No one quite knows what cataclysmic event rips Thedas asunder after Corypheus's defeat. After everyone thought the world had been saved.

No one quite remembers it, either. Not even Finn Lavellan, who wakes up in a rather compromising position in Helgen in the custody of Tamriel's Imperial forces. Baffled, surrounded by strangers, and facing the fact that even Dorian doesn't remember him anymore, Finn resolves to gather his loved ones scattered around Skyrim and find a way home...no matter the cost.

He hopes it's only a minor complication and a bit of lunacy when everyone starts claiming he has some sort of dragon's soul.

…

Skyrim/Dragon Age crossover with characters from both universes injected in Skyrim.
Expect ridiculous humor, suspense, angst over memories lost, and of course: ROMANCE.
MAJOR AMOUNTS OF ROMANCE.
Awakening didn’t come easy to Finn.

It felt almost as though a powerful force had slammed his mind around in his skull, smashed it to a mushy pulp, strained it through a colander, then poured it back into his head and expected it to just work properly. It *pounded*, pain lancing through his head and down the back of his neck, tension tightening the muscle cords into what felt like pure granite.

He was vaguely aware that he was kneeling, his head rested on something, cheek pressed against what felt like a solid block of stone. The noises around him filled his sensitive elven ears—boots scuffing dirt, quill scratching against paper, a rabble of angry voices.

“Death to the Stormcloaks!”

“Imperial bastards!”

“Let’s get this over with!”

Two of those words sounded vastly unfamiliar, and Finn opened his eyes just a crack, the harsh sunlight nearly blinding him. Frosty wind whipped against his body, seeping through his clothes; he squeezed his eyes a second then forced them open, making them adjust.

Someone in a black mask was posed over him—someone tall, holding the shaft of a mercilessly huge headsman’s ax.

Mythal’s butt. This didn’t look anything like Skyhold.

His wrists were bound behind his back; that much he felt when he tried to move his arms. A thousand questions ripped through his head: where was he? Where was his sister, Dorian, anyone else? And, most importantly—who the fuck fell asleep and woke up about to have their head chopped off?

The headache *could* have meant a hangover. Possibly. And Finn wasn’t usually one to turn down an ale. But he must have done something absolutely *heinous* to end up in this position.

He’d ask Dorian. If he could even find him.

If he didn’t get his head lopped off.

Scratch all that—his *ghost* would ask Dorian.

Finn’s ears picked up a heavy beating sound as the man grasped the ax handle in gauntleted hands and began to lift it. It was the sound of wind stirring, pushed and whipped by heavy, powerful things; he knew that sound, and yet he didn’t want to know that sound at all.

The headsman lifted the ax, and instead of scrambling away and running for his life like any smart individual might try, Finn stared dumbly above the headsman as a massive black dragon landed on the top of a keep tower.

*Well, fuck me sideways,* Finn thought.

It looked almost like Corypheus’s (now dead) dragon, if only for the soulless black of its scales; yet this one looked even more impossibly wicked, twisted horns jutting up from each side of its
head, piercing eyes fixed on the people below it that must have looked like ants. The headsman
hesitated, turning his head slightly. People began to shout all around Finn, a chorus of “dragon!”
and “by the eight!” and “get inside! Get inside!”

The dragon roared—or, well, Finn thought it was a roar, except it sounded deceptively like three
guttural words. Dragons in Thedas didn’t sound like that. Even worse, the skies immediately
roiled above, spinning into a cyclone of angry rainclouds, lightning cracking and spitting.

There was a hesitation from everyone around him, as though they were all breathing a collective
breath. Then the dragon opened its mouth again—and a solid shockwave of force blasted into the
crowd.

Finn went flying.

This was not the first time he’d done this; he was reminded, mid-tumble, of being hit by the
swinging arm of a red Templar behemoth during the attack on Haven. His body barreled across the
ground and he smashed sideways into the wooden wheel of a wagon. The wheel snapped from the
impact, knocking the cart off balance and spilling what felt like two thousand ripe cabbages all
over him.

Insult to injury, it seemed.

It wasn’t the easiest feat, getting off the ground with his wrists bound behind his back and his head
spinning and all those cabbages rolling all over him. He rolled to his belly with a groan and got
one knee crooked under him, using that leg to push his torso off the ground.

The dragon had already turned a perfectly serene beheading into utter anarchy. It flew overhead,
flames jetting from its mouth, coating ground and buildings and terrified people in vermilion fire.
What people hadn’t been burnt were running amok like startled sheep, herded only by a few
soldiers in unfamiliar armor who were trying desperately to funnel them into buildings. The
remaining prisoners who still had their heads were running with some semblance of unity towards
a door, largely ignored by everyone else.

Everyone seemed to have forgotten the small Dalish prisoner.

Finn blew upwards, puffing a strand of wavy white hair away from his forehead, and watched the
chaos for a moment. After contemplating if a bundle of cabbages could make a halfway decent
shield, he maneuvered himself into getting on his feet, stopping to catch his breath.

He almost thought he could just stroll out of there unharmed, but there was a soldier running for
him, weapon strangely unsheathed. Finn hesitated, about to make a run for it as best he could, but
the soldier held up a hand to stop him, his eyes brown and kind and widened.

“Halt, prisoner,” the soldier said, skidding to a stop beside Finn and grasping his elbow. “You’ll
never survive out here. Stick with me. Let’s get into the keep.”

“I would never have survived with my head lopped off, either,” Finn reminded him. “Well…
maybe. For a few seconds.”

“Don’t you see the dragon?” the soldier urged, giving his elbow a tug.

Finn braced his feet. “I’ve seen several dragons. I know how to survive a dragon attack. If it’s not
too much of a bother, could you just snip my bindings off and let me go? That would be peachy.”

A stream of flame suddenly erupted only a few yards from them; the soldier reacted by flinging
Finn over his shoulder, skirting around the mess of cabbages, and making a run for it.

Finn just went with it.

The soldier hauled him across the town, letting out a sort of startled yell every time the dragon’s fiery breath sent rock chunks hurtling through the air or set a building aflame. The screams and the booms and the dragon’s keening roars were enough to make Finn think his hearing might blow out. The soldier barreled through the (thankfully open) solid wooden door of a keep, someone else shutting it behind them.

Finn had no choice but to hang over his shoulder while the soldier caught his breath.

“That the only prisoner, Hadvar?” another asked.

“The only one I could find,” said the soldier, Hadvar. “He’s light for a bosmer.”

Bosmer? The fuck? That wasn’t a term Finn had heard to describe the Dalish before.

Hadvar mercifully set Finn on his feet and sliced through the bindings with the tip of his sword; Finn drew his arms in front of him, wincing at their stiffness as he tried to coax blood back through his veins.

The inside of the keep almost reminded him of Skyhold, in a way. But the stones here were grey, all grey, and there was a massive wrought iron lamp hanging above, casting flickering light around the inner sanctum of the keep. A dirtied rug lay under his feet, stitched with a brick red and sand colored geometric pattern. He curled his bare toes in it, then regarded the soldiers, who all seemed to be mentally deliberating what the hell to do.

Since they didn’t seem hostile at the moment, Finn decided to question them. He turned to Hadvar; the man looked nice enough, fair skin scuffed with dirt, brown hair a rumple at the top of his head. “Where are we, exactly?” Finn asked.

“Did you miss the carriage ride here?” Hadvar asked. “We’re in Helgen. Falkreath Hold. We caught you materializing among a bunch of Stormcloaks. Are you a spellcaster?”

“Aye,” Finn said without thinking. Whoops; who knew what sort of tolerance these people had for mages. “Falkreath Hold…I don’t recognize that…what country are we in?”

You know you’re in deep shit when you have to ask what country you’re in, he thought.

“Skyrim,” Hadvar answered helpfully. “Just above the border of Cyrodiil.”

Well, Finn was in much deeper shit than he’d previously thought, because none of those names rung any sort of bells.

The dragon roared outside, shaking the stone walls of the keep. Finn listened to it, remembering that there were probably still people out there, needing to get to cover.

He lurched for the door, but Hadvar grabbed his arm.

“Are you out of your mind?” the soldier yelled. “That dragon out there will burn you to a crisp!”

“And it’s killing all those people!” Finn reminded him. “Let me get out there and help. I know what I’m doing and I might be able to cast enough ice to neutralize that dragon for a bit. I can get some of the villagers to safety.”
Hadvar looked hopeful for a moment, then shook his head. “You don’t understand, prisoner. Dragons are supposed to be legends. You can’t fight a legend and survive. I don’t like it either, but there’s nothing we can do about the villagers. We have to keep moving through the keep and find a way out.”

Finn was about to move for the door again, but another soldier barred it with a heavy crossbeam, slamming the beam down into the metal slat.

“Well,” Finn said finally, “if I’m going to be stuck with you mystery people, the least you can do is promise not to behead me again when we’re out of here.”

“You have my word, prisoner.”

“Oh, and call me by my actual name. ‘Prisoner’ is starting to sound a little tacky.” *Tacky?* What kind of word was *tacky*? It sounded like something Dorian would say. *Creators, Finn missed him with the desperate force of a thousand fiery suns already.*

“What are you called, then?” asked Hadvar.

“Finn,” he answered. “Of…” *No, not of Clan Lavellan. They clearly won’t understand.* “Just Finn.”
Riverwood was enough like home to make Finn miss it terribly—and yet nothing like home at all.

It was a small town from the looks of it, just a working settlement built around what appeared to be a lumber mill. True to the town’s name, a river ran through the edge of it, its babbling grey-blue waters tumbling over rocks and driftwood and making a pleasant, ever-present rush in Finn’s ears. The air was cold here, chilled with the threat of a frost snap, scented heavily with evergreen.

He followed Hadvar, looking curiously around at the buildings. All were a matching wood the color of dark chocolate, dotting the riverbank without much semblance of city order. Finn liked it—Val Royeaux, majestic and beautiful as it was, had always struck him as too orderly. Riverwood was more like Redcliffe in that sense, built with only practicality in mind.

“My uncle is the blacksmith here,” Hadvar told Finn over his shoulder. “It’ll do us some good to rest up here for a bit. Where will you be heading next? Home to Valenwood?”

Was following Hadvar, one of the soldiers who’d been overseeing his beheading that morning, an abominably stupid decision? Probably. But Finn had been desperate for some form of companionship, so he’d done it anyway.

“Where?” Finn said.

Hadvar stopped in his tracks, turning to give Finn a rather blank look. “Valenwood. Your people are from there.”

Ah, right. Apparently in this country Finn was a wood elf—not too far off, considering how his old clan had lived—and wood elves didn’t originate from Skyrim. Finn needed to get with the times before he started looking like a clueless moron.

*Chronically oblivious ignoramus*, Dorian had once affectionately called him, when the Inquisition had been trekking through the Frostback Mountains after the destruction of Haven. Finn could even hear the Tevene mage’s voice saying the words as he thought them.

His throat tightened.

“But you could be from somewhere other than your homeland, true,” Hadvar said, resuming his course. “Do you remember?”

Finn could have played it safe, said his head trauma was too severe and he didn’t remember his own hometown. He could have told Hadvar the name of any town or city in Ferelden—Redcliffe, Highever, Amaranthine, Denerim, even Orzammar—and probably gotten away with it. He could have stealthily peeked at a nearby road sign and picked a name at random.

But this situation was ridiculous, and the heavily ridiculous side of his brain was itching to explode out of him. He was mad at whatever magic had yanked him from Skyhold, mad at whatever magic had separated him from Dorian and his sister and Varric and the others, and so he decided blending in would not suit his current whims.

“Assvale,” he said, almost sardonically.

Almost immediately he knew he was going to regret this decision for probably the rest of his days.
Dorian would have sighed.

“Assvale,” Hadvar repeated in perfect deadpan. “I’ve not heard of that particular…settlement. Where is it?”

“Way far away,” Finn said. “It’s really snowy there. Everything’s white. Kind of blinds you, actually. But you can see a great full moon in the sky on most nights.”

“Is it north near Dawnstar or Winterhold?” Hadvar asked. “The mage’s college is up there, in Winterhold. Is that where you studied your magic?”

There was a mage’s college up north? Was it anything like the Circles in Ferelden and Orlais and the Marches, or was it a true college of magical study like the ones in Tevinter? Finn wasn’t certain why but something deep in the back of his mind was urging him to find out more about the college. Fervently. It could’ve had something to do with him and Dorian being mages and missing him a great deal—or Dorian mentioning he’d studied at the Circle of Vyrantium—but either way, Finn was suddenly determined to find it.

“I’m somewhat self-taught,” he said. “I, um…where is Winterhold, exactly?”

“On Skyrim’s northeastern shore, on the Sea of Ghosts,” said Hadvar, climbing a set of stairs in front of him; Finn followed, glancing around the porch at a grindstone, an anvil, a tanning rack with what looked like deer hide stretched over it, a stone workbench, and a working forge with red hot coals churning out heat from the center. “It’s east of Dawnstar and northwest of Windhelm. I’d recommend taking a carriage from Whiterun. The northern road through The Pale can be difficult to navigate on foot.”

A whole ‘nother generous helping of words that rang no bells. Finn memorized it regardless; someone along the way would be able to point him towards the northern road.

“Thanks,” he told Hadvar. “Really, that helps a lot.”

“Certainly,” Hadvar said. “This is my uncle’s smithy—Uncle Alvor? Are you here?”

He looked around the porch where the forge was, obviously searching for the man, but decided to descend the steps after a moment. Finn followed, noticing a few people had stopped their comings-and-goings to peer at them. They were hardworking people from the looks of them, some haggard, many sporting a fresh layer of dirt over their clothes.

“You!” cried someone, and a wrinkled old woman careened into Finn, grabbing his shoulders with skeletal hands and giving him a good shake. “You came up the road! Did you see the dragon? I saw a dragon!”

“Mother, stop it.” A man with well-groomed blond hair pried the old woman’s fingers off of Finn’s shoulders. “There’s no dragon.”

“I’m not crazy!” The old woman let out a firm gust of a huff, then turned and wobbled back towards what was presumably her house.

Finn was about to reiterate that he’d seen plenty of dragons in his twenty-six years, and that this really wasn’t something to wet your pants over, but decided against it. These people seemed startled enough as it was. “Actually, I got an up-close-and-personal view of it right as I was about to have my head—”

“Mother, stop it.” A man with well-groomed blond hair pried the old woman’s fingers off of Finn’s shoulders. “There’s no dragon.”

“I’m not crazy!” The old woman let out a firm gust of a huff, then turned and wobbled back towards what was presumably her house.

The blond man lingered a moment, giving Finn an apologetic look. “Sorry for my mother,” he
said. “She keeps insisting she saw some big black dragon flying overhead. Dragons are legends, and she’s scaring the village children.” He extended a hand, and Finn shook it. “I’m Sven, by the way. Riverwood’s bard. I trained at the Bard’s College in Solitude, and I sing and tell tales over at the Sleeping Giant Inn. Are you staying there tonight, traveler?”

Loquacious fellow. The word “bard” made him think of Orlais, and Spymaster Leliana, and gods be damned he was reminiscing about home again.

“This is awkward,” Finn said. “See, there actually was a dragon. Is, rather. As far as I know, it was headed north. Is. Currently.”

“Oh,” Sven said, shifting uncomfortably. “This is awkward. Dragons were legends up until now…I suppose I’ll have to tell Mother she was right all along.”

“I doubt you’ll hear the end of it,” Finn said, chuckling a little. He’d lost track of Hadvar for the moment, but a glance told him the soldier was just searching around the forge. “Is the Sleeping Giant far down the road?”

“Nope. It’s right here in Riverwood, just over there.” Sven pointed over his shoulder. “Good food, good music, good night’s rest. I highly recommend at least coming up for an ale.”

Ale? Oh, Finn liked the sound of that.

The door to the smithy finally creaked open, and out strode a man who was quite obviously the local blacksmith—heavy apron stained with blackened iron flakes, reddish brown beard, massive bands of muscle on his arms.

“Uncle Alvor,” Hadvar greeted, stepping up to give his uncle a quick one-armed embrace, complete with heavy thumps on the back.

Finn let them exchange greetings for a bit, his gaze wandering. Sven was still standing there, obviously curious about the whole matter. Finn decided that if anyone would have useful information about the area, it would be a bard—Hadvar had done his best to answer Finn’s questions, but Finn didn’t want to drive him batty.

“How can I reach Whiterun?” he asked. “Is it far?”

“That’s right here in Riverwood, just over there.” Sven pointed over his shoulder. “Good food, good music, good night’s rest. I highly recommend at least coming up for an ale.”

Finn could handle a few wolves, but that was completely beside the point.

“Serannas,” Finn said with a smile, blurting out the thank-you in elvish before he could correct himself. He widened his eyes and cleared his throat. “Er, I mean, thank you.”

A scratching at the ground caught his attention, and he looked down, noticing a common russet-feathered chicken at his feet, searching for grains and bugs. He stooped, reaching down to pet it.

“Don’t touch the chicken,” Sven warned him hurriedly.

Finn stopped, straightening up and arching a brow. “What’s the matter? I won’t hurt it.” He’d only been meaning to pet it, after all.
“Just…trust me on this one. Don’t touch the chicken. People are really protective of the animals around here.” Sven cast a shifty-eyed glance around him, then cleared his expression and smiled at Finn once more. “Maybe I’ll see you at the Sleeping Giant tonight? Either way—safe travels, friend.”

With that, the bard turned and left; the chicken made a mild tut tut tut noise and continued on its way.

Alvor and Hadvar had been joined at the stairs by a woman, a pretty woman with almond-shaped eyes, fair skin the color of porcelain, and fiery red hair that reached a little past her shoulders. She came down the steps past them and approached Finn, and he noticed she was several inches taller than he was.

“You must be Finn,” she said. “I’m Sigrid, Alvor’s wife. You must be terribly exhausted; come on inside.” With that, she splayed a hand between Finn’s shoulder blades and guided him up the stairs; he happily complied, his eyes adjusting to the dimly lit interior as he stepped inside.

It was nothing like the interior of Skyhold, not even like Finn’s bedroom above the Herald’s Rest, but it was cozy. There was a fire crackling in the hearth and a cooking pot held over it; Finn smelled stew, and his mouth watered. Above the mantle hung a few sprigs of plants Finn didn’t recognize, along with a couple pheasants and some bread, all likely placed there to dry. At the wooden table sat a young girl with brown hair, building what looked like a miniature house with intricate blocks and pieces of wood and iron. Rough wooden boards creaked beneath his bare feet. He heard Alvor and Hadvar enter the house and turned, watching Hadvar shut the door behind them.

“Hadvar tells me Helgen was attacked by a dragon,” Alvor told Finn, his eyes weathered but friendly as they met Finn’s own. “These are dark times we’re in. We haven’t seen a dragon around here since—who knows how long.”

“The Jarl will need to hear of this, husband,” Sigrid said. Finn watched her ladle spoonfuls of stew into wooden bowls.

“Aye, he will,” Alvor said. “The dragon may be headed for Whiterun, but there’s no guarantee it won’t circle back. We need guards posted. Are you passing through Whiterun, Finn? Maybe you can inform him.”

If Finn was really serious about seeking out the College of Winterhold—and he really was, for some reason—then his path would take him right through Whiterun. An easy enough feat, informing the Jarl (whatever that title meant) of a dragon appearing.

“I can do that,” he offered, nodding. After a moment he sat down at the bench, and the girl at the other side of the table shot him a quick grin before returning to her miniature building project.

“That’ll do Riverwood a service,” Alvor said. “I’ll inform Gerdur and Hod of the news, come tomorrow. It’s their town, after all.”

Sigrid handed Finn a bowl of stew, which he gratefully accepted, trying not to shovel it too quickly into his mouth as he ate.

“I’d lend you a horse if I had one, but no one in Riverwood has got a horse,” Alvor continued. “I might have some armor pieces in the smithy that’ll fit you, though. For the road.”

“You sure?” Finn asked. “I’m not the easiest to fit for armor. Dal—Elven shape and all. I mean,
I’ll happily clunk around in something a little too big for a day or so, but...you know.”

Alvor chuckled. “I’ve made armor for Faendal in the past, and elves pass through here from time to time. Come see me in the morning tomorrow and I’ll see what I can do about fitting you.”

Faendal must have been an elf, if Finn had any brain to speak of in his head. He knew from experience that seeking someone out with the premise of “hey, check it out, we’re both elves” could start some pretty vicious arguments, so he didn’t ask where Faendal lived.

“That means a lot,” Finn said gratefully.

He sat in silence for a while, eating, as Alvor and Hadvar talked. From snippets of their conversation, Finn learned that Hadvar was a soldier for the Imperial army and that Skyrim was currently in a bloody state of civil war. Not to mention that both of them were considering the possibility of the dragon appearing and Ulfric Stormcloak—the leader of the rebels—escaping at the same time to be more than coincidence.

Everything was full of wars, wasn’t it? The mage-templar war, the battles against Corypheus’s forces...it seemed like peace always verged on unattainable. Not that Finn didn’t enjoy a good fight, but some worldwide downtime would be appreciated.

The stew was simple, but mouthwateringly good—heavy beef broth, chunks of well-cooked beef, carrot bits, leeks, corn, beans, hints of basil and salt. He was awfully hungry, probably from the adrenaline rush of narrowly escaping a beheading earlier that day.

“So you need supplies, Finn?” Sigrid asked, coming to stand behind him. “I can take you down to the Riverwood Trader if you like. Alvor makes good money with his smithing and you’ll need some things to take along the road.”

“That’s awfully generous of you,” Finn said after he’d swallowed. Really, these people were beyond nice; whether they were trying to lure him into a false sense of security just so they could eat him later, he didn’t know.

Was that the meat in the stew? Chunks of dead escapee? At this point in his life, Finn was almost beyond giving a shit.

And Sigrid was waiting for an answer.

Sheesh, he was absolutely terrible at conversation today.

“And I’d appreciate that,” he continued, standing. “I’m thinking I’ll get on the road tomorrow morning.”

“You should reach Whiterun early in the afternoon, then,” Hadvar told him from his seat on the bench. “Watch the skies and be careful.”

“Come with me,” Sigrid instructed him, pulling the front door open. “Oh, Finn, did you ever say where you’re from? Are you very far from home?”

“He’s from Assvale,” Hadvar said, and there was an unmistakable undercurrent of amusement in his voice.

Dirthamen’s balls. Mild-mannered Hadvar, Imperial soldier Hadvar, was actually fucking with him by bringing up his earlier absurdity.
“I’ve never heard of…Assvale,” Sigrid said, her eyes narrowing in thought as she continued to hold open the door.

“I doubt you truly will,” said Hadvar.

Finn blinked, opened his mouth, tried to think of something to say that would backtrack his former dumb decision, closed his mouth, and followed Sigrid out the door.

Well, Sven was right; the Sleeping Giant did have nice ale.

Finn sat on a bench by the fire, a bottle of Nord ale in his right hand, his left stretched towards the flames to warm his palm. Sven was currently singing some ditty about a hero named Ragnar the Red who got his head lopped off or something; that was all well and good, but at the moment it struck a little too close to home for Finn to really enjoy it. He took another swig of ale and watched the flames in the pit lick towards the ceiling, illuminating the inn’s dim tavern in orange, flickering light.

He let his mind wander when Sven started plucking on his lute.

This village, tiny as it was, wanted what seemed like a thousand things from him. Hadvar and his family wanted Finn to inform the Jarl of the dragon—which was reasonable. The Riverwood Trader’s owner, Lucan Valerius, had asked Finn upon his arrival if he’d venture into an old Nordic tomb on the hill and retrieve some priceless artifact—semi-unreasonable, but not completely out of left field. Some drunk guy in the tavern wanted Finn to buy him some mead with the coins Sigrid had given him—eh, reasonable enough.

But when Finn had stepped foot in the Sleeping Giant, and right after Sigrid had paid for his room for the night and left, Sven had approached him with something that couldn’t quite be considered reasonable.

For one, he’d noticed Finn going into the Riverwood Trader and asked if he’d spoken to the shopkeep’s sister, Camilla. When Finn said he had—perfectly nice woman, by the way, she’d even walked him to the bridge and pointed towards the fork in the road—Sven had gone on some diatribe about it being ridiculous that Faendal, the local elf, was also interested in her, and at the end of it he’d handed Finn a folded letter and told him to hand it to Camilla and say it was from Faendal.

This was entirely too much bullshit for one day.

The letter was still in his pocket, poking his leg through the fabric. He figured he’d leave well enough alone and keep the thing himself, as a memento of the single weirdest day in his life. Maybe frame it on a wall in his room, if he ever made it back to Thedas.

Still, in all fairness, he was comfortable right now and the ale was good. There was that. He drained the last drops from the bottle, idly watching the fire.

“More ale?” Orgnar, the barkeep, asked from behind the counter. Finn’s bench was right near the counter, so he had the luxury of ordering more often.

“I really don’t have much money left,” he said instead, shrugging. “Great ale, though; kind of
reminds me of home.”

“That’s the idea.” Orgnar reached below the counter and pulled out another bottle. “Here. This one’s on the house.”

“You’re a lifesaver,” Finn said, grinning as he reached for the bottle.

He figured he’d wake up early tomorrow, have Alvor fit him for whatever armor he could find, grab the small satchel Sigrid had bought him—full of dried beef, dried fruit, leather strips, cloth bandages, and a small steel knife—and get walking. A blast of cold, fresh morning air would do him some good.

And from there…Whiterun. And whatever lay ahead of him.
Finn took a moment—a purposefully long moment—to dust nonexistent dirt off the legs of his breeches as the Whiterun guards shut the looming wooden gates behind him.

He actually hadn’t expected them to let him in so easily. There were a lot of aspects working against him; his being an elf, for one. Even outside of Thedas, or wherever this “Skyrim” was, he couldn’t escape the sideways looks. Then there was the matter of the dragon flying overhead, and the guards being nervous of anyone wandering by themselves along the road…but a simple “I’m here on Riverwood’s behalf” had gained him entry.

For all those guards knew, he could’ve lied his way into Whiterun with the intention of robbing everyone blind, divesting them of their sweetrolls, and leaving nasty hexes all over the roads for people to step on. Yet they’d waved him in anyway, and his agonizing over what to say as he’d walked here had been for naught.

No matter. It was a nice day, sunny and crisp outside; he’d find the Jarl’s palace and be on his way.

He could find the silver linings here. He had a full pack of supplies on his back, courtesy of Sigrid, and a pieced-together set of leather armor, courtesy of the blacksmith Alvor. The sun wasn’t too hot on his back, and the air was clean here, misted with the finest scents of sage and heather. People walked through Whiterun’s cobbled paths, chattering with each other, making a nice quiet din in his ears. The buildings looked inviting here—sturdy and scattered throughout the city walls so one could meander around them—and Finn could hear what sounded like a central market, so that was good.

The harsh noises of hammering and grinding filled his ears as he passed a blacksmith working outside her shop, her apron stained black with metal grime. Someone hurried past him with a stack of chopped wood, and a couple of farmers strode by, one of them complaining about a “nip in the air” or something.

If he closed his eyes and listened, didn’t see…it could almost feel like home.

But Dorian would’ve made some comment on the rustic quaintness of this place, and there were no such comments filling Finn’s ears. If he sat down and let himself, he’d get too depressed over it, so he just kept walking, taking in the sights as he went.

It got him thinking—where was he? Not that he hadn’t thought the very same question a myriad of times before, but…were Skyrim and Thedas existing in the same world, completely oblivious of each other? Or were they in strange, separate dimensions entirely? Did separate dimensions exist? Questions like that made his head hurt.

He hadn’t been his Keeper’s apprentice for his brains. Sure, he seemed to pick up languages and
games well, and magic—especially of the cold variety—came to him naturally, but academic ponderings like this one had never been his forte.

They’d been Dorian’s.

Knock it off, he chastised himself. You’ll find Dorian somewhere. If you’re here, he must be too. And his sister, the Inquisitor. And the others he’d left behind.

He left the market behind, ignoring the tantalizing smells of fresh meat seeping from one market stall to his right; hungry as he’d been on the way here, he suddenly didn’t feel like eating for the moment. He jogged up a set of stairs, nearly bumping shoulders with an ebony-skinned man on the way.

“Do you get to the Cloud District very often?” asked the man.

Finn stopped, turning to face the man with a curious expression. “Cloud District?” He couldn’t tell whether the man was making strange conversation or about to ask for yet another favor. At this point, either was fair game.

“Oh, what am I saying?” the man sneered. “Of course you don’t.”

He smirked and kept walking, leaving Finn to reset the fuses in his brain before he resumed his ascension up the steps.

So the people here were odd. Extremely odd. Giving Finn extremely personal life details upon making eye contact seemed to be a tradition here in Skyrim, as was asking absolutely heinous favors. Finn considered himself lucky that this nobleman didn’t want anything from him, and kept walking.

It wasn’t hard, even for a simpleton, to deduce where the Jarl’s palace was. It loomed over the whole city, its peaked roof reaching high for the foggy sky above. He picked up a quicker jog as he went up the multiple sets of stone stairs, listening to the soothing babble of water in the terraced pools next to the steps.

The palace wasn’t necessarily the most welcoming of things—it seemed to loom even bigger as Finn crossed the bridge to reach the front doors—but it wasn’t horrendously frightening, either. Nothing crafted of wood and stones could frighten Finn, usually, not when the architecture was almost familiar. A guard patrolling the bridge paid him no heed as he neared the double doors.

He paused to take a deep breath.

All he had to do was ask the Jarl to send extra guards to Riverwood. That was it. Then he could either head back to Riverwood and see about scavenging for the golden claw Lucan Valerius had lost, or he could flip them off—metaphorically—and get on his way to Winterhold. Because the mages were there. And maybe…he didn’t know what.

Just one conversation. He was good at those. He liked talking.

He grasped an iron handle and pulled one of the doors open, slipping inside.

The ceiling rose high above him, supported by pillars with carvings at the base that almost looked Avvar to Finn; he paused to peer around him, marveling at the space within. The entryway led to a wide, shallow set of stairs, and directly atop the steps appeared to be the main hall; he spotted two long tables piled high with food, a few people sitting at the chairs and picking at the contents of their plates. A stack of thick logs burned with low fire from a pit in the floor between the two
tables.

Finn’s elven ears picked up a conversation coming from people at the opposite end of the main hall—the Jarl was probably the one lounging on the throne—but his eyes were quickly fixed on a woman in full armor unsheathing a sword and approaching him.

Well, shit.

“I didn’t do it,” he said, holding his hands up in surrender as the woman stalked closer. Whatever ‘it’ was. Better to get all his cards on the table straightaway.

He noticed belatedly that the woman was an elf—one with interesting iron-grey skin and flaming red hair—and that she didn’t drop her aggressive stance. The conversation between the Jarl and the other people ceased, and all eyes turned to Finn.

“What’s the meaning of this interruption?” the grey skinned elf spat, her jewel-red eyes narrow and fixed on Finn’s. “Jarl Balgruuf is not receiving visitors.”

Think, self. She probably doesn’t actually want to run you through.

Funny how often he forgot he was a knight-enchanter and could easily throw a barrier up in time.

“I came from Riverwood,” he said calmly. “The dragon flying overhead? You know the one? Big black one—anyway, I’ve been asked to petition for some guards to be sent to the village. They’re all feeling a little overexposed there. I saw the dragon myself at Helgen.”

“Well, that explains why the guards let you in.” The woman sheathed her sword. “Welcome to Dragonsreach. The Jarl will want to speak with you personally.”

Good. That was good. Step one. Finn dragged a hand through his frost-white hair, probably messing it up rather than the relaxed combing he’d intended, and followed the elven woman up to the Jarl’s throne.

The Jarl may have been sitting on a throne, but he actually didn’t look terribly intimidating—he was slouching pretty bad, after all. Sometimes Nanyehi looked like that when she performed judgments from the throne in Skyhold’s main hall. His skin was ruddy, his hair long and yellow-blonde, and his eyes were weathered and almost kind. To the Jarl’s right stood a balding man who appeared to be a steward, if his wooden clipboard was any indication.

“So you were at Helgen?” the Jarl immediately said to Finn, not bothering to straighten up in his hair. He must’ve overheard Finn say as much. “You saw this dragon with your own eyes?”

“I had a wonderful, up close and personal view,” Finn said. From a chopping block, of course. Right before he nearly lost his head. What a day.

The Jarl glanced to the right of him, at his steward. “What do you say now, Proventus? Shall we continue to trust the strength of our walls? Against a dragon?”

Proventus? That could easily be a Tevene name.

Finn bit his own tongue.

“My lord,” said the dark-skinned elven woman, “we should send troops to Riverwood at once. It’s in the most immediate danger. If that dragon is lurking in the mountains…”
So she was on board with Finn’s temporary cause to aid Riverwood. Good. That was good.

“The Jarl of Falkreath will view that as a provocation!” Proventus argued. “He’ll assume we’re preparing to join Ulfric’s side and attack him. We should not—”

“Enough!” Balgruuf straightened in his chair. “I’ll not stand idly by while a dragon burns my hold and slaughters my people. Irileth, send a detachment to Riverwood at once.”

The elven woman nodded and strode away, and Finn nearly heaved a sigh of relief.

That had been his obligation. Over. Done with. Now he could focus on piecing this strange reality together.

“You have done Whitrun a service, friend,” Balgruuf said, addressing Finn. “I will not forget it. But there is another thing you could do for me. Suitable for someone of your particular talents, perhaps.”

Damn it.

“My talents are nothing noteworthy, mi’lord,” Finn said. “I can balance a spoon on the end of my finger. I can also curse in three languages. Unless you really have need of those skills…”

“You were at Helgen. You survived this dragon’s attack and saw it with your own eyes. You came up the road to Whiterun alone without a scratch. Surely your talents are more than that.” Balgruuf wasn’t taking no for an answer, apparently. “Come, let’s find Farengar, my court wizard. He’s been looking into a matter related to these dragons and…rumors of dragons.”

Well, it looked like Finn didn’t really have a choice in the matter of his own generosity towards Whiterun. There went his plans of heading straight for the College of Winterhold for an inexplicable reason he hadn’t quite pinned down yet.

No moping. Whatever the Jarl wanted now, he’d do, and then he’d bail and head northward. Probably.

Finn had always been a sucker for helping people. He’d even had a bit of a reputation back home for accidental martyrdom, the times he’d thrown himself ass-deep into danger and almost died for it. But these were entirely foreign people in a nation he’d never heard of before.

Still—a dragon was a dragon. That was kind of a universal woe.

“If Farengar has information, that would be lovely,” Finn said.

“He will give you as much as he can,” the Jarl promised, standing and stepping down from the dais. “But I have no intentions of asking for your help unaided. I have a number of good, loyal soldiers in my personal guard—I’ll assign one to you, for the time being.”

Finn was about to open his mouth to thank the Jarl when the latter motioned for someone and a guard strode into the throne room.

The words strangled in Finn’s throat and died, and his jaw nearly shattered to pieces on the floor.

The guard was helmetless, her persimmon red hair falling like a thick curtain of silk down her back. Her skin was fair, free of blemishes, the faintest dusting of freckles at her nose and forehead. She fixed friendly blue-green eyes on Finn, did a shallow bow, and said “good day to
No mistaking it. He’d just been bowed to by the Queen of Ferelden.

“Um,” he said dumbly.

The Hero of Ferelden, the slayer of the dread Archdemon during the Fifth Blight, the beloved wife of King Alistair Theirin, should not have been standing here in plain guard’s armor, wearing a guard’s sigil on her round wooden shield, bowing politely to random elven travelers. It was almost sacrilege. Finn had been at Denerim, watched this woman lead a group up to the burning apex of Fort Drakon…and now she was standing here. In Whiterun, wherever Whiterun was. Offering him a pleasant smile and watching him curiously.

“I’m ready to leave when you are,” Palla Cousland said, shifting her weight onto one hip.

“Er…” Finn said, just as dumbly.

“Let us discuss the situation with Farengar,” Jarl Balgruuf urged, striding away.

Palla turned her body to face where the Jarl had gone, but swiveled her head back to watch Finn, her red hair cascading around her shoulders.

Idly wondering if ragequitting this bizarre alternate reality was an option, Finn chewed on his tongue, then followed the Jarl at a slow enough pace to let himself think. Of the two people here who were originally of Thedas—himself included—he seemed to be the only one who remembered all of their original lives.

That meant one of two things. First, that everyone could potentially be in this universe, going about their mundane lives without a flicker of a thought regarding their old identities.

Second…if Finn did encounter them, by blessing or chance…he had the sinking suspicion they wouldn’t remember him, either.
Now, it seemed, Finn had two reasons to climb down into this so-called Bleak Falls Barrow just outside of Riverwood.

The merchant at the Riverwood Trader—the one with the name that had sounded fairly Tevene—had gotten some relic stolen and asked that Finn retrieve it for him. According to him, the thief who’d probably taken it was holed up with a group of bandits in said Nordic barrow, but who really knew for certain? If Finn knew anything about thieves from living with so many rogues for so long, it was that they only took things with value. Possibly this thief was getting the claw appraised and/or selling it. Or, he wanted it for some other purpose and had stashed it in the tomb.

Either way, going tomb-diving on a trader’s hunch was a bit much. Lucan Valerius hadn’t seen the thief take it, just speculated.

But there was also the matter of Farengar and the dragonstone he seemed to want. Supposedly, this stone was buried in the tomb as well. And Jarl Balgruuf wanted Finn to put his ass on the line and get it for them.

He wasn’t even getting paid for this shit.

And he had personal matters to attend to. The appearance of Palla Cousland here in Skyrim had given Finn a sort of renewed enthusiasm—and desperate hope—that his loved ones and friends were here as well.

So he’d decided, upon leaving Whiterun’s gates and hearing them groan shut behind him and Palla, that he’d get around to the business of tomb spelunking after he’d paid a visit to the College of Winterhold.

This had only apparently reached Palla’s ears after Finn had found a horse-drawn carriage outside the Whiterun stables and asked the driver to take them north to Winterhold.

“Winterhold?” Palla repeated, climbing up into the back of the carriage after Finn and seating herself on the bench across from him. She leaned her shield against one of her knees, tapping her fingers on the hewn wood. “Do you need a crash course in geography, Finn?”

He chuckled and shook his head, studying her. She really was a lovely woman, fair of face and bright-eyed; Finn didn’t blame King Alistair for being taken with her. It seemed a tragic shame that she couldn’t remember her own husband or her country.

“I have business up there,” he said as the carriage lurched from a standstill into a slow roll, then picked up speed, the draft horse chuffing as it broke into a steady trot. “At the College, specifically. I think.”

“You think?” Palla snorted and leveled him with a suspicious look. “I suppose Jarl Balgruuf is going to grow mold, waiting on you for quite some time.”
“Yeah, well, here’s the thing—I’m kind of really lost here. As in, I barely know anything about this place and I’m honestly trying to find my way back home. If I do get home…well, I won’t be able to worry about this place’s dragon extravaganza. If I don’t…I will keep my promise and get the stone for Farengar. I’m just not terribly motivated right now.”

He’d expected anger, but instead Palla nodded knowingly, drawing her persimmon hair over one shoulder and weaving it into a lazy braid. “I feel that way sometimes,” she said. “Like I’m missing something. It’s weird.”

The carriage bumped over a rock, and Finn grabbed the siding to hold himself steady.

“Do you have any idea what’s causing that?” Finn asked.

Alright, he was prodding. Shamelessly. But maybe if Palla could be coaxed to remember her old life in Ferelden as Hero of Ferelden and Queen, her true life, then there was hope after all. Finn liked to think on the positive side. There had to be a way to fix this.

“My name kind of rings a bell, but I can’t place it.” Palla cleared her throat. “So, about the carriage we’re currently sitting on and the extremely frigid northern settlement we’re destined for—are you sure the business you have in Winterhold is important?”

Not really, no. “Definitely.” Finn took another look at her shield, the sword at her belt, the metal armor she wore. “I know you’re one of Balgruuf’s personal guards; am I going to be in deep shit for delaying? Deserting, they might even say.”

“But with me.” Palla shrugged one shoulder. “You want to know what guards do around Whiterun? Answer noise complaints. Make noise complaints. Convict people of sweetroll theft. Tolerate the Jarl’s youngest son who asks everyone if they’ve come to Dragonsreach to lick his father’s boots. Listen to that same dithering twit who claims he used to go around adventuring until he took a fucking arrow to the fucking knee. As far as I’m concerned, you’re my temporary ticket out of completely losing my mind.”

Finn grinned. “So we’re doing each other a favor. Perfect.”

Palla smiled in return, patting her bicep. “I’ll keep you guarded, and you give me a welcome distraction from listening to and dealing with the same bullshit over and over again. So, no—I’m not going to put you in trouble for our trip to Winterhold. I will, however, complain vicariously about the weather up there. Because it sucks.”

“I can live with that.” Dorian did it all the time, anyway. Finn had grown rather fond of his griping. “If the mages can’t help me get home, though, I will head back to Riverwood. And then
we can dive right into Bleak Falls Barrow.”

“I’d make sure you’re prepared to encounter draugr, before you do that,” Palla said. “At the very least.”

“Draugr?”

She nodded, leaning back against the side of the carriage. “They’re infesting just about every tomb in Skyrim. Undead, basically. With glowing blue eyes and stupid shuffling feet and all that crap. I don’t know what makes some corpses draugr; either way, they’re extremely hostile and they don’t exactly take prisoners.”

“Wonderful. That’s the most beautiful news I’ve ever heard. Bless this day. I’m so excited to meet them.”

“Hold on to that sarcasm,” she said with a laugh.

Finn looked out at the scenery passing around them—the cropped, tawny tundra grasses and dots of purple mountain flowers, the pools of icy water scattered about, the backdrop of snow-covered mountains all around them. He saw a lone elk trotting along the plains to the east, and what looked like a giant grey crab scuttling around the shrubs closer to the carriage.

He didn’t know how long the ride to Winterhold would take—obviously—but he’d do his best to keep his impatience in check.
“This weather is more depressing than a bucket of dead—” Palla started.

Finn gave her a look. “…you should probably not finish that sentence.”

“Duly noted,” the fire-haired warmaiden said.

Truth be told, Finn usually liked cold and snowed over terrain, but Winterhold was just bleak. Flurries of windborne snow gusted about so thickly that the entire town was choked in a film of shifting white. No one walked about the paths, either, even though it was just about midday. Most of the residents probably knew when to hunker down, rather than walk around like imbeciles, just as Finn and Palla were doing now. He liked the cold, to be sure, but this cold bit. It had a nasty streak, sinking its frigid teeth into his exposed skin like a feral animal.

At least luck was on his side; the College was large and imposing enough to see even through the blizzard. He wouldn’t get lost, so long as the snows didn’t blow any thicker.

“This town used to be prettier, you know,” Palla mentioned as she and Finn walked down what was probably the main road through Winterhold. “Or so I’ve heard. But most of it sloughed off into the Sea of Ghosts during the Great Collapse about eighty years ago. People around here say the mages caused the collapse.”

Finn had, truth be told, seen mages do some incredible things, both good and bad. He himself had wielded enough power to nearly tear himself asunder. What trouble would it be for a group of mages to annihilate part of a town?

“I doubt they’d have any reason to do that,” he said in answer.

Palla shook her head, gathering her red hair into a knot and tying it at the nape of her neck. “I’m inclined to agree. But no one really knows. Everyone has a strained relationship with the College, these days. Unless they studied here.”

Mages were always controversial, weren’t they? They held the power of nature itself in their hands, after all. Powers of time, of storm, of blood. Finn knew these things firsthand.

“Reminds me almost of home,” he said. “Except you could be hauled away to imprisonment just for being a mage, if you were caught.”

“That’s awful,” Palla said, walking. Clearly, she still didn’t remember Thedas. “That doesn’t sound like anywhere I know—where are you from? I don’t remember if I ever asked.”

Where had he told others he was from? Oh, right…Assvale.

Luckily, that bout of stupidity hadn’t swung back around to bite him in the butt. Yet. He fully
expected everyone in Riverwood to have heard about this mysterious “Finn of Assvale” by now, courtesy of Hadvar and his family. Still, he didn’t have to perpetuate the idiocy with Palla, even though idiocy was usually his forte.

Technically, his old clan had settled near Starkhaven, so he might as well say that. Might even jog Palla’s memory, if he kept pelting familiar names at her.

“Shithaven,” he blurted out.

Damn it.

Palla made an undignified snorting noise and whipped her head around to stare at him, one brow lifted dramatically towards her hairline. “Pfffft. You mean Starkhaven?”

Both of them stopped in the middle of the road and stared at each other.

“Starkhaven,” Palla said again, rolling the word around in her mouth. “I must have heard someone mention that before…how weird. It rings a bell, but I can’t place it.”

But on her own, she’d corrected his silly mistake and remembered the name of a city-state in the Free Marches. He’d never mentioned the name before while talking with her; he was certain of that. And he was going to bloody well take this as a good sign.

Maybe these lost memories could be found, so to speak. He’d only been here in Skyrim a smattering of days—maybe all it took was time.

He could hope.

Still, if these mages somehow knew a way for him to cross dimensions and get home, he’d jump on that in a heartbeat.

“Starkhaven, yeah,” he said. “I think I’ve gotten into a chronically sarcastic mode after getting lost here, and it’s gotten stuck to the point where I inject curse words into everything. Then again, I’ve probably done that all my life. Who knows?”

“Nothing better than a hearty round of blaspheming,” Palla said with a grin.

Finn couldn’t help but smile in return, then set off down the path towards the College.

“I should tell you,” Palla said after a second or two, “the entry policies for the College are a bit stringent. I don’t think they’ll let you through the gates just to ask questions and whatnot; you’ll probably have to petition to be a student.”

Might as well. “What sort of thing would I have to do to convince them?” he asked.

“Fuck if I know,” Palla said.

Well then.

The snow might have been difficult to see through, but elves had keen eyesight. Finn spotted a thin stone ramp leading upwards, and a woman standing at the top of that section of ramp; she was leaning against a pillar and studying her nails, the harsh wind pulling at her robes.

So they really didn’t let just anyone walk in.

No matter. Finn was a mage. The College of Magi, if anything, should’ve at least been the one
His toes dug as much as they could into the ice-slicked surface of the stone ramp, trying to gain purchase on the slippery footing as he strode up it. The ice didn’t feel great on his bare feet, but he was a frost mage. He could handle it.

“Halt!” the tall elven woman announced when they reached her, standing straight and blocking their passage. “Cross the bridge at your own peril.”


Finn lifted and slumped his shoulders in a dramatic sigh. “Alright, I’ll bite. Why?”

“The way is dangerous, and the gate will not open,” she said. Up at the top of the ramp as she was, and already quite tall for an elf, she towered over Finn. Not that he wasn’t used to the sensation. “You shall not gain entry!”

“Doesn’t that kind of fuck with your College getting more students?” Finn said. “If you threaten all of them with tragic doom, I’m fairly certain most of them will just leave.”

“Oh, forgive me. We have had trouble with attacks on our mages in the past.” The woman crossed her arms. “What is it you hope to find within these walls?”

“…magic,” Finn said.

“You are a mage?” she asked.

“Are you really?” Palla said. “You never actually used magic on the way here.”

“You didn’t see me doing it,” he said.

“The more pertinent question is what you can offer the College,” the elven woman said. “Not just anyone is allowed inside. Those wishing to enter must show some degree of skill with magic.”

Some degree of skill with magic. Yes, Finn supposed being trained as a mage since he was five years old counted as some degree of skill. He had enough raw ice within his blood to freeze much of Winterhold, although the weather had happily managed that task already.

“There are a lot of ways I could show you,” Finn said. “I think you’d hate most of them.”

“Pass a small test, if you will,” the woman said instead. “There’s a seal on the ground, right here. Cast a spell on it, and I will grant you entry.”

So she preferred not to have the spell cast on her. Fair enough.

Time to skim through his mental library of spells. A simple ice spike might do; he’d think about it. A fireball would work, although he risked it glancing off the floor and setting the woman’s robes on fire. Chain lightning? No, it would hit her. A stonefist might actually shatter the ramp beneath them. He didn’t have the pommel and grip to work his spirit blade, so that was a no-go.

There were more, obviously, but Finn was an elementalist. And he was too lazy to think of all of them when an ice spike would do just fine. He spread his fingers and pointed his palm at the carved emblem on the ground, firing an ice spike directly at the middle.

The seal glowed slightly bluish and absorbed the magic; Finn almost startled. The spike was just
No trace of it ever existing in the first place.

No wonder she’d asked him to aim at the seal.

“Well done, indeed.” The tall elven woman made a small noise of approval. “Good form and good control. I think you’ll be a superb addition to the College. Welcome, apprentice.”

Apprentice?

Oh, he could rant all day about being considered an apprentice. He was too old and too experienced to be a newcomer to anything magical, except perhaps mind-altering spells and such; those were Dorian’s forte. But Finn didn’t fancy being a dick today, so he’d let it slide.

“Thank you,” he said, offering her a polite half-bow. “I’m excited for this opportunity.”

More like he was excited by the potential of meeting other mages. Other than Farengar, of course, who’d happily talked down to Finn like the elf was an incompetent ninny, then suggested no less than five times that Finn check out the College if he had magical aptitude. Perhaps other more helpful mages would have some clue on how to boot someone back to their original…world.

“I’ll bring you to our Master Wizard, Mirabelle Ervine,” the woman said, gesturing Finn forward. “Come. She’ll give you a tour of the College.”

Finn took a step.

* * *

“No bad, for a dormitory,” Palla commented, looking around the room. “No doors, though. Looks like a secret orgy is out of the question.”

Finn snorted his amusement, slinging Sigrid’s pack off his shoulder and plopping it on the bed. He wasn’t certain how long he’d be here in Winterhold, but at least this would be a safe place to stash his stuff, for now. Not bothering with taking anything out and organizing it, he merely rifled through the sack to make certain everything was in working order, then plopped it in the cupboard beneath the nightstand.

The bed and desk were his, apparently, so long as he was a student here. As were two tall wooden cabinets and a gargantuan fur pelt hanging on one of the grey stone walls. It was nothing compared to his old room above the tavern in Skyhold, the one Josephine had gotten specifically furnished for him, but it was something.

“I think class starts in a few minutes,” he noted out loud. “Unless I’ve completely lost track of time.”

“No, I think you’re on schedule.” Palla gestured at a pile of clothes on the pillow; robes, they looked like. “Shouldn’t you put those on? I don’t know much about the College, but I’d wager you should at least go to your first class in uniform.”

“You make a good point.” Finn reached for the robes, then turned and pointed firmly at the doorway. “Out.”

The redhead raised a brow. “What, really?”
“Yes, really. It’ll only take a minute.” Finn wasn’t one for exhibitionism, and Dorian had really been the only person to see his body; it was something Finn wanted to preserve, no matter what reason he used as an excuse.

Palla shrugged, but complied and stepped out.

He tore off his armor as rapidly as he could—he’d always fancied himself something of a speed-changer—and set the pieces in a pile on the bed. They could be organized and stored later. Right now, he wanted to meet some of the mages and see what he could find out. He lifted his arms over his head and slipped into the robe, fastening the thick fabric belt around his waist and making sure the collar was adjusted and lay flat. The cowl he left on the comforter; he’d never been fond of wearing those.

“Finn, these people are loons,” Palla called from outside his dorm room.

“What do you mean?” he asked, padding barefoot out of his room.

“I snooped around a couple of the other dorm rooms,” she said. “I didn’t take anything, promise. I’m not a rogue. Anyway—have you seen the shit mages keep on their shelves? I understand wanting a stash of ingredients for alchemy work, but who keeps human skulls lying around? Dead dragonflies? A toe from a dead giant? It’s foul!”

“A toe?” he repeated, his nose wrinkling. “Better question is, who the fuck cut the toe off that giant?”

“Someone who’s a few planks short of a wall, I should think.” She fiddled with her long apple-red hair, drawing it over her shoulder and combing it with her ivory fingers. “You ready to go?”

“Ready as ever.” His palms were a little sweaty with uncertainty, but he’d live. Staffless, barefoot, and clad in not much but warm fur-lined robes, he walked briskly out of the Hall of Attainment and into the cold.

Even in the mage’s college, no one wanted to tolerate the blizzard outside. Finn squinted his eyes against the whipping flurries of snow, feeling the cold air invigorate his blood and send his hair into a tousled mess. He trotted his way across the short stone path and pushed into the Hall of the Elements, holding the door open for Palla behind him.

Immediately he could hear voices echoing off the high stone ceilings inside the Hall’s inner chamber, excited chattering between a couple of students. The thin wrought-iron gate separating the inner hall from the antechamber was wide open; Finn looked around curiously as he stepped inside.

Mirabelle Ervine had said there were many esteemed wizards here as she’d given Finn a tour. If he wanted to work his way into their good graces—and information—he’d probably have to do some sucking up. Which meant learning. No matter; Finn loved to learn. He used to be able to sit and listen to an impromptu lecture from Solas for quite a while.

That was before Corypheus’s defeat, before Solas vanished.

The interior was stone and bleak. The grey floors beneath him had evenly spaced seals like the one he’d seen on the ramp, ringing a circular well in the middle with a beam of watery blue magic pouring upwards out of it. Lighting, perhaps. Finn felt cold, hard stone beneath his feet as he padded over to a group of apprentices gathered around someone talking.

“You can’t cast fire when you’re afraid of it,” said someone past the clump of apprentices,
probably the wizard currently teaching. Oddly familiar voice… “Fire reacts to your energy and your courage. It won’t let itself be summoned if you have the battle-presence of a four year old girl.”

Curious, Finn edged closer. Everyone else seemed to be taller than him, surprise surprise; he’d have to find a gap.

He noticed Palla remained by the well in the center, watching the beam of magic stream towards the ceiling. She was awfully patient, waiting for him while he brown-nosed mages. Then again, he imagined this was better than the crap she’d described in Whiterun.

“J’zargo has already mastered these spells,” said someone with an exotic, slightly scratchy accent. Finn couldn’t see him either.

“And J’zargo will get all the credit he deserves when J’zargo stops talking in the third person,” the wizard said.

Finn found a gap between a brunette man and an elven woman with dark grayish skin. The woman looked down at him and politely stepped to the side so he could have a better view.

No way.

This was getting weird. First, he saw the Queen of Ferelden being a nobody guard to Whiterun’s Jarl. Now, he was currently taking an elementalism class from Ferelden’s Commander of the Grey, Corvis Nalida.

There was no mistaking him. Corvis’s dark, Antivan looks were a popular topic among many people, and Finn had fought under his command at Denerim. Actually, he didn’t even look like he’d aged at all, weirdly enough.

He turned striking amber eyes to Finn, going silent for a moment.

Something had crossed his expression. Something Finn couldn’t place. But he immediately smoothed his face over and said, “you’re a couple minutes late, apprentice, but you’ve missed just about nothing. Now, as I was saying—” he continued as he turned to face everyone, “—a ball of fire is an easier projection, at first, than a continuous stream. The major issue a lot of students have is control.”

The brown-haired man next to Finn cleared his throat. “It can’t be that hard.”

Corvis crossed toned arms over his chest and lifted a brow. “Shoot a fireball exactly two inches from my right side.”

“But what if I hit—”

“But then you shouldn’t be boasting about your own control of it, hmm?” From the look on Corvis’s face, he knew he’d won that little tiff.

Finn glanced at him, then back at Palla. What an odd thing, standing in the room with two Wardens who had fought the Blight at each other’s sides and yet didn’t remember each other anymore. He remembered their loving bickering at Denerim, the sort of ragging on each other people did when they’d gone through hell at each others’ sides and come out of it alive.

“I think we should practice by burning things,” one mage blurted out from the cluster.
“By all means, burn yourself to your heart’s content,” Corvis said. He glanced to the side. “Hmm.”

“Corvis, my friend,” a mage from behind Finn said, stopping his heart cold, “it appears I’m here to finish the rest of the lesson. I’ve been told the loveable Orc librarian is asking for you.”

Creators…gods…balls…Lady of the Skies…any deity ever…

Finn turned his head, watching Dorian approach the Warden-Commander.

He looked the same, sounded the same, had the same confident look on his face, and the ache of loss and longing lanced through Finn’s heart. He opened his mouth, found himself unable to force anything out, and remembered to close it again.

So Dorian was here, in Winterhold, teaching mages. Right in the nexus of magical study in Skyrim. Right where he’d want to be.

Safe. But—

Corvis and Dorian were exchanging words, but Finn couldn’t comprehend them. His pulse roared in his ears. He opened his mouth again, to make an attempt at spitting out something, when Corvis walked past him and grabbed his arm.

“I’d like to have a chat, apprentice,” the Warden mage said firmly, grabbing the crook of Finn’s arm as he passed. “Come with me.”
And suddenly, the romantic "sub"plot starts to take hold.

Much love to all of you for reading, kudo-ing, bookmarking, and/or commenting. Your support keeps me writing!

(Quick note: I took a couple of liberties with the College's layout. Namely, because it was designed for easy roaming about in-game, and thus I decided to expand it a bit to reflect a bigger mage's college. This really has barely any impact on anything, except a few room designs.)

“Have a seat,” Corvis said, gesturing.

Finn sat in the leather-upholstered chair facing the former Warden-Commander’s desk, his eyes raking over the desk itself and taking in its appearance. Each and every thing, from papers to quill pens to books, had been organized with impeccable neatness. The stacks of papers and books were even lined up perfectly parallel to the edges of the desk. He spotted a paper label on top of the stack of paperwork that read finish this bullshit before they bitch again, and he nearly laughed.

Then he noticed the surroundings of the room. It appeared Corvis—and probably the other mages or wizards teaching here—had small offices in front of their bedrooms, if the archway leading into another small room with a bed was any indication. A red, gold, and black tapestry hung on one of the office walls, amidst ample shelving, which Finn realized was covered in alchemical ingredients.

And human skulls.

“What’s with all the bones?” He had to ask.

“Obviously I’m a sociopathic serial killer who keeps them as trophies from his numerous victims,” Corvis said, sitting in his own seat at his desk and offering Finn a view of his regal Antivan profile as he glanced sideways at the shelves. “And look, there’s a couple of open spots.”

Finn shot him a bit of a look. “But, really.”

“Enchanting and alchemical purposes,” Corvis said. “Bone dust isn’t necessarily hard to come by, but bone dust from the skull is the most potent. Likewise with the spine.” He leaned back in his chair, looking deceptively relaxed. “I’d memorize that, if I were you. The alchemy exams here aren’t to be trifled with.”

“Duly noted,” Finn said with a nod. “Is there a reason you pulled me aside, sir?”

“There is, yes. And you don’t need the sir. Just Corvis. I’m not that old.”

Finn vaguely recalled that Corvis had been about twenty-five when he’d led the forces against the Blight in Denerim. That put him in his mid thirties at present. He certainly didn’t look it.
The Warden rested one elbow on his desk, studying Finn, who studied him right back. *Amber* didn’t do the man’s eye color justice; his irises looked like vivid gold and orange-ish light welling up from the depths of rings of pure bottomless black. It was no wonder the man was notorious for his silver tongue back in Thedas; eyes like that, intelligent and exotic, stared straight into the most embarrassing depths of your soul and knew all your secrets in a matter of seconds.

“Where are you from, Finn?” Corvis asked.

Finn managed the herculean feat of *not* being a sarcastic shit, this time. “Starkhaven, or at least near there.”

Corvis lifted an eyebrow. “And have you been in this Starkhaven your whole life?”

Right; Finn remembered no one had retained any of their memories of Thedas. Corvis wouldn’t know where Starkhaven was. “No, I’ve been here and there. And everywhere.”

“Be specific.”

“Well, see…when I was twenty-six, my younger sister and I…went south. Then we stayed south.”

Corvis nodded. “Where, exactly?”

“…south.”

“How beautifully eloquent and informative.”

Finn shifted in his chair. “This isn’t going to make any sense to you. And I’m not sure why I’m being interrogated about this. But—we went south to a town called Haven. Then Haven was destroyed—big mess, flames everywhere, avalanche, really a complete shitshow—and we crossed through the mountains to a fortress called Skyhold. It’s—”

“So you *do* remember,” Corvis said, his expression quite feline in its self-satisfaction.

Finn stared at him.

“What do you mean, I—” he started.

“You remember Thedas, yes?” Corvis prodded. “You remember the Inquisition?”

“Yeah,” Finn said. “Holy shit. You remember too? I’m not the only one?”

His heart pounded erratically beneath his ribcage. Someone else, someone powerful and influential, remembered where they’d come from. *Incredible*. What if Palla had been the only one with devastating memory loss? What if Dorian—

“Don’t get your hopes up too high,” Corvis said. “You and I are the only ones I’ve encountered with full memories. Dorian has none. He thinks he’s from the empire called Cyrodiil and that he’s been teaching at the College for five years now. A couple of days ago, I saw Cullen with the Imperial army, escorting captured Stormcloaks to Windhelm in the east. He didn’t recognize me either, and I know he would have at least wrinkled his nose in my direction.”

Finn’s heart sunk, like a ship that had scraped bottom on a coral bed and fell to the ocean floor in sad smithereens.

So Dorian didn’t know him anymore. Didn’t remember him. Didn’t—
He wanted to punch something.

"Why is it just us?" he asked in a small voice.

"Who can say?" Corvis shrugged one shoulder. "Whatever flung our souls here, it seems to have separated most everyone from their memories and spit them out where they’d be most likely to be. I woke up here at the College, myself. It seems this mysterious force took a gander at my memories of Kinloch Hold."

"I woke up in Helgen about to have my head chopped off," Finn said. Gods, it felt good to say that. "Then I watched a giant black dragon burn Helgen to the ground. I’m not sure what this says about me."

"Either you’re a magnet for all things disastrous and shitty, or the mysterious force really hated you," Corvis said.

Finn plucked a quill pen from a teal glass jar and brushed the feather against his palm. "What was this force, exactly?"

"Of that, I’m not entirely certain." The Antivan mage scrubbed the back of his neck. "As far as I understand, this soul-flinging could only have been caused by something absolutely catastrophic. Yet your sister killed Corypheus, so something else—someone else, possibly—must have shaken Thedas to its core. Somehow, our souls funneled into Skyrim and our bodies manifested once again." He sighed irritably. "Why it fabricated memories for some instead of preserving the old ones, I don’t know. Perhaps they died in such a horrendous fashion that if the memories had been preserved, they’d cause inescapable pain."

Finn’s mind struggled to wrap around the concept, fought to come to terms with its implications. "Maybe it’s speculation, right? Maybe this is just a bad dream?"

"Does it seem like a dream to you? If so, it’s a disappointing one."

Finn shook his head. "No. And if you’re right, is there a way back?"

Corvis’s eyes brightened somewhat; he’d been looking quite dour for a second. "Yes, possibly. You recall the focus orb that Corypheus used to open the Fade?"

"How the hell do you know about that?"

"I know everything. You’d do well to get used to that." Corvis chuckled a bit. "Regardless—there are undoubtedly magical artifacts of great power scattered about Skyrim. If one is—"

"Oh!" Finn said.

"Hmm?"

"Dragonstone." He almost mangled the word in his excitement. "Jarl Balgruuf of Whiterun and his court mage asked me to retrieve an artifact called the dragonstone in an ancient Nord tomb. Maybe it doesn’t do anything by itself, but…what if it has something to do with a source of magical power?"

And what if there was a source in Skyrim powerful enough to restore what was? Finn had seen time magic, when he and Dorian and his sister Nanyehi had intercepted Magister Alexius’s plans in Redcliffe Castle. The magister had developed time magic. It clearly existed.
“Good, good.” Corvis drummed his fingers on the desk. “In addition, the College is hosting a student tour of an expedition site in about a month’s time. The site’s name is Saarthal; it’s a Nordic tomb as well. Perhaps it holds something powerful if your tomb does not.”

Finn’s breath quickened. “A month gives me enough time to reach Bleak Falls Barrow with Palla and check out that dragonstone.”

“I might go on a sort of sabbatical and join you,” Corvis said. “Not that I hate teaching. And a couple of the apprentices are showing quite talent in elementalism. I’d rather get on top of this artifact hunt, however.”

“I’d really appreciate that.” Having someone around to talk to that had all their memories would be a blessing and a half. Not that he didn’t appreciate Palla’s company; she certainly lightened the mood when he needed it.

“As I’d expect. Now, if you’ll excuse me…” Corvis got up from his chair and pushed it in, making sure the back was completely flush against the side of the desk. “…I’m expected in the Arcaneum. I have to go be bitched at by an Orc librarian with bad teeth. I’m not sure my ears or nose will survive the encounter. In the meantime, you’re free to do whatever you’d like. The College isn’t exactly strict about its students’ comings and goings.”

Finn knew exactly where he was going to go.

* * *

He caught the tail end of Dorian’s lecture—or rather, the fine hairs at the tip of the tail, seeing as the students were dousing their flames and getting ready to leave. One mage hurriedly patted low flames off another’s shoulder. Palla hadn’t moved much from her spot in the middle of the chamber, seated on the low circular wall surrounding the light beam and fiddling with her gloves. It was then that Finn realized one of the students was a cat.

Sort of. Half-cat, semi-cat, some sort of walking cat hybrid that nearly made Finn jump right out of his skin.

From the wider shoulders and chest, and the lack of womanly hips, Finn gathered this cat—person—was a man; he had grey fur streaked with black, and surprisingly enough, facial hair.

“J’zargo is ready to begin with the harder lessons,” the cat-man said idly to Finn as he passed by. “J’zargo has already mastered these spells.”

Either this guy had a tendency to speak for the intentions of some mysterious friend…or he was the one Corvis had called out on for speaking in the third person.

He reminded himself not to focus on Skyrim’s eccentricities as he brushed past the flow of departing students, heading for Dorian. The Tevene mage had turned around to jot something down in a leather-bound notebook; Finn walked up to him, hesitated for a few nervous seconds, then cleared his throat.

“Excuse me,” Finn said. “Dor—er, I mean, Master Pavus?”

What a weird thing to call him. *Outside of sex, that is,* Finn thought wryly. Dorian had introduced himself with his first name when they’d met in Redcliffe’s Chantry a lifetime ago. It felt like his heart took a roll-around in cactus needles when Dorian turned around with a charming smile, granite-colored eyes devoid of any recognition.
“And you’re the newest apprentice, I presume,” Dorian said. He performed an elegant half-bow. “Dorian Pavus, at your service. You may call me Dorian, if you like.”

“I will,” Finn promised. “I missed the majority of the lesson, and…I was hoping you could tell me when you offer tutoring? I could use some practice with the ball of fire.”

“Mm, I see.” Dorian regarded Finn curiously, crossing muscular arms over his chest. “You know, I believe I could make time right about now. I’m interested in seeing what sorts of magical capabilities you have. Faralda doesn’t let in just any regular plebian through the gates.”

“That would be great.” Finn’s heart knocked against his ribs. “I hope I’m not burdening you.”

The taller mage’s smile turned sly. “Oh, no, no. If anything, you’re indulging me.”

Was he…? Finn swallowed.

“At any rate,” Dorian said, “I’d much prefer to be elsewhere than the Hall of the Elements.” He gestured around them at the room they stood in. “It’s such an impersonal space. Accompany me to my office, would you? I’d like to learn more about our mysterious new student.”

“Of course,” Finn said, nodding and offering Dorian a tentative half-smile.

Dorian turned around and gestured, and Finn followed after him.
Well, guys, that was a horrendously long absence on my part. You have my apologies for that. Things got a bit crazy, what with holidays and college and all that jazz. Thank you all for your patience! <3

Without any further ado, here's 7!

“And there we are,” Dorian said with a bit of enthusiastic flourish, ushering Finn into his office and shutting the door behind them both. “Much more private, yes? Sit anywhere you like.”

Finn didn’t sit just yet; he had to take a moment to calm the erratic wardrumming of his heart and the nonsensical spinning of his head.

Dorian’s office had a similar layout to Corvis’s, although the personal touches tended towards the gold and smoke-black hues rather than fire-red. Dorian’s desk wasn’t quite as neat—Finn knew the other mage could be a bit of a sardonic rebel when it came to doing things he didn’t care for, paperwork and required readings included.

The notion of Dorian teaching students here, at a College, was an interesting one. Not that Dorian wouldn’t have made a good teacher—far from it. He’d been one of the most skilled and intelligent mages Finn had ever met. But Dorian had always been more concerned with changing the world rather than being an instructor out in the middle of nowhere.

Especially Winterhold. What a place for Dorian to end up in. The Tevene mage despised frigid weather.

“I’m fine on my feet,” Finn said. “Could you—”

“Tsk, tsk. You can ask all of your questions in a short while.” Dorian leaned one hip against his desk, regarding Finn with one of his characteristic crooked smiles that always made Finn unhelpfully weak in the knees like some sort of giddy village girl. “It occurred to me when I saw you that you seem awfully familiar. Have we met before?”

Not long ago, Finn thought. We helped save the world, together. I fell in love with you.

“You might’ve seen me before, yeah,” he said instead. “Any idea where?”

Dorian turned his head to the side to think, and Finn took in the sight of his chiseled profile, the arched nose he loved so much. Maybe it was a silly thing to note, but Finn had immediately loved everything about the damned mage’s face, let alone the rest of him.

There had to be something here in Skyrim that could restore his memories.

And yet...what if Dorian had died horribly, back in Thedas, more horribly than perhaps Finn had? What if that—like Corvis had insinuated—was the reason he had no memories? To spare him from such pain?
“No,” Dorian finally said, “and it’s going to bother me for a while, I can just feel it. Hooray.” He fixed granite-grey eyes on Finn once more. “Never mind that. Actually, I can get a taste of your magical capabilities at a later date—I’m much more interested in how you arrived in Winterhold and what exactly you’re here for. You stick out like a sore thumb, I’m afraid. Not that it’s a bad thing. You have a very striking appearance.”

A year ago, Finn would’ve been too oblivious and not fine-tuned enough to Dorian’s idiosyncrasies to recognize that as flirting.

He smiled despite himself. “I could say the same thing about you, you know.”

“Oh?” Dorian grinned crookedly. “So I see you’re the complimentary sort. Although you’re not wrong. I am absurdly handsome, aren’t I?”

“I’m half surprised this office isn’t covered floor-to-ceiling with mirrors,” Finn said.

“Now there’s a good idea.” Dorian chuckled breathily, then exhaled an almost wistful sigh. “I’m curious. What brings you here?”

Finn crossed his arms loosely over his chest. “Research, actually. I’m looking for magical artifacts so I can…find them. And…study them. For…things.”

“That’s generally what one does with magical artifacts, yes? Unless one intends to use them for worldwide destruction. In which case, I don’t wish you well in any catastrophic efforts. I’d much rather not die in a horrendous fashion.” The dark-skinned mage sifted through a stack of parchment papers on his desk, messing the pile further. “Did Corvis tell you about our upcoming expedition to Saarthal? Granted, there are researchers digging into it as we speak, but I’m told it’s currently unfit for student exploration.”

“Perfect way to accidentally lose those unlikable students, though,” Finn joked.

“Ah, yes. Homicide as a way to solve all of our petty grievances.” Dorian’s mouth twisted in a wry smile. “Where did you come from, might I ask?”

“Right before this? Whiterun. I was supposed to be searching for something for the Jarl of Whiterun. Actually, I went in completely the wrong direction to get here. I’m completely out of the way. If he has me publicly flogged for the shit I just pulled, I really wouldn’t be surprised.”

“Whiterun. I believe I’ve been there. A lot of guards from Whiterun tell you they’ve been shot in the knee without being prompted. Either we have a serial knee-shooter on our hands, or a long string of odd coincidences.” Dorian sifted through a stack of loose parchment papers, made a valiant attempt at ordering them, then dropped them back on the desk in roughly the same state he’d picked them up in. “And before this?”

“Before,” Finn repeated, thinking. Tell him the truth? Try to jog his memory? “It’s a place called Starkhaven. Up north.”

Dorian’s lips twitched into a frown. “So many names that ring unexpected bells with no explanation. I may have you to blame for loss of future sleep, Finn.”

“You stay up often trying to place names?” Finn said.

“Amongst other things,” Dorian said with a smirk.

Finn swallowed.
Yeah. That was definitely flirting. It seemed different universes didn’t dictate Dorian finding Finn attractive enough to hit on, memories or no. Finn was torn between having a little fun with it like he used to, flirting back and feeling that same thrill tingle up and down his spine…or wallowing in sadness over the love they’d lost in the unknown catastrophe.

Blast it. Finn wasn’t a wallow-er.

“You may not be the only one,” he said, shifting his weight to one hip.

“Oh, you are a riot.” Dorian burst into laughter, his eyes lighting up. “I think I’m going to enjoy having you around Winterhold. Such an awfully dreary place. What I wouldn’t give to see a bit of sun around here.”

If Finn knew Dorian, the other mage had likely been spending his days here huddled inside, likely as near to a roaring hearth as he could be. Heat—that was Dorian’s go-to comfort zone. Warm sun on his back, a blanket and a good book, that sort of thing.

“You could always try shouting at the blizzard until it goes away,” Finn said.

“And freeze my feet off in the process? I think I’ll pass on that, thank you very much.” Dorian looked down, eyeing Finn’s feet. “And you’re barefoot. By the Eight. Any particular reason for that? Are your toes still attached to the rest of you, by any chance?”

“No,” Finn said, “they’re just stuck on with a bit of glue. Purely aesthetic choice.”

“Naturally.”

“But aside from that…” Finn looked down at his own feet, at the blue lines of *vallaslin* curling over the arches of them, remnants of a life he’d known so recently and yet so long ago. “It’s kind of a cultural thing, really. Plus—you should see me in boots. I tried them on once. Stubbed my feet on no less than five table legs, tripped over a crack in a stone tile, and spent the next few minutes shuffling around so I didn’t have to lift my feet up.”

“And then you ripped them off and flung them out a window,” Dorian said, snickering.

Then he stopped laughing. Snapped his mouth shut.

Both of them stared at each other.

A memory! An insignificant one, but a memory nonetheless. And it was the same sort of thing that had happened with Palla earlier, when she’d corrected Finn on the name “Starkhaven”; they remembered things without seeming to know how or why, things that were buried so deep in their subconscious they couldn’t even properly access the memories for more than a second or so.

“How odd,” Dorian said. “I don’t quite know why I said that.”

*I do,* Finn thought.

The optimistic side of him was doing some sort of ditzy jump-for-joy routine in his head. What if, as time passed, the memories grew stronger? Crowded out the fake Skyrim-centric ones everyone had?

Worth a chance. Worth the wait.

“Shit happens,” Finn said, shrugging one shoulder.
“Ah, that it does.” Dorian dragged a hand through sleek ebony hair. “Might I ask how long you plan on staying in Winterhold for?”

“Actually…not long,” Finn said, frowning. “That task for Jarl Balgruuf I told you about? Turns out, it might be important to my own personal goals, too. Potentially. Hopefully. So I’ve got to head south for a little while. But Corvis told me the College is hosting an expedition into Saarthal in a month, so I’ll be back for that.”

Dorian nodded once. “Yes, I’ve heard ever so many interesting things about this Saarthal. Haven’t ventured inside myself, yet.”

“I’m looking forward to it,” Finn said.

“No doubt.” Crossing the room in a few smooth strides, Dorian reached into a cabinet, fished around inside, and pulled out a bottle made of dark olive-green glass. “Fancy a drink? It’s only alto wine, nothing terribly fancy, but it’s something.”

Poor Dorian—a self-admitted wine critic and snob, subjected to a land without proper pinot noirs and cabernet sauvignons and the like.

“Yeah, I’ll take some.” Finn smiled. “Could use a drink.”

“I knew there was something I liked about you,” Dorian said with a teasing glint in his eyes. “Agreeable and a drinker.”

He fetched two metal goblets from within the same cabinet, setting them on his desk and pouring equal amounts of deep red wine into each.

“Emphasis on the last one,” Finn said, taking the goblet when Dorian offered it to him.

“A toast,” the human mage suggested. “To new and exciting ventures…and new and exciting people.”

Finn grinned, clinking his goblet against Dorian’s.

“To whatever comes next,” he said. To getting to know you all over again, unless I can find a way to get us back to where we were.

And with that, he brought the goblet to his lips and took a swig.

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