A Peace offering.

by Erilanya

Summary

Spoiler alert for Dragon Age Inquisition. I own nothing, just having a bit of fun with the characters. Point of view varies. Some angst and eventually fluff.

Story is set right after Cassandra finds out Varric lied about Hawke. That doesn't go down without a hitch and this is their account of the events and to what it may eventually lead. I portray them as I see them, so it may differ from your own p.o.v. Forgive possible inconsistencies in the storyline as I might twist it around a little to fit my narrative better. Thank you for reading! Other chapters when I have the time, maybe few and far between, but incoming.
Chapter 1

"Go Varric, just...go."

She had spat out his name a couple of times during their heated argument, but nothing hurt quite as much to hear her say it in such a defeated tone.

He wondered why it did. If you told him a year ago that he’d be out adventuring with his interrogator, an apostate and another rogue who had a green magic mark, he would have laughed and called you crazy.

And yet, here they were. Good thing the Inquisitor was there to calm things down a bit, cause he didn't know how much longer he could have dodged the Seeker's punches. Luckily humans were a bit gangly in their movements.

"You know what I think? If Hawke had been at the temple? She'd be dead too." He said bitterly, before thundering down the steps.

The people working at the forge threw each other some quizzical looks as they saw the enraged dwarf go out the door. He didn't feel like returning to his regular hang-out in the main hall. Too many prying eyes and loose tongues. Moments like these called for a little peace and quiet. The garden seemed like an excellent place. The Inquisitor had chosen to make it a botanical garden. Exotic herbs were blooming in big clay pots and they filled the air with a sweet, floral scent.

Also less Chantry types, always a plus in his book. He let his mind wander to his recent encounter.

To think he took the initiative. He would go up to her regular haunt and have a civilized conversation about his deception. Varric would try to explain why he felt the need to lie about Hawke. To protect her. Surely that had to resonate somewhere with Cassandra right?

The way she threw herself into battle, in front of her companions. Taking the heaviest blows with a strange sort of grace. When she was with them, Varric barely had a scratch. Enemies would just not reach him in time.

The reality was much, much different however. He had knocked softly on the door.

"Yes, come in." She had said.

When he opened the door, it was clear by the look in her eyes, that he was not who she had expected.

She veered from her chair, looking ready to pounce.

"You!" She spat.

The rest was too painful to relive again, at least for now. He just settled against the cool stone wall of the keep and watched the residents of Skyhold go by their business.

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"You people have done enough to her." Was the last thing she heard while he was going downstairs.
Her shoulders slumped and she felt all the fight drain out of her momentarily.

"I...believed him. He spun his story for me and I swallowed it. If I'd just explained what was at stake...If I'd just made him understand."

Cassandra didn't know what hurt her more. His betrayal or her failing to extract the truth out of him.

What good was she as a Seeker of truth, if a dwarf could bamboozle her so easily.

It seemed like her heart was gripped tightly and squeezed. The constricting feeling became even worse.

*It's because you started to trust him. To think he was on our side. Why else would he have stuck around?*

To spy on them so it seemed. All that playful banter, all those times he tried to elicit a smile from her. Part of the act? It couldn't all be? Right?

For all her confidence on the battlefield, she doubted all other aspects of herself. Never good enough, alert enough.

"I am such a fool."

The Inquisitor did their darnedest to pucker her up at least a little. After their conversation she didn't feel like going to sleep. There was too much residual adrenaline left in her system. So she went downstairs and did what she liked most. Pummeling the living daylights out of the training dummies. This time she could have sworn they looked a bit like Varric.

A couple of days had past. They avoided each other like the plague. She made sure to break her fast earlier then him. Just to be gone before he entered the great hall, to take his usual spot by the fireplace.

The Inquisitor must have felt it too as Varric and Cassandra were never on the same away party. At least not for another week. There was a delicate operation ahead. There were Darkspawn sightings and usually they lead back to a Dwarven Thaig.

The ride to the the Storm Coast was laden with an uncomfortable silence. Cassandra did her best not to glance sideways. She did once, only to see him looking back at her, a question in his eyes.

Quickly she averted her eyes to the road ahead again, spurring her Orlesian charger on to go faster. She cursed under her breath at the heat she felt creeping upon her cheeks.

Well shit, it was going to be such a day then. He had noticed how she started eating earlier, just to avoid him. She didn't look much happier now his presence was forced on her either. It was obvious to him that she wasn't going to take the first step in a possible reconciliation.

It didn't seem to interfere in her duty however. He was so focused on the Hurlock Alpha, that he had missed the other Hurlock creeping up on him from behind. Before it could even sink one of it's Blight ridden claws into his shoulders, Cassandra was upon them. With a mighty slam of her silver
shield, she sent the foe flying.

"Thank you Seeker." He said softly, his heart still pounding hard, from the strain of battle.

She gave him a short look and nodded before she stormed the Alpha again.

"Well, that's a start at least." He mumbled quietly.

The day was won. Solas had magically sealed the tunnel from which the Darkspawn had escaped, and they were making their way back to Skyhold.

Once arrived everyone went their separate ways again. Solas went back to study in the rotunda and Cassandra to her spot above the forge.

The Inquisitor decided to linger a little.

"You won't believe what I'm going to tell you next."

"Ah?" Varric replied, his curiosity piqued.

"Guess who's a big fan of yours..."
Smutty literature.

Chapter Summary

I'm on a roll. Perhaps these chapters are a bit short, but it's easier for me to manage that way. :D Thanks for reading.
Continuation of part one. The inquisitor is about to reveal Varric's biggest fan.

When the Inquisitor said: "Cassandra is waiting for the next issue of Swords and Shields"
A sudden, warm feeling bubbled up in the pit of his stomach. That and complete and utter shock.
"I must have heard that wrong, it sounded like you just said that Cassandra read my books;"
If the Inquisitor's smirk would have gotten any bigger, jaws would be sprained.
"What's so surprising about that?"
Varric was shaking his head slightly in disbelief. That was the last thing he expected of her. He knew where this was going. The Inquisitor would have him write the next installment.

_Mustn't appear too eager!_

"You have met Cassandra haven't you? Wait, did you say the romance serial? She'll be waiting for a while then. I haven't finished it and I wasn't planning too."
After some pleading from the Inquisitor, he thought the time was right to yield.

"That's such a terrible idea, I have to do it. On one condition, I get to be there when you give her the book."
They shook hands and the deal was sealed. He couldn't wait to get started. His golden opportunity to make things right with the Seeker again. It unsettled him a little just how much he seemed to need their reconciliation.

Varric shook it off and dipped his quill into the ink. His hand seemed to fly over the paper. The inspiration came abundantly and fast. He had trouble keeping up with this thoughts.

The thought that Cassandra read his books. That somewhere deep within that armor, a romantic heart was beating. Andraste's tits, this was almost too much to bear.

Oh how he did his best. This book had to blow her away!
His mind wandered further and before he knew it, he ended up with this passage.

*When he entered the tavern, his eyes were drawn immediately to the dark haired beauty in the corner.*

*The soft candle light accentuated her chiseled features. She had the most beautiful eyes. The sort that draw you in. Her hands, slender, graceful and slightly calloused. Perhaps from holding a sword?*

*"What is your name, my Lady?" He said, as he paused at her table.*

*"Portia." She said simply, her voice telling him she wasn't Fereldan, or Orlesian.*

"Maker..." He gasped. Her, he had been describing her, even used one of her many names. Varric was of a mind to scrap the whole passage, but he stopped himself.

*Let her read it.*

She had a keen mind, she'd catch on. If she was negative about it, he would completely deny it. No one said Portia was Nevarran. The person he described could be Antivan or any Free Marcher. The name was common enough too to be a coincidence.

He wasn't sure if he wanted that way out for her, as much as for himself. While it seemed clear that he harbored more complex feelings for her then friendship, the dwarven writer wasn't too keen on admitting that to himself yet.

*I'm not even into humans. And what about Bianca...*

What about her, he wondered. Last time they spoke wasn't such a great experience. She was still married to what's his name the Smith caste boy. He knew she has let him go, at least in that way. Why didn't he move on? But with Cassandra. Of all people. Heck, even Hawke had sent him some feelers on a drunk night out. He gently let her down by stating he wasn't into humans. That was no lie, up till now. The height difference didn't bother him. If they ever hugged, his head would be pillowed quite well, he thought with a mischievous grin.

He stopped his musings in time, to insert a dose of reality.

There is no way she would ever reciprocate. Not in a million years.

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The Inquisitor had caught her reading one of Varric's books. Of course, he knew. She could tell by the looks the dwarf threw her. Every once in a while, the looks would be accompanied by a small, knowing smile. Oh Maker, how it flustered her. Was he laughing at her? Was he amused? No way to
Cassandra had given up completely ignoring him. She went to the main hall to have breakfast with the rest of the company.

"There you are darling, and there I started to think you had given up eating." cooed Vivienne.

Varric looked up from his paper, hands stained by ink. He was writing a lot lately.

"Ask him, it burns inside you, questions, more questions, confusion. Warmth." A whisper in her ear. This time she felt a furious blush creep up onto her cheeks.

"Thank you Cole." She managed to stammer out before taking her leave from the table. Judging by his demeanor, Varric had certainly noticed.

If only a rift in the Fade spawned to swallow her whole...
Chapter Summary

Varric hands Cassandra his latest installment of Swords and Shields.

It was finally done. Bound with a slightly glossy cover. His first book written specifically for one person. He was so nervous, but being the good liar that he is, no one was the wiser. Varric had been walking around the keep all day, book pocketed for a chance to catch the Inquisitor.

When he finally did, they both made their way to the sparring ring. The dwarf's heart hammered in his chest and there was a slight tremor in his hands. Having the Inquisitor near was reassuring however and we has glad he didn't have to break the ice between him and Cassandra. Seems she did it for them.

When she saw them approach, she stood up from her three legged stool and came towards them.

"What have you done now?" She asked, voice dripping with suspicion.

*My you are fearsome. I see why our enemies tremble and shout to kill the warrior first...*

Every time Varric felt drummed into a corner however, his silver tongue took over.

"I get it Seeker, you're still sore after our spat."

"I'm not a child Varric!" She said indignantly. "Do not suggest I'm without reason."

After the weeks of indifference, her indignation felt like a cool breeze. He was loving every second of this.

"A peace offering, the next chapter of Swords and Shields. I hear you're a fan." He held out the book to her, she didn't take it. Instead she turned towards the Inquisitor.

"This is your doing."

"I was hoping you'd be happy about it." Came the reply.

*Time for a different tack.*

"Well, if you're not interested, you're not interested. Still needs editing anyhow."

And with those parting words he turned around, slowly making his way back to the main hall.
"Wait!" Cassandra cried out.

*Oh this is gold...*

He turned around, but he wasn't letting her off the hook just yet.

"You're probably wondering what happens to the Knight Captain after the last chapter." She softly gasped and her eyes grew large.

"Nothing should happen to her! She was falsely accused!!"

"Well, it turns out the guardsman..." He teased further.

"Don't tell me!" She interrupted and quickly snatched the book from his hand.

Varric cleared his throat, a small smile on his lips.

"This is the part where you thank the Inquisitor, I don't normally give sneak peeks after all."

"I...thank you." And then she smiled, really smiled, widely, from the heart. He was falling for her, hard. There was no more denying it anymore.

*Oh shit...*

"Varric's the one you should be thanking."

Before she had the time to reply to that, he took a small bow.

"I am but a humble servant to my loyal readers."

He wasn't sure if she heard him any longer, cause she was raptly staring at the precious book.

"I wonder if I have time to read the first part?"

"Don't forget to tell all your friends....if you have any."

A little jab, he still harbored some hurt from the treatment at her hands before, and it was sort of their way with each other.

A contented sigh. "Completely worth it."

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She had let her hair down. It was a balmy summer night and she stood upon the balcony, overseeing Hightown.

*He tentatively placed his hand on the small of her back.*
"My Lady, if you need my help, you need only ask."

Portia did not move, which was encouraging, but she didn't reply, not right away. It seemed she was weighing her words very carefully.

"That is a noble offer you make, my Lord, but I am not defenseless, not on the battlefield."

"Ah." He answered, "but what of the political battlefield? You cannot strike down the ones that threaten you there."

"At least not with any physical means indeed."

She turned around and their eyes met. An alliance was in the making. An alliance of interests and if he got his way, maybe even an alliance of hearts.

Oh he didn't disappoint. Seems he had introduced two completely new characters. They were having a little subplot of their own, sometimes interweaving with the main storyline.

Portia, the foreign noble and a dashing rogue who had made his fortune in Kirkwall, slowly climbing the rungs of the social ladder.

She didn't earn her Seeker title lightly, and it was foolish to disregard certain 'parallels' with real life. Varric was known to use the people around him as inspiration. Oftentimes he used them as characters in his books, albeit under a different name. The fact that the young noble's name was Portia, one of her own middle names, was almost too convenient to be a coincidence.

It was hard to shake that feeling, even during her daily training session. Usually it cleared her mind, but this time she felt it wander back to the book.

I had best go get something to eat, I cannot focus anyways.

Upon entering the main hall, she saw him in his usual chair by the fire. He raised his hand and beckoned her over.

"Yes Varric?" She said curtly.

"Hmmm, still no smile, but at least I lost my title of conniving little shit."

"Urgh. If that is all?" He held on to things like that so surprisingly long.

"Ah come on Seeker, I'm joking. Were you going to have something to eat? Might as well have it here. Unless you enjoy mingling with the Orlesians? Ruffles invited over some important baronet So and So."

Cassandra looked over at the rowdy table, all those masked idiots playing their little Game. Her stomach churned at the thought.

"I will take my chances at this table."
Cassandra and Varric find themselves a little less at odds, and what looks like a friendship might start to flourish. Again, my own text supplemented by existing party banter between the two. Thanks for reading! :D

Cassandra came back from the kitchens with a tray of food. It smelled delicious. A stew of ram meat, a large chunk of bread to go with it and some roasted beets. A hearty meal. Also, two tankards of light ale. To his surprise, she placed one in front of him.

"Cheers Seeker." Varric said, as he raised the cup.

She nodded curtly while shoveling food into her mouth. To think she was raised as a noble. He half expected her to raise her pinky while drinking, but that wouldn't correspond with who she was. Cassandra was no princess to put underneath a glass bell jar. She was no vulnerable porcelain doll, to put on a shelf. There were vulnerabilities, so he had started to learn, but they didn't lay there.

"Can I ask you something?" Varric asked.

"If you must, sure."

"I have to know. Swords and Shields? How did you find that serial? Scrape it off the bottom of a barrel in Dust town?"

She nearly spat out some of her ale."It was research! I thought I might learn more about the Champion."

"I did write a book about the Champion. You might remember it. Had your knife stuck through it last I saw." A small smirk played on his lips.

"I already read that one. Twice." she replied coolly.

His smirk widened a little. "I can't believe you picked the absolute worst of my books to read. Why not Hard in Hightown?"

"I have enough mysteries and investigations of my own."

An actual chuckle: "What? You don't want to solve more in your free time?"

"Then, you killed my favorite character in Chapter 3, so I threw the book across the room."

By that time she had pushed her plate aside and stretched her legs under the table. If he didn't know better, it would seem the Seeker was relaxing, even getting a bit comfortable.

He sighed dramatically. "A critic. Say no more."

Then she laughed, making her face do that adorable thing again.
Smiling.

The Inquisitor noticed their slightly improved relationship. They were traveling together a lot more lately.

After an intensely challenging day, they settled in one of their camps in the Emerald Graves. The Inquisitor had already turned in and Solas found an interesting ruin. He was going to sleep there and explore the Fade.

Varric had offered to come along and offer some protection against the Freemen. Solas had smiled knowingly and whispered.

"I think there are others who would benefit from your company more, child of the Stone."

At that the elven apostate had taken his staff and disappeared into the night. He maybe didn't talk much, but he didn't miss a beat that one...

So that just left him and Cassandra. She was cleaning her sword. It was a lengthy process and she was very meticulous about it.

That made him look at Bianca, she was a sturdy beauty, but she needed some tlc too. They sat in silence, both maintaining their gear near the campfire. Until the Seeker spoke up.

"Varric, how could you let the Knight-Captain be framed for murder?"

*So that was still going through her mind huh? Andrae's knickers, I must have made quite the impression.*

"Well I did spent three entire chapters setting it up."

"But she didn't deserve it! You'd already put her through more than enough!" She cried out, some of that passion she had during battle in her eyes.

"Look Seeker, if you love a character, you give them pain, ruin their lives, make them suffer. Maybe even throw in a heroic death!"

Cassandra threw down one of her gauntlets, shaking her head. "That makes no sense!"

It was such a weird kind of pleasure to see her get so worked up, about his book no less.

"But you care enough to argue." He said gently. "If she has a nice afternoon and took a nap you'd stop reading."

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After a while, he had turned in too. She had agreed to take first watch. Cassandra welcomed the
nightly ambient noises the forest brought. Bustling with life. A stark difference from the necropoli in Nevarra. They were built for living in the afterlife. Beautiful gardens, bath houses in glistening marble. Only empty, unused, shrines for the dead. Such a waste, while some of the living lived in squalor. She despised all the posturing of who loved their ancestors more.

Then her mind drifted to more recent events. She had started to take her lunches at Varric’s table more often. He didn't ask her everytime, but she would notice ‘her’ chair, slightly pulled from under the table. Ready to be seated upon. In the clutter of paper, books, ink pots and more obscurities, there would also be a cleared space, just large enough to place a tray of food.

It was strangely comfortable, they would trade jabs at one another and every now and then, he would read her a short passage from the latest chapter of Swords and Shield. Only to stop at excruciating moments, leaving her wanting more.

The fire was crackling nicely. She felt the strain of the last couple of days slip away and grew so very tired, so heavy. What seemed hours later, she woke up with a start. Oh Maker, how long has she been sleeping? The camp could have been ransacked because of her...A feeling of panic gripping at her throat.

Curiously the fire hadn't gone out yet. When she looked up, she saw why. Varric sat across from her, poking at the fire.

"Hello sleepyhead." he greeted her, his voice slightly hoarse from being silent for a while.

"Why did you not wake me, it was my turn, my duty! My carelessness could have brought ruin upon us..."

He interrupted her before she could continue the slew of reproaches aimed at herself.

"Shhhht, not so loud Seeker, you'll wake the Inquisitor." He said, smiling.

"Besides, you looked like you needed some rest, you're so wound all of the time."

Now it was her time to smile, just a little.

"Why Varric, that almost sounded like concern."

He pretended to choke and their laughter rang through the forest, their worry of waking the Inquisitor temporarily forgotten.
The Inquisition is going to war. Despite all their carefully laid plans, things go wrong.

Skyhold had been in an uproar lately. Harrit the Smith was working overtime and even Dagna had taken up the hammer and tongs to make more 'mundane' weapons. You could see she was a Smith Caste girl, it was second nature to her.

Varric was overcome by a sense of pride. He may not agree with the caste system, but craftsmanship like this did his people proud.

Ser Morris, the quartermaster, was really pushing his contacts. Potions and salves were coming in by the cartload. The kitchen staff were being tested to their limits as they churned out field rations.

They had found out the Grey Wardens were using blood magic. They sacrificed their own warriors, so the Warden mages could bind demons.

The Wardens thought they would march upon the Deep Roads and kill the old Gods. This would prevent them from being corrupted by the Blight and thus turning into Arch Demons.

While in all actually, they were being manipulated by Corypheus and his Venatori. They had issued a fake Calling, making the wardens think their time had come. Their plan was to use the demon army to march on Orlais and plunge it into chaos. By binding the demons, the mages had unknowingly bound themselves to the Elder One's will.

So after many fervent discussions around the War Table, it was decided the Inquisition would march upon Adamant fortress in the Western Approach. A Grey Warden stronghold.

The evening before they would leave, Hawke had joined him for an evening of drinks.

"Well this is sure a step up from the Hanged man isn't it?" She said, while taking in the decor around her. The Inquisitor had gone all out. Although he secretly suspected that Ruffles was the real culprit.

"Well, blood mages aren't trying to kill me everywhere I look, and it's a roof I suppose."

Hawke chuckled: "Still no cute dwarven serving girls in sight tho."

"Well shit, you have good memory, for a human at least."

Little did she know that cute dwarven girls were the furthest thing on his mind right now.

His reply did earn him a playful slap on his arm. As the evening progressed, the ale flowed richly. Hawke couldn't take her liquor as well as he, so he offered to escort her to the guest chambers.

With her arm slung around his shoulder for support, they made their way across the courtyard. To his great surprise, Cassandra was still out, beating at the dummies.

"That's her isn't it? The one.." Hawke said, slightly slurring her words. A small panic overcame the
dwarf and his cheeks started to turn a little red.

*How did she guess? How am I going to talk myself out of this? Do I have to? I'll just tell her.*

Before had had the time to reply, Hawke finished her sentence.

"The Seeker that hunted me."

*Oh phew...*

Varric got his good friend to bed without any additional hitches. Tomorrow Hawke would wake, fit as a fiddle. He often wondered if a mage's mana burned away hangovers too. On the way back, he was a little disappointed to see that Cassandra had gone back inside.

The morning that followed was complete chaos, everyone was carrying something. Horsemaster Dennet was chastising a stable boy for not strapping the battle armor on correctly.

"You don't want their plate falling off mid battle do you?" The poor lad shook his head, lost for words.

The crowd grew thicker. The full might of the Inquisition assembled was a sight to behold. Curly had started to lead the first of the troops out of the main gate already. Amid the stream of people, he noticed her. The sunlight bounced off her polished armor. The Seeker in her full array was impressive.

*Like a paragon of Battle. I'd start running, Corypheus!*

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The trek to the Western Approach took about a week. Morale however was soaring. At certain moments the soldiers would burst into song. To hear a thousand voices harmonize made the hair on her arms stand on end. The energy was palpable, a little nervous too. Good people would lose their lives, it was inevitable and everyone knew it. Cassandra wasn't even sure of her own survival. Situations like these made you realize where your priorities lie. She gave her charger the spurs and looked for the Inquisitor's traveling party.

It wasn't too hard to find, people loved their heraldry and circling the Inquisitor were banners and flags. She joined them and found a nice pace, not coincidentally next to Varric. He looked very uncomfortable.

"Is even terrain too much to ask for?" He sighed.

The Seeker raised one of her well groomed eyebrows: "Is there a problem?"

"You might be used to traipsing through the countryside-punching dragons, interrogating people, or whatever it is you did before this." He said, giving her a look of mock indignation.
"I'm from the city."

Then they laughed together, the road appearing a lot less bumpy all of a sudden.

At Adamant fortress, things turned serious very fast. Magister Livius Erimond had summoned the false Arch demon dragon when the Inquisitor barged in on their bloody ritual. Warden commander Clarel finally saw the error of her ways. So she decided to divert the dragon's attention away from everyone. The Inquisitor gave pursuit, but it was too late. The bridge under their feet gave way.

Falling, this is it. Maker help me...

Then, a bright flash of green. She wasn't hitting the ground, instead found herself suspended. Suspended a foot above the ground.

"Where am I?" Cassandra looked round. Varric was there, Hawke and warden Stroud too. On the other side were the Inquisitor and Solas. The latter had a curious expression on his face.

"This, is the Fade."

That brought her no solace at all. Neither companion looked at ease. There was a rift on the other side. They had decided to go there and find a way back into the real world. This place was all wrong. Her footing and was way off and everything looked a bit blurry. Just a little off, to throw you.

As if that wasn't enough, a figure emerged. It felt as if the breath was sucked out of her.

"Divine Justinia? Most Holy?"

Her legs were trying to give way, until she felt a hand pull on the hem of her coat of chainmail.

It was Varric, concern etched in his face. "Are you ok, Cassandra?" The situation was serious enough for him to call her by her first name.

Lost for words. "I...no, not really." She placed her hand on his shoulder and steadied herself. They kept walking like this.

A fear demon controlled this part of the Fade. They had to take it down if they wanted to stop Corypheus' demon army. It didn't let them pass peacefully. Everyone of them them got confronted by their worst fears.

They walked up to what seemed a graveyard, only their own names were on the tombstones. Along with their worst fear as an epitaph.

Helplessness...

"I wouldn't worry too much Seeker, you are the least helpless person I know, and I know Hawke."

He had a real talent for making light, even in the worst of situations. Sometimes that aggravated her,
but here it was most welcome. Anything to lift their spirits.

"And you are nothing like your parents...Varric."

He didn't have anything to say about that. They just looked each other in the eyes. Cassandra looked away first, blushing a little.

The Divine helped the Inquisitor regain their memories, about Justinia's death and how they got the mark.

I cannot believe it, how do I know if this is real, most Holy...

The time to fight the Nightmare came. Warden Stroud had sacrificed himself. He bought them enough time to escape. The Inquisitor had banished the Wardens from Orlais, too much had happened. Hawke went with them to oversee everything.

Things calmed down a little and Cassandra resumed her usual lunch routine with Varric. Nowadays they rarely skipped a day.

"I am somewhat surprised you didn't follow Hawke to Weisshaupt, Varric"

He looked up from his writings.

"There's a lot of work to do, Seeker. We'll catch up once this is all over."

She hadn't given much thought to what would happen if or when they would take down Corypheus. There was a world to rebuild of course, but how to start...

"Besides, Hawke would rather we stay away, stay safe. That won't fly forever. Besides, if I went to the Anderfels, how could I annoy you?"

"You would find a way."

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The days were so strange lately. Days that he would look forward to their daily lunch date. He had written an especially tricky passage that she would enjoy! Or maybe she would throw her tankard at him. You could just never know with the Seeker. That was definitely a part of the attraction to be sure.

He smiled when entering the Main Hall, but it vanished quickly. Suddenly he felt a nausea creep up from his stomach. For by the fire stood a hooded dwarven figure.

"Are you going to stand there with your mouth open or do I get a hug at least?"

"Bi..Bianca..."
A wave of old feelings just surfaced again. He couldn't believe she was here, in the flesh. It was easier to think of her as a long lost love, far away. Conveniently using her as the last wall around his heart, so he wouldn't have to let anyone else in.

"Where you followed? Does the guild know?" Last time they met, her parents sent assassins after him.

Bianca laughed. "It's nice to see you too Varric!"

"Of course it's nice to see you, but you know how things get, every time we meet."

They had a lot to talk about. So much he had completely lost track of time. He started when he heard a familiar voice.

"Am I interrupting?"

Andraste's ass! I asked her to come over and completely forgot. Shit, shit, shit!!!!

"Not at all Seeker, I'd like you to meet an old friend of mine. Miss Davri."

Bianca nodded and shook Cassandra's hand.

"Ah yes, Bianca..."

Varric could read the Seeker like a book by now, and he didn't like what he saw. Her shoulders tensed up, making her look even taller and more withdrawn. Her eyes narrowed. She went from open, relaxed Cassandra, to Seeker on duty.

"I will not take up any more of your time, if you'll excuse me." At that she left, going back outside.

*How are you going to handle this one, Tethras...*

"What was that about?" Bianca asked, sensing some of the tension.

"Don't worry about it. The Seeker and I have a strange sort of *relation*, friendship."
Cassandra stalked out as fast she could. It was unsettling just how angry Bianca's presence made her. Why, was she jealous?

"He hurts, screams inside. Talk to him, tell him how you feel."

"Not now demon." She said viciously, slamming her door in Cole's face. Moments later, she did regret treating him as such. When she opened the door however, he had vanished again.

"I am sorry, Cole." She said quietly, knowing he'd hear it, somewhere out there.

She needed a way to calm her nerves. Her eye fell on her copy of Swords and Shields. Might as well.

After settling into her chair, she opened the book and started to read.

Portia wore a loose fitting tunic, leaving one shoulder bare. What he would give to touch it, if only briefly. He went to stand behind her, as close as she would allow it. Around her, the scent of rose petals and fresh grass.

"You look exquisite tonight, my Lady." He whispered, inching even a bit closer. They were now so little apart that he could feel her body heat.

"Only tonight? She said huskily, while turning around.

The young noble didn't step back and the desire became excruciating. He wrapped his arms around her supple waist. She didn't fight it, in response she wrapped her arms around his shoulders, pulling him closer. His head touching that blasted, infuriating, soft shoulder. She moaned softly as he pressed a small kiss upon the bare flesh, her cheeks turning scarlet.

Cassandra quickly put the book down. Portia's weren't the only cheeks that had turned scarlet by now.

"Oh sweet Maker." She muttered softly to herself. If the characters had been based upon them... Did Varric think of her like this?

A knock on the door. Cassandra veered from the chair and quickly put the book under one of the pillows. Please Andraste, don't let it be him.

It wasn't. It was the Inquisitor. They had these frequent chats about the state of the Inquisition, the Chantry and their companions. And somehow the conversation gravitated to where her mind was at.

"Did you know Varric is Andrastian? Sure, he blasphemes with every second breath, but his heart is virtuous."

"You have been spending a lot of time with him lately." The Inquisitor noted.

"What of it." She answered way too defensively and way too fast.

The Inquisitor smiled. "No reason, in fact, I'm glad you're not at each others' throats anymore. Makes for more relaxed travel this way."
Bianca seemed to have gone the day after. The Seeker overheard a snippet of conversation.

"She asked us to meet her there." Varric told the Inquisitor.

"This is your mission, I'd like to go with, if you'll have me. You can assemble the rest of the team."

He nodded. "I know just who to ask."

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After the Seeker made her hasty exit yesterday, he hadn't had the chance to talk to her yet. He felt as if he owed her an explanation. He'd seen her pop up in the main hall, but just as soon had she slipped away.

She wasn't training either, so he took the steps up to her room. He knocked three times. Cassandra opened the door and said. "Yes, Varric?"

"I wanted to ask you something. Can I come in and talk?" She didn't answer, but stepped aside and motioned for him to come in.

He had never been in her room proper. It was plain, functional. The only things that gave it a bit of character were a plush chair with mismatched pillows. That and a stack of books, among which, many of his own.

"Oh no, you have Hard in Hightown II."

"Yes, I have often wondered why the second one is so completely different from the first.

A deep sigh. "Because I didn't write it. Shit, did you pay actual coin for that book? One of these days, I'm gonna find the duster who wrote that garbage and introduce him to my editor."

"By "editor", do you mean your crossbow?" She inquired.

"No my actual editor! Best in the business. She runs half of the Coterie in Kirkwall, stickler for grammar. She'd want to kill the man over a semicolon. I'd never print anything without her."

She chuckled briefly, but then turned serious again.

"I gather you didn't come here to discuss my book collection?"

"No, that's true. Bianca discovered a Dwarven thaig, inside Valammar. It could very well be the source of Corypheus' red lyrium. I feel responsible for this, because of Bartrand and all that. I get to assemble my own team and the Inquisitor already volunteered."

His throat became oddly dry and he got slightly nervous. Her face was not giving away anything, not a flicker of emotion.

"So I was wondering if you might join as well."

Cassandra didn't say anything yet and took a deep breath. "It's a worthy goal, to be sure, but why
don’t you take Blackwall along? He can protect you all as well as I can, maybe even better."

At that he walked up to the chair where she sat. Her left arm was resting on the table and he placed his hand lightly over her wrist. She startled a little at the touch, but she didn't pull away.

Varric looked her straight in the eye.

"I prefer you. We may have our differences Seeker, but if I had to lay my life in anyone's hands, they'd be yours."

The intensity between them was tangible.

She swallowed visibly and whispered. "Ok, I will do it."
Bianca discovered the nature of Red Lyrium. (Note from me, the chapters might be coming at a slightly slower pace for the coming time as health and time don't always cooperate. Nothing life threatening by the way! So no worries :D )

"Thank you, Cassandra, I really appreciate it." He slid his hand down from her wrist. He brought her hand to his mouth and pressed a soft, chaste kiss on it. After that, he went out again. Leaving her a bit flustered, heart hammering in her chest.

He sure was adamant that you come with. Why don't you just tell him the truth!

She was a Seeker of Truth, then why was it so hard to admit? Never would she refrain from the truth, and if he would ask her outright, she would not deny it.

It was maybe easy to forget at this time, but their relationship did start as interrogator and prisoner. Cassandra had not been gentle and she wondered if someone could get past that fully, if ever.

If she were Varric, she would surely still harbor a lot of resentment.

And now this Bianca, she's not just a friend.

At least she admitted to herself that there were some feelings there. Where they were going was still in flux. She would wait and see how this Bianca situation would pan out.

Besides, if she was completely honest, she still had some unresolved feelings about Regalyan. He was a circle mage. At the time she had been wounded and could hardly walk. He had tended to her, listened to her suspicions about mages and...

Apologized....

"I am so sorry, Cassandra. It is true that both Circle and blood mages are mages. Our methods may differ, but there's no denying we practice a common art. And as a mage, I would like to express my sorrow. What happened to your brother was truly something horrendous."

It had been easy for her to distrust, even hate mages, after what happened to her brother, but Regalyan had shown her another side, another perspective.
"Contrary to common belief, not all mages wish to see the Chantry deposed. Those of us within the Circle seek only to be treated with equal dignity and respect. I do my part to help ensure our efforts are not undermined by the actions of a few."

He had said, and from that moment it was impossible for her to see the world as black and white as before. A lump in her throat.

She shook the doubts from her mind. It had been her only relationship, and now Regalyan had passed, died at the conclave.

It was time to ride for Valammar. When she entered the courtyard, Varric was anxiously waiting.

"I'm still expecting Cole, he said he would join, but you know how the kid gets."

She nodded.

"To be honest, I wasn't even sure you would turn up." He added.

"Ah? Because I have given you so many examples of how I break my word on a daily basis." She replied angrily.

One could accuse her of many things, being too brash, quick to anger, but not honoring her promises? The Maker himself would have to come down and smite her first.

Instead of following into the argument, like he usually did, he raised his hand slightly.

"Hold up Seeker, I didn't mean offense, I'm just nervous. Knowing Bianca, she's probably nosing around there already. The place is probably crawling with Darkspawn."

"I understand." Her breath hitched for just a second. "Is she..."

Before the Seeker had the chance to finish that sentence, Cole had, well, materialized.

The trip was spent in a comfortable silence, till Cole spoke up.

"He writes words that aren't real, but they are for him, in a quiet place whose stone shape shakes the ground."

Her mind immediately jumped to the more 'romantic' passages in Swords and Shields. The ones that Portia and Emmerick were living. He must have thought the same. Their eyes met briefly and they both turned their heads away, blushing furiously.

Finally they had arrived. Bianca was nowhere to be seen, so they ventured into the entrance to the Deep Roads.

"Finally, I started to think you weren't coming!"

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A sigh of relief, there she was.
"Nobody said you had to hang out in the creepy cave while you waited."

"Well, I did wait, so let's make this quick. These idiots are carrying the red lyrium out in unprotected containers."

They stumbled upon the miners quite quickly. Seems like someone had leaked the location of Bartrand's folly. They were looking for the entrance they used, to seal it off. In mean while Varric and Bianca traded jabs at each other like an old married couple would. It was so easy to slip into this routine with her. If she hadn't been married to What's his Face, they would have been.

It felt a bit awkward, especially with Cassandra there, but it wouldn't been a party if Cole didn't speak up again.

"Cassandra, who's... Regalyan?"

She coughed and covered her mouth and half her face, to hide the redness of her cheeks. Her eyes wide.

"No one to concern yourself with." 

"You were thinking about the time you..."

"Now I'm thinking about something else. Can you guess? " Cassandra said through gritted teeth.

"My hat wouldn't fit there."

Varric knew better then to ask her now, but his curiosity was piqued. He also felt a tiny bit annoyed.

*What vows do Seekers take? Were they allowed to?*

"That was, strange..." Bianca remarked, staring at Cole.

"Yeah, the kid is a special kind of special, I'll tell you about it later."

After a lot more actual fighting and looking around, they got to another intricate door. Bianca took out a key.

"They won't be able to use this entrance again.

*Oh shit, she didn't....*

"Bianca..."
"You want to say something?" The Inquisitor inquired.

"Andraste's ass, Bianca? You're the leak?"

Turns out she gone out to investigate the site, to help him, and Bartrand. She wanted to figure the red lyrium out. It was alive, it was alive and carried within it, the Blight. He couldn't really be angry with her, not really. He sighed.

"We've done all we can here. Bianca, you'd better get home before someone misses you." The trained ear would not have missed how he enunciated someone.

This is why they better had a long distance relationship, less mess and heartache. She would never leave Bogdan. It was time he would realize this.

And who in Andraste's flaming knickers is Regalyan...
Chapter Summary

Bianca went back to her husband, but the consequences of her visit are still felt.

He had been walking around with a black cloud over his head the last couple of days. Him and his Bianca had not parted on the best of terms. His replies to people were short and often snappish. And Cassandra, he had avoided all together.

When it was time to lunch however, she thought to bring that avoidance to a halt. Only to find he was not at his usual spot. Varric had not joined the Inquisitor to go and secure that alliance with the blades of Hessarian either.

A bit further into the hall, Vivienne was entertaining a host of masked fops and dithering ladies. Cassandra definitely didn't want to eat anywhere near them. So she just took her regular spot. Amid the piles of books and paper, she noticed a copy of Tale of the Champion.

It had a very peculiar hole in it, like a stab wound. She traced it with her finger, a small smile playing on her lips.

*He kept it....*

"Fond memories of stabbing me in the book, Seeker?" Came a familiar voice. Fancy him interpreting her smile all wrong, but she realized how it looked.

"I think it's time to stop playing the wounded party with me, Varric." She answered scathingly.

"Ignoring the times you actually wounded me?" He retorted quickly.

"I did no such thing. I questioned you, and then brought you to Haven so you could tell your story to the Divine." Cassandra was starting to get a little piqued.

He put his hands up. "What then? "Thanks Varric! We believe you! See you around!"

She pushed her food aside. "And ignoring the fact you did lie to me."

His silence was telling.

"Do not pretend to be an innocent bystander - I could have done far worse, with full justification."

He took a ridiculously deep bow and his voice was dripping with sarcasm.

"Yes, thank you for not torturing me. I'm so much happier now."

Despite her anger, she couldn't help but laugh. His tension seemed to have lessened a bit too. He
you never did tell me why you dragged me to Haven Seeker?" He asked.

"I mean, what could I have told the Divine that you couldn't say yourself?"

"I thought she needed to see the chest hair for herself."

Now his eyes widened and he chocked up while drinking.

"Er...say again?"

"I thought she needed to hear it from the horse's mouth, as it were. I also knew she would ask you to help us." The memory of Justinia made her feel a twinge of melancholy.

"Help the Inquisition? Me?" He said, feigning surprise.

"A crazy thought, I know, yet here you are."

They smiled at each other and a truce had again been brokered, for now at least.

"Since you ate without me, you can at least wait till I finish too. In mean while, help yourself to any literature you wish to stab."

He swiftly dodged the book that came hurtling towards him.

Lately the keep had been buzzing with rumors over the Inquisition's next course of action. A civil war was tearing Orlais apart. Sure, they did dispose of the demon army at Adamant, but Corypheus could still take advantage of the in-fighting and make his move.

One particular rumor was more incessant than the rest. Empress Celene's life was in danger. The Inquisitor and the advisors had been holed up in the War room, looking for a way to reach her.

Sending messengers seemed straightforward, but there was no guarantee they would actually reach the empress in time. Or at all for that matter. They had to find a solution quick, or the country would be plunged into chaos.

However, life went on in Skyhold and petitioners from all over Thedas kept arriving. Seeking justice, help, goods to survive and it was obvious the Inquisitor couldn't do all of that alone. There were many agents and often 'the inner circle' members went out by themselves to take care of matters.

That's how he saw Cassandra. She was fastening her horse's bridle and stuffing her saddle bags with clothing and supplies.

Varric's curiosity got the better of him and he walked up to her.

"Packing light I see?"

"Ah yes, heavy armor gets so cumbersome in the desert."
He knew she was joking, Cassandra would wear her armor always. Come blizzards or sand storms.

"You're going alone?" He inquired, trying to make his voice as casual as possible.

"Yes, Knight-Captain Rylen, from Griffon Wing Keep asked for some help to deal with the Varghest. They are swarming near their drinking supply."

This is your chance, go on!

His mind's voice spurred him on. "Care for some company? Bianca's been itching for some action."

He said, while affectionately tapping his crossbow.

The Seeker squinted, trying to sniff out ulterior motives, to be sure. To his surprise she nodded.

"Pack quickly, I'd like to be well underway before nightfall."

And so they rode to the Western Approach, towards their first mission alone. It was Cassandra who spoke up first.

"Am I to understand your Bianca is married?"

"Oh have we reached the state where we gossip about each other's love lives?" He didn't know why he replied so harshly. Bianca was just a sensitive subject.

She made a disgusted noise. "Forget I mentioned anything. It was a simple question, Varric."

"There was nothing simple about it."

They rode on, in silence. He already regretted snapping at her. The fact she thought to ask was remarkable in itself, and he had brutally cut her off.

Tentatively, he tried making conversation again.

"You brought up Bianca, Seeker. Does that mean I could ask about your "conquests"?"

"I would rather you didn't." She said, looking rather uncomfortable.

"No tantalizing secrets to divulge?" He asked, smirking.

Cassandra started blushing intensely. "None." She managed to bring out.

"Are you blushing, Seeker? Maker, the world is really coming to an end." He didn't know what came over him to make him so forward. The lack of prying eyes and wagging tongues, no doubt.

They reached one of their forward camps near the border of the approach. They were always manned by at least two scouts. Of course they got rotated, so they got a bit of active scouting duty, holding camps and getting some rest back in Skyhold. It was an elegant system. Nightingale knew
her stuff.

"Almost nightfall messere, best to stay here. Scout Morris is making her rounds. If you want, you can use my tent."

So they moved in for the night, their bedrolls a mere arm's length apart. Scout Morris had brought back a couple of Fennecs, which they roasted over cackling fire.

Satiated and full they went back into their tent and fell asleep. In the middle of the night Varric woke from a noise. When he looked up, Cassandra was no longer in her bedroll. A sense of dread took a constricting hold on his chest. He dressed hastily and went outside. No Seeker in sight. He did see some footsteps in the nightly desert sands.

One of the scouts was supposed to keep watch, but they were fast asleep. He contemplated waking him, to give him an earful, but Varric decided against it.

Instead he took a field emergency kit and went into the cold night, Bianca at the ready.
Blood

Chapter Summary

Forays into the desert are never without danger.

Varric could hear his own heartbeat, rushing in his ears. He followed the trail of footsteps and he saw they weren't only the Seeker's.

*Shit, shit, shit! Stupid scout!*

Although it was unfair to put this on them. They were only human, and he had not heard Cassandra leave either. Regardless, he needed someone to blame at this moment.

*If anything, anything happened to her...*

After what felt like hours, he saw a small light in the distance. Type small camp fire. He started running. There was blood on the trail now. As he came closer, he saw it was a Venatori camp. There were three corpses, and propped up against the tent.

"Cassandra! What happened?"

Quickly he knelt beside her. There was a big gash at her side. Her tunic was drenched in blood. He started unfastening the leather straps that held her breastplate in place.

"I heard a stalker, could not sleep. So I followed him." Her breath hitched. She closed her eyes and stifled a groan.

"Shhhhh, careful Seeker, try not to overexert yourself." Varric said tenderly. He worked fast. He started out by cleaning the wound. Then he applied an elfroot poultice. It was a long gash, but luckily not too deep. It would leave a scar though.

"He was going back to tell the others. They would have captured us, interrogated." She coughed and her whole body shook.

With deft hands he started to bandage the wound. Finally he took out a vial. It contained a red substance.

"Take a swig of this Seeker, it should hold you over, at least till we reach camp again."

Carefully he placed her arm over his shoulder, holding her hand. His other arm was wrapped around
her waist, for support.

Slowly he helped her up. She had to lean on him hard, as any effort must have pulled at the wound immensely.

Her shield was strapped on his back and he carried her armor piece loosely over his leather jacket.

Now the initial shock had passed, Varric looked round the Venatori camp site. One defender, one mage and the stalker lay dead.

"I have to say Seeker, you may be wounded, but I would definitely call you the winner of this scuffle."

She smiled, only to wince right after. "Don't make me laugh, please."

They were met halfway by the scouts. They joined hands, placed Cassandra between them, her arms around their shoulders. That way, they carried her back to camp, while apologizing profusely.

He said nothing more of it. She was safe, that was all that mattered.

Scout Morris had helped the Seeker out of her bloodied clothes and put her in her bedroll.

"I'll keep watch this time, messere."

He nodded and went into the tent. All the tension didn't release him yet and he just stared at the ceiling, waiting for sleep to take him.

"Thank you Varric, if you hadn't come..."

"Don't mention it Seeker, I wouldn't want to lose my most loyal reader. Your patronage alone will keep me out of debt for years to come. If I stop giving you free samples at least."

Her answer came a series of hacks and coughs. "What did I tell you about making me laugh!"

When he finally did fall asleep, it was with a wide smile on his face.

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The bandage had held up during the night and it seems the poultice had done some great work in the healing process. Cassandra did realize she needed sutures. They could not go back to Skyhold. The only option was to reach Griffon Wing Keep as soon as possible.

The only option so far was to make a herbal astringent and dab it onto the wound. It would shrink the vessels somewhat, halting the blood loss.

Only that would require her to first be able to leave the bedroll. She cursed herself for whimpering
when trying to get up.

Varric had heard and he was with her in a second. "Seriously Seeker? You must have lost like what, half your blood last night, and now you want to start walking around?

He was right and realizing that made the half of her blood that was left boil. Before she had a chance to speak, Varric took one of her hands into his own.

"You must be horribly uncomfortable right now. Not just because of the wound, but you must feel very helpless."

He had seen the epitaph on my gravestone in the Fade.

How hard it was to admit this. "You are not wrong, I was foolish to storm their camp on my own. I should have roused you and the scouts."

Again he stopped her before she went on a tirade against herself. He was starting to make a habit of this.

"You just wanted to protect, like you always do. I can hardly fault you for that." He sighed.

"Can you, just this once, rely on your friends? Let me help you. We'll get you to the keep and they will fix you up, good as new."

There was an inexplicable lump in her throat. "We...are friends?"

"Don't get any funny ideas Seeker, but let's get back to heckling each other after you get better?"

A smirk. "It's no fun now you're helpless and fragile like a baby nug."

Surprising, just how much strength she had left in her 'good' arm, and it surprised him too.

It was high noon before she had was somewhat ready to start the trek to Griffon Wing keep. Since the sweltering sun wouldn't do them any good, they waited till well in the afternoon to depart.

With her health no longer in critical condition, she had time to let her mind wander to their earlier conversation, about Bianca.

"Very well, Varric. If you wish to know about men I have known, I will tell you."

He looked at her and said. "Look, Seeker. I was only..."

Cassandra interrupted him and shook her head, she needed to get this off her chest. He had to know.

"You are right. I pried first, and fair is fair. Years ago, I knew a young mage named Regalyan. He was dashing, unlike any men I met. He died at the Conclave."

Varric's face got that same look as when he was tending to her. Sympathy, sorry and something she couldn't quite read in his eyes.
"Oh..."

"What we had was fleeting. And years had passed. Still, it saddens me to think he's gone."

She was biting her lip hard. With all that happened, she hadn't really taken the time to mourn him properly.

"I'm sorry."

They rode on in silence. The keep wasn't that far off anymore, but the Seeker's health caused them to pause regularly and take a breather.

Varric had started a fire and Cassandra took out the pewter canisters with the broth they took from camp.

Once the fire was well underway and the broth was bubbling, Varric sat himself next to her.

"Look Seeker, I didn't mean to make you talk about your mage friend."

"I know. I was not trying to make you speak of Bianca. If I was, you would know. I will yell, books will be stabbed."

He laughed so joyously, she couldn't help but to follow suit. She clutched her wound.

"I'll keep that in mind, Seeker." He looped his arm around her waist and gave it an awkward little half squeeze. Like a hug, well almost.

She let him, in that moment, they could both use a little support.
They had reached the Keep without running into any more trouble. The varghest were dealt with swiftly. After resting up and healing, largely at Varric's insistence, they made the journey back to Skyhold. In their absence, they have been kept in the loop by Nightingale's ravens.

The Inquisitor had an ambitious plan and they wrote for Varric’s and Cassandra's input on the matter.

Orlais was in the middle of a civil war. On one side was Gaspard, the Empress' cousin. On the other, the Empress herself. She was going to throw a grand ball at Halamshiral and host peace talks. Even though she hadn't invited the Inquisition, they would get in as a personal guest of Grand Duke Gaspard.

Safe to say that Skyhold was once again in full preparatory mode. This time however, not only weapons and armor were prepared. People were wondering what to wear. There was an upsurge of color and ruffles. The main hall had almost been turned into a fashion show.

After Varric had saved the Seeker, and they had their talks, something between them had changed.

Sure they still traded insults and jabs at each other, but differently. Hard to put into words, and for him, that was quite the feat. Their lunch dates were daily and implied. He would not ask her anymore and she would show up. And if she didn't, he would go seek her out. While training, Cassandra sometimes lost track of time.

"Hey Seeker, how about replenishing all that energy you just expended."

She looked up and wiped her forehead.

"After I freshen up, Maker forbid I appear to lunch, smelling like the horses."

When Cassandra came in, her eyes fell on a group of ladies. All kitted out and chirping loudly about their dresses and masks. She made 'her' disgusted noise.

"Urgh, they remind me of the dallying nobility back in Nevarra. Making light, wasting food decadently while people starve."

She rarely mentioned her home country. What he heard wasn't too positive. They had been so neck deep into the Inquisition, that his thoughts never wandered further than defeating Corypheus.

"Think you'll ever go back to Nevarra, Seeker?"

"Why? Are you eager to see me go? She answered with another question.

A sly impish grin appeared on his face.
"I wasn't, actually, but now that you mention it..."

"How do you know I wouldn't just drag you along?" She barely held in a smile.

That was the last reply he expected.

*Could it be?*

"Be still my heart! I've grown on you."

Again, that look he couldn't read. He berated himself for having such a cliche thought, but what beautiful eyes she had. Dark, fierce, expressive.

"Like fungus." Came the answer.

"No, no, no, I will not!" With big paces Cassandra stormed out of Josephine's office. The latter followed her holding some burgundy dress.

"But Lady Cassandra, you would look marvelous in this. The Inquisitor was adamant that you come with!"

The angry Seeker stopped and turned, staring the poor ambassador down.

"Pray tell Josephine, does it come with a belt to strap my sword onto?"

Where any normal person would have backed off by now, Lady Montilyet didn't. She held up the dress to the grumpy Seeker.

"Of course, we would have to see it on, so the seamstress can touch up where needed."

Josie's face lit up and she clasped her hands together.

"Maybe we can even have her embroider an Inquisition symbol onto it!"

Cassandra knew when she was defeated and meekly followed the Ambassador back to her office.

"Did I just see that right? The mighty Seeker, hero of Orlais, tamed by Ruffles?"

Came an all too familiar voice. Before she had the chance to release her ire on Varric, Josephine had dragged her in.

While an elderly woman was taking measurements, Josie was fussing over some lace detail.

"So Cassandra, for Varric I have a vest in the same colors, only with a less revealing tunic. I don't think the Imperial court is quite ready to deal with such. Ah."

She paused, probably thinking of a diplomatic choice of words.

"Abundant growth of, ehm, corporal hair."
The Seeker laughed at Josie's euphemism, but something else stuck with her.

"Why would Varric need to wear the same colors as I?" Josephine gave her a quizzical look.

"Well, since you two are almost constantly together, so I assumed..."

When Josie read the look on Cassandra's face, she didn't finish that sentence and flashed the Seeker a big smile. Had she winked?

"I must have assumed wrong, beg pardon."
Chapter Summary

Whew, that was a long hiatus. While I still struggle with inspiration, I wrote a really short chapter, in order to get the creative juices flowing again. I still struggle to find words, but I plan to push through this rut and finally perhaps finish this story. Thanks for sticking with it! Much appreciated.

It was time to ride for Halamshiral. All the dresses and frills were packed up. The road was long and some of the poverty they saw along the way was in stark contrast with the wealth and opulence that would await them at the Winter Palace.

As a Neverran noble, Cassandra had seen her share of wealth, but this was different, over the top. The sheer decadence made her feel sick to her stomach.

Varric, who was never too far from her it seemed, picked up on the Seeker's chagrin.

"What is it? You look even more murderous than usual."

That made her smile a little.

"Oh, you read me that easily yes? Well, you are not wrong. All this exaggerated opulence, it sickens me. You can almost taste the deception in the air here. Behind all these masks are some of the worst criminals of this time."

She was getting really worked up by this time.

"And instead of giving them the punishment they rightly deserve, they get treated to the best food and drink gold can buy."

Varric just nodded and gave her a sort of awkward tap on the shoulder.

They moved on in silence and got room and board near the palace. It was time to get dressed and strap their masks on. The Seeker pulled out the burgundy with gold number Josephine gave her. She still couldn't believe she let the Ambassador talk her into this.

A soft knock followed by Leliana's sweet voice. "Can I come in?"

Without awaiting a reply, the redhead came in anyways.

"Oh, the hero of Orlais has trouble taming her wardrobe I see..."

Cassandra turned on her friend, red in the face, struggling with her dress.

"Don't start, don't even start!"

"Hush, don't get angry. Just let me help you."
With deft hands, the rogue tied all the strings and buttons into place and soon Cassandra looked like the noble she was.

"There you go, you look fantastic."

Cassandra threw her friend an incredulous look. She hated being dolled up, but it was good sometimes. To affirm the fact she was still a woman.

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After helping some ditzy noble to find her precious heirloom ring, the Inquisitor's party finally made it into the heart of the palace. Cassandra, Dorian and Varric flanked the Inquisitor as they ascended the steps of the Vestibule.

This place was such a mixture of human and elven culture. On one hand, statues of Andraste, on the other, golden statues of elven busts with golden wings.

And of course, the all present golden lion that represented the proud nation of Orlais.

The grand ballroom was even more impressive. The giant dancefloor was sunken and could be observed from the gallery above. There was food everywhere.

Nightingale slunk into the crowd, looking chipper, like a fish in water. Cassandra went back into the vestibule. He made a note of that, so he could find her later.

For the time being, Varric stuck to the Inquisitor and Dorian, who looked to be in his element.

"This is all so familiar, I half expect my mother to materialize from the crowd and chastise my manners!"

The Inquisitor smiled at that: "Is this how the Tevinter Elite carry on?"

"You could almost mistake this for a soiree in the Imperium. The same double dealing, elegant poison, canapés... It's lacking only a few sacrificial slaves and blood magic."

The horror must have been apparent on both their faces, as Dorian added, laughing.

"But the night, is, still young!"

There was some time to wander around before a course of action was decided and semi-automatically, his feet took him to the Vestibule, where she was.

The Seeker looked like a beautifully wrapped thundercloud. It would not surprise him in the least if she had hidden a sword in there somewhere.

"So having a good time?"

Her answer came as a hacking cough.

"I take it that means no."

"How did you guess. I don't trust any of these masked prancing fools. I wish we would find the threat and deal with it already."

Varric smirked: "Yeah well Seeker, if we did that your way, we'd be holding everyone at sword point until we flushed out the conspirators."
"Something wrong with that?"

"Not really, we would just not make many friends, friends that can help the Inquisition."

Her eyes narrowed: "You mean friends that can fund the Inquisition right?" A small smile.

The dwarf just winked at that.

"So were you planning on spending your evening here in the Vestibule? Leaning against that pillar?"

"Works for me so far."

It was time for a different approach, she was dead set on hating all of this. Dorian could probably cheer her up a little.

"What say you if we seek out Sparkler. Without us he will probably collapse into a pile of glitter with some masked fob."
Eye of the Storm

Chapter Summary

Long time no write. Short burst of inspiration while I should be studying for exams, but it feels good to write again. The progress was choppy, but sometimes one just has to try and push through it. It's again a rather short chapter, apologies!

The Ball is in full swing, The Game is being played and sometimes it just gets too much.

“Honestly, I don't feel like talking to anyone. I just want some air, I shouldn't have come here.” Cassandra sighed.

“Blackwall wouldn’t have looked half as good in that dress tho. The Iron Bull however might have made it work.”

She swatted him on the shoulder, which almost sent him flying, but she was smiling.

“That’s better. Let’s try to get to one of the balconies or courtyards then, find some repose in this beautiful, chaotic storm happening around us.”

It seemed she needed a moment to take in what he just said.

“How do yo write as you do, Varric? I can never find the proper words.”

He raised an eyebrow and tried to hide a smirk. “You. Write. Really?”

“I’ve needed to describe events in reports. They always come off as…”

The smirk turned into laughter. He could just imagine Cassandra, staring daggers at the paper in front of her, getting angrier by the minute.

Time to put some oil on the fire…


Astonishingly she kept her composure, and only muttered. “You...are an ass.”

“Just…helping you find those words.”

When making their way through the palace, they favored less crowded corridors. They found a large open window, it gave way to a small balcony overlooking the large, inner courtyard. It was beautiful, as far as gilded cages went at least.

Without much thought he put his hand on the small of her back and guided her towards a marble bench. Cassandra gave him a quizzical look, but she let him. It felt encouraging.

He only sat down when she did. They usually weren’t so formal and delicate with one another.

This place is doing things to me…

Her, in this dress. It did something to him too. Mostly it didn’t matter what she wore, preferably
nothing. Thankfully Cassandra stopped that particular train of thought by speaking up.

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“I never really apologized to you.”

What was she thinking, what was she saying, why now, in the middle of an important mission like that. Being in a place like this, that was swimming in shallowness, only covered in a thin veneer of civility, it seemed she yearned for some honesty. Something real.

Oh well, you started now, might aswell finish.

She saw Varric looking up at her, a question in his eyes.

“Apologize for what specifically? For interrogating me? For our fight about Hawke? We have a lot of anger between us, Seeker.” He asked, his voice reproachful.

The blood was creeping to her cheeks and she felt the anger and disappointment bubble up to where it constricted her breathing. There she was, ready to apologize and all he did… He must have read her reaction and great was her surprise when he came closer and grabbed her hand with both of his.

“I’m sorry, please relax. I don’t know what it is. Every time we come close to resolving our issues, it’s like a defense mechanism pops up. Because if I can’t hold to the past slights between us, I’m afraid to…I don’t know.”

He let go of her hand. He looked miserable and was, uncharacteristically, lost for words.

Afraid to admit you like me? Is it possible?

Her heart was beating fast, but she kept her composure as best she could.

“I understand. For what it’s worth, I’m sorry for all of it. I could have gone about it differently. All this hurt was avoidable. I suppose it’s hard for me to realize that I can’t solve everything by throwing myself at it.”

The Seeker took a deep breath. She tried to read his expression, but she couldn’t make out what he was feeling. The uncertainty sent her into an anxious spiral, making her usually guarded words tumble out of her.

“And I suppose my apology is for my own benefit, to feel better, to get forgiveness somehow. Reasonably however, you are not obliged to give that to me, and I should live with that. If we can work together for the sake of the Inquisition, that’s all I can really ask and…”

“I forgive you.” Varric said, interrupting her stream of words. “Completely.”

He moved over even closer, so close she could feel his heartbeat. One of his arms grabbed her waist and squeezed it gently.

“Cassandra, I…”

It was like the wind was knocked out of her. She tried to take deep, steadying breaths, but her body betrayed her and reacted to his proximity. Her hands were shaking, her heart pounding. His other hand found it’s way to the back of her head, his fingers softly stroking the hairs on the nape
of her neck. 
In response she wrapped her arms around his neck. Their lips where an inch apart.

“I’ve looked all over for you two!”

They untangled with the speed of an arrow, but it was too late, Dorian and the Inquisitor had seen them, about to kiss.

“Seems we’re interrupting a tender moment here…” the mage said, with a sly grin on his face.

Her face was red, and so was Varric’s. All that pent up emotion and no release. She needed to get the edge off somehow.

“I hope you came here to tell me we can go hit something…”

The Inquisitor was smiling too: “We can, we suspect Venatori intruders to be present.”

The party hurried over to an armor locker. It felt good to slip on a breastplate and hold the sword and shield again. Everyone was gearing up, but before exiting, Varric held her back.

“When all this is over, you owe me a proper kiss.” He proceeded to kiss her on the cheekbone.

"You had better believe it."

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