As if gliding home

by froeken_frost

Finding a place to call home after being tossed into this cruel world is not easy. Only few who are lucky enough will find it. And some might even loose it again.
More than Da’len

Chapter Summary

Haven. A strange place for an escape to end.

9:41 Dragon

Bright green light, pulsating, thumping to the palm of the hand. Stigmatized. Sign of her foreignness. Will the clan cast her out because of it? Will they ever accept her again, as one of their own? Probably not. She fled for a reason, after all.

Sudden grief, all-devouring. Will she ever be able to return at all?

Cold greyish eyes, like liquid ice, scaring her. Will the Seeker ever allow her to leave?

A new pulsation. The mark spreading, retrieving, green glowing. Desperation, disgust rising in her throat. She doesn’t want it, it does not belong to her!

Steps towards her, hushed by the thick layer of snow.

Focus, Da’len!

Constrained aiming her mind to the world outside, just in time. He stops in front of her, remaining silent for a few seconds, observing her. He keeps himself quite distant from her, as always. She is grateful about it.

“Is it bothering you?” His gaze upon the marked hand. Spoken with his calm, calming voice.

She tries to clear her throat. The first words are always the hardest to come by.

“No, it is… not troubling me. Not really. I would just like to know what it is. Where it comes from.”

Well done, Da’len. Be a good girl and keep lying!

No one needs to know how you feel. No one cares!

Her mother’s voice a backhanded compliment. She tries to ignore, but she fails. As always. But the voice in the back of her mind is wrong, this time.

He tries. He wants to figure out, what is going on behind her mask. He might be different. Greyblue eyes upon her again, estimating, searching for something she can’t name. It makes her nervous, she doesn’t like it. She doesn’t like to feel nervous, it’s distracting her. It is hard enough to focus, even under normal circumstances!

Their silence is soft, still, lingering between them. She enjoys it.

Considerations about the silence being too long, in his opinion. Shredded phrases darting in her mind, but disappear again, too quickly to get hold on.
“Whatever gave you this mark, an artifact, containing this amount of power, might still be very dangerous. It must not fall into the wrong hands!”

She nods, mechanically. She likes his voice, she really does. Always this deliberate, calm. She echoes inside her, water on blazing flames. A voice sad, wise. She recognizes it, it speaks to her. Only people who have seen too much in their lives do have voices like this.

The head lifted a bit higher, facing him. Silence lingers for too long.

“You mean: Not again.” His lips curl, hardly to spot.

“Indeed. Not again.”

His smile warms the body, as she suddenly realizes cheerless. It is wrong. The body should not answer to anyone’s smile. The body is just her tool, it’s worthless beyond. It has no right to react. Especially not now! Not to him!

“I wanted to apology. About before.” Mind racing, memories scanning.

Greyblue eyes squinted, filled with anger. Causing anxiety, choking, narrowing. He shouldn’t look at her, not like this. But he is wrong, and she is right. He judges her people without even knowing!

Yet, he is apologizing. Apology means pride and anxiety won’t have to fight anymore. Weight disappears, she may breathe.

“You made up your mind, based on your own experiences. You have your opinion, I have mine. I cannot empathise your memories, as you cannot do with mine.”

Twisting of the corner of his mouth, asymmetric. Smiling should be symmetric. Elves, humans, everybody is symmetric. But not him. There is always something asymmetric about him. Something, that won’t fit exactly. She just can’t name it.

“Thank you for this, Da’len. I did not mean to offend you.”

As he turns around and leaves.

Da’len.

He called her Da’len.

But she is no apprentice, not to him, not to anyone.

Not anymore.

Words, which she wants to say to him, but he is gone. It doesn’t matter. It does not matter what he thinks of her.

Sweet ache, bitter taste. It may not be important, what he thinks of her. It may not. Repetitions, hoping to believe it. It may not matter. Not now. Not him.

Thoughts, racing back to the hunter, from years ago, when it was expected. The body answered him, but she, herself remained empty, remained silent. It was expected. One had to bond.

*The magic is strong in you, Da’len. As it will be in your children! You owe it to your clan!*
Duty, stealing away her breath, leaving her choking, without any air to breathe, but knowing her mother is right.

And she tried. She really did.

She wanted to feel, but yet she stayed numb, callous.

Her mind dead, murdered, stolen by all her helplessness, by all the pain from back then.

The body answered, but she remained silent.

But now it is not only the body to respond.

And it frightens her.

What was dead cannot come back to life. She is a healer, would know.

It may not be!

Greyblue eyes, examine. Warm, smooth skin at her wrist as he helps her closing the first rift. His voice, soft, mellow.

Desire to let go, to fall, to trust. It is dangerous. It is different from the hunter, it is nothing like back then.

He calls her Da'len.

She does not wish to be Da'len.

She wants to be more.

And it frightens her.
No one knows

Chapter Summary

First evening in the Hinterlands

Cool air in her knotted hair, not dragging, but soft, a tender breeze, carefully mingling with the crackling campfire. She doesn’t look.

*Looking directly into the fire ruins the night vision.*

Her mother’s voice wrong in her head. Deshanna never told her anything about campfires. Lectures about campfires, hunting, surviving, all told by father. But father had to train her sister. Memories fading, withering. Too short known, too early taken from her. Regret, more than ever. Only learning from her mother, now lacking the requested skills.

Nothing her mother told seems to help.

Dusky light of the dawn lets the Hinterlands appear peacefully, but the memories keep lingering. Fugitives crying, screaming, whining, lost faces burning behind closed lids. Why did she never learn to hunt properly? Knot blankets?

Mind stumbling, turning. Exhausted by hours of helping, healing. Disgust in all those faces, don’t want to be touched by a mage, don’t want to be touched by a knife-ear.

Low voices startling her. The dwarf and the Seeker closing towards the lonely camp.

“You are still awake, Herald?” the Seeker asks.

Pulse rushing, throat cramping up. Nodding, unable to speak.

The tall woman seemed tired, slouching. She doesn’t even has to get closer to the woman’s mind to feel her exhaustion.

*Answer!*

She obeys, quietly raising the dry bread crust in her hand, almost forgotten. The elf gave it to her, yet she doesn’t feel any hunger.

Big gestures, feigning exaggerated exhaustion, the dwarf sits down next to her. Slight scent of sweat reaching her, trepidation rising in her. May she stand up? Sit away? Would it be rude? Is it normal to sit that close to someone she hardly knows?

*Behave normal, Da’len! No one wants a lunatic around them!*

The voice vibrating merciless, forcing her to stay where she is.

“At least, we had some luck with the rams today! There should be plenty enough to eat at the crossroads tonight!”

The dwarf’s voice creaking, deep, warm, like liquid honey. Yet always a bit too loud, too harsh, to
feel comfortable about.

“Even though it was mostly my doing, no doubt about it!”

The Seeker groans, obviously tired of her travelling companion, but does not answer him. To busy cleaning her blade. Does not seem to be any more interested in conversation as she does. The realization is calming her troubled mind. The dwarf seems to recognize it, too. Their silence lingers above the crackling fire, the Seeker’s sword squeaking occasionally. A silent snore from one of the tents blending in. The elf had already fallen asleep.

She can feel the shallow tiredness, making the bones heavy and her mind blurred. She should go to sleep, she does know. She knows, tomorrow will be as exhausting as today. Frightened by her own thoughts. Two tents, four people.

With her clan it was different. Her sisters knew of her fears, her anxieties. They kept distance.

No one knows about it here.

It is their first night on the road.

No one knows about her fears.
Protection

Chapter Summary

A lonely glade and an excercising mage.

Breathe, one, two, hit, three, four. Breathe…

The rhythm steady, stable. Stroke, push, turn. Breathe. Concentrate, focus. Blade, flashing, disappearing, rushing through the cold, foggy morning air, yet leaving no draught. Focus on the grooved wooden staff, firmly in the hand, aiming, channeling. The fir covered in crystallized ice, shimmering in the first light of the rising sun.

Use your power wisely, Da’len. If the flames try to burn you from inside, channel you power. Let the ice quench the flames!

Breathe going fitful, sword risen, blocking blades of enemies unseen, evading others, turning.

His present almost tangible, bursting the silent of the small glade, as he draws closer.

Move! Don’t just stand there!

She obeys, lowering her staff, the spirit blade disappears. He recognizes her disrupt, stopping, staying between the trees which are fringing the small glade.

Lips forced into an insecure, little smile.

“This is probably the last place I’d expected you, Herald! I beg your pardon. I did not mean to interrupt your training.” His voice friendly, soft-spoken. She tends to believe him, yet he shows no intention of leaving.

Insecurity. What is she supposed to do? To say? Being forced into a situation she had not thought of. Her whole body rejects it, contracting, sickness spreading.

His gaze wandering from her to the sleeping roll beside her, lying messy underneath the trees. One eyebrow risen, lips smirking.

“Please tell me you have not slept here, entirely unprotected!”

Dizzy confusion, anger. Why should he care?

She shrugs, the words sounding stupid, foolish in her head.

“I couldn’t sleep. Over there.” Facing the small town, first smoke already rising from the chimneys. “Just too crowded.”

His eyes focus on her again, leaving her nervous, flustered, she can’t explain it. Imperceptibly nod,
soft smile.

“I do get your point. Even though this might not be the safest place to spend the night!”

He claims to understand, yet he keeps asking. Questions, she can’t answer to, which is making her even more nervous. Why should he care? Does he not realize she had spent all of her life outside of towns?

“I placed some wards as I slept.” Her brief answer.

His smile finally reaches the Greyblue eyes, lightening, as if he suddenly understands.

“I see.” Imperceptibly turning, looking around.

“Yet, your wards are not functioning now.”

Amusement in his eyes, she can feel the glowing in them more than actually seeing it.

“I am awake now. Also, nobody would attack someone who is already wielding their weapons.”

Quiet proud of her answer. Her mother’s voice is pleased.

He closes, a small laughter escaping his lips. He closes. She backs. Not much, but he recognizes.

“Presumably right.” He points towards the grip of her sword, the hand still clasping to it.

“You fight well for a healer.”

Is it an insult? A compliment? She can’t tell. Anew shrugging. Maybe he simply wants to talk. In her clan people used to talk, just for the enjoyment of it.

“A keeper has to guide their clan, has to preserve the lore. Has to protect the people.”

The gaze risen, firmly looking into his eyes. “One cannot protect unless one knows how to fight.”

Nodding, his faces showing interest, making her feel fluttered for no obvious reason.

“An admirable goal. Yet, one can hardly achieve mastership in multiple skills. Especially if walking the path of the Arcane Warrior.” The glance keen, she does not like to be made fun of.

“Probably true. But not a reason not to attempt.”

Don’t be so sharp!

She agrees with her mother’s voice. She does not want to sound as harsh as she does. She tries – and often enough fails – to express herself. Most of the times, she can control it. But with him around, it seems even more difficult.

Yet, he does not seem disgruntled. Relief rushing through her. Maybe he is as unused to the customs as she is.

“Still, as far as I’m familiar with, keeper do not often join their clan directly in combat.”

His face shows an insecurity, a confusion she would have not expected.

“Arcane Warriors once fought for the Gods as their personal guards. Or at least that is what I figured out from my studies. If the technique once was proved worthy to protect the Pantheon, it will be
enough to protect my people.”

Silence falls between them, not calmly as usual, but tense, twisted.

“I have seldom seen a Dalish like you, Herald.”

Again, she is lacing for words. Her mouth dried up.

His look wandering back to the distant town.

“They are probably already looking for you. We should get going.”
A place to call home

Chapter Summary

With Clan Lavellan extinguished, nothing should change. Actually.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Flames joyfully playing, flickering around the crackling branches.

Fugitive heat caressing the body, warmth enjoyable, relaxing. Eyes dare not to close, need to stay opened, just in case. The will to trust already developing, but not yet ready to engage in.

Companions’ laughter banishing the silence, filling the air with their loose chatter. Head heavy from the long day, but still glad about having them around. It reminds her of home, chummy evenings after days too long to stay rational. It reminds her of her clan.

Deep dark grief, overwhelming, mind shattering. Feelings too strong, too big to ignore, unable to cope. Waiting for her mother’s voice, but her mind remains silent.

For her mother is gone. Dead, like all of them.

Nothing to be done about it. No time to grief. Not allowed to grief.

“What you have done for the widower in Redcliff was very kind of you, Herald.”

First impulse to look up, to meet his gaze. But the tears, trying to make their way up, out, hold her back. Eyes locked to the ground she tries to answer.

“He should have been able to visit his bonded’s grave himself.”

Deep breath taken. “This needless war has to stop. As soon as possible.”

His silent chuckle fills the space between them.

“Well, I guess everybody would agree with you on that matter. And it will presumably end as soon as you can make an agreement with this Tevinter Magister.”

Hesitant agreeing, but interrupted by the Seeker’s harsh voice.

“Or we just search for the Templar’s aid instead! Which will probably end this war just as well, but with much less danger for all of us!”

She finally looks up. Meeting light eyes, usually cold, icy, but now carrying a wisp of tiredness, making them softer.

Their encounters with the Templars rising before her eyes. The world torn apart, closing, compacting, crushing her. Mana fades away from her, bleeding out, leaving nothing but emptiness, nothingness.
Head shaken gruffly. No, she does not want the help of people who twist the world purpose like this!

“You are different, Cassandra. You do not disport yourself on your power. But they do. There is so much cold, so much hunger… I would rather first try to approach the mages.”

The Seeker disagrees yet says nothing.

Torn between her companions, the weight of the necessary decisions lasting heavily upon her. Why her? She does not even have an official position? She is just another soldier, another healer, another part of a greater institution. She never asked for any of this!

Yet, they leave it to her. To her, who can’t even really cope with her own life!

But they can not know. Not, if she does not let them know. And she won’t.

Homesickness crushing upon her, out of the sudden. Her mother may have had her mistakes, but at least she had known about the inabilities of her oldest daughter.

Sighing. Her sisters’ laughing, the playing children. Mother trained her for making decisions. That’s what a First has to learn. But just for her clan. Just for a grouping she understands! One she can handle!

But it is irrelevant now. They are gone. They left her behind.

Strangely, she had found solace in the thought of them being somewhere out there. She could not have returned to them anyway. But the thought of having a place to call home, somewhere, had truly been calming.

Deep breaths, Da’len. Hold yourself together!

Deep breaths. Repeat.

Her gaze lifting from the dancing flames, desperately facing the darkening horizon.

They are somewhere out there, decaying, without decent graves to be buried in. If only she could do it for them. If only she was allowed to leave, to ensure a proper burial herself. If only she could lift up, soul spreading its wings, sailing over the hushed lands, searching for them. Searching for a place never truly known, a place to call home.

Chapter End Notes

In this version, Clan Lavellan gets extinguished a lot earlier, a few weeks before "In hushed whispers"/"champions of the just" takes place.

Excerpts from "Moonlit Night" by Eichendorff

It was as though the heavens
Had silently kissed the earth,
Such that in the blossoms’ lustre
She was caught in dreams of them

The wind crossed through the fields,
And swayed the heads of grain
The forest softly rustled
How starry was the night

And my soul spread
Far its wings
And sailed o’er the hushed lands
As if gliding home
Faded future

Chapter Summary

Returning from Redcliff castle

The clearing greeting her, calm, peaceful lying on top of the mountain. Breath fastening of the exertion of climbing. Mind tumbling, thoughts raising, imposing on her. Desperately pushing them aside.

Can’t deal with them, not now, not yet.

A casually gesture and her wards are working again. She does not wish to get interrupted in her meditation.

The lush grass beneath her catching her, offering rest. Fatigue singing in each bone, demanding sleep, yet she withstands.

Legs crossed beneath her, back upright, lids closed.

Concentrate on your breath, Da’len.

Her breath fluently, gently gliding over parted lips. Her mind calming along with it. Screams becoming muffled, pain hushed. Her mind concentrated on the point between the closed eyes.

They made it. They are safe. Not one died. They returned.

All these terrors she has seen, faded away. The future is unwritten again.

The spymaster, flesh cut from her bones, nearly reduced to a skeleton, only hatred left in her once bright, blue eyes.

Her throat cut open, incredulous hands reaching for the wound, her body giving in.

The own throat burning still from her horrified scream.

The Seeker kneeling in the small cell, faith nearly faded, torn between guiltiness and self-recrimination.

Desperate hope rising in her eyes as she faces the Tevinter and her. Red glowing, hardly to spot, swirling around her body. Determined fighting, rushing through the castle. Released for now she can help again.

The archer’s silent curses, tying to remember long lost little poems to keep insanity at bay. Fear written all across her face as she recognizes them. Then, facing her fate, no hesitate in her gaze.

And him. Breath tries to fasten again, she holds it down, strained. Devastating pain in once beautiful eyes, now glowing red, growing wider in disbelieving relief.
His mind capturing the situation far or quickly than she had expected him to. Yet, the red is in him, torturing him, she can feel it but she can’t help. She is a healer, she needs to help!

"I’m dying but no matter."

Words cutting through her mind, in her memory, cutting through her now.

He won’t even let her try. Unlike the others, he does not seem to take encouragement from them returning. No militancy in his eyes as in Varric’s, no determined duty as in Cassandra’s. There is nothing but sadness and fear.

"I’m dying but no matter."

He knows. All of them know, probably. But he is aware of it. As they decide to buy the Tevinter mage all the time they can get, he just glances at her. A strange look which she cannot classify.

Body and mind numb as he turns and leaves.

It is not right. No one should die for her! She is not worth it, she is not worth of any of this!

But no one would listen. There is nothing for her to do. Just stand there, praying to all the Gods, crying out for help, for the assistance they have never shown to her.

Door smashed, Leliana’s arrows hissing through the howl-filled air. His body crashing onto the ground, motionless, lifeless. First impulse to run, to help, to protect, but with all vengeance holding herself back.

"If you move, we all have to die!"

He was right. He died, but it didn’t matter. He is back, as is she, as are all of them. The future never became reality.

No one knows what happened except from what they were told. Only the Tevinter mage remembers.

No one saw his glance before he died.

But she won’t forget it. She will never forget.
“Who is next?” Question from heavy lips, tired, numb, just as the rest of the body as she rises. Weak nodding from her opposite, a human woman, young, her face distorted, weeping now and then of pain. She lowers beside her, hands calming on the woman’s arm. Skin hot, sticky of sweat. Forcing herself not to take away the hands in disgust.

“Stay calm. Relax.” she demands.

Always talk to your patients, Da’len. It will calm them. Calm patients are easier to heal.

Eyes flickering in her direction, searching for help.

Forcing the corner of the mouth to lift. Patients like it when their healer smiles. Patients are strange. She does not heal better just because she is smiling! But there are many things she can’t understand yet.

She takes the hand of the woman’s arm, tracing over the stomach, hardened and cramped. Eyes close by themselves, she reaches out for the fade’s energy. Its power nestling up to her, vibrating, pulsating. Behind closed lids the world rises again anew, radiant strands made of light shaping the woman’s appearance, trying to shut out the rest of the world.

What she sees she does not like. In the center of the woman’s body the strands are gaping open, the mesh torn. Dark streaks shadowing, blood leaking. A wound not noticeable from outside.

She focusses on the energy of the fade surrounding her.

First get rid of the blood, then locate the wound. There.

Edges gaping, accusing. She forces them closer, reaches out for the fade to hold them together. She needs time to yarn new strands, to reconnect to broken ones.

The woman’s mind fading away, she won’t have enough time!

The pain, reflecting her patient’s, growing stronger the harder she tries to focus.

Ignore the pain! It is a liar, a trickster. It is not real!

Too much blood lost, the wound too big.

Desperation tries to catch her with its sticky fingers, but she forces it back. No emotions allowed, they will attract demons!

As the thought floats away she can feel it. A presence of someone else. She flinches, but this is different from what she expects. She can sense it, its intention, but there is no malice in its essence. She feels its pain, but not real, mirrored. Mirrored as the pain she feels, just a travesty of the patients
pain. Its intention dominating everything in its presence. Breath stagnating, the intention so familiar to her.

*I want to help*! *She is dying! It hurts… Let me help!*

Thoughts in her mind, words, but not the remnants of her mother’s voice. Different, softer, nothing she ever faced before. Unlike a spirit, unlike a person. Nearly material, but yet a creature from the fade.

*Don’t ever trust the fade, Da’len!*

It is right. The woman’s body giving up, her mind weakening, welcoming the cold which reaches for her limbs.

Concentration digresses but it may not. She locks the creature away, keeps on working, but it won’t work. One spot is renewed but the last one torn open again. Hopelessness clouding the strands, suddenly vibrating as more words appear in her mind.

*I only try to help!*

The tries to deny it but the strands calm, she can reseal them. The mesh is stable again, blood stays where it is supposed to.

*Ma serannas.* Her silent thanks to her unknown helper. Feelings of joy in her mind, but not her own. Then she is alone once more.

The woman’s mind growing stronger, the entity gone.

She resolves herself from the fade, opens the lids.

Confusion replaced by panic, choking in her throat.

But she is still herself. Inside of her, there is no one but her. The demon is not here, it is not inside of her, it truly disappeared.

She is still herself.
No child anymore

Chapter Summary

Escaping from the burning Haven

9:42 Dragon

Desperate pant for air; head, back, lungs aching, sudden lack of breath. Knives, in her head, her body, her thoughts. Cold, biting, burning, scorching, encasing her. Lungs filled with fire, every breath fanning the flames, punishing her. Darkness behind her lids, closed. To heavy, to big the effort of opening. Silence, tempting, calling for her.

_Do not give in!

Why?

Giving in promises quietude. Giving in promises peace. Giving in promises to end the torture, for the first time.

She is a child again, and her body betrays her. Weak, so weak, battered. It hurts, everything hurts, her mind twisted, pulsatile behind her temples.

_Do not give in!

Go away!

_Do not give in!

She does not want this! She does not want it!

_It is too cold!

Eyes teared wide open, heartbeat pounding loudly in the ears. Dusky light, shadows falling down on her.

It is cold. It has not been cold, back then.

She is no child anymore. There is no mother left to fear.

_Run!

Her own voice within hear head, not her mother’s.

Where to? From whom?

Gaze wandering around, trying to figure out a way, some way.
Snow, she recognizes. White, untouched. But then darkened, spoiled by her blood, splints of wood all over it.

Silent memories crawling back into her. Screams of the moribund echoing inside her.

Glowing eyes facing her, grim hands reaching for her. Back then, now. Delivered, weak. She was weak, again, still. Soaked clothes heavy on her body, either snow or blood, she can’t tell.

*Run!*

He won’t get her. Not this time. She is no child anymore!

Every streak of her body protesting, punishing her. She wants to stay, lying there, embracing the kind darkness which the whispering silence promises.

Just a single gaze, just a single taste!

A child, crying, clinging to its mother’s skirt. An old man, refusing to let go of his wife’s dead body. All of them, all of them under her charge. She was supposed to protect them. She failed. She failed her clan, she failed these people.

*You failed them, Da’len!*

Her mother’s voice cold, harsh, unforgiving. She knows the price one has to pay, she told her often enough.

*Protect your clan. There’s nothing beside of it!*

World turning, spinning, blurring, baneful sickness in the stomach, fervent try to reach up.

*Do not weep. Show them strength!*

She can’t, she can’t. It hurts, it hurts so much!

*Proove to me that you are worthy!*

She sits. Wooden grip above her, solid enough to raise herself to her sore feet. Screaming, white gleaming pain in the shoulder, but she remains silent. She stands.

It *is* cold. It is cold and her inside is not torn apart. It is better than back then!

She can make it. She has to!

Hobbling steps towards the shady, distant grey dawn. The pain keeping her awake, the head heavy and foggy. She wants to stop, to rest, but the thought of getting started again keeps her going.

The ache awakens the memory.

*Never again!*

All her vows laid vast. She had lost control, delivered to harsh, reaching hands, desperation reaching for her thick, black, letting her ache, shivering from the helplessness.

*He wants to kill me.*
Sudden relief as she understands.

*It is only my death he demands.*

It is different from *him*. He doesn’t want *her*, he just wants her to die. Feeling of relief flushing through the body.

He just wants her death.

She is no child anymore. Today, she can run!

The cave more and more lightened, yet still dusky light filling the narrow walls. Every step the cold hits her harder, snow surrounding her, cutting the face. Tempting her to let go, to fall. It promises cover, promises shelter from the world.

But she knows. She knows about the raging storm which cannot hurt her. She knows about the snow which cannot get her relief.

Step by step, struggling against the storm against the snow. Against her fatigue in the head, against the weight of the limbs, against the frenzied ache in the body.

*They had your body, yes. But it does not matter. You are your spirit, Da’len. Just concentrate on your mind, and nothing else!* 

But her spirit, her mind are exhausted. There is nothing more they can give. Her mother’s words are no help. They can’t get her out of the wilderness, they can’t lead her any further.

Mumbled words in her mind, again, but she can’t understand. The traitorous legs failing her. They don’t even notice crashing into the ground.

The words repeat, coming closer, becoming more comprehensible. But still they stay without any meaning.

*Get up! Do not rest here!* 

The body becoming heavier, her mind tilting.

She is not allowed to give in, but the hot sickness keeps her, refuses to let her go.

Voices fill the air, words ripped from lips by the raging storm. Firm hands reaching out for her, lifting the body up. She doesn’t want to, it terrifies her! Lids fluttering, trying to open, but their weight is too heavy again. Oily scent of armour, metallic from blood. The body denies to fight, fails her again. The voice now closer to her, determined but not cold. A bit of reassurance finally finds her, when she recognize the Seeker.

She won’t hurt her.

She did not give in. She may rest.

But the darkness is not deep although she tries and tries to let go, to fall into the soft, tender black, but she can’t.

Magic, subtle, gentle caress in the head, in the body. Holding her back, does not let her go, does not let her sleep.
Please!, Her silent plea, but the magic won’t allow it.

She recognizes it, reluctant, restrained, recognizes him. She searches for him, for his magic, finds them. She catches the overwhelming pain in his calm mind, reflection of her own. Healing. He is healing her.

Healing is familiar to her. Healing helps her to forget, to keep the picture, the memories at bay.

But now he is healing her. Twisted, unfamiliar. It shouldn’t be like that! She is supposed to help, to heal. She should not be this weak!

His presence withdraws and he is gone. Her mind empty, silent, she is alone again. Nothing left to keep her from the blackened depths. She falls, warmth filling her sense, tender warmth. It is promising as was the snow. She may fall. She may let go.
Spoken thoughts

Chapter Summary

The ability to forget is not always a kindness.

Her surroundings condensing, slowly but she notices. She greets the spirit with silent voice, a smile on numb lips, an honest one, for his company is enjoyable, pleasant. He is calmness, quietness. Something in his being make her less angry, less scared about herself.

Flicker, jitter, and then he appears, sitting there on the heavy, wooden desk which is now supposed to be hers. The empty room becoming calmer, more right than before.

*Her* room. The thought bulky, unfamiliar. Way too much space for just one person, way too much space just for her.

Cole, she remembers. Don’t digress.

‘‘Wind beating, rushing through the trees, leaves rustling as I fall, slowly, soft. Sleep, sweet, acquiescent, patient. Door to another world, without pain, the hurt forgotten. Easier to understand, easier to control.’’ You will miss it to sleep outside.”

Displeasure, bitter taste on dry tongue. Her thoughts spoken out aloud, resounding in own ears. Wrong, twisted like always, but even worse if spoken. Like this, they seem to be more real, but they must not be real.

‘‘*Do not show who you truly are, Da’len. Don’t ever. It is your façade they see. No one cares about the rest!*’’

Her mother’s words, distort by the spirit’s voice. A silent gasp as he feels the pain they are causing in her. “I’m sorry, Rhachalle. I just want to help! It usually helps… I will try it again!”

His hand lifted in front of her, she can feel his intention.

“No!” A scream, loud, in her thoughts, in her throat. Repulsion, fear filling every inch of her. He wants to make her forget, but she must not forget. She must remember, her mind a sloshing vessel, which she has to balance at every single moment. She has to remember, because everything she knows, everything she is, is based on her memory.

Cole flinches back, pain written on his pale face.

“I’m… doing everything wrong. But why?” His voice hardly hiding his pain, quailing.

Remorse, rolling, restless. She does not mean to harm him. He does not mean to harm her.

“You *do* help, Cole. Just, let me keep my memory. Please.”

Nodding, thoughtful, hesitating. “So fragile, unstable. A thin skin above seething chaos. Never to be disturbed or it will break.”
She nods, hoping for him to understand.

“Do not speak about it, if someone else is around, alright?”

Understanding glimpse. “Yes. Leaders have to be infallible. Have to appear infallible.” He understands. He will keep silence about her thoughts, he will try.

He wants to leave, but decides otherwise and stays.

“You become better, you know? Josephine noticed. And so did Cassandra, after Josephine told her.”

Consolation, warming and shameful at the same time. Indecisive what to say, remaining silent about it, instead asking something else, been on her mind since before her flight from Haven.

“The woman in Haven. Nearly bled to death because of wound in her stomach. It was you, wasn’t it? It was you who helped me healing her?”

Questioning, but deep inside already knowing the answer. Cole’s smile happy, proud. “She is alive.”

She confirms, smiling. “You do help, Cole. Keep that in mind. I am very grateful to you.”

Fading smile, water blue eyes filling with fear, grief.

“Fleeing from the own pain, searching out the ache of others’ to keep the old one from hurting you. Buried, deep down yet always on your mind, always present, hiding, torturing. Foreign pain to evade the own. ‘Selfish, selfish, selfish. I benefit from other’s hurt. I’m not better than him.’

Do not believe yourself, Rhachalle. You are different from him. You do not help other people because of what has happened back then.”

The fade becoming clearer, thinner as he disappears. The desk remains empty as her mind.
What makes a monster

Chapter Summary

Everything is a matter of perspective.

“It’s quiet here. I like it.” His words soft-spoken, a gentle hint that gives her a little smile. Sight wandering, facing him, agreeing just as quiet.

Sera’s snorting voice behind them, disrupting the indulging silence between them. Of course the younger woman dislikes this precious place. Too many skulls, too much swamp. The thought of it makes her smile again. The archer is not made for bogs as she is not made for cities. Yet, she enjoys having her around. Mercilessly honest, still keeping her playful heart, always wearing it on her sleeve. Her perspective so different from her own deadlocked, twisted mind. A spirit similar to her youngest, much missed sister, gone like everybody she had known, gone like her life before. Keeping the archer around means keeping the memory of the faded vivid.

Fastening steps behind them. The Seeker suggesting a place she spotted to set up camp. She agrees. Night is slowly falling, dusky dawn crawling towards them.

Subliminal sadness suddenly. Craving to explore the grove, but no not possible anymore. Not today.

The fade trembling as they pass by. History reaching deep, way back to ancient times. She can sense it even before they spot the two giant statues honoring Ghilan’nain.

She will have to hope for her dreams tonight. Curiosity burning inside of her, anticipation revitalizing, relegating her back into the days she wandered with mother, discovering, learning. Possibilities without counting.

“Cassandra is right, lethallan. This place’s kept secrets are easiest discovered in the fade, anyway.”

His words raise a smile from dry lips.

Camp is set up quickly. Movements equipoised from numberless evenings before. Yet today even less focused than usually. The allurement of forgotten tales and history calling for her. Exciting and frightening of what she may find, disputing in her mind.

The chinking voice of the Tevinter startling her up, ripping her from her contradictory thoughts.

“Actually, I thought only somniari could willingly wander the fade. How do you do this, exactly? Is that some kind of, what? Dalish magic?”

Question too often heart, unpleasant. Deforming, stressful.

“These dreamers can shape the fade, affecting it. But I simply sleep. And hope for some lingering memory to come for me.”

Drawing the Seeker’s skeptical gaze on her, for certain, but she can’t help. She is who she is, and she won’t lie about it.
“So, based on this, every mage could do this? That… just doesn’t sound really desirable to me! Aren’t people afraid enough of us already?”

Insecurity, tumbling in her mind. She is not good with words, she can not explain it any better. Her concern unnecessary for Sera interrupts him from digging any deeper.

“But then why do you search only for such boring stuff? Why not do something funny with it?”

Greyblue eyes shining, sparkling at her, questions asked but no answer demanding, for her answer would never satisfy the younger woman. Instead his soft voice raised.

“This place is a really old one, I assume. Forgotten for centuries. And since it seems to be dedicated to the goddess our Inquisitor worships… Can you think of something more exciting, Sera?”

The young woman rolling her eyes by his words, dripping by sarcasm. It reliefs her, taking away the weight Dorian’s questions left on the shoulders.

“Really? What should you pray for to a stupid hart? C’mon, sent me – what? Grass? Some more of your kind so I can shoot ’em for dinner?” Sera gaggles, dryly but she does not take it amiss.

But then she realizes the woman is indeed waiting for an answer this time. Answers she does not want to reveal.

Anxiety seizing her, forcing her breath to grow heavier, stringier. She can feel how silence falls over them as she can not answer. Eyes aimed on her, their gazes burning underneath the skin. Mind racing, trembling, desperately searching for words.

*Repeat, Da’len. Our legends may always be recited!* 

“I do not only worship Ghilan’nain. I believe in the whole pantheon.”

Campfire crackling after she falls silent again. The Seeker shrugs, turning back towards her blade which has to be taken care of. Sera murmuring something, too low to understand properly, probably something she does to wish to hear anyway.

His eyes however still sticking on her, too embarrassed to face his look, without even knowing why.

“It is actually a question which has crossed my mind before. Why exactly have you chosen to wear Ghilan’nain’s sign on your body?”

Heat rushing through each single fibre as he speaks the words out aloud. Confusing, entangling at the same time disgusted by the body’s reaction. There is nothing insinuation about the way he speaks about it. It is only curiosity!

His gaze still resting on her face, waiting. A deep sigh escaping form unwittingly opened lips.

Maybe she can simply repeat what she once said to her mother. It might be enough for him to stop questioning.

“We pray to Ghilan’nain for guidance. She leads our halla, and we follow.” Sight wandering off to the darkening horizon. The decision so long ago, almost another life.

“I was to be keeper. I felt like… I had a certain need for some more guidance, some assistance, at the time I had to decide for my vallaslin.”
The look on his face slightly amused as she speaks. “You did not mind Ghilan’nain creating all these monstrosities the legends speak of?”

Fretful assuring herself not to look aggrieved.

“She might have created them, yes. But who can truly tell what makes something a monster?”
Sera sometimes links arms with her, trying to cheer her up. The Bull gives her a slap on the shoulder at times, well-meant, amicably. Dorian pats her arm when she tires after long days on the road. Fleeting touches, hardly noticed by them.

But she does, every single one. She never enjoyed being touched. Not since back then.

At her clan they knew. Nobody knows it here. Nobody can, because she did not tell.

She still doesn’t like their brief touches now, feeling foreign hands on the body. But it hungers, the body. She can feel it. It craves for attention.

Maybe it isn’t the touching itself. Maybe it is just her fear that restrains her from enjoying it. Maybe it is just the fact that she is not used to this kind of attention.

This hunger isn’t exactly new to her. It has always been there, hidden underneath her tumbling mind, underneath her fears and struggles. She could always dominate it, oppress it. Something is different, something she can’t name yet. It simply belongs to any living, social creature.

It is there, before her, every day. Looking so native. The Bull, placing a brief kiss on Dorian’s head as they sit next to each other by the campfire, the mage leaning against him. Sera, falling asleep on Blackwall’s shoulder after a hard day. Touches out of friendship, out of fondness. Out of love. The word tasting strange on the tongue, foreign.

The memory of her sister coming back to her, turning from a considerate, clever woman into a snickering, infantile fool as soon as her future bonded was around.

Bitter sigh leaving sour taste inside of the mouth. She believes to understand, to begin to understand. He changes it, changes her, changes everything.

She still is not fond of her companions’ brief touching, but she can live with them. There is no demanding behind it. It simply belongs to their life.

But he has never touched her, not even by accident. Almost.

He took her hand to close the very first rift she faced. He healed her after her flight from Haven.
The body craves to be touched, but she is the one to rule. And she denies it, usually. She is stronger than the body will ever be, it will have to yield.

But now it has grown stronger, stronger than ever. It does not simply long for being touched, it aches for his touches, for his skin.

And it terrifies her. Anguish, creeping in, grim, choking. For she is no fool. She notices his looks, his voice, softening as he speaks to her, greyblue eyes lightening up as he spots her.

But he does not know her. The real her.

He expects a normal, healthy woman. Instead she is skewed, twisted. Broken, shattered.

He will turn away as soon as he realizes. And she will not even be upset with him for she understands.

Her mind comprehends it, yet the body is selfish, it wants more.

He has never touched her.

He talks to her, makes her smile and even laugh. Listens to her, argues with her about historical misinterpretations. Shows her more wonders in the fade than she had ever expected to see.

Nevertheless, he has never touched her. And it slowly drives her mad.
Awakening

Chapter Summary

Some dreams are innocent.

Warmth surrounding her, sweet, mellow. She’s floating, sliding trundling. She can feel as the world tries to reach her, but she bristles. She does not want to wake up. Her dreams have been too pleasant to leave them now. What has she dreamt? She can’t recall, nothing left except the warm, blissful feeling.

She does not wish to wake up for she might be able to find her dreams again.

Sluggish turning over to the other side, own numb arm falling across her waist.

Arms, wrapped around her body, pleasant, more than pleasant, tingling but ensuring.

She is awake at a single blow.

Consternation lets the heart race, head swimming, congealing the body, become entirely numb.

Her dream, so clearly, so vividly in front of her, lingering in the silence of the gloomy night.

Skin sticky and hot against the cool, fresh air of her chamber, the thin layer of her bedroll resting heavily on her. She struggles to free herself from the blanket, drenched by her sweat.

Traitorous legs deny to obey her. Something feels wrong about them, unasked wetness between tickling thighs alarming her.

“Wake up.” his tender voice reverberating inside her mind.

Wrong, wrong, wrong!

This was not a normal dream and she knows.

Breathing heavily she forces herself into sitting. Tries to dry the faithless body with the linen cloth, but the touch only intensifies the painful pounding. She stops immediately.

Fenedhis! This should not have happened!

Developing feelings for him was even bad enough. He should have never known about it!

Deep sigh as she realizes he is much more familiar with the fade than she will ever be. He certainly remembers, too!

Indecisive rising from the improvised bed, stiff fingers tear open the balcony door.

Freezing breeze reaching out for her, tugging on her thin nightgown, disheveling loose hair as he did some brief seconds before.

Moaning unwillingly as her memory crashes upon her.
Shaking fingertips pressing against pounding temples until pictures get replaced by muffled pain.
Better.

She should not feel this way. Not now. This is how she should have felt for the hunter mother had chosen for her, years ago. It had been expected at that time. Not now. Not for him!

Dizziness spreading into every inch of the body, forcing her to clamp on the railing.

Lips, tongues, hot, wet, demanding, giving. Hands upon longing body, searching, worshipping.

She does not want to remember back then, but her thoughts forsake her. It could not be more distinct. She wanted him! Wants him. There is nothing to be compared!

She should not feel this way! Self-hatred choking her, leaving her abandoned in crushing culpability, guilt all-devouring. She is tainted, spoiled. He deserves better than her!

She should not have allowed this to happen. Just a flash of carelessness, but now he knows about her desire.

They made her the lead of the Inquisition. She is in charge. No one is allowed to know about her disgrace. No one is allowed to know who she truly is, which battles she has to fight.

He may not find out, never!

She has to apology, has to sort it out!

Sudden drive gets her going before realizing the movement of stumbling legs.

.Focus! her own harsh voice inside her head. Yet her body stays unimpressed, hands trembling, cold, sweaty, throat constricted. Desperate tries to clear it, preparing it to speak as she knocks at his door.

Wavering lights beneath it, he is awake.

Silent steps towards her, mind racing, telling her to run, yet she tries to ignore it for it would not make any sense right now, body betraying her once again.

He opens, smirking, greyblue eyes darker than known, blame to the twilit light of the candles.

“May I talk to you?” her halting ask.

He takes a step back, offering entry. The sight of the soft lightened room amplifying the nervousness that is shaking her. Yet, she enters, staying close to the door, simple securing to have a quick way out.

“Slept well?” he asks even before she turns around to meet his sight, hearing the smile in his voice even without seeing it.

Fear and nervousness clinching to her, leaving her stubborn, angry about herself.

Her movements too jerky, lips curling, answering his smile. His eyes filled with soft amusement.

She has to put an end to this. Immediately!

But there is only emptiness left inside of her. Words forming inside her mind, drifting away again, she can’t hold to them, fading away, leaving her in embarrassing silence.
“I… apologize. The kiss was impulsive and ill considered. It was probably not the best idea. It could lead to trouble.”

Flattering inside her, breathes shallowed. This is not how it happened. She was the one, the first to make an attempt! Yet, he had been the one to respond. Cool shivering as his respond forces its way back into her mind.

*He tries to end it. Tell him he is right about it!*

But she remains silent. Wants to look away, wants to go away. He is right, she is right. They agree. Why can’t she agree?

“I don’t care.” hushed whisper, both to him and to herself.

The awareness about what she just has done comes crushing into her mind.

*Wrong, wrong, wrong.*

Yet he smiles, warming and caring, tender curving of his lips, reaching his eyes, relief and fear mirroring in them. Affectionately, warming her unasked.

Grey is not a warm colour, neither is blue. Yet now they are. Twisting her world, and he doesn’t even know.
Reverberation

Chapter Summary

Embarking on someone can be...

Fear at first. He might ask for more, for more than a dream, for more than she is willing to give. But he doesn’t. He stays as polite and calm as she had known him. Relief at first, second thoughts afterwards. She does not know much about this concept, about these kind of feelings. Yet, she surely had not expected him to be as comprehensive as he acts.

She expected either awkward silence or importunity, yet he shows none of these. He smiles at her when he catches her eyes on him. His voice stays soft, pleasant as he speaks to her. He helps translating elven runes she does not understand entirely. It seems like nothing had changed. But it did.

Fluttering heartbeat as she sits close to him, convulsive aching of her stomach, now more intense than ever before. Too much on the spot to be ignored.

“There are… considerations.” Indeed, there are. Tension inside that denies to solve, to vanish. She does not deserve this. She does not deserve him.

She has lost the permission for that kind of happiness as she was too weak to defend herself, back then. Even in the happier times of live, the bittersweet taste of guilt never faded, never let her enjoy these moments. She did not deserve to.

The knowledge of her duty bearing heavy on exhausted shoulders. She has to let go of him. She must focus on her response to the Inquisition. She is not free to choose. She never was. And she never minded. Yet again, he changed it.

*Your clan always has to come first, Da’len. Your happiness has never to be an issue. The clan has to be your priority. That is what makes a good keeper.*

Mother’s voice forcing her way back into her mind, relentless advising yet she knows she is right. She had lost her privileges the day her magic manifested.

Bound to her mother, bound to her duty, bound to her heritage.

Eyes wandering towards him, debating silently with Sera as they follow her lead through the hills of Crestwood. Still and sharp, brilliant mind behind shining eyes. Fierce and bold in battle, wise and gifted in understanding of the world. All his contrasts matching perfectly in a way she can not quite conceive.

His head turning as he feels her gaze upon him, lips twisting into a hushed smile, caring look in greyblue eyes. Quick averting, pretending nothing had happened.

She should not linger on her foolish thoughts. The well of the Inquisition is her priority, he would just be a distraction to this purpose.

Why can she not just stop thinking about it?
“Lips, parting at first, taking what was desired for so long, but then compressing, falling silent, remaining silent. Keeping words locked up inside, words that need to be spoken, but would only make everything even more complicated.’ Please, Solas! Let me try to help you!”

Blood freezing inside the veins as the spirit’s words reach her mind, panic rushing through her before she realizes he is not speaking about her, but proclaiming his thoughts, his thoughts about her.

His cheeks and ears flaming red, eyebrows furled as he asks the spirit to stop. Confusion written all over Cole’s face, unaware of the border he had crossed. “But…”

“Cole. Let go. This is none of your concern.” Words leaving her mouth before she can stop them. All eyes turned towards her, leaving her as embarrassed and blushed as him.

Turning the back towards their nosy eyes, continuing make her way through the rainy hills, Cole’s words echoing in her mind. He is as uncertain, as caught up as she is. For some reason, this gives her a great relief.
Shared dreams

Chapter Summary

Shared nights in the fade.

It takes her a few nights, nights of nervous racing thoughts, of fear and overthinking, leaving her even more indecisive than ever before.

The courage to finally seek for him in her dreams overcomes her with a sudden, breathtaking determination.

Sleep slowly settling upon her mind, limbs becoming numb, mind focused on his aura, focused on the urging need to find him, yet awaiting for his approval.

Her meadow, she realizes as she gains consciousness back. Not snowed-in as she remembers from her time in Haven, but flowers blossoming all over it, the mellifluous scent of them melting in the clear, fresh air. Grass, soft and lush beneath bare feet, tickling against the soles as she remembers from her childhood.

And him, standing solitary in the middle of her small glade. Relief, delight encasing her. He did not shy away from her!

Muffled guiltiness throbbing at the back of her head. This might only be a dream, yes, but it still should not happen. She has her duties as well as he has his, and whatever this between them is, it might interfere with those duties.

But this is the fade and she can decide. And she decides to disregard her sense of guilt. Even if only for a night, only for a single dream shared with him.

She can feel the corner of the mouth lifting as their eyes meet.

“Are you…. all right with this?” Her words stumbling from confuse mind and uncertain lips.

His silent chuckle crashing upon her, carrying her away with a wave of warmth rising somewhere deep inside her.

She can feel the corner of the mouth lifting as their eyes meet. 

“You decided to come.” his voice decent, gentle as always, echoing in her mind. She closes the distance between them with careful steps, admittedly slowly but bold, a self-assurance that is unfamiliar to herself.

But yet she stops. Has he truly awaited her? Or has she done something wrong by seeking him out? She does not want to hassle him. Anxiety creeping inside of her, letting her hesitate once more. She does not wish to make him feel uncomfortable!

“Are you…. all right with this?” Her words stumbling from confuse mind and uncertain lips.

His silent chuckle crashing upon her, carrying her away with a wave of warmth rising somewhere deep inside her.

“Of course I am, lethallan. Things have always been… easier for me in the fade.”

Unspoken truth behind polite words, hushed emotions she cannot identify for certain.

“'Lips closed, holding back words which cannot be spoken’” Cole’s voice a reminder in her troubled mind, yet it must not bother her now. There are too many things she is holding back from
him as well, she does not have the right to judge.

The tickling energy of the fade calming her, calming her restless thoughts, quenching the raging fire of guilt, fear and anxiety inside of her. For this is the fade. Everything is possible here.

She has no body to control her. Everything is determined by their memories. She cannot be betrayed by the body this time.

He sits down, pleasure written across his sharp face as he meets the soft ground. Brief hesitate before she settles next to him, close to him. Closer than she ever dared to in the material world, arms gently touching, lightly brushing against each other.

“I always found it rather amusing that the dashing ‘Herald of Andraste’ preferred to sleep on a lonely glade in the mud rather than in her assigned chambers.” Eyebrows raised, smirking. Silent flattering in every inch of the body which is not even present.

“I think you might have slept lonely in the wilderness as often as I have, lethallin.”

Daring flashing within light eyes. “I’d rather doubt that.”

Words ambiguous again, not quite seizable but present.

“I liked this meadow. It has always been so peaceful, calming.” Quickly changing of subjects as she feels his discomfort due to their topic.

A soft smile as her reward, “I figured you would like to see it in springtime once. I think it is even more beautiful like this, awakening from its slumber.”

Tension reaching out for her again as the thought of him conceiving her wishes crosses her mind. Unfamiliar but not unwelcome. Considerations about her are foreign to her. She has to be the one to take care about others. Hardly to remember the last time someone had been as thoughtful about her as he is.

Excitement as she reaches out for his hand, lying beside her in the lush grass. Smooth, tender skin meeting hers as she leads it up against smiling lips.

“It is indeed beautiful. Thank you for showing it to me.”

She might not be able to offer much. It might not be enough for him in the long run.

But it will be enough for now.
Collapsing

Chapter Summary

Even the best cannot save everyone.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Your husband did not survive. I am sorry.” Words falling from tense lips, exerting to keep them without trembling. The patient’s agony still resonating inside her as the woman’s eyes grow wider, head shaking in disbelief, piercing whimper escaping as realisation slowly crawls into her mind.

“I am sorry.” she repeats, throat closing, tiredness in each bone, head dizzy from too many bleary-out days.

She sees the woman’s lunging hand yet does not flinch at it hits her. Pain exploding on her cheek, hysterical crying tearing the foggy mind apart.

“You were to save him! He trusted you!”

Too much to bear, too much to endure. The woman is right in every word yet there is no solace she can give her now. Her being the guilty one might be the only thing she can do now for her.

She turns without another word and leaves, culpability tainting her mind, occupying her thoughts. Grief overwhelming, taken stairs becoming blurred as tears become too strong to be hold back. She reaches the empty battlements before traitorous knees become too weak to carry her weight. Face hidden by shaking hands, unstrained sobbing, trying to hold back, yet walls teared down, too heavy, too strong to be kept inside.

He had been better. He should have survived his wounds. There should not have been any hazard…

Relieved, brightening eyes as she told his wife he would recover. Nothing left but chagrin, hatred, grief. She is healer. She ought to save lives. It is her commitment. She should never deflect from it. Yet thoughts circling in her mind, unfamiliar responsibility, strange appellation, new tasks to fulfill. And him, always him. Circling around their shared dreams, around the feelings he is letting grow inside her. Around the memories of long hidden, long trying to keep suppressed past. Too much to consider, too much to bear. Did she let it distract her? Did he have to die because she was not able to focus on her task?

“He trusted you!” He trusted and she let him down. Failed her task, failed at the only thing she is truly useful to.

“Vhenan?”

Soft-spoken, concern barely hidden in low, tender voice. Rejection waving through her. Not him, not now!
Helpless hands try to dry disobedient eyes while he stops, keeping distance, even now. Gratefulness flashing for a second but being replaced immediately by pure embarrassment.

*Always keep your appearance decent, Da’len!*

“What happened to you? Are you hurt?” His voice rough, apprehension in it, alarmed as he kneels next to her, still without touching her.

She does not want to look but her face lifts towards his worried eyes anyway. The warming empathy in them breaks her will once again.

“He died.” stammering, throat worn down, voice mute, mind blank.

“Under my hands, my hands. I’m sorry, I’m so sorry. I don’t understand what happened. I’m so sorry. Everything got so big. I was so small. Why did I get so small? I should have tried harder, I should have. I lost it. I lost it.”

Realisation of her rant, surely incoherent to him.

*Do never show anyone what is raging inside of you, Da’len. No one will care!*

“I am certain you did all you could, Rhachalle. You always do.”

Words so mellow, trusting. Inspiring confidence, forgiving, indulgent. Soft secureness if she would let dare to let go.

She cannot stand it, too much, too overwhelming.

She does not deserve it, does not deserve any of this.

“I am sorry. I should not have let you see me like this.”

Hash tripping over sore tongue, ungainly rising up.

“You can always talk to me. I am here for you.” Sad smiling upon his face, eyes half-closed lingering on her own.

“Mortals die. I should have gotten used to it by now.” Hesitating then smiling back to him, desperate trying to lay all her gratefulness, all her appreciation in it, every touch, every kiss she is not yet able to give. But then turning, walking away before her body can betray her again.

Trying to figure out the meaning of the sudden shift in his eyes by her parting words.

Chapter End Notes

massively inspired and partly quoted by the staircase scene from "City of Angels" (1998)
A question asked

Chapter Summary

Sometimes a friend might offer help.

Head dizzy, body aching, mind sore form infertile thoughts, circling around each other, leading nowhere.

The patient’s loss still fretting her, but more silent, subtle than before.

Too harsh her behavior towards him, she knows. He has shown her nothing but kindness... And she has simply brushed him off.

Sleep will not come easily to her tonight. It will haunt her, keep her mind and body awake, re-thinking, re-playing it, facing every single scarce word she said, every word he might have understood as unfriendliness.

She should find him. Resolve this. Apologize, right now.

Yet she hesitates. She has been weak, so very weak. Even worse, she has shown it to him. He should not have seen her like this. She does not want him to see the sadness pouring inside her, for he would abandon her without hesitating, backing away from her just as everybody else did.

But she is selfish. She does not want him to leave. Yet, she mustn’t. Selfishness is the worst flaw a leader can have. Conscientiousness prohibits it.

Fear grasping for her. Too much uncertain, too much unspoken. These shared dreams of theirs, almost every night by now, are only complicating everything. The pure thought of him, opening a massive hole of confusion, uncertainty and meaningless deliberation, making her loose her footing, plunging into suspense, an abyss of possibilities, each single one unexplored. And every time she encounters him again only makes it even worse.

A harsh knocking jolts her out of her gloomy thoughts.

Slowly breathing in, slowly breathing out. Repeating.

Attempt of taming uprising agitation as she opens her chambers’ door. Small ease as it is just the Seeker standing in front of her. Deliberate raising of lips as she asks the woman to come in, with all the politeness she can effort.

She does not often have visitors up here, except for Cole, but everything is different regarding the spirit.

Expressions all too familiar on Cassandra’s face as she hesitates.

“Solas sends me, to be honest. He thought... Well, that you could use someone to talk to.”
Her eyes resting on her, biding, unsure.

Truly, she had spent some time along the Seeker, for she feels more secure to talk to than most of her companions. There is no mockery, no polite digression in her way of thinking nor speaking. Yet the thought of sharing the mess inside her with the woman seems way too much to take.

And why does he think…

“Well, I actually thought you may rather need some distraction. If you would like some sparring instead…”

Still feeling slightly ill at ease and confused about his concern, gratitude makes her smile at the warrior.

“I still need some practice in dealing with Templars, if you do not mind.” she hears herself sputter as she fetches her staff and grip.

Her vision spinning around as the mana pours out of her once again. With her magic nullified, weakness crushes upon her, air consolidating, getting heavier, forcing her down on her knees if she does not control herself.

“Attack me!” Cassandra’s voice challenging, commanding.

Breath only coming in bursts, every single one a disputing strain.

She forces her hand into the small pocket of her armour, the cool metal calming against her palm.

Pretending to break down to her knees, hurling the filigree throwing blades into Cassandra’s direction, forcing her to quickly raise her shield, to disrupt her spell.

Lungs refilling with cool air, finally extending again, reaching accustomed capacity. Mana reflowing back into her, rekindling her mind.
Quick visceral strike before Cassandra can recover swiping the warrior of her feet. Her face, reddened and covered in sweat, smiling pleasant at her. “You are improving.”

Kind consolation arming her, yet making her feel uneasy in her skin again. But the Seeker does not feign assurance.

“Let this be enough for today. We need you at your best.”

Still gasping for breath, she simply nods as they start their return to Skyhold, silence falling between them, not unpleasant but comfortable.

He has sent the Seeker to her. He has shown her kindness which she has answered with inappropriate ebullition. And instead of being angry with her, he has searched for Cassandra to console her. She should not be ungrateful again!

“May I…” she starts but courage leaves her again before she can continue. Throat dried up as she can’t figure out where to start.

Cassandra’s face turned down towards her, subtle surprise shown upon it.

“May I ask you something?” Eyes fastened on the muddy ground, suddenly very eager to avoid puddles.
“Sure, if you want to.” No, she is not sure about this, not at all. And yet…

“You are one of the most conscientious person I know.” *And you are nothing like my mother*, her mind adds without her permission.

The Seeker remains silent, seemingly allowing her to adjust her thoughts. Maybe she simply does not know what there is to say about it.

Howsoever, it eases it a lot for her.

Question, tediously framed, hasty asked before courage will abandon her again:

“Is one ever allowed to dwell on selfish pleasure if in charge? Is one ever free to indulge in personal affairs when so many lives depend on one’s decisions?”

The words burning in her throat and lungs, aching, embarrassing, and yet a wisp of relief as they leave bitten lips.

Strange, never before seen expression on the Seeker’s face, amused but yet constrained.

“Well, everyone needs some place to rest at some point. *Especially* those in charge. I myself had to learn this lesson the hard way... As long as it does not distract you from your duties. Or him, for that matter.”

Face glowing, turning heated and febrile, she can feel it, leaving her mortified.

Mind void, thoughts silenced. She does not know how to respond nor how to behave. A plain nod and hushed thanks is all she can figure.

Maybe he does not want her in that particular way anyhow. Maybe she is driving herself crazy for nothing.
Considerations

Chapter Summary

A step taken back.

“Can you spare me a moment, Inquisitor?” His voice sounding unexpected in digressed mind, triggering soft chills running though her.

Eyes flickering through the emptying dining room, no one seems to mind them, yet thoughts already speeding um, stumbling over each other, dried up mouth, nervous swallowing which does not soothe.

The still unspoken apology tormenting her, duties keeping her busy, her mind aiding to oust the discomforting thought.

Yet he simply smiles, subtle, as if for her eyes only and leads the way to his office.

She follows, searching for the best, the most explaining words.

She did not want to be harsh towards him. It was not because of him. She simply had have a bad day. She is sorry. He had been very nice, has shown her more kindness than she deserves.

None of her worked out shreds of hollow sentences sound good enough, her mind letting her down again, now that she needs it the most.

Door closed behind upright back, the tower almost silent except for the spymaster’s sustaining cawing ravens.

“I wanted to apologise. I did not meant to…” Mind and tongue running dry as she notices the hopeless confused look in his kind eyes.

"I don’t think I understand: There is nothing to be sorry about.” His defiant smile returning to his face as he offers her a seat on the comfy settee. Uncertainty emptying her mind completely, unable to express her thoughts as she sits, gathering courage again.

“The evening on the battlements. After my patient had died. You tried to comfort me, and I was so harsh, dismissive to you. I wanted to apologise for my behaviour. It was not appropriate and I am sorry about it.”

His eyebrows furling as he sits down next to her, his arm resting on top of the backrest, yet relaxed, calmed in his posture.

“It was not because of you, I just…” Slow exhaling as she realizes her stammering. He cannot know what she is thinking. She has to explain if she does not wish him to be misled by his interpretation of her behaviour!

Begging herself to calm down, to think clearly again.

“You were upset and sad. You had lost one of your patients. There was nothing dismissive about it.”
His smile does not bear any smirking now, severity instead. “Know that I am always here for you if you have the need to talk.”

Divested from her thoughts’ basis she hesitates to answer, brief sound of surprise escaping bitten lips. “Well then, never mind it. But what did you mean to talk about with me?” Forcing their silence into a new direction, even though she can hear the ineptitude in her speaking.

Fortunately he does not seem to mind it.

“Right. I wanted to ask a favour of you, lethallan. Perhaps you could take Madame Vivienne along with you, when you are leaving tomorrow. No need to worry, I have already asked her, and she does not mind. Instead, she seemed quite pleased with the idea. There lies more orleasian history on the Plains than she could possibly find in our library.”

Anxiety raising waves of deliberation, hunting each other, hunting her, leaving only the conclusion that she nonetheless did something wrong.

His tender laughter draws attention back to him, seeing his head shaken slowly as he keeps talking, voice softer now again, less formal. She is lethallan again, not Inquisitor.

“Do not worry, it is nothing personal. Well, I suppose it is in way.” Dropping his gaze, in his voice, hands wringing as he continues hesitantly. “You said you would need some time for, well, considerations. As have I. Yet being around you exacerbates the whole matter a lot. It is confusing me.” His head still lowered as his eyes search for her again, a smug smile playing around the corners of his mouth. “Furthermore if one considers our shared time in the Fade.”

Memories already replayed in her head too often flooding her mind once again, leaving her as a fluttering, flustered muddle, unable to catch a clear thought. Memories of soft, melting kisses and tender touches, of sweet moaning reverberating inside of her, of breathless wanting.

He has never touched her. Not in this world.

Despite to this, maybe even because of this, the urge to lean forward and finally taste these lips of his, these lips which keep hunting her, grows stronger, the quietness singing between them.

Allowing herself to dwell a second longer on the warming, indulging feeling of trembling excitement, before she forces herself to pull herself together again.

The fainted reprovals grown louder, falling to silence again as she nods.

“Of course. It is probably for the best.” A soundless whisper, trying to hide her interior sundered, for she understands him, knows this is the right thing to do. The only right thing left.

They should not continue. It is wrong against all conscience. Too many lives depending on her actions.

No time to spare, no thoughts to digress.

She comprehends but it hurts nevertheless.

Some weeks by her won, apart from him and his confusing presence, back in the Dirthavaren will do her good, will silence the selfish voices within her.
Absence

Chapter Summary

Lonely nights on the Exalted Plains

As she awakens from the first night, empty and black, lacking real dreams, lacking him, she is not certainly concerned. Despite his demand for some distance, of not taking him along the Dirthavaren, he had visited her dreams, tender smile on soft lips, sweet, promising kisses shared, just as if nothing had changed.

Yet, they did not share their dreams every night. The silence of her sleep leaving her less rested, less revived than with him, for if he is not there to calm, to focus her mind, the well-known nightmares, born out of suppressed memories, haunting her, subliminal but yet present, bequeathing a vaguely taste of bitterness in parched mouth.

She awakens from her shallow sleep with soft wistfulness and rises quickly before the unpleasant remains of the unwanted dreams can reach her awareness.

As he stays away for the second night, barely hidden, seething feeling of insecurity starts to from troubled mind, chased and caught by the old-familiar nightmares of the night from nearly twenty years ago.

Awakening less softly, less slowly, but harsh, merciless.

Skin sticky from dried sweat, mind slowly, foggy, uncertain of what reality is and what just memories become dreams, numb limbs, refusing to move as she violently forces her way out of the black, paralyzing darkness. Deep, concentrated breaths as mother told her once. She was used to them, before his visits. It belonged to her life, these breathless hauntings, this capturing darkness, only broken by glimpses of ancient memories from the fade if she is lucky enough to find them. Changed within a few weeks with him present in her sleep.

Way too attached, way too depending.

She must be able to deal with it, must be able to endure by her own.

Breathe in. Breathe out. Repeat.

Trepidation slowly fading away, breaths coming and going easier, ability to open eyes again, to get up.

They never stayed away from each other for more than one night. This is unusual, even though she had not searched for him. It always seems easier for him to find her. She simply hoped….

But he did not come.

Concern she was lacking yesterday, now overtakes her with a vengeance she can barely withstand. Countless questions summoning within her, making her dazed just by listening to them.
Did something happen at Skyhold? Did something happen to him? Has he finally decided what she couldn’t? That what they are doing is wrong? Is this his way of ending things?

Denial whisking every other thought away. He would not do that, would he?

He would give her a proper goodbye, a proper ending. He would tell her how he had decided.

Wandering thoughts back to their last shared dream as she dispatches her morning routine by default. Unfamiliar, never seen city, never seen palace filled with wonders and beauty beyond her imagination, slow dancing to never heard melodies, coruscating stars above them, delicate touch of his hand on the waist as he leads their dance, steady, firm.

No, it had not seemed like a goodbye.

The third night she does not bide. She closes tired eyes as she lays down on the hard rigid ground beneath the thin bedroll, focusing on him, his radiant mind, his warming presence she misses so much. She is greedy, the knowledge is gnawing on her, guttering her.

She does want him to be safe. But she also wants him by her side again; a wish born out of purest selfishness, a perception which should be enough to prevent her from seeking his presence, especially if he truly does not wish to encounter her. But it is not.

The worries about him persistently on her mind, the whole day, torturing it with questions she cannot answer, with scenarios of what could have happened, distracting her till the point that she is endangering their group with her lack of concentration.

So she seeks for him. But her dreams sty in salty, caustic solitude that contaminates her mind.

Her awakening for the morning watch is as hard as the morning before, still unaccustomed again to her lifelong load.

However, the billows of the remnant nightmares vanished in a heartbeat as Cassandra wakes her with his name, hasty fallen from her lips, concern echoing in her voice.

The body fighting its way from the constraining bedroll in a second, rushing out of the empty tent as fast as possible.

Only a brief moment of prudency for she is only wearing her nightgown before the built-up sorrows prevails again, rousing, all demanding, unignorably.

As she spots his lean stature dismounting, she can feel the tense body release again, as if seeing him healthy, unharmed before her would somehow tie up all the loose ends.

Yet as he turns, his look searching for hers, as she softly calls him, she frowns.

His face pale, sharp by depletion, dark circles from more than one sleepless night underneath his usually bright eyes, now darkened, deeply troubled, a fear within them she has not seen in him before.

His voice brittle, raucous as he addresses her. “I may need to ask another favour from you, Inquisitor.”
Loss

Chapter Summary

All new, faded for her.

“Ma nuvenin.”

His voice rasping, lacking its usual bland overtone, soaking sadness as the spirit fades.

His grief lingering, dense and solid surrounding him, reflected in her mind as she knows it from healing.

His pain aching, twisting and distorting, empathy like a curse upon her as he wishes his friend safe journeys.

Throat narrow, trembling uncertainty as she forces herself to say something, anything to help him, to ease his pain.

“I heard what it said. It was right. You did help it.” For she knows his feelings so distinctly written upon his face, display of grief tearing her apart.

His usually always polite remaining mask dropped, without pretending, without poise, unveiled for what feels like the first time.

All the anguish, the sense of indebtedness, the feeling of not having done enough, all too familiar to her, suffered from them far too long. He shall not got through them the way she did. She will not allow it.

“Well, I must endure.” His voice breaking again, subtle shifting that increases the hurt inside her, increases the urge to help, to protect, to ensure him he did everything he could. To dispel the posture of solitude he shows, to show him he is not alone, not if he does not wish to.

Own voice hardly audible as she offers any succor she will be able to give.

His movements maladroitly as never before as he rises, his sight avoiding her, leaving her all closed-in, uncertain of what to say or do, the urge to help him in any way growing stronger by every heartbeat of lasting, frozen silence.

“You already helped. All that remains now is them.” Unexpected softness in his voice before sudden shift to a hatred as he turns towards the mages who summoned his friend, making her tremble from the inside, old oppressed for too, long bulging out, as his move starchy, infuriated as they try to thank him.

Their impudence raising rejection raising disgusted, nearly unhidden rage within her, these imbecile morons who understand nothing, yet try to control and destroy everything that is precious and rare!

She can see his teeth gritted, expressions wrathful, devastating as the blast shatters the mages’ bones.

Acrid, caustic smell of burned flesh awakens the objectionable satisfaction within her deepest buried
memory again, nearly overwhelming her along with the relieving, gratifying memories, a sentiment so strongly she has to close the lids for a second to drive them away.

“Damn them all.” His wrathful outcry resonating within her, answering the darkness, shatter her mind once more, before the sudden lowering in his voice deflates her again, lets her crush out of her hate-filled, detested memories back into the reality. “I need some time alone.”

Words merely spit out than spoken, already while leaving, still without looking at her. His disappearance as sudden as his arrival.

Crumpling emptiness inside her as she watches his stature departs, desire to run after him, to hold him back, overshadowed, swallowed by deep depletion, denying her to move, shattering her as she can only stand there and watch him leave.
Emptiness

Chapter Summary

He needs time to mourn. She accepts.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The gates always crowded, filled with people, busy and haunted by their duties. Merchants hoping for some good trading, merchants and volunteers with faces filled with sometimes relief for finally reaching Skyhold, sometimes with eager. Soldiers practicing, Leliana’s spies and scouts rushing, hurrying for no one lets the Nightingale wait.

The big gates which offer shelter, offer resort for all these people, never abandoned, never resting.

Yet they seem empty to her, every time she glances over to them, they seem somewhat emptier.

New excuses to spend time near them, sparring with Cassandra, checking in with the Commander or getting lessons about Orlesian trading by Bonnie Sims, even spending time with Madame de Fer, friendly spoken words and well-intended comments on fighting like what she calls a Knight-Enchant, intended to flatter, but empty beyond, polite poison sinking into her, smug grin of the enchantress, twisting her sore stomach but staying, for from the balcony she can watch the gates without someone noticing.

Paperwork now done on her own balcony instead of at the heavy, uncomfortable desk, back leaned against sun-warmed wall, eyes digressing from her work more often than she will ever admit.

Passing by the Nightingale every morning before the collective breakfast, for he might have returned in these rare hours of the night in which she actually found some sleep, restless, terrified by her dreams, becoming more vividly every time. Entering the tower, his tower, nerves trembling underneath tickling skin, as she crosses his room to reach the stairway to Leliana’s office.

Hollow disappointment as the room is still empty, without any new signs of his presence recognizable as she scans his desk briefly, but can’t figure anything out of the mess on it that usually would have annoyed her, but is now just another painful reminder of his absence.

Deflecting quickly and meeting the Nightingale for the recent updates. Even allowing herself to talk about the time her and Mahariel’s clan spent some time together in the Free Marches, even if Leliana, always focused, always reserved, can’t hide the pain in her eyes, in her mind as she hears about her absent bonded, deep understanding of her feelings leaving a well-known bitter taste.

She denies to leave Skyhold already again, not this soon. It is still an appropriate time, even though it is no usual for her, yet her companions seem to enjoy the rest. At least the Ambassador seems happier since Cassandra is staying at Skyhold for more than just some days in a row.

Quick trips of scouting, comforting the visiting nobilities. There are more than enough ways of filling one’s day, and still her duties here seem endless.

But it cannot last much longer, she will have to leave again soon enough, or it will prompt questions
she is not willing to answer. The knowledge of it gnaws at her, at her mind every time her gaze wanders off to the gates again and does not find him.

The worst are the nights, endlessly, slowly. Her memories, awakened and more brisk than ever since the events on the Dirthavaren, growing louder as tiredness and night are falling onto her, singing in her veins, demanding, claiming attention.

She denies herself to search for him, fighting the urge to let her mind wander, keeping it focused on herself, on the present as she forces sleep to take her away. He needs to mourn. All she can offer him now, all she can do to ease his pain is to leave him alone as he wished to. Her own demand of seeking for him is nothing but selfish.

Yet she keeps hoping, hoping to suddenly feel his presence in her dreams again, hoping for a sign, for anything that proves him to be still out there, him to be still alive, unharmed.

But her dreams stay empty, without him.

Captured between her crawling nightmares she feels the heavy earth falling away from all the stars above into emptiness and becoming nothing but solitude.

Until one night, after awakening screaming in entire blackness, she walks the ramparts again, moving the body to ease the mind, as she spots the light of a candle burning behind his room’s windows again.

He returned.

Chapter End Notes

quoted (modified) from R.M. Rilke's Autumn Poem

The leaves are falling, falling as if from far up, as if orchards were dying high in space. Each leaf falls as if it were motioning "no."

And tonight the heavy earth is falling away from all other stars in the loneliness.

We're all falling. This hand here is falling. And look at the other one. It's in them all.

And yet there is Someone, whose hands infinitely calm, holding up all this falling.
“I wasn’t sure if you would return.” Voice sweetened, softened on purpose to hide the gaping chasm of solicitude and apprehension, but stopping to pretend as she sees the worn-out look in his wary eyes.

“Quiet asking for his state, misgiving already rising up within her again, threaten to silence her at all. His look evading hers again, his answer given with a gloomy tremble within his voice, the deep sadness resonating in it that cuts right through the bones just by hearing.

“It hurts. It always does, but I will survive.” One of the seldom hesitations elevating in his usually fluent way of speaking as he thanks for her help. Yet his words don’t help her, and neither him, it seems. The sound as he calls her friend again, twisting the stomach, aching in the mind. He does not know her, otherwise he would not consider her this.

Yet he is still in sorrow and she should not dwell on her self-centered thoughts.

“You don’t need to be on your own, next time you have to mourn.” Bold words tumbling from incredulous lips, an honest offer given with whole-hearty. Yet answered by a hardly perceptible smile. “It’s been so long since I could trust someone.” His words biting inside her, her mind spinning from all the things she did not tell him, she does not want to tell him. Lips pressed against each other, mechanical not, for she cannot think of anything more to say, trawling her mind for anything, yet finding nothing but nervous emptiness and ridiculous embarrassment.

His smile deepening, eyes softening as the silky silence between them lingers, imprints of the smallest movement visible within it. “Would you take a walk with me?” His voice melting within the silence as she answers his smile, dispelling some of the lasting sorrow within his greyblue eyes.

The breeze of the clear mountain night against her body as they access the ramparts together, the courtyard dark and silent, even the tavern’s light doused and for a little while even their silence remains devoid. And she can’t even parse, for he is back and he is safe and nothing has happened to him. The relief reaching for her first now, realizing the full significance of it, leaving her mind eased, floating with joy. Need to close the eyes for a single moment of overwhelming flood of emotions, before he speaks again.

“May I ask you a question?” And without waiting for her response, his gaze lingering somewhere nowhere at the darkened horizon, he continues.


Questions rotating within her, gnawing on her, drawing on her, for she has asked them many times to herself before.
Has she changed?

Pictures of the burned body lying in front of her, his scream, racked with pain, resonating within her mind once again, imposing on her with breath-taking force.

Yes, she did change. But before she was spoiled by the mark. Did the Anchor encourage her further change? Or would it have happened either way? Well, without it, she would probably not even be alive anymore.

Which means it does not matter that much. Not to her, at least.

But she can’t say that. He won’t understand. And she is too selfish to tell him for than he would abandon her and she is too weak to stand it, not right now.

“Why… why do you ask?” Her evading, cowardly answer, but he does not seem to mind.

“You show a wisdom I have not seen since… since my deepest journeys into the ancient memories of the Fade. You are not what I expected.” His words soft, sweet, flattering, perfect.

Yet only causing even more nervousness inside her, for she is not used to this, these kind words, this acceptance. Indecision dazing her, unable to think clearly as his gaze wanders from the distance back to her, only lightened by the cold, silver shine of the two moons above them, his face looks sharper than usual, but his eyes gleaming lenient.

“I…” staggering harrumphing, all captured by the way he looks, the way he looks at her.

“I am just like everyone else.”

His brows narrowing, she can hear his disapproval darkening his voice. “Perhaps in the form of your body, yes.” She knows her reaction is way too exaggerated, yet she winces as the words reach her mind.

“You have shown subtlety in your actions, a wisdom that goes against everything I expected.” Speaking this blunt, without any courtesy, without a followed but to enumerate the mistakes she despite made. Only agreement in voice and words, leaving her suspicious and flustered. This is nothing alike she is used to.

“If the Dalish could raise someone with a spirit like yours… have I misjudged them?”

Their earlier arguments back at Haven, years ago now, followed by many others later.

Invidious voice, silenced for quite some time, piping up again.

You are my creature, Da’len. I am the one who created you, you owe me everything. You will do as I tell you.

Hot, demanding fury seething, flooding her as her mother’s voice skirils within her mind once again.

No! She screams against the painful intruder. I am not. I am not your conception. “The decisions were mine, and mine alone.”

Words more severe and violently spoken than she intended to, tasting bitter on her lips.

He thinks he likes her, her spirit, but he would not if he knew all of it. And he would certainly dislike what her mother wanted her to be.
But she did not let her win. It is her mind, and only hers. Mother is rotting in the dark soil, and her mind belongs only to herself.

It is his gentle, sudden chuckle that fetches her attention again, lifting her from her depressing thoughts.

“Most people act with so little understanding of the world. But not you”

Brief flicker of his hand towards her but holding back, retrogressing, space between them broadening. It is first now that she realizes how close they were standing, the cold mountain air compassing her with its harsh grip again.

She can’t tell if it is courage or desperation that lets her reach out, reach out for him, for his arm, to hold him back, to finally dare to touch him. His body warmth underneath the soft fabric nestling against her palm, welcoming, inviting as she begs him to stay, a fleeting whisper only. “Don’t go.”
“Sudden flare of sadness, but sweet softness in his voice as he speaks. Ar lath, ma vhenan. Denial, nonetheless, choking defence. ‘You should not love me. I should not… I will only break both our hearts.’ But he left. Please, I try to help you!”

The spirit’s sudden appearance making the body wince, her mind just alike as she hears the spirit’s word cutting through her heavy, weary mind, still not quite used to him, not used to have somebody around who can read her as easily as he can.

“There is pain inside you, new one, adding up to the old, but I don’t understand. It usually helps people if they hear the words.” The fine, high voice halting, insecure as water blue eyes lay proving upon her.

“Just don’t mind me, Cole.” Words easy from her lips, for it is different with him, with him she could speak, if she desired to. There is no need to focus on behaviour, no need for accuracy in placing her words, for he knows what she wants to express without the bothersome detour.

Resemblance usually, deeper comprehension on both sides, but now the thin face darkens. “But I want to help!”

Atrabilious smile on her lips. “You always do.”

Disbelief deepening under frowned forehead. “He hurts too, but he will not allow me to help, either. But it’s the wrong time. Normally, they are happy now, and the hurt appears only later; words staying unspoken, even if they are needed more than ever, feelings frozen by time, choked by petty lies piled up as time goes by.”

Slow nodding as the description comes to her, observed examples arising, common tragedy masked as day-to-day life. “Maybe you should focus on more urgent needs, Cole. Don’t strain yourself with these trifles.”

Small, silent approval as his answer. “The boy’s temperature too high, can’t help anymore but ease the pain. ‘Not my son, please Maker, not my son. His happy chuckle as he laid eyes on the wooden sword I made for him. So radiant, so buoyant. Not him, please, not him.’”

Stinging discomfort, pain from bitten lips as the spirit repeats the words she saw within the father’s eyes earlier. “Yes, for example. He needs your help more than I do.”

Concerned disbelief along with a shaken head. “But their hurt stains on you. You allow it because you think it reduces your own, muffles it, but it doesn’t. Maybe if you let me make you forget the old one…”

Vigorously refusal towards his suggestion. “We talked about this before, Cole. It is not an option.”

A quick fell of quietness between them as Compassion considers her words. His voice calmer as he
continues. “I just don’t understand why to cling to the old pain if all you do is trying to avoid it anyway.”

Deep resigned sigh about this question, this forever lingering question, which she still does not know an answer to.

“They are… connected. Without the old one, I could love him. I could bond. I could give him what he deserves, what he desires. But I can’t. For if I let you take the pain away, it wouldn’t be me anymore. Whatever would happen, it wouldn’t be real. I don’t want it that way.”

Pale eyes defocusing again, drifting to distance. “He deserves more, more than me. Broken, raddled, tainted. I will taint him, too.”

Writhing with helplessness, all too familiar roundelay of despondence as she hears her thoughts spoken out loud.

“Maybe even the old wounds can heal.” His austere statement easily spoken, well-meant, yet tearing the fog from ruffianly evaded memory, ripping her apart once again. Tight grip, rigid hands, around her wrists, on her mouth, leaving her helpless in every way.

*Use your magic and we will tell them you attacked me!*

Choking, viscid darkness, hot caustic torture, expanding every second into eternity, ripping her apart, yet denying her to fade away. Cruel awaken world, filling each racking passing heartbeat with agony.

It is first Compassion’s stifled cry of pain that vaults her back to the present, bright and fair, it takes her a few seconds to adjust again.

“Creators, no! Please forgive me, Cole. I did not intent to hurt you! You shouldn’t have seen this!” The words stammered, stuttered, fastened in panic. No one knew beside mother and her older sister, no one else should ever know! Freezing pain within her veins as nightmarish imaginations flushing her mind. He may not tell anyone! He must forget!

His voice as shaky as hers as he asks uncomprehendingly: “Why would you keep those? I could…”

“No!” she intervenes again. Seductive, tempting imagination, sweet, white oblivion, promising as the fatigue after her flight from Haven. To let go, to forget, finally forget and find peace.

Never again pain, never again the fire within her veins. Never again the memories she cranks around for years, always cautious not to touch them, yet ever-present, luring in the back of beyond.

She knows about her abnormity. She has seen enough states of mind as she was healing to be aware of how a mind should work. Hers does not. No one else lives inside their mind. People live within their bodies. Memories come and go, on a par with each other, not subliminal and with lasting repetition. If he made her forget the reason why she is different, if she could not remember why, madness would claim her entirely.
Along with the falling darkness, cool breezes come along, gentle, stroking, caressing braided hair, soft touch on sunburned skin. Allowing herself to take a single, deep breath as the ardent heat of the Western Approach slowly fades, melting into the tender warmth of the dusketing night, legs loosely dangling over the edge of the towering rock formation. The peaceful silence claiming finally claiming her mind, slowly clinging onto her, easing her thoughts, and for now she allows it.

The distant sounds of her companions mingling softly with the tender call of nature surrounding her as she tries to let go of the discomforts the exhausting traveling has caused. The wide, broad plains lying open in front of her, allowing mind and soul to spread, to wander, to feel unbound. And for one scarce blissful moment of repose she can catch her breath, feel herself again.

It is first the heavy, broken breaths behind her back that captures her attention, letting her turn her head around and for once not be perturbed over the distraction. A silent chuckle escapes her lips instead as she reaches him her hand in aid to take the last few steps on top of the formation.

His grip soft yet solid against her palm, warmth enfolding but not restrictive. The feeling still unfamiliar but not as unpleasant as she has thought. She cannot help but smile at the thought crossing her mind and he, of course, notices as he rests against the calorific stone behind her.

“You actually made quite a descent choice for making a camp. Down there. There is no reason to climb on these rocks, vhenan.” His voice clinking lightly but his brows are furrowed and narrow with concern, fixing the abyss beneath rigidly. The term of endearment still bulky within her mind but still sending hot rushes through unknown veins, unasked yet not unsolicited.

“You came up here, too.” Her dry statement of an answer.

“Just making sure you will not fall.”

Lips curling as she tries to lay all the reassurance into her smile while slipping away from the edge, next to him. “Honestly, I am far more concerned about you. You do not look particularly fond of heights.”

Words falling from lips more easily than ever before, mind calmed enough to sort her thoughts, new awoken boldness rustling within her, encouraging her to offer her hand once more and even approving of him taking it.
“Well, Cole murmured something about ‘the calling abyss’, so I thought I might check, just to be sure.” His voice still playful, teasing next to her, close to her, but suddenly damped as her mind starts to race.

*Singing, calling, inviting, promising. Just let go, just let go. Let yourself go, fall. In falling, you will be in peace.*

Unintentional head-shaking as the nearly forgotten thoughts brush against her mind once again. Swift forcing of a little laughter to distract.

“I don’t know. I like it, in some way. To be able to oversee everything. It’s freeing. As if nothing could ever touch you, as if you could be free for once, like a bird. The world beneath you, and close to the heavens.” Her munificent answer, for a second surprised by the honesty within her own words.

Even before she turns her face towards him, she can feel his eyes upon her, greyblue glowing with something that might be amusement, maybe endearment. The sudden wish to understand, to grasp him, his thoughts, clenches within her chest. Everything about it, about them, feels so unfamiliar, new, complex. It might not matter now.

Instead, she attempts to lean her body against his and as he does not object, carefully gives in into the sudden, extensive touch, the radiant warmth, the softness of his body and closes tired lids as his arm wraps around her shoulder.

The abyss may call to her on another day, just as the world. For now, all she wants is the assurance of him by her side and the peace circling around her mind.
Choking fears

Chapter Summary

Here lies the abyss.

“They sent me to Adamant. We cannot win but we can buy more important people time.”

Words, strange, resonating within numb, disoriented mind. Cannot assign them, floating desolate through the muffled thoughts. Words, written hastily by a hand writing never seen before, black letters burning, leaving clawing marks behind the closed lids. The submissive, humble words aching within her, pressing her, forcing her to remember, to awake. A letter, only half legible, burned by the fire of the siege.

The siege!

Sudden realisation hitting the mind like a stroke, abrupt awakening of senses, flooding overwhelmed mind with crushing impressions. The back hurting, cold-wet discomfort surrounding the body, strangely unknown, yet subliminal familiar keen scent in heavy air, pressing firmly against the body as she tries to sort the stiff limbs. Weary lids finally opening, trying to make sense of the greenish, flickering lights falling down onto her until she grasps.

The fall, the calling abyss. She fell, but she did not let go. Hand risen in reflex, seizing to the strange, barely controllable force within the left hand. Bright green light swallowing her.

Feet bogged down in muddy water, denser and tighter than water should feel, lungs filled with the sharp scent of the muffled air. Lyrium, she realizes. The air tastes like the sharp jolt that hits the body if consuming the potions.

She does not need to look for the floating rocks nor the all-dominating Black City. This. This is the actual fade. Crossed the veil, it opens up for her, laying in front of her, the real fade, physically to be walked. Heartbeat skipping every second beat as she realizes the whole extend of her situation.

The rushing of feelings all crushing down on her within the short moments of convincing the body to rise, before her mind recalls the fall completely.

Frantic looks around to ensure the safety of her companions. Yet, before concern can take over the reign of the body, they start to move again, too; getting up, seeming mainly unharmed.

Just one more second of lingering, catching unsteady breath.

The mind telling her to worry, to feel afraid, for it would be the appropriate reaction now. Yet she cannot get herself to feel. The gloomy light casting more darkness and shadows than actual lightening this unfamiliar place, despite soothing thoughts, calming the rushing blood underneath tingling skin. Every reason telling her to feel afraid yet she can only stand and admire what is shown to her, completely biased by the sight, by the feeling clinging to her entire being. For this is the fade, the real fade. She never thought she would be allowed to witness its wonders physically.
“Some variety of fear, I guess.” His words confirming the thoughts within her mind, which she still cannot hold on to. This place screams danger within every single detail, but she can hardly withdraw her gaze. The silken silence lingering almost soft within her ears, like a song she cannot hear clearly, but returning to her every time she does not focus on it. Always near, never quite tangible.

She can see the fear in the companions faces; terrified, wide-opened eyes of Sera’s, gloomy, brooding face with hardly hidden trouble in the Seeker’s eyes. The spirit taking the Divine’s form clearly touching the usually brave woman.

It is just in the second she thinks about approaching the troubled woman as she feels rather than hears it. A grutal tremor that resonates until deep inside the bones as the demon finally rises its voice. A voice as dark, as old as the best buried memories, carved into her soul, into the flesh. Older than any personal experience could ever date and much more powerful. For the demon is fear itself and it speaks to her, to all of them, to the primary instinct itself. Even though she cannot understand its words the emotions rising within her mind, finally fitting to what her mind kept telling her to feel.

The demon speaks and the body responds, ready to flee, ready to fight.

Her companions shuddering and jerking, Cassandra’s face twisted with rage, Sera covering her ears in the desperate attempt of shutting the trembling voice out. Seeing their torture growing the chest tighter, narrow pain rising within her. “Don’t worry. It is a liar, Sera. There is nothing to be afraid of. It cannot harm you.” Her attempt to calm the young friend, but she can hear the vacancy within her own words as she speaks them out loud.

He, despite all, stays unblinking, yet she realizes the hardened line around his mouth. “Banal nodas.” She hears his murmured whisper, before all available attention is consumed by the devouring voice, burning her mind and leaving her trembling.

“She is some silly little girl comes to steal back the fear I kindly lifted from her shoulders.” A silent laughter filling the dense gap around her, melting the air within the throat, liquid and doughy within her mouth, threatening to choke her.

“Oh my dear Da’len. How ironical. All these fears seething underneath this well-kept surface of yours! Ah, how much I could actually tell about them! And yet your biggest fear right now is the thought I actually might! Tell me: What would they think of you if I did? Tell me: What would your pretty little lover do if he only knew?”

Each single syllable wrenching her innermost, air fading completely, nothing left to breathe but wet, black burning moisture, caulking the throat, choking her.

Stay calm, Da’len. Do not show it your weakness. It is a liar. There is nothing to be afraid of.

The sudden voice of the mother resonating in the sore mind both easing and unwelcome at the same time. The instructions standing clear in front of her, yet the body, the mind neglects to follow, panic threatening to overwhelm, focus slowly slipping further away, harder to get a hold on it.

Imbecile child you are! Worthless whining weak girl! You are my creation! You will show strength!

The mother’s anger cutting through the clouded mind with a severity as if the mother would be standing right behind her, causing the stomach to twist, albeit the dismay breaks the demon’s spell.

Air becomes air again, easy and dry within her mouth and nose.
“Are you alright, vhenan?” His dark voice altered with concern, letting her flinch once more. Did he hear the demon too? The collected worried looks of the companions do nothing to soothe her.

“We should continue. I am well, thanks.” Forced words lacking any meaning yet meant to calm. She cannot deal with this fear right now. They have to return. There are duties awaiting. She may not fail again.

The lonely child’s fear clinging to her, tearing onto her, old pain trying to claim what once belonged wholly to it. Old familiar shadows hunting her down once again, trying to raze her down once again, ever again.

“Mama says to hush, that others have it worse.” The fainted whisper of the long dead child, words bound to the spirit which surrounds itself with solitude like a protecting shield. Surrender to the mother, dutiful even as its own fear grew stronger and stronger.

She knows the emotions the spirit is showing, all too familiar, a well-fitted glove, too easy to glide back into it. She does not want to feel again, she struggles, she fights.

But for a single, seemingly endless second she is Da’len again. She is Da’len again and has to obey to the mother. For she may not disappoint. She owes perfection, to the mother, to the clan.

The loneliness inside her awoken from its slumber, clawing onto her with its cold, dreary offshoots, before she is hurled back into reality. She may not let it touch her. It can’t. She quickly searches for the stuffed animal to soothe the spirit’s fear. As the relieve delivers the spirit the heavy weight is lifted from her, too. Nothing left but a blunt pressure. She will not fail again.

It finally is the graveyard that almost breaks this promise. His name, letters fat, sticking out, unable to be ignored. The written prove of their fears tough for her, all of them. Witnessing what is haunting them, right now as well as in every sleepless night. Yet the words upon his grave tomb almost too much to bear.

“Dying alone”

Two single words that manage to break her down in no time. The urge to protect, to shelter rising, intensifying with every breath she fights to take. The awareness of how painfully lonely he must have been in this past years hitting her all out of the sudden.

It is not right at all. She should not see this, should not know this, for none of the companions can see anything written on the lithic tombs.

Dying alone.

Thoughts racing back to the long lost clan, inability to safe them.

It will not happen again, her silent promise to him, to herself. She will not allow him to. She will be
there to protect. She lost her family, her home before. She will not lose him as well.
A roaring silence covering the improved, hushed war camp that night. She can almost taste the lingering grief that fills the fresh air. Isolated fires still burning in the distance, the soldiers too tired and exhausted to bother about those which don’t threaten the camp side. The fortress finally fallen quiet after this seemingly endless day.

But she cannot. Her mind buzzing, trouble denying her the required sleep. She rises from her bedroll, a quick glance over his face, sleeping next to her, relaxed and rested expression, almost innocent in his slumber. She won’t be able to join him in his dreams tonight.

Heading towards the improvised sickbed, the feet numb and heavy from the fighting and walking, yet she does not bestow consideration upon them. She caused enough harm today, has to make it up somehow.

The dark-haired shem propped against a damaged wall next to the young Dalish warrior from Keeper Hawen’s clan. The healer’s face a mirror of his exhaustion, eyes barely held open, dark shadows under relinquishing eyes. Silent spoken command to go get some rest, she will take care of his duties.

The shem’s relieved nod hardly noticing, she kneels next to the young warrior. His lids closed, his mind absent, she checks the wound on his leg, but there is nothing to do that the human healer has not done already.

“Ir abelas, Da’len. You should never have been involved in this.” She whispers as she covers him with the thin blanket again. His face so young and untouched by the cruelty of this world underneath the fresh lines of his vallaslin. Her promise to Keeper Hawen to keep Loranil safe resonating within the ears.

Promise to protect, something she once dedicated her life to. But she fails. Over and over again. No matter how hard she fights, no matter how many wounds she treats, no matter how hard she tries to consider every possible outcome: there will always be sacrifices to make, to endure. She will never be able to protect everyone.

There is not one of the soldiers that has not lost someone today. Their blood sticking on her hands, never to be washed of. It were her decisions that killed them.

“I’m sorry, Anders.” The champion’s voice cracked, a breathy goodbye to the one who would never hear it, never hear his beloved voice again.

The pain marking Varric’s distorted face as he demands to know: “Where’s Hawke?” And she has no answer to appease the friend’s grief. For there never is.
The heroic Champion finally died a hero, committing the necessary sacrifice to safe the rest of them. But what is it good for? He is dead, or lost to the fade at best. There is nothing heroic in losing a friend.

It was her decision that killed the man with the gleaming blue eyes and the contagious laughter, and Varric knows it. It was her decision, rebuilding the Grey Wardens to be more important than the Champion’s life, more important than the feelings of those he left behind.

“I’m sorry, Anders.” And she is, too. Sorry for right now this unknown healer is somewhere out there, wondering when his bonded will return to him, not knowing that there is a letter on its way which’s content will change his life forever.

The guilt threatens to swallow her up again, she forces herself to rise, to take the next round through the sickbay, checking on the wounded once again. Focusing her mind on the work that is familiar to her, giving restless hands something to do, suppressing the cutting thoughts threatening to torment her.

His restraint steps resonating in the cold night. Her glance kept lowered as she is uncertain if she should show herself to him now. Deep breathtaking to force the shaking hands to repose. The body is exhausted, it should rest. She knows he will disapprove of her denying the body its right to rest. But she does not wish to discuss the matter. Not tonight, not after all that happened today.

“You are already up again.” He states the obvious, his voice pitched slightly higher. By amusement? By aggravation? She cannot tell.

“I was not able to sleep.” Finally, she rises, for there is no meaning in pretending to be busy. He would know, anyway.

The familiar slight smirk upon his face conveying the warm feeling of safety, of belonging in the midst of the foreign she is dangerously close to getting used to.

“It has been a long day. You should really try to rest.” The anticipated subtle plaint draws a tired smile on her face.

“Did I do the right thing?” The question, rotating within her mind for hours, suddenly bursting out of her. “All these deaths… What if there had been a better way?” The shift in his facial expression quick and sharp against the soft, silver moonlight.

“Something had to be done, vhenan. We could not allow the Wardens to continue their insane plans!” His voice glooming darker again, hardly hiding the anger he carries underneath his mask.

A silent sigh narrowly held back as she realizes what is about to come.

“Even though I do not think the Wardens can be trusted now. They still could fall to Corypheus’ corruption.” Despite the preparation, his open disapproval hurts, leaving nothing but a bitter, stinging taste on the tongue.

“The remaining Warden’s only offence was to follow their given orders.” Her attempted defense, yet she can feel the weakness within her argument.

“Following orders without questioning! Orders which are clearly beyond any reason! Blind obedience can never be an excuse, I thought you’d know that. And now, their weaknesses are a threat for the Inquisition as well!”

His angry persuasion towering in front of her like a solid, sleek wall she has no way to come by,
forcing her mind to race, for she realizes this moment to be crucial, her next words to be especially considered.

“It is a risk, and I am aware of that. But we have to think beyond the urgent threat. After we defeat Corypheus, there will still be darkspawn. The next blight to come is just a matter of time. Dissolving the order might be equal to judge the word to burn underneath their corruption! The Wardens need to recover from this. They need this second chance!”

Exhaustion takes its grip on her as she falls silent after her almost upset speaking, she nearly misses his gaze to soften again, anger melting into sorrow.

“And you are sure, your judgement was not confused because you would wish for a second chance yourself?”

His words causing the mind to freeze and her thoughts to accelerate at once. Memories flooding before congealed eyes: The hunter’s body burning by the flames from her own hands, the caustic smell of his burnt flesh forever etched into her mind as well as his tortured screams, her mind rejoicing at her final revenge.

Her mind yelling at her to return to the present moment, reminding her of the hazardous moment she currently has to deal with. No time to concede now!

His eyebrows furrowed in quiet concern. “I heard what the demon said to you. You do not have to tell me. But please remember not to let your feelings cloud your judgement.”

The all too often heard phrase resounding dull in her mind, as it is spoken aloud by his voice.

“I won’t.” She promises, caught between the past and the present, vividly remembered of all the times her mother demanded the same pledge from her.

“Protect the people. I was raised for exactly this. Even though my responsibility became somewhat bigger than I had expected, I will. I will do whatever it takes to keep all of you safe.”

His eyes narrowing by her words, sadness casting a shadow over his face which she cannot quite capture. The knowledge she found in the fade forcing its way back into the surface of her mind once again.

_Dying alone._

A heavy swallow as he nods slowly and one gentle finger caresses her cold cheek. She might ask him about it. At another time.

Chapter End Notes

The part about Hawke/Anders turned out a bit too long, but thinking about Anders being left behind still hurts. One has to compensate one’s feeling somehow...
Invitation

Chapter Summary

Comforting warmth against the coldness of nightmares.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

*Her own light brown eyes staring at her, burning with hatred, glowing dark within countless of reflections of her own twisted face. The hate filled eyes pinned upon her as the creatures attack her, resentment swirling around them as their assaults miss her only scarce.*

*It is only a quick flashing of the pale green blade before the distorted creatures turn to ashes, yet there is no escape from them. Her swords swings, her staff follows, the creatures weak in comparison, but for each slain one two new rise.*

*Arms growing tired, legs stiffening, fighting against her, betraying her. She wants to scream, to shout out her frustration but the ever growing fear is a gag within her throat. She is silenced, just as the strange reflections that keep attacking her: Gagged, enchained, helpless. The creatures becoming clearer, details emerging before her eyes. Hands tied, dried traces of desperate tears on beaten cheeks, as they rage against her.*

*The body betraying her, she becomes slower each passing second, her reflections attacking merciless, more frequently than before. They can feel her becoming weaker, it makes them bolder. Their collective, muffled groans causing nausea within her stomach.*

*Limbs more and more numb, helplessness crashing down on her. She will die here. She cannot escape. She can never escape.*

*The hunter’s laughter resounds above the battleground as the twisted creatures finally savage her.*

Her awakening is sudden, eyes teared open without catching the surroundings, heart pounding as if from the fight she just believed to be in. Mind dazed for a few seconds until she captures the witnessed just to be a dream.

The room lightened by golden, soft flickering light, the surface behind her back softer than the floor underneath the bedroll.

His rotunda, she grasps, the moment before he sits next to her on the soft couch. Legs pulled back automatically to give him space.

“Are you alright, vhenan?” His voice slightly rough as from a too long lasting silence. Forcing herself to clear her mind.

*It was just a dream. Calm yourself.*

“Just a nightmare. I am well, thank you.” His brows furrowed with concern.
“You are not. You tend to have these bad dreams quite often. I can see how they haunt you.” His words scraping dangerously close past the one topic she does not wish to speak to him about.

Throat dried as well as restless thoughts, unable to find a suitable answer. Thankfully his eyes rest upon her patient and calm as always. He does not pressure her and right now, she could not be more thankful about it.

“It was just a memory of the fear demon at Adamant.” She finally manages to say.

“Being confronted with one’s greatest fear is not a thing to be cast aside easily.” His answer, voice wistful as rarely heard.

“I’m sorry I fell asleep. Did you make any progress?” Her gruff attempt to distract from the unspoken memories lingering between them, chin pointing towards the spread nooks and notes upon his desk. Despite her guess to see through her attempt, he meets her distraction.

Focusing on his clear voice telling her about the results of his studies, soothes her still unsettled mind, until he breaks off in mid-sentence.

“You do not suffer from nightmares if I join you in the fade, if I’m not mistaken.” He continues after a heartbeat of silence. The fondness of the situation stirring within her mind, yet leaving a heavy weight upon the chest.

Ar lath, ma vhenan, resounding in her ears, words not spoken again since, yet lingering, unable to take back, unable to be forgotten.

There is no logical reason for him to join her every night in the fade. She used to have nightmares each night ever since she was a child. Still, he cares enough to want to protect her from her nightly demons. This realization flashing through her mind, yet she feels unable to find a proper way to respond to it, to him.

“You cannot join me every time in the fade. I have to deal with my nightmares on my own. Do not worry.” The words tasting wrong on her tongue, even though actually true, they feel like a lie to her.

So much she has not told him. So much he does not know.

Ar lath, ma vhenan. He claims to love her without even knowing her. Whatever this between them is, it is more than just a little unfair not to tell him. His expressions softening again, grey-blue eyes gleaming warm in the golden light of the candles.

“We should finish this for tonight. You should retreat to your quarters and get some sleep. I will join you in your dreams, if you want me to.” The promise lingering behind his words tempting as always. Yet there is more, for tonight the idea of losing the warmth of his presence, his physical presence, stings in the back of her mind. There is something peaceful about him, settled next to her, surrounded by the scattered old transcripts.

Ar lath, ma vhenan. He has told her, and she almost wanted to believe him. But she is not stupid. She is aware of what this concept means to others. He has never pressured her and she is thankful for it. Yet she knows she should return his words. She knows she should offer more. But it would not be fair, for she could not do so in clear conscience.

He deserves so much more, better than her. And he knows.

It would be kinder in the long run., his sad voice repeating within her head.
Right there, even before he had turned around, she had known: He would leave.

Maybe not tonight, maybe not even tomorrow. Yet, there had been a presentiment sounding within his voice, a bittersweet taste of an imminent goodbye.

Maybe not tonight, she tells herself.

“Come with me.” She hears herself whispering, though hurries to clarify as she sees the flinch within his facial expressions.

“No, not like this. Just… sleep. Will you come with me?” Body tensing as the seconds for him to respond expand ridiculously, until his posture eases and his confirming nod resolves the agitated tension within her.

His consistent breathing next to her unfamiliar loud within her ears, as unused as to the fuzzy bed used for the first time since her arrival at Skyhold, instead of the worn-off bedroll on the ground.

She can feel the alluring sleep calling tender to her from the back of her mind, but she tries to withstand for a moment longer. Never had she expected to feel this warmth, this tenderness that is surrounding her now. Being this close to someone, without the all too well known feeling of being constrained, of being caged, blissfully claiming her mind.

He is here, he stayed. For these moments before sleep finally claims her wholly, she allows herself to indulge in the sweetness he has brought into her life.

Chapter End Notes

sorry for the cheesy fluff in the end. but she needs to experience a little happiness before, well...
Regarding privacy

Chapter Summary

One cannot hide a matter like this forever.

It is, of course, Cole to know first, and even though she does not object entirely, the idea of the spirit divulging her thoughts on this peculiar matter keeps spinning around her mind. She knows, it lies within the spirit's nature to know, he can hardly do anything about it. He already knew of her growing feelings, as he knows about anything causing trouble and disturbance within people’s mind. It does not surprise her as one day the spirit decides to speak about it, yet she is relieved he chose to do so in private.

“You make him happy, you know? A happiness he would never have thought to experience ever again. ‘A brilliant mind behind caressing eyes, laid upon me like tender touch. Blissful, gentle forgiveness.’ But, with happiness darkness, dismalness rises, I want to help, but…”

The spirit’s words startling her, forcing her to interrupt him before he can finish, for she does not wish to hear about his thoughts through Cole, they should not be spoken by accident. If he is willing to tell her, he will. Otherwise it may not be of her concern.

She assumes Leliana to be the next one to know. The spymaster’s eyes well-hidden, yet peering in every dark corner, as she is sure about. There is hardly a way to keep any secrets from this woman who breathes and lives for concealment. Still, the spymaster does not mention it and she is silently thankful about it.

Even though one time Leliana mentions to her, if she would ever want to order some extra portions of the orleasian frilly cakes they sometimes serve for dinner, she would have all but to ask.

The hint so sudden she cannot find another reaction except for blushing and hastily vanishing from the tower.

Maybe this would have been it. Whatever this thing between them is, or ever will be, it is just of their personal concern. Too fragile, too many things yet left unspoken for others to hash over it.

Unfortunately, Sera does not seem to catch that thought, when she refused to discuss it while their small lunch break on the roofs, watching the bustling activity of Skyhold from above.

So she has to weather several lewdness at one evening’s dinner. Her privacy exposed like this in front of everybody was exactly what she wanted to avoid, forcing her to approach the feisty woman afterwards.

“C’mon! It was just fun! I will need some if you plan to stay with that boring elvy elf!” Annoyance glistering in the young woman’s voice.
“Just try to be a little less offensive in public, if you do not mind. Please, Sera!” Even though she does not truly believe her request will be considered twice. The young elf is a far too free-living spirit to comprehend her state of mind. It would only scare her if she would try to explain to her why she cannot deal with these kind of vulgarity.

She is lucky, though. Sera only mentions it only three times on their next journey. And finally quits her remarks at all.

After Sera’s frenzied assumptions upon their relationship, she prepares herself for the rest of their companions to pry. However, it is Vivienne to be the first to approach her.

“Oh darling. For sure, there lies a certain amiability within this matter, but make sure to remember your position! You are, after all, the Inquisitor! Nations will bow to your judgement! What will you do once you are forced to give your hand in marriage to obtain a political bargain? Do you think he will accept this?”

Underneath arched eyebrows unexpected warm eyes looking down on her, despite the harmful words which remind her of the endless talks of the never content mother.

“Dalish do not marry.” Her deflecting answer that earns her nothing but a mild shake of head.

These truths spoken aloud again, vibrating within her, nearly suppressed, seeming to haunt her wherever she goes.

But today, she is free, she reminds herself violently. She is free to choose whomever she wants to.

Varric’s opinion emerges not to be any more pleasant to hear than Vivienne’s.

“Word of advice? I wouldn’t go for the apostate with the mysterious past. Never a good idea to date one of those. Told Hawke that once. He just laughed at me and asked if I had gotten the impression of him ever taking the easy way. Still. Wouldn’t want something like Kirkwall to repeat.”

Her careful hint of herself being an apostate, too just earns her an agonized groan.

With these memories still fresh within her mind, she sighs internally as the Seeker approaches her, too.

“So, this means it was Solas you were talking about, after our sparring session?” Her casual questioning, referring to that day one the clearing months ago.

*Is one ever allowed to dwell on selfish pleasure if in charge? Is one ever free to indulge in personal affairs when so many lives depend on one’s decisions?*

A shy nod is everything she can get herself to. Cassandra, always brave and bold, yet standing here, talking about these kind of matters, seem to offend her as much as it gives herself unease.

Her mind starts tumbling as the silence between them continues to grow, trying to catch a memory of similar occasions experienced. People tend to be willing to overshare once it comes to affairs of romance, yet she can hardly imagine Cassandra to seek for an opportunity to speak of her
relationship with the Ambassador.

She appreciates it to hear Cassandra speaking first, before she can say something foolish. “Don’t get me wrong, I do not disapprove. I would just not have guessed it. But I wish you luck. You deserve it. And please, do not concern yourself too much. I am sure, neither of you will disregard your duties. You should enjoy every rest from this world you can get.”

The warm reception surprising her, but the Seeker rushes away again before she can express her thanks. A content, little smile forcing its way upon her lips. She would never have guessed Cassandra to approve.

The heavy wooden door to her quarters been opened is something she would hear every time. The lids already weary from the piles of paperwork the Ambassador assigned her to examine she cannot conceal to be glad about the distraction, her ranting conscientiousness almost easy to overhear.

“I should definitely talk to Sera about certain boundaries. You would not believe what I had to listen to all day.” His voice wielding with irritation but the little proud smirk upon his face makes it a mockery. She answers his smile easily as she offers him to sit next to her, something almost like a tingling delight to listen to his clear, familiar voice after this long day.
Preparations

Chapter Summary

Departure for Halamshiral shall be prepared.

9:43 Dragon

The moment Madame de Fer and the Ambassador had appeared on the sickbay’s doorstep out of schedule, she had known something was coming. The polite plea to come to Josephine’s sitting room once her duties here are done hardly hiding cached ulterior motives.

Deep sighs pinching within her throat but negating them for now. Their departure to Halamshiral only few weeks away no. It does not require much musing to associate what the two women have in mind.

She waits until both of them have left before she allows the sighs to emerge. It may belong to her duties as Inquisitor, yet she can still not find any pleasure in studying shemlen politics.

The wounded soldiers pain almost a welcome distraction. At least her help is of some use here.

The more she is surprised as she enters Josephine’s sitting room. Walls covered with clothes racks, fabrics shimmering in bright colours she only knows from the nobles visiting Skyhold.

Her throat drying as her gaze wanders around.

“You wanted to speak to me?” She asks as politely as she manages with clenching jaw.

Vivienne’s smile as radiant as always, voice tumbling with eagerness, yet she can tell it is all just fancy hassle as usual towards her. The Enchanter’s eyes cold and distant, looking at her as a useful too, granting her a way back to the power she had before the Circles fell.

Her glance switching to the Ambassador, blurry recognizing the woman’s hinted smile, but brows furrowed as the Ambassador realizes she is not truly listening, stream of words mingling together, she needs to focus again!

“What Madame Vivienne and I want you to understand, Lady Inquisitor: It does not matter how well you are prepared or how well you play The Game, if you do not fit in. You have indeed improved your skills a great deal the last few months, yet it won’t matter if we sent you into the Winter Palace in your bloodstained armour. We must find you something decent to wear!”

Always make sure to keep your appearance, Da’len! You will be respected, you will be desired. You will ensure to find you a suitable man. Trust me, you have to hide the mess inside your mind somehow!

The memory of the mother’s voice distracting her for a few seconds, eyes shut meanwhile, forcing the intruder back into the depth of the consciousness, seconds which Josephine utilizes to fetch one of the dresses, looking as expansive as it could buy enough food for her whole clan to get through
the winter.

The Ambassador had never been anything but accommodating, but she cannot help the disgust rising within the stomach as she thinks about the shem, as used to luxury, as blind for those who struggle right on the outside. Dresses and balls as a center of the mind while her clan was threatened to starve, to freeze to death in the woods.

The flash of a moment passing, leaving her horrified by her own feelings. Not Josephine’s fault, not Madame de Fer’s.

Unbelief, self-loathing replacing with the same intensity. How can she let herself get carried away like that?

Remorse forcing her to try the dress, a glimpse of relief on Josephine’s face as she does not object. Yet the piece of cloth is more complicated to take on than everything she is used to. Standing indecisive behind the ornamented room-divider, staring incredulous upon the reflection in the mirror.

“Let me see how it fits you.” The Enchanter’s skeptical voice suddenly behind her. Cheeks and ear peaks burning, for the limp fabric smooth but fitting tightly on her skin, exposing the entire back including the sanguine lines of her vallaslin, the thin material revealing more than it hides.

The examining pairs of eyes laid upon her, divested like this, causing vertiginous revulsion within her mind.

“We should definitely choose a different shade of colour. This one does not match with these tattoos of yours at all!” the pejorative tone within the Enchanter’ voice a sharp confirmation.

The two of them have been practicing with her for month now, teaching her how to play The Game appropriately. They had told her what pretty female elves had to expect at Court. She can vividly imagine how she will be seen as if she wears something like this dress midst of them. For now she cannot even stand the eyes of these two women upon her; women who she knows, who do not have any interest in her.

She is aware of her feelings being highly irrational but her realization cannot soothe her tumbling mind. She cannot stand this. She most certainly won’t stand it for an entire evening.

“No.” She finally states. “I will not wear it.”

Josephine hurries to nod, assuming she is endorsing Vivienne’s opinion. “As you say. We could try… Ah… how about this one?”

Head shaken, growing panic tying up her throat as the Ambassador reaches out for the next dress.

“I will not be wearing any of these.” Her quickened correction.

Vivienne’s immediate, irritated sigh bothering her, but it is the shadow casted above Josephine’s caring face that raises a wave of guilt once more.

Think! She commands herself. Think, or they will wonder why. You will have no explanation!

“We will wear uniforms. Formal attires, all of us. We will show the Court we are a power to respect, not a bunch of pretty flowers to admire and stare at.” The words falling from her lips as soon as the thought manifests, relieved to have found anything, anything better than to explain the truth.

To her surprise Vivienne is the first to enlighten. “I like how your mind works, my dear! A thrilling
idea, don’t you think, Lady Montilyet?”

“Perhaps we should let her die.” Words intriguing, wheedling her thoughts as soon as the spymaster utters them, her sight lifting surprised towards the quiet woman as she continues.

“What we truly need is a stable Orlais, thus we don’t need Celene to sit on the throne for that.”

The memories of the burning city of Halamshiral still fresh within her mind, desperate attempts to help the elven fugitives who managed to get out of the city soon enough. The wounded’s weeping, the cries of those who had lost a beloved in the burning prison they once had called home.

Mother had sent her southwards towards the Heartlands to take care of their now homeless brothers and sisters who sought for shelter, to offer them a place within the clan.

Despite everything hardly one had accepted.

“Celene would certainly deserve punishment for murdering the elves of Halamshiral, but is it wise to endanger Orlais for this?” Her astonished objection.

Leliana’s focused glance lifted from the documents on her desk, facing her with slight confusion before she silently chuckles. “Oh yes, I see. But I was not suggesting revenge for the victims of her political strokes. I have rather thought about helping Gaspard claim the throne. He would be in debt to us, and thus easier to control. And if not, there is still Briala. Behind the curtains, she could easily reign Orlais on her own. As long as we let her, at least. It is something to consider, Inquisitor.”

A slow nod to ensure Leliana she has listened, while her mind starts tossing the situation around again.

The thought of revenging what has been done to her people dangerously tempting. She is a healer, she should never encourage death and destruction! If only the memories would not stir her, hunt her. Did the Empress knew how many lives her actions would cost? Did she care?

“There is but one more thing, Inquisitor. Empress Celene has a certain occult advisor by her side, a quite powerful apostate. I have had dealings with her in the past. She is ruthless and dangerous. We should watch her closely.” The quiet concern in the fearless woman’s voice startling her up.

“Do you think of magical mind control?” She speaks out her first apprehension, for this could be the missing link to Corypheus and his Venatori.

“I am not sure. Morrigan has always walked dangerous path. A brilliant mind, well-educated in many forbidden fields of study. I can resent Celene to be intrigued by her knowledge.”
Chapter Summary

The final preparations for Halamshiral.

“You seemed distracted tonight, ma vhenan. Are you feeling alright?” His voice stirring sweet in the cold air of her chamber, luring her focus from the notes Leliana gave to her for the final preparations. His implied smile kindling the more and more familiar warmth within the chest, dragging a smile on her lips before she could even command it.

“Do not concern yourself, I am well.” Her quick answer, easily flowing from her lips as she rises to close the distance between them.

“I am just…” The feeling filling her mind to bursting, but putting it into words adequately almost impossible, leaving the sentence unfinished between them.

“Nervous? Because of tomorrow?” He suggests, while carefully tucking up a loose strand of hair which had fallen in front of her eyes, leaving her even more agitated than she had already been before. Mind filled with all the things she wants to say, she only manages a halting nod.

“Yes, that too.” She leads him towards the opulent ornamented bed to sit down as soon as she realizes her sight to get slightly blurry. A sharp curse shooting through her mind. She should have not denied dinner this evening. Thoughts too cluttered with the rules she has to remember tomorrow for The Game, with their plans, with the different possible outcomes of tomorrow night’s peace talks.

“Would you mind if I’d ask…” She tentative restarts their conversation. His opinion always reasonable, a helpful guidance as the own mind is too preoccupied. She can feel him leaning closer in, more than see it, as she reaches out for his soft palm.

“No matter what, vhenan, you know I’d be happy to help you.” The unspoken thought behind his words stirring within her mind, distracting, yet tempting.

“What would you do, if it were yours to decide? Regarding tomorrow. Would you let the Empress die, as Leliana suggested?”

He takes a few seconds to consider, he will chose his words deliberately as always.

“A difficult question, indeed. Especially since you can only hope your attempts will work out the way you actually want them to.” He falls quiet for a second, his eyes absent for a flicker of a moment. “BrialÁ’s effort has impressed me. A remarkable woman, yet unable to reign Orlais officially, of course.” A deep sigh rising within her throat as she hears him speak the way too often tossed around thoughts aloud.

“Yes, I agree. The situation of the elves within the Empire needs to be improved and Brialá could be the key to it. But it is not an option. Yet, she and Celene were close once, as Leliana informed me. Celene made any effort she could to help the people, even though she was bound by the court’s approval too much.” She can feel her face glooming as she remembers the city burning from afar, yet does nothing about it.
“Until the political situation forced her to state an example.” He finishes the thought, a distant sadness carried along his voice.

Her silent confirmation hardly loud enough to hear, mind still fighting to focus on the presence once again. “I was there. Tried to help the refugees, to offer healing, shelter. So much death just because of one woman…”

Straightening the back in order to clear her mind. “But still I cannot sit back and watch her get killed. Not if it means weakening Orlais, not right now. We may not fail. There must be another way, a way to avoid further bloodshed.” The confidence within her voice unexpected yet soothing, his glance lightening as he hears it.

“We won’t fail.” His promise, too easy, too tempting to believe, sweet and tender as his kiss.

So easy to let go, to surrender to the illusion, to break with all the logics and just believe for once.

Believe there could be a happy ending after all, for tomorrow, for them.

For this one night, safely in his arms, she is tempted to believe.
Chapter Summary

Halamshiral. Orleasians and injustice everywhere.

Chapter Notes

The following events are not precisely according to canon's order.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Covered faces, hardly hidden suspicions, prying eyes, swirling around her, mingling into a single droning ambient, strange and surreal.

“A dalish apostate? Maker forbid!” Poisonous whispers, just loud enough to be heard, their causers perfectly aware of it.

*Keep smiling, Da’len. Pretend not to hear them.* The unwanted guidance of the mother mixed with the Ambassador’s training advices constantly commentating on every anxious thought crossing her mind.

Another mask approaching, offensive smile on uncovered lips, voice sweetened by half-truths and back-handed compliments.

“I’d be honored if you’d grant me this dance, Lady Inquisitor.” The mask’s final conclusion.

Warping unwilling lips into the most delicate smile, humble hint of a curtsy as she apologizes innocently.

*Perhaps later.* Foreign hands on stiff waist, eyes wandering, a mixture of lust and demand, barbed fingertips claiming the body, not for it itself, not for her herself, but for what she is, what she represents. A useful tool, being seen with the infamous Inquisitor.

A servant offering her another coup of wine, bruise marks failed to cover on the young elves neck.

Faked smile, polite deny, hidden rage. The servant yet another proof for her people’s position.

*How do you find Halamshiral?* The Empresses pressed voice resounding in her memory.

*There are no words to suffice.* To suffice the heavenwards shouting injustice.

*Halamshiral*, end of journey. Their journey. Once a long desired, long needed home, yet now the elves used as servants, fulfilling the shem’s unsatisfied pleasures. Bringing more wine, getting the pastries. And the bruises on the young and pretty elves.

Sworn a healer, she should not indulge in hateful thoughts like these. Yet, these elves are of her kin, are of her people. She should be able to protect them!
Ambassador Briala’s offer lurking around at the back of her mind.

But how long would the elf be able to obtain her power? Her failure could do as much damage as the good she might has achieved by then.

A deep, silken voice entering her mind, conspicuously undisguised, the natural sound of it a not unwelcome surprise to hear at this peculiar place.

“Well, well, what have we here?”

The tall woman drawing nearer to her, face unmasked and scarcely painted, but yet no need to do so. Back held up straight, a life-long built confidence within her pace. The scent of power swirling around her, almost physical. Blisterring sarcasm dripping from the woman’s words as she twists the nobles’ common introduction.

Her mind reverberating. The woman means danger, a glooming somberness, like a keen scent surrounding her.

“You are the one they call Morrigan.” Her bland statement.

The dry laugh answering it quenching the cynical fire within glowing green eyes, leaving a cold, calculating gaze, evaluating, estimating.

The same kind of gaze the mother used to give her when she could not hold up to the woman’s demands.

Morrigan will mean trouble.

“I am just enjoying the moment of peace while it lasts.” Relieved words, released from the depth of her soul, final realization it is over.

No more bloodshed, no more war for Orlais. Though she doubts it will last for long, at least for tonight she has fulfilled her duty. How long the public truce will maintain is in her hands no longer. The approaching storm already close enough to feel, yet she denies to think about it.

Not now, not with him by her side, glancing at her with these overflowing eyes and enthusiastic spirit.

“You should. They’re fleeting enough. Hang on to them when you can.” A reassuring, gently hand laid on her shoulder, a small piece of nearness in the almost silence of the secluded balcony, leading them to believe in insincere privacy, a pretty illusion to hide the curious eyes prying on them behind heavy curtains.

“Come, before the band stops playing, dance with me!” The tonight too often heard words finally spoken by the only one she is willing to agree. She delights in the idea, his familiar scent soothing agitated mind, his body a warming guardian against the coldest of politics she faced tonight.

“I didn’t knew you danced.” Her surprise given utterance, as he leads firm and steady, a dance unknown to her.

“I did once, in another live.” A sadness seething underneath his expression but hidden a second later
by yet another adoring smile and the kindest of kisses.

Yet a sadness which keeps haunting her even long after their shared dance on the moonlighted balcony, in the dawning morning, as they are allowed to retreat and she finally may lay down to sleep next to him again.

Chapter End Notes

1. Me personally, I adore Morrigan. She's gorgeous and lovely, and her character development - especially along with her son! - means a lot to me. Despite, my Rhachalle won't get along with her that well. Not for now, at least. If I don't get Morrigan the credit she deserves, it is just because I view her from the eyes of my Inquisitor.
2. "kindest of kisses": Florence + the machine "Hardest of hearts". Who hasn't listened to that song and cried over Solavellan
3. "I didn't know you danced." - "I did, in another live." Quoted from the Blackwall romance, yet I like that line way too much and I think it fits pretty well here.
In-fighting

Chapter Summary

Clan Lavellan. Can they still matter?

“Oh, one thing! I have a new Jenny near Wycome. Says he saw your clan… Well, I’m sorry that got lost while everything was happening. He says there could be survivors. A few. But they would’ve got away by being hard to find, so… he’ll keep looking?” Sera’s usually defiant glowing eyes softened with concern, unfamiliar to catch upon her face.

The Archer’s words though spoken with a wary voice cutting through her mind, sparking hope and desperation anew. The biting thoughts of solitude too well known, too accustomed.

“Maybe you could return sometime. After we deal with Coryphishit!” The young elf continues ranting, cheerful smile forced upon her face, yet not covering the concern within blue eyes.

The body numb, unable to respond appropriately, mind screaming to show joy, gratitude, maybe even grief, anything! She cannot just stand there doing nothing, Sera will not understand her callousness!

Panic rising from the depth of her mind as she realizes the full magnitude of the possibilities Sera is showing her.

A murmured thanks is all she can manage, voice breathy and balking, Sera will misinterpret it hopefully.

Maybe you could return. Returning home. The only home she had ever known in her life, and she has left it, with full conscience. She left it, left them. Abandoned them, failed them.

You owe it to your clan, Da’len.

Protect the people, protect the clan.

Her silent vow implied in every mastered spell, in every declaimed tale, in every treated wound.

Raised to be the next Keeper, raised to lead the clan, to protect the clan.

Mother never let her forget. She is nothing, she is worthless unless she succeeds.

Protect the people, protect the clan, fulfill your duties.

She had done so, even happily. Becoming Keeper, making the mother proud, keeping their lore, leading the people. She would have done so with pleasure. There has never been an alternative in her life.

Until the mother finally tired of her denial to bond.

He might not be a mage himself, yet the magic runs strong in his blood, stronger than in any other suitable man! It will as well in your children’s.
You owe it to your clan!

And she did. It would have only been a small price to pay. Bond with the hunter, procreate the next generation of mages, ensure the clan’s subsist. A small price to pay, indeed.

Yet she was too selfish, is too selfish.

I know what he did to you. But I cannot matter. The clan needs more mages! You must do what is best for the clan. You owe it to them!

Too selfish to tie herself to the hunter who forced himself upon her when she was just a child.

It has been years, Da’len! It is finally time you move on!

The thought of it claiming her mind again, causing blackening, toxic nausea, body weakening but sight sharpening with untamed, rage, not felt for years but clear as day now, seething underneath numbing skin.

She knows she failed the clan when she indulged in her selfish desire for revenge. They would not have forgiven her. They would not have forgiven the cold-blooded, unregretted murder.

The very second the hunter’s torture had ended, the second his last breath left his wretched body she was condemned.

And the clan along with her, for now they would be without a First, without a successor the mother.

The Sylvanwoodring dissolved to ashes in the flames of her pointless rage.

No, there will never be a way to return home. She lost the right to do so.

This night, sleeps teases her once again. Left alone in the blustered silence of the peaceful night, his steady breathes softly caressing sensitive skin. Left alone between awakening and falling asleep, always on the edge, never truly facing one of them.

She had almost forgotten. Forgotten how it felt. She had been safe. The hunter had paid for what he had done to her. The mother dead, no one left to fear. No one left to decide in her instead, no one left to force her.

In the shady doze, the mind leads her to believe the mother yet survived the raid, returning her to the restrictive rules, reminding her of the duties as she always has done.

You owe it to the clan, Da’len.

Finally drifting away, stepping deeper into the fade, promising ease for a few hours, yet betraying her once again, letting her revisit the memories she had buried deep inside her soul years ago, despite haunting her ever since.

Trapped, caged within a distorted mind, helpless scream choking, constraining within trembling throat. Only memories, brought back to life by the fade’s energy.

It is not real, this is not real.

Focus, Da’len!
She fights, mind tense, struggling to find a way out of the old familiar nightmare as she suddenly feels his tender brush against her mind, a retained question, an hesitant invitation to join in dreams once more, usually warm welcomed, happily indulging, yet tonight the shadows of her memories to distinct, to urgent to be hidden quickly enough from him, he must have felt their presence hovering in her mind.

The apprehension hurling her back into the body once more, sudden awakening of perception, the body unprepared, stinging ache in still asleep limbs.

Despite, she forces to rise, restlessness occupying her mind.

Slight reassurance as she sees him still peacefully asleep, spread out over the soft furs covering the sheets, still warm from their shared sleep.

Clumsy stumbling towards the mirror above the wooden wash bowl. Eyes staring dark and dull into her own, glooming within dark chasms, resulting from too many lost hours of sleep during the last weeks.

*Focus, Da’len! Always stay restrained. No one needs to witness the weakness inside of you!*

Deep angry breathes, kept as hushed as possible, as she throws herself against the poisoning voice occupying her own mind.

The mother is dead, has to be dead. It does not matter. She is free. The mother has no hold over her anymore.

Mocking chuckle resounding within her thoughts.

*Do you really think this is about mother? Fool! You are no one but yourself!*

*You will never be free, Da’len.*

*You damned yourself with your selfishness. He will find out soon enough. And he will turn away.*

*Abandon you, just as you abandoned your clan, abandoned your duties.*

*You will never be free! You lost the right to be free, you lost the right to be happy!*

*Someone like you will never find peace!*
Those three words

Chapter Summary

Sometimes love isn’t some dashing storm of the heart. Sometimes love is just... there.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Expecting the pleasant warm richness of the hot beverage, the bitter taste of the cooled tea stings on her tongue, drawing her attention from the tome, resting heavily on her lap.

A quick noise of aversion skipping from her throat as she lowers the mug back on the mall side table.

She can feel it, having caught his attention, greyblue eyes meeting hers as she raises her gaze.

“Do you finally agree with me on… that stuff? I always found Skyhold’s tea rather unsavory.” Chaffing frivolity flickering, distracting her thoughts once more from her studies.

“I just don’t like it as much once it is cooled down.”

He leans in, his careful hands taking the clay mug from her own, warm fingers casually brushing against hers. A scarcely noticeable stroke of heat on her skin as he warms the beverage with his magic.

“Maybe you should try and remember you are a mage yourself, vhenan. There is no need to drink your tea cold, you know.” Smug smirking as he hands her the now again steaming cup. Cheeks glowing warmer by his words.

“I was taught only to use my magic if necessary. For useful thinks. Like healing, defending. Rewarming my tea was nothing I considered before.” Words, meant playfully, attempt of mirroring the subtle teasing he has reserved for her, for their shared privacy, yet once outspoken they sound dull and pathetic to her.

Yet seeing him smiling back to her regardless, tucking a strand of hair, fallen in front of her forehead, behind her ear. The world deepens for a moment, the candles’ light softer, the air denser, his touch drawn out, a moment memorized already while happening.

“Maybe treating yourself with a nice, hot beverage from time to time is something useful.” His hummed dally.

“So, about that story you promised to tell?” His low voice filling the hollow quarters of hers, startling her from the left over paperwork that never seems to be finished anyway. For a brief moment the flash of memories claiming her, everything she has withhold pressing against her thoughts, until she recognizes his playful expressions as he kneels next to the heavy wooden desk, lowering himself until he can look into her eyes.

“You know, people use to work sitting by their desk, not next to it? I was told, that’s its actual
purpose.” Insecure smile as she lays the papers aside.

“My back hurts whenever I try sitting there for too long. The ground is much more comfortable.”

An amused shake of his head and a tender kiss upon her forehead her reward before he entirely settles next to her.

“A healer who is afraid of back pain.” He teases as she leans into him, without a second thought searching for their shared warmth, indulging in the familiarity, maybe a heartbeat too long to find a somehow suitable answer, yet not caring about it, for with him words are not obligated and their silence is comfortable.

“What story have I promise to tell?” She captures his greeting words, subtle unrest prickling from the inside of her mind.

“You implied something about an aversion against Fereldan cheese tonight at the dinner.” Fingers interlacing softly, his words flowing steady as usually, yet she can anticipate his curiosity behind them, restrained ways of alluring her to talk, to share her previous life.

The surprised thought of her, not requiring to backtrack, crossing her mind briefly, before the memory claims it, letting a dry laugh escape from her lips.

“Oh yes, Fereldan cheese.” Quick organizing of memories before she starts speaking.

“You need to know, Xen’eth, my youngest sister, used to sneak into the cities we were camping nearby during her hunting trips, without permission of course. Not that she would care for mother’s prohibitions. She would just to it anyway. And she, well, used to return with one or another thing she surely did not pay off properly. What usually sufficed to cheer up the whole clan for the night, so mother never took action against her certain kind of hunting trips.”

The overflowing memories emerging vividly in front of her sight once again, defiantly glowing green eyes, filled with pride and a wicked grin on wry face, always brimming with life. She allows herself so rarely to touch these kind of memory, a reminiscence of the life she has given up.

“Yet, one day Xen’eth returned from… Oh I cannot remember properly… I think Ostwick? It does not matter. Anyway, Xen’eth returned, her luggage obviously crammed once again. Of course, she would start bragging about her prey instantly.

And she pulled out… lots of cheese. Some Free Marcher nobility apparently liked the imported cheese from Fereldan a great deal. And Xen’eth had to steal some of it, even though I could never guess her reasons.

Oh creators, I can still recall that smell! Nothing in comparison to the one Josephine offered to the dinner tonight! It was absolutely nauseating!”

She can feel his soft chuckle rumpling, reverberating against his lean body.

“Oh, I can definitely imagine it.” He confirms, one slender finger gently caressing her shoulder. “Did you try some of it?”

“Well, the whole clan had to try, actually. Yet, I could not bring myself to it, even though it only earned one more annoyed reaction from Xen’eth.

Eventually, it happened to be quite fortunate, for none of my clan was used to the tangy spices, nor the high amount of grease in it. It became… rather disgusting as the evening past, even though as a
healer I had already seen almost everything there is to see about a body. But the whole clan disabled by food intoxication? I think I have never been this unhappy to be the clan’s healer. It is not exactly my fondest memory, as I am sure you can imagine.”

She smirks, despite the uncomfortable night lingering on her mind.

His out bursting laughter a kind indorsement. Sharing her mind without the fear of judgement. Just small, harmless pieces for now. He listens, he even wants to listen!

Moments like these, she is tempted to give in.

In shared laughter, in mutual delight, that bursts the sadness he wears like a holy mantle, in consolidating silence with ripening words lingering within.

In moments like these, she wishes the sun would never come up ever again. She wishes they could just remain like this.

Later that night, as sleep is softly tugging on eased mind, his calm heartbeat steadily guiding her into sleep, these memories return to her, unasked, yet indulging in them once again, a happy smile on her lips. These precious moments, piling up appeasing. This might not be so bad. Sharing the same, unexpected cozy sheets every night, falling asleep in his sure embrace, only to join him seconds later in the fade, his dear smile keeping any faint of nightmare at bay.

Being safe, being held, being loved. Loving

The thought startling her up, mind twitching on the outrageous idea.

Forcing the body to stay calm, not to move, not to reflect the mind, not to betray her, not now! Not while he could awaken so easily and ask!

*Ar lath, ma vhenan. Ar lath.*

The thought of it, love, awoken in these small, quiet, humble moments.

A thought dragging hundreds of complications along, complications she cannot afford.

Yet a thought she cannot deny once plugged on her mind. A thought not nearly as disturbing as she would have thought it to be, not nearly as disturbing as it *should be!*

The alarmed anxiety already fading, suspiciously fast.

This here, lying easily against his chest, sharing memories, thinking of answered love, this cannot go well.

She knows it, but simultaneously the urge to deny keeps growing stronger.

Maybe this is not so bad. Maybe this is all it takes.

Only the tender, soft reassurance of him beside her.

The chance of not having to face the next day on her own.

This warming, welcoming feeling of loneliness fading, of finally having found a place in this unforgiving world, a place to call home.
The realization crushing upon her as it hits her, stirring loudly within her thoughts.

Nothing has changed. She is still unworthy, unworthy of him, unworthy of his love.

Tainted, spoiled. *Lying*.

She cannot continue this, not the way it is.

If they are ever to have a future, she must be honest with him, she must finally tell him the truth.

Her mind shivering at the biting cold of the anxiety these thoughts raise.

She cannot keep lying to him, even if this means he might abandon her, even if this means she could lose him.

She needs to prove worthy, once and for all.

Chapter End Notes

Utmost thanks to *gfp-monster*

Also, faintly quoted from "The Thorn Birds" (1983) and Rilke's poem "Eingang"
Time for truth. Relationships based on lies cannot last forever.

Please note: The warnings are there for a reason! This chapter contains more explicite references on rape than the previous ones did!

This night sleep keeps avoiding her again, no matter how desperately her attempts become. Thoughts haunting her down every time the mind relaxes enough to slip through the veil, to finally rest.

Considerations of how to tell him the truth, mulled over for the last years now, again and again, yet inconclusive. There seems no way of telling that she feels comfortable with, because why should it?

She has kept lying to him, ever since she knew him.

*Her clan sent her down here to spy on the Conclave.* Lie.

*She keeps pretending to be a normal, healthy, untainted woman.* Lie.

*She keeps behaving like the dedicated healer she always wanted to be, denying the blood sticking on her hands from cold-hearted murder.* Lie.

He thinks her to be loyal, to be true, yet she abandoned and condemned the only family she has ever had, only for her selfish revenge.

At some point she surrenders, the battle against her restless mind lost. She raises the tired body from his slowly rising and falling chest, crawling back to the headboard, her back flat against the cold wood.

The sudden chill sending small shivers across the body, legs pulled back, arms wrapped around them, distraught attempt to still have something to hold on to.

She sits like that, watching his rested face deliberately, studying every tiny freckle of his, memorizing every inch. Counting his slow sleepy breaths, fearful watching every single one, for he might awake at every second, she will have to confess and he might leave.

Will leave

Only the thought of him staring at her with all the disgust within his beautiful eyes, all the disgust she usually feels for herself if thinking about *back then*, is almost choking her.

So she keeps sitting, waiting, trying desperately to keep every single passing moment that flees into
the moonless opaque dark of the night, trembling at the thought of him awakening, for he might be
gone as the morning sun rises, for this might be the last time ever to be close to him.

Seductive doubts alternate with unyielding determination.

She will tell him! But still, it will be so easy to continue just as they used to. She might love him. But
does that really change anything?

She has been selfish enough until now, accepting his – so believed – unanswered love before.
Yet her doing was wrong before. It still is.

She should have told him sooner. She has done him injustice and it is more than time to pay for it.

All that remains now is to confess and hope for his forgiveness.

Forcing herself to concentrate as his slumbering body fastens his breaths, slowly announcing his
feared awakening.

“Good morning, *ma vhenan*. Slept well?” His voice still hoarse, rough from the sleepiness, yet eyes
telling brief astonishment as they meet her posture.

*I lied to you.*

*I was not sent to the Conclave.*

*I fled from my clan because I murdered one of my people.*

*Because I murdered the man who has abused me when I was a child.*

*My mother forced me to bond with him.*

*I could not. I denied. I failed.*

*I betrayed everyone who ever trusted me.*

The thoughts loud and clear resounding in her mind, all she needs to do is to let go of the iron grip
that forces her jaws to remain clenched.

His expressions dimming, gracefully closing the distance between them, every somnolence vanished
in a heartbeat.

“Is something wrong? You haven’t joined me in the Fade tonight. Were your nightmares bothering
you again?” His endearing voice almost too sweet to bear, resounding within her ears, the
unrestrained love aggravating on her chest as she repeats the sentences within her mind.

*I lied to you.*

“There is something I must tell you.” Her broken whisper, she can actually hear the hardly withhold
sobs inside her throat.

“I should have told you sooner. I didn’t.” Soft hands gently cupping her burning face, his closeness
nigh on hurtful, for it is everything she ever wanted, yet it cannot be, it must not be!

“I’d gladly listen.” His soft-spoken promise, even though she is uncertain if it applies to her ore rather
to himself.
“Something from my life before all this. Before the Conclave.” Her words stumbling, stuttering, tumbling muddled from her lips, wasting every attempt to keep this short and concise.

“If it is too hard to talk about it, you could show it to me instead. The Fade still holds your memories hidden, if you’d like to share them.” His suggestion both freeing and unsettling at the same time. She wouldn’t want him to see what she has become that night she left her clan. Yet she is craven, too afraid to set the words from her mind free.

She wants to refuse, but she can feel herself nodding hesitantly instead.

His kiss melts on her lips and herself along, forlorn answering it, wanting to feel, to taste everything of him once more, for it might be the last kiss they will ever share.

“Alright then, vhenan. Whatever it is, just show me.”

This time, with the aid of him and the deprivation of sleep, she passes the veil easily.

Mid in the swirling uncertainty of the still unstable surrounding she perceives his slender appearance.

“What are you ready?”

Every single time she has shown him fragments of her past, of her childhood, rising up in her memory, every single shared second with him. The cutting fear of loss establishing within her mind and thus influencing their surroundings, shaping it even darker and gloomier than before.

Yet she confirms. It is too late to back away by now anyway.

“I have not spoken about this for more than twenty years.” She announces as she finally lets the memories claim her, rise to the surface of her mind, no attempt of withholding them this time, freeing them for the first time, struggling against their intensity.

Their surroundings adjusting, reshaping her memory as vividly as the day she has lived through them.

Tags of memories in the fade, now shown to the only man she ever cared about enough, too much, too keep them from him.

Yet she turns her back on him for now, lids pressed together. She cannot look at him, the fear of what she might catch sight of filling her with breathtaking panic.

He will hate me. He will see me as disgusting as I truly am. He will never look at me like before.

He will leave me.

His remaining silence more threatening than every harsh words could ever be, yet she still cannot bring herself to look at him.

She interrupts the memory of the weeping child, of the weeping her, crushed underneath the merciless, oppressive hunter’s body, and lets the memory of the night she left her clan take its place, fighting not to let the just seen memory claim her once again.

The unsolicited hands upon her helpless body all too present once more, the tearing pain within her body felt all over again, but she cannot loose herself in them, not now!

The Fade is dangerous to everyone who stays trapped in feelings. Mother inculcated her with this in all of her life. She will not fail now.
Trying her best to focus on the memory upraising around them instead. The loathsome face of the hunter contorted in pain and disbelief, the toxic rush of alleviation within her veins as she smells the devastating flames dancing on her palms once more, hears the jarring screams from his shattered throat once more.

Motionless staring into the mirrored face of herself, the vision clearly indulging in a revenge she once believed to bring her peace, to heal her pain.

The self-hate overrunning her by the sight, almost breaking her down.

How can she expect anything less for him to feel about her?

She lets the memory fade away, leaving the surroundings dark and gloomy again, an instant before they rupture, hurling her back into the physical world without premonition.

Finally managing to take heart and search for his gaze.

His expressions torn with anger and wrath, furious as she has never seen him before.

She knew. Now. This is where he will abandon her.

Still, his name falling from her lips, a last, desperate plea from an emptied, hollow mind.

His voice hoarse and rough, rumbling with barely retained hatred as he spits out the words:

“You have shown him a mercy he did not deserve.”

Chapter End Notes

The memories Rhachalle shows to Solas are pretty much the same as described in Tags of memories earlier in this series.
As if gliding home

Chapter Summary

Some happiness for them, at last.

"Take moments of happiness where you find them. The world will take the rest." - Inquisitor Ameridan

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“You have shown him a mercy he did not deserve!”

The realization of his words’ meaning come crawling into her mind with antagonizing slowness, combining them along with his face, distorted with flaunting wrath. A wrath she had expected to be because of her, caused by her actions, by her lies.

You have shown him a mercy he did not deserve!

Mind still struggling to wrap around the gradual realization, she can feel his arms around her, drawing her close with all the strength inherent of his slender body yet usually withholding. Embracing her deep and desperately, his hand shaking as it combs through her loose hair.

“I’m so sorry, vhenan.” Voice shaken and weary, a broken tremor within.

He is still here. The constant, repeating whispers within her troubled mind, finally allowing her senses to awake again, nestling deep into his caress.

“You are not disgusted by what I did?” Her incredulous inquiring.

He moves slightly, positioning his body to be able to meet her sight, opening a small gab between their bodies were the fresh morning air seizes, bringing little discomfort along, first now entirely realizing how good his body against hers had felt.

“Listen to me, ma sa’lath: There is nothing you have to be sorry about. Do you understand?” His words twisting within her mind, unrest cleaving in narrowing throat.

“Do you understand? I have murdered him. I assaulted him, made him defenseless and executed him! I condemned my clan to be without a First, only to satisfy my selfish desire!” Her voice agitated, cracking of the conflicting mess inside her mind, for she must make him understand, now, for she is sure she will not be able to speak of this again at another time.

His expressions calming, slackening as his palm gently caresses her cheek.

“There was nothing selfish about it. He deserved every second of pain. And more. If I would have gotten ahold of him…” His voice fading into a growling tremor as he leaves the sentence hanging unfinished in the cool air between them.
The alleviation suddenly rushing through her veins, dazing and stirring simultaneously, flooding her mind with vertiginous gladness as she fully comprehends.

*He will not leave me.*

His sure embrace grounding, ensuring. Clenched body loosening, melting, for the first time in this endless night, relaxing wholly, indulging in his alluring scent, in the safety of his arms, wrapping her own around him, still disbelieving her fortune, the bliss of still being allowed in his embrace.

*He will not leave me.*

Cradling him with all the strength the relief unleashed within her, nestling her face against his neck, as she suddenly realizes the wetness on her cheeks. He must have too, a silent chuckle rumbling in his throat as he claims her cheeks with soft lips, tenderly kissing the tears away.

“Have you truly believed me to leave you, because… of what happened to you?” He asks with a humming sadness within his voice she cannot assign.

Tears streaming continuously along, her mind too baffled to sort if of joy or anxiety, she simply forces herself to a shaken nod.

She can almost feel the words, unspoken lurking between them, burning, tangible drifting in front of her, yet too afraid to inquire, secretly hoping for a promised *I will not leave you* but concurrent scolding the foolishness of her wishes.

The look he gives bearing an almost tormented uncertainty, eyes darkening as they stay locked with her own.

Faintly becoming aware of her behaviour, which he might interpret as pressuring, she reaches out to drag him closer, drawing him into a kiss, passionate and devouring. Once and for all letting go of her self-restraint, fully giving in to the frenzied tempering, persistently closing her mind to the fact that he has not spoken the words she longed for.

*I will not leave you.*

But it does not matter. He is here, now, with here. He did not leave after seeing who she truly is. Nothing else can matter now. Pouring herself into their urgent kiss, starved hands aching for every inch they can get hold on, ensuring her over and over again that he is still here, with her.

The intoxication driving her further than ever before in this physical world, enlightening with every pulsing heartbeat, unfamiliar loud and pressing within her ears, forcing her to deepen their kisses, every stifled moan of his against her hungry lips a secret little victory.

The awareness of his body upon her own slowly seeping into her mind, his rigid outline pressing against her, thrilling and heady, promising.

Yet he backs away as soon as she attempts to find slightly more friction, his withdrawing pressing cold against her chest, surprised by the amount of chagrin she feels about it.

“*Vhenan, we truly shouldn’t. Not like this, I –“*

Driven by the blur within her mind she interrupts him harshly.

“I don’t care.” Words hastily moaned, shortened by the impatience burning in her veins. She reaches out for breeches once again, still holding his gaze affirmative, relieved to see his consent this time.
Sanity telling her not to pry, yet not withstanding to look, to bruise fingertips, shaking by nervousness.

His delicate fingers encompassing her chin, elevating her face to meet his once again, sweet lips pressed firmly on nose, forehead, cheeks, parted lips. She can feel the pace slowing down again, shifting into familiar subtlety and tenderness, but the urge for more to present to give in.

Slightly backing away from his kisses, attempting to remove the nightgown, heavy and hot against her tingling skin.

“I am sorry. I should not have pressured…” He starts anew, angering her with his clear misinterpretation of their shared moment. He never pressured anything. And she has always been grateful for it. But not now, now that she finally wants more.

“You did not. I want you!” Surprised by the hoarseness of her craving voice she pulls off the thin fabric, leaving her exposed for the first time in front of him, heart pounding harder, skipping beats erratic. “I want you.” She repeats breathing.

His darkened eyes locked to hers for tantalizing moments before she closes the distance between them once more, heated skin on heated skin, every lean muscle sharply outlined against her body. Cool fingertips tracing antagonizing slowly over her neck, her throat, her collarbones, fondly exploring, caressing.

For once again it is her body again, not the body. Out of the sudden a feeling of entireness, unbrokenness, mind and body synchronized, working together instead of against each other. Her mind aware of her body, her body aware of her mind.

Writhing underneath his delicate hands, yearning his name under her breath, she finally feels whole again, whole and save and loved.

Maybe this was supposed to be. Maybe this is where she belongs.

Chapter End Notes

ma sa'lath = my one love
In another world

... ... ...

He...

... ... ...

She...

... ... ...

You are so beautiful.

... ... ...

World spinning, spinning, spinning, sight darkening.

You have a rare and marvelous spirit.

... ...

Bitten, pressed, clenched jaws ripping apart, cold air biting, burning.

World slowing down, stopping.

... ... ...

I didn’t tell you this to hurt you.

... ... ...
World spinning, spinning, spinning, sight darkening.

*Please, vhenan.*

...

Cold, caustic air, burning.

...

...

...

*I... can’t!*

...

...

...

World spinning, spinning, spinning, sight darkening.

*Ar lasa mala revas.*

...

Cold air, choking.

*You are free.*

Spinning, choking, gasping.

Darkness compressing, forming words.

...

*I distracted you from your duties.*

Aching, cutting, pressure rising.

*Then what I must tell you,*

Halting, awaiting

*the truth.*

for the pain

*You deserve better.*

to subside

*In another world.*

yet
Why not this one?

only

*In another world.*

growing

*Why not this one?*

stronger.

*In another world.*

*Why not this one?*

*In another world.*

*Why not this one?*

*In another world.*

*Why not this one?*

…

…

…

World spinning, spinning, spinning, sight darkening; cold air filling flaming lungs, choking, coughing, cringing.

…

…

…

*Don’t leave me. Not now. I love you.*

“I love you.”

Spinning, darkening, falling.

…

…

…

…

“*I love you.*”

Whispering, weeping, whining.

…
“I love you.”
Sore throat aching from words unspoken.

Too late.
Like everything in her life.
Too late for him.
Too late for her.

I love you.
Smothering, panting, smothering, panting.

In another world.
Screams rising, urge rising, tension rising.

Why not this one?
Throat remaining empty.

I love you.

Freezing realization.
Her fault, her omission.

“I love you.” Blissful joy in the light of the rising morning, sweet moans filling a mind overjoyed by rare sensation.

“I love you.” I am so grateful to you for being honest with me, ma vhenan. For trusting me enough to share your past with me.

“I love you.” Halting unspoken words, yet hopefully stirring: Will you join me again, tonight?
“I love you.” *Ar lath, ma vhenan.*

“I love you, Solas.”

…

…

…

Too late.

Too late.

She has waited too long to tell.

…

…

…

Darkest silence surrounding.

Words lurking.

Breathes unsteady, hurting.

Surrendering to the darkness, promising darkness, old familiar friend, sweet alluring.

*I’m sorry.*

A remembrance of hoarse voice, beautiful pain.

Surrendering to the darkness, only way to endure the pain.

…

…

…

*Da’len.*

The mother’s voice, instead of his, unheard for months; rushing, startling appearance in her mind.

*Remember your duties, Da’len.*

Hurting, hurting, hurting.
Breathing hurts, thinking hurts, remembering hurts.

No one cares for your selfish little ailments.

She is a child again, scolded, reprimanded by the mother.

She is a child again, stubborn, weak, wrong.

Breathe, Da’len. Focus.

She obeys, too broken to fight.

Remember your duties.

She obeys.

Protect your people.

Dazing the body, mind retreating from it, only commanding it, commanding it to move.

Unsteady, small shaky steps.

One foot in front of the other food, moves mechanically.

Breath taking in sharply.

Remember your duties.

Inquisitor

Protect your people.

The people, they need her.

They need their Inquisitor.

I distracted you from your duties.

Waterfall’s thunder fading slowly,

It will never happen again.

silence thudding instead.

…

…

…

Is one ever free to indulge?

…

…

…
You failed them, Da’len.

Clinging onto the familiar asperity, drawing enough energy out of it to proceed.

Mind roaring with emptiness, spinning circles, over and over and over.

...  

...  

...  

I love you.

Ar lath, ma vhenan.

...  

...  

...  

The way in front unfurling.

The memory of the past lingering so close to the surface; almost able to hear, to see, to feel it again. Everything again.

Can you feel it on your skin, tingling?

Only a moment, and the moment is gone.

Memories, gone.

Past, gone.

...  

...  

...  

...  

How long? How much time passed?

Questions stirring, fading again, unanswered, uncared.

The way back.

Once, considered a way home.

Only a way now.

Only yet another way to walk.

Home, barely known.

Home, lost once again.
In another world.
Way back

Chapter Summary

Some dreams are better when they end.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Rocking. Back and forth. The mount’s leisurely trot lulling numbed mind. The trodden way fading into one mingled heartbeat, twisted into eternity. Time’s meaning lost for her.

The shadows of the past uprising without mercy. Same way taken the day before, along with him. The day before? Two days? A lifetime? Mind too tired to figure it out. There is no sense in it, anyway.

He had been by her side, and now he is no longer.

Time grows null, trivial.

He had been by her side.

Hands in firm grip, slight, almost accidental touches as they passed, she gazes after it, this old tree. This small pond. This sign, rotten away by the years and wastage. Every detail screaming, yearning for attention, containing minor memories, petty, unwanted.

He had been by her side.

In the last weeks, spent in the harshness of the Hissing Wastes.

She led, he followed.

She smiled, he answered.

Stolen moments, fleeting in the consistent sandblasted air. Sneaking from the camp side, against all common sense, to share some moments of intimacy away from curious eyes. All of this, their love, more real underneath the pale, shimmering light of the almost tangible close twin moons. Sweet surrender. In the forgiving moonlight, it had become real. They had become real.

The looks he bestowed her when she’d loosen the slaves chains, found left to die in the merciless wastes. A matter of course to her, yet his proud like a badge of honor to her.

Their sweet touches, leaving her trembling, reconciled with this body of hers, dissolved in pleasures never encountered in all of her life. Coming to fulfillment simply by pleasing another being, by sharing one’s inmost self with another person. Feeling safe, being safe.

She had wanted to believe so badly.

He had been by her side.

In all this time, since she woke up in chains and with the pounding mark on her hand, he had been
there. A familiarity in a foreign world, a hint of something she had believed to have lost forever.

He had offered comfort when the world did not.

He led, she followed.

He had been by her side.

She had wanted to believe.

To believe the past would not matter.

To believe there might be a future for them.

To believe his desire, his love for her might not fade too quickly along with the progression of time.

She had longed for the happiness this misbelief offered. She longed for the intoxicating way he had made her feel. It had blinded her, blinded her for the deceiving truth.

She was tempted to believe.

An intriguing maybe.

And yet she does not know how to stop wanting.

Foolish enough to believe love could safe them.

Foolish. Love is more killing than hate.

Hate is clear. But this…

When she had betrayed her clan by murdering the hunter, she had not been strong enough to accept her punishment. Instead, she ran. She betrayed everyone she knew by that time. She had done injustice. Now justice claimed its price.

She had known, always known.

The best is only bought on the cost of great pain.

Dying alone.

Disembodied whispers creeping their way into her mind.

His greatest fear, stolen knowledge from their physical walk in the fade, antithetical towards his actions.

Illogical.

He never acts illogical.

Tension tightening at the edges of her mind. Something missing to complete the unstable thought.

Deep breathes to banish the lurking whispers at the back of beyond of her mind.

Whispers, ancient, powerful, yet distant, hardly to hear, but impossible to be brushed aside.

The well trying to tell, something, anything. But she cannot see, cannot understand.
The voices in her head… *Compassion* had been right. She did not want them.

Yet a price she must pay.

Accepting a way leading to the fulfillment of his greatest fear as the price he attempts to pay for their success?

“And I am sorry. I distracted you from your duty. It will never happen again.”

*YOU* distracted *ME* from *MY* duty.

The irritating whisper claiming unsolicited; almost angry chasing it away before it poisons her thoughts any further.

*Did* he lie to her? A mask, worn with such perfection she would have been deceived?

His love only a lie, only a game, unreal, illusive?

She denies to believe the breathtaking thoughts.

He left.

She had always known he would not stay.

She had always known he would leave her, someday.

She is not good enough, not to him, not to anyone.

She never was.

Mother had been right after all.

It had been nothing but intriguing to live in the forgiving denial for a little while.

It had been nothing but easy to give in, for once.

Nothing but a shimmering dream, fragile, delicate.

*Some dreams are better when they end.*

The world crushing upon her, burying her underneath.

Uncried tears taking her sight, unwept screams taking her breath, unwanted thoughts taking her mind.

Nothing left.

Just duty.

She will not let the hurt distract her. If necessary, she will commit to the ritual.

She obviously failed him.

She will not fail the Inquisition as well.

*Some dreams are better when they end.*
Chapter End Notes

The ritual Rhachalle is refering too, will be explained in the next chapters.
Aftershocks

Chapter Summary

"God knows how much I've hurt you. But I do love you." The Thorn Birds (1983)

Chapter Notes

rate: E  
mainly for smut this time ;)  
also, reference to self harm in this chapter

The sun has already disappeared hours ago, yet she refuses to stop her mount, refuses to set up camp. Her mind still unsettled, constantly driving itself in circles, circling around the painful ache inside it. Distracting, annoying. She should never have encouraged it. People like her are not deserving of a happy ending, she should not have shut her eyes from a fact that simple. Her minds is aware of the entirety of it, yet the hurt won’t fade. But it must. She needs to concentrate again, focus on her duties. She cannot allow her mind to keep wandering of. She remembers the day the father was buried. Remembers the mother’s face torn with ache, like never seen before, like never seen afterwards. Her sister Mir’lin had cried out for the father’s death, on that day. And mother had punished the girl for it. "Don’t let the hurt distract you, Da’len." The mother had told them, standing by the still, gaping grave. Late that day, the mother had showed them the ritual, the vir revas, path to freedom. Release your anger and grief in a moderate amount, than never speak of it again. The pain will slowly fade afterwards. The soundless whisper of the mother’s voice resounding in her head as she makes her slow way towards Skyhold. Fingers, cold and stiff from the long ride in the cool mountain air, reaching out for the hideous scar above her heart. She had been too young to understand at the time. She could not see how the gruesome ritual could help anyone. Despite she never saw the mother mourning over the loss of her bonded again, she
could not comprehend it.

Everything she took out of the ritual was the remaining pain of the wounds and the bulging scar on her chest, additional to the task of comforting her little sister, for Mir’lin had been too young to comprehend the cause behind the vir revas as well, crying from the hurt the open wounds inflicted within her.

It had been years later, her sisters as well as her already grown up, when she understood how healing it could be to let go of the hurt. When Mir’lin’s beloved was killed in a hunting accident, the younger sister had asked her to guide her through the ritual.

Watching her sister mutilating herself almost let her loosen all reason. Until she saw with her own eyes how it had helped Mir’lin.

*Release your anger and grief in a moderate amount, than never speak of it again. The pain will slowly fade afterwards.*

She will take the vir revas.

She owes it to the Inquisition to function, she owes the Inquisition the best she can give.

She cannot be distracted by some foolish matter of the heart.

She owes it to her people.

Skyhold towering above her, a black shadow against the lightened night sky, troubling her mind again, reminding her of what must come.

She does not know how long she was gone, every sense of time lost in the small cave next to the steady fall of water next to her.

She will not need much time on her own, but fears there will be trouble ahead for her being away for so long. It won’t take long.

Going through the preparations necessary to complete the ritual keeps the mind busy, numbing the dark ache on the back of her mind.

It will not be easy. She does not wish to do the ritual redundantly.

Even though the thought fills her mind with unease, she has to make sure it is finally over.

She cannot allow the doubt and the hurt she had seen in his eyes to poison her heart and mind with desperate *what if’s*.

She has to make sure, there will never be a future for them.

She will hear him say the words

She will leave.

She will bother him no further.

She reaches the rotunda without anyone but the guards on the gate noticing her. The silence breathing on its own, the darkness of the night becoming alive, hiding her from prying eyes, a rogue
ally, yet the only in this night.

The flickering light underneath the door indicating him being still awake. She stops for a second, fruitless attempt to slow her pounding heart, racing by the thought of him being just behind the wooden door, yet not hers anymore, for everything is different now.

She has to make sure, there will never be a future for them.

She will hear him say the words

She will leave.

She will bother him no further.

Clinging to the thoughts she knocks, hand shaking, cursing it for its exaggeration.

Soft paces indicating him moving towards the door, towards her, waiting for him to open, tearing upon her nerves.

She has to make sure, there will never be a future for them.

She will hear him say the words

She will leave.

She will bother him no further.

The weighing darkness on his face, in his posture unfamiliar again, almost forgotten. The mind is tumbling by things she wants to say and do, fighting about what to do first, what to think first, the body freezes, overwhelmed by the intensity of the chaos within her mind.

As he steps aside, a silent way of giving her access into his room, the body reacts.

Steps shaky, unsteady. Unsure about what to do, what to say, despite her intended plan.

*Make sure, there will never be a future.*

*Hear him say the words.*

*Bother him no further.*

Yet it is he who speaks first.

“Inquisitor. How may I help you prepare for our final battle?” His voice guarded, impassive.

His voice as distant, he could address it to anyone.

A voice like choking hands around her throat, cold as if nothing had ever happened between them.

A voice that without any reasons stirs within her mind, disgruntling her.

She is *Inquisitor* again.

*Da’len. Lethallan. Vhenan. Inquisitor.* She cringes at the thought of it.

His face as sharp, as tense, as guarded as his voice.
Nothing like the man she knows, nothing like the man she loves.

Expecting him to evade her sight, but when she dares to lift her eyes, his are staring distant into hers, nothing left of the hurt and the despair that filled them last time.

_I’m sorry._

The voices from the well strengthening at the memory, but she pushes them away.

“Regarding our…” She stills herself, the hurt cutting through her mind just by the thought of it.

“What happened before…”

His posture shifts slightly, arms crossed behind straightened back, chin lifted starched, all of his attitude creating an unknown foreignness between them, a wall shielding him, his true him, from her.

“We shouldn’t speak of it now. Explaining it now would only lead to more questions, an emotional entanglement that would benefit neither of us.” His face obtaining the look of a cold mask as he speaks.

“Harden your heart to a cutting edge, and put that pain to good use against Corypheus.”

The urge to swallow impossible to deny, hurting inside her throat as she can feel the irritation stir in her mind once again.

She does not want an explanation.

She is quite aware of his reasons to end it.

She is more surprised he did not end it earlier, after she told him all the terrible things she did in her life before.

She would not want to commit to someone like her, either.

Yet it hurts that he lead her belief her past did not matter to him, just to leave her now, after these last months in which she had finally gotten a taste of happiness.

No, she certainly does not wish to hear his reasons!

_Make sure, there will never be a future._

_Hear him say the words._

_Bother him no further._

“So don’t explain it. Just tell me, it is over for good. Tell me, there is no possibility of anything between us ever again.” The words she had prepared out of her mind now, her duty done, yet she cannot restrain herself.

There is nothing left for her to say, nothing left to do, but to wait for his response.

Yet, the words keep falling from her mouth, she cannot hold them back, a gate opened within her mind; words tainted with emotions forcing their way out of it, stirring in her mind, rushing through her veins as she spits them into the caustic silence between them.

“Tell me you have never truly cared for us.” A fear coming to life by lingering spoken out loud in the
cool air.

“Tell me, I was just some casual dalliance, so I can call you a coldhearted bastard and move on!”
The whispers from the well roaring in her mind, eyes burning from the tears she can feel damming up behind of them.

Just say it, her ardent thoughts. Just say the words, repeating on her mind.

“I can’t do that. I’m sorry. I never wanted to hurt you.” The distance within his eyes melting, the grey darkening again, resembling his kind eyes she loves so high again.

He denies her to hear the so much needed words to free her from her bound. Hurting her with kindness instead of cruelty.

Why can he not just say the words?

There will never be a future.

Hold down rage flaming within her mind again.

I never wanted to hurt you.

A dry laughter escaping her bitten lips, leaving a stinging taste of metal within her mouth.

“You have not just said that to me, have you?” Closing the distance between them, knees weak by the amount of rage throbbing inside her mind, a rage completely irrational and illogical, yet brisk up by the screaming, distant whispers inside her mind, pounding, but cloudy. She pushes them of again, mad about her own incapability of controlling her mind.

She flashes her anger against him. “Banal’abelas! Banal’vhenan!”

The world slows down painfully as soon as the words are spit out.

Forcing her to realize the horrified look on his face.

Forcing her to comprehend the awful things she just said to him.

Forcing her to feel the amount of guilt crashing upon her as she anticipates the hurt her words are causing within him.

Just say the words. Release me. Release us.

Anger on him, anger on herself. Anger on the raging whispers in the back of her mind which keep claiming her attention, even now. The lack of rest, of nutrition adding up to it, leaving her in this purely irrational, floating state of mind, denying her to think clearly.

The realization she does not care, the worst on top of it.

Her kiss is more of an assault, a messy clash of tongues and lips, yet answered by him just as passionate, leaving her entirely lost to the overwhelming sensations. Pushing the body close to his, pressing herself desperately against his slender body, grown all too familiar in the last years, drawing hoarse moans from his gaping lips; moans that only rile her up even more.

Loosing herself in the sensation of his touch, seeking fulfillment for her selfish desire once more.

The knowledge of what she is doing is wrong, so wrong angering her anymore, reaching out for his
tunic to pull it over his head, only disrupting their kiss for a short moment before devouring him again.

She pants in desperation but cannot care for it, not now, not with his hands impatiently fumbling around with the belts of her armour. Silent curses on her lips, she helps to get rid of the unwanted leather, way too eager to feel his smooth skin on her own once again, just one more time.

“You are so beautiful.” His whispered astonishment interrupted by another clash of lips.

Don’t think about it! Her resolute order towards herself.

Too quick to catch he turns them around, pressing her against the piled up desk, she can feel his rigid outline against her center. She can feel her hips grinding against him, frantic searching for any kind of friction.

Countless memories of him, teasing her until she could not hold back anymore, leaving her on the edge, begging for more, for anything, crushing back upon her mind, letting a frustrated groan escape her lips, but swallowed up by his hot, hungry kisses.

Mind clouded with desire as his lips start wandering across her bare chest, her peaks rising and tingling in the coldness of the air. He grunts at the sight of it, eagerly cupping one, sucking the other one in ruggedly, making her cringe once more.

Her breath collapsing once she can feel his other hand firmly pressing against her throbbing center, choked cry escaping her sore throat as she eagerly raises her hips against his hands.

More. Demanding of an impatient mind.

She drags him back into another angry kiss, reaching out for his breeches, pulling them down unwary.

His rugged small cries her reward for the first, firm strokes, she can feel him to be just as impatient as she is, but still he restrains himself for a second. His regard, even after everything that has happened between them, keep infuriating her, angrily panting out her demand.

He is inside of her in only a heartbeat, slamming into her in one firm thrust, leaving both of them gasping, taking her a few seconds to adjust to his length, before he starts moving inside her again.

His shaken moans intoxicating her mind.

Don’t think!

One of his hands reaching down between their clutched bodies, fingers pressing against her apex, capturing his rhythm, drawing hold back cries from her lips as the aching in her stomach grows.

His thrusts speeding up as she raises her hips against him, allowing him deeper, yearning for more.

Tension building stronger between her thighs, an unforgiving, sweet ache that demands fulfillment, immediately.

Elven words she cannot understand trembling on his lips, before he claims hers once again, messy and hot, leaving her panting and moaning as his tongue teases hers.

The press of his fingers increasing, slowly circling around her apex, shouting small flashes through her mind, short tenses of her stomach, before she can feel nearing her edge, desperately to come but
horrified of the afterwards.

She tries to draw it out for a heartbeat longer, the sensation overwhelming her. Hot pleasure hitting her mind, catching her breath away as she groans his name in ecstasy, clenching around him, her whole body tensing almost painfully.

She can feel it is dragging him over the his edge as well, thrusts becoming unsteady, but desperately, his voice a single hoarse whimper.

The sound of her name on his lips painfully hurling her back into reality.

Her mind coming back to senses as the frenzy disperses.

*Oh creators, what have we done?*

She pushes away from him, avoiding his look until she is clothed decently again, until she gathered enough courage to withstand.

“I am sorry. This is not what I intended.” Her stiff apologize, poisonous on her tongue.

His touches still reverberating on her skin, the whole extend of their doing splays in front of her.

His eyes grown tired and cold again, changed within a second, so it does seem.

“It won’t happen again.” He confirms.

The need to close her eyes for a moment too strong to resist.

Here they are.

The words she needed to hear.

“There will not be a future for us?” Her voice is shaking with against her will again, but the body is long since beyond control.

“There can’t be, and I’m sorry about it.” His voice restrained and distant again, just as nothing had happened.

*Bother him no further.*

“Very well.”

She leaves.

She will bother him no further.
Vir Revas

Chapter Summary

Rhachalle's attempt of coping with the break-up

Chapter Notes

Please note: This chapter contains explicit descriptions of selfharm!
The ritual "Vir Revas" is purely based on my own headcanons.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Upstairs.
Mind buzzing.

Downstairs.
Mind stirring.

Upstairs.
Her chambers deserted.

Downstairs.
Moans, groans, filled with lust, memories screaming within her mind.

Upstairs.
Aching pain, filled with rage, desire clouding her mind.

Downstairs.
Have to end it, have to end it.

Upstairs.
It is over. It is done.

Downstairs.
It must end.

Upstairs.
May not be stuck on distraction.
Downstairs.

*Must end the distraction.*

Upstairs.

*Must fulfill the ritual.*

Downstairs.

*The ritual will end the distraction.*

Upstairs.

Rummaging for the memory.

Downstairs.

Trying to remember every word spoken.

Upstairs.

Rehearsing them again, silent, in her mind.

Downstairs.

*May not forget any single one.*

Upstairs.

*Must remember every single detail.*

Downstairs.

Feeling certain, feeling determined.

She pauses, legs sore from the frantic up and down.

A moment to indulge on the sweet ache, promise of what to come.

Rushes to leave her chambers, restraining the mind from wandering, legs heading for the courtyard, expecting to find the Seeker on her way to her morning prayers.

Yet interrupting her walk as she spots the woman, carefully shutting the door to the Ambassador’s chambers behind her, blissful smile on the woman’s face, telling of a happiness that makes her sick only by the thought of it, a happiness lost for her forever now.

Voice deep and harsh as she addresses the Seeker, who gets startled up by the sudden sound of her voice. She spins around, grey eyes widening as her eyes meet her face.

“Rhachalle! You… What happened to your face? Your marks…” The Seeker sputters, voice pitched lightly higher than usually.
“… were removed.” She cuts her off, eyes wandering over the Seeker’s complete put on armour and the girdled sword.

“You are prepared to fight.” She states, own voice foreign with command.

“Follow me.” She turns and continues her march, steps behind her accelerating.

“Wait, what? Are we under attack? What is going on?”

It is rude to ignore the woman’s questions, yet her mind feels inflated, focusing to find the words to answer, a task too complex to fulfill right now.

“Inquisitor, report to me, now!” The woman’s voice raised, sharpened by demand, the heavy steps behind her have stopped.

But she keeps going, trusting in the certainty that the Seeker will follow anyway.

She has already reached the gates as she can hear the woman behind her again.

“Open the gate.” She calls out to the guard who has seen her return a few hours ago.

Only a few hours ago.

Don’t think about it!

“Inquisitor, where are we going?” The Seeker demands answers again, she can hear the disapproval and concern in the warrior’s voice, yet still cannot bring herself to talk.

Guilt nestling at the back of her thoughts because of it, but she cannot bother right now.

The frenzied rush stops immediately once she reaches the small glade, out of earshot of prying eyes from the castle.

The body objects to the forced rest, it remains unquiet, haunted, demands action, demands motion.

“Bare your blade.” She commands, straightened back still turned towards the Seeker.

“Rhachalle?” The woman’s voice bearing an uncertainty within, addressing her with her name instead of her title again. She must not.

“I must fulfill the ritual.” She murmurs, more to herself than towards the Seeker.

“I need you to watch me. If I call forth a demon and cannot withstand possession, you must slay me immediately.”

The own voice heard like from a distance, the bleakness within would have concerned her, under different circumstances. Now, she just shrugs it off. Why bother.

She turns to wait for the Seeker’s consent yet only finds horrified disbelief.

“What happened to you, Rhachalle?” She repeats the annoying questions again.

“Do not call me that!” She inhales deeply to calm down again.
“You carry the same abilities as a Templar. Will you do your duty, if necessary?” Her voice an impatient growl, the body aching to break the stagnation again.

“We were worried about you, when Solas returned without you. But he insured us, you’d be fine. What…”

“Enough!” Her throat stings, letting a weak cry escape as his name startles mind and body.

She cannot wait for the Seeker to consent.

The woman will not show mercy on her if she becomes an abomination anyway. Why bother.

“Stand ready.” She orders, turning around again, panting harshly of the mental struggle she fights.

The dagger, usually used to chop her herbs, laid in front of her in the limply grass, the small bowl filled with coarse salt placed next to it, before she undresses carelessly, forcing her mind not to remember the last time she exposed her skin this night. Not yet.

Her staff and her spirit blade’s grip lunged tossed aside, so she will not be able to reach it in case of possession. No need to endanger the Seeker any further.

Bare and exposed against the cold air of the dawning grey of a foggy morning, her skin cringes, small stings of distress.

_Breathe in. Breathe out. Focus._

She reaches for the small blade in front of her as she kneels on the frozen ground.

_Release your anger and grief in a moderate amount, then never speak of it again. The pain will slowly fade afterwards._

She remembers floating unconscious through heavy darkness, the just obtained mark on her hand aching, pounding, haunting her down.

She remembers a healing spell, soft and easing, a promise of consolation, of escaping the pain.

_Liar._

The blade hits the exposed skin of her shoulder, penetrating it like water, sharp stinging pain, singing softly within her ears, decreasing the ache of her mind as the metal leaves ornamental lines behind, beautifully red on pale skin.

She remembers the caring smirk within greyblue eyes as he seeks for her on the small glade she called her own when they were still located at Haven.

_Liar._

The blade cutting deeper, the pain increasing as the dagger tears the soft flesh of the upper arm, drawing tears from her eyes, but she brushes them of.
She remembers his devotion, witnessed in the red future of Redcliffe.

“If there is any hope, any way to save them… My life is yours.”

Liar.

The blade opening the veins at her wrist, the entire arm singing by now, alluring her with ache, with burning. She closes her eyes, lids heavy, weary, tired, indulging in the sweet promise of oblivion.

She remembers the terrified look on his face, illuminated reddish by the fires devastating Haven.

“I can’t allow you to sacrifice yourself! There must be a better way!”

Liar.

The blade finding its way through the aching flesh on its own, the hand starting to shake uncontrollable as it guides the delivering metal through the rejoicing flesh, each drip of blood entering the skin a blessing.

She remembers their first shared dreams, sweet taste of first kisses pounding on her lips.

She remembers their slow approaching night for night, following a path they both felt comfortable with.

Liar.

The blade dancing, deepening, the flesh growing more sensible, senses sharpening.

A small cry escapes bitten lips as the memories claims her mind violently, hiding from the pain within her mind, hiding in the pain of the flesh.

She remembers her relief, when he returned to Skyhold after mourning for Wisdom.

She remembers their shared walk on the ramparts that night under the forgiving light of the moons.

She remembers reaching out for him, their first kiss in the waking world.

She remembers the words falling from his lips, pious and reverent.

“Ar lath, ma vhenan.”

Liar!

The blade rips the flesh apart, her throat aches from the scream roaring through it by the sight of the memory.

She remembers their shared dreams, shared talks, their stolen moments of peace.
She remembers her anxiety, always fearing he would detect who she truly was.

She remembers his sweet patience whenever she had not felt ready to proceed, respecting her boundaries.

*Liar!*

The blade sings along her veins, releasing the soothing red, releasing the hurt into a familiar kind of pain, a bearable kind of pain.

She remembers their intimate togetherness, sharing a bead, savoring in the other’s presence.

She remembers dancing underneath the tender moonlight at the balcony of Halamshiral.

She remembers his smile, so full of pride, full of elation.

*Liar!*

The blade forces its way across the devoted body, willing to give, willing to receive.

The face wet from streaming tears, the throat sore from constant whimpers.

She remembers his kind kisses after she told him the truth about herself.

She remembers the deliberate comfort.

She remembers the warm tenderness of being accepted, wholly, safe, at home.

*Liar!*

The blade breaks through the sensitive skin of her tights.

One cut for every touch of his hands, punishing the traitorous skin.

Pain clouding the aching mind, numbing it for a few more heartbeats, finding peace at the foggy daze.

She raises the dagger, blade only inches away from the skin above her heart.

One scar already visible on her chest, remnant of the last *vir revas*, the day the father was buried.

Again, weary lids close.

She remembers the deep, profound hurt on his face, replacing the blissful expressions of love, of pride in a heartbeat only.

“And I am sorry. I distracted you from your duty.”

Mind and body flinch of the memory, as vividly as witnessing it at just this moment.
“I’m sorry. I never wanted to hurt you.”

“Liar!”

The blade invades the soft flesh of her chest, ripping it open, releasing all of her hurts, all of her rage, all of her grief into this one feral outcry.

Lips unable to shape the word anymore, throat only releasing an urgent, furious, wordless cry.

Until there is nothing left inside of her.

Until darkness threatens to take over her mind.

Until her thoughts are numb, as numb as the body, as numb as her soul.

The hand is shaking and sticky with half-dried blood as she reaches for the bowl filled with salt.

She grabs a handful, smearing it across the gaping wound upon her chest.

A sharp inhale as the salt sets the flesh on fire, leaving nothing behind but sweet, forgiving pain.

As she rises again, she can feel the weakness within the legs, struggling to carry the body’s weight.

The Seeker’s voice reaching her ears again, it must have done before, but she cannot figure it.

She faces the woman, face distorted with horror and concern.

She wipes the face dry of tears and puts her armour back on, skin crying out with pain whenever the leather meets the aching cuts.

The voice rising from the sore throat silent, hoarse, foreign.

“You will never see me weep again.”

Chapter End Notes

You might want to listen to the incredibly talented Emilie Autumn, inspiration hit me quite hard while listening to Liar
Responses

Chapter Summary

Basically the companions reacting to the break-up. Not exactly according to canon.

Chapter Notes

Please note, there is some implied references to self-harm again, as well as some pretty unpleasant thoughts regarding self-harm.

“Inquisitor, stop it, now!” The Seeker’s voice rough with command now, shrilling behind turned back. Yet there is no reason to stop and explain. The ritual fulfilled, nothing left to bother about.

The legs deny the seeker her wish, keeping moving steadily towards the silhouette of the castle, dark against the dawning morning, the sun still unable to dispel the dense, humid fog in the air.

“Rhachalle, we have to talk about what happened to you!” The name hanging in between them, sticking viscidly to the body. It flinches by the raw sound of it. Too familiar, too personal.

She cannot allow anymore selfishness.

“I should have never agreed to this!” The Seeker continues hissing, despite her own silence, voice deepened with anger now.

At another time it would have forced her to stand and listen. Yet not today. Not anymore

She cannot bring herself to care anymore.

“You had no choice. In my state of mind I was a danger to the Inquisition.” Her austere, plain answer.

“And you are not anymore? After performing a blood magic ritual within a spitting distance of Skyhold?” The Seeker’s voice cracks, pitching higher once more.

“Strictly speaking, I should make you never set foot in the castle again!”

The Seeker does not know, does not understand.

And how could she.

The vir revas is not familiar to her, neither to the Chantry.

It is not part of her world. She cannot understand it.

“There was no blood magic involved, Seeker. You have not failed your duty.” Head turns slightly, anticipating the Seeker’s stature out of the corner of the eyes.
“You were cutting yourself while chanting… something! You have to be aware of how dangerous this is! How bad it could have ended!” The wrath in the Seeker’s voice slowly muddles with disgust, a sound that despite everything hits her with a sharp sting.

Too often heard within others’ voices if addressed to her.

“I do. Which is exactly why I brought you along.” She hardens her voice with all the strength she can find within the dizzying body. Aware of its weakness, she does not allow her to continue their argument, heading down for the castle instead.

The blood still running warmly over sensitive flesh, small caresses, yet she is aware of the price it costs the body. She needs to hurry before the traitorous body of hers becomes too weak to even walk.

She will not sacrifice anymore to its weakness.

Back in her chambers, she fetches her dish containing the salve made of elf root, soothing the raging skin once applied.

She lets a soft sigh escape, already missing the burning ache a little, the physical pain that kept the ones of the mind at bay.

*No magic may be used on the ornaments of the vir revas.*

*Use only the gifts of the Hearthkeeper to survive.*

*Honor the pain.*

*Let it be a reminder of your loss.*

*Along with the wounds of the body, the wounds of the soul will heal along.*

She obeys to the mother’s voice, applying the sharp scenting salve on the bleeding cuts, except for the one above her heart, smearing the gritty salt in it once again.

The emerging scar will be the only sign of her pain that may remain on her body, on her mind.

“*Harden your heart to a cutting edge.*”

His voice resounding still painfully within the head as the fingers trail along the edge of the wound. Still hurting words, fingers digging into the raw flesh almost automatically, causing the pain to raise again, to swallow his hurting words from her mind, embracing her with its soft silence.

A firm knock on the door flinches her back into the body, suddenly aware of the harsh breathing emerging from the lungs.

The body answers differently to the pain than the mind and she is not used to this fact.

The knocking reappears, reminding g her not to be the only person around.
Her steps still shaky as she climbs downstairs again to open the door, denying herself to name the hope rising within the chest.

He will not visit her anymore.

Still, she cannot deny the slight feeling of disappointment as she spots the Enchanter on her doorstep.

“Oh my dear, Cassandra did not exaggerate! You do look dreadful! Come, let me take a look at this.”

The Enchanter continues her mindless chatting, meant only to allure other’s mind to rest, promising ease with drivel.

She already knows this strategy of the Enchanter, she does not object as the mind blends the calm voice and words into one, messy puddle, allowing the mind to wander as she follows the Enchanter back upstairs.

*I want you to leave.* She wants to say, *I want to be alone.* Yet remains silent.

After all what has happened within the last days, there had been enough self-referentiality. It would not be appropriate to ask the Enchanter to leave.

She realizes the sudden silence between them already seconds too late to react, the Enchanter staring at her uncomprehendingly.

“Pardon me?” She forces her mind to find a proper way of keeping up with the one-sided conversation.

The Enchanter’s polite smile weakens, the woman’s expressions softening.

Only once has the woman shown herself like this to her, without her mask, with a different kind of mask?

Only once, after the woman’s bonded had crossed the veil.

“I said, sit down, so I can take care of these wounds of yours.” The Enchanter says, obviously repeating the previous, unheard words.

*No!*

“I cannot let you do this.” The strained answer, lips numb again, as if unaware of how to form words.

“Oh, don’t be ridiculous, darling. You can’t go around with these wounds! They’ll weaken you. And most of all, they will tell everybody you are weakened right now! You may not risk this.” The Enchanter’s voice and the voice of the mother mingling together for a second.

Gruff shaking of head before she reaches for her mana, pouring deep inside.

A quick thought and a whispered word is all it takes to call the spall that hides the red lines on her skin.

Something similar to amusement stirring within the chest as she sees the Enchanter’s eyes widening.

“Oh, what a nice little gimmick. Where did you learn *that* from?”
Thoughts wandering back to the day Mir’lin had completed the ritual as well; the mother must not have known about it, for she had never agreed to Mir’lin’s relationship with her beloved. The spell an invention of her own, to protect the sister from the mother’s anger.

“It does not matter.” Her answer more harsh than intended, spoiled by the painful memory of her lost sibling.

“I am thankful to you for your concern, Enchanter. Yet it is not necessary.”

A sound of indignation coming from the woman next to her, signalizing she must have said the wrong thing.

“Not necessary? Darling, who do you think you are going to fool with this little conjuring trick?” The Enchanter closes the distance between them again, forcing her to take a step back, yet remaining silent about it as the Enchanter clearly does not want to hear her answer to that.

“Enchanter, my wounds are part of a ritual, part of my religion. Tradition demands the… my body to heal them by itself.”

The Enchanter sighs, showing to be annoyed clearly.

Of course she cannot understand either.

The Enchanter is just as captured by the Chantry lectures as the Seeker is.

She will not understand.

“All right then. But remember, I did warn you about this… liaison of yours after all.”

The Enchanter rummages within the small bag of hers before she puts her hand out again.

A plain ring made out of cerise wood lying on the woman’s palm.

“I intended to give you this gift under less…. traumatic circumstances.” The Enchanter hesitates as all she does is stare at the piece of wood.

The Enchanter never hesitates.

“I commissioned this ring from the Formari – the greatest enchanters in all Thedas – for you. Once it was customary for the circles to craft enchantments for their staunchest friends and allies. And you have been both.

Do remember this, yes darling? Love has always been fleeting. But it doesn’t mean you have to be all by yourself in times like these.”

Still unable to reach her hand out for the gift the Enchanter offers, she stares at the ornamented ring until the woman lays it down on the small nightstand next to her.

A breathless “thank you” is all she can bring herself to.

An awful feeling of guilt crushes down upon her as the Enchanter leaves, for she cannot thank her properly.

She briefly remembers her Sylvan wood ring, worn almost all of her lifetime, then left burning along with the hunter’s corpse before she left the clan, a sign for her time as a First to be over.
Carefully reaching out for the precious wood, turning the carved piece of wood between her fingers. She finally recognizes the delicate carving on it. The lines show Ghilan’nain’s sign, lines that once have marked the body and face of hers for almost fifteen years by now.

Attempts to catch up on the sleep lost to the last nights, inefficient.

The pain in every inch of the body allows her to forget the pain of the mind, yet denies her to fall asleep as well.

She surrenders to the waking world, dresses again and leaves the stifling narrowness of the chambers.

Yet the ramparts are not as deserted as hoped-for.

The snorting voice of the Archer cutting through the silence of the midday.

Usually gladdening to spent time with the young elf, yet today she fears what is about to come. Caught by her unprepared, the ornamenting red lines shown on her exposed arms.

“What’s up, Inky? Glad you’re…” The elf’s voice freezes as she forces the body to turn around, facing the Archer.

Yet accumulating into a little shriek as the young elf faces her.

“Dammit, Inky! What freakin’ happened?” She forces her mind to calm.

The Archer usually reacts with much more emotion than she is used to. She needs to stay still in mind.

“Your face… And your arms?! Fuck! Who did this to you?”

Another long breath before she trusts the voice to answer.

“It is nothing to concern you, Sera.”

“Bullshit!” The elf cuts her off.

“I told that stupid son of a bitch he shouldn’t have left you out there all alone!

‘She can handle herself, Sera!’ Pissbag!”

Hearing her mimicking his voice, stirs the urge to cup her ears so she does not have to listen to it, not even from the young elf’s voice.

But the Archer smirks already again. “I bet he so makin’ it up to you! You’re gonna get some really hot I-am-so-sorry-redemption sexy bits!” The Archer snorts with laughter, yet the words call forth the memory of the last night much more vividly than desired.

“I am afraid not, Sera. We… It is not like this anymore.”

The Archer’s face frowns within seconds.
“Wait, what?” She can see the elf’s jaws clench even from afar.

“What did he fuckin’ do?” The elf demands to know, taking a step closer towards her.

“Are the wounds…? They’re not because of him, right? Right?”

Another slow breath.

“They are, in a way.” She begins but the Archer does not stay to listen. She can hardly blink as the young elf turns towards the large tower and runs off, on hand reaching for the quiver on her back.

A silent curse whirling within her mind as she pursues her.

By the time she reaches the rotunda, the Archer is already pointing an arrow with her drawn bow on his chest, yelling furiously at him.

“Sera!” Her voice louder, harsher than expected, yet it has the desired effect. The Archer lowers her bow, but without looking at her.

First now she allows herself to perceive her surrounding, the Bull and him sitting over a board of Diamondback, two cups of the Bull’s liquor which she is all too familiar with standing beside the board. Despite everything it soothes her that he does not have to be by himself after the events of the last days.

She can feel the Bull’s gaze darting over the visible wounds on her arms, for she did not take the time to cast her spell to hide them again.

“Sera, down with the bow, immediately!” She orders once again, forcing herself not to look at the deepening pain on his face.

For of course he notices the wounds, too.

“After all he did to you?” The Archer hisses towards her, now looking straight into her face, with eyes darkened by anger.

“He has done nothing. The actions were mine.” Her voice rough and cold again, yet she cannot nor will not do anything about it.

“Furthermore, we will need every support we can get against Corypheus. Leave him be. He is still useful to our cause.” The cold words resounding like roars within her mind.

The hurt lingering within the air almost physical.

She turns and leaves before it will break her down.

She cannot allow this kind of weakness anymore.

As the evening crawls in again, the Seeker approaches her another time, barely looking at her.

She does not mind.
She never felt comfortable with being eyed.
“What you did today was irresponsible, Inquisitor. I always tried to respect the traditions of yours, but this…” The Seeker’s voice cracks once again.

She tries to close her mind against the pang of guilt but it will not work.

“What you did today was irresponsible, Inquisitor. I always tried to respect the traditions of yours, but this…” The Seeker’s voice cracks once again.

“It has been necessary. I could have been distracted too easily in a fight, if I had not completed the ritual. I could have been tempted by a demon at any time, unless I would get control over my feelings again. Which I did.

But I am sorry to have bothered you with it. Yet you were the only one I trusted.”

The Seeker’s face softens slightly by her words.

“Trusted enough to kill you.” She completes the thought.

“Trusted to do whatever was necessary. To do your duty.”

A frustrated groan escapes the Seeker’s throat.

“I honestly don’t know what to make of you.

Sometimes I consider us friends, other times I can hardly recognize you at all.”

The Seeker leaves as quickly as she had arrived, leaving her mind a bit emptier than before.

Never has she felt the distance between them so deeply.

“I honestly don’t know what to make of you.”

Of course she could not.

How could she?

The Seeker never truly knew her. No one ever did, except for the mother.

Her unforgiving, strict mother.

With her death, the only person aware of her entire wickedness had been gone.

She had thought she could start anew.

How foolish.

She had dared to show him who she truly was.

She had finally dared to trust someone.

And what has it been good for?

She revealed her true self.
And it had driven him away.

He left, because he could not stand her true self.
Rhachalle follows Morrigan through her Eluvian

Eyes torn open, soothing sleep still denied to her. The aching body as restless as the mind, tumbling into the never ending abyss of circling, haunting memories.

No, sleep will keep avoiding her tonight.

She rises, before even more time is wasted in the fruitless attempt, the abandoned ramparts offering some comfort, like so often before, the biting cold mountain air offering some peace to her chaotic thoughts.

Yet not tonight, either. Her walk remains unsteady, mind keeps wavering, wandering, still and despite everything not able to forget this matter, their matter. Him.

Anger against her stubborn thoughts rising again, pace quickening, the body enjoying the simplicity of its accelerated, aimless walk.

Wearing the body out, exhausting it, maybe this will be enough to finally allow her to get some rest.

“Inquisitor Lavellan!” The spymaster’s sonorous voice tearing the silence of the clouded night apart.

Quickly forcing the body to straighten, the face to hide the chaos within the mind, before she dares to turn towards the agitated woman.

“Thank the Maker you’re here!” Fighting against the idle mind, not prepared to meet anyone, not prepared to listen and comprehend, she forces it to focus on the Spymaster’s troubling words, catching her off guards.

The Witch’s Eluvian activated, both her and the son of hers vanished.

The Eluvian open, unprotected in midst of Skyhold, offering a gate for whatever the Witch may send to them.

“I will go after her.” Her quick decision, already heading for the gardens.

Focusing on the possible threats against the Inquisition she first realizes the possibility of this being an ambush at the moment she passes through the glowing glass.

Silently cursing herself for going alone, without armor nor weapons, focusing on her mana, summoning it in case she has to protect herself.

She expects to find herself in the temple again, or maybe the Crossroads. Astonishment even greater as the sharp scent of Lyrium fills the lungs and revives the mind, the pale green light recognized within a heartbeat.

This is the Fade.
A few steps taken, carrying her away from the still glowing mirror.

The shredded landscape extending before her, a seemingly endless abstruse net of small trails and paths, impossible to say where the Witch and her son went.

Yet the Witch knows too much about the Inquisition already.

She will not allow the woman to flee and sell her information to the Empress, or even worse to the Elder One.

She cannot allow it!

She has to find her!

*Breath in. Breathe out.*

Mind slowing down, thoughts calming again, before she lets her mind reach out for one of the small wisps, curious, playful, teasingly swirling around her, attracted by the power of the mark.

Her mind stroking the wisps almost faded energy briefly, a picture of the Witch shaping within her mind, the scent of the power she emits, sending it to the wisp, an unspoken question.

The wisp spins around quickly, muttering cheering, happily quivers of energy as it rushes away, herself hurrying to keep up with it.

Hardly enough time to see into the miracles the Fade once again reveals to her, too obtained not to lose her small guide.

The Witch’s desperate shouts audible before she spots her, calling out for the son of hers.

Lifting the own voice to draw the Witch’s attention, lips still unused to the hardly spoken name.

The Witch approaching her, revealing facial expressions distorted by sorrows so deeply, she would never have expected to see on the restrained woman’s face.

“You are here? But…” The Witch’s voice dropping, biting back whatever she intended to say.

The desperation within light green eyes so unfamiliar, yet surprised to believe the woman’s pain to be real, instead of assuming deception.

“We are standing in the fade! To direct the Eluvian here would require immense power. If Kieran is lost to me, after all I have sacrificed…”

A heartbeat passes, yet another.

All the distance the Witch had shown since she had joined them at Skyhold, everything the Spymaster has warned her about the Witch, challenged in the distress of a woman simply searching for her son.

The reserved, intransigent Witch simply caring for the son of hers.

She does not seem wanting to run and betray the Inquisition.

“I will help you. We will find him.” Her voice firmer than the mind, yet she turns towards the wisp
that led her to the Witch, picturing the woman’s son in her mind, until the wisp wanders off again.

Following the hovering light, she hardly perceives her surrounding, first realizing how more and more wisps head for the same direction as they do.

Mind awakening suspiciously again, only now becoming aware of the reason focusing to be so much harder than before.

Once spotted, she cannot cut the whispers of the Well, growing louder in her mind, anymore.

Distant flicker usually, chatting voices now, mingling words and phrases together, unintelligible, numbing and startling at the same time.

Pictured memories rushing through her mind, too fast, too quickly to hold on to, but clearly accelerating, causing her mind to flinch, a growing headache like red-hot knives on the inside of the head.

“That’s… No. It can’t be.” The silent gasp behind her, a way out of her mind, into reality again, rising the gaze, only to fall silent by the sight that is offered to her.

A lithic statue towering in front of her, portraying a hooded person, stabbed by an abandoned sword, blood streaming constantly out of the stylized head and chest, an image sending shivers through the body just by the sight of it.

Yet the skin tingles by something different, a raw power, causing dizziness within the body as she spots its source.

The son of the Witch standing before an elder woman, kneeling at his feet, clearly casting some kind of spell. A spell, so unfamiliar, so foreign she can feel its simple presence weakening her.

No spell a young child should know, neither cast.

Almost gasping in relief as the boy looks up, breaking the spell, at the moment the Witch calls for him.

They young face brightening as it spots the familiar figure, yet she can hardly concentrate on the boy, nor on the Witch as the elder woman rises up gracefully despite her age, without hesitation approaching them, her voice filling every inch of her mind, a mind barely containing the rebelling, exclaiming voices of the Well, answering the humming voice of the woman in front of her.

The headache distracting her from reality, struggling to keep track of the heated conversation between the Witch and the elder woman.

A short moment of surprise as the Witch addresses the woman as mother, answered by a rush of deep understanding, not her own, but the Wells.

She can feel the Witch summoning her mana, she opens her mouth interfere, not sure who exactly they are facing but certain the elder woman to be too powerful for them, especially if purely trusting on their mana, without staffs to focus it.

Trying to warn the Witch, apparently unaware of the power hiding behind the charade of the elder woman, now casually lifting her arm, blue light flickering on her palm.
“Be a good girl and restrain her.” The simple command as force overwhelms her, overriding her ability to think, to control.

The voices of the Well rejoicing in the nameless power claiming the limp body.

The body which obeys them instead, instead of her, the traitorous body, denying her the right that is her, the right to control it.

It has to obey to her, her alone, not them!

Lost every control over it, nothing left to do but watch as the body reaches out to interrupt the spell the Witch is preparing, unable to answer to the angry protest of hers.

The world around her mingled into one single, clouded blur, yet one smug chuckle reaching her mind.

“You drank from the Well. What were you expecting?”

The raging choir within her mind answering to the presence of the both strange and familiar woman, the unspeakable force radiating around the elder woman.

“You… are Mythal!” A breathless whisper falling from uncredulous lips.

“You gave yourself to the service of an ancient elven god!”

His voice unwanted, trying to shut it out immediately.

Always be devoted to the Pantheon, Da’len. Even if you feel no one is listening to you.

Pray, and hope they will, one day. It is part of your duties as a Keeper!

The betrayal of the body still aching within her mind, lost control over it again, sworn too often not to ever let this happen again, darkest exhaustion threatening to claim her just by the thought of it.

Delivered at the mercy of another once again.

Yet at the mercy of a Goddess, of Mythal, of the Protector of sun and earth.

The Goddess whose vallaslin she would have chosen if the Hanal’gihan had not interfered with her life.

She presses the body to bow before the Goddess, not sure she will be able to rise from a proper curtsy again.

The Goddess’ small smile a greater honor than she ever thought she could receive, yet trying to calm the still raging voices down again, to be able to take every detail of this precious moment in.

A sudden sting of sadness hitting her, the Mother might have been proud of her, if she would have lived to tell.

After a lifetime of dedication to the Elven history, a piece of it personified in front of her daughter.

The voices within her head switching into pictures once again, memories of Mythal’s priests, collected over millennia. A beautiful elven woman, with golden eyes, the same power radiating around her, vibrant and terrifying at once.
But still.

A question, an old question staring to rise from her thoughts once again, a question she had asked the mother for so many times as a child, yet still unanswered.

Though she restrains herself from asking. Restrains, until she can no longer hold back, addressing the Goddess, voice more tainted with desperate sound than intended to.

“If Mythal is a part of you, why haven’t you helped us?”

The body still hurting from the hunter’s demands, beaten, broken, lying in front of the towering shrine, the lithic dragon spreading its wings as like protecting, yet the desperate pleas staying unanswered. Pleas for revenge, pleas for justice.

The younger sister denying to eat, denying to sleep. Revenging her beloved the only goal left on the sister’s mind, denying to listen to reason, no matter what she tries to tell the sister. Praying in front of the dragon’s statue again, praying to calm the troubled soul of the sister, praying to finally give her the peace she denies herself, praying to let the sister find the shem who killed the sister’s beloved.

No justice for Mir’lin, no justice for her. No justice for all the elves that prayed to Mythal in the millennia of her absence.

“We have called to you. Prayed to you!” An anger, kept for a lifetime raising up within her as the woman avoids her eyes.

“What was could not be changed.” The cryptic words startling the voices of the Well again, but now she pushes the quickly rushing, blurry memories aside.

“And what about now? You know so much…” She continues, fully aware of crossing every border of decency, yet knowing this might be a unique chance to finally, finally change something for her people.

Yet the warning glance terrifies her, a glance like the mother’s, when she misbehaved.

“You know not what you ask, Da’len!” Almost aching by the low, cutting voice, fighting the cries within the head, answering to the Goddess’ power seething underneath her barely hidden anger.

One sentence stuck in chaotic mind, repeating over in the head again and again.

“She was betrayed, as I was betrayed – as the world was betrayed!” A sentence causing the voices to roar in excitement again, responding to the Goddess wrath, before they calm without her doing, just as the Goddess.

“Alas, so long the music plays we dance.” Along with the calming voices of the Well, herself weakening, too, energy drained from the body, weary mind struggling to keep up, struggling and finally losing it, too obtained with the task to hold the body upstanding to follow the words of the Goddess.
It is first in her chambers later at night, lying in the thin bedroll on the hard ground again, for she
does not dare to use the ornamented, soft bed that still holds his scent in it, she recalls the encounter
over and over again.

Seeing the Witch, known only proud, restrained, coldhearted, pleading on her knees, begging for the
safety of her son.

“Have you not used him? Was that not the purpose, the reason you agreed to his creation?”

“That was then… Now he is my son!”

The heated words of the two women resounding within the big, empty rooms.

A child, created only for purpose sake, just as the mother did with the two younger sisters, just as
mother did with her.

Yet the Witch started caring for her child, cares enough to sacrifice herself for him.

Thoughts racing back through years of memories.

Would the mother do that for one of her daughters?

Protect the people, protect the clan.

She would, presumably. For it is a Keeper’s duty.

Yet only out of duty.

Did the mother ever loved them?

Lying in the cool air of the deepest night again, lying on the hard ground again, feeling almost like so
many nights of her former life, she almost believes the youngest sister’s arguments to be reasonable.

“I am many things, but I will never be the mother you were to me.”

Slight guilt creeping into the back of her mind, considering her previous low opinion on the Witch.

Yet now showing her a way of how not to repeat the mistakes of the past,

An achievement, leaving her utmost impressed by it.

The mother had always pressured her into bonding, into having children.

The magic runs strong within you, as it will in your children. You owe it to the Clan!

Despite everything the youngest sister had argued with her, she has always been aware of other
families, being different from theirs.

Families, in which love was given freely instead of only earned as a reward for extraordinary
achievements.

She never wished to be a mother like her own.
The Witch changed herself, the Witch did not repeat the mistakes of the past.

Maybe there still is a way for her to….

Connection between body and mind lost for an achingly long moment.

She will never be a mother.

She will never have children.

Not with him gone.

She tried to open enough for a… relationship to grow.

And he left.

A reminder that someone like her, someone like her does not deserve the right to love and be loved.

He had made a mistake, a mistake he corrected.

There will never be another man after him.

There never could.

The second before sleep finally claims the exhausted mind, the whispers bring yet another memory to her conscience, sending her over the edge of sleep.

“Without an end, there can be no peace.”
Almost a conversation

Chapter Summary

If one's subconsciousness wants to tell something, one should listen closely.

Chapter Notes

Despite completeing the Vir Revas, Rhachalle is still thinking an awful lot about Solas?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sharp, stinging scent, startling, salty taste within dense air, pale green swirling in thick strains around her, closing in, threatening to tie her down, denying her to move.

Urge to flee, to run, yet withstands it, but only just.

It is not real.

The fade a reflection, a dream awakening her fears to live again.

Thousands of eyes, staring at her, the feeling of their gaze stinging in the back, yet nothing to spot as soon as she turns around.

They are out there, somewhere, lurking lying in wait for her to make a mistake, to suffocate in mere panic.

Breathe in.

It is not real.

Breathe out.

They can only hurt her if she fails to control herself.

She must not. She is stronger than the Nightmare!

Within the whirling strands of pale fog, a pair of vibrant blue eyes appear, torn wide open in rawest fear, a face emerging around them, dried tears on tanned cheeks, as words tumble from ripped lips.

“Corypheus is mine” “I'm sorry, Anders.”

It is not real.

Yet trying to launch forward to protect the man from the deadly blow directed towards him. No sword, no staff, movement denied to her.

Condemned to watch and see the Champion fall, finally able to move again, kneeling next to the body in a desperate attempt to treat his wounds, to save what had been lost long age.
Another illusion arising, flaming red hair of the youngest sister, cocky glance, lips twisted in a flippant snoot, stalking the realm, her bow drawn, an arrow on the bowstring, yet oblivious to the assailant behind her.

A scream building up in the throat, ready to shout a warning to Xen’eth, ready to run, to protect the youngest sister.

But no scream emerges, no fiber moves.

It is not real.

Congealed to immobility again, condemned to watch and see her youngest sister fall, overwhelmed by the strength of the man attacking her, pinning her slender body down beneath his, helplessly as she was once, too, now condemned to watch, condemned to helplessness again.

Finally able to move again, the throat sore from her cries as she tries to get to the slain sister.

A scream of a well-familiar voice behind her, sending shivers over the skin, the illusion an almost perfect mirror of the day Mir’lin’s bonded had died. The younger sister softly holding the bleeding body of her beloved in her arms, crying, weeping, pleading for somebody, anybody to help her.

It is not real.

Yet she hurries to reach the younger sister, this time she might be able to save her sister’s beloved.

But by the time she reaches the whining sister, the body of the bonded fades, crumples into ashes and is gone.

The greenbrown eyes shaped so similar to her own, filled with nothing but grief and anger.

“Why couldn’t you save her?”

She wants to answer, say something, wants to tell how sorry she is, wants to help the younger sister, but Mir’lin runs, runs away and she is left to search for her, stumbling almost blindly through the foggy, drained landscape, pushing herself forward for she knows what the younger sister will try next.

Yet as soon as she spots her, ready to fulfill the vir revas, kneeling naked on the hard ground, a bowl of salt in front of her, a knife in her hand.

It is not real.

But she tries again, yet only to discover the body numbed again, unable to move, to reach for the sister, to stop her from her actions.

Can do nothing, condemned to watch the knife penetrates the sister’s chest, blade sheeted completely inside the flesh, until the body collapses, hits the ground.

Again, she can weep now, mourning for yet another life she could not protect.

You failed them, Da’len.
The mother’s voice ever-present, filling every inch of her aching mind.

It is not real.

She is surrounded by a crowd of people, count steadily growing, faces belonging to members of the Clan, faces belonging to the victims of the burning Halamshiral, faces belonging to the Inquisition.

Each one picturing a person who has died under her command.

You failed them, Da’len. You failed everyone!

Spinning world, faces blending into each other, head aching by the pure sight, spinning faster, desperate eyes and desperate pleas.

Why have you abandoned us? Why have you betrayed us?

She awakens, sudden, severe.

Head pounding along with the quickened rhythm of the irregular heartbeat.

Breathe in. Breathe out.

It has not been real. The headache growing stronger by the thought of it.

The Champion did not die.

Xen’eth has never been raped.

Mir’lin has never killed herself.

Not, that she knew about.

Just a dream. Just a dream. Repeating the simple statement to herself, yet doubting.

She had witnessed too many times how the fade had revealed the truth.

The headache almost too much to bear, making her gasp for air, yet lungs still feeling emptied, despite the deep breathes.

Slow attempt to rise from the bedroll, yet the body denies to, wounds still paining from the ritual, warm blood coating heated skin as the wounds break open again.

She should not bother.

Before him, she had been used to these nightly horrors, too.

And she will again.

The headache pounding within her mind, steadily. The voices from the will denying to fall silent again, after the encounter with the Goddess, still skipping though memories all the time, too quickly to actually capture anything.

Compassion had been right, that time at the temple. She does not want the voices within the head.

That time at the temple.
“You bear the mark of magic, which is familiar.”

“Those were foci, said to channel power from our gods.”

The stream of the voices of the Well slowing down a little, hardly to spot, but the headache subsides for a moment.

A picture rising from the depths of the voices memories, a slender hand, cupping the orb the Elder One had carried, lean fingers placed deliberately on the surface.

Nervousness, tension growing within the body as she recognizes the orb, recognizes the voice of the Sentinel, his voice, but keeps focusing.

“He clings to all that remains of his world, because he lacks the power to restore it.”

“What was could not be changed.”

“You honor the past and work to recover what was lost, even if the cost is high.”

“She was betrayed, as I was betrayed – as the world was betrayed!”

Thoughts darting back and forth, without logic reason to be shown, yet to weary to attempt to control those uprising memories, only grateful for the voices fading steadily, slowing down furthermore, almost pleasant to listen to by now.

“But what was Mythal? A Goddess or something more?”

“If not Gods, then mages. Or spirits. Or something we have never seen.”

Memories of his voice, of the Goddess’ voice, mingling together, almost like a conversation.

Almost like a conversation.

Something about the thought starling her up, driven by the unrest of the voices on the inside of her mind.

Almost a conversation.

Another picture shaping in front of the eyes, two elves walking side by side, laughing, chatting, attired in imposing, golden armour.

A brief flicker just and the image is gone.

Desperation crawling slowly into her mind, grim attempt to call the picture forth again, this one memory the well is so eager to show her.

Another quick flicker of memorizing, picturing the two elves again, closer this time.

The radiant golden eyes of the Goddess Mythal, the intoxicating sense of power surrounding her, calling to the voices within the head. Addressing the elf walking beside her:

An elf…

No!
Unaware of how she got on her balcony, the body shaking and numb at once, mind struggling to warp around the image the Well had shown her.

No!

Desperately fighting against the weak body to grasp what the image had shown, who the image had shown!

Younger, yes. A different style of clothing, of hair, yes. “Hot-blooded and cocky”, yes.

Yet him, she would always recognize.

Always recognize those kind greyblue eyes of his.

But how can it be true?

“Fen’Harel.”

Breaths still coming raggedly, small dark lights dancing in front of eyelids torn wide open.

“So much knowledge, yet so little personal history.” The memory of the Enchanter’s voice commenting unasked.

The most fluent mastery of the elven language she had ever witnessed, forming sentences without blinking an eye.

The manipulation of other’s dreams as easily as manipulating his own.

The spell that took her vallaslin away, a spell only the Creators were able to cast.

Another picture arising, showing him surrounded by a mass of people, respectfully greeted, their
faces freed from the vallaslin.

“Be slaves no more. Join my revolution on your free will, if it pleases you.”

His velvety voice resounding in the ears as if truly hurt, the cut above the chest flinching again.  

Our legends were... wrong? Again?

Seconds passing, minutes eventually. 

Maybe the memory has shown the truth. 

Maybe she is losing her mind. 

Maybe both. 

Yet the voices of the Well remaining finally quiet again, only faded whispers again, so easily ignored. 

But even if it is the truth, does it matter? 

“What I must tell you now. The truth…” 

An attempt to… actually tell her? 

Vigorously shaking the head at the thought. 

Why should he tell her? 

It does not change anything. 

She is still twisted, broken, tainted. 

If the voices showed her the truth, there is no doubt why he left. 

It had been inevitable. 

And she can never tell. 

He must never know that she knows. 

She certainly does not want him to feel pressured to stay, just so she keeps his secret. 

Furthermore, the vir revas has been completed. 

She may not wish for him to stay. 

He will leave, and she will accept it. 

Even if with her clan extinguished and him gone there will be no one left who ever truly knew her. 

Solitude a price she is willing to pay.
The knocking on the door missed hearing, hence the sudden presence of the spymaster startles her, leaving her panting once again this morning.

“I apologize for disturbing you this early, Inquisitor Lavellan. But I think you should greet your guests.”

The skeptical frown obviously not hidden will enough, as the spymaster starts laughing, a twanging little sound, fitting nicely into the fresh, grey morning air.

“I ensure you, you will want to meet these two.”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to all of you reading, leaving kudos and commenting!
Rhachalle's story will be continued after the holidays in A sister's concern

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!