”

Truthfully, Mira did not know how it all looked around Thedas. The previous surgeon at Skyhold was a woman.

“We have more women than men”, she smiled gently. “Some of them are still training.”

“I come from nobility. Women either marry and dabble in power or politics or very rarely fight. We do not… work.”

“I was a commoner before my marriage”, Mira shrugged, thinking how every single Orlesian she met had to remind her of that. “I am sure you know that.”

“So I have heard. I can’t imagine Bann Barris being too enthralled by that.”
It stung, partially because it was true, partially because once again it crossed the boundary and Mira was not sure how to navigate that.

“Mother and father are kind and understanding people”, she answered slowly, for the first time feeling grateful that lady Adriana Barris made her address them both that way.

Jeanette eyed her curiously and she could not decide whether it was a look of sympathy or something else. She was friendlier than the previous night, but there was that tinge of bitterness that made Mira pause, and she knew of the Game and… It was all too much.

“We could compare our notes about Barris”, Dame Toussaint laughed shortly.

“Uhm?”, Mira hesitated.

“I have nothing but fond memories”, Jeanette continued unabashed. “There was a lot of fun.”

Something ugly and painful reached Mira’s heart. There was a difference between a casual, polite conversation and the image of Delrin having fun with another woman. She tried so hard to maintain civility and behave like an adult, mature woman but that infringed on something intimate, something that was now entirely hers.

Mira knew Delrin had a past. She had no issue with that, every adult person had a past of sorts, and most people had more experience than her. The difference was that his past was both quite lovely and quite pushy, staring at her almost challengingly.

Mira said nothing, hoping it would be enough to deter further talk.

“I am almost offended that he has not mentioned me”, the Chevalier sighed. “We were seeing each other for two years.”

*Two years.* He had mentioned his relationship being fleeing and informal, but two years was rather long time.

“I have never asked.”

“I have only good things to say”, Jeanette fixed her bangs. “He was nice, and sweet, and he knew how to keep a woman happy. By the Maker, he has always been exceptional with those mouth and to—“

“Don’t”, Mira interrupted abruptly, the hurt spreading all over and burning. She stood up. “I don’t know why you insist on allowing yourself to say all that to me. Goodnight, Dame Toussaint.”

She walked into the tent and she could not stop few tears from falling of her face. Fiona certainly noticed, but she was discreet enough not to ask, likely assuming it was the effort of the day.

Mira felt such a mixture of emotions, from shame to anger to something else entirely. It was felt like a violation. She had no desire to peek upon every detail of Delrin’s past, and Jeanette managed to reveal more than she should have, and it was at least partially venomous and distasteful and—

Mira tried very hard to stand above it all, and she knew she was failing.

The confusion was perhaps the worst aspect of that. She hated jealously and possessiveness, but she did not want to punish herself for normal and healthy feelings either, and wasn’t feeling upset not uncommon in a situation like this?
Her mind went to Ida, and the words she would tell her, but the memory of her dearest friend only brought more ache, stabbing her heart.

The loneliness washed over Mira and suddenly all Thedas seemed hostile and unpleasant, and everyone far away and unavailable.

Tomorrow, she thought, calming herself down. Tomorrow.

Tomorrow, and then what? The doubts flooded her. Tomorrow she would get swallowed by work that was way above her abilities and qualifications. Tomorrow she would see Delrin, but tonight it provided less comfort than it should have.

Finally, she found that little anchor of hope in thinking about Cass. Cass who kissed Varric and still had not replied to her last letter. Cass who could best anyone in combat and who would harm anyone who would dare to hurt Mira. Cass for whom she was bringing two books even though she had enough baggage on her own.

Tonight, Mira truly needed a friend.

The Inquisitor got to the Emprise mid-day the next day, and immediately called for the first joint meeting between the Chevaliers and the Inquisition, before Delrin even managed to greet any members of the Inner Circle.

Maxwell Trevelyan sat at the top of the table. On one side, there was General Jean-Claude Beauregard, Barris’ trusted friend from Val Royeaux. He was accompanied by Maurice Valois-Anjou, the Corporal that Delrin met in Val Chevin and Ser Forsard Malecot, a man Delrin had not heard of before. On another side, there was him and Cassandra.

The Skyhold soldiers, the Chevaliers led by Jeanne and Mira had not yet arrived. Delrin kept calm but he could feel his emotions simmering under the surface.

They were discussing various tasks ahead of them, planning the careful movements to clear the region of the Red Templars.

“Obviously I will take over the rifts, unless anyone else volunteers”, Maxwell Trevelyan joked, earning himself few dry chuckles.

“The concern is over the terrain”, Jean-Claude muttered. “We are at disadvantage coming from below. Nonetheless, with enough men and we could push through. We could establish a second camp somewhere here”, he tapped the map. “Provided we have enough reinforcements in case they push back.”

“The ultimate goal is to win over the Keep”, Delrin announced, giving a knowing look to the Inquisitor. He already managed to inform Maxwell about Michel de Chevin. “Before we do that, we have to be very careful not to separate our forces too much. I agree with general Beauregard that we have enough man to comfortably establish another encampment while keeping Sahrnia as the base of our operations.”

“Very well”, Cassandra agreed. “I will accompany the Inquisitor to the rifts. General, whom are you proposing to send to to engage the Red Templars tomorrow?”

“Myself, Corporal Valois-Anjou and Corporal Toussaint who is not here yet could take our squadrons”, the man replied. “Ser Malecot could accompany the Inquisitor, if that would alright
with you all.”

“I will join you, Jean Claude”, Barris said. “Alongside Bull’s Chargers. I will need to come back to the base, but I can easily leave Clarissa at the second encampment. Corporal Valois-Anjou is familiar with my unit and how we operate.”

“I would be delighted to work with Ser Clarissa Thornhall again”, the man nodded.

“Very well”, Maxwell approved. “There is nothing more left to say until we actually see the size and the quality of our enemy. Once we put the dent into the Red Templar’s presence here, we can realistically approach the topic of taking over the Suledin Keep. Any other concerns?”

“The infirmary”, Barris gritted his teeth. “We are getting both the surgeon and the Enchanter, but they will need more hands to help.”

“We will set aside soldiers that received basic medical and rotate the mages to help, including the members of the Inner Party. We will make do with what we have. When are they coming?”

“Should be only few hours from now.”

The meeting ended on a hopeful note, but that was just the beginning. He trusted Jean-Claude, but he did not forget that the man represented the Orlesian interests. It was a delicate balance and there would inevitably be problems. Something about Ser Forsard Malecot made Barris uncomfortable. He could try asking Jeanne if she knew anything about him. Even Beauregard seemed less than enthused around the man.

“Barris”, the Inquisitor spoke quietly before he left the command tent. “Can you wait for a second? Cassandra?”

“I will get them here”, she got up and left.

Delrin used all his willpower to not mention anything about Mira.

“I am sure you read the reports during your brief time in Skyhold”, Maxwell sighed. “Things went sideways in the Western Approach. We still have strong presence, but the Wardens escaped to the Fortress of Adamant. We disrupted their initial plans for the blood ritual but we have only delayed the inevitable. Regardless of the outcomes of the negotiations at Halamshiral we will be moving onto the Adamant. It will be the easiest with the Empire’s approval but we will do whatever is necessary.”

“Are we marching straight from there?”, Barris felt his throat drying.

“Yes. It is absolutely imperative we clear out the Emprise du Lion before the ball. I will never say to do whatever is necessary, but we damn need to push it.”

The flaps of the tent opened and the Seeker returned in the company of two man, one mage and one Grey Warden.

“Captain Barris, the Second-in-Command of the Inquisition Forces and the first in command over the army here.”, the Inquisitor introduced them. “Garret Hawke, the Champion of Kirkwall and Warden Jean-Marc Stroud.”

“Delrin Barris”, he bowed down.
“Let’s recount everything that happened in the Western Approach”, Maxwell muttered resignedly. “I thought it would be best if you were all here.”

The future confrontation in the Western Approach was unavoidable. Barris had never seen the Adamant fortress, but he knew of its history. It had been abandoned for over a hundred years, the sign of the decline of the Grey Wardens. Nonetheless, it used to be formidable, and it was positioned right at the edge of the Abyssal Rift, making it impossible to launch the attack from many sides. The Grey Wardens were fierce fighters. Each of them were forced to accept their fate during the Joining. All men feared death, but the Wardens seemed to fear it less than others. They had both warriors and mages in their ranks. The only army able to match its diversity would be the one belonging to the Inquisition.

The future of the war to save Thedas was shaping right before his eyes. The Emprise was a prelude, but the Adamant fortress would be the major battle.

“You want to use the path across the Emprise du Lion to move more soldiers from Skyhold to the Approach”, Barris realized.

“Indeed”, Cassandra confirmed. “We will need our noble allies to supply us with the siege equipment, but at least some of our troops could be moved that way avoiding major routes and cities if the situation remains tense after Halamshiral.”

It was hardly a good idea, but they could end up with limited choices.

“We have our Orlesian allies with us here at the moment. Do you think they will leave voluntarily after securing the area?”

“They might”, Maxwell responded. “Neither of them seem personally motivated to remain, quite the opposite. Both Gaspard and Celene need notoriety for the support of the nobility. They will play any victory here to their benefit, but do they want to invest in the region on the peripheries of the Empire? I am not sure. Baron Desjardins who has claim to some of the region is a member of the Inquisition himself, and he can take over our efforts while maintaining the proper facade.”

“Well”, Delrin raised his eyebrows. “We shall do our best then.”

They all left the tent at the same time, and Barris wanted to stop Cassandra for a moment, but Stroud got her attention instead. He walked away with Hawke. Two months ago he would be very intrigued to strike the conversation with the Champion of Kirkwall, but now all he could think of were his advances towards Mira. Did Hawke even know who he was?

“Can I help you, Champion?”, he asked impatiently, and the mage frowned slightly.

“Once a Templar, always a Templar, I suppose”, Hawke shrugged with a sarcastic smirk. “You do not need to stare at me as if I am about to turn into abomination momentarily, Captain.”

“I am not”, Delrin clenched his jaw and then lowered his voice. “You... met my wife before.”

“I do not know what you are— Ah”, the sudden understanding appeared on the man’s face. “So you are the husband.”

“I won’t say a word about this”, he fixed the fur mantle on top of his armor. “But I will let myself to glare.”
“Wouldn’t be the first time for me”, Hawke seemed almost amused. “Very well, I won’t assume your prejudice and bigotry against the mages. Is Mira one of the medics arriving?”

“Yes”, he swallowed, still angry about it.

“We are all lucky then”, the Champion replied politely. “Now please excuse me, Captain.”

The words hit him. They were lucky. He did not doubt Mira’s skills. He did not doubt that the soldiers and people of Sahrnia would benefit from it. He understood it as the man in command. That was the only reason why he did not voice any of his private worries to the Inquisitor. Nonetheless, as the husband Delrin could not shake the feeling that he was risking his wife’s life, and that was almost impossible to bear.

“Barris!”, he turned around and saw the Iron Bull marching, waving at him. “You look exactly how I thought you would after finding out.”

“Bull”, his voice broke, unable to hide from his best friend. “Mira is coming here.”

“I know”.

“There is war around us.”

“I know.”

“The Red Templars had attacked Sahrnia multiple times before.”

“I know.”

“She is the only civilian among all the Inquisition members.”

“I know.”

“Is there something reassuring you have to say?”

“Mira has the most powerful warrior in all Thedas as her protection”, Bull tapped him on his back.

“I am not— For fucks sake, Bull. You’re talking about Cassandra, aren’t you?”, he chuckled a little despite his mood.

“Surely you did not think I was talking about you, kid”, Bull laughed. “In all seriousness, Mira won’t be alone. Your worries won’t keep her safer, you know that, right?”

“Thanks”, he scoffed.

“It’s the truth. Where are you heading?”

“To debrief my squadron. I want to at least have a moment to talk with Mira once she arrives.”

“Let me walk with you.”

“Bull?”

“Yeah?”

“Thank you.”

“Anytime, kid”, his friend replied.
Two, three, maybe four hours and Delrin would see Mira. It was difficult to focus on joy and excitement when he was so full of fear.

Chapter End Notes

Mira is going to war.

How do you think she is going to deal with seeing Delrin? How is he going to react to seeing her? How will their conversation go? Do you think Delrin will be able to easily let go of some of his worry and protectiveness? Mira is hardly a combat medic, she has no military training aside from few very crude and basic self-defense classes with Cassandra that were mostly a good excuse to build their friendship. Do you think Mira will struggle with everything she will see in the field?

Expect a lot of professional challenges for both Delrin and Mira.

(I do not think of Mira as a jealous person, but at the same time this is an awkward and rather hurtful situation, and she STILL doesn't know about Jeanette's advances towards Delrin during the time in Val Chevin. Because the major decisions were made when he was on the ship/traveling, he had no idea that Jeannette would actually end up in Skyhold.

I also do not think of Delrin as a jealous man, but it doesn't mean he would not be irritated seeing Hawke. ;) )

Btw, yes, pretty much everyone is in Emprise right now.

Thank you so much for reading and for all you comments!
Mira was a lucky woman. For her, the war on Earth was either a thing of the past, or something happening far away. She could see the traces in the city she lived in before moving abroad to study. The majority of the city got destroyed in the war, but some buildings remained. Even after the rebuilding, it was possible to find the walls that still had bullet holes in them. The scars would always remain, fueling the memory. Everything Mira knew was through someone else’s words, someone else’s experience. She was aware and educated, but there was little aside the theory. As a doctor, she was trained to consider war trauma given the possibility of caring for refugees or war veterans. Still, none of this prepared her for Thedas. None of this could prepare her to see how war looked like. No books, no movies, no lectures.

Thedas was not like Earth, but Mira supposed that war anywhere would always present similarly grimly. Thedas had no means of mass destruction in a modern sense, although apparently there were explosions that could kill hundreds at once. Still, there were no bombs, no drones, and confrontation usually meant one by one combat. She did not know what to expect. She could sense her anticipation growing as they were reaching Sahrnia, and she possibly had never felt more inadequate in her entire life.

When the town appeared on the dusky horizon, Mira swallowed uncertainly. It looked scary, almost abandoned. How could she serve and help those people? What if this was all too much? The infirmary at Skyhold never handled anything like this. The fear filled her heart, because as much as she tried to prepare herself for the inevitable losses, she felt shivers on her back at the mere thought of it. Surely, she had seen people die before. Elderly, babies, men and women alike, some sick, some seemingly healthy. It would not be the first time. Nonetheless, that was war, and anything could happen.

The gates to the town they were marching through were cordoned by the Inquisition soldiers and the Chevaliers, and Mira saw the military tents in the back, behind the buildings. That was it. She was here. She instinctively straightened herself for her horse, trying to remain brave.
The town looked decimated. Empty. There was shattered glass on the streets. The people looked hunted and hungry. There was devastation visible in the buildings and the gates. It looked nothing like anything she had seen so far.

“We’re here”, Fiona remarked darkly by her side, looking around with her sharp eyes.

“We are indeed”, Mira sighed in response.

Sahrnia was barely standing. It was hard to name that feeling of emptiness and the catastrophe all around. She read that over half of the population either died or disappeared and that the Red Templars raided the village before the Inquisition forces arrived.

“Do you hear that?”, Fiona lifted her finger and Mira frowned.

It was surprisingly quiet. The villagers did not talk much aside from glancing at the new troops arriving, but there was on sound that broke through the silence. The wailing of a newborn. Mira would recognize it everywhere.

“I do. Do you see where it is coming from?”

“Are we stopping?”, Enchanter eyed her, although it was clear that she already made a decision.

“Sure we are”. They rode to the side, catching the attention of Dame Touissaint.

“What’s the deal?”, she turned around.

“We shall check few things with the civilians”, Mira responded calmly. “You can pony our horses, we can walk to the base.”

“Are you certain?”, Jeanette made sure. “Do you need soldiers?”

“No”, Fiona cut her shortly. “We do not want to scare anyone needlessly.”

“Well, I can’t nanny you”, the Chevalier remarked heavily. “I just do not want to leave you unprotected.”

“I sincerely doubt even ten recruits could outmatch Fiona”, Mira noticed while the elven woman raised her eyebrow. “Tell me I am wrong.”

“Of course you’re right”, Fiona shrugged, helping Mira pick up the medical sack. “I also believe that we do not need to seek approval since we’re not under anyone’s direct command.”

“I’ll tell Barris where you are”, Jeanette said. “And let someone take care of your horses. Am I to tell them to start unpacking?”

“At least let them bring everything to the infirmary tent. It should not take us too long.”

“Very well”, Dame Toussaint nodded and the whole group moved forward, leaving them both standing in the middle of the town’s square. Mira closed her eyes for a second, trying to pin point the crying.

“To the left”, she gently tapped Fiona’s arm.

“Lead the way.”

They quickly noticed a young Elven woman pacing frantically throughout the alley, her cheeks red
“Hi”, Mira spoke and the woman startled, immediately shielding the little bundle in her arms. “Don’t be afraid. We are the medics for the Inquisition. My name is Mira Barris and I am the surgeon, and this is Enchanter Fiona who is a mage healer. We have just arrived in Sahrnia and we’ll be establishing the infirmary at the camp. What is your name?”

“Odette”, the woman exhaled loudly and relaxed her stance a little, though she still glanced nervously at Fiona. The mages were clearly not a commonplace around here.

“What is the baby’s name?”, Enchanter smiled with genuine care.

“This is Abel”, she bit her lip. “I have trouble calming him down and feeding him.”

“How old is he?”, Mira asked gently.

“Three months”, Odette replied, revealing baby’s face.

“Do you have trouble latching him?”

“I lost my milk. I don’t know what happened, I feel so horrible—”

“Shh”, Mira reassured her. “It happens. What have you been feeding him?”

“Broth, soup… I can’t leave him to work, but my mother in law started cooking for the Inquisition, and she gives me coin, the little that she can. There is no milk I can buy. Mister Fournier would not give me any without coin, but now he sells it all to the Inquisition even though I have some. My husband… Sacha disappeared with the others to the quarry right before Abel was born. My mother in law helps however she can, but there is nothing here, so little food left. He is the only newborn in the village”, the tears appeared in Odette’s eyes. “I try what I can but he gets thinner and thinner.”

Fiona and Mira looked at each other knowingly.

“Come with us, Odette”, Enchanter gently tapped the woman on her arm. “We will get milk for Abel and we can examine him and give you things you need. Would that be alright?”

“Is it allowed?”, Odette looked uncertain.

“Sure”, Mira answered confidently. That she was certain of. “Do not worry about that. Do you need to grab something? We can walk as slow as you need.”

“I shall be fine”, the woman adjusted Abel in her arms.

“One of us could carry him, if you want your shoulders to rest”, Fiona offered. “At the Inquisition’s fortress there actually is a baby the same age as Abel. Little Rosie. All of us medics have had quite enough practice lately.”

Any hesitancy in Odette disappeared with exhaustion. “Really? The shawl I had ripped recently and now I can’t wrap him”, she passed Abel to Fiona who rubbed her cheek against baby’s hat, picking him confidently.

Odette proved to be witty and observant, and she answered all the questions they had. Fifteen minute walk turned out to be extremely fruitful. Now they knew how many people were in Sahrnia,
how many children and elderly remained, who seemed sick, who had issues with mobility, who lost most weight during the famine, what houses were the most devastated, who lost family members. This community knowledge was invaluable to build rapport and provide help.

They finally reached the inner gate to the military base. There was a guard there consisting of three Chevaliers at the entrance and two Inquisition soldiers she could not recognize.

“Yes?” the man dressed in the most decorative armor stropped them.

“We are the Inquisition medics”, Mira announced. “We arrived with Dame Toussaint.”

He eyed them both carefully and glared at Odette and the baby.

“You separated from the rest?”

“We found a patient in the village”, Fiona shot daggers out of her eyes, still carrying Abel in her arms.

“The civilians are only let in two times a day for work shifts”, he frowned. “They will need to come tomorrow morning.”

Fiona raised her eyebrows at Mira who gritted her teeth with irritation.

“That is a three month old baby”, she seethed. “And that is a chilling cold weather. I am surgeon Mira Ba —“

“I do not care who you are”, the Orlesian sneered. “I am telling you, they are not entering the camp. Tomorrow morning, when the day workers arrive.”

“Then please get us someone—“

“I am not your scout and you are not allowed to give me orders”, he looked so angry that Mira took a step back. Fiona seemed willing to murder someone, and Odette was absolutely terrified, placing her hand on little Able.

The anger simmered quietly inside of Mira. There was no point in arguing, and there definitely was no way they would allow this baby to get cold. The evening was rapidly descending.

“Wait here”, Mira told Fiona and took few steps in.

“Now I wonder if I should let you cross before being vetted first, either”, the Chevalier blocked her way with his body. “You should wait until we are able—“

“CASSANDRA!”, Mira yelled loudly spotting the tall silhouette of the Seeker right ahead. All those childhood singing lessons paid off, because she clearly could use her lungs. Cass turned around immediately and waved, quickly walking ahead.

“Mira!”, her dear friend smiled, visibly excited. “Why are you not coming in?”

“It appears that this man thinks we have not been vetted, so we can’t come in. I am sorry, you have not introduced yourself, so I am not sure how to refer to you”, she turned to the Chevalier glowering at her.

“Ser Forsard Malecot”, he mustered with open contempt. “I am merely upholding the proper order. The medics brought a civilian and this is outside—“
“The infirmary can see patients as they see fit”, Cassandra waved her hand dismissively. “That is the whole point, and I believe we have raised it before, Ser Malecot. Perhaps we have not been clear enough, and I assure you, we will make sure to clarify it further, but not at this moment, with a child being out in the cold.”

Thank you, Mira mouthed silently, already on edge.

“Well, I suppose”, Ser Malecot had no choice but to relent.

“Cassandra Pantheghost”, Cass smiled to Odette and bowed silently to Fiona. “I do not know what was that about, but let’s hope that this is merely a misunderstanding. I will bring it up at the war meeting. The infirmary tent is all set up, and I believe all the chests were brought in, but not opened yet. You will have men at your disposal, but I think the first shift is set for tomorrow morn. I don’t think we have anticipated patients right away.”

“That’s fine”, Fiona answered calmly. “But we could use some help unpacking.”

“There was supposed to… Let me fetch someone”, Seeker said.

“Wait!”, Mira interrupted her. “Cass, we need milk and sugar pretty urgently. Please.”

“For the baby? That can be done. You need a cooking pot?”

“Yes, I am not going to use the one we brew potions in. Thanks.”

Everything was set up tp their specifications, from the fire pits outside, to the procedure area, to the cots allowing for relative privacy. It looked… well, it looked like nothing Mira had seen in her life, but it seemed to be as good of a field infirmary as it could be in those circumstances.

She quickly open the chests, looking for cloths and bandages that could be used as diapers or covers, and finding glass dripper and measuring tools. Abel was back in his mother’s arms, not wailing this time, but somehow it did not reassure Mira. Crying was much better sign than lethargy. Fiona used her magic to light up the fire pit, and the heat reached the inside of the tent as well. The warm water was getting ready, so were the blankets.

She checked on him as soon as they were prepared. The diaper was slightly wet, which was reassuring, though Mira could see he was definitely slightly dehydrated and definitely too thin. It could have been worse, but she clenched her jaw at the sight of the sunken cheeks and the circles underneath the baby’s eyes. He cried when she used warm cloth to clean him up. He would need to be monitored very closely, but Mira did not see any imminent threat to life.

Her throat dried a bit. An infant like that was absolutely the most gut-wrenching sight. Abel was so adorable. He had more hair than most, already little curly. He also had dark skin, just like his mom.

Just like Delrin, Mira thought for a second, and it punched her in the gut. The thought of being in Odette’s shoes, the thought of having a child who would go hungry… No. She would not go there, and Abel would be alright, too.

Cassandra came back with milk and sugar, shouting that Zuzu and Simon were about to stop by and help in a short while. Mira knew she would need to bring the topic of whether there was a chance of Odette re-lactating, but Abel needed to be fed right now. She thanked the fucking heavens that her brain retained the information of breastmilk substitutes in times of emergency with no formula access. Why was she even reading that? She could not remember. She never fathomed that she would ever be in a situation to consider doing this, but now she measured milk, sugar and
water to mix up a substitute that at least would be more appropriate than broth or other available alternative. Just another thing she would likely never need to do on Earth.

Fiona somehow managed to get a chair, and soon enough they seated Odette and helped her feed Abel with a cup. The dripper would be a second choice, but he actually managed to drink like that, much to his mother’s relief.

“Thank you”, she whispered, becoming teary. “Thank you.”

Fiona gave her a questioning look, because one-time intervention was obviously not enough.

“We would love to hire you, Odette”, Mira nodded to the Enchanter.

“What... what about Abel?”, the girl asked nervously.

“You could have him here”, Fiona tapped her shoulder. “What can you do?”

“Regular things, clean, cook, do laundry, farm but...”

“You could help us wash and boil bandages. We could set you up so you’re not at the infirmary. You could put Abel in a cot, we could repurpose one of those crates. You would not need to move around or run around. You seem like a very thorough person, so it would just need to be washing and drying and assembling dressings.”

“I would sleep here?”, Odette worried. “You know, the soldiers...”

“Mira is going to share a tent with her husband, so I have a space in mine”, Fiona shrugged. “You would not need to travel and we pay decently. I promise no harm will come to you. We could talk with your mother in law ourselves, but this would also mean we could check on Abel few times a day and see if he is improving.”

“You would not mind?”, the Elven girl swallowed.

“Surely not”, Fiona scoffed. “Hardly a bother. We do genuinely need help, and believe me, Odette, I am certain you are better at this that the recruits. It would also mean it would be easy to supply you with milk.”

“That would be such huge help”, Odette’s voice broke. “I thought he would— I don’t—”

“That’s fine, Odette. It’s fine now. He will be alright.”

Mira looked at Cassandra, who stood by the entrance, not trying to intrude. She certainly heard the whole exchange, and just grimaced sadly.

“Ohette?”, Cass remarked gently. “I could escort you and Fiona to your mother in law myself. The workers shift is ending soon, and...”

“I don’t want to take him into the cold”, the girl licked her lips. “Could you—?”

“I can hold him until you’re back”, Mira extended her arms taking over Abel who looked more invigorated and rather displeased to be in stranger’s arms. “I can sing him a song. Don’t worry, it’s just few minutes.”

Alright”, Odette smiled bravely, though Mira could only imagine how it felt to leave her vulnerable son with a stranger, if only for a short while. “Thank you.”


“We’re not moving from here”, she reassured the girl, pacing and gently rocking little Abel at the same time.

Delrin finally managed to escape the questions and sudden pressing issues he needed to address, and set his foot to the infirmary. It was getting dark, and if Mira was not in the encampment he would go and find her himself. He clenched his jaw and scolded himself. He was already on edge, irritated and nervous. That truly was not his usual demeanor, but the mixture of being aware she was outside Skyhold now, facing potential danger combined with everything else they needed to talk about and his mission tomorrow proved a little too much. Even time with Bull did not manage to steady him enough.

He noticed Mira immediately. She was facing away, her red hair braided and glowing in the light of the fire pits. She wore an armor, and he was happy to see that, but at the same time it felt odd. Disconcerting. She was pacing a bit, as if dancing. She turned around and Delrin could immediately see her holding a baby. Before he could verbalize any of his questions, he heard at the sound of her own voice. Mira was singing, quietly, with her eyes closed, rocking the child in her arms.

“Twinkle, twinkle, little star, how I wonder what you are, up above the world so high, like a diamond in the sky.”

The words were silly and unfamiliar, but the whole image moved something at the very core of his heart. Barris stood by the side of the tent, soaking it all in. The thought to have a child had crossed his mind before. Sweet Andraste, they even very briefly discussed it. Right now the sight was so vivid and sweet at the same time. Mira stopped singing, but continued moving around, holding the baby with such care and affection. Delrin imagined her holding their own baby. The gentle wave of tenderness flooded him. One day, this could be their future. As a Templar, he never really considered having a family. It was not impossible, Arthur was a prime example, but it was rare enough. Now, with the Order gone, with Mira in his life, so many possibilities opened. He swallowed, observing his wife lovingly as she wandered around the tent.

She turned to face him and almost jumped up in surprise before lifting her finger and shushing him, even though he did not dare making any noise.

It hit him in the chest. There was something deeply awry about the bundled newborn pressing against the metal breastplate that Mira wore. Delrin could not escape the reality that all the sweetness of the vision before him happened in the context of war, and both that baby and Mira, his wife, should be as far from here as possible. Safe and sound, not standing in the middle of the military base.

“Hi”, he mouthed quietly.

“Hi”, she gave him that bright, brilliant smile that always made him a little weak.

Delrin had always been observant, and he knew Mira so well at that point. Tiredness showed on her face, accompanied by worry and nervous anticipation. Her hair seemed more disheveled than usual, despite being actually braided. He could bet that the lack of proper bathroom access was far more bothersome to Mira than any physical exhaustion.

“I’m glad to see you”, she whispered and his stomach churned.

He loved Mira. He loved everything about her, and he hated that she was here. The thought of lying repulsed him, but he did not want to hurt her feelings either. He found it difficult to rejoice in
her presence considering everything around them.

“Who is that?” he asked softly instead.

“That is Abel”, she replied warmly. "He is the only newborn in Sahrnia”, she adjusted her grip on the baby. “He was starving and his mom could not feed him, and now he finally has some milk in his belly. We got the situation solved though, and we’re paying Odette, his mother, to help out here. I think he’ll do fine, but it is… close.

Despite his lack of knowledge about infants, he could notice the collapsed cheeks. Babies should be chubby. The feeling of dread grasped his throat.

“Do you have everything you need for him?”, he swallowed.

“Yes, thanks to Cassandra. One of the Chevaliers gave me and Fiona quite the trouble to cross the gate with Odette and Abel. He blocked me from entering alone, too. Cass said she would handle it.”

“Was it Malecot?”, he gritted.

“I think so. Why?”


“She is with Odette, Abel’s mom and Cassandra. Zuzu and Simon are supposed to stop by shortly. Actually, can you start unpacking those crates and check them for splinters? We could use one as a crib for Abel, assuming it seems safe inside. It is the best idea I can think of.”

“Sure”, Delrin got to work as he infirmary filled out with other people, helping to set everything up. He listened to Mira make a schedule with Fiona, he witnessed her preparing proper care package for little Abel, he heard her laugh with Cassandra. He felt guilty for still having that pit in his stomach. They needed to talk, alone and uninterrupted.

Mira was quieter than usual, and Barris could see the exhaustion on her face as they entered their tent. He made sure that there were enough sleeping furs and blankets inside. Her satchels were already brought in. She struggled with the armor, trying to remove it impatiently. Delrin reached out and unclasped it for her.

“Thank you”, she breathed. “I had no idea how horrible it feels to wear that for so long.”

“You don’t need to wear it around the base”, he whispered, taking off his own. “Just when you go outside.”

Or if there was trouble ahead. He decided not to utter that out loud.

“Delrin, It is so good to see you”, Mira murmured, embracing him and letting her face rest on his chest.

He wanted to kiss her and to hold her, to tell her all the sweet things that were going through his mind in all this time they were apart. Instead, he just tapped her back, taking a deep breath.

“Can we sit and talk?”, he asked, knowing that it had to happen before anything else. He poured
them both hot tea from the travel kettle equipped with a heating rune.

“How are you feeling?”, he pried carefully, searching her face and noticing the blush creeping up her cheeks.

“I have been better”, she replied cautiously. “What about you? Have you got any injuries in Val Chevin or—?”

“I am fine”, he smiled, despite not feeling that great. “I am more concerned about you.”

“I think I am stressed about what the work here will entail. I don’t know, Delrin. It is a little bit surreal and I feel like I am drowning somewhere between my knowledge and my skills and the complete unknown. I am sure it will get easier once the work starts. It’s just… unexpected.”

The guilt and embarrassment settled around his stomach.

“Mira, I am truly sorry about the whole situation with Jeanne. I wanted to tell you about her in person, but then I received the new orders and truthfully, by that time I just forgot. I had no idea she would be part of this operation. Her presence in Val Chevin was a surprise as well. A lot of decisions were made at the last minute. If I had any indication it would end up that way I would write to you right away.”

“I figured you planned to tell me in person”, she sighed. “Honestly, Delrin, it is alright, I was just a little taken aback and—“

“Well”, he rubbed his head awkwardly. “Before you say anything, there is one thing I have to add. Jeanne propositioned me twice in Val Chevin.”

Mira’s cheeks turned crimson and even though she remained calm and quiet, he could clearly watch the shadow of pain appear on her face. She covered her face with her hands.

“I… don’t know what to say. For fucks sake, seriously? I just spent three days telling myself… You know, never mind”, she shook her head. “It just stings. It’s been difficult few days and all the stress adds up. I am sorry, Delrin. I am not angry at you, I’m just… I don’t know. It just odd. I’ll get over it. I just feel so… stupid.”

“I’m sorry. I really am.”

“It’s fine”, she bit her lip. “I know it is all a giant accumulation of everything. I am sorry. It will pass.”

“I hope you know—“

“Delrin”, she looked at him resignedly. “I know. I know what kind of a man you are, and I love you.”

“I love you too, Mira.”

“Alright”, her face twitched nervously. “I know you, so I know something is wrong. I am already stressed, so why don’t you just say it instead of letting me guess? Despite this conversation I have this feeling of anxiety in my stomach just looking at you know. You have not seen in me in a month and you have yet to touch me, and I already feel quite rough and raw so—“
“Mira, Mira, wait”, he rushed and caught her hand. “You’re right. It has nothing to do with Jeanne or anything like that, I assure you. I do not even know how to say it.”

“We have always been honest with each other.”

“Yes, I know”, he admitted, the giant knot in his stomach growing and growing. “I found out you’re coming here yesterday. I have barely had time to process it, and even talking with Bull did little to help. Mira, I… I am so angry. I have been angry since yesterday. Not at you. Not at all, please, I need you to know that. I am angry that you’re here. I understand why it is happening. I know your skills. Still, I just feel that worry inside of my stomach. Mira, I know you’re the best medic we’ve got, but this is Emprise du Lion. This is the most intense military operation yet since the beginning of the Inquisition. We are not in the keep or the fortress. Aside from townsfolk of Sahrnia, you are the only civilian in the Inquisition forces. I know why you’re here, and not Stitches, but Stitches could pick up a weapon and defend himself, you cannot. We will expand aside from this base camp, and you likely will be needed in the field to tend to the wounded. The mere thought that you might be out there just kills something inside of me. I know it is selfish, and I know it is not your burden. I know I worry about my men. But Mira, it is all so different from the way I feel about you. There are Red Templars here. Aside from Maxwell who rarely commands and Cassandra, I have this whole operation to oversee. Just as we watch our enemy, our enemy is watching us. I can hardly bear the thought that something might happen to you, and usually I don’t even need to bear it. It is my utmost duty to protect you and keep you safe, and up until now, I have always felt I could provide that for you.”

He took a deep breath to steady himself, noticing his hands shaking a bit. He could hide his feelings from most, but he could not hide them from Mira. All the fury, fear and frustration boiled inside while she kept staring at him with grave seriousness in her eyes. He could see the tears slowly welling up.

“I don’t know what I would do if you were facing danger, and that terrifies me for so many reasons. Mira, I love you so much. I love you more than anything in this world. I don’t say it lightly, but I would lay down my life for you. I do not know how to coincide that with my job. My men are supposed to trust me with their lives. I am to to make the most rational decisions, always. I do not know if I trust myself if you are involved. Believe me, I care deeply about my squadron, every single one of my men. I would lay my life for them, but it is different. We all know the rules. With you… I do not know what is worse. The thought that you might be there under my direct command, or the thought that I must trust someone else with your life. I know this is all hypothetical, and it is not like you would be in combat, and I know I am fucking spiraling right now, but this had been sitting in the back of my head since yesterday and… Mira, the obvious truth is that I care about your life so much more than anyone else’s in this camp. To reconcile it with the possibilities… I am sorry. I know everything has been rough and new for you, and I do not mean to scare you or— Mira, I’m sorry, I did not want to make you cry—“

“I always cry”, she wiped her tears quickly. “It should hardly surprise you anymore. Delrin, I… I can’t fully grasp what you’re talking about, but perhaps I can understand it in some way. Do you think I have not imagined how it would be to treat you and to treat others at the same time? I love you. I feel the same way you do. I should not be the one tending to you, for magnitude of reasons. If you get injured, I will, and if that happens, I should follow the same rules as I would with anyone else, but I do not know if that is even possible. I remember how different it felt when I had to provide care for Josephine. Do you think I never imagine it being you instead? I wonder how objective I can be in assessing who receives care first when you’re one of the people involved. For fucks sake, I hardly imagine doing it with the whole Inner Circle, but you? The worst, the absolute worst is that regardless what we tell ourselves or each other there probably are biases that are impossible to shake. I wish I knew the solution, but I do not know if there is one. Try not getting
injured. I’ll try not getting in danger. We’ll both do what we can to do our job and hope for the best. It’s all so fucked up, but believe me, it could not have been Stitches instead of me here.”

The tears started flowing down meticulously again, one by one, and Delrin pulled Mira in his arms, letting her wrap herself around him and feeling her body near.

“I am glad you told me”, she whispered into his neck, taking a deep breath. “Don’t pull away from me, Delrin, please. Not here.”

“I won’t”, he promised.

The knot was still there, but there was also warmth and gratitude, because Mira understood enough of what he tried to convey. It solved nothing, but the loneliness that surrounded his thoughts was gone, and that mattered.

“It feels so good to hold you”, he murmured softly, kissing the top of her head. “I missed you, Mira. I, well… I might have been a little too quick to say some things. I do abhor the idea of you in danger, but I love seeing you and holding you close.”

“I know”, she responded tearfully, running her fingers on his cheeks. “By the way, you are the most bearded I have ever seen you. Hairy all over. It’s so odd.”

He laughed quietly. “Well, now you know how I look when I’m stranded in the wild. I probably smell too, sorry.”

“I actually kind of love it, disturbingly so. Maybe I just missed you too much.”

“Is that so?”

“Yes”, she admitted quietly, her voice vulnerable and sweet.

Delrin relaxed a little more, leaning back to lie down, with Mira on top, flushed against him. The weight of her body, the sound of her breathing, the heat of her skin permeated his senses, grounding him in the moment.

“I really missed you too. The last time we spend with each other was wonderful and cut far too short.”

“Yes”, she sighed. “My memories of snow were far nicer when it was that room in Jader.”

“Mira’, he cupped her face. “I am sorry for today. I should have welcomed you properly.”

“I am taking offense that you have not kiss—“, he did not allow her to finish, catching her mouth with his and nudging his tongue to enter, kissing her properly, ardently, with love.

By the time he pulled away, Mira’s lips were dark and swollen. Her body felt just a little heavier, mellow, emitting heat that could warm the whole tent. He would never tire of this, not for a second.

“That beard might be growing on me”, she giggled lazily, rubbing her cheek again his. “It is less rough and itchy.”

“I was going to trim it tomorrow in the bath—?”

“Bath?”, she perked up. “Please tell me that bath is possible at least every few days—“
“It is. We do have couple of metal bathtubs from Sahrnia. There is a very meticulously kept ledger to reserve them, but I managed to get one booked for tomorrow evening. I thought you’d appr—“

“That alone is lifting my mood”, she exhaled loudly, tickling his ear which sent a little jolt of pleasure down his spine. There was nothing wrong about wanting his own wife, but her face still showed the signs of crying. That was all because of him and his outburst. Sweet Andraste.

“I am glad I did not fuck it up entirely”, he mused, circling the dimples on her lower back.

“Delrin”, she chuckled and caressed the top of his head. “Just talking openly makes it better.”

“It does.”

“I am still upset about the whole thing with… Jeanne, if I am honest. I am sorry, I know it is not your fault, I just… it stings somewhere around my heart.”

“Mira”, he hugged her tightly. “It’s alright. I might have… glared at Hawke. Enough for him to notice.”

“It is not quite the same.”

“Duly noted. Is there anything I can do…?”

Her laughter filled the room, and Delrin could not help his own smile. They could still find solace in each other.

“Keep the beard for now”, she caught his lips with her teeth.

“As you wish”, he managed between kisses.

Chapter End Notes

I am always extremely grateful for all the kudos and the comments. It really helps. Thank you so much, guys.

The Emprise du Lion will be a darker arc than usual - no wonder, Skyhold provided Mira with a lot of safety. I will still balance it with some sweet and caring moments, so do not lose all hope.

Btw yes - Delrin has a longer beard now, until Halamshiral ;)

Also - you should never use anything but breastmilk or commercially available formula for babies that young, but there are recipes approved by WHO in cases of extreme emergencies in situations where breastmilk/formula is not available. This is one of those situations, obviously. Mira knows it painfully too well.
After the battle

Chapter Summary

Mira tries to be a surgeon, and Delrin tries to be a good husband.

Chapter Notes

TRIGGER WARNING: Blood, gore, medical procedures, war. You know the drill and you know how I write.

More cursing than usual, but we're in high stress scenario.

ALSO NSFW (the last three POVs in the story, separated by "************")

See the end of the chapter for more notes

First week of Guardian, 9:43 Dragon Age, Emprise du Lion

Mira woke up to the sound of Delrin’s voice.

“We need to get up”, he whispered.

She hated it, but her body was used to rising abruptly. Last evening was short and despite everything, it did little to reassure her worries. After spending some time kissing they both went to eat. The soup was not as disgusting as Mira anticipated. Perhaps she was just accepting the reality of situation. Later, Delrin attended the war meeting preparing for today’s mission, and she double checked that everything was going well at the infirmary and walked around the base to familiarize herself with where everything was. She still had not managed to talk privately to Cassandra, who was just as as busy as Delrin.

There was a strict routine around the army life, especially for a larger operation like this. Twice daily there were war meetings, allowing for planning and solving any upcoming issues. Mira knew that as the surgeon she would be expected to attend some of them, like the one this morning. She had no idea what could her input be, honestly. Everything seemed new and foreign, and this time the responsibility seemed almost suffocating.

Even working at the Skyold infirmary could not come close to this. Sure, it required care and measure, and Mira was cautious, but the patients she had seen were coming with problems she usually was rather comfortable addressing. This was so removed from her experience. How could it not feel fraudulent for her to be a medic here? How could it not be fraudulent?

She tried telling herself that action was better than inaction, especially regarding potential combat wounds, but Mira understood that it would never be that simple. She could cause unnecessary harm by trying. There were few procedural guidelines to carry her through. There was no one there to watch her hands, no one to lead her, no one to stop her when necessary.
The day had not started yet and she already felt sick.

“Are you alright?”, Delrin asked with care in his voice.

He could always tell.

“Yes”, she replied quickly, taking the cup of tea from his hand and biting into a bland roll.

The tea was unsweetened and disgusting, but with food rations and people starving in Sahrnia Mira couldn’t justify using sugar after she already took over some of the Inquisition’s supplies to give out to the local population. What this town needed were the established trade routes and help before they all perish out of hunger. She had no appetite herself, but she forced herself to eat. The last she needed was her own body failing.

The command tent used by the Inquisition was the largest all around. Mira immediately noticed the tall silhouette of Jeanette Toussaint and gritted her teeth. For fucks sake. It still stupidly hurt, but she could hardly afford any distractions right now. The least she could do for all those people that trusted her was to give them her focus and her effort.

The tables, undoubtedly collected from houses in Sahrnia, were pressed together, offering enough space to roll out many maps and documents. She followed Delrin and sat down by his right side, next to Bull.

She recognized Jeannette, of course, and the other Chevalier that tried to block her entrance to the base yesterday. Wonderful. Good start. There were two other Orlesians at the table, and then Cassandra and the Inquisitor, the Iron Bull, her and Delrin.

“Before we start”, Maxwell glanced at her. “Let me introduce you to the Inquisition medic, surgeon Barris, who is leading our infirmary.”

“Mira Barris”, she introduced herself calmly, waiting for others to say their names as well.

The next step on the agenda was going over the objective for today’s operations. The sense of bewilderment filled Mira. Of course she knew what Delrin was doing, but to see it with her own eyes… She never actually expected to be privy to that much information, although her role now was very different than one in Skyhold.

“Regarding the infirmary”, the Inquisitor asked. “Surgeon Barris, is everything ready?”

“As ready as can be. Everything is set up and we are ready to see the patients. We are also ready to perform the procedures. First aid kits are assembled and we have a good supply of everything for now. We are also ready to provide further training when required”, she looked at the Chevaliers.

“Aren’t you supposed to be the medic, not us?”, Ser Malecot scoffed.

“Well”, Mira felt getting warmer. “I cannot be in several places at once. Sometimes it is a matter of minutes. The more prepared you are, the safer you and your men will be. Most of the Inquisition units had been trained.”

“What about the support on the field?”, general Beauregard asked and Mira could feel Delrin tensing up by her side.

“I sincerely cannot answer any tactical questions. The goal is always to stabilize patients temporarily and then move them to the infirmary when possible.”
“Most of the basic emergency needs can be addressed by the soldiers who have been trained. We have done is successfully in the Western Approach”, Delrin added, and Mira wondered if any part of his response was motivated by his personal fear for her safety.

“Still, we have come up with distress signals”, the Inquisitor added. “What we do here is the novel approach in the first place. We’ll cross that bridge when we get there, and we’ll see what yields results. Mira, you’re getting Hawke to help today. He volunteered. We will rotate the mages so Fiona is not alone.”

Delrin would not send a civilian into combat, she reminded herself. Not easily, whether it was her or anyone else. Undeniably though, Delrin was right yesterday. They both knew it end everyone else knew it too, in a way. The bias and the complications their relationship would bring were likely inescapable, regardless how professional and dutiful they both were. The work was too much to bear, but it was her new reality and she needed to try.

She had kissed him before he was leaving to fight, but never quite like that. They would move on foot, not that far from here to gain just a little territory from the Templars, to push them further from the town. He would be, what, several kilometers away? That seemed painfully close, enough to slash her own heart.

Mira greeted his squadron, already positioned and waiting to march out. Delrin was tasked with keeping them safe, and they were tasked to do the same for him.

He kissed her shortly but sweetly.

“I’ll see you in the afternoon”, he whispered as if he was leaving for the nine-to-five job at the office.

“Be safe”, Mira tapped his breastplate, keeping all her emotions in check.

“I love you.”

“I love you, too.”

That was it. The first day had begun, and Mira rushed to the infirmary, forcing her mind into submission, subduing the fear and the worry.

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Emprise du Lion was swarmed with the Red Templars and infected with red lyrium. There simply was no other way to name it. Right now, they had over forty people with them, and yet pushing back against the enemy proved to be challenging. The red lyrium sang all around them. Even Delrin could feel it echoing in his veins.

They approached one of the encampments openly. It surly was not the main base of operation. That was likely both the keep and the quarry. Still, between few behemoths that all did break a sweat. Barris was just assessing his squadron and Arthur’s injury that Beau was tending to where the sudden scream reached his ears.

Jeanne.

He rushed upwards, almost colliding with Jean-Claude himself.

Sweet fucking Andraste.
One of Jeannette’s men was lying on the ground, the huge red crystal directly poking through his shin. There was blood, but less than Delrin expected.

“Fuck”, he muttered at Jeanne, reaching to the satchel for the tourniquet, but Bull appeared out of nowhere and got to the soldier first, applying it carefully.

“Merde”, Jeanne hissed, shaking. “Armand. Talk to me.”

“Still here, Corporal”, the man managed, blinking at at the sight. “Still alive.”

Another one of Jeanne’s Chevaliers rushed to soothe and distract Armand, while Delrin grabbed her arm and pushed her aside. He could see that she tried to remain in control, but her hands were shaking.

“There is no way to remove this lyrium shard, that leg is done”, Bull noticed quietly. “Even if we managed, I am afraid he would bleed out.”

Delrin knew that, too.

“Lavellan”, he shouted, his stomach twisting and turning. “Send the distress signal asking for medical help.”

“Can she actually help?”, Jeanne swallowed. “Does he even have time? What about the mages—?”

“He has time”, Bull sighed. “Enough, at least. Those things are tricky with magic. We cut it straight with a sword, heal with magic… You know it is not the way to do it, and he could still bleed out. It is not easy for such wounds. We could try if we had no other choice but they take horses so the surgeon could be here in thirty minutes.”

“The tourniquet should stop the spread of the red lyrium as well”, Barris added grimly. “I’m sorry, Jeanne. What happened?”

“The fucking behemoth. Maker’s balls. What the fuck is even that?” She barked, hiding the emotions underneath her anger. “How the fuck has this spread all over Thedas?”, she looked at him furiously.

“I am sorry”, Delrin murmured, fully aware that the Order was to blame. His Order.

He understood. The fear of losing someone under his command… He had been there. He had failed before.

“Any losses?”, she thinned her lip, as if trying to stop herself from adding ‘so far’ to her sentence.

“No”, Beauregard answered quietly, wiping off the sweat from his forehead. “Let’s secure the camp. Jeannette?”

“Take whomever you need. I’ll stay with Armand.”

“Get Clarissa”, Barris added, acutely aware that despite everything he still needed to ensure the successful cooperation between the Orlesians and the Inquisition, and not let them take over the operation. Their goals aligned so far, but this could change. “Bull and I will start setting up defenses with Valois-Anjou.”

Maker’s breath. This is not how he intended this fight to end, and he certainly did not anticipate the need to bring Mira into the field so soon. His body rebelled at the thought, and he clenched his jaw
to calm himself.

“Let’s send Merle and Skinner to scout around discreetly”, Bull said once they walked away. “I want to know how far the Red Templar reinforcements are. You’re alright, kid?”

“Just fine”, Delrin brushed him off, fully aware that they both knew it to be a lie.

When the distress signal came, distinguished by the color of the smoke, they were in the middle of seeing Sahrnia townsfolk and dispensing salves, potions, dressings and sugar rations. The work was not difficult, but tedious, and Mira had a lump in her throat watching the afflicions troubling people of Sahrnia. Famine and poverty, the side of war killing probably more efficiently than swords.

She left with Hawke, on horseback, leaving Fiona in charge of the infirmary. Hawke could heal magically, but unlike Fiona, he had no knowledge of their procedures, so he could not stay.

“So how does it work”, she asked him. “The distress signals?”

“Fire magic with some alchemy”, he replied. “Actually it is the first time I have seen it used as thoroughly, although I think you are likely more privy to any detailed information me, given who your husband is. The signal that came means they are not under attack, but someone needs medical help. We should still keep to the trail but that can you see area to your right, with the frozen lake far ahead? That is where the Inquisitor ventured today. I see one rift already gone.”

Rift, Mira thought, swallowing. She had not seen a rift since landing in Thedas, and that was quite a traumatic memory.

“So”, he asked her, trotting by her side. “What do you think it is?”

“Something serious enough to let me look at it”, she responded darkly, letting her mind consider the possibilities again. “Something affecting mobility, perhaps. Spinal injury, entrapment… There are many traumatic injuries that they could heal on the spot. The mages in Delrin’s squadron are good.”

There had to be something in her voice, because the mage eyed her carefully.

“How are you doing, Mira?”

How was she… She could not help the sigh escaping her mouth.

“I’m fine”, she replied shortly.

“I certainly won’t push”, he said calmly. “We barely know each other, but I imagine how fucked up it must be for you to be here and to see all that and do the work you do.”

Something opened inside, letting the fear bleed out.

“Fucked up is the right word”, she muttered. “I… I don’t know, Hawke. It is a mess. I don’t know what I am doing and I try to bear it. There is no other choice. There is no guarantee I will help, and there is a risk I end up hurting someone even more. I am just wandering in the darkness. There is… It goes against every fiber of my being, and yet it must be done. Ehh. Ignore me. I am also feeling achy and gross. The lack of sweetened coffee or tea does not help.”
"You know", he started cautiously. "I don’t know if I can ignore your words. You know what happened in Kirkwall. At least you know Varric’s prettied up version of events. I was *wandering in the dark* and it ended up with… another war ravaging Thedas, and the ancient magister ready to doom us all. All I am saying is that, I don’t know… You can open your mouth to me if you want to."

“I am terrified”, Mira admitted. “I am terrified and I can’t show it, because the very least I can give those who need care is the demeanor that puts them at ease, even if I am screaming inside.”

“Your secret’s safe with me. Look, ahead of us.”

They sped up, seeing the camp filled with the Inquisition soldiers. Mira immediately spotted Delrin, looking tired and dirty, with blood on his armor, but likely uninjured. The pile of corpses, some normal, some monstrous, with red crystals all over, was set far to the side. She noticed two soldiers carrying another one. She blinked, acid burning in her mouth.

There was very few things that disgusted Mira, and she had seen cadavers before, but that was not that, that was war, and a *mass grave.*

*Fuck.*

She knew. Of course she knew that people were dying, but to see it like that twisted her stomach. *Fuck that, it twisted her soul.*

“Follow me”, Delrin said quietly right away, grabbing her medical satchels. “It’s an entrapped leg.”

Mira saw Dame Toussaint accompanied by two soldiers kneeling over a man lying on the ground, with clothing underneath his head as a pillow. He looked pale and sickened, but not bad, considering the giant red crystal piercing the lower portion of his left leg. Someone applied the tourniquet, properly placed.

“Surgeon Barris”, she introduced herself, kneeling alongside Jeannette. “What is your name?”

“Armand”, he replied, clearly trying not to look down at his limb.

“I will need to examine you”, she instructed. “Are you in pain?”

“It is sort of… numb”, he murmured.

The tourniquet helped with that. Good, in those circumstances. She removed his armor aided by Jeanne. She checked his pulse, listened to his heart, examined the area around the wound thoroughly, being very careful to not touch the lyrium. He seemed stable, all things considering, but the elements around would not help for long. They needed to move him.

She gestured Hawke, Delrin and Jeanette to the side, and they were quickly joined by the Iron Bull and general Beauregard himself. The sickly feeling was still hanging around Mira, but there was no turning back. Armand would die otherwise. Tt was as simple as that, and they could not even transport him back to the infirmary without amputating first.

“I’ll amputate below the knee”, she announced, wondering how the fuck her own voice remained so calm. With magic and the proper dressing it should be possible for someone to double ride with the man to the infirmary.”

“Will he live?”, Jeanett interrupted her, fire in her eyes.
“I can’t guarantee it”, she answered, thinking of all the possible complications, especially in the field hospital. Nonetheless, they had magic at its disposal. “There is a really good chance he will though.”

“What do you need?”, Bull asked.

“When was the tourniquet placed?”

“What, thirty five minutes ago?”, the man replied. “When we sent out the signal.”

Alright, Mira thought, at the same time recounting any possible ortho knowledge and growling internally that it was all far less helpful than it should have been.

“I will need help”, she said. “Both mages and people to assist.”

“Beau or Zuzu or both?”, Delrin asked.

“Beau”, she replied and he shouted an order. “I already have Hawke. Will any of you faint or get in my way?”

“No”, they all replied in unison, and Mira had no option but to ultimately trust them.

“Jeannette”, she looked at the woman who was so visibly upset. “You keep Armand calm. I don’t need you to do anything else, in fact, I don’t want you to. Just talk to him, distract him, I don’t know, whatever works.”

“It is going to be agony, isn’t it?”, Dame Toussaint kicked the snow.

“Actually”, Mira hesitated. “I don’t think so. The pressure from the tourniquet put his leg to sleep, so to say, so I am hoping it will demonstrate substantial pain relief. I will need some time but I will try to move as quickly as possible. Damn it. Hawke and Beau can heal him along the way and afterwards. The magic could also stop some possible… complications.”

“We would have cut the leg ourselves if you were not available”, general Beauregard noticed.

“I’m glad you did not”, Mira thought about guillotine amputations considering the possibility that her own butcher job might be slightly better if everything goes to plan. “But would be an option nonetheless. Alright. Who is good with their hands?”

She knew Delrin’s squadron the best, following Bull’s.

“Krem?”, she looked at the Qunari warrior questioningly. He nodded and shouted for his Second-in-Command. Stitches made sure Bull’s Charges were retrained after he left the company to join the infirmary. Krem also could keep calm in any situation and Mira knew he could knit and sew.

The sweat built up under her armpits and the flash of hot hit her body, the adrenaline rising. This could be done. She would not ever do this on Earth, not likely, not under any circumstances she could have imagined, but this was not Earth. Earth was gone. Mira from six months ago was gone too, in a way. This was Thedas, this was now. She focused, clenching her jaw. She looked at the people staring at her, waiting for instructions.

“Each one of you wears leather gloves, for your own protection, but ditch the metal. Each of you wears a helmet or otherwise covers their face. Hawke, you can use the cloth from the medical satchel. I actually have two pairs of glass eye protection. I don’t want bone dust to land in anyone’s eyes when I file it. Shit”, she turned around to glance at Armand and the red lyrium crystals. “It
will be tight, but I definitely need help immobilizing the leg and holding him in place. Delrin, Bull, General, you can do that. Hawke, Krem and Beau, you’ll stay with me. Alright, let’s practice.”

“Practice?”, Hawke sounded confused.

“Practice”, Mira repeated. “I need a man, similar size to Armand, so we could see how can we position ourselves around him and all do our tasks.”

“Trevelyan!”, Delrin shouted.

“Simon, lie down flat. We’ll see what works with how we approach him. Whatever you do, do not get in my fucking way. I need space when using the bone saw especially. I also need someone to pass the tools—“

“I can do it”, Kirke’s calm voice came from nowhere.

Good. Well, not good, but maybe… maybe just enough.

“Let’s get to it”, Mira ordered.

************************

Delrin had seen more blood and guts in his lifetime than he could have recalled. He had killed people, he had seen people die. He had seen them die in ways that were gruesome, and yet he turned his head when Mira cut and separated the flesh like a mouth of a fish. He looked again, but at her face. Her eyes were behind the glass, her mouth was covered by a mask. She was focused in such an intense way, and he was surprised to see how physical the job was. There had to be strain on her back and shoulders.

There was less screaming than he thought there would be. Mira had to be right that the tourniquet placed for so long clearly diminished most pain. Nonetheless, the breathing and straining and the occasional screams of Ser Armand reached all of their ears.

He could not tell how long it lasted, but his knees started aching on the snow and he developed a dull cramp. Mira worked tirelessly, barking short instructions to Kirke, exchanging quick words with Krem, Hawke and Beau. They used magic periodically, he could sense the steady flow from time. Finally, he heared Mira say loudly:

“Almost there, everyone”

Delrin glanced at Jeanne, visibly relieved, but still shaken. He could understand the feeling well. The thought that it could be one of his people had crossed his mind more than once, but at least Armand would live, at least he would get back home.

The healing magic burst around. Ser Armand relaxed and breathed a little deeper as Mira finished dressing the stump. Jean-Claude and him both carried the man away from the red lyrium crystal, his leg remaining there.

They decided not to wait and to move him right away to the infirmary. They placed him on the horse alongside Hawke, strapping Armand to the mage. Not a safe way to ride, but the safest they could come up with. Mira offered her horse to Jeanne so she could accompany her soldier, which she accepted readily.

He really wanted to talk with Mira, to ensure how she was doing, but Jean-Claude immediately called for his attention to discuss the further actions. Delrin still would leave Clarissa, Arthur, Beau
and Morve here, and Beauregard and Valois-Anjou would stay with their teams alongside the Chargers, at least for now. Barris and Bull would go back to the base, leading Jeannette’s men and the rest of Delrin’s squadron, and of course Mira. Once back at the Sahrnia, he would delegate more troops to support the second encampment. He doubted the Red Templar would try to get it back. He wouldn’t if he was leading them. Not while holding the quarry and Suledin Keep. It did not seem worth it.

They walked over the defenses, the communication patterns and finally, Barris was ready to march out. So ready.

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Delrin’s squadron helped her clean up. The dead silence surrounded them. All the tools would be boiled with magical help in the portable autoclave of Dagna’s invention. Frankly, Mira tried not to obsess over how rudimentary the preventative measures she was taking were. It was Thedas, not Earth, and they did what they could.

Now that it was over, she could feel her body rebelling. Even her hands were shaking a little, and she certainly felt nauseous. It was more than stress or fear, it was also guilt. There was no other choice, and yet Mira felt guilty. It was not massive guilt, more like a cut across the skin, but it burned. It felt wrong. It felt wrong to step up, it felt wrong to tell everyone she could. It felt wrong even when it did work.

She was unsettled.

Mira believed in following rules. She believed in them not for the rules sake, and not even because she had always been a rather good girl. She believed in them because the right rules at the right time mattered. They made patients safer. They made doctors better. They made the system work.

Suddenly, she was in a lawless land, bearing the power and responsibility so much beyond her abilities. Still, there was no other way. There was a price to pay, but the inaction was not better, and Mira clutched onto that thought desperately.

“Walk with me”, the Iron Bull said quietly. “I told them I wanted you to check a small injury.”

They walked for a couple minutes until they found themselves behind the evergreen trees and the small boulder, and Mira sat down on the ground, sweating and hyperventilating, trying to fight the nausea.

“Fuck”, she cursed, the tears appearing in her eyes. “Sorry.”

“You’re good, kid”, he passed her a waterskin.

“I’m such a—“, her voice broke. “I don’t know what I am.”

“He lives.”

“For now.”

“Come on, Mira”, Bull gave her a look. “Do you honestly think he will die?”

“No”, she replied earnestly. “With the help of magic? No, I think he will live.”

“He has a partner in a small town near Val Chevin. He treats his kids as his own, too.”
Mira chewed on that information, feeling the emotion swirling inside. She knew very well that there would be no boundary to her gratitude if someone saved Delrin’s life.

“I know”, Bull shook his head, “that it does not take away from everything you feel, but today matters. It matters in the most radical way possible.”

“Thanks”, she patted his shoulder automatically and then stopped and faced him, really looking into the man’s eyes. “I actually— I do really mean it. Thank you, Bull.”

“Always”, he gave her a big hug, and Mira calmed down a bit.

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Despite Mira’s protests, Barris let the soldiers carry all the medical equipment. He could see how much she tired herself during the whole procedure, and now she would march for over an hour in snow. They walked in the front, right in front of Bull who gave them some privacy.

They chatted a bit, but he could tell how much today weighed on her and he understood why.

“Do you want to talk about it?”, he finally asked quietly.

“I don’t even know”, her face was so serious it hurt. “It was a lot, that’s all. It is literally my first day. I dare to hope it won’t always be like that.”

“Believe me, you and me both”, he sighed. “It won’t be like that, Mira. It won’t. Today was… unfortunate.”

“Are you alright?”, she looked at him. “I haven’t even checked.”

“I am fine. Some bruising will form, I am sure. Nothing even worth mentioning.”

“It feels different, you know?”, she whispered. “Being here. Seeing you leave to do that. I saw you leave before but right now I just— It is different.”

It was different for him too.

“I know.”

“The bodies… I have never—“

“Fuck”, he cursed quietly, the cold shiver traveling down his spine. “Damn. I have not even thought about that, are you alright? We burn them after the fight. We usually say the few words from the Chant, too.”

“It was just… I don’t know, Delrin. You know I have never seen anything like this with my own eyes. The red lyrium too… Are you really alright?”

“I am fine, I swear”, he replied. “It is much worse for the Templars in my squadron but we have experienced it before, too. That was not the worst of it.”

“So how does it happen? You know, the lyrium poking out of the ground?”

“It was a behemoth, it happens when the red lyrium entirely corrupts one’s body. Behemoths can… shoot lyrium. They sort of… seed the soil with it and it spikes up as a defense.”

Delrin could see Mira doing that nervous gesture with her hand, and all he wanted to do is to take
her in his arms, but that would not happen until they came back to Sahrnia.

“So, did all those Templars took the red lyrium willingly?”

He knew where she was going.

“Many, but not all”, he answered heavily.

“I am sorry.”

“Me too”, the sadness appeared in his voice. “Every time I fight them.”

Mira glanced at him with so much care in her eyes that it almost choked him. He should be the one making sure she could cope with everything she had seen and done today.

“Armand should be fine”, she said with some newly found resolve. “I will check up on him upon our return and we’ll design the whole protocol for his healing. He will need to start exercising sooner than he thinks. I also need to write Dagna and Ellendra about pros— about the artificial limbs. I read of them being used here and Dagna is pretty ingenious. The stump that I managed to achieve and the cushioning of the bone… It was not the worst job, considering the circumstances. It is just so hard, losing a limb.”

“Better than losing a life”, he said confidently and she looked at him sharply.

“I am glad you say that.”

“Mira, coming home is a gift. I know it.”

It earned him that sweet, sad smile that went straight to his heart.

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The bathhouse was merely a tent, but at the moment it seemed glorious. Mira ran there few minutes late. She stayed at the infirmary and ate her dinner there while sitting down with Fiona and discussing Armand, baby Abel and all the other patients.

Delrin was already soaking in. The metal bathtub was huge and the water seemed steaming hot. Mira could actually smell the herbal scent of soap.

“I hope you don’t mind”, he said, watching her, “that I started without you.”

“Please”, she scoffed, kicking off her shoes. “I would have done the same. I would not have waited even a second.”

The sound of his laughter filled the tent. “I brought you a change of clothing, although I could not find some things, so you’re getting my socks and my sweater.”

“Even better.”

Mira undressed with a lightning speed. Thanks to the steam, the inside of the tent actually felt rather warm and pleasant. She unbraided her hair, now slightly matted and completely entangled.

“Is there any chance—”

“I did find your hair stuff and brought it, it’s on the chair”, Delrin kept his eyes fixed on her.
“You are the best husband”, she murmured, approaching the tub.

“And you are the sight to behold”, he smiled.

“I am *so gross* after today. How many people use this bathtub daily—?”

“Don’t think about it”, he laughed again, making space for her. “It is better this way, believe me.”

The water felt hot and wonderful, and Mira relaxed, letting the it float around as she dived in to wet her hair.

“If you thought we would just lie down and relax, I am sorry to ruin your fantasy”, she giggled, seeing Delrin’s face while vigorously washing her hair. “There is a lot to accomplish here.”

“I am not saying anything— Ouch”, he grimaced when she moved. “Careful, I am a bit sore on the side.”

“Sorry”, she shook her head. “I’ll check it later.”

After all the scrubbing and grooming, they finally did manage to cuddle. Mira rested her body on Delrin’s, laying her head on his chest. He wrapped his arms around her waist.

“Do we still—“

“Shhh, Mira”, he whispered.”We still have a lot of time.”

She breathed out loudly, closing her eyes. Just having Delrin so near helped a little. His body was strong, and warm, and she could feel his heart beating, and she could certainly feel that he was *happy* to see her. The familiar longing stirred between her legs. It surprised her a bit, after all the stress and fear and guilt of today, after all the insecurities surrounding her lately. This was war, and she was so tired, and her muscles ached, but sex had been good and it had made her feel safe, and wanted, and loved in such an undeniable, visceral way. Perhaps it was not odd to want it now.

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Deep inside Delrin still wished for Mira to be far away, *safe* and comfortable, but he could not deny the comfort her presence brought. He only hoped he provided her with the same. Truthfully, he was concerned, and not only about her physical safety.

The soldiers themselves struggled, and Mira was not one. Yes, she was a medic, and yes, she had seen death and suffering and injustice, but she had not seen *this*. Not until today, and while hopefully there would not be a need for managing such injury again, things would definitely get worse. He already was certain they would lose men at some point. Today came close, and today they definitely outnumbered and outperformed the enemy. They would not always get so lucky.

Mira was not from here. Sometimes at Skyhold he would almost forget, but here her otherness could not leave his mind. It was all new for her in such a profound and complicated way, and he wanted to protect her, to shield her, to spare her some of the pain.

She was a resilient woman, and she was smart, and capable. She was serious, and careful, and she *cared* Each day here she would hurt while trying her hardest, and he still could not find the right words or right actions to help.
Delrin was not a stupid man. He knew there were things he could not fix. He knew that sometimes the only thing to do was just this. Being close. Maker preserve him, he had already failed at that when Mira was the one that pushed to stay connected yesterday. She listened to him and she soothed him, and what did he do for her?

“I love you”, he said solemnly.

“I love you, too”, she answered softly.

“I will find time for you”, he promised. “Every single day we’re here. I don’t care if I need to wake up in the middle of the night to have a cup of tea and to talk with you, but I just need you to know that I am here fo you, even though I was such an arse yesterday. I know it’s hard, Mira, and there’s nothing shameful about it being hard. I just… I want to take away some of your burden, but if I cannot, at the very least I do not want to add to it. You can come to me with everything. You… Actually, you shouldn’t need to come to me, I should be the one checking up on you.”

“When I say that I don’t know how I feel, it is the truth”, she whispered. “I don’t know. Sometimes I feel like what I am doing is wrong. That I should have never pretended that I could be a medic here. The terrible secret is that I don’t know what I am doing. I keep guessing, and half the time I am not sure if my approach is right. There is a better way, I am sure, to do most of the things I do here, and I just do it however I can. It goes against so much I believe about my work and my responsibility, and yet I know that doing nothing is not an option either. I’m just trying to find myself in between and grasp onto something to know there is a path. Ah, we’ll see. I got so nauseous today that I almost got sick and… Delrin, I just… I don’t know. I should not have such reactions. You know, with all the schooling and training I have received I got desensitized and I adapted, and right now sometimes it feels I need to do it all over again, but this time the world is more confusing and there are less rules and I am not sure how to proceed.”

“I am sorry, Mira. When did it happen?”

“The nausea? Still at the other camp. Bull was with me. He talked with me briefly and he hugged me, too.”

The wave of gratitude traveled through his body thinking of his best friend.

“Bull is good at this”, he muttered. “Honestly, Mira, you do realize that despite training you still can have reactions to things you see and do, right? It happens. I got queazy today watching you work, and believe me, I have seen things. Things like that happen. I have been doing this for years and sill it hits me sometimes how hard certain things are. Mira, you’re… I do not know what to say, but your reactions are normal and not a sign of weakness.”

She kissed his hand. “Thank you, Delrin. Can we— Can we just change the subject for now? I just want to… relax.”

“Sure”, he embraced her tightly. “Anything you need.”

********************************************************************

By the time they came back to the tent, Mira felt better, more relaxed, and more importantly, clean and refreshed. Clean from sweat, clean from dirt, clean from blood. The exhaustion of the day, the fake detachment melted away, leaving her exposed, and raw, and craving for the connection to fill all the wounds.

She kissed him the second they took the coats and shoes off, still wearing his sweater and socks,
standing on her tiptoes. She was urgent and needy while Delrin was sweet and gentle, and maybe a little surprised. His hand tightened around her, and he sharply inhaled between the kisses. She knew he wanted her too.

“Mira”, he whispered when they pulled away, looking at her questioningly, still not certain.

“I need you”, she breathed out into his neck, putting her hand underneath his tunic and running her fingers on his stomach, right above the line of his breeches. “Please.”

“Sweet Andraste”, he took her hand and pulled her to lie on the bedroll and furs. “Mira.”

The flashes of the stress of the last couple days started tormenting her mind, from the signs of famine and war, to the smirk on Jeanne’s face when she said Delrin was good in bed, to the feel of cutting through the actual bone. Mira frowned irritatingly and grabbed the fabric of Delrin’s shirt to urge him to catch her lips again.

He was more careful, calculated, but she could sense the heat of his body and the want right underneath his skin.

“Please”, she repeated, not caring how desperate that sounded.

“I would love to. Are you sure, I ——“

“Yes”, she interrupted him. “I want to stop thinking and I want my husband.”

“Yes”, his warm breath tickled the skin. “Mira… let me take care of you.”

“Mhmm”, she eagerly agreed.

“We’ll need to be quiet”, he murmured into her ear.

“I can keep quiet”, she promised quickly and Delrin just laughed softly, rubbing his cheek against hers.

“I don’t know about that”, he teased. “Don’t worry though. I have few ideas.”

“I want to…”

“Yes?”, he nudged her eagerly, leaving the trail of wet kisses on her neck. Mira could feel her face and body flushing red. ‘Tell me”, he added. “I know what you want, honey, just please let me hear you say it.”

“Well…”, the slight embarrassment mixed with excitement all, “I want to feel your beard between my thighs. I want you to lick me”, she exhaled loudly, “and to… make me come.”

He slid of her breeches, struggling slightly since the leather clung to her skin after the bath. The fire braziers were set all over the camp, warming up the grounds, but Mira shuddered when the air hit her skin. Even the inside of the tent was still very cold. Her smalls were already damp when he took them off, and the temperature around started getting unpleasant.

“It’s definitely the winter time”, she complained. “And we’re definitely inside of the tent.”

“I won’t take off your socks”, he smiled. “And the sweater. You look really hot like that, just let me”, he exposed her breasts by pulling the sweater up, “play with them a little. I’ll warm you up.”

“Right”, she caressed his scalp and the back of his neck lazily, focusing on the sensations
spreading all over her body.

“I love you like that”, he took a moment to look at her, and Mira did not think she could want him any more.

“Like what?”

“Horny”, he smirked, stroking her inner thigh. “For me.”

The warmth filled Mira quickly. Delrin placed her thighs across his shoulders. She still felt the cold surrounding them, but her body burned with the constant, steady flame of desire. The longer beard definitely provided a slightly different sensation, softer, certainly less scratchy, but at the same time more intense. His hand landed flat below her stomach, putting gentle pressure to keep her in place. How could she ever describe the feeling of his tongue and mouth? The pleasure felt bright and clear, not dimmed by anything else.

“Maker”, she gasped softly, still remembering the need to keep quiet.

He stopped for a second, laughing a little. Mira let out a frustrated growl.

“Sorry”, he kissed her thigh, “I won’t stop after that, I promise, I just… Maker, really? I have never heard you invoking the Maker ever before. It is honestly… weirdly arousing.”

“Well”, she giggled, “I suppose after all this time it was bound to sneak up on me. Anyway, Delrin, please, can you just… stop talking?”

“As you wish”, she could feel his face rubbing against her. “Damn, Mira, you smell so good.”

She closed her eyes, relaxed and allowed the pleasure to build up. Her mind rarely slowed down, but right now Mira let go, if only for a while. She let go of today, she let go of worries, she let go of insecurities. Her own hand landed on her mouth to keep quiet, stifling the moans.

She crashed into her orgasm. There was no other way to describe it, and nothing, nothing in the world could compare to the intensity of that feeling. She barely caught her breath before Delrin kissed her, gently touching her face.

“I love you”, he whispered with so much need in his voice that Mira chuckled.

“I love you too, but why are you still wearing clothes?”, she complained.

**************************************

He loved watching Mira completely mellow after receiving pleasure. He could see that, her whole body relaxing, the tension escaping, any rigidity caused by stress gone. She was soft, and sweet, and ripe with yearning, even when the tiredness painted her face. Maker preserve him, he wanted her so much it hurt.

“I don’t think I can move much”, she bit her lip. “That is probably more the marching in the snow and all the labor of the day than your prowess but—”

“Shhhh”, he joked. “No need to go into details, it could be my prowess.”

Sweet Andraste, he loved Mira’s laughter at all times, but there was a certain warm and lazy timbre to it when she was satisfied that only made him more turned on.

“I have been thinking so much about you when you were away”, she purred, moving her hand
across his length.

“Honey”, he rasped. “I want to be inside of you.”

“Yes, Maker, yes.”

“Can you lie down on your stomach?”, he asked, throat dry with arousal. “You’ll be comfortable and you can scream into the bedding.”

Oh. That sigh alone made him a wreck. He helped her out of the sweater, his sweater, but she still kept his long woolen socks and he found it oddly attractive. She lied down comfortably, her hips resting on the pillow and the towels.

“That is a lovely view”, he whispered, running his finger down her spine, up until he reached those perfect dimples on her lower back.

“Mhmmm”, she responded leisurely, shivering with anticipation.

“Mira”, he kissed the back of her neck. “I’ll be very gentle.”

“Alright.”

“Mira”, he took it slowly, “I have been thinking about finally making love with you for a whole month.”

She gasped, closing her eyes and grasping onto the furs.

Damn, he groaned, buried in heat and wetness. Mira was right underneath him, so responsive, so trusting. He could see her profile; the dark blush covering her cheeks, the little frown between her eyebrows, the mouth moving, making effort to stay quiet, her hair, completely disheveled and messy. His delicious, beautiful wife, his home.

“Oh, Delrin” she whispered as he found the right pace. By the Maker, he had to remind himself keep the noise down.

“Fuck”, he breathed out, feeling her thighs starting to tremble and his own pleasure rising. “You are so so hot.”

The exhaustion of the day mixed in with the thrill of sex. It was almost surreal, like a complete surrender. The softness of the sleeping furs provided comfort underneath. The cold around completely dissipated, replaced by a thin coat of sweat here and there. She was pinned down, covered, shielded. Delrin’s weight felt solid on top of her, but not suffocating. It was just enough to really feel entirely one with him. He was not rough, and it wasn’t that fast but somehow it seemed more intense than ever before. Her clit rubbed against the pillow. Each move was a step towards the edge, and each time she felt she could not go higher, and yet. Delrin was softly groaning right by her ear and Mira clawed her nails into the furs. She buried her face in her forearm, wailing.

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“Fuck”, he repeated. He did not swear often, and somehow that made it so much hotter.

“Feels good?”, she managed.

“So… good”, he replied erratically, his breath right on her skin.

“Please”, she begged shamelessly. “I am… so close.”
“I got you, honey”, he gritted. “Fuck, Mira, I can feel you— I want you to come all over me.”

She could not help the scream, hiding her face in the furs, feeling Delrin’s body pressing her, whispering that he loved her. He needed only few thrusts himself to finish with that guttural growl, and soon enough he collapsed by her side, still keeping his hands on her.

Mira could not move. She laughed, getting her hair out of her face and looking at her husband.

“Yes.”

“I love you. I also genuinely can’t move.”

He chuckled, stretching comfortably. “I love you, too. I’ll help you clean up.”

“I also need to pee. Goodness, the cold outside—“

“I’ll certainly escort you.”

“Chivalry is not dead, I see”, she remarked amusingly, still making no attempt to even lift a finger.

“No ever”, he gently swatted her ass, getting up.

Inevitably, Mira’s mind returned to all the tasks awaiting her. She thought of how long she could sleep for, she thought of Armand, her amputee patient a, she thought of Delrin venturing out to fight again tomorrow, she thought of needing to find time to finally catch up with Cassandra, she even briefly thought of Jeannette.

Still, there was a sense of belonging that hadn’t left her, the sense of bond and intimacy and love that sweetened her worries, because Mira was surely not alone.

Chapter End Notes

The next chapter will be more calm - and finally there will be Cassandra. Mira needs a friend. Also we will celebrate Wintersend, albeit in the military encampment.

The chapter was inspired by the tiny and short BMJ article "Painless amputation: history of a discovery that wasn’t made" that you might be interesting in. The trouble with trying to write Mira is that she would not do things as they were done in the past, she would try to improvise in a way that is, well, rather modern.
I wanted to show Mira and Delrin's intimacy because it is already different than their first time and they strictly fluffy honeymoon period. The environment is much darker, and Mira finds some semblance of solace in sex and physical closeness.

Thank you for reading, for all the comments and the kudos. I really do enjoy reading the comments. I know it is a long fic, but if you're still reading and liking the story I would love to hear it periodically.
“Please tell me you’re alone”, Mira shouted.

“Of course I am alone. Who else would be here— Do not answer that! Come on, hurry in!”

Mira walked into the bath tent on Wintersend morning only to find the triumphant, happy Cassandra and a tub full of steaming water, smelling of oranges.

“How did you make it happen?”, she gasped at her friend. “I thought that nothing is as protected as the bath ledger in the camp.”

“Threats of violence”, Cass smirked and Mira wondered if some part of it was true. “That is my Wintersend gift to you. A bath sooner that you expected.”

“Oh, her heart.

“You are my dearest, most amazing friend. Is that the bathing oil?”

“Courtesy of Vivienne who arrived last night. I think you missed because of your shift. I feel we have barely seen each other in the last several days.”

“We have a lot to talk about.”

Seeker gave her the resigned look. “Is this wonderful field spa not enough to get you off my back about Varric?”

“No fucking way”, Mira scoffed, undressing quickly. “I have been waiting weeks to find out something more. Oh, that water is wonderful.”

“Move over” Cass ordered. “If I am to confess everything, you don’t get the tub all to yourself.
Also some of us have long legs. And fine, I give up. I read your letter hundreds of times. What do you want to know?"

“Everything. What happened? What is between you two? I even considered asking Hawke, but I would not stoop that low.”

“Ugh”, Cassandra grunted. “In all the moments of my life—“

“Alright, this was the most shameful moment of your life. I got it. Details, Cass. I need context.”

“We stumbled upon a dragon hunting around Crestwood. It moved too close to our path and to various farmlands, and there was no choice but to fight it and kill it. Honestly, between the five of us I had not anticipated any problems. I have fought dragons with small parties beforehand, and we had two mages, more than capable of long distance attacks. I was fine to carry the burden of close combat, aided by Stroud. Two mages, more than enough barriers. I still don’t know exactly what happened exactly but Varric was searching for the higher ground and the next thing I remember is that damn beast using lightning and Varric falling. He fell down, slipping on the rocks and hurt his head a bit. Nothing seemed serious. There was blood but he did not lose consciousness. You know him, he is very dramatic and manipulative. He whined more than usual. Everyone went to sleep except me and we drank some whisky and Varric got all serious. He said that he worried about the future, that he felt guilty about Corypheus. He told me why he did not share anything about Hawke. He said that the bonds of friendship are for life. He said he considered me a friend, and I kissed him. He panicked, I panicked, we just… went to sleep, not talking to each other.”

“So, what was it exactly? The kiss…?”

“I don’t know”, Cassandra sneered. “I had this innocent crush on Cullen and it was safe and… I can’t be falling for Varric. It is absurd.”

“Why?”

“Because…”, she started passionately. “He finds me mean and cruel, and I find him careless and irresponsible and untrustworthy.”

“Do you really though?"

“No”, she grimaced. “I don’t. And the kiss was good. We still have not managed to talk it through. He spends almost all of his time with Hawke. We traveled to the Western Approach and then you know what happened, more or less, at least. It was absolutely awful and we were so busy. Now we’re here, stretching ourselves thin to try to win over Emprise du Lion before Halamshiral and I’m behaving like a stupid teenage girl fawning over a boy.”

“Oh, Cass”, Mira whispered. “You know that attraction does not give a fuck about the circumstances. Sure, we are all working, but that does not mean you stop having feelings.”

“If Varric did anything, I would not be… opposed. Perhaps. If he took proper considerations. He is better with words that me. Seriously though, now it is not the right time. We are both talking to each other, pretending that it did not happen and I don’t want to reopen the wound. Not now. Better tell me how you are doing.”

The deep seated worry stirred in Mira’s stomach. “It is all new, and I honestly don’t know. I am way over my head, Cass. Way way over my head. There is not a day when I without me catching myself hyperventilating at the thought of what I might need to do. The Orlesians badger me incessantly, the war meetings make me feel worried, and the female Chevalier—“
“Dame Toussaint? She seems rather competent.”

“Her and Delrin were sort of… together, in the past.”

“Whoah. Are you serious?”

“I found out in Skyhold by accident and— Well, needless to say Jeanette made some praiseful comments about him—”

Mira paused to let Cass make her now famous disgusted noises.

“Thank you”, she smiled at her. “Honesty, I probably would not care as much if I was prepared for that and if did not not say certain things.”

“What about Barris? Honestly, Mira, I don’t see him as the type who would ever do anything inappropriate—”

“I am not worried about that”, she shook her head. “It is just not pleasant to hear. We were in such romantic stage of our relationship before he left and everything was perfect and wonderful, and suddenly I am in the middle of the military base staring at his beautiful and smart former lover who oozes confidence. It is bizarre and Delrin is as nice as usual. I don’t want to be petty, except I am, a little. I do want to allow myself to wallow for a day or two, and to feel just slightly upset, but we’re at war and he is leaving every day to fight and everything else loses importance. I am not being petty when he is risking his life daily. I also know he is actually stressed about work and he is certainly not happy that I am here.”

“You should have seen his face when he saw Maxwell when we arived. He did not say anything but I thought he would punch him.”

“He worries about me, I worry about him. We’re… trying.”

Cassandra looked at her carefully. “It’s rough, isn’t it?”

“Ah”, Mira made a brave face. “It’s rough, but the bath right now? It is a blessing.”

“Good”, Seeker beamed. “It is as much of a gift for me as for you. Maybe even for Barris, depending what you are giving him for Wintersend later. I am that amazing.”

“You are horrible”, Mira splashed water at her friend while trying to detangle her hair. “Can you help me cut it? I can’t keep it that long.”


“They are curly. Nobody will notice if they are a bit uneven. You know how to use blades, don’t you?”

“I won’t refuse you, but I want my skepticism to be noted.”

“Duly noted, Cass. Duly noted.”

****************************

There was so much work ahead. Today was supposed to be a time of rest, and yet Delrin hardly could forget about all the plans to attack the quarry. A lot of people counted on their family members being alive. Truly, it was not impossible, given that the Red Templars needed laborers. Still, just the red lyrium exposure itself would be extremely problematic.
Large scale operations were not his specialty. Granted, he had the training to run them and a lot of combat experience in general. It did not change the fact that he mostly worked in small, very specialized units. This time, ideas clashed. Chevaliers had their ways of doing things, the Inquisitor was likely to deviate from previously established attack plans in the middle of the battle.

Delrin would love to say fuck and take his squadron and Bull with the Charges to deal with it themselves, but the Red Templars had just too much presence in the area. They needed manpower, and they would need even more to attack the keep. Thankfully the reinforcements from Skyhold were to arrive. Cullen also wrote that more Orlesians were to come, but this time under the banner of Baron Edouard Desjardins, the agent of the Inquisition.

Enough, Barris told himself. Today was Wintersend. They organized a community meal and some celebrations, both for the townsfolk and the soldiers themselves. The importance of boosting the morale and keeping the hope high could not be overstated, and he had no right to let himself sulk.

Moreover, he would finally spend a day with Mira, and Sweet Andraste, he needed that. He desperately needed his wife, and not for the tired, rushed conversation.

He walked around the camp, watching soldiers spar for fun while taking bets, seeing the silly games being played, hearing few familiar chantry songs.

Perhaps today would be a good.

How peculiar. It dawned on Mira that it took her mere few days to get used to the rhythm of life in the military encampment. There was never enough sleep. Each morning started with the war meeting, and she attended quite the few of them, just to be updated on the missions and prepare for possible casualties.

Today was different than usual. No military operations were planned for today, no training. It was Wintersend, and the vast majority of the soldiers and town folks were Andrastians. It tugged at her heartstrings for many reasons. Perhaps there was still something sacred in the time of war. Some yearning for peace, for a break from this nightmare.

There was hope around. The infirmary was always a good place for gossip, and while Mira never shared what she learned in the war meetings, she knew that within less than a week the troops would march onto the Sahmnia quarry. Many civilians still believed their loved once were alive, and that included Odette who still had not given up on Abel meeting his father Sacha.

“Are you sure you do not mind? I hate to impose on your day of rest”, Odette asked hesitantly.

“I am sure”, Mira replied confidently, taking the baby in her arms. “Honestly, I could use some baby snuggles, and you could use a break.”

“Could I, really?”, the Elven woman frowned.

“Yes”, Fiona cut in on the conversation. “Odette, you barely had any chance to rest since he was born. Mira will take care of him for few hours, I will take over later. Few soldiers watch over the infirmary. We can always call on you if something happens. Go, relax, play some games or simply catch on some sleep. Please. We both are more than capable.”

“I am not going to lie”, Odette’s eyes got glassy. “I am so tired and stressed and —“

“Go”, Mira nudged her, calming down Abel, clearly not looking forward his mother leaving. “Just
tell me, do you mind if others hold him as long as I am there and make them wash their hands? I am afraid there will be requests once I go into the tent.”

“It’s fine”, the girl smiled. “As long as he is safe and with you.”

“Sure. Go, go!”

Both her and Fiona watched Odette disappear.

“Do you think she’s going to get any sleep?”, Mira asked.

“No”, Fona chuckled. “Probably not, but you know what? She will still rest, if only mentally. Are you going to the Inquisition lounge tent?”

“Yes. I will be there the whole time. Let me know if you need anything and get some rest too. Seriously, today might be the only day we are able to take off work. All the wounded are stable, the soldiers with basic training can watch over the infirmary.”

The Enchanter raised her eyebrows. “Are you convincing me or yourself? Because I have no guilt whatsoever about taking some time off.”


“Go, you too.”

She wrapped the shawl to secure Abel onto her chest, put on a coat and marched out of the infirmary.

Delrin was easy to spot. He was taller than most, and the dark skin on his head reflected the midday sun. He was out his usual plate armor, but he still carried a sword. His laughter carried far, and Mira’s heart almost skipped a beat at the sight. He was surrounded by three children, showing them how to use swords, except that swords were obviously wooden sticks. The Orlesian language reached her ears as she walked closer.

“Alright, Luca”, he breathed. “I really need to go soon.”

“No”, the children protested loudly. “One last time, Captain!”

“Fine”, he gave up quickly, with a smile on his face. “But three on one, guys? I stand no chance. It’s almost unfair.”

“It is fair because we are much smaller”, the girl quipped and Mira chuckled quietly.

“I can’t quite argue with that”, Delrin laughed.

_Oh._ Mira had never seen him around children before and now all the feelings roused in her heart. Delrin was always patient and caring, two qualities she imagined a good dad to have. Still, they had never discussed it in detail. It seemed too soon or too much. She had always wanted children, one day, but living in Thedas made everything more complicated. There were few things in life Mira was less keen on that pregnancy and childbirth outside modern medicine. Nonetheless, that did nothing to stop the yearning in her heart watching him like that, all while holding a baby in her arms. He said he would accept a child if that happened on accident, but did he want a family with her? He was always leaving and she was working, but maybe that war would not last forever and—
He noticed her and grinned.

Even here, when everything seemed rather grim she could not help but to grin back.

“Mira—”, he started and then flinched when one of the boys hit him with the stick on the shin. “Ouch!”

“You are so close to defeat”, she laughed as he tried to gently parry three children at once. “I have to feed the baby, so I am going inside the tent. You can find me later if you don’t perish.”

The kids squealed in happiness.

By the time Delrin escaped, Mira had already managed to show Abel to everyone in the tent and she had settled on the furs on the floor to feed him. It had been only several days of steady routine of breastmilk substitute but he gained some weight already. Good. Perhaps there would be no negative consequences. He had been fed properly for most of his life, and Mira could not notice any delays. He was able to grasp onto her finger, she saw him push up on the floor, he would smile and babble a little. He mastered drinking from the cup. His sweet dark eyes did not leave her face.

“You’re such a handsome big boy, aren’t you?”, she cooed. “Look at you, eating well, not crying when I hold you…”

“Hi”, Delrin whispered, sitting right next to her.

“I see you survived”, she chuckled.

“ Barely. Zuzu and Simon volunteered to replace me. Truthfully, I prefer to know someone trusted is watching over. It’s not easy, childhood during the war.”

“No, it isn’t”, she agreed, stroking Abel’s cheek with her finger.

“Is it me or is he looking better than the first time I saw him?”

“He is”, she noted with satisfaction. “Fiona will take care of him in few hours so I will be free for the rest of the day. We wanted to give his mom a break. She has a mother in law who is always working and honestly she’s been on her own since, you know—“

The shadow fell on his face as he sighed. “Believe me, Mira, I know. The Red Templars have no motivation to kill the workers in the mine but the red lyrium… We shall see. We’ll be moving—“

“Hey”, she leaned her head on his shoulder. “It’s alright. You don’t need to explain.”

“It’s not you”, he kissed her head. “Believe me, I can feel the atmosphere around the camp. There are a lot of expectations and this is a very large operation, which adds to my worries. Anyway, enough about that. It’s Wintersend, and we’re supposed to relax.”

“Hold that”, she passed him an empty cup and supported Abel on her lap to burp him. He did and looked at them confused.

“I expected him to cry more without his mother.”

“Wait until he gets cranky and wants to fall asleep. He is also very little, they start being more opinionated several months later.”
There was so much tenderness in his eyes. Mira blushed and swallowed. This was certainly not the best moment to ask, but she could barely bite her tongue.

“You look so sweet holding that baby”, he said softly and something cracked.

“So…Do you want us to have one someday?”

The question was less surprising than Delrin thought it would be. Perhaps he simply knew Mira that well. She was looking at him so seriously. There was tiredness painted on her face, but somehow her eyes twinkled brightly, too.

“I do, I really do”, he replied. “Uhm— do you?”

“It is not easy”, she glanced at Abel. “And it is hard to imagine what will happen once this is over. Pregnancy is dangerous and so is childbirth and I have to tell you, I still am a better medic than I am a patient. I worry about everything, constantly snd—”, she stopped abruptly and smiled widely. “Who am I going to fool? I want a baby one day.”

The pleasant warmth spread all over. It felt good to think of the future, of something more than this war. Something more that he had ever dared to hope for beforehand. Truthfully, he had never entertained the thoughts of family, and partially because there had never been a sense of permanence to allow this. He was a Templar. He came from a noble house but of moderate holdings. He had been spending whole months traveling. Now his job was taxing but he was married and—

“You would make a great dad”, she added with so much certainty in her voice. The emotion appeared out of nowhere, hitting him hard.

“Do you really think so?”, he rasped.

“Sure”, she let the baby grasp her hand. “You’re the very caring and you might be the most patient person I know. You have basically adopted baby Trevelyan and Lavellan.”

“That is a very disturbing thought.”

“Sorry”, she laughed. “You’re really great and I am not even saying that because I love you. It was nice to see you playing with the kids outside.”

“I will probably have some bruising on my shins”, he chuckled. “It means the world to me that you think that. Can I hold him? I actually held a baby that you delivered at the infirmary, you know?”

“Really?”, she gasped. “You never told me that. Was it when you went there with Cass? Alright, grab him like that and let him observe you. He might grab your hand, he knows how.”

He knew he was smiling when holding Abel. The baby was adorable, and the whole interaction brought a different kind of peace.

Mira stared at him with tenderly. “That might be the most heart-melting sight ever.”

“Good”, he winked at her.

It was good. A much needed respite.
“So, how did I do?”, he asked when they reached their tent.

“Are you fishing for more praises?”, she frowned.

They spent close to four hours with little Abel. For half of that time, he was napping in the improvised cot made from a crate, but the rest of the time Mira watched Delrin change, feed and soothe a baby. There was not a word of protest or complaining, although he struggled with folding the diaper. Truthfully though, she did too at first when Rosie was born at Skyhold. Diapering options were far superior on Earth. Still, there was something particularly endearing about seeing Delrin try so hard and be so gentle.

“I like when my wife praises me”, he leaned in and kissed her.

“You know you did well”, she smiled. “We handed Abel back fed, clean, and happy, and you, my dear husband, are apparently not disgusted or afraid of diaper changes.”

“Ah”, he rested on the bedroll with his arm underneath his head. “Believe me, the shit we see in my line of work—“

“That is a good pun”, Mira laughed. “And I am glad you’re not squeamish. You know, I would consider hiring you should you seek an alternative employment. If we weren’t together.”

“Sweet Andraste”, he glanced at her. “You are being very generous today. I wish I could say the same but I can’t see you do well in combat, ever.”

“Well”, she walked to one of her satchels. “I suppose I could be offended but I am afraid I agree with your statement. Anyway, I have your Wintersend gift. It’s nothing much but I got it back in Val Royeaux and— well. Happy Wintersend. And thank you for perfume, once again. It is much better gift than mine and just per—“

“Let me open it first”, he interrupted her. “Ha! That is so similar to your little pocket knife—“

“Yes. I got it at Bianca Davri’s store. I know you’re—“

“I love it”, he said firmly. “That is actually really neat.”

“Honestly, I do not even know what you would use it for exactly, but I remembered you liking my knife from Earth and, well, this is the next best thing I could find that you can actually carry without raising any difficult questions.”

“You are so adorable when you’re trying to explain yourself. Come here.”

She straddled him with ease, leaning down onto his chest and brushing her lips against him.

“I can’t believe you like kissing me through all that facial hair”, he joked.

She did. Truthfully, she loved every part of him. He was her home.

“Always”, she replied, running her fingers across the top of his head, feeling the coarseness of his hair. “Oh, by the way, I cut my hair.”

“Wait, really?”, he gasped. “I haven’t noticed. Let me see.”

Mira always braided it when working at the infirmary, for obvious reasons.
“My curls are tangled, but…”, she straightened her back, took the tie out and shook her head, letting the locks spill, barely touching her shoulders.

“You are so beautiful”, he whispered, wiggling his hand into her curls. “I like it.”

“Do you really??”

“I always love your hair, but now I have entirely unrestricted view of your breasts.”

The waves of warmth spread throughout her body and the little twitch hit between her tights.

“Is that your first thought?”, she grinned, rolling her hips a bit.

“Is that bad?”, his hands landed underneath the layer of her clothing, trailing upwards.

Mira sighed when his fingers found her nipples, covered only by a thin fabric of her brassiere.

“Bad?”, she breathed. “I don’t know how to answer that. It’s so good when you’re a bit bad.”

The sound of his husky and relaxed laughter saturated the space. He was still caressing her and Mira felt her face and body flushing.

“Mira… There are so many things I want to do to you right now. So. Many. Things.”

The desire simmered, starting to bubble and overflow.

“I am not that willing to miss what might be the only half decent meal around”, she protested and kissed him, melting into his mouth.

“Mhmmmm”, he complained, cracking her resolve as her lips moved onto his neck. “I love your lips on me.”

They did not have that much time, but it was not entirely hopeless. Her heart raced a little.

“Delrin?”

“Yes?”

“There are so many things I will do to you tonight.”

“Maker, yes.”

She drowned into his kiss, needy and perfect. Delrin stroked her sides, moving lower and lower until he firmly grabbed her ass.

“Tonight”, she chuckled.

“Tonight”, he looked at her dreamily, the longing obvious in his soft green eyes.

There was still the sense of newness around sex for Mira. It had not been that long, and Delrin left Skyhold only few days after they made love for the first time. In some way, half of her experience happened in this exact tent, on the bedroll, between those furs. Perhaps it was the stress of the work or the reality around them or simply sex being quite awesome, but she could not get enough of Delrin, and he certainly did not seem to mind. She loved it all. The pleasure she had been receiving, the pleasure she had been giving, the closeness and the intimacy, the love made flesh.
Today, he seemed especially eager, and there was something thrilling and wonderful to see that hunger on his handsome face.

“You know, there is some time left…”, she moved her body a little, just enough to elicit one groan. “There are things I would love to do with my mouth right now if you promise to fuck me later.”

“Fuck”, his fingers dipped into her flesh, pulling her closer “Yes, please. And I promise. I will be very good. Or a bit bad. Whatever you want.”

There was no doubt in Mira’s mind that she would be bothered throughout the whole evening, but the prospect of having to wait made it all more exciting.

“Good”, she said gently, shifting to kneel by his side. “Let’s get you out of those clothes, shall we?”

“Yes”, he rasped. “Take of your shirt, too. Please?”

“Sure. Whatever you want.”

She knew his body by heart. Mira could close her eyes and map each one of his scars with her fingertips. She preferred to keep them open, to see all of him. The perfect face with those cheekbones she loved to feel, the most loving eyes, the mouth that could drive her wild, and that smile, full of anticipation. The muscles on his stomach tightened under her touch, and her lips followed from his neck to his chest, and further down. She teased and tantalized until he placed his hand behind her ear, stroking her cheek with his thumb. He said one word only:

“Please.”

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Delrin was in truly excellent mood. All the worries and concerns about the task ahead disappeared temporarily, and now he just enjoyed grabbing dinner with his beautiful, sexy and wonderful wife. Sweet Andraste, he was both sated and yet primed for tonight. It was glorious. Mira certainly seemed comfortable with him, and her confidence only grew, and it was both incredibly hot and simply good, because he felt like he was doing right by her and she deserved nothing but the best he could give her.

She blushed a bit more as she glanced at him and it made him all warm inside, especially knowing how turned on she still had to be. He definitely planned on adding to the fire before the evening was over. Each time he touched her, however innocently, the color on her cheeks deepened and Delrin could see what she was thinking about. And Maker preserve him, he did try to touch her constantly, from his hand on her lower back as they entered the canteen, to the not so accidental brushes on her hands or knees, to the occasional kiss on her head. He had never been one to display affection in public, but that was subtle enough and he loved feeling her shiver or watching her reactions.

The stew, he had to admit, was indeed the best meal so far in Emprise. Likely it would remain so until they leave.

“Hey, kids”, Bull and Dorian joined them at the time. “Any plans for later?”

Mira flushed even more.

“I am not going to ask what Barris promised you this Wintersend but I am very tempted to”, Dorian
chuckled.

Delrin wrapped his arm around Mira, feeling the heat of her body.

“Stop teasing them, Kadan”, Bull warned, giving Delrin the look. “Anyway, Varric is running the game of Wicked Grace soon, and I thought maybe you would like to join, assuming you are both free.”

“Sure”, Mira said quickly. “I mean, I am most definitely not playing that game, but Cass won’t forgive me if I don’t spend some time with her as well, and who knows, Delrin, maybe it is your lucky day.”

“It sure has been so far”, he noted smoothly,

The large lounge tent was slowly filling with various leadership people. There were contests and games throughout the day, and in the evening, most would try to play cards or simply chat and tell stories. In places like this, there was little more to do on a day like this. Still, it was Wintersend and many people tried not to be alone, and that included the command stationed at the base. Tired of the intensity of the last week, taunted by the high stakes of the missions ahead of them everyone sought rest and laughter.

“Just so you know”, Mira tapped his chest playfully. “This is not how we end our night, right?”

“Mira”, he pulled her closer and lowered his voice. “I never go back on my word. You have no idea how much I want you. Just say a word and I am yours.”

“Good”, she smiled playfully. “Because I am very, very bothered.”

“Good”, he whispered right into her ear. “Because I am fucking you tonight.”

She hid her face into his chest and squeezed his arm, and he kissed her hair few times, enjoying the moment immensely.

Varric’s love for Wickeg Grace was commonly recognized. To be entirely fair, it was never difficult to find people to play with, especially with Bull around. Tonight the table was full and the stakes quite high. They were joined by Hawke, Scout Harding and Jeanette, all experienced and ruthless players.

“Barris, Barris, are you in trouble or not?”, Bull eyed him. “You do realize how well I know you at this point.”

“Sod off”, he chuckled, fully aware that his friend might be right. “It is not me you should be concerned about. Lace is awfully quiet and I bet she is the dark horse here.”

“Nothing to see here, Captain, nothing at all”, the woman giggled. Despite all the expressiveness, Scout Harding was difficult to read, regardless how much he tried teasing her. “Go bother Varric. He is much more seasoned of a liar than me, I guarantee you that.”

“Did you hear that, Varric?”, Hawke poked his friend. “I believe the lovely lady just called you old.”
“The cruelty of life”, the dwarf mused with a smile. “There is no escape from it. By the way, Hawke, you know I can always see through your misguided deception. Out of all of your talents, Wicked Grace has never been one of them.”

“What about another lovely lady in our company? Nobody knows you, dame Toussaint.”

“Barris knows me pretty well”, Jeanne smirked, raising her eyebrows. “Isn’t that so?”

Sweet Andraste. Up until this moment he was quite sure that nobody except Mira, Bull, perhaps Cassandra and maybe Beauregard knew about him and Jeanette, and he preferred for it to stay this way for multiple reasons. There was no need for gossip to spread around the camp, and he did not need anyone doubting his command, and Mira certainly did not need more reminders of his past, especially not tonight.

“I sense a story there”, Varric remarked with well trained casualness.

“There is no story”, he gritted his teeth. “We were seeing each other occasionally several years ago. Now, can we go back to the game, please?”

“Has he always been so serious?”, Hawke asked innocently and Delrin wanted to punch his face.

“Yes”, the Chevalier answered loudly with feigned seriousness. “Serious and private. Even when playing strip Wicked Grace.”

Sweet fucking Andraste. He glowered at Jeanne. The laughter erupted at the table and Barris thought that the most polite and courteous way to deal with it all was to simply ignore it.

“Hi, Mira”, Hawke said suddenly.

Maker’s breath. She definitely heard that comment, and the last thing he wanted was for her to feel uncomfortable or awkward, and truthfully, he felt a bit uncomfortable himself. There was absolutely zero need for such comment and he worried that Mira was hurt.

“Hi, guys”, she replied calmly, sitting onto his lap and resting her head on him.

“Hi, honey”, he whispered hopefully, wrapping his arm around her waist.

Whether it was conscious or not, the ease and comfort with which she claimed him were both charming and quite a turn on. Mira was like him, more private than not, and rather proper. He had no intention of hiding his devotion to his own wife though.

“We could go now”, he murmured into her ear and felt the tiniest shiver.

“It’s fine”, she settled herself.

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Perhaps it was petty, but Mira was angry once again at Jeanette’s comments. She was not entirely surprised that Delrin’s past with her had come up, but there was no need for any details. It pinched and hurt, especially tonight. They were married, he was her husband, and she was the only person to have any right to make similar remarks, regardless of his past.

Mira had never been much jealous, and she certainly hoped she had never been petty, but she claimed her space in his arms because she could, and because it felt good. He embraced her
instantly, breathing onto that sensitive spot in her neck, and telling her they could leave. The little flames of anticipation reignited all over her body. She was most definitely still in the mood, and she craved being wanted.

“So, how did you both meet?”, Jeanette asked nonchalantly.

Mira cursed internally.

“Yes”, Varric immediately latched onto the idea. “I don’t believe we have ever heard the full story.”

Fuck. She sighed nervously but then she felt Delrin fingers caressing her side in a soothing gesture before he began his tale.

“I was traveling through the Bannorn to Amaranthine to catch the ship to Ansburg for one of my missions. It was summertime. It was bright and hot and the smell of hay was in the air. I stopped at one the villages and I saw you”, he looked at Mira who could not help but smile. “You were tending to an injury caused by a scythe. I noticed your hair, and how lovely you were, and how kind your voice sounded when you were reassuring your patient, and then you smiled to him, so brightly and warmly and I honestly thought I have never seen a more beautiful person. You looked at me and I don’t think you even noticed me, but I just knew I wanted to talk to you. I bought two jars of Elfroot salve, making a little lie about the lack of supplies. Then I asked if you would like to get something to eat with me, and they were selling those berry pies they always do in the summer and by some miracle you agreed—“

“It must have been a berry pie”, she grinned, melting inside.

“Then we talked and you turned out to be this smart and capable and caring and incredible woman and I still don’t know how I got so lucky that you actually married me.”

Damn. He was a terribly good liar, and a wonderfully sweet man at the same time. She kissed him on the cheek. Jeanette glanced at them and for the second their eyes met before the Chevalier turned away.

“I have so many questions”, Hawke raised his eyebrows.

“You do not”, Delrin warned him calmly. “Besides, we have a game to finish and I feel quite lucky.”

“No fucking way”, Bull roared. “I don’t believe you.”

“I don’t either”, Jeanette said. “And I have a decent hand.”

Scout Harding won with one of the best hands he had ever seen, and Delrin could not care less. He finally wanted to have Mira to himself and to make good on his word, especially as she still seemed happy and comfortable.

The punishing cold wind of the night hit them both. The braziers were lit all over the encampment and the fire helped a little, but the wind was still chilly and Mira shuddered.

“So”, he asked softly. “How are you feeling? Do you still want—“

“Yes”, she smiled quickly. “Do you?”
He grinned and picked her up in his arms, making her squeal in surprise. The snow was crunching underneath his boots and Mira felt pleasantly heavy and warm, clinging onto his neck.

“The things I will do—“ he started.

She laughed loudly.

“Alright, what was that scream—“, one of the patrol soldiers stopped them. It was Kirke, her face betraying much amusement.

“Captain. Surgeon”, she coughed out while Mira hid her face, giggling.

“Kirke”, he responded with as much dignity as he could muster.

“Well, I won’t say a word to anyone”, his Right Hand smirked, waving them off. “Please, try not sounding like murder is being committed.”

He felt his face getting warmer and by the time they ended up in their tent, they both could not stop laughing. He lit the tiny oil lamp, just enough to to cast a slow glow around the tent. The thick cloth layers would protect their privacy, but he wanted to see all of Mira tonight.

Her beauty stunned him, all soft and curvy and wonderful to touch. She flushed out of excitement and Delrin could smell her desire the second she got close. He could easily take his time. He was in no rush, but she was burning. Her hands traveled on his body so freely, and he smiled.

“Mira”, he whispered, burying his face between her breasts greedily. “You are so beautiful. I don’t tell you that enough. I love all of you and I love that you are all mine.”

“I love you, too”, she whispered sweetly, her back arching. “Please, Delrin, it’s been torture…”

“Oh, honey”, he smiled. “What should I do with you first?”

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Her legs were shaking, both from her recent orgasm and the physical exhaustion, but Mira continued moving on top of Delrin until he came with that quiet, long growl. He grinned, looking at her lovingly when she collapsed onto his chest with a sigh.

“My heart might explode”, she complained, giggling.

He embraced her gently, kissing the top of her head. “That was incredible. You’re incredible.”

She slid out gently, falling next to him.

“Delrin?”

“Mmmmm?”

“You are incredible.”

He faced her, looking elated. She could not stop smiling.

Later on they bundled themselves in all the blankets and furs. Mira sensed the warmth and the
strength of his body, and she marveled how safe and loved his presence made her feel. Regardless
of the day, and today happened to be a very good one, coming home to him was wonderful. There
was love, there was a sense of familiarity and intimacy that brought wonder each day. It was right.
Perhaps there was nothing more right than this.

“The story you said about how we met… You can be a very good liar.”

“I thought about it before”, he admitted. “After my parents visited Skyhold I promised myself to be
prepared for the next time. Besides, it is a different kind of lying. I am lying about the
circumstances of how we met, but not about what I feel for you. And truth to be told, I did find you
beautiful the moment I saw you. It was just completely inappropriate to mention it. I have always
thought that. You looked stunning on our wedding day, too.”

She laughed shortly. “I thought you were very handsome. It actually made me worried that you
were entitled. And then I simply wondered what could be wrong with you to make you agree to
this whole thing.”

“Yes”, he chuckled. “That does sound like you. So when did you start feeling something?”

“When did you?”

“When I was in the Dales and I read your letters. I told myself it would pass and then I came back
and my first thought when I saw you was to kiss you senseless.”

“Ha”, she hugged him tighter. “I had no idea.”

“Well, of course I was not going to do anything about it… Anyway, will you tell me now?”

“I honestly don’t know. It happened so naturally. I definitely felt a lot during that soiree. You did
not compliment me at all—“

“I remember that. I tried not to be creepy and then I felt like such an asshole when you told me I
looked handsome—“

“You were charming to all women around you and then the marquis—“

“I do regret not punching him.”

“I wanted you to notice me.”

“Believe me, I was looking at you the whole night. I still remember that cleavage. You have no
idea of all my efforts to not look at you.”

“Vivienne told me you were doting on me”, Mira stroked his cheek. “That did make me wonder.”

“I think I was already in love with you.”

“And I was so awkward”, she hid her face in his chest. “I told you I had never had sex and you said
nothing in returned.”

“Alright”, he wiggled his fingers to place his hand on her stomach. “I don’t know if there was
anything suitable to say and you got so embarrassed and I did not want to make you uncomfortable.
I did notice the flirting at the tavern.”

“And yet you did nothing”, she teased.
“You were drinking and I was trying—Believe me, I wanted to kiss you, so badly, each day.”

She kissed him now, soft and sweetly, tasting the elfroot on his tongue.

“Mira”, he said quietly. “How would I say ‘I love you’ in your tongue?”

Oh. The shot through the heart was so unexpected.

“Oh”, she managed out lout. “You have never asked before.”

“I know”, he breathed out. “For many reasons, as you can imagine. I have wondered, sometimes. You never let anything slip out.”

True. She never had.

“Well”, she swallowed. “Kocham cię.”

“Ko-ham che”, Delrin tried and Mira giggled before the giant lump formed in her throat, making her unable to let out any sound.

She crashed into his lips again, wrapping her arms around him, pressing her whole body to his as if the world was to end tomorrow.

Chapter End Notes

This is the last fluff chapter before the major angsty plot starts for Emprise du Lion, so enjoy. This is also the last NSFW for a while, so enjoy as well. ;)

I will try to publish one more chapter of ‘Lady Barris’ soon, but I am taking the rest of the December work to celebrate, to rest and to get ahead of my writing. I will be back January 1st.

Thank you so much for reading, and kudos, and comments. I love you all!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!