The Spaces in Between

by Corbie

Summary

When Reyn Hawke came to Kirkwall, he only wanted to protect what remained of his family. But fate has bigger plans for him, and a meeting with an optimistic rebel mage and a spirit of Justice introduce him to a love--and a cause--much greater than himself.

Contains eventual M!Hawke/Anders and M!Hawke/Justice

Notes

I was inspired to do this bit of fanfiction for a couple of reasons. One was the passage of time in DA2--a lot could happen in those spaces in between the narrative (see what I did there? ;)) Plus dear Reyn, who was my second playthrough, somehow turned out to be so much his own character that by the end none of the dialog choices really felt right for him anymore. So in addition to all the in-between bits, this is my little idea of how some of his scenes would have gone instead.
Reyn Hawke stood on the deck of the ship and watched the dock slide closer. Carver and Mother were still below, sprawled with the rest of the Ferelden refugees, but he hadn’t been able to stand it one moment longer. After two weeks of storms, trapped amidst the filth while disease spread like wildfire through the crowded hold, he’d reached the point where throwing himself overboard was starting to look like the better option.

He’d done his best to keep up everyone’s spirits throughout the hellish voyage, cracking jokes even when he didn’t feel at all like laughing himself. Carver had initially responded to his attempts at humor with a glare, but quickly moved on to petty sniping, which was more or less Carver on any given day. The templar’s wife, Aveline, had smiled once or twice, but she was lost in grief for her dead husband.

And isn’t it odd that she stayed with us, instead of denouncing me as an apostate to be killed or chained as soon as we were out of sight of land? Given who her husband had been, her apparent tolerance came as a genuine surprise. A nice surprise, for once. There’s that, anyway.

As for Mother…she had only lain there, day after day, barely eating or drinking, hardly sleeping. Just…staring into nothing.

No, not nothing. I know exactly what she sees. It was the same thing he saw every time he shut his eyes: the ogre closing in on Bethany, its claw-tipped hand smashing into her as she moved to protect their mother. He couldn’t stop seeing it, just as he couldn’t stop hearing the loud crack as her neck snapped: the only sound in a moment of utter, horrified silence.

His hand tightened convulsively on Bethany’s staff, as if it could give him some comfort. He’d taken it, not because it was better than his own, but because it was the only thing he had left of her.

It had always been three of them against the world: Father, Bethany, and himself. Even though Bethany had been younger, she’d joined in his magic lessons the moment her talent showed itself. Magic had formed a bond between them far stronger than that between her and her twin. While Carver had been at sword practice, learning from whatever local knight or ex-soldier was willing to train him, the three mages had been closeted in their house, deep into the study of magic. So maybe it was natural that Reyn had become Bethany’s confidante, and she his.

Sometimes, she’d known things even without his saying them aloud, so close had they been. Like the fact that he’d been interested in Peaches’ brother, not Peaches herself. Or the fact that neither of them, no matter how badly they wanted it, could afford to have even a close friend, let alone a lover. The risk of exposure was simply too great.

Carver had lived without such restrictions. He was free to go where he wanted, do what—or who—he wanted. And yet, he’d always resented them. The prick.

Reyn shook his head sharply. This was no time to stir up old angers, not with all their lives in danger. Carver was his brother, and with Bethany gone, that relationship became even more important. If they were to survive in their new lives, they’d have to bury the old resentments and learn to work together. And he did love Carter, if only because they were brothers, and because Mother depended on them both now more than ever.

The ship slipped through the high cliffs, bounded by statues of agonized slaves, and glided into the docks. With a sigh, Reyn turned to the gangplank, Bethany’s staff gripped in his hand.
Chapter Summary

After a lonely year in Kirkwall, Reyn meets another mage. A sexy, brooding mage. ;)

Chapter Notes

Sorry, all - this is a repost, because I messed up the first time and made it a separate work instead of a chapter. :)

Darktown was everything they’d been warned about. No, scratch that, it was far worse: a stinking pit of filth and desperation that made Reyn feel dirty from just breathing the air. For the first time, he appreciated just how lucky they’d been to end up in Lowtown. Gamlen’s hovel might be cramped, filthy, and virtually lightless, but at least they didn’t have to worry about getting raped or murdered while they slept.

*We still might end up here, if this expedition doesn’t pan out.* He’d put on a confident front for Carver’s sake, but he didn’t know how they could possibly come up with fifty sovereigns. Let alone justify handing that much money over to Bartrand, instead of spending it on food and clothes. Maker’s breath, I hope Varric knows what he’s doing.

So far, this little trip into Darktown wasn’t inspiring him to trust the dwarf. Varric claimed that there just happened to be a former Grey Warden—if it was even possible to be such a thing—living here. Even more improbably, he was supposed to be a mage—a healer.

*Lirene seemed to believe in this healer. Not to mention the crowd outside her store.* The other Ferelden refugees had been surprisingly protective of an apostate, even one that was helping them.

The chance that the man was actually an apostate, a healer, and an ex-Grey Warden seemed vanishingly slim. Although few non-magical people were mad enough to claim to be apostates, charlatans did crop up now and again.

*Maker’s sake, the man didn’t even give Lirene a proper name.* Reyn had met a dozen men over the years with the moniker “Anders,” meaning nothing beyond the fact that they’d come from somewhere in the Anderfells. It fit perfectly with Reyn’s theory that this so-called healer was nothing but a con artist; giving only a nickname would make it even easier to vanish once he’d finished whatever game he was playing.

No, this “Grey Warden” was definitely a fraud. The only real question remaining was whether Varric was in on the scam or not.

“That must be the clinic,” the dwarf said, gesturing to a set of double doors with an outsized lantern hanging in between. Both doors were closed, and Reyn cynically wondered if a gang of thieves lurked on the other side, waiting to beat and rob them.
Although if so, it’s a rather convoluted plan just to steal a few coppers. Surely someone as slick as Varric could come up with something better than that.

He exchanged a glance with Carver, but as usual, his brother only glared back. Bethany would have read Reyn’s wariness in an instant, would have had a spell ready to cast the second they stepped through those doors.

Maker, I miss her. It had been a long damned year, with no other mage to talk to. Reyn had spent his entire life in the company of the other mages in his family. He missed his sister and father, not just because he grieved for their deaths, but because he no longer had anyone who understood what it was to carry the gift—and burden—of magic. There had been no one to talk spells with, no one in whom the need for secrecy and hiding was so ingrained that it had become as natural as breathing.

Just Carver, whose “another delicate mage-flower” comment had been worthy of a templar, except that presumably a templar would have sounded more murderous and less whiny.

With a shake of his head, Reyn strode to the nearest door and flung it open, his hand half-way to his staff.

A bit to his surprise, no one jumped out at him. Instead, he found himself staring into a well-lit room that had been scrubbed to a standard of cleanliness probably never before seen in Darktown. A soft breath of air sighed out, stirring Reyn’s hair; to his surprise, it smelled pleasantly of herbs and potions, rather than sewage and dead rats. Lanterns cast warm, steady light over the cots and chairs, a direct contrast to the flickering shadows and torches outside.

A number of Ferelden refugees stood around, but all their attention was focused on a long table near the back of the clinic. A motionless child lay on the rough wood, and beside him stood a woman and a man whom Reyn recognized from the shop earlier. Even from a distance, the boy’s injuries were obviously grave.

Run over by a mine cart, wasn’t that what the father said when talking to Lirene? From what Reyn could see, not even magic would be able to help, unless the mage in question was an exceptionally gifted healer.

A second man bent over the boy. Even as Reyn watched, warm light flowed from his hands, encompassing the child.

Andraste’s ass. Lirene was right. He is a mage.

Reyn’s heart lifted unexpectedly. Another mage. Whether he was also a Grey Warden remained to be seen, but even this much felt like a gift.

And the stranger wasn’t just a mage—he was a damned good one. Within moments, the child was sitting up and smiling, the horrific injuries healed as if they had never been. The healer took a step back and stumbled, obviously drained from his spellcasting, and Reyn got a clear look at him for the first time.

Maker’s breath, he’s gorgeous.

His strawberry-blond hair was untidy, and his thin, careworn face badly in need of a shave, but there was something about the narrow jaw and long nose, the warm brown eyes, that drew Reyn’s gaze and held it. He felt a little bit as if he’d been struck by one of his own lightning spells, paralyzed and unable to quite get a breath or a thought.

Then the healer’s gaze snapped up and found them—and instantly became icy. He spun in a single,
coordinated move and snatched up a staff that had been discretely propped nearby.

“This is a place of healing and salvation,” he declared, his gaze locked on Carver’s sword and Varric’s crossbow. “Why do you threaten it?”

Reyn smiled at his fierce insistence, his willingness to defend the people around him from what must seem like an armed invasion. *I like him already.*

Varric immediately began to negotiate for the maps; it seemed that this Anders really *had* been—or maybe was still—a Grey Warden. Who had left the order over a cat. Named Ser Pounce-A-Lot. But was apparently still hopelessly tainted by darkspawn blood and prone to nightmares.

*Tortured, brooding, sexy…and a sense of humor.* At this point, Reyn was seriously wondering if there was any way to convince everyone else to leave them alone together in the clinic for a few hours. So when Anders suggested trading a favor for a favor, Reyn leaned his hip against the table and gave the other mage the sexiest smirk he could summon.

“I don’t do anything involving children or animals. Otherwise…I’m your man.”

Which was how a few hours later, Reyn found himself sneaking into the Chantry to help Anders hook back up with his ex.

*Bugger.*
Ghosts

Chapter Summary

Anders and Justice have been on their own since leaving the Grey Wardens. Have they found a friend in the Warden Commander's cousin, Reyn?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“So, here we are,” Hawke said with a grand gesture. “Home sweet hovel.”

Anders stood in the doorway of the Lowtown home, a nervous smile plastered on his face. What little he could see of the interior was dim, illuminated only by a few narrow windows high overhead. The only visible furnishings consisted of a few tables, and the only decoration consisted of a dead plant and a beat-up mallet hanging on the wall. What he at first mistook for a pile of laundry turned out to be a mabari war hound sleeping in front of the cold fireplace. The air smelled like a mixture of sour milk, old cheese, and feet.

An older man and woman stood inside, staring at him as he followed Hawke inside. Am I supposed to say something? Do something? He’d lived his entire life in the Circle, then with the Wardens, and finally in his clinic. Being invited into someone’s private home was a completely new experience, and he had no idea how to act.

“Be grateful for a roof over your head, boy,” the man muttered, scowling at Hawke. Then he gave Anders a scowl as well, seemingly for good measure.

“This delightful fellow is my uncle, Gamlen,” Hawke went on, snagging a bottle from one of the tables as he passed by. “And the lovely lady is my mother, Leandra. Uncle, Mother, this is my friend Anders. We’ll be up on the roof if you need us.”

At least Leandra offered Anders a genuine smile. He mumbled something polite, sticking close to Hawke's heels as he led the way through the dim home. Anders hadn’t spent much time in Lowtown, but this house was almost as oppressive as Darktown.

But not as oppressive as the Circle. He didn’t know if that thought belonged to him or to Justice.

To make up for the dark houses, most Lowtowners had run ladders up to the flat roofs of their buildings. Their version of sitting out on the porch, Anders supposed, as he followed Hawke up the rickety ladder. The roof space was small, but at least it got air and light, or would if the sun hadn’t already gone down. A mixture of ashes and sparks drifted lazily on the wind, whether from torches or the foundries nearby, Anders didn’t know.

“Make yourself comfortable,” Hawke said, flopping down on a thin pillow that served as a seat and gesturing for Anders to sit by him. He uncorked the bottle, took a long pull from it, then proffered it to Anders. “The best wine money can’t buy. Our neighbor makes it in his basement, but it isn’t too bad if you drink it fast enough to avoid the taste.”

“No thanks. Justice doesn’t let me get drunk anymore. I kind of miss it.”
He watched Hawke from under his lashes, waiting for the other mage’s reaction. A flinch or a cringe, or...something.

Hawke only shrugged. “Suit yourself. More for me.” He took another swallow and winced. “Unfortunately.”

Anders sank down warily on the cushion; the roof had soaked up the day’s heat, and now gave it back even through the thin material. _He acts like it doesn’t matter. He introduced me as his friend, despite everything._

Carver hadn’t hesitated to call him a monster. Even Hawke hadn’t been entirely sure at first; his tone might have been light when he asked if Anders was an abomination, but his eyes had been sharp. Assessing.

_R e a d y to pass judgment against us._

But he didn’t, Anders reminded himself—_themself._ Or, rather, Hawke had decided that they were to be trusted.

_Friends._

_We don’t have friends._

_We did. Once upon a time. Or have you forgotten Solona?_

_Solona left us._

Anders looked around, casting for some topic of conversation that didn’t involve spirit possession. “Nice place,” he said lamely.

Hawke laughed. “Yes, I’ve grown quite fond of the rats. And the filth adds a certain ambiance that you just don’t get anywhere else.” He took another pull from the bottle and shook his head. “Poor Mother. She thought we were coming here to live in the ancestral estate. She still seems convinced that we can get the old Amell mansion back somehow, even though we don’t have enough money to pay the bribes to get an audience with the Viscount.”

“Wait a minute.” Anders sat up sharply. “Amell? As in, Solona Amell, the Hero of Ferelden?”

Hawke’s eyes lit up—and now Anders understood the sense of familiarity that had nagged at him since they’d met. Hawke had Solona’s bright green eyes, wide cheekbones, and red hair, not to mention her slightly-goofy sense of humor.

“She’s my cousin!” Hawke exclaimed. “I wondered if you might have known her, being a Grey Warden.”

“She used the Rite of Conscription to save me from templars. _And_ gave me my cat.” Anders’ heart ached, even though he knew Ser Pounce-A-Lot had a better life in Amaranthine as a spoiled house cat than he would’ve had in Darktown, where he would have risked being eaten by starving refugees.

Hawke turned to face him full-on. The dim light filtering up from the street cast shadows across his face, accentuating his high cheekbones and generous lips. “I’ve never met her. She was taken to the Circle in Ferelden when she was just a child, or at least, that’s what Mother says. I think her mother—my aunt—paid bribes to keep her from being locked up here in the Gallows. Tell me about her?”
There had been plenty of things Anders had hated about being a Warden: darkspawn, the Deep Roads, the Joining, the endless nightmares. He skipped over those and concentrated on the good things: the camaraderie, the sense of helping people, the way Solona had made the Wardens feel like a family. The freedom.

_I miss it._

_We have a higher purpose now. But...yes. There was much that was good in Amaranthine._

_At least before Solona left._

Eventually, he trailed off. Hawke smiled—not his usual smirk, but something softer. More honest. **Gorgeous.**

No. Anders swallowed and looked away. He couldn’t think like that. Not about anyone. Certainly not about this man who’d already indicated that he might be interested. The old Anders would have kissed that smile without a second thought. But that Anders was gone, drowned in a wash of templar and Warden blood, in the taste of raw meat in his mouth.

“It sounds like you were happy,” Hawke said quietly.

“I was.” It hurt to say the words, more than he would have expected. “Happier than I’d ever been. For a little while.” He cleared his throat, desperate to put some distance between himself and memory. “So magic runs in the Amell line?”

“And the Hawke line, too. My father was a mage from Ferelden, but he ended up in Kirkwall. He and Mother escaped together.”

“Strong woman,” Anders said, impressed. “Not many would risk their lives for an apostate.”

Hawke shrugged and smiled, but there was a sad edge to it. “She loved him,” he said, as if it were simple. As if he didn’t understand that such love was forever anathema to a Circle mage. And he probably didn’t, Anders acknowledged with a twinge of jealousy. Hawke had enjoyed a freedom most mages couldn’t even dream about, without even having to work to get it.

“I grew up surrounded by magic,” Hawke went on. “When my sister started to show signs, I don’t know if my parents were elated or horrified. Probably both.”

“You have a sister?” Anders asked with a smirk, dropping into the old habit, the old way of being, because it was easier that way. “Is she available?”

Hawke’s mouth tightened, and for a moment the openness was replaced by a flash of real hurt. Then it was gone, shut down behind the easy grin he usually wore. “Only if you’re into necrophilia,” he said lightly, as if it didn’t matter.

_Andrasste’s ass._ “I’m sorry—that was a stupid thing to say.”

Hawke shrugged and looked away. “You didn’t know.” But that openness Anders had sensed had vanished.

“Your brother doesn’t seem very sympathetic to mage freedom,” he said uncertainly, wondering if there was any way to make up for his idiotic comment.

“No.” Hawke still wasn’t looking directly at him, though. “My fault, or so I’m sure he’d be happy to
tell you. He’s been mad at me ever since the mabari incident.”

Although he had the sense that Hawke was deliberately leading the conversation away from anything truly personal, Anders decided to follow along for the moment. *Maybe it’s for the best, anyway. It isn’t as if we’ll ever be anything more than friends. Maker’s breath, I didn’t even expect to have that much.* “The mabari incident?”

“Oh yes. Our father decided to get a mabari hound for Carver a few years ago. He spent most of his time teaching magic to Bethany and me, so I think he wanted to do something special for our brother. One day, Father brought home a mabari puppy—I hate to think how much it cost—and explained to Carver how the hounds would imprint on a single master, to whom they’d be loyal forever. Carver was beside himself with excitement. I think he liked the idea of something that would love only him.”

“So what happened?”

“Father told Carver to call the puppy to him. Carver had chosen some pompous name for it—Calenhad, I think. He called, but it just sat there and looked confused. So I yelled: ‘Come here, Barkolomew!’”

Anders burst out laughing. “Barkolomew?”

Hawke grinned. “I refuse to take criticism from a man who had a cat named Ser Pounce-A-Lot. At any rate, Barkolomew immediately ran to me and ignored Carver. There was nothing to be done—the hound had imprinted. Carver never forgave me.”

“And that’s the monster sleeping in front of the hearth downstairs?”

“Carver or the dog? Sorry, bad joke. Barkolomew has much better hygiene, so it’s easy to tell them apart.”

Anders snorted. “I can’t imagine why Carver doesn’t get along with you. You have such a wonderful sense of humor.”

Hawke laughed. “No one appreciates my jokes, it’s true. At any rate, don’t look to Carver to have any sympathy for us mages. I’m sure he’d love to see me made Tranquil, if he thought he could turn me in without Mother finding out he’s the one who did it.”

Anders tried not to remember the empty look in Karl’s eyes, the hateful brand on his forehead, but it was impossible. The ache of grief in his chest twined with a flash of fury from Justice, and he clenched his fists, trying not to think, struggling not to give in to an anger that had no outlet at the moment.

“I’m sorry,” Hawke said, and Anders felt the other man’s hand close on his shoulder. “I didn’t mean to remind you of…of what happened to your friend. Sometimes, I have this problem where my mouth moves when I talk.”

For some reason, his sympathy had a soothing effect on Justice. Which was a little odd, because normally Justice didn’t seem to care what anyone else thought. *Maybe it’s because Hawke is a mage, too. An ally, perhaps.*

“It hurts,” Anders admitted. “I hate it, because that’s all I can remember of him right now. I try to picture his smile, or what his laugh sounded like…and the only thing that comes to mind is the knife in my hand, sliding into his heart.”
Hawke’s hand tightened on his shoulder. “For what it’s worth, I truly believe you did the right thing—the only merciful thing. Just as Aveline did, when she killed her husband.”

“Did she?” He had known that the guard’s templar husband had died, but not that it had been at her hand.

“He had the darkspawn corruption in his blood. He knew that there are fates worse than death. Just as Karl did.”

“He was right.” Anders tilted his head back and stared at the sky, at the sparks whirling across a tapestry of stars. “If such a thing were to happen to me… I would hope that someone would show as much mercy.”

“As would I,” Hawke said quietly.

It was a pact, Anders realized, even though it hadn’t been stated as such. Is this what my life has come to? Two apostates sitting on a roof, promising to kill each other if it should come to that?

It could be worse. I could be sitting here by myself.

Hawke stretched out on his back to watch the stars. “So. Lyrium potions. Bethany swore that adding a drop or two of honey made them work better, but I think that’s just because it let her choke more of the stuff down. What do you think?”

Anders smiled. “Well, when I was an apprentice, Senior Enchanter Wynne used to say…”

Yes. It could be a lot worse than this.

Chapter End Notes

- Yes, Reyn named his mabari Barkolomew. I have no regrets.

- After seeing various assassins and gangs plunge from the tops of buildings to attack the party, I assumed that the flat roofs were used for gardens, sitting areas, and the like (because why else would they be up there in the first place?). So it made sense that the characters might hang out there, while Hawke was living in Lowtown. And I really liked the idea of him and Anders hanging out there, just shooting the shit and talking magic until the wee hours of the morning.
Chapter Summary

When Reyn decides not to take Carver on the Deep Roads expedition, will his brother understand? Or will the rift between them become even wider than before?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“I can’t believe you aren’t taking me on the expedition!”

Reyn stopped in the middle of the street. He and Carver had just entered the slums, a block or two from Gamlen’s hovel in Lowtown. As usual, the air reeked of sewage and sweat, and ash drifted from the foundries like gray rain. Other Ferelden refugees hunkered in every available doorway, begging for coin, and Reyn wondered if he was right to pass them by, or if he should do more to help. After watching Anders spend long days selflessly healing these very same people, Reyn felt an unfamiliar twinge of guilt.

What wasn’t unfamiliar was the demanding tone in Carver’s voice. Me, me, me. Pay attention to me! And Maker forbid if you had something more important to worry about than Carver’s tender feelings.

“I would have taken you,” Reyn said, struggling to keep his voice level. “But you heard Mother. She’s already lost Bethany—she’s terrified of losing you as well. It’s not my fault that I’m the expendable one.”

“You could have told her no,” Carver snapped. “You could have taken me.”

Reyn turned to face his brother. Carver had inherited their father’s dark hair, just as Bethany had, but the pout warping his mouth belonged only to him. “Think about Mother, for once,” Reyn said. “Someone needs to stay here and take care of her. I can’t. I’m the one who’s sunk all the money into the expedition, so I don’t have any choice but to go down into dank caves filled with darkspawn. While I’m gone, I’m counting on you to look out for our family.” So be a man instead of a boy for the first time in your life.

“You’re taking your boyfriend,” Carver sneered, ignoring Reyn’s attempt to reason with him. “The other delicate little mage-flower.”

It took all of Reyn’s willpower to hold back his temper. “Anders is a Grey Warden,” he said coldly. “Not only that, but he was trained by our cousin Solona—the Hero of Ferelden herself. You will respect that.”

“Why should I?”

Even though he knew it would do no good, Reyn tried another approach. “Anders has gone out of his way to be nice to you, when he didn’t have to. You could at least try to be civil to him.”

Carver spat to one side. “He was only nice to me because he wants in your pants. Maybe I should tell Mother that. She thinks you’re going to get married and sire the next generation of Amells. She
doesn’t know that you can’t even get it up for a girl. She doesn’t know you’d rather be taking it up the ass from your mage boyfriend—“

Reyn grabbed Carver’s shirt and shoved him against the nearest building. “Shut up,” he snarled. “Or I’ll tell Mother about Faith at the Blooming Rose.”

Carver’s face flushed dark red. “Faith is different—special—“

“That’s what Isabela tells me.”

Carver threw a punch, but Reyn ducked to one side. “To the Void with you!” Carver shouted, his face twisted in fury. “Have it your way! Go on your precious expedition, take your precious Grey Warden! But don’t expect me to be here when you get back. I won’t live my life in your shadow, brother!”

“I never asked you to. And who knows—maybe you’ll get lucky, and I’ll die in the Deep Roads.”

To his surprise, Carver paled slightly. “I don’t—I never—“

Reyn shook his head, too angry for Carver’s half-apologies. “Don’t lie to me. I haven’t the patience to coddle you any more.”

Two spots of color appeared on Carver’s face. Before his brother could say anything else, Reyn turned his back and stalked away.

To the Void with this. I have to get up early tomorrow and join Bartrand, Varric, and the rest of the expedition. I don’t have time for childish fights with Carver.

He didn’t say anything to either Gamlen or Leandra, only stalked past them to the back room and threw himself onto the lower bunk. Eventually, Carver came in, pausing by their bunk, as if he would say something. Reyn kept his eyes closed, however, pretending to sleep, until Carver finally put out the lantern and went to bed without speaking.

Chapter End Notes

Oh, Carver. You're such an ass. I loved the conversations with him in-game, because Reyn always just bitched right back and they ended up furious with each other.

I assumed, given Leandra's comments later in the game about marrying Hawke off, that she must have been completely clueless as to his sexual orientation. Possibly the thought of little grand-Hawkes running about gave her a bit of a blind spot in the matter.
**The Deep Roads**

Chapter Summary

When the hazards of the Deep Roads almost cost Hawke his life, Anders must confront the fact that he has feelings for the other mage.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

**The Deep Roads**

Anders had sworn he’d never return to the Deep Roads. He hated everything about them: the darkness, the filth, the ever-present stench of darkspawn that never came out no matter how many times you washed your clothes after. He hated the ancient carvings, layered with dirt and the ponderous sense of time. He hated the spiders, and the deep stalkers, and those nasty poisonous centipedes that crawled into your boots while you slept. He hated how even the good air was stagnant and foul, let alone the pockets of bad air where the ventilation shafts had collapsed.

The only thing he liked was the soft hum of the lyrium veins twining in the rock; they sang to him, soothing. But that was all Justice, of course. Anders alone would never have even been aware of the soft whisper cascading from the exposed arteries of magic.

So he’d sworn he’d never come back, not ever. Not as a Warden, and certainly not as an apostate on the run.

Yet here he was, not just in the deep roads, but trapped by a dwarf ruthless enough to leave his own brother to starve or be eaten by darkspawn.

*It figures.*

Varric had finished pounding uselessly on the door and moved on to screaming at it. Or, rather, at Bartrand, who was no doubt long gone and unable to hear his curses. Merrill stood a few feet away, looking stunned at the suddenness of the betrayal, offering up a feeble excuse that maybe Bartrand hadn’t realized what he’d done.

As for Anders, he just felt tired. He’d been betrayed too many times to be surprised anymore.

Hawke walked away from the door and stopped to linger by the altar where the lyrium idol had lain. A shiver walked up Anders’ spine at the memory of the thing. He—Justice—hadn’t liked it. It’s song had been…different. Dissonant. Jarring.

*Corrupted.*

“Bartrand was a thorough-going bastard,” Hawke said, too quietly for the others to hear, “but I didn’t see this coming. Neither did Varric, and he prides himself on being a good judge of character.”

“Bartrand is his brother. If he has a blind spot, that’s going to be it.”

A small smile quirked the corner of Hawke’s mouth. “Because I never noticed that Carver is a huge
“prat?”

“No…but then, he’s never trapped you in an ancient tomb and left you to die.”

“Not yet, anyway. But then, I’ve been smart enough never to give him the opportunity.” Hawke turned away from the empty altar and raised his voice so that Varric and Merrill could hear. “We need to find another way out of here.”

Hawke chivvied them along, cracking jokes and generally behaving as if they were picnicking on the Wounded Coast instead of lost in the Deep Roads. Listening to him, one would never know that they were facing the very real possibility of being trapped down here until they starved, went mad, or were killed and eaten by darkspawn.

Probably all three.

He’s a good man. A good leader. A lot like Solona, actually, who had also understood the value of keeping up everyone’s spirits. When he’d known her as the Warden Commander, Anders had accepted her cheerful front at face value. He’d never questioned whether she was sad, or uncertain, or lonely for her absent lover (who had apparently gotten lost on his way to Highever, only to be found wandering the countryside months later without any pants). The old Anders had been too selfish to wonder about things like that. Everything had always and only been about him.

He tried to be better, now. Whether it was because of that, or because Hawke trusted him for some insane reason, he’d caught glimpses behind the other mage’s cheerful mask. Infrequent moments, when Hawke answered a question with real emotion instead of a sarcastic quip, and always when they were alone in the clinic or on the roof of Gamlen’s house, where no one else could see.

He knew Hawke well enough by now to guess that his friend felt responsible for getting them all out of here alive. Maker, Hawke still felt that Bethany’s tragic death had been his fault, even though Anders had earnestly tried to point out that there was nothing anyone could have done. So the last thing Anders wanted to do was bring up any new worries and add to his burden.

But if staying quiet gets us all killed…that’s no good, either.

“Hawke?” he called softly, when they stopped for a rest break.

Hawke had been leaning on his staff—Bethany’s old staff—as if it was the only thing keeping him on his feet. When Anders spoke, though, he straightened and put on a smile, as surely as a chevalier putting on armor. “If we run out of lyrium potions before we get out of here, do you think we can just lick the walls?” he asked.

“Let’s hope we don’t have to find out,” Anders said with a shudder. “But I think we have more pressing problems at the moment.”

“What do you mean?”

“I don’t hear the darkspawn any more.”

Hawke frowned. “So they’re…what? Being quiet? Sneaky? All asleep in their comfy beds, tucked in by their broodmommies?”

“I wish.” Varric and Merrill had moved closer to listen, so he tried to include them as well. “Grey Wardens can sense darkspawn when they’re nearby. It’s one of the reasons most of us hate the Deep Roads, because the darkspawn are literally everywhere, all around us, all the time. I’ve been hearing them since the day we came underground: above me, below me, to every side. All day and night, if
day and night have any meaning down here.”

“Is that why you’ve been having nightmares?” Hawke asked sympathetically.

Anders gave him a surprised look. “I didn’t realize you’d noticed.”

“Ooh, have you been watching him sleep?” Merrill asked. “Is it very interesting? Should I watch him sleep, too?”

“Maker’s breath, please don’t!” Anders said sharply. A blood mage staring at him while he slept—that was all he needed.

“So what does this mean?” Hawke asked, dragging the conversation back to its original point.

“It means there aren’t any darkspawn here,” Anders said with a shrug. “As to why, your guess is as good as mine.”

Varric looked uncharacteristically grim. “If the darkspawn are avoiding this area…”

“…It’s probably because there’s something even worse than them lurking down here,” Hawke concluded for him. “Wonderful.”

***

Demons, Reyn thought. Of course it was demons. When is it ever not demons?

It seemed that the only thing that could chase darkspawn out of a cave was a ravening horde of shades, profane, rock-wraiths, and—just to top it off—a demon of hunger. All of whom were perfectly happy to kill the first living things that happened to stumble into their lair in Maker-knew how many centuries.

They’d fought their way through, leaving them tired, bloodied, and in terrible moods. Thank Andraste that Anders was such a good healer; they would have all been dead five times over otherwise. Now they walked down a narrow corridor that Varric seemed to think would lead to some sort of vault. Why a surface dwarf would know anything about the architecture of an ancient thaig, Reyn didn’t know and didn’t intend to ask, if only because the thought of possible riches just ahead had cheered Varric immensely.

Reyn went in the lead, with Varric just behind him. Bringing up the rear were Merrill and Anders, who had been arguing nonstop since their encounter with the hunger demon. The thing had tried to bargain with them, not wanting its feast interrupted, and Merrill had suggested that they might safely strike a deal, so long as they were careful.

Predictably, Anders had all but lost his mind at the very idea. Which, Reyn thought privately, was rather hypocritical of him, considering his extra passenger.

There was no point in bringing that up, though—Anders would insist that Justice was a spirit, not a demon, that his circumstances were completely different, that he’d only agreed to act as a host out of the very best intentions. Ignoring, of course, the fact that was probably what every mage told him-or herself, right before turning into an abomination.

Anders claimed that it was his emotions that had corrupted Justice, but Reyn wasn’t so certain. From what little he’d heard about their days in the Wardens together, it sounded like Justice had already been pretty far down that road. Justice might not have initially chosen to come through the Veil, but once here, he’d started to fall in love with the world he found. He’d admitted as much, even as he
admitted that he retained at least some of the memories—and therefore emotions—of the Warden whose corpse he’d first inhabited. He’d gotten attached enough to this world to have desires, which put him pretty far along the scale toward “demon.”

It didn’t make him evil, though. Certainly it didn’t put him in the “kill everything” class of demons they normally dealt with. But Reyn never forgot that it was Justice who had suggested the current arrangement to Anders, not the other way around.

Maybe it was the distinction between “spirit” and “demon” that had been Anders’ downfall. Maybe Merrill was right, and all spirits were dangerous in their own way. Maybe Anders just didn’t want to consider the possibility that he’d been duped.

So the two mages argued incessantly about demons and blood magic, both of them so certain that they were doing the right thing. Forget about paving a road—between them, Anders and Merrill were building a Tevinter Highway out of good intentions, the whole time ignoring just where that highway was leading them to.

“Heavy thoughts, Hawke?” Varric asked, breaking into his reverie.

Reyn forced himself to put on a bright grin. “Just pondering a suitable punishment for Bartrand. So far, the best I’ve come up with is stripped naked, covered in honey, and left hog-tied outside a dragon’s lair.”

“He’d probably give the poor dragon indigestion.”

“Ooh, good point. No need to be cruel to the poor thing, after all.”

Varric slowed, his eyes taking in the ragged doorway in front of them. Beyond, they glimpsed a cavernous space lit by the sullen glow of raw lyrium. “The vault should be through here.”

As soon as they passed the door, Reyn sensed the flare of magic and heard the grating of rock on rock. Letting out a sharp curse, he turned, expecting to see another phalanx of rock wraiths building themselves out of scattered rubble.

This time, there was only one. But as it grew…and grew…Reyn suddenly found himself wishing that they were back to fighting a bunch of little ones.

“That’s…big,” he managed to say, before it turned to them with a booming roar. “And…angry.”

***

It was the hardest fight Reyn had ever been in. The ancient rock wraith just wouldn’t die, and it kept calling in its smaller cousins to help it out. Sweat dripped down Reyn’s face and made his grip on his staff dangerously slick. His arms ached from casting spells, and he could feel the mana draining steadily out of him, like blood out of a wound, leaving him dangerously depleted. Like a complete idiot, he’d left all his lyrium potions in his pack and was too busy trying to stay alive to fish them out, now that he needed them.

A ball of lightning came at him from one of the smaller profane. He dodged, but fatigue made the move clumsy. Pain shot along his skin, blistering his arm and the side of his face, and he cried out involuntarily.

An instant later, a warm wave of healing energy passed over him, erasing the pain. “I’ve got your back!” Anders called encouragingly from somewhere behind him.
The words buoyed him even more than the healing spell. Reyn glanced over his shoulder, meaning to throw Anders a quick grin that might convey at least a small part of his gratitude.

The ancient wraith chose that moment to unleash a blast of energy.

Reyn caught the full impact. For a moment, indescribable agony seized every inch of his body, as if his skin peeled from his flesh, then his muscles from his bones, then his bones broke into powder and ash. His back arched and his mouth opened, but no sound came out, all the breath burned from his scorched lungs.

Then he was falling, falling to the floor and past it, into darkness.

“No!” someone screamed, sounding as though his soul was being ripped from its very moorings.

“Don’t die! Please!”

But the cry was very far away, and the darkness was so much closer.

***

No, Anders thought. It was his only thought, repeating over and over again inside his head, like an echo that never got any fainter. No, no, no, no, no.

Somehow, he’d ended up on his knees beside Hawke, pouring healing energy into his friend’s shattered body. He didn’t remember how he’d gotten there—had Justice taken over, or was it just the blind reflex of his training, to get to the injured as soon as possible? He didn’t remember what had happened to the rock wraith, either, but he could see a few bits of inert rubble out of the corner of his eye, so the battle must be over.

No, please, no, don’t die. But the body beneath his hands was so still, the face so pale, except for the thread of crimson leaking out between bloodless lips. He could sense the damage to…well, just about everything: organs ruptured, lungs burned, bones broken. Energy poured from his hands into Hawke’s body, forcing flesh to knit back together, intense enough that it lit up the cavern with its blue glow.

“Lyrium potion!” he snapped. Someone handed him one—he thought it might have been Varric, but couldn’t spare the concentration to even look—and he chugged it down in a single swallow. Energy flared through him, then right back out again, channeled into healing the massive damage done to the man in front of him. “Another!”

No one said anything to him—or if they did, he didn’t hear. He didn’t know how much time had passed, or notice when his knees went numb against the cold stone, or register the crackle of flames when someone built a small fire nearby. He wasn’t even certain when the tipping point came, and Hawke went from barely clinging to life, to getting stronger with every moment. There was only the healing and that one word clanging in his head: no.

Color crept back into Hawke’s face, and the movement of his chest became something visible, not just sensed. His eyelids fluttered, then opened, revealing those exquisitely emerald eyes. His fiery hair had come undone from its tie, and Anders reached out a shaking hand to brush back the strands that blood had glued to his face.

“Reyn,” he whispered through the knot that had formed in his throat.

“You never call me that,” Reyn mumbled, sounding like a man emerging from a deep sleep. Then he blinked a few times, and his eyes focused. “From the look on your face and the gap in my memory, I’m going to assume that I didn’t defeat the rock wraith single-handedly, then loot Antivan brandy
from its corpse and throw a big party? Because my head feels like the mother of all hangovers.”

“Sorry,” Anders said. Despite the exhaustion weighing down on him, he reached out and fed a little more healing magic to Reyn. Hawke.

**Reyn.**

“What happened?” Reyn asked, struggling to get up. Varric grabbed his hand and helped him to his feet.

“You should’ve seen the healing Blondie here did on you,” the dwarf said, with what sounded like real admiration. “Too bad that sort of thing doesn’t make for a good story. I’ll have to change the ending. Maybe something about you striking down the rock wraith with a twist of your staff. It’ll sound better than you wearing your guts on the outside.”

Reyn paled slightly. “Oh.”

“Come on, Hawke. Now that you’re up and around, why don’t we see what we can find in the vault?”

“You go on ahead—I’ll catch up in a minute.”

Varric and Merrill left. Anders remained sitting, uncertain that he could make his drained body move even a few feet. Fortunately, the fire was near enough for him to feel its heat on his skin. Now that the healing was over, he was acutely aware of the cold of the cave seeping into his bones, as if all the warmth of his body had gone out of him and into Reyn, along with his magic.

Reyn crouched down in front of him. For once, his generous mouth was set in a serious line. “Thank you.”

Anders shrugged awkwardly. “That’s why you brought me along on this little pleasure jaunt, isn’t it?”

“No. I brought you along because I know you’ve got my back.” Reyn half-raised his hand, as if he meant to touch Anders…then let it fall to his side. “I’ve got yours too, you know.”

Anders found himself unable to look away from the intensity of Reyn’s green eyes. His mouth went dry; even if he’d known what to say, he wasn’t sure he could have formed the words.

He’d been alone, always: escaped alone, been caught alone. Sat in a cell alone for a whole damned year, unless you counted the templars who snuck in at night to abuse his body in whatever way gave them the most pleasure and him the most pain. He’d run the clinic alone, come to Kirkwall to help the mages there…alone.

*Not alone,* Justice reminded him.

No, not alone, and that was part of the problem, wasn’t it?

“Hey, Hawke!” Varric yelled from somewhere deeper into the cavern. “Come take a look at this!”

The tension between them broke. Reyn rolled his eyes and rose smoothly to his feet. “I’d better go see what Varric wants, before he yells loudly enough to bring the darkspawn down on us.”

Anders grabbed his canteen and took a swallow, wishing that it was something stronger than water. “I think I’ll stay here for now. This should be a safe place to make camp, with all the nasties dead.
Hopefully it will take a while before the darkspawn realize the former tenants have been evicted.”

Reyn strode away, long coat flapping against the backs of his legs. Anders sat alone, his arms wrapped around his knees, listening to his companions exclaim over something. They came back eventually, all three loaded down with treasure. Even better, as far as he was concerned, they’d found a way out.

Varric determinedly celebrated their find over dinner, as if mocking Bartrand for missing out on a fortune would somehow erase the pain of his betrayal. Anders smiled and nodded in all the right places, then offered to sit the first watch. Reyn gave him an uncertain look, but accepted Anders’ reassurance that he wasn’t really that worn out.

It was a lie. Exhaustion threaded his very bones, as if the marrow had been replaced by lead, but he didn’t think he could have slept even if he had let someone else take the watch. So he sat and listened while his companions dropped off one by one, their breathing evening out into a soothing rhythm.

He’d sworn never to return to the Deep Roads. Not for Warden business, and certainly not for a damned treasure hunt.

The last light of their dying campfire mingled with the unvarying glow of raw lyrium, illuminating the reason he’d broken that promise to himself. Reyn hadn’t even asked him to come—he’d bloody volunteered, handing himself over along with his maps, as if his vow to leave the Wardens behind had meant nothing.

For the first time in months, he allowed himself to remember Karl. Not what Karl had become at the end, but long before, when Anders had been a horny young apprentice, easily charmed by the handsome, much-older enchanter. Karl hadn’t just taught him how to give—and receive—pleasure, but passed on a whole new set of rules that Anders would learn to live by. Not the templars’ rules, for once, but rules the mages had created themselves to survive their captivity. Most of them had to do with not getting caught in an awkward position by the templars: only remove the minimum amount of clothing, don’t make any noise, get it over with as quickly as possible while leaving your partner happy.

And above all else, don’t fall in love.

He’d seen the sense in the advice, and in truth, it had made things easier. Over the years, he’d had plenty of lovers. Some of them had even been friends. But he’d never, ever lost his heart to any of them.

And now…now when he was in an even worse position in many ways, when he’d forced himself to accept that he’d never have sex again, just as he’d never get drunk again, or have even the shadow of a normal life again…

Now he’d met someone who made him wish that there didn’t have to be any rules.

Pulling his coat tighter around his shoulders, Anders huddled by the fire and finished out his watch in lonely silence.

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, I know Anders doesn't use that cry in-game until after you sleep with him. But I
figured it would be appropriate here. ;)

Reyn's thoughts about Justice, demons, and spirits in general are getting into my interpretation of the Justice situation, which will become clearer as the story progresses. Suffice it to say that, since we never directly interact with Justice in DA2, I based my idea of what was going on with him on the various dialogs in Awakening. Some of which are very interesting and relevant, at least IMHO. Going by those, I don't fall into the "Justice has no interests/feelings/desires beyond 'justice,'" camp.

I also don't take most of the things Anders says about their situation at face value, since some of it ("We're one and the same! Really!") is pretty directly contradicted later on ("Except for the black-outs when I don't know what's going on! Also, we totally disagree about banging you!"). I suspect that some of what he says is driven by his desire not to get his head cut off for being an abomination, so he isn't entirely truthful. Reyn, of course, has his own suspicions about this. ;)

I'm embarrassed to say how long it took me to figure out that I could just hide behind a column and not get blasted by that damn rock-wraith.
When Reyn Hawke returned from the Deep Roads expedition, it was to find that his brother had betrayed him in the worst way possible.

“So,” Reyn said to Merrill, “here we are, back in Lowtown. Home sweet home.”

“Yes,” she said, sounding disappointed about it. And, Creators, maybe she was. Certainly she’d blossomed in the wilderness of the Wounded Coast, as she’d never done in the Alienage. For the first time, Reyn felt that he’d seen her the way she’d once been, before the Eluvian had cast its curse over her clan.

It had been ten months since they’d been in Kirkwall. Almost a year, spent out of communication with anyone except for the occasional coded letter to assure Mother that he was still alive.

Ten months living in a cave with Merrill, and every damned day of it Carver’s fault.

Their return to Kirkwall from the Deep Roads had already been under a shadow, thanks to Bartrand’s betrayal. But when Reyn had walked into Gamlen’s hovel, he’d been genuinely happy. He’d returned a rich man—or he would be, once Varric managed to sell the pieces they’d looted from the vault—finally able to secure their position in the city and make the rest of the family happy.

And what had he walked in on? Carver, dressed in templar armor, in the middle of telling their mother that he was going to join the order.

The order that had hunted—and ultimately killed—their father, that had hunted Bethany, hunted Reyn. The order that had ensured they had to move every few years, or else be caught and imprisoned at best and made Tranquil at worst. The order that had symbolized Leandra’s ultimate nightmare: her husband and children taken from her, never to be seen again.

If Carver had spat on Malcolm and Bethany’s ashes, it couldn’t have been any worse.

Carver had made his announcement and walked out, leaving Leandra broken and sobbing on the floor from the depth of his betrayal. And this time, she’d only had Gamlen to console her in her grief, because Reyn had to run for his life.

Oh, Carver had claimed that he wouldn’t turn in his own brother. But if he’d join the templars, who knew what he might do? And even if he didn’t betray Reyn, what about Merrill? What about Anders?

So Reyn had fled, less than an hour after getting home. He’d stopped by the Alienage long enough to grab Merrill, then headed straight for Anders’ clinic. Originally, he’d thought they all might flee Kirkwall together, but Anders had been adamant that they needed to split up for their own safety. A
smaller group would be easier to hide, he’d argued, and Reyn had agreed, even though he wasn’t at all sure Anders knew what he was talking about. After all, the man had been caught every single time he’d tried to escape the Circle; a track record like that didn’t inspire much confidence.

In the end, Reyn and Merrill had gone to the Wounded Coast, found a cave in an area with plenty of food and water, and stayed there. He’d never truly roughed it before, so it had been up to the Dalish elf to teach him how to hunt and trap, how to fish, how to forage for roots and berries without poisoning himself.

She’d taught him other things, as well. Three months into their stay, while they were standing beside a shallow pool, ready to shoot lightning at any fish that happened by, he’d said: “You told Anders you had your own stories.”

Surprised, Merrill had looked up at him. She’d been a good companion; a bit naive, maybe, but at the same time she had a wisdom all her own. “That’s right. The day he was trying to explain your idea of demons and spirits to me.”

“It isn’t my idea.” There, he’d said it. “I don’t…I can’t believe that the Chantry—and thus the Circle—have it right. The concept that ‘demons’ embody certain sins, and ‘spirits’ embody virtues…it sounds like a children’s story, like something boiled down into the sort of simplicity that doesn’t describe how the world really works. Everything about it is geared toward invoking guilt in people. Desire is cast as inherently evil, or pride as inherently evil. Spirits who have any interest in this world instead of the Fade must be evil as well, because the world itself is a place of sin that we have to escape. It embodies the idea that we, the Maker’s creations, are so flawed that He’s abandoned us in disgust not once but twice…but isn’t He supposed to be the one who made us that way in the first place? What sort of god punishes His creations for being the way He made them?”

“It doesn’t make sense to me,” Merrill agreed matter-of-factly. “But you humans seem to understand it. The elves in the Alienage, too.”

“And that isn’t even getting into the part where mages are blamed for turning the Maker against us,” Reyn had gone on, warming to the topic. “We’re even blamed for the Blights! It’s like the Chantry found one scapegoat and just…stuck with it, for the last thousand years. But magic isn’t evil. Being a mage doesn’t make you any more dangerous than being a swordsman. A king can order ten-thousand men to die in battle—Carver saw the truth of that at Ostagar. How could even a blood mage hope to compete with a body count like that?”

And in for a penny, in for a sovereign. “Speaking of which, I’m not even convinced that blood magic is inherently evil, that it can never be used for good. Using someone else’s blood would be wrong, yes, but why shouldn’t I use my own?”

Merrill brightened. “Would you like me to teach you?”

For a moment, Reyn hesitated. Then the image of Anders’ face intruded. He would never forgive Reyn for using blood magic.

And I care about him too much to hurt him like that.

Reyn wondered if that made him the biggest fool in the Free Marches. Probably. But it doesn’t change how I feel.

“No,” he’d said firmly. “But…could you teach me your stories? I don’t know if I’ll find them any more true than those of the Chantry, but I want to at least think about them. The things that you’ve said, about all spirits being dangerous, about the Fade being a foreign land and not the home of any
gods…they make more sense to me than anything the Chantry has ever come up with.”

A pleased smile had spread across Merrill’s face at that. “Of course, lethallin. I trained for this, after all, when I was supposed to become Keeper.”

And so here they were, over half a year later, and he was a thorough-going heathen. *Won’t Mother be surprised. And Anders.*

*Anders.*

If he had to be honest, he might have damned well stayed on the Wounded Coast and never come back to filthy Kirkwall, if not for Anders. At least he knew Mother was doing all right, from her messages. From Anders, he’d had no word.

The possibilities terrified him.

“At least they won’t have given away my house,” Merrill was saying. “The elves here seem a little in awe of the Dalish, I’ve noticed. Can you imagine? I don’t understand why they don’t just run off and join the clan, do you?”

“They have family here. Friends. People they love, whom they can’t bear to leave behind,” he said ruefully.

She looked at him, and for a moment he suspected she saw more than he’d intended. “True. Well, goodnight, Hawke. It will seem strange, not waking up to your snoring in the middle of the night.”

He rolled his eyes. “One of us snored to wake the dead, and I’m pretty sure it wasn’t me.”

“A human blood mage animated those corpses that attacked us, not me!”

He laughed, despite himself. “Absolutely true. Goodnight, Merrill. I’ll come by tomorrow and check on you. Remember: if you even think you see a templar, run. Worry about getting word to me later. I won’t have you ending up in the Gallows.”

She only waved good-bye, not taking the threat seriously, as she hadn’t even when he’d showed up on her door, begging her to flee. He suspected that she’d only come with him because it gave her an excuse to leave the Alienage behind for a while, not because she truly believed that Carver would betray them.

*She’d never survive the Gallows. Kirkwall itself is slowly crushing her spirit. Imprisoning her in the Circle would destroy her in a week.*

They parted, Merrill heading for the Alienage, himself for the human slums. Mother and Gamlen both assured him that there had been no sign of templar activity in the area since Carver had joined up, but he went warily nonetheless. So when he spotted a lone figure sitting on the steps leading up to Gamlen’s door, he froze.

The very last rays of sunset cut between buildings, lighting on strawberry-blond hair and outlining feathered pauldrons. The figure shifted slightly, and Reyn caught the familiar shape of a long nose and pensive mouth, of beautiful healer’s hands folded together.

*Anders.*

Reyn held himself very still, overwhelmed with unexpected emotion. A tidal wave of relief crashed down over him; until that moment, he hadn’t realized how terrified he’d been that the other mage had
been caught. Had been made Tranquil.

He closed his eyes against the dizzying vision that had haunted his every nightmare for ten long months. If he had returned to find Anders dead…or worse, staring blankly like Karl, unable to comprehend why Reyn was upset, because all of his own passions had been erased…

*I would have kept my promise to release him. And then I would have killed Carver and every other templar in existence.*

*I would have painted this city with blood.*

It was the sort of raw truth he didn’t share with anyone else, not ever. The sort he hid beneath jokes and stupid puns.

The sort Bethany would have understood, without even having to be told.

“Reyn?”

He opened his eyes and saw that Anders had risen to his feet. Warm brown eyes all but glowed with happiness, accompanied by the smile that never failed to make Reyn weak in the knees. With a little laugh of delight, Anders strode to him, both arms outstretched. “Maker’s breath, it’s good to see you! Leandra said she thought you’d be back soon, but she didn’t know exactly when.”

Reyn gladly embraced the other mage. It might be intended as a friendly hug, but he wasn’t going to pass up this opportunity. Anders had lost weight again; he could feel the other man’s bones beneath layers of cloth and muscle. Reyn took a deep breath, smelling healing herbs and lyrium, and a hint of healthy male musk. He leaned his head against Anders’ for just a moment, as longing flooded his veins and made his body sing.

“You’ve been in contact with Mother?” he asked, past the constriction in his throat.

Anders moved back a bit, but didn’t quite let go. “Of course. I worried about you.”

Realization came crashing in, killing desire. “You didn’t leave, did you? You stayed in Kirkwall.”

Anders winced, looking briefly guilty. “I couldn’t. The clinic…too many people needed my help.”

*Creators.* The risk that Anders had run stole Reyn’s breath away and filled him with anger, although whether that was directed at the other mage or at the templars, he wasn’t entirely sure. “Damn it, Anders, you couldn’t have known Carver wouldn’t turn you in! You told me you were leaving the city!”

“I know. I’m sorry.” Guilt flashed over Anders’ face, and he tightened his grip, as if afraid Reyn would pull away. “But you’ve seen how the refugees protect me—you almost got attacked, when you were looking for me, remember? I trusted that I’d have enough warning to get a head start. You lacked that protection.”

Reyn shook his head mutely, uncertain what to say. *If anything had happened to you, I would be running mad in the streets right now. I’d go straight to the Gallows and slaughter everyone and everything in my way.*

*I can’t lose you. I love you too much.*

And, *Creators,* it hurt to admit that even to himself. Hurt to acknowledge that it went beyond simple physical attraction toward a handsome man. Hurt to want something so damned badly, when he
didn’t know if there was any hope of the feeling ever being returned.

“You need a haircut,” Anders said, maybe sensing that Reyn’s mood had turned dark, and not sure how else to lighten it.

Reyn smiled wanly. “I was thinking about letting it grow.”

“A shave, then, at least.”

“I thought you liked men with beards,” Reyn said, referring to Karl, then cursing himself in the next instant.

But Anders only smiled, instead of withdrawing the way he normally did when Karl was mentioned. “It doesn’t suit you,” he said, and lifted one hand, running it along the growth of beard clinging to Reyn’s jaw. “Your mouth is too nice to hide.”

His thumb came to rest just on the edge of Reyn’s lips. Anders’ expression sharpened suddenly, as if he realized what he’d said…but he didn’t pull away, didn’t do anything, just left his hand where it was. Reyn was suddenly, painfully aware of the heat of the other man’s body, of his fingers, of his gaze. If he turned his head just a fraction, he could take Anders thumb into his mouth, taste his skin, suck…

“Reyn!”

Anders jerked his hand back as if burned. The door to Gamlen’s house flew open, and Leandra dashed down the steps, her face alight with joy. “Darling, I’m so glad you’re back!” she cried, hurling herself in Reyn’s arms. “You won’t believe what happened!”

“Barkolomew ate Gamlen while I was gone?” he guessed.

“Of course not!” She swatted him on the arm. “Varric managed to sell some of the pieces you brought back, and it was enough to pay the bribes! I have an audience with the Viscount!”

“That’s lovely, Mother,” he said, looking over her shoulder for Anders.

The other mage had withdrawn. “Congratulations,” he said with a smile that didn’t quite reach his eyes. Then he turned and walked away, into the Lowtown night.

Bereft, Reyn hugged his mother, then followed her inside for a celebration that felt oddly hollow.

Chapter End Notes

AFAIK, there’s no cannon reason ever given for Malcolm's death, so I decided that the templars did it because it dovetails into the main themes of DA2.

I'm pretty sure the Dalish would be utterly horrified at the idea of a human converting to their religion, but I also figured that Merrill would be the one elf who was okay with it. As for Reyn, I just couldn't see him sticking with a religion that basically branded him as evil. He'd already written off the Chantry, some things that Merrill had said made sense to him, so it made sense that he might see the Dalish religion as a valid spiritual path.

As it turns out, Reyn sold Carver a bit short. At the same time, given how much he
stood to lose, I don't think it was overly paranoid of him to flee the city for a little while, just to make sure.
Reyn Hawke throws a party for his friends after moving into his mansion. Will a certain mage even bother to show up?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

House-warming Party

Three years, Reyn thought, surveying the grand foyer of the—his—estate. It had taken three damned years to get here, and he still wasn’t entirely certain that it had been worth it.

“Do you think we have enough food, Bodahn?” Leandra’s voice floated from the direction of the kitchens: high and happy and light. So, yes, it had been worth it, if only to make her smile. The Amells were back in Hightown, and Leandra was in her element as she’d never been when a peasant’s wife.

He’d told her that she didn’t have to bother for this party. They’d had the formal affair a few days ago, a horrid thing featuring a bunch of rich people he didn’t know and didn’t like. His mother had loved every minute of it, though, from the carefully-constructed seating chart for the grand table, to the stable of musicians, to the dancing. At least the Reinhardt girl—what had her name been?—whom Leandra had made certain he sat beside and danced with, hadn’t been a complete idiot.

No, that wasn’t fair; she had a good mind and used it to think about things other than the latest fashions. He might have even enjoyed her company, if not for Leandra’s attempts at match-making.

Reyn sighed. At least Carver hadn’t dropped that fireball in the soup. So there was something else to be grateful to his brother for, besides not turning any of them into the templars.

The better part of the first year had been spent hiding from templars, then most of the second petitioning the Viscount for the right to buy back the Amell estate. Money talked, though, and he had plenty of it now. Once they had the right to live in Hightown, they’d had to actually buy the estate, and of course the place had been in shambles after being used by slavers for the last decade. It had taken another year just to get the cursed place livable again.

But at least Leandra was happy; that was the important thing. And not just because she got to throw expensive parties, but because she got to help out with this one meant just for Reyn’s inner circle.

I feel like I’m five years old, and my mother is proud that I’ve managed to make friends. Given that she’d raised two apostates who couldn’t afford friends under normal circumstances, maybe she was at that.

Someone knocked on the door, and Reyn went to answer, grateful to get away from his thoughts. Brooding is Fenris’ job. I wouldn’t want to horn in on his territory.

Isabela stood framed in the doorway, striking a seductive pose. The lantern light gleamed off her gold jewelry and highlighted her breasts. Reyn reflected that he’d always rather admired the
structural integrity of her corset; the tailor who had made it must have been a genius.

“Is this the ‘Carver is a Colossal Prick’ party?” she asked brightly, waving her invitation at him.

“Bela!” he exclaimed, giving her a hug and a kiss on the cheek. “It is. But Mother thinks it’s a house-warming party, so don’t wave that around where she can see it.”

“My lips are sealed,” she promised, tucking the invitation into her cleavage and sauntering past him.

“Where’s the booze?”

“Right here,” said a dark, sexy voice. Fenris walked across the threshold like he owned the place, an entire crate of expensive wine balanced on one shoulder.

“Aren’t you sweet!” Isabela squealed, and they moved off. Reyn idly wondered if they were sleeping together. Creators knew, he hoped somebody, was getting laid, because it surely wasn’t him.

“Nice place, Hawke,” Varric told him when he arrived a few minutes later. “I think I’ve got a buyer for that last piece, by the way. I’ll send your share over as soon as I get it.”

“Varric.” Hawke clapped the dwarf on the shoulder. “You know, you should think about moving to Hightown. Keep me from being lonely up here.”

“Are you kidding? I’d never get any business done. The Hanged Man is the place to be. Besides, you’ve got Fenris living up here—call on him if you’re lonely.”

“Not my type, really.”

“What—too stable?” Varric asked sardonically.

Merrill showed up next, to Reyn’s pleasure. “Hello, Hawke!” she chirped. “Is this your new home? It’s very…large. And…large.”

Reyn laughed and resisted the urge to ruffle her hair. “It is. The others are through there. If my mother tries to fuss over how skinny you are—let her.”

“I will. I like how you’re wearing your hair,” she added, tugging on his braid.

“Thanks. It was getting too long to just tie back.”

“It suits you.”

The clank of mail announced Aveline’s arrival. Reyn wondered if she slept in her uniform, given that he’d never seen her out of it.

“Hawke,” she said, surveying the foyer as if expecting a bandit attack from behind the potted plants. “I can’t stay long. I want to check in on a patrol in Lowtown before midnight.”

“You’re the Guard Captain—delegate! Checking on patrols is what underlings are for,” he wheedled.

Her look clearly indicated that she didn’t find him charming. “A good captain knows what’s going on with her men and isn’t afraid to get her hands dirty.”

Reyn sighed. “Fine. Have it your way.”
He could hear the party getting underway in the great room: Varric spinning some absurd tale that had everyone laughing, Leandra making sure they all had something to eat, Fenris popping the cork off a bottle of wine that no doubt contained a generous helping of slave blood and tears. Reyn hovered near the door, unwilling to join them. Not yet.

*Maybe he didn’t get the invitation. I knew I should have delivered them personally. But Bodahn swore he handed them all out himself.*

*Maybe there was an emergency at the clinic. It happens. I should wait a little while longer, just to be sure.*

*I should go in and sit with the others. We’ll hear anyone at the door, and it isn’t locked. It isn’t like Anders needs me to open it for him.*

*Or…maybe I should just accept that he isn’t coming.*

Three years. Three years of hot-and-cold running Anders, who pulled him close with one hand and pushed him away with the other. Who might reward Reyn’s attempts to flirt with a sexy smirk…or might turn the conversation to something more serious, or shut it down altogether.

Reyn sighed and rubbed at his forehead, massaging away the ache forming behind his eyes. *Not interested…maybe,* had been the message. *And why would he be?* Anders had vast sexual experience, or so Reyn gathered. There was no reason at all for the renegade to be interested in a stupid apostate from rural Ferelden, when he’d already had the most sophisticated lovers the Circle—or the Pearl—could offer. Hell, one time they’d been at the Blooming Rose, searching for Ninette, and a discerning customer had even offered to pay for a few hours with him. Not that Anders had accepted, but…

*I can’t really compete with any of that, now can I?*

Turning from the entrance, Reyn headed toward the great room, determined to enjoy himself even if Anders didn’t bother to show up. A knock on the door arrested him mid-stride.

“Er, hello?” Anders called tentatively, opening the unlatched door and sticking his head inside.

“You made it!” Reyn said, hoping he didn’t sound half as pathetic out loud as he did in his head. “I was starting to think you weren’t coming.”

“And miss the social event of the season?” Anders smiled, but his voice sounded tired. Dark circles showed under his eyes, and his clothing hung looser than it had before. *He’s lost weight again.*

“Are you all right?” Reyn asked, taking a step toward him.

“Fine! I’m fine!” Anders held up a messy sheaf of paper. “I was just writing, and I lost track of time.”

“The manifesto,” Reyn said, and tried to keep the sigh out of his voice. Anders seemed to think that if he just spelled out the injustices done to mages and what might be done to ameliorate them, people would suddenly see reason.

Reyn knew better. The templars—the Chantry—didn’t act the way they did because of *reason.* They acted out of fear. Fear was their currency—fear of mages, fear of the Maker’s wrath, fear of damnation, fear of retribution. The creation and exploitation of fear had allowed them to rule Thedas for a thousand years, because fear trumped logic every time. Any individual who defied them had to live with the *fear* of templars breaking down the door in the middle of the night. Any nation that
sought to go its own way had to deal with the fear of an Exalted March.

“Yes,” Anders said, oblivious to Reyn’s dark thoughts. “I had a new idea on the way over, and I need to write it down before I forget. Do you have a pen and paper?”

“The writing desk is through here.”

Anders shook his head. “Too noisy. I need to think.”

“Well,” Reyn said, taken aback, “I have a desk in my room. Up the stairs, bear right, then straight ahead—”

Anders was gone almost before he’d finished giving directions. Trailing after him into the great room, Reyn saw everyone else staring after the other mage as he raced up the stairs.

“Um, so,” Reyn said with a weak smile. “Let’s get this party started, shall we?”

***

Despite Anders’ erratic behavior, the party was a resounding success.

Leandra stayed with them through dinner, then claimed a need to sleep and gracefully retreated to her room, leaving the “young people,” as she called them, to carry on without her.

Varric told lies while they played diamondback (Isabela predictably suggested strip diamondback, which Reyn flatly vetoed, on the possibility that his mother might come back out and find him sitting there naked). Aveline left after the first hand, to no one’s surprise. Fenris polished off two-thirds of the wine he’d brought, then drunkenly berated Reyn about the hideous Tevinter statue that had come with the house. Merrill had a single glass of wine and spent the rest of the evening giggling on the carpet with Barkolomew, telling the attentive mabari more Dalish legends.

Once they were all good and drunk, Isabela challenged them to first slide down the banner, then swing from the chandelier. In the midst of these noisy antics, Anders stalked out onto the landing and glared down.

“Do you mind?” he shouted. “Some of us are trying to do important work here!”

Isabela flung her arms around Reyn’s shoulders and kissed him sloppily on the cheek. “I’m doing something important, too!” she shouted back. “Haven’t you seen the size of this man’s…house?”

Anders glowered, then stomped back to the bedroom in high dudgeon, slamming the door behind him.

“You’re awful,” Reyn said, pushing her off.

“No I’m not. I’m very, very good.”

“I like rudders, not rigging, remember?”

She snickered. “I remember. He’s just so easy—I can’t resist. Oh, don’t pout. It’s why you love me.”

“I knew there had to be some reason.”

She laughed and jumped up. “Come on—let’s carve ‘Justice has a stick up his ass’ on the bannister.”

“No,” Reyn said, but she was already running for the stair.
Merrill tugged on his sleeve. “Hawke? Fenris just poured wine into Barkolomew’s water bowl. Does your dog have a drinking problem?”

“Creators’ sake,” he muttered. “Bela! No vandalizing my house! Fenris! Stop giving my dog wine—it isn’t good for him! Varric, is that my diary? It doesn’t need any creative additions from you!”

Eventually, the party wound down. Fenris and Isabela staggered off in the direction of Fenris’ mansion, arm in arm. Varric offered to escort Merrill safely back to her door, for which Reyn was profoundly grateful, given that the Dalish elf was still giggling uncontrollably and walking into walls.

After seeing them all out, he closed the door and headed up the stairs. The door to his room was still firmly shut; he opened it and stuck his head in cautiously, half afraid that Anders would throw a fireball at anyone who dared break his concentration.

What he saw brought a smile to his lips. Anders sat slumped over the desk, deeply asleep, the quill pen still clutched loosely in one hand. His head rested against the pages of his manifesto, his hair straggling loose from its tie and into his face. The candle cast its dancing light across his features: the high forehead and absurdly long nose, the curve of jaw shadowed with stubble. There was something achingly vulnerable about how soft his mouth looked in sleep, how his hand curled around the pen like a child with a favorite toy.

Reyn reached out and tenderly swept a loose lock of hair back from Anders’ face. Anders didn’t even stir, and he took courage from that, enough to lean down and press the lightest of kisses to his temple. “Sleep tight, my optimistic rebel,” Reyn whispered. Anders didn’t wake, but he did let out a soft sigh, as if comforted in his dreams.

Reyn straightened and took a step back, intending to go in search of a blanket that he could wrap around Anders’ shoulders. When he turned around, he found his mother standing in the open doorway, staring at him.

Dread wolf take me.

She didn’t say anything, only gestured in the direction of the great hall before heading that way herself. Knowing that she wouldn’t give him a choice, he followed her, although not before carefully shutting the door again behind him. No need to wake Anders over a family quarrel, after all, especially one that might make him feel as though he wasn’t welcome. And this is my house. Anders will always be welcome here, no matter what.

Leandra waited near the fireplace. Barkolomew had curled up on the hearth rug, in his favorite spot; his snores provided a soft counterpoint to the crackling of the flames. As Reyn approached, his mother turned and gave him a small, sad, smile.

“So,” she said, “I’m guessing things aren’t going to work out between you and the Reinhardts’ girl.”

It almost made him laugh, that last little bit of wistful hope in her voice. “No. I’m sorry, Mother, but if you want any grandchildren, you’re going to have to rely on Carver’s trusty sword.”

She rolled her eyes, apparently past being annoyed by any vulgarity on his part. “Are you…sure? That is, just because you’re making eyes at that Anders fellow doesn’t mean you might not get married someday, right?”

He leaned against the mantelpiece and stared into the fire, suddenly wishing that he hadn’t had so much to drink. “I’m sure. Do you remember that girl Carver was so mad over? Peaches?”

“Oh, yes! She had quite the crush on you, if I recall.”
“Much to Carver’s dismay.” He shook his head, remembering the temper tantrum Carver had thrown. “I never had any interest in her at all, but her brother gave me my first kiss.”

“I see.” For a long moment, she didn’t speak—then reached out and took his hands. “Why didn’t you say anything?”

“I don’t normally discuss my romantic life with my mother,” he said dryly.

“Reyn, please, be serious for once.”

“All right, all right. I suppose it’s just that…I knew you wanted something different for me. Even before we moved up in the world, you wanted me to get married and have children like you did. Now you want me to carry on the Amell dynasty. Maybe I should have told you, but I just…didn’t want to disappoint you. Besides, as an apostate, I was used to hiding who I really am.” He looked away with a shrug. “What was one more secret?”

“Oh, darling, you could have told me,” she said in that exasperated-mother voice she did so well. “I only ever wanted you to be happy.”

She caught him off guard—and lightened his heart. “So, no more pretending to be deeply interested in which rich girl is available to spawn the next generation of Hawkes?”

“No, but you still have to be polite to them.” She squeezed his hands and glanced in the direction of his bedroom. “I suppose I shouldn’t be surprised that you’re carrying on the family tradition of falling in love with wanted apostates.”

“It isn’t like that,” he objected. Too quickly, he realized, when she gave him a knowing look. “Anders and I aren’t together.”

She let go of his hands and straightened his collar gently. “That’s a shame,” she said. “Because I think he’s very lonely.”

He didn’t know how to tell her that the man he’d been in love with for three years might be many things, but “alone” was never one of them. “Anders is a good friend. A good man,” he said instead. “I won’t abandon him.”

“I know.” Her eyes were sad when she looked up at him. “Your father would have adored him. If Malcolm still lived, he would have been up there tonight, helping write that manifesto.”

“You’re right.” Reyn kissed her forehead. “Go to bed, Mother. I’ll be on the couch in the library if you need me.”

He walked her up to her room, then ducked into his, intending to snatch a cover off the bed. A part of him wondered what would happen if he just stripped naked and turned in as usual. What would Anders do if he woke up to that sight?

*Probably run screaming in the opposite direction.*

Anders hadn’t stirred. Taking an extra blanket from the storage chest, Reyn carried it over and carefully draped it around his sleeping friend’s shoulders. As he did so, he caught a glimpse of the hastily-scribbled pages scattered across the desk.

Some of the writing was in Anders’ familiar script. The rest, however, was in a completely different hand.
Justice, Reyn realized, as the fine hairs tried to stand up on the back of his neck. *That must be Justice’s writing.*

*Are he and Anders coming to more of an understanding? Or is it something else?*

*Is he getting stronger?*

Chapter End Notes

This was actually the first chapter of the fic that I wrote. One of the musings that inspired me to write The Spaces in Between was on Reyn's relationship with Leandra. As I think I mentioned before, her in-game references to marrying Hawke off made it clear that they'd never discussed that part of his life. Later on, though, when she doesn't seem at all surprised when acknowledging his relationship with Anders, so presumably they had some sort of conversation in between. So I started imagining how that conversation might have gone, and what sparked it, and...well, here we are. ;)

Isabela and Reyn are BFFs. They play off each other well, and I suspect that they make each other laugh quite a bit, which Maker knows Reyn could use.

Reyn hasn't quite figured out the whole Justice situation or how he feels about it. That will change very soon. ;)
Desire (Part I)

Chapter Summary

A trip into the Fade brings Reyn face-to-face with Justice...and awakens the desire for a more personal sort of interaction.

Desire, Part I

Reyn opened his eyes and found himself in the familiar, not-quite-there surroundings of the Fade. Long training immediately focused his mind on his purpose: he was here to find Feynriel and somehow help the boy master his talents.

Or kill him.

Reyn put that thought firmly aside—he wouldn’t even consider such an option unless he was truly convinced that it was the only way. Taking stock of his surroundings, he saw that Feynriel’s sleeping mind had shaped the Fade into a replica of the Gallows. The place he fears most. Wonderful. That means he’s already feeling threatened. No telling how he’ll react when we show up.

“We need to move quickly,” Reyn said, turning to his companions. Aveline was staring around in obvious discomfort, while Isabela seemed torn between confusion and fascination. Both of them turned their attention on him when he spoke, however, which was good. They’d need a mage to guide them through this.

Anders stood a little farther in, his back to Reyn. “Anders,” Reyn began, walking up to him—then stopped, confused. There was something off about the way Anders held himself, something aggressive and fierce in his stillness, that made Reyn think of a falcon or a lion. Some predatory creature, at any rate.

Then he turned, every movement one of barely-leashed power, and Reyn saw the blue glow that had replaced Anders’ warm brown eyes, the energy crackling up through his skin. “I had not thought to return in such a way,” he said, his voice a deep growl utterly unlike his normal tones. “It is good to feel the breath of the Fade again, not the empty air of your world.”

“I worry what a journey into the Fade might bring out in me,” Anders had said. But Reyn had asked him to come anyway, wanting another mage to back him up, and Anders had agreed.

Except now Anders was nowhere in evidence.

“Er…you look different,” Reyn said, like a complete idiot. And even though he didn’t really have a body here, he swore his heart started to pound and his mouth went dry.

Justice seemed mildly annoyed by the statement. Or maybe that scowl was his normal expression. “I am Justice. Anders has told you of me.”

Yes. Yes, he did. I just wasn’t expecting you to be so...so...

So damned sexy. And virile. Could a spirit be virile? Reyn wasn’t sure, but he definitely wanted to find out.
By all the Creators, he needed to put a lid on it, now, before every desire demon in the Fade descended on them. It was harder than he’d ever imagined to just stop wanting, though.

*Remember those rumors? About mages going into the Fade together to have sex? I never thought it was true, because it would be too dangerous, but now I wonder…*

*Gah! No! This is absolutely the wrong time to think about anything other than the mission. Focus, Reyn. Focus.*

It took all of his willpower, but he managed to drag his mind out of the gutter and concentrate on matters at hand. He had a bad moment when a desire demon did eventually turn up, but, perhaps fortunately for him, it kept its attention on Isabela. To say that her betrayal came as absolutely no surprise would have been something of an understatement. He had to hand it to the demon for hitting every one of Isabela’s weaknesses with pinpoint accuracy.

“Don’t feel bad,” he told her later, over drinks at the Hanged Man. “I know what it’s like to be tempted by a demon.”

Fortunately, she didn’t ask for any details, still too caught up in her own embarrassment. But that night, when he lay alone in bed, it wasn’t only Anders who occupied his fantasies.
Broken

Chapter Summary

Reyn tries to comfort Anders, after Justice almost kills an innocent mage-girl. But why did the spirit listen to Reyn in the first place?

Broken


Reyn stopped at the edge of Anders’ tiny living space in the back corner of the clinic. He’d wanted to run every step of the way from the tunnels beneath the Gallows, but he’d had to get the cowering, terrified girl out of there as well. It had taken too long to coax her out of hiding and convince her to come with them, and he wasn’t certain he would have been able to do it at all if Aveline hadn’t been along. The guard captain had a natural air of calm authority…and more importantly, she was a woman. Reyn hadn’t missed the flash of distrust in the girl’s eyes, the way she saw and judged him first as a man, and only then as a fellow mage.

The templars would have raped her. Maybe already had at some point. They would have raped her, and made her Tranquil, and then used her until they tired of her and went looking for fresh meat. The perfect sex slave, unable to protest or disobey, even inside the sanctuary of her own mind.

And this is the order Carver joined. Wonderful. Lovely. I suppose he can finally get all the girls he wants.

I swear, if I ever see him again, I will strangle him with my bare hands.

They’d gotten the mage girl to Darktown. Whether she’d bought his explanation that Justice had been nothing but a trick or a bad joke, he had no idea. It hadn’t been his best work, but in his defense he’d been rather distracted.

“Come on, sweetie, I’ll walk you to the docks. The mage underground is there,” Isabela had said, maybe realizing that Reyn was frantic to find Anders. “They’ll take good care of you.”

“Thanks, Isabela,” he’d thought to say, before rushing off.

She’d only shaken her head. “You owe me a drink.”

Anders had once said that the clinic was the only place he felt safe, so it had made sense to look there first. Reyn found him crouched by his small cot, sorting wildly through the belongings collected in a trunk.

“Trash,” Anders said again, and his voice trembled and cracked, as if the slightest vibration would make him fly apart altogether. “Trash. Won’t be needing that anymore.”

He’s leaving, Reyn realized. Sorting through what to take and what to leave behind.

But this wasn’t something Anders could run away from. He couldn’t shed Justice as easily as the things he was discarding so carelessly onto the floor. He’d made that one little slip that every mage
was warned against from childhood, and now he was stuck with the consequences of that single mistake for the rest of his life.

Maybe he knew that, given how erratic his movements were, how frantic the note in his voice.

“Throwing everything out isn’t going to make you feel better,” Reyn said.

Anders came to his feet. “Should I feel better?,” he snapped, voice shaking with rage directed only at himself. Then the anger collapsed, leaving behind a mix of pain and weariness. “You were the only thing that kept me from murdering an innocent girl. It’s all gone wrong, Justice and me. We’re just a monster, same as any abomination.”

The utter defeat in his eyes and voice sliced Reyn like a thousand tiny glass slivers, leaving him bleeding inside. He understood with a sudden clarity why Isabela avoided falling in love. It wasn’t just that the other person could hurt you. It was that you hurt for them, with just as much of your heart.

There had to be something that he could say that would somehow make it better. “You were out of control,” he allowed cautiously, “but even then you heard what I was saying. You knew in your heart that you had to stop.”

“You have too much faith in me. Without you, I would never have known who was there until it was too late.”

Reyn hesitated, not certain what he could say. He remembered that moment clearly, when Justice had turned and focused on him. Seen him, when he didn’t see anything else.

And it had been Justice, no matter what Anders said. Anders had clearly just been along for the ride, with Justice driving them both off the edge of a cliff. But Justice had turned, had looked at him—and fled, leaving Anders to pick up the pieces.

Why? Reyn didn’t know, couldn’t guess. And I won’t, unless I demand he come out and talk. Which...might not be such a good idea.

He listened while Anders poured out his fears. When he spoke of giving up healing, the one thing that really seemed to give him any happiness, Reyn’s heart broke into a thousand jagged shards.

He didn’t let it show, though. He listened, and he spoke what words he thought Anders might hear, all the while feeling so terribly, terribly helpless. He wanted to fix this, wanted to make everything all right, but he didn’t know how.

What good is magic, when it can’t heal the wounds inside us?

When Reyn showed Anders the papers he’d taken from Ser Alrik’s body, though, the other mage seemed to revive somewhat. “Perhaps I should try talking to the Grand Cleric. Maybe she’s more reasonable than I thought,” he finished eagerly.

And, Creators, it felt so wrong to give him false hope. Because even if Meredith and Elthina hadn’t approved the Tranquil Solution, they hadn’t stopped it either. It wasn’t as if the Harrowed mages Alrik had made Tranquil turned invisible—they were right out in the open, wandering through the Gallows courtyard where anyone could see them. The mages knew, the templars knew, the Chantry knew. And yet no one in a position of authority had done a damned thing to stop it.

Plausible deniability. Say no on paper, then look the other way when it happens anyway. Sister—or was it Mother, now?—Petrice was a rank amateur when compared with Meredith and Elthina.
But it had turned Anders mood around for the moment, even made him smile. So Reyn only nodded and made encouraging noises, all the while hoping that the false hope of today wouldn’t lead to an even more crushing despair when the lie was finally revealed.
Desire (Part II)

Chapter Summary

When a desire demon takes an interest in Hawke, Justice disapproves. Strongly.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Demons again. Of course. What the bloody hell did they ever find anywhere, but demons?

*I miss the darkspawn,* Reyn thought wistfully. They might be mindless and stupid, but at least they were a force of nature, not evidence that some idiot had chosen to strike a deal out of greed, fear, or hubris.

Unless you believed the Chantry version, that is, in which darkspawn were all that remained of—surprise!—mages, meaning that all the evils of the world were once again—double surprise!—the fault of the magically gifted.

It was a story that the man standing beside him in the tunnels beneath the Harimann estate no doubt believed whole-heartedly.

“Silence, temptress!” Sebastian Vael declared, sounding even more self-righteous than usual. “Your lies led our allies astray. You’re the only one I must kill.”

Why did I help this prat again? Oh right, I needed the money. When Reyn had first gotten involved with the prince-but-I-want-to-be-a-priest’s problems, he’d needed the coin to help fund his part of the Deep Roads expedition. When Sebastian had approached him a second time for help with finding the ones who had killed his family, Reyn had agreed because…

...Because I’m an idiot, apparently. I should have known to steer clear of a man who wears Andraste on his crotch.

They’d made their way to the inner sanctum beneath the Harimann estate, killing demons with almost every step. Now the desire demon that had struck a bargain with Lady Harimann had abandoned her, looking for better prey.

The demon’s glowing purple eyes narrowed at Sebastian’s rejection, but she turned her attention on Reyn. *At least she’s leaving poor Isabela alone. So far.*

“And you?” the demon asked, running her hands over her extremely feminine body. “The desire for power is easy to find. Do you not wish to…rise?”

Reyn arched a brow, unmoved by the sight of her heaving breasts. “You really aren’t any good at this, are you?”

It was a mistake; he knew it as soon as the words left his mouth. Rule number one: don’t ever talk to demons, because it gives them an opening, a chink in your armor.

Rule number two: see rule number one.
The demon’s form shimmered, shifting into a masculine shape with broad shoulders and narrow hips. The piercings through his nipples now attached to a delicate golden chain that ran down and disappeared beneath a sheer skirt that clearly revealed the outline of his hard, pierced cock. Powerful muscles rippled beneath his lavender skin, but his lips were full and sensual, promising delight.

*Dread wolf take me, why did I have to open my big mouth?*

Reyn wanted to look away, but didn’t dare, lest the demon strike. The demon smiled, no doubt well aware that he’d just put Reyn in something of a bind. He swayed closer, watching Reyn through heavy-lidded eyes.

“Am I not?” he murmured, his voice like a song inside Reyn’s skull, buzzing in his bones.

“Oh, shit,” Isabela muttered.

“I know what you want,” the demon continued. His voice was low, seductive, impossible to muffle or to drown out. “I can see all of the long, empty nights, all of the dreams that vanish on waking. I can make those dreams a reality. I can give him to you.”

For a hysterical moment, Reyn wondered what would happen if the demon tried, only to find out that there was no vacancy at the Anders hotel. “I really, really doubt that,” he said instead, scrabbling to find his wits. His smart mouth had gotten him into this; maybe it could get him out.

“I can take away your pain, your loneliness.” The demon’s voice seemed so intimate, something meant just for him and no one else in all the world. “And I promise you, it will be every bit as good as you imagine.” His sensual lips parted and he was getting closer, closer, almost near enough to kiss…

“Away with you!” shouted a deep, growling voice that cut through the desire demon’s soft whispers like a sword through silk. The next moment, something hit Reyn from behind, shoving him out of the way. A steady blue glow eclipsed the flickering mauve flames, and Reyn had the confused impression of Anders charging the demon like a maniac.

No—not Anders. **Justice.**

“No—I didn’t know—“ the desire demon tried to shout. Justice didn’t give him a chance; an instant later, the two Fade-born creatures were tearing into each other with single-minded intensity, while all around them rose shades, aided by Lady Harimann.

Glad to have something to fight, Reyn swung his staff around and fired off a lightning bolt at the nearest shade. Barkolomew and Isabela went into the melee, while Sebastian loosed a storm of arrows from a distance and called on the Maker and Andraste for aid.

Justice vanished along with their last enemy, blue glow dissolving and leaving behind only human skin and confused brown eyes. Blinking, Anders looked around at the corpses scattered around the room. “Er…did I miss something?”

Reyn took a step toward him, but Sebastian grabbed his arm. “Hawke! Don’t get close! That thing is an abomination!”

Anders blanched, a look of horror spreading across his face as he took in the bodies, the blood. He took a step back, right on the edge. Another moment, and he would run—and this time, Reyn knew it would be for good.

“Let go of me, you idiot,” Reyn snarled. Startled, Sebastian did so—then reached for his bow.
“No, no,” Isabela said conversationally, one of her daggers suddenly at the prince’s throat. “Don’t even think about it.”

Even so, Reyn made sure he put himself between Sebastian and Anders. He’ll have to go through me, first.

He kept moving closer, making sure Anders had nothing to look at but him. “Justice saved us,” he said. “Well, saved me, anyway.”

Some of the panic eased out of Anders’ eyes. “You wouldn’t have dealt with a demon.”

Let this work. Please, gods, let him believe me. “Not intentionally, no. But I was stupid enough to talk to it. Either Justice realized I was in trouble, or he got tired of the conversation, since it was cutting into his templar-smiting time.”

The tiniest flash of a smile played around Anders’ lips. “That…sounds like him, actually.”

“Just ask him about it. He’ll tell you no one got hurt.”

Anders searched his gaze uncertainly. “You’re sure?”

It hurt, that he had to offer such an assurance in the first place. Oh, Anders. And Justice. What am I going to do with the two of you? “I’m sure,” he said, drawing on all his long experience of pretending that everything was fine, even when it was anything but. At least this time, he wasn’t lying. “Justice helped. Tell him I owe him a drink.”

“Now you’re just being cruel,” Anders said with an actual smile, and Reyn felt himself relax. The crisis was over, for the moment at least.

They walked back through the mansion, a very unhappy Sebastian in front of them. Once back in Hightown, he paid them and left for the Chantry, no doubt to pray for forgiveness for breathing the same air as them. Anders departed for the clinic, seemingly no worse for having been briefly taken over by Justice.

“Well,” Isabela said, showing no inclination to leave as Hawke headed back to the Amell estate, “that certainly was interesting.”

“Mmm,” he said noncommittally.

“Are you all right? And don’t say you are, because I can tell.”

“It’s nothing, Bela,” he said. “Nothing you can help with, anyway.”

“Maybe.” She linked her arm through his. “Tell you what. Meet me at the Hanged Man tonight at sunset. We’ll drink away our sorrows.”

“After that…I could use a drink,” he admitted.

“That’s not all you could use, pumpkin,” she said with a wink. Then, letting go of him, she strode away and disappeared into the crowd.

Chapter End Notes
So, yeah, I apologize to any Seb fans out there. I found him annoying myself, so I never took him on quests. But lots of people like him, and that's okay with me!

Reyn, of course, despised him. Despite his snark, Reyn actually managed to get 100% friendship from almost everyone except Carver and Sebastian, both of whom probably wanted to shank him.

I liked the idea of writing a desire demon competent enough at its job to actually mess with Reyn's head a little. I also found it curious how relentlessly indifferent to other Fade creatures Justice was. I guess he was focused on the plight of mages, but you'd think at least once he'd be, "Hey, that's Bob! Dude, last time I saw you, you were on Harrowing duty. How are the wife and kids?" ;) OK, maybe not. XD
"So," Isabela said, hopping up the table and flashing a bit of inner thigh before she crossed her legs, “we have got to get Hawke laid.”

Anders stared at her. When she’d come into the clinic shortly after he’d returned, he’d assumed that she wanted healing for whatever latest disease she'd picked up at the Blooming Rose. This conversational gambit was unexpected, to say the least.

“What are you talking about?” he asked, annoyed. “I have actual patients to see.”

“Maker’s balls, don’t be so grumpy.” Isabela leaned forward, planted her elbows on her knees, and rested her chin on the back of her folded hands. At one time, he would have found the view thus displayed to be interesting, to say the least. Now, it didn’t even call for a second glance. “Hawke? Remember him? The mage who was about two seconds from giving into a desire demon?”

“Don’t be ridiculous. Reyn knows better than that.”

She rolled her eyes. “Yes, and as we all know, desire is perfectly logical and based on what we know and not what we feel.”

Anders tried to remember what had happened in the basement. Everything up until the encounter with the desire demon was perfectly clear. There weren’t any templars around, so Justice had no real interest in any of the proceedings, at least as far as Anders had been able to sense. Then they’d found Lady Harimann and the demon, and Reyn had talked to the damned thing, and it had transformed…

And then he’d felt a flash of something hot and angry from Justice.

Mine.

After that, everything was blackness, until he awoke to find himself standing in the midst of a pile of corpses. It had been far too reminiscent of the first time Justice had taken control, immediately after they’d merged, and in a moment of absolute terror he’d half-expected to find that he’d killed Reyn.

Justice stirred at that thought, angry and annoyed. Rejecting the idea, as if he’d never gone on a murderous rampage before.

“Well, he didn’t give in,” Anders said, angry now. Why did Isabela think she had to drag up the whole ugly incident, when all he wanted to do was forget about it? “Reyn would never give in to a demon just for sex, especially since he probably has lovers lined up around the block.”

Her momentary look of surprise gave way to a smirk. “Is that what you think?”

I try not to think about it at all. “He’s handsome, smart, and rich. Just because you couldn’t get him into bed doesn’t mean that no one could.”
“You really don’t know?” Isabela let out a delighted laugh. “Oh my. And I thought the two of you shared almost everything. Does this make me the best friend, then?”

Anders picked up an old linen sheet that he’d been meaning to tear into bandages. “If you don’t have anything constructive to say, then please leave,” he said, ripping a strip off with rather more force than was strictly necessary. “I have work to do.”

“He’s an apostate,” Isabela told him, as if that was supposed to be some sort of grand revelation. “A lifelong apostate, who’s never been caught. As opposed to, you know, an apostate who thinks hiding in a brothel and showing off his magic hands is a smart idea, and then wonders why the templars keep finding him.”

Anders shot her an icy glare. That had been the escape attempt that had landed him in solitary for a year and given him some of the worst memories of his life.

“Anders linked to stay hidden by keeping to himself,” Isabela explained, in a tone people normally used for children or idiots. “By which I mean keeping everything to himself.”

“Oh.” It caught him completely off guard. It did make a sort of sense, though. There were so many ways for a mage to betray himself. Reyn had mentioned that he and Bethany hadn’t been allowed to make close friends, that they’d interacted as little as possible with the community, just enough to seem normal and non-threatening. But no lovers? That’s quite a sacrifice.

Maybe. But he was never caught. I always assumed that his freedom was some sort of fluke, just a lucky break that the rest of us didn’t get. Something that had been handed to him on a silver platter; something paid for by the sacrifices of others. I never considered what he might have given up to keep that freedom.

Exactly,” Isabela said, leaning back on the table, her legs crossed again. “But you’re right—he didn’t almost give in because the demon tempted him with sex. He almost gave in because the demon tempted him with you.”

Anger flooded through Anders, and it was everything he could do not to reach for his staff. Worse, the anger roused Justice, which he most certainly didn’t want to happen. “Never taunt a mage,” he said coldly. “If you have nothing better to do than mock me, leave. And don’t come back unless you need healing.”

Her dark eyes were fearless. “This isn’t about you. I’ve come here for Hawke’s sake, because if the two of you don’t get this resolved, then he’s going to be a danger to all of us.”

Maker curse her for making him say it out loud. “There’s nothing to resolve. In case you haven’t noticed, I’m possessed. I’m dangerous. No one in their right mind would even trust me, let alone… want me.”

It hurt to speak what he’d only thought to himself, every word like one of her daggers, slicing fine shreds of flesh from his gut, his heart. How clever of her to make me do it myself. She doesn’t even have to lift a finger.

She shrugged, like none of it mattered. “I’m not arguing with any of that. Shit, I’ll add to the list: you’re unstable, erratic, can’t shave properly, and have a giant stick up your ass—and not in the fun way, either. But if Hawke doesn’t care, that’s his business.”

“Of course he cares,” Anders said raggedly, past the lump that emotion made in his throat. “I’m not a fool, Isabela. I know he flirts with me for the same reason he flirts with you. Because it’s easy, and
it’s safe, and it doesn’t mean anything.”

Isabela held up her hands. “All right. Have it your way.” She hopped down off the table and started for the door. “It’s up to me to get him into bed, then. And if that doesn’t work, I could probably talk Fenris into doing it.”

“What?” Every muscle clenched at the very thought, and Maker, if there was a lower growl tainting his voice, who could blame him? The elf was practically a wild dog! *Reyn would never—never—*

_Fenris already knows he’s an apostate, though. Reyn wouldn’t have to worry about betraying himself._

Anders struggled to exert his willpower, to calm his pounding heart, and above all, not to think of Fenris kissing Reyn, touching him, pleasuring him, when it was the only thing Anders had dreamed of for three long years. Waves of anger and jealousy burned through him, so close to igniting something that he couldn’t—didn’t want to—control.

Isabela had frozen in mid-step, as if she knew the danger she’d put herself in. Without looking back, she said, “Then meet me tonight at the Hanged Man, a quarter hour after sunset.”

She walked out, still not looking back, and shut the door behind her. Anders stared unseeing at it, feeling all his anger burn out and collapse into ash.

Isabela was wrong, as usual. Reyn wasn’t a fool—he was a mage who understood what Anders had become, as much as anyone outside of him and Justice _could_ understand. Reyn probably hadn’t been tempted by the desire demon at all. He’d probably been gathering his energy for a spell, which of course Isabela had completely misunderstood. She was obsessed with sex, so she interpreted everything through that lens.

_That’s all it is_, he thought, painful certainty settling into his gut. _That’s all it will ever be._
Desperation

Chapter Summary

Isabela tempts Hawke with a plan that might get Anders into bed--assuming Hawke doesn't mind Isabela joining in.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Reyn settled onto the bench at the Hanged Man across from Isabela. *Creators, I need a drink.*

Isabela had seated herself with a view of the door, which meant that Reyn had a convenient line of sight to the bar. He signaled to the bartender, and a few moments later, Norah deposited a shot of something purported to be whiskey in front of him. Reyn downed it fast, to avoid the taste as much as anything, and nodded for another.

“In a hurry to see the alley tonight?” Isabela asked with an arch of her brow. “Because I’m not holding back your hair again while you get sick.”

“It’s been a long day,” he admitted. “First that business with Vael. Then I get home to find that Carver had sent a letter.”

“What did it say?”

“Who knows—I threw it in the damned fireplace without reading it. Then Mother cornered me and asked if I’d take her to the haberdasher’s the day after tomorrow.”

Isabela snickered. “She really has no idea, does she?”

“About me going around killing demons, saving people, making the streets safe for urchins and old women? Thankfully, no—it would give her a heart attack.” He shook his head and downed the second shot. “It’s also decided to rain outside, by the way, so I’m soaked through just walking over here. You know, in case you missed the giant puddle of water collecting under the table.”

“And here I thought Varric had talked them into installing a fish pond.” The door behind Reyn opened and closed, and he saw Isabela’s eyes dart to it. Actually, now that he thought about it, she’d been keeping a sharp watch on the comings and goings tonight.

“Are you expecting someone else?” he asked, craning his head around to look.

“Just keeping a weather eye out.” Her mouth curved in a wicked grin, and she leaned over the table, folding her hands in front of her. “So, Hawke. I have a proposition for you.”

“Am I going to need another drink for this?”

“Probably.” The unsteady light of candles and lanterns flickered off the gold in her ears and lip, and made the serpents on her torc seem to crawl. Or maybe it was the whiskey he’d drunk. “Correct me if I’m wrong, but I get the feeling that you’d like Anders to have his hand on your rudder.”
I do need another drink. “Is it that obvious?”

“To those of us who don’t have our heads up our asses.” She leaned forward conspiratorially. “I think I can help you with get what you want.”

The mind boggled. “Does this plan of yours involve rope, leg irons, and a ship bound for Antiva?”

“No, but I like the way you think.” She sat back again, a little smile playing on her mouth, as if she knew the punchline to a joke that he hadn’t heard. “As you might recall, Anders’ ship has already docked in my port.”

“One more nautical euphemism and I’m leaving.” And thanks for the reminder. My day is now complete.

“Ooh, jealous.” She winked. “My point is that I could convince him to come back for another round. For old time’s sake. When he agrees, I tell him it’s on one condition—that you get to join us.”

He opened his mouth, then hesitated, uncertain what to say, what to think. “Bela, you’re a beautiful woman, I’m sure, but—”

She held up her hand. “That’s not what I’m after. You don’t have to touch me at all, and you get all the fun you want to have with Anders. Plus, I get to watch and have some fun of my own. Now that, my dear, is what they call a win-win situation.”

He thought about it. Creators help him, he actually thought about it. This might be—probably is—my only chance. It wouldn’t be what he’d dreamed of, certainly, but at least it would be something. Surely one night of passion, even if he had to share with Isabela, was better than this aching loneliness. Surely the memory of Anders’ kisses, his touch, the smell and feel of his skin, would be enough to sustain Reyn, to take away this agony of longing.

I want this, Reyn thought, closing his eyes so Isabela couldn’t read the naked desperation that must surely show on his face. I want...

No. Not like this. He wanted Anders more than he could ever remember wanting anything, so bad it made his hands shake and his breath stutter. But a single night of sex wouldn’t be enough, not by half, because he wanted so much more. His body ached for the other mage to the point of pain, but his heart ached for Anders just as much, perhaps more.

He opened his eyes, met Isabela’s gaze. “I know you mean well, Bela,” he said gently, “but I can’t. I’m sorry.”

To his surprise, an expression of wistful sadness crossed her face. “You poor dear,” she said. “You really are in love, aren’t you?”

The door behind him opened again. Isabela glanced at whomever had come inside, and a smile crept over her face. “Well, then,” she said, “remember to thank your Auntie Isabela later, won’t you?”

And so saying, she lunged across the table and kissed him full on the mouth.

Chapter End Notes

Three guesses as to who Isabela saw walk through the door, and the first two don’t
count. ;)


For a moment, Anders stood absolutely paralyzed in the doorway of the Hanged Man, unable to look away from the sight of Isabela kissing Reyn. A thousand emotions rampaged through him like the lightning cracking outside: jealousy, grief, anger, and white-hot...

They have betrayed us.

No. He hadn’t any right to feel that way, they hadn’t, but knowing that in his head didn’t stop him from feeling as though Isabela had just ripped his heart out of his chest, like Fenris with a slaver. I can’t watch this. I can’t be here. We can’t.

He ran, leaving the door open in his haste. He thought he heard Reyn call his name, but it was lost in the rumble of thunder, lost in the voices shouting inside his head: his own, Justice’s, everyone whose heart he’d broken following Karl’s rules, laughing at him now that he found himself on the receiving end. Rain roared down from the dark sky, pounding on the leaky roofs of Lowtown, gushing through spouts and pouring off threadbare awnings that sheltered beggars and whores. His boots splashed through puddles, stumbling over submerged potholes and hidden stones. Water soaked in through cracks in the soles, while the rain slicked his hair and sluiced down his neck, chilling his body to the bone.

He ran without purpose, without destination. Andraste’s blood, he couldn’t even see where he was going in the absolute darkness, any moon or stars hidden by clouds and the torches long doused. Lightning danced across the Waking Sea, outlining the taller buildings. Even that became a painful reminder of Reyn, who never started a battle without a good tempest spell.

A hand closed on Anders’ shoulder, jerking him to a halt. He spun, ready for a fight—wanting a fight in some perverse way, because the focus on survival would at least take away this pain for a little while. He half-hoped to see an entire cadre of brigands, or even a platoon of templars, anyone he could unleash his wrath on without guilt or qualm.

Reyn stood there, the soft light of magic clinging to his fingertips and illuminating his face. The rain had darkened his fiery hair and stuck loose strands to his face. Cold or the night washed all the color from his skin, his eyebrows like two slashes of ink across his face.

The fire rising to Anders’ hands collapsed, draining back into mana, and the taste of ashes filled his mouth. I don’t even get that much, he thought. Not even the release of a fight. Nothing.

“What is wrong with you?” Reyn demanded, giving him a little shake.

Anders pulled away roughly. “Nothing. I didn’t want to interrupt.”

“Interrupt what—Isabela being a blighted idiot? I don’t have the slightest idea why she did that.
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Probably her idea of a prank.”

“I think I have a damned good idea why she did it,” Anders said. He tried to sound indifferent, but
his voice shook on the words.

“Really?” Reyn spread his arms to either side. He’d left his coat behind in his hurry to catch up, and
the downpour had soaked his shirt, adhering it to his skin so that the broad line of his shoulders was
clearly visible. “Then maybe you’d like to share it with me?”

“Don’t play the fool, Hawke. It doesn’t become you.”

“I don’t understand you.” Reyn took two paces away, then stopped and came back. “Why do you
even care?”

“…” But what was there to say, besides the impossible?

Reyn took another step closer, auburn brows drawn down sharply in anger. “Just answer the
question. Is that so hard? Why do you care?”

Anders dug his short-bitten nails into his palms. His whole body trembled, whether from the cold
rain that licked all the warmth from his skin, or the force of his emotions, he didn’t even know
anymore. “I’ve tried to hold back,” he said. If Reyn was going to force him to spell out what they
both knew, then on his head be it. “But I’m still a man. Don’t expect me to resist forever.”

Reyn gaped at him—then shut his mouth with a snap. Lightning crashed nearby, reflecting for a
instant in angry green eyes.

“You have got to be kidding me!” he shouted over the boom of thunder. “You say that as if I’m the
one who’s been playing with your feelings, when it’s never been anything but the other way
around!”

Anders blinked, shocked for a moment beyond speech by the accusation. “What?” he demanded,
finding his voice at last. “I’ve never toyed with you, never pretended to be something I’m not. You
saw what I almost did to that girl. You’ve seen what I am.”

“And I’m still here, aren’t I?” Reyn asked, stepping closer. The light boiling off his hand lit his face
from below, accentuating the lines of fury distorting his features. “I’ve done everything I could to get
close to you. But you…you just can’t make up your bloody mind! First you tell me that you don’t
want me involved with the mage underground, that you don’t want to know too much of what
you’re doing. That hurt, curse you.”

“I—“ Anders started to apologize.

“No!” Reyn grabbed him by the pauldrons, as if he’d physically hold Anders there until he’d said his
piece. “I’m not done yelling yet, damn you. I could have lived with that…but then you tell me I’m
the only bright spot in Kirkwall. That you would drown us all in blood to keep me safe. And when
you said that you feared being made Tranquil now more than ever, what was I supposed to think?
How did you imagine that would make me feel?

“And yet you have the unmitigated gall to stand there and pretend I’m the one who’s been teasing
you.”

Reyn let go of him with a shove, stepping back as he did so. “Fine. Have it your way. I’m done.”

He turned to go back to the Hanged Man, and in that moment, all Anders could see was Reyn
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walking away. Walking out of his life and taking with him the last untainted piece of Anders’ heart that had somehow managed to survive the templars, survive the rules, survive Justice and the Wardens and all the things he had seen and done and felt.

Blind instinct propelled him; his hand closed on Reyn’s shoulder, the heat of the other man’s body almost scalding through the wet shirt. He jerked Reyn around—or maybe Reyn turned on his own, Anders didn’t know, didn’t care, except that it brought them face-to-face.

He shoved Reyn back against the nearest wall and pinned him there with his body. Cupping Reyn’s face with both hands so that he couldn’t pull away, Anders kissed him with all the stored up desperation of a lifetime. 

*Just this moment, he thought wildly. Just give us this one moment before he pushes us away.*

Reyn shifted against him, and Anders braced himself for the inevitable. But instead of shoving him away, the arms that closed around his shoulders pulled him tighter. Reyn’s lips parted beneath his with a moan that sent a bolt of pure desire straight to his groin. The kiss deepened, turned even fiercer, tongues meeting and exploring. Reyn’s mouth tasted like the awful whiskey of the Hanged Man, underlain with the familiar spice of lyrium. Their legs threaded together; Anders could feel the other mage’s erection pressing hard against his thigh through their layers of clothing.

They broke apart, both of them breathing raggedly. Reyn’s eyes blazed with desire, and Anders considered dragging him into the nearest sheltered spot, dropping to his knees, and sucking him then and there like some two-copper whore. The old Anders would have done exactly that and not thought twice about it.

But the old Anders had still lived by someone else’s rules.

So instead, he fought the temptation, forcing himself to take a step back. The rain felt even colder in the absence of Reyn’s heat. “Reyn…”

Reyn swallowed thickly, but his voice still trembled with emotion when he spoke. “I’ve never felt this way about anyone. Not ever. So if you don’t want this, now would be a good time to say so, because if it goes any farther, I don’t know how I can go back to the way things were before.”

*Is he…is he saying what I think he is? Surely not. People didn’t fall in love with abominations. Did they?*

Anders tried to push down the hope beating inside him like a thousand trapped birds wanting to be free. “I thought with Justice…this part of me was over. I can’t give you a normal life. If you’re with me, we’ll be hunted, hated. The whole world will be against us.”

“I’m an apostate. I’ve lived with that possibility my entire life,” Reyn pointed out. All of his glib words had deserted him, and what remained was that raw part of him that he’d let Anders glimpse from time to time. It was a part Anders suspected he’d never shown to anyone else. “But that doesn’t matter…none of it matters…unless I have you with me.”

It took everything Anders had to move back yet another step. “If your door is open, I will come to you tomorrow night,” he promised, and tried not to read too much into the slow, sexy grin that spread across Reyn’s face. “If not, I’ll know you took my warning at last.”

Then, before his willpower failed him, he turned and walked away, heading back through the growing storm.
Chapter End Notes

So the first time I romanced Anders, when he accused Hawke of teasing him, I looked for the "WTF, dude?" option on the dialogue wheel and was honestly surprised not to find it. Yeah, Mr. Mixed Signals, it's totally Hawke who's the tease, not you.
No Rules

Chapter Summary

Anders arrives at the Amell estate to find the door unlocked, and we finally get to the smut. ;)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The door will be locked, Anders told himself, standing in the dark square outside of the Hawke estate. I shouldn’t have even come. I might as well have stayed at the clinic.

He had to know for certain, though. During unguarded moments all throughout the day, in between seeing patients at the clinic, the thought had flashed through his mind: what if the door is open? No matter how many times he tried to tell himself that Reyn would surely have come to his senses, that a mage of his caliber wouldn’t be mad enough to invite an abomination into his bed, Anders couldn’t quite snuff out that little flame of hope that made his heart leap every time he considered the possibility.

Most of the time, he wasn’t aware of Justice as a being separate from himself, as he had told Reyn when they’d first met. Today, though, he’d been painfully aware of a restlessness that didn’t belong to him, the spirit annoyed and impatient.

Reyn is a distraction. There was distress in that feeling, though, rather than anger. We cannot afford this. We shouldn’t care.

But Justice did care, of that Anders was absolutely certain. The restless mutterings were full of half-realized images, some that Anders didn’t understand, others that had most certainly belonged to the Warden Kristoff, inherited by Justice along with his corpse. Justice had the memories of two human hosts now; no question he understood a broken heart, and had no desire to experience the emotion first hand.

And so they’d been standing here in the dark, staring at the estate like a pair of burglars sizing up a target. The windows were dark, but Reyn’s room didn’t open onto the square, so that didn’t necessarily mean anything. Only a few steps more, and I’ll know. We’ll know. The door will either open, or it won’t.

So why had they been standing here for half an hour, just staring?

Because touching the latch means the end of possibility. The door will be locked, and I’ll have to accept that our one kiss was the beginning and the end of it. Maker, it was one more kiss than he’d had any right to expect; he should be grateful for even that much.

It started to rain again, fat drops pattering down on streets already damp and slick. Thunder rumbled in the distance, far out over the Waking Sea, as yet another band of storms moved in to replace the ones that had departed scant hours ago. The smell of lightning spiked the air, and Anders took a deep breath.
No sense standing here getting wet. Even his pathos had its limits.

He took the final ten steps, and now he was in the sheltered doorway, while the rain suddenly swelled and grew steady, sheeting down only inches away, as if to block his retreat. Not letting himself think or hope, he put his hand on the door.

It opened.

He stared through the doorway for a long moment, at the dimly-lit interior beyond. Reyn had left a small candle on the mud bench to light the way; it had burned down and guttered in its pool of wax. A half-remembered feeling moved through Anders, like a bubble rising to the surface of a still pool, and after a moment he recognized it for hope. The smile on his face felt equally out-of-place, like something he’d long forgotten how to do.

Maker. He left the door open.

Anders latched the door behind him, locking out the rain and the wind. The house was still and silent, and he felt a bit like a thief, sneaking in when most of the inhabitants were asleep in their beds. The click of toenails on the floor alerted him that he wasn’t the only one awake, and he saw the outline of the mabari hound watching him curiously from the main room, stubby tail wagging a greeting. No doubt Reyn had left him there to make sure no burglars took advantage of the unlocked entrance.

Reyn’s door on the second floor stood open, warm light spilling out like a golden carpet laid down the stair. Heart pounding and hands trembling, Anders walked up to the landing and crossed into the room.

Reyn stood in front of the fireplace, as if he’d been watching the dance of the flames. Hearing Anders approach, he turned, and a smile that mingled welcome and relief lit up his features. Maker, he looked so handsome, dressed in soft black boots and pants, with an ivory shirt. His fiery hair was free of its braid and brushed so that it lay shining across his shoulders.

Anders was embarrassed to realize that he was still wearing his filthy clothes from the clinic and hadn’t even bothered to comb his hair. At least I could have shaved. Maker, was I thinking?

He knew the answer, of course—he’d been so afraid of rejection that he’d behaved as if it were a given, as if that would have made the pain more bearable.

If Reyn was disappointed that Anders hadn’t made more of an effort, he didn’t let on. “You’re here,” he said, and it wasn’t until Anders heard the relief in the other man’s voice that he realized he hadn’t been the only one afraid of rejection. “I wasn’t sure you would come.”

Anders closed the door behind him, then pulled off his staff and set it in a corner, beside Reyn’s. Scented candles burned on the writing desk, perfuming the air with cedar and sandalwood. Expensive, and Anders realized with a rush of affection that Reyn must have gotten them especially for this night. Another candle sat on the nightstand, beside a lyrium potion, a flask of scented oil, and a jar of herbal cream.

Oh. Oh my.

“Justice does not approve of my obsession with you,” he said, because he had to say something, and it sounded far better than I was a coward who stood in the square for half an hour when I could have been up here with you. And to make it not an complete lie: “He believe’s you’re a distraction. It is one of the few things on which he and I disagree.”
“So he’s kind of…an unwilling participant in our threesome?”

Hardly unwilling. But that was another of those things he couldn’t say. “Please don’t call it that.”

Reyn winced. “I’m sorry. That was a stupid thing to say. It’s just that I’m nervous, and that makes me even more of an idiot than usual. I know may be hard to believe that’s possible.”

“There’s no reason to be nervous.” Anders crossed the last few feet to stand directly in front of him.

Reyn bit his lip, flash of white teeth against the full softness. He glanced away briefly, then back. “I just don’t want to disappoint you.”

It was odd to see him so vulnerable, and for the first time Anders realized just how much energy Reyn put into maintaining that confident, light-hearted mask. Given Carver’s complete lack of anything resembling a backbone, combined with what little Anders knew of Bethany and Leandra, he suspected that Reyn had always been forced to be the strong one. As an apostate, it had been even worse; his sarcastic humor had been the shield he created to keep everyone at arm’s length, lest they get too close and learn his secrets.

Both of those talents had served him well in Kirkwall, there was no doubt about it. But Anders also didn’t doubt it had came at a cost. The realization that Reyn trusted him enough to let down that guard, to be vulnerable, was humbling.

So maybe he could repay that trust with some of his own honesty. “Perhaps I have the same fears.”

Reyn looked back at him, startled. “Why? That is, you’ve done this before. A lot, from what I hear.”

Well, he couldn’t really argue with that part. “Yes…and no,” he said. “When I was in the Circle, love was only a game. It gave the templars too much power if there was something you couldn’t stand to lose.” And now it was his turn to look away, afraid of showing too much. “It would kill me to lose you.”

There. It’s out in the open.

Reyn stepped forward and put his hands on Anders’ shoulders. “You aren’t going to lose me,” he said firmly, as if he could make the universe bend to his will.

And Maker, he looked amazing in that moment, his eyes blazing with determination and strength. He would fight for this, just like he’d fought for everything, and the void take anyone who tried to get in his way. There was something in him that burned so bright it almost frightened Anders, and he suddenly understood exactly why Flemeth had chosen Reyn for her task, and why she’d spoken to him the way she had on Sundermount.

And he wants to be with me. It seemed mad, a fevered dream that couldn’t possibly last. But while it does…I can’t turn away. I can’t live without this.

Anders swallowed and lifted his hand, gently touching Reyn’s face, shaping the high cheekbones. “No mage I know has ever dared to fall in love,” he murmured. A pulse of magic, healing warmth circling around his fingers, soaking into Reyn’s skin so that he sighed softly in pleasure as Anders gently drew him closer. “This is the rule I will most cherish breaking.”

Their mouths met, gently at first, then with more passion. Like every mage Anders had ever kissed, Reyn tasted faintly of lyrium, but underlain with a flavor uniquely his own. Hunger flared to life, firing his blood, making his heart pound and his cock harden, so that he had to remind himself that tonight wasn’t about being quick, or discreet. Tonight, he didn’t have to worry about being caught
by the templars.

Tonight, he would break all the rules.

The kiss ended. Reyn caught his hand and took a step back, pulling Anders after him to the bed. He lay back on it with a smirk that made Anders want to kiss him again—or find an even better use for those lips—and pulled Anders down on top of him.

He went willingly, sliding one leg between Reyn’s thighs, so that he could feel the other man’s erection against his hip. Reyn’s arms went around him, pulling him close for another hungry kiss. He framed Reyn’s face with his hands as they kissed, savoring the feel of the other mage’s lips, exploring his mouth thoroughly with his tongue. He felt Reyn tug loose the tie holding back his hair, fingers twining through the locks.

His lips wandered along Reyn’s clean-shaven jaw, then down onto his throat. The other man let out a sigh of pleasure and arched to give him better access, pulse fluttering in the vein under Anders’ mouth. Anders shifted to the side slightly, running his hand down the front of Reyn’s shirt, slowly undoing the buttons. The shirt fell open, baring pale skin sparsely dotted with auburn hair.

He ran his hand appreciatively across the flat, hard muscles of Reyn’s chest. One thing about all the fighting they did: swinging a staff around certainly did wonders for the upper body. He teased one small nipple into hardness with his fingers, pleased when his lover let out a responsive moan.

A touch of mana, and cold spread from his fingertips, chilling the skin. Before Reyn could react, he laved the cold nipple with his warm tongue, and was rewarded with a gasp and involuntary jerk of the hips. A glance showed him that Reyn’s cock was hard enough to make out the ridged outline of the head beneath the soft cloth of his trousers.

Reyn reached up and caught the chain that held Anders’ coat closed. “Why don’t we get you out of some of these clothes?” he suggested breathlessly.

“Good idea.” Anders sat up and pulled off his jacket, and then the longer padded vest under that, and the long shirt under that. A shiny white scar showed on his bare chest, where a templar sword had shoved into his heart the day he and Justice had merged.

Don’t think about that now.

He bent to his boots and cursed. “Maker, why did I wear boots with so many buckles?”

Reyn laughed. “Here, let me help you,” he said, and hopped off the bed to kneel in front of Anders. His swift fingers started to work on the buckles of the left boot, but Anders paused on the right, watching him. Reyn had shed his shirt and shoes, wearing only the soft, tight pants. The firelight burnished his skin with gold, outlining every muscle, and edged the strands of hair falling forward over his face. Maker’s breath, but he looked incredible, like something out of a sculpture or a painting, too good to be real.

Reyn pulled off the boot, then glanced up. “So, is keeping one boot on some sort of weird fetish I should know about?”

Anders laughed and went back to undoing the last few buckles. “No.”

“Are you sure? Because I could put one of mine back on.”

“You’re terrible.”
“You know you love it.”

I do. Instead of agreeing aloud, Anders stood up, raising Reyn to his feet as well and pulling him close. The other man’s skin was deliciously warm against his, the feeling so good it made him ache even more fiercely. He slid his arms around Reyn’s waist, then dropped his hands lower, slipping them under the waistband of the trousers and cupping his hard buttocks. Reyn moaned and arched against him, hooking his fingers into Anders’ pants and tugging impatiently.

Slowly, Anders reminded himself against the excitement building in his blood, in his groin. But Maker, it had been so long since he’d touched a lover or been touched by anyone except himself.

“Are the walls in this house thick?” he whispered into Reyn’s ear, breath stirring the small hairs.

Reyn shivered, his skin pebbling in reaction beneath Anders’ hands. “Yes.”

“Good.” Anders nibbled lightly on the earlobe, gaining even more of a reaction. “I want to hear you scream my name.”

Reyn pulled back and grinned wickedly. “Make me.”

Anders laughed, and then they were stumbling back to the bed, kicking off their pants as they went. Their cocks rubbed against each other, pre-come slicking their skin, and Reyn moaned. They tumbled into the bed together, skin on skin, and it felt so incredible that Anders felt a bit cheated that he’d wasted so much time with his clothes on.

He pulled back a little, before he got so carried away that he couldn’t think straight. “We’ll do anything you want,” he promised, running his hand along Reyn’s side, hip, and thigh. “And nothing you don’t. If you don’t like something, then we’ll stop. There are plenty of things we can do together that will make both of us happy, so don’t hesitate to speak up if you’re not having fun.”

Reyn brushed back the raggedly-cut ends of Anders’ hair. “I want to do everything with you,” he whispered, voice thick with lust and affection.

Anders kissed him, then rolled the other mage over onto his back. He nibbled, licked, and kissed his way down, over Reyn’s throat, his chest, the flat, hard muscles of his abdomen. Magic pulsed around them, largely unfocused for the moment, just a whisper of mana and warmth.

Reyn gasped and jumped when Anders slid a hand between his thighs, cupping his balls before gliding up the swollen shaft. The glistening drop of pre-come at the slit drew Anders; he leaned in, breath and hair tickling the sensitive skin. “I want to taste you,” he murmured.

“Yes…please…”

He teased a little, running his tongue from the base to the head and back down, drawing a whimper out of Reyn, before circling the head and probing the slit lightly. Reyn tasted of lyrium and salt, so damned good, and with a happy moan Anders took him into his mouth.

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Reyn gasped again, his back arching slightly, struggling not to thrust his hips. He must have been close to the edge, and the lust to take him there shot through Anders like a lightning bolt. He’d always fancied himself rather good at this; more than one lover, male and female, had told him he had a talented mouth. So he took Reyn completely, sliding all the way to the base of his shaft, savoring the taste and hardness.

Reyn’s fingers tightened in Anders’ hair. “Anders—I—I can’t—“
Anders sucked harder in response, and was rewarded with a shuddering moan and a hot flood of salty come. He swallowed greedily, wanting every drop.

“Mmm.” He raised his head and gave Reyn his sexiest smirk. “Yum.”

Reyn’s glass-green eyes were glazed from his release, but he reached for Anders. Anders stretched beside him; Reyn pulled him close and kissed him unselfconsciously, obviously not minding his taste in Anders’ mouth. There was something sexy about that; Anders’ aching cock jerked in response.

“My turn,” Reyn said huskily. “Why don’t you lie back?”

“I’m all yours, sweetheart.”

Reyn straddled his legs and bent over him, long hair brushing his skin like silk. His hands glided over Anders’ skin, little electric shocks dancing around his fingers, just enough to make Anders gasp. His mouth was warm and eager against Anders’ throat, his skin, his nipples. “Use your teeth, please,” Anders whispered, and was rewarded with a bite that made him moan.

It was hard to remember that he didn’t have to stay quiet—that he probably shouldn’t, considering that they were learning how to pleasure one another. There was something luxurious, even decadent, about being completely naked in a bed with someone else; it made him feel wicked, as if he were getting away with something naughty.

The sight of Reyn finally wrapping those delicious lips around the head of his cock was almost enough to send him over the edge, but he managed to control himself, not wanting things to end yet. Maybe the rumors about Grey Warden stamina were true; Solona had always claimed as much, but Anders hadn’t had the opportunity to put it to the test until now.

“Is that good?” Reyn asked after a few minutes of what Anders could only describe as undiluted bliss.

“Better than good.”

Reyn sat back, erect again. He looked unspeakably delicious, his hair falling everywhere, his hard, male body, his swollen lips. “I want you,” he whispered, crawling up to press his body against Anders’. “I want you to take me.”

Oh, Maker. “Gladly. Are you sure?”

“More than sure. Do you know how many nights I’ve dreamed of having you fuck me?”

With a low growl of desire, Anders wrapped his arms around Reyn and rolled them over, so that he was on top. The herbal cream and oil were within easy reach on the nightstand; he grabbed both, lingering for an instant over the lyrium potion, even though there was no need for it at the moment. He had a sudden, very clear image of licking the glowing, singing liquid off of Reyn’s body that he didn’t think came from him.

Let’s not go there. Please, tonight of all nights. I don’t want this to end with Reyn cutting off our head because he’s decided we’re an abomination after all. Which was exactly the danger they ran if Reyn had any reason to doubt the fiction that Justice had no interest in anything beyond killing templars.

“Is everything all right?” Reyn asked, and Anders realized that he’d hesitated a moment too long.

“Fine,” he said glibly. “I was only thinking that I recognized the label on these from the time we
interviewed Jethann at the Blooming Rose.”

“Skinny elves aren’t really my thing,” Reyn said with a roll of his eyes. “They were a Feast Day gift from Isabela, who seems to view virginity as a deadly disease.”

“She’s right. Good thing for you, I’m a qualified healer. I have your cure right here.”

“Do you, now?”

“Mmm hmm.” He bent over Reyn, kissing him, then moving down to pay attention to his sensitive nipples. At the same time, he slid his hand between the other man’s thighs, grazing his balls lightly before finding his entrance and slipping one well-lubed finger inside.

Reyn gasped, and his cock went even harder. “How is that?” Anders murmured against his skin.

“G-good. Do it some more, please.”

He did, going slowly, then adding another finger. It wasn’t something he would ever admit to Reyn, but in the Circle, he’d had a bit of a reputation as a good first lay. Thanks to his talent as a healer, it had been easy to make sure that no one, male or female, experienced any sort of discomfort. He wondered cynically if the senior enchanters had encouraged the rumors, knowing that he would pass along the “rules” at the same time. Not to mention walk away from any emotional entanglements, no matter what the other person felt.

To the void with that.

He grabbed the oil and spread it over Reyn’s cock, to make things even more pleasurable as their bodies slid together. Reyn arched and moaned beneath him. “Anders, please…”

Anders positioned himself between Reyn’s thighs. “Anything. Anything for you.”

He eased in carefully, slowly, even though his entire body was screaming for release by now. Reyn was so tight, so warm, that it was hard to keep control; he stopped as soon as the head of his cock was in, biting his lip and drawing on all the willpower that a mage could summon. “Is this good for you?” he asked, ready to pull out if Reyn decided that maybe the reality wasn’t quite the same as his fantasy.

Reyn looked utterly edible, his sweat-sticky hair spread across the pillow, a bright flush on his cheeks, his eyes wild and gleaming with desire. “More would be better,” he growled, and wrapped his legs around Anders’ waist.

Yes.

Anders groaned and sheathed himself in Reyn’s heat. Reyn gasped and arched his back, his legs locked tight around Anders’ waist now, pulling him close. Anders bent over him, the ends of his hair falling across Reyn’s face. Reyn’s fingers dug into his shoulders, and his oil-slick cock throbbed, caught between them as Anders began to thrust rhythmically into him.

“Yes,” Reyn whispered frantically. He caught Anders face between his hands and stared straight into his eyes. “Yes, please, I’ve waited for this so long, you don’t know how long, please, my love, please…”

Anders gazed back, those piercing eyes making him feel more vulnerable, more exposed, than he’d ever imagined. And Maker, it all felt so damned good, from Reyn’s body tight and hot around his cock, to the way his lover whispered to him, to the look in those gorgeous eyes that he loved so
much, more than he could ever hope to express.

“Please what?” he asked, at the very edge of anything resembling control, knowing that he was lost, so lost, body and soul.

“T-take me. Take everything, anything; I need you, please, I need you—“

It was too much. Anders closed his eyes reflexively, and for a fraction of an instant smelled the Fade and felt something hot flash across his veins. His hips jerked, hard, whether from instinct or Justice’s control, he didn’t know and at the moment didn’t care, because nothing mattered except this feeling, this man, this exquisite pleasure.

Reyn stiffened beneath him, calling out Anders’ name as his hot seed spilled between them.

“Maker, yes!” Anders shouted, his own climax taking him, harder than he ever remembered coming before, and if there was the edge of a deeper growl in his voice, it could be ignored. For a moment, he and Reyn were frozen together, bodies locked in a circle of frantic ecstasy.

After a while, Reyn sighed and stirred beneath him. With a happy sigh of his own, Anders flopped down onto the bed beside his lover. Reyn’s arms went around him, and they curled into one another, both grinning foolishly. Cuddling—another new experience for me tonight.

Which made him wonder exactly what he was supposed to do next. There had never been a question before—get done and go your separate ways, so the templars don’t suspect. Now…Does he want me to stay the night? For a few hours? Or does he want me to grab my things and leave as soon as I can make my legs function again? I don’t want to presume too much…but Maker, I don’t want to leave.

“That desire demon was a damned liar,” Reyn mumbled.

Anders blinked, trying to remember what he was referring to. “How so?”

“Because this was far better than I’d imagined.”

It was impossible not to feel flattered. “I’m glad you think so.”

Reyn reached up and touched Anders’ face, running his hand along the stubble, sweeping aside the loose hairs that had gotten caught in the bristles. He looked so content, so happy, so handsome, that it made Anders’ heart ache.

No rules tonight, remember?

He propped himself up on his elbow, so that he could look into Reyn’s eyes as he spoke. “I love you,” he said. “I’ve been holding back from saying that. You should have a normal life, not be tied down to a fugitive with no future.” He swallowed against the sudden dryness in his throat. “But I don’t ever want to leave you.”

He half expected Reyn to flinch, or say something sarcastic. Or possibly throw him out the door, now that it was over. Instead, he took Anders’ hand, fingers intertwining. “Don’t ever leave.”

“Do you mean that?” Anders asked, surprised. Whatever he had expected out of tonight—and he’d tried to keep himself from expecting anything at all—that wasn’t it. Or had he misunderstood? “Would you have me here, living with you? Would you tell the world, the knight commander, that you love an apostate and will stand beside him?”
Reyn rolled his eyes. “I can see how you might miss it, what with all the spell casting I do, but I’m an apostate, too.”

“Not as far as Kirkwall is concerned. Your family connections, your money, have saved you from too much scrutiny. I’m a fugitive from both the Circle and the Wardens.” And I’m a monster.

“Shh.” Reyn kissed him softly. “I know all of these things, Anders. Yes, I want you to live here with me. Yes, I would tell the world and everyone in it that I love you, that I’m with you, whatever may come. Although I hope you’ll forgive me if I don’t send the knight commander a personal announcement. How would that even read?” He pretended to consider. “Dear Meredith, I hope you’re dying of some horrible disease. By the way, I’m sleeping with the sexiest apostate in Kirkwall. No love, Reyn Amell-Hawke.”

Anders snorted. “You’re impossible.”

“Better get used to it. You’re stuck with me now, you know.”

Anders could only shake his head in wonderment. “For three years, I have lain awake every night, aching for you,” he murmured, as if speaking too loudly would shatter the fragile bubble of peace surrounding them. “I’m still terrified I’ll wake up.”

“This is no dream.” Reyn leaned his forehead against Anders’. “We have three years to make up for. Let’s not waste another moment.”

Chapter End Notes

I downloaded a mod for Hawke’s casual clothes that looked something as described here. The Hugh Hefner ensemble that came with the game weirded me out, to be honest. Plus it clashed with Reyn’s hair. ;)
Anders awoke to the gray light of dawn streaming through the high windows. Outside, rain still tapped softly on the glass, and there came a distant rumble of thunder, as if the storm had set in to stay for a while. Even so, he could make out the pale skin of the man beside him, his copper hair muted in the dimness.

Reyn had rolled away from him some time in the wee hours, after they had made love again. One arm sagged over the side of the bed, and he’d dragged most of the blankets with him. Anders watched him for a little while, wondering what he should do now.

The declarations of love seemed like a wild dream still, the sort of thing that only happened to other people. Last night, Reyn had asked him to move in…but would he regret it now, when the glow of his first sexual experience had some time to fade?

No one in his right mind could love an abomination. I’m bound to foul this up, just as I have everything else. He’ll never stay with us.

Perhaps it would be better to get dressed now and quietly slip away. He could leave a note saying he’d gone to the clinic. That way, if Reyn still wanted a relationship, he could come and find him. Otherwise, they could politely pretend that the offer had never been made.

Anders slid out of bed and dressed with as much stealth as he could, although he needn’t have bothered. Reyn was a notoriously heavy sleeper; on one memorable occasion, he’d snored his way through the first part of a bandit attack on their camp, until Aveline had literally yanked him out of his bed roll and thrown him at the bandit leader.

Anders paused for an instant before slipping out the door. Reyn looked so peaceful, so handsome; it made him ache, body and soul. He wanted to go back to bed, wake Reyn up with kisses, and curl up under the blankets for the rest of the day while the storm raged outside.

Instead, he fetched his staff from its place in the corner and left. Barkolomew had been sleeping just outside the door; seeing it open, he happily padded inside, stubby tail wagging.

Anders crossed the landing, went down the stair—and froze. Leandra Hawke stood in one of the side doorways, a cup of tea seemingly forgotten halfway to her mouth.

Oh, Maker, what do I say? During one of his escape attempts, he’d stayed in a barn in some wretched little village in the middle of nowhere, courtesy of a very cute farm boy. Or he would have stayed, except that they’d been caught, and the boy’s father had chased Anders off with a pitch fork.

He had the sudden, horrible vision of himself running for his life through Hightown, Leandra and the mabari in hot pursuit.

“Oh! Anders! I didn’t know you were here, dear,” Leandra said graciously, despite her obvious
“I’ll let Orana know to make extra for breakfast. Do you like waffles?”

Even though he told himself that there was no need for it, that Reyn was a grown man and not subject to anyone’s approval, he felt himself turning bright red. He must look awful, in dirty clothes with two days’ growth of stubble, his hair uncombed, and no reasonable excuse as to why he should be coming from the direction of her son’s bedroom. She probably thought he looked like a maniac or a madman; he supposed he ought to be glad she didn’t think he’d just murdered Reyn in his sleep.

“N-No,” he said. “That is, I don’t want to make extra work for anyone. I’ll just…let myself out.”

“Don’t be ridiculous.” Putting down her tea on a side table, she caught him by the elbow and all but dragged him after her. “It’s obvious you haven’t been taking care of yourself like you should—you’re far too thin. I hope you don’t mind, but we usually eat in the kitchen with Bodahn, Orana, and the boy. Reyn says it’s silly for he and I to sit alone at opposite ends of the formal dining table. I suppose he’s right, but I do miss the sit-down meals my family used to have when I was a girl.”

Anders nodded and made noncommittal noises, his mind frantically turning in circles. Maybe Leandra didn’t know why he’d been sneaking out of the house like a thief making his getaway. Maybe she assumed he’d innocently come to visit Reyn and fallen asleep at the writing desk, like he had the night of the party.

Before he was entirely certain how it had happened, he found himself seated at a rough, wooden table inside the spacious kitchen downstairs, with Leandra on one side and Sandal on the other. “Good to see you, Master Anders,” Bodahn said, bustling about to lay out an extra plate and silverware. “Would you care for some tea? Orana is making her special waffles this morning, so I dare say you picked a good time to visit.”

“Have her make an extra batch,” Leandra instructed.

“No, really, I can’t,” Anders protested.

Orana entered the room, holding a bag of flour from the pantry, and caught the last of their conversation. “It’s no trouble, Messere,” she said earnestly. “I’m not as good a cook as Papa, but I can make waffles, or pancakes if you’d like those, or biscuits.”

“Waffles are fine,” he said, giving up for the moment. Bodahn put a cup of tea in front of him; he took a sip, and found Sandal staring at him transfixed.

“Er, hello,” he said, feeling out of his depth.

“Enchantment!”

From somewhere upstairs, there came a muffled shout of “Barkolomew!” followed by a frenzy of barking. Leandra let out a long-suffering sigh and shook her head.

Anders sat frozen and hideously uncomfortable. When Reyn came down and found him having breakfast with the family, would he think that Anders had overstepped his bounds? What were the bounds? Even if Reyn had been serious the night before, what was Anders supposed to do, how was he supposed to act?

Having a nervous breakdown at the breakfast table probably isn’t appropriate under any circumstances. Which is a shame, because I think I’m going to have one anyway.

The sound of Reyn running full-tilt down the stairs echoed throughout the house, accompanied by the still-barking mabari. “Honestly,” Leandra muttered, “you’d think I’d raised that boy in a barn, the
A moment later, Reyn burst through the door. His eyes did a quick scan of the room; when he found Anders, he slumped abruptly against the door frame. He was dressed for the rainy weather outside, his hair in a hasty, sloppy braid completely unlike his normal neat grooming.

He thought I’d left, Anders realized, torn between guilt and amazement. He woke up alone, thought I’d snuck off, and was going to find me. The fact that he had been sneaking out made it even worse, and to his horror he felt himself blushing crimson again.

“Good morning!” Reyn said brightly, as if he went tearing frantically around the house every day. Leandra was giving him a suspicious look, which he blithely ignored. “Do I smell waffles? Orana, you’re amazing.”

“Let me fetch another chair for you, Messere,” Bodahn said diplomatically.

“Thank you, Bodahn.” Reyn clasped his hands together and gave Anders an expectant look. “Well? Did you tell Mother the good news?”

Since Good morning, Leandra, I just spent a wild night of passion with your son, wasn’t much of a conversation-opener, Anders could only shake his head mutely.

“News?” Leandra asked with interest.

Reyn spread his arms out expansively. “Anders is moving in with us!”

“Oh!” Leandra leapt to her feet, and Anders shrank back, bracing himself for a blow.

Instead, she flung both arms around his shoulders, hugging him hard. “Oh, Anders! Welcome to the family!”

“I, uh, thank you?” He cast a desperate look in Reyn’s direction, hoping for some sort of guidance. Reyn, however, was too busy stuffing waffles in his mouth.

Leandra sat back in her chair, beaming. “We should have a family get-together tonight. I’ll invite Gamlen. And…maybe Carver?” she added hopefully, glancing at Reyn.

Reyn almost choked on his waffle. “Fabulous plan, Mother. Maybe he can bring some of his templar friends, and Anders and I can finish off the evening by fleeing for our lives.”

Leandra sighed. “Your brother—“

“No.” Reyn set his fork aside. “You know how I feel about this. Carver had a choice between this family and the templars, and he chose the templars.”

“He’s still your little brother.” But she didn’t say it as if she thought she’d change his mind. “Oh, all right. Just Gamlen, then.”

Reyn rolled his eyes. “Ah, yes, Gamlen. The man whose first words to me were: ‘Leandra never said she had two daughters.’”

Leandra winced. “Oh dear. Gamlen can be a bit…rough around the edges…but he means well. Bodahn can run a message down to him while we’re out shopping.”

Reyn had picked his fork up; now he stopped with his fork halfway to his mouth. “While we’re doing what?”
“You agreed to take me to the haberdasher, remember? And perhaps a few other merchants while we’re out.”

“This is blackmail. You’re guilting me into this because I won’t let Carver set foot in this house.”

“I thought Anders might like to join us.”

“Um, what?” Anders asked, wondering what he’d gotten himself into.

Reyn put one hand over his eyes. “Mother, please, could we not send Anders screaming in the opposite direction just yet?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Leandra turned to Anders with a smile that reminded him rather strongly of Solona. “Anders would be happy to go shopping with us, wouldn’t you, dear?”

Solona could have charmed the bark off a tree; apparently, it was an Amell family trait. “Er,” Anders said helplessly, “I thought…that is, my clinic…”

“Isn’t nearly as busy as it used to be, or so Reyn tells me. So you’ll come with us?”

Reyn sighed. “I’m sorry, Anders. You might as well know now: everyone in this family is completely insane.”

“I’d noticed that, actually,” he said, then wondered if he should have made such a comment in front of Leandra.

Leandra tisked. “No wonder you and Reyn get along so well,” she said. “If Malcolm were still alive, I’d be completely outnumbered.”

“Mother—“

“And what have you done to your hair? Darling, if you’re going to rampage around the estate first thing in the morning, you could at least use a comb first.”

Reyn made some rejoinder, and they settled into what sounded like an old—and jovial—quarrel. Staring at them, Anders felt as though he were completely and utterly out of his element.

A tugging on his sleeve caught his attention. Startled, he turned to Sandal, who stared up at him hopefully.

“May I have some salamanders, please?” the dwarf asked.

Anders hesitated, but no one else seemed to have noticed the bizarre request. “Um, yes?”

A grin crossed Sandal’s broad face. “Boom!”
Leandra drags Anders and Hawke along when she goes shopping. Anders is horrified, and Hawke argues with people for no good reason.

Going around to the shops in Hightown in the company of the Amell-Hawkes was a bit like shopping in Amaranthine with the Warden Commander. If Solona had an interest in hats and fancy clothes, instead of weapons and armor, that is.

Leandra was in her element, so much so that Anders wondered how she’d ever gotten by as a peasant’s wife. After selecting a new hat, she turned her energy to browbeating Reyn into going to a tailor’s as well, where she surprised her son with the news that he was to purchase a new outfit for himself. Apparently, there was some sort of soiree at the Viscount’s estate at the end of the week that she was determined Reyn attend, and which required finery that, as she put it “hasn’t been bled on.” They argued for several minutes, during which Anders tried to pretend he was invisible. In the end, Reyn flung up his arms in surrender…at which point, Leandra turned her attention to Anders.

“Perhaps you would like something new, dear?” she asked hopefully, eyeing his rather disreputable outfit.

*Is this woman insane?* Justice wanted to know.

*I…I’m not sure.*

“I have work,” Anders stammered. “At the clinic. And…you know…other things. I wouldn’t want to dirty up something nice.”

“Of course,” she said with a smile. “Perfectly understandable. But the rest of the time…well, you’re going to be living in Hightown now, and I wouldn’t want the guard getting the wrong idea if you came home late at night, dressed like…er…”

*Dear Maker.* Anders eyed the shop helplessly; he wouldn’t even be able to afford the button on a shirt, let alone an entire outfit here. “That’s very kind of you, but I don’t know…that is…”

Reyn grabbed his arm and hauled him farther into the shop, toward the waiting tailors. “Oh, no. If I have to suffer through this, so do you.”

“But—“

“If Mother is so determined, she can bloody well pay for it,” Reyn said, correctly guessing one source of his concern.

“But—“
“Trust me, Anders: if you give in on this, you can hold your ground about something more important later. Well, that’s my theory, anyway. It’s never really worked for me.”

Anders started to object again—although he wasn’t entirely certain what he was objecting too—but the tailors closed in on them, and it was too late.

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“I hope you don’t think I’m too pushy,” Leandra said.

Anders stood nervously near the door to the shop. He’d been mostly silent, just nodding his head when spoken to, and as a result been released from all the cloth swatches and measurements fairly quickly. Reyn, on the other hand, had spent the entire time arguing with the Orlesian tailor, a conversation which had degenerated into a shouting match over watered silk versus brocade.

“Er,” Anders said brilliantly. Andraste’s blood. I have no idea what to say to this woman. The entire morning had been something so far out of his past experiences that he felt utterly lost and adrift.

Leandra stepped up beside him, staring out the shop window at the market square. It was raining again; the guardsmen huddled miserably under the awnings, and only a few brave souls in oilskin cloaks browsed the kiosks. The watery gray light seemed to highlight the lines in her face, and made her silver hair almost glow.

She folded her arms across her chest and looked up at him; her sharp eyes were the same shade as Reyn’s and Solona’s, and made him feel equally vulnerable, as if she looked right past his skin and into his heart. “It’s just that… I can’t help but think about your poor mother.”

*What? “I’m sorry?” he asked, surprised.*

Leandra sighed, her mouth settling into lines of grief. “That woman lived my nightmare. I married an apostate, even though everyone told me it was a terrible idea, to bring more magic into a family already known to produce mages. I gave birth to two mage children. And every day—every single day—I lived in fear that they would be discovered. Every time they left the house, I wondered if I would ever see them again. Every time a stranger approached, I wondered if we’d have to flee—and if this would be the time we didn’t run fast enough.”

At that moment, Anders suddenly felt that he truly saw her—or perhaps it was Justice who truly saw her, or both. “I can’t imagine how frightened you must have been. How much courage it took to just live your life. But that’s exactly what I want to change. I want to make it so that no mother has to ever fear as you have.”

“I know. Malcolm… Malcolm would have absolutely adored you. He was such an idealist.” She smiled sadly. “The templars killed him, you know.”

Anger flared through him—his and Justice’s, both. “No. I didn’t. I’m sorry.” *No wonder she was so crushed when Carver joined the order.*

“We aren’t certain exactly what happened,” she said. “We—that is, Reyn and I—believe that templars from elsewhere were following the rumor of a blood mage passing through Lothering. The local members of the order were obsessed with the Kocari Wilds; they never bothered looking within the village itself.”

“They were hunting the Witch of the Wilds?”

“Indeed.” Leandra laughed, but it was a sad sound. “We owe more to Flemeth than she may know.
They were so intent on finding her and her daughters that they missed the apostates living right under their own noses. So we think it must have been templars from somewhere else. Malcolm…Malcolm sacrificed himself. He led them away from the village so that they wouldn’t find Reyn or Bethany.”

Emotion choked Anders’ throat. “Maker’s breath. I’m so sorry.”

“It’s only speculation.” She waved her hand, dismissing it. “And I’ve gotten off track yet again. I only meant to say that it breaks my heart to think of how your mother must have suffered, when you were taken to the Circle. And to imagine how frightening it must have been for you, taken away when you were so young. I can picture it happening to my own children, to myself, far too easily. So if I dote on you a bit…forgive an old woman’s silliness, won’t you?”

It humbled him. “You’ve been kinder to me than I deserve.”

She reached out and laid a hand on his arm. “I suppose that you don’t really remember much about belonging to a family, after spending so much time in the Circle. Maker knows ours isn’t the easiest one to be a part of. But we mean well, and I hope you’ll be patient with us.”

It was nothing he had looked for; nothing he had expected. He wasn’t certain if Leandra knew about Justice, or if her welcome would have been as generous if she did. But he couldn’t help but feel as if something clicked into place, deep inside; some hole filled by a piece he didn’t even know existed. Not certain if he could say anything to convey his gratitude, he gave her a tentative hug. Leandra returned the embrace with all the strength in her old arms. After, they stood in companionable silence in front of the window, until Reyn finally got tired of arguing and came out to join them.

Chapter End Notes

AFAIK, there’s no cannon on how Malcolm died. So I tried to make up something sad and relevant to the overall story. No doubt the next DLC will probably contradict everything I’ve just written here.

Next chapter: more angst, less fluff, I promise! :)
Anders has nightmares from his time in the Circle.

Nightmares

Anders huddled on the cold floor of his cell, shivering. The pile of straw under him didn’t give much in the way of either heat or comfort, but it was all that he had.

The light from the tiny window high above had faded, and he tried to remember if he’d marked off the day on the wall or not. Going by the marks already there, he’d been in this cell for weeks. Weeks without seeing another soul, except for the templars who brought him food twice a day, none of whom ever spoke to him. Weeks of silence, of loneliness, of nothing for company but his own thoughts and the occasional appearance of Mr. Wiggums.

He couldn’t remember if he’d made the mark or not, and panic flared in his gut. If he lost track of the days, then what else might he have lost track of? What if there were other things he’d forgotten? What if he could no longer trust his own memories?

What if he was slowly going mad?

There came the sound of the heavy door opening, and he raised his head hopefully from where it had lain against the stone floor. He’d been fed for the second time that day—he was sure of that, at least—so there was no reason for the templars to come, unless they meant to free him. The Knight Commander had no doubt given in to the First Enchanter’s arguments. Anders would be allowed to leave, to go back to the enchanters’ quarters, take a bath, change his clothes, and sleep in a real bed.

The clank of armor drew nearer as the templar walked along the line of cells, all of them empty except for the one that held Anders. He carried a lantern; the illumination was painfully bright after the darkness, and Anders had to squint as he climbed to his feet.

“So,” he said, trying to keep his tone light instead of pathetically, desperately grateful, “I guess you’re letting me out?”

The templar cast Holy Smite, so fast and suddenly that Anders didn’t even know what had happened until he found himself gasping on the floor. The cell door was open, he realized, and the templar inside, crouching down by him.

“You didn’t have to—” he tried to say, but the templar struck him with a fist this time, the hard metal gauntlet splitting open his lip. Panicked now, he tried to react, tried to cast a spell to defend himself, but the templar’s abilities had drained his mana to nothing.

Metal-gloved hands closed around his shoulders, shoving him face-down into the straw. For an instant, he thought the templar meant to kill him, until he felt his robe being unceremoniously jerked
up to his waist.

“No,” he tried to say through the filthy straw pressed against his nose, his mouth. “No, don’t, please!”

The templar ignored his pleas, and with his ability to cast a spell gone, there was nothing he could do to stop it.

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“No!”

Anders’ shout jerked Reyn awake. He rolled into a sitting position, automatically calling up a wispy ball of light as he did so. He’d known since they’d met that part of being a Grey Warden was to be tormented by nightmares, so he wasn’t entirely surprised to be brought out of sleep by Anders’ thrashing about.

On the other hand, the fact that the room was already dimly lit, and that the glow came from the blue spirit-energy glazing Anders’ eyes and welling up through his skin, was a surprise.

Then Justice vanished, seeping back inside, and leaving behind a shaking, gasping Anders, with no sign of what had roused the spirit.

“Love?” Reyn asked worriedly, reaching out and touching Anders’ shoulder.

Anders flinched away with a little cry of panic. There were drying tracks of moisture on his face, as if he’d wept in his sleep, and his brown eyes were wild with fear. Startled by the reaction, Reyn snatched back his hand. “Anders? It’s me, Reyn. What’s wrong?”

Anders blinked, focusing on Reyn’s spell light. After a moment, he seemed to realize he where he was, at least, although the blankness didn’t quite leave his gaze. He drew his knees up and wrapped his arms around them, huddling in on himself. “N-Nothing. I’m fine.”

“You don’t look fine. Was it a Grey Warden nightmare?”

“No.” Anders wiped roughly at his face with the heel of one hand, as if trying to punish his own flesh for betraying him. “From before. It’s…it’s nothing.”

Reyn watched him uncertainly, not knowing what to do, how far he should pry. But that flinch worried him. It had been a blind reaction to the simple act of being touched, something that Anders had seemed to relish up until now.

“Was it a nightmare from your time in the Circle?” Reyn guessed hesitantly.

Anders shivered, confirming the guess. Creators, he looked awful, his skin pebbling even though it was a warm night, every muscle trembling as if from some deep cold that came from inside. “It’s nothing you want to hear,” he said hoarsely.

Reyn shifted to sit on the edge of the bed by him. When Anders didn’t move away, he lifted the blanket and draped it around the other mage’s shoulders for warmth, careful not to touch him directly, or to wrap the blanket in such a way as to make him feel constricted. “You don’t have to tell me,” Reyn said. “But you can. Tell me anything, I mean. I love you.”

“Perhaps you shouldn’t,” Anders said, voice barely a whisper. “I wasn’t…entirely truthful with you earlier, when I said that I was fortunate to have escaped some of the things that…happened…to
Circle mages. I’m—I’m sorry.”

Reyn felt a mixture of grief and anger tighten around his throat. He tried to take a deep breath, tried to think what to say, terrified of inadvertently making things worse. “Please don’t apologize. I probably would have said the same thing, at least in front of a group. But if you want to talk about it…I’m here. And if you don’t want to talk about it, then I’m still here.”

Anders bowed his head, staring at nothing. His unbound hair fell around his face, hiding his eyes. Once or twice, he drew breath as if to say something, but the words died. Reyn sat quietly, trying to project an air of patience and solidity and not knowing if he succeeded or not.

When Anders finally spoke, Reyn had to strain to hear him. Emotion roughened his voice: anger and pain and bewilderment, because it was hard for a man who’d dedicated his life to easing the hurts of others to really grasp why anyone would be so cruel. And shame, that above all else, which wrung Reyn’s heart worse than all the rest of it put together.

Once Anders started talking, it was as if he couldn’t stop, the words flowing out like pus from an old, old wound that had never even been tended, let alone had the chance to heal. Reyn forced himself to listen calmly, even though within he burned with blind rage. This must be how Justice feels, everything trapped inside, with no way to express it.

But screaming and breaking things certainly wouldn’t help Anders at the moment, so he held it all deep down. But if I find out that Cullen was one of them…this will be his last night on earth, because in the morning I’m going straight to the Gallows and ripping out his spine with my bare hands.

“It wasn’t your fault,” Reyn said, when at last it seemed that Anders had run out of words.

“I know that,” Anders said; he’d put one hand over his eyes, maybe hiding tears. “Or I think I do. But in the dark, alone, I started to see things, hear things, and I don’t know for sure. I thought I was going mad, and I was almost relieved when they came back, because at least I knew that was real, and…”

His voice hitched on a sob. Reyn tentatively put a hand to his shoulder, not sure if Anders could bear to be touched by anyone at the moment. But the other mage turned to him, curling into his embrace. Reyn put his arms around him protectively, rocking him like a child.

“I’m sorry,” Anders whispered, his head tucked against Reyn’s chest. “I’m sorry I’m so damaged, I’m sorry…”

“Shhh.” Reyn stroked his hair. “I love you. You’ve come through so much, things that would have destroyed most people. You’re a survivor, and no one can ever take that away. I admire that about you, more than I can say.”

“You do?” Anders sounded genuinely surprised, but his voice was perhaps a bit stronger.

“Of course.” Reyn leaned his face against hair damp from sweat. “My optimistic rebel. My brave love.”

Anders laughed shakily and sat back. He still looked a mess, his eyes red and his nose swollen, his hair falling into his face, but at least he managed a smile. “I bought a mirror after the last time, but you still keep seeing things in me that I’m not sure are there.”

Reyn grinned at the reminder of their first meeting. “I haven’t changed my mind about the sexy, tortured look.”
“Heh. Well, I can’t really complain, now can I?” His smile shifted into something sadder and more genuine. “Thank you. I didn’t mean to burden you with…with any of this.”

“It isn’t a burden. When I asked you to move in, it was because I wanted to share your life, not just your bed. That means the bad things along with the good.” He tugged the blanket more tightly around Anders’ shoulders. “You’re still cold. Would you like me to make you a cup of tea?”

Anders shook his head. “No. Just…hold me, if you don’t mind.”

Reyn let the spell light go out and slid back under the blanket. Anders rested his head on Reyn’s shoulder, and gradually his skin warmed and his feet became less like blocks of ice resting against Reyn’s legs. Eventually, he fell asleep, but Reyn lay awake for a long time, staring at the shadowed ceiling.

He had always wondered about Justice’s uncharacteristic loss of control when confronted with Ella beneath the Gallows. Ripping the heads off templars was one thing—that was just what Justice did, and Reyn wasn’t such a hypocrite as to pretend he didn’t approve. So why had the spirit viewed Ella with that same blind rage?

Was it because when Anders looked at her, he saw himself? If his feelings of shame and self-loathing had come to the forefront, if he’d projected his own guilty sense of having somehow deserved what had happened to him onto her, no matter how illogical that guilt was…would Justice have understood? Would he have been able to make that fine distinction, to realize that Anders’ reaction had nothing to do with Ella, and everything to do with Anders himself?

Probably not. Especially when a great deal of Justice’s understanding of the world must be filtered through Anders. It even made sense, because despite Anders’ fears, nothing else had happened since to make Reyn believe that Justice would kill someone just because they happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

He felt a stab of pity for them both. What a mess. Turning his head to the side, he pressed his face against Anders’ hair, breathing deep of his scent: herbs, lyrium, and musk, underlain with a very, very faint earthy tang that Reyn could never place. He always wondered if it came from the Warden taint, but wasn’t entirely sure how to ask without sounding insulting.

He wanted desperately to protect Anders, but it was far too late for that, had been too late long before they’d ever met. Too late to protect Justice as well, assuming he’d ever needed protecting.

A spirit, dragged against his will from the Fade, cast first into a corpse, and then into Anders? He needed protecting, all right. And it sounded as if Solona had tried, from what Anders said about her. But then she left, and they let that damned templar into the Wardens. Anders must have been terrified, desperate to do something, anything, to protect himself.

And Justice…didn’t know. He’d thought he was getting a stable partner in his fight against the injustices of the world, not a damaged man frantically latching onto what must have seemed his only hope of safety.

Creators, have mercy. Sylaise, bring them healing. He felt as if his heart broke for them all over again.

I love you, he thought desperately. I love you both so much. I wish I could make everything all right. I wish I could cast a spell and take away the pain, the anger, the disappointment, everything.

But such a spell didn’t exist, even if he had been any good at healing magics…and really, the only
thing he’d ever excelled at had been destruction.

*So if I can’t heal you, then at least I can fight for you.*

It didn’t feel like nearly enough. But it was the only thing he had to give.

Chapter End Notes

Since there's nothing explicit here, I don't think it rates a warning for rape/non-con...but if I'm wrong, somebody let me know, and I'll change the story rating.

Otherwise...not much to say about this chapter that isn't already said in the text, other than the next chapter is considerably lighter in tone.
One Week

Chapter Summary

As the rain comes down on Kirkwall, Reyn Hawke and Anders spend one near-perfect week together.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The rain stayed for an entire week. Each day was one of gray skies and steady showers, interrupted by the occasional flash of lightning or growl of thunder. Puddles gathered in the streets of Hightown, Lowtown had been reduced to a swamp, and large parts of Darktown were uninhabitable due to flooding.

In many ways, it was the best week of Reyn’s life.

Anders didn’t directly say anything more about what had happened to him in the Circle, and Reyn didn’t push, knowing that Anders had to be the one to set the pace. But he awoke Reyn the next morning with a series of sweet kisses, followed by a long round of tender lovemaking. When it was over, he put his head on Reyn’s shoulder and whispered, “Thank you. For everything.”

“I love you,” Reyn whispered back, even though there was no need to be quiet; the hush had given the moment an odd poignancy that he didn’t want to disturb.

Then word came that Darktown was flooding, so they all but ran to the clinic, along with Bodahn and Sandal, to salvage whatever could be saved before the water rose too high. In the three years since coming to Kirkwall, Anders hadn’t accumulated many personal possessions, so it was mostly healing supplies that needed to be dragged back up the estate to keep them safe. Everything else fit easily into the bedroom—their bedroom, Reyn kept thinking, and grinned like a fool every time, until Anders asked him what he was smirking about.

With the clinic closed and the rain keeping away the inevitable cavalcade of people needing Reyn’s help, they had the week more or less to themselves. Leandra conveniently—or purposefully, maybe—spent most of the time gone visiting friends or Gamlen, giving them plenty of privacy. That still left the dwarves and Orana, of course, but none of them were likely to come knocking on the bedroom door.

“I can’t get enough of you,” Anders said hoarsely, as they lay in bed one gray afternoon.

“Well, that certainly works out well for me,” Reyn murmured, lips brushing the warm skin of Anders’ throat. He sprawled on top of his lover, leisurely rediscovering every plane of muscle, every freckle, every sensitive spot that made Anders gasp or moan.

“You don’t understand.” Anders caught him by the hair, gently tugging his head up so they could look in each other’s eyes. His expression was one of depthless hunger, tinged with an odd sort of desperation. “Our first night together, a part of me understood why Flemeth chose you. You burn so brightly, but I can’t look away.”
“Then don’t,” Reyn whispered, pinning Anders with his gaze even as he slid his hand down to the other man’s cock. There was something almost too intimate in the act, but neither of them looked away, even when Anders arched against him and whispered his name frantically, his come slicking their bodies.

After, they lay wrapped in each other’s arms, listening to the rain drum on the roof above them. “There’s nothing special about me, you know,” Reyn said sleepily. “Unless you count my excellent sense of humor, that is. I’m just a dumb peasant from Ferelden who got lucky.”

“You’re wrong.” Anders had been lying on his back; now he rolled onto his side and brushed Reyn’s hair away from his face. “There’s something about you, a determination, maybe, that I’ve only seen once before.”

“See? Now that’s the way to make a man feel special—tell him you’ve met someone just like him.”

Anders rolled his eyes. “I’m talking about Solona. It wasn’t an accident that she was the one who ended up on top of Fort Drakon, blasting the archdemon into little bitty pieces.”

Reyn heard the admiration in Anders voice and felt an unexpected twinge. He’d told himself that he wouldn’t ask any questions about Anders’ romantic past, but… “You slept with her, didn’t you?”

“Andraste’s flaming knickers, no!”

Reyn arched a skeptical brow. “Oh, come now. You were at the Ferelden Circle together, weren’t you?”

“It wasn’t a nonstop orgy, you know,” Anders muttered, but had the grace to look abashed. “She was a few years younger than me, and I seem to remember she had a thing for a particular apprentice. He left her for a Chantry Initiate.”

“Ouch.”

“You’re telling me. And when we met up in Amaranthine, she was in a relationship with that other Warden who helped stop the Blight.” Anders shrugged. “If you’re asking if the old Anders would have slept with her given the chance, then yes. If you’re asking if I regret I didn’t have the opportunity, then no. If you’re asking if I was in love with her, then definitely no.”

“I’m not sure what I’m asking,” Reyn admitted. “I’m curious, I suppose—she is my cousin. And… maybe wondering if I shouldn’t be a little jealous.”

“No,” Anders said firmly. His long fingers twined around Reyn’s, gently tugging his hand until it rested against the scar over his heart. Reyn could feel his heartbeat acutely beneath the knotted tissue, so different from the smooth skin of the rest of his chest. “Don’t be, please. I love you. I’ve never loved anyone but you.”

Reyn took Anders’ free hand and held it to his own chest. “And I love you,” he said.

Neither of them spoke again after that, only lay peacefully together while the rain came down, until the beats of one another’s hearts lulled them to sleep.

Chapter End Notes
I figured that the boys deserved a few perfect days, where nothing went wrong and they could just pretend that they were no different than any other new lovers.

Reyn can be intense. He just has enough of a filter not to go around blurting out crazed promises to drown everyone in blood.

Next up: The Viscount throws a party! Dancing! Jealousy! Sex in a pantry! And the return of Carver!
Chapter Summary

Hawke takes Anders to the Viscount's party, but trouble arrives when Carver shows up to spoil the fun.

Chapter Notes

The title of this chapter refers to Reyn's line in chapter 14, where he declared that he was willing to tell the world and everyone in it that he's with Anders, whatever may come.

The World and Everyone in It

Reyn stood in front of the mirror, frowning at his reflection as he tugged on a fancy green shirt that didn’t clash too horribly with his flaming hair. The damned Orlesian tailor had sworn up and down that it brought out the color of his eyes, but that didn’t change the fact that it had enough scratchy, stiff embroidery on it to stop a knife thrust. *Except that it somehow manages to be even more uncomfortable than actual armor.*

He braided his hair neatly back and ran a hand over his clean-shaven jaw, checking that he hadn’t missed any spots. *I hope Anders remembers to shave.*

*Or to show up at all.*

The rain had finally stopped and the floodwaters withdrawn. Anders had headed out to the clinic immediately after breakfast, taking with him a satchel containing his expensive new clothes, and leaving behind a promise to meet them at the Viscount’s estate that night. It had taken Leandra to convince him to go in the first place, but Reyn thought there was a better than even chance that Anders would take the opportunity to hide in Darktown, then claim later on that some emergency had kept him.

*If so, he’ll find out just how good Mother is at wielding guilt.* Even Justice wouldn’t win that battle.

Barkolomew jumped up eagerly when he came downstairs. “Sorry, boy,” Reyn said. “As entertaining as it would be to take you with me, I’m afraid I’ll probably be in enough trouble before the night’s over.”

Leandra waited near the door; now she arched her brow at him. “What will you be in trouble for?”

“Nothing, Mother.” At her skeptical look, he added, “I invited Anders as part of our household, the way you wanted. And I may have extended our invitation to include other obscure family members. Do you think there’s any elf blood in the Amell line?”

“Reyn, you didn’t!”
“Now, Mother, I’m sure the Viscount’s guests will be charmed by the opportunity to meet new and different people. Very different.”

She shook her head. “What’s done is done, I suppose. And half of Kirkwall will be there anyway—no one will notice a few additions.”

Considering the personalities and natures of those additions, Reyn highly doubted that. It seemed foolish to say so, though, so he only offered her his arm. “Shall we?”

Bodahn went with them; he seemed to think it his duty to escort “Mistress Amell” to any and all official functions, as the Amell estate lacked a proper footman. As they grew closer to the Viscount’s estate, Reyn handed Leandra over to the dwarf and went a little ahead, keeping an eye out for the gangs that sometimes roved the area at night. Fortunately, Aveline had put out a heavier than usual contingent of guards in anticipation of all the tempting targets that would be strolling through Hightown tonight, so the streets remained quiet.

As he drew close to the steps leading up to the estate, Reyn spotted the guard captain herself walking a short distance in front of him. And—even better—at her side was Anders’ familiar figure.

His heart gave a foolish little leap at the sight of his lover. I can’t believe he actually came.

Reyn broke into a jog to catch up with them. As he drew near, the tail end of their conversation drifted back to him. “And yet I allow an abomination to whine at me,” Aveline gritted out between clenched teeth. “Credit where it’s due.”

Reyn winced. Anders and Aveline had never really gotten along. Or Anders and Merrill…or Anders and Fenris…

Putting on a burst of speed, Reyn caught up to them, casually draping one arm around each of their shoulders. “Aveline!” he exclaimed, hoping to dissipate her annoyance—or at least divert it from Anders to himself. “How is my favorite guard captain?”

“What do you want, Hawke?” she asked immediately. Diversion it was, then.

“Why do I have to want something?”

“You’re hugging me. You must want something.”

“Nonsense! I hug everyone. It’s what I do. I’m a hugger.”

Aveline gave him a look that said she thought he was an idiot.

As for Anders…Creators, he looked even more edible than usual, and that was saying something. He’d actually worn the rust-colored silk shirt and black pants that Leandra had insisted on buying, and remembered to shave and comb his hair on top of it.

And yet, he didn’t look remotely happy to be there. He gave Reyn a pale half-smile, but that was about it.

“Hard day at the clinic?” Reyn asked sympathetically.

Anders shrugged. Before Reyn could interrogate him further, however, they reached the door. Seneschal Bran stood there; at the sight of them, his mouth curled in an expression of distaste. “Lovely,” he said to the doorman, who looked startled at being addressed. “More of the Amell-Hawke party.”
“Someone else got here first?” Reyn asked, as Anders and Aveline both looked at him in surprise.

“Hawke!” shouted Isabela, bounding out the door. “Great party! Thanks for inviting me!” She snagged his arm and dragged him inside, pausing only long enough to shoot a wink at Bran. “And I’ll see you later, cutie.”

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“So, I suppose Operation Get Hawke Laid was a failure?” Isabela asked.

Reyn glanced at her suspiciously. They’d ended up—no surprise—at the makeshift bar at one end of the room. “What?”

“You know, my brilliant plan. The one where I invite you to the Hanged Man, then invite Anders. I kiss you, he runs off, and you chase him down and declare your love. Or at least your desire to screw him until he can’t see straight. That plan.” She leaned back against the nearest column, her high-cut boots and low-cut corset utterly out of place amidst the marble and silk surrounding them. At least all the gold jewelry matches, although I’m not sure it’s quite gaudy enough. Several nobles were eyeing her cleavage openly, to the dismay of their wives—or husband, in at least one case. “I don’t see what went wrong.”

“Yes, nothing could possibly go amiss with a cunningly-constructed plan like that,” he said dryly, and took a gulp of wine. “But I am curious to know why you think nothing happened.”

“Just look at Anders. No one scowls that much when they’re getting laid on a regular basis.”

“Very funny.” He walked away, before she could say anything else. But the truth was, Anders didn’t look very happy at all, and Reyn had no idea what was wrong.

To be fair, a lot of people didn’t look happy. Fenris had ensconced himself at a table with a bottle of wine and resisted all attempts to remove him; the nobles circulating nearby had apparently decided that the best way to deal with his presence was to pretend that he didn’t exist. Aveline, who had come as the guard captain, and not on Hawke’s invitation, looked as if she were ready to chew off her own arm to escape. At least Varric and Merrill were having a good time, with Varric charming a group of ladies with some wild tale, and Merrill far off to one side, surrounded by elvish servants who were in awe of meeting a real, live Dalish. Leandra also seemed pleased, circulating amidst her friends and peers.

The grand hall was packed; the only people of any importance who didn’t seem to be in attendance were the Grand Cleric, the Knight Commander, and the First Enchanter. Which is just as well, to be honest. I’d hate to have to watch out for templars and dance at the same time. Spoils my rhythm.

“Hawke!” exclaimed a voice that was unfortunately familiar. Wincing, Reyn turned and found himself face-to-face with Sebastian Vael.

Creators, what did I do to deserve this? “Prince Vael,” he said, because he knew it would annoy the other man to be so addressed, “how are you? Everything all settled here? Ready to go back to Starkhaven, then?”

Sebastian shook his head soberly. “Nay, Hawke. I’m not yet certain it’s the Maker’s will.”

He went into a long, rambling discourse about how he couldn’t make up his bloody mind whether he ought to take vows in the Chantry or go back to being a prince. “I’m sure whoever’s been in charge of Starkhaven for the last four years is doing a bang-up job,” Reyn said, desperate to cut him off. “So what are you doing here? I thought this party would be too worldly for a man such as yourself.”
“Some of the young Mothers wanted to come,” Sebastian said. “I offered to escort them, to make sure no one insults their purity.”

Reyn quickly glanced around, but didn’t see Petrice in attendance. *Probably too busy scheming.*

“Yes, well, don’t let me keep you.”

“Maker watch over you, Hawke.”

He almost offered the blessings of the Creators, but since getting hung for blasphemy didn’t seem like a good way to end the evening, he only nodded politely and kept walking. A group of musicians had started to play, and couples were making their way to the center of the floor, which was reserved for dancing. Spotting Anders, Reyn hurried over to him.

“Hello, love,” he said with a smile. “Would you like to dance?”

Anders glanced at the other couples and gave Reyn a weak half-smile. “Oh. No. I don’t really do that.”

“Oh.” Reyn’s heart fell—he loved to dance. “I could—“

“No, it’s all right. You go ahead, though. If you want.”

“You don’t mind?”

“No,” Anders said, finding something very interesting to look at on the other side of the room. “Why would I mind?”

Reyn suppressed a sigh. He didn’t know what in particular was bothering Anders tonight, but it didn’t seem that his lover wanted to talk about it at the moment. Later on, once they were snuggled in bed together, perhaps Anders would be more forthcoming. “All right. Mother probably expects me to circulate, so I’ll go make nice for a little while.”

He stood and watched while Anders wandered off toward one of the tables set up along the walls. “Who is that?” asked an interested voice at his elbow. Startled, he turned and saw Melody Reinhardt, who was watching Anders’ departure with interest.

“My boyfriend,” he said; he and Melody had become fairly good friends despite their parents’ matchmaking attempts.

“He seems…intense.”

“That’s how I like them. Crazy and sexy. It’s an irresistible combination.”

She laughed. “Maybe you and I should have gotten married after all. We seem to have the same taste in men.”

He flashed her his best grin. “So, what say we have the next dance, and you can tell me all about that footman you were going on about the last time.”

“Old news, darling. I’ve moved on to…bigger…and better things.”

***

As evenings went, Reyn would have preferred killing bandits on the Wounded Coast. He’d danced with Melody, and then with some other girl, and then with a tedious succession of young women, all of whom were deeply interested in his money. In the meantime, Anders had somehow ended up at a
table with Fenris and Aveline; Reyn half-expected a raincloud to spontaneously generate over all their heads.

At least Bela’s having fun. She’d danced with several men and women, challenged some sort of admiral to a drinking contest, and generally set the party on its ear. Varric, who was there as the representative of the Dwarven Merchants’ Guild, seemed to be enjoying himself as well. The crowd around him had grown steadily throughout the evening, and Reyn hesitated to imagine what sort of wild tale Varric was no doubt spinning about him at that very moment. There are probably dragons involved, though. Merril had been drinking wine and giggling with the elven servants, and even though some of the nobles shot her dirty looks, most of their ire was reserved for Fenris.

Reyn excused himself from the dance floor and retreated to grab a glass of wine. As he did so, he bumped into another guest; turning to apologize, he found himself face-to-face with a rather attractive man.

“Oh, hello!” the noble said. “I’m dreadfully sorry.” His dark hair curled around over his shoulder in a neat tail, the style accentuating his narrow jaw and high cheekbones. Blue eyes sparkled as they boldly met Reyn’s gaze.

“Not at all,” Reyn said with an automatic smile.

“You must be Reyn Hawke, yes? I’m Havard DuLan.”

“A pleasure.”

“No, no, the pleasure is mine.” Havard offered him a flirtatious smile. “Can I get you a drink? Perhaps you can tell me a bit about your travels. According to Serah Tethras, you’ve had quite the exciting time since coming to Kirkwall.”

“Er…” He cast a covert glance in Anders’ direction, and discovered that the other mage was glowering rather ferociously at poor, oblivious Havard. “Perhaps some other time,” he declined, as tactfully as he could.

“Oh of course.” Havard’s smile turned downright sexy. “We could continue this discussion later, if you’d like. At my estate.”

Oh, dear Creators. “As lovely as that sounds, I have another commitment.”

“Ah. Perhaps another time, then.” Havard gave him a little bow and left. Reyn repressed a sigh and tried not to notice how nicely the nobleman’s pants displayed his backside. Maybe I should have at least asked him to dance. Then again, he seems like a nice man—it would be a shame for him to have his head ripped off by a rampaging abomination.

So what? I keep dancing with the ladies? Or stand around getting drunk alone? This is utterly ridiculous. He wasn’t happy, Anders wasn’t happy, and maybe it was because this entire idea had been a bad one from the start. Or maybe Anders was just being obstinate, or hadn’t really meant half the things he’d said in the depths of the night, when it had just been the two of them. If so, then I suppose now is the time to find out.

Reyn walked over to the table where his three friends sat. “Well, if it isn’t Grumpy, Grouchy, and Mopey,” he said, helping himself to an empty chair.

Fenris glared at him. He’d been drinking wine straight out of the bottle; using a glass apparently interfered with his quality time with the alcohol. “Very funny.”
“I know! So, stop me if you’ve heard this one. An alcoholic elf, a workaholic guard captain, and a possessed mage walk into a bar—“

“Keep your voice down!” Anders hissed, at the same instant as Aveline snapped: “We aren’t all here to have fun, Hawke. Some of us are working.”

“I’ve noticed the ‘no fun’ part, believe me.”

“And what should we be doing, Hawke?” Fenris asked. “Shall I entertain myself by ripping out the heart of the next noble who demands why an elf should be allowed here as a guest?”

“Don’t even think about it,” Aveline warned him.

“You could try dancing. It’s far more relaxing,” Reyn suggested, not entirely sure that either of them were joking.

Fenris paused in the midst of lifting the bottle to his lips. “Dancing? With you?” he asked, sounding intrigued by the possibility.

Out of the corner of his eye, Reyn saw Anders glaring at Fenris with such fury that it was a wonder the elf’s head wasn’t on fire. Yet. “Er, no,” Reyn said hastily. “Not me. Definitely not me.”

Fenris cut his large, green eyes in Anders’ direction, and a decided smirk crossed his mouth. “Are you sure?” he drawled. “I know quite a few…dances…you would like.”

Oh yes, taunt the angry abomination, Fenris. What’s the worst that could happen?

Reyn rose to his feet, before mage and elf could actually come to blows. “All right, then. Listen up.” He pointed at them one at a time. “Fenris, keep emptying the Viscount’s wine cellar. Aveline, you sit here and look impressively serious for all the nobles, so they’ll remember to keep funding the city guard. Anders, you come with me.”

Anders looked at him suspiciously. “Where?”

“To the dance floor, where else?” Reyn turned his hand palm up and held it out, his tone softening. “‘The world and everyone in it,’ remember? I was serious when I said that. Were you, when you asked?”

Bluff called. Gauntlet thrown. Cards on the table.

Anders froze for an instant, his lips half-parted, as if he’d meant to argue. Those gorgeous brown eyes widened slightly…then flooded with warmth, and possibly just the tiniest flash of blue, there and gone so fast that Reyn might have imagined it.

Then he smiled and put his hand in Reyn’s, letting himself be drawn to his feet and away from the table. “I really don’t know how,” he confessed. “I mean, I used to do this spicy shimmy thing, but there wasn’t much call for formal dancing at the Circle.”

“Don’t worry, just follow my lead,” Reyn said, pulling him in among the dancers. “And you can show me that shimmy later on in private.”

The music had slowed as the night wore on and the nobles got drunker, so the dance was a close and relatively intimate one. Reyn took Anders into his arms and showed him the steps. The other mage beamed at him, all his earlier bad mood gone. “Have I mentioned that I love you?”
Reyn grinned. “It’s possible. Refresh my memory again?”

Anders laughed. “I’m sorry, sweetheart, if I’ve been…not my best tonight. It’s just that I tried not to expect too much.”

“Too much what?”

“This.” Anders leaned his forehead against Reyn’s briefly. “I wasn’t sure that you’d want anyone—the nobles, your friends—knowing that we’re together.”

“Why?” he asked, honestly confused.

“I don’t know. Maybe because no Circle mage would have taken the risk. Maybe because…because I’m damaged. Because I know you could do so much better than me, and yet I don’t have the courage to do anything but desperately hope you don’t come to your senses.”

“Or because you’re completely ridiculous. You forgot to mention that possibility.”

“Hmph. So tell me—how are the others taking it?”

Reyn glanced over Anders’ shoulder at the rest of the room. “Fenris is trying to drown himself in the wine bottle. Aveline has broken down in desperate tears of loneliness. Varric is busy scribbling notes so he can take his *Hard in Hightown* series in an all new direction. Merrill has rainbows shooting out of her eyes. And Isabela is communicating through hand gestures that she wants me to rip your clothes off and do you right here on the floor. I’m not making that last one up, by the way.”

Anders snickered. “That, I believe.” As the music wound down, he took a step back and tugged on Reyn’s hand. “Come on.”

“Where are we going?”

“Just follow me.”

With a shrug, he let Anders all but drag him off the dance floor and through the crowd. There was a discreet servants’ door near one end of the room; Anders led him through it.

“Er, are we visiting the kitchen?” Reyn asked, confused.

“No. It’s not the kitchen we’re after. But there are useful little rooms near any kitchen.”

“Useful for…?”

Anders paused at the first door they came to, cracked it open, and peered inside. Satisfied, he pulled Reyn in after him and shut the door. A flare of spell light revealed a small pantry, almost completely filled with sacks of flour and dried beans.

“Useful for this,” Anders said, and pushed Reyn back against the wall. Dropping to his knees, he started to unfasten Reyn’s belt.

“Oh!” The movement of Anders’ fingers, brushing against the cloth of his trousers, had him half-hard already. “Are you sure?”

Anders impatiently tugged Reyn’s trousers down, freeing his cock. Long, sensitive fingers wrapped around the rapidly-hardening shaft. Anders paused for just an instant, glancing up at him with such intensity that it stole Reyn’s breath.
“I want to show you how much what you did means to me,” he said. He didn’t add “The only way I know how,” but Reyn understood it anyway.

Then he leaned forward and wrapped his warm mouth around Reyn’s cock. Supple lips slid halfway down the shaft, then drew back with a quick tease of the tongue, before taking him completely.

Reyn bit his lip against a moan, not wanting to catch the attention of any passing servants. His fingers tangled in Anders’ hair, pulling it half-free from its tie. It was different than anything they’d done together before; this was no slow, leisurely exploration, no exquisite, teasing build that might or might not stop just before he reached the edge. This was hard and fast; he couldn’t look away from the sight of Anders’ head bobbing up and down on his cock, driving him relentlessly toward climax.

“My love,” Reyn whispered softly, desperately, his voice tight and thin with building ecstasy. Anders glanced up at him with sultry, sexy eyes that unmistakably flashed blue for just that smallest instant.

It shoved him over the edge; Reyn bit his lip harder against a cry as he came. Anders swallowed it down without hesitation, his mouth unspeakably warm and soft. Reyn leaned his head back against the wall, feeling utterly boneless; he wondered distantly that he could even stand at the moment.

Anders rose to his feet, neatly pulling Reyn’s clothing back into place as he did so. “Enjoy?” he teased, kissing Reyn.

Reyn kissed him back; there was something incredibly erotic about tasting himself on Anders’ tongue. “Mmm hmm. But what about you?” He traced his fingers across the front of Anders’ trousers, feeling the other mage’s erection strain against the fabric.

“Don’t worry about me. Just consider this a little preview of all the things I’m going to do to you when we get home tonight.”

Home. The estate felt like that, suddenly, in a way it never had before. “I can’t wait.”

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They couldn’t leave just yet, of course. Anders took his hand and led him back to the party, a perfect who-me-I-haven’t-been-up-to-anything expression on his face that probably would have worked better if his hair hadn’t been disheveled. Reyn tried to copy him, but had the feeling that the flush on his skin gave him away.

“Would you like anything to drink?” Reyn asked.

Anders glanced at him from beneath thick lashes, and the tip of his tongue wetted his lips lightly. “If they have anything that isn’t alcoholic.”

“I’ll ask.”

He watched Anders stroll casually away, and his heart clenched unexpectedly. If we’d been in the Circle together, every encounter would have ended like this. Him going one way, and me another. There wouldn’t be any “later,” any “home.”

He could see it, feel it, with such clarity that his heart ached for that hypothetical version of himself. This was all anyone in the Circle ever got: quick sex in a quiet corner, and nothing else. No declarations of love, no holding hands at the breakfast table, no lazy afternoons in bed.

Isabela’s ear-splitting squeal broke into his thoughts, a moment before she latched onto his arm. “I
knew it! Oh, I am good!”

“It’s true; you are.”

She gave him a sly look. “So. Details. You, Anders…and Justice. That must be exciting. As they say: two’s company, but three is better.”

Reyn hadn’t expected her to take the conversation in this particular direction. Although I probably should have. On reflection, the only ones who probably don’t want to talk about it are Anders and Justice. “I don’t think whoever said that had a Fade spirit in mind,” he hedged.

“Oh really? Because the shit-eating grin on your face says otherwise.” She gave him a knowing wink. “So, has he shown you his spear of righteousness? Given you a good smiting? Everyone deserves a good smiting now and then. I could use one right this minute.”

Reyn laughed. “It’s…complicated,” he allowed. “And that’s all I’m going to say about it.”

“You’re no fun.” She stopped suddenly. “And speaking of no fun.”

Startled, Reyn turned around and found himself face-to-face with none other than Carver.

His brother hadn’t changed much in the last three years, and yet his appearance hit Reyn like a blow to the gut. After spending Carver’s entire life together, they hadn’t laid eyes one another since the day he had walked out.

In the intervening years, Reyn had done his best not to think of his brother unless he absolutely had to. Seeing him again here brought everything rushing back: childhood memories, holidays spent with all their family alive and happy around them, the day that Carver had left to fight for the king at Ostagar. Joy and sorrow, love and rage, all wrapped up together until there was no longer any separating them.

“Brother,” Carver said coldly. “I need to speak to you.”

Reyn crossed his arms but didn’t move. “I didn’t expect to see you here. Since when do templars come to fancy-dress parties?”

But what he really wanted to say was: Did you rape that Tranquil girl? Ella? Others? Have you beaten mages for speaking out, for looking at you wrong, for just existing?

“Mother invited me.”

Of course she did. Because she’ll never believe that you’ve become one of them. One of the ones who killed father, who chased us from town to town our entire lives. Who raped and tortured Anders, who would make us both Tranquil if only they had the chance. You’ll always be her little boy, and she’ll never see anything more than that.

“If you want to talk, let’s do it outside,” Reyn said. “Merrill tells me the Viscount has a very nice garden.”

“No. This shouldn’t take long.”

Reyn led the way outside, even though he hated turning his back on any templar, even one that used to be his brother. The skin between his shoulder blades itched, half-expecting a knife to bury itself
there at any moment. *What if this is a trick? An ambush? I don’t even have my staff with me.*

The moonlit gardens were peaceful, unoccupied except for a lone figure, standing and contemplating a fountain. As Reyn’s boots crunched on the marble chips lining the path, the figure turned, and he recognized the Viscount’s son, Seamus.

“Good evening, Serah Hawke,” Seamus said politely.

“Seamus. Are you doing well?”

“Well enough. I find these parties…excessive.” He gestured at the garden. “I came here to breathe a bit of fresh air. I hope my presence won’t be an inconvenience?”

Reyn shook his head. “Not at all. There’s plenty of space. We’ll try not to disturb you.”

As they walked away from the fountain, Carver said, “Still sucking up to the high and mighty, are you? I bet you just love feeling important.”

“Yes. It’s fabulous,” Reyn said, because wasn’t that what Carver would hear no matter what words actually came out of his mouth? “Did you want something?”

They stopped, facing each other. All around them, the gardens stretched, peaceful and silent. Strains of music floated from inside, but with all the doors closed, it seemed as though it came from another world.

“You’ve gone too far this time, brother,” Carver said, folding his arms across his chest and fixing Reyn with a petulant stare.

“Just what is that supposed to mean?”

“Don’t act like you don’t know what I’m talking about! What all of Kirkwall will be talking about by tomorrow morning, thanks to your little stunt tonight. You and that— that abomination!”

“Keep your voice down,” Reyn said, taking a menacing step toward Carver. “Anders is not an abomination. Ser Alrik—he was an abomination. Just not the kind who had a demon inside him.”

Carver’s face paled sharply. “I knew you had something to do with his murder!” he hissed. “Damn it, Reyn, you’re playing with fire, and I’m not going to be able to help you if you get burned.”

“What an original turn of phrase. Nothing cliche about that at all. Did you spend all evening coming up with that one?”

Carver let his arms fall to his sides, his hands balling into fists. “I’ve had it with your stupid jokes. If you won’t think about yourself, at least think about Mother.”

“You’re telling me to think about Mother?” This was going too far, even for Carver. “Remind me—which one of us broke her heart by joining the order? And which one of us lets her live in his house?”

“Money doesn’t equal love, brother!”

“In that case, why are you spending all yours on Faith at the Blooming Rose?”

Carver flushed red with anger. “I’m not a full knight yet—my stipend barely covers meals. If Mother wasn’t—“
He stopped, but it was too late. “Oh, no,” Reyn said in disbelief. “You must be kidding me. Mother’s sending you money? My money?”

“It isn’t yours! It’s her allowance for dresses, or-or something.”

“I can’t believe this.” Reyn resisted the urge to bury his face in his hands only because he didn’t want to take his eyes off Carver. “You have the nerve to accuse me of not thinking of Mother, when everything I’ve done has been for her. What have you ever done that wasn’t only for you?”

“I’m trying to help you now, you Blighted idiot! There are rumors about an apostate…I’m sure it’s Anders. No one else knows yet, but it’s only a manner of time before he does something stupid and brings you down with him!”

“Stupid?” Reyn asked coldly. “Like trying to save mages from being abused at the hands of your new friends?”

Carver’s eyes narrowed. “If you insist on continuing your…relationship…you’ll end up guilty by association. Possibly Mother as well, since Gamlen says you’ve so little shame that you moved your little mage-whore into the estate. I swear, I ought to turn Anders in, just to save you—”

Reyn hit him, with all the strength he could muster—and, given that he spent a good deal of time swinging a heavy staff around his head, that was quite a bit.

Carver’s head snapped back, and he staggered, but he didn’t go down. Instead, with a low snarl of rage, he launched himself at Reyn. Reyn found himself slammed back into an ornate planter; it fell over with a loud crash, splintering into pieces.

“Serah Hawke! Hold on—I’ll get help!” Seamus shouted from the other end of the garden.

Neither brother acknowledged him; they were too busy trying to pummel one another into submission. Fury pounded through Reyn’s veins, a red haze that kept him from feeling the blows on his jaw, chest, and stomach.

Then, suddenly, Isabela was there. With a wild cry, she leapt onto Carver’s back, wrapping her arms around his neck and her legs around his waist. “I’ve got him, Hawke! Hit him! Hit him!”

There were other shouts, as people streamed outside in response to Seamus’ summons for help. Anders’ frantic voice cut through it all: “Reyn? Reyn?”

And Creators, that was all they needed. If Justice saw a known templar pummeling Reyn…well, he wasn’t sure what would happen, except that it would probably end with Carver getting his head ripped clean off. And, despite everything, Reyn didn’t want to see his brother hurt.

Then Leandra showed up, and Reyn wished that he’d had to face Justice after all.

***

“I can’t believe it!” Leandra said for the tenth—or was it the eleventh?—time. “I didn’t raise you boys to behave this way! Brawling in public like a pair of common hoodlums! What must the Viscount think?”

Reyn walked stiffly in front of their little procession, heading back for the Amell estate. He’d refused healing, and the sight of blood dripping from his split lip onto his shirt set Anders’ nerves on edge. Reyn hadn’t said a word about the fight, either, which made Anders even more worried. The only hint as to what had happened had been the glare he’d leveled at Carver, before turning and stalking
Carver. The templar.

Don’t start this. Please. Not right now.

A templar had hurt Reyn; that was all Justice knew, all he felt he needed to know. Even now, he seethed, restless, wanting to avenge every scrape and bruise on Reyn’s face, wanting…

No! Not now. This isn’t helping. Carver is Reyn’s brother. They never got along, but that doesn’t mean Reyn hates him or wants him dead.

“At least tell me what you were fighting about,” Leandra said as they approached the door, flanked on either side by the Amell shields.

“Carver doesn’t approve of me. Nothing new there,” Reyn said shortly as he flung open the door.

Well, at least he was talking now.

“There must be more to it than that,” Leandra insisted.

“Ask Carver,” Reyn threw over his shoulder. He stalked inside without pausing, past Barkolomew, who whined in consternation at his master’s mood. Reyn didn’t look at the dog, only headed up the stairs to the bedroom. The slam of the door echoed through the house, loud enough to make Anders wince.

Leandra rubbed tiredly at the bridge of her nose. “Honestly.” A sigh escaped her. “If only Bethany were here. She’d know what to say to him.”

“I’ll talk to him,” Anders offered. “At least get him to accept some healing.”

“Thank you, dear. Maybe he’ll listen to you, since he won’t listen to me.”

“I’ll do my best.”

He started past her, but stopped when she reached out and patted him on the arm. “You look very handsome tonight. I meant to say that earlier. Thank you for coming, even if things didn’t turn out well.”

Anders automatically tugged at the hem of his rather-uncomfortable shirt. “Er, you’re welcome.”

“Of course, Reyn’s managed to bleed on yet another outfit. The stains will never come out of that brocade, either.” She shook her head sadly. “I suppose I ought to be used to it, but one does hope.”

Their bedroom door wasn’t locked; Anders took that for a good sign. Reyn stood in front of the fireplace, staring at the ashes, as it had been far too warm for a fire in the last few days. He glanced at Anders, and the line of his shoulders relaxed visibly, another good sign.

“Did Mother send you to berate me?” he asked with a faint smile.

“No.” Anders closed the door and crossed the room. “Well, not exactly. Do you want to talk about it?”

“Just Carver being a prat, as usual.”

“I don’t remember you ever ending up in a fistfight with him before.”
“You’re right.” Reyn smiled more broadly—then winced as the split in his swollen lip opened and began to bleed again. “Let’s just say that our time apart hasn’t improved our opinion of each other. I threatened to cut off the money Mother’s been secretly sending him, and he got defensive. He said some things that made me angry, so I threw the first punch.”

Anders frowned. “What did he say?”

“Just stupid prattle.” Reyn shook his head. “Look at it this way—if it had been a serious fight, we would have been using magic and steel, not our fists.”

“He doesn’t approve of me,” Anders guessed.

Reyn’s guilty look confirmed it. “Not exactly—as I said before, he doesn’t approve of me. Which means he has to disapprove of you by default, because to do anything else would mean I made the right decision.”

Anders wasn’t entirely sure he bought that explanation; it was hard to imagine that there wasn’t anything personal in Carver’s dislike of him, even if it was just because he was a mage. But if Reyn doesn’t want to talk about it, perhaps I should let it be.

“So you got into a fistfight defending my honor?” he asked lightly. “I’m not sure if I should be flattered or horrified.”

“Let’s go for whichever leads to you telling me how irresistibly sexy I am.”

Anders grinned, knowing that if Reyn had started joking around, the worst must be over. Taking the last few steps across the space that separated them, he slipped his arms around Reyn and very carefully touched his lips to his lover’s. He channeled healing magic through the kiss, mending Reyn’s split lip, then his black eye, bruised ribs, and scraped knuckles.

Reyn made a soft sound of contentment and relaxed against him, his own arms winding around Anders’ shoulders. “Mmm. You’re good at that.”

“That’s not the only thing I’m good at.”

“You can say that again.” Reyn nuzzled his neck, breath hot against his ear. “I seem to remember you saying that earlier was just a preview of all the delicious things you were going to do me tonight?”

“I did say that, didn’t I?”

“Mmm hmm. What did you have in mind?”

“Lock the door, and I’ll show you.”

***

Sometime in the wee hours before dawn, Reyn propped himself up on his elbow in the bed.

The estate was silent, without even the creak of settling timber to disturb the peace. Anders curled beside him, facing the cold hearth, for once not even twitching from the nightmares that plagued him. His raggedly-cut hair straggled into his face, making him look younger and somehow more vulnerable.

Reyn wanted to settle in beside him and fall asleep. By the Creators, he ought to be exhausted, after
the party, the fight, and the sex. But when he put his head down on the plush, silk pillows and tried to relax against his lover’s warm body, the only thing he could think about was that moment at the party, when Anders had walked away from him.

And to think, he’d been half-jealous of all the mages who had been with Anders before him. Gods, I was fool. A quick round of sex in the pantry had seemed titillating, fun even. And it was…until he’d realized that was the only thing those Circle mages ever had. There wasn’t even the option to do anything more, not without running the risk of being caught and punished by the templars.

This moment…this quiet, this closeness…was unthinkable.

Seeing the couple at the Gallows had been horrible, especially when the Tranquil-made girl had said: “I belong to Ser Alrik now.” To know that such abuses were an open secret was awful enough. But Reyn had never realized that the alternative, although better, contained its own measure of soul-crushing bleakness.

No wonder so many mages make deals with demons, desperate to escape at any cost. I can’t say that I wouldn’t do the same. In his own way, even Anders had.

If I had met Anders at the Circle, what would I have done? How far would I have gone? What if the only alternatives had been celibacy or a quick tryst in a closet? And forget any of the bonds of family they had been carefully forging—that would have been even more out of the question.

The situation in the Circle…it’s intolerable. Something must be done.

Anders was trying—Creators knew, he was trying. Helping mages escape one at a time. Writing his manifesto, as if the Chantry has the slightest interest in justice, or fairness, or even goodness where we’re concerned.

It’s not enough. It won’t ever be enough.

Reyn closed his eyes and leaned his forehead against Anders’ shoulder. Maybe. But Anders was in the Circle, and I wasn’t. Surely he knows more about the situation. Perhaps I should just trust that he knows what he’s doing and support him. Maybe the Chantry really will see reason, really will agree to open a dialogue with the mages.

And maybe Gamlen will be crowned the Queen of Antiva.

No—he couldn’t think like that. He had to let Anders try things his way first.

And if it didn’t work…if things became violent…then he would do whatever it took to protect Anders. Even if it meant razing the whole damned city to the ground.
Winner Take All

Chapter Summary

After Varric confronts Bartrand, Hawke suggests they go get drunk. Things get out of hand.

Chapter Notes

This chapter is mostly just crazy fluff. I've actually written several silly little chapters like this that don't really advance the plot, but this is the only one I've posted. But the interplay with Fenris surprised me a little, because I realized that he wasn't just trying to screw with Anders. So, um, yeah.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Winner Take All

It was wrong, Reyn reminded himself, to find it incredibly sexy to watch his boyfriend summon spirit energy. Especially since said energy was being used to heal—at least for a few moments—the broken mind of the very dwarf who had left them all to die in the Deep Roads.

Completely, totally wrong. At the very least, it was disrespectful of the gravity of the situation. At the worst, it meant he was distracted while standing in the same room as a dangerous lunatic.

But he couldn't help it; every time Anders drew on the spirit energy Justice so abundantly supplied, it instantly turned him on. Maybe it had something to do with the two of them working together so seamlessly, at least for a moment. Maybe it was how competent they were at it, how utterly in control.

Maybe I just have a weird fetish.

Says the man who’s sleeping with an abomination. Weird fetish it is, then.

“Varric?” Bartrand asked, sounding bewildered. With some effort, Reyn stopped ogling Anders and forced himself to pay attention to the conversation. But the truth was, his desire for vengeance had cooled considerably during the three years since Bartrand Tethras had locked them inside the ancient thaig. Too many other things had happened in the meantime, Carver’s betrayal not the least of them.

Ultimately, he felt more pity for Varric than anything else. Bartrand might have brought his condition on himself by stealing that damned idol…or he might not have. Considering how quickly he’d seized the opportunity to kill them, it was hard to believe that he’d ever planned on them living to see the surface again. No matter how powerful the effects of the idol, most people would have at least have had some struggle of conscience over murdering a sibling.

Varric had come expecting a fight, not a conversation with a broken man who was barely a shadow of what he had been. All of his anger vanished, leaving behind only bewildered hurt.
In the end, they left Bartrand in the half-destroyed manor with the promise of sending someone around to collect him. *The workers from the madhouse* was who Reyn understood Varric’s vague “someone” to be, and he felt his friend’s pain. If even a healer as talented as Anders, backed up by the full might of a spirit, couldn’t heal Bartrand for more than a few minutes, then there was little hope the dwarf would ever recover. Poor Varric would spend the rest of Bartrand’s life taking care of him. Or his money would, anyway.

“Come on, Varric,” Reyn said. They’d emerged into the clear night air; after the stale, motionless air of the estate, tainted with blood and rotting flesh, even Darktown would have smelled good at the moment. “Let’s drink until we go blind.”

Varric laughed, albeit weakly. “With Corff’s brew, that’s a real possibility. All right, Hawke. Seeing you vomit in the alley always cheers me up.”

***

Reyn sat at a table in the Hanged Man and blearily wondered where everything had gone so completely wrong.

Matching Varric drink-for-drink hadn’t been it—that had been the point of this outing, after all. He knew the dwarf well enough now understand that pretending nothing was wrong was how Varric dealt with anything painful. In the Deep Roads, that had meant constant gloating about how Bartrand had missed out on a fortune. Now, apparently, it meant carousing as much as possible.

Possibly things had started to go wrong when they arrived at the tavern and found Isabela, Merrill, and Fenris there, along with Donnic of all people. Aveline, who had walked down to the tavern with them, seemed surprised but happy to see him, so she’d stayed as well.

No, no, it had definitely gone wrong when Isabela had suggested they play cards. At first, it had been nice and innocent, but she’d bided her time until most of them were drunk enough to have trouble focusing, and suggested they switch to strip diamondback.

And so that was how Reyn found himself sitting in nothing but his smallclothes, holding the world’s shittiest hand of cards and wondering how he was going to avoid exposing himself to the entire bar.

Varric was in similar straights—normally he could hold his own in any card game, but either he was still shaken from the encounter with Bartrand, or the drink had gotten the better of him. Even his necklace and the leather tie from his hair were off, leaving him without much more to shed either.

Aveline had refused to play, of course, as had Donnic. Merrill had played a single round, lost her scarf, and quit. Anders, who, despite being the only completely sober person there, was quite possibly the worst card player Reyn had ever seen, had quit the game after losing both his coats. Fenris was still in; he’d removed his gauntlets and pauldrons so far.

“Well, gentlemen,” Isabela said with a smirk—she still had on most of her clothes, and she had a lot less layers to lose than any of them. “Read them and weep.”

“You cheated,” Reyn said, tossing down his own miserable hand. Varric and Fenris had done only marginally better.

She laughed. “I didn’t need to, after all the whiskey you put away.”

“Staying sober must count as cheating.”

“I don’t think so. I won fair and square, and you lost. Which means you have to take off another
piece of clothing. And, ooh, it looks like you’ve only got the one left.”

“Anders,” he whined, hoping for rescue. “Isabela’s trying to make me get naked in the middle of the Hanged Man.”

Anders leaned back in his chair, balancing it on the back two legs, and smirked. “You speak as if I don’t want to see that.”

“Ooh, is it true what they say about humans?” Merrill asked him curiously.

Anders gave her a slightly horrified look. “What they…? Never mind. I don’t want to know.”

Isabela leaned over, her jewelry gleaming in the lantern light. “All right, Hawke. If you’re going to be a baby about it, I’ll give you a choice. You can strip, or you can perform a task of my choosing.”

He wasn’t nearly drunk enough to trust that offer. Actually, he was pretty sure it wasn’t possible to be drunk enough for that. “I’m not agreeing to anything before I know what it is.”

“Hmm.” She chewed on the end of a fingernail and eyed the three partially-clothed men around her. “All right. You can keep your underwear on if you run your hands through Varric’s chest hair.”

“Oh, no, no, no,” Varric said, holding up his hands to forestall her. “I’m already going to be having nightmares about tonight for weeks, Rivaini. Don’t make them even worse.”


The legs of Anders’ chair came down on the floor with a loud crack. Reyn glanced at Fenris, waiting for the elf to object…but instead, the former slave had a slightly glazed expression on his face.

“All right,” Fenris agreed.


Fenris fixed heavy-lidded eyes on Reyn. “Go away, mage,” he said, without looking at Anders. “You already left this game, remember?”

“Reyn is my—“

Fenris shot to his feet unexpectedly. “He isn’t your property, just because he pitied you enough to let you into his bed!”

Anders came to his feet as well, his face thunderous. To his horror, Reyn realized that they really were on the verge of attacking each other.

If he hadn’t been drunk, he could probably have come up with a better solution, one that involved talking them down and sorting out their problems with each other. Unfortunately, as it was, there was only one thing he could think to do.

“I hate you, Isabela,” he muttered, before flinging himself at Anders.

Startled, Anders automatically grabbed hold of him. Hoping that he wasn’t about to get dropped on his ass, Reyn wrapped his legs around Anders’ waist, his arms around his shoulders, and sealed their lips together with a passionate kiss.

For a moment, Anders was too surprised to do anything. Then his hands tightened, fingers digging into Reyn’s buttocks through the thin underwear, and he kissed back with a fierce hunger.
“I have the best ideas!” Isabela exclaimed, yelling to be heard over the catcalls coming from various parts of the tavern.

Whatever sense of modesty Reyn might have maintained melted before an onslaught of passion and alcohol. Anders certainly wasn’t backing off either, plundering his mouth possessively, his hard cock pressing against Reyn through the rough material of his trousers. As for Reyn, it wasn’t as if the little scrap of underwear he still had on went very far toward hiding his erection.

“Hawke, you’re going to get thrown out of here,” Varric said from somewhere very far away.

“But Varric, you own the Hanged Man,” Merrill pointed out.

“I know, Daisy. I’m the one who’s going to throw them out. Sorry, but I don’t think I can handle watching those two screw on the table. And since neither of them is paying the slightest bit of attention to what I’m saying, Aveline, could you…?”

Fingers clad in a cold, hard metal gauntlet wrapped around Reyn’s shoulder, jerking him back and breaking the kiss. “That’s enough!” Aveline exclaimed. Her face was flushed bright red, and she kept her eyes fixed rather determinedly on Reyn’s face, as if afraid to look anywhere else. “Maker’s breath, Hawke, put some pants on! And Anders, you should know better.”

Reyn managed to get his trousers on before the room started spinning too badly to continue. Aveline bundled up the rest of his clothes, along with Anders’ coats, thrust the whole pile into his arms, pushed him out the door, then shoved Anders out a step behind him.

Merrill wandered outside after them. “Thank you, Hawke,” she said brightly. “That was very educational. Well, good-night, then.”

Reyn tried to sort through the clothes, then gave it up as a bad job and compromised by hauling Anders’ feathered short coat on. Anders was taller, but not quite as broad through the shoulder, so it didn’t fit all that well. Even so, there was something comforting about being surrounded by something that smelled of his lover.

“That’s mine,” Anders said.

“Mmm hmm. That’s why I like it.”

“Fine, then. I’ll just take yours.” Anders pulled on Reyn’s coat; it was too short in the arms, but there was something undeniably sexy about the exchange.

“It looks good on you,” Reyn said; he tried not to leer, but suspected he failed miserably.

Anders laughed and shook his head. “Aveline was right. I should have known better. You’re drunk, and I took advantage.”

Reyn went to grab Anders by the arm, but his feet tangled together, and he almost fell. Anders caught him with a sigh. “Oh well. At least you haven’t vomited on me,” the healer said. “Yet.”

Reyn clung to him for support as they started the walk back to Hightown. “You have a potion for hangovers, right?”

“Hmm, I don’t know. Maybe I should just let you suffer.”

“You’d rather I whine and complain all day?”
Anders made an exaggerated expression of horror. “All right, you win.”

“Heh.” Reyn smirked. The world was tilting oddly around him, so he closed his eyes and let Anders guide his steps. “Anders?”

“Yes?”

“Why don’t you like Fenris?”

“Are you insane?” Anders came to such an abrupt halt that Reyn almost toppled over. “Fenris hates mages! He refuses to see that not all of us are the embodiment of evil! He’s letting one bad experience color his entire existence. He won’t admit that a skilled swordsman could easily cause the same damage as an abomination. I don’t understand why you insist on keeping him around. No, never mind—I do understand, and it makes me…argh!”

Reyn blinked, trying to focus, and wished desperately that he’d waited until he was sober before starting this conversation. No, wait, I wouldn’t have been stupid enough to have this conversation sober.

“Erm…why do I keep him around, then?” he asked in confusion.

Anders glared down at him. “Because he’s handsome, of course!” he ground out. “With those green eyes and all that brooding. And the way he looks at you! You saw him tonight. He thought he was going to get his chance to-to steal you away from me!”

Reyn put his hand to his head. “All right…I’m still trying to get past the fact that you’re attracted to Fenris.”

“I didn’t say I was attracted to Fenris. I pointed out that he’s good-looking, which is completely different. Besides, that wasn’t my point, and you know it.”

“I don’t know. Maybe I should be the one working himself up into a jealous frenzy.”

“I’m not in a jealous frenzy,” Anders snapped. “I just don’t like Fenris, and for good reason, I might add. I certainly don’t like the idea of him kissing you, which he seemed all too eager to do.”

Reyn sighed. “Anders, Fenris is not going to steal me away, or kiss me, or do anything else to me. Honestly, I think the only reason he agreed to Isabela’s suggestion was to annoy you.” When Anders didn’t look convinced at all about that last part, he added, “Besides, given the choice of which of you to jump on, I picked you, didn’t I?”

After a momentary struggle, a reluctant grin crept over Anders’ mouth. “Yes. You did.”

“That was some kiss, wasn’t it?”

The grin became a smirk. “It was.”

“Want to wait until we get home, or just do it in the first secluded alcove we come to?”

Anders laughed and slipped an arm around his shoulder, pulling him close. “Unfortunately, in the mood Aveline’s in, she’d probably make us spend the night in jail of any of her guards caught us in the act.”

“Home it is, then.”
As I did Reyn's playthrough, some moments suddenly became unbelievably awkward. Like the healing Bartrand scene. *Really*, Reyn? Sheesh.

Apparently, Anders has been keeping his frustrations about Fenris bottled up. I'll be honest--I have a soft spot for certain incarnations of Fenders. But I'm sticking close to canon, and since Anders seems to get particularly crazed when Hawke sleeps with Fenris, I figured bringing that jealous streak into it wouldn't be unrealistic.
In the wake of Leandra's death, Anders must do what he can to comfort Hawke, even as he deals with his own grief.

Anders stood very still, barely able to move, to think, to breathe. There was broken glass in his chest, or so it felt, and every beat of his heart ground it in deeper and deeper.

The dank basement stank of rot, the air so clotted with putrescence that it was a struggle not to gag. The torchlight revealed body parts and old bloodstains, and the familiar claustrophobic walls so typical of Darktown. But for a moment, the only thing he could see was the open fields and blue sky of a summertime farm, and the only thing he could hear was a woman’s voice crying out, while templars in silver armor dragged him farther and farther away from her.

“Hawke…,” Varric said, then stopped, for once at a loss for words. But his voice brought Anders back to the here-and-now, back to the sight of Reyn slumped on the filthy floor, clutching the mutilated horror that was all that remained of Leandra Hawke.

This is…is wrong. Justice said, seeming as much at a loss as any of the mortals in the room. Something must be done.

But Quentin was already dead. There was nothing more to do, no more justice to be served. Nothing but the gaping hole where Leandra had been.

Leandra, who had treated Anders like family. Leandra, who was the closest thing to a mother he’d known since the templars had taken him as a boy.

If she had died in an accident, or from natural causes, it would have been terrible enough. But for her to have been tortured like this, forced to endure unimaginable agony, and at the hands of a damned blood mage…

Quentin was dead, but it didn’t feel like enough, somehow. It didn’t feel like justice, or even vengeance. If the blood mage had died screaming in agony a thousand times over, then maybe, maybe it would start to take away this rage, this pain, this grief, this feeling of complete and utterly helplessness—

Anders swallowed hard. No. We can’t lose control. Reyn needs us.

He walked past Aveline and Varric, both of whom seemed to be frozen by uncertainty. When he reached Reyn’s side, he leaned down and put his hand on the other mage’s shoulder.

Reyn didn’t move, didn’t even seem to realize he was there. Anders had expected to see tears, but worrisomely, there were none. Just a blank, thousand-mile stare, as if whatever he felt at that moment was too enormous to express.
Anders unwillingly followed his gaze to Leandra’s dead face. Maker have mercy, he could smell her, like something that had died and rotted in the dark.

*I felt no pain, when I inhabited Kristoff’s corpse. Perhaps she felt no pain, either.*

*I wish I could believe that.*

“Love?” Anders said quietly.

For a moment, he didn’t think Reyn had heard him. Then the other man blinked and slowly raised his head to look up at Anders.

“What do you want to do with…with the body?” Anders asked uncertainly. “Do you want to take her back to the estate, or…?”

“No.” Reyn’s voice was steadier than expected—which actually worried Anders even more. “I don’t want anyone else to see her like this.”

He rose to his feet and looked around, as if confused by his surroundings. Anders put an arm around his shoulders and drew him back to the nearest doorway, catching Varric and Aveline’s eyes as he went. They seemed to understand his prompt, both of them retreating quickly from the room.

Reyn and Anders stopped in the doorway. “Would you like me to do it?” Anders asked, not sure how they would build a pyre otherwise.

Reyn nodded. “Yes. Thank you, Anders.”

Polite. In control. But with that thousand-mile stare in his eyes that told Anders that it was all an act. That on the inside, he was screaming.

Anders drew on Justice’s feelings of helpless outrage to fuel the spell. Flames engulfed the room at his command, fueled by mana into a veritable firestorm that consumed everything: the blood mage and all his works, pages of his notes swirling upward on hot air before bursting into flame. The demons and the corpses Quentin had summoned burned, their corruption scoured away with cleansing fire. And in the center of it all lay Leandra, her white dress glowing eerily for a moment, until it, too, was wiped away.

Anders felt the tears on his face, although the fierce heat dried them almost as soon as they formed. He glanced at Reyn, saw the flames reflected in his lover’s glassy eyes. Under his arm, he felt Reyn’s breath hitch once, then twice…then even out again, a mage’s willpower exerted not on a spell, but on the refusal to break down.

“Falon’din, guide her. Let her find peace,” Reyn whispered.

The firestorm drained mana fast, vanishing when Anders’ strength gave out. Only ashes remained, even bone burned down to nothing, the stone floor blackened and cracked from the tremendous heat.

*She’s gone. She’s really gone.*

Reyn turned and walked away without speaking. Varric and Aveline both wept; they tried to say something comforting, but Reyn didn’t seem to even hear them. He didn’t say anything on the long walk back to Hightown. Anders didn’t try to talk, only fell in beside him.

*I’m here. We’re here. You’re not alone.*
When they reached the entrance of the Amell estate, Varric caught hold of his sleeve, stopping him for a moment. “Take care of him, Blondie.”

“Of course I will,” Anders said, annoyed that Varric thought he needed to say that. “I know you have doubts about our relationship, but if I’m a monster, it isn’t an unfeeling one.”

“Told you that, did he?” Varric muttered, wincing. “And I didn’t mean to say that you were. Just… never mind.”

Anders left Aveline and Varric standing in the square. Inside the familiar bounds of the estate, new grief clawed at his throat, as he realized that he’d never again walk in and find Leandra waiting in the great room, ready to ask about his day at the clinic or scold him for forgetting to eat.

*She was…a good woman. She cared deeply about justice for mages.* No guessing which of them *that* thought had come from.

Reyn had taken a seat in front of the fire, staring blankly into it. Gamlen came from upstairs, heading for Reyn, so Anders slipped into a side room and went to the servants’ quarters. Reyn could tell his odious uncle the bad news, if he chose to, but there were others who deserved to know as well.

He found Bodahn, Sandal, and Orana all sitting around the table in the kitchen. His expression must have told them the news wasn’t good, even before he spoke, because Orana paled and clutched at the edge of the wooden table, and Bodahn’s eyes grew wide. He gave them only the barest details: that the lilies had come from a murderer, that Leandra was dead, and that her killer lay dead as well.

They all cried, in painful opposition to Reyn’s silent reaction. Bodahn wrapped his arms around a distraught Sandal, and Orana sobbed into her apron. Feeling as if he intruded, Anders moved back to the door. As he did so, Bodahn glanced up. “You will take care of the young master, won’t you?”

“Of course,” Anders said, but more gently than he had to Varric. Bodahn had always approved of him, at least.

“He’s fortunate to have you to turn to in such a troubled time,” Bodahn said, wiping his eyes.

Anders went back to the main part of the estate. Reyn and Gamlen were both gone. Hoping that Reyn hadn’t slipped out somewhere, Anders headed up to their bedroom.

Reyn sat on the edge of the bed, only his breath disturbing his stillness. He’d taken off his coat and changed into a shirt that wasn’t crusted with gore, but that seemed to be as far as he’d gotten. Now he only stared into the hearth, as if there was some message to be found within the cold ashes.

Anders shut the door, took off his staff, and propped it in the corner beside Reyn’s. Not entirely certain what to do, he went and sat on the edge of the bed as well.

“I know that nothing I say will change it,” he said, putting a hand to Reyn’s shoulder. “But…I’m sorry.”

Reyn made no reply other than a very small nod. Anders closed his eyes against fresh tears, seeing for an instant that sunlight field, that woman whose face he could no longer quite recall. “You were lucky to have her as long as you did,” he said. “When the pain fades, that’s what will matter.”

Reyn swallowed visibly, but he didn’t look around. “I appreciate it, Anders.”

“I can get you some tea, if you’d like,” Anders said, casting around for something, anything, he could do. “Or if you want to talk…”
“What is there to say? I failed her.”

For a moment, Anders was so taken aback he didn’t know how to respond. How could Reyn possibly think that? “She wouldn’t want you to blame yourself.”

“She blamed me for Bethany’s death.”

“No, she didn’t. She may have lashed out at you in her own pain at the time, but you know that she didn’t really hold you responsible.” His hand tightened on the hard muscle and bone of Reyn’s shoulder. “She loved you. She was proud of you.”

Reyn only shook his head. “If I’m not to blame, then who is?”

“A madman. A blood mage, twisted by his own selfish desires. You couldn’t possibly have known he’d set his sights on your mother.”

Reyn looked down at his clasped hands. “Maybe. Or maybe I should have been faster. Cleverer. Maybe I shouldn’t have dismissed Ser Emeric so quickly.”

“You aren’t perfect. No one is.” Anders stroked his shoulder hesitantly. “I know that you’ve always had to be the strong one, the one who held the family together. And now you’re the one who holds our little band of misfits together. But you don’t have to be that way for me, you know. You can lean on me. I’m here for you. Whatever you need.”

Reyn’s lips parted slightly, as if he were going to say something, but no words came. He squeezed his eyes closed, and Anders felt his shoulders shake silently under his hand.

Anders wordlessly wrapped both arms around Reyn, who turned blindly into him, his whole body shuddering with the force of his sobs. “I-c-an’t believe that she’s gone,” Reyn said, his voice muffled as he pressed his face into Anders’ shirt, as if half-ashamed of losing control in this way.

Anders held him tightly, one hand stroking his hair. “I know, sweetheart,” he said, his own voice cracking around tears. “I know.”

Anders leaned against the pillows, taking Reyn’s weight on his chest and thighs, while hot tears soaked into his shirt, Reyn sobbing as if his heart was broken past any hope of healing.

Anders tipped his head back, shedding his own tears in silence. He remembered how Leandra had caught him sneaking out that first morning. How she’d embraced him when Reyn told her that he was moving in. How she’d doted on him, as she put it, urging him to eat more, to relax more, to take better care of himself. How patiently she’d listened to his ideas about mage freedom, and even asked him to read parts of his manifesto to her. How she’d wish him good luck whenever he’d depart to work in the clinic.

And Reyn…Maker, it hurt to see him in such pain. For the first time, Anders felt viscerally what he’d only understood intellectually before: that to love was to feel greater joy…and greater anguish as well.

“I’d do anything to take this pain away from him. Anything. But there’s nothing to be done. Nothing but this.”

Justice didn’t like it. Justice wanted to take action, to fix things, to make it right and do it now.

_Quentin is dead. What more would you do?_
"I...do not know. But this seems so inadequate.

Maybe. But it's all that we have.

Eventually, Reyn fell asleep, worn out from grief. Anders carefully disentangled himself, rolled out of bed, and padded over to the small chest that held their most prized possessions. Reyn’s portion consisted of the few things he’d managed to bring with him out of Lothering: an amulet that had belonged to his father, a doll that had been Bethany’s favorite toy as a child, that sort of thing.

When they had decided to combine their lives, Reyn had invited him to put whatever he wanted inside the chest, whose lock had foiled even Isabela’s curious fingers. There had been only one thing he owned worth putting in there, and now Anders opened the chest and drew it out.

The pillow was old and tattered, its embroidery frayed and half gone. The stuffing had worn to paper-thinness, and the exterior was stained from tears, blood, and a spilled lyrium potion. A thief breaking in would have wondered what lunatic had bothered to put such a thing in a locked chest.

Anders held the pillow to his nose and breathed deeply. He knew that it wasn’t possible, that there had been too many years for it to hold any scent of the woman who had pressed it on him as the templars pulled him away. No smell of baking bread, or summer fields, or the strawberries they’d picked earlier down by the riverside, never knowing that would be their final moment as a family.

He didn’t even know if his mother was still alive. Had the other villagers let her stay in the house, or had they driven her out for the crime of giving birth to a mage? How many nights had she cried herself to sleep, wondering what had become of him? Had she ever been able to put the loss of a son behind her, or had that moment haunted her, as it had haunted him?

Anders sighed and reluctantly returned the pillow to the chest. Stripping down to his smallclothes, he crawled back in bed. Reyn made a soft noise, almost a whimper, and Anders wrapped his arms securely around the other mage, drawing him close.

They both had a great deal of grieving to do in the coming weeks, months, and years. But for now, at least, they had their memories. When Leandra’s ashes were long cold, and the sharpest pangs of grief had faded with time, the memory of love would remain.

And perhaps there was no other comfort than that.

Chapter End Notes

All That Remains was a true masterpiece of a quest. My first playthrough, when I saw those lilies at the estate I was absolutely horrified. When Leandra died, I’ll admit I was teary-eyed, heartbroken, and in total awe that Bioware had managed to pull such a deeply-felt reaction out of me. (It didn't help that my Hawke had already had to kill Bethany in the Deep Roads--damn, that was a depressing playthrough.)

It was also the quest that got me started thinking about all those "spaces in between." As I mentioned previously, Anders’ in-game line about not knowing Leandra confused me, because, hello, Hawke had asked him to move in about 2/3rds of the act ago. Which led me to think about how, if any of the companions needed someone to mother them, it was surely poor Anders.
Demands of the Heart

Chapter Summary

As the qunari destroy the city, Anders frantically tries to find Reyn. Will he be too late—and if so, will he be able to live with himself after?

Chapter Notes

I changed the warning to graphic violence ’cause there's a little bit of gore here. I don't really think it's much, but I know people draw the line in different places, so heads up if you don't like reading about blood.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Anders ran through familiar Lowtown streets turned strange from fire and chaos. Screams sounded from every direction, and the stench of blood filled the air. Smoke billowed from a dozen fires; it seemed that the qunari were bent on destroying the entire city in their rage.

He didn’t know what had set them off after so many years of troubled peace. Didn’t care, really; give their brutal treatment of mages, he would be just as happy to see them all consigned to the void. The only thing he cared about was finding Reyn.

Maker, please, let him be all right.

Anders had spent the day at the clinic. When the first rumor of qunari trouble hit Darktown, though, he’d closed up shop before hurrying up through the cellar entrance into the Amell estate, certain that Reyn would want to investigate.

Only Reyn hadn’t been there. According to Bodahn, Aveline and Isabela had shown up at some point shortly after Anders had left that morning. What Isabela had wanted, Bodahn didn’t know, but he’d overheard Aveline saying that she needed Reyn’s help with the qunari. It was just supposed to be a talk—there was no reason to take anyone else, and Aveline would have an entire contingent of guards with them.

It was supposed to be safe.

Except now the bloody qunari were doing their best to raze Kirkwall to the ground. Anders didn’t know what had happened to Reyn, if he’d gotten caught up in the fighting, if he’d been captured, if he was lying hurt somewhere…or even if he was still alive.

Rage and fear flashed across his veins, from him and Justice both. If the qunari had killed Reyn, they would all die screaming. He would paint the streets with their blood, he would rip their flesh from their bones, he would keep on until there was nothing left of their wretched kind—

No. Stop—this isn’t helping! We don’t even know what’s happened—he might not have even gotten caught up in this mess.
Reyn? Justice asked incredulously. Because of course they both knew how ridiculous the suggestion was, that something of this magnitude might be happening and Reyn not be in the middle of it.

True. But he might be perfectly fine.

And if he isn’t?

Then…then yes. We’ll kill every last one of the bastards.

He dodged a group of fleeing people—Fereldens, it looked like—and almost ran face-first into a lone qunari and a group of elves chasing them. Whipping his staff off his back, he laid down a cone of cold, freezing them all in their tracks. Unwilling to get caught up in a fight that would delay his search for Reyn, he ducked around them and kept going.

Have the elves sided with the qunari to fight for their freedom?

They joined Andraste against the Tevinter Imperium. And then when they tried to live free, the Chantry called an Exalted March against the Dales and enslaved them all over again. I can’t imagine they’ll fare any better with the qunari. After all, the qunari idea of freedom was “Do what we tell you or be killed.” A lot like the Chantry, now that I think of it. You’d imagine they’d have gotten along better with Petrice.

And then he felt that shadowy flicker along his nerves that said darkspawn were near.

He was so shocked that he stumbled, his boot catching on a bit of debris and almost sending him into a pile of flaming timbers. Andraste’s knickerweasels, what are darkspawn doing here? There wasn’t an entrance into the Deep Roads in Kirkwall, he was sure of it.

They were close, though—four or five of them, he thought, although he’d never been as good as Solona or Nathaniel at detecting them. And only one street over.

He heard shouts and fighting, accompanied by strangled screams. Silently cursing, he dashed around the corner. If he could just hold off the darkspawn for a moment, give people time to escape—

They stood in a small courtyard, covered head-to-toe in blood, a pile of dead qunari at their feet. And too late, Anders realized his mistake. What he sensed technically wasn’t darkspawn, but the darkspawn taint. And, yes, normally that came with darkspawn.

It also came with Grey Wardens. All of whom had sensed him as well, and were now staring in confusion.

The nearest Warden was a tall warrior; blood coated his heavy armor and made his blond hair stand up in drying spikes. For a moment, he stared at Anders, just as confused as the rest of the Wardens—then, unexpectedly, his face cleared.

“You must be Anders!” he exclaimed, sounded downright pleased about it. And not hostile at all, which wasn’t the reception Anders had been expecting from any Wardens he might encountered, given that he and Justice had slaughtered quite a number of the order in the course of fleeing for their lives. “Thank the Maker! Solona will be so relieved—she wasn’t sure you were even still alive.”

Anders blinked, utterly taken about. “S-Solona?”

Solona. An ache accompanied the thought of her; she’d been kind and good and just, doing everything she could to make the transition to this world less traumatic, whether that was a quiet talk on the battlements of Vigil’s Keep, or a trip to Amaranthine to see Aura.
“Let me introduce myself,” the other Warden said. “I’m Alistair.”

“Alistair laughed; he seemed like the kind of man who laughed a lot, at himself as much as anyone else. “I’m sure she did. No, don’t tell me—I don’t think my ego could handle what she had to say. She still won’t let me live down getting lost on the way to Highever.”

“I wouldn’t have thought he was my type,” Solona had confided once, when they’d both been drunk off their asses, swapping stories about their lives. “I never really went for the burly sorts, and even though the Chantry literally forced him into templar training—even though he hated it—I wouldn’t have thought I could get past that. But he made me laugh, even when things were really bad, when it seemed like there was no way we could survive, let alone kill an Archdemon. He was so funny that I couldn’t help but talk to him, and…well. There you have it.”

Anders shook his head, bemused. “What are you doing here? Is—is Solona with you?” he added, not certain if he hoped she was or not. How could he and Justice look her in the eye, after everything they’d done?

Alistair’s face took on a wistful expression. “No, she isn’t. As for what we’re doing here, we’re just passing through, I’m afraid. Hold on, though.” He began patting at the pouches on his belt distractedly. “I shouldn’t have given that amulet to the fellow who said he was her cousin.”

“Reyn!” Anders’ heart lurched. “You’ve seen him? Is he all right?”

“He was when we ran into him. He was on his way to Hightown. Ah, here we are.” Alistair opened a pouch and pulled out a ring, which he tossed to Anders, who caught it reflexively. “This was meant for a mage—I was keeping it as a gift for Solona, actually. But she’s got enough of these things to fill a house, and if I told her I’d left you without at least trying to help in some small way, I’d be sleeping on the floor with the mabari for the next year.”

“Really? I mean, not the part about the mabari, but…”

But does she still care about us even after everything that happened?

Alistair’s expression softened slightly, as if he knew exactly what Anders couldn’t quite bring himself to ask. “She’ll be glad to know you’re all right. Now, we really do have to leave. Go find your friend.”

“Yes, I—yes.” Reyn was what mattered now—the only thing that mattered.

Anders turned his steps toward Hightown, slipping on the ring as he did so. He could feel the enchantment worked into the simple band; nothing fancy, but it would boost his access to mana a bit.

The long stairway leading up to Hightown was choked with rubble and bodies, but at least there no longer seemed to be any active fighting. Whether that was because the qunari were winning or because their focus had simply moved on, Anders didn’t know. If Reyn was headed to Hightown, though, the latter seemed like a safe bet.

The stairway consisted of hundreds of steps; Anders took them at a run, ignoring the stitch in his side
that started when he was only a quarter of the way up. By the time he reached the Hightown market, he was gasping and out of breath.

The streets of Hightown had obviously seen a great deal of fighting since he’d gone tearing out of the mansion, trying to find Reyn. *If we’d just stayed put, he would have come to us,* he thought, and half wanted to laugh at the uselessness of the last few hours of dashing about. Maker, he hated this, *they* hated this: Anders beside himself with worry, and Justice certain that the only place they belonged was at Reyn’s side and wanting to go there *now now now.*

There were only two places where the qunari would logically focus their attack if they’d come to Hightown: the Chantry and the Viscount’s Keep. Anders had been betting on the Chantry, but when he got there, he found the townspeople were busy fleeing into the building instead of away from it.

*The keep it is, then.*

The courtyard outside the keep turned out to be littered with the bodies of dead mages and dead qunari, which sent a spike of fear through Anders as he ran past. The long stair leading up held even more bodies, this time including those of templars.

When he reached the top of the stair, his legs burning—and thank the Maker he was a healer, or otherwise he’d be in real pain the next day from all the damned stairs—he froze at the scene unfolding in front of the great doors. Templars, mages, and qunari were all locked in battle, the air filled with blood and screams, with war cries and fireballs. Justice jerked hard against his control at the sight of the templars, but Anders realized that for once they weren’t fighting against the mages, but with them.

Justice didn’t care; fury and spirit fire raced along their veins. He would kill them anyway, and the qunari as well, if need be.

*And Reyn? He’s somewhere in this mess—we can’t just abandon him!*

Justice twisted, snarling, caught on the prongs of two opposing urges: to kill templars and to help Reyn.

*If we kill the templars now, the qunari might overwhelm the mages—overwhelm us all! Damn it, we have to keep moving, we have to find Reyn! What if he’s hurt; what if he needs healing and I’m not there?*

Fear flashed through him, resonating back and forth between them. For a moment, he honestly wasn’t sure who would win, until…

*Yes,* Justice agreed, blind rage giving before worry.

They kept to the outskirts of the battlefield, slipping along the edges of the chaos to the great doors of the keep itself. The doors stood open, just wide enough for a single person to slip through at a time. *Reyn must have come through here before us.*

Bodies lay throughout the entryway; Anders ignored them, making for the hall leading to the throne room. The doors were closed, but as he ran up to them, they unexpectedly swung open, and a platoon of qunari emerged.

Anders froze in his tracks at the sight of the qunari, automatically casting a Glyph of Paralysis around his feet. He couldn’t hope to take so many, but perhaps if he could slow down the first wave with the glyph, he could at least hold them off for a few minutes.
But the qunari didn’t even look his way. They walked slowly, and although he found their inscrutable faces difficult to read, he would have sworn that they looked…shaken. As if something unexpected had happened, something that had overturned their view of the world. The warrior at the front carried a blood-stained sword and axe, both of which Anders would have sworn belonged to the Arishok.

They marched past, with the air of people who didn’t intend to return. Stunned, Anders waited for them to clear the doors, then hesitantly walked to the throne room and peered inside.

He got a muddled impression of a large crowd of people, most of them dressed in the embroidered clothing of the nobility. The air smelled of lightning and charred flesh, and the stone floor in front of the throne wasn’t just scorched, but actually heaved up in places with damage reminiscent of a Petrify spell. The stench of blood hung heavy on the air, and a large, bronze-skinned figure sprawled near the throne, unmoving.

But in all of the destruction, the only thing Anders saw clearly was Reyn.

Reyn stood in the midst of it all, a wide space around him, as if no one else quite dared to approach. Blood drenched his skin and dripped from his clothing, puddling on the floor beneath him. He shifted his weight, wincing, and Anders saw a huge gash in his side, skin and muscle separated by an axe stroke so deep that he caught a glimpse of ribs through the welling blood.

In Reyn’s right hand was all that remained of Bethany’s staff. Some great force had literally sheered it in half; from the angle, it looked as if the staff had gotten the worst of the blow to Reyn’s ribs, maybe the only thing that had saved him from being chopped in two.

“Reyn!” Anders shouted, and broke into a run, shoving people heedlessly out of his way. Reyn looked around at the call; his skin was chalk-white from blood loss, and the slightly glazed look in his eyes warned that shock was setting in.

And oh, this was bad, so very, very bad. Reyn was hurt, and it would take all of Anders’ concentration to heal him. But the templars were just outside, and it looked like everyone in Hightown had just witnessed indisputable proof that Reyn Hawke was an apostate.

Isabela was there, along with Varric, Fenris, Aveline, and Barkolomew. They’d fallen into a loose circle around Reyn, and Anders spared a thought to be grateful that they at least had enough sense to understand the danger.

They parted to let him through, Varric saying something that Anders didn’t quite make out. Then he was at Reyn’s side, catching him even as he started to stumble.

“I’ve got you,” he said.

“ Anders,” Reyn said, cracking a bloody grin. “I knew you’d show up.”

Maker, his voice was weak and fading fast, along with the blood dripping on the floor. “Where else would I be?” Anders asked, the words trembling slightly, because he hadn’t been here when Reyn needed him.

No. There’s still time. I can heal him. But he couldn’t heal Reyn and prop him up at the same time, and a part of him feared what might happen if they went to the ground. Would the crowd turn on them at the first sign of weakness? Would the templars come in and find them helpless?

Heal him, Justice ordered. I will keep us on our feet.
As if things weren’t dangerous enough. They’d never tried anything like such a division of labor, and Anders didn’t know how much spirit energy would show, if he’d mark himself as an abomination in front of every noble in Kirkwall.

*There is no time for this. Reyn is dying. Help him, and let me tend to my part.*

Anders closed his eyes, just in case they started glowing, and began casting healing spells.

It took a while—Reyn had been badly injured. Not as severely as during the battle with the rock-wraith, true, but enough that he would have died within the hour without magical healing. He’d been hit and slashed and stabbed, his bones cracked and his organs bleeding out inside. Anders poured magic into him, carefully knitting bone and muscle back together, smoothing away bruises, regenerating damaged organs. Eventually, he became aware that Reyn stood on his own, and that his breathing had evened out into something that didn’t rattle inside his lungs.

Then it was done, the last injury healed with the final scraps of Anders’ mana. He blinked, exhausted, and found that Justice had kept his promise and not let them fall.

One of Reyn’s arms was locked around his shoulders, holding him close in mutual support, but his attention was focused on the nobles that the qunari had gathered here. There was a roaring in Anders’ ears, and after a moment he realized that it was the sound of…cheering?

“Thanks, love,” Reyn murmured to him. He had an easy smile on his face, his attention apparently on the crowd around them, his free hand half-lifted in acknowledgment. Surprised, Anders looked around, and saw that the nobles were almost wild with excitement—crying, laughing, cheering. Some of them kicked and stabbed the Arishok’s prone body, taking out their anger and fear now that the qunari couldn’t fight back.


“Oh, this and that. Isabela’s relic turned out to belong to the qunari. She gave it back to them. They wanted to take her with it, and I said no. End of story, really.”

It wasn’t, that was obvious. It was equally obvious that this wasn’t the time or place to ask. Their other friends had fallen back a bit; Isabela and Varric had even started celebrating along with the crowd.

It was then that the templars marched into the throne room.

They moved in a phalanx, Meredith at their head, a scowl on her face. Orsino scurried behind her, looking unhappy, as if they’d been arguing. At the sight of them, Reyn tensed sharply, and Justice snarled deep inside Anders’ head.

Reyn had just been outed as an apostate, beyond any possible doubt. And so Meredith had come to claim him.

*No! They will not have him!*

“Three cheers!” one of the nobles shouted. “Three cheers for Serah Hawke—Champion of Kirkwall!”

The words had an galvanizing effect on the crowd. They screamed and cheered, over and over, far past the requested three times: “Hurrah for the Champion! Hurrah for Serah Hawke!”

Meredith paused, her icy blue eyes taking in the crowd, judging their reaction. Then she glanced at
Reyn gave him the tiniest of nods, turned, and walked away.

She...she backed down. I don’t know what this Champion thing is all about, but it was enough to make her leave without arresting Reyn.

He was aware, then, of Reyn’s arm still tight around his shoulders, holding him close even though neither of them needed the support now. Belatedly, Anders recognized it as a signal—a claim. An attempt at spreading whatever protection he’d earned over Anders as well, by silently telling the world: “This man is mine.”

It felt good…and dangerous as well, given that it pulled Anders into what seemed to be a very bright spotlight. Well, I did ask if he was willing to declare his love and support in front of the Knight Commander. Maker, I really have to quit saying things like that.

Most of the templars followed Meredith out, some of them looking rather confused. One lingered, however, staring at Reyn with a look on his face that somehow combined admiration, jealousy, and rage.

Carver.

The brothers stared at one another for a long moment. Then Carver’s lip curled into a contemptuous scowl, and he left, scurrying after Meredith like a lapdog after its master. For a moment, Anders half-wanted to chase him down, punch in him in the face, and…

And end up in a templar cell. No thanks.

Reyn swayed slightly, and Anders firmed up the arm around his waist. “Sweetheart?”

Reyn’s face had taken on a slightly greenish tinge. “I’m…not feeling so well, all the sudden.”

Anders winced. “Yes. Sorry about that. Let’s get you outside, shall we?”

He caught Aveline’s eye and motioned in the direction of the door with his head. She took his meaning and cleared a path through the celebrating nobles. Fenris fell in after her, and Varric and Isabela came behind.

As soon as they were outside and away from the eyes of anyone except their friends, Reyn turned hurriedly to the side, dropped to his knees, and vomited. Anders caught his braid with one hand and held it out of the way, stroking Reyn’s back soothingly with his free hand. “There you go. Let it all come up.”

“It seems to me that a healer should be more useful,” Fenris said stiffly.

Anders shot the elf an angry glare. “Funny thing about bleeding out inside. All that clotted blood has to be gotten rid of somehow. This is the quick and painless way to do that. But I’ll keep in mind that you would prefer a different option, if you’re ever in this situation.”

Fenris’ bronze skin went a shade paler as he contemplated what other exits Anders might have in mind. “Ah. I see. Never mind, then.”

Reyn climbed creakily to his feet, wiping his mouth with the back of one gauntleted hand. His clothing was shredded and stiff with blood, his hair matted with dried sweat and still more blood, and he absolutely reeked. And yet, at the moment, all Anders wanted to do was take him in his arms and never, ever let go.
“Hawke,” Aveline said in a low voice.

Anders looked up, and found her staring out into the square. Some of the nobles had run outside before them, and the templars had done their part in spreading the word. Noble and commoner alike flooded into the square, all of them shouting for the Champion.

“Mythal protect me,” Reyn muttered, staring at them.

Varric sidled up beside them. “Your adoring public, Hawke.”

“This is your fault. All those stories you told.”

“An apostate mage singled-handedly saves Kirkwall from the qunari? I couldn’t make something up like that if I tried. Too fantastic.” Varric tipped his head at the gathering crowd. “If Blondie can let go of you for five seconds, maybe you ought to say something. It would go a long way toward cementing your image as a hero.”

Reyn hesitated, and Anders could all but see the calculations going on behind his eyes. Then he nodded, and slipped on an easy-going smile like another man might pull on a pair of boots. “Of course,” he said. Freeing himself gently from Anders’ hold, he walked alone to the top of the stair.

The crowd roared its approval.

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“I’m sorry about your staff,” Anders said. “Bethany’s staff. I know how much it meant to you.”

Reyn looked up from where he lounged in the bath, deliciously naked, his long hair unbound and floating on the surface of the water around him. It had taken three changes of the water to keep it from tinting red around him, but between Sandal’s strong back at hauling water and Anders’ ministrations with a scrub brush, all the gore had been removed.

“The staff saved my life,” Reyn said with a sad twist of his lips. “One last favor from Bethany.” He shook his head. “Sometimes I wonder what she would think, if she could see me now.”

“She’d be proud,” Anders said without hesitation. He crossed the marble floor of the bath room and crouched beside the claw-footed tub. “Just like I am.”

The moment when Reyn had gathered himself, blood-spattered and barely on his feet, to speak to the crowd had seared itself into Anders’ memory. It reminded him a little of the day he’d seen Solona talk down a mob of peasants in the courtyard of Vigil’s Keep, but this had been far more powerful. That brightness burning inside of Reyn that only he and Flemeth had seemed to see had finally become visible to everyone. Commoners and nobles alike had screamed Reyn’s name deliriously, their adulation fired by the relief that the qunari were finally and irrevocably gone.

Anders didn’t even remember what Reyn had said; he’d been too wrapped up in his own fear that the other mage would fall flat on his face in the middle of his speech. But when Reyn had finished, he’d stepped back and graciously surrendered the spotlight to Aveline, who’d immediately started barking orders. Considering that parts of the city were still on fire, someone needed to take charge and organize the populace. With the Viscount dead and the Grand Cleric nowhere to be seen, that duty had fallen to the Guard Captain. Anders suspected that Aveline hadn’t been entirely displeased at the situation.

He couldn’t complain, though; it had given him a chance to get Reyn home while he could still walk. A bath had been the first order of business, given how utterly filthy he was.
Now Reyn tipped his head back slightly. He looked a great deal better than he had before, after the application of water, a lyrium potion, and some more healing magic just to follow up. “Bethany would have loved you,” he said.

“I wish I could have known her. She sounds like a remarkable person.”

“Heh. I probably would have lost you to her.”

Anders shook his head, knowing that Reyn must still be feeling the affects of the battle, or else he would never have said such a thing. “Never.”

“I fell in love with you the moment I walked into your clinic. Did I ever tell you that?”

Anders’ throat tightened. “So you fell in love with a man who hadn’t had a bath in days, whose first reaction was to threaten you?”

“Don’t forget the part about asking me to help you get back together with your ex.”

“I was not trying to get back together with Karl!”

“Really? I thought you were. ‘Oh look,’ I said, ‘it’s the man of my dreams, and instead of begging him to take me here and now, I’m helping him sleep with someone else. I must be the biggest idiot in Thedas.’”

“Hmph. Well, you were wrong about Karl, anyway.”

“Ouch.” Reyn touched his hand to his chest in a parody of receiving a terrible wound. “I’m hurt. I think I need healing.”

Anders arched a skeptical brow. “Oh really?”

“Mmm hmm. Care to join me in the tub?”

Anders hesitated. “I shouldn’t. You need rest, even after the healing I’ve done.”

Reyn stretched out in the bath, his hand drifting below the clear water to touch his cock. “Please?”

Anders swallowed. “Well…I suppose I should…check you over thoroughly. Just to make sure I got everything. Give me a minute.”

He darted out of the bathroom, and found the dwarves and Orana anxiously waiting just outside. “He’ll be fine,” he told them. “I don’t think he’ll need anything further tonight.”

“Are you certain?” Bodahn asked. He’d been hovering ever since they’d come in the door, with poor Reyn looking as thought he’d had the contents of a slaughterhouse dumped over him. “It’s no trouble at all.”

Unlike Bodahn, Orana immediately twigged to the code for “Please go away, we’re going to have sex.” She bowed quickly, already backing away. “Yes, messere. Ring the bell if you need anything.”

Bodahn, who had perhaps picked up the hint from Orana, put an arm around his son and steered him away. “Enchantment!” Sandal said happily as they left.

Exactly, Anders couldn’t help but think, as he slipped into their bedroom. He’d already shed his coats, short and long, so now he quickly stripped down to nothing but his pants. Grabbing the oil from the nightstand, he returned to the bath.
Reyn smiled languidly at his return and scooted forward, giving Anders room to slip in behind him. Shucking his pants, Anders climbed into the bath, his muscles relaxing as the warm water closed around him. For the first time, he realized just how tense he had been all night, even after bringing Reyn back to the relative safety of their home.

Reyn’s wet hair clung to his back, so Anders gently gathered it together and tucked it over his shoulder. “Massage?”

“Oh, Creators, yes.”

Anders spread some oil over his hands, then carefully applied them to Reyn’s shoulders. Reyn sighed happily, bending his neck forward to give him better access. His skin was warm and tight, unblemished thanks to Anders’ earlier healing, the muscles underneath lean and loose. With his hair drawn to the side, the short curls at the nape of his neck were exposed, and Anders leaned forward and pressed his lips to the spot.

Yes. Oh yes.

Maker, it was practically a miracle that he was able to do this right now. He’d come so close to being too late…to messing up yet again, and losing the only thing that made life bearable…

Reyn gasped and pressed back against him. “Anders?”

Anders closed his eyes, nuzzling his skin, trying desperately to concentrate on the fact that it was smooth, unbroken, that all the blood had been washed away. “Yes?”

“I want you.” Reyn pulled away, but only far enough to drape himself over the gentle angle of the end of the tub, water dripping from his arms and head onto the floor, his legs spread for better access.

We don’t deserve this, Anders—or maybe it was Justice, he honestly wasn’t sure at the moment—thought, even as he reached for the oil again. We were almost too late.

He slid one oil-coated finger into Reyn, making him whimper and push back, wanting more. Maker, he looked so edible, languid and wanton, his head turned to the side and his eyes half-closed. Aching now, Anders slicked his cock with oil. He removed his finger, getting a little whimper; the whimper turned into a moan of sheer pleasure as he eased his cock in instead.

Yes. This. Yes.

Anders closed his eyes, pressing his face against the nape of Reyn’s neck, breathing in the smell of his skin. He moved slowly, wanting to feel every inch, Reyn’s body clasped tight around him. He reached around blindly, found Reyn stiff and ready, and matched the rhythm with his hand.

“I’m sorry,” he whispered desperately, pushing in, in, in. “I should have been with you.”

Reyn moaned, his head tipped back now, hips pressing hard against Anders. “I didn’t know where you were,” he said, voice cracking from pleasure. “I hoped—oh!—you had slipped away into Darktown, even though I—mmm—I knew you wouldn’t.”

Anders knew he’d already done so much wrong, made so many mistakes along with Justice. If they had failed Reyn completely, if they hadn’t arrived while there was still time, then they would never have forgiven themselves. Justice might have been able to survive, might have been able to cope with the loss, because he was strong.

“I was terrified,” Anders confessed, every movement of his hips slow but almost painfully intense. “I
knew you’d be in the middle of everything, and I was so afraid something terrible had happened, that I’d be too late.”

Anders wasn’t like Justice, wasn’t strong, no matter what he pretended to everyone else. He knew the truth that he’d admitted to Reyn: that he was damaged goods, cracked like a cheap vase that had been handled too roughly. If Reyn had died, he wasn’t certain that he wouldn’t have spiraled down into madness and taken Justice with him.

He’d always assumed that it was demons who drove their hosts to insanity and caused abominations. But maybe it was the other way around.

Reyn groaned at the slow stroke of Anders’ hand, matching the rhythm his cock. “I knew you’d come,” he whispered, his voice as hoarse as if he’d screamed Anders’ name. “I knew you’d have my back.”

The reminder of the Deep Roads rubbed against emotions already raw, like sandpaper on a wound. “Reyn,” Anders whispered, his arms locked tight around the other mage, the thrust of his hips becoming more urgent. He wanted to say more, wanted to tell him that moment in the Deep Roads had been when he’d realized he was in love, that there could be no more pretending, no more hiding behind Circle rules, but the words were lost in a haze of pleasure.

Reyn cried out, his voice cracking helplessly as he came. It was enough to drag Anders with him, to erase all his fears for a moment in the sweet, urgent ecstasy of release.

Their bodies relaxed slowly back into the bath. They’d drowned the floor with splashed water, but at the moment, Anders couldn’t bring himself to care.

It was then that someone began pounding on the estate door.

Reyn raised his head, bleary-eyed. “Now? Really?”

Anders kissed him, then levered himself out of the bath and grabbed a towel. “Let Bodahn deal with it.”

Unfortunately, that wasn’t to be. Anders managed to get Reyn dried off and wrapped in a thick, warm robe before they left the bathing room, but as they emerged onto the landing, Isabela’s voice drifted up to them.

Reyn frowned, pulling away a little. “Bela?” he called. “Is something wrong?”

“Go see what’s happening,” Anders said. “I’ll grab some clothes, in case we need to go back out.” Not that he wanted to, he thought as he slipped into the bedroom and started to dress. But if someone needed healing, or there was some problem that only Reyn could deal with, out they would go.

When he emerged from the room and started down the stair, he was surprised to find an air of tension in the room below. Isabela and Reyn were staring at each other, as if one of them had just said something irrevocable.

Her mouth flattened into a hard line. “Don’t read too much into it,” she snapped.

“Bela—“

But she wasn’t listening, instead already turning on her heel and striding out the door, every inch the pirate queen who didn’t give a damn about anyone else.
Every inch the lie.

Reyn stood in the foyer, looking shocked and hurt. Anders hurried down the stair and past him, pausing only long enough to touch his arm. “I’ll go after her,” he offered.

Reyn nodded, still obviously confused. “Thank you, Anders. I-I don’t know what I said to upset her.”

Anders caught up with her in the street outside, as she headed toward the stair that would take her to the market, and then to Lowtown and the docks. The night here was relatively quiet; any parts of Hightown that had been alight had been doused, and the guards were out in full force, looking for looters or qunari stragglers.

“What do you want?” she shot back over her shoulder, when she realized that he was behind her.

“I know why you’re running away,” he called.

That at least got her to stop. Turning to him, she arched one brow. “Oh really?” she asked in a dry, bored voice.

All of us have our masks, don’t we? As philosophy went, it was cheap, but it felt like a revelation. Reyn, me, Isabela. All of us trying to pretend like everything’s fine, like we don’t have a care in the world. Well, not him so much, not any more. If one didn’t count the whole Justice-only-cares-about-justice song and dance he did for Reyn, anyway, because it was bad enough when only the human half of a monster was in love with you.

“I heard what you did—that you came striding into the throne room with the qunari relic in your hands,” he said. “Saving the day, when everyone else thought you’d be long gone without a backward look.”

“And it was damned stupid of me. I could’ve been halfway to Ostwick. Which is where I’m headed right now—unless I find a good orgy between here and there. I always stop for a good orgy.”

Anders narrowed his eyes at her. “I’ve spent my whole life escaping, Isabela. You can’t fool me. You aren’t running away because you’re stuck now with Castillon on your back, and no relic to give him. Or because you lied to Reyn about the nature of the relic. Or even because your selfishness resulted in the deaths of hundreds of innocent people at qunari hands.”

She folded her arms defensively underneath her breasts. When she spoke, her voice was hard and cold, completely unlike her usual bantering tones. “So tell me, then. Why do you think I’m leaving?”

“You’re running because Reyn agreed to duel the Arishok for your sake. He was willing to lay his life on the line for you, willing to die for you, when it would have been safer and easier to just let the qunari drag you off in chains. And when you look in the mirror, you know deep down inside that you don’t deserve that sort of devotion. That you’re not worthy of it, and you never will be. So you’re leaving before Reyn has a chance to figure that out.”

Her eyes widened slightly—then narrowed into a hard look. “Don’t project your problems onto me.”

“I’m not.”

“Now you’re either lying to me, or lying to yourself.” She turned around and started away.

“Reyn is your friend, Isabela! If you just walk off now, it will hurt him. You know it will.”
She paused and tossed one last look over her shoulder. “Well, then. I guess he should have known better than to trust someone like me,” she said bitterly.

Then she vanished, slipping into the shadows as if she’d never been there at all.

Chapter End Notes

My strategy when fighting the Arishok: summon Barkolomew, cast a petrify spell, do as much damage as possible while he's stuck, and then run madly around in circles trying not to get killed, until the cool-down ended and I could petrify him again. I'm pretty sure it was the least awe-inspiring battle of all time. I assume fictional-Reyn did much better, or else all the nobles would be pointing and laughing instead of cheering.

I also didn't intend to have more sexytimes in this chapter, but apparently Reyn is a damn horndog.
Reyn sat at his desk in the library and stared at the stack of correspondence in front of him without any real desire to pen a single answer. Most of it consisted of invitations—the city had barely cleared away the rubble and burned buildings, and already the nobility were throwing parties to celebrate the defeat of the qunari. And of course, none of the parties could be considered a social success without having the Champion who had killed the Arishok on hand.

He closed his eyes against a growing headache and wondered what he’d gotten himself into. He hadn’t meant for any of this to happen. He’d just been fighting for his life, for his friends’ lives, nothing more. As for challenging the Arishok to a one-on-one, winner-take-all duel…well, that had been more stupid than brave, considering that he’d be dead if Anders hadn’t shown up when he did.

At the thought of Anders, he opened his eyes again and stared at the other pile of correspondence, the ones he would discreetly pass along to Aveline. Those were the death threats, the ones calling him apostate, claiming that his rise to power was a sure sign of the decadence of Kirkwall, that the Maker’s judgment would fall on him via the hands of the faithful. Tellingly, the vast majority of those were anonymous.

But they were why he’d done what he had done. Because if he hadn’t—if he hadn’t stepped up, made his speech, and accepted the mantle of Champion, then there would have been more than just letters turning up on his doorstep.

He’d never, ever wanted to get involved in politics. The only thing he’d ever really tried to do was to keep his family safe. He’d risked the Deep Roads for Carver and Leandra. He’d bought the estate and agreed to play the role of noble mainly for his mother’s sake. Now, he let them make him Champion, because he’d known from the moment he’d seen Meredith back down that there was real power in the title…and that power could protect Anders.

More—that power might help mages in general. Here he was, an apostate who’d used his magic in front of every important person in Kirkwall, including the Knight Commander, and yet he was hailed as the very savior of the city. And, true, he might be pushing the bounds if he cast spells at every party he went to, but if he went to those parties, if he kept the old smile on his face and the old charm turned on…

It was something no apostate had ever done. Unless Solona counted as an apostate, anyway; he
wasn’t entirely clear on how the Chantry viewed the Grey Warden mages. Certainly she’d slipped the Chantry’s control, which meant that some of them would consider her an apostate, no matter what the official line might be.

If he could do this, if he could pull this off…it might make things better for mages. It might make people see that a mage was no different than anyone else, no more dangerous than a well-trained warrior. Maybe they would start to question. Maybe they would think twice at the next Chantry sermon.

Maybe Anders had the right idea with his manifesto after all. Maybe it was possible to change the world without breaking it first.

The door behind him opened, and Anders himself came through, cradling a wooden box in his arms. “There you are!” he exclaimed, dropping the box heedlessly onto the piles of correspondence. “It was just delivered—I thought I’d bring it to you.”

Reyn found himself grinning, despite his earlier dark thoughts. “Fantastic! Let’s have a look, shall we?”

They pried off the lid quickly. Inside, amidst a cushion of packing straw, lay what would become one end of Reyn’s new staff.

He’d ordered it through one of his contacts from his time as a mercenary. It consisted of a foot-long blade, each edge honed to razor-sharpness, surmounted by a fan of blunter metal designed to help channel lightning. The whole ended in an empty socket, where the wooden body of the staff would fit.

For the first time since Bethany’s old staff had shattered beneath the Arishok’s blade, Reyn felt himself relax completely. With no staff, he’d felt like half a man, his ability to cast spells severely limited. And, yes, he still had to construct his new one, but with this part he finally had all the pieces he needed.

He lifted the blade carefully out of the box and cradled it in his hands. Anders watched him with undisguised curiosity. “You could have just bought a new one the day after the qunari left, you know,” he said.

Reyn shook his head. “That’s the Circle talking. They want you to think that every staff is the same, that it doesn’t matter who it was crafted for, or how it was done.”

Anders leaned against the wall, looking genuinely interested. “So you disagree?”

“Of course. Every staff has its own personality, just as every mage does. Don’t tell me you haven’t sensed any difference from one staff to the next.”

“I suppose. That is, some are crafted to make it easier to heal, others to cast fireballs. But you could just try the different ones for sale and pick one you like.”

Reyn shook his head. “Absolutely not. Every staff has its own characteristics, as you say, but none will ever suit you as well as one you create yourself. That was one of the first things our father taught Bethany and me. We started out with the basic wooden staves, then added on to them as we grew older and figured out what spells we were good at.”

“But you’ve been using hers for the last four years. Wouldn’t it have been better to keep yours?”

The question wasn’t meant to wound. But for a fraction of a second, Reyn found himself back in the
Blighted landscape outside of Lothering, and heard again the crack as Bethany’s neck snapped. It had been the second time he’d lost a family member, the second time his world had changed irrevocably.

*But not the last.*

“No,” he said quietly. “Because Bethany’s staff reminded me of everything I’d failed to save…and of what I had yet to lose.”

Anders winced. “I’m sorry. That was thoughtless of me.”

“Don’t apologize—it was an honest question.” Reyn shrugged. “I only know that it felt right, to take her staff, and to leave mine with her for Flemeth to burn to ashes. Maybe it was just my own ego. I was the eldest; I was supposed to look out for her, and yet she died right in front of me. Maybe it was just my way of making myself feel better, when I had no right to.”

Anders frowned and took a quick step forward, his hands closing on Reyn’s shoulders. “Sweetheart, no. Don’t talk like that.”

*I would do anything to keep you safe,* Reyn thought, but didn’t say aloud. *I failed Bethany; I failed Mother. I won’t fail you, no matter what it takes, no matter what I have to do. I swear it.*

Reyn dredged up a smile. “Sandal promised to help me make the staff—let’s see what we can do with it, shall we?”

He and Sandal already gathered together the other bits and pieces that would go into making the staff: a sturdy length of blackthorn, already heavily enchanted so as to withstand most blows; two lengths of wood inlay salvaged from Bethany’s old staff that would boost the mana of the wielder, and a large chunk of clear crystal that would aid in focusing the lightning spells that were his speciality. For the next several hours, Reyn and Sandal worked on putting it all together, casting enchantments and embedding runes to turn it from a conglomeration of parts to a finely-honed weapon fit for a mage at the height of his power.

“Anders,” Reyn called, suddenly inspired as he readied the leather and twine that would bind the crystal to the staff.

Anders had been watching with interest from the other side of the room, giving them the space to work. “Yes?” he asked, standing up and coming over.

Reyn hesitated just a moment. He knew what he ought to ask for…and knew equally well what Anders’ reaction would be, if he requested even a drop of spirit-charged blood.

“May I have some strands of your hair?” he asked instead.

Anders looked at him in bafflement. “Why?”

“Enchantment!”

“What Sandal said.” When the other mage still continued to look at him blankly, Reyn rolled his eyes. “Anders, I know you think of your staff as an impersonal tool, but to me, the more personal it is, the better it will work. If I add a few strands of your hair to the twine here, any healing spell you cast on me should be slightly more effective.”

“Really?” Anders asked, looking skeptical.
“I’m sure we’ll have to put it to the test the next time Aveline drags us all out to the Wounded Coast,” Reyn said dryly. “But until then, just think about it for a moment. The Circle has a vested interest into making magical as impersonal as possible—even when it takes away a mage’s advantage. Maybe especially when it does. Besides, even if you think I don’t know what I’m talking about, what harm could it possibly do to indulge me?”

“I don’t think that,” Anders protested. “I’ll be the first to admit the Circle doesn’t know everything, and doesn’t share everything it does know. Especially considering the secrets I know First Enchanter Irving kept…Maker I hated that bastard.”

Anders stared off at nothing for a moment, grinding his teeth and looking murderous. “Erm, so you’ll give me your hair?” Reyn prompted after a long, awkward moment.

Anders blinked back to the here-and-now. “Oh! Yes. Sorry.” He pulled the short knife free from his belt—the same one he’d used to kill Karl, Reyn couldn’t help but note, and dismally wondered how that would affect the magic.

He carelessly hacked off a few strands of strawberry-blond hair, with no thought at all for his appearance. Reyn concealed his wince with effort. “There you go.”

“Thank you.” Reyn wove the strands into the twine carefully, concentrating all his will as he did so. All right, so he wouldn’t have chosen that particular knife to do the cutting…but Anders had, so that was what he had to work with. Killing Karl wasn’t precisely a bad thing, though. Painful, yes, but not cruel. It was an act of mercy, the last thing that love can do when all other choices have been taken away.

A shiver ran up his spine at the thought, although he wasn’t entirely sure why. Maybe because it reminded him of that long-ago conversation they’d had on Gamlen’s roof, promising to offer the same mercy to each other if it should come to that. But that explanation didn’t quite settle with the skin prickling along the back of his neck.

Back to work, Reyn, he told himself firmly, dismissing the brief chill. He closed his eyes and focused on the memory of the silkiness of Anders’ hair when he ran his fingers through it, on how warm the healing magic made him feel, on his absolute certainty that Anders would always have his back in any battle. He could feel the magic, just like Malcolm had taught him, twisting the threads of reality as he bound it into the staff. It felt deeply right, the way taking Bethany’s staff had did, the way incorporating whatever he could salvage from its ruin into his new staff did.

When he and Sandal were done, though, the staff felt…curiously incomplete. Anders didn’t notice, when Reyn asked his opinion. He declared the it a nice piece of work, testing its heft and using it to cast a glyph of paralysis, finishing with that little flourish he always did that was the equivalent of a sexy swagger in a mage. But when Reyn used it to shoot lightning at the hideous Tevinter statue in the library, the whole thing felt unbalanced to him. Not physically, perhaps, but on some deeper level.

“Not finished,” Sandal said, when Reyn would have taken it anyway.

So he nodded and left it behind on the workbench. Maybe a night spent pondering what it lacked would bring him new insight.

It was getting late by that time, so he and Anders shared a quiet dinner, then sat on the couch and read together for a few hours. Eventually, Anders suggested they go to bed; he had a wicked look in his eyes that was all the convincing Reyn needed.
It was sometime after midnight when Reyn awoke. Blinking, he sat up, and realized that he was alone in the midst of the rumpled sheets. The bedroom door stood open, and a faint light drifted from below.

Worried that Anders had suffered another nightmare, Reyn slipped out of bed hurriedly and found his trousers, discarded in a heap near the door. Moving quietly, so as to not disturb the rest of the household, Reyn went to the landing and looked down.

A lone candle shed illumination over Sandal’s worktable, its yellow light barely touching Reyn’s staff and the dwarf’s broad face. Far stronger was the bluish glow of spirit energy radiating out from the other figure in the room.

*Justice.*

Reyn’s heart gave a loud thump, and for a moment he was half-afraid that the two figures below had heard it. He saw Justice so seldom; except for that one time in the Fade, they’d never even really directly interacted. It struck him again just how different Justice was from Anders. He held their shared body differently, and moved with a confident, predatory grace totally unlike the human mage. The spirit energy welling up through his skin and glazing his eyes only added to the image of controlled, aggressive power.

It made Reyn’s mouth go dry and his cock go hard. A part of him wondered what would happen if he went downstairs right now and begged to spirit to join him in bed. *Take me, please, any way you want.*

But the truth was, he didn’t really know what Justice thought of him. Their first night together, Anders had said Justice thought he was a distraction, and yet things had happened that made Reyn question just how true that was. *Or maybe I’m just seeing what I want to see.* Creators, he hoped Justice wasn’t really an unwilling voyeur to their sex life. That just felt…wrong. Dirty, and not in the fun way.

He’d tried to subtly broach the topic once or twice since, and Anders’ abrupt non-answers had made it clear that this was One of Those Things We Do Not Talk About. Which in theory was fine with Reyn; everyone had their boundaries, and maybe the whole thing with Justice was just too damned personal, too intimate, to discuss with anyone else, even a lover. Anders had already trusted him with so much that it felt wrong to push on this.

Now, as he watched, Justice stretched out a hand and held it a few inches above the staff. He was naked except for a pair of trousers, so it was obvious when the glow around him abruptly intensified. Spirit energy spiraled around his outstretched arm, coalescing in his palm, lines of beautiful blue fire pulsing along his veins, spilling through his skin…

The light flashed, so bright Reyn had to look away. When the afterimage vanished from his eyes, he found that Justice’s glow had returned to normal. Blue energy cracked and snapped around the staff, arcing off the metal and crystal, before slowly sinking into the weapon and being absorbed.

“It is finished,” Justice said in that low, gravel-laced voice so different from Anders’ tones.

Sandal clapped his hands together. “I like enchantment!”

His heart pounding, Reyn slipped back into the bedroom, took off his pants, and slid under the covers. The staff was complete now, he was certain of it. Why Justice hadn’t wanted him to know what he was doing—or perhaps hadn’t wanted Anders to know, which was an unsettling thought—Reyn couldn’t guess. *Which means that I just have to respect it, and pretend that I wasn’t*
When Justice came in, he was aware of the blue glow through his closed eyelids, the smell of the Fade saturating his senses. There came the soft rustle of cloth, then silence, as if the spirit stood by the bed for a long moment.

But just as Reyn started to roll over and pretend to be awakened, the bed gave slightly beneath added weight, and the blue glow flashed out. When he opened his eyes, he saw only Anders sleeping peacefully at his side.

Chapter End Notes

I actually really like the idea that Anders and Reyn sit around talking shop quite a bit. Anders had the benefit of a number of different teachers and all the knowledge stored in the tower (that Irving wasn't hiding in his office, anyway), but also was constrained by whatever perspective the Chantry approved for teaching. Reyn only had his father to teach him, but at the same time, the perspective might have been vastly different. Even if you discount the differences created by their different approached to magic (the healer and the damager), they probably had some really interesting discussions on philosophy and technique.

In other words, they have more in common than just the sex and the whole I WOULD KILL THE WHOLE WORLD FOR YOU mentality. ;)

Re: Justice: Reyn really, really tries to trust his friends to do the best thing for them, and he tries not to butt in or order them around. He's gone along with Merrill's schemes to fix the Eluvian, he told Isabela should could have the qunari relic, and he did every hare-brained thing Aveline asked during the Donnic quest...at least until she really started flailing at the end and then he tried to intervene. It's a respect thing for him, I think--he'll give advice, or help when asked, but he assumes the people around him are competent until proven otherwise.

Unfortunately for Reyn this approach never works out, because his friends are actually a box of assorted nuts as opposed to functional human (or elven) beings. Except for Varric, I guess; other than a few moments with the idol, he's pretty much got it all under control. But Reyn keeps hoping that they'll prove him wrong, I guess.
One Year

Chapter Summary

Reyn makes plans to celebrate with Anders, but things don't quite go as intended.

Chapter Notes

One Week, One Year...I suck at titles.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“What is that thing?” Reyn asked, not bothering to disguise the horror in his voice.

He and Varric stood near the entrance to the docks, close to where the old qunari compound had been. It was a bright summer’s day: ships sailed in and out of the harbor, dock workers swore, prostitutes called invitations, and life generally went on as if the qunari had never been there at all. With one exception: a score of workers on scaffolding, busily constructing a brand new monument.

“Don’t you recognize it, Hawke?” Varric asked, shading his eyes as he peered up at the looming, oversized statue. “It’s you.”

Somehow, Reyn found his voice. “It can’t be. I don’t have any need to compensate like this.”

The dwarf let out a half-snort, half-laugh. “So Blondie tells me, when he comes down to lose at cards. I try not to listen to him, though. No offense, but I don’t really want to picture you naked. Or him, for that matter.”

Reyn loftily ignored Varric’s comments. “Look at it, though,” he said, eyeing the severed head of what he assumed was meant to be the Arishok, “it’s not even a mage—just some faceless guy in a metal suit, holding a sword, of all things.”

“That’s why I wanted you to see this. Besides the look on your face, of course.” Varric’s affable mouth thinned slightly. “The way I hear it, the original idea was to make it true-to-life. Then the Chantry got involved. It seems the Grand Cleric suggested a ‘monument that would celebrate the courage shown by all Kirkwallers on that terrible night.’”

Even though he’d never wanted the monument, Reyn felt yet another layer adhere to the pearl of anger that had been growing in his heart. “In other words, she forbid anything that might indicate that the Arishok was defeated by a mage. I’m surprised she didn’t insist on the statue being a sodding templar.”

“Technically, she didn’t forbid showing a mage—she only made a ‘suggestion.’ But since Meredith has done everything possible to block the election of a new viscount, Elthina is the strongest power in Kirkwall right now.”

“How very convenient for her,” Reyn said, the words bitter on his tongue. He wondered if this
would have happened if he hadn’t been a mage, if some guy in a metal suit really had defeated the Arishok. Would Meredith and the Chantry have let the nobles choose a new viscount already?

Are they afraid that I—an apostate—might become viscount? Or would they have taken the opportunity to seize secular power no matter what?

“Thanks, Varric. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I’m going to go home and drink myself into a stupor. With any luck, I’ll forget this monstrosity even exists.”

“Glad to be of service, Hawke,” Varric said cheerfully, slapping him on the arm. “You should join Fenris and me for cards tonight. Donnic said he’s coming, which means Aveline is probably on patrol, so she won’t be there to glower at us all having fun.”

Reyn gave him a wan smile. “Maybe another time. I already have plans for tonight.”

They parted at the entrance to Lowtown, Varric heading to the tavern, and Reyn up the endless stair to Hightown. The truth was, he wouldn’t have gone even if he hadn’t had plans for the evening, having avoided the Hanged Man as much as possible ever since Isabela had left Kirkwall. Every time he’d walked inside—and there hadn’t been very many—he’d automatically looked in the direction of the bar, expecting to see her there. Then he remembered their final argument, and the scab ripped free of the wound all over again.

He still didn’t know what he’d done wrong; that was the worst part of it. He’d been hurt when she’d run off with the artifact, but it wasn’t as if they’d even had a chance to talk about that. And it didn’t really matter; the moment when she’d entered the throne room, the pirate queen in all her glory swooping in to save the day, he’d forgiven everything.

She’d been his best friend besides Anders. Isabela had been the one person who’d never wanted anything from him, the one person whose motives had always been simple and uncomplicated. Unlike everyone else he knew, with their dark pasts and painful choices, Isabela was straightforward. She wanted to have a good time, and she wanted her freedom. End of story.

So why had she gotten so angry, when all he’d done was thank her for coming back? For being his friend?

Whatever the reason, she’s gone. I can’t avoid the Hanged Man forever.

Maybe not, but tonight he had better things to do. Thinking about the evening ahead put a spring in his step as he finished the climb back to Hightown.

“Everything is just as you asked, Messere,” Bodahn said by way of greeting when he walked through the door. “Orana has outdone herself.”

Reyn took a deep, appreciative breath; the savory scent of a roast had drifted all the way from the kitchen, accompanied by the sweet odor of baking cake. “It smells divine.”

“I found a nice bottle of Sun Blonde in the market, which should do nicely,” Bodahn went on. “I have it chilling in the dining room now. The table is laid and ready. Is there anything else you need?”

“No, thank you. You’re a marvel, Bodahn.”

The dwarf chuckled. “Not at all. It’s the least I can do, in return for letting Sandal and I stay here on your fine estate. Let alone encouraging my boy with all his little enchantments. I know how much those ingredients you buy for him cost, after all.”
“I certainly can’t pretend that I don’t benefit from the arrangement,” Reyn pointed out.

“True enough, I suppose. You should go and get ready—Master Anders will be back from the clinic soon.”

Reyn grinned. “You’re right. It wouldn’t do to keep him waiting.”

Reyn hurried upstairs. He bathed and shaved quickly, before dressing in the clothes he’d laid out that morning, after Anders had left for the clinic: the ivory shirt and black trousers he’d worn for their first night together. Humming to himself, he brushed his hair and left it loose down his back. A quick check of the room revealed that everything was in order: rose petals lightly strewn over the turned-down bed sheets, a host of scented candles that Orana would sneak in and light while dinner was going on, and a box of lyrium-filled chocolates from Tevinter that had cost a ridiculous amount of money to import.

This night was indeed going to be one to remember.

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The sun had set, but Anders had yet to return home.

Reyn had wandered in and out of the dining room several times, for no particular reason other than impatience. Barkolomew followed him back and forth, his nails clicking on the tiles and his tail wagging. Bodahn emerged from the direction of the kitchen, his kindly face concerned. “No sign yet?”

“There was probably an emergency at the clinic,” Reyn said. “Anders doesn’t exactly keep regular hours down there.”

“Orana said she’ll keep things warm, and not to worry.”

“Thank her for me, please. I’m sure Anders will be along shortly.”

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“I’m going down to the clinic and check on Anders. Tell Orana not to worry about the roast—it isn’t her fault.”

“Of course, Messere.”

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“No sign of Master Anders, then?”

“No. And no signs of a struggle. I went to the Hanged Man, in case he took it into his head to play cards tonight for some reason, but Varric hadn’t seen him.”

“Do you think he’s all right?”

“I don’t know. I hope so.”

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“There’s no need for you to wait up with me, Bodahn. Go to bed. And please tell Orana I don’t hold her responsible for dinner being ruined.”
“Yes, Messere. Wake me up if you need anything.”

***

The creak of the door leading to the cellar awoke Reyn from his restless doze on the couch. Raising his head, he saw a familiar silhouette by the light of the fire that had almost burned down. “Anders?”

Anders started. “You didn’t wait up for me, did you?”

A dozen replies flashed through Reyn’s mind, but he bit back most of them, not wanting to start an argument before he knew what was going on. “Of course I did. I was worried. Where have you been?”

Anders winced as he crossed the room. “I’m sorry, sweetheart. One of my contacts came by today… there were some things I had to follow up on.”

“With the mage underground, you mean.”

His voice had come out sharply; Anders gave him a startled look. “Yes.”

“You could have asked for my help.”

Anders sighed. “I know, but…you’re our public face. You’re the one out there convincing the ordinary people that we mages aren’t all dangerous maniacs who need to be locked up. But that means everyone knows who you are. You’re too recognizable.”

Reyn thought of the deliberately obscure statue down at the docks, and bit back another surge of anger, although whether that was directed at Anders, the Chantry, or the universe in general, he wasn’t entirely sure. “Fine. Let’s go to bed.”

“Why are you angry?”

“I’m not angry.” Which was an obvious lie. “I’m tired and I want to sleep somewhere that doesn’t put a knot in my neck.”

“I can give you a massage if—“

“No. I just want to go to sleep.”

He turned and headed for the great room and the stairs, knowing that he was being petty and childish, but too tired and hungry and annoyed to care. Anders followed, frowning. “If you were worried about me, I’ll send a note next time. Or leave one in the clinic, since I assume you checked there.”

A note would have been nice. Instead, he said, “You’re a grown man, Anders. You can do whatever you like. You don’t need to check in with me.”

“Maker’s breath, Reyn, don’t be like this.” Anders followed him up the stairs and to the bedroom—and came to an abrupt halt.

Reyn winced—he’d forgotten that the room was still half-prepared for what he’d hoped would be a fantastic night. Pretending that there was nothing out of the ordinary, he started stripping off his clothes and tossing them in the general direction of the chair.

Anders, however, scanned the wilted petals, the wrapped box on the nightstand, and the candles. “Were you planning something?” he asked cautiously.
Reyn sighed. “Remember what we talked about last week?”

“No, I…oh.” Anders’ face suddenly went ashen. “It’s been a year tonight, hasn’t it?”

Reyn sat down on the edge of the bed. “Yes.”

One year since the night he’d left the door of the estate unlocked and come up to wait nervously in front of this very fireplace, not at all sure if Anders would even show up, or what would happen if he did. One year since he’d asked Anders to move in with him, afraid at the time that he was overstepping the bounds, or that he’d scare his new lover off with his neediness.

“Oh. Oh, sweetheart, I’m so sorry,” Anders said, looking utterly horrified with himself. Setting aside his staff, he went down on his knees in front of Reyn, taking his hands. “I just got busy, with the clinic and…things…and I forgot.”

Reyn shrugged. “It wasn’t as if we’d planned on doing anything special. I just thought I’d surprise you. But you may need to apologize to Orana—she spent half the day cooking some elaborate meal that ended up ruined.”

Anders looked so miserable that he felt bad for even mentioning Orana. “I’m so sorry,” the healer repeated again, his long fingers tightening earnestly on Reyn’s. “Please, tell me how I can make it up to you.”

Reyn found that his annoyance and hurt had largely dissipated. “It’s all right,” he said, tugging Anders to sit on the bed beside him. “You were doing important work. I understand that.”

“You’re important, too,” Anders objected. “Maker’s breath, being with you, having a partner, means more to me than I can say.” He freed one hand and used it to brush the long hair out of Reyn’s face, tucking the lock behind his ear. “You asked me once if I was happy with the Wardens, and I said that I was, for a little while. But this last year…despite all the blood and horror and people trying to kill us, I’ve never been happier. That sounded a lot less pathetic in my head, by the way.”

Reyn snickered and leaned against Anders’ shoulder. “It’s all right. Next time, I’ll let you know beforehand instead of trying to surprise you. And I do understand about the mage underground. I love you because you’re so passionate about mage freedom, not in spite of it. Which reminds me—I got you a present.”

“And you’re still going to give it to me?” Anders asked incredulously.

Reyn went to the writing desk and opened the drawer, pulling out a small object that he tossed to Anders. “It’s a journal. You can write drafts of your manifesto and keep them in one place, instead of scribbling on loose paper and then losing them all the time.”

A slow smile bloomed on Anders’ face. “Thank you. It’s perfect. I wish I had something for you.”

“I’ll take that massage, if you’re still willing. How’s that?”

Anders leaned forward, a gleam in his eyes. “Whatever you want. Always.”

Chapter End Notes

It always struck me as a bit odd that Bodahn always used the Ferelden form of address
when referring to "young Master Anders" or "Mistress Amell," but calls Hawke "Messere." That Bodahn: he's a complicated guy. :) 

Next chapter: Aveline's wedding and the return of an old friend!
"Well?" Reyn asked. "How do I look?"

Afternoon sunlight streamed in through the high windows of their bedroom, accompanied by the sweet scent of spring roses. The weather was absolutely perfect: a deep blue sky, broken only by fluffy scattered clouds. Even the birds were singing.

Anders straightened his sleeves with a final tug. He wore a sea-green silk shirt with silver-threaded trim and a pair of brown trousers. His hair was neatly combed for once, and he'd even shaved. *Aveline should feel honored.*

"You look gorgeous, as you very well know," Anders told him.

"Hmph." Reyn brushed a stray dog hair off of his deep green shirt. "It doesn't hurt to hear it." He crossed the room to Anders and slid his arms around his lover's wiry frame. "You, on the other hand, look positively edible."

"You're going to crease your shirt."

"Since when do you worry about clothes?"

Anders pushed him gently back. "Since Aveline will kill me if I get you all disheveled before the ceremony. She doesn't like me as it is."

"That isn't true." Even so, Reyn was careful of his shirt when he leaned in for a kiss.

"You should go on down," Anders said, when they broke apart. "Make sure the bride hasn't run off and jumped a ship bound for Antiva."

"All right. I'll see you after the ceremony, then."

Humming to himself, Reyn left the room and bounded down the stairs. The estate was a bustle of activity today: caterers rushing in and out, extra servants hired to drape every available surface with garlands of flowers, and wedding guests of every stripe. Although he suspected Aveline would have preferred a small ceremony, it wasn't every day that the Captain of the Guard got married. She had, however, refused to give any of her guards time off to attend; if they were already off duty, they were welcome, but she wouldn't tolerate a decreased guard presence in the city just for her wedding.

Their friends were all there, of course. Fenris leaned against the cold fireplace in the great room, already swilling down a bottle of wine that Reyn suspected had been liberated from the estate’s cellar. Varric stood in a corner, chatting with Donnic, who looked oddly young out of uniform and in fancy clothes. Merrill had gone out into the garden to attend to some special decorations.
Gamlen loitered near the stairs; he’d heard about the wedding and more or less invited himself. As Reyn came down the steps, his uncle gave him a sour look.

"Well, if it isn't the maid of honor," Gamlen said. "Better hurry up and put on your dress."

Reyn rolled his eyes. "Very clever, uncle. Why don't you go out into the garden and find somewhere to sit? And please don't bother Anders."

"Fine," Gamlen said, turning to go outside. "At least I don't have to ask which one of you is the girl."

Reyn shook his head and turned his steps in the direction of the library, which had been temporarily converted into a very large dressing room, and knocked on the door. Guardswoman Brennan, now wearing a dress instead of a uniform, opened it a crack, then beckoned him through.

Aveline sat stiffly on a chair in the middle of the room, while Orana fussed with her hair. She wore a long dress of pale, peach fabric that matched the roses Orana was busy braiding into a crown. Although under normal circumstances, it would have brought out a delicate blush in the Guard Captain’s cheeks, at the moment it clashed with the rather green hue her face had taken on.

“'Aveline, you look beautiful,” Reyn said in a hearty voice.

“I can’t do this, Hawke,” she said, clutching at her skirts in a way that was bound to wrinkle them. “I’m going to-to throw up on the Chantry Mother, or-or trip over this stupid dress coming down the aisle, or say my vows wrong, I just know it.”

“'You won’t,” he told her. “I promise. And even if you do, Donnic will only smile and say, ‘ah, yes, there’s the woman whose flawless attempts at seduction won my heart in the first place.’”

She glowered at him. “In other words, he already knows I’m an idiot, so what’s the worst that could happen?”

“Well, I wouldn’t have put it quite that way.” He sank down in a chair to face her. “You and Donnic love each other. That’s what matters. The rest of this is just details.”

A small smile passed over her face. “You know, sometimes you really do know just what to say.”

“I try not to make a habit of it.”

“I’ve noticed.”

“There you are, Messere,” Orana said, finishing with the last braid. “All done.”

“If you’re ready, Orana can go out and tell everyone to get into place,” Reyn said. “If not, we’ll sit here for as long as you need. I’m sure the guests will entertain themselves just fine with the contents of my wine cellar.”

Aveline gave him a wry smile. “No, we shouldn’t keep Donnic waiting.”

Orana slipped out to give the signal. Reyn went to the door, listening for the music to start, which would be his cue. Clutching a bouquet of roses and wildflowers, Aveline came to wait with him.

“I’m sorry,” she said unexpectedly. “Here I am, doing all this complaining about my wedding, while you and Anders can’t…”

She trailed off awkwardly. Reyn sighed. “It isn’t as if the Chantry lets mages get married anyway. Unless they’re apostates pretending to be ordinary farmers like my father, of course. I suppose I
could put on a dress and claim to be a blushing peasant girl. If we could find a blind Mother, we might even get away with it.”

“Joke all you like, Hawke, but it can’t be easy. On Anders if not on you. I know you don’t believe in the Maker, but he does.”

Reyn gave her a sideways glance. “Keep talking like that, and I’ll think you’re sympathetic to the cause of mage freedom.”

She offered him a rueful smile in return. “Just know that I’m grateful for everything you’ve done for me. Including letting me get married here. It means a lot, to Donnic and me, both.”

The strains of the hired quartet flowed in from the open doors to the garden. “That’s my cue,” he said. “See you at the altar.”

Donnic’s younger brother was the best man; he waited rather awkwardly near the garden entrance. “I’m not sure if I should offer you my arm, Serah,” he said with an attempt at a smile that was half grimace.

“Best not to,” Reyn told him. “My boyfriend gets jealous.”

The poor lad didn’t know what to say to that, only turned red and fell in beside Reyn and kept pace as they left the house and passed into the garden.

Leandra had been the one to plant the roses, and Orana had made sure they’d continued to flourish since her death. Reyn and Anders’ contributions had been more practical; removing ornamentals to make more room for elfroot, blood lotus, and other plants useful in potion making. They were almost all in bloom now, filling the air with a riot of sweet fragrances.

The four musicians sat near the doors, while the guests had been seated in two sections, with an aisle in between. At the end of the aisle was the bower Merrill had created: four thick staves of wood twined and interconnected with a massive profusion of flowers and vines, to create a sort of shelter. The Chantry Mother stood in its fragrant shadow, and Reyn felt a momentary twinge of anger, to see someone in those robes on his property. But he swallowed it back for Aveline’s sake. Instead, he found where Anders was sitting with Varric, Merrill, and Fenris, and shot him a wink as he passed by.

Donnic already waited with the Mother, looking as if he might pass out at any moment. His brother went to his side, and Reyn stepped to the other side to wait for Aveline.

She came almost right after them, and marched rather than walked, but Reyn supposed that was more fitting anyway. From the utterly smitten expression on Donnic’s face, he certainly had no objections.

When she reached the bower, Aveline passed Reyn her bouquet. Reyn blinked at the weight—and the feel of what he would have sworn was a handle. Aveline shot him a brief glare, as if she thought he might blurt out some criticism in the middle of her wedding.

That would have been rather hypocritical of him, not to mention rude, so he kept a straight face as she turned and joined her hands with Donnic’s.

The Mother launched into some tedious sermon that Reyn immediately tuned out. Instead, he looked at Aveline; the sight of Donnic had apparently steeled her nerves. She was smiling now, with a warm softness he’d only glimpsed when Donnic was the subject of their conversation.

Suddenly, sharply, he remembered that day in the Blight lands outside of Lothering. The stench of
the darkspawn, the horrible barren landscape that just the day before had been fertile farmlands. The agony on Ser Wesley’s face when he’d told Aveline that killing him was the only way.

Only six years ago, and yet it felt like six lifetimes. Reyn had been grieving for Bethany, trying to keep what remained of his family together, and at the same time trying to negotiate with a powerful being who could turn into a dragon. Or a dragon who could turn into an old woman who talked too much, maybe. He remembered Flemeth’s words, how she’d seemed oddly sympathetic toward Aveline when she said that Wesley was beyond all help. As if she’d understood the other woman’s pain.

*If you’d told me then that I’d be here, watching Aveline get married a second time, in an estate that I own… It wouldn’t have seemed possible. Like something out of one of Varric’s stories, too fabulous to be true.*

The Mother at last fell silent, catching Reyn’s attention back to the present. Donnic and Aveline leaned in to kiss, and the guests clapped and cheered, so it seemed like the ceremony was over. *Next comes the drinking and dancing. I can’t believe things have gone so smoothly.*

“And now it’s time to make your pretty new husband a widower,” said a strident female voice.

*_Dread wolf take me, you’d think I’d learn not to even think things like that by now._*

Several people in the audience gasped, and everyone turned to the back, where the musicians had been sitting. They were all on their feet now…and all armed. The lute player was the one who had spoken; she tore aside her fancy clothes and revealed leather armor underneath.

“You’ve caused too much trouble, Guard Captain,” she declared, waving a pair of long daggers in a rather threatening manner. “Cracking down on the gangs. Jeven knew how to keep his bloody mouth shut and look the other way when enough coin crossed his palm. But you won’t bother us no more. We’ve got you here, unarmed and helpless.”

The caterers and most of the hired servants closed in menacingly. “Oh dear. I suppose I should have spent more time screening the staff,” Reyn said.

Then people were running and screaming, and there was no more time to reflect. He tossed the bouquet to Aveline; she caught it, ripped the flowers aside…and revealed a rather wicked-looking blade. The guests in the front row had abandoned their seats in favor of running for their lives, so she snatched up the nearest chair and used it as a shield as the first of the bandits closed in.

Reyn grabbed the nearest post holding up the bower and yanked it free of the ground, revealing that it had been anchored by a foot-long blade at the bottom. Trailing vines and flowers went everywhere as Reyn used a telekinetic burst to wrench loose the other two concealed staves and toss them to Merrill and Anders respectively.

He couldn’t unleash a tempest spell with so many innocent people running about, so he settled for blasting the bandit attacking with a bolt of lightning. Aveline cast him a startled look over her shoulder—and let out a short bark of laughter.

He supposed he did look rather ridiculous, wielding a staff festooned in flowers and trailing vines. “It’s a new branch of magic I’ve decided to take up,” he said, dropping in behind her as the next wave charged them. “It’s called, um, flowermancy. Invented by a mage who really just wanted to be a florist.”

A small gang of the criminals, all of them dressed as caterers, tried to sneak around the side. Reyn
caught them up in a force spell, then smashed them onto the ground with a rather satisfying thump. Then he winced, realizing that he’d just managed to flatten an entire bed of elfroot at the same time.

The entire garden was in the process of being destroyed, actually. Merrill was using the plants themselves to ensnare anyone who attacked her. Fenris trampled the roses, chasing down bandits and ripping out vital organs with his bare hands. Varric, who had claimed that Bianca was his date for the wedding, was gleefully turning the hedge into a pincushion. And Anders had thrown a fireball directly into the corner where Orana grew her herbs, so that the air was now filled with the smell of burning sage.

Aveline smashed another bandit in the face with the chair, which cracked loudly down the middle. “Damn it, Aveline, I’m never going to get my deposit back on that now!” Reyn shouted.

“Hawke, now is not the time—” she started—then stopped.

Reyn froze as well, both of them staring as silence gradually spread across the battlefield. The bandit leader stood in the center of the aisle, one arm locked around Donnic’s chest to pin his arms. The other held a dagger point-first against his side, angled to cause the maximum amount of damage to the organs within, should she decide to shove it in.

For a moment, Aveline’s stony expression cracked, revealing anguish. The bandit saw it, of course, and laughed.

“Drop your weapons,” she ordered, “or your pretty husband dies right now.”

“All right!” Donnic shouted.

Red bloomed on his silk shirt as she slid the dagger into muscle. To his credit, his face remained stoic, and not so much as a whimper escaped him.

“Do it!” the bandit snarled. “Now! Or his blood is on your hands!”

All the color had drained from Aveline’s face. His blood is on your hands, the bandit had said, and Reyn knew that she was the one reliving that day in the countryside near Lothering now.

Her dagger and makeshift shield fell to the ground with a clatter, followed by the sound of staves and various weapons small enough to conceal.

An expression of triumph spread across the bandit’s face, and Reyn had just enough time to note how maniacal it looked, before she buried the knife to the hilt into Donnic’s body.

Several things happened at once, then. Aveline’s agonized cry split the air. Donnic staggered to the side, and collapsed into the arms of Anders, who’d shoved his way through the crowd to reach him. And the bandit leader sprang forward, her bloody dagger upraised, aiming it straight at the unarmed Aveline’s chest.

Light glinted off the blade of a dagger as it flew whistling through the air. It buried itself in the bandit leader’s back; she stiffened, looking momentarily surprised, before collapsing dead to the ground.

Reyn realized that his mouth was hanging open; he shut it with a snap. Wait a minute. I know that dagger.

He down the length of the now-vacated aisle. Isabela stood at the opposite end, one hand still poised from her throw. The other hand held a wine bottle. Catching his gaze, she shot him a wink, hefted the bottle to her lips—then cast it aside with a curse. “Damn it, Fenris, you could have left something
for the rest of us!”

With a wild, incredulous laugh, Reyn ran down the aisle, caught Isabela up in his arms, and twirled her around. “Bela!”

She laughed as well, giving him a tight hug. “Miss me?”

“You have no idea.” He set her down, grinning like an idiot. “I didn’t think I’d ever see you again.”

“I had bad information. Someone told me there was going to be an orgy here.” She gestured at the corset-and-boots ensemble she still wore. “I thought I was going to be overdressed.”

“Someone get me a potion!” Anders barked. He was on his knees beside Donnic; healing magic bloomed in a blue nimbus around them both. Aveline crouched by her new husband, his head cradled in her lap.

Merrill ran to one of the flower arrangements, tossed the flowers aside, and pulled out a lyrium potion that had been hidden in the urn. It passed quickly from hand to hand until it reached Anders, who barely broke concentration long enough to down it.

“I take it you were expecting trouble?” Isabela asked as they watched Anders work.

“Not expecting, exactly,” Reyn said. “And not this sort. It occurred to me that this would be the perfect time for templars to disguise themselves as wedding guests and take the opportunity to remove Anders and me. If they could create enough chaos, there would be enough plausible deniability for Elthina and Meredith to suggest that we’d been killed by enraged citizens, not templars.”

“So I take it you’ve still got your hand on Anders’ rudder?”

“Every chance I get.”

The blue glow around Anders and Donnic vanished. Anders sagged back; Donnic sat up and looked lovingly into Aveline’s face.

“There might be vomiting,” Anders warned. But neither of them seemed to hear him, considering they were too busy locking lips.

Isabela grinned wickedly. “You realize what this means, don’t you? She owes me. Oh, this will be delicious.”

Reyn laughed and gave her a quick squeeze. “It’s good to have you back, Bela.”

***

The next morning, Reyn surveyed the wreckage of the garden unhappily. Half his mother’s roses were gone, and almost everything he and Anders had planted had been trampled or torn to bits.

“It’s all right, love,” Anders consoled him as he dug through the mess left behind. “We’ll replant. At least the elfroot grows quickly.”

“I suppose,” Reyn said. “It just bothers me. I’ve always thought of our home as somewhere safe, somewhere apart from all the violence and death we seem to deal with in the outside world. A sanctuary.”

Anders winced sympathetically. “I know. I did, too.” Then he picked up an object, and a bright smile
crossed his face. “This should cheer you up, though! This must be the lute the bandit leader was playing. I don’t think I ever mentioned it before, but I used to play myself. Come inside and I’ll serenade you.”

Chapter End Notes

As soon as I read the codex entry that said Aveline had gotten married on Hawke's estate, I started planning this chapter. I also immediately came up with Gamlen's "maid of honor" line.

Aveline's fears are pretty much mine from when I got married 11 years ago. I had to come down a flight of stairs and was certain I'd a) miss my cue and be standing at the top looking like an idiot when the music ended and/or b) fall down the stairs and break my leg. And of course there was always c) be so stupid I couldn't even repeat the lines of my self-written vows back to the officiant.

The city elf origin seemed to imply that a normal wedding party had at least a couple of bridesmaids/groomsmen, so that's what I ran with. I also assumed Aveline would ask Hawke to stand by her, even if he isn't female. I guess he might have walked her down the aisle, but she doesn't strike me as a woman who needs to be "given away."

I leave it to your imaginations as to the horrors Anders inflicted on poor Reyn with the lute. Just imagine Reyn's pained expression as he's torn between the understanding that Anders is genuinely trying to do something sweet for him, and the desire to beg Anders to please, please stop.
Danarius shows up to claim Fenris, and Reyn comes to a realization.

Reyn had never met a Tevinter Magister before, but he doubted they could all be like Danarius. Not and still have a functioning society, anyway. The man practically oozed a trail of slime behind him, and his voice hung thick and oily on the air. He’s like some sort of walking, talking Grease spell. I feel like I need a bath, just being in the same room.

The magister stood two steps above them on the stairs leading up to the rooms in the Hanged Man. At Reyn’s side was Fenris, all but quivering, whether with fear or shame or hatred or some other emotion, it was impossible to tell. All too clearly, Reyn remembered the story of how Fenris had slaughtered other friends, the people who’d helped him escape the first time, at Danarius’ orders. It occurred to him rather belatedly that history did have a way of repeating itself.

But Anders was on his other side, and Merrill behind them. Isabela had detached herself from the bar and drifted closer, and with any luck Varric would have noticed the commotion and be moving in behind the Tevinters from the direction of his room. Not bad odds, even if Fenris turned on them.

Creators, though, he didn’t want that to happen. He killed enough people already without adding friends to the list.

“Fenris doesn’t belong to anyone,” Reyn told Danarius, hoping to remind the elf of the same thing.

Danarius smirked. “Do I detect a note of jealousy?” he asked smugly. “It’s not surprising. The lad is rather talented, isn’t he?”

To Reyn’s left, Fenris flushed darker, shame flooding his cheeks. To his right, Anders was conversely getting paler, his hand tightening on his staff so that his knuckles went white.

Oh shit.

“I really wouldn’t know,” Reyn said, hoping to head off any unnecessary explosions.

“Oh, don’t play the innocent,” Danarius drawled, because apparently Imperial Magisters didn’t know better than to to poke the angry abomination with a stick. Although to be fair, he probably didn’t realize the danger. All of his attention seemed to be focused on Fenris, his erst-while possession, and Reyn, who he no doubt viewed as a rival magister who’d taken his property. Anders didn’t even appear to register, which normally would have been a positive, as such things went.

Today…not so much.

“You’re obviously a powerful mage, Champion,” Danarius prattled on. “To have climbed so high, you’re not the sort of man to deny himself the power infused in my little wolf’s skin. And if you’ve touched that, then you know how he writhes, how he’d do anything to please you.”
Someone was growling, and Reyn was pretty sure it wasn’t him. Nor did it seem to be the humiliated Fenris, which meant that he had at most a few bare seconds before there was glowing to go along with the growling. Which, again, would normally be a good thing, except that Reyn wasn’t entirely sure who would be the first target: Danarius or Fenris.

Not to mention they were in the middle of the Hanged Man, and Corff would never let him drink here again if all the other customers were scared away by a rampaging abomination.

“I’m terribly sorry to disappoint,” Reyn drawled, careful to keep his voice light and unworried. “But unlike you, Danarius, I prefer my wolves all grown up. With nice, big…” his grin widened and became something savage…”teeth.”

Then he threw a Tempest spell, and the inevitable bloodshed got underway.***

“You’re a bastard, Hawke,” Fenris said.

Reyn sighed. “I assure you, I knew my father quite well.”

Because of course things hadn’t gone as badly as could be expected—they’d gone exponentially worse. Oh, the killing Danarius part had gone off without much of a hitch, considering that he was a powerful magister. But then Varania had turned out to be a mage, which had set Fenris off.

Had he not witnessed the agonizing confrontation between Varric and Bartrand, Reyn wasn’t sure what he would have done. But as it was, he’d asked Fenris not to kill Varania, and rather to his surprise, the elf had let her go. Which was when she’d dropped yet another fireball in the soup: Fenris had asked for his lyrium tattoos, had won them in fact. A mark of honor, in exchange for the freedom of a family he no longer remembered, a family he’d almost killed.

Which had been bad enough. Except then Anders had chosen to start in: swearing at Fenris, calling him a hypocrite for having a mage sister, then lashing out a second time, when Reyn tried to reassure the despairing elf that he had friends.

Predictably, Fenris had then gone on an anti-magic rant…and yet his heart hadn’t been in it. More than anything, he’d just seemed…tired, really. Worn out, like a horse run to foundering and then left to stagger neglected in a field until it died.

So Reyn had insisted on walking Fenris back to his mansion, a bit worried that the elf might do something reckless in his depression. Anders had invited himself along, which for once didn’t help Reyn’s mood, considering that he was feeling rather put out with his lover at the moment. They’d gone to the mansion; Fenris hadn’t said a word, only led the way to the study, beckoned Reyn within—and slammed the door decisively in Anders’ face.

Which was how Reyn had ended up sitting in the study, listening to Fenris bemoan the fact that his best friend was a mage, while Anders palpably sulked on the other side of the door. Probably with his ear pressed against the panel, or his eye to the keyhole, just in case Reyn abruptly decided he found Fenris so irresistible that he was going to shag him with Anders right outside.

Because obviously, all of my behavior up until now has indicated that’s exactly the sort of thing I might do.

Reyn pinched the bridge of his nose against the beginning of a headache. None of this was about him, he reminded himself firmly. It was all about Anders’ and Fenris’ problems and fixations, and his job as their friend was to help them and not take it personally.
But, Creators, he really wanted to knock both of their heads into the wall, then go get drunk by himself for a few hours.

“I didn’t mean that sort of bastard,” Fenris said, between gulps from a wine bottle. No doubt the vintage was incredibly pricey and rare, and made from the blood of especially oppressed elven slaves.

“Well, that’s good, I suppose. So am I a bastard because, as you already pointed out several times, I’m a mage? Or is there some new and different reason you’re calling me names?”

Fenris shifted uncomfortably in his chair, his attention suddenly captured by the fireplace. “I was referring to your response to Danarius when he implied that you and I… Well. You didn’t have to make it quite so insulting, you know.”

Reyn winced. “Sorry about that. If it helps, I don’t think of you as a little wolf. It’s demeaning, and…kind of disturbing, to be honest. But I felt that I needed to, er, make things clear.”

Fenris watched him for a long moment, his green eyes shadowed. “What do you see in him?” he asked at last, his lip curling slightly in disgust. “Anders. He is weak—not like you at all. He claims otherwise, but I know that he would set himself up as a magister in a heartbeat if he could.”

“Then why hasn’t he gone to Tevinter and done just that?”

“I do not know. Perhaps he wishes to establish a new Imperium here.”

Reyn shook his head. “That doesn’t make sense, and you know it. Someone as weak as you believe Anders to be would surely take the easiest path.” Fenris opened his mouth as if to protest, but Reyn held up his hand. “No. Just listen. The problem is that you and Anders have both built up this idea of each other inside your own heads. Both of you have suffered—and don’t you dare shake your head at me, Fenris. You don’t know the first thing about Anders, no matter what you believe.”

The heat in his voice caught Fenris’ attention; there was that at least. “Anders thinks you’re a wild dog,” Reyn went on. “I don’t think that. Am I wrong?”

Fenris glared. “Of course not!”

“You think Anders is weak and corrupt. I don’t think that. Am I wrong?”

Fenris opened his mouth…and then closed it again. “I…do not know. Perhaps there are things I have not considered.”

Well, it was something. “Just think about it. I’ll try to convince Anders to do the same. I’m not asking you to be friends, but you don’t have hate each other. You have more in common than either of you would ever believe.”

Fenris nodded slowly. “I will try.” He swallowed, wetted dry lips with his tongue, then glanced up at Reyn, as if he couldn’t quite bring himself to speak. When he did, it wasn’t at all what Reyn expected him to say.

“Hawke…do you ever wonder…what might have been?”

He looked sad then: sad and vulnerable and afraid, stripped raw by the encounter with Danarius. And a part of Reyn wanted to say something comforting, or make a joke, or do something, anything, but speak the truth.
But he owed Fenris that truth. Fenris, who counted him as his only real friend, mage or not. Fenris, who was so damned fragile underneath the hard shell of his exterior.

_Just like all the rest of us._ Creators save them.

“No,” he said gently, or as gently as he could with such bald honesty. “I don’t.”

Because he still remembered that day in the clinic, when he’d walked in expecting a charlatan at best and an ambush at worst, and instead found something he never, ever looked for. Remembered that moment, when Anders had spun around, staff in hand: fierce and protective and with that fading flash of blue in his eyes that Reyn hadn’t understood at the time.

That instant broke his life into two parts, like a lightning strike splitting a tree asunder. Like a sword cleaving a shield.

Like a leap into the abyss.

Reyn rose to his feet. “I should go,” he said. “Take care, Fenris. Remember that you have friends. If you need anything, even if just to talk, send word to the estate, and I’ll come. Night or day. You have my promise.”

Fenris nodded, although he still looked sad. Regretful. “Thank you, Hawke. That means more to me than you know.”

Reyn let himself out, almost walking straight into Anders as he did so. He arched a brow, and Anders at least had the grace to look guilty for eavesdropping.

They walked out of the mansion, past the long-desiccated bodies and spiderwebs and utter filth that Fenris, for unknown reasons, refused to allow anyone to clean. _Maybe he thinks he doesn’t deserve anything better. Maybe a part of him believes he deserves what happened to him._

Just like Anders. In a way, it was a crime that they each refused to see how much they had in common, how much of their damage was the same.

Neither mage said anything until they were back in the clean night air. Then Anders’ beautiful, long fingers found Reyn’s and twined tight. “You truly never wondered?” he asked.

Reyn tipped his head back and stared up at the stars, his eyes searching for the constellation of the Dragon. He remembered the flash of sunlight off scales, how Flemeth’s wings had beat the air, how proud and fierce and beautiful she had been. How she had looked at him with the knowledge of ages in her eyes…and yet with a very personal kind of pity as well.

Because, if the legends were to be believed, then Flemeth had once been human enough to understand matters of the heart, had in fact been undone by them.

Or raised up by them, perhaps, if one wanted to look at it that way.

“No,” he said simply. He paused, forcing Anders to stop as well, and looked up into the taller man’s eyes. “I never did.”

Anders smiled then, and kissed him. And if he didn’t understand…well, that was all right. Reyn knew. That was enough for now.
Reyn knows his own kinks pretty well, and doesn't have any problem owning up to them. ;)

It seemed logical that Thedas would have a constellation generally referred to as the Dragon. Probably a Griffon, too. Maybe even a speed griffon.
Sundermount

Chapter Summary

Anders and Reyn quarrel about Merrill, and Justice worries about the demon's intentions.

By the time they made camp, Reyn already had a splitting headache, accompanied by the feeling that it was going to get a lot worse before it got better.

The Dalish had picked a beautiful place to spend the last seven years, he had to give them that. The sun setting over the peak bathed one side of the mountain in golden light and the other in sapphire shadow. The air smelled crisp and pure, so unlike the fish-and-feces stink of Kirkwall. The wind moaning across the exposed gray bones of the mountain had the same cold bite as the crystal-clear stream running through their camp. Under any other circumstances, he would have enjoyed the outing immensely.

Not this time, though. Now the fact that they stood on the shadowed side of the mountain felt like a portent of doom.

He shook his head and turned his attention to setting up the tent he would share with Anders, while Varric got a campfire going and Merrill fetched water from the stream. Normally, Anders would be making himself useful by casting a wall of protective glyphs around the camp to repel any intruders, or at least freeze them until they could be dealt with.

Today, however, he was dogging Merrill’s every step. They’d been arguing vociferously ever since leaving the Alienage. It had gotten even worse after they’d left the Dalish camp. Anders seemed to take new heart from Keeper Marethari’s gentle attempt at dissuading her former first, and a long, long afternoon of bickering had followed. Reyn had actually welcomed the times they’d been attacked by shades and corpses, because at least it ended the argument for a brief while.

Now, Merrill lugged a bucket of water over to the fire, the burden seeming almost too heavy for her small frame. Anders followed on her heels, gesticulating wildly, as if he thought that if he only waved his arms around enough, it would somehow convince her that he was right.

“I don’t know why I’m bothering with this,” he was saying as they drew near enough for Reyn to overhear, “But you do realize this is crazy, right??”

Merrill set down the water without looking at him. In the gathering dark, her pale face seemed almost to glow, ghostly and haunting. “Believe me, I noticed,” she said, sounding more weary than Reyn had ever heard her, except possibly for that day in the Alienage when she’d asked him to accompany her here. “If I had any other choices, I’d take them.”

“You have choices!” Anders shouted. He looked half-crazed, his eyes wild and his hair coming out of its tie. “You always had choices! Stop using blood magic! Get rid of that damned mirror!”

Merrill turned to him. In contrast to his mania, she had the calm of someone reaching the end of a long journey…whatever that journey might have led her to. “Oh, in that case, I’ll head back to Kirkwall and throw it away. Right after you abandon the plight of the Circle of Magi.”
Anders thin face went pale with anger, except for two bright spots of color high on his cheeks. “That isn’t the same at all!”

“Isn’t it?”

“Of course not! I would never turn to blood magic!”

“Really? Not even if it could save them all?” She cocked her head to one side. “Never mind, then. I suppose you aren’t as dedicated as I thought.”

*Dread wolf*s teeth, Merrill.*

“ Anders?” Reyn called hastily, before Anders could think of a response—or simply burst into flames, which seemed equally likely from the expression on his face. “May I speak with you? In private?”

To his relief, Anders turned his back on Merrill and stalked over to the tent. Reyn held the flap open politely; although the tent didn’t really offer much more than the illusion of privacy, there were too many shades and other things on the mountain to risk going further away.

“Are they going to have sex?” Merrill asked Varric guilelessly, before Reyn could duck in after Anders.

Varric glanced briefly in Reyn’s direction. “Probably not, Daisy.”

Reyn pulled the flap closed behind him. The tent was small, just something to keep the rain off them while they slept. Anders sat cross-legged on his bedroll, glowering in the light of the small lantern. Reyn sat down facing him; he opened his mouth, obviously about to launch into a tirade.

Reyn held up a hand to forestall him. “Anders. Please. Leave Merrill alone.”

Anders stared at him in shock. “I’m trying to save her!”

“She’s a grown woman, Anders. She has the right to make her own choices, even if that means making choices that you don’t approve of.”

Anders flushed sharply. “How can you say that? You know what’s going to happen tomorrow, when she contacts that demon!”

And here we go. Reyn shook his head. “No. I don’t.”

“What? Of course you do!”

“Anders, please stop shouting at me. I’m right here.”

“Sorry.” Anders scrubbed a hand over his face, across the stubble that indicated he’d forgotten to shave yet again. Just like he tended to forget to change his clothes, or bathe, or eat, unless reminded by someone who didn’t live inside of his head. “It’s just…I don’t even understand how you can say that. She’s contacted a *demon.*”

“Maybe. Maybe she’s right, and there are no demons, just spirits. All of whom are very dangerous.”

Anders mouth tightened angrily. “You must be joking. You aren’t saying what I think you’re saying.”

Reyn reached out and took Anders’ hand, but his lover’s fingers lay stiff and unresponsive in his.
Mythal, is this a conversation I really want to have right now?

But if not now, then when?

“You assume that Merrill doesn’t understand the danger,” Reyn said carefully, feeling as though he picked his way through a field of broken glass, trying not to make a misstep. “You assume that she doesn’t understand that we may well have to kill her tomorrow. She does. That was why she asked me to come in the first place. She trusts me to do whatever is necessary.”

“Then why would she do this?”

“Because she thinks it’s worth the risk.” Reyn leaned forward slightly, looking directly into Anders’ earth-brown eyes. “Anders…she’s taking a terrible chance, but she’s doing it for her people. She’s willing to take the risks inherent in allying herself to a powerful spirit, not for her own sake, but for the survival of all the Dalish. Doesn’t that sound at all familiar?”

It had been the wrong thing to say. Anders jerked his hands free, a mixture of hurt and fury flashing over his features. “It’s not the same thing at all!” he snarled, volume rising even as his voice fell into a lower and lower register. “We are no demon!”

And now the pronouns are slipping. Good going, Reyn—get both of them pissed at you instead of just one.

He hadn’t expected that to happen, because as far as he could tell, Justice didn’t seem to care about blood magic one way or another, didn’t seem at all interested in whether or not Merrill struck a bargain with every spirit on the mountain. But suggest that he was anything like them…

Rather belatedly, it occurred to Reyn that this might actually be a rather touchy subject for Justice.

“Well, no,” he said, back-peddling verbally and wondering if he was going to have to do it physically as well, “it’s just that…I hadn’t met you and Justice, of course I wouldn’t even consider it, but what if she really has found what you might call a spirit—and I know the whole blood magic thing is a touchy subject, but just set that aside for a moment, and…er…”

Anders—there was no glowing, so he was pretty sure it was Anders—lurched toward the tent flap. “I don’t believe you,” he shot back over his shoulder. “There is nothing similar about our situation at all. So when you have to cut off Merrill’s head tomorrow, just remember that I tried to warn you both.”

“Anders—” Reyn said, scrambling out behind him.

Anders stomped away toward the perimeter of the camp. “I have work to do,” he snapped without looking back.

Reyn let him go with a sigh. I could have handled that better.

Merrill came over and hovered at his side. “I’m sorry, Hawke. I didn’t mean to cause trouble.”

“It isn’t your fault,” he said. “Not really. Anders can’t abide blood magic, and I somehow managed to provoke Justice on top of things. There’s no talking to either of them right now.”

“Still, I’m sorry. You seem so happy together; I hate to see you argue. Or hear you argue, I suppose.”

Ah, yes, the illusion of privacy that a tent so kindly gave. “Don’t worry about us, Merrill. I think our
relationship can take a few arguments. Anyway, the make up sex will be fabulous.” He glanced over
and saw her blush crimson. “Anyway, it’s you I’m worried about.”

She hunched in on herself, all sharp angles and delicate bones. “But you’ve supported me anyway,
even when my own clan hasn’t. I appreciate that.”

“Like I told Anders: you know the risks. You’ve decided that what this can do for your people is
worth your life, if it comes to it. I respect that.”

She was silent for a long moment, before letting out a little sigh. “I feel sorry for Anders.”

“Why?”

“Because he didn’t know the risks. I’m walking into this with my eyes open. He went into it with his
eyes shut.” She gave him a sad smile. “I think Varric has dinner ready, Hawke. Let’s go eat.”

***

Reyn is ours.

Anders sat on a rock just outside of camp, grinding his teeth together against a rage that didn’t
entirely belong to him. He’d meant to start casting glyphs to ward off intruders, but his concentration
was shot, and his hands shook on the haft of his staff.

I can’t believe Reyn is siding with Merrill. How can he not see that this is madness? How can he not
see that this situation is completely different from us?

Is it? asked a treacherous little voice of doubt, the one that belonged to no one but Anders.

Justice didn’t care about Merrill; she wasn’t a templar or an oppressed Circle Mage, so she wasn’t in
his purview as far as he was concerned. Reyn is ours, he insisted again, nonsensically. Then: This
demon will not have him.

Do you think that’s going to be an issue? Anders wasn’t at all sure where this was coming from.
After all, Merrill was the one handing herself over to it, wasn’t she? Do you know something?

Justice shifted, restless and angry. Reyn spoke of it as if it is like us. We are not some demon, weak
and pathetic enough to become trapped on a mountain. We are Justice, and Reyn is ours, and this
creature will not have him.

For a long moment, Anders only sat and stared at nothing, shocked into incoherence. Are you…
jealous?

He’d known all along that some inhabitants of the Fade—usually demons, but not always—regularly
became fixated on certain mortals. It happened quite a bit with spirit healers, actually. Solona had
even told him that Wynne had become possessed by a spirit of Faith that had been stalking her for
years. Unlike a demon, it had been content with just watching from the Fade, until the day she got
into serious trouble. Then it had stepped in and saved her life by possessing her.

It had in fact been the stories about Wynne that had convinced him it would be safe to accept
Justice’s offer…but that was neither here nor there at the moment.

If Justice had decided to fixate on Reyn, what did that mean? Was Reyn in danger from them?
Would Justice try to make the leap from Anders to him somehow? Was that even possible?
Justice must have been listening in, because anger slashed across his thoughts, scattering them like a pile of papers swept off a table. *What nonsense is this? Why would I wish to do such a thing?*

No, *that* wasn’t what Justice wanted. Justice wanted Anders to get out of the damn way for once, that was what he wanted, and surrender control to him while they were in Reyn’s bed. Which would be a complete and utter disaster—

Another flash of annoyance. *I know this. You have made the situation very clear. It is you Reyn loves, not me. But this creature will not have him.*

Because, the thinking apparently ran, if Justice had decided that a mortal was worth his affection and attention, why wouldn’t some other denizen of the Fade come to the same conclusion? He rather reminded Anders of a jealous suitor, utterly convinced that every other man was plotting to steal his beloved. It would have been funny if it hadn’t been so…bizarre? Horrifying? Frightening? Anders had no idea what to feel at the moment.

He did know that if Reyn knew about Justice’s proprietary attitude, he’d run away screaming. Or put them down as an abomination, which was the specter that haunted Anders’ nightmares when he wasn’t busy dreaming about darkspawn or templars.

In his dreams, he’d died a hundred times at Reyn’s hands, condemned for being the monster he knew they were. But worse by far were the dreams where he lost control, where Justice tore Reyn apart while Anders was trapped inside, screaming…

Justice was privy to those dreams, as he was privy to everything that was Anders. He hated them; they confused and frightened him. *I would not,* he insisted, as if he’d never gone on a murderous rampage before. As if he hadn’t threatened that poor mage girl, Ella. As if he hadn’t shredded Wardens during those first, horrific moments of their merged existence, *eaten* them…

Justice retreated, hurt and afraid. That memory frightened him; he was usually painfully confident in his actions and opinions. He’d been trying to protect them, that was all he knew. Things inside a living host had been so very different from inhabiting a corpse, *everything* so huge and bright and intense, so overwhelming to a spirit who had no practical experience in self-control under such circumstances…

Justice didn’t believe that he would ever hurt Reyn. But he never would have thought that he would have acted as he did on that terrible day, either. Which was why Anders didn’t trust him—*couldn’t* trust him—to take control, even for a moment.

The spirit curled into as small a ball as possible in Anders’ mind, scared now, and ashamed. *You will not let this demon take him from us?* he asked, but the thought was small, tentative.

Anders closed his eyes, as if shutting away the world could somehow shut away all his fear. *Of course not. When Reyn finally leaves us…the fault will be ours alone.*
The Hawke

Chapter Summary

Warning: minor "Legacy" DLC spoilers!

When the Carta tries to kill Hawke, he has to team up with his templar brother to get to the bottom of things. Needless to say, this does not go over well with Anders.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

“Fen’Harel locked away the gods. Locked away in the heavens, the Creators couldn’t prevent in the fall of Arlathan,” Merrill said.

She leaned against Barkolomew, on the floor of the great room, where she and Reyn been drinking wine and talking about whatever came to mind: old stories, mostly, of heroes and gods and things that didn’t impact their day-to-day lives. Certainly they didn’t talk about what had happened on Sundermount. Indeed, when Merrill had appeared at their door after dinner, Anders had narrowed his eyes and stalked off to the library, where he sat scribbling furiously on his manifesto, refusing to speak or even look at her. Reyn had only rolled his eyes at Anders’ behavior and invited her inside.

“True,” Reyn allowed. “But he also sealed the Forgotten Ones in the abyss. He removed evil from the world at the same time as he took away good. It seems to me that the point of the Trickster is to remind us that no action, no person, is entirely good or evil, and that to fall into that kind of dichotomous thinking is itself a trap.”

Merrill gave him a wan smile. “There are some who believe that Fen’Harel brought the humans to our lands. He never cared for the Elvhen, so perhaps he was looking for a people to call his own.”

“An interesting thought.” Reyn absently scratched at the stubble on his chin while he considered; he’d spent the day at home, and anyway Anders liked it when he was a bit on the bristly side. “I sometimes wonder if the Chantry didn’t steal some of the elven stories. The Creators are gone, and coincidentally, so is the Maker. Although at least the Creators didn’t want to go, whereas the Maker threw a cosmic temper tantrum and stormed off to his room. I suppose the Forgotten Ones would be the Old Gods who were sealed away deep beneath the earth. I’m not sure that there’s an equivalent of Fen’Harel, though. Probably too complex a concept for the Chantry founders.”

Merrill giggled; wine always had that affect on her. “Elgar’non, Hawke. The Dread Wolf won’t have to drag your spirit into the Void; you’ll chase him after him yourself, won’t you?”

“I won’t rule out the possibility.”

“And Anders says I’m the crazy one.”

Anders’ voice floated from the direction of the library. “Reyn might be a heathen, but at least he hasn’t summoned any demons or killed everyone he loves.”

Merrill paled, and her eyes widened with hurt. Restraining the impulse to smack Anders upside the head, Reyn instead said, “Oh listen, someone wants to sleep in the doghouse tonight.”
“We don’t have a doghouse.”

“I’m sure you’ll find one if you keep walking long enough, darling.”

Merrill stood up. “I-I should probably go.”

Reyn sighed and followed her to the door. “Merrill, don’t listen to Anders,” he said. “There are three mages in this house at the moment, and which one of us is an actual abomination? He really can’t claim the moral high ground here.”

“I know,” she replied wretchedly. “But if the Keeper hadn’t done what she did…”

Reyn winced. Sundermount had been horrible in every possible way; there was no denying that. There was also no denying that the spirit Merrill had contacted had indeed turned out to be malevolent. Anders had unfortunately taken that as confirmation that he’d been right and Reyn and Merrill had been wrong, and the world really was neatly divided into spirits and demons, thank you very much.

And Creators, that had been an argument, by far the worst they’d ever had. Anders had made a cutting remark to Merrill about the world being poorer with her still in it, while Marethari was gone. Reyn had intervened, and a moment later, they’d been yelling at each other over a miserable campfire, while Merrill sobbed and Varric tried to comfort her. They’d ended up falling asleep with their backs turned to each other that night, six inches of cold mountain air in between.

Of course, they’d rolled over at some point during the night and automatically flung an arm here and a leg there, until they’d woken up before dawn cuddled into each other as usual. Anders had agreed to keep his mouth shut around Merrill, and Reyn had apologized for comparing Anders to Sebastian Vael and implying that Justice might in any way be considered demonic.

“Marethari made her choice,” he said now, putting his hand to Merrill’s thin shoulder. “She chose you over your clan, and I know that you see that as a terrible thing. I know you believe that she failed in her duty as a Keeper, and I’m not disputing that. But I won’t pretend that I’m not glad you’re still here. I wish things had been different, but if it was a choice between her and you, I’d take you every time.”

“I know you mean well, Hawke,” she said, not meeting his gaze. “But you don’t understand what it means to be Dalish. What it means to be a Keeper.”

“I know.” He hugged her; she felt bird-light against him, as if a strong wind would blow her away. “Are you sure you want to walk all the way back to the Alienage? You can spend the night here if you’d like. I’ll have Orana make up the guest room.”

She glanced in the direction of the library. “No. I should probably go.”

Reyn suppressed a sigh. “You’re always welcome here, Merrill. Please don’t let Anders drive you away. It’s my house just as much as it is his.”

“Thank you,” she said with a valiant attempt at a smile. “But it might be better if you come and visit me for a while.”

_anders, my love, we’re going to have a few words tonight before bed._ “I’ll do that, then,” he promised. “Be safe, Merrill.”

He opened the door, intending to at least escort her to Lowtown. To his surprise, a large group of short, stout figures wearing hoods stood on his doorstep, blocking the way.
“It’s the Hawke!” exclaimed one of the dwarves, and Reyn had just enough time to reflect that was a very odd way to refer to him, before the daggers came out.

Moving on instinct, he jerked Merrill back and shoved her hard in the direction of the great room. “Anders!” he shouted at the top of his lungs. “I need my staff, now!”

He heard a muffled exclamation from Anders. “Merrill, make sure Orana and the dwarves are safe,” he ordered, before turning to face his attackers.

They swarmed in, all of them dressed in dark clothing and wielding daggers. Thieves or brigands of some kind, he decided, but awfully well organized. It was harder without his staff, but he pulled on his reserves of mana and managed to stop the first ones into the foyer with a blast of lightning. Barkolomew charged from the direction of the great room, barking and snarling like a mad thing, and latched onto an assassin who had been trying to flank Reyn.

“Reyn!” Anders shouted from above. Reyn looked up, just in time for Anders to pitch his staff over the railing. He caught it and set about casting a tempest spell, while Anders rained down fireballs from above.

The dwarves didn’t really stand a chance, not against three battle-hardened mages and a marbari warhound. “Does anyone need healing?” Anders called anxiously, once the final assassin died screaming with the blade of Reyn’s staff through his heart.

“I’m fine,” Merrill called from her position just inside the great room.


The servants crept from behind Merrill. “Y-Yes, messere, I’m fine,” Orana reassured him, although her eyes were twice their normal size.

Reyn pressed his lips together and eyed the destruction. The air stank of burned flesh and hair, and the carpet and mud bench were charred beyond hope of repair. Oh well, at least it’s the bench Barkolomew chewed on. “So, does anyone know why we have a pile of dead dwarves in the foyer?” he asked. “Because I don’t remember ordering an assassination attempt tonight.”

“They look like Carta, messere,” Bodahn offered as he came closer to inspect the bodies.

“Why would the Carta want to kill you?” Anders asked, leaning over the railing. Reyn met his gaze and read worry in his eyes.

“Maybe they had the wrong address?” Reyn suggested hopefully.

Anders’ sensitive mouth tightened. “They said your name.”

Another figure appeared in the still-open doorway. Startled, Reyn turned, expecting a fresh assault. The newcomer was no dwarf, however.

For a moment all Reyn’s mind registered was templar. His hand tightened on his staff, even as his blood froze.

Then the details came into focus: this templar was alone...and the flushed face above the gleaming breastplate belonged to his brother.

“So,” Carver said, surveying the damage, "they're after you, too."
To Reyn’s infinite surprise, Carver claimed that he had actually been worried. The Carta had managed to get into the Gallows, launching an attack just after sundown, all the while screaming something incoherent about “the Hawke.” Carver had realized that the attack might not only be aimed at him, and so had hurried to the estate to warn his elder brother.

*Or to make sure they’d finished the job.*

Varric had spent the next few days using his contacts in the Carta to investigate the attacks, and eventually turned up a lead. So now they were on their way to the Vimmark Mountains: Reyn, Varric, Anders...and Carver.

Carver had insisted on coming, arguing that the Carta had tried to kill him, too. He was already involved, and Reyn had to admit that, like it or not, his brother did have a point.

Anders went on all of Reyn’s outings; that had been a given even before they’d become lovers. This time, however, he’d tentatively suggested that Anders stay in Kirkwall.

“Of course I’m going!” Anders snapped, scowling at the suggestion. “I’m not leaving you alone with a templar!”

Reyn winced, not wanting this to develop into an argument. “You do have to admit that Carver didn’t turn any of us in when he could have,” he pointed out carefully. “You weren’t there, but Meredith was not happy with him the night the qunari attacked, when she realized that he had an apostate brother he’d never bothered to mention, let alone turn in. I can’t believe she didn’t call him on the carpet after that, but he must not have given away Merrill even under pressure, since no templars ever showed up in the Alienage to drag her off.”

“They haven’t shown up in my clinic, either.”

“Because I spend half my life mired in politics!” Reyn exclaimed, exasperated. “As long as I can keep my position in society, they don’t dare move against you. But Merrill? That’s a different story.”

Anders had hesitated, glancing away and then back again. “I just don’t like the idea the Carta can get at you. It worries me. An attack here, in our home…”

It was impossible for Reyn to argue with Anders when he was being sweet. The suspicious part of his mind wondered if the other mage had switched tactics on purpose. “Fine. Just…leave Carter to me. Please.”

“I won’t turn into an abomination and rip his head off, if that’s what you’re worried about.”

Reyn thought about pointing out that being an abomination was pretty much a full-time lifestyle, not something Anders trotted out for parties, but resisted the urge.

And so here they all were, on the way to some Carta outpost that wasn’t even supposed to exist, according to Varric. Anders spent the morning glaring daggers at Carver, but not actually saying anything, which Reyn supposed he should be grateful for. Unfortunately, it was a hot day, and trudging along a dusty road in plate armor made Carver’s already short temper even shorter. Some time around noon, he made some snide comment in Reyn’s direction, which Reyn paid no attention to, used to far worse from their years growing up. But it broke Anders out of his seething silence, and within moments, he and Carver were on the verge of a shouting match.

Which would not be good. Justice was probably already hovering close to the surface thanks to
Carver’s presence. Reyn didn’t want to find himself in the position of holding an angry abomination back, while trying to convince Carver to run for his life at the same time. Not that his brother was likely to listen.

“So, Blondie,” Varric interrupted, blithely walking between Anders and Carver, as if unaware that they were about to start a fight, “there’s something I’ve been meaning to ask you. Got a minute?"

Reyn knew a cue when he saw one. “Carver? Would you mind taking point with me?"

Glowering, Carver clanked and jangled his way up to where Reyn walked at the head of their little procession. “Trying to protect your boyfriend?” he sneered.

“I’m trying to protect both of you,” Reyn replied, not seeing any particular point in denying it.

Carver snorted. “I’m not afraid of him.”

Then you’re a sodding idiot. Either Carver had forgotten the night they’d fought the templars in the Chantry, or he chose to believe that he was more competent than they’d been. Or that Anders wouldn’t actually let Justice hurt him. Or that I won’t.

“Have it your way,” Reyn said. “I thought it would make sense to have our best fighter near the front, in case we walk into a Carta ambush, but if you’d prefer to hide at the back and pick on Anders, go right ahead.”

“I’m not afraid of the Carta, either,” Carver said hotly, as easy to distract now as he’d been when he was five. “Just wait until we run into those bastards. You’ll see some things that will impress even the great Champion of Kirkwall.”

Reyn bit back a half-dozen responses that would lead to an argument, and instead said only, “I look forward to it.”

Carver eyed him suspiciously, as if he suspected mockery but couldn’t quite prove it.

“So,” Varric was saying from behind them, “you and Hawke. I need some details. Did you go down on one knee? Did he jump you? Did you swear eternal vows of love, or is this just a physical thing?”

Dear Creators, Varric, why are you asking that now?!

“I don’t see how that’s any of your business,” Anders replied coldly.

“It was the jumping one, wasn’t it? Hawke seems like a jumper. And I guess after three years I can rule out the physical thing. Besides, you seem like the eternal vows of love sort. More dramatic that way.”

“Wonderful,” Carver muttered. “Just what I wanted to listen to. Tales of my brother and his catamite.”

Reyn clenched his jaw so hard he thought his teeth might crack. “Don’t start,” he said. “If not for my sake, then because Mother loved Anders like a son.”

“Of course she did,” Carver said darkly. Reyn glanced at him questioningly, but he didn’t elaborate.

Does he mean because Anders is a mage? Surely he isn’t trying to imply that Mother didn’t love us equally, just because Carver didn’t have magic.

Whatever the reason, it had shut him up, at least. Varric moved on to a less-uncomfortable topic, and
they trudged on down the dusty road.

***

The Carta base was too far away to walk to in a day, and so they made camp as night fell. Anders set up a ring of glyphs around the site. Reyn lingered by the pile of their equipment, watching with a little smile. Anders always added a little flourish on the end of every glyph, a twirl of the staff that was the equivalent of a confident swagger in a mage. It was undeniably sexy, which was probably why Anders did it in the first place. When Reyn eventually turned back to set up the tent, he found Carver watching him with an odd expression on his face.

*What now?*

Carver didn’t say anything, though, only went about setting up his own tent, so Reyn chose to ignore him. Varric had dinner going already, and at first he thought they might get through the evening without too much drama.

Once the stew was ready, Reyn took his bowl to sit on a log they’d dragged up near the fire. Anders joined him a few seconds later, sitting right up against him so that their thighs pressed together. Reyn gave him a curious glance, which was ignored.

...*All right.*

At least Anders was ignoring Carver, or at least pretending to do so. In fact, all his attention was focused on Reyn, in the form of small touches and demonstrations of affection, far more than was usual for him when they were in company. Generally, Anders tended to be somewhat more reserved in public than Reyn, thanks to the lingering influence of the Circle, where any show of affection was anathema.

All of which meant that it was going to be a long evening of playing “guess the neurosis.” Was Anders acting oddly because he wanted to assert his place in Reyn’s life? Because it was guaranteed to bother Carver, whom he had never liked? Or because it was his opportunity to defy a templar in relative safety? A mix of all three? Something else that Reyn hadn’t yet figured out?

*I love Anders, but Creators, sometimes he can be exhausting.*

Perhaps it didn’t matter at the moment. Anders needed something from him, so he would give it, without question. He struck up a conversation with Varric once they were done eating, casually reclining against Anders as he did so. Anders’ arm slid around his waist immediately, and he leaned his head against one feathery pauldron. In a different situation, t would have been relaxing.

He quizzed Varric about the Carta, both of them pretending they didn’t see Carver and Anders glowering at each other. The conversation limped along, until Varric finally decided to put it out of its misery by suggesting everyone else turn in while he took first watch.

Anders ducked into the tent, but Reyn hovered outside a moment, feeling oddly awkward. He didn’t know how he’d ended up trying to mediate between Carver and Anders, especially since there was no real question of where his loyalties would lie if push came to shove.

The last time he and Carver had been face-to-face had been the night of the Viscount’s party, when Leandra had still been alive. Losing her hadn’t awakened any particular desire in Reyn to reconnect with his brother. Yet somehow, traveling with him again, even bickering with him, had felt so familiar, so effortless even after all this time.

*Familiar doesn’t mean good.* Still, it was true what he’d told Anders: Carver could have betrayed
them a dozen times over, and hadn’t done so.

“Goodnight, brother,” he said finally, not knowing what else he even might want to say.

Carver glanced up from where he’d been polishing his two-handed sword—at least Anders had refrained from making any sarcastic remarks about that. For a moment, he looked surprised. Then he grunted something that could have been “goodnight” or “get stuffed,” and went back to his polishing.

Biting back a sigh, Reyn ducked into the tent.

Anders was on him instantly, hands cupping his face, mouth locked against his in a demanding kiss. Taken by surprise, Reyn stiffened for a moment, before yielding gladly.

When Anders finally pulled away, Reyn whispered, “Love? Do you want to talk about—“

“No,” Anders said shortly. His hands were busy finding the straps and buckles on Reyn’s clothing and undoing them, as if in a race to see how fast he could get Reyn naked.

It was impossible not to respond to such passion, but Reyn tried valiantly to give Anders the opportunity to talk things out. “Are you sure? I know this can’t be easy—“

Anders kissed him again, possibly to shut him up, possibly out of genuine desire. His clever fingers tweaked Reyn’s nipples, left a slight layer of frost in a flash of mana, before streaking delicious cold down his belly. Reyn gasped and arched his back, and a moment later Anders mouth was on him, warm against the chilled skin of his nipples and cock.

Creators, he was good at this. Reyn bit his lip hard, suppressing a moan. That was the worst thing about these damned trips they took into the countryside: tent walls didn’t go very far toward muffling sounds. At least Carver wouldn’t come barging in and demand that they shut up, the way Aveline had one memorable night on the Wounded Coast—and thank all the gods that they’d been well under the covers at the time, because Reyn wasn’t sure his dignity would have survived otherwise.

He reached for Anders, wanting to return the favor, but his lover gently pushed his hands away. “Shh. Let me. If you will,” he added.

Reyn only nodded. Not being allowed to touch in return was a teasing torment, but he was willing to play along. Anders’ hands shaped his body, finding all the sensitive spots, lips and tongue trailing deliciously behind. He paused eventually, rummaging briefly in one of their packs, before returning to crouch between Reyn’s knees. By now, Reyn was hard and leaking; he shifted slightly to make access easier, felt an oil-slick finger teasingly circle his entrance.

“Please,” he whispered.

Anders leaned over him, loose hair trailing along his belly and cock in a soft caress. “Please what?”

Reyn let out a soft whimper, but Anders wouldn’t be satisfied. “Please what?” he repeated. “What do you want? Do you want me to make love to you?”

“I thought we already were doing that.”

Anders stillled, and for a moment Reyn thought he’d somehow managed to say something wrong. Then Anders gave him a little kiss that would have qualified as chaste, if he’d been kissing the tip of Reyn’s nose instead of the tip of his cock. “You’re right,” he said, his lips brushing tantalizingly against the tender skin.
Then he slid his finger inside, and Reyn’s hands gripped the bedroll hard, his body arching in response. Gods, but Anders knew him, knew just what to do to make him pant and moan and writhe with pleasure. A second finger joined the first, working him expertly, his unattended cock aching and jerking against his belly.

“Anders, please,” he whispered again.

“You never said what you wanted me to do.”

Damn the man. “Take me; fuck me; come with me.”

“Mmm. Now there’s an offer I can’t resist.”

Anders withdrew his fingers, replacing them almost immediately with his cock. Reyn couldn’t quite suppress a moan at the sensation of being opened, filled, taken by the person he loved more than anything else in this life. Then Anders’ hand, still slick with oil, closed around his shaft, and all rational thought fled.

“Love you,” he managed to gasp, as Anders moved in him, hitting just the right spot with every thrust.

Anders whispered his name. In the dimness of the tent, there was only the light from the fire outside filtering through the canvas to give any illumination. Reyn could see only a silhouette bent over him, ragged hair hanging down, too-thin frame outlined against the roof. He wished suddenly that he could see his lover’s face, see his expression, gaze into his eyes in a desperate attempt to read whatever thoughts moved in the deep mazes of his mind.

And, gods knew, it was a maze, and that navigating Anders’ moods wasn’t always easy. But it was always worth it, in the end, and Reyn didn’t doubt that it always would be.

So he let Anders take him where he wanted, which was the peak of pleasure, everything wiped away in a white-hot moment of ecstasy, body tightening and arching around and against his lover. Anders gasped, then moaned Reyn’s name hoarsely, hot seed spilling deep inside.

Usually, after was lazy warmth, sprawled together in their bed or whatever passed for it in the camp. Tonight, Reyn forced his brain into coherence as Anders gently slipped free and stretched out against him. He pulled the other mage in close, until Anders’ head rested against his shoulder, their arms wrapped tight around each other and their legs tangled together.

“Love?” he asked softly. “Are you feeling any better?”

Anders’ long fingers found the end of his braid and toyed with it. After seven years of letting it grow, Reyn’s hair was to the point where he seldom took it down during these camping trips, to keep it from hopelessly tangling far away from the civilizing influence of a bath. “Yes.”

“Do you want to talk about it?”

Anders sighed. “I don’t know what to say. Maker, I just… I don’t know what’s wrong with me sometimes. I’m sorry. I’m sorry I’m so messed up. I’m sor—“

“Shh.” Reyn kissed his forehead, which was the only bit of skin he could easily reach. “I love you the way you are, not the way you could have been, if everything had been different. I just want to do whatever I can to make you happy. That’s all.”

Anders seemed to withdraw, even though he didn’t move. “Is that what you did tonight? Try to
make me happy?” There was bitterness and disappointment in his voice, but it seemed turned inward instead of aimed at Reyn.

“Fen’Harel’s balls, no! That is, I hope I made you happy. I hope I gave you what you needed from me. But if you’re implying that I’ve ever had sex with you out of some sense of-of obligation, even though I didn’t want to, then no. Never. What we have is too important to treat so lightly.” He stroked Anders’ side, feeling the delicate curve of ribs too close to the skin. “How many nights have we spent cuddling, when one of us was tired, or feeling off, or just not in the mood? Hmm?”

After a long moment, Anders sighed, his arms tightening around Reyn. “You’re right. I’m…I…thank you. Just…for everything. Thank you.”

“I’d do anything for you,” Reyn said gently, and meant it. He doubted that Anders believed it, or at least not entirely, but it was the truth.

Anders nuzzled him. “I love you, Reyn. You…you do know that?”

“Of course.”

They didn’t say anything more after that, only snuggled up together, despite the sweaty heat of the summer night. Perhaps there was nothing more that could be said with words. But when Anders awoke from a screaming nightmare of templars in the wee hours of the morning, Reyn held him silently and tried not to cry.

Chapter End Notes

Finally, an update! Oh, Legacy DLC chapter, why are you kicking my ass so badly? Part one of a total plot mess. "Legacy" neatly wrapped up several things I'd ended to handle in different ways, and gave me some new thoughts, so I really wanted to include it in "Spaces," but it ended up sprawling all over the place. Sigh.

I've never heard anyone suggest that Fen'Harel brought the humans, but why not?

I think I've said before that I imagine Anders isn't the easiest person in Thedas to be in a relationship with. Reyn puts up with a lot, from general moodiness to not getting along with most of Reyn's friends.

I figured this would be the absolute worst possible time for Varric to trot out the "tell me about your relationship" banter, so that's why I put it in.

Reyn was always weirdly distracted by Anders' casting glyphs in battle. It's sort of amazing he didn't die more frequently. It was a very strange playthrough at times.
Chapter Summary

Carver reveals part of the reason for his hostility toward Anders, and Reyn realizes what it means to be a Grey Warden.

Chapter Notes

More Legacy spoilers!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Not surprisingly, the trip failed to improve once they found the Carta’s secret compound.

The place turned out to be full of lunatic dwarves, who drank darkspawn blood and followed the orders of some creature named “Corypheus,” whoever—or whatever—that might be. Even worse, this person needed the blood of Malcolm Hawke in order to be free…or that of his children, since he was inconveniently dead.

It had been a nasty shock to hear their father’s name in such a context. Once the battle was over, Carver glanced at Reyn uncertainly. “Did you know about this?” he asked accusingly, as if he thought Reyn had been holding out on him.

Reyn was too stunned to think of a snappish reply. “No. Father never said anything to me.”

“Oh. I thought…” Carver trailed off and shrugged.

“That he might have mentioned it because I’m a mage like he was? He didn’t.”

Maybe his own unease showed through, because Carver only nodded and looked apprehensive.

Until they’d come to Kirkwall, Reyn would have said that he had a pretty good idea of their father’s past. Malcolm had often related stories about his time in the Circle, mainly to emphasize how crucial it was that neither Bethany nor Reyn ever end up there. They’d known that Leandra had belonged to an important family, that she’d fallen in love with Malcolm, and that the two had run off together to live a simple life in Ferelden, far from either the Circle or the Amell family.

But then he’d found out that Carver had been named after the templar who had helped Malcolm escape—that there had been a templar involved in his escape at all, let alone one who’d made such an impression. Then, after meeting Anders, Reyn had begun to realize that Malcolm had barely scraped the surface of what life in a Circle was really like, that there were plenty of things he’d never even hinted at to his children, things maybe even Leandra hadn’t known.

And now this, whatever this was. Dwarves and darkspawn and…

“Your father used blood magic?” Anders asked, sounding taken aback.
Reyn shook his head miserably. “Not that I ever knew about. Not that he ever even hinted, when he was teaching Bethany and me. But...I don’t see that there’s any other explanation.”

Carver had gone back to try the door the Carta had locked behind them, but it seemed well and truly sealed. “I suppose we go forward,” he said, returning to them. “And down. I’ll take point.”

Reyn only nodded and fell in beside his brother. He wasn’t really sure how he felt about the others witnessing whatever family secrets were about to rear their ugly heads. Normally, he wouldn’t have thought twice about Anders’ presence, but with the blood magic and the darkspawn, even that was starting to feel awkward.

Anders and Varric fell in behind, striking up a conversation as they usually did. “More Deep Roads,” Anders said with a sigh, his voice echoing slightly off the passage walls. “Why did we agree to do this again?”

Varric snorted. “Because I love trouble, and you think Hawke is cute. That wasn’t a serious question, was it, Blondie?”

Anders paused for a moment; when he answered, there was real warmth in his voice. “He is pretty cute.”

Reyn found himself grinning despite everything. Predictably, Carver shot him a sour glance. “Disgusting.”

“Jealous?”

“Ugh, no!” Carver sneered. Then he lowered his voice, so that Reyn had to strain to hear him over the clank of armor and boots. “Knight-Captain Cullen took me aside. He thought I might have reason to worry about you. Apparently, Anders was the biggest slut in Ferelden—he’d fuck anything with a pulse.”

Reyn felt heat rise sharply to his face. To have a templar say such things, even if Cullen hadn’t been involved in the rapes and beatings... “It sounds like Knight-Captain Cullen’s face has a date with my fist.”

“Why—for speaking the truth? Anders is probably screwing half of Kirkwall behind your back—”

“Carver.” Reyn came to an abrupt halt so that he could look his brother in the eye. Behind them, Varric and Anders also stopped, falling silent. “Shut. Up.”

Carver glared back. “Maker’s sake, brother, can’t you see?” he demanded, and this time his voice was raised in anger and frustration. “He’s just using you! You spent three years chasing after him and got nothing for it, but the second you had money and power, he couldn’t wait to jump into bed with you!”

Anders’ face went pale with shock and anger. “That’s a filthy lie!”

Carver ignored him, all his focus on Reyn. “Did you know that everyone thinks you’re the author of that bloody manifesto? You’re the face of mage freedom in Kirkwall, the one who goes to all the parties to show everyone how nice and civilized you apostates are, who tells everyone who’ll listen that it’s wrong for the Knight-Commander to seize secular power along with spiritual. When these blasted manifestos show up strewn around half of the city, of course everyone assumes you’re writing them!”

Carver jabbed a finger in Anders’ direction. “He only cares about your money and your position, and
as long as your star is on the rise, he’ll cling to you. But the second you fall, he’ll disappear, and leave you to pay the price for everything he’s done.”

“I would never do that!” Anders shouted, his hands balling into fists. There was the hint of deeper gravel in his tone, Justice getting riled now as well, and Reyn really didn’t want this fight to turn physical.

“You’re out of line, Carver,” he said, deliberately putting himself in between, in the hopes of distracting them from each other. “You don’t know anything about Anders, and you don’t know anything about our relationship, so back off.”

Carver scowled. “Have it your way,” he said stiffly, then turned and went clanking off down the corridor. “But don’t come crying to me when it all falls apart.”

Varric shot Reyn a questioning glance. He nodded, and the dwarf fell in with Carver. Thank the gods for Varric. Even though the dwarf had endured his own nasty shock, he remained level-headed enough to know that Reyn didn’t want to be anywhere near his brother at the moment, but that someone should keep an eye on Carver in case he did something stupid in a fit of pique.

Anders caught up with Reyn as they started moving again. “Carver’s lying,” he insisted. “I love you. I’d never use you.”

Reyn wanted to take Anders’ hand, but they both needed to be free and ready if they were attacked. “Despite what Carver thinks, I’m not an idiot. I know that my money and position helps our cause.”

Anders paled again, his amber eyes widening. “Reyn—“

“Let me finish. We were friends a long time before we were lovers, Anders. I was already doing whatever I could for mage freedom, and you know I would have continued to do so. You didn’t have anything to gain by sleeping with me.”

After a moment, Anders gave him a tentative smile. “I think I’ve gained quite a lot, actually.”

“I feel the same way.” He reached out briefly and put his hand on Anders’ shoulder, smoothing the disarranged feathers of the pauldron. “I love you. I trust you.”

Was it his imagination, or did Anders’ eyes darken a shade, from amber to earth? His lover glanced away, then back with a troubled smile. “I hope I can live up to that.”

***

“Sometimes I forget what it means to be a Grey Warden,” Anders said as Larius loped away. “But that made it hit home.”

Reyn didn’t know how to respond. He felt as though someone had ripped his heart out of his chest and left him stumbling and bleeding to die. Except, of course, that he wasn’t the one with the death sentence.

He’d known from the first day he’d meant Anders that the other mage bore the Grey Warden taint. In their early conversations, he’d learned that meant Anders was looking at another thirty years of life, give or take—maybe shorter, maybe a great deal longer.

He’d known that…but he’d never understood it.

He did now. Having faced the shambling wreck that had once been a man, seeing the blighted eyes
and diseased skin, the painful gait and clumps of hair coming loose from the scalp…and worst of all, the smell. The smell of deep caverns that never saw sunlight, the exact same scent that he’d noticed as a subtle aftertaste on Anders’ skin and in his seed, but so much stronger…

No. Please, Creators, no.

But there was no point in prayer, no point in denial. None of his rage or pain would make the slightest bit of difference, because this was something that had been decided before they’d ever met.

He wished that he could go back somehow, rewrite history. Flee to Amaranthine instead of Kirkwall, and somehow end up at the Vigil just in time to strike the Joining cup from Anders’ hands.

And then what? Anders had become a Warden to escape the templars and the Circle. Or, rather, Solona had conscripted him so that he could escape, but Anders had taken the opportunity when it was offered.

Even so, for a moment, Reyn hated the cousin he’d never met. Surely there had been some other solution. Queen Anora had made Ferelden a haven for apostates; surely there had been some way to save Anders without condemning him to a horrible death.

Pull it together, Reyn. He wasn’t the one who’d just had to stare his own fate in the eye, after all. Time to do what he’d always done: stiffen his spine, take charge, be the strong one.

“Let’s get moving.” he said. “If the only way out is down and through, then that’s what we’ll do. Carver, take point. Varric, I want you on rear guard. Anders, you can sense the darkspawn before we walk straight into them, so your job is to keep us blind fools alive by letting us know the instant you feel the bastards.”

Anders nodded immediately. Giving him An Important Job was the surest way to get his mind off brooding and focused on the matter at hand. Once they were back in Kirkwall—assuming they didn’t all end up leaving their bones down here, of course—Reyn would figure out how to best help Anders deal with all of this.

As for his own raw grief and pain…well, that would have to wait. Anders came first.

Which sounded like a fine plan, except that there were drawbacks to being a Grey Warden that were problematic right now, not just in some nebulous future neither of them might live long enough to see. Anders warned them about lurking darkspawn, and even kept Carver from heading into a room that would have ended with him literally stepping on a group of genlocks hiding under piles of sand. But as they penetrated deeper into the chasm, his footsteps became more erratic, and he started murmuring and swatting at the air, as if trying to chase away the voice of the thing waiting for them beyond the final seal.

After breaking the first seal—and defeating the demon that Malcolm had bound to it—Anders suddenly staggered, his hands clasped to either side of his head, fingernails digging cruelly into the skin. “I’m not listening!” he shouted frantically. “I’m not listening!”

Varric was nearest; in a moment, he was at Anders’ side. “Come on, Blondie. You’re strong enough to overcome this.”

Anders had straightened by the time Reyn reached him. “I’m fine,” he said, breathing hard, as if he’d been in a physical struggle and not just a mental one. “It’s all right. I’m fine.”

Reyn nodded and stepped back. But when Anders had gone past, headed for the way out of the room, he caught Varric’s eye. “Thanks, Varric.”
“Sure thing,” the dwarf said. Reyn was grateful, though. Despite his initial misgivings about their relationship, Varric had been the closest to Anders of all their friends. He believed what he said about Anders’ strength, because he could see it in a way no one else but Reyn seemed able to.

Reyn kept a close eye on Anders, but he seemed to regain control after the outburst. At least until they breached the next seal.

“No! Get out of my head!” Anders shrieked.

Reyn swore and ran to him. But this time, Carver was there first.

“Anders? Anders!” Carver called, and to Reyn’s shock, he actually sounded worried. As he approached, Carver glanced up, and gods, was that real concern in his eyes? “Maker, it’s like he doesn’t even hear me.”

Reyn swallowed and nodded his acknowledgement, putting his confusion aside. “Thank you, Carver. Anders? Sweetheart?”

Anders slowly focused on him; his strawberry-blond hair hung disheveled around his face, and the reddened marks of his nails showed on the pale skin of his cheeks. “It’s all right,” Reyn murmured, taking his hands, and folding them tight in his own. “Just listen to me. Focus on my voice. You can do this, love. I know you can.”

Anders swallowed convulsively. “…Reyn?”

“I’m here.”

He took a deep, shuddering breath. “I’m sorry. I’m trying…”

“I know. I love you. I’m not going to lose you to this.” He touched Anders’ face gently. “Just hold on, and we’ll get through this and go home.”

Anders laughed shakily. “A hot bath will be nice.”

“First thing, as soon as we get back to the estate. A nice hot bath, and our own soft bed, and a good night’s sleep.”

“That sounds wonderful.” Anders took another deep breath, but this one sounded far steadier. “I’m better. I am. I just…when the seals break, it gets so much louder…but I’m fine now.”

Reyn didn’t believe that Anders was anything like fine, but he nodded and smiled. “Good. Ready to go, then?”

“Yes.” He disentangled his hands gently from Reyn’s. “Let’s…let’s just get through this as quickly as possible.”

“Agreed. The sooner we’re out of here, the better.”

Chapter End Notes

Oh dear FSM, there's going to be yet another Legacy-based chapter after this. I didn't realize it was going to sprawl out as much as it has.
Cursed

Chapter Summary

Hawke tries to cope with his father's legacy, and Anders' worst fears finally come true.

Chapter Notes

Contains major spoilers for the Legacy DLC.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

*Father didn’t want me.*

Reyn held himself very still. Everything had already broken into a thousand pieces; any movement would just grind them smaller, finer, until there was nothing left but needle-like slivers to work their way into his heart.

For some gods-forsaken reason, Malcolm had left behind a record of what he’d done. An attempt at justification, perhaps, the last lingering bit of the Circle in him, wanting approval or punishment for his actions long after they were over and done with.

He’d used blood magic to seal Corypheus’ prison. He’d summoned demons and set them to guard every seal, every entrance. And he’d done it all to preserve the life he had with Leandra, to preserve their baby.

The baby Malcolm had prayed never carried the curse of magic.

*Well. I suppose you were damned disappointed then, Father.*

It hurt. Gods, it hurt, because Malcolm had never let on the slightest indication of that disappointment to his son. Reyn’s earliest memories were of his father and magic, and all those memories were joyful ones. He’d known that he had to hide what he could do, yes, but he’d always understood that was the fault of other people, not him, and not the magic itself.

He’d never realized that Malcolm considered their shared power a curse, or thought him a bitter burden. Never known that his father had wanted some other boy for his son, some unimaginable other Hawke whose soul didn’t sing with magic.

*At least Bethany never knew.* Cold comfort, but it was all he had. It would have broken his sister’s heart, to know that the father who’d pretended to love them had felt…what, instead? Pain? Resignation? Disappointment?

Their shared lessons had never been a time of love and bonding, as he’d always thought. They’d been a chore. A duty. Necessary time that the two freaks took away from the favored child.

Reyn’s heart cracked from side-to-side.
“I guess the templar’s not such a disappointment now,” Carver said smugly.

Guess again, ass. “And with that, the goodwill of our reunion vanishes.” It wasn’t his best line, but it was all Reyn could manage at the moment. Carver faltered and looked uncertain, even mouth a few words to take the sting out of his comment. Reyn pushed past him, not interested in talk.

Anders and Varric had hung back, perhaps not wanting to intrude on a family moment, but now Anders hurried to catch up with him. Funny; Reyn had always assumed Malcolm would have loved Anders. Leandra had assumed the same thing…but she hadn’t known her husband any better than his children had, it seemed.

“Love?” Anders said uncertainly, touching his arm. Reyn paused at the contact, but kept his eyes focused elsewhere. “Are you all right?”

“Of course,” Reyn said lightly. “Why wouldn’t I be? No family outing would be complete without finding out one of my parents wished I was never born.”

“Don’t say that. He was bitter and angry with the situation, not with you. Your father loved you, just as Leandra did. He’d be proud of what you’ve accomplished.”

How would you know? You never met him. Maybe I never did, either, not in any real sense of the word.

Reyn shrugged, pretending it didn’t matter. After all, hadn’t Anders said that his own father had been relieved when the templars finally came? And here I always thought I had it so much better.

“Did I ever tell you about Father’s funeral pyre?” he asked.

Anders glanced nervously back at Carver, which struck Reyn as ironic. Finally, he’d found a way to get his brother and his lover on the same side. “I don’t think so. Leandra told me that you thought templars had killed him, but that you weren’t sure.”

“By the time we finally found his body, it was impossible to tell. Whoever killed him left him for whatever carrion eaters wanted to have a go. They didn’t even think he was worth burning.”

“I’m sorry,” Anders said. Varric made a motion, then checked it sharply, as if uncharacteristically unsure of himself.

Reyn shook his head. “It doesn’t matter. We burned him, as he would have wanted. And I remember standing in front of the flames and thinking, ‘Well. It’s all up to me now, isn’t it?’”

“Oh, you damned, self-centered ass,” Carver exclaimed. “I can’t believe you’re making this all about you.”

Reyn ignored him. “And you know what? It wasn’t all that different from before. That was the awful thing. Father was strong enough to die for us, but he was never strong enough to live for us.”

He turned to his brother, so abruptly that Carver took an involuntary step back. “Look at what’s around us, Carver! He used blood magic!,” Reyn shouted, gesturing furiously at where the ghostly echo of Malcolm had stood. “He took the easy way out! He said it was to be with Mother, but if he hated himself and magic so damned much, then why did he force her to give up everything to be with him? Because he was selfish, because he was weak, because I knew from when I was a toddler that I had to look out for Bethany every second of my life, and he died and left me to do it all alone! And I failed!”
The words caught in his throat, and he spun away from them all, furious and ashamed. And, gods, wasn’t that the truth that had haunted him every waking moment from the day Bethany had died? Everything rested on his shoulders...but it was already too late. He’d already failed. So no wonder Carver became a templar, and Anders sank ever deeper under his burdens, and all of Kirkwall descended into madness. If he’d saved Bethany, then maybe, somehow, he could have saved everything else.

But he hadn’t, and he couldn’t. Because the final, damning truth was that he’d failed even before he’d ever been born, by daring to carry magic in his veins.

Arms closed around him, and he felt the soft tickle of feathers against his cheek. “Shh,” Anders murmured. “Shh. I’ve got you.”

Reyn closed his eyes, frantically willing himself not to cry. Not in front of Carver and Varric, at least.

“I didn’t know Malcolm,” Anders said, stroking Reyn’s hair with one hand, the other arm tight around him. “But I did know Leandra. Not as long as I would have liked, but long enough to know that she loved you, just as much as she loved Carver and Bethany. She was so very proud of you. I don’t think she would have changed a thing about any of you. Not even Carver, more’s the pity.”

“Oh, very nice, magey,” Carver muttered.

For a moment, Reyn leaned his face against the ragged feathers covering Anders’ shoulder. He wanted to breathe in their dusty scent and forget everything. Wanted to pretend that it would all be fine, somehow. But that was a luxury he’d never possessed.

Besides, it was Anders who needed him now. What sort of selfish bastard cried on his lover’s shoulder because it turned out his daddy never loved him, when said lover was in danger of having his brain taken over by some sort of sentient darkspawn?

*Fall apart later, you arse. There’s no use crying over the dead, not when there are the living to take care of.*

His father had taught him that lesson, albeit indirectly. Feeling a grim smile stretch his face, Reyn pulled back.

“Let’s finish this,” he said.

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Things got worse the deeper they penetrated. Harder, both in terms of darkspawn…and in terms of whatever pried at the corners of Anders’ mind.

By the time they made their way through the strange ruin, full of dead dwarves and deepstalkers, Anders was in bad shape: staggering, talking to someone who wasn’t there, humming along with music no one else could hear. Reyn wasn’t sure he’d ever hated anyone as much as he hated the monster tormenting Anders.

“It’s all right,” he told Anders, again and again as he helped him over the cruel rocks that formed their path. Whether Anders could even hear him over the song in his head, Reyn didn’t know.

They crossed over a vast lake, onto a rocky islet. Then, as they were heading along the shoreline, looking for an entrance, Anders suddenly screamed.

It caught Reyn by surprise—Anders had been quietly following for several minutes along the level
ground, seeming as though he might even be doing better than before. Now the mage fell to his knees on the ground, clutching his head and shrieking.

Reyn grabbed his hands, pulling them away from his face before he could scratch himself again. “Anders! Fight this!”

Anders shook his head, his eyes squeezed closed, his entire body bent almost double. “I can’t…the voices…I have too much taint in my blood…I can’t shut him out.” He shuddered wildly. “Help me, love!”

The pleading desperation in his voice shattered Reyn’s already-bruised heart. “Anders!” he shouted, overwhelmed by helplessness. Gods, why couldn’t he do anything? Anders needed him, and he could only stand here like an idiot and watch while his lover suffered.

Then Anders’ shoulders stiffened, his whole posture shifting to something not at all like his normal body language, even in such an extremity of pain and fear. His head snapped up, and Reyn found himself staring into eyes glazed by blue fire.

Justice’s eyes.

“I will not be controlled!” Justice roared, surging to his feet and sending Reyn stumbling back in a single move. Spirit fire crackled along his skin, the electric smell of the Fade like the breath of an oncoming storm. Anders had succumbed to the darkspawn’s control, but Justice was still free, still fighting, and for a moment Reyn felt a glimmer of hope.

It was short-lived. Justice stiffened—and then something seemed to go out of him, his will subsumed, snuffed out. In some ways it was even more horrible than watching Anders lose his fight, like seeing some fierce bird of prey stuffed broken-winged into a cage.

No. Oh no.

Something reached through Justice, then. He brought Anders’ staff around—and, gods, Justice never used the staff in a fight, never—smashing it into the ground in a shower of spirit fire and strange words spoken in a language that sounded an awful lot like the tongue that Fenris routinely swore in. The Veil tore, and whatever had control of Justice reached through and hauled out a pair of Shades, also in its control.

It had to be an emissary…but Mythal save them, Reyn had never heard of an emissary with the sort of strength it would take to control a truly powerful spirit like Justice.

And then Justice charged at him, eerily silent, no enraged growling at all. Still wielding Anders’ staff, as if whatever controlled him didn’t really understand what it had in its grasp, or maybe couldn’t quite distinguish between spirit and mage, and so tried to use them as some clumsy hybrid thing.

And Reyn…stood there. Frozen. Unable to move, because moving meant fighting, and he couldn’t hurt them, couldn’t…

An armored hand closed on his arm and yanked him to one side. “Damn it, brother, out of the way!” Carver yelled, even as he fended off a blow from Anders’ staff.

“Don’t hurt him!” Reyn shouted frantically. “Please, Carver!”

“He’s trying to kill us!”

“It isn’t his fault! Carver, please, I’m begging you!”
Carver gritted his teeth. “Fine! Take care of those bloody Shades, and I’ll try to keep your boyfriend from murdering us all.”

That, Reyn could do. He hoped.

The Shades were simple enough to destroy, and Reyn wondered if the amount of power the emissary had needed to control Justice simply hadn’t left it with enough magic to pull anything more dangerous through the tear in the Veil. As he fought, he felt Carter bring his templar abilities to bear, first stunning Justice and Anders with Holy Smite, then using Cleanse in an attempt to cut off whatever outside magic was controlling them.

Carver was using templar powers against Anders, because Reyn had asked him to. After all the nightmares, after all the long talks, and the tears, and the tentative steps toward healing, it felt like a horrible betrayal, like the violation of every bit of trust Anders had ever put in him.

But it worked. Whatever Corypheus was, he apparently gave up on Justice and Anders as a bad job. They collapsed to the ground, clutching their side, where Carver had fended them off with the flat of his blade. Something seemed to dissipate around them, like black smoke, leaving behind only the clean, blue flame of an angry spirit. Then even that was gone, and only Anders remained.

Reyn rushed past Carver and dropped to his knees to gather Anders in his arms. His throat was too tight to do anything more than choke out Anders’ name.

Anders took a deep breath, wincing slightly at bruised ribs. “Thank you, love,” he said with a shaky smile.

It made Reyn want to cry, that Anders would thank him for anything that had happened in the last few minutes. He kissed the other mage, then hugged him, hard.

*I’m so sorry*, he wanted to say. *I’m sorry I ever dragged you here; I’m sorry I couldn’t help you when you needed me; I’m sorry I had to ask Carver to do that to you because I was too slow and stupid to think of any other way.*

But he couldn’t say any of those things, not without breaking down altogether, so he swallowed them back.

“We should get moving as soon as Blondie can walk,” Varric said. “Corypheus knows we’re here, and I don’t want to uphold the Tethras tradition by becoming lunch for some darkspawn.”

“I can walk,” Anders said. As Reyn helped him to his feet, he gave him a second wan smile. “I-I guess they’re right. You never can leave the Wardens. I hope I can hold against him.” He glanced down and away, as if shamed. “Against them both.”

Reyn frowned as Anders walked past him to join Varric. *What did that mean?* As far as he’d seen, Anders had gone down first in the struggle against Corypheus. Justice had been trying to save them; the fact that he’d failed hadn’t been any more his fault than it was Anders’.

Anders didn’t want to talk about the spirit even under the best of circumstances, however, which these most certainly were not. The topic of Justice, except in the most superficial ways, had always been Strictly Off Limits, and Reyn had respected that and not pried, despite the fact that he would dearly have loved to for a multitude of reasons. As a result, he wasn’t certain what to think about Anders’ comment now.

*Maybe it doesn’t mean anything, other than Anders is upset and put out with everyone but me.* Anders had a talent for picking a fight with most everyone at one time or another, and poor Justice
might not be an exception.

Even so, the seemingly off-hand comment lingered uneasily in the back of his mind, as he hurried to join his friends.

***

It had finally happened. The moment Anders had been waiting for ever since that awful day in Amaranthine, when he’d agreed to merge with Justice and exposed the spirit to things no bodiless creature of the Fade would possibly be equipped to deal with.

Every moment since then, he’d been afraid that they would turn on their friends. And now they had.

Justice had made himself small, had withdrawn as far as he could, hurt and angry and humiliated that he’d failed to resist the emissary’s influence. Afraid, too, of what might have happened had Carver not managed to disrupt its hold on them.

They would have rampaged until either their companions were dead, or they were. And maybe it wouldn’t have been entirely their fault…but that wouldn’t have made it any easier, when they came back to themselves to find that they were covered in Reyn’s blood, because they’d lacked the willpower to resist.

Anders glanced to where Reyn walked beside him. His fiery hair almost glowed in the sullen light seeping into the chasm, his pale face determined and set. Even this hellish place couldn’t take away the brightness that lived inside him. Maker, if Anders were to be responsible for destroying that…he’d deserve to be cast into the outermost reaches of the Void for eternity.

He might have done it today. He might do it some other day, because when Justice said he would not be controlled, he didn’t just mean by Corypheus.

It had gotten harder and harder to control Justice over the years, because the more he experienced the world, the more he wanted. His role as an observer from behind Anders’ eyes wasn’t enough for him anymore. He wanted the freedom to act. He wanted the mages free and the templars punished. He wanted the things he had when he inhabited Kristoff’s corpse: friends, allies, companions.

He wanted Reyn.

And if Anders’ control slipped too far, if Justice’s desires became too strong to hold back, if they turned into a terrifyingly-strong, flaming abomination in bed some night…

Anders had dreamed of suddenly finding himself amidst blood-soaked sheets, strands of copper hair stuck to his hands, the taste of raw meat in his mouth. If they hurt Reyn, murdered him whether by accident, or in self-defense when he finally decided to put them down as the monster they were…

*I’d kill myself.* And pray to the Maker that his death took Justice with him. A horrible image of Justice shambling around Kirkwall in his decaying corpse sent a shudder down his spine. At least that would be obvious enough to bring down the templars to put an end to it at last, though.

“How are you holding up, sweetheart?” Reyn asked quietly.

Anders swallowed back a bubble of hysterical laughter that threatened to escape. “I worry about what this emissary might make me do,” he said instead, which wasn’t a complete lie and yet nothing like the whole truth. “The music…it’s fainter now, but I can still hear it.”

“I’m sorry. I’m trying to get us out of here.”
“I know.” Anders glanced at him, then back at the rocky path under his feet. “If I turn on you again, promise me that you won’t hesitate to strike me down, if that’s what it takes.”

“No.”

Anders glanced up in surprise. Reyn’s sensual mouth had tightened into an uncharacteristically harsh line.

“I’m sorry, love,” Reyn went on, although he didn’t look it. “But I try never to lie to you. It’s not an option.”

“But—“

“Anders, please, this isn’t the time or place for an argument.”

“You’re right. Let’s just move on,” Anders agreed. But Reyn’s words brought him no comfort.

***

“Father was right to hide this,” Carver had said hollowly, once Corypheus was finally dead and before they’d managed to get out of the damned tower. “I wish I didn’t know about it.”

And for once, Reyn had found himself agreeing whole-heartedly with his brother. He still agreed with the sentiment a day later, when they limped battered and exhausted back into Hightown. If he had it all to do over again, he might have suggested that a long vacation with Anders in Orlais would be the perfect way to avoid the Carta. Or maybe Antiva: it was supposed to be warm and decadent there, wasn’t it?

Varric had already left them, headed back to the Hanged Man to lift a glass in memory of Gerav, or Tethras, or just to drown his own sorrows. As they approached the entrance to the Amell estate, Carver came to a halt, and Reyn with him. Anders glanced over his shoulder as he went to the door.

“I’m going to have a hot bath,” he said tiredly. “If I’m lucky, I’ll fall asleep and drown in the tub.”

“I’ll join you in a few minutes,” Reyn said.

Anders only nodded and disappeared inside the estate. For a moment, Reyn wondered if he were being churlish by not inviting Carver inside.

“I have to head back to the barracks,” Carver said, saving Reyn the trouble. “But…I did want to tell you one more thing, before I go. I don’t know the details, but I’ve heard rumors. That git Sebastian Vael supposedly met with someone high up in the Chantry, close to the Divine. She wanted Vael to convince the Grand Cleric that it isn’t safe in Kirkwall any more.”

“And what does this have to do with me?”

“Nothing, I hope. Meredith is taking the threat seriously, though, and seems to think that mages are involved somehow. Just…be careful.”

Reyn sighed, feeling suddenly old. He’d spent seven years in Kirkwall, but right now it felt like seven hundred. “Does none of this make you want to, I don’t know, offer a reason for joining the order?”

Carver’s face twisted with anger. “Right. My great betrayal. All to spite you, is that how you remember it?”
“Pretty much, yes.”

Carver glared at him. “We spent so long running, and why? Because of magic, the Blight, money, and abuses. Well, I’m no mage. I’m no Warden, and you didn’t need me—that was clear enough even before you refused to take me on your precious expedition. But there was one thing I thought I could do.” He hesitated, then shrugged, seeming suddenly awkward. “Father believed in a templar. Why can’t I?”

“Father believed in a templar who helped free him!” Reyn exclaimed in exasperation. “A templar who didn’t just let him escape, but actively assisted!”

Carver nodded. “Exactly.”

Reyn froze, thunderstruck. “What are you saying?”

“Just that everything isn’t always about you.” Carver turned and walked away across the square, his armor clanking loudly as he went.

Reyn stared after him, blinking like an idiot. Someone like Thrask, who thought Meredith was a sodding lunatic, might throw his lot in with mages, but Carver? It would take too much personal risk, wouldn’t it? And doing it on the sly—that wasn’t Carver’s style at all. He wanted the whole world’s attention on him all the time. Besides, Carver hated all mages on principle, sneered at them for being weak while the whole time seething with jealousy for their power.

Right?

I must be too tired to think straight to even be contemplating this.

Bodahn greeted him at the door. “Good day, messere. I trust everything went well on your travels? Master Anders is upstairs; I believe he had Sandal draw a bath. Several messages came for you while you were out; they’re on the desk.”

Of course they did. The endless parade of people wanting things from him didn’t stop just because he left town for a few days. Reyn forced a smile and said, “Thank you, Bodahn. I’m not sure either Anders or I will feel much like coming down for dinner—would you mind having Sandal run a couple of plates up to our bedroom later?”

“Of course; no trouble at all. I’ll bring them myself. Sandal might just keep knocking if the door’s locked, you see.”

Reyn chuckled despite himself. “Probably a good idea, although I assure you a bath and sleep are the only types of physical exertion I have planned for the rest of the day.”

Bodahn looked politely skeptical, although he refrained from saying anything. Well, he had lived in the same house with them for three years.

Reyn tiredly climbed the stairs and headed to the bathing room. A cloud of steam greeted him when he opened the door; one of the perks of sleeping with a mage who had a fondness for fireballs was that there was never any shortage of hot water. Anders’ clothing formed a trail across the tiled floor, leading to the tub, where he sat immersed in the steaming water, studying something small and gold in his hand. Reyn didn’t have to see it up close to know it was that damned amulet they’d taken from Corypheus’ body.

“It doesn’t mean anything, love,” he said, as he stripped off his own clothing and dumped it in a slightly-neater pile.
“You heard what Corypheus said,” Anders replied, setting the amulet aside. “He said they sought the light. The golden light. The power of the gods. If the Chantry was right about that…what else might they know that we don’t?”

Reyn slid into the tub behind Anders. Picking up the soap, he lathered his hands, then began to methodically spread it across his lover’s shoulders. Anders made a little sound of pleasure and tipped his head forward. “You’re making a pretty big jump between ‘Corypheus was an ancient magister’ and ‘the Chantry is right.’ Say that the first darkspawn really were Tevinter Magisters. Say the Black City in the Fade used to be Golden, until they set foot in it. Sweetheart, you’re not just a mage, you’re a mage with a spirit living inside your head. You ought to know better than anyone that the Fade is full of traps for the unwary. Full of dangerous things that no one sane ought to go messing around with.

“They went somewhere they shouldn’t have, and they unleashed something that had consequences in the real, physical world. That hardly means that the Chantry was ‘right’ and that the Blight is mankind’s punishment for allowing mages to roam free. It could just as easily have been a trick by Fen’Harel, luring humanity to its doom for fun. Most likely, it’s had nothing to do with gods at all, just some kind of Fade spirit that only lives in the Black City and doesn’t take kindly to be bothered with.” A sudden thought struck him. “Perhaps the Black City is where dragons go when they dream. That could explain a lot, actually.”

Anders didn’t say anything for a long time. Reyn didn’t push, only kept up the half-massage, half-scrub. Anders had lost weight again; his ribs stood out beneath his pale skin, and the delicate flare of hip bone was far too easily traced.

“I don’t know,” Anders said finally. “I just don’t know anymore.”

“Even if the Chantry’s version is true,” Reyn said quietly, “it doesn’t justify punishing mages over a thousand years later. Bethany never hurt anyone in her entire life—why should she have to suffer because of the actions of someone like Corypheus? And cousin Solona stopped the Blight, but the Maker can’t be bothered to say, oh, hey, mages aren’t all that bad, so maybe I’ll just call off the whole darkspawn thing? It’s just more Chantry rubbish, designed to make people feel guilty and afraid.”

“Maybe.”

Reyn suppressed a sigh, too tired to think of a more eloquent argument at the moment. Instead, he concentrated on washing Anders’ hair, rinsing away dried blood, cobwebs, grime, and grease. “Sweetheart…I’ve been thinking,” he said hesitantly. “After learning about Corypheus’ possible influence…and the whole ‘Band of Three’ business…maybe it would do us both some good to get out of Kirkwall for a while. Isabela wants us to come with her when she leaves, and her ship is almost ready. We could sail away, leave all this—”

He trailed off as Anders’ muscles went taut under his hands. “I can’t believe what I’m hearing. Are you seriously suggesting we give up on mage freedom? That we just abandon everyone in the Gallows?”

Reyn sighed and closed his eyes. He’d known the suggestion would be futile, even as he made it. “No. Just thinking aloud.”

Anders rose up and stepped out of the bath, snatching up a towel. “I can’t just walk away from this, Reyn,” he said, drying his hair with unnecessary vigor. “You know that.”

“I know. It was a stupid thing to say.”
Anders wrapped the towel around his waist and left the room. Once he was done cleaning himself, Reyn followed suit. Torn between joining Anders in the bedroom, and responsible part of him that remembered the pile of correspondence, he decided to combine both. Going downstairs, he grabbed up the stack of letters, intending to carry them up and spread them out on the bed, to be read at leisure.

In the midst of the letters was a small, badly-wrapped package. Curious, Reyn opened it as he walked up the stairs. The outer wrapping was actually a letter, written in Merrill’s meticulous hand.

*Lethallin*,

*No Dalish would wear this, but I thought you might like it.*

-M

Tearing aside the inner wrapping, Reyn found himself holding a crudely-fashioned amulet that he suspected Merrill had carved herself. A small representation of Fen’Harel, the Dread Wolf himself, hung from a leather cord.

Reyn stood still and stared at it for several moments. Then, with a private smile, he slipped the amulet around his neck, and continued on up the stairs.

Chapter End Notes

I spent a lot of time thinking about Carver's relationship with Reyn. When I was playing through, I saw it as purely adversarial; at the end game, when Hawke and Carver encounter each other briefly, Reyn picked the "don't you 'brother' me" (or whatever it said) option. He'd been bitterly angry since Carver had joined the templars, and he was going to stay that way, damn it.

But when I sat down to write this fic, I had to think about it a bit more. Yes, Carver is a giant prat. But, as Reyn reluctantly came to recognize, he never sells any of them out to the templars, even though Meredith must surely have called him onto the carpet after the end of Act II, for hiding his apostate brother. Presumably, he could have given up Merrill then as an act of atonement, or to save himself further punishment, but he didn't.

So he wasn't entirely bad, but I was still pretty on the fence as to whether or not I should try to reconcile the brothers at all, or just have them fall further and further apart until that final confrontation. Then "Legacy" came along, Carver says his line, I think of what I'd have Reyn reply back...and I thought "huh." I'm probably reading more into it than was ever intended (and in a fanfic, no less!).. ;)

These couple chapters display most of Reyn's neuroses front and center. Taking responsibility for everything and everyone around you may be useful, but not always healthy, especially when you're just stuffing your own issues in a box and trying not to look at them.

I've always had a fondness for tricksters, and it seemed to me that Reyn might as well.
A Normal LIfe

Chapter Summary

As the mages' plight becomes more dire, an old friend from Hawke's mercenary days shows up.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Anders walked into the Chantry. It was night, but all the candles were still lit, and half-seen figures moved around the periphery of the huge hall, vanishing whenever he looked at them too closely. Reyn had asked to meet him here; in the way of dreams, he didn’t question why his lover would have chosen this extremely unlikely place for a rendezvous.

He searched for a while, growing slowly more disturbed when he failed to spot Reyn. Eventually, he climbed up the stair, and found Reyn in the same side area where they had come upon Karl so many years before.

Reyn stood with his back to Anders. He was naked, and his fiery hair, uncut since before the Blight, hung in a shining curtain to his waist.

“Love?” Anders asked. Then he noticed an odd detail: the imprint of bruises fanned across Reyn’s hips, along with shallow, bloody gouges that he knew were left behind by the cruel, sharp tips of metal gauntlets.

Fear and horror choked him; he tried to make a sound, but no words would come out.

“Carver was right,” Reyn said. “You did drag me down with you. It’s your crimes that I had to pay for.”

His voice was flat, emotionless. All the humor, all the exasperated patience, all the tender affection had been wiped away. So Anders had already gathered himself to scream, even before Reyn turned around, and he saw the horrible brand of the Tranquil stark against his pale forehead.

***

Anders awoke clutching the blankets, his heart pounding and a strangled scream in his throat. Justice writhed beneath his skin, angered and frightened by the dream.

“Love?” Reyn mumbled. At one time, he’d been a sound sleeper, but three years with Anders had trained him to come awake at the slightest sign of distress from his bedmate.

Another thing I’ve taken from him, Anders thought, even as he forced his breathing back to a normal pattern. Maker, I take and I take, but what have I ever given him?

Nothing. Not a damned thing, except pain and worry.

He rolled onto his side, needing to see Reyn’s face unblemished by the Tranquil seal. Reyn’s hair was down, as it had been in the dream, so Anders had to brush quite a bit of it out of the way. By the
time he was done, most of the sleepiness had left Reyn’s gaze.

“A bad one?” he asked sympathetically, as Anders cupped his face gently.

“Better now.”

“Do you want to tell me about it?”

“No, I…I don’t need to. Just the usual darkspawn thing.”

Reyn shifted. “Here. Put your head on my shoulder.”

He did so, felt Reyn’s arms close tight around him. He shut his eyes and took a deep breath, trying to find comfort in the familiar scent of their mingled sweat. But the words from the dream echoed and re-echoed in his head, and he lay awake for a long time after Reyn had fallen back asleep.

***

Reyn was going over the books with Bodahn when the knock came on the estate’s door.

The problem with having money, he’d learned early on, was keeping track of it. His first lesson had been the partnership in Hubert’s accursed mine, but that had been only a taste of what he had to deal with when he came into real wealth. There were accounts that had to be kept track of, and numbers that had to add up, and a thousand other details that nothing in his upbringing as a rural apostate had prepared him for.

Bodahn, having once run his own business, had a head for this sort of thing. What he would do when the dwarf left for Orlais, Reyn didn’t even want to consider. I’ll probably have to drag Varric up here. Or haul all this down to him.

When the unexpected knock sounded, Reyn and Bodahn exchanged a nervous look, both of them remembering the attack by the Carta all too well. “I’ll get it,” Reyn said, snatching his staff up from the corner of the room. That, too, was a new precaution he’d found himself taking—or rather an old one, from his life in Ferelden, never knowing when the templars might show up.

Anders was spending the day at his clinic, so Reyn called Barkolomew to him as he went to the door, wanting whatever backup he could get, just in case this was the day Meredith decided to send a squad to his door. Or the Carta decides it wants revenge. Or the Grey Wardens. Or…damn, I’ve made enough enemies that I’m starting to lose track.

He flung open the door sharply, staff at the ready. On the other side, a very handsome man lounged casually against the stone of the entry way. His sun-bleached blond hair was held back in a short braid, and nicely offset his tanned skin. Blue eyes that crinkled with mirth were set in a heart-shaped face, and his sleeveless shirt and vest showed off nicely toned muscles.

“L-Lamarc?” Reyn asked, not entirely certain if his memory played tricks with him. Lamarc had served in the Red Iron mercenary company alongside Carver and him, but he hadn’t laid eyes on the man since he’d left the company.

Lamarc grinned. “Kissed any ogres lately, Hawke?”

“A hundred, and every damned one of them cuter than you,” Reyn shot back, smiling so hard he thought his mouth might crack.

Lamarc laughed and hugged him enthusiastically. “Maker’s balls, Hawke, I’d heard you’d done well
for yourself, but I never expected this!"

It was strange to embrace someone who smelled of leather and steel, instead of lyrium and
darkspawn taint. Reyn hugged him back, then held his old friend at arms’ length to study his face.
“You’ve barely changed at all in seven years. I heard a rumor you’d left Meeran and gone off with
some company roaming the Marches.”

“That’s pretty much the truth of it. But I found myself back in Kirkwall for a bit, and thought I’d
look you up. Imagine my surprise when your uncle told me you were living in Hightown!”

That gave him a small flush of pleasure. Lamarc had been a good friend. No, I should be honest with
myself: I had a definite crush on him. Nothing had ever come of it, of course, but it was still
gratifying to hear that Lamarc had sought him out before learning he’d made it good, instead of after.

“I can only imagine how that conversation went,” he said.

Lamarc laughed. “Your uncle—Gamlen, is it?—said something along the lines of: ‘Oh, great,
another one.’ Popular fellow, are you?”

“Only in some circles.”

“Mmm.” Lamarc let his eyes roam appreciatively. “I’ll just bet you are. So, do you have time to grab
a drink with your old friend, or are you too important to be seen with a mercenary?”

“With the company I usually keep? You’ll fit right in. Just let me grab my coat.”

Bodahn handed the battered coat to him. As he pulled it on, he said, “Tell Anders to meet us down at
the Hanged Man when he gets in, would you?”

“Of course, messere.”

“Thanks, Bodahn.” Buttoning up his coat, Reyn headed for the man awaiting him at the door.

***

It seemed almost too much effort to climb the long, narrow stair of the hidden passage leading from
Darktown to the cellar of the Amell-Hawke estate. Or maybe it was just that Anders’ heart felt as
though it weighed a thousand pounds, something too heavy to carry any farther, but that he didn’t
have the option of putting down.

The day had been one of unrelenting bad news. First had been a spate of reports about abuses at the
Gallows. The mages were literally prisoners now, locked into their cells by the templars, with even
the First Enchanter only allowed as far as the courtyard. Living in isolation, with virtually no contact
with others, some of the mages had started to go mad. Having endured such isolation himself, he
couldn’t pretend that he was surprised to hear it.

Any sign of mental instability was used as an excuse to make those mages Tranquil, or simply kill
them outright, of course. And as for those who escaped that fate…well, with the mages unable to
communicate with each other or otherwise lodge complaints, torture and rape had become a daily
fact of life.

*Our cause is almost lost,* Justice whispered, and Maker, even *he* sounded defeated, when lately he’d
been nothing but defiant and angry.

Some of Meredith’s own templars knew she was mad, but Knight-Captain Cullen was spineless and
wouldn’t do anything to actually stop her. Some of the nobles feared her for stealing away their ancient right to elect a new Viscount…but, despite Reyn’s best attempts, there weren’t enough of them willing to stand up against her to make a difference.

And then had come the rumor that truly made things seem hopeless. Meredith had sent for the Right of Annulment. She didn’t have it yet…but surely it would only be a matter of time. The Divine had already expressed her concern, at least according to what Carver had told Reyn, so she’d surely sign off on it. And as for Elthina, there was no point in looking for help there. Reyn believed her to be a subtle politician, moving pawns like Sister Petrice and Knight-Commander Meredith across the her chessboard, but never leaving enough of a trail to be caught herself. Even if he was wrong, she was worse than useless, unwilling to keep Meredith from seizing secular power that she had no right to, unwilling to lift a finger to stop the abuse of the Circle, unwilling to use her office to do anything at all except to implicitly condone Meredith through inaction.

No question but that she, too, would approve Meredith’s request for the Right of Annulment, if she hadn’t done so already. And once it was in hand, Meredith would need only the slightest excuse to invoke it.

The Circle was doomed. Every mage in the Gallows had a death sentence hanging over their heads. It was only a matter of time, now.

Years of work, years of struggle, years of spending every waking moment on his manifesto, trying to reason with the Chantry and make people see that mages were humans and elves, no better or worse than anyone else…and what good had any of it done?

None. None at all.

I don’t know what to do.

Maybe Reyn would have some ideas. Despite what Carver thought, Anders had done everything he could to keep his lover from getting too deeply entangled with the mage underground, just in case things went horribly wrong. Reyn had worked so hard to go from penniless Ferelden refugee to the very Champion of Kirkwall; Anders couldn’t bear the thought of endangering that.

But Reyn would want to know about this, wouldn’t he? Anders couldn’t see the next step on the ever-darkening path, but Reyn had always been good at this sort of thing. He’d know what to do.

When Anders emerged from the cellar, however, Bodahn bustled into the room. “Master Anders! I hope your day was uneventful. Messere Hawke has gone down to the Hanged Man with a friend, someone he knew from his time as a mercenary, I believe. He asked that you join them when you got in.”

Anders suppressed a groan. “Thanks, Bodahn.”

Bodahn nodded and left him alone. For a long moment, Anders considered just going upstairs and waiting for Reyn to come back later. But Reyn asked so little of them; it seemed an injustice to ignore such a simple request.

And where in the Void had that thought come from?

Justice was suspiciously silent. Making sure his staff was securely strapped to his back, Anders headed for the front door and the long walk to Lowtown.

***
To Reyn’s delight, most of his friends were already at the Hanged Man when they walked through the door. Of course, Isabela and Varric actually lived there, but Merrill and Fenris were present as well, the Dalish elf playing cards with Isabela and the ex-slave drinking alone in a corner. Aveline was absent, but that wasn’t much of a surprise; she hadn’t spent much time at the tavern since marrying Donnic.

Reyn guided Lamarc to the table where Isabela and Merrill sat. “Mind if we join you ladies?”

Isabela eyed Lamarc with open interest. “Friend of yours, Hawke?” she asked, in a tone that implied something more than a friend.

“An old acquaintance. We served in the Red Irons together, my first year in Kirkwall,” Reyn said with a roll of his eyes.

“I was in town for a bit, and thought I’d look Hawke up, renew our…acquaintance,” Lamarc added. Isabela arched a brow in Reyn’s direction. “Really? Do sit down and tell me more.”

***

When Anders walked into the tavern, he spotted Reyn immediately. Isabela, Merrill, and Fenris were all crowded around him, laughing uproariously at something a stranger had said. The unfamiliar man sat beside Reyn, one hand on Reyn’s shoulder in an overly-friendly manner that Anders didn’t like at all.

“So,” the man was saying, “the whores said that, since we’d done such a good job getting rid of those damn slavers, they’d let us all have a tumble on the house. Of course, we still had to pay for the drinks, so they got back most of the money they’d paid us.”

“Most?” Reyn asked incredulously. “Lamarc, you got so drunk, you thought I was one of them!”

Isabela burst out laughing. “Oh, this I have to hear!”

“I did not,” Lamarc protested. “So, you won’t believe this, but Hawke actually says the rest of us can have our fun if we want to, but he’s going to go stand guard outside!”

“I believe it,” Isabela said, sounding deeply disapproving. Reyn elbowed her in the ribs.

Merrill’s eyes were even bigger than usual. “Oh, were you terribly worried about getting attacked, Hawke?”

“More like worried about get the pox from some plague-ridden rent boy,” Reyn said.

“Oh, no—it isn’t like that at all! My neighbor’s brother Jethann works at the Blooming Rose and comes by every week for dinner. He says—”

“The Blooming Rose is a bit different from some dockside brothel, Kitten,” Isabela interrupted.

“So I’m sitting outside, minding my own business, when this one stumbles out smelling like bad whiskey and worse perfume,” Reyn said with a nod in Lamarc’s direction. “He sits down by me and says, ‘How much for a tumble, lovely?’”

Lamarc grinned. “And Hawke says: ‘Five sovreigns!’ ‘Five?’ I say. ‘You must be the best lay in the Free Marches!’ And he says: ‘That costs more—the five is just to kiss my ass!’”

Reyn shook his head. “And then you passed out face-first in my lap, and I had to carry you all the
way back to the barracks. And a week later, the whole lot of you had come down with some awful disease and had to go to a healer.”

“And you sat there and looked all smug. Maker, you’re an insufferable bastard, Hawke.” But he didn’t say it like he thought Reyn was an insufferable bastard—quite the opposite, in fact.

Anders hands tightened unconsciously into fists. He hadn’t been in the mood to come down here in the first place, but he’d done it because Reyn had asked. And now here he was, only to find Reyn telling stories with some idiot mercenary he’d known years ago, who was quite obviously flirting with him, and—

“Anders!”

Reyn had finally spotted him; a smile bloomed across his face and he rose half-out of his seat. “I was wondering when you’d get here! Come and sit down.”

His throat tightened, and for a moment he wanted to join them. But Merrill was there, not to mention Fenris, and with this new person—who, now that he was turned in Anders’ direction, turned out to be very handsome—he just didn’t have the energy left to deal with it all. Not after the day he’d had.

“I’m going to play cards with Varric,” he said, who he’d noticed off in one corner, talking to another dwarf.

Reyn frowned. “Are you sure? We’d love for you to join us.”

Anders seriously doubted the use of “we,” unless Isabela counted, and that would only be because she wanted to cause trouble. “I’m sure.”

“Oh. All right, then.”

Reyn’s look of disappointment almost convinced Anders to change his mind. Then Lamarc grabbed Reyn’s coat and pulled him back down onto the bench. “Speaking of whores, do you remember the time your brother…”

With Reyn distracted, Anders went and sat down uninvited at Varric’s table. The other dwarf looked rather surprised at his intrusion, but Varric just waved him off. With a shrug, he left.

“So, Blondie, why didn’t you join the party over there?” Varric asked.

Anders moved his chair around so that he could see Reyn and Lamarc from his new vantage point. “Why didn’t you?” he shot back.

“This Lamarc seems to think he’s a story-teller. I didn’t want to make him feel bad.”

Anders made a noncommittal sound, only half paying attention. With a sigh, Varric shook his head and pulled out a deck of cards. “So what’ll it be: diamondback or Wicked Grace?”

***

Anders didn’t pay the slightest bit of attention to the card game. Instead, all his focus was on the other side of the tavern, where Reyn sat laughing and drinking with his friends. With this Lamarc fellow, who was handsome and obviously fond of him.

Reyn laughed at something the other man had said, green eyes flashing with humor. They clinked glasses, sloshing bad whiskey everywhere, which brought forth more laughter.
Anders closed his eyes briefly. What he was feeling wasn’t jealousy, exactly, if he was going to be honest with himself. Reyn had wanted Anders to join them. He’d wanted to introduce this old friend. Maker’s breath, he’d asked Anders to come down here in the first place, which he’d never have done if he’d been planning on sleeping around with the fellow.

So he wasn’t jealous of Lamarc, exactly. He was jealous of what he represented.

A man who could laugh with Reyn, drink with him. An ordinary lover, the sort of person Reyn deserved to have. Someone to grow old with; someone who wasn’t an abomination; someone he didn’t have to fear.

Someone who wasn’t Anders.

“I can’t give you a normal life,” he said, years ago beneath the rain, the taste of that first, desperate kiss still on his lips. But he’d tried anyway, tried so hard to pretend he was ordinary, to keep their life separate from the dark things he saw and did as part of the mage underground. He’d struggled to keep Justice under control, to avoid anything that would remind Reyn that his lover was the sort of thing most people thought ought to be killed on sight. He’d done everything he could to keep from dragging Reyn down with him.

Earlier, he’d thought that he’d turn to Reyn for guidance, now that everything seemed to be getting worse and worse, and every solution he’d tried had failed. But I can’t. Not without involving him too much. Not without taking yet more from him.

He wondered what might have happened, had he not given in to that moment of weakness in the rain, if he’d kept his mouth shut and let Reyn walk away. Would Reyn even now be sitting here with a normal man at his side? Someone like this Lamarc fellow: handsome and funny and carefree, instead of skinny and half-mad and desperate. Someone Reyn deserved, who came with a life he deserved.

A life I stole from him.

Justice stirred. We stole.

The injustice of it cut them both, their hurt and anger and loathing twining together into a single thing. Both of them in their own ways wanting what they couldn’t have, what would never be.

Varric swore and threw down his cards. “Another hand you’ve won! Either you’re the most patient card sharp I’ve ever met, or someone’s been giving you lessons.”

Anders glanced down at the table, surprised to find a modest pile of coins in front of him. “What? Sorry. I haven’t been paying attention.”

“Figures,” Varric muttered in disgust. He took a long drink from his tankard, then set it aside and leaned over the table. “Take my advice, Blondie—just go over there and snuggle up with your boyfriend. Your face is so long it’s turning the ale and making all the drunks cry.”

“I thought you said you’d throw us out if we ever got friendly in here again.”

“As long as the two of you don’t start ripping each other’s clothes off, I’ll look the other way. Anything to get you to cheer up.”

Anders scooped up his winnings and stood up. “I think I’m just going home. Tell Reyn not to worry.” Assuming he even notices that I’m gone.
Keeping his eyes averted from the sight of Reyn and his friend, Anders slunk out of the tavern and into the streets of Lowtown.

***

There weren’t any street gangs left to bother Anders as he wandered aimlessly. Between Aveline and her guardsmen, and Reyn’s penchant for hunting down and rooting out anyone inclined to prey on innocent pedestrians, the criminal element had finally given up and moved on. The smart ones, anyway; the stupid ones were all dead.

Out of habit, his feet took him in the direction of his clinic. There were more people moving about in Darktown at this hour: bartering, talking, sleeping, and fornicating all out in the open tunnels. The vast majority had come through his clinic at some point or another, and he’d tended their gangrenous wounds and seeping sores, their rib-breaking coughs and abscessed teeth. They smiled and nodded as he passed, and it occurred to him that they were a large part of the reason he’d managed to stay free, and why the mage underground hadn’t been crushed sooner. So many of them had tried to pay him out of their own meager savings, or with their bodies if they’d had nothing else, and been shocked when he’d always refused anything in return. Their silence was the only compensation he would take, and they had paid him back tenfold.

He’d always hoped that some day in the future, it could be like this everywhere. Healers using their Maker-given talents to help the less-fortunate, or even getting paid to do it for the well-to-do. People unafraid just because a mage walked in their midst. Unafraid to flirt, and maybe fall in love, and no templars to tear them apart.

A future where even someone like him could have a normal life.

Some part of him had even believed that he’d live to see it. The mages would be freed, and Justice would be satisfied, and he and Reyn would grow old together in a house full of cats and books.

It had been a stupid dream.

As he drew near the door of the clinic, intending to distract himself with work—there was always something that need to be done, whether rolling bandages or making potions—three robed figures emerged from the gloom.

“Thank the Maker, you’re here!” cried one. Startled, he recognized Grace, one of the mages from Starkhaven. Despite Reyn’s best attempt to help them, she and her companions had been captured by templars and dragged back to Kirkwall.

Apparently, she’d made it out of the Gallows, accompanied by two others. Grace and a mage he didn’t recognize supported a third between them, whose boyish face Anders did know—Alain, another Starkhaven mage.

“What is it?” he asked in alarm. The smell of blood was thick in the air, even over the stench of Darktown. “What happened?”

“Alain’s been hurt,” Grace cried desperately. “The templars—they—they—“

She didn’t seem able to go on. Swearing furiously, Anders turned to unlock the clinic door. “Hurry—bring him inside. I’ll—“

Then something heavy struck him from behind, and everything went dark.

***
Reyn walked back to the estate, hoping that Anders wasn’t waiting up for him in a mood to argue. It was the wee hours of the morning, well past midnight, and his mouth tasted of bad whiskey and even worse ale. All he really wanted to do was fall into the bed and get a few hours of sleep, and hope that the hangover wasn’t too bad when he woke up.

Varric had let him know shortly after Anders had left. As to why Anders had left, it was hard to say, considering that he hadn’t even spoken to Reyn after their brief exchange earlier, let alone let him know that he was heading home. Which probably meant that Anders was annoyed with him about something—Lamarc at a guess, even though that was almost as ridiculous as Anders’ irrational jealousy over Fenris.

Yes, Lamarc was his type. Fen’Harel’s teeth, he was Anders’ type as well, the damned hypocrite. And yes, Reyn’d had a crush on him, but that was years ago, before he’d ever even met Anders. None of it meant anything, beyond the fact that two old friends had gotten together for a good time, which could have included Anders.

*Or who knows. It could be something completely different. A hard day at the clinic. The sight of templars on the street corner. Not everything is about me, after all.*

He let himself into the estate, and was surprised to find a candle lit in the great room. When he entered, stepping over Barkolomew’s sleeping form, he found Bodahn sitting half-asleep in a chair, as if he’d been waiting up.

The dwarf started violently when Reyn touched his shoulder. “Oh! You gave me a fright, you did!”

“Don’t tell me this chair is more comfortable than your bed,” Reyn said.

“A message came for you messere. Very urgent—the fellow who delivered it said I had to give it to you the second you walked in the door, that lives might hang in the balance!”

“Of course they do,” Reyn said resignedly. “Do I ever get any other kind of message? Never mind, don’t answer that.”

“I think the messenger was a mage,” Bodahn said as he handed the wax-sealed letter to Reyn. “That was one reason I thought it might be important enough to wait up for you.”

Reyn broke the seal and read the letter. For a moment, all he could feel was shock and fear, quickly replaced by anger…and then by icy calm.

Oh, there was still rage...but it was a cold rage. Calculating. Rational. Because a life did hang in the balance, and he had to be able to think straight to save it.

“Bodahn,” he said calmly, “did Anders return to the estate tonight?”

“No, messere. I thought he was with you.”

Reyn nodded and tucked the letter into his coat. “Whatever appointments I had today—cancel them. Cancel everything for this week, actually. I’ll be back as soon as I can.”

Turning on his heel, he stalked to the door, calling Barkolomew with him as he went.

“What shall I tell your appointments?” Bodahn asked from the doorway.

“Tell them I had some people to kill,” Reyn said shortly, and closed the door behind him.
The bastards had Anders.

They’d been led a merry chase, but Reyn had finally tracked the kidnappers to the Wounded Coast. Mages and templars, working together against him, and he would have laughed aloud at the irony under any other circumstances.

But not these.

He’d managed to frighten his companions, although he hadn’t meant to. Merrill, Varric, and Aveline had all given him troubled looks on the trek out of the city, probably wondering where the easy-going Hawke had gone to, the one who cracked jokes and made light under even the most dire circumstances. The one who had mercy in his heart.

It didn’t matter if he’d scared them. The only thing that mattered was that someone had taken Anders, had robbed him of his freedom, had made him a prisoner yet again. Reyn was going to get him back, and if they’d hurt him in any way, everyone responsible would die screaming.

He marched down the sandy path, killing everyone who jumped out at him, mage and templar alike. The lyrium-addled ex-templar Samson seemed like he wanted to talk, but after one look at Reyn’s face, decided to run for his life instead.

Smart man. Reyn might have chased him down, but he didn’t want to waste a single second, not when he was so close.

The main group waited at the end of the path, in the old ruins where he’d found Saemus, all those long years ago. In their midst lay Anders, stretched out on his back, without so much as a cloak between him and cold, hard ground. His pale skin had lost even its usual color, and only the shallow rise and fall of his chest, showed that he still lived.

Someone was talking to Reyn: meaningless words, nothing more than sounds strung together. He looked up in annoyance and saw the templar, Thrask. He didn’t know what Thrask saw in return, but the man took a cautious step back.

Thrask was babbling something unimportant—some blather about Reyn supporting Meredith.

“Hawke, support Meredith?” Varric interrupted, agog. “Are you insane, or just suicidally stupid?”

Then Grace was ranting, and Thrask arguing, and none of it mattered the slightest iota. Because Reyn was done talking, and he was done solving their problems.

“Give Anders back right now, or I kill every last one of you,” he said simply.

Grace was having none of it, of course, too angry over the death of her own lover to think straight. Again, in other circumstances, Reyn might have even felt sorry for her. But not now. Maybe not ever again.

He hit her with chained lightning, but it only made her mad. Grace had taken on a passenger, it turned out.

She killed Thrask first, but at least that distracted her from Anders. Reyn put up a barrier around Anders’ inert form…and then set about slaughtering everyone in reach. Maybe if they all died, Anders would be released from the spell they had him under. If not…well, Reyn and Merrill would figure something out between them.
Finally, only one mage was left. The boy, Alain, cowering against one of the ruined walls. Reyn advanced on him, lightning building around his staff, crackling in his hair and along his skin, ready to unleash—

“No, Hawke!” Varric grabbed his arm, and almost got fried for his trouble. “Stop! He’s surrendered!”

“He hurt Anders.” Maybe not him, personally, but he’d been working with them, and that was close enough.

“I—I can wake him up!” Alain shouted desperately, his eyes huge with terror.

Reyn’s hand tightened on his staff, and he took a step back. But just a step. “Do it, then.”

Alain crept closer to Anders’ motionless form, and Reyn let the barrier dissipate. The terrified boy glanced at him and swallowed. “I…I’m sorry. Grace used blood magic to hold him. There’s no other way to wake him up.”

“I said do it,” Reyn snapped. “And when you’re done…run, and hope I never see you again.”

A wet stain spread across the front of the boy’s robes as he stammered out a frantic reassurance that this would work, and he’d run, and oh yes thank you for not killing me, messere. No one said anything as he drew a knife and slashed his wrist with a trembling hand, then spoke a few quavering words while sprinkling the blood around Anders.

And, thank the Creators, Anders stirred almost immediately. Even as his eyelids fluttered open and he struggled to sit up, Reyn ran to his side. “Love?” he asked worriedly.

Reyn fell to the blood-soaked ground by him, pulling him close. The familiar smell of dusty feathers, healing herbs, and lyrium filled his nose, underlain by the faintest whisper of deep earth. The smell of his lover; the smell that had come to mean home more than anything else. It cracked the last reserves of icy rage, letting in the fear that Reyn had desperately been holding at bay since the moment he’d gotten the letter.

“When I heard they’d taken you, I was afraid they’d kill you,” he whispered into Anders’ hair.

Anders hugged him back gently. “It’s all right. I’m fine, really. Well, a bit embarrassed—I never thought of myself as a damsel in distress.”

Reyn snorted at that. Climbing to his feet, he pulled Anders up after him. “You should be embarrassed. A couple of lousy templars, and you’re down?”

“They knew better than to send templars.” Anders glanced at the charred, smoking corpse that had once been Grace, and his mouth tightened with suppressed anger. “I never thought one of my own would turn on me.”

“People are people, Anders. Mages or not, they do stupid things all the time.” He put his hand on Anders’ shoulder, needing the contact. “we shouldn’t linger here, if you’re well enough to travel.”

“I’m fine, except for a bump on my head and a nasty taste in my mouth.” Anders put his fingers to the back of his skull with a wince. There came a blue flash of healing magic, and Anders dropped his hand again. “That’s better. My mouth still tastes like old blood, though. No surprise there, I suppose.”

Reyn passed him a canteen to rinse his mouth out. After, they walked back up the steep path, and
headed back in the direction of Kirkwall, fingers twined together. As they walked, Anders glanced at him. “Thank you for coming to my rescue. I’m not sure if I sounded properly grateful before. I am always glad to see your face…but it was particularly lovely to wake up to in such circumstances.”

“I’ll always come for you, Anders. Always.”

Anders’ smile faltered slightly, and he looked away. “Thank you. You mean the world to me.”

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Anders stood in front of the fireplace in the library. Upstairs, Reyn still slept in amidst their tangled sheets. After going without sleep for almost two days while tracking down the kidnappers, not even Anders getting out of bed, dressing, and slipping out had woken him.

In his hands, Anders held the battered journal that Reyn had given him to write his manifesto in. The cover was stained, and the pages filled with his crabbed handwriting…and Justice’s, in places, scrawling words that Anders had no memory of putting down.

Years of his life in those pages, and in the stack of papers bundled with them. Hours upon hours of searching for just the right word, just the right turn of phrase, to make his argument. To convince the mages, convince the Chantry, convince the ordinary people of Kirkwall that the situation was unjust, that something had to be done.

What a fool he had been.

In a single, decisive motion, he tossed the whole stack on the fire. It flared, pages curling and words turning first to light, then to smoke.

All that work, all that time, all those dreams…and all that remained was ashes.

It had all been for nothing. Things were worse now than before he’d started. The brutal treatment of the Circle Mages had driven more and more of them to resort to extreme measures in an attempt to fight back, which in turn led to even harsher conditions for those who survived.

Words were useless. Words didn’t convince anyone. Only action. The Circle had turned the mages into sheep; they wouldn’t act until they saw someone else take that first step. Even if that someone was a dangerous blood mage like Grace.

The realization hurt, because deep down, he’d really believed that he could make a difference. Change the world. The only thing he’d managed to do was waste time, pretending that he was Doing Something, when in fact he’d done nothing at all.

Nothing but entangle Reyn in his life and threaten to drag him down.

“You should have seen him,” Varric had said on the way back from the Wounded Coast. Reyn and Merrill had been ahead of them, talking about Maker-knew-what, and Aveline had been out in front, so Varric’s slightly-lowered voice was as close to privacy as they were likely to get. “Hawke was just...cold. Merciless. He didn’t care how many people he had to kill to get you back. I’ve never seen him like that before. And I don’t want to again, so make sure you don’t turn your back on any other friendly blood mages, all right?”

The dwarf had probably even meant it as a compliment of sorts, a testament to Reyn’s love, that he’d been willing to slaughter everyone who stood between him and Anders. But it wasn’t right. It wasn’t just, that his funny, sweet Reyn should be stripped of everything Anders loved about him…and for Anders’ own sake.
Reyn deserved better. More.

He deserved a normal life.

*This has to end,* Anders thought, even though he wasn’t entirely sure what “this” even was. This relationship? This pain? This intolerable situation?

This shadow life?

He turned away from the fire. The manifesto and its many drafts had been reduced to nothing but cinders. Moving slowly, like an old man whose joints ached, he walked out into the great room.

All was silent, the fire there banked down to coals. By its light, he could make out the writing desk, the rug where Barkolomew slept away the afternoons, and all the other familiar things. Sandal’s enchantment apparatus threw back stray gleams of light, catching his eye.

Anders stopped and stared at it for a long time. His heart began to beat faster, and sweat slicked his palms.

*No. This is madness.*

*I can’t. We can’t…*

*It might work…*

*Reyn would never…*

*Unless…*

He wanted to close his eyes. He wanted to walk away. But if he did…things would only get worse.

Words were useless. Only actions mattered.

One last act. Something to free the mages. To free him. To free Justice. To free Reyn.

He took a deep breath, feeling as if there were knives in his chest. The grief resonated silently, passed back and forth between Justice and him, because neither of them wanted *this*. They wanted some reprieve, some excuse to let things stay as they’d been. They wanted to go back upstairs and snuggle up against Reyn and never, ever leave.

But there was no fairytale ending. There never had been, not for them. He’d joked about being the damsel in distress earlier, but there was no knight in shining armor riding up to save the virtuous and punish the wicked.

There was only him, alone and desperate. Only the heaviness of truth, that in a city like Kirkwall, overrun with smugglers and murderers and slavers and the rotting remains of Tevinter blood magic, it would take something truly spectacular to get people’s attention.

Words on a page wouldn’t do it. He’d been an idiot to ever think otherwise. But there was something he could do.

He could act. And he could make certain he acted alone, kept Reyn out of it, so that when the time came he’d be the only one to pay the price.

He wanted to collapse to the floor and cry from the weight of it. Instead, he dragged himself up the stairs and slipped into bed beside Reyn, where he lay awake until dawn, trying to memorize the the
lines of his lover’s face to take with him into the darkness.

Chapter End Notes

In the actual game, Carver ended up being the hostage, of course, which had to be the worst hostage possible considering his relationship with Reyn. If there'd been a "go on and kill him, I'm going home," option, he would have taken it.

Our post-Legacy Reyn might be more likely to want to save Carver. But Anders is a way better hostage, and surely far more vulnerable. How would they have even gotten Carver's limp body out of the Gallows in all that armor without being spotted?

It also makes way more sense that the kidnappers would contact him directly, so I changed that bit to streamline it.

As I was writing, it rather occurred to me that Grace and Reyn have something in common. She plotted for years to get back at him from killing her lover, and I'm pretty sure he would have done the same thing if she'd killed Anders on the Wounded Coast.

"This shadow life" is of course a thought of Justice's, which readers of "Unjust" might recognize.

And so we segue into the end game. Expect some angst...and, I hope, some things that will make you smile as well. ;)


The Breath of Fen'Harel

Chapter Summary

When Anders secretive behavior leads Hawke to believe that Anders no longer loves him, will he be able to keep the pieces of his broken heart together long enough to save the Circle?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Reyn sat on the edge of the bed, his face buried in his hands. He wanted to cry—wanted to scream and rant and rave—but he held it all ruthlessly inside. Because if he broke now, he wasn’t sure how he would go about putting the pieces back together.

Before, there had always been someone else. Someone he had to be strong for, whether that was his parents, or Bethany, or Carver, or his friends.

Now there was nothing left. Just him.

Because Anders didn’t love him.

He took a deep, shuddering breath that felt as though his lungs pressed against razors instead of ribs. Anders thought he was an idiot, just a stupid, bumpkin, hedge-mage from the Ferelden countryside, deprived of that oh-so-glorious Circle education. Too ignorant to recognize the ingredients they’d collected in the sewers and the mines, even after living in the same house as Sandal for years.

Anders thought he was nothing but a dupe, someone who could be fobbed off with a transparent lie. And why not? “I love you,” had kept him fooled for almost four years, hadn’t it?

Not only had Carver apparently been right, not only had Anders been using him all along, but it turned out that Anders didn’t even trust him. Before, Reyn had accepted his excuses for keeping him out of the doings of the mage underground because they had the ring of truth. Reyn was too damned well known in Kirkwall, even before the qunari incident, to do anything covert.

But this…there was no excuse for keeping this from him, except that Anders simply didn’t trust Reyn. Probably, he never had.

Yet what hurt most of all was the justification Anders had given for collecting materials from the sewers and from those dragon-haunted mines. He’d offered the one thing he obviously thought Reyn wanted so badly that he wouldn’t ask questions, just go along with whatever Anders told him to do.

“I believe I have a formula for a potion that can separate Justice and me,” he’d said, his eyes bright and wild, his grin like the haunted grin of a skull.

As if getting rid of Justice was somehow the solution to all their problems. As if the templars would suddenly start listening to him, if he only wasn’t possessed.

This curse, he’d called Justice, as if the spirit was responsible for all the damage inflicted on him by the templars, and the Wardens, and the Creators only knew who else.
As if he believed Reyn hated and feared that part of him.

*Ignorant and gullible…and horrible enough to hate half of the being I've slept with for three years. Even Carver never had such a low opinion of me.*

Reyn became aware of the small wooden box he held clenched in his hand, the edges cutting painfully into his palm and fingers. A messenger had delivered it from the dwarven smith whom Reyn had commissioned several weeks ago. The fact that it had come today of all days showed that the gods did indeed have a dark sense of humor.

With a sudden cry, he flung the box as hard as he could at the fireplace. It struck the stone and broke, the lid flying one way and the bottom the other. A pair of rings rolled away into opposite corners of the room.

Reyn collapsed to his knees in front of the fireplace, bending over so that his forehead pressed against the hearth rug. He bit his lip to keep in a howl of pain that would surely have brought all the servants running, bit it until blood dripped down his face and onto the carpet.

Anders had gone out to the tailor. His old coat, which had survived so much, had finally met its end at the fiery breath of the high dragon that had been lurking near the Bone Pit, when they went to gather the drakestone. When he came home tonight…they would have to talk.

It would be a painful, awful, maybe even final, conversation. But it was past time to find out, once and for all, what place Reyn really had in Anders’ life. Whether Anders really wanted a partner, the way he claimed, or just someone to pay the bills and warm his bed. Because if he actually wanted the former, then things had to change. And if he wanted the latter…

Reyn’s throat closed against another surge of grief. With a sudden clarity, he remembered a moment that Anders had probably long forgotten. They’d been walking through the Hightown streets in the early evening, about two years after they’d first become lovers. Reyn couldn’t even recall where they had been going to or from, only that Anders had turned to look at something—then looked at Reyn instead. The most beautiful smile had crossed his face, so sweet and full of love that it had stolen Reyn’s breath.

“It is still a thrill to turn and see you beside me,” Anders had said. And Reyn had kissed him, and for that moment, everything had been truly perfect.

*How can I give that up?* Reyn wondered miserably. *How can I even think about leaving him? How can I not do anything, anything, to hold onto that? Even if it's just sex to him, how can I live without him?*

A cold, wet nose nuzzled his cheek, and Barkolomew let out an anxious *whuff*. Reyn let himself be distracted by the mabari’s distress, sitting up and running his hand along the sleek, short fur.

“I don’t know what to do, boy,” he said hopelessly. “I don’t know what’s even left to do.”

Barkolomew let out a low whine and laid his head on Reyn’s knee, looking up soulfully. “You’re all I’ve got,” Reyn said through a throat that ached with unshed tears. “You’ll never leave me, right?”

The dog barked once and wagged his tail.

No, he’d never leave. Mabari were loyal like that. They never gave up on a person, no matter what. Especially not if said person needed them.

An odd sense of calm stole over him, then. So maybe Anders didn’t love him. He’d never known
Justice’s thoughts on the matter, outside of a certain inclination to be possessive, which could have been a result of protective feelings towards Anders just as easily as any fondness for Reyn.

But I love them. They didn’t believe in him, but he still believed in Anders and Justice. In their cause. In the dream that someday all mages would live as free as anyone else.

A tentative knock sounded on the half-open door. Reyn glanced up and saw Bodahn standing there, looking profoundly nervous. And with good reason, he thought wryly; he probably looked like a maniac, sitting on the floor in the midst of the wreckage of his life, his eyes red and swollen, blood smears all over his face from his bitten lip. He’s probably wondering if he can move up that trip to Orlais.

“Pardon me, messere,” Bodahn said uncertainly. “I can come back later, if this is a bad time.”

It’s the worst time. “It’s all right. What do you need?”

“A letter came for you…and since you were actually home for once, I thought I’d go ahead and deliver it. The messenger said it was from First Enchanter Orsino, you see, and that it was urgent.”

“I imagine it is,” Reyn said tiredly, holding out his hand for the folded parchment.

***

Reyn went first to the Keep, to find Aveline. The sun was setting over hightown, painting the walls a beautiful shade of gold that he’d never seen anywhere else. The gulls turned in the air, screaming their eerie cries, and the wind off the ocean brought with it the stink of decaying fish from the wharves.

His path took him past the Chantry. With sunset, the few supplicants who went there these days were clearing out, heading down the stairs under the suspicious eyes of a contingent of templars. In response to the Divine’s concern for Elthina’s safety, Meredith had placed a division of templars inside the Chantry to stand constant guard. Paranoid of assassins, they bullied and searched most of the people who entered, which meant that the Chantry wasn’t quite the haven it had once been to the populace. Or even the Mothers and novices; rumor had it that Elthina had ordered her underlings to the safety of Val Royeaux.

He wondered why Elthina had stayed. She was a canny old bitch; as time had passed and he’d learned more of the subtleties of politics, he’d come to recognize her as a master of the game. Clearly she thought that she had something to gain by remaining here in her place of power.

And why not? Once Meredith killed every mage in Kirkwall, Elthina would look like a hero for bravely staying her post. The people would adore her selflessness.

Fen’Harel, catch her in your teeth and drag her into the Void, he thought vindictively.

Inside the Keep, more templars glared. They’d replaced the city guard here a year ago, cementing Meredith’s bid to turn Kirkwall into a theocracy ruled by her iron-gauntleted hand. Only two things stood in her way now. The first was the nobility, reluctant to give up their rights. But if Meredith got enough popular support—say by ridding the city of “dangerous blood mages” and whipping up so much fear that no one would dare speak out against her—the nobles would have no choice but to fall in line.

The second, of course, was Reyn himself. The Champion of Kirkwall. A mage, who could be conveniently labeled a maleficar. Meredith would only have to claim that he’d somehow used blood magic to control the minds of everyone in the city…and if he died while resisting arrest and was
unable to refute her accusations, so much the better.

*History is always written by the victors, in the blood of the losers.* He couldn’t remember where he’d heard that—it sounded like something Anders might say—but it was true.

Ignoring the glares of the templars, Reyn went down into the barracks. Aveline was in her office, as he’d expected.

“Nothing to report, Hawke—“ she started to say—then stopped when she looked up from her paperwork and saw his expression.

“I’ve gotten a message from Orsino,” he said. “He wants me to come to the Gallows. It looks like Meredith is finally making her move.”

Aveline nodded, not needing to ask anything more. Her gruff, soldier’s ways were one of the things he’d come to appreciate about her in all their years together, and never more than this very moment.

Going to the door, she called: “Guardsman Donnic? A word, please.”

Her husband walked in, all stiff formality. “Serah Hawke,” he said with a nod in Reyn’s direction.

“Hawke and I are going to the Gallows. We may be a while.”

Shadows flickered through Donnic’s eyes, but his posture never faltered. “Understood, captain. Any special orders?”

Aveline considered for a long moment. “Remember the laws of this city. The guards serve the people, not the Chantry, and certainly not the Knight-Commander.”

Donnic inclined his head. “Understood. Maker watch over you both.”

Aveline crisply walked out of her office, as if it were any other day. Reyn exchanged a brief glance with Donnic.

“I’ll try to keep her safe,” he offered, even though it was entirely his fault that she was heading into a powder keg with him now.

“Thank you, serah,” Donnic replied.

“Hawke!” Aveline called from the hall outside, impatient to be on their way. Reyn nodded to Donnic, then hurried out after the guard captain.

***

As it turned out, Orsino wasn’t waiting for him in the Gallows. Meredith and a large contingent of templars had taken off for Lowtown, with Orsino chasing after them. What Meredith wanted in Lowtown, Reyn didn’t know and was half-afraid to guess. Passing through on her way to Darktown, where she would arrest the Champion’s apostate lover, seemed likely enough.

In a stroke of mad luck, Orsino had managed to get Meredith to stop right in front of the Hanged Man. Varric, Isabela, Fenris, and Merrill had all been drawn outside by the commotion and hovered nearby, watching the confrontation tensely as Reyn and Aveline ran up.

Orsino looked small and slight next to Meredith’s armored bulk, but the handsome old elf all but burned with defiance. A wall of armored templars—and, oddly enough, that git Sebastian Vael—surrounded him, but he kept his eyes fixed on Meredith, as if she were the only one present.
“You cannot do that!” he shouted at her. “You have no right!”

“I have every right!” she raved back, and followed up with an all-to predictable rant about blood magic. Reyn tiredly wished that someone, just once, would come up with a different excuse for mage oppression. It didn’t even have to be a better one; anything that wasn’t demons and blood magic would do. *Crimes against fashion, say, or making ordinary men feel inferior with our big staffs.*

“The way you two carry on,” he drawled, when they finally stopped long enough for someone to get a word in, “people will talk.”

One of the templars shifted. “Well, look who decided to show up.”

Carver. Reyn spared his brother only the briefest of glances.

I don’t have time for posturing right now.

Meredith fixed her cold, pale eyes on Reyn, and fear ran across his skin, like a trickle of ice water down his spine. *This woman is dangerous. And she’s out for blood.*

“This does not involve you, Champion,” she said in a voice like a pair of prison gates slamming shut.

“I called him here,” Orsino said, taking responsibility immediately. Reyn found that he rather liked him for that. “I think the people deserve to know just what you’ve done.”

Once again, Meredith’s answer was painfully predictable: a long diatribe about how she’d done everything to protect the people, with a few words of regret thrown in to make her seem less like a monster, seasoned with references to how great her personal sacrifice had been. Reyn suspected she’d practiced her speech in front of a mirror.

“Does the word ‘crazy’ mean anything to you?” he wondered aloud.

Unfortunately, Orsino also seemed crazy—or at least insanely naive. “Grand Cleric Elthina will put a stop to this,” he declared, even though Reyn couldn’t imagine why he would possibly think so, when she’d never lifted a finger to rein in Meredith before.

The First Enchanter turned, as if he meant to stride all the way across the city and straight up to the Chantry. Meredith, however, grabbed his arm, yanking him to a halt. “You will not bring her Grace into this!”

“The Grand Cleric cannot help you!” cried a familiar voice.

Startled and relieved, Reyn turned and saw Anders striding up the street toward them. His first, nonsensical thought was: *Huh. He went to the tailor after all.*

Anders looked…amazing, that was the only word Reyn could think of. Dressed all in black and gold that accentuated his lean height, his staff in his hand, his pale face flushed and determined, he was every inch the proud, rebel mage. Despite everything, Reyn’s heart swelled with emotion: love and pride foremost, but mingled with grief and anger and the fear of loss.

Meredith pinned him with her cruel eyes. “Explain yourself, mage,” she all but spat, and Reyn shifted his weight in case he had to shield Anders from her.

But for once, Anders seemed in his element. He’d always avoided the spotlight before, but right now, he effortlessly commanded the attention of everyone there. “I will not stand by and watch you treat all mages like criminals,” he replied, before his gaze shifted to Orsino, “while those who would lead us bow to their templar jailers.”
Orsino glared, taken aback. “How dare you speak to—“

“The Circle has failed us, Orsino!” Anders cut him off savagely. “Even you should be able to see that!”

As he spoke, spirit fire flashed across his skin, his eyes glowing briefly, furiously blue, before fading out again. Reyn’s heart leapt into his mouth and he felt a flush of terror, because Anders had done the one thing Reyn had never expected he’d do—unmask himself as an abomination in front of everyone. Not because he’d lost control, but…deliberately.

Anders turned away. “The time has come to act,” he said, and if his voice wavered slightly on the word, no one who didn’t know him as intimately as Reyn did would ever notice it. “There can be no half-measures.”

He glanced briefly at Reyn. Reyn wondered if he was expected to act the part of the ignorant hedge witch, wring his hands, and gasp out a plea for Anders to explain what he’d done, as if he were too stupid to have figured it out. Or so unfaithful as to pretend he hadn’t had any part in it.

To the Void with that. I’m not playing along any more, Anders.

His lack of a reaction threw Anders for a moment. He recovered quickly, however, and faced Meredith and Orsino again. “There can be no turning back,” he said.

He lifted his staff...then brought it down with a sharp crack. Reyn felt the flow of magic, and turned expectantly toward Hightown, where the Chantry—the highest point in Kirkwall—stood silhouetted against the starry sky.

For a long moment, nothing happened, and he thought something must have gone wrong. Then a flash of scarlet light enveloped the Chantry, spreading out in a brilliant circle. A few seconds later, the sound of the titanic explosion rumbled out over the city.

A pillar of light sprang up, rocketing into the sky. The building was drawn up with it as if lifted by Elgar’non’s hand, its stones torn loose from each other and from the earth, swirling and spiraling up and up, gathering into a ball that glared over the city like a baleful eye.

And then, the ball exploded outwards in a blinding flash of light, accompanied moments later by an ear-splitting sound, as if a hole had been ripped in reality itself.

A hot wind gusted down onto Lowtown, like the breath of a Fen’Harel. Reyn closed his eyes against the grit it stirred up, even as he tilted his face back and felt the soft brush of warmth on his cheeks. Distantly, he realized that he was grinning like a madman.

“There can be no peace,” Anders said. And in his defeated, exhausted voice, Reyn heard an odd echo of the words Flemeth had spoken to Aveline, all those years ago, when they stood outside of Lothering and watched their old lives crumble into dust.

“Without an end, there can be no peace.”

Sebastian Vael fell to his knees and began howling about Elthina. Orsino, his elven eyes even wider with horror, turned on Anders. “Why?” he demanded, aghast. “Why would you do such a thing?”

Anders didn’t fold, as Reyn half-expected him to. I always knew he was stronger than most people gave him credit for. Is this how he was in the mage underground? Or has he found some new reserve inside himself? Or is Justice helping?
“I removed the chance of compromise, because there is no compromise,” Anders replied steadily.

Meredith moved forward, and Reyn tensed, ready to reach for his staff. “The Grand Cleric has been slain by magic, the Chantry destroyed,” she said, a maniacal light in her eyes and something horribly like Reyn’s own grin hovering about her lips.

Oh shit. Come on, Anders, if you planted a second bomb in Templar Hall, now would be the time to use it. You did think to do that, didn’t you? Right?

“As Knight-Commander of Kirkwall, I invoke the Right of Annulment,” she finished triumphantly. “Every mage in the Circle is to be executed—immediately.”

Bugger it all, Anders!

“Champion, you can’t let her!” Orsino shouted.

Meredith turned her steel-blue gaze on Reyn as well. “And I demand you stand with us! Even you must see that this outrage cannot be tolerated!”

A short bark of startled laughter escaped him. Dear gods, was everyone in Kirkwall mad, or had Grace’s lies about him found even Meredith’s ears? “You must be joking! I’m not going to help you slaughter every mage in Kirkwall, you raving lunatic!”

“Why are we debating the Right of Annulment when the monster who did this is right here?” Sebastian demanded in confusion.

“Because invoking the Right has nothing to do with Anders, and everything to do with Meredith’s personal power, you twit,” Reyn snapped. “Please do try to keep up.”

“How dare you,” Meredith exclaimed. “I serve the Maker—“

“Yes, yes. Can we drop this ridiculous pretense? I’m not going to let you kill the mages. End of story.”

“I know we can do this,” said a small, gentle voice at his elbow. Startled, Reyn looked down and found Merrill peering up at him. “I believe in you, Hawke.”

“Thanks, Merrill.”

“You are a fool, Champion,” Meredith spat. Turning to her templars, she motioned sharply. “Kill them all! I will rouse the rest of the order!”

Which she can do, because Templar Hall still seems to be standing. Thanks, Anders. Your tactical skills will awe generals for generations to come. If only you’d had someone you’d trusted to advise you.

But that final thought threatened to break his heart all over again.

Meredith turned and marched away, taking a handful of templars with her—including, thank the Creators, Carver. Orsino turned to the small contingent of mages who had crept out of the shadows at some point. “Go! Get to the Gallows! Warn the others before it’s too late!”

And then the templars were on them.

The first thing Reyn noticed was that Orsino was a damned good mage. The man wasn’t First Enchanter for nothing. He blasted away an entire handful of templars with force magic, then froze
another batch in their tracks for Isabela and Fenris to take down.

As Reyn fought, aiming lightning at the metal-clad warriors closing in on him, he realized that something was missing. A presence that had always been there, for so long that he’d come to rely on it, to assume that it would always be there.

_No. I’m wrong. He wouldn’t abandon us, not now…_

But a quick glance showed Anders standing apart. Hands folded across his chest, head bowed, and staff on his back. Not fighting. Not healing. Not doing anything at all.

For the first time in six years, he didn’t have Reyn’s back.

That was the moment Reyn’s heart finally, completely shattered. Anders had played him up until this endgame, and now there was nothing left between them.

“No!” he screamed in a templar’s face, and shoved the blade of his staff through the slit in the helmet. Lightning boiled off his hands, speared down from the heavens, and the smell of frying human flesh, like overdone pork, filled the air. Somehow, though, it didn’t take away the desperation or the pain.

It was over sooner than Meredith had probably anticipated. A stunned silence fell over the group, unbroken by the usual call of “Does anyone need healing?” Orsino was the only one who didn’t know that anything was amiss—besides the obvious, at least.

“I don’t know if we can win this war, Champion,” he said, stepping away from the last, dying templar, “but thank you.”

Reyn nodded, even though he was staring in Anders’ direction. Anders had found a low box and seated himself on it. Not speaking, not doing anything except rocking slowly back and forth.

Orsino followed his gaze. “I will leave your…friend…for you to deal with. I must return to the Gallows and save as many mages as I can.”

Reyn nodded. “I’ll be there soon. Good luck, Orsino.”

“And you.”

Orsino hurried away, and an eerie silence fell. Far off, there were screams and cries, but nearby it felt as if they existed in some place utterly separate from the rest of the world. Clouds had gathered above Hightown; they burned with a sullen red glow, and streaks of fire fell intermittently to the earth below. Ash and sparks drifted on the wind, strangely beautiful.

Reyn crossed the street to where Anders sat on his box. Anders didn’t turn around at the sound of his footsteps, didn’t look at him, only kept rocking. In the red glow from the sky, the tracks of tears on his face looked as though they were made of blood. And, insane as it seemed, it suddenly occurred to Reyn that maybe—just maybe—Anders hadn’t joined in the fight not because he didn’t love Reyn, because he didn’t think Reyn would want his help.

“There’s nothing you can say that I haven’t already said to myself,” Anders said as Reyn came to a halt behind him.

“I want to speak to Justice.”
Well, Anders, I bet *that* wasn't what you expected him to say, was it?!

So, being familiar with the history of gunpowder, it was pretty obvious to me what Anders was up to (i.e. *sela petrae* = saltpetre and *drakestone* = brimstone, aka sulfur) in the "Justice " quest. But I figured the poor warrior Hawke of my first playthrough would be clueless, and played her that way. But Reyn, a mage who specializes in destructive spells, having lived and possibly worked with Sandal for years would reasonably twig to it immediately. So yeah. He was pissed, and hurt, and put the absolute worst interpretation on Anders' absurd attempt to fool him.

So, if you've played Awakening and chosen to burn Amaranthine, you get to see this heartbreaking montage of all those citizens who die when the city is lost. In contrast, the destruction of the Chantry shows us only Elthina and templars getting blown to smithereens. So I'm a bit skeptical when I see people talking about how Anders murdered hundreds of innocent people. Unless you count the templars as innocent (and, considering that my PCs are universally getting ready to slaughter the remainder wholesale, that would be awfully hypocritical of me), or Elthina (more arguable, although I obviously think she was culpable). Way more random citizens died thanks to Isabela not giving back the qunari relic, but no one ever seems to complain about that.

I'm giving the rest of Hawke's friends the benefit of the doubt by assuming they would have been able to see the writing on the wall, and wouldn't have had to make any last minute decisions (or switches) of loyalty, even if they didn't know just how things would go down. Especially Aveline--she's way too savvy.

I always wondered why they had Anders semi-echo Flemeth's line from the prologue.

I so, so wanted to type "box o' shame," but I resisted. You should all be proud of me.
Justice

Chapter Summary

“There’s nothing you can say that I haven’t already said to myself."

“I want to speak to Justice.”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Y-You what?” Anders asked, half-turning on his box so that he could look up at Reyn.

“I want to speak to Justice,” Reyn repeated with what he thought was a remarkable amount of patience. “Now, please.”

“No…Reyn, don’t do this to me.” Anders looked up at him, his expression one of fear and something else. Betrayal? “The world needed to see this. Now we can all stop pretending the Circle is a solution. If I’m to pay for that with my life…then I accept that. But let me die a man and not an abomination.”

Reyn stared at him for a long moment, feeling as though he’d been punched in the chest, all the breath knocked out of him and only emptiness left behind. *Anders…thinks that I’m going to kill him? He believes that…what, that I’ll find it easier to do if he’s obviously an abomination, and that’s why I’m asking?*

And suddenly, the last piece of the puzzle slid into place: the one facet of the complicated, fascinating, wonderful, infuriating creature that was Anders, which Reyn had somehow failed to understand from the very beginning.

*He believes that, if I ever see the real him—the part that includes Justice—the entire truth—that I won’t love him anymore.*

*And what is it that people do when they see abominations?* Anders had mentioned it himself, trying to convince Reyn that he needed sela petrae and drakestone for some absurd Tevinter potion. *“They’re the only ones who have ever sought to reverse spirit possession, not just behead the victims.”*

There was ground glass in his blood and razors in his lungs. Fury pooled in his gut: at himself, for not understanding sooner, and at Anders, for thinking such things of him. With a barely-suppressed growl, he grabbed Anders’ feathery pauldrons and used them to yank the other mage unwillingly to his feet.

“You owe me this,” he snarled into Anders’ pale face. “Now let me speak to Justice!”

For a moment more, there was only Anders’ warm, amber eyes staring back into his, filled with despair and resignation. Then spirit energy swirled, clouding the corneas with blue, and heatless flames burst into being across his skin.

Justice shoved Reyn back, breaking his hold with contemptuous ease. “Speak, if you have aught to
And, gods, he looked even more impressive in the fiery night, boiling with spirit energy, pure blue against a backdrop of dark red. He was scowling, but then he was always scowling, whether because that was his normal mood or because Reyn annoyed him, there was no knowing.

“Oh, I have some things to say, all right,” Reyn replied, glaring right back. “And I want Anders to hear them as well.”

Justice looked down his long nose: haughty and aloof. “What is there to say?”

“First off: I am not an idiot, and I do not appreciate being treated as one!”

That didn’t seem to be what Justice had expected from him. “I do not understand.”

The spirit’s incomprehension fueled Reyn’s frustration, kindling the suppressed pain that had underlain all those hours in the sewers and the mine and the Chantry, helping the man who supposedly loved him. “Did you really believe—either of you—that I didn’t know exactly what you had planned?”

“You…did?”

“Of course I did, damn you! I’ve lived with Sandal longer than you have. I was right in the middle of that blasted business with the qunari explosives. I’m a mage, you sodding bastards—I know potions and I know magic. Yet you treated me like a fool, like someone you could manipulate. Like someone you felt nothing for but contempt.”

“We—“

“No! You don’t get to talk yet! If you had just bothered to talk to me, to treat me like an equal, like an adult, maybe we could have destroyed Templar Hall as well. You know—the place packed with the templars who are about to kill all the mages?”

“I—“

“Shut up! I’m not done yelling! The obvious thing to have done would be wait until all the templars were at services, including Meredith, then blow the Hall. The remainder would rush to the Chantry to protect Elthina, and then—boom! But, oh no! Why do that? After all, it might have meant letting poor, stupid Reyn in on your glorious plan!”

He fell silent, except for his breath rushing raggedly in and out of his lungs. Justice looked at him in…well, it was hard to read those blank, glowing eyes, but he wasn’t radiating nearly the amount of confidence Reyn had come to expect from their brief encounters.

“Anders…and I…we did not think it right to ask you to risk so much,” the spirit said at last.

“Risk what?” Reyn asked, flinging his arms out. “My position? My money? Do you—does Anders—really believe I give a damn about any of that? Gods, it’s worse than I thought! Bad enough that you have no respect for my intelligence, but now I’m a greedy, power-hungry bastard on top of it? Did Anders ever love me at all, or was it always just my money—“

“No!” Justice roared, surging forward. Spirit fire flared around him in sudden agitation. “That meant nothing to us!”

*Us?*
“Then why do this to me?” Reyn shouted, not backing down, despite the fact that a very angry Justice was now towering over him. “Even if it you thought you were doing it to protect me, why lie about the potion to separate you? As if that was the only thing I wanted, as if I’d be so eager to grasp at that straw that I wouldn’t even think twice about the ingredients, or the trip to the Chantry, or anything else?”

Justice drew back from him; spirit energy swirled, then dimmed, the fires banked. “And why wouldn’t you?” he asked, in that voice of deep gravel, laced with anger and something that might have been hurt. “I know that Anders is the one you want. I know you would as soon be rid of me. I know that I am the thing standing between you and an ordinary life. Why would you not jump at the chance?”

Fen’Harel’s teeth, it was worse than he’d ever imagined. Pushing aside the anger and hurt, Reyn stepped forward, until only a few inches of air separated them.


It occurred to him, rather belatedly, that he might have just done one of the more spectacularly foolish things in his life. If he was very, very lucky, backhanding him across the street would be the worst thing Justice would do in retaliation.

For a moment, Justice was frozen against him, probably in shock—or sheer affront, or the gods only knew what, because Reyn surely didn’t.

Then he shifted, arms lifting in a rustle of feathers, and pulled Reyn to him.

And, Creators, it was a completely different experience from kissing Anders. It wasn’t just the spirit energy, although in such close proximity it absolutely sang along his magic-sensitive nerves, a flush of warmth and heat that made the fine hairs stand up on his arms and tingled along his skin in a manner that was in no way unpleasant. That was certainly new, but mostly it was the controlled power of the way Justice moved, the aggressive, possessive, way he plundered Reyn’s mouth with his tongue, pulling back just enough to nip his lower lip with his teeth, before deepening the kiss once more. Reyn thought he heard someone moaning, then realized it was him.

“Hawke! Get a hold of yourself!” Aveline shouted, although prudently she did so from the other side of the street.

Elgar’non, he didn’t want this to end, except as a prelude to more, which was absolutely insane given their current situation. But Justice was already drawing back, so he reluctantly loosened his own grip.

“Anders…believes he may have been incorrect about some things,” Justice said. He sounded dazed, which pleased Reyn absurdly.

“I suspect that’s an understatement,” Reyn managed to say, acutely aware of the sound of his own breathing, of the tantalizing lick of spirit energy against his skin. “I understand that your arrangement hasn’t worked out the way either of you expected, but this is the way things are. You’ve got to make this work, and if I’ve been part of the problem, then I’m more sorry than I can possibly say. But you’re stuck with each other, and you’re stuck with me, and-and we have to figure this out.”

“Of course. Do you believe me, or do I need to start yelling again?”

“Please don’t.” Anders gave him a small, tentative smile. “Thank you for my life. I’ll try not to make such a mess of it this time.”

“No!”

Surprised by the outburst Reyn turned and found Sebastian Vael staring at them. The prince’s blue eyes were wide and wild, and the red glow from the sky lent his white armor a bloody hue.

“You cannot let this abomination walk free!” Sebastian snarled, his expression demented. “He dies, or I am returning to Starkhaven! And I will bring such an army on my return that there’ll be nothing left of Kirkwall for these maleficarum to rule!”

Anders blanched sharply, but Reyn felt only anger. And now we see the true face of the Chantry fanatic, willing to slaughter an entire city of innocents to get to one man.

Reyn stalked slowly to where the indignant Sebastian stood quivering, his every step echoing off the stone faces of the surrounding buildings. A grin warped his face—a wolfish grin, like the one Fen’Harel must have worn when he trapped the gods and the Forgotten Ones in the heavens and the abyss.

“I’ve slaughtered enough men to make an army since arriving in Kirkwall,” Reyn said, his tone almost conversational as he paced forward. “I’ve faced blood mages, templars, slavers, raiders, and carta dwarves. I’ve fought ogres, rock-wraiths, shades, demons, and vartarrel. I killed the Arishok in single combat, and I took the head of a high dragon. I’ve spoken with one of the very Tevinter magisters who began the Blights—and slain him.”

Reyn stopped less than a foot away from Sebastian and leaned in, so that their faces were only inches apart.

“After all that, do you really think I’m afraid of you?” His grin grew even wider, and all the color drained from Sebastian’s face in response. “Run back to your princedom, little boy. The grown-ups still have business to take care of here.”

For a long moment, his words hung threateningly on the air, like the roll of thunder before the lightning strike. Sebastian took one cautious step back. When Reyn made no move, he took another. “I-I will not fight you, Hawke. My death now will serve nothing.”

Then he turned and ran.

Anders had hung back during the exchange. “I’m not sure if I should be terrified or aroused,” he remarked as he rejoined Reyn.

“If you’re done, can we get back to the matter at hand?” Aveline asked, sounding exasperated with them both.

“Er, yes. Sorry about that.” Reyn walked back to the rest of their friends, Anders at his side. “All right. We need to get to the Gallows. Aveline, you take point.”

She nodded, her eyes clear and hard with purpose. “They’ll have to come through me, first.”

“I’m counting on it. Fenris, I want you to take rear guard, in case we get surrounded or ambushed.”

The elf nodded as well, his lyrium markings reflecting the glow of the sky. How much, Reyn
wondered, had it taken for him to agree to stand with a group of mages against the Chantry? “I understand.”

“Varric, Merrill, hang back near Fenris and get ready to throw everything you’ve got in whichever direction trouble comes at us from. Isabela…create whatever havoc seems appropriate.”

“Oh Hawke, you do know how to treat a lady.”

And now came the hard part. “Justice? Anders? I’m going to have to ask a lot of you.”

Anders straightened self-consciously. “I’ll fight the templars. Damned right I will.”

“I appreciate that, love, but I need you on healing. And I need Justice on templar-smiting duty. So I suppose what I really need is for the two of you to cooperate. Justice, you’re our best fighter when it comes to templars, so I’d like to have you with me behind Aveline, ready to go. But killing a bunch of templars doesn’t help us much if we’re all dead, too. So the instant—and I do mean the instant—someone needs healing, you have to get out of the way so Anders can get to work. Once the healing is finished, Anders, then it’s back to Justice fighting. No struggle for control, just doing what needs done according to your strengths. Can you two do that for me?”

Anders seemed surprised by the suggestion—and gods, they were going to have to have a talk about that—but after a moment he nodded firmly. “We understand.”

Then spirit fire bloomed into being around him, and his stance shifted to something more aggressively powerful, more predatory. “As Anders said,” Justice growled.

Reyn pulled his staff from his back, holding it loose and ready in his hands. “Well, then,” he said, “let’s go kill some templars.”

Chapter End Notes

We’ve finally arrived at the scene that convinced me to write this sprawling monstrosity in the first place. In Reyn’s playthrough, I got to the “box o’ shame” dialog…and none of the answers were remotely like anything Reyn would ever have said. I went ahead and finished the playthrough, but the next morning while I was out biking, I starting thinking about what he might have said if given the opportunity. Thing snowballed out of control from there. :)

Anyway, I hope this chapter gave most of you the promised smiles, either for the kiss, or for telling Sebastian off, or possibly both.
Chapter Summary

Anders and Justice must work together, Carver finally chooses a side, and Justice has his best day ever.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

They fought their way across Lowtown. There was panic in the streets, although at least most of the ordinary citizens had taken refuge. Templars were out in force, though, killing suspected mages and mage-sympathizers. Reyn didn’t know if they were working from a previously-collected list or just relying on door-to-door intimidation.

A few of the mages so cornered had become true abominations, and Reyn wondered bitterly if they had been spirit-possessed like Anders, except that their spirits had reacted rather more drastically when threatened. Thank the gods Justice is…what? More self-possessed, no pun intended? Because the truth was, he didn’t still didn’t know why some spirits ran mad and others didn’t.

Why do some people break in times of trouble, and others show their true mettle? Maybe there wasn’t any better answer than that. Anders was a survivor: damaged but not destroyed. Was it any wonder that he’d attracted a spirit with that same core of inner strength?

When they came upon the first group of templars, more than the usual tension of battle tightened Reyn’s nerves. If Anders and Justice couldn’t do this, if they ended up in a fight for control, things were going to get very ugly very fast.

Justice of course charged the templars without even an instant of hesitation. Not knowing what they were facing, the templars closed with him.

He took them apart with terrifying ease, the same hands that had held Reyn only a short while before ripping through armor like it was tinfoil. There was the crunch of breaking bone, a guttural cry cut short as a head parted company from the rest of its body, and panicked screams as some of the templars realized that maybe they ought to be running for their lives.

Reyn glimpsed all this in between casting lightning bolts—templar armor was so wonderfully conductive, after all—and trying to keep track of everyone else as well. So he saw when Isabela took a bad hit that left her staggering and gushing blood. He spun away, searching the battlefield, ready to call for Anders and praying to Mythal that he didn’t have to get into a shouting match with an enraged Justice, while Isabela bled to death.

Instead, what he saw was something like a beautiful but terrifying ballet. Justice threw a templar through the air, smashing him into his nearest fellows—and not-incidentally clearing the area immediately around him. Spirit fire folded inwards, sinking back beneath the skin. In a smooth, coordinated motion, Anders pulled his staff from his back and cast a healing spell on Isabela. The spell done, fire burst forth once again, and it was back to the business of destruction.

“Good work everyone,” Reyn said, when the fight was over. It was true in general, but of course he
meant it in particular when it came to Justice and Anders.

Justice, however, looked slightly affronted. “We have done as you asked,” he said, as if it were in any way that simple.

It wasn’t—Reyn had lived with Anders for three years, so he knew that nothing was ever quite that simple—but it did make him wonder. *Is that all I ever had to do? Ask?*

From Lowtown they fought their way through the docks, where they commandeered a small ship to take them across to the Gallows. It was quiet, out on the water. Reyn could see fires burning fitfully, lit either by enraged templars or terrified mages, or just opportunistic arsonists for all he knew. The sky above where the Chantry had stood still glowed red, and bits of flaming debris arced down from the clouds now and again, usually burning out long before they reached the earth below.

No one said anything at first. Perhaps they were all still too shocked by events, or worried about what was yet to come. Then Isabela broke the silence.

“Do you think the mages will reward us?” she asked hopefully. “With magic jewels, perhaps?”

“I don’t think the mages are exactly rich, Rivaini,” Varric replied.

“Oh. Then why are we doing this again?”

Merrill came forward to stand by Reyn near the bow. “It’s almost beautiful, in a strange sort of way, isn’t it?” she asked, nodding toward the bloody sky.

“Like Elgar’non’s wrath, brought down from the heavens,” he agreed.

Merrill shook her head. “Not Elgar’non, Hawke. Mythal. I would have thought you of all people would understand that.”

He thought about it a moment. “Yes. You’re right, of course.”

Anders moved toward the front of the small boat. Merrill glanced at him, then drifted back to sit by Isabela, who manned the rudder.

“What did she mean?” Anders asked. Maybe he thought it sounded like a safe topic; certainly he’d never shown any particular interest in Reyn’s religious inclinations before.

“Elgar’non, the all-father, is the god of vengeance,” Reyn said, watching Anders face out of the corner of his eye. “He strikes out in anger and pride. But Mythal is the goddess of justice. When she acts, it’s to protect.”

“Oh. I see.” Anders seemed rather taken aback. “I didn’t know that.”

“Heads up,” Aveline said quietly. “We’re coming to the dock. Meredith may have a welcoming committee waiting for us.”

As soon as the boat bumped against the dock, Reyn leapt off, followed by Justice. Armor glinted in the glow of the spirit’s fire, and Reyn started to bring around his staff—then collapsed his spell in a swirl of mana when he recognized Donnic.

The guard was pale, his face streaked with ash and soot, but he didn’t seem to be hurt. When he caught sight of Aveline, relief flared across his features, and some of the color came back into his skin. They embraced; then Aveline stepped back, stiffly formal. “Guardsman. Report.”
“There’s rioting in Hightown,” Donnic said. “The Chantry is…gone. Obliterated. People are saying that it was the Maker’s wrath that did it, brought down on us all by Knight-Commander Meredith. Marlein Selbrech swears it’s because the Knight-Commander wanted to make herself ruler of Kirkwall, while others are saying it’s punishment for the way she’s treated the mages. Everything’s chaos, but the guard are trying to get things back under control. A few of the houses nearest the Chantry caught fire when everything went up, but they’re stone, so most of them had only minor damage. Except for Seneschal Bran’s—his burned to the ground.”

“Really?” Reyn asked with a grin. “Tonight is like Satinalia and my birthday all wrapped up in one.”

“Don’t start acting crazier than your boyfriend, Hawke,” Varric said.

“Boyfriends,” Reyn corrected.

“I’m definitely leaving this part of the story out,” Varric muttered. The dwarf moved closer and lowered his voice. “Seriously, Hawke—people are going to look to you to be in charge. If they think you’re crazier than the scary abomination you’re ordering around, we’re screwed.”

“I headed here when I saw Meredith rounding up templars out of Hightown and leading them en masse to the Gallows, so I assumed that you would be coming here soon enough,” Donnic concluded. “I’m guessing you lot know what really happened?”

“Good man,” Aveline said. “I’ll brief you as soon as we have time. Right now, we’re here to defend the mages and get as many out of the Gallows alive as possible.”

“Of course,” Donnic said. He hesitated, then nodded in Justice’s direction. “It’s always good to see you, Anders.”

“I am Justice,” said Justice. “You have spoken with Anders about our cause.”

“Er…”

“Later,” Reyn said, walking past Donnic and making for the stairs leading up to the courtyard.

The sounds of fighting reached him even before he entered the courtyard. A templar’s body came hurtling past him, thrown by Orsino’s force magic, and crunched satisfyingly against the hard stone.

“First Enchanter?” he called, hurrying toward Orsino.

Relief transformed Orsino’s features. “Champion! You’ve survived, thank the Maker! We must—“

“And here you are,” said Meredith in her cold-steel voice from the entrance behind them.

“Yes, it’s me. Like a bad rash, I always turn back up,” Reyn said lightly. He turned to face Meredith, but as he did so, he reached out and grabbed Justice’s arm. “Hold on,” he murmured.

Much to his surprise, Justice didn’t argue. Instead he eyed Meredith warily. “The song…it is dissonant.”

“What are you talking about?” Reyn asked, confused. Creators, he hoped that Anders wasn’t starting to hear voices again.

“The lyrium sings. You mortals cannot hear it. She has lyrium with her—they all do—but what she carries is twisted. Corrupt. I have heard its like only twice before—in the Deep Roads and in the dwarf’s house.”
“The dwarf’s—oh shit. Bartrand. The idol. He sold it to Meredith.” And there was just no possible way that could be good news, doubly so if it worried an abomination who’d just got finished literally tearing templars to pieces.

Orsino walked past them, his arms outstretched, to show that his staff was on his back. “Let us speak, Meredith! Before this battle destroys the city you claim to protect!”

Justice gave Orsino a look of utter, withering contempt. Reyn suppressed a sigh, not certain if Orsino was acting from a place of strength, trying to save his people, or out of fear. Either way, it clearly wasn’t going to work; Meredith had no intention of stopping until every mage was dead. While First Enchanter and Knight-Commander jostled pointlessly with words, Reyn tried to frantically recall what little he knew about the lyrium idol. It had driven Bartrand mad—or at least pushed him over the edge, given that Reyn wasn’t entirely convinced of his mental stability to begin with. But Bartrand was a dwarf; the lyrium shouldn’t have affected him at all. Which meant there was no way of knowing if it would affect a human in anything like the same way. He’d handled it in the Deep Roads, albeit briefly, and hadn’t noticed anything odd. And certainly Meredith had an ominous reputation long before the Deep Roads expedition had even left town.

Then again, left to its own devices, without either human or dwarf handling it, a mere chip from the idol had wreaked havoc in the empty manor. If Meredith had the rest of the idol on her, and could somehow direct its powers…

*We’re in deep trouble. Damn.*

The conversation between Orsino and Meredith reached its forgone conclusion. “All right. Time to end this,” Reyn called.

Meredith gave him a coolly appraisingly look. “Would you fight against your own brother, then?” she asked, gesturing to the templars at her back.

*Carver.*

Carver looked pale, almost sickly, in the reddish light from the night sky. He glanced at Meredith, then at Reyn.

Their eyes met, and Reyn saw uncertainty and fear in Carver’s gaze. Whatever Carver’s reasons for joining the order, slaughtering all the mages at Meredith’s command couldn’t sit well with him. There was no way he could look at them and not imagine Bethany, or Father, in their place.

Then again, the idea of fighting alongside an obvious abomination who’d just blown up the Chantry and the Grand Cleric probably wasn’t sitting all that well with him, either.

*Only one way to find out.* Reyn held out his hand. “I need you, brother,” he said simply.

Carver’s eyes widened in surprise. He cast a last glance at Meredith…then crossed the empty space between mages and templars, to stand in front of Reyn.

“Ser Carver!” Meredith’s voice cracked like a whip. “If you stand with the mages, you will die with them. I suggest you remember our purpose.”

“I suggest *you* remember it,” he snapped back over his shoulder.

Reyn clasped Carver’s arm gratefully. “Thank you.”

“The Hawke brother’s together again, just like old times,” Carver said with a shaky smile.
“Hopefully not at all like old times, actually.”

“What do you mean by that?!”

Meredith gave Reyn a look of such hatred that it felt almost like a physical thing. Justice growled threateningly.

“So be it,” she said. “You will share the Circle’s fate.”

“So what’s it to be, Meredith?” Orsino asked. “Do we fight here?”

“Go,” she told him. “Prepare your people. The rest of the Order is already crossing the harbor.”

Great. More templars. On the other hand, if they’re all grouped here in the Gallows, they won’t be blocking the overland passes or the sea lanes. Any mages who get out of Kirkwall won’t have to worry about being ambushed at least.

“This isn’t over!” Orsino snarled, his face transformed by rage and what might have been long-suppressed hatred. He spun, robes flaring, and marched into the Gallows. “Come, Champion. We need to gather as many mages as we can and see to the wounded.”

The flare of spirit fire beside Reyn vanished. “I can help with that,” Anders offered.

Carver gave Anders a surprised look as he hurried after Orsino and the retreating mages. “And here I thought he’d finally snapped and turned into an abomination. Or more of an abomination. Or—well, you know what I mean.”

“Honestly, Carver,” Reyn said in exasperation.

“What? You can’t blame me for thinking that!”

Reyn only shook his head as they trailed after the retreating mages. “It’s good to have you back, brother.”

***

Anders sat on a low bench in the very heart of the Gallows, his hands folded in his lap. The murmur of voices came from all around: some afraid, others determined, still others resigned. Orsino had gathered all the mages he could, but there were others deeper within the prison, locked in their cells or hiding from roaming templars. While Anders had been busy healing any of the injured who were willing to let an abomination touch them, Orsino had given an inspiring, if fatalistic, speech. For all that Anders hated the many accommodations the First Enchanter had made to the templars over the years, the old elf was at least standing firm now.

Not that he has any choice.

The healing finished, there hadn’t seemed much else for him to do. Reyn had gone to talk to the others one at a time; right now, he and Merrill were murmuring some Dalish prayer. Anders heard the names of Mythal and Elgar’non mentioned several times.

Justice and vengeance.

He still couldn’t believe that he was sitting here alive. When he’d walked down that road into Lowltown to confront Meredith, he’d been so certain how things would play out. They were going to act, finally. Going to do something so huge that even the jaded, broken inhabitants of Kirkwall
couldn’t ignore it.

And they were going to die. Or Anders was going to die, and Justice would probably end up lurching around in his corpse for a few minutes until it was rendered uninhabitable even to a spirit. As for what would happen to Justice after that...neither of them knew for sure. He was completely on this side of the Veil, with no part of him still in the Fade to draw him back. Would he return to the Fade anyway? Become a ghost on the wind? Something else?

But if that was the price they had to pay for mage freedom, then so be it. They could accept that, so long as Reyn didn’t have to pay along with them.

So when they’d seen him there with Meredith and Orsino...that had been a bad moment. Knowing that they were going to hurt him, knowing that he’d hate them for their deception, even if it had been to protect him...well, that had been hard enough. Seeing the look on his face would be nearly unbearable, and their courage had come close to failing.

And when it had all played out, when they were at the very bottommost point, nothing left but ashes and despair and a single, wild hope that at least maybe the mages would benefit from their act...when they’d sat on a box in Lowtown and waited for a knife to fall...

Reyn stepped in and picked them back up. Despite all of Anders’ mistakes, despite of the pain he’d —apparently unnecessarily—heaped on both himself and Justice, Reyn embraced them and offered another chance. A new start.

Anders still felt...overwhelmed, that was a word that came close to describing it. Amazed and grateful and shocked, those would do, too.

Justice, on the other hand, was practically giddy. As far as he was concerned, this had been the best damned day of his entire existence. They’d struck a blow for mage freedom, slaughtered templars left and right, and Reyn had said he loved him. Not to mention that kiss...Anders had been at one remove, and even he’d felt it all the way down to his toes.

While Anders healed and fretted, Justice had curled up around that memory, obsessively replaying it over and over. Occasionally, he stopped long enough to take a quick look out through Anders’—or, no, their—eyes to make sure that there weren’t any templars about who needed killing.

Yes, this was a red-letter day for Justice, all right. Who didn’t understand why Anders wanted to sit and worry instead, and...

_I forgive you_, Justice said.

Anders blinked, having not been aware that the spirit was paying the slightest attention to his thoughts. _What?_

_You were wrong about many things. But you believed them to be true and acted accordingly. I cannot blame you for that._

Reyn, he meant, or at least mostly. _Maker, how did I misjudge everything so badly?_

_You will also observe that I have not yet run mad and destroyed all that we hold dear._

Ouch. All right, fine, perhaps Reyn wasn’t the only misjudgment he’d made. But the consequences of carelessness had been so huge, the stakes so high...

_And our existence is not what you imagined it to be. Nor is it what I imagined. And...things did not_
start as well as they could have, Justice admitted a bit reluctantly.

_Reyn thinks we can make this work._

Yes.

_I’m sorry for anything I’ve done wrong. For hurting you._

_I am sorry as well._

“Are you all right?” Reyn asked.

Anders blinked, and found that Reyn had sat down beside him while his attention was turned inward. “Just…working things out.”

Reyn nodded. “I didn’t have a chance to mention it before, but I like the new outfit. Very dashing.”

“Thanks.” Anders plucked absently at the black feathers. “Reyn, I…I should have trusted you.”

“Yes. You should have.”

Anders winced. There was no anger in Reyn’s voice, but hurt…oh yes. Knowing that he’d put that note of pain there, not out of necessity as he’d convinced himself, but out of fear, carved a hollow place out beneath his heart.

“I’m sorry,” he said miserably. “I’ve made such a mess of things: with you, with Justice, with everything. And yet you’ve stood by me, when I gave you every reason to turn away. Anyone else would have thrown up their hands and left a long time ago. I wouldn’t have blamed you if you’d walked away and left me to whatever fate had in store for me.”

“No. You wouldn’t have been surprised, because it’s what you expected. That’s the thing which hurts the most,” Reyn said. He still wasn’t quite looking at Anders, just staring off into some middle distance.

“I’m sorry,” Anders said again, because what else was there to say? “It’s just that…I know I don’t deserve you. I never have. So I keep expecting you to come to your senses and leave me.”

Reyn sighed heavily. “I told you once that I love you for who you are. I know now that you never believed me, but it’s true. I don’t love some hypothetical Anders, some man who never has a nightmare, who doesn’t bear any scars, who never forgets to eat, or that its our anniversary. I don’t even love the Anders who existed before the Grey Wardens, or before Justice. I might have, but I don’t know, because I never met him.

“I love you. Just you, the way you are right now, today. Anders and Justice; man and spirit; messy and complicated and frustrating as hell. And I really thought you understood that, that after three years I’d managed to prove myself to you. It’s hard finding out that I failed.”

It was painful to hear. _Maker, what’s wrong with me? How could I have so hurt the one person who never deserved it?_”

Justice had risen to the surface, and Anders felt a thread of worry knotting in with his own tumultuous emotions. _We have treated him most unjustly._ There was distress in that thought, more than just a human regret, but the pain of a spirit that has failed at very thing that it used to define its being.
Anders swallowed hard against the bands of emotion tightening his throat. “You are the one shining
light in my life,” he said quietly, but there was a deeper bass underlying the words, Justice
completely united with him in this. “Never doubt that. We don’t deserve your forgiveness, but we
swear to you, we’ll do anything it takes to make it up to you.”

Reyn sat silently for a moment, maybe considering their words. “I have something for you,” he said
at last. Unbuttoning his coat, he fished around in the inner pockets, then drew out a small, wooden
box. The top was split, and one hinge fell off and bounced away across the floor. “We have a hard
fight ahead, and this will come in handy.”

Reyn opened the broken box and revealed a pair of rings, sloppily stuffed onto what had once been a
nice bed of velvet. “Here,” he said, handing one of them to Anders. “Dwarven-made, with as many
enchantments as they could pack into it. Mana, healing, defense, just for starters.”

Anders took the ring uncertainly. There was writing around the gold band, although he didn’t
recognize the characters or the language. It glowed a soft blue, and Justice heard the song coming
from it even before Anders realized that the letters were inlaid in lyrium.

This wasn’t something Reyn had randomly found, or picked up off a corpse. “Love?” he asked
tentatively.

Reyn sighed. He’d already slipped the matching ring on. “I had them commissioned a while ago. I
wanted something to symbolize my commitment to you. They came this morning. I was…upset, and
the box may have had an unfortunate encounter with the fireplace.”

“Oh,” Anders said in a small voice. He wasn’t sure if it was possible to feel any more wretchedly
unworthy. “Can I ask what they say?”

“The script is elvish. It’s just our names.”

“Oh,” he said again. Turning the band, trying for something, anything, to say that would make this
less painfully awkward, he said, “There are three words on there. You put your last name on as well?
Really, shall I started calling you Hawke again?”


Oh. But he’d already said that twice, so he only looked away, trying to master himself, despite the
surge of emotion that made his eyes prickle with tears.

Reyn sighed. “Damn. I’m sorry. I’ve completely bollixed this up, haven’t I? Maybe I should just go
talk to Merrill and—“

“Don’t you dare,” they said, and pulled Reyn around and into a kiss, with a surge of spirit energy
that caught the attention of every mage in the place.

Reyn returned the kiss with unselfconscious enthusiasm, obviously not caring if everyone in Thedas
knew that he was intimate with an abomination. Justice didn’t particularly care what anyone else
thought, either, and after a moment Anders decided that if they weren’t concerned about it, then he
wasn’t about to be the responsible adult and start worrying. He’d had enough of that for quite a
while.

I have also had enough of your worry.

Oh, shut up and enjoy this.
The kiss eventually came to an end. They sat together for a long moment, arms around each other’s shoulders, foreheads leaned together. “Justice is going to be insufferable after this,” Anders murmured eventually.

“I am not,” Justice said, annoyed. And, Maker, now they really did sound like a lunatic, arguing out loud with one another. Bad enough when it had just been inside their head, but now everyone could be privy to the crazy abomination.

Reyn snickered. “It seems to me that he may have some reason.”

“No,” Anders said, half-laughing and half-horrified. “You are not allowed to gang up on me. I absolutely forbid it.”

“And where is the fun in that?” Reyn’s fingers made small circles against the nape of their neck, and with Justice hovering practically on the surface, the small pleasure resonated into something exquisite.

“Hawke,” Varric called from across the room. “Get ready. The templars are on the way.”

Reyn’s hand tightened, pulling them in for another kiss. A last kiss, the if the templars had their way, which brought a flash of fear from Anders and a tide of anger from Justice.

Reyn let go of them and rose to his feet. “Ready?” he asked. “Same plan as before, if you’re all right with that.”

“We are. But—” Anders hesitated, struck by a sudden thought. Justice stilled, curious as well. “Do you think Flemeth foresaw this? I mean, what she said that day on Sundermount, about the world on the edge of a precipice, when she advised you to leap. Is this what she was talking about?”

Reyn smiled and shook his head. “No. It isn’t. Do you know how I know that?”

The certainty in his voice took Anders aback. “No, I don’t.”

“Because I already leapt. I leapt years ago, when I walked into a clinic in Darktown and lost my heart to a possessed apostate who dared to dream of freedom for all mages. When I left the door unlocked on a rainy Hightown night. I’ve just been waiting ever since for you to join me.”

Anders didn’t know what to say, too stunned to speak. “Hawke!” Varric shouted.

“Coming!” Reyn called over his shoulder. Turning back to them, he held out his hand. “Well, my loves, shall we see if we can fly?”

Chapter End Notes

Remember when I wrote short 1,000-words chapters? :cries:

I feel kind of bad for burning down Bran’s house. Oh wait, no I don’t! :D

Yeah, I decided to redeem Carver, pretty much for the reasons given in the story. And it seemed a little bit more of a satisfying character arc, especially after the Legacy events.

The scene with Reyn and Anders/Justice is what took me so long. I wanted to get their
varying emotions right: Reyn, still a little hurt that Anders didn't include him in his plans, Anders stunned and not sure what to feel, and of course Justice, who is having the most awesome day ever. Anyway, I hope I managed to do it...justice. :P
The Gallows

Chapter Summary

Can Hawke and Anders/Justice escape the Gallows alive, with as many mages as possible?

Chapter Notes

I had meant to combine this chapter and the next one, but I figured I've made you all wait too long as it is!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They raced through the halls of the Gallows, making for the old cells, where some of the mages were still imprisoned. Reyn was in the lead, Carver on one side and Justice on the other. They’d succeeded in fighting off the first wave of templars and getting out of the dead end they’d been pushed into. Several mages had died, and unfortunately Orsino had gone down trying to protect some of the injured. Which was a damned shame, because Reyn could surely have used him now.

“How many mages are locked up here?” Reyn asked Carver.

“I don’t know,” his brother replied. Sweat beaded his brow, beneath his shock of black hair. “Meredith didn’t exactly keep me informed!”

“I would work harder to prove myself useful, if I were you, templar,” Justice growled.

“Is it just me, or has he gotten a lot pushier since our trip to Vinmark?”

“Behave, both of you,” Reyn said shortly.

“He is a templar—he must atone for his acts!”

“Are you actually screwing this thing? I always knew you were a pervert, but—“

“We’re here!” one of the mages said from behind them. “Maker, please, let him be all right!”

Who “him,” might be, Reyn didn’t know, but he was glad for the interruption, since it shut everyone else up. The corridor they stood in was even grimmer than the parts of the Gallows he’d already seen, nothing but a narrow stone slot lined with doors, each one set with a tiny grate of rusted metal somewhere near eye level. A prison in truth, the place where the most troublesome slaves had once been put into solitary confinement to break their spirits.

Spirit fire flared around Justice; he looked absolutely murderous, and Reyn wondered if he was recalling Anders’ abuse at the hands of the templars. “We must release them!”

“Do you have a key?” Reyn asked Carver. He nodded and drew it out, but Reyn took it from him. “I don’t think the first thing they need to see is a templar hovering over them,” he said. “Or a glowing
abomination, for that matter—sorry, darling.”

“I’ll do it,” one of the mages offered, and Reyn tossed her the key. The other Gallows mages came forward, following behind her and offering kind words and comfort to those she released.

Some of them had obviously been abused. Reyn’s hands curled into fists at the sight, but Justice vanished and Anders went to them, speaking in low, soothing tones. It was so obvious that he was a healer that most of them seemed to relax in his presence right away, letting him tend them without flinching away from his touch.

_Gods, he’s so good at this_. He’d always loved Anders for his compassion, but never more than at this moment. _Sylaise, lend him your strength._

Carver hurried past the mages as they were released, glancing from face to face, as if searching frantically for someone. Some of the mages drew back and stared at him fearfully, others only frowned. “Why is _he_ here?” one of them asked.

“He’s the Champion’s brother, so he’s joined with us.”

“Ah, Anders,” said a familiar voice. Solivitus emerged from one of the cells; there was a large bruise on one side of his face, and his formerly-immaculate robes were dirty and torn. “Good to see you, my friend. I take it our work here has reached a conclusion of sorts?”

Reyn wanted to smack himself for not realizing earlier. “Sol—you’ve been working with the mage underground all along, haven’t you?”

“Of course, Champion,” Sol said with his usual cheerful smile.

“We used to pass messages in the bundles of crafting supplies you were always selling to him,” Anders admitted, looking chagrined. “I should have told you, but I thought if you were ever caught, it would be easier if you could honestly deny knowing anything.”

Reyn sighed and rubbed his eyes. “I’ll just add this to the list of things we’re going to have a long, long talk about.”

Anders flushed. "Um. Yes. I'd say I'm sorry, but I imagine you're tired of hearing that by now. I'll just get back to healing, shall I?"

"I'm glad to see you've joined us as well, Ser Carver," Sol added tactfully. "Your help has been invaluable in the past."

Carver’s cheeks reddened. _Damn it. He really did mean that he was helping mages._

"You could have told me, you know," Reyn said as Anders went to work healing Sol.

Carver shrugged awkwardly. "I wanted to do something that didn't involve you. Besides, you've been sleeping with the apostate most likely to be caught and dragged off to Tranquility or execution. I would have sounded like a right bastard if I'd said I was working with the underground in one breath, then warned you off him in the next."

“You sounded like a right bastard anyway. You didn't have to warn me off him at all.”

Carver shot him an incredulous look. “Have you actually _seen_ him the last few hours? He's a flat-out abomination!”
"He might be an abomination, but Justice isn't a demon. And besides, they're my abomination."

Carver shook his head, turning away and continuing his search down the corridor. "And you wonder why I worry about you."

Reyn followed him. "You could have trusted me."

"Trust you? Your bloody abomination just blew up the Chantry! I could have been assigned there, you know."

Reyn winced. "Yes, well, if I'd known for certain you weren't a sadistic rapist, I would have warned you beforehand."

Carver spun on him. "A—you know what? Just never mind." He turned around and started walking again, his shoulders held in a straight, angry line. "I won't ask. Anders was a Circle mage, and even though Kinloch Hold was no Gallows, I'm sure he had plenty of stories to tell. But I'm appalled that you could think that of your own brother."

Reyn narrowed his eyes, glaring at Carver's back. "I heard Ser Alrik taunt Ella before we saved her, you ass. I've heard plenty about the Ferelden Circle as well. I wouldn't expect you to feel bad if I'd been the one sent there to be locked in solitary and tortured by templars, but what if it had been Bethany?"

Carver's step hitched. "Not all templars are sadists. No more than all mages are maleficarum."

"Mages are born what they are. I imagine the Order attracts a certain…type."

Carver didn't argue that. "You're wrong if you think I ever wanted anything bad to happen to you. Why do you think I never gave you up?"

"I assumed it was because of Mother, but...I did always wonder why you hadn't turned in Anders or Merrill. Maybe I should have known by that."

"Maybe you should have."

Reyn suppressed a sigh. This seems to be the day for hammering out misunderstandings. First Justice and Anders, and now Carver. "Fine. I'm a horrible person who's made mistakes. I apologize. If you want something more—well, get in line."

"I never—" Carver started to say. Then his attention was gone from Reyn, and he'd broken into a run. "Gena!"

Startled, Reyn trotted after him. The mage with the key had opened a larger room at the very end of the corridor, releasing a huddle of children, most of them below the age of puberty. A lone adult mage was with them; they clung to her robes, staring around with wide, frightened eyes.

"Gena!" Carver called again. She turned to him, her own eyes widened in surprise—then closing in relief. As for Carver, he ran up to her, then stopped, hesitantly touching her arms with his gauntleted hands. "Are—are you all right?"

"Oh, Creators, you've got to be kidding me."

"I-I'm fine, Ser Carver," she said. But her eyes went to his with a look of longing.

No. Really. Please tell me you're kidding.
"Ser Bernerd let me stay with the apprentices, so they wouldn't be so afraid," she went on. Pulling gently back from Carver, she stroked the hair of the nearest child, who stared at the templar crest on Carver's armor with an expression of terror. "Can you tell us what is happening, please?"

"Does anyone need healing?" Anders interrupted as he approached. He looked tired, the lines around his eyes more deeply graven before, but he held his back straight and moved with an energy that did Reyn's heart good to see.

Gena gave him a nod of acknowledgement, but at the same time interposed her body between him and the children. "Are you a spirit healer, Serah?"

_Time to intervene._ Reyn draped an arm around Carver's shoulders and gave her his most charming smile. "Hello. I'm Carver's brother. I'm sure he's told you all about me. Don't worry—every word is a lie."

Gena gave him a rather alarmed look, which suggested whatever Carver had said, it hadn't been very flattering. "You're the Champion of Kirkwall?"


_Oh, Carver, you idiot._ "I'm Reyn. This is Anders. He's a spirit healer, originally from the Ferelden Circle. We're here to free everyone."

One of the children tugged on Gena's robe. "Can I go home to Momma?" he asked hopefully.

Anders winced. "Maybe later," he said evasively. "Right now, we have to make sure everyone is healthy." He smiled encouragingly, even as he subtly took the boy's hands. "Why don't you tell me about the magic you've learned from Enchanter Gena?"

Gena cast a panicked look at Carver, who had no doubt entertained her with stories of his idiot brother and said brother's horrifying abomination lover. Looking rather pained, Carver said, "Anders is a good healer. You can trust him with this."

Reyn watched as Anders worked. _He's good with kids._ Having helped raise two siblings, one a mage, Reyn thought he knew all the tricks for keeping children calm and focused and—most importantly—not setting anyone's hair on fire. Anders made it look easy, especially given the terrible circumstances that had reduced most of the children to tears or white-faced terror.

“We’ll have to take them with us,” Reyn said. “No mages can be left behind.”

“They can keep up,” Gena replied. She gave Carver a fierce look, as if expecting him to argue. Showing uncommon wisdom, he kept his mouth shut. “Don’t worry—I’ll make sure of it.”

“Worrying is pretty much my job at the moment,” Reyn replied. This Gena had some fire; he liked that. “All right,” he called, raising his voice. “Everyone ready to move? Apprentices all go in the center. Is anyone good at healing? You go in the center as well, then. Anyone who enjoys serving up the destructive forces of nature, form up around them and don’t let any templars through. The rest of you know where to go.”

Aveline’s grip firmed on her shield, and she strode to the front. Spirit fire burst into life around Justice; a number of the mages they’d just rescued cried out or shied away at the sight. Justice ignored them with an air of haughty indifference.

“He isn’t a demon,” one of the mages reassured the newcomers.
“Then what is he?”

“Oh our side.”

***

They headed down, making for the lowest dungeons in the hopes of escaping the Gallows through the secret tunnels running beneath the bay. As they went, they liberated fewer and fewer mages; most of those considered troublesome enough to have been sent to the depths had returned Tranquil…or not returned at all.

“The entrance isn’t much farther,” Sol said. “I’m afraid it’s actually a privy hole, with a ladder bolted to the side, just low enough to be out of sight of anyone, er, using the facilities. It won’t be pleasant.”

“More pleasant than walking into whatever Meredith has planned for us,” Reyn replied.

“What do you mean?”

“We haven’t seen Meredith or Ser Cullen since this began. My bet is that they’re waiting for us in the courtyard. If they think that’s the only way out of the Gallows, they’ll let us run around like rats in a trap, sending in small groups of men to wear us down and pick us off. Those of us who survive will ultimately be herded into the courtyard and find ourselves facing an overwhelming force. That’s not an option I’m going to take if I have a chance.”

“Ah. Yes. Now that you put it that way, a little trip into the sewers seems far more attractive.”

They went down a flight of stairs, and Aveline came to an abrupt halt. “Hawke? You might want to take a look at this.”

Gripping his staff more tightly, Reyn went to stand by her; Justice followed on his heels. They were in a long hall, bordered on either side by iron bars. Most of the cells were empty, but in the nearest one huddled a group of templars.

He had just enough time to notice that they seemed to have neither weapons nor lyrium, before Justice brushed past him. The templar’s eyes grew large as the spirit’s glow washed over them, and they crushed together, as far away from the bars as they could.

Justice didn’t bother with the lock, only grabbed the bars and pulled. With a squeal of tortured metal, the door started to bow outward.

Damn.

The templars began screaming, either begging to Maker to save them, or yelling at the “demon” to get back, as if that would do any good. Reyn was fairly sure that most of them had pissed themselves by now.

He turned to Sol and Carver. “Why are these men in here?”

Carver blanched. “I…I’m not sure—“

“Well, be sure! Meredith didn’t put them in here for nothing!”

“Please, Champion!” one of the mages cried out. He was a young healer; Reyn hadn’t caught his name. “Bernerd—Ser Bernerd—he’s not—his parents gave him to the Chantry when he was a baby—he never wanted any of this—“
No one else was stupid enough to get within ten feet of the cell, which at least meant that he had a clear avenue of retreat if that became necessary. He didn’t think it would—but the truth was, he really didn’t know Justice all that well. Creators willing, he’d have the chance to work on that, but right now he was working on gut instinct more than anything else.

“Hold on,” Reyn said, as he approached Justice. “We need to find out what’s going on here first.”

Justice ignored him and kept yanking on the door, which didn’t look like it was going to last much longer.

Mithal, now would be a good time to intervene, if you have any inclination to do so. Taking a deep breath, Reyn reached through coruscating spirit energy and grabbed Justice’s arm. “Stop!”

Justice turned on him with a snarl. He looked utterly terrifying at the moment, as drenched in templar blood as if the contents of a slaughterhouse had been dumped over him, even the ends of his hair stiff and spiky with gore. His eyes swirled with blue fire, making it impossible to read their expression, and spirit energy boiled through skin and clothing until the very corridor glowed with the light of it.

Atavistic fear clawed at the back of Reyn’s brain, insisting predator and danger and run and hide. But it seemed sometimes that he’d spent half his life facing down things that had terrified him, and if he didn’t trust Justice not to hurt him even now, as worked up into a righteous fury as he was, then what did they have?

Reyn locked his knees and glared back. “I think we agreed that I get to decide on strategy from now on, and I told you to stop!”

“These men are templars,” Justice shouted back; his voice reverberated in the very stones under their feet, which was damned impressive. “They must pay for their crimes!”

“They are locked in a cell with no weapons!” Reyn replied, moving to put himself between the bars and Justice. “Meredith put them here for a reason, probably because they wouldn’t go along with her insane plan. They might be guilty of other abuses—but they might be innocent, and we’re going to find out before tearing off any limbs they might miss later.”

Spirit fire flickered, and Justice flinched, as if fighting some internal battle. “Stay out of this, Anders!” Reyn snapped, realizing what must be happening. “This doesn’t concern you, so back off.”

That got their attention, all right, and shock if nothing else seemed to make Anders stop fighting for control. Seizing the opening, Reyn went on: “Justice, I’m asking you to trust me. We’ll talk to the other mages here. If these men turn out to be a bunch of sadists who get off on torturing people, I’ll gladly step aside and let you have at them.” Someone in the cell behind him moaned, but he forced himself to ignore it, along with the smell of piss and voided bowels. “But I’m going to make damned well sure that as few innocents die here tonight as possible.”

For a moment, they stared at each other. Reyn was acutely aware that Justice could quite easily have just lifted him out of the way and gone back to ripping the door off its hinges. In all practicality, there was really nothing he could do to stop the spirit, short of an all-out fight.

Justice didn’t look particularly happy, but he gave Reyn a grudging nod. “Very well.”

Reyn let out a breath he hadn’t realized he was holding. “Thank you, darling.”

That actually got him the ghost of a smile. “We trust you. And we will remain close, in case these
templars try something.” Justice rather sounded as if he hoped they would.

“Please do. Carver?”

Carver didn’t seem at all pleased about coming so close to Justice, but he did it anyway. “Ser Carver?” one of the templars called from inside the cell. “Are you all right?”

“I’m fine, Ser Bernerd,” he replied.

“Traitor!” Another snarled. “Standing with these mages and demons!”

“T am no demon!” Justice roared, lunging at the bars again. “I am Justice!”

Oh, shit. “Yes, darling, yes, and he’s an idiot,” Reyn soothed, snagging his arm. “Step back and let Carver through, would you?”

Justice gave the templar one last scathing glare before stepping back.

“Maker, this was not one of my best ideas,” Carver muttered under his breath, as he made his way to Reyn’s side.

“Do you know any of these templars?” Reyn asked, pretending he hadn’t heard. “Do any of them have an unsavory reputation?”

Carver studied the templars carefully, then shook his head. “No. Most of them just do the job. I’d wager some of them even feel bad for the mages.”

Reyn turned to the mages. “Is he right? Speak up if you know otherwise. None of them can ever hurt any of you again—that much I swear.”

There came a mute shaking of heads, except for the young mage who had spoken out before. He edged closer to the cell. Bernerd focused on him, looking sick with worry. “Please, Champion,” the mage said. “Ser Bernerd never hurt anyone. His family gave him to the Chantry as a babe—he didn’t have a choice. He was as trapped in the Order as I was in the Circle.”

Reyn suppressed a sigh. “All right, then. Listen up, templars. Right now, you’ve got two choices. The first is to stay here in the cell and hope that whoever wins decides to let you out and show mercy. The second is to come with us—but if you do that, make no mistake: you’ll be fugitives just as surely as any mage here. If you throw your lot in with us, the Chantry won’t be lenient. You’ll never be part of the Order again.”

“You could just let us out—we’ll leave—“ another templar offered.

Reyn cut her off. “Not going to happen. I won’t let anyone go, just to have them come up behind us and stab us in the back later on. I’m guessing most of you know where to find swords, and I don’t want anyone tempted to get back into Meredith’s good graces by killing any of us. Plus, then Justice would have to kill you, and that would just mean more blood on his new clothes.”

Spirit fire flared momentarily. The sticky mess of blood turned to powder, which Justice absently brushed off his sleeves and out of his hair.

“Never mind, then.”

“I want to join you,” Bernerd blurted out, although he was staring desperately at his mage when he said it.
“We don’t have much time,” Reyn said. “So make your minds up fast. Isabela?”

She appeared at his elbow. “Why don’t you ever take me anywhere fun?” she groused.

“Because the party is wherever you are, of course.”

“I can’t argue, when you’re so obviously right. So let me guess—you want me to pick the lock on that cell, assuming Justice hasn’t bent it so far out of shape that it will never open again?”

“If you wouldn’t mind.”

“You’re such a slave driver.”

Reyn kept a careful eye on all of the templars while Isabela worked on the lock, although none of them dared come anywhere near her, with Justice looming and glaring. “One at a time,” he warned, when the lock clicked open. “And if anyone is thinking about pretending to side with us and then betraying us at the wrong moment, may I refer you again to the angry spirit to my left.”

Not surprisingly, Bernerd was the first through; he swept his mage up in his arms, and they clung to each other, crying. “Step aside, Bernerd,” Gena said gently, and drew them out of the way.

Several other templars joined them, casting defiant glares at their fellows as they did so. About half of them remained in the cell, including the one who had called Justice a demon. The door swung shut on them, and Isabela went back to work, finagling the lock until it clicked shut once again.

“I am good,” she said, stepping back with a smirk of satisfaction.

Bernerd took a step toward Reyn, then stopped when Justice growled at him. “Serah, if I may ask—what are you doing down here in the first place? Not that I don’t appreciate the rescue, but surely this isn’t the most direct route out of the Gallows.”

“There’s a secret passage farther down,” Sol said, gesturing to the corridor.

Bernerd went pale. “Oh. Meredith and some others went there after they’d locked us up this afternoon. We heard a loud noise…”

“Shit.” Reyn didn’t wait, just ran flat-out down the corridor, as if he could somehow outrace what had already happened hours ago.

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“We were betrayed,” Sol said a few minutes later, as they surveyed the collapsed corridor.

Reyn closed his eyes briefly, laying a hand on the rock fall. It would take a team of dwarves a month to clear it; they had no hope now of sneaking past Meredith. It was going to have to be a face-to-face battle in the courtyard…just like Meredith wanted.

Damn it. Fen’Harel take her. He didn’t know what the Knight-Commander had waiting for them, but given the corrupted lyrium of the idol that Justice had sensed on her, it wouldn’t be anything good. We might all die here.

He felt it, then, as he never had before. Since the day Carver had come running into Lothering, one step ahead of the Horde, his life had been nothing but a series of calculated risks and desperate gambles. At times his toss of the dice had come up short, and Bethany and Leandra had both paid the price.
This was something more, though. Tonight, they could all die. Not just the mages, but his companions as well: people who were here because of him, not because they held deep beliefs about mage freedom. Friends, like Isabela and Fenris, Varric and Aveline, who believed in him and were willing to follow him into this madness, when they would never have come otherwise. If they died…their deaths were on no one’s shoulders but his.

Merrill’s hand closed on his arm. He could smell her distinctive scent: elf sweat, blood, and the herbs she burned to honor the Creators.

“Let it go, Hawke,” she said quietly. “We’re all here because we want to be.”

It got a smile out of him, that she had guessed his thoughts. “Thanks, Merrill.”

“May Mythal protect us from our enemies, and Elgar’non give us strength against them.”

“And the Dread Wolf eat their souls,” he finished.

Turning away from the collapsed corridor, he spread his arms wide to encompass all the people waiting on him. “So. This isn’t the best news, and I won’t pretend otherwise. But our cause is just, and our strength is as great as our hearts. I wouldn’t have chosen this, but if it had to be…then there is no other group of people I’d rather have stand at my side.”

“Oh, you,” Isabela muttered, and punched him in the arm.

“Hawke, not in front of the apprentices,” Varric added. “You’re making me blush.”

Reyn thought about replying with an obscene gesture, but as the dwarf had pointed out, there were children present. “I only wanted to say that I appreciate each and every one of you—even those of you I don’t know yet,” he added, catching Gena’s eye, then Bernerd’s. “The easy way out is blocked, so that leaves the hard way. What we have ahead of us, I’m not sure, but I know that we can do this so long as we stand together.”

“Three cheers for the Champion!” one of the mages shouted, which was downright embarrassing, and became even more so when everyone took her up on it.

Anders beamed at him—Justice had dropped back, and Reyn wondered how they had decided on that, and how they might negotiate things in the future. In truth, they were the ones most likely to walk away from this. A normal abomination wasn’t easy to kill, let alone one fueled by so powerful a spirit as Justice. And yet, somehow, I’m more terrified of either of them dying than of my own death.

So he pulled Anders in for a kiss: sweet and desperate all at once. “I love you,” he whispered, too low for anyone else to hear. “If I’m the one shining light in your life, then you’re my sun and my moon and my stars, and I am honored beyond all saying to have had the privilege of sharing your life these last three years.”

Anders made a small, soft sound, as if trying not to sob. But it was Justice who answered him.

“It…would be a grave injustice,” he said, sounding so stiffly formal that Reyn half wanted to laugh, “if either of us perished without my saying that…that I love you.”

And, gods, if he hadn’t waited years for that. “I love you, too. I have ever since we went into the Fade after Feynriel.” Reyn drew back a little and grinned, and he felt again a bit of Fen’Harel’s manic smile curl through him. “And, darling, after hearing you say that, there is no way I’m going to die if I have any choice in the matter.”
RANT: Yes, I let poor Orsino just die nobly, because WTF?! Having him suddenly go
crazy and attack his allies, at the very moment when the mages are winning is just
fucking stupid.

I get that there's supposed to be something about Kirkwall that's slowly driving
everyone crazy. Hell, I'll even embrace it. But make it consistent! To have the calm,
competent First Enchanter we've seen up until now suddenly go crazy and attack his
own allies with blood mage was ridiculous.

I've heard a rumor that you weren't supposed to have to fight him if you sided with the
mages. If so, great, but that should have been fixed in the first round of patches if so. As
it stands, it's a huge black eye for Bioware's vaunted story-telling.

END RANT.

As for mages other than the First Enchanter, I always had this idea that Sol was some
radical mage organizer who totally had all the templars hoodwinked. Man, that would
have been awesome.

Did anyone else besides me wonder why your trip through the Gallows not only doesn't
seem to result in rescuing any mages, but doesn't take advantage of the fact that Hawke
damn well knows there's a secret way out through the sewers? Some Hawkes might
charge head-first at Meredith anyway, but Reyn would probably have gotten out, tried
to rally whatever support still existed in the town for the Champion, and blockaded the
Gallows island until the templars surrendered.
Chapter Summary

It's the final showdown with Meredith. Will they all walk away unscathed...or will someone pay the ultimate price to stop her madness? (I guess the lack of Archive warnings probably give away the answer to that, huh? ;) )

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Reyn took the lead as they walked into the courtyard.

He’d put the apprentices in the back of the column, the farthest away from whatever nasty surprise Meredith had in store. The healers came next, then the mages who excelled at damage, with the templars who had defected in front of them. Aveline flanked Reyn on one side, and Justice on the other, with Carver and the rest of his friends on his heels.

Even with all that force behind him, his heart was in his mouth as he walked out of the shadows of the arch and found Meredith and a line of templars waiting to slaughter them all. Because it wasn’t just faceless soldiers behind him, but friends, companions, lovers, family.

It never is just faceless soldiers, though, is it? Everyone has someone who will mourn their death.

“And here we are, Champion,” Meredith said, her voice dripping contempt like venom from a serpent’s fangs, “at long last.”

He knew then what he’d always suspected, that she would have taken him down the night he killed the Arishok, if she’d thought anyone in Kirkwall would have allowed it. The three years since had been spent in patience, like a spider in the center of her web, waiting for him to become enmeshed to the point where she could strike.

He gave her the most calm, confident smile he could summon. “I imagine you’ve wanted to be rid of me for some time,” he replied lightly, delaying the inevitable in the hopes that some way out of this trap would miraculously appear. Not surprisingly, it didn’t.

“I bear you no ill will,” she protested, which was possibly the most outrageously false thing anyone had ever said to him in his entire life—and that included some of Varric’s wilder tales. “You were never part of this Circle, and I tolerated that.” More like couldn’t do anything about it. “But in defending them, you’ve chosen to share their fate.”

Rather to his surprise, Knight-Captain Cullen paled slightly at that. “Knight-Commander, I thought we intended to arrest the Champion,” he said uncertainly.

“If you believed that, I have a speed griffin to sell you,” Reyn told him. Honestly, they don’t pick templars for their brains, do they?

Meredith looked annoyed; her icy eyes narrowed in Cullen’s direction. “You will do as I command, Cullen.”
“No,” Cullen replied. Meredith looked shocked, but her surprise didn’t hold a candle to Reyn’s. Anders had claimed that Cullen was one of the better templars from Kinloch Hold, but that had been damning with just enough faint praise to keep Reyn from marching up to the Gallows and ripping out the man’s spine. Certainly he had never expected him to stand up to Meredith.

Meredith’s eyes lit up with a mad look that Reyn didn’t like at all. “I will not allow insubordination! We must stay true to our path!” Reaching over her shoulder, she pulled her two-handed sword from its sheath. Bloody red light spilled from the blade, and Justice let out a pained growl.

A twisted smile warped Meredith’s face at the sound. “You recognize it, do you not?” she asked, waving the weapon at them tauntingly. “Pure lyrium, taken from the Deep Roads. The dwarf charged a great deal for his prize.”

*Justice was right, then.* Reyn could smell…something almost like the Fade, but with a foul tang like burning hair that coated the back of his throat. “It seems a lot more sword-like than I remember,” he said, fighting to keep his fear from showing. *Gods, what is it, really? Lyrium, yes, but corrupted somehow.* There was no telling what it might do to them. Or what it’s touch might do to a spirit like Justice.

*Oh, Creators, this is not good. Not good at all.*

Meredith turned to her templars, who to a man were cringing fearfully away from her. “All of you. I want him dead!”

Justice let out an enraged snarl of pure fury. His entire body trembled, like a leashed warhound waiting to be turned loose.

Cullen looked absolutely terrified, but once again, showed rather more bravery—or perhaps stupidity than Reyn had ever expected. “No! This is not what the Order stands for. Knight-Commander, step down. I relieve you of your command.”

Meredith broke out in a predictable rant, about how blood magic had corrupted them all, how they were weak, how mages were so awful—the usual things. As she did so, Reyn took the opportunity to scan the courtyard with a new eye. If the templars would go so far as to refuse to follow her, then perhaps things weren’t so bleak after all. Surely they could overwhelm a single woman, no matter what sort of weapon she wielded.

Then Meredith lifted her sword and drove it point-first into the stones of the courtyard. An energy like spirit fire, but scarlet instead of blue, burst into life around the blade. “Blessed are those who stand before the corrupt and do not falter!” she screamed.

Then her head snapped up, and Reyn saw that her eyes were glazed with the same crimson fire that poured out of her sword, out of her skin.

*Shit.*

“Justice! Anders!” he shouted, even as a hot wind began to rise up in the courtyard, swirling madly from the thing that had been the Knight-Commander. “Take her down!”

Justice, at least, didn’t need any further encouragement. He charged Meredith, spirit fire streaming around him. Praying that the other healers would be able to take up the slack, Reyn ran after him, Aveline at his side.

The templars fell back in confusion as a torrent of magic and steel avalanched down on Meredith, headed up by an enraged spirit. Bloody fire burst out from her, flinging those nearest back, hard
enough to stun them. Justice hit the ground beside Reyn, rebounded to his feet in a blur, and launched himself at her again.

But she’d managed to clear a space around her. Even as Justice closed with her, she leapt, and her movements were even more inhumanly fast and strong than Justice’s. With a single jump, she cleared the courtyard, landing on the guard platform above.

*Gods, what is she? It can’t just be lyrium doing that, can it? It’s as if she’s possessed, but not like an ordinary abomination.* She seemed, truthfully, more like some twisted mirror of Justice and Anders, but he didn’t even know what the implications of that might be.

*Other than bad. That’s probably a given.*

Meredith drove her sword into the stone platform, and red spirit fire burst all around, running across the stones until it reached the great, bronze Tevinter statues that had stood watch over the courtyard for centuries. With a crack of rock and the groan of tortured metal, the statues began to move.

*Magic. She’s using magic.* No amount of lyrium in the world would make an ordinary person into a mage, so either she really was an abomination now, or Meredith had been harboring a secret deeper than anyone had ever guessed.

“Look out!” he had time to shout, before one of the bronze giants leapt down into the huddle of templars, smashing those nearest into a mass of crushed armor and blood.

Justice ignored the statues, tearing after Meredith and bounding up onto the platform with her. Reyn started after him, but a group of the slave statues—smaller only by comparison with the bronze guardians—rose to their feet and shambled in front of him.

The courtyard turned into a nightmare of bronze and blood and death. Mages pounded the statues with magic, even as templars hammered at them with swords. Fireballs heated the bronze to red-hot, melting some of the joints together. Ice cooled it quickly, turning the metal fragile enough to crack under the templar assault.

But even so, flesh was far more vulnerable than unfeeling metal. The gate guardians smashed their way through the nearest ranks of fighters. Reyn caught a glimpse of Aveline as she flew threw the air, her limp body hitting the stones and skidding across them. The pale glow of healing magic enveloped her immediately, but a group of fleeing mages came between them before Reyn could tell how badly she had been hurt.

The air was full of the smell of blood and the shrieks of the dying. And above it all came the sound of the two creatures fighting on the platform: a pair of screams of such inhuman rage that Reyn knew they would haunt his nightmares for years to come.

Justice and Meredith were nothing but twin novas of spirit fire, retina-searing scarlet and cerulean battling for supremacy. There might have been two human shapes still within that swirling storm of magic and fury, but Reyn could make out nothing but glowing eyes and tearing hands and the sword flying in an arc of blood.

He wove and ducked through the melee, trying frantically to get closer to the platform. If he could just distract Meredith long enough to give Justice an opening, then maybe they’d have a chance. He ignored the statues as well as he could, dodging and diving around them. If Meredith went down, the implacable army of bronze should revert to inanimate objects without her magic to sustain them.

*Otherwise...we’re doomed.*
He had almost reached the stairs leading up to the platform, when Meredith brought her sword around in a sudden, aggressive arc. Blood flew everywhere—and Justice staggered.

No.

The brilliant blue shroud of spirit fire collapsed inward, as if the touch of the corrupted lyrium was somehow draining magic instead of opening a channel to it. Justice dropped to his knees, one arm outflung to ward off the inevitable.

“No!” Reyn screamed, so loud and so desperate that he felt something tear deep inside his throat.

Meredith turned at the sound. She was like a dark goddess now, her eyes brilliant ruby orbs, her golden hair flying around her in a storm of wind and fire. The deadly sword glittered in her hands, and she brandished it at him. “Watch, Champion!” she cried in a voice that was like nothing that had ever issued from a human mouth. “Watch as I cleanse the world first of this foul demon, then—“

Justice—or maybe it was Anders, or even both of them—cannoned into her back, sending them all flying off the edge of the platform.

Justice struck the stones of the courtyard hard and lay there without moving. Meredith, however, caught herself: knees bent to absorb the impact, one hand planted on the ground, the other holding her enormous sword with terrifying strength. In another second, she would surge to her feet, and the battle would be back on. Only this time, Justice wouldn’t be there to stop her.

Reyn didn’t give himself that second to think. He didn’t worry about the dying all around him, or about the sheer terror pumping through his veins at the sight of Justice and Anders’ still form. Instead, he lifted his staff, the one he had crafted three years ago, the one that Justice and Anders had both given parts of themselves to make, and drove it point-first into Meredith’s neck.

The metal blade slipped through the gap between armor and bit deep between vertebrae. And because that wouldn’t be enough to stop her, Reyn channeled his magic through the staff, out the blade, and into Meredith in a blaze of heat and light.

He poured everything he had into the spell. The deep well of his mana drained, farther than he could ever remember, and still he pulled on reserves that he hadn’t even known existed. Something broke loose inside his head, and he felt the warmth of blood gush out of his nose and down his face, but that didn’t matter. Nothing mattered, except that he somehow bring an end to this, even if nothing of him remained behind but a burnt-out shell.

Meredith twisted violently, her shrieks pounding against his eardrums until he could hear nothing else. The stench of scorched flesh and burning lyrium boiled up from beneath her armor, and for a moment Reyn thought that everything he had simply wouldn’t be enough.

Then a wave of heat and light burst outward, flinging him back. His head cracked against the stones, and he tasted fresh blood in his mouth. A flash of crimson light seared through his eyelids, blinding him, and he could hear nothing but the ringing in his ears.

Then…nothing. Silence.

Time slipped; it could have been minutes or hours before he blinked and found himself lying on his back, staring at the stars overhead. Gena knelt beside him, her hands outspread, funneling healing magic into his battered body.

Gena. Not Anders.
He struggled to sit up. Someone told him to lie still, but he ignored them. With a long-suffering sigh, Carver held out a gauntleted hand and hauled him to his feet.

The first thing Reyn saw was Meredith—or rather, what was left of her. A twisted, smoking thing, her sword reduced to dust and somehow melded with her body, leaving behind a burnt shape rather horrifically like the original idol writ large. His staff lay beside her, its metal blade reduced to melted slag.

On the other side of her, Anders lay sprawled, his limbs loose as those of a rag doll tossed carelessly to the floor. His eyes were closed, and bright red swatches of blood stood out starkly against his black clothing and chalk-white skin.

No.

Three other mages crouched around him, pouring healing magic into his broken body. But, gods, he wasn’t moving, not even breath stirring the blood-sticky feathers of his coat.

Mythal, no, not this, please not this, please oh please.

Reyn staggered to his lover’s side and fell to his knees. “Anders,” he moaned. “Oh, Anders, no, don’t do this, don’t leave me, please.”

Anders’ eyebrows twitched together slightly, and his eyelids fluttered open. “I wasn’t planning to,” he mumbled.

A bark of hysterical laughter escaped Reyn, and he half-collapsed over Anders’ body, not quite daring to touch him until the healers were done. “Gods. Oh, gods. Are you all right? Is Justice all right?”

“We’re fine.” Anders’ voice sounded stronger, and his warm brown eyes focused on Reyn’s face. “Just drained. And bleeding everywhere.”

“Less of that now, messere,” one of the mages said. She and her compatriots let their spells die away.

“Thank you,” Reyn said.

“No need, Champion. It’s you who’ve brought us this far.” She raised her eyes and looked around uncertainly. “And hopefully farther.”

Worry for Anders and Justice had driven all other considerations out of Reyn’s mind. Now he looked up, abruptly reminded that they weren’t safe just yet.

The templars stood around in a shocked circle, staring at what remained of Meredith in horror. One of them made as if to touch the charred, twisted thing, then wisely pulled back.

Reyn wrapped one arm around Anders’ shoulders and heaved them both to their feet, where they stood swaying: two ragged, blood-stained men, filthy and drained to the point of having nothing left to give. Reyn found a lyrium potion in his pouch, miraculously unbroken, and pressed it into Anders’ hand. Anders slugged it back without argument, which alone said something about just how badly he was feeling at the moment.

Their movements attracted the attention of the templars. Cullen stared at Reyn for a long moment, as if at a loss. Then his eyes went to the silent mages standing around them, the dead bodies littering the courtyard, the burned husk that remained of Meredith, and finally back to Reyn.
Reyn met Cullen’s gaze with all the force of accusation that he could muster, and no matter that he didn’t have any mana left to back it up at the moment. See your precious commander, he thought fiercely. See the devastation she’s wrought and just let it go.

Cullen seemed to understand. He dropped his eyes and backed off, clearing the path to the gates leading down to the dock. Bereft of any other leadership, the rest of the templars followed suit.

Isabela materialized at Reyn’s elbow. Both of her daggers were in her hands. “Come on, Hawke,” she murmured. “My ship is just across the harbor. We’ll take this lot and get the hell out of Kirkwall, before Captain Chastity here changes his mind.”

He nodded. “Thanks, Bela. I owe you.”

Her mouth tightened slightly, then she grinned. “Forget it, Hawke. We’re even.”

Anders seemed steadier on his feet, so Reyn let go of his shoulders and took his hand, the only concession he was willing to make to the possibility that the templars might change their minds and attack after all. But we’re walking out of here together, damn it.

One side of Aveline’s face bore a spectacular bruise, but she was on her feet, at least. She and Donnic moved toward the exit, sweeping mages up as they went, and their other companions followed suit. Reyn and Anders brought up the rear, the very last ones out of the Gallows.

Reyn paused at the gates and glanced back. The templars looked small, somehow, as if they’d shrunk inside their massive armor. Meredith’s remains still smoked ominously. A red glow lingered around them, and Reyn wondered if the lyrium now fused into her corpse would continue to corrupt all those around it, or if the templars would be smart enough to seal off the island and abandon the Gallows as a cursed place.

Anders looked back as well. His throat worked visibly as he swallowed. “No mages remain imprisoned here,” he said softly, sounding surprised at the realization.

Reyn’s fingers tightened on his. “You did it. You freed them.”

“No. We did it. All of us, together.”

Reyn turned his back on the Gallows for the last time. Hand-in-hand, he and his lovers walked down the steps and to the waiting ship.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: sexytimes! And speaking of which, a lovely reader over at DeviantART has created this terrific bit of fan art depicting Reyn and Justice having a good time. It's marked mature, so those of you without DA accounts won't be able to view it (sorry!).
Chapter Summary

This chapter is basically an excuse for Hawke and Justice to get it on. I have no regrets.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Anders rose slowly to wakefulness. At first, he was aware only of the unaccustomed movement of a ship beneath him, of the salty scent of the sea, and of the cool whisper of the night air against his cheek. Rough rope pressed against one side of his face and formed an uncomfortable bed underneath him; vaguely, he remembered collapsing here, after long hours spent healing. There had been wounds from the battle to tend, of course, but some of the mages had older injuries that had never been seen to. Those had been the hardest to cope with, both from the perspective of a healer, and from the knowledge that they had occurred from systematic abuse.

Opening his eyes, Anders lifted his head cautiously. Night had fallen over the Waking Sea, and the sky was spangled with stars beyond counting. The moon had risen, and its silvery light reflected off waves that held a phosphorescence of their own, as if a million tiny spirits danced in the foam. The ship creaked and groaned as it rode the swells, and the soft sound of subdued voices drifted from here and there. A lone lantern glowed near the stern, supplemented by wisps of magical light. He half-wondered if he were truly awake, or if this were all just a dream that would vanish and find him back in Kirkwall, with the Chantry still intact and the mages still imprisoned and everything falling to pieces around him.

This is no dream, Justice told him impatiently. Why do you think these things?

Because I’ve learned that if something seems too good to be true, it probably is.

Justice curled their left hand, so that the cool weight of the ring that Reyn had given them pressed against their palm. Some things are good and true.

Anders sat up slowly; he had a crick in his neck, and his back was stiff from lying on a pile of rope instead of a real bed. Still, it was far from the worst place he’d ever slept. Feeling every ache and pain, he climbed to his feet. His clothing was in tatters, shredded by templars and by the thing Meredith had become. A needle and thread, combined with a great deal of patience, might salvage most of it, but he feared the short coat at least was beyond saving. A good thing it was a warm night, as every other scrap of clothing he owned was sitting in the wardrobe of the Amell-Hawke estate, falling farther behind them with every second.

Along with everything else we owned. Guilt sliced along his nerves like the edge of a razor. Reyn lost everything once before, when he fled Lothering. He spent years clawing his way out of poverty…and now it’s all gone again. Thanks to me.

You are being foolish, Justice said. Reyn made his choice.

I—
He chose us.

Anders spread his hands in front of him. The tiny amount of lyrium in the ring that spelled out their names glowed faintly, and he could hear its soft song filtered through Justice’s perception. Yes. The smile on his face felt strange, as if he’d half-forgotten how. Yes, he did.

“Oh! You’re awake. Or one of you is. How does that work, anyway?” Merrill chirped from above him.

Startled, Anders looked up and saw the elf’s slender form clinging to the rigging above his head. “Andraste’s bloody ashes, what are you doing up there?”

“Isabela is teaching me to sail. It’s rather like climbing a tree in a windstorm, only with less branches and more vines. Anyway, it’s much better than being down the hold, she was right about that.” She swung easily to a different rope; it gave him vertigo just to watch her. “Anyway, if you’re looking for Hawke, he’s at the pointy end of the ship—the starboard?”

“The bow?”

“That’s it! Oh, all these terms are terribly confusing, aren’t they?” She started to climb higher, then stopped and looked down again, her huge eyes reflecting the magelight like a wild animal’s. “I’m glad you’re all right. Both of you.” Then she was gone, lost to his vision in the shadows shrouding the high masts.

Anders shook his head and turned away. Making sure his staff was securely fastened to his back, he started toward the bow, careful not to trip over any of the coils of rope, barrels, crates, or sleeping bodies that littered the deck. Most of the latter were mages, and he vaguely remembered Gena shepherding the apprentices down into the hold, where they would be protected and out of the way of the crew.

Here and there, groups of mages sat awake and talking; he heard the tenor of their conversations alter as he passed, and wondered what they were saying about him. Am I the man who struck the first blow for mage freedom, or a cautionary tale?

Does it matter? They are free—was that not our goal?

Anders had to concede the point.

Varric sat propped again of one of the masts, with Barkolomew snoring loudly beside him. Anders thought the dwarf slept as well, but as he passed by, Varric said, “Blondie. Glowy.”

“Your wit will take you far, Varric. If getting beaten in an alley can be considered far, that is.”

Varric chuckled. “Now there’s the Anders I used to know.”

“Maker, I hope not.”

Varric raised an eyebrow. “Really? Because I kind of miss him.”

“I don’t,” Anders said shortly, not wanting to continue the conversation. What was he supposed to say? That even the Anders whom Varric had first known—and who didn’t even count as the “old” Anders, as far as he was concerned—had been trapped by his fears and his assumptions and his own stupidity? That he hoped, most sincerely, to do a great deal better this time around?

Reyn believes in us.
Maker knows why. Unsure what prompted him, he added, Do you? Believe in us, that is?

Justice answered without hesitation. Yes.

As Merrill had promised, Reyn was at the bow of the ship, leaning against the rail and gazing at the slowly rolling sea ahead. He’d taken down his hair; it snapped behind him in the wind, twisting like a flame, and no doubt snarling into a hopeless tangle. A smaller, slighter form leaned against the rail beside him; the wisp of light floating above Reyn’s head caught a faint glow from white hair and lyrium tattoos.

Anders came to a halt, torn between eavesdropping, interrupting, and retreating. Fenris had stood with them against the templars, but Anders didn’t fool himself for a moment that the elf had suddenly come to his senses about mage freedom. He’d done it for Reyn, and for Reyn only.

The wind brought him their voices. “…even so, Fenris, thank you.”

Fenris shook his head slowly. “I wish I could say you’re welcome. But I fear that in a year, or two, or ten, the mages will turn the Free Marches into another Tevinter.”

“People are people. Some bad, some good. Those of us from Ferelden are used to the idea of power being granted from beneath, not enforced from above. That was the reason Teryn Loghain failed to secure his hold on the throne, and believe me when I say that people liked him a lot more than they generally like mages. Despite what you think, not everyone will abandon their culture, their beliefs, their essential goodness, to turn all of Thedas into a new flowering of the Imperium.”

“No. They might do something worse.”

“Or something better. That’s the gift Fen’Harel offers: change. The chance for mortals to shape their own destiny, without the interference of either Creators or Forgotten Ones. Sometimes change is good, and sometimes it’s bad, but it’s always an opportunity.”

“A heathen and a philosopher. You truly are something, Hawke.” Fenris straightened. “Your pet abomination is spying on us from the shadows, by the way.”

“We are not spying,” Justice said with an air of wounded dignity, even though of course that was exactly what they’d been doing.

Reyn turned, and the joyful smile that transformed his face erased the sting of Fenris’ words and presence. The elf looked away quickly at the sight of that smile, and took himself off. Justice shot him a parting growl for good measure.

Reyn leaned back against the rail and cocked an eyebrow. “You don’t have to do that, you know.”

Anders shrugged, feeling his face heat with embarrassment. “Yes, well.”

Reyn’s smile took on a melancholy air. “Will you join me?”

“I still can’t believe you want me to,” Anders said, stepping up to the rail. Then, when Reyn turned to stare out over the sea again, he winced. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean…I heard what you said in the Gallows, I did. About…about wanting to be with me—us—as we are. I just…it isn’t easy, changing my whole way of thinking. But I’m trying. We both are.”

“I’m glad.” Reyn didn’t look directly at him, though, but instead at the pitching waves beyond the bowsprit. “Because it means that maybe you can both find it in your hearts to forgive me.”
Anders replayed that last in his head, wondering if he’d misheard. Justice was equally confused. “Forgive you?” they asked, their voice falling naturally into a register deeper than Anders’ and lighter than Justice’s.

Reyn finally looked at them, and there was misery in his emerald eyes. “Yes. I’m so sorry. I didn’t ask the questions I should have, and I didn’t speak the words I should have. Everything that happened was my fault.”

“What are you talking about?” Anders asked, feeling his bewilderment echoed my Justice. Well, at least Reyn confounds both of us, and not just me.

“Anders never seemed to want to talk about Justice, and I thought I was respecting that by not pushing,” Reyn said. “I assumed that Justice wasn’t interested in talking, or in…other things, even though I thought I caught glimpses that contradicted that from time to time. I assumed that if there was a problem, you two would work it out, or talk to me about it if you needed a sympathetic ear. So I didn’t ask, and I didn’t question my own assumptions, and I damned well should have, because then maybe I would have realized that you were afraid of me, of how I’d react, and…”

He trailed off, blinking rapidly, and to his horror Anders saw tears clinging to his lashes. “Love, no,” he said—or tried to say, because Justice tried to say something slightly different at the same moment, so what came out was something more like “Glfbg.”

It was embarrassing, but it did get a tiny chuckle out of Reyn. “Something we’re going to have to work on,” Anders muttered. “But love, please, don’t blame yourself.”

“The fault in this is not yours,” Justice added. “You did not know.”

“I should have. To think that you’ve spent years believing that I would kill you for being who you are…I feel like a monster.”

Maker, he sounded so damned sad that it all but broke their hearts. “No,” they said, and turned him gently but inexorably to face them. “You’re anything but,” Anders went on. “I should have realized, but…Maker, so much had gone wrong, I’d made so many mistakes…I should have trusted you, instead of assuming that if you knew we were both in love with you, you’d run screaming like a sensible person.”

Reyn’s mouth twitched in a small smile. “And since when have you ever known me to be sensible?”

“You do have a point.”

“Besides, I don’t see why you think that fear would be a sensible reaction.”

Anders let his hands drop away from Reyn’s arms. “Because there’s a name for spirits who want too much. Who get too attached to this world.”

Reyn reached out and caught their hands, twining his fingers tight with theirs. “You are no demon,” he said fiercely. “You’re anything but,” Anders went on. “I should have realized, but…No, you’re not. You’re no demon.”

“You’re no abomination. You’re dangerous, and you’re good, and you’re strong, and you’re beautiful, but. You. Are. No. Demon.”

Anders was acutely aware of the beat of his—their—heart, of emotion rising like a tide as it resonated between himself and Justice. “You forgot one other thing that we are,” he managed to say, past the constriction in his throat.

Reyn leaned in closer, until only a few inches of air separated them. “What’s that?”
“Yours,” Justice answered, and moved forward to seal their lips against Reyn’s.

It was sweet and fierce and heady beyond all describing. Justice’s full involvement doubling the simple pleasure and turning it into something that left them gutted. Reyn kissed them back, his arms strong around them, his hips lean and narrow pressed into theirs. Desire awoke, firing along their nerves, and Maker’s breath, he had no bloody idea how they were going to manage this.

Justice half-opened their eyes, just to see the way Reyn’s lashes lay against his cheek, and the world was washed in blue fire. They were lit up like a beacon, the brightest thing around amidst miles of black ocean, and everyone who was awake on deck was probably staring and pointing.

Eventually, Reyn pulled back, just enough that his lips barely brushed against theirs when he spoke. “Isabela gave us the first mate’s cabin.”

“What happened to the first mate?” Anders asked, and was vaguely proud that he managed to get out a coherent sentence.

“Probably drunk in a brothel somewhere. He wasn’t on board when we left, and we couldn’t exactly wait for him to show up.” Reyn gently disentangled from them and took a step back. His eyes were hot with lust as he held out his hand. “So. Care to continue this privately?”

_Oh, Maker._ “Please.”

***

Reyn didn’t _think_ that he was visibly trembling with desire as he led his lovers—and Creators, what an arousing thought that was—across the deck toward the door opening onto the cabin in the stern, but he wasn’t entirely sure. He did know that some of the other mages were staring, even though Justice had stopped glowing for the moment, and he heard a scattering of whispers as they passed by.

Which was fine with him. He didn’t know what the future held, hadn’t even had the chance to consider what heading to give Isabela, other than away from Kirkwall. Whatever came, though, it wouldn’t involve an indefinite stay on the ship, which meant that at some point it was likely Justice would have to conceal himself, at least in public.

Right now, though, everyone around them knew. So if Reyn wanted to show off a bit, to say, “yes, I’m sleeping with not only the sexiest apostate in Thedas but the spirit possessing him,” he could do so without worrying about bringing trouble down on their heads.

Here, now, they could just be who they were, without fear.

The ship had two passenger cabins in addition to the first mate and captain’s cabins. One of those had gone to Aveline and Donnic; the other was set aside for whoever needed, as Isabela had put it, “alone time.”

“So with space so cramped, why did you give us a cabin of our own?” he’d asked her, curious.

She’d rolled her eyes. “Because the point of the ‘alone time’ cabin is that other people get to use it. And besides, my cabin is right next door to the first mate’s, in case you want to turn that threesome into a foursome.”

“Always thinking of others, aren’t you, Isabela?”

“I can’t help it. I’m a giver.”
Reyn pushed open the door and led the way inside. The room was tiny, much smaller than their lavish chamber back in Kirkwall, and he felt a flash of regret that they’d never see it again. So many good memories were bound up in that place: their first night together and all the times after, the evenings spent with Anders hunched over the writing table while Reyn lounged in bed reading a book, Anders’ disastrous attempts to serenade him with the lute, the conversations and the arguments and the moments of holding each other in silence, all the threads forming the tapestry of their life together.

*But there was still a piece missing, colors gone, a warp but no weft.* So maybe the best memories were still ahead of them, starting here in this cramped little room with no furnishings but a low bed, a desk, a chair, and a sea chest.

He’d dumped their few possessions in here earlier: his staff with its ruined blade stowed beneath the bed, and their pouches containing various potions and oils on the desk, and…well, that was it, really. Everything else they owned was back in Kirkwall. He wondered if the templars would try to claim the estate, or the nobles, or whoever stepped in to fill the power vacuum left by the deaths of the Grand Cleric and Knight-Commander, and the flight of the Champion.

*With any luck, Bodahn will have the presence of mind to sell everything to the Merchant’s Guild before anyone else can make a move, split the money between himself and Orana, then head for Orlais and disappear.*

Reyn crossed the room and opened the porthole, letting in a wash of cool night air and the smell of the sea. “Do you mind the breeze? I can close it if too much spray comes in.”

“Um, no. It’s fine,” Anders said, sounding unaccountably nervous.

Surprised, Reyn turned back to him. Anders stood just in front of the closed door, an odd expression on his face. “Is everything all right?”

“Yes,” Anders said, then ran his hand back through his hair in a gesture of uncertainty. “I think. Maker, this is ridiculous.”

Reyn cocked his head to one side questioningly, worry cutting through desire and anticipation. “What’s wrong, love?”

Anders sighed. “It’s just that Justice has decided that now is suddenly the perfect time to have an attack of nerves. Which doesn’t really do much for one’s performance.”

Reyn blinked. For a moment, it was hard to imagine the powerful, aggressive spirit he’d glimpsed being nervous about anything. But then he remembered the awkwardly formal declaration of love, just before they’d gone to face Meredith.

“There’s nothing to be nervous about,” he said, going to sit on the edge of the bed. “It’s just me.”

“Just you’ is the most important person in the world to us,” Anders countered with a rueful smile.

“Even so, this is hardly new ground.” Reyn hesitated, a thought occurring to him. “Is it? Or does Justice not usually, ah, pay attention to what we get up to unless it involves smiting templars? I don’t ever want to do anything that would make either of you uncomfortable--”

“No, it isn’t that.” Anders laughed wryly. “Maker, believe me, he’s been paying attention. He wants this. It’s just that…”

Reyn licked his lips and tried to think through the arousal that gripped him. “Justice? Darling? Will
“You talk to me directly?”

After a moment, the soft blue glow of spirit energy joined the light of the lantern. “Very well.”

“Thank you.” Reyn gave him a welcoming smile and patted the bed invitingly beside him. “Care to sit by me?”

Justice perched on the very edge of the mattress, as if prepared to spring up at any moment. So close, Reyn could smell the Fade, like the rain-washed air after a lightning storm. “Now tell me what’s wrong,” Reyn coaxed. “Whatever it is, we’ll work through it together.”

“I wish to—to make love with you,” Justice said at last, stiff and formal and awkward. “But I fear that it is not safe.”

“How so?”

Justice held up his hands and stared at them. They were Anders hands, of course: slender and long-fingered, but wreathed in the flickering, fractured glow of spirit energy. And, very recently, the hands that had been ripping apart templar armor and shredding flesh, covered in blood up to the shoulder. “I do not dream, but many of Anders’ nightmares have concerned us—me—harming you. I would not willingly do such a thing, but I cannot deny that we are dangerous.” He let his hands fall limply into his lap. “Perhaps it would be better if I…if things remained as they have been.”

Reyn winced. “I’m sorry Anders has had nightmares. And if you’d rather that things continue on as they have, then of course that’s your choice, and I won’t push.” He reached out and cupped Justice’s chin, turning his head gently so that he could look into eyes glazed and glowing with spirit fire. “But I trust you, the same as I trust Anders. The same as I hope you trust me.”

Justice leaned his head into Reyn’s hand, the soft graze of stubble against his palm achingly familiar. “We trust you,” he said.

Noticing how Justice moved into the touch, Reyn shifted so that he could slip his other arm over Justice’s shoulder, his fingers finding the gap between his coat and the base of his skull and tracing light little circles against the bare skin. Justice made a small sound deep in his throat, his eyes going heavy-lidded with pleasure.

“Is it very different for you, like this?” Reyn asked curiously, trying to pretend that his trousers weren’t uncomfortably tight.

“Yes…and no. It is difficult to explain.” It was hard to tell, but Justice’s gaze seemed to have dropped to focus on Reyn’s lips, his own remaining slightly parted even as the words died away.

Unable to resist, Reyn leaned in and kissed him. Justice responded, kissing him back fiercely, hands slipping around to cradle Reyn’s back and pull him close. Reyn found himself straddling Justice’s lap, his erection pressed tight against something equally hard, separated by layers of cloth and leather.

“You wish this?” Justice asked, when they broke apart again, sounding rather dazed at the prospect. So close, his deep, gravelly voice vibrated intimately through Reyn’s chest and bones.

Reyn shucked his coat onto the floor, then pulled off his shirt and let it fall blindly behind him. “Darling, I’ve wanted this for years,” he said, his voice ragged with need. “Ever since we met in the Fade, going after Feynriel. It was everything I could do not to beg you to just take me any way you wanted. I thought I was going to have every desire demon in the Fade down on my head.”
Justice moved—and Reyn suddenly found himself on his back on the bed, his hands pinned over his
head and Justice looming over him, without even being entirely sure how it had happened. “I would
not have allowed any demon to take you from us,” Justice growled, before kissing him again.

The kiss was deep, possessive, Justice plundering his mouth thoroughly. With his hands pinned,
Reyn could do nothing but arch against his lover, his heart pounding and his cock painfully hard.

Justice let his lips trail along the line of Reyn’s jaw, then down onto the side of his neck. “You are
ours,” he whispered, before biting Reyn in the sensitive spot where his neck met his shoulder.

Reyn let out a gasp of startled pleasure, hips jerking sharply in response. “Ah, yes!”

A warm tongue laved the bruised spot on his neck, slid along the arch of bone, before nipping lightly
at his shoulder. “And what would you have had me do, then, once the demons were gone?” Justice
half-murmured, half-growled into his ear, grinding his erection against Reyn’s hip as he did so.

On some level, Reyn was aware that Justice was not human, and that there were probably all sorts of
important clues here as to how the spirit’s mind worked, and figuring them out now would probably
make things a lot easier later on. The rest of him, which was too damned turned on to care, told that
analytical part to go straight to the Void and stay there. “Oh, sweet gods, anything, whatever you
want, just tell me, please.”

Justice let go of him and sat back, stripping off the tattered wreck of his short coat and dropping it
onto the floor. Freed, Reyn shucked off his boots, trousers, and smallclothes as quickly as he could,
before eagerly helping Justice out of his.

And, gods, he was beautiful in the dimness, spirit fire crackling in threads along his skin, swirling
down over pulse points and following the lines of mana in Anders’ body, coalescing around his heart
and his hands and his wonderfully hard cock. Reyn leaned back against the pillows, and Justice
moved to press against him, skin-on-skin. Which meant a spill of spirit energy against magic-
sensitive nerves from head-to-toe, and Reyn let out a gasp, his whole body jerking in reaction.

Justice snapped back instantly, almost falling off the bed in his haste. The glow in the room went out,
and Anders started to reach for Reyn, then snatched his hand back, as if afraid of touching him.

“Maker, oh Maker, are you all right? We didn’t—“

“I’m fine,” Reyn said, startled by their reaction. “Are you all right? What happened?”

Anders stared at him with wide, frightened eyes. “You—the way you jumped, and—Justice thought
he’d hurt you—“

“No, sweetheart, that wasn’t it.” He reached out and took Anders’ hands. “Not at all. I’m fine.”

“But—“

“I jerked because it caught me by surprise, that’s all. It felt good. Really good. I don’t have words for
it, but I could feel the—the magic, I suppose, like touching the Fade but…erotic.”

Anders gazed at him searchingly for another few moments…then the look of concern faded into a
sly, flirty grin that Reyn knew well. “I see.” He shifted closer, leaning in so that his mouth hovered
beside Reyn’s ear, breath stirring the small hairs there and making Reyn shiver in reaction. “Do you
want to feel that against your skin again?”

Reyn swallowed thickly. “Yes.”
“Do you want to feel it inside you?”

The thought made him whimper and stiffened his cock even more. “Oh, gods, yes.”

The scent of the Fade stole into the room, and spirit energy licked against his skin, making the tiny hairs stand up on his arms. Justice nipped his earlobe, then whispered: “Soon. Not yet.”

He pushed Reyn back on the bed, stretching out full-length against him and kissing him sensually. Reyn let his hands roam eagerly across Justice’s back and shoulders and buttocks, the planes of lean muscle and bone intimately familiar, but rendered oddly different with the powerful, controlled way Justice moved.

After a few minutes, Justice gently freed himself and went to the table, rummaging through their packs before returning with two flasks: one of oil, and the other rather puzzlingly of lyrium. “Lay back,” he ordered without explanation.

Reyn did so. Justice uncapped the lyrium potion, then very carefully drizzled a thread of the glowing liquid onto Reyn’s chest. His fingers smeared through it, drawing loops and whorls over Reyn’s skin. His eyes were heavy-lidded and the tip of his tongue touched his lower lip in anticipation.

A lyrium fetish? Well, people do a lot stranger things in bed than that all the time.

He moved down Reyn’s body, pouring out a stream of lyrium across his belly, before again tracing artful patterns across the skin. It felt good; even more so when he got to Reyn’s thighs and balls and cock. Setting the remainder of the potion aside, Justice leaned over him, the ends of his loose hair brushing teasingly over lyrium-slicked skin.

His tongue flicked out and, with a guttural moan of sheer pleasure, licked one whorl of lyrium away from near the base of Reyn’s throat. Slowly, thoroughly, he retraced the patterns he’d made, his mouth hot and wet on Reyn’s chest, nipples, belly, sides, and finally cock. Reyn closed his eyes, his fingers digging into the mattress, lost in the sensation of teeth and tongue and the teasing flicker of spirit energy. Not to mention the way Justice moaned: low and hot and growly, and so damned sexy that it made Reyn want to beg, until they were both writhing on the bed.

Justice reared back when he was done; his breathing was ragged, eyes glowing like twin suns. “What do you wish me to do?”

“Let me suck you,” Reyn panted instantly.

The spirit didn’t seem surprised; after three years of silent watching, he was no doubt just as familiar with Reyn’s quirks as Anders was. Or perhaps Anders was communicating with him even now.

Interesting thought. Reyn slid off the bed and onto his knees. “Is Anders watching?” he asked, even as he grasped their cock.

“Yes,” Justice said, not sounding at all steady. One hand tangled in Reyn’s hair, urging him forward.

“Good,” Reyn murmured, before wrapping his lips around them.

Justice’s hand tightened in Reyn’s hair, hips jerking slightly. Reyn kissed and teased and nibbled, before finally relenting and taking him entirely. It was strange, the flicker of spirit fire not just on his skin but his tongue and teeth, the sensation odd and weirdly sensual. He slid his hands up the back of Justice’s legs and buttocks, a soft pulse of mana transmuted to warmth, and was rewarded with a moan. He didn’t know if that was from the warmth of the sheer feel of the magic; surely a being like Justice could sense magic and mana, might even derive some pleasure from it the way he apparently
did from the lyrium.

“Enough,” Justice panted at last, pulling free. A moment later, he caught Reyn up in his arms, lifting him and pinning him against the wall beside the porthole. Reyn wrapped his legs automatically around his lover’s waist; their cocks pressed together, both of them aching and hard, and the intimate touch of the spirit energy made him whimper.

Justice kissed his throat, lips trailing up to Reyn’s ear. “I would have you now,” he murmured in that voice like gravel and night.

“Oh, sweet gods, yes,” was about the most coherent thing Reyn could get out. The oil and potions on the desk were in easy reach; Justice kept him pinned against the wall while he reached out with one hand. The wood dug into Reyn’s back, but there didn’t seem to be any splinters, and he was too aroused to notice any discomfort.

Then oil-slick fingers stroked across his entrance, little tongues of spirit energy making him gasp and whimper, before pushing in. Creators, it felt good, so good. “More;” he begged, tightening his fingers digging hard into the muscle and bone of Justice’s shoulders. “Please.”

Justice’s breathing was wild and ragged, and spirit energy lit up the room—and probably spilled out of the open porthole onto the sea like a spotlight, just in case anyone on deck didn’t know what they were up to. His hands tightened on the backs of Reyn’s thighs, lifting and positioning him with that effortless strength.

“Ours,” he growled again, teeth closing on Reyn’s neck at the same moment as he thrust into him.

Reyn cried out, pleasure shattering along his nerves. Everything was warmth and heat and the strange, electrifying sensation of spirit energy moving inside him, and he didn’t think he’d ever been so close to coming and not gone over the edge. He clung helplessly to his lover, pinned between the wall and thrusting hips and hands that held him up with the controlled, predatory power he’d found so damned sexy.

There would be other nights for tenderness and slow, gentle exploration; right now, everything was sweat and moans and the desperate edge of passion too long denied. The glow of the lyrium potion caught Reyn’s eye; he caught it up off the table, wrenched out the stopper with his teeth, then swigged a mouthful. Instead of swallowing, however, he grabbed Justice by the hair, pulling him close enough to kiss, feeding the potion to him with his tongue.

He liked that, did Justice, stiffening further and picking up the pace. Mana sparked through Reyn’s veins; nerves already singing from so much spirit energy in such proximity, he felt drunk on magic and sex: wild and unfettered and aching with need. There wasn’t enough friction against his cock, so he reached to take care of himself. Noticing what he was up to, Justice broke off the kiss to say: “Don’t. Anders wishes to finish you.”

“Unf!” was all Reyn managed in response to that thought.

“But tell me what else you wish, and I will do it.”

“Y-You are,” Reyn said hoarsely, voice cracked with passion and need. “What I want. Love you, darling, love you so much.”

Justice’s eyes widened slightly—then shut tight, a shudder passing through his whole body. Spirit energy flared, arcing wildly, the whole room lit up bright as day.

They stilled for a moment, Reyn still aching for release, and Justice with his face pressed into Reyn’s
neck and hair, little shivers running through his body like aftershocks. Then he slipped free and lowered Reyn to the floor. The glow faded.

Anders wasted no time positioning himself between Reyn’s sprawled knees and wrapping his lips around his cock. Reyn was too close, hard and red and leaking with need, and he barely held out long enough for the wet heat of Anders’ mouth to completely engulf him, before climaxing hard, moaning Anders’ name as his vision seared white behind his eyelids.

“Mmm,” Anders murmured, lapping the last drop from the head before moving to kiss Reyn softly. Then he got up and went to the basin. Boneless and spent, Reyn cracked an eye to watch while Anders first cast Winter’s Grasp to fill the basin with ice, then melted it with fire to leave behind warm, fresh water. Tearing a rag off his ruined coat, he came back and gently wiped off Reyn’s skin, tsking whenever he came across a small bruise or bite mark.

“You know I like it a little rough sometimes,” Reyn said. “And you certainly didn’t hear me complaining at the time, did you?”

Anders cast a healing spell, even though there was no real need. But he was grinning as he did so. “No, mostly I heard you begging for more.”

“Mmm hmm.” But his mind was starting to function again. “Are you all right?”

“Am I—?” Anders gave him a puzzled look. “Of course. Why would you ask such a thing?”

“Because I’ve already made a mess of things once by assuming. We’ve never done anything quite like this before, so now I’m asking if you’re—both of you—all right.”

The look of puzzlement melted into a tender smile. “Yes, love. It was…different. Odd, and a little awkward, and very arousing. We’re still going to have to figure out just how to share, but that’s just details.” He reached out and took Reyn’s left hand in his, twining their fingers so that their rings clinked softly together. “I think…I think we’re going to be all right.”

Reyn tugged Anders’ hand to his lips and kissed it, too overwhelmed with emotion to say anything for once. Anders smiled at him, then rose to his feet. “Come to bed, love.”

They curled up under the blankets on the narrow bed, wrapped in each other’s arms. Reyn lay his head against his lovers’ chest, and fell asleep listening to the beat of their heart and slow, deep voice of the sea.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, just a brief epilogue to go, and this monstrosity is over! Yay!
The smugglers’ cove where Isabela docked was along the Ferelden coast, not too terribly far from Amaranthine. Putting in at the city itself would have been ideal, but there was too great a risk that Anders would be recognized. Ferelden might be a haven for mages thanks to Queen Anora’s edict, but the Wardens probably had yet to forgive him for killing some of their number.

Fortunately, Isabela knew every inch of coastline along the Amaranthine Ocean and had located the cove without difficulty. There was even an old dock, falling to bits but sound enough to get them off the ship without having to resort to a launch. Most of the sailors remained on board; Reyn wondered if they were relieved that the glowing abomination was getting off here, and the rest of the passengers soon enough.

*Except Merrill.* She’d taken to the ship like a bird to the sky, and Reyn suspected that she’d be terrorizing the sea at Isabela’s side for years to come.

They said most of their good-byes before leaving the ship. Aveline and Donnic were headed for Orlais, where Aveline still had family. Fenris would accompany the erst-while guard captain for a little while, saying he wanted to travel and see all the parts of Thedas he’d never been to as a free elf.

Carver, Isabela, and Varric accompanied Reyn and Anders past the dock and onto the rocky shore, however. “So here we are,” Carver said, once their feet were solidly on land. “Back in Ferelden.”

*Running again,* his tone implied, but Reyn didn’t rise to the bait. There was no comparison, really, between his arrival in Kirkwall and his return to Ferelden. “Take care of yourself,” he said instead.

Carver shrugged awkwardly with a clank of templar armor. The plan was that he would escort Gena, the apprentices, and most of the other mages to Kinloch Hold, where they would join other free mages. If they came across any roving bands of templars, Carver would pretend to have captured the mages, hopefully convincing the templars to move along without a fight. If they came across any mages…well, Gena had promised to intervene before anyone tried to fry Carver with a lightning bolt.

Carver nodded at Anders, who stood waiting beside Reyn. “Don’t let them get you killed.”

“We will protect Reyn,” Justice said, apparently under the mistaken impression that would reassure Carver. Or maybe he was developing a sense of humor and enjoyed tweaking the templar; that was a possibility Reyn couldn’t rule out.

Things had changed during their weeks at sea—were still changing, actually. Anders and Justice had gotten better at sharing, in more ways than one. They spoke more often in that voice somewhere between Anders’ tenor and Justice’s bass, like honey laced with gravel. Not all the time, or even
most of the time, but more and more frequently. Reyn wondered if they were just getting better at actually sharing their body, or if Justice was more apt to put his two coppers into a conversation, even if just to agree with Anders. Or maybe now that Anders had finally let go of his need to control their shared being, something more like a true merger was taking place between them.

Carver only sighed. “Yes, well. Good luck, brother.”

“You, too.” And because it might very well be their last good-bye, Reyn gave him a brief hug. Rather to his surprise, Carver returned it, clapping him on the back. When he turned away and went back onto the dock, Reyn thought that his brother’s eyes looked suspiciously misty.

“You know, my offer still stands,” Isabela said, taking Carver’s place in front of Reyn, so that he felt rather as if he stood at the head of a receiving line. “We’re the fastest ship on the ocean. The templars would never catch us. Forget the Chantry; forget the mages. You could be truly free.”

There was an earnestness he’d seldom seen before in her dark eyes—but a sadness as well, because she already knew his answer.

“I can’t, Bela. I can’t just abandon my fellow mages.”

“You mean Anders.”

“That’s not fair!” Anders objected hotly.

“I wasn’t talking to you, Ser Stick-Up-His-Arse.”

Reyn suppressed a sigh. One memorable afternoon, Justice had suddenly decided to lecture Isabela about stealing and the need for her to atone for her life of piracy, a conversation which had very nearly ended with him and Anders dumped overboard in the middle of the Waking Sea. At least Bela quit bothering me about a four-way after that.

“I meant what I said,” he told her. “I chose my path a long time ago. But thank you for walking some of it with me.”

Her look softened. “Don’t get all mushy on me.”

“You’ve been a good friend, Bela.”

She hugged him, and he thought he heard a little sniffle. “You, too, Hawke. The best.” Then she strode off, her head high, as if daring anyone to accuse her of getting sentimental.

That left only Varric. “You know I hate good-byes,” he said. “And I don’t want you hugging me—no offense.”

“None taken.” Reyn clasped his hand instead.

“So, you’re dead-set on finding the Warden, are you?”

Reyn nodded. “Yes. Solona isn’t just my cousin, Anders’ friend, and a mage—she’s the Hero of Ferelden. The Defeater of the Blight. If anyone can rally the populace to the cause of mage freedom, it’s her.”

“Are you sure she’ll want to?”

Reyn glanced at Anders, who nodded. “Positive.”
“Are you sure it’s wise for you to go back to Kirkwall?” Reyn asked the dwarf. “Thanks to your stories, everyone in the city knows that we’re friends. If the Chantry comes looking for me or Anders, it’s your door they’ll knock on first.”

“I’ve sat through meetings of the Merchant’s Guild. After that, a few interviews with the Chantry will seem like child’s play.” Varric gave him a cocky grin. “And if there’s one thing I can do, it’s tell a good story.”

“Varric,” Reyn said, with a trace of exasperation, “these people are dangerous. If you tell them some wild tale about me riding away on a griffin, they’re not going to be amused.”

“You wound me, Hawke!” But when Reyn continued to look steadily at him, he sighed and rubbed his forehead. “Fine. I’ll salt it with enough truth that they’ll swallow the lies without noticing. Happy?”

“Happier, anyway.”

“That’ll have to do. Take care of Blondie, would you? He needs somebody to keep an eye on him.”

Anders rolled his eyes. “Thanks, Varric.”

“Any time.”

With a little wave, he turned and headed for the ship. The crew had already scrambled to hoist the sails; as soon as Varric was on board, the ship slid free of the dock. Reyn raised his staff and sent up a burst of light in farewell; he thought he saw tiny figures lined up along the rail, waving to them, until distance reduced everything to a blur.

Anders took his hand. “It’s just the three of us, now.”

Reyn put away his staff. “Yes—and poor Justice will have to stay hidden a good part of the time, unless we want to fight our way across the countryside.” He and Anders might pass themselves off as peasants or simple travelers, but people had a tendency to notice glowing abominations.

“I do not mind,” Justice said; he and Anders had gotten better at quick switch-offs, which made conversation both easier and more complicated at the same time. “It will not be forever. And we will still have the nights, in the meantime.”

Reyn grinned. “Indeed we will, my darling.”

The glow of spirit fire faded, leaving behind Anders. The wind off the sea stirred his strawberry blond hair and ruffled the feathers on the shoulders of his coat. They’d managed to scrape together heavier outfits than anything they’d regularly worn in Kirkwall; Ferelden was cold, and winter was coming on.

“Here we are, fugitives on the run from the Chantry and the templars,” Anders said, giving Reyn a puzzled look, “heading into Ferelden to look for a woman who by all accounts vanished years ago. We’ve no possessions beyond what we’re carrying on our backs, and barely enough coin to get us halfway to Denerim. Yet you seem…happy.”

Reyn smiled and squeezed his fingers. “I’m with my two favorite people in the world, doing something truly important. Of course I’m happy.”

Anders laughed and shook his head. “And they call me the crazy one.”
They kissed for a while on the shore, while the tide slowly fell. Eventually, Anders reluctantly pulled away. “We should put a few miles behind us before sundown.”

“True enough.” Reyn settled his staff more comfortably on his back, then held out his hand to them. “Come on, then, loves. Let’s see what trouble we can get into, shall we?”

Hand-in-hand, they made their way up the crooked path into the hills, until they could no longer hear the sea.

THE END

Chapter End Notes

Huge thanks to every one of my readers, especially those who commented--you’re what kept me going. I truly cannot express my gratitude.

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