Oathkeeper

Summary

Luciana’s reputation as a warrior precedes her. The perennial enemy of the Alliance, the Horde, has given her a new name - Scarjaw. But not even respect will keep people from doing what is necessary. Though Luciana is highly respected by the war-like orcs and their allies, their capital city is in ruins from the Siege and desperation is growing in their ranks. Luciana is full of berserker fury, but even that might not be enough this time.

Her oath will be put to the test. So, too, will her will be tested - but Luciana is nothing if not tenacious, even under the greatest of adversity.
The 1st Legion’s soldiers were known to be powerful fighters and cunning tacticians. As part of an integration program that spanned the entire Legion, most healers were draenei and the scouts were of the Gilnean Royal Hunters - worgen, skilled once-human hunters that could take a wolfish form that enhanced their senses, their speed, and their strength.

The 113th Company was one of four units led by a paragon of martial prowess and strategic intelligence. Luciana Amadeus Wrynn, wife of the Crown Prince and as such Princess of Stormwind, was a recently appointed Knight Captain in charge of an entire Brigade. Nearly one hundred and fifty soldiers and officers followed her command not only because of her status as a member of the Royal House of Wrynn, but because time and again she proved herself fully capable and ready to carry the weight of command. With the scars to prove it, she was a warrior whose fury housed a powerful and dangerous berserker, and whose mind held a cunning master of the battlefield.

Sent to the Blasted Lands after a preliminary invasion force had scattered through the region, then still a Knight Lieutenant, Luciana had proven her mettle. By utilizing the full capabilities of the 35 skilled individuals under her command she helped to contain the Iron Horde. They were a force that came from an alternate timeline of Draenor, one where the orcs had not swallowed the vile blood of a demon but instead had followed Grommash Hellscream of Clan Warsong to dominion over their world. Now, they sought to conquer Azeroth. And Luciana would not allow it.

Promoted to Knight Captain, and awarded a medal for her previous and continued efforts in Duskwood where the civilians and local militia honoured her work, Luciana was recognized worldwide. She was a target for assassins of the many enemies of the Alliance, and with the aid of her loyal squad mates she survived them all. Now, she was in command of an operation that sided the main Dark Portal mission.

“Roll call!” Luciana bellowed, striking down a foe who had dared to bring his party to her territory. “Officer!”

“Healer!”

“Scout!”

“Soldier!”

“Soldier!”

“Soldier!”

“Soldier!”

With a nasty grin Luciana kicked the dying orc from her longsword, an enchanted blade she had named Oathkeeper, and turned to aid her scout. Wielding two wicked daggers, the worgen was snarling, biting, and stabbing at anything that came too close. “Jill, down!” Luciana cried, and swung out to strike the orc that had nearly blindsided Jillian.
“Thanks!” the worgen said, slipping through the mass of bodies to aid Christopher, one of her squad mates and a steady-headed soldier.

It was an easy victory for the experienced and well-matched squadron. The rest of their Company, the 113th, could be seen almost a mile away. They were also victorious, if the cheers that Jillian noted with her sensitive hearing were any indication.

“Mount up!” Luciana called. “Let’s head back to base!”

The Iron Horde sent regular patrols into the territory held by the Alliance. Scouts reported that they did the same to the Horde, meaning that the new foe wasn’t discriminating between them. It was good news and bad. Luciana knew that some, namely her own husband the Prince, wanted to take this chance to make another attempt at peace with the Horde. However dangerous, and however temporary it might be. It was a noble goal, but it would have to wait until the Dark Portal was sealed and the coming invasion averted.

“Knight Captain!” Luciana earned salutes as she strode back into the encampment. “Report from the front.” A scout handed her a wood clipboard with a short stack of papers. Still mounted she quieted her great Westbrook Warrior, a horse bred for war, and took the report.

She read it through quickly and frowned. The expression pulled at the ragged scars that marred her jaw, reaching down her neck to the left side of her powerfully built chest. Luciana stood tall at six feet and it left plenty of room for muscles and scars, both of which she had to spare. “The rest of it?” she asked.

“Sir?”

“I need details, scout, on armour, armaments, behaviour. How are they acting? Does one of them stand out? Do some of them not? Send out for more information.”

“Yes, Sir.” The scout saluted stiffly, took back the report and vanished into the bustle of the camp.

Luciana sighed, looked over her shoulder to her 113th Company. The rest of her Brigade was occupied in the field, reinforcing strategic points under command of their individual Knight Lieutenants. “Get some rest. We’re heading back out in six hours’ time.”

“Sir!” they echoed discordantly. Most scattered into the encampment, either to stable their Stormwind Chargers or to hand the reins to someone else, if the horse was still fresh. They were in high demand these days. Luciana was grateful for her own horse. Westbrooks were willful mounts that fought alongside their chosen rider, and descendant from the Charger they benefitted from the wide chest, strong neck, and thick legs. They were also bred to have the gait unique to them and the Charger - a rapid advance, the charge they were named for, with their head down and ready to butt or bite and their legs kicking out at exposed legs and feet. A group of armoured Chargers could mow down an entire orc war party in minutes.

Luciana’s mount was a stubborn, sometimes hateful beast that barely tolerated the more experienced stable hands and respected only her. Some said that Westbrook Warriors imprinted on those they saw as worthy to hold their reins, and the breed did hold a certain intelligence that gave some weight to that folk tale.

“Easy, Thunderer,” she soothed, petting the top of the horse’s head past its spiked armour. She rubbed the exposed spot behind its ear and the horse tossed its head lightly and snorted, pretended to be annoyed at the gesture Luciana knew it actually enjoyed. “Come on.” She clicked her tongue and the horse started at a slow walk towards the stables. Crow was the most skilled of the stable

“Knight Captain!” the relatively young night elf smiled. “How goes it?”

“Well enough. Another small victory for the Alliance, and we’re back to rest for the next one.”

“The small things build up,” he replied, taking the reins carefully in hand. Thunderer had tried to bite even him before, and caution was merited.

Luciana dismounted easily, and moved in front of the horse. She took its massive head gently in her hands. “Behave, you,” she said in a warning tone. Her smile was fond and she kissed its nose. Her horse snorted and sniffed at her for a moment before allowing Crow to lead him away.

Before coming to the Blasted Lands to counter the Iron Horde threat, Luciana had spent several months in Duskwood, south of the expansive Elwynn Forest whose ocean front held the capital city of Stormwind. Her previous efforts there to restore the safety and economy of the local population had been immensely successful and after sending over two dozen letters to her commanding officer, then Knight Captain Rivers, the mayor had convinced the Captain to send Luciana back. Her plans for a fur trade based on local bear and wolf populations had gone through and a number of hunters had taken up residence. Yet more skilled individuals had settled in to help maintain wards around the cursed Raven Hill cemetery to keep the undead contained, following the original setup Luciana had created, and warriors had arrived in droves to test their mettle against the regular encroaches of the ogres.

When the Iron Horde first came through the Dark Portal, they stormed the Blasted Lands and took the Alliance base with fire and advanced weapons that were too similar to be coincidental to the weapons found in the siege of Orgrimmar. She requested she be sent to the Blasted Lands, and after some arguing with both her superior officer and her father-in-law, King Varian Wrynn, she convinced them to place her and her Company there for two weeks.

Being such a celebrated Knight Lieutenant, the Princess of Stormwind's presence bolstered the spirits of the remaining soldiers from the ransacked Nethergarde Keep, and turned the tide in their favour. She once again argued with her superior, and the decision was made to keep her in the Blasted Lands until it was considered too dangerous for her. As one of only three living members of the Royal House, they couldn’t afford to blindly risk her death - at least, not until she provided an heir. Her squadron was charged by royal decree with keeping her safe while following her orders, and after spending her entire eighth tour in the Blasted Lands she was promoted to Knight Captain of the 01D Brigade - the fourth brigade of the 1st Legion.

During this time the economy of Darkshire, the capital of Duskwood, boomed thanks to her efforts and initial personal investment. As a result Luciana was awarded the rare Her Majesty’s Blue Cross. Named after the late Queen Tiffin, the medal was given to those who gave continuous and dedicated efforts to aiding civilians and civilian settlements. Luciana was a decorated Officer of the army, and her time and attention were highly sought.

“Knight Captain!” Luciana turned to a scout with a stack of reports sent in from field agents. “Reports on the Horde spotted to the west.”

“Thank you.” She took them, continued on her path to her tent and ignored the noise and commotions around her. The camp was a busy place, receiving more and more adventurers and heroes each day. Their efforts were invaluable to both the Alliance and Luciana. Without so many skilled individuals at her disposal, she would not have been so successful and may not have earned her promotion, nor her victories.
The warrior ducked into her tent, a spacious affair with a small section closed off where she could sleep in private. The center of the tent held a wide table, over which was spread a map of the Blasted Lands. Markers for Alliance forces, Horde units, Iron Horde activity and more were placed with care on the painted linen expanse.

She ignored it, instead sitting at her desk and brushing aside a small, messy pile of papers. In her hand was a stack of reports, inside which was hidden a letter. This was a weekly occurrence and the scout that delivered them to her was actually a skilled SI:7 agent in disguise.

Luciana carefully broke the plain wax seal on the envelope and slid the folded paper out. It was addressed to her as Knight Captain, and was written in code she had memorized long ago. She mentally translated as she read through it. Much of the text was either gibberish or meaningless, and she expertly picked out the parts that mattered. When put together, the tidbits made a short letter that made her heart ache.

Luciana,

I miss you. I pray for you, and hope you’re well. The court is in upheaval over a new request for funds. Father is having the time of his life verbally beating them over their selfishness. Your Princess risks her life and you won’t even give gold? He misses you too. Return soon, and safe.

I love you.

Anduin

She smiled softly, reverently folded the letter and placed it back into its envelope. It would have to be burned as usual, and she wished - not for the first time - that she could keep them. It would have to be enough that whenever she returned to Stormwind, Anduin was waiting with open arms. She couldn’t keep his letters, risky as it was to send her information that could be used by a skilled enemy. Perhaps she could get him to write out copies of the sweet letters and stash them in a safe in her bedroom, and she could reread them when she visited.

With a sigh, Luciana stood to drop the letter into a torch mounted on one of four thick wooden poles at the corners of her tent. She watched it burn to cinders, carefully poked at it with an armoured finger, and returned to her desk when she was satisfied it was completely destroyed.

There was a lot of work for her to do, and it couldn’t wait. Though she was only twenty-two, she sometimes felt as though she were fifty. After four consecutive years of war and eight successful tours on the frontlines, she was tired, worn out save for when she was in the midst of battle - or in Anduin’s loving arms.

Restless, she reached up to her neck and gave the cord wrapped around it a careful tug. With a bit of effort, her wedding ring was in her gauntleted hand. She observed the mithril ring, inlaid with three river’s heart sapphires from Pandaria and a line of gold around its center. She and Anduin had picked out their wedding rings a bit later than usual, as she had been on tour in Duskwood, but Varian used his authority as King to pull her home at least once every six or seven weeks so Anduin could see her. After a month and a half of fighting worgen, rebuilding destroyed homes, and checking on sealing wards around Raven Hill, she had visited Stormwind to pick the rings. And, more importantly, to see her young husband.

Anduin’s ring was similar to hers, but the line in his ring was silver. He had wanted the typical gold ring, at first, but mithril was nigh-indestructible and the chance of it breaking while Luciana was fighting was much lower. It would also give them opportunity to commission the rings from dwarven jewelers. This, like any move the Royal House made, gave opportunity to show favour to
their allies and strengthen the bonds between them. The three dwarves, professionals of the highest calibre, had been honoured to make the rings that the Prince and Princess would wear as life-long symbols of their union.

She gave the ring a short kiss, wishing she was with Anduin so she could kiss him instead, and gently tucked the ring back under her tunic, where the metal of her breastplate could protect it. She tried to continue her work, but a call went up outside and she looked up in time to see her scout, Jillian, pop her wolfish head into the tent.

“We got a situation. The Archmage and his folk stormed the Portal.”

“What?” she snapped, standing and striding from the tent. “He said it’s be at least another week!”

“He saw a chance,” Jillian said, her long furred legs easily keeping up with Luciana’s long strides. “Took it. I got it from a field scout a minute ago. They’re trying to rally the lads over here to keep the Iron boxed in until the Portal shuts or they come back.”

“Let’s hope it’s the latter,” she growled, entering the center of the camp. “Listen up!” she bellowed, and Jillian flattened her ears to her skull at the sudden boom of Luciana’s deep voice. It got everyone’s attention, to be sure, and once they realized it was their Princess speaking the people at the outer edge of the camp hurried over to listen. “Archmage Khadgar has taken an opening to storm the portal with his vanguard! 113th Company, to me! The rest of 01D will lead a charge over the Iron Horde forces still standing in front of the Portal! For the next twenty-four hours you will hold your position there under Knight Lieutenant Tungsted until either the Archmage sends back word, the Portal closes, or Iron Horde reinforcements come through! To arms, Alliance! We will be victorious! Adventurers, to me!”

Luciana was soon swarmed with eager heroes willing to fight with her, some for glory and some for gold. A handful had been in Khadgar’s vanguard, but plenty remained at the camp and she handed out assignments according to urgency. Supplies were low and she sent out hunters to gather more meat. Any herbalists or skinners in the group were sent out with them for medicinal herbs and leathers. Healers and fighters were split between the Portal unit and the camp guard. Several mages who could teleport were given hastily scrawled reports to bring to Stormwind and to nearby Alliance forts with haste. Plenty of warriors with their own mounts were eager for battle and Luciana sent them alongside the Portal unit. She sent warlocks with them, knowing the pure destructive power they could bring, and also to keep an eye on the Portal, as it was fueled by fel energy.

The camp soon resembled an anthill, with everyone crowding together as they prepared to set out. It cleared out quickly, with just over half of its forces scattered throughout the nearby regions. “Jillian,” she said. “Find a good scout to send to the Horde base. Tell them not to get close - fire an arrow with a note attached, or send an animal in. Give word that the Archmage has moved in, though they likely already know, and that our forces will take the Portal. The Iron Horde garrison remains open to attack.”

“Are you sure?” Jillian asked quietly, though her voice growled as any worgen’s did. “Higher-ups won’t like that.”

“I am the higher up,” Luciana grumbled. “We can take the Portal, but not if the garrison is open and sends in reinforcements. While we’re occupied at the base of the Portal the Horde will take and ransack the garrison, have their fill of looting and bloodshed for the time being. It’ll take their eyes off us, and take care of a threat on our border.”

“Alright.” Jillian saluted, her dark claws gleaming in the afternoon sun, and turned to lope away.
She likely had someone in mind already and with her experience, Luciana knew she’d take care of it.

Luciana turned as her Company approached, her squadron at the lead. “Where to, Cap?” Kain asked, jogging up to her alongside Enaeon, a massive armoured paladin from the Exodar.

“You must rest soon,” Enaeon told her. “You have been wake for almost a full day cycle.”

“I’ll be fine a while longer,” she said, waving his concern away but allowing him to push a strengthening draught into her hands. “We’re mounting up and heading out to the south of the Dark Portal. We’ll stealth in to the sparse underbrush, keep our heads down while the rest of the Brigade starts the fight. When they’ve gathered most of the Iron Horde to them we’ll charge.”

“Sounds good,” Lars said, joining them. “I’ll get the stables going.”

“I will gather any healers who yet remain,” Enaeon said, and though he was wearing full plate armour he jogged away like it weighed nothing.

“Orders?” Knight Lieutenant Oaken, who had been given charge of the 113th Company after Luciana’s promotion, approached her. She was a reliable officer with a steady hand on her soldiers.

“Send a scout to Tungsted’s party. Let them know that once they’ve gathered enough attention, open up a route for us to charge.”

“Yes, Sir.” She turned to her Company and shouted for one of her scouts, a worgen like Jillian. Nearly all of the scouts in the 1st Legion were Gilnean Royal Hunters, at this point, and the worgen had quickly proven invaluable as information carriers and trackers.

Luciana made her way to the stables, knowing that her horse would not tolerate anyone taking his reins when there was so much tension. He’d be stubborn and try to shake them off. Luciana sometimes wondered if the horse knew the concept of spite.

“Thunderer!” she snapped when she saw the horse rearing up and kicking out at stable hands. “Down!”

The horse’s front hooves hit the dirt immediately and it ducked its head, turning it to look at her with one wide black eye. It snorted irritably, as though to express its unhappiness about its brushing being interrupted.

“Yeah, yeah,” Luciana grumbled, running a gauntlet over the top of the horse’s muzzle. “We’re heading out for another charge,” she said. “Get him ready!” she ordered a nearby stable hand. “He won’t bite while I’m here.”

“Yes, Sir,” the stable hand said, eyeing the great Westbrook Warrior nervously. Luciana kept her hands on the horse’s head and neck, managing to gather enough of her patience to wait while the stable hands prepped the great beast for battle.
By the time Thunderer was dressed for battle in blue plate armour that matched that of his rider, the rest of the 113th Company was ready to go. “Fall in!” Luciana bellowed, bringing Thunderer to the head of the forming procession. “Follow me!”

She led the way at a canter to a copse of dried out trees and sparse underbrush to the south of the Portal, where fighting could be heard. Jillian sprinted towards her on all fours and long used to the Gilnean worgen. Thunderer only tossed his head once when Jillian approached, switching gaits to a bipedal run with smooth, practiced motions.

“They’re almost ready,” she reported, hardly out of breath. “If you bring the horses up the cliffs there’s a path you can take down into the fray. Tungsted’s expecting you through there.”

“Roger that. Notify Oaken.” Luciana nodded over her shoulder and Jillian took off again.

Luciana waited for Knight Lieutenant Oaken to call ready, and when it came Luciana drew her longsword. Oathkeeper gleamed under the sun. Its spine was dark iron, flexible but strong, and its edges were mithril worked in the bellies of Ironforge. With a wolf’s head pommel of compressed iron to smash in helmets, the sword was truly a weapon of war.

She raised it high over her head. “Follow me!” she bellowed, and kicked Thunderer into a gallop.

They rode around the edge of the crater that surrounded the Dark Portal. Years ago demons had roamed the lands, but their numbers had since been greatly thinned and the edge of the crater was deserted. Luciana spotted the trail that Jillian had mentioned. It was well hidden behind the rock and dirt of the crater’s edge, but wide enough for ten horses to pass unhindered. The ground was slightly uneven, but no trouble for a unit of Stormwind Chargers, and she waved her blade in a circle in the air. “Charge through!” she roared, taking the lead through the pass.

The fighting in the bowl of the crater was intense, and she could see a path for her charge. A thick mass of Iron Horde orcs were pressed in by two forces of her soldiers and bloodthirsty Alliance adventurers, and she led the way down to them. “Charge!” With her sword pointing forward, bright and clear, 113th Company charged down the incline into the battle, and over the Iron Horde.

Stormwind Chargers were dangerous in a group charge and they mowed over the path of Iron that Tungsted had made for them. There was still plenty of orcs to fight but the battle was in the Alliance’s favour by the time Luciana’s unit cleared the fighting and gathered on the other side. “Join the fray!” she ordered, her voice booming out over the din of battle. “For the Alliance!”

Eager to prove herself worthy of her new title, Knight Lieutenant Oaken took command of her Company save for Amadeus Squadron, who had been given standing orders from the King to stay with Luciana and guard her with their lives. As she was now a Princess, she would need the buffer between her and potential threats. It was an odd situation, but after four assassins were thwarted by her squadron in three weeks, no one had any room to argue. They were a good group, used to working together and fighting as a unit. They hadn’t had any changes in their ranks for many long months and fit together like a puzzle.

The battle continued past sunset and Luciana was in it for several hours, until her healer Enaeon pulled her out. He was astride his Light-blessed Charger, an ethereal horse he could summon from the Nether thanks to his abilities as a paladin. The horse was huge to fit its rider and could push its way easily through the mass of bodies.
“You need to get out of here!” Enaeon had to shout to be heard.

“Why? I’m just getting started!” Rampant bloodshed had long since awoken the beast of fury that lived in Luciana, and it roiled in her gut, wanting to escape and fight.

“You must rest!” Enaeon responded, reaching out to grab her wrist with care. “It has been over twenty-four hours! As your healer, I am telling you to pull out and return to camp and rest!”

Luciana frowned. He’d pulled the healer card on her, which was a rare occurrence. Still, she couldn’t ignore his wishes, and she nodded. “Let me find Oaken,” she said.

“She is over there.” Enaeon pointed to where the Lieutenant was fighting with her squadron at her back, and Luciana had Thunderer push his way through the crowds. Around Luciana, there was almost exclusively Alliance forces. An hour prior, Stormwind marines had arrived to reinforce 01D Brigade just as they started to tire.

“Oaken!” Luciana called, and waved. Still mounted, Oaken shouted orders to her squadron and approached Luciana.

“Captain!”

“I’m returning to base! Healer’s orders!”

“About damn time you take a break!”

“Keep up with 113th and make sure Tungsted’s keeping his sword up! The marines have it in hand over at the entrance to the crater and I’ve already sent them to the pass we took in! Hold the Portal, I should be back in a few hours. I’ll send word ahead. If something changes, send me a scout!”

“Yes Sir!” Oaken nodded, unable to salute as both her hands were occupied.

Luciana turned Thunderer to the entrance to the crater. Enaeon followed, and soon her squadron was riding in semi-circle formation around her rear and sides. Most of the Iron Horde had either swarmed to the Portal itself, or retreated to their garrison when the Horde had launched a sudden and vicious attack against them. Luciana’s plan had worked and both enemy forces were distracted, leaving the Alliance camp free to receive wounded soldiers and marine reinforcements from the warships just off the shore.

“Knight Captain!”

She waved away several people who tried to approach with worried expressions when they saw her returning to camp so soon. “At ease, people. I’m here to rest, healer’s orders. The battle continues under Tungsted and Oaken, and the marines.”

“Horde’s at the enemy garrison,” a soldier called.

“I’m aware. Don’t let anyone bother me unless they’re bringing news about the Portal, or from Stormwind.”

“Yes, Sir.”

A handful of soldiers were guarding her tent by the time she arrived. Thunderer was once again led to the stables, now tired from battle and easier to handle. Luciana stripped off the top layer of her armour, leaving the heavy metal plates on an armour rack in her sectioned tent. Enaeon had come in with her to help, and he took the time to heal the worst of her injuries. Two broken fingers, bad
internal bruising, and a cut on her arm from a knife that had slipped between plates and sliced through the protective leathers underneath.

“No time to repair it,” she muttered, inspecting the cut. “It’ll wait.” She kept the leathers on, laid on her back on her cot to rest as Enaeon kept watch. He was a healer, but he was still a paladin and the heavy warhammer he carried was not an idle threat.

Luciana found she couldn’t sleep, but she did doze with Enaeon’s presence enough to let her relax. She felt as though she’d hardly gotten any rest when a scout, panting and sweating heavily, stumbled into her tent. “News from Lieutenant Tungsted,” he gasped, and Enaeon immediately offered him water from the pitcher on Luciana’s table. It was lukewarm but the scout accepted the pitcher gratefully. There was no time for finesse or pouring it into a glass, and Luciana didn’t care as she sat up, alert.

“Report,” she commanded.

“The Portal’s closed,” the scout said, regaining his breath slowly. “Deactivated. No news from the vanguard. The Iron Horde forces on our side have fallen to 01D and the marines. The Iron Garrison is being looted and torched by the Horde as we speak.”

“Good,” she said, a toothy grin spreading over her face. “Let them spend themselves on each other. Prisoners?” she prompted.

“We’ve taken several. They’ll be prepped for transport with the marines once they finish cleaning up the Portal crater.”

“Local demons?”

“No new ones. Remainders are patrolling the area around the crater rim, but they’re wandering mindlessly and haven’t even looked at the battle.”

“Good. Take a moment and then return to Tungsted, I’m heading back out to oversee clean up.”

“Yes, Sir.” The scout saluted stiffly.

Luciana equipped her armour quickly, eager to be out. The sun had barely risen, which told her she’d rested at least six hours even if it had felt like much less. “Did you get any sleep?” she asked Enaeon.

“Enough for now,” he replied.

Luciana watched from Thunderer’s back as the marines took just over a dozen Iron Horde orcs, brown-skinned and beaten to a bloody pulp, by wagon to their rowboats. Luciana had her men search the bodies strewn over the ground for survivors. Alliance people would be taken back to camp for treatment. Orcs would be finished with a knife to the throat or a sword through the neck or heart. Any fallen Alliance soldiers would be collected for magical preservation and transport, their dog tags taken with care to send ahead to their families.

With the relative peace, Luciana looked to the Dark Portal. It was truly inactive, no magic reported by the warlocks and mages who’d been assigned by Tungsted to examine it. It was odd, after so long, to see it vacant. The ever-present hum that it had produced, and to which Luciana’s Brigade had adjusted to, was gone. It left the area feeling oddly empty.

“Captain.” Oaken was coming up on foot, a gash on her cheek partially healed. “Lots of injuries, mostly non-fatal. Fourteen reported dead.”
“Roger that. You lost anyone?”

“A scout. Not mine.”

“And your horse.”

The Lieutenant laughed tiredly. “Yeah. We’ll head back to camp on our own. You should get back there now, before the Horde starts moving through the area on their way back. We’ll wait for them to clear out before mobilizing.”

“Alright. If they make a threat, ignore them. If they attack, send for reinforcement, and make it obvious you’re doing it. Tell Tungsted, too.”

“Yes, Sir.” Hayley saluted weakly, and turned to limp back into the milling crowds.

Luciana turned to Enaeon. “We might have lost the vanguard,” she murmured. He could hardly hear her and brought his mount closer to listen. “And the Archmage. I hope he gets word back soon, somehow. This could be very, very bad.”

“He will,” Enaeon said. “He had Glory Seekers with him. Their guild only accepts the most skilled and powerful heroes.”

“I know.” She nodded slowly. “But they’re facing an entire army on their own.” She sighed, straightened her back. “We’ll wait for word to come through. Likely a mage portal. Either way, the Portal is closed and Azeroth is safe from invasion, at least for now.”

“We should get back to camp.” Lawrence, a member of Amadeus Squadron, interrupted them as he approached on horseback. “Squadron’s waiting for you, Cap. No doubt there’s a lot of work for you waiting at camp.”

“No doubt,” she grumbled. “Never any breaks.”

“Ain’t no rest for the wicked.” Lars was grinning as he and the rest of the squadron closed ranks around Luciana, his face streaked with dirt and dried blood. “Also, I want a shower.”
News arrived from Khadgar’s party almost a full week after they stormed the Dark Portal and shut it down from the other side. Now there were frantic preparations as the army gathered supplies and people to send over through a portal that the archmage would create, and hold only for a short time before a more permanent portal could be set up.

Luciana had been called to Stormwind to aid in the preparations, her squadron brought along for the ride. There were people to organize and she was best known for being able to utilize the unique abilities that each adventurer held, whether they were a druid, a warrior, a mage, or a death knight.

But, for the time being she wasn’t worried about the plans for a Draenor garrison. A Field Commander, one who held a strategically important garrison and its forces rather than a Legion, had already been chosen. One of Khadgar’s Iron Vanguard, Celia was a mage with many years of experience and the title of Archmage under her belt. Ostensibly known as Flameheart, she had been a Glory Seeker for a number of years. Her experience as a raid leader and adventurer was proving useful, as she was swiftly organizing her garrison into a force to be feared. She was also amassing a small army of adventurers, locals, and even some foes who respected her enough to follow her.

Luciana wasn’t worried about anything right now, except the man who lay under her, panting and sweating. “Lucy,” he sighed as she kissed a trail down his chest to his hips. “I missed you.”

“I couldn’t sleep,” she murmured against his skin. “Imagining you here, without me... Lonely and cold. Did you keep yourself warm at night with thoughts of me?”

He moaned when she took him in her mouth, eyelids fluttering as he watched her. “Oh, Lucy.”

Anduin’s room was connected to the King’s through a secret passageway that was mostly used in the mornings when one’s breakfast arrived first, and the other didn’t feel like waiting. Occasionally, when Anduin relapsed and his nightmares returned, he’d sleep in his father’s chambers for comfort and safety. Luciana’s room was on the other side of Anduin’s and to avoid an awkward situation with the King, when they had sex they used her bedroom. Though they both agreed that Anduin’s bed was more comfortable - Anduin, because he was used to his room. Luciana, because his bed smelled like him.

It was early in the morning, just after sunrise, but Luciana had only been home for a few days and she could never seem to get enough of him. Touch, taste, smell - she was so often without him that when she returned she felt as though she had been drowning, and could only now breath again. Anduin, for his part, was more than willing to spend all of his time with her while she was in Stormwind.

Unfortunately they couldn’t pass entire days in her bedroom, as the King would soon be waiting for them to join him for breakfast in their private dining room.

Anduin dressed first as Luciana used the washroom and wiped herself free of sweat with a wet towel. Her metabolism was much higher than a normal person as her body supplied her constantly with the energy to fight off an attack, and as a result her temperature was higher as well and she sweated much more easily. It was not always pleasant, but on cold nights Anduin would huddle up to her and she’d be thankful for a time for her warrior’s body.
Varian was smiling widely when they entered the dining room and eyed Luciana meaningfully. Completely unabashed, she grinned back. “Good morning,” she said, sitting at her regular spot between Varian and Anduin.

The table was small, only holding room for four people, and she imagined that one day soon there would be a fourth person sitting opposite her - a young one, a child, somehow wrested from her thickly muscled body. It would take some work for her body to ovulate again, let alone bring her to term, but it would be worth it. She knew it would be. But it would wait. She was only twenty-two, though she often felt much older, and Andin was twenty. Varian had recently entered his fortieth year and though it showed in the lines around his eyes and the heaviness that sometimes weighed on his shoulders, he was still going strong and none were worried that he would soon need to retire. He was quite enjoying himself, now that he had two children to look after.

“I bet it was,” Varian joked.

“Father,” Anduin scolded, but his ears were red. He didn’t blush easily, but his ears tended to give him away. Luciana chuckled and reached over to try and tame the permanent cowlick that popped up from the back of his head.

“What? I’m just making small talk,” Varian replied, mocking offense. “It’s not my fault you two are like rabbits. Always f...”

“Hey!” Luciana interrupted just in time. Varian burst out laughing when he saw how red he was making his son’s face. “No teasing before breakfast.”

“Fine, fine.”

At first, Luciana had felt awkward and out of place among the royal family. But Varian had seen her as his future daughter long before anyone else even knew he was playing her into a betrothal with his son, and Anduin was a caring and open person who had accepted her easily into his life. She had resisted, always feeling as though her imperfect control over her fury made her a danger. Anduin had helped her learn how to direct it like she would her squadron rather than lock it down in an abyss deep inside her.

She had been pressing other things down with it, things that were necessary to create lasting and meaningful relationships, and at first it’d been a frightening experience. But Anduin loved her, and showed it every time he soothed her injuries, aches, and rages with his Light. And Varian, for his part, was a warrior and understood intrinsically the difficulties she faced. For the first time in many years she’d felt her actual age when he held her in a moment of uncertainty. He understood her, supported her and protected her, and was more her father than the one who had sired her.

Today was one of many days she spent marveling at the closeness she felt with the two last people who held the royal bloodline in their veins. Varian, normally closed off and easily angered, was relaxed and laughed readily. It still amazed her sometimes that despite his antisocial tendencies, the King often made time specifically for her. Anduin, who was cool and collected in court and poised in public, showed his embarrassment easily and openly gave affection to those he cared for. The two were understandably selective when it came to friends, as they couldn’t trust easily, so Luciana knew that the fact that they found her worthy of their time was no small gesture.

When Anduin reached for Luciana’s hand, taking and holding it while they ate, her heart ached. She wasn’t home nearly enough, she felt, and she was always dangerously close to regret when she had to leave again for the frontlines. But Anduin was an understanding man and never begrudged her the love she felt for her squadron, her enjoyment of war and battle, even though he was one who always aimed for peace. Varian, too, always welcomed her home with a warm and affectionate
“Luciana, do you have time today to review the volunteers who want to travel to Draenor?” Varian asked over the tea they always drank after breakfast. He asked, because although he knew she had nothing planned and would be willing to do as he asked, it showed respect to her autonomy and helped her to slowly prepare for the day she’d become queen. Each step was one he took deliberately, and she took them with him. He had similar preparations with Anduin, though they had a different aim as Luciana was the warrior who would lead from the frontline while Anduin would likely handle the more domestic affairs, while still guiding Luciana’s blade from afar.

“Certainly. I’ll take a look and organize them into viable war parties. Five each?”

“One healer, one tank, three damagers,” Varian confirmed. “There’s a whole mess of them. It’s going to take you the entire day just to get through all of their files.”

“I have time.”

“Anduin, I’ve got a few things you can do.” Varian spoke with Anduin briefly and let him choose which thing he’d prefer - oversee the porters who loaded supplies onto wagons, inspect weapons shipments for the base being built in Ashran off the eastern coast of Draenor, pen political letters that would be carried by couriers and SI:7 agents to various parts of the kingdom, or help Varian to host a delegation from the Explorer’s League and discuss with them the possibilities of starting excavations in Draenor.

“I should start with the porters,” Anduin sighed. “It’s the most urgent, and you can take care of a few Explorer’s League members. However excited they get. I’ll start the letters this afternoon and finish them tomorrow if you want to inspect the weapons shipments.”

“I could help with the inspections,” Luciana volunteered. “I’ll take regular breaks from reading the files so I don’t develop a migraine and help you.”

“I appreciate it,” Varian said, nodding to her. “I’ll see the Explorer’s League tomorrow, then, and start the inspections today.”

“Remember to take breaks,” Luciana said to Anduin. “We don’t need you hurting your wrist. Again.”

“I’ll be careful,” he said, smiling into his tea. She sometimes had difficulty expression her love for him, no matter how easy it had become to show it physically. Anduin saw it in every little thing she did and not for the first time she marveled at her luck for ending up with him. Anduin had seen her once, held a crush for some time, and Varian had seen her potential and had chosen her for his son. She was his warrior, his guardian, who would protect Anduin while he guided the kingdom and healed its many old and aching wounds.

Luciana stayed with Anduin briefly after breakfast, returning to her bedroom to dress properly for a day of being the Knight Princess, her new working title. Anduin took the opportunity to remind her how bold he’d grown in the year they’d been married. At first he could hardly bear to be undressed near her. Now, he trapped her against a table, kissed a line down her neck and caressed her until she was ready for him. Willingly she surrendered, bowed over the table and gripped its edge in fingers that could break iron links like paper chains while Anduin had her from behind.

His smooth hands ran over the scars that marred her skin and the ugly burn marks that covered her embrace.
lower back entirely save for a line over her spine. He bathed her with his Light that knew to cool her skin, and Anduin directed it to heat her where it counted. He was not as practiced with it in such a function, but he was getting better each time and it was, too. He was gentle with her, always so soft and pliant under her, and when she surrendered to him he was a kind master, and she was sweet and trusting.

Luciana would be in Stormwind for a bit longer than her usual visits. The need for her skills in the army would have to be balanced with the need for her aid in coordinating matters that could only be decided by one with the authority of the Royal House. Her squadron was never bothered by the sometimes very sudden trips, as when they were in Stormwind they didn’t have to worry about enemies, save for assassins. The chances of someone coming after Luciana while she was safely ensconced in a city full of guards was low, and they were truly only there as a final defense should something happen.

While Amadeus squadron was in Stormwind Keep, news arrived from Ironforge. Luciana had written primers for human understanding of their allied races, starting with the most recent addition - the jinyu - and finalizing with the night elves, who had been allied, or at least friends with the humans for a much longer time. She had written the primers carefully, with respect to her own status as a human who might never fully understand the cultures she did not belong to. She had written to Professor Theoded Grufflink that should he find any inaccuracies in the primer on gnomes he could correct them as long as he included a note saying that he had done so.

Anduin, for his part, had followed through on his promise to write about the dwarves. He wrote three different primers, one for each major clan, and took pains to explain in brief the histories between them and why there was still tension today. He wrote it respectfully, aware that it would reflect on Stormwind as a whole, and actually visited Ironforge several times to confer with the dwarves who lived in the mountain. Theoded Grufflink had become something of an icon, as well, for his part in helping to compile the books, as well as editing and publishing them. The obvious efforts of the Royal House to help normalize their more exotic-looking allies to their citizens had improved the political climate between them, as well, and Varian was ever appreciative of it.

Luciana spent most of her day forming teams of five from the tall stack of files she’d received from volunteers ready to visit Draenor. One healer, a tank that could match their abilities, and three damagers to compliment them. She avoided pairing death knights with Light-based healers, as the Light could easily burn them, and instead put them with druids or shaman. She also made sure that every team had at least one ranged attacker in their party, and hunters - with their abilities to understand the local fauna despite being newly introduced to it - were in high demand. Many draenei had volunteered, wanting to revisit their old home and try to change the outcome of the formation of an orcish Horde. Luciana made sure to include as many of them as she could, as their reasons for fighting would inspire the parties they were in.

Every two hours she would stop reading. She would stretch to get her blood flowing properly to her limbs, get something to eat, and visit Varian in the Dwarven District to help speed the process of inspecting the weapons and armour they’d be sending to Ashran. It was becoming a heavily contested island, with the Horde also interested in it for its strategic location and resources. They were determined to win it under the name Vol’jin’s Spear, while the Wrynn’s Vanguard faction had emerged from the Alliance stationed there.

“Knight Princess!” she was greeted as she approached. There were hundreds of crates in stacks of six or seven that formed a semi-circle around the main square fountain. Varian was in the center of it, easily standing out with his sheer presence. It helped that even though he was not wearing full armour, instead only the leather and chain portions of it under a Stormwind tabard, he had Shalamayne at his hip.
“Hail,” she nodded with a smile to a Royal Guard she recognized. “I thought I’d come help,” she said when Varian looked up to see her. “The letters were starting to swim.”

“Always glad to see you,” he replied with a nod. His brow was furrowed as he carefully tested a short sword with a few experimental swings. “Good balance,” he said. “These are all made from the same ore?”

“Same ores, same smith,” a dwarf with a soot-filled beard replied. His bushy eyebrows were also blackened with the stuff and he had obviously wiped his hand over his face to clear some of it away. It resulted in a slightly crazed, comical appearance, one that Luciana tried to ignore as she opened a crate on the ground to peer inside. Boot knives awaited her and she reached in eagerly. They were standard issue, quite similar to hers. She bent to draw it to compare the two. Her knife had obviously been crafted with more care but the ones in the crate were satisfactory and were high enough quality that she could shut the crate and move to the next one.

Two full days passed in such a fashion and the supplies were brought to Ashran through a portal strengthened by several mages on both ends. Luciana snuck back to the Keep so that no one could catch her and rope her into anything. Varian gave her a knowing smile and stayed behind to hand out more commissions for the blacksmiths in the Dwarven District. These ones would have more time to complete and a higher quality would be expected, and regular visits would be necessary to ensure the continued efforts of the blacksmiths. Leatherworking commissions would be sent to the Old Town, instead.

Anduin was at his desk, grimacing openly because he thought no one could see him. Luciana had opened the passageway between their rooms in silence and saw the expression before he could hide it. “Lucy!” he greeted, smiling.

“You need a break,” she said immediately, letting the passage remain open as it usually was, unless they were both out of their chambers.

“I’m fine,” Anduin insisted, but didn’t resist when she took his writing hand gently. He had a forming callous on the side of his finger where the pen rubbed it and the skin was red and inflamed.

“You’re not,” she said, kissing his finger lightly. “Come on, let’s get something to eat.”

“Alright. Let me just...” He quickly flipped a few papers around, hiding the more sensitive ones, and shut the drawers that had been opened in the desk. He hardly had to lean down to kiss her, as she was only two inches shorter than he, and at her prompt he healed his own hand.

“That’s handy,” she quipped.

Anduin groaned. “That was terrible!”

“You like my puns. Don’t resist it.”

They ate together in the common kitchens, where off-duty servants and guards took their meals. There were also a handful of SI:7 agents that were sometimes unoccupied and visited the Keep for a good meal and a safe place to eat.

Luciana spent every night with Anduin, mostly in her bedroom because the two were separated for long periods of time and wanted the chance to enjoy each other and the time they did have together. Six days were passed in Stormwind, and then Amadeus squadron was sent back to the frontlines in the Blasted Lands to clean up the mess that the Iron Horde vanguard had created. Nethergarde
Keep had yet to be retaken and was under siege by Alliance forces who wanted it back under their control. Luciana’s efforts would be invaluable in their mission to reclaim their old base.

Chapter End Notes

Brace yourselves, feels incoming!
01D Brigade left the Blasted Lands after a time, spending just shy of a full month more battling its enemies, before Luciana was asked to bring her soldiers to the Barrens. There yet remained some forces still loyal to the vanquished orc warchief Garrosh Hellscream and his ideals, and though Warchief Vol’jin had created a small taskforce to deal with them they were a threat to Alliance forts nearby. Sending the entire Brigade seemed almost like overkill, but it would take much less time if Luciana and her troops were sent instead of a single Company.

As a warrior the battlefield was her home, but as Knight Captain she spent more time organizing her troops and dealing with the local officers. She was the only one with the authority to do so, and while she sometimes wished she could simply jump into the fray she knew it took a tactician to keep casualties to a minimum, rather than a berserker who would focus solely on inflicting them.

Her Knight Lieutenants were skilled individuals in their own right and though Oaken was permanently missing eight people because Amadeus squadron had to stay with Luciana, she managed to get by just fine without them. Luciana had already sent notice to her Knight Champion, her old mentor Leon Servol, that she wanted Hayley to receive recognition for her capabilities. If Hayley managed to keep up her current record she would soon be in the running for a medal. His Majesty’s Red Cross was not awarded lightly and she would need to prove herself worthy, but so far she had gone above and beyond in terms of continued strategic brilliance.

Luciana sometimes went out on runs with her squadron to break up the monotony of paperwork and staring at maps for hours on end. It helped that seeing their Princess fighting the same enemy with fervour raised spirits. Today, though, she was not out with her squadron. They had orders to remain with her at all times, and they were less than a hundred yards away enjoying the benefits of the oasis they’d found. Luciana was reviewing the situation with a local force of hunters who were cooperating with the army in their efforts to raze the remaining Hellscream loyalists.

Her head snapped up when she felt a cold tingle of magic. It raised the hairs on the back of her neck and she shifted her stance, pulled her sword Oathkeeper from its sheath smoothly. “We have guests,” she growled, and the four hunters who had been speaking with her for their entire group each prepared for battle. “Amadeus squadron!” she bellowed. A moment later, she cocked her head. “Amadeus!” she tried again. No response.

“They’re not answering,” a hunter said quietly, looking down at her pet coyote.

“This isn’t good,” Luciana said. “We need to rejoin them.”

She moved towards the main pool of the oasis but only managed five steps before an orc slammed into her from the underbrush. The air was beaten from her lungs but she managed to roll away, letting a hunter’s arrow find a new home in the attacker’s skull.

“Watch out!” she cried, but the hunter fell to three more orcs a second later.

Luciana fought viciously but without her squadron at her back she was open on all sides, and severely outnumbered. Not only that, the orcs had brought someone capable of making her limbs feel like stone, heavy and useless. She spotted the shaman responsible, tried to reach him with fury burning in her. Someone struck her head from behind, dazing her, and one more strike was all it took to knock her unconscious despite her fury.

Warm water hit her and she woke with a start, immediately snarling and trying to fight off whoever
had dared to attack her. It took a moment but she soon realised her arms were suspended over her head with thick chained manacles around her wrists. Her ankles were similarly bound to the floor with very little give, and a manacle around her neck made her itch. She bared her teeth threateningly, growling like an animal at whatever shadows got too close.

She was in a dark chamber, the air dry and dusty. The only light came from two weakly fluttering torches in the corner, and she saw the glinting eyes of at least three orcs. She knew a bit of orcish, enough to get by, and had learned a bit more while fighting in the Blasted Lands. She could understand the gist of what the three orcs were saying.

“Scarjaw killed six.”

“She is warrior. Deserves respect.”

“We must do.” She couldn’t understand the verb the orc used, but knew it wasn’t good for her. “Orders. For Orgrimmar.”

“What after?”

“Respect. Send back.”

“Kill messengers!”

“Send on animal.” He was referring to a pack animal, perhaps a horse. It wasn’t the word for boar. “With things.”

“Not take?”

“No, hers. Send back.”

An orc said a word that resembled ‘shadow’ and she thought it might be ‘secret’ or ‘undercover’ because of its context.

“I will kill you,” she said through gritted teeth. When she growled it was low in her throat, animalistic and dark. None of the orcs laughed, and she knew that though they obviously respected her as a warrior and a war leader, they had something motivating them that was more important than the honour they would have shown her otherwise. Something that important could only be either the Horde itself, or the honour of their Warchief, Vol’jin. “I will destroy you.”
They left her hanging for what felt like several days. She couldn’t tell without a window, or any changes in lighting that would indicate the passing of time. When they returned to her cell, she felt like a starved forest wolf and it fueled her fury almost as much as the pain. It started with poisons they injected into her limbs. She recognized some of the sensations, the burns and the itching, and knew they were using non-lethal substances to try and break her before resorting to the more brutish forms of torture she knew were coming. The less they marred her flesh, the less likely they would receive swift and vicious retaliation, but she wouldn’t break from simple poisons.

It continued for a long time. She lost track of the seconds, the breaths she counted every time they struck her with a new poison. It was painful, and she didn’t hold back the screams. Letting out the pain through her voice would help diminish it slightly, help distract her from it, and it would also give her the opportunity to try and frighten them. She did scare away one orc, who spent one day flattened against a wall when she started cursing them in Draenic. He was replaced the next day by an old scarred orc who didn’t even flinch when he got too close and she bit off two of his fingers.

They tried uncountable injections, and she was put into an involuntary sleep more than once. To confuse her, but also to make sure she didn’t pass out in the middle of torture. They wanted her to feel everything. They even brought in a shaman, disguised with a cowl over her head, to heal her so she wouldn’t bleed to death before they could extract something. They asked her about all manners of things, sometimes more than once in one session, to try and confuse her. It was working, to a point. She could hardly remember what they’d asked her in previous sessions.

When they brought out the whip, the pain built until it was replaced by her fury and she fell into a berserk state that couldn’t break the chains, but she did kill the orc who was stupid enough to try and ask her questions while she was berserking. He brought his face in, and she slammed her forehead into his nose with such force that it cracked his skull clean through and rattled his brain to mush. She knew, because she caught a few words after when the others were discussing it in muted tones.

Luciana’s back burned. They had whipped it until the skin fell off in ribbons, and they left them on the floor to horrify her. It was disgusting and she nearly vomited, but reminded herself that they were trying to break her, to subjugate her. She had decided at a young age to never let anyone conquer her, not like her Mother had tried to, and her fury built like a coming ocean storm. Twice more she berserked while chained, but no other orc was dumb enough to even enter her cell while she was in that state.

Then they whipped her front, and the pain spread through her flesh to her back and her entire body hurt. Every nerve screamed at her and she let it out at the orcs, who not once laughed or mocked. They were grim in their duty and Luciana knew, knew that they were waiting to ask her the important questions. They would find some way to break her, even just crack her enough to get things out of her. She revealed nothing when they inquired about Stormwind’s defenses, about its castle. She screamed and laughed instead of talking when they asked, between whip lashes, about...
the army’s supplies lines. When they burned her with fire she grinned malevolently at them with a mouth full of blood.

They put her to sleep and she could only tell it was more than a few days by how weak she felt. She’d lost muscle mass, had atrophied while they held her. It was not a good sign. She wondered how the others were faring. Had her squadron suffered punishment? The thought was enough to nearly send her into a rage but she didn’t have the energy for it, not anymore. Did Anduin think her dead?

Anduin likely thought her dead.

She had sworn to always return, and he knew she would, he knew she would come back and she refused to believe otherwise. That, she knew, would break her. To think that Anduin had moved on from her, believing her dead. She imagined him remarrying, to some faceless noble’s daughter. Varian blessing the marriage. She howled, resisting it and felt a tingle of shadow magic. The orcs had brought in mindbenders. Shadow priests, most likely, or shaman who could use incense and the air element to force visions into her head. She couldn’t smell anything over the scent of her own stale blood and the rotten skin that lay in strips on the floor beneath her. There were no rats here to eat it.

Letting her pain out through her voice had been a mistake. They knew now how much the visions could hurt her. They showed her Anduin in bed with his new faceless wife, showed him pleasuring her and professing his love. They showed him sitting with her in at breakfast with Varian, and though the room was not the room Luciana had always eaten in with her new family it made her howl in grief. Anduin loved her. She knew he did. But now she doubted and it was worse than the poisons, the whips, the smell of her own burnt flesh.

Then they smartened up. She heard them talking on a rare day of rest.

“Loyal mate.”

“Humans are not.”

“Scarjaw is.”

“Cannot use it!”

“Must use it.”

“Respect?!”

“Must use it. For Orgrimmar.”

She knew that was meaningful, his use of Orgrimmar instead of Horde. But she couldn’t concentrate. She had no energy, no fight left in her mind. But her body still had some and when they tried the whips again on her legs she roared and bellowed her rage.

The worst came after another long period of rest, the exact time of it lost to Luciana. Nothing ever changed in the cell.

Anduin was strung up with ropes, the chains not needed for his weaker archer’s body. She knew it wasn’t him. They couldn’t take him from the Keep, not from Varian. They had only taken her because she had been in the Barrens, separated from her family, from her squad mates, her brothers and sisters. The attack had been completely unexpected. She had already prayed for the hunters who had died, and prayed again for their souls that now rested with the Light. She was sorry for
their needless sacrifice.

The orcs showed her visions of Anduin being hurt like she had been hurt. Poisons hit him and at first he resisted. She was so proud of him, for screaming and crying but never giving in. When the orcs left them at night Anduin and she tried to make plans on how to escape. She knew he wasn’t real but it didn’t hit her like it should have, couldn’t stop her from letting the illusion affect her.

Then the orcs started to burn Anduin. His beautiful, smooth tan skin was marred with horrible burn wounds and he screamed and it tore at her. She cried when he cried. She couldn’t help it. They were hurting him. Hurting her Anduin.

When they brought out the whips, flayed his back like they’d done her, she howled and wailed. But she couldn’t talk. After three sessions of whipping, between which she heard the orcs talking but couldn’t remember what they’d said, Anduin begged her to talk. Begged her, please, “Just give them what they want,” he moaned. “Please. Please, Lucy. Please!” The screaming started again when they whipped him and she cried, slumped forward, her shoulders long since dislocated from hanging for so long.

“I’m sorry,” she sobbed. She couldn’t. The City of Stormwind alone had hundreds of thousands of people. “I’m sorry. I’m sorry.” She couldn’t sacrifice them all for one man. No matter how much she loved him.

“You said you loved me!” Anduin screamed. “You promised you’d come home! Why won’t you save me?”

“I’m sorry!” Did she really love him? If she could let him suffer so, she couldn’t love him as she’d professed.

But she couldn’t break. Not to these orcs, who would hurt her people if she lost herself to the pain.

They let her sleep for another while. She woke to Varian screaming.

“Luciana!” he screamed. “Don’t tell them anything! Whatever they do!”

How had they gotten the King? No one would have allowed that! Varian wouldn’t have allowed it! The entire kingdom would fall before the King was captured by the Horde. They would kill him before capturing him. But he was here, with her. Anduin hung limp, and she wondered if he was dead.

“Don’t tell them anything!” Varian told her, even as he bled out slowly from an untreated stomach wound. They had stripped him naked, beaten him until his entire body was bruised, taken one of his eyes and some of his fingers, but still he resisted. “Don’t give anything up!”

“I won’t,” she promised. “I won’t.” But she nearly did, seeing him suffer. He was supposed to be her protector, her mentor. He taught her so much. How could she let him suffer like this? “I’m sorry.”

They stopped beaten Varian, gave them a break again. Anduin was barely breathing, close to death. “Tell us,” the old scarred orc said, holding her chin in his hand. His grip was not rough, but it was not gentle either. “Tell us what we want. We will stop hurting your mate and his sire.”

She couldn’t respond verbally, but the slide of her gaze gave her away. Away from the orc’s face, to the side where she wouldn’t have to face the reality of the situation. The orc did not smile. He was not happy. But he did it anyway.
“Ashenvale supply lines,” he said, his voice gruff and cracked from years of abuse. “Tell us of the night elves.”

She couldn’t speak right away and the orc had a shaman look at her throat. There was minimal damage, and he gave her time to recover before asking again. “Ashenvale night elves. Tell us. Or we whip your mate.”

“Sentinels,” she said, barely able to make a sound anymore. “Sentinels patrol. Units of six. Nightsabers. Better smell than the others.”

“Their weapons,” the orc prompted.

She clenched her jaw. She had to think. Wasn’t that what she was good at? What did the Sentinels wield? How could she tell the orc without telling him? “Glaives,” she muttered. “One. Skilled have two.”

“How many blades on the glaives?”

“Three.” Some had four-bladed glaives. Only the masters. But they flew faster through the air and could slice through rock.

“What else?”

“Daggers.” Short swords. Longer reach. She didn’t mention the throwing knives they were trained to keep hidden in their vests.

“Shields?”

“No.” She didn’t include their shield runes as shields. The orc was asking about physical ones like bucklers. Those would slow the Sentinels, and they weren’t used.

“Armour?”

“Leather. Some mail.” Typical Sentinel armour had metal plates hidden in key areas between layers of leather. He wasn’t asking about that, though. It wasn’t important. “Partial helms.” The helms were partial, yes, but enchanted and runed so that they would protect without blocking sight. He didn’t care about the magic. He wanted to know about the important stuff. Then he’d stop whipping Anduin. Stop hurting Varian.

“Patrol routes?” the orc asked.

“I don’t know. Change every month.”

“The old ones, then.”

She described some of the routes she knew from nearly a year ago, knowing they would have varied too much to be of any real use. She said they were recent. In the grand scheme of things, a year was very recent. Practically yesterday. That was what he wanted to know, she told herself. He’d stop hurting Anduin if she just gave him what he wanted.

“Good,” the orc said, but he wasn’t praising her. Just bringing their session to a close. “You will rest. I will come back. You will answer more questions.”

He let her head drop and her chin came to rest against her chest. She was tired. So tired. Why had she ever joined the army? It had only brought her here. It had only brought pain to her family. Her sisters would lose another sibling. She’d never visit Darkshire again. Anduin would never have the
wife she should have been, at his side for everything. Varian would lose a child. They’d be back down to two. Just two. A small, lonely family. She’d never fill that fourth seat at the table.

“You promised you’d come home,” Anduin whispered. “You made an oath.”

Oathkeeper. She’d named her sword Oathkeeper. Why? Why had it mattered so much? Where was Anduin getting the strength to lift his head, look at her? She tried to wet her lips but her mouth was dry. She was dried out.

“You swore to me. You never answered me. You said the people loved me. I asked if you did, too. You never answered me.”

“You swore,” Varian added quietly. “We were waiting for you. Why won’t you come home?”

What new torture could the orcs bring to her that would hurt more than that?

But they were right. She had made an oath.

The old scarred orc returned, called her Scarjaw and started questioning her. He had someone stand over Anduin threateningly, whip raised. Luciana concentrated and thought as best she could. It was her unique ability to think, even while berserking. Her reputation, her legend.

She told the orc half truths and old information masked as new. She tried to think of a way to send out a message, tell him something he’d use that only she would know. She tried, failed, tried, and Anduin was whipped a handful of times when she took too long to answer and it made her cry, beg them to stop. None of them showed any sign of enjoying her begging. It did give her another chance to answer, to stop Anduin’s pain.

The orcs made her rest again for a short time after seeing how tired she was. “We will test your answers,” the old orc told her. “You will tell me, now, if you lied. If you did and we see that, outside, we will skin him.” He pointed at Varian. She nodded once, weakly.

“No lie,” she mouthed. Her throat didn’t work anymore.

She had very little time to work. She had released most of her fury, yes, but there was a piece of it that had always frightened her and she’d never mentioned it, not even to Varian. Not even to her draenei. Enaeon. It was the deepest part of the fury, the darkest part of an ocean of anger. Denser, monstrous. She knew that if she ever let it free it might take over and never let go. But it could potentially make her fight, past the point of death, past the point of no return. It could bring her home.

She meditated for the first time in uncounted days, weeks. It was hard, nearly impossible, but Anduin and Varian were silent as though they knew it was what she needed. Before, she’d needed their words. Now she needed to be alone. Isolated inside herself, where she could reach for the door. She balked when she found it. She didn't know what would come out when she opened it.

She opened it.
Escaped

She felt like a spectator in her own body when the old orc returned, angry. “You lied!” he roared, and she was in a daze, not in control of her own limbs, until his hand grabbed her face.

She inhaled deeply. Whatever was controlling her body - her fury, her beast - inhaled with her, and howled. She imagined it was loud enough to shake the dust from the ceiling.

Her hands came down and the chains snapped. The old orc died, his head in her hand. The hair was white with age, rough in her fingers. Anduin and Varian were hanging still, watching her silently. She didn’t see them. All she saw was the locked iron gate in front of her.

She broke through it, howling her rage for the world to hear. Nothing would hold her back, not now. Not with the monster inside her finally having a chance at freedom.

The orcs in the upper levels died easily. She didn’t notice the wounds they inflicted, didn’t even feel the painful poisons some daggers were laced with as they sliced into her skin. What was one more mark? Her back didn’t ache anymore. Her stomach, her chest didn’t burn from the rampant infection.

Luciana was not in control. Something else had her body. She wasn’t even sure it was a part of her. But it was fighting when she couldn’t and she watched as it tore into the orcs, tore them up and tossed them aside. They only mattered when they were alive. Dead, they were lumps of meat, nothing more. The ones she didn’t see before her, the ones who stepped aside, were allowed to live.

The desert waited for her outside. The sun was too harsh and she had to close her eyes, snarl at it for being too bright. Her body kept moving, the old orc’s head trailing blood. She was naked.

Luciana thought. She needed coverings. The sun would kill her if she didn’t cover herself.

She took pants from a female orc, tied them at her too-thin waist with a rope. She took a shirt, wrapped it around her emaciated frame, wrapped herself in a cloak. The old orc’s head didn’t matter anymore and she dropped it.

The orcs had mentioned things. Her things. Her ring. She went back in, searched for signs of her armour. It was piled in a heap, dented and rusty. She dug in it, found the ring on a dusty leather cord. She slipped the cord over her head. It hung around her thin neck, and was almost too heavy for her to bear.

She headed for the oasis she’d been captured in. After a bit of time she realized that her squadron would have left a long time ago. However long it had been since she’d last been seen. She hoped, prayed to the Light that they were safe even as her body was turned around, to the north, to Ashenvale. Night elves. They were her allies. She needed to get to allies. Her body was rotting around her. She needed healers.

Durotan was a hot and dry desert and she suffered, but she kept walking. Marching. Always keep marching, forward. No other direction to go. She couldn’t stop, not until she was surrounded by trees and night elves saw her took her healed her.

At least a week passed. She was moving slowly, and it might have been more because she could hardly even keep track of her own feet as they moved endlessly beneath her. She stumbled, fell, swallowed sand but kept moving. She had a goal. She would reach it, regardless of whether it killed her.
She reached Ashenvale while in a daze and it only hit her that there were trees around her when a branch hit her face and bit deep. It woke her from her cold fury-fueled daze, and she stumbled and fell. She couldn’t get up. Luciana had nothing left.

getup

Luciana’s eyes fluttered open. She had to get up. She had to keep moving.

getup

She stumbled to her feet, managed a few steps and hit her knees

getupwalk

She got up, started to walk, stumbled and fell again.

getupwalkmove

Luciana forced herself to stand. She couldn’t feel her legs anymore, was hardly even aware of her own arms. She had to keep moving.

walkmove

She kept herself going, past the point of death. She had no energy and didn’t have a thought to spare about how she was moving without anything fueling her. She hadn’t eaten in a long, long time. She hadn’t had any water. She should be dead. But she wasn’t.

walkmove

Ashenvale was a contested area. She was in danger. She was dizzy. One of her eyes was closed. She tried to open it, wondered why it hurt and remembered she’d been struck by a tree branch at some point. She stumbled again.

walkmove

The night elves allowed their hippogryphs to have free rein. Hippogryphs were highly intelligent. Luciana wondered if they could hold a conversation. She fell.

breathe

Luciana inhaled with ruined lungs and a torn throat.

getupwalkmove

She had to keep moving. She had. People were waiting for her. Anduin. Varian. She’d left them behind. They were waiting for her to come home.

breathegetupwalkmove

She managed maybe a dozen steps before she fell.

getup

getup
She couldn’t get back up. She tried. She couldn’t move anymore. She was dying.

A hippogryph’s beak bumped her face and she opened her eyes. The animal was staring at her, head cocked to the side so it could watch her with one bright eye. It was curious. Help me, she mouthed. Her breath couldn’t make a sound in her broken throat. Darnassus.

“Darnassus,” she whispered.

The hippogryph nosed at her with its massive beak, lay down next to her and lifted its wing to let her climb on its back. It belonged to a flight master and still had its saddle attached to its body.

Luciana, somehow, dragged herself over its back and managed to position herself in the saddle. She had the strength to tie one leg into the saddle and hoped that she didn’t slip from it and snap her leg in half. The hippogryph shook its head, made a worried-sounding trill, and took a running start. Within moments it was airborne, and Luciana closed her eyes.

She inhaled weakly. She could hear the hippogryph’s wings flapping at a rapid pace. It was pushing itself higher, faster.

Luciana breathed in a bit. It was cold, this high up.

She exhaled, inhaled, tried to count her breaths and failed.

Luciana opened her eyes, breathed in the smell of old forest and petrichor. It had rained here recently. The trees were purple. She was in Teldrassil.

Darnassus was a beautiful city and she wished she’d been able to visit it while she was alive. The hippogryph landed, still moving forward. Running. It was running, smoothly, over white marble.

It stopped moving. She heard a human-like scream. The hippogryph was screaming, regularly, like an alarm. There was no one around her.

A night elf approached. A priestess of the moon goddess, Elune. They were just inside the temple. The hippogryph was still screaming every few seconds, until the priestess started speaking and the hippogryph calmed enough for the night elf to lift Luciana out of the saddle. She shouldn’t have been able to. Luciana weighed over two hundred and fifty pounds.

Not anymore, she thought. I’m weak now. Useless.

She was carried to a flat surface, barely remembering to breathe. The Light touched her but there was so much damage at the surface that it couldn’t even reach past it.
“It’s her,” someone whispered. “She’s alive.”

“Fetch the High Priestess. Now!”
It had been so long since Luciana heard birds. Their songs were brilliant, diverse. She listened to them whistle and chirp and caw and sing. How could so much beauty exist in one place?

She wasn’t in pain anymore. She couldn’t move, still, but she could breathe normally and she could feel her legs again. Her skin pulled tight when she inhaled but it didn’t hurt.

She marveled at it, at the lack of pain. How long had she hurt? It’d become commonplace, not even worthy of notice.

She inhaled the sweet smell of honeysuckle and petrichor. This was a damp place, rich with life, and she knew that not even the most skilled of illusionists could make such a convincing scent. Not while paired with the birdsong she could hear all around her.

This was a peaceful place. Quiet, full of life and beauty. Luciana opened her eyes. The ceiling above her was gnarled wood, old but still very much alive and healthy. It had to be the work of night elves. She turned her head. The walls were the same wood, the same tree. She’d heard of such buildings, had never seen one but had wished she could. Now she was in one. It was beautiful.

Luciana tried to sit up. Her arms were weak and her back was tight and didn’t want to support her, but she managed to turn her shoulders towards the open wall and lean on her elbow.

“Easy,” someone murmured. They were coming up the ramp. A male night elf, with the antlers of a stag. Malfurion Stormrage. “You are still very weak.”

She tried to sit up again. His arms were thick with muscle like hers should have been and she let him help her, let him settle on the furs behind her so he could support her weight and help her drink from a vial. A draught of strength. It warmed her on the way down, made her breathing a little deeper.

“You are safe here, Your Highness. Though I do not know how you found the hippogryph that brought you here.”

She tried to speak, but her voice didn’t come and she closed her mouth. It could wait. She wasn’t in a hurry, not anymore. There wouldn’t be any more pain, not here. Anduin wouldn’t be whipped here. She had done her duty, protected him from the orcs. She could rest, for now.

“You are weak from months of starvation and torture. We have done what we could to heal your body, but your spirit is badly hurt and must heal before you can regain your strength. It will be a long recovery.”

She nodded once, slowly. It was so relaxed here. Nothing to do. Nothing to worry about. She looked up at Malfurion. He had a kind face. She liked him. How long? She mouthed.

“You disappeared for nearly three months,” he supplied. “For the past month we have kept you asleep, deep in the Emerald Dream where you would be safe. It took this long to merely bring your body back from the brink of death. You were far into that realm, Your Highness. I wonder how you managed to stay alive in there.”

She shook her head slowly. She didn’t remember anything but her fury, the beast that had been dormant underneath it since the beginning.
“It matters little. You are safe now, and you will heal.”

She looked up at him again. Do they know?

“No. Only myself, Tyrande, and a handful of priestesses know of you, and all have sworn to secrecy on the matter. You were followed into Ashenvale by orcs. We thought it wise to keep your survival a secret so that they would not know where to search for you.”

She nodded slowly in appreciation. It was a good plan. What about now?

“You will need time to recover your strength. I will do what I can to speed the process. I imagine you are eager to return home.”

She nodded.

“You will need to start eating again, slowly at first. As your appetite returns you will be able to eat more.”

She nodded.

“You must sleep a true sleep now, Your Highness.” She appreciated him using her title. It reminded her of who she was. She kept losing track. It kept slipping from her mind. “Sleep for the rest of the night. I will watch over you and I will keep your memories away from your dreams. Tomorrow, we will start your recovery.”

He laid her back down in the furs. They were soft, warm, and she felt colder than she’d ever felt. Malfurion was a nice person, she decided. She liked the antlers, too.

Luciana slept peacefully for the first time in years. She woke to birdsong and took the time to listen, to pick out individual birds, smiled serenely at the peace she felt.

Malfurion helped her sit up and presented her with a bowl of deer broth. It was hard to swallow and she only managed to get a bit of it down before she had to stop. She drank a few more times, and lay back down to rest. She liked the birds. Some of them had flown into the open-sided room, were sitting on the back of the chair or on the edge of her concave bed. It was full of furs that kept her warm but the edge was wooden and some of the bird perched on it, watching her with beady black eyes. They were very pretty and their colours and the sounds they made distracted her. Time passed quickly while she was watching them jump and fly around the room in short bursts.

Malfurion helped her drink more broth and at night, she slept. It continued for a week, maybe eight days. She tried to count but things slipped from her mind like sand through a broken hourglass. Malfurion was a constant, and his presence was a low hum, soothing and steadying. She wondered if it had to do with his age, or his druidic abilities, or maybe it was just him.

He told her that Tyrande was covering for him while he spent time with Luciana. No one knew where he actually was and several rumours had been spread, some placing him as far as Westfall. Luciana wondered how things were going there. Had Varian had the time to implement the plan they’d once discussed?

When Malfurion fell silent, she mouthed the word Anduin.

“He is safe in Stormwind,” Malfurion told her, encouraging her to take another sip of broth as he spoke. This broth was thicker than the first and had a bit of herb in it. It was rich and salty on her tongue and warmed her chest. “As is the King. You are presumed deceased,” he said. “I’m sorry. I have heard from Tyrande while I healing your body that the nobles are urging him to find a new
wife and produce an heir before the fate that befell you has chance to take him. He is stubborn. He is resisting and the King has apparently been unapproachable for the past month.”

She nodded once, drank a bit more broth. Squadron, she mouthed.

“I did not hear of anything that has befallen them since you disappeared. You have been replaced in the Imperial Army. They could not go so long with a Knight Captain.”

She nodded again.

“I did what I could to heal your wounds, but you will be scarred terribly. They will be stiff until you can regain enough strength for me to care for them.”

She nodded again. What was more scars...?

Anduin would be disgusted.

She froze. She didn’t know where that thought had come from but she didn’t like it. The tone of it was dark, alien. She didn’t like it.

“What’s wrong?” Malfurion asked, seeing her unease. She shook her head. Her battle fatigue, she thought. It must have gotten much, much worse. It was interrupting her thoughts with dark words that sapped her strength. And she wasn't with Anduin - he couldn't ease it for her with cool, soft Light. She would have to manage alone.

Would Anduin be disgusted? He hadn’t been by her other scars. She looked down, inspected her stomach. It was nearly completely covered by thick, ropey scars that stood out like mountain ridges. All the way up her chest, narrowly avoiding her nipples. Most of the scant breast tissue around them had not been spared.

Anduin would be disgusted. He wouldn’t touch her. Wouldn’t look at her. She was repulsive. How was she supposed to keep him happy if she disgusted him?

“Be at ease, Your Highness,” Malfurion soothed, using his magic to calm her. “Breathe slowly. There we go.”

He had her drink a bit more broth, and thankfully didn’t push about why she’d suddenly gone rigid. She was alright, for now, and lay down to sleep away another night.

After another week or so she was strong enough to sit up alone, and she let her legs dangle over the edge of the bed. Her legs were so thin. She didn’t have any muscle, any fat on her legs. Only skin and bones. How would she recover? It seemed impossible. How would she protect Anduin when she was so weak?

You are weak. Useless. Worthless to him.

She sighed, concentrated on the birds that had acclimated to her. One perched on her knee. It looked a bit like a cardinal but its crest was longer and it wasn’t aggressive like a cardinal. It trilled at her brightly, cocking its head. She smiled weakly. What a lovely creature.

When she saw Malfurion that morning he had a bit of fruit with him. She knew that she would need to eat bread, fruits, and cooked vegetables before she could eat meat. She didn’t even yet have an appetite but the food tasted so good that she ate as much as she could. She mouthed to him, some of the words whispering from her throat, of what she had told the orcs.

He nodded sagely. “No advantage came from it,” he promised her. “They did not cause harm with it. There were so few casualties that we hardly noticed a difference in their strategies, and they were not at any great advantage for long. We adapted to whatever it was they planned from what they gleaned from you.”

She nodded, relieved. He helped her eat a bit of fruit, drink the broth.

You are helpless. What use are you to him? Why would he love you now?

Luciana grew more aware of the time passing. She could keep track of the days, of what she ate and the birds that visited her. The red one was friendly enough to eat a bid of fruit from her hand and let her very gently stroke its back. There were a few others, blue and brown and green, that would sing for her if she left them a bit of fruit on the table. She could take a few steps at a time, and actively kept herself from hating her weakness. Instead she marveled at how she was recovering from such a brutal deterioration.

It took another month and a half for her to recover her ability to eat, walk, and talk. It was slow and sometimes difficult. Malfurion was gentle, constant, didn’t ask for anything she couldn’t give and didn’t try to wring anything from her. He was not a Darnassian leader while he was with her. He was a healer. She appreciated it. She would remember it, the capability for selfless kindness that night elves held.

It took a lot of time but when she could walk around the room ten times without stumbling, Malfurion handed her a ring of illusion that would disguise her features. It changed her face, hid most of her scars - especially her jaw scars - and made her seem much shorter. She estimated she looked to be five feet and four inches, about average for a female human. Malfurion reported that people had been spreading word of her. She was in a secluded glade just outside of Darnassus, and few night elves ever saw her. It was rumoured that she had been injured in Darkshore adventuring, and was resting here while she recovered.

“I want to go home,” she murmured one night. She was impatient, had been for a while. She had a duty to fulfill. She was supposed to be at Anduin's side. “They still think I’m dead?”

“Yes. We think it is yet too dangerous to allow word of your survival to spread. You are still much too weak to fend off an attack. We can send word if you insist, but I would advise against it.”

She shook her head. His reasoning was sound. In her current state, any attack could be a death sentence. “Have they found someone for Anduin?”

“No. Your husband is stubborn.”

She smiled sadly. “It might be best. I don’t...” She ran out of breath, had to pause. “I don’t know what I can do now.” Safety and happiness would have to come from someone else. She couldn't do it anymore.

“You will recover,” Malfurion promised. “You are recovering. Slowly, but surely. You are stronger than you believe.”

“I’m useless now.”

“You are still who you were before,” he told her. “There is a heavy weight on your shoulders. Each day you shed a bit more, and one day soon you will be free of it again. And then you will be as you
were, stronger for it.”

She smiled but it was a weak expression. Malfurion didn’t push and she enjoyed the silence that was not silent. The sounds of the forest always filtered through. If she was still in the cell, she wouldn’t mind. It didn’t hurt anymore.
Returned

She had been presumed dead for the better part of a year. Nine months and a week. But she could stand, walk, even run, and though she could not yet wield heavier blades she had two short swords that were fitted to her hands. Malfurion had healed her scars and though she was still marked, still mutilated with it, she was not stiff from the mass of scar tissue that had once covered her entire body save for her arms and face. The branch that had cut into her face during her escape had narrowly avoided her eye and left a scar from the left side of her nose, down her cheek to her jaw. It evened out her face, and though her jaw scars were hidden thanks to her ring of illusion, she knew they were there.

It was time for her to return. She thanked Malfurion, who brought her in the middle of the day when most elves were sleeping or hidden away to the docks at the roots of Teldrassil.

“I am only grateful that I could heal you,” he told her, placing a wide hand on her shoulder in a gesture of comfort. “I prayed to Elune every time you slipped into the realm of death, and each time you returned. Weak, but alive. And now you are nearly recovered.”

“I still need to build up my muscles again,” she said mournfully. “It’s going to take a long time. And a lot of pain. But I’m a warrior. It’ll happen whether I like it or not.”

“Be careful,” he warned. “When you begin to strain yourself physically, beyond a certain point your body will respond and try to bulk itself like it did before. You will give it a kick start.”

“I’ll be careful,” she promised. “Thank you, Malfurion. I owe you my life.”

“And I owe you all of the lives of the Sentinels who were saved by your resistance and quick thinking.”

She grimaced. “I shouldn’t have said anything. I, of all people, should have resisted.”

“You described a barbaric and brutish torture I thought only a truly evil creature could inflict,” he started.

“I don’t blame them,” she murmured. “I should, but I don’t. I overheard some of what they were saying. For Orgrimmar. They must have been desperate, after the siege. Desperate enough to capture and torture a Wrynn.” She didn’t mention her suspicions. They’d simmered in her mind, ever since her baby brother had been killed. *It could have been a splinter group.* She remembered the discussion she and Varian had had, what felt like a decade ago. It could have been the Horde, it could have been any group with orcsish members. And the emphasis they’d placed on Orgrimmar, on making sure she heard them discussing it... It seemed too easy. But she kept it to herself. She’d have to tell Varian, first. She was still weak and shaky. He would know better what to do.

“Are you certain you do not wish for revenge?” Malfurion asked quietly. “If you wish, know that we will gladly go to war alongside you. You have proven yourself, Your Highness. With every passing year you give us more reason to respect you as a great leader.”

“Thank you,” she said. “I’m sure. If we retaliate now, we’ll only be fighting a war on two sides. Draenor is still active?”

“Very much so. From what I hear, Archmage Khadgar has yet to capture Gul’dan, though they are getting close.”
“It would be self-destructive to declare open war on the Horde now,” she said. “If they’re not even whispering that they had me, it’s not what they want either. I think they really only wanted Ashenvale. They’re desperate for lumber.” Deflection wasn't only a dueling technique, and she tried to move on from the subject. She wasn't up to a strategic debate, not yet.

“They will not get it through violent means,” he retorted gently.

“No, but when people are desperate and their families are dying, it’s only to be expected that they’ll lash out. I wouldn’t dare tell you what to do,” she continued. “And in no way do I blame you or your people. It’s your land and you have every right to refuse them. They were only desperate, probably still are. I’ll think of something.” A dismissal, a wish to move on, and Malfurion took it.

“Take care, Your Highness,” Malfurion sighed, giving her shoulder a final squeeze before stepping back. “Lureith will see you to safety, as will your sabers.”

“Thank you again, Malfurion. I won’t forget the kindness you’ve showed me.”

“It was my duty and my honour as a healer,” he told her with a smile.

Lureith was a night elf warrior, skilled in hunting as well. She had, when asked, volunteered to journey with Luciana to Dun Morogh by boat, into Ironforge and through the Deeprun Tram to Stormwind. It wasn’t safe to travel straight to Stormwind, as the Horde was likely still discreetly watching the boats that traveled from Kalimdor to the Eastern Kingdoms, especially to Stormwind. Ironforge wasn’t nearly as important to them, and it would greatly reduce the chances that Luciana would be recaptured. She didn’t even want to entertain the thought of it. She didn’t want to see another orc for at least the next decade.

“Ray,” Lureith greeted, using her fake name.

“Lureith. I’m ready.”

Two moonsabers waited patiently next to Lureith on the dock. One had darker fur under its chin and made a noise of appreciation when Luciana reached out to gently scratch the dark patch.

“He will carry you swiftly and with care,” Lureith said.

“Thank you.”

The boat ride took a month and a half. Darnassian ships were light and fast but there were two major storms to avoid. They encountered a few rough patches in between and when they reached the docks at the edge of Dun Morogh, both Luciana and the sabers were glad to be on land.

Not for the first time, she wondered what Anduin was doing. Was he still mourning her? Had he been trying to move on? She knew he hadn’t remarried because that would have been blaring from every town crier’s throat until the entire continent was exhausted. But she hoped that he hadn’t lingered too long on painful things. She could only blame herself for not returning sooner, for causing pain where she should have given happiness.

The guards at Ironforge hardly glanced at them. Lureith chatted with one, inquiring about the Tram timetables and good places to eat while they waited. A human and a night elf traveling together was not a particularly odd sight, though a human riding a saber might have been.

They ate a hearty, spice-heavy stew at an inn and waited an hour at their table, relaxing in the great mountain city of the dwarves. Luciana still felt ill at ease and Lureith had to direct her saber to sit
behind her to watch the rear.

The Deeprun Tram was a wonder of gnomish technology but it was a bit of a bumpy ride. Two hours later it slowed, and soon came to a stop in its Stormwind station. Luciana felt nearly giddy. She was almost home. She would see Anduin. It didn’t matter if he was disgusted or revolted by her weak and torn body. As long as he was happy. She would sign divorce papers, let him marry someone else. As long as he was happy. She wanted to see him smile. Maybe Varian wouldn’t be disgusted. He knew what war could do. Maybe he’d still talk to her, even if Anduin asked for a divorce and remarried. Maybe her sisters wouldn’t mind too much. Her brothers would be sad, but they’d still like her. She just wanted to hear him laugh again.

She and Lureith mounted their sabers again when they were out of the tram. The echoes of the Brawler’s Guild base underneath it faded away when they emerged into the sunlight. No one glanced at Luciana because of the illusions and she was glad for it. She would have had a breakdown if she’d been subject to even a small crowd. As it was, the late afternoon was quiet in the Dwarven District as people left their places of work to return home, or to visit a tavern.

She traveled with Lureith to the edge of the district, and paused by the canal to listen to the familiar sound of its small waves hitting the stones that lined it. She could see some crabs scuttling about in the mildly foggy water.

They continued to the gates of the Keep, open as they always were. Luciana dismounted slowly, gave her saber one last chin scratch. It groaned lightly and rubbed its head against her chest. She looked to Lureith. “Thank you,” she said, trying to put as much emotion as she could into those two words. Lureith smiled understandingly.

“I will see you again,” she said. “Perhaps one day we can spar.”

“I’d like that.”

Lureith clicked her tongue and the moonsaber gazed at Luciana almost sadly before turning to follow the night elf. They would return to Darnassus by ship from the Stormwind docks, leaving Luciana on her own.
Nostos

Chapter Notes

Varian is sorry. I'm not.

Luciana turned to enter the Keep. It was not uncommon for adventurers to climb the steps and visit, and more than once they’d been directed there to take quests directly from nobles or even the King himself. The guards glanced at her, saw her short swords and very human face, and left her alone. She barely kept herself from crying. She was almost home. If she was good, she knew she'd be able to see Anduin smile again, even if it wasn't because of her. She would gladly be a Royal Guard, be his shield, if a different, less irresponsible Princess was in order.

It took time to climb the stairs. Luciana didn’t hurry, didn’t strain herself. When she reached the front entrance of the Keep the Seneschal approached her. “Welcome to Stormwind Keep,” he greeted smoothly. “I see from your clothes and your bearing that you are an adventurer ready to depart on a quest. There are several places in the Keep you can visit to receive one. Unfortunately, the King... is...”

He trailed off, and his mouth stayed open. Luciana had removed her ring and the illusion fell away to reveal her scarred, tired, and thin face. “Hello William,” she said quietly. “It’s been a while, huh?”

“Y-you...” he stuttered, and glanced around slowly before returning his gaze to her. “You’re returned,” he managed to say.

“Yes. Finally.”

“Shall I...?”

“No, don’t announce me yet. Though I imagine you’ve been waiting this whole time to do it.”

He smiled awkwardly, not really sure what to do. “I suppose I have,” he said. “Is there anything I can do...?”

“Could you tell me where the King is? And where the Prince is?”

“The King is in a meeting with several representatives of Parliament Major,” the Seneschal answered slowly. “In the eastern wing, fourth meeting room. The Prince is in his chambers. He has been spending much of his time there, working for the King. He has not received any visitors in five months.”

“Thank you, William.”

“Your Highness,” he said bowing his head.

“Spread word to the servants that I have returned, but I’d appreciate if they could keep quiet for a little while. I want to surprise the King. Especially the Prince.”

“Of course, Your Highness,” he said. As she passed him, he took her arm gently. “It’s good to see
“Thank you. I’ll be here for a while yet. It’s not so easy to get rid of me.” No, although it had been a close call.

He nodded, released her arm. She tugged the hood of her cloak down a bit further, to hide her face. The guards let her pass freely until a certain point. Luciana lifted her head, revealed her face and held a finger over her lips to ask for silence. Each guard nodded frantically and let her pass. Some, she could see, were smiling widely. At least two were teary-eyed. They had missed her, it seemed. Or they had grown tired of the King's foul mood.

She was almost home.

The four guards that stood before the meeting room moved aside to let her pass. One gave her shoulder a pat in greeting and she smiled at the woman. She pulled her hood down, breathed deeply, and pushed open the doors.

The nobles inside immediately jumped to their feet, but Varian didn’t move. He watched her, eyes glinting yellow. “Who dares to interrupt our meeting?” a man demanded. She recognized him.

“I’m a little offended that you of all people don’t recognize me, Lord Pembrooke,” she said. Her voice was a bit scratchy but it had regained its deep pitch months ago. She pulled the hood back slowly, lifted her chin proudly and smiled.

“Leave us,” Varian said. In the sudden silence his voice seemed louder than it was.

“Your Majesty...” someone protested. She didn’t look at them, holding Varian’s gaze.

“Now!” he snarled, and everyone jumped up in surprise and fear and rushed out of the room. The doors were shut behind them by a silent guard. Varian stood, and Luciana waited for him to approach her. He moved slowly, predatory, ready to strike if it appeared that she was an imposter.

“I’m back,” she said softly. She wanted to cry.

“Are you?” he said lowly. “Or are you a spy?”

“I’m me,” she answered. “I wasn’t, for a while. I was hurt pretty bad. But I’m back.”

He reached out and she let him unclasp her cloak and pull it from her shoulders. It was dropped unceremoniously on the floor, as was her coat, her shirt, and her undershirt. She felt cold, still unable to produce the heat she once had.

Varian took a step back and stared at her. She was naked from the waist up, much too thin and with too many scars to count. They were ugly, discoloured and ridged, and he couldn't speak for what felt like minutes. “Luciana,” he whispered. “What happened to you? Who did this?” With that, his anger resurfaced and he took her shoulders in hard hands. She winced, the squeeze of his fingers hurting her weakened body and he released her, hands hovering uselessly in the air. “Who did this to you?” he demanded.

“Swear to me that you won’t act on it,” she said. She knew how it went, with fury. Kill first, investigate after everyone was dead. But she couldn't allow it this time.

“I can’t do that. I’m going to find them,” he growled, turning to pace the length of the room. “I’m going to destroy everything they hold dear. They’ll live only long enough to regret what they did.”
“I’ve been thinking about it for months, Varian,” she said. Was she still allowed to call him that? “Swear to me that you won’t act on it. This is my choice, as the only survivor. I’m the one who suffered. I’m the one who has to live with the memories of it. Swear to me, or I’ll go to the grave with it.”

He looked at her. He was furious and for the first time in a long while, she was afraid of him, of what he could do to her in her weakened state if she wasn't careful. Not much, truly only a shadow of fear, but it must have shown in her face or her bearing because he visibly forced himself to relax, straightening and breathing deeply. “Fine,” he said tersely.

“Swear.”

“I swear!” he said impatiently. “I won’t act on it. Just...” He seemed to deflate. “Tell me who hurt you. Please. Tell me what's been done to you. I have to know.” Just as she'd felt the need to know how Frederic had suffered.

She watched him, looking for signs of deception. He wasn’t lying to her, and she wet her lips. "Orcs,” she said quietly, and Varian exploded.

He roared wordless rage, turned and practically threw the heavy table across the room. Luciana ducked away, not wanting to be hit by flying debris, and waited for his rage to end in the corner of the room. She watched him destroy the table, kick the chairs into the walls and hit those with his bare fists. She could hear in his voice, without words, that he was in pain. She knew he felt like he’d failed her, somehow. She wished she’d been able to return sooner, to save him some of this.

When he stilled in the center of destruction, breathing heavily, she could see that his hands were swollen and his knuckles were broken and bleeding. When he looked at her, she could see tears tracking down his face. “Orcs,” he said, his voice broken. “The Horde did this? To you?”

“They were orcs,” she said quietly, coming out of the corner slowly. "Claiming to be acting for Orgrimmar. It's too convenient. They made it too obvious. But I don't know who else it could have been." Varian watched her, pain and sorrow and age etched into his face. She took his hand, inspected it. He’d done a number on it. If she had been in his position she would have done the same. Right now her fury was tired still from her escape, weak and curled up in her chest. In time it would recover, as she did. She could still understand Varian’s rage. “I overheard some of what they were saying. They were desperate for information on Ashenvale. They needed lumber to rebuild after the siege.”

“So they tortured you?” he said, his voice breaking. “Invited war to their doorstep? Orcs are nothing but animals. Brutes to be put down like sick dogs. Either they were lying, or looking for excuses.”

Luciana shook her head slowly. “I don't know,” she said. “They showed respect for me as Scarjaw and seemed almost regretful when they did hurt me. But they said they had to do it. They had to ground their own honour into the dirt for Orgrimmar. Not for the Horde. For their city.”

Varian was having a hard time controlling his fury, and Luciana looked up at him. He had to take a minute to breathe deeply before he could speak. “I should destroy them,” he said. “The entire desert. Every last one of them. They’d deserve it.”

“They wouldn’t.”

“They hurt you,” he said. “They... My...” And at that, he finally broke, and pulled her into his chest. His shoulders shook as he sobbed openly, holding her as though afraid she’d slip away from
him again. Luciana started to cry, finally feeling truly safe since escaping the cell. She tuck her arms against Varian’s chest, ducked her head down and retreated from the world. With him, she knew, she was safe. Despite her current weakness, despite the memories that plagued her dreams worse than any nightmare, right now Luciana was safe.

“I’m sorry,” Varian sobbed. “I’m so sorry.”

A guard poked his head into the room to make sure the destruction they’d heard hadn’t resulted in injury. When he saw them, relatively uninjured, he pulled back in silence. Varian stemmed the flow of his tears, wiped his face tiredly with his hand and sniffed, looking down at her. “Tell me what happened,” he said softly.
Luciana recounted the tale of her capture, watching as Varian’s face slowly darkened with anger. She had been not a hundred yards from her squadron in an oasis, with four local hunters reviewing something. She couldn’t remember what anymore. When an orc had snuck up to attack her she’d felt the danger coming and called out for her squadron, but a shaman had affected the air around them and no sound could pass. She estimated that over twenty orcs had jumped into the fray, and after being hit in the head she’d fallen unconscious. She reported that she’d apparently killed six of them, and had woken in a cell, chained to the floor and ceiling. She redressed while she spoke, leaving her cloak on the floor.

“What did they do to you?” Varian asked. He kept his hands on her shoulders, not willing to release her yet.

“Poisons,” she said. “They burned, itched, felt like knives. That didn’t work and they tried burning me. Then they whipped me.” She gestured to her stomach. “Back first, then front, and eventually legs.”

Varian’s grip tightened for a moment but he was careful not to hurt her, now that he knew how truly weakened she’d become. “The scars,” he supplied. “Who healed you?”

“I’ll get to that.” She swallowed thickly. “They showed me illusions. First of Anduin, strung up like I was. They beat him, and had him beg me to...” Her throat tightened and she blinked away the tears that gathered. Varian rubbed her shoulders soothingly. “He begged me to just tell them. He asked, didn’t I love him? Why was I letting them hurt him? Just tell them what they wanted to know.”

“Did you?” Varian asked gently. “I wouldn’t blame you. I just need to know what they do.”

She shook her head. “I didn’t say anything, not yet. But... I was crying. Screaming. I begged them to stop. I was far gone at that point. I knew logically it couldn’t really be him but it didn’t matter. It seemed so real... I kept saying, I’m sorry. I’m sorry. But I couldn’t tell them.” She shook her head again. “I couldn’t sacrifice an entire kingdom for him. Not even just the city.” She looked up at Varian, tired beyond measure. “What does that say about me?” she asked. “That I’m not willing to sacrifice to save him? I’m supposed to protect him. Keep him safe. I didn’t.”

“You did what any true Queen would do,” Varian told her gently, cupping her face for a moment, trying desperately to comfort her. “You love Anduin. It’s obvious, whenever you look at him. But any ruler knows that one life is not worth a kingdom, no matter how precious it might be to you. Anduin would have understood. He would make the same choice.”

“Would he?” she said. “I let him suffer.”

“It wasn’t him.”

“I thought it was. I let them whip him and burn him. I listened to him scream and I didn't...” She tried to choke back her tears but they fell anyway and Varian had to hold her while she sobbed openly so that she didn’t fall to the floor. “I’m sorry. I’m sorry.” She clutched at him, at his shirt, feeling completely lost and alone despite his arms steady and strong around her back. “I’m sorry.”

He shushed her, brushed his hand over the back of her head and down her back. “It’s alright,” he soothed. “It wasn’t real and it’s not going to happen. He’s safe in his room, he’s been here the
whole time. It’s alright, Luciana.”

She recovered, stepped away and wiped her face with her sleeve. “Thank you,” she said quietly. “They brought you in after that,” she said, not able to look at him for the moment. “Did the same thing. But they had you tell me not to tell them anything, no matter what. It hurt.” She had to take a minute to recover. “I was so weak. I could hardly lift my head anymore. I was tired, Varian,” she said. “I’m still so tired. There was an old orc, all scarred up. He asked me questions and I almost started answering. But I thought. I managed to think, enough to give him old patrols. He wanted information on the Ashenvale Sentinels. Patrols, weapon, armour. He stared with that. I gave him old patrol routes, I didn’t tell him about the metal plates in their armour, I didn’t mention most of their weapons. I told him that their nightsabers had better scent instead of better hearing. When he came back and said I lied, he was angry. I let something out.”

She stopped talking. “What was it? Your fury?” he asked.

“No. It was something under my fury. I don’t know,” she said helplessly. “Something dark. It... I should have died. I was in the realm of death, he said. That... whatever it was, it kept me alive even past the point of no return. I kept walking.” She inhaled deeply, shakily. “I woke it up and let it out and it destroyed things, killed whoever it saw. I wasn’t in control of my body,” she said. “But I was too tired to care. I let it go. I made it go back for clothes, because I was naked and the desert would have killed me. I made it go back for this.” She slipped her wedding ring from her pocket, on a new leather cord. “And then I let it walk. All the way to Ashenvale. I don’t know how long it took. I fell often. Something told me to get up, walk, move. Something heavy and dark.”

“And you did?”

“I did. I almost died. It woke me back up and kept going until I fell and really had nothing left. A hippogryph found me. Still had the saddle on. Something told me to get up, move, pull myself up. I got myself in the saddle and the hippogryph flew me to Darnassus. I almost died. Maybe I did, a few times, while I was in the air. It landed at the temple and started screaming.”

“The priestesses found you?”

“It was pretty empty. I think it must have been the middle of the day. A priestess found me and I passed out. Malfurion healed me. Tyrande covered for him, he said, and rumours were started that placed him in faraway places.”

“I heard the one about Westfall,” Varian said briefly. She wondered if he’d been angered at the rumour, not knowing that she was still alive while it had been spoken.

“Yeah. He said that the few priestesses who were aware of my survival were sworn to secrecy. The ones who’s taken me were looking for me and they couldn’t chance spies or assassins getting into Teldrassil. I was almost too weak to open my eyes. I was in danger. Malfurion stayed with me, helped me recover and drink broth until I could sit up on my own.” She smiled slightly. “Teldrassil is a beautiful place. I listened to the birds for hours at a time. There was a little red one that would eat fruit from my hand and let me pet it. I was just outside Darnassus, I think, tucked away somewhere.”

“I owe him much,” Varian said quietly.

“I owe him everything. He said that he owes me for not giving up more about Ashenvale. I shouldn’t have given up anything. Sentinels died,” she said softly. "Because I ain't strong enough. People died because of my failure."
“You can’t blame yourself,” Varian told her, trying to catch her gaze. “You resisted more than anyone else could manage. The things you described... You went through horrific torture, Luciana. That you gave away as little as you did, and worthless things, is only a testament to how resilient you are.”

She shrugged mutely. “It took a lot of time for me to heal enough to even walk. I’m still very weak. Malfurion says that when I start to strain myself my body will... uh, kick start itself and that with care I can get back to how I was relatively quickly. I am a warrior,” she said, trying to joke. It fell flat and Varian sighed, pulling her into another gentle hug. “Did you punish my squadron?” she asked in a small voice.

“No. I wanted to. But your cannon-woman, Victoria, started crying when she told me what happened and I realized that they lost a sister and a friend just as much as I’d lost my daughter.”

“She would,” Luciana replied, burrowing into his protective embrace. She took in the feelings of safety and warmth, having lacked any semblance of them for so long. She almost regretted pulling back at all. “You should have a shadow priest come in and take a look,” she said, tapping her temple. “To make sure it’s me.”

“I should,” Varian said quietly. “But I’m not sure I want to know the answer. If it’s you, then I’m happy. If it’s not you... well.” He smiled tightly. “I think I’d be happy with an illusion, just this once.”

She blinked, feeling more tears well up. She’d missed him. “You should still do it,” she suggested. “Before I see Anduin. It would be safest.”

“You haven’t gone to see him yet?”

She shook her head. “I thought it would be smarter to come to you, first. Let you know I’m alive so that when Anduin doesn’t show up for dinner you don’t burst into his room to see him crying and me suddenly alive.”

He smiled, not really able to laugh just yet. “I’ll have the guards fetch someone.”

He left her reluctantly, and she crossed her arms over her chest and waited in the middle of the destroyed room. Varian returned, wrapping an arm around her shoulders and letting her duck into his side like a wounded cub. “The guards are holding the nobles in the third room,” he told her. “Seems they want to respect your wishes to surprise everyone.”

“I didn’t expect them to do that. Couldn’t they get in trouble for holding nobles?” Right after the words left her mouth, she kicked herself. Her orders superseded the wishes of Nobility. She was a Royal. But she’d forgotten, again.

“I just gave them orders to keep doing as you wished,” Varian soothed. “One’s gone to fetch a priest from the Cathedral.”

“Alright,” she said. "Later, we need to talk about this. This is the second time the Horde supposedly attacked me, specifically, as a Royal. But like last time, the Horde hasn't acted like they did, for the most part. Something's up.”

"I know," Varian muttered darkly. "But we didn't find anything last time and I don't think we will this time, either. I've spent the last year sending out everything I have to find you, but nothing came up. Someone or something is against us, and they're very good."

"Something has to break."
"And it won't be us," he promised firmly.

While they waited, she mentioned something that had been weighing on her mind the entire time she’d been with Lureith. “I wanted to ask you about something before mentioning it to Anduin.”

“Sure.”

“It would take a lot of work and the chances are failure would be high if I tried to have a child with my body like it was,” she started. “I actually started ovulating sometime in my recovery and on my trip here I had a monthly. I’d like to get my body a bit stronger, raise the fat percentage a bit, and produce an heir before bringing my body back to its warrior state.”

Varian took a moment to think before responding. “It would be practical,” he said slowly. “But are you sure you want to do that right now? You don’t need to. Having you back at all will quiet the people who were trying to force Anduin to remarry.”

“I’m not doing it for them,” she answered. “I’m doing it for me and Anduin. And a bit for you,” she said, nudging his side with her elbow. “I want something good to come of this. My body’s weak right now. If I can get it a bit healthier I can bring a baby to term much more easily than I would normally. And if something happened again...”

“It won’t,” Varian said darkly.

“If it does,” she repeated. “I won’t leave Anduin completely alone. I’ll leave something worth remembering, something to keep him happy.”

Varian leaned over and kissed the top of her head, and her gut tightened. “You already have,” he said. “Every memory Anduin has of you is precious.”

“I didn’t give him enough,” she said. “I should have been here more.”

“You did what you thought was right. I thought it was right, too, and look where you ended up.”

After a moment of silence, she spoke again. “Do you... Do you think Anduin will mind?” she asked, putting a hand on her stomach. “I don’t really look the same anymore. Will he...?”

“He loves you,” Varian told her, no doubt in his voice. “Even when you disappeared, when we thought you were dead, he loved you. He still does. And when he sees you, he’ll react to the scars. He might seem horrified, or sad, but it won’t be directed at you. He will be horrified that you suffered so badly, or sad that it marked you. But he will still love you and he’ll get used to the scars like he did your old ones.”

“These ones are a bit more obvious,” she said. “And I don’t look the same anymore.”

“Whatever you look like, he’ll love you all the same. He didn’t fall in love with a body. He fell in love with a young woman who could move the entire House of Nobles with her words, and inspired him to do the same.”

“If you say so,” she murmured. It did ease her mind to hear Varian say it with such confidence.

They were both silent for a time. “Whatever you decide to do in regards to child bearing,” Varian said quietly, “I’ll support you in it.”

“Thank you.”
Not long after there was a knock on the door and a guard announced that a priest had arrived. A dark-skinned woman with a comforting smile entered the room. She curtsied gracefully. “Your Majesty, Your Highness. It’s a relief you see you alive, Knight Princess,” she added.

“Thank you,” Luciana answered quietly.

“As I understand it, you wish for me to inspect the Princess’s mind to make sure it’s truly her?” the priest said, turning to Varian.

“Just enough to be sure her memories weren’t fabricated,” he said. “Don’t dig too deep. You might not like what you find.”

“You sound sure that it’s her,” the priest said, but approached Luciana as Varian stepped away to give her room. “I’ll double-check, in that case.”

Luciana closed her eyes as the Light washed over her. It felt almost like it was rushing into her, and it was a comfort to feel it again. She knew which memories the priest examined - a memory of receiving Oathkeeper, of seeing the litter Penny sired, of standing beside Anduin at the altar. The priest chose emotional memories that would stand out in her mind and would be difficult to implant or fabricate.

“I believe it’s her,” the priest said, taking her hands from Luciana’s temples. “There’s no sign of tampering in her memories, though there are some signs that she was subjected to heavy illusions somewhat recently.”

“Thank you for your time,” Varian said, nodding to the priest. “If you would keep her presence here a secret a while longer, an announcement will be made to the city as a whole.”

“Of course, Sire,” the priest said, bowing her head. To Luciana she said, “Please, if ever you’re in need, come to the Cathedral. We’ll gladly give you sanctum.”

“Thank you.”

The room was silent while Luciana stood still, deliberating. Finally, she turned to Varian. “I’d really like to see Anduin.”

Varian smiled, relieved. “Me, too. Let’s go.”
Scarred Anew

Varian wrapped his arm protectively around Luciana’s shoulders and they made their way up the Royal Wing. The guards all bowed their heads as they passed, not only honouring their royalty but honouring Luciana and her miraculous return. When they reached Anduin’s door, she took a deep breath and moved to open it. Varian followed in silence, the guards closing ranks in front of the door. No one would bother them.

Varian, as always, had the key to Anduin’s bedroom and he opened it for Luciana. Anduin was at his desk, his posture tired and stiff. “Anduin,” Varian called.

“Yes, Father?”

When Varian didn’t respond Anduin looked up. His eyes first passed over Luciana as he looked at Varian, and then his gaze returned to her and he froze. She smiled softly.

“I’m home,” she said quietly.

Anduin moved slowly at first, unsurely, but when he was clear of his chair he sped up, and by the time he reached her he was frantic and grasped at her arms and shoulders before finally pulling her into a tight, desperate hug. He was already crying, rocking her, and the sound of his sobs brought her to tears. She clutched at him, afraid that he’d let go of her, and soon Varian was wrapping them both in a hug, holding them tightly together.

“I’m sorry,” she murmured, her chin just high enough to set on his shoulder. He was pressing her head against his, her chest to him, like he was trying to feel her heart. “I’m sorry.”

Anduin kept crying for a long time and she was glad he did. She had been worried, so incredibly worried that he’d moved on in the ten months she’d be gone, apparently dead. Almost a full year, gone from him. She would have deserved it. She’d been so worried that he wouldn’t have welcomed her home, would have been upset or distant or angry, but feeling him shake and cry against her, his arms clasped like iron around her, she was utterly relieved. “I love you,” she said, turning her head to kiss his cheek. He wasn’t giving her enough room to manoeuvre to kiss his lips, and she would have even with Varian there. “I love you. I should have said that much, much sooner. Anduin, I love you. I don’t know why I didn’t.”

“You idiot,” he choked, pulling back to kiss her firmly on the lips. She took his face, held it and savoured it. She’d been so sure for so long that she was never going to feel him again. “I don’t care about that. I thought you were dead.” His face was somewhere between a smile and a grimace and it was splotchy and red, and she thought he’d never looked more beautiful. “I thought... You disappeared. There wasn’t any news. For a long time.”

“I know,” she said, brushing tears from his cheeks with her thumbs. His arms went back around her and she relished the firmness of his body against hers. This was no illusion, she was sure. She could smell him this time. She knew the press of his hands on her skin was real. “I know. I’m sorry. They were still looking for me when I escaped and we couldn’t tell anyone or risk them finding me again. And I was too weak to defend myself if they did.”


“Orcs. Horde, apparently,” she said simply. “They claimed to be desperate for an advantage in Ashenvale. They needed to rebuild after the siege. I escaped and ended up in Teldrassil. Malfurion
stayed with me and helped me recover until I was well enough to take ship to Ironforge. A night elf named Lureith came with me. A warrior."

He choked on his words and instead kissed her again. Varian rubbed his hand up and down her back slowly and she could see him doing it for Anduin, as well. "I’ll go and make an announcement to the city," he said quietly. "Luciana, you won’t have to make an appearance at least until tomorrow. You can both stay here. I’ll let the kitchens know to bring you food too, Luciana. Do you still eat as much?"

“No,” she answered when Anduin let her go. “Not nearly. I still have a hard time stomaching anything that’s too rich.”

“Alright.” Varian kissed the side of her head before he left.

Alone, she and Anduin took a moment to simply gaze at each other. “You have a new scar,” he said softly, brushing the pad of his thumb from her nose - touching her bottom eyelashes, making her eyelids flutter - to her jaw.

“I have a lot of new scars,” she answered.

“What happened?” he asked softly, running his hand gently through her shaggy hair. She hadn’t cut it in almost a year and it was long enough to tie the top half back. She relished in his gentle touch, leaned her head forward slightly so he could reach the back, too.

She gave him an abridged version of what she had gone through, avoiding details to keep from worrying him overmuch where it wasn't needed. She almost didn’t tell him of the illusions but considering she’d been having nightmares of it for a long time, she told him. The pain in his face made her regret it.

“I’m sorry,” he whispered, kissing her softly again. “We should have looked harder.”

“It’s not your fault,” she said. “It probably did look like I was dead. After so long... I wish I could have sent word to you. But it was too risky.”

“It’s better that you didn’t. I wouldn’t have wanted them to find you again. It was the Horde?” he asked, a bit disbelieving. “Why would they attack a Wrynn so directly?”

It warmed her chest to hear him say she was a Wrynn. His. She’d been one for a while but it reminded her that she had a family, one that truly cared for her. One that she’d made for herself. “They were desperate,” she said. “They made sure I overheard them, too, which is odd. The siege left the city in shambles and they needed to rebuild, they said. Without lumber...” she said, trailing off. “They weren’t even really concerned about any other information I could have potentially given them. Just Ashenvale.”

“I see.” Anduin frowned. “They haven’t had much luck there and Orgrimmar is still in bad shape. We could speak with the night elves,” he said. “If they’re so desperate they’d take you and torture you, they might try to launch a full invasion. But they wouldn’t simply give lumber. But what you said... It sounds like you think it wasn't the Horde.”

“I don't think it was,” she said. "Remember Frederic?"

Anduin frowned. "You're right," he said quietly. "And tensions were high then, like they are now. But, let's say it was the Horde. Even if it wasn't, if everyone thinks it was, it might as well have been. What could we do to prevent retaliation? To calm things?"
"Suggest a temporary treaty," she said. "And a deal. The orcs get lumber and in return they send people to Felwood. There’s a significant demon presence there and having even a small force from Orgrimmar could really help. That’s assuming that the Felwood situation hasn’t changed. If these orcs wanted us to respond with aggression, they’ll be disappointed."

Anduin’s lips quirked into an almost-smile. "Right," he said softly, again brushing his thumb over her jaw. He frowned suddenly. "The situation there hasn’t changed." He paused, thinking. "A treaty, even only a temporary one, almost certainly wouldn’t go through. But it’s at least something to talk about, to make us feel like we’re moving forward. In the meantime, SI:7 can send out operatives..." He smiled softly, kissed her. "It can wait. I just want to hold you for a while."

“Can we sit?” she said, her smile growing. “I’m exhausted. I’m not as strong as I used to be.”

He guided her wordlessly to the couch and she huddled up next to him, letting him wrap himself around her. She started to cry again, quietly, when she felt his Light tickle at her palms like it used to. It trickled down her arms, soothed her, and at first it tried to cool her. Then, it adjusted and warmed her skin, and she cried openly and hid her face in Anduin’s neck.

He held her while she cried, caressed her back with his hands slowly. “You’re home now,” he said. “You’re safe. I have you.”

He could likely feel the difference in her body even through her clothes, and it was obvious just by looking at her how much mass she’d lost. She didn’t weigh as much, wasn’t as thick around the thighs or neck. “You lost a lot of weight,” he murmured, leaning their foreheads together. “How long were you in the cell?”

“Two months or so, I think,” she said quietly. “It was hard on me.”

“I can see that.”

“I’m doing a lot better now, actually. If I can... Ah, Anduin?”

“Yes?”

“I want to talk to you about something now, before my return puts the city into a frenzy.”

“What is it?”

“I started ovulating again, and I had my period last month,” she started. Anduin’s hands stilled, and he likely knew exactly what she was suggesting before she could even say it. “If I can get my body a bit stronger, put a bit more fat and a bit more muscle, I could bring a baby to term. Much more easily than if we waited for me to regain my warrior’s form.”

It took him a moment to respond and she could see his throat working. “I see,” he said quietly. “You don’t have to... You know that it doesn’t matter what the courtiers say? You don’t have to do anything you don’t want to. You don’t have to do this. Not yet.”

“I want to for me, and you,” she said. “I want something good to come out of all this. And I want to leave something behind if it ever happens again, and I can’t escape.”

“It won’t happen again,” he said. “Father wouldn’t... I wouldn’t let it happen.”

“I know,” she soothed, and kissed his mouth firmly. Oh, she’d missed that. “I know. I want to do it.” She smiled. “And I could tease Varian about being a grandfather at forty-one.”
Anduin laughed a little and she reveled in it. She’d wanted to hear him laugh again for so long. It ached in her chest to hear it, so soft and brittle.

“I love you,” she murmured. She felt his breath on her lips. “I know I’m not in good shape right now...” she started.

“I don’t care about that,” he interrupted, voice thick. “I’m just... unspeakably happy that you’re back. You’re alive.” He sobbed, once. “You came back.”

“I made an oath to always come home to you. And I did.” She’d made him happy, by coming back. That was good. That was a start.

He smiled wetly. “We have your sword,” he told her. “The orcs must have left it behind.”

“I have this.” She pulled her wedding ring from her pocket. “I had to force myself to go back to get it. But I did.”

“Oh, Lucy,” Anduin breathed, and pulled her into a gentle, slow, open-mouthed kiss, hands on her face, breath uneven against her cheek.

She grew tired from the intense emotions she’d been running through, and lounged on the couch practically in Anduin’s lap. For the time being he was wider than her, stronger, and she enjoyed curling up in his arms and feeling safe. He regularly let his Light wash over her, soothing her various aches and the exhaustion that made her eyes dry and their lids heavy. She forgot, for a few moments here and there, about her new scars. About the brands the orcs had left in her flesh. Anduin’s hands soothed away the phantom pains and she was content for the first time in a long time.

When food came, the guards opened the door in silence and set it down on the low table in front of the sofa. Anduin thanked them quietly and waited for Luciana to move before reaching for the plates.

“What can you eat?” he asked.

“Almost anything. I’m still avoiding meat. But fruits, cheese, bread and rice. Those are good for me right now.”

He fed her, insisted on it even when she tried to take it from his hands. “Let me do this,” he told her. “Let me do this for you. Let me help you recover.” She did, relaxing against his chest - when had it gotten so broad? How hadn’t she noticed? - and opening her mouth obediently when he presented her with a morsel of food.

She grew full quickly and it seemed to worry Anduin that she couldn’t eat much. “It’ll come,” she said, feeling dozy. “One step at a time.”

“Right.” He picked her up with little trouble, bracing her against his chest. He’d gotten stronger. Maybe he could protect her while she recovered, until she was able to protect him again. That was what married people did, right? Make up for each other's weakness. She wouldn't make him do it for too long. He carried her to his bed, undressed her and she was too tired to remember what he’d see. When he gasped sharply, she stiffened. “Lucy,” he moaned. “Oh, Light. Lucy.”

He buried his face against her stomach and cried, and she gently combed her fingers through his hair and waited for him to spend his tears. “I’m okay,” she told him. “Malfurion healed them. They’ll always be there but I can move just fine. They don’t hurt anymore.” It was a bit of a lie. In the mornings, after a nightmare, they ached fiercely. Sometimes she could feel the whip still, in
one or two at a time. But overall, they were mostly healed.

“I’m so sorry.” He saw her legs, cried but didn’t stop moving until she was nearly naked, and then he pulled the covers over her and tucked them in around her. He could already tell that she didn’t produce enough body heat to keep herself warm, let alone warm him like she used to. His hands trembled and she watched them as they worked.

“You’re not lying down with me?” she asked quietly, watching him.

“I didn’t think you’d want me to,” he said.

“I do. Why wouldn’t I? I spent the last ten months just wanting to hear you laugh. Now I can hold you. Please, Anduin?” It made him happy, she remembered, when she reached out for him. Instigated affection.

Anduin offered a tight smile, undressed quickly and joined her in the bed. She sighed, turned onto her side and he curled around her back. He kissed her shoulder and her neck, caressed her stomach, her hip and her thigh. “I love you,” he whispered. “I missed you.”

“I know.” She turned her head into his pillow and inhaled. Clean linen, something sweet and earthy, paper and ink. It was familiar. It meant love, home, intimacy. She felt a few tears fall, and moved her head away from the little wet spot that resulted. “I love you, Anduin.”

“Sleep, Lucy. I’ll watch over you.” His hands were bathed in Light and it washed over her, making her drowsy and warm. When Anduin’s lips again touched her shoulder, she was already asleep.
Rennick was an adventurer, yes, but he wasn’t a particularly adventurous one. He liked to travel but he didn’t like the trouble that often came with it. So he learned the important teleportation spells, used them to get around from city to city. He was more of a tourist, actually.

He also used his portals to make the money he’d need to live in a new city for a month or two. Busier adventurers were always willing to pay good coin to shorten their trips by a few weeks. When an SI:7 agent came to requisition a portal, it was unusual but didn’t really register as such until after the woman disappeared into the wavy image of the Arathi Basin garrison.

Oh well, Rennick told himself. It wasn’t that important. As per the agent’s request he also stepped through the portal, as he’d be needed to make a return portal to the Mage Quarter.

The Arathi Basin garrison was an impressive sprawl of military training camp mixed with barracks and siege engine workshops. The SI:7 agent was already a good distance away, moving at a brisk pace. Rennick watched her go, and then he watched her return not a minute later at a jog with half a squadron behind her. He noticed the draenei first and then the worgen, and then it registered that he was seeing some members of the famous Amadeus squadron.

“Open the portal,” the agent ordered brusquely.

“Alright.” Easy-going as always Rennick expertly tore a tiny hole into the fabric of their world and connected to another tiny tear in Stormwind. The Nether formed a tunnel around it, making it a true portal and safe to use, and he gestured towards it. The agent handed him a handful of gold coins as she went.

He gave them a few minutes to get clear, and then stepped through it himself. When he arrived in the mage tower, the group was gone.
Interlude: SI:7

Ava didn’t much care for politicking but all of SI:7 had been aware from early on of the scheme the King had been playing around the Amadeus girl.

The Amadeus girl. That’s what they’d called her, up until she’d actually become involved in things. She was absolutely massive, scarred from years of battle, and the look in her eyes was a dangerous one. You could see the intelligence in her eyes, and those who were familiar with it could see an animal lurking just beneath. She was a berserker, no matter how well she could think, and when she moved suddenly, whether it was to catch something that fell from a table or to wrap her hands around a throat, any agents nearby were instantly on guard. Her fury was well known, but her control was not so sure. Not for the first little while.

She became the Lady Knight, and then the Prince’s woman, and then the Knight Princess, and for a time she was Unmentionable around the Wrynns. Yesterday she’d become the Princess, again, and it was a relief. The King had only become more and more volatile, too much like he’d used to be, and the Prince had become sharp, dark, until he’d started isolating himself from the nobles who tried to wheedle him into marrying one of their own daughters.

The Princess was too thin, too weak, too nervous, but it was her and she was home. She could recover. The King had chosen the best possible match for his son and it showed in the steely glint already returning to her eyes. She had once again found her reason to fight and it wouldn’t be long now until she was back up to her full power, which was impressive even now. Simply the fact that she considered herself weak for not being able to fully resist months of particularly creative torture was a marker of her actual strength.

Ava had been directed by the King himself to discretely seek out the remainder of the original Amadeus squadron, give them the news, and guide them home to their new and permanent assignment. The draenei, Enaeon, and the worgen Jillian Rourke had stayed in the army, along with Kain McLode and Daniel Andersen.

The other four had disappeared, not able to serve knowing that they’d failed their Knight Captain and friend. Whatever was said by the Wrynns, the SI:7 considered it a failure on the part of Amadeus squadron. They should not have been more than twenty yards away from her. They should have kept visual at all times.

But it wasn’t her business or her place to judge them. Light knew she’d done far worse than let one woman be captured and tortured. She led them silently through the city with standard randomized rings of illusion to keep their private business private, and when they were safely ensconced in the Keep she moved on to the next part of her mission: locate and retrieve the other four members.

Lawrence Burns, Victoria Dougan, Christopher Shireman, and Lars Abelen were in various parts of the kingdom. Lawrence was in Duskwood, likely Darkshire with Victoria. Christopher was in the Amadeus Manor. Lars was in Redridge somewhere uninhabited. It would take time, or more portals.

Ava left the four soldiers to find the mage she’d already paid. It was annoying, but it would be better to have fewer witnesses, and his portals were pretty solid.
Interlude: Christopher

Christopher had, at the beginning, felt guilty about staying in the family manor. He had been one of the ones to let her be taken, and he’d felt her death was his fault. Maybe more than the others, because he’d known it hadn’t been a good idea to let her get so far without direct visual but he hadn’t said anything.

But after they’d announced her dead, after the first four months had passed without even a solid rumour that she was safe somewhere, healing, he’d requested leave and visited her family at the manor to pay his respects and try to apologize indirectly.

He should have expected that Bannister would remember him well enough to start crying on his shoulder. They hadn’t exactly gotten close but they had enjoyed each other’s company and Christopher had always felt they could have been good together. Bannister needed someone to worry about and Christopher needed someone to worry about him. They fit.

In the few days he’d stayed there Bannister must have seen some hint of what he wanted because he’d invited Christopher to come back to the manor soon – actually, he’d asked Christopher to stay because he felt like he was going to break for the longest time and now his little sister had died doing what he’d put her into doing, and yes, Christopher had just screwed him senseless, but would he mind just holding him for a while?

Bannister was a good man, sweet to those he cared for, and Christopher had left the army for him. Bannister had already lost one person to the war. Christopher didn’t want him to lose another, even if what they had wasn’t permanent. But it was quickly becoming permanent and Christopher even had a room in the manor now, though he rarely used it unless Bannister was away or they had a mutual day of individual space. Christopher appreciated that. While he certainly enjoyed spending time with Bannister, he did need his own time, too. Bannister understood and was more than willing to give it to him.

It’d been almost four months since Christopher had moved in and while the father was still a bit distant, the mother seemed to adore him and Desmond didn’t mind him at all. He had even started joking around with him during the day a couple of weeks ago. He and Ophelia didn’t really see each other much as she was usually occupied elsewhere with her theatre training, but she seemed to like him well enough. He had only met Dania once, as she lived in Dalaran with her mage trainer.

Christopher was actually helping their hound master Matthew, a patient and unflappable older gentleman, when the SI:7 agent came to him.

“She’s home,” the woman said. That was all it took to get his attention. Christopher stood from the new litter of puppies, walked to the door with care to their tiny little paws.

“There’s only one person you could be talking about,” he said.

The agent nodded once.

“Matthew, I’ll have to take a rain check on you.”

“Don’t worry about it,” he said gruffly, inspecting a pup’s ears.

Christopher turned to the agent. “The castle?”

She nodded.
“I’ll head there now. I know Lars is in Redridge, and I’m willing to bet Vic went back to Darkshire.”

She nodded.

Christopher looked up to where he could see the towers of the castle, resting against the blue sky. The clouds were, as always, moving swiftly to the east to be interrupted by the mountains. She’s home.

He smiled crookedly. He’d always known, somehow, that she’d come back. It just wasn’t in her nature to leave a soldier behind.
Interlude: Victoria

Darkshire wasn’t a typically nice place, but Victoria had grown up there and she loved it. She even loved the howling of the feral worgen she’d often hear at night, and had grown used to the wolfsong again soon after returning. Lawrence had come with her, but was more interested in the fur trade than the beauty of the wild place.

She wished Jillian had come with her. She thought that the Gilnean worgen would have enjoyed the dark forest, the heady scent of pine and sugarwood that came every spring. Lawrence had once asked her if she was interested in Jillian.

“No,” Victoria had said easily. “I just really like her. She’s good people.”

There wasn’t really a brief way to explain it to someone else. Victoria wasn’t really interested in anyone, for any reason. She never had been. But she liked Jillian, enjoyed spending time with her, and thought of things the scout might enjoy. It wasn’t a crime to want to be with someone without a sexual aspect. They were close friends and she wished they had stayed close friends.

But Jillian hadn’t wanted to leave the army when she was in the integration program her own king had set up to help assimilate the worgen into the fighting forces of the Alliance, and Victoria could respect that. She’d left because her own Princess had died on her watch.

Lawrence visited her occasionally. She lived on the outskirts of the quickly growing town of Darkshire and he lived in the centre, near the Town Hall. It had a new wing to handle the sudden influx of fur traders and hunters, and he was having a ball over there. Sometimes she wondered if he felt guilty, too. Like he’d failed her.

They didn’t talk about it. Victoria didn’t push. She knew that some things, you just didn’t talk about. Luce was one of those things, and would be for the foreseeable future. Victoria had kept expecting her to pop up, lecture her on leaving her responsibilities, and drag her back to the war. She wouldn’t have minded if it had been Luce. But other people had tried, and they lacked the conviction, the drive to protect and lead that Luce had. It just wasn’t the same. Wasn’t worth it.

Victoria had three dogs, which she was very happy about. She had been given Shauna the boxer terrier, previously Luce’s dog, to care for. She liked that dog. Very energetic, and sometimes a bit goofy. She had a mastiff from a Gilnean line, and while the big lump could be lazy and she liked to call Marge a worthless pile of drool, she was a good hunting dog and was alert at the first sign of activity outside her small, isolated home.

Her third dog was a wolf-dog, bred from the dire wolves that wandered the northern edge of the province, near the river across which the Elwynn Forest lay. Popsicle, or Pop, was a big one. He was more wolf than dog, and had a wild side to him. She loved the stupid mutt and alternated letting him run around the forest and keeping him home to snuggle with in bed. He liked it, and she knew he did despite the occasional sigh or groan.

It was Marge that first gave the alert with a quiet, groaning growl. Pop reacted by getting to his feet to prowl the house, ears swiveling. Even Shauna, usually friendly and eager, was on alert.

“Victoria?” a voice called from outside. She didn’t recognize it. “I’m Ava, from SI:7. I’ve been sent to retrieve you and the rest of Amadeus squadron.”

Victoria made a sharp cht noise and the dogs quieted down, slinking through the house to her side.
She went to the front door, opened it carefully and poked her head outside.

“Why?” she asked tersely. “What’s so important? I’m out.”

“She’s home.”

Victoria blinked once, twice, and looked down at Pop. He looked back up at her. Marge similarly offered no answer. “Only she I know could get an agent out doing her dirty work is supposed to be dead.”

“She isn’t.”

Victoria nodded once. “Alright. Suppose she’ll be wanting her dog back.”

“I imagine so.”

Victoria made a couple of short tst sounds and the dogs all backed up to her let close the door and leave the small vestibule. “We’re going to Stormwind, pretties,” she said. “And I’m selling the house. Get your favourite toys and let’s go.”

Marge sat in the kitchen to wait for her to gather her things. Pop followed her through the house, his black claws clicking regularly on the stone floors. Shauna disappeared, likely following Victoria’s orders.

“She’s home,” she muttered, and chuckled. “ Fucking stubborn bitch. I should’ve known.”

She wondered if the SI:7 agent had gone to find Lawrence. She’d go check up on him, anyway. He was probably blubbering like an idiot all over his fancy important documents.
Lars watched as the woman wandered by the front of his hiding spot for the twelfth time in an hour. She wouldn’t find him. He was the squadron’s stealth specialist, better even than Jillian. He could hole up somewhere and outlast a war. Luciana had helped him learn that hiding like this wasn’t cowardly. It was practical. You needed every advantage out there and he was going to keep using them until he didn’t need to anymore.

“Lars,” he heard her say. That was a first – she hadn’t made a sound until now. “I’m Ava, of the SI:7. I’m here to bring you back to Stormwind. The rest of the squadron’s already there, or on their way.”

He waited for her to elaborate, not willing to leave his hiding spot above the empty cave he’d left as a decoy. He’d seen her coming into his territory, and had moved accordingly. Now she knew he was nearby, but he was still better at hiding than she was at finding.

“She’s home, Lars. And she’s going to need her squadron at her back while she recovers. She’s healed up but she’s still got a lot ahead of her. And the way I hear it, she’s planning on having a kid soon. I think that she’ll want her squadron at her back for that.”

He was tempted to reveal himself, but didn’t. He’d become comfortable here, in Redridge. Plenty of places to hide himself and his supplies, and the locals at Lakeshire didn’t bother him and accepted him easily enough when he went to town to trade. He had seven different caves that appeared lived-in and places above them or behind them that actually were lived in. If he wanted to, he could get through a full-on Blackrock invasion without a scratch.

And the Captain was dead, anyway. It had been announced and for a while it was all anyone in Lakeshire would talk about. The Knight Princess, so promising, so valorous, dead. The Prince, left sole heir once again. The King, dark and angry. The House of Nobles, scheming and pushing for a new, less willful Princess.

It was disgusting. If anyone could replace Luciana Lars would eat his own boots. And they were nice boots, too. He’d seen the look on her face when she was thinking of the Prince. Sappy, gooey, love-sick fool. She’d missed him. Every time she came back to the war she’d missed that kid something awful. Lars had always been tempted to tell her to just go home. Obviously she needed whatever it was her Prince was giving her. But she always came back to her squadron. Her boys, they’d once been. But now Vic and Jill were there and they were her troops instead. Her kiddos.

“Lars,” Ava the Agent called again. “I’m not lying to you. The four that stayed in the army were brought to Stormwind first. Christopher was next. I’ve already gone to Victoria and she was packing up to leave when I spoke to Lawrence. They’re both on their way to the city, to her. She needs all of you, Lars.”

If that was true – but it wouldn’t be – then Luciana would need him. He was the second boot knife no one else knew about. He had her six in the dark. “She’s dead,” he called out.

Ava turned to look to where his voice had come from. Not quite right, considered the spot he’d chosen. The sound would echo slightly and he estimated she thought he was about six yards from his actual place. “We thought she was. But she’s come home. A shadow priest looked in her mind. It’s her, Lars. The King’s already made the announcement.”

If the King had... “The Prince?” he called.
“He’s been holed up with her in their chambers since she returned.”

If a priest thought it was her... if two priests thought it was her... and the King, that scary motherfucker with the wolf eyes, thought it was her... maybe it was? Lars would have to find out.

“I’ll see you in Stormwind, Lars,” Ava called, apparently confident that she’d made her point. He scoffed silently at her. What did she know?

He slipped from his rocky perch, readjusted his bow on his back and checked his throwing knives, his sword, and his daggers. He looked like he was prepared for all-out war. He was.

“She’s home?” he asked a tree. “Right. Sure she is. She’s dead. We all let her get dead.”

But he set out anyway. He wanted to make sure. That was the best way to do things. Double-check your kills.
Enaeon did not know what to expect when he climbed the last set of stairs to the Royal Wing. He was only allowed into the heart of the Keep, where the leaders of Stormwind rested, because he was part of the original Amadeus squadron. He knew that the looks he garnered from the guards were of disbelief, caution. Even the worgen next to him, Jillian, should not have been allowed there despite her humanity and the close ties of her king to theirs.

They were not brought directly to Luciana’s room. Instead they were guided by silent Royal Guards to a meeting room of sorts, where some food and drink were laid out. The two humans were comfortable enough there, and Enaeon spotted a chair large enough to fit his larger size. He sat carefully and when it did not creak ominously he slipped his tail through the space at the back, let it trail over the soft carpet, and watched. The two humans were eager to eat, and Jillian was relatively relaxed.

He was more concerned about Luciana. He ate a bit, drank water, and thought. What kind of shape would she be in? How badly scarred? Mentally and physically? If she had been tortured, even for only a few days, she would be hurt badly. How much mass had she been able to regain so far? How weak were her bones, her ligaments?

They were given some time in the room, before King Varian arrived. He was silent, dressed in loose, non-formal clothes. His eyes were dark. Though Luciana had returned, he was still angry. Enaeon wondered if she’d told him who had captured her, and why. He wanted to know that as well, but would not ask her if it would cause distress.

“Amadeus,” King Varian said quietly, and the chatter between Enaeon’s three companions ceased. They turned to look at the King in unison, wiping their mouths or hastily finishing a bite of food. “I called you here personally. You are no longer part of the Imperial Armed Forces. Jillian, I’ve already spoke to your King. Enaeon, I’ve given you a new assignment. If there’s some cause for concern with your leaders, I’ll take care of it. Your new assignment will begin today. The rest of your squadron is expected to arrive within the week.”

“What is it?” Jillian asked.

“You are now the Princess’ personal guard. You will not leave her side for any reason, and if she dismisses you, find a place nearby where you can still hear or see her directly and wait for her to recall you. If there is danger to her life you will offer up yours instead. While she is in the Keep you do not need to guard her directly but you will be prepared at all times to leap to her defense should there ever be even the slightest cause for concern. You will have shared chambers and they will be connected to hers. You’ll figure out your own rotations but there must be at least two of you with her, or ready for action, at all times. Enaeon, you will be her personal healer. You will follow her health, both mental and physical, with complete dedication. Jillian, you will continue your previous duties as a scout and handle any information that changes hands, as well as inspecting any food and drink that doesn’t come directly from a Royal Guard’s hands. Genn has voluntarily relinquished you as a Royal Hunter. You are now a Royal Guard in direct service of the Princess. He expects you to show her the dedication and loyalty you gave to him.”

Jillian didn’t seem sure how to receive the news, but Enaeon was. He stood slowly, nodding to the King. “I will take on this role with gladness. It is not so different from my old one. May I see her? I am concerned as to her current state.”

“A guard will show you,” the King said, and turned to the others. “None of you are leaving until
you accept. I’m not giving you a choice.”

“All right, then.” Daniel shrugged, and stood. “Like the big guy said. It’s not so different from before. Better eats, though.” He grinned nervously. “Sire,” he added.

Kain stood next. “I’m with him,” he said, nodding to Daniel. “They replaced her position but they can’t replace her. I’m with her, Sire.”

“All right,” Jillian growled, flattening her ears to her skull. “I don’t really appreciate the throwin’ around but I’ll do it. If Greymane wants me to do this, I will.” They all knew she was really doing it for Luciana, but she was a bit ornery, especially after their Knight Captain disappeared. “Where is she?”

“A guard will show you all the way.”

A silent and stoic Royal Guard guided them up a set of stairs hidden behind a solid but otherwise unremarkable wooden door. The hallway they found themselves in was relatively short, with only seven doors on one side and one at the end. There were two offshoot hallways that led somewhere unknown. “The Princess’s chambers,” the guard said, and left them. There were fourteen guards spread out along the hallways and two patrolled its length regularly. The two guards to either side of Luciana’s door were glaring at them, protective of their Princess.

Enaeon made the first move and when the guards didn’t stop him, the others followed. He wasn’t wearing his armour, but he was still much larger than a human. He had little trouble opening the door to the antechamber, but at the second door he knocked instead.

“Come in,” he heard. Luciana’s voice was deep as he remembered, a low and commanding sound. But it wasn’t as strong, as confident as it had been.

He opened the door. The room was wide and lavishly decorated in deep reds and browns. The hearth was lit, which was the first sign that something was off. Luciana was burrowed into her bed, dressed warmly for once, and that was the second. The third was the Prince whose chest she was sitting against, pressed close for warmth.

Enaeon moved forward slowly, smiling slightly. It was good to see her, he would admit that readily. But he was a healer and could see many things wrong with the way she was settled. “How are you, my friend?” he asked in a soothing voice.

“I’ve been better,” she said. The Prince watched Enaeon curiously and he recalled that the Prince was a priest. A healer. How appropriate, that he was bonded to a warrior.

“How is your recovery?” Enaeon let his Light wash over her, inspecting her for wounds and masses of scar tissue. On her stomach, her legs, and her back, there was a lot. It had already been smoothed and loosened, but it was thicker still that the rest of her skin and likely would be for a long time. The procedure had been expertly done and he was patient in his inspection of her flesh as she told the story, in brief.

“Malfurion?” Jillian asked, finally coming out of the shadow of the door. “He healed you?”

“Yeah.” Luciana smiled but it fell flat after a moment. She was tired. The Prince gently rubbed her arm, and Enaeon could feel the boy’s Light brush against his. It was youthful, firm with his resolve and heavy with conviction, but soft on Luciana’s skin. A good Light. Anduin obviously thought the same of Enaeon because he smiled approvingly. “I’m not in good shape right now. I’ll get there.”
“We’ve got your six,” Daniel promised. “We’re not going to let you down again.”

She smiled again, a bit easier than the first. “Thanks, kiddo.”

Enaeon notified her of their new mission, and their new positions. Her smile this time was genuine, and happy. “That’s good,” she said quietly. “You’re going to have your hands full, Enaeon.”

He looked up at her. “Why is that?”

“You’ll see.” The Prince kissed the side of her head and he leaned into his embrace further. Enaeon finished his examination of her, and though he felt something dark, something heavy and old in her chest, he didn’t mention it. It could wait. He would let her have this time to be happy, safe in her husband’s arms. She had more than earned a break from all of her troubles.
Interlude: Jillian

She was smaller than she remembered.

Luciana was a big woman. Big woman. Big voice, big arms, big legs, big smile, big hands. Sitting in the bed, curled up with her husband, she looked small. Fragile, almost. Compared to Jillian’s human form Luciana was still a giant of a woman. But Jillian remembered her differently. Remembered her more powerful, more confident. Right now she looked lost. She didn’t even smell the same.

Jillian couldn’t describe scents well in Common. As a language it was built around sight, not scent. But it was different. It used to bring to mind forested, snow-capped mountains. Rivers cut paths through the trees like scars. Now it reminded her of a wounded and bleeding animal, curled up in its burrow in the roots of a rotting tree.

“You alright?” Jillian asked. She’d taken her human form. Her ears would go back in distress if she didn’t pay attention in worgen form and she didn’t want that. “Tired, eh?”

“Yeah.” Luciana smiled weakly. The Prince had left for a bit, so Luciana could reconnect with her squadron. They weren’t all there, not yet, but maybe it was best to start small. A few at a time. Luciana was twitchy and her heartbeat kept jumping. “I went through some bad things, Jill.”

“I know.” Jillian took her hand, offering comfort. Enaeon was at her other side, sitting on the edge of the bed. He had one of her legs in his huge blue hands, and the Light glowed softly on her limb. It was scarred heavily. “Whip?” she asked.

“Yeah.”

“You want them hunted?” she asked.

“No. I’ve already discussed it with the King. There won’t be any direct retaliation.”

“Why not? They tortured you.”

“They attacked a faction leader,” Luciana said quietly. “If we retaliate there will be war and we’re already spread too thin in Draenor. We can’t afford to be distracted from the Iron Horde, and we can’t afford to let the Horde ease up on them either. We need to focus.”

“After that?”

Luciana shook her head mutely. “I won’t start a war and risk losing an entire kingdom because I got some more scars.”

“They attacked our Princess,” Kain said darkly. “We’d destroy them.”

“It’s not worth the losses it would bring,” she said. “I think I should be able to make this decision, Kain, considering I’m the one they hurt. This isn't worth a war.”

Kain huffed, turned away with his arms crossed, but didn’t object. Luciana’s smile was pained. “Do you know when the others will arrive?” she asked Jillian.

She shrugged. “Pretty soon. The agent what came got us had a port mage. And the others weren’t too far off – one in Redridge, two in Darkshire.”
“Maybe a week, if they hurry,” Luciana mumbled. “Less if they take gryphon.”

“I betcha Lars’ll sneak his way in,” Jillian said.

“Five silver says he’ll be here by tomorrow,” Luciana countered, smiling again. “And I’ll give you another five if Victoria doesn’t have at least three dogs with her.”

“You’re on,” Jillian said, her smile baring her teeth. Luciana saw the expression, and her smile widened into a grin. It was familiar, Jillian knew, her teeth-smiling. A habit carried over from worgen form. Luciana had always thought it was hilarious.
Kain couldn’t recall ever being this angry. He wasn’t a violent person by nature, even though he was a soldier. He usually preferred to keep things light, humorous. Even when someone of an older generation made some smart-ass comment about his tits, or his distinct lack of a dick, he kept things level. But seeing Luciana, his Knight Captain, his Princess, so lost and unsure had lit a fire in his chest he didn’t know he could possess. He was angry and it burned him to hear her say they couldn’t do anything about it.

No, that wasn’t true. He could do something about it. He could have her six, make her safe and keep people off her back. He could help her train, get her back up to a good weight. He could run with her around the city, maybe with Jillian too, get her heart healthy again. Giving her back her warrior’s body, going through that process, would make her confident again. He knew it would.

It wasn’t easy to see her like this. She was trying to condense herself, conserve heat and energy. He’d only once see her so tired, and it had been during a week’s recovery right after they’d lost Devon. She’d gone berserk and had fought all night and it had taken some time to get her back on her feet. Kain didn’t want to imagine what she’d gone through this time to make her recovery time last so long. He did it anyway.

It was obvious she’d been whipped. Badly. Often, too. Her legs, back and front, were covered in ridges of scar tissue. Enaeon said they had been ‘loosened’, whatever that meant. Kain guessed it meant she had full mobility, or at least most of it. What wasn’t covered in whip marks was burned. Only small patches of her skin were clear of any marks.

Her stomach and chest were marked in the same way. Her breasts had been somewhat, for whatever reason, and they were bigger than Kain remembered. They used to be tiny, barely there past all of Luciana’s muscle, hardly distinguished from her pectoral muscles. But she was heavier now, not as light on her feet. She had more fat than muscle, it seemed. It was good for her, would give her a good starting point for mass.

Her back was marred forever. From the top of her buttocks to the bottom of her neck, there was a nearly solid patch of scar. It was ridged like her legs and front, but darker, uglier. They’d whipped her back often. Probably taken out some of the muscle, too. Kain watched Enaeon fret over it uselessly for a while before the draenei simply lay his hands on it to make sure it was healed properly.

Her face had a new scar, too. Kain didn’t know if it was from the torture. It might have happened after, in her escape, or even when she’d been taken. He knew there was a battle before the torture, at least one. She wouldn’t have gone down without a fight. He’d ask about it later. He was more concerned with the look in her eyes.

Doubt. He saw doubt, and it was worrying. Doubting yourself could only get you killed. Doubting your perceptions would get an entire Company killed. She had both and it was painful to see her brought so low. But Kain knew she was strong. He’d seen it. She’d gone from Academy grad, a noble-born, to a true Knight Captain. She was a Wrynn and Wyrnns were strong. They had to be. They had tough decisions to make and she’d made one of the hardest. Kain had respected her before, and he still did – maybe now more than ever. Not many could truly prioritize someone else, and she’d decided to put her kingdom over herself. If more Nobles were actually noble like her, Kain thought, things would be much different.

“We’ll get your strength back,” Kain said quietly. Luciana looked up at him, trusting. She trusted
him and he would not betray that trust ever again. “We’ll start with your appetite. Get a bit more mass on you. Then we can move into basic weight training, running. Unarmed combat, then armed.” She seemed grateful that he wasn’t going to demand retribution from the Horde. He should. She should. She had perfect right to do it.

Her smile was loose, relaxed. Having them here was helping her already. They’d have to drag him away before he left. The King himself could come in here and order him to leave.

He’d sooner kill the man.
Interlude: Daniel

It was difficult to relax when he was so tense. Daniel didn’t know what to do. He didn’t have any special skills, couldn’t heal like Enaeon or listen for stealthed invaders like Jillian. He couldn’t even get angry and righteous like Kain had done.

Luciana was having an easier time eating, at least. She’d reported that she still had a difficult time taking in meat but she was having bits of chicken fed to her by her husband. The Prince. It was still odd to think of her as the Princess, however true it was.

At least her husband was caring. He didn’t mind the scars, it seemed, though it would have been impossible to not notice them. Daniel tended to fade into the background easily, and had seen more than once the Prince’s hands gently trailing over Luciana’s lower back, under her shirt. Every time he did it she relaxed. Daniel could tell she was worried about how her new appearance would come across, especially to her husband. The Prince was the reason she’d found the strength to come home. Daniel was glad he was making himself worthy of that.

What Daniel could do was clean up. He cleaned her bedroom, picked up clothes that she hadn’t had the energy to bring to a hamper or a hanger. He tidied up after a meal, setting all of the plates down with the cutlery and the cups and bowls on the tray and bringing it out for a Royal Guard or a servant to take back to the kitchens. He could turn off the lights she forgot about in the washroom, open the window when the room became stifling and shift the logs in the hearth so the fires wouldn’t get too low.

It made him feel a bit useless, to see her so openly dependant on the Prince, on Jillian and Enaeon. But one was her husband and the other two were highly specialized. Daniel still had his part to play. He wasn’t a healer, couldn’t detect faint traces of poison or hear stealthed footsteps. But he could keep her living space clean, organized, so she would feel the same.

Daniel took care of the little things that Luciana shouldn’t have had to bother with. She had a long recovery ahead of her and Daniel had heard her and the Prince murmuring about having a baby while her body was still capable of doing so. He’d known that before, when she was muscle-bound and active, she wouldn’t have been able to have a child. But now she was fattier, heavier, and it could work. Would work, if Enaeon had anything to do with it. He was a draenei, he was of the Exodar and followed their Prophet Velen, but he was a loyal soldier too and Daniel didn’t doubt he’d follow Luciana anywhere. She was a good person. A good leader, the kind you knew you could trust to use your skills and keep you alive. He’d known for a long time that Luciana would keep her Knight's Oath. It was why they followed her.

When she settled in for a nap, Daniel volunteered for first watch. He was quiet, attentive, and he and Jillian stayed in the dark room while Luciana slept. She shifted a lot, murmured, and at one point cried out and started to struggle against the sheets. Jillian was in worgen form, her ears swiveling to listen for potentially unwanted guests, and she leaned in close to Luciana’s ear and sniffed. It sounded like a dog, and seemed to ease Luciana a bit. She settled back down soon enough. Daniel returned to his book, not commenting on Jillian’s actions. They would seem strange to anyone who didn’t know a worgen. Daniel was used to her and knew it really wasn’t a big deal.

Luciana woke from a nightmare and when she got well and truly tangled in the sheets and started to scream in fear and rage, Daniel was at her side. He carefully untangled her, got her hands and legs free, and Jillian spoke in her growling voice to calm, calm down. Luciana cried for a bit, silently, heaving and curled up with her head tucked down and her hands over her neck, and Daniel left her
with Jillian. He let the guards know she was fine, just a nightmare, and they nodded. “She had them before, too,” one guard whispered. “Not that bad, though.”

“She got tangled in the sheets. Spooked her,” Daniel said. They must have tied her up.

He returned to her room, poked at the logs in the hearth and added a new one, opened the window a bit to get some air flowing. When Luciana didn’t want to close her eyes, huddling under her blankets, he wordlessly stood and opened the washroom door. The werelight streamed out, just enough to bring some light to the bedroom. Luciana calmed down when she could see what the masses of shadow actually were, and slept a while longer.

When food came from the kitchens Jillian sniffed at it and tasted a few pieces for poison. It wasn’t really considered necessary when it came from the kitchens but she took her new position seriously. Daniel helped Luciana sit up against her pillows, made her comfortable, and brought over the tray. He reminded her to eat slowly, she just woke up; she smiled gratefully.

“Thanks, Dan,” she said quietly, and he knew that she meant thanks for cleaning up, for being quiet and unobtrusive, for being there and ready. He patted her knee gently.

“No problem, Cap.”
Lars was pretty good at sneaking, but he was no SI:7 and didn’t bother trying to stealth past the
best guards this side of Dun Morogh.

He walked up the stairs to the Keep, and the guards let him pass with nothing more than glances to
his weapons. He mentally dared them to try and take them away. Anyway, he had more hidden
under his clothes. They wouldn’t find them all unless they stripped him naked, and that would be
quite a chore.

He wandered the Keep, found a hallway that was hidden away. “The Princess?” he asked gruffly.

“Sixth room on the left,” a guard answered.

Lars entered the room in silence, shut the door behind him and cleared his throat. Daniel had
already noticed him, nodded in greeting, but Jillian growled and flicked her ears back in annoyance.

“She lost the bet,” Daniel whispered with a grin.

“Ah. She in the shower?” Lars asked.

“Yeah, she’ll just be another minute. Just had her hair cut.”

“Hm.”

“You look like you’re ready for war,” Daniel commented as Lars made himself comfortable at the
table.

“I am.”

“That’s good.”

Daniel wasn’t a boisterous guy. He had his moments, but for the most part stayed in the
background, observed and took care of the small things.

Lars knew already that each one of them would have their own part to play. Jillian would be the
nose and ears, keep watch on things the others couldn’t detect. Enaeon would be the healer, a
confidant. Daniel would be the helping hand, unseen until he was needed. Lars would be the
hidden boot knife, watching the shadows for a coming strike. Kain would be a driving force, a
confident motivator. Victoria would be casual, the non-judgemental ear and the distraction.
Lawrence would be the energizer, would help her organize herself. Christopher would be her
brother, the one she could joke with and be light-hearted.

The Prince would be there when she started to fall apart, started to doubt. That was what he was
there for, anyway. Lars didn’t know him well. Yet. He’d have to keep an eye on the guy, make
sure he was doing his job, wasn’t letting the Captain down. She was valuable. He was... well, he
was the Prince, but she was the Captain.

She came out of the shower naked, like she usually would. That much, at least, hadn’t changed. But
her body was a bit different than Lars remembered. She was less defined, still wide and strong but
she looked like a soldier and not a warrior. Her breasts were heavier, and he considered asking if
she was ovulating again. She seemed to be able to now, with the fat she held on her body.
She had new scars. Lars almost volunteered to fillet them off for her. Simple procedure, really painful but it took care of skin layer scar tissue. The ones on her back would be a bit more complicated. It looked like they’d bit deep into the muscle.

“You kill ‘em yet?” Lars asked.

“Most of them, on the way out,” she answered easily. “It’s good to see you too, Lars.”

“Should’ve gotten ‘em all.”

“Not worth it,” she replied. “Not worth a war.”

“Yeah it is. You want me to go?”

“Naw.”

“Alright.”

When a guard brought food Lars watched him, hawkeyed and ready. Jillian sniffed at it for a few longs moments and Daniel set up the table for Luciana to eat. Without speaking they’d taken on roles around each other. Lars was proud of his group. He’d picked a good one.

Luciana held out her hand, grinning cheekily, and Jillian growled and plunked five silver into her waiting palm. “Thank you,” the Captain said.

“How’d you get here so fast?” Daniel asked quietly.

“Stole a gryphon.”

That made Luciana laugh loudly, freely. Jillian tossed her head, tossed off the five silver as a loss and grinning toothily down at Luciana. That made her laugh harder, and she had to take a bit of water before choking on her food.

This was why Lars confirmed his kills now. He hadn’t done it with her, and now she was back.
Interlude: Reunion Pt. 2

Lawrence was a bit nervous. A lot nervous. Victoria could tell. He hadn’t always been the most assured of individuals and yeah, Pop was big, but his growls were play growls. She kept telling Lawrence that but he didn’t seem to believe her.

It didn’t matter now anyway. They were already in Stormwind. It’d taken a few days to cross up from the river but with a mastiff and a wolf-dog, and quite a bit of combat experience, they did just fine.

“C’mon,” she sighed, shooing Pop away from Lawrence’s side for at least the tenth time that hour. “Leave him be.”

Pop sniffed at her hand and gave her fingers a lick. Probably tasted the small deer she’d taken down earlier that day. He’d had his fill of the guts but always wanted a bit extra.

“You think she’ll be in the manor or the castle?” Lawrence asked, okay again now that Pop had been distracted.

“Castle, definitely. She can’t be in the manor now, hasn’t really since the confirmation.”

“Why’s that? It’s her family’s place, yeah?”

“Yeah but she’s a Royal now. Can’t go living with nobles when you’re a Royal, the rest of ‘em will get all pissy.”

“Ah, yeah, you’re right.”

They didn’t get many looks until they got closer to the Keep. Even with Pop there, people tended to ignore them. But when they reached the castle and the guards posted near its entrance recognized them, nearby civilians did, too.

“We should hurry,” Lawrence said. “Don’t want to get held up out here. She’ll be inside, in a hidden wing somewhere. Once we’re in we can ask a guard.”

“Okay.” Victoria wasn’t really one to rush, but Lawrence was right. If they got held up out here it would only take that much more time to see Luciana for themselves.

And then did, once they got Pop and Marge past the guards. Victoria was willing to bet at least five silver that Lars had brought in enough weapons to supply the entire squadron and they’d let him in without a fuss. They were Amadeus, after all.

Shauna got pretty excited when she heard Luciana’s voice through the first door. The antechamber was nice, cushy, and the bedroom was pretty wide and spacey. Enough room for them all to hang around.

“Shauna!” Luciana cried, smiling widely and throwing her arms out. She was in bed, fully dressed for once and buried under the thick duvet. She was cold, probably. Even the hearth was lit. She must have lost a lot of muscle.

Shauna was yipping and crying and had to try twice to jump on the bed because of her furiously wagging, crooked tail. “Hey to you too, Luce,” Vic said, smiling and going to sit on the bed to pet the frantic Shauna.
“Hey, Vic,” she said. “Hey, Law.”

“Hi, welcome back.”

“We the last ones in?” Victoria asked.

“Yeah, Lars snuck in on day two,” Luciana said. “He’s out with the others right now.”

Victoria looked around the room. She and her dogs were there, with Lawrence. Enaeon and Kain were there, too, discussing something in the corner. She gave them a little wave in greeting. “Hey, guys,” she said.

“Hello, Victoria,” Enaeon responded. “How have you been?”

“Alright.” She patted Pop on the head. “Got these big lugs while I was out.”

“I can see that.” He was smiling, at least. Kain looked passively angry. He had for a while, before she’d left.

“So, what happened?” Victoria asked, turning to Luciana.

“I got ambushed, shaman did something with the air so you wouldn’t hear me call for reinforcements,” Luciana answered easily. Shauna had placed herself on the blanket, nestled between Luciana’s legs, and had her head lain over the woman’s stomach. She was still whining quietly, her tail thumping the blankets. “Captured, tortured for a few months. Poisons, fire, whips mostly. Some illusions. Ugly stuff. Escaped, went to Darnassus. Malfurion Stormrage healed me. One of his warriors, Lureith, helped me get to Ironforge, then Stormwind.”

“Nice little adventure you had,” Victoria joked, reaching over to pet Shauna. “You didn’t send word ahead? Followed?”

“Yeah, chances of being recaptured.”

“Better that you didn’t, then.”

“Malfurion thought so, too. Anyway, I’m back now.”

“Yep.”

She was smaller, less defined, but still very much Luciana. Her hands were still big, she still had those palm scars from the cliffs – Lawrence had told her that story, long ago. When she looked up, spoke to Victoria, she still had that look of intelligence in her eyes. There wasn’t as much confidence, and it might take a while to build that back up. But the core of her personality, what made her Luciana, was still there.

“Why don’t you tell me about it while the two boys get us something to eat?” Victoria said. “Marge can go with ‘em. Eh, ya big pile of drool?”

Marge groaned, and obviously decided not to get up. Kain looked at Victoria meaningfully when he passed and she smiled grimly. She knew that look and while she didn’t feel at all threatened by it, the meaning of it stood.

Victoria patted the bed next to her and Pop hopped up, settling at the foot. His bright amber eyes stared at Luciana unflinchingly. Usually he wasn’t so good with new people. “Wolf dog?” Luciana asked, reaching out to let him sniff her fingers. He gave them a few licks for good measure.

“Yeah. I knew they weren’t real. But...well.”

“Talk to me.”

Luciana quietly recounted the things they’d shown her – Anduin, begging for her to talk. Varian, telling her not to. She mentioned not being sure of reality when she’d woken up in Teldrassil, of still being unsure whenever she woke from a deep sleep in her own bed.

“Anything we can do to help?” Victoria asked.

Luciana smiled down at Shauna, who wagged her tailed briefly. She’d gotten tuckered out on the walk to the Keep, and meeting her old owner had tired her the rest of the way. “Touch,” she said quietly. “I can’t trust sight or sound, and sometimes not scent. But always touch.”

“Alright.” Victoria reached out to pat her knee a couple of times. “You get nightmares?”

“Yeah. They’re memories. Battle fatigue,” she supplied.

“Yeah, I know how that goes. Should we wake you out of ‘em?”

“No, not unless I start screaming.”

“Alright.”

“If I get tangled in the sheets it’s like I’m chained again,” she added.

“We’ll watch for that.”

Victoria ceded her place to Lawrence when they arrived with food. He was going to start talking numbers with her, organize a guard rotation and whatever else they were planning. He was good with numbers, could fit them all together. Victoria didn’t have the knack for that, though she could remember them if someone else figured them out.

“I’ll leave Shauna with you now, considering she was yours first,” Victoria said. “I’m gonna go walk Pop around the Keep, let him get used to it and show him how to get back outside.”

“Alright. What about Marge?”

“She can make her own decisions. She’s a big girl. Eh, you lump?” Victoria nudged the mastiff’s side and the dog sighed mournfully. “Ah, she’s tired from the walk here. C’mon, Pop. Let’s go scare the pants off some nobles.”

Luciana’s laughter was a beautiful thing to hear, Victoria decided. Open, rich, shoulder-shaking laughter. Nice noise. She hoped the Prince knew how to appreciate things like that.
Luciana was quieter than before, but just as intelligent. Lawrence could tell that she’d lost some confidence in her own abilities but it wouldn’t be long before they returned. She was tough. He could still remember, clear as day, watching her climb the cliffs bared-handed all the way to the top. She’d started bleeding halfway through, hadn’t even paused, and when she’d reached the top she’d screamed down at them. She was willing to bleed for them. She’d proven herself worthy of them. Now they had to return the favour.

They’d had a rough start, after losing Michael. They hadn’t had any confidence in her, as she was noble-born and nobles had a well-earned reputation for being selfish and carelessly with the lives of their soldiers. But she was always on the frontline with them, fighting. She was a warrior more than a noble.

Though she didn’t look it at the moment, Lawrence knew she was still stronger than most of them. Maybe Enaeon was stronger than her, and maybe Christopher could match her. But she was made of stern stuff. She just had to see that again.

They’d all been together in the castle for maybe a day when Lawrence had sought out Christopher. He’d been staying with Luciana’s brother Bannister, and the two were apparently sweet on each other, so he would know more about her childhood than the rest of the squadron.

“What was it like, for her?” Lawrence asked quietly. He was on duty with Chris and Enaeon was, as always, at Luciana’s side. The others were either out in the city, or resting in one of three rooms assigned to them. The two rooms to the side of Luciana’s chambers had been hastily modified and now resembled barracks. It was fine with them.

“It was hard. She was a warrior but her mother tried to force her into being a Lady. Really messed her up. She killed a kid in the Academy, didn’t know she was a berserker until then. Gave her more issues, with control especially.” Christopher described how her brothers had been forced to intervene, eventually being the ones to carry her out of the manor by horse and to the Academy in the Old Town.

“That must have been rough. And her father didn’t step in?”

“He doesn’t really have the most willpower,” Christopher said quietly. Luciana and Enaeon were talking about something in muted tones, and the draenei was getting excited. Luciana was smiling, at least. “That’s why she took to the King so easily. He actually knows how to be a parent.”

“Hm.” Lawrence sighed heavily. “You think she’s gonna be okay?”

“She will be. She’s tough, man. You’ve seen her. Even after her kid brother was killed and chopped up she kept going.”

“I feel like we didn’t get the full story on that,” Lawrence said quietly. “She never talked about it.”

“Why in fel would she want to? She’s the one that found his body.” Christopher shrugged. “I think you’re a little paranoid about things like this.”

Lawrence copied his shrug. “I just want to know the whole story. Makes it easier to organize. I wouldn’t ask her about it, anyway. Not right now.”

“Yeah. Yeah, I think she’ll be okay. In a little while. You see her eyes? No confidence. We gotta
“Get that back up.”

“How would we do that?”

“I think Kain had the right idea. Get her strong again.”

“She’s already strong, Chris.”

“I mean, warrior strong. Body strong.”

“What about her mind? That’s the worst, when you can’t think properly.”

“Yeah. I dunno, shadow priest?”

“Vic told me she said touch helps. She was subject to some bad illusionary stuff. Sight and sound, she said, she can’t always trust.”

“So, touch it is. What, hugs? Hand-holding?”

“Whatever comes up, I guess.”

“Alright. Easy enough. Hey, you hear yet?”

Lawrence looked away from Luciana and Enaeon. “Hear what?”

“She and the Prince are planning on having a kid.”

“Really?” Lawrence leaned back into his chair. “Now?”

“Yeah, she says her body can do it now but if she went back to warrior form she couldn’t. So she’s gonna put on a bit more weight, have a kid, and then start training again.”

“Is she worried about the nobles?”

“She doesn’t give a rat’s ass about them,” Christopher retorted quietly. “She’s doing it for her. She wants something good to come out of this whole mess.”

“Wonder what she’ll name them.”

“Frederic, if it’s a boy.”

“That might be awkward.”

“Yeah, maybe. Llane?”

“Isn’t that the Prince’s middle name?”

Lawrence was already running the numbers. Two more weeks for continued eating, nine months for gestation and birth, two more weeks for recovery, between two and five months for training. They’d have plenty of time to get her back on her feet. Well, she was already on her feet. On her horse, then.

“How’s Thunderer?”

“He’s been in the stables this whole time. Seems he can tolerate the Prince alright. Enough to let him out for runs around the pastures every day, anyway.”
“Good enough. Maybe she should see the horse. Might help her.”

“Probably. What’re you thinking?”

“Supplies. If she wants a kid she’s going to need a lot of supplies. And people. Handmaids, midwives, nannies, healers. If she’s going to breastfeed that’ll add on to total time. If she’s going straight into training after the initial recovery she’ll need wet nurses.”

“I think we’ll leave you to that,” Christopher said with a cheeky grin. Lawrence gave his shoulder a shove.

“Fuck off. I’m smarter than you.”

“Nerd.”

“Idiot.”
Things had honestly gone better than Luciana could have hoped. So much so that she often doubted that she was actually home. Too many times she woke to a dark room, surrounded by dark masses and shadows, and her mind automatically filled in the blanks - she was in the cell, they'd given her a rest period, and they were going to hurt her again. Show her Anduin, show her Varian, strung up and bleeding.

But after she adjusted to being awake, she's remember. She was home. Anduin still loved her and loved to touch her, she had Shauna back and the dog had remembered her, Varian had helped her through the worse of the initial public attention, and her squadron was with her. They’d been removed from the main forces of the army and made her permanent personal guard. It was a nice arrangement, and they’d all accepted her back into their lives with minimal difficulty. She'd honestly expect at least Daniel and Lawrence to refuse, or move on. But they'd all flocked to her side the moment they’d learned she was alive. And Enaeon was almost more excited to look after her during her planned pregnancy than anyone else involved.

It had been almost two weeks since she’d returned, and she’d been eating and sleeping better with each passing day. And every night, though she suffered from hallucinations and terrible nightmares, she huddled up under the covers with Anduin beside her, soft like he’d always been and solid like a wall at her back. Sometimes he’d wake her from a nightmare, just as it began, with quiet words and soothing Light. She often wondered how he knew, and she never asked. It was nice to wake up with his hands on her skin, brushing off the dregs of the bad memories. He was so careful with her that sometimes it made her cry a bit, press up against him.

Sometimes, he’d wake her after one of his own nightmares, needing reassurance that she was home now to stay, still there with him. She never minded him waking her like that because it was nice to know that he cared so much for her, wanted and needed her despite her current lack of physical strength. She couldn't protect him, not the way she was, but at least she could still give him happiness. Some of those nights he’d kiss her softly, murmur how it was nothing, he was just checking she was still there, he had missed her a lot, you know?

And some nights he’d brush his lips over her shoulder, and she’d turn to face him and he’d kiss her mouth and pull her closer, and he’d want her. He’d want her but he would touch, caress, kiss, until she initiated it and then he’d take her so gently, whispering into her ear how much he loved her.

This was one of those nights, where he ran a wide, hot hand over her back and she mouthed at his throat. She could feel the vibration of his moan under her tongue. “Lucy,” he sighed, turning onto his back. She moved with him, ground her hips down. She'd didn't like being underneath him so much. It was harder to control things when his weight was bearing down on her weakened form. It'd only taken once for him to learn that she couldn't handle having her hands immobilized, especially not above her head. Only once. The bed had disappeared from under her and she’d felt cold and pain, and he'd seen it coming the moment it started. That had been a long night.

“Anduin,” she murmured. She almost tasted the word. She watched him move in the low light. It was hypnotizing, to see his beautiful smooth skin roll over his muscles. Luciana moved her hands over his abdomen, watching her tan skin contrast with his dark tones. Her hands were scarred, her arms marked by battle, and Anduin’s hands were firm on her skin when he ran his hands up her arms.

“Luciana,” he murmured. “I missed you, you know.”
“I know.” She smiled, leaned down to kiss softly across his chest to his shoulder. She licked it experimentally, felt his hands grip tighter at her hips, and she sucked at the skin. He hummed and she felt it in his chest, with her own pressed against it so tightly. “I missed you, while I was in Teldrassil. I was worried that you’d found someone else.”

“No one could ever find anyone who could replace you,” he replied. He slid one finger inside her, curled towards him and moving slowly. She sighed, lifted her hips to give him more room. They were both already naked. Sleeping in her bedroom had the advantage of partially isolating them from the others, whether it was Varian or the squadron, and they didn’t have to hold back quite so much. She’d insisted they sleep in her room. She liked to feel Anduin’s skin against hers. When she woke in the middle of the night she could feel the bare heat of him, and it soothed away a nightmare before it could work her into an attack.

“Mm.” Luciana bit her lip, holding back a moan. “Right there,” she exhaled against his chest, sliding her hand up the hard planes of muscle. “Ah...” He had added a second finger to stretch her out a bit more. She’d not quite adjusted to him fully yet, or she would have simply slid his hard length into herself already. “Oh.” She sighed.

“Allright?”

“Oh, yes.”

Anduin’s other hand caressed all of the soft spots he remembered - along her spine, though the scar issue had dulled much of it, above her hips, the backs of her arms, along the base of her neck, the back of her head just below the hairline. She kissed him, slowly, didn’t mind the morning breath and tasted along the lines of his lips. He groaned into her mouth, took his hand back and licked his fingers clean with a mischievous glint in his eyes.

“Allright?” he asked.

“Yeah.”

She leaned down, laying over his chest and reached down to guide him into her. It was a bit tight, and she savoured it, the hard hot length and the settle of her thighs around his hips. She picked herself back up slightly, enough to kiss him, and rolled her hips slowly. Anduin let out a soft, strangled groan. “Oh Light. Lucy. It’s hot. Oh.”

“It should be,” she responded, finding a good angle and pace. She had always enjoyed the noises Anduin made and now she savoured every little gasp, throaty moan, the vibrations in his throat and chest. “Oh, I missed you,” she said, brushing her lips over his jaw. “I missed you. All I wanted. This is all I wanted. Just... touch.” Sight and scent, she couldn't trust. But this, the feel of his skin against hers, she knew was real. Nothing could imitate it. His hands cupped her buttocks, moved her faster and he ground his hips up against her, thrusting up. She moaned, let her forehead rest against his shoulder and enjoyed the sensations radiating up from her crotch. “Oh, you cheater,” she said without any real heat when he used his Light to make her feel hot, make her feel pleasure that thrilled up her spine and down her legs. “Oh, fuck. Oh.” She tightened briefly, involuntary, at the sudden rush of sensation.

“Do you want me to stop?” he asked, teased, and the Light faded somewhat.

“Anduin, please,” she moaned. “Don’t stop. Don’t... Keep doing that. Oh, fuck.” He adjusted his position on the mattress, his thrusts deeper and harder. “Oh!” Her hand gripped at his hair, tugged it when she moved to make him go deeper, further into her, tried to draw out each thrust. “Oh, fuck. Anduin. I’m gonna come.”
“Then come,” he panted, struggling to keep his pace relatively even. “Come, Lucy. Come on.”

“Anduin,” she moaned. “Oh, don’t stop. Don’t… don’t stop.” A shiver ran up her spine, originating from its base, when the Light grew more intense. She felt like she was burning but it was a pleasurable sensation, hot and bright under her skin. “I’m gonna come,” she said breathily. “Oh, I’m gonna come. Mm, gonna…” Her breath stalled, and she tightened around him before her back tensed and jumped and she came, letting out her breath in a shaking high-pitched moan.

“Lucy, fuck,” Anduin gasped, his hands still moving her hips. “Oh, Light, Lucy.” He groaned as he came, abdomen flexing under hers. “Light's will, oh.”

She calmed first, legs still clamped tight on either side of his hips. She sighed shakily, shifted so she was lying more comfortably on his chest, her legs stretched out and pressing against his. When he relaxed, breathing hard, she leaned up to kiss his lips gently.

“I love you,” he sighed quietly, running his hands from her hips to her shoulder blades and back down, slowly and lovingly. “I really do.”

“I know. I love you.” She let her head loll for a moment, and then sighed heavily and sat up. He was still inside her, not yet fully soft, and she relished feeling him stiff inside her. It made it real, made it so that she knew he was real. “I’ll be right back,” she said quietly, and lifted her hips. He slid out of her and she smiled when he screwed his eyes shut at the sensation.

She tottered to the washroom, her legs weak and jelly-like for the moment. It was nice to have that feeling from such a pleasurable experience, rather than from her damnable weakness. She went slowly, unrushed, sat down on the cold toilet seat to pee. It took a moment to find the bar of soap at the sink, as Luciana hadn’t turned the werelights up past their dimmest setting.

She returned to Anduin, who had already burrowed back under the duvet. The nights were chilly this time of year, and though the hearth was lit, it was still much better to curl up in bed with him.

Anduin hummed in contentment when she pulled the covers back up. He turned over, laid his arm over her waist. He kissed her temple softly, buried his nose against her hair and sighed. “Love you,” he murmured. “My wife.” She felt his chest move with his laughter and he pressed another smiling kiss to her temple.

“Sleep, Anduin.”

She felt his sleepy smile, let it warm her. It was nice, to have a home like this.
When she woke in the morning, Anduin was already up and about. He wasn’t dressed, not really, only wearing a pair of pyjama pants and a housecoat, but he was sitting at the round table, spoon halfway to his mouth, papers in the other hand.

“You should bring the spoon up the rest of the way,” Luciana pointed out, sitting up and stretching. Anduin looked up, saw her and smiled. It lit up his face. “Good morning,” he said, watching her roll to the side of the bed to grab her pyjamas from her nightstand. She still grew cold easily, and they were made of the highest quality ram’s wool imported by Amadeus. In truth, they were a gift from her eldest brother.

Luciana stood and shoved her feet into her slippers before shuffling over to the table. “Morning,” she said, leaning down to kiss him briefly. “Did you leave enough for me?”

“Ha, ha,” he said flatly. “Yes, there’s enough for you. Look, an entire meal! Incredible!”

“Don’t sass me,” she said, ruffling his hair. His cowlick was as persistent as ever and he always had terrible bed head in the morning. She kissed the top of his head again before sitting down. “What’re you looking at so early?” she asked, glancing at the clock in the corner. “It’s not even nine.”

“Handmaidens,” he said simply. “Father wants to find you a handful of good ones while you’re pregnant.”

“I ain’t yet,” she grumbled.

“You might be. What, two weeks already?”

“About that. I don’t think it’s going to happen that quickly.”

“You never know,” he shrugged. “When are you supposed to get your next period?”

“Um.” She did a bit of mental calculating. “Last week.”

Anduin was still for a moment, then looked up at her blankly. “Last week,” he repeated. “After we had sex at least four times a day for five days straight.”

“Uh, yeah.” She nodded once, slowly, and bit into a piece of toast. It had cooled mostly but was still tasty. She added a bit more jam.

Anduin inhaled deeply, and let it out slowly. “I’m gonna go get Enaeon,” he said quickly, getting to his feet and walking normally to the newly-built passage to the squadron’s first room.

He returned with Enaeon, who seemed absolutely delighted to be there at nine o’clock in the
morning. “If you stand I will do a simple inspection,” he said.

“Alright, alright,” Luciana sighed, standing and holding her arms away from her body. Enaeon’s large hand covered her entire abdomen, and the Light penetrated her flesh easily. He then held both hands at either side of her hips, about an inch from her skin, and returned his hand to her abdomen.

“Yes, I think so,” he said, still concentrating on her. “It is early, and I am not so sure it will last. Human embryos are often flushed from the system if they are not strong enough so that the female does not waste resources on...”

“We know,” Luciana interrupted. “It’s there?”

“Yes, it is.”

“Good.” She smiled briefly. “I’d like to eat breakfast now, if you don’t mind.”

“Yes, of course,” Enaeon nodded. “Lots of calories. Lots of fruits and vegetables, some fats, protein, carbohydrates from bread and potatoes and rice, fiber and calcium and iron. I will tell the kitchens to adjust your meals.”

“Ah... I’m not sure that’s...” She and Anduin watched him hurry out of the room with a wide smile in place. “...necessary, quite yet?” she finished weakly. “Okay. Whatever makes him happy.”

Anduin chuckled. His hands were wringing the belt of his housecoat nervously. “You’re pregnant,” he giggled. “Holy Light. You’re pregnant.”

“Yes. Apparently.” She pointed with her fork, a piece of melon speared on it, to his food. “You should finish eating. You’re going to need your energy, too.” But she couldn't help the smile that grew on her face in response to his happiness.

“Yeah. Okay.” He managed a few more bites before standing. “I’m going to go and tell Father.”

“Anduin,” she groaned, catching his hand as he passed her. “We should wait until it’s past a month, or it might just get flushed out.”

“Your period is a week late,” he said. “It would have happened already.”

She sighed, released his hand. “Whatever makes you happy,” she said, smiling when he giggled nervously again and went to open the passageway to Varian’s room. Luciana hurried to eat a bit more, knowing that when Varian found out she’d likely be having a child - his grandchild - in nine months, he would be very... enthusiastic. For so long his family had been all of two people. She knew that he’d watched his father die to an assassin’s blade, one who had supposedly been a friend. He’d held his wife as she died to an errant stone thrown during the Freemason troubles. He’d nearly been lost, himself, and Anduin had been close to death more than once. It would make him unbearably happy to know that his family was going to gain a member for once.

She was right. She heard an exclamation of excitement, some drawers slamming shut. She knew he slept naked and was probably hurrying to dress. She sighed, put down her fork, finished chewing her melon and stood a good few feet away from the table.

Varian popped into the room and with three long strides was hugging her tightly, laughing joyously. “You’re pregnant!” he cried.

“Yes, I am!” she responded.
He pulled back, stared at her with a stupid grin, and then kissed her forehead and hugged her again. In his excitement he practically picked her up off the floor. “Oh, my Light,” he said, a disbelieving mutter against her hair. “Congratulations, the both of you!” He loosened his arms enough for Luciana to breathe properly, and see Anduin blushing scarlet. Varian had a very knowing look on his face.

“Don’t tease him,” she grumbled. “That’s my job now.”

“I’ll split the duties with you,” Varian joked, and then he looked down at her, smiled, and hugged her again, gentler this time, holding her protectively. “Oh, I’m happy. And happy for you, too, I guess.”

“You fucking...” she started, then cleared her throat. “I mean, thank you. So much.”

Varian’s chest bounced when he laughed, and finally he actually released her. “Make sure you eat well,” he instructed. “Tiffin didn’t get enough vitamins and was an unholy terror for the entire first trimester. Maybe that’s where you came from,” he said to Anduin.

“Father! I am clearly a perfect embodiment of priestly virtue,” he said, mocking offense with hand over her heart. Luciana would have added something but Enaeon came back in, grinning, with an entire tray of fruit.

“I brought you fruit!” he said, completely unnecessarily. “Oh, good morning, Your Majesty,” he said, bowing his head to Varian for a moment. “I brought you fruit!”

“Yes, I see that,” Luciana said dryly, and sighed. “I surrender. Just... no blueberries.”

“She likes fresh mint leaves,” Anduin added.

“Yes. Yes I do.”

“That is good. Mint has good things. It helps digestion and can help with nausea and headaches, and reduce feelings of tiredness and depression. It is also good when breastfeeding. The oils help to prevent skin cracks on the...”

“Not there yet,” Luciana interrupted, seeing Anduin’s face turn red again. It was cute, actually, how easily he blushed at casual things, and yet he could handle traumatic and horrific injuries without a second thought. Varian clapped his shoulder, laughing at his discomfort. “Just give me the damn fruit,” she grumbled. “Feel like a fucking circus animal.”

She ate in silence while Anduin continued to peruse the selection of possible handmaids. Varian stayed for a short while, but he had his own day planned out and when he left he kissed the top of Luciana’s head. “Take care of yourself,” he murmured quietly. Anduin hadn’t heard him, and Luciana offered a short smile around a mouthful of grapes.

Enaeon was insufferable and tried to make her eat the entire tray full of fruit. “I couldn’t eat this much at once if I was twice my size!” she exclaimed, holding up her hands to fend off his insistence. “Seriously, I get it - you want to make sure this goes well. I do too, trust me. But enough with the fucking fruit! I’ll have more later!”

“I will make sure,” he warned with a toothy smile, standing with the rest of the fruit. “I will bring it to Victoria, then. She will enjoy it.”

“Go on,” Luciana sighed. “Me and Anduin need to talk, I think.”
Enaeon nodded in understanding. “I will tell the others you are still asleep.”

“Thanks.”

Luciana sighed quietly, leaning back in her chair. She watched Enaeon close the passageway behind him, and looked over to Anduin. He had been watching her eat with an amused smile. Seeing her serious expression, he sobered. “What do you want to talk about first?” he asked.

“I know we said we wanted to do this,” she started. “Or, at least, I wanted to and you agreed. But are you sure you want to have a kid now? You’ll be twenty-two when they’re born.”

Anduin smiled softly. “That would make me two years older than Father was when I was born. I’m sure, Lucy.”

“I don’t know how much time I’ll be able to spend with you and the kid after a certain point,” she said. “I’m going to want to start training again within a month after the birth. I’ll breastfeed for that time and then get wet nurses who know what they’re doing. Or formula. I hear it’s gaining popularity and we’ll have the best people in the kingdom. It’ll be up to you, mostly, to keep up with the kid. I’ll help raise them but if I can I want to go back to the army within a reasonable time period.”

“I thought you would,” Anduin sighed. “I wish...” He wet his lips, thinking on his words before he said them. “If it were up to me, I’d find you something safer where you could still command troops and fight. I don’t want to even chance losing you again. But it’s not up to me and while I might feel strongly about it I know I can’t make you do anything.” Luciana listened with a neutral expression, trying to give him a chance to say everything he wanted to before she responded. Anduin was blinking quickly, sniffed once, and looked away for a moment. His voice wavered, close to tears, when he spoke again. “I don’t want to lose you again, Luciana.”

“You won’t,” she said quietly.

He nodded a few times loosely, chewing on the inside of his cheek. “I won’t stop you if that’s what you want. I know you were happy there. I just... If there was something you could do that was similar to it, but kept you in Stormwind more, would you consider it?”

“I would.”

“And if I couldn’t find something, would you at least visit more often?”

“As often as I can. I’ll add a mage to my squadron,” she said, and reached over the table for his hand. “Then I can visit every week.”

He took her hand, squeezed it for a moment and brushed his thumb over her knuckles with a watery smile. “Good enough,” he said. “As for child-rearing, I think I’ll have it covered. I’m good with kids, and Father will be more than happy to help. Also, you know... we have an entire kingdom to choose from for babysitters.”

“I can only imagine how happy he’d be to help,” Luciana said, smiling and leaning back in her chair. Anduin did the same, returning the expression easily. “I thought he was going to burst earlier.”

“He’s excited. For so long, it’s been just us,” Anduin explained. “We’ve nearly lost each other more times than I’d like to count. To think now, the family’s growing again...” He cleared his throat, and Luciana saw his ears redden at the tips.
“Kind of like I’ll be growing?” she joked, and his ears turned bright red. “You’re going to need to get used to the fact that you made me pregnant, you know.”

“Like I got used to you talking dirty?”

“You like it.” His cheeks blushed brightly now. "You can handle blood and gore and screaming, and all kinds of nasty things, but the moment I say something even remotely sexual you light up. Why is that, I wonder?"

He sighed heavily. "Because you tease me."

Luciana grinned at him cheekily. “So, I suppose I shouldn’t say things like...”

“Don’t,” he said, holding up a finger in warning. The colour of his face and neck made it completely ineffective, and Luciana slid from her seat, still grinning.

Anduin watched her warily when she circled around to stand behind him. She slipped her hands over his chest, hung over his shoulder, and whispered into his ears. “Just think,” she murmured, her lower lip brushing against the shell of his ear. “You made me pregnant. You came inside me, impregnated me with your seed...” Anduin swallowed thickly and she brushed her lips against his ear. “It’s going to grow in my womb, slowly at first, and people will think I’ve just gained a little weight. And then it’s going to be obvious that I’m pregnant, and everyone’s going to know how much you fucked me when I came home.”

He inhaled sharply through his nose, swallowed again. “Lucy,” he said quietly.

“Just think, Anduin,” she continued, as though he hadn’t spoken at all. “A little baby, half you and half me. Everyone will say how romantic it is that we had a child after I was tortured, but we’re both going to know the truth. That the reason it happened so soon after I came home was because you fucked me so much, came inside me every day, and I had a meeting with publicists with it still inside me. And when Bannister stopped by here, before leaving for his Chevalier business with Desmond, he had no idea that you came inside me not ten minutes before. He had no idea that my legs were still weak from how hard you made me come around your cock.”

Her hand caressed slow circles on his chest, and she could see a bulge in his pyjama pants. “And now every time the squadron, or Varian, or the servants or the guards see us, they’re going to know. They knew we fucked often, but now? They’re going to know that you must have come inside me, and they’ll try to imagine how often...” His breathing was deeper, heavier now, and she relished the quick rise and fall of his chest under her palm. “But they’re not going to know that you licked along every line on my back as you fucked me. They’re not going to know that I knelt under your desk and you came down my throat. They’re not going to know that I tied you to the bed-frame, spread out and so lovely under me and teased you until you cried and begged.”

His head lolled back when she tipped his chin up with her fingertips. She brushed her lips over the sensitive skin on his neck and he moaned softly. “They’re not going to know that I can reduce you to a ragdoll just by talking about all the lovely things I want you to do to me, or that I’d love to you to you. Wouldn’t it feel so good to be inside me right now? I fit so perfectly around your cock, Anduin, don’t I? My cunt is so hot, just tight enough, and when you come inside I can feel your cock twitching, and I know what kind of faces you make, what kind of sounds I can draw from your throat if I move just right...”

“D-didn’t you want to talk about some things?” he said, weakly, his breath uneven.

“I did. I’m talking right now, aren’t I?” she said, licking at the hollow behind his ear. He shivered
and inhaled sharply. “I’m going to have a child,” she said. “Your child. The one you made inside me, and the one you’re going to watch swell in my belly. How proud you’ll be, a new father, when it’s born. And I’m going to be left empty again, and I’m going to fill myself with you every night. Every morning, too. And maybe every day.”

His hands were gripping the chair arms tightly. Luciana reached down and palmed the bulge in his pants and he whimpered quietly. “Feels good, doesn’t it? You love it when I touch you. I love it when you touch me, Anduin. How much better will it feel when I’m fucking you?”

“Luciana,” he groaned, bucking his hips up into her hand. She smiled against the side of his neck, kissed along his shoulder and pushed the housecoat down his arm with her other hand.

“Lovely, isn’t it? To have a wife who loves your body so much. Won’t it be so nice when I have a warrior’s body again? I know you like this one, too, but you liked the muscles so much. I can’t wait to get them back and pin you down, take you like I did on our wedding night. You remember that, don’t you? Maybe you can get lingerie like that satin piece and I can lick you all over, like I did the first time I took you. Would you like that?”

“Yes,” he moaned breathily. She slowly slipped her hand down the front of his pants and he exhaled sharply, bucking his hips again.

“You know, when you’re asleep sometimes I’ll lie on my back, look over at your face and imagine all of the expressions you make when we fuck. I’ll make myself come, remembering how hard and thick and hot you are inside me, how full you make me feel. All of those little noises you make, so lovely, and your smooth skin under my rough hands. You know,” she said conversationally. “When I have my old body type, when I’m thick and strong and my hands are rough and leave bruises on your thighs... Wouldn’t that be nice? I can throw you on the bed, hold you down and take what I want... And you’ll be so sweet under me. You remember what that’s like? To have someone bigger than you take you?”

“Yes,” he sighed, leaning his head back. “Oh Light, Lucy, that feels good.”

“It sounds good too, doesn’t it? I can hardly wait,” she said, kissing a spot between his shoulder and neck before sucking on it, hard, and making him moan. “I’m all wet, you know, thinking about it. Thinking about all of those times these past two weeks when you were on your back, and it felt so good Anduin, you made me feel so good and I came so many times... My legs around your hips, my cunt around your cock, squeezing so tight... Does it feel good when I come around you?”

“Oh, Light, yes.”

“Do you want to feel that right now, Anduin?”

“Yes.”

She smiled slowly, licked her lips. “I wonder, how would I like you to fuck me? On the table? On my back, or my stomach? Or do I want to sit in your lap and you can reach around and make me come. Or, maybe I’ll just go take a nice cold shower and we can keep talking like you suggested.”

“Lucy,” he groaned. “Please, I want you.”

“What do you want?” she asked, smiling wickedly and brushing her fingertips along his length. His breath jumped in his throat.

“Lucy, I want to touch you, I want to be inside you.”
“What would you like? On the table? Your lap? Or should we move to the bed and make it interesting?”

He licked his lips, looked over his shoulder and she reveled in the heat and the weight of his gaze when he met hers evenly. “The bed,” he said after a moment, and stood slowly. Luciana moved with him and opened his housecoat, slipping it off his shoulders. They let it fall to the ground and he backed her up slowly, leaning down to kiss her. She loosened the tie on his pants as his hands rested on her back, pulling her flush against him.

Anduin turned to sit on the edge of the bed. Luciana pulled her shirt over her head and he ran his hands over her stomach. He cupped her breasts, fondled them gently, leaned forward and kissed her scarred skin.

“Lay back,” she commanded softly and he obeyed. She slowly pushed her pants down, left them on the floor to kneel on the bed. She crawled over to him slowly and leaned down to kiss him. He moaned into her mouth and she savoured the taste of coffee that lingered on the tip of his tongue. “Oh, Anduin,” she sighed, nestling against his hips. “You have no idea how much I love your touch.”

“I have some idea,” he mumbled, flattening his hands on her back and pulling her gently down.

“Mm, do you?” she murmured, smiling against his mouth. “Maybe I should show you, just in case. You know,” she said, using her hand to slowly slip his length into her. “You’re going to come in me again. The same seed that impregnated me.”

“I don’t...” he gasped, “know whose else it could be.”

“Oh, no one,” she said responded, moaning and smiling slightly when his fingers found her clit. “Oh, that’s nice,” she sighed, rolling her hips slowly. It was nice, she decided, to have a husband with such lovely hands. He knew how to show his appreciation of her, and he knew even better how to make her appreciative of him.
Distraction

Luciana was glad to be home. Not simply because Anduin knew her body, knew almost thoughtlessly when and where to touch and how hard or how soft, not simply because his mouth was hot on her skin and sometimes just the thought of his tongue at her vulva was enough to make her wet - though they were nice things to think about. She was glad to be home because after sex, when she felt like jelly and he was panting, kissing at her neck and lips, he was so sweet to her. After, he made sure he hadn’t gotten too rough, because although she liked it rough it could still hurt her or make her bleed. He was always the one to get up to get her water or pull the blankets up if they were going to sleep. She could lay back and bask in it, in the sensations still lingering in her muscles and skin and sometimes Anduin’s Light trickled up her skin like a snow-melt brook in the spring, utterly familiar and safe. She had missed him, his silences and his endless talking, the way he knew how to make her feel safe, how to remind her she was home when she forgot.

She wondered, countless times, what she’d done to deserve him. He knew the blood on her hands covered her all the way up to her shoulders and then some, he knew she enjoyed killing and savoured the sound of breaking bones, and he loved her anyway. She’d told him some of the things she could do - crush someone’s neck in her hand, smash their helmeted skull under her heel, even the time she’d squeezed someone in half at the waist. But he was so careful when he touched her, careful not to rush, careful to make sure she didn’t feel used or unwanted, that she felt like maybe it didn’t matter.

Like now, when she was lounging in his bed naked while he redressed. He had a soft smile on his face. She reached a hand out and he took it, let her pull him down for a relaxed kiss. “I love you,” she murmured. He smiled against her lips, kissed her again and straightened.

“Was there anything else you wanted to talk about?” he asked.

“Mm, I can’t remember now,” she said, stretching languorously. “I’ll write it down next time so you can’t distract me.”

“If I recall correctly, you distracted me,” he said with a fond smile.

“Ah, but you distracted me first.”

“How did I manage that?” he asked, bemused.

“You’re so beautiful,” she sighed. “I’m always distracted by you.” His ears reddened and he smiled bashfully, ducking his head. “Aw, c’mon,” she said, arching her back to stretch it. “Don’t be like that. Now I can’t see your lovely smile.”

“Stop it,” he scolded. “You know that embarrasses me.”

“That means I’m not doing it enough, obviously.”

“Lucy!”

She laughed, pulled the covers up to her chin and wriggled around under them until she was comfortable. “I’m gonna take a nap,” she said. “You... keep doing whatever you’re doing.”

“Alright. I’ll be quiet.”
“Anduin?” she said.

“Yes?”

“Do you think I’d be a good mother? Even if I’m not always here?”

“I think you’d be a wonderful mother, Lucy. I know you were to Frederic.”

Her face fell, and she quickly turned it into the pillow to hide it. “Yeah.”

“What’s wrong?” Anduin must have heard it in her voice, and a moment later the bed dipped as he sat on the edge. She felt his hand on her hip through the duvet. It was a solid weight, and grounded her. “Lucy?”

“I miss him,” she said quietly. “What if that happens again?”

“It won’t,” Anduin promised. She looked up and his eyes were hard. “I’ll be here, with our child, and if anyone tries to harm them I’ll break them.”

“I didn’t know you were a shadow priest,” she said, understanding what he’d been saying.

“I can use some of the abilities,” he answered shortly. “Not all. But there cannot be Light without Shadow, and it’s possible to find a balance between the two.” He didn’t want to go into it any further, and she didn’t push. It obviously wasn’t something he wanted to discuss yet, and she could be patient.

She hummed, laid her head back down on the pillow. “I’m just worried,” she said. “If I’m not here to protect them, I’ll worry.”

“I know. But they’ll have the entire Royal Guard looking out for them. Personal guards that Father will interrogate himself, SI:7 looking after them from the shadows. Me, making sure they don’t stick their hand in a werelight receptacle.”

She chuckled quietly, and Anduin smiled. He brushed her dark hair away from her forehead, leaned down and kissed her temple. “I just worry,” she said. “I don’t want to be like my Mother. Or my Father, really. He’s a nice man but he couldn’t stand up to his wife. If I ever make you feel like that, Anduin...”

“I’ll speak up,” he promised. “You don’t have to worry about that, at least. You make me feel safe.”

“Even when I’m weak?”

“You’re never weak, Luciana. You’re one of the strongest people I’ve ever known. You make it easy for me to talk to you about anything.”

“I try.”

“I know, and I appreciate it. On our wedding night, I was so nervous,” he said, chuckling lightly at the memory. “I didn’t know what to do. I thought you were making fun of me, for a bit, but you made sure I was comfortable and knew that I didn’t have to do anything. You didn’t say that you loved me, but I knew anyway.”

“I’m glad,” she said, shifting her shoulder against the mattress to a more comfortable position. “I think you’d be a good dad,” she said with a small smile. “You’re patient, caring. You listen to
“I don’t think I’ll be very good at disciplining,” he said with a sheepish grin.

“You know what I think?” she said. “I think I’ll end up being the sappy parent who would let the kid do whatever they want, and you’ll be the strict parent who makes sure I don’t feed them three ice cream cones for dinner.”

He laughed openly. “You know better than to do that,” he said.

“Yeah, but I also know better than to swim in the canals in the middle of winter, but I’ve done that before.”

“No!” he said, acting scandalized. “What would people think of their princess when they hear that?”

“That I’m an Academy brat on a long and elaborately set up dare?”

He laughed again, leaned down to kiss her lips softly. “For what it’s worth,” he said. “I’m really glad I said your name that day.”

“I am, too.”
It's Good to Be Back

Luciana dozed while Anduin continued his work on the handmaid applicants. By the time she felt ready to get up he had a tall stack of folders to his right, and only a handful on his left. Luciana guessed that the taller pile was the ‘no’ pile. She yawned, stretching under the duvet, and Anduin looked up and gave her a radiant smile. “Hey,” she greeted, settled down again with a satisfied groan. “What time is it?”

“Just before noon,” he said.

“Wow. This rate I’ll be eating, sleeping, shitting, and eating again for nine months. Like a baby!”

He snorted a laugh. “Didn’t you do that before?”

“No, there was some weekly gutting thrown in for good measure.”

He was laughing to himself, sipping at a cup of coffee when she rolled out of the bed, landing on her feet and straightening slowly. She stretched her back as she stood, yawned again and scratched at her stomach. Sensation on the skin there had become dulled since the scars had healed over, but it would occasionally itch like fire. The healers said she had some damaged nerves, and that they’d heal or die off completely with time.

“You been working this whole time?” she asked. Anduin had picked up her pyjamas, folded them, and placed them neatly on the nightstand. She was smiling somewhat sheepishly as she dressed, seeing his knowing gaze land on her for a moment.

“Yeah, just about. Did I wake you?”

“No, it was time for me to get up.” She leaned over his shoulder to peek at the last file he was reading, and kissed his cheek. “Anything happen while I was out cold?”

“Daniel popped his head in. He said they were going out back to train, and that he told the hall guards already.”

“How long ago was that?”

“Uh.” Anduin glanced over at the clock. “Maybe forty-five minutes?”

“Alright. I’ll go and yell at them. Light knows they’ve probably missed me screaming at them about their amateur shield arms.”

Anduin leaned back and she kissed him chastely before making her way to her own bedroom. Victoria was sitting in an armchair by the bookshelves, and looked up briefly. Her resting face looked like a glare, but everyone in Amadeus knew that she was actually quite sweet. If she wanted to be. “Hey, Luce,” the woman greeted, completely relaxed. Her wolf-dog, Popsicle, raised his head and sniffed at the air when he saw Luciana. “Had a good night’s sleep? And also some good sex, apparently.”

“Did you hear anything?”

“Nope. But you got a dopey look on your face.”

“Ah, yeah.” Luciana grinned awkwardly and hurried into the bathroom for a quick shower.
She didn’t get dressed right away, knowing that Victoria wouldn’t be bothered by it at all. In fact, the woman barely gave her a glance, engrossed as she was in her book. Luciana peeked over the back of the armchair as she was dressing to see a page spread of a complex disassembled cannon base, and the other page was full of tiny words she could hardly understand. “Having fun?” she asked.

“Yeah,” Victoria said simply. Luciana gave her head a gentle pat as she passed.

Everyone save Victoria was in the back fields sparring when Luciana came outside. “That’s a shield in your hand!” she roared, and everyone jumped. She heard one person’s high pitched scream and looked at Lawrence with both eyebrows raised. “Didn’t know you could go that high, Law,” she said, and turned back to Kain. “Block with it!”

“Yes, Sir,” Kain said with a wide grin. “It’s good to have you back, Cap.”

“Thank you. It’s good to be back. Bend your knees, Jillian! Your center of gravity is lower than his!” Jillian snarled and shifted to worgen form suddenly, making Lars retreat momentarily while the shadowy magic dissipated. “And now it’s not! Lars, bend your knees! Your center of gravity is lower than hers! Straighten your back, crouch, and brace!”

Luciana hadn’t realized how much she’d missed training her squadron until she was yelling at Daniel to tilt his shield down. “You’ll lose an eye to shrapnel if it’s tilted wrong!” she shouted. “Or you’ll lose your entire fucking face to a fireball!”

“Sir!” he responded through gritted teeth, and tilted his shield appropriately.

“Enaeon!” Even the paladin, usually keeping back to heal, was now sparring in full armour against Christopher. His speed had dropped noticeably and he was striving to correct that by fighting against someone who was truly dangerous if he couldn’t keep up. “You’ve got a tail! Use it!”

He grimaced, followed her instructions and lashed out with his tail when Christopher tried to slip around him. His tail was thick and heavy, and Luciana knew it was strong enough to break bones. The soldier now had another weapon to keep watch for.

“Having fun?”

Luciana turned. Genn was leaning against the stone wall of the Keep, hidden mostly in the shadows it cast. It was getting colder out as the year progressed towards winter, though in the sun, exercising, the squadron was sweating bullets. She offered a grin. “You’re damn right I am,” she responded. “If anyone of you can still walk ten paces by tonight you’re all running suicides!”

“No, I got time now. Just let me...” She turned back to her squadron. “If anyone of you can still walk ten paces by tonight you’re all running suicides!”

“Cap, no!” Kain cried. “Mercy!”

“Luce!” Christopher groaned. “I was gonna go and see Bann later!”

“Everyone except Chris!” she corrected. “He needs his energy to fuck my brother later!”
There was a smattering of laughter and Christopher turned a brilliant shade of red, but grimaced and fought on. “Sorry about that,” she said, smiling cheekily at Genn.

“Trust me, I’ve heard worse. Walk with me,” he said, holding his hand out. She approached to stand at his side. “Would you mind if I put my arm over your shoulders?”

“No, go ahead.”

He tucked her into his side, and it reminded her so strongly of the way Varian pulled her close for comfort that she had to remind herself to keep walking. “You looked a bit chilled,” he said, walking her around the Keep, away from the training field. “Varian came to see me earlier. He’s quite excited by the news.”

“Yeah, I could tell,” she said dryly. “He nearly squeezed me to death when Anduin went to tell him.”

Genn smiled briefly. He was warm, and Luciana appreciated it. “He’s not had much reason to be this happy in a long time,” he said. “It’s good to see his spirits raised so high. All of Stormwind will be holding its breath for the next nine months. Gilneas, of course, will celebrate with you.”

“I wouldn’t expect anything else,” she said. “We’re allies, even with the troubles of the wall. That’s in the past now. I’ve fought with your worgen, Genn, and I would trust Jillian with the lives of both my sisters.”

“I know how much your siblings mean to you,” Genn said. “And so I know how much weight your statement holds. Jillian is a good woman. I’m gladened that she has found a place with you.” He was silent for a moment, drawing Luciana into a copse of trees. It cut the wind, and if she hadn’t known Genn so well by this point it would have been suspicious that he was isolating her. “Varian did tell me some of what happened to you while you were in the tender cares of the Horde,” he said. “As you know, he and I have a steady rapport, even outside of our duties.”

“I know,” she said, nodding firmly. “And I’m glad you do. It’s a lonely place at the top and no matter how strong one is, you need friends.”

Genn smiled briefly. “Thank you. I’m glad you understand. I did want to talk to you about your escape, specifically. He told me that you mentioned something dark and heavy that made you move when you felt you couldn’t. You said that it kept you going, even past the point of death...?”

“Yes. Whatever it was, it was controlling my body. Almost like a puppet. I was stuck watching, but I could influence it. I made it go back for clothes, so the sun wouldn’t kill me. I made it go back for my wedding ring. But I was tired, and it kept me walking. First towards the oasis, where I’d been ambushed. But I realized that it must have been a while ago, and no ally would be there waiting. So it turned me around to the north and walked me to Ashenvale. And when I collapsed, it told me to get up, move, walk. I think I heard it, while I was on the hippogryph, reminding me to breathe. I was pretty out of it by that point.”

“Of course,” he nodded. “What sort of impression did you have of this... voice, besides dark and heavy?”

“Old,” she said slowly, thinking. “I’d long been aware of it, I suppose. I had my fury, you know? And the whatever it was had been under my fury, for a while. Not really sure how long. I just sort of noticed it one day. It was dormant, not quite asleep but not active. Waiting, I think, for my fury to thin enough for it to get out. If that makes sense.”
“It does. I’m not necessarily a warrior but I am familiar with fury.”

“Jillian told me about it,” she said. “About the aspect of the pack, and how the first druids to take it lost themselves to the fury it brought.”

“Yes. Did she tell you how we tamed it?”

“Yes, with the Sickle and the blessed waters.”

Genn hummed, turned to face the city. They were overlooking the Cathedral Square, and the Cathedral’s spire towered over the rest of the district. It shone brightly under the sun, ever blessed by the Light of the people that had gathered there over the years. “We all have our beasts,” Genn said quietly. “Some are just more familiar with theirs.”

“I was afraid of mine,” she said. “I learned how not to be. But I don’t know what that dark thing is, or where it came from. It’s not me, not like my fury is me.”

“I have some ideas of what it could mean,” he told her, looking back down again. He was one of the few people she knew who made her feel her actual age. Simply the experience and wisdom in his gaze was enough to remind her that she was, in fact, only twenty-two. Practically still a child, especially compared to him. He was nearing his fifty-third year. “I wouldn’t dare to investigate without your permission. It can be a very personal thing, the fury that lives in us.”

“I know.” She sighed. “Tell me of your ideas, first.”

“Of course.” He nodded once, slowly. “My first thought, when Varian told me how you described it, was that it is the sha. You may have been infected while in the Jade Forest. Some of the areas near Pearlfin Lake were infected during the initial rediscovery of the continent and the ensuing battles against the Horde. It’s possible that it remained dormant in you, subjugated by your fury, until you were sufficiently weakened by starvation and torture. But that it did not use your body to wreak havoc, nor attempt to keep control of you even after you reached safety, indicate that it is not the case. The sha are purely malevolent, and would use their host’s body until it deteriorated completely. That it had retreated voluntarily, leaving you again in full control of yourself, means it is something else entirely.”

“What else could it be?” she asked.

“It may be a spirit of someone who was also held in the cell in which you were tortured. They recognized the pain you felt and latched onto you. That it felt as though it had always been there may have simply been a trick played on your exhausted mind. With enough shared experiences one can feel as though they’ve known another for years. But if the shadow priest that inspected you did not sense it, and Anduin and Enaeon cannot feel it, then it is not a spirit.”

She waited for him to continue, tucking her hands under her armpits to keep them warm. She’d forgotten to grab gloves before leaving the Keep, again.

“The third option is one that I’m not yet sure is a valid one,” he started. “I don’t know how much Varian has told you of his own experiences?” he prompted.

“He told me the whole story on Onyxia,” she said. “About his dual personalities and how he was split into Varian, who had his will, and Lo’gosh, who had his willpower. I know the legend of Lo’gosh and made the connection. He told me about the time he remembers from the gladiatorial rings, and how he got Shalamayne. Anduin also told me a bit. Varian told me that he learned how to control his fury with your help, but he wouldn’t say why he needed to use the methods that you
“I see.” Genn sighed softly, glanced back at the Cathedral. “I would ask him if he minded if I told you, but I know that he wouldn’t. I also know that if I’m correct and this thing inside you, under your fury, is what I believe... This is something you’ll need to know, whether or not he approves.”

“That sounds a bit ominous, Genn.”

“It likely does. Varian is the scion of Goldrinn, the wolf ancient, who is known for his tenacity even against immeasurable adversity. When the Burning Legion first invaded our world ten thousand years ago, he had already lived for an eternity. The ghost wolf slaughtered uncountable demons before he fell to their onslaught. His aid was invaluable to the night elves of Eldre'Thalas in holding their city against the Legion. He vanished after that battle, and was not seen again until recently, during the Cataclysm. At his shrine on Mount Hyjal, heroes fought with his spirit against the Twilight’s Hammer.

"Some of my own men saw his spirit and swore to me that they recognized him from their dreams brought on by the blessed waters. I was told, by one of the oldest night elves still alive, one who lived through the first war with the Legion, that it was Goldrinn’s unyielding will and sheer ferocity that enabled him to push through the boundaries of the afterlife to give aid to our heroes in their time of need. Eventually, he was resurrected, but he yet walks in death, moving freely between realms. I believe he can be found some days at his shrine in Hyjal.”

Luciana was silent for a time. Finally, she said, “Varian is his scion?”

“Yes.”

“Why? How do you know?”

Genn signed heavily. “The first worgen were a result of the pack form that twisted the bodies of the druids who took it. Each druidic form has a source in their demi-gods, the Ancients. The pack form took inspiration from Goldrinn, and as worgen, we can feel his influence whenever we transform. The initial fury, and then the control that we hold over it. The orcs describe him as the spirit of the hunter, the animal instinct that drives us to hunt and feed, to act when our children are in danger. We can feel him, not directly, not actively. But we know him. When Varian’s fury grows, when he fights, I can see Goldrinn’s influence clear as day in him.

"Varian told me of his days in the gladiator’s ring. He fought in Dire Maul, where Goldrinn is said to have fallen into a deep sleep that some took to be true death. He told me of the crowd’s sudden favour towards him, of their chant of the wolf’s orcish name Lo’gosh. I believe, without even a shadow of doubt, that Varian is his scion. As for why...” He hesitated. “There could be many reasons, or there could be none. I cannot claim to know the mind of an Ancient. I only know that Varian’s fury is what drives him, to protect his son, his daughter,” he said, looking at her meaningfully. “His people, his kingdom. It is what drives him to care for them, to provide for them. Perhaps the wolf recognized these instincts in Varian and chose him for his strong will.”

“And you think... what, that Goldrinn favours me?”

“Perhaps. Everyone feels his influence differently. Some describe him as a watcher, others say he is a comfort. You see your fury as something to be carefully controlled, lest you berserk, and that may reflect on how you see his fury. If it is, indeed, his fury that lays underneath yours, dormant only until you have need of it.”

She blinked a few times, turned towards the training fields. “You know, I’m not even sure I
believe in the old tales of the Ancients. I read the sagas the kaldorei wrote while I was in Teldrassil with Malfurion, and he told me about them, but it doesn’t really seem real.”

“Not like the Light is real?” Genn said with a humorous smile.

“Right. I’ve felt the Light, I’ve seen it heal my wounds. Anduin uses it sometimes to soothe me if I’m having a flashback, or wake me slowly if I’m having a nightmare. It’s very real. But I’ve never encountered an Ancient. I’m not discrediting what you feel, but they’re not part of my reality.”

“They’re part of Varian’s,” he said. “He knows he is Goldrinn’s scion. Ask him about it and he will tell you. Have you ever seen his eyes when his fury is woken?”

“They’re yellow,” she said. “They’re blue, usually.”

“Yellow like the wolf’s.”

Luciana looked back to Genn. “So, you think Goldrinn, who chose Varian as his scion, chose me as a host? Or is watching over me, like he does you and your worgen?”

“Perhaps.” Genn shrugged one wide shoulder. “It’s hard to say right now. I can tell just by looking at you that you were near death. Your spirit and your fury suffered for it. They’ll return, slowly at first, but I can smell it whenever I’m near you.”

“Even outside of worgen form?” she asked with a crooked smile.

“Yes, even then.” He offered his arm and she ducked down into his side, glad that he offered the warmth it brought. “Ask Varian about Goldrinn. He will not lie to you. I don’t think he’ll be angry, either, if you explain that I believe it may have been the wolf who kept you from death’s embrace. If it is the sha, Anduin will know how to cleanse you. He learned from Chi-ji, the red crane of Pandaria. If it is a spirit that yet lingers within you, Enaeon will surely know how to help. And if it is Goldrinn...” he trailed off. “Well, I imagine you and Jillian will have something to talk about.”

Luciana smiled briefly as they came back into sight of the training fields. Some off-duty Royal Guards had joined them and the sounds of cheering, jeering, shouting, and clanging echoed against the Keep. “I’ll ask him soon,” she said, looking at Genn. “Thank you.”

“Always a pleasure, Luciana.” He gently squeezed the back of her neck in a familiar gesture and she smiled up at him. “I’ll see you another time.”

“See you.”

She watched him enter the Keep, and turned to the various pairs of fighters. “Amadeus!” she bellowed, and immediately they jerked away from their sparring partners and hurried to line up in front of her. She grinned, watching them brush sweat from their faces or fan themselves with their shirts. Victoria, she saw, had joined them at some point, and she gave the stocky woman a wave.

“Weapons down! We’re gonna have some fun. Enaeon, step out.”

“It’s good to have you back, Captain,” Lars panted.
**Looking to the Future**

Chapter Notes

So I’ve finished writing Oathkeeper, now I just have to upload all the chapters. I’m going to take a little break before writing the third part, which will likely be titled Scarjaw. I don’t think it will be as long as Amadeus or Oathkeeper. I also have a sort of plan to write a fourth story, further into the future when the kiddies are a bit more grown. We’ll see how it goes.

Luciana waited a few days before bringing up what Genn had said to anyone else. She thought it out, looked at the possibilities, and came to a decision. First, she spoke to Enaeon about the possibility of having a spirit haunting her. She made it out to be a mild concern, more of a minor and personal worry, because she had been very close to death and even Malfurion had told her that she’d been on the border between realms. Enaeon checked her over, his Light familiar and friendly - almost playful - and found no trace of any spiritual being. He also made her eat a banana and a handful of strawberries before he let her go.

Next, she spoke to Anduin. She described the dark, heavy thing in brief, and asked if it was possible to pick up the sha like a virus. “I did spend time in the Jade Forest, near an infected patch,” she mentioned, and he looked her over. His Light was soothing, calming, and had already adjusted to her body’s temporarily lowered metabolism. It warded off a chill in her arms while Anduin inspected her for traces of sha energy. “I just want to be sure,” she told him, waving away his concern with a smile. “I mean, I’m pregnant. And I don’t want anything to get in the way of that.” Anduin didn’t find anything and she kissed him briefly in thanks.

She waited until after dinner to speak to Varian. Anduin had another pile of applications waiting for him, but these ones were for midwives. He apparently knew some of the people from all the time he’d spent in the Cathedral and had to consider them carefully. Luciana slipped out of his room, hearing his distracted response to her telling him she was going to speak to Varian.

The King was in his usual place - his personal office. The logistics of running an interplanetary military force were immense, and took up much of his time. He seemed almost glad for the distraction Luciana provided.

“If you have a moment, I’d like to talk to you,” she said, poking her head into his office. He glanced up, smiled briefly, and waved her in.

“I always have time for you. What is it?” He set aside the report he’d been reading through and removed his reading glasses, setting them down on the desk.

“I spoke with Genn the other day,” she started. “He had some concerns about the thing that took over during my escape.”

“What about it?” Varian asked, his brow furrowing and pulling at the scars on his face. They had a habit of making his eyes seem darker, angrier, though Luciana knew he wasn’t either of those things. At least, not at that moment.

“He was worried it might be sha, from my time in Pandaria, or a spirit. It’s neither. I already went
and saw Enaeon about the spirit, and Anduin knows what to look for if it’s sha.”

“So what else could it be?” Varian asked.

“Genn suggested it might be Goldrinn. He told me you’re the scion of the ghost wolf?” she half-asked. “He didn’t think you’d mind me knowing and he was quite concerned that it was one of the other two. He thinks it might have been Goldrinn who kept me alive, even past the barrier to the afterlife.”

Varian watched her closely for a moment, looking for something. She didn’t know what, exactly, he was looking for, and she didn’t know what he found. It was obviously something, because he sighed heavily and leaned back in his chair.

“I am,” he said finally. “I don’t know if I always was, or if half of me was chosen sometime as a gladiator.”

“So, these Ancients,” Luciana said when he fell silent. “I read the sagas while I was in Teldrassil. Three times. They’re real?”

“Yes. Very much so.”

It was her turn to sigh and lean back. “Well, alright then. What does being the scion of Goldrinn entail, exactly? If you don’t mind me asking.”

“I don’t. You would have found out eventually, somehow. Anduin does know,” he said. “At least, in part. He knows that I have the favour of the ghost wolf. He’s seen it.” Varian fell silent for a few moments and Luciana waited for him to speak again, recognizing that he was trying to collect his thoughts. “Most times, I hardly notice it. Just an extra layer to things, some... awareness that isn’t completely my own. Sometimes my hearing will be much finer than it should be. Sometimes I can smell things a human shouldn’t be able to detect. I can move faster when I need to, react immediately to things that should have been a complete surprise. And, sometimes, I’ll be completely aware of it. Something standing over me, like someone reading over my shoulder, but they’re reading through my eyes and listening through my ears. Those times, I can tell that it’s foreign. It’s not me. But, at the same time, it is me.”

“Like a guardian?” she asked.

“Like someone who empowers me to be my own guardian,” he corrected. “I don’t know how else to explain it to you. I’ve been told it’s visible when I’m angry.”

“Your eyes are like a wolf’s,” she said, nodding. “Your teeth are sharper. Well, that’s not a temporary thing.”

He grinned briefly at her. “Yeah, I noticed that too. Years ago.”

“Is that why you grew your hair out? Like a wolf’s tail?” she joked.

“Ha ha,” he said flatly. “In all seriousness, why would Genn think it was Goldrinn that pushed you? He’s not dark, or heavy.”

She shrugged. “He thinks it might have been because I see myself and my fury differently than you see yours. If I see my fury a certain way, I’ll see Goldrinn’s fury the same way.”

Varian took a moment to consider it. “I don’t see how it would happen,” he said slowly. “Unless he saw you through me? I first felt his influence in Dire Maul, where he lost his physical form to the
Legion. That’s as close to a shrine of him as you can get, short of visiting him in Hyjal. Which you
will not be doing while you’re pregnant,” he added in a regulated tone. “It’s not a good idea,
anyway. I would suggest against it.”

“I wouldn’t,” she said, smiling. “Nice save, by the way.”

“Thank you, I thought so too.” He returned her smile for a moment. “But, if he saw you through
me... I could see why he’d favour you.” Luciana tilted her head, questioning him without verbal
prompt. “You’re a fighter, driven to protect and lead, and you protect your pack. Your squadron,
your family.”

“Anduin,” she supplied.

“Yes. Goldrinn could reach us through the barrier of death to influence and aid us. It’s entirely
possible that he first found you curious because of the balance of your careful nature and berserk
fury, and when he felt you fighting even at death’s doorstep to return home, he decided to lend you
his fury to bolster your own.”

“Why, though?” she asked, shaking her head slightly. “Why me, why Goldrinn?”

knows? Goldrinn is an eternal entity,” he said. “He has the power to shape Azeroth’s future. Who
knows how he thinks? But I promise you,” he said, leaning forward to rest his arms on the desk.
“He chose me while I was in a very bad place, and that strength let me pick myself up and keep
fighting. He came to you when you were in a very bad place, and with a bit of help you kept
fighting. Whatever the reason he chose me, and if he did choose you, he’s someone you would
want on your side.”

“I know,” she said quietly. “It’s just that I didn’t even believe he was real and now I’m being told
he might have possessed my body and walked it all over Durotan and into Ashenvale. Why?” she
said. The question was clearly bothering her and Varian sighed again, reaching out and gesturing.
She placed her hand in his and he gave it a comforting squeeze.

“My best guess?” he said. “Because you’re strong. Even when you’re weakened by starvation and
torture, you’re strong. Enough to make him turn back for a sentimental ring. Strong enough to heal
from it. He is tenacity under adversity and I’d say you fit that bill perfectly. You’ve been through a
lot, Luciana,” he said. “I mean, a lot.”

“Yeah,” she said quietly, nodding. “I guess I have.”

Varian smiled grimly. “Your Mother tried to cut out your fury, your Father couldn’t stand up to
her, you killed a boy at thirteen and scared the shit out of yourself, you went through hell in the
army and developed battle fatigue, you lost your brother in horrible circumstances that you can’t
talk about to anyone, you lost two of your squad mates, you got married and became Princess, you
practically rebuilt Darkshire, you became a Knight Captain and earned quite a few medals, you
watched the Dark Portal shut down from the other side in an alternate timeline, and then you got
captured and tortured for two months, escaped, walked through a desert, and flew to Darnassus half
dead and strapped to a hippogryph. And then you made the journey home.”

“And I missed my birthday,” she joked weakly.

“You’re twenty-two” he added. “Twenty-two,” he repeated for emphasis, squeezing her hand
again. “You’re still incredibly young and you’ve been scared and isolated and alone for most of
that time. You think I didn’t notice how you acted when I started to act like a parent to you? You
took to it immediately. You never had parents. You only had your brothers.”

“I know,” she said softly. “I’m not in the best shape.”

“But here you are,” he said. “Still kicking. And screaming,” he added. “I could hear you with your squad the other day.”

“I did miss screaming at them,” she said wistfully, and Varian chuckled, releasing her hand after giving it a final squeeze.

“You’re strong, Luciana,” he said. “Tenacity under adversity. You’ve had nothing but adversity, and you’re still going strong. I don’t see why he wouldn’t take a shining to you.”

“Because he already has a scion?”

“I don’t see why he can’t have more than one,” Varian said, unfolding his reading glasses and delicately perching them on the bridge of his nose.

“Those make you look very distinguished, by the way,” she teased. “I thought you didn’t need glasses, o mighty scion of the ghost wolf?”

“Fuck off,” he growled without any heat. “I don’t feel him hanging over you right now,” he said. “I didn’t when I first saw you. But you described it as something lying under your fury, so it’s possible he’ll just pop up when you really need him.”

“Well, what about when I need to use the bathroom in the middle of the night? That would be a great time for wolfish night vision.”

He gave her a flat look and she snickered. She saw the smile he was trying to fight back, and finally he chuckled. “Enough about that,” he said. “Go and enjoy your husband’s company. You’ve more than earned it.”

“I want to return to the army. After this,” she added hurriedly, gesturing to her belly when Varian raised both eyebrows.

“I should hope so,” he said. “You’re not waddling into battle if you had the best armour we can make. But, are you sure you want to go back so soon? And, after what happened?”

“I’m sure,” she said, nodding once. “I understand if there’s not currently a position open for Knight Captain. I’d even be happy as a Lieutenant, or even just a Knight. I want to get back out there.”

“You wouldn’t be going back as anything less than a Captain,” he said. “I’ll arrange for it. How long after birth?”

“One month for breastfeeding, and then at least two to three months for training,” she said. “Malfurion did say my body would kick itself into high gear once I started, so I don’t think it would be much longer than that.”

“Alright. Have you spoken with Anduin about this?”

“He’d prefer that I found something closer to home, or less dangerous. Or both, preferably,” she said. “I promised to visit as often as I could. I’ll add a mage to the squad, if it comes to that.”

“That... actually, that’s a good idea,” Varian said. “Give mages to key squadrons, or areas, or to officers of a certain rank. It would certainly facilitate travel between major hubs and messages
could be sent instantaneously, without risk of interception."

“It’s certainly something to think about. That reminds me, what happened with Westfall?”

“We have plans in the making,” he said. “I’m starting with simple propaganda. It seems that Shadowstep has already taken an interest in the area.”

“Helliah?” she asked. Varian nodded. “Why not give it to her? As a province of the kingdom. She could rule as prime minister, or whatever position she prefers. Fel, let her decide. She rules it as a province or a territory of the kingdom, sends monthly reports on development. She’s smart. She can figure it out. We’ll have one pleased and powerful rogue, and the farmland. She’ll keep some of the profits as leader, but we’ll still get most of it - or we’ll be able to direct it through her. She would cooperate, I think. It’s a good deal. You could set some basic rules for her, like...” Luciana paused for a second to run through possible ideas. “No organized crime syndicates, unless it’s the one she already has, in which case she needs to keep it as an underground system. No forcibly recruiting locals. She has free reign over her own business but anything pertaining to Westfall has to be over the table and approved. That sort of thing. And send her the druids and the shamans.”

Varian regarded her, smiling slowly. “I did pick a good one, didn’t I?” he said, to no one in particular.

“I’d like to think so,” she said dryly. He laughed, smiling fondly.

“Ah, you’ll be fine,” he said. “You have some brilliant ideas, Luciana, I’ve got to tell you. You spoke with Anduin about wanting to return to the army?” Luciana nodded. “And he didn’t freak out?”

“Well, he knows that he can’t simply tell me what to do,” she said. “I agreed that if he found something similar that was safer, or closer to home, I’d do that. I’m bringing my kiddos along, either way. Wherever I go, the squadron goes. It’ll be a while yet, anyway.”

“True enough.”

Luciana sighed, and looked down to her abdomen. “It’s an odd thought, you know,” she started. “Pregnant. I didn’t even think I’d live this long. I didn’t intend to.” Varian was silent, waiting for her to finish speaking. “I didn’t want to die, per say. I just... expected to. What else could happen? I’m a berserker. We live in the battlefield and we die in it.” She shrugged loosely. “I didn’t really see anything else in my future. And now I’m married to a lovely man I’m still not sure I deserve, I have a parent who understands me and makes a genuine effort to make me happy, and I’ve got a kid on the way.” She smiled bitterly. “I hope it doesn’t happen again.”

“It won’t.” Varian promised quietly, knowing what event she was referring to. She glanced up to see his eyes glinting dangerously, though his voice and demeanor were still calm. “It shouldn’t have happened in the first place. And it will not happen again. Not to my grandchild.”

For the first time in many months, Luciana felt her fury stir. It was still a tired beast, resting in its den. But it felt Varian’s fury and raised its head, testing the air for hostile scents. She didn’t squash it down, for once, and let it run its course. It settled down on its own, and she smiled. “You’re going to be a granddad,” she sang. “At forty-one!”

He paled slightly. It was really only noticeable because his skin was so dark to begin with. “Aw, fuck,” he groaned, slapping his hand over his face and dragging it down. It left his glasses completely askew. “I was trying not to think about that.”
She laughed openly. “You’re going to be Grampa Varian!” she crowed. “Before Genn!”

“Stop!” he groaned. “Mercy, I beg you!”

“Grumpy Gramps Wrynn!”

“Mercy! Oh, mercy, cruel lady!”

“Grampa Varian.” She smiled softly. “Papa Anduin. Mama Lucy.”

Varian quieted, fixed his glasses and ran his hand through his hair to try and get it out of his eyes. “It does have a nice ring to it,” he admitted grudgingly. “I wish Anduin had had his own grandfather, but... well, shit happens.”

“Just keep marching,” Luciana added. “Well, he’ll be a father. And a grandfather. I’d kill anything that tried to make it otherwise.”

“I know you would.”

“You know, sometimes I feel like Anduin forgets what I do,” she said. “Not willfully. He’s just never seen me fight. Not really.”

“He will, someday.”

“I hope not. It’s... I’m told I can be frightening when I fight.”

“You think he’d love you any less? I think he’d be proud of you.” Luciana gave him an expression of doubt and he smiled. “He’d puff his chest out and say look! That’s my wife! Isn’t she beautiful?”

“I’ll stand there, huffing and puffing with blood all over my face,” she said. “Someone’s head in my hand, sword in the other. Blood in my teeth, too, in all likelihood.”

“And he’ll sniff, crying a little, and say isn’t she just wonderful? I love my wife.”

Luciana let herself laugh quietly at the mental image Varian’s words brought forth. “Probably. With a kid in his arms, too.”

“Ah, one day you’ll stop wondering when he’s going to see the real you,” Varian said, picking up the report he’d left off when she’d first entered the office. “And you’re going to realize that he already saw it, and that every time he said he loved you, every time he smiled at you, he knew exactly who he was talking to. Your self-image is all screwed up, Luciana. Let Anduin show you the real you.”

She sighed quietly. “I hope I can do that,” she said. “It’s hard to let go.”

“I know it is. You’re managing well so far.”

“Thank you, Varian,” she said. He glanced up at her from behind his glasses. “For everything.”

He smiled softly. “My pleasure, Lucy.”

She left in silence as he returned to his reports. He had suggested that she enjoy her husband’s company, and even if he was busy, she was going to enjoy him completely. Work be damned.
Big Breakfast

She and Anduin both woke late the next morning, and though she wasn’t given much work at all so she could relax and keep from straining herself, Anduin was swamped with it. He didn’t seem to mind the late night much at all, as he’d spent most of it either under her or on top of her. When she woke him by rubbing her hand across his chest, he smiled and turned over to kiss her.


He laughed, smiled brightly, reached out to tickle her sides. They hadn’t been hit many times by the whip and there was no scar tissue to protect her sensitive points. He seemed to remember exactly where to touch and in moment she was squealing and trying to flail her way out of the bed. “You go chew some mint!” he cried, leaning forward to chase after her with threateningly wiggling fingers.

“Fuck you!” she said, smacking him with a pillow.

“You already did!”

“I know I did!” she hit him a few more times with the pillow, mostly missing or hitting his arms, and he laughed and tried to protect his face with his hands.

“Mercy, o great warrior!” he laughed. “Mercy, please!”

“Only if you go brush your teeth,” she grumbled. “And then give me a nice kiss without the gross morning breath. Ugh.” She shudders. “Yours is terrible. Must be all the coffee you drink.”

“Yours is any better?” he asked, smiling widely. He did roll out of bed, and she openly admired the flex of his back and buttocks when he walked to the bathroom. He looked at her over his shoulder and she gave him her signature crooked grin, the one everyone always told her was too flirtatious to be healthy.

She took the minute afforded to her to shrug on a housecoat, yawn, stretch, and scratch madly at her stomach. She wasn’t really supposed to, and Enaeon had suggested she actively avoid it, but sometimes it itched like there were bugs crawling under her skin. She knew it was just damaged nerves but it drove her crazy because when one itch started, it didn’t stop, and most of the time it just moved around and she ended up scratching her entire stomach.

She stopped when Anduin exited the washroom, faced washed and hair somewhat tamed. She smiled when he approached her, leaned back against the edge of the desk. “Still got that cowlick,” she said, reaching up to bury her hands in his soft, messy hair.

“Mm, never getting rid of it, I think,” he said, slipping her housecoat open so he could press against her directly.

“Someone’s excitable in the morning,” she murmured, shifting so his hardened length could settle between her thighs. His breath was a little heavier and he kissed her like she’d asked. Her fingers played with his hair and her right hand descended slowly down his front, leaving a hot trail all the way to his crotch. He groaned shortly and rolled into her hand, eyes dark and intent.

“What did you expect? You spent all last night making me very excited.”

“You liked it,” she smiled, brushing her lips against his. He responded by kissing her again, this
time brushing a hand down her spine to rest at her tailbone. There was a clear patch of skin over
her lower spine, healed long ago when she’d been burned, and the whip hadn’t reached quite that
far down. He used the sensitivity of that area versus the surrounding scar tissue, and each time his
fingertips fluttered over the skin Luciana’s nerves jumped. He slid the hand further, down the
crack of her buttocks. It took a bit of maneuvering but soon he was teasing the folds of her vulva,
kissing a line down the side of her neck.

“You did, too, if I recall correctly,” he said.

“Oh, I did,” she sighed, leaning her head to the side to give him easier access. “And I’d like it very
much if you did it again.”

“We don’t have much time before they come in with breakfast,” he murmured against her shoulder.

“Then you’d best hurry, huh?”

He went to his knees to tease her with his tongue and when she was ready for him she very
willingly lay back on the table, letting him pick up her legs and sling them over his shoulders. The
table was solid wood, heavy and new enough to be silent. Anduin was careful anyway to avoid
going too fast or too hard, and when she came she managed to do it silently, opening her mouth and
holding her breath to keep in the moan. Anduin did the same, and she could hear his laboured
breaths when he calmed a few moments later. His hands were tight around her waist, not nearly big
enough to wrap around her but firm and grounding.

“Better put something on,” she murmured as she sat up on the edge of the table. His hands were
still on her and slid to her thighs to hold her while he kissed her gently. The skin under his hands
felt chilled when he released her to find his own housecoat.

Luciana used the washroom, peeing and brushing her teeth, and when she exited there was
practically a feast waiting for her.

“What’s all this?” she asked, brow furrowing as she tried to count the number of dishes. There was
a pile of fresh fruit in the center of it, mostly citrus today. Enaeon’s doing, most likely.

Anduin shrugged helplessly. “Kitchen got a tip from someone that we’d need more food than
usual.”

“Oh, good. Breakfast.” They both turned to see Victoria wander in through the passageway, still in
her pyjamas. Luciana blinked at her a couple of times, and then Lars and Daniel wandered in.

“You said you told them three extra people,” Daniel said, though it certainly didn’t sound like a
complaint to Luciana.

“I did. I guess they assumed we were like Waddlesworth over here.” Victoria pointed with her
thumb at Luciana, who turned to look at Anduin in askance. “Others ain’t up yet. Drank too much
last night. We didn’t,” the cannoneer explained shortly, sitting at the table and grabbing an orange.
She spoke as she peeled it, also taking bits of granola from a bowl. “We got hungry.” Victoria’s hair
was textured and cropped short and didn’t need to be brushed in the morning, and Lars’ light brown
hair looked a bit crazy by comparison.

“I see,” Luciana said shortly. “Well, alright,” she sighed, shrugged, and sat down to eat. Anduin sat
next to her, still a bit dazed, and Lars sat next to him, watching him intently.

“He fuck up yet?” Lars asked.
“Lars, you can’t just...!” Daniel sputtered.

“Nope,” Luciana said briefly.

“Alright.” Lars shifted his attention to the food, now ignoring everyone around him. When Anduin gave her a shocked look, she shrugged.

“He’s just like that,” she explained.

“Okay,” Anduin answered, a bit high-pitched.

They ate mostly in silence, until Daniel pitched in with, “Waddlesworth?” in a questioning tone.

“Yes. Waddlesworth. Waddle? Pregnant? Hello, anyone in there?” Victoria knocked on the side of his head gently, and he leaned away from her.

“She’s not even showing yet.”

“Yeah, but she will be. By the way,” Victoria said, looking at Luciana. Her normally calm expression had, predictably, not changed. “I think Jill and your other brother are giving each other moogly eyes.”

“I thought you...?” Daniel asked, looking at Victoria. She shrugged off whatever his question had been.

“Eh, not worth it.”

“Yeah you are.” Lars gave her a meaningful look, though it looked a bit more like a glare. “Just tell her. You told me. It ain’t that complicated. Who told you?” he said, looking at Daniel.

“I kind of guessed,” he said. “It’s not obvious, though.”

“Yes, alright.” Lars nodded to himself. “Just tell her, Vic. She’s not dumb.”

“She’s got mooglies for Luce’s brother.”

“So? You can have... Uh, mooglies for more than one person,” Daniel said. “By the way, what’s a mooglie?”

“Moogly eyes, like googly eyes?” she said.

“Oh,” Daniel said intelligently. “Alright. Well, why not tell her? What’s the worst that could happen?”

“Eh,” Victoria shrugged again.

“Vic,” Luciana said around a bite of sausage. “Do you have a platonic crush on Jillian?”

“That’s as good a word as any.”

“Why don’t you want to tell her?” Luciana asked. “And does she actually have eyes for Desmond, or is that just the rumour of the week?”

“No, she does,” Daniel said. “They hung out a lot when we were here for your wedding and she wouldn’t stop talking about him and his dumb jokes. She liked the jokes, though.”
“Okay.” Luciana nodded slowly. “As I understood, Christopher is completely involved with Bannister?”

“Yeah. They’re in a relationship,” Daniel said. “Started sometime after you were captured. Bannister apparently asked Chris to stay and he did. Left the army and everything.”

“Okay,” Luciana said again, and let Anduin feed her a slice of orange. “So. Now Jillian has a crush on Desmond, and you have a platonic crush on Jillian. What do you think of Desmond?”

“He’s cool,” Victoria shrugged. “Nice kid. Good sense of humour. A bit dramatic but hey, takes all kinds.”

“Yeah, he does tend to blubber,” Luciana chuckled. “Why not hang out with them a few times, see if you can tolerate Desmond and Jillian together?”

“Why, you want your brother to have two chickadees?”

“If both chickadees want to be there, I don’t see why not,” Luciana said, assuming 'chickadee' meant 'sweetheart' or something similar. “But it’s up to you, Vic. If you like Jillian that much, talk to her. Talk to Desmond. Don’t be passive about it.”

“I’m a crazy cannon lady,” she said. “What about that is passive?”

“Your views on relationships because of your own asexuality,” Luciana replied plainly. “You don’t feel sexual attraction. So what? You think that makes you any less valid as a person that me or Daniel? Sex isn’t necessarily an essential part of a relationship. You can have a completely successful monogamous or polygamous relationship without it. I understand you might have some issues with it though I don’t know enough about your past to say why, but you’re still completely worthy of affection and anyone who can earn it from you needs to be worthy of you, not the other way around.”

Victoria stared at her for a moment, chewing slowly. “So, what, you want me to try and get Jillian and Desmond together with a side of Vic-fried potato?”

“No, I want you to do what you think will make you happy in the long run. You like Jillian that much? Talk to her. You know her, Vic. You brush her fur, for Light’s sake. Worst case scenario she’ll thank you for being such a good friend and then hook up with Desmond for however long she can put up with his theatrics without you there to smooth things over.”

Victoria thought a moment longer, then shrugged. “Yeah, you’re right.”

“She’s always right,” Anduin interjected. “You get used to it.”

Victoria chuckled at him. “Trust me, we know. We just forget sometimes. She’s different here than she in out there. More noble, less Knight.”

“I like the Captain better,” Lars grumbled. “Less frills.”

“Each has their own purpose,” Daniel said to Lars, and it sounded like an old argument.

“Fuckin’ nobles send us off to die,” Lars responded.

“They run a kingdom. They have to think in terms of large numbers.”

They kept at it until Luciana growled low in her throat, like a dog. It was a decidedly inhuman
noise, and when they looked at her wide-eyed she bared her teeth. “I’m eating,” she snapped.

“Right. Sorry.” Lars looked down at his plate to see that someone had stolen some of his bacon. He glowered at Victoria, who shrugged and glanced at Daniel, who quickly looked at Anduin, who gave Lars a cheeky smile. Victoria had been the one to take the bacon, Luciana had seen her, but she’d managed to deflect it and Lars didn’t really care enough to pursue it. “Fucker,” he mumbled, but it held less heat than what he’d directed at Daniel and he kept eating without another word. Anduin raised a questioning eyebrow to Luciana, who smiled lopsidedly and shrugged.

“He’s like that,” she said.

The three soldiers left them after breakfast with a sizeable amount of food remaining. “What a waste,” Luciana sighed. “I feel like I should eat it all.”

“Are you joking or are you serious?” Anduin asked. He had stood to stretch, and now leaned against the back of her chair to rub her shoulders with Light-infused hands. She groaned and leaned forward to give him better access, and she heard his chuckle.

“I’m serious. You don’t waste food. I’m surprised my own squadron would do it. They know better. All it takes is two days on short supplies and you learn to treasure food like it’s gold.”

“We could send it back,” Anduin said. “Or give it to Father. Or invite a couple of guards in for a snack. Or the SI:7 agents that are always prowling about. Or wake up your other squad mates.”

She sighed again and pulled his hands down to her chest. She leaned back and felt him rest his chin on her head. “I really love you,” she murmured, smiling slowly.

“I know. I love you, too.” He kissed her head. His chin retook its previous place after a moment and she enjoyed the feeling of being close to him.

“See if Varian’s up, I guess,” she sighed. “He probably is. And he probably already ate. But see if he wants some, anyway. I’ll ask the guards.”

“Alright.”

One guard took her offer, and the other politely declined, saying she’d already had a big breakfast. There was also an SI:7 agent that appeared momentarily in the room, grabbed three big apples, and promptly disappeared again. Varian popped his head in, inspected the food, took what remained of the meat and cheese, and left just as abruptly as the agent. The guard took his time, thanked them for the food with a humour-filled grin that told Luciana exactly how long they had before the tale of the food-sharing royals made a circulation around the Keep, and left with promises of sending up servants to collect the now mostly empty trays.

Luciana took the last bunch of red grapes, settling herself on the couch to eat them. After eating only a few, she got up and walked slowly over to Anduin, who had reseated himself at the desk. “What are you looking over now?” she asked.

“Caretakers,” he said. “All of my selections go through Father, and then when he’s made his decision he’ll hand them to you for final say.”

“I don’t know any of them,” she said.

“The interviews and investigations were very thorough. Everything from how many haircuts they’ve had in the past eight months to what they like to eat in the middle of the night is in there.”
“Ah.” She nudged at his legs. “Scoot back,” she ordered, and he complied with an expression of confusion. It cleared when she settled herself in his lap with her legs hanging over the arm of the chair. “Alright?” she asked. “Not too heavy?”

“Yeah, no, you’re fine,” he replied, smiling and leaning down to peck her lips. “I like this arrangement,” he said. “It even comes with food!”

“Get your own,” she scoffed, tossing a grape into her mouth. Anduin smirked and kissed her with a hand on the back of her head to prevent escape. A moment later he backed off with the grape, chewing on his prize. “That was gross,” she complained.

He looked at her flatly. “You regularly swallow my...”

There was a knock at the door. “Your Highness? We’re here for the food trays!”

“Come in!” Luciana answered, making a face at Anduin. He chuckled at her, and waited for the servants to leave. When the door shut, Luciana peeked out from the side of the chair to make sure they were alone. “You are disgusting,” she said, smacking Anduin on the chest.

“What? It’s true!” he replied, still grinning mischievously. “And, aren’t you the one who said I had to get used to dirty talk? Now who’s the one who has to get used...?”

She interrupted him by pulling him forward with a hand at the collar of his shirt, and kissing him soundly. “Now I want to swallow you,” she murmured against his lips, and his breathing hitched. “After my grapes, maybe,” she said.

“Tease,” he complained, leaning back in the chair. He settled a hand on her thigh and continued to read through the file he had in hand.

“Yeah, but you like it,” she said. “What’s the words, now...? I want you to tie me up, hands to the headboard, feet to the bedposts... And then what? What did you ask me to do for you, you dirty man?”

He was blushing pink at her words and tried to hide behind the file. “I hadn’t seen you for months!” he squawked when she pulled the file away from his face. “What did you expect?”

“Striptease and a dance certainly wasn’t it,” she said, laughing at his blush. “But it was worth it. Oh! Was it worth it. I don’t think I’ve ever heard someone make noise like that before. Mm.” She shivered theatrically. “Just thinking about it makes me pleasantly warm,” she said with a suggestive brow-waggle.

“Oh my Light,” Anduin groaned.

Luciana bit her lower lip, chewing on it for a few seconds and then licking it absently. “How occupied would you say Varian is?” she asked.

“How occupied would you say Varian is?” she asked. “I hadn’t seen you for months!” he squawked when she pulled the file away from his face. “What did you expect?”

“Pretty occupied,” he replied. “Why?” She hummed in response, wordlessly returning to her grapes. Anduin seemed to shrug it off and kept reading. He was on another file when she put down the empty grape stem and slid off his lap. He looked down at her, bemused. “What are you doing?” he asked as she made herself comfortable on the floor beneath his desk.

“What, you don’t recognize the position?” she asked, caressing his thighs slowly. His smile fell and his eyes followed the path of her hands. “I think you do, after all.”

She loosened the tie on his pants, shuffled them down his legs enough to free his cock and teased it

“Best hope you’re a good actor, then,” she said.

No one did walk in, which was almost disappointing to Luciana. But, the little noises of pleasure that Anduin couldn’t hide made up for it. She watched his face when he came, and licked him clean when he relaxed again. He exhaled shakily when she yanked his pants back up over his hips, and was limp like a ragdoll in his seat when she climbed out from under his desk. “Enjoyed that, did you?” she asked, kneeling on the seat and settling in his lap.

“Yeah,” he mumbled, smiling loosely.

“Good.” She leaned down and kissed him, and let him taste himself on her tongue.
Several weeks passed in a relaxed, sometimes abruptly frenzied fashion. Victoria spoke to Jillian, with Daniel as a silent witness in the corner of the room because both of them had forgotten he was there. Luciana still didn’t know the results of their chat, though Jillian was avoiding Victoria for the moment. Daniel assured her that Victoria hadn’t said anything rude, but the cannoneer was known for being frank and it could sometimes come as a shock.

Luciana started to feel nauseous at seemingly random hours, which severely worried Enaeon until she groaned for him to shut the fuck up, and told him that it was normal in pregnant human females. “Just keep that fucking cheese away from me,” she told him. “That smell is making me want to vomit.”

“Oh.” Enaeon looked at her blankly for a moment before turning and pushing the cheese into a bowl and covering that with a few napkins. “Should I get a human healer?” he asked, looking at Varian. Luciana had felt the urge to vomit while Anduin was in the bathroom and the passageway to Varian’s room had already been open, so she’d rushed in praying that he wasn’t in the bathroom and promptly vomited into the toilet. He had followed her back into Anduin’s room with an expression of amusement mixed with concern.

“Naw, she’ll be fine,” Varian said. “Lucy, are you more sensitive to smell or is it because of the nausea?”

“The cheese smells greasy,” she complained.

“Oh.” He looked at Anduin. “Let the kitchens know to avoid greasy or oily foods until her belly sickness passes.”

“Belly sickness?” Enaeon asked.

“When female humans are pregnant they can sometimes suffer from bouts of nausea, vomiting, both, or neither,” Varian explained patiently. “I know because when Tiffin started vomiting I thought she was dying.” He chuckled dryly. “Ah. Well. Luciana seems to have both, which is really the shit end of the stick. It usually doesn’t last past the first trimester, the first three months, but it can come back randomly at any time during the pregnancy. Something about hormone spikes,” he said.

“Fuck you,” she spat at Anduin, who looked at her with wide eyes. “This is your fault.” She groaned and hid her face in her pillow. “Stop moving. It’s making me dizzy.”

“Sorry?” Anduin squeaked. Varian laughed openly at his expense and clapped his hand on his son’s shoulder, giving him a little shake.

“Go to the kitchens,” he said with a grin. “I’ll take care of your wife.”

“Oh.” Anduin hurried away, likely frightened by the animalistic growl Luciana let out.
“Fuck,” she groaned, drawing the word out. “Why this. Why.”

Varian was still laughing, and she could see he almost sat on the edge of the bed. Obviously he thought better of it, knowing it would shift the mattress unpleasantly, and instead kneeled on the floor next to her. “It happens,” he replied. “Seems random, from past studies. Enaeon, is there something you can do for her?”

“If it is her hormones,” Enaeon said, approaching slowly. His hooves were silenced by the thick carpet he stood on, though he left impressions in it that were something of a game to the squadron. They tracked his movements all around the room, guessing why he’s stood there or taken such wide steps over to here. “I can try to balance them, or ease them out of the sudden spikes.”

“Please,” Luciana begged, her voice muffled by the pillow. “I am floating in wavy water and it is unpleasant.”

Varian took her hand and gently rubbed his thumb over her knuckles while Enaeon worked. The Light soothed her roiling stomach almost immediately, to which she sighed in relief, and not long after her nausea was lowered considerably. “Any better?” Enaeon asked quietly, his Light still working over her stomach.

“Yeah, much. Thank you, space goat,” she said. Enaeon chuckled, and she expected him to stand or stop with the Light, but he kept at it. She moved the pillow off her face completely and looked down. “What’re you doing down there?” she asked.

“There is...” he started, brow furrowing heavily. “Hm.”

“What?” she asked, shifting to lean up on her elbows. “What is it? Enaeon?”

“Is there a problem?” Varian asked in concern.

“No, no problem,” the draenei answered distractedly. “How long are you pregnant?”

“How far along?” Varian asked, and then looked to Luciana. “Do you know?”

“Uh,” she said, thinking back. “Hm. Five, six weeks? Yeah, six weeks. Seven on Thursday.”

“Hm.” Enaeon hadn’t looked up from her stomach, and the Light seemed to shift from a fine mist to a firmer, more even tone.

“Enaeon,” she said, trying to sit up. He pushed her back down, gently.

“Give me a moment,” he said soothingly. “I am just checking something.”

“Checking what?”

“There is no problem,” he repeated, trying to calm her. “I am just...” He trailed off, concentrating on the movements of his large hands. He brought them closer to her stomach. A moment later, he laid them directly on her skin, going so far as to push up her shirt. Varian moved to intercept and Luciana stilled him by raising a hand. His eyes flashed when he looked at her, but he didn’t speak. Luciana watched Enaeon work, and after several long, tense minutes, the Light faded and he leaned back to sit on his haunches. “I checked,” he said, looking up at her. “There is no problem,” he said. “Well, it may be a problem.”

“Enaeon I’m about to throttle you,” she said calmly. “Tell me what’s going on.”
“You are having two.”


“Twins,” Enaeon said, testing out the new word.

“Twins,” Luciana repeated.

“Two?” Varian asked, looking at Enaeon in askance.

“Two?” Anduin asked, coming through the door. “Two what?”

“Two,” Enaeon answered, looking up at Anduin.

“Twins,” Luciana said, and threw a pillow at Anduin with deadly accuracy. “Fucking twins!” she screamed.

“Ow, hey!” Anduin rubbed at the side of his head where the pillow had hit him. He stooped to pick it up, approaching the bed. He saw the look on his father’s face and frowned. “What’s wrong?”

“Twins,” Varian said. “You knocked your wife up with twins and I think she’s pissed at you.”

“Oh,” Anduin said. And then it dawned on him and he looked down at her stomach. “Oh,” he said again. “Well, that explains the pillow.”

“Get out,” Luciana growled. “All of you. Get out.”

“This is my room,” Anduin started to protest.

“Out!” Luciana roared, and Enaeon retreated first through the passage to the first squadron room. Varian practically carried Anduin out of the room despite his spluttered protests. When the room was silent, she huffed a sigh. “I didn’t sign up for this shit,” she grumbled to herself. Daniel popped his head in.

“Light off?” he asked.

“Light off,” she responded. The room was bathed in darkness a moment later and she sighed again. “Thanks.”

“Yep.”

She rested in silence for a few hours, not shifting from her position on her back. The nausea faded slowly, and while Luciana was aware that she’d been a bit unfair to Anduin and Enaeon, she felt completely justified in her anger at the situation. She’d wanted one kid. Not two. Anduin was supposed to make one. Not two. And she was the one who’d have to carry the little fuckers to term! And birth them! Through her vagina!

She groaned when the clock chimed and was tempted to throw a pillow at it. They were tried and true projectile weapons when thrown with enough force, and even though she felt weak she knew she was strong enough to hurt someone with even a glorified sack of feathers.

She groaned when the clock chimed and was tempted to throw a pillow at it. They were tried and true projectile weapons when thrown with enough force, and even though she felt weak she knew she was strong enough to hurt someone with even a glorified sack of feathers.

The nausea returned and she held back a wail of complaint. This wasn’t fair! “Anduin,” she moaned, kicking her legs a bit in frustration. It didn’t help. She hated nausea.
Not a minute later Anduin was creeping in through the passageway to his father’s room. “Did you call me?” he asked quietly.

“I feel like shit,” she moaned. “Make it stop.”

She heard his chuckle, and not a moment later felt the coolness of his palm on her forehead. “I’ll try,” he said. “Tell me if this helps.”

She waited, and slowly felt the Light trickle down into her skull. It soothed her headache. “It’s helping a bit,” she murmured. “Got rid of the headache.”

“Okay. Let me try something else.”

The Light moved in her head, which was a bit of an odd sensation because of the coolness of Anduin’s Light. It seemed to move down the inside of her neck, out to the sides of her skulls, stopped at her temples and shone brightly. Her nausea faded in increments. “Sort of,” she said. “Slowly.”

“Okay.”

It grew brighter at the corners of her vision for a moment and she smiled. “That’s helping,” she said, and sighed in relief when the nausea faded completely. “Thank you. Sorry for yelling at you.”

“It’s alright,” he said, leaning down to kiss her lips softly. She felt his smile. “Father told me about the belly sickness. And the twins.” He was grinning now against her mouth. “Twins!” he said excitedly.

“You’re happy because you’re not the one who has to carry them around for nine months and then shove them out of a hole that’s about half as big as it needs to be,” she grumbled. “This is your fault!”

“I’m sorry?” he laughed. “You asked me to!”

“I asked for one! The fuck am I supposed to do with the other one?”

“I don’t know,” he said, kissing her chastely and then kissing her again, like the first wasn’t enough. And then he kissed her again and laughed when she grumbled and shoved at his shoulder. “I’d say you should love it like you would love the first,” he answered finally. “Because it’s your child, and you did want to have one.”

“One!” she said. “Not two.”

“But it will be yours,” he said. “That’s guaranteed, considering you’ll be shoving it out of a hole that’s half as big as it should be.”

“And it’s guaranteed yours,” she responded, feeling the mattress shift. Anduin laid down next to her on his side, head propped up in his hand. “You think anyone else would touch me?”

“Why wouldn’t they?” he asked.

“Have you seen me naked recently? I look like I tried to take dancing lessons from a blender.”

His chest was touching her side and she felt him shake with laughter even as his hand slowly caressed her chest and stomach. “So?” he asked quietly. “Why wouldn’t they touch you? I am, right now.”
“Yeah, but you already loved me.”

“And I still do. Lucy,” he sighed, leaning over to kiss her softly again. “You’re stuck on your scars being unattractive and it’s keeping you from seeing everything else.”

“What everything else?” she asked, catching his slow-moving hand and interlacing her fingers with his.

“Your intelligence,” he started, kissing her temple. “Your wit.” He kissed her cheekbone. “Your morning breath.”

“Yours is worse,” she grumbled. He laughed quietly and kissed the side of her nose.


“I get the point,” she said, letting out a giggle when he blew a raspberry on the side of her neck.

“Your love for your squadron,” he said, kissing her neck where he’d blown the raspberry. “Your honesty.” He kissed over her throat. “Your eagerness to learn.” He kissed under her chin, shifting on the bed to hover over her as he moved to the other side of her neck. “Your love for your people.” He kissed her neck, and then her lips again. “Your love of good food. And dogs,” he added, smiling against her cheek. “Your tactical mind.” He kissed the other side of her jaw, brushing his lips up to her ear. “Your respect of others,” he whispered. “Your proud stance.” He kissed her other temple. “Your love.” He placed his forehead carefully on hers and gave her a moment.

“Flatterer,” she said after a moment, trying to sound light.

“I love you,” he murmured, kissing her, sliding his mouth over hers and gently tugging at her lower lip. “Anyone can see that your scars only speak of your virtues. They show your strength, your courage. How hard you’ll fight to keep your promises.”

“I didn’t want to leave you alone,” she muttered.

“And how much you’ll do for those you love.” He kissed her again, and laughed lowly. “I still sometimes wonder if this isn’t a dream.”

“Why’s that?” She slipped her hands under his shirt to rest on his lower back. The skin was smooth, unmarred by whips or fire or swords.

“Because you’re wonderful,” he said. “You’re all of the things I want to be. And I still can’t believe, when I’m lying next to you in bed or watching you eat dinner with me and Father, that I’m married to you. How lucky am I?”

She wasn’t really sure how to respond to that. “I thought I was the lucky one,” she finally said.

“No, I think I am,” Anduin replied, kissing her lips chastely. “I have someone who’s willing to kill anyone for me. I think that if I asked you to, you would.”

“Yeah,” she said easily. “Wouldn’t even ask.”

He smiled against her lips. “And why would you do it? Without even asking why?”

“Well,” she said. “You would have some reason they should be dead. You wouldn’t just kill
“I trust you,” she said quietly. “That’s why I’m not six feet at the Amadeus crypt, in five pieces.”

“What do you mean?”

“You think I would have lasted much longer out there?” she asked, feeling him lean back to look at her. She could barely make out his features in the dark, but she could see his brow furrowing.

“Without... this?”

“Without what?”

“This.” She patted his back. “What you give me.”

“What do I give you that makes such a difference?”

“When people are alone, they get desperate,” she said quietly. “One of the most basic needs a human can have isn’t being met. And that makes you crazy.”

“I see,” he said simply. “I’m glad I said your name, then. And I’m glad I found a way to help you.”

“I’m glad your father is so good at the Game.”

“What’s that have to...?” Anduin groaned, and his head dropped for a moment. “He played you. He played you right into the palm of my hands and you let him.”

“Yeah,” she said simply. “He knew what he was doing.”

“Oh, Light,” Anduin sighed, moving up and away. Luciana reached for him, and realizing that he wouldn’t see it she sat up and grabbed his forearm to keep him from leaving.

“Don’t get up,” she said plaintively.


“Because I saw what he was doing,” she answered. “I saw what you were trying to do, too. He put us together, yeah. But, Anduin.” She tugged at his arm. “Anduin,” she said again, and he sighed.

“Lucy,” he said.

“He put us together, but you’re the one who reached out to me. You’re the one who let me talk about my nightmares, didn’t judge or poke or prod, and you’re the one who brought me snacks every hour because you were thinking of me. You’re the one who let me into your bedroom and let me sleep next to you. You’re the one who had the kitchens add mint leaves to every meal and you’re the one who keeps getting them to make my favourite dishes.”

“Like the pear?” he asked, voice lighter.

“Like the pear,” she responded with a little laugh. She tugged at his arm again and he leaned over, just in reach for her to shift closer and wrap her arms around his waist. “Your father saw that you liked me, and played me into your hands, handed me over to you like a token. But you were the one who was so gentle when you took me in your hands. You kept your hands open.” She moved her head and rested her cheek on his shoulder. “You...” She paused, casting around for the right
words. Anduin waited, patient as he always was with her. “You gave me a home. A family. I didn’t really have one of those, before.”

“Lucy,” he said quietly.

“Anduin,” she replied, smiling a bit now that the tenseness had bled from his frame. “Your father wanted me for you because he saw what I could do for you. And I saw what you could do for me and it scared me, a lot. But I let it happen and I trusted you. And now look where we are.”

“Sitting in the dark with our clothes still on?” he joked.

“And I thought I was supposed to be the dirty one,” she grumbled. He chuckled, and she felt him kiss the side of her head. “Don’t try to get in my pants right now. I feel like my nausea is going to rear its fuck ugly head any minute now.”

He barked a laugh, and reached up to lay his hand gently on the side of her head. The Light radiated from his palm and she smiled, squeezing him in her arms. “I’ll keep it away,” he promised.

“Mm, I know. How about we just lie down for a while?” she suggested.

“I’d love to,” Anduin replied, and the softness of his voice made her chest ache.
Squadron

News of Luciana’s pregnancy had already been spread, but finding out she had twins was apparently enough to set the kingdom into another frenzy.

Worst of all, the nobles were also reacting strongly. “How will you decide who is heir?” a lord demanded. Luciana, suffering from nausea, headaches, and a constant urge to vomit since her sixth week, didn’t have the energy to recall his name right then.

“Well usually it’s the first one out,” she replied dryly. Varian was sitting in on the gathering, if only for support. The burden of answering questions and deflecting verbal assaults fell to Luciana. Varian wanted to help her adjust to the fact that while she was pregnant and forced to avoid any major physical activity, nobles could make demands on her time. She could easily hate him for it, but she knew that she needed to gather more experience in the court before she could even think of becoming a queen. “They don’t come out at the same time, Lord.”

He pursed his lips. “Would that not complicate things?” he continued. “To have one sibling, younger only by minutes or hours, who would feel slighted?”

“Why would they feel slighted?” she asked. “They’d still be a royal, sibling to a high ruler and powerful in their own right. And they’d have freedoms that a high ruler would not.”

“Power is alluring,” Lady Marina interjected. “Perhaps it would be best to consider separating the second sibling? They could be raised in safety and anonymity in Northshire...”

“You would have me abandon one of my children, favour one over the other, because you think I could not raise them to be selfless and thoughtful?” Luciana said, leaning back in her chair and looking at Lady Marina with an expression of disinterest. “I know how to treat children, Lady, and telling one of them that their parents couldn’t spare time or love for them because their sibling needed it more will only teach them to be bitter and hateful. If the only solution you can find to fix a situation that only you perceive as a problem is to have me abandon my child, then I do believe that discussions on the matter are over.”

Luciana made to stand and immediately several nobles copied her, quickly backpedaling on their previous words or telling her that they would find some other way to ensure the safety of both her children. Varian wore the expression he typically used while dealing with almost anyone outside of his family, but the corners of his lips were pulled up slightly in approval.

It was a pain to deal with court sessions, but at the same time Luciana enjoyed the mental exercise. If she played it right she could get a thrill out of cornering someone or silencing them with her words. It wasn’t quite the same as a bloody, physical fight, but she could certainly find something to enjoy in it. And when Varian showed approval for her careful manipulations, she felt a bit of pride in her abilities outside of fighting, something no one else had ever really been able to inspire in her save Frederic.

The best part of having a court session was afterwards, when she could rejoin either her squadron or her husband and let the mantle of royal fall to the floor in a messy heap. No one would let her do anything except sit, eat, and write, but she enjoyed it all the same.

“Hey, Waddlesworth,” Lars greeted her as she entered the communal room. The nickname Victoria had coined was catching on.
“I’m barely showing,” she groaned, falling into the couch next to Christopher. He was playing Lars in a game of chess with the pieces all mixed up. “That one doesn’t move that way,” she said when Christopher made a move.

“We’re playing Squadron,” Lars explained. “That’s the Healer.”

“Oh. Teach me,” Luciana said, and they started to explain the rules and the abilities of each piece. They were still using chess pieces but the functions were completely different. “Okay, so the King remains the King, but now the knights are Chevaliers and the pawns are Soldiers. And the rooks are... Cannoneers? And the bishops are royal Heirs. And the Queen is now the Healer.”

“Yep.” Lars nodded once.

“The King can move one square at a time, any direction, and defeats any piece. The Chevaliers move three spaces in any direction, but can’t defeat another Chevalier, or the King or Heir. They’ll have to face off until another piece comes in. Soldiers can’t defeat King or Heir and can move straight or diagonal, one square at a time. Cannoneers move straight one square at a time and can defeat anything if they’re two spaces away, but can only defeat a Soldier if they’re any closer than that. And Heirs can move diagonally, any distance, and defeat everything except King. The Healer moves any way they want, and if they reach one of the four squares without being defeated they can revive a Soldier or a Cannoneer. They can’t defeat the King, Heir, or Chevalier, but they can avoid an attack once per game.”

Luciana stared at Christopher for a moment. “I’m going to memorize that,” she promised. “And then I’m going to kick both your asses.”

“Probably,” Christopher confirmed. “But it’s going to be fun as hell.”

“We’re still working out a few kinks,” Lars added. “But we think it’s just about ready.”

“I still think we should have included scouts,” Christopher said.

“And have them do what? Throw pieces at the other player?” Lars retorted.

She watched them play for a while, but when they devolved into arguing about the roles of the pieces and Christopher had to pull out a crumbled paper with the rules scrawled all over it messily she left them to their game.

Jillian was alone in one of the two bedrooms the squadron shared. They had been offered individual bedrooms on the floor above, currently unused, as passageways could easily be added to the existing architecture to connect them to Luciana’s bedroom below. Used to sleeping as a group in a barrack, they had refused. For privacy there were curtains that could be pulled four ways across the room, and Luciana knew that they would be able to work out any problems on their own, should any arise.

“Hey, Jill,” Luciana greeted, sitting across from the woman in an armchair. The hearth was lit and the fire crackled merrily, feasting on a recently added log.

“Luciana,” she replied without looking up from her book. She was in human form and it was a bit harder to read her, as her ears weren’t mobile and her nose didn’t crinkle quite the same way. But Luciana knew her, well enough to tell she was unsettled.

“Copper for your thoughts?” she asked.

“They’re worth at least a silver,” Jillian answered. She sighed, closed her book and put it on the
wide arm of her chair. “It’s Vic,” she said quietly, watching the fire to avoid looking at Luciana. “She told me the strangest thing.”

When Jillian fell silent, Luciana spoke. “What’d she say?”

“She’s very blunt,” the scout said. “She just said it. Sat down, said it, got up and left. Just like that.” Jillian sighed again, and looked down at her lap. “Jill, I don’t like sex, and I don’t see you that way, but I don’t want to spend any time away from you and it feels like I want to be in a relationship with you. I’m not going to pursue you if you want Desmond because I want you to be happy.” She looked up at Luciana, finally. “Why would she say that? I thought we were friends.”

“You are friends,” Luciana said. “What I understand is that Victoria wants to stay friends, but she also wants to be closer. Not necessarily romantic, or sexual,” she added. “But definitely friends.”

“She said she wanted a relationship, though.”

“Did she specify what kind?” Luciana asked. She could see that Jillian was a bit upset and kept her tone even and calm.

“No,” Jillian said hesitantly. “But I know what a relationship is.”

“I don’t know if it’s a cultural thing,” Luciana started. “But in Stormwind there’s a notion that the word relationship can mean a number of things. It’s not necessarily two partners. It could describe any sort of interaction. Like, I have a relationship with you guys. I’m your officer and you’re my soldiers, right? That’s a relationship. I have a familial relationship with my parents. I have a romantic and sexual relationship with Anduin. I have a platonic relationship with Tess Greymane, because we’re friends. Maybe Vic meant something else. Maybe she meant she wants something like a romantic relationship, but without the romance? Or maybe she wants a really strong platonic relationship. I think you need to talk openly with her,” Luciana said, seeing Jillian grow frustrated. “You’re her friend, right? Friends can talk to each other even if it’s a bit awkward or uncomfortable. Vic is kind of blunt, yeah, but that might make it easier to get answers out of her.”

“She said it’s about Desmond, though,” Jillian said. “I don’t... I don’t want him, necessarily,” she said. “I just like him. He’s funny, cheery. Not easy to find a man like that when you’re cursed. I can hear people lie, you know,” she said. “They change timbres, heart beat sometimes jumps, unless they’re really good. He’s an honest man. I can appreciate that.”

“Like I said,” Luciana sighed lightly, reaching out to pat Jillian’s knee. “Talk to Vic. She’s not going to do anything to hurt you and she obviously really values your friendship. What’s the worst that can happen? You tell her what you want, if you even know, and she’ll respect it. And if you don’t know, well... I’ll help you figure it out.”

Jillian gave her a short-lived and tense smile, and nodded once. “Right. Thanks, Luciana.”

“Anytime, Jill. Talk to her, let me know how it goes.”

She patted Jillian’s shoulder as she past her, seeing that the woman needed to be alone to think. Luciana checked the other bedroom, saw that Daniel, Lawrence, and Kain were all asleep, and shut the door silently. She poked her head into Anduin’s room, saw that his hair was in complete disarray but he was otherwise fine, and returned to her own room to nap. The medicine for belly sickness she’d taken earlier, delivered weekly from the Mage District’s apothecary, was starting to wear off. She’d found out over the past few weeks that it helped to take the next dose and lie down to rest right after. The first dose would wear off as the new one started to take effect, and if she was lying down and relaxed she hardly noticed it.
The medicine worked most of the time, but occasionally the vomiting part of her belly sickness would come through anyway and she'd spend hours at the toilet. Everything she smelled made her want to puke at times like that and she had, on more than one occasion, locked herself into the bathroom in the squadron’s first bedroom so she wouldn’t be bothered. Everyone knew better than to do anything that could possibly disturb her when she was locked in there. Usually Daniel was waiting outside with a bit of plain food, like crackers or a baked potato. Oily or fatty foods especially made her feel sick, even if the medicine had taken effect.

Sometime while she was resting, Luciana heard Victoria’s voice murmuring in her antechamber and not a minute later Shauna hopped up onto her bed. “Hey, pup,” Luciana crooned, and the dog licked her hand. “Lie down. There we go. Good girl.” She stroked Shauna’s fur, feeling the difference between the first, wiry layer and the softer undercoat.

It was a calming activity to pet a dog and on more than one occasion Shauna’s presence had helped Luciana calm after a nightmare. Even with Anduin there to wake her, sometimes with Light in his hands, the nightmares - some not even deviating from her memories - left her unsettled and sometimes panicked. Shauna was a solid weight in her lap or against her back and was usually the first thing Luciana could see properly without the dregs of her nightmares mixing with reality. Feeling the textures of Shauna’s fur had broken Luciana from a panic many times since her return to Stormwind.

Victoria had left after bringing Shauna back in after her daily walk around the Old Town and the dog slept like a rock next to Luciana. She would occasionally twitch, or let out a weak and muffled bark. When she started to snore softly Luciana smiled widely and petted her head gently.
Updates

When the medicine had calmed her nausea Luciana turned up the dial that controlled the werelights in her bedroom. She took her time stretching, sitting up, and yawning, and Shauna copied her actions. The dog yawned so hard her head trembled, and then she sneezed and scratched at her collar. Luciana reached over with a smile to scratch under it for her, and the dog leaned into it gladly.

“You’re a sweetheart,” Luciana murmured as the collar tags jingled. “Yes, you are. You’re a good dog.”

There was a knock at the door and a guard opened it just enough to speak through it. “Enaeon here for you,” she said.

“Let him in.”

Normally the guards would simply open the door, but Luciana had requested they knock first and announce their intentions before entering the room. They hadn’t questioned it, though she had gotten a few guards who had to try a couple of times to get used to it. She wasn’t really a fan of surprises anymore.

“Hey, big guy,” she greeted when Enaeon entered the room. He pulled the door shut with his tail on the door knob.

“How are you feeling? The medicine is good?”

He checked in on her whenever she took a new dose, which was every six hours during the day, starting when she first woke up in the morning. “Yep, it’s good,” she replied.

“Good!” Enaeon was a generally cheerful draenei, though his puns often went over people’s head because they thought it was simply a miscommunication. Somehow that only made it funnier for Enaeon. “When did you eat last?”

“Breakfast,” she said. “I had some crackers and a bit of plain yogurt in the court session.”

“Do you feel able to eat more?”

“Uh.” She paused, looked off into space for a moment. “Yeah, I could eat right now.” She hummed quietly. “No fruit. Please. I just imagined an apple and it made my stomach angry.”

“Okay, no apples,” Enaeon chuckled. Her choice of descriptors sometimes made him do that.

He left to get food from the royal kitchens. They had gotten used to seeing him at all hours of the day and Luciana had been told that they didn’t even question his sometimes very strange orders, unless he asked for food for more than four people. Then, they wanted details. Otherwise they simply gave him whatever he wanted, as they knew by now that it was usually for Luciana and her sometimes very finicky stomach.

The draenei returned not long after with a tray that held a plate of plain toast accompanied by a small serving plate with a dollop of almond butter and a knife. There was also a bowl of various types of seeds and nuts, and some plain yogurt with Luciana’s favourite tart raspberry syrup. It was added on one side of the yogurt so she could scoop it out if she so desired. There was also a glass of hot water, which Luciana found helped her swallow food when her throat tried to close on it.
“Thanks,” she said, sitting up against her pillows.

“Of course!” he said, putting the tray down on her lap. “Do you need anything?”

“Hm.” She observed the food for a moment. “Could I get some chicken? Just plain white meat, no salt, nothing?”

“I will go and get some,” Enaeon said, smiling warmly. “It is good you are eating now. The medicine helps.”

“It does. I’d be the Princess of Porcelain otherwise.” She could hear Enaeon’s resulting laughter even when he was out in the hall.

She ate at a leisurely pace and when Enaeon returned with a plate of chicken, plain as she’d asked, she updated him on her daily activities. “I felt pretty nauseous while I was in court, but that might have just been the company,” she said. “It gave me a headache but that all cleared up after when I was in the common room with Lars and Chris. I just needed quiet, I think.”

When Luciana was finished eating, leaving a bit of yogurt, half a piece of plain toast, and some of the nuts, she stood next to her bed and pulled off her shirt. She had gotten used to being naked around Enaeon years ago, soon after he’d first been assigned to her squadron, and she often felt that she could be uncomfortable with Anduin before she would be with Enaeon.

“You are showing a bit,” he commented, passing his hand gently over her stomach. The scarred skin tingled from the Light. Every time he did it the scars became just a bit less stiff, a bit smoother. It was hardly noticeable from day to day but from two weeks ago Luciana could feel a definite difference in the scars on her stomach. Giving her skin back some of its elasticity would help it stretch as she swelled and then recover after she gave birth. “It is only eleventh week,” he said.

“You forgot the,” she said.

“The what?” he answered distractedly, and then he snorted a laugh. “Oh, I get it! The eleventh week,” he corrected with a grin. Draenei, she’d noticed, had prominent canines and sharp teeth, and Enaeon sometimes enjoyed showing them off. “You should start to show more after twelve or thirteen weeks,” he said, straightening and helping her get her shirt back on. One of the sleeves had gotten inverted when she’d yanked it off. “I have been speaking with many human healers. Midwives, too,” he said. “In some things, it is not so different from draenei. But you don’t have to worry about tails setting wrong and your gestation is a bit shorter.”

“How long is it for draenei?” she asked.

“Eleven months, usually. Twins are very, very rare. They take twelve.”

“Huh. I don’t think I’d want to carry twins for twelve months. No, thank you.”

Enaeon asked her a few questions, wanting to know if she’d noticed any difference in her balance, or if she’d developed any aches. Besides the headaches she seemed to get more easily, she hadn’t yet developed anything noteworthy.

When Enaeon was gone she opened the passageway to Anduin’s room. “Hey,” he greeted when he heard the door open. It was quiet, but the gears did groan. He didn’t look up from his work until she was standing next to him, leaning against his shoulder.

“Hey, yourself,” she said.
He finished reading the paper, signed at the bottom, and set it aside before looking up at her, smiling. “Did you eat?” he asked, resting his head in the crook between her hip and the chair back.

“Yeah, some chicken, yogurt,” she answered. “Nuts and a bit of toast. I couldn’t get all of it down. Most of it, though.”

“The medicine’s really helping,” he said. He gave her a certain look sometimes, a soft-eyes-little-smile look that made her want to cry. He was looking up at her with it, adoration obvious on his face, and she tried to return it as best she could. The scars on her face made it hard sometimes to get finer expressions, as they were stiff and pulled at her skin and often made her look surly or angry. Even if she was smiling and laughing, she knew she sometimes seemed darker than she actually was. Still, she smiled down at him warmly. She thought it wasn’t enough and used her hands, her body, to try and make up for it. She gently pulled his head to her stomach, felt him lean into it gladly, and carded her fingers through the messy hair at the back of his head. The cowlick sprung up every time she tried to make it lay flat, stubborn as the person it was attached to.

“It is,” she said quietly. Anduin’s hand found the back of her thigh and rested there, warm and heavy. She felt him sigh, saw his shoulders droop, and smiled. “What are you so busy with?” she asked. “Varian’s only having me look at trade quarter numbers and nannies.”

“Supplies for Ashran,” he mumbled, half of his mouth pressed against her stomach. “The combat there has picked up.”

“Still nothing from Khadgar?” she asked.

“No, nothing new yet. Commander Celia has it well in hand, though. She’s made amazing progress there. I hear she even found a Shadowmoon orc willing to work with her, and an ogron.”

“Blook?” Luciana asked. “I heard about that one, too. He calls her Blook-beater, apparently.”

She felt Anduin chuckling, and he wrapped his arm around her waist, loose and content. He inhaled slowly, deeply, and let it out in a humming sigh. “Blook-beater,” he said, and chuckled again.

“I’m wondering,” Luciana started, using both hands to try and comb his hair down a bit. Anduin seemed to enjoy the attention. “How did this all start? What caused the alternate timeline to coincide with ours? How did the Iron Horde get the technology we only developed a few years ago?”

Anduin grew somber in her arms and she leaned back, seeing him do the same. She waited for him to speak, resting her wide, scarred hands on the sides of his neck. “You know of Wrathion?” he asked.

“I’ve read SI:7 reports and I’ve spoken with a few adventurers who are familiar with him,” she answered. “I’ve heard some interesting rumours about his origins, and his goals.”

“He released Garrosh Hellscream from his prison in Pandaria and a bronze dragon named Kairoz brought him to the other Draenor. A parallel timeline, I’m told.”

“I see.” Luciana was silent for a moment. “Do you know why he would do that?”

“No.” His answer was short, clipped, and she leaned down to press a kiss into his hair.

“I’d heard you spent some time with Wrathion while you were recovering from the Divine Bell,” she said. “Did you feel close to him?”
“I did. I do,” he corrected. “I don’t know.”

“That’s alright,” she soothed, holding his head to her front for a moment. “Relationships are complicated. Whatever kind you have.”

“We’re not complicated,” Anduin said.

“We were definitely complicated at the beginning. I had to treat you as the Prince but I also had to treat you like a future husband but also as a superior officer because I was a Knight and it got a bit difficult, balancing everything,” she said with a smile. “And then you wanted to be friends but you knew you couldn’t get too close too fast because I was a Knight in your father’s army but I was also a noble and things were generally very complicated.”

“They’re not now, though.”

“No, not nearly as much,” she agreed. “But now we’re friends and lovers and married partners, and also both royal heirs and I’m still technically a Knight. But we’ve had time to learn each other, so it’s easier to handle.” She felt him sigh again and she leaned back to look at him. She had her hand on the back of his head and he copied her motion, watching her with a soft look. “Hi,” she said, grinning.

“Hi, yourself,” he responded. After a moment he tucked his head against her stomach again.

“So, a black dragon claiming to want to save Azeroth helps create an alternate timeline with a massive army of orcs with advanced war technology.”

“And gronn,” Anduin added. “Can’t forget the gronn.”

“Oh, how could I forget the gronn?” she said, a bit sarcastically. “And that army tries to invade Azeroth and now we’re fighting the Horde like we always are, maybe a bit less, but we’re also desperately fighting the Iron Horde despite being severely outnumbered, and the Horde is also fighting us and them at the same time, and we’re just generally very preoccupied. Now would be a good time for Wrathion to try and step in on both factions.”

“He wouldn’t do that.”

“Why not?”

“Too direct.”

“Ah. I’d heard he was raised in Ravenholdt. That would certainly give him roguish tendencies.”

“Mm. He’s also a black dragon.”

“And Varian let you hang around him?” she asked. “After what happened with Onyxia?”

“He’s not like that,” Anduin sighed, releasing her and sitting back in his chair. He seemed tired, worn down. “He’s a scheming, lying black dragon, yes. But I think he genuinely wants to save Azeroth. He thinks the Burning Legion is on its way to us and wants to prepare us. He feels responsible for Deathwing, somehow, like just being a black dragon makes it all his fault. The Old Gods, the corruption, everything.”

“That’s not common knowledge,” she half-asked.

“No, it’s not. I only heard because Father was discussing it with Professor Linnet and I walked in
“Linnet, from the Kirin Tor?” she asked. “Isn’t he studying the news reveals in Ulduar?”

“Yeah. It’s where he learned about the Old Gods in the first place. There was one chained up in the bowels of Ulduar, weakened and barely alive, but a Horde raid group took it out. I don’t know if Old Gods can die, but this one apparently did.”

Luciana rested her hand on the back of his neck, brushing at his hairline with her thumb. “So. Wrathion, the last black dragon, takes it upon himself to save Azeroth by making an army that’s trying to invade us. Smart.”

“He must have been tricked. Maybe Kairoz, or Garrosh. I don’t know. He’s only four years old!” Anduin exclaimed.

“Seriously?” Luciana frowned. “He’s four? Well, he is a dragon. I read that they mature extremely quickly.”

“They do,” Anduin confirmed. “But four years is still very young.”

“Yeah. Especially if you’re trying to control the entire underground. It’s called the shadow world for a reason - it’ll swallow him if he’s not careful. I think he should leave that to more experienced people. Like Shadowstep. Maybe if he went around educating people on the Legion instead of trying to shove people together by lying to them he’d have better results.” Anduin didn’t reply, instead looking around the room for something else to talk about, and Luciana let it drop. “Have you eaten recently?” she asked. It was an abrupt change in subject and he looked up at her, a bit startled. She smiled, and he seemed to realize that she’d done it for him, as he returned the expression tiredly.

“Not since this morning,” he said. “I’ve been drinking coffee like crazy, though.”

“It’s not good for you,” she said. “It makes you jittery after two cups. I’ve seen it happen. Eat something instead. Have nuts! They’re full of energy. Which is, I think, why Enaeon keeps making me eat them. If I’m not sleeping, shitting, or vomiting, I’m eating Light-damned nuts.”

“I thought we had something special?” Anduin whined, and then he grinned up at her.

It took her a moment to understand why he was grinning. “You are absolutely disgusting,” she said plainly, stepping away and towards the door. “I’m not doing it ever again, until you apologize.”

“I’m sorry!” he laughed.

“A real one!” she replied.

“I’m sorry, Lucy! Don’t say things like that!”

“Well then don’t be disgusting!”

Anduin was laughing loudly, from his belly, while she asked a guard to send for food for Anduin. “And see if they can get some earthroot tea for me,” she added. “It’s going to be a long day if I have to put up with that,” she nodded towards Anduin, who was still laughing, “Until I have a reasonable excuse to knock him out.”

The guard was chuckling while he quietly gave her a nod and a ‘yes, Your Highness’. Anduin’s laughter was infectious. By the time Luciana returned to his side, even she was smiling.
Old Stomping Grounds

By the twentieth week Luciana was showing visibly. She visited the Amadeus manor when she had the time and energy to spare, knowing that despite the distance between her and her parents she was still an Amadeus. At the very least she wanted to see her brothers, and her sisters if they were in town. Dania lived in Dalaran, where she learned magic from more experienced mages, and Ophelia had taken up temporary residence in Goldshire where the theatre company she was in had their base of operations.

The healers Anduin had suggested had been combed through even more by Varian, and Luciana had to remind them that she needed more than two on several occasions. Midwives, healers, nannies, and personal guards had been chosen and sorted into shifts so that Luciana would always have access to more experienced people. She had her squadron, which was bolstered by six Royal Guards, two SI:7 agents, and four City Guards until she was in better shape to defend herself, and two dozen people had been selected for duty that would start the moment she gave birth. Not all of them were human. Some night elves, worgen, and draenei had found themselves accepting the honour of safeguarding the Princess during and after her pregnancy. The people who had been chosen for the two children’s personal keepers, while not yet on duty, were already gathering acclaim.

Luciana wasn’t allowed to ride on horseback and walking the distance was out of the question, and she ended up sitting in a horse-drawn coach with Victoria, Lars, and a healer from her roster. Nancy had volunteered for the duty and when Luciana had found her in the pile of tentative acceptances she’d told Varian to include Nancy. When she explained how she knew the priest Varian had acquiesced easily. Not only was Nancy a priest of the Cathedral and someone Luciana already knew, she had also had four kids of her own to draw experience from.

“This is boring,” Luciana sighed, kicking her legs back and forth. They thudded against the wooden frame of the bench. “Why couldn’t we just go by horse?”

“Pregnant people can’t ride horses,” Nancy said patiently, ready to explain for the seventh time why it wasn’t a good idea.

“I know that!” Luciana said before Nancy could start. She earned an amused smile for her efforts. “I can’t do anything anymore,” she whined. “I wanna fight!”

“You can’t fight until you pop out the kids,” Victoria said. “You yourself said so.”

“I know.” Luciana sighed. “I’m just getting cabin fever, I think. I’ve been in the Keep for what, five months?”

“About that, yeah,” Victoria confirmed. “Isn’t that why we’re going to the manor? To give you a chance in scenery?”

“I thought it was so you could play with the dogs,” Lars said, looking at Victoria.

“It’s so we can both play with the dogs,” she responded, gesturing between herself and Luciana.

Lars was not necessarily a relaxed person, but he was quiet until provoked and when Luciana fell silent he and Victoria fell into a muted conversation in respect. Nancy was also quiet, and gently took Luciana’s hand to offer support. Luciana wasn’t sure how the priest could tell when she was tense, but she appreciated it nonetheless.
The gates were open as was normal, and the horses were stopped just outside the grounds so that guards could talk to the coach driver. One guard also took the time to climb the stairs to the cabin and peek inside. When he saw Luciana he smiled and turned to the others to let them know.

“It’s Lady Luciana,” the guard called. “Two members of her squadron and a Cathedral priest.”

“Alright.”

The coach was waved in and they crossed the wide expanse of grassy grounds. When they clattered to a halt in front of the manor’s front doors, Lars moved first. The moment the driver opened the door he was in the driver’s face, and he glanced around warily.

“I think we’d be safe here,” Victoria said.

“Just making sure,” Lars replied, moving aside so Victoria could exit next. She gave Nancy a hand down and Luciana descended on her own, ducking her head to avoid hitting the roof of the coach. She took a deep breath, inhaling the familiar scents that wafted over the grounds in the fall.

“You don’t have to wait out here for us,” she said, looking to the coach driver. “You can bring the coach to the stables. They’ll have room for you there.”

“Thank you, Highness,” he said, tipping his hat before giving the reins a tug.

Luciana watched the carriage roll away for a moment. “Alright,” she sighed, turning to climb the short staircase to the manor door. “No one’s going to announce us,” she said. “But Bann should be waiting inside.”

“Is that why you didn’t bring Chris?” Victoria asked.

Luciana nodded her head, fishing in her pocket for the key. It was scratched from years of use, but was solid and worked just as well as it always had. She guided her small party through the manor, eventually coming to the family gardens. Bannister was indeed waiting there, sitting back in a padded chair under the sun. The fire pit, built up from the ground with decorated masonry, was blazing merrily. “Hey, Bann,” Luciana greeted, and the man looked up.

“Luce!” he crowed, jumping to his feet. His book was abandoned in his chair and he swept her into a great hug. “It’s great to see you again,” he said, smiling brightly. “How are you doing, sister?”

“I’m bored,” she whined, and he laughed and wrapped an arm around her back.

“Come on, then. Let me show you the first real litter of boxer terriers.”

Bannister led the way to the hound stables, and at the first audible sign of dogs Victoria perked up and started talking. Everything she knew about dogs, from pugs to Kul Tiras waterdogs, she recited as if teaching a class. Bannister chuckled or nodded sagely at appropriate intervals. When they were close enough Matthew, the family’s hound master, heard Victoria talking and he interrupted to start telling her about boxer terriers.

The last thing Luciana heard from Victoria was an excited and decidedly Victoria-like squeal, and the cannoneer disappeared into a pile of four month old terriers.

“See the tail?” Matthew said to Luciana. “A bit shorter than what’s on your dog. Still black. Good colour to see in the snow. Rose ears, slight under bite just as you asked. Managed to get the snout a good length, too.”
“They’re so cute,” Luciana crooned, reaching over the gate to let a puppy sniff at her hand. A moment later several more swarmed to her, and Victoria cried out.

“Come back! Puppies, come back!”

Luciana laughed and pulled her hand back. Without her interesting scent to distract them, the puppies returned to Victoria to climb all over her and nip at her exposed face and hands. Nancy looked mildly disconcerted. “I can’t tell if she’s crying or laughing,” she said.

“A bit of both,” Luciana answered. “She’s like that.”

Bannister pulled Luciana aside with an arm around her shoulders, his head ducked down for privacy. Lars was a quiet man and went mostly unnoticed when he followed them. Nancy watched them go curiously from her place next to the gate. Bannister gave the soldier a warning look but when Lars didn’t budge, he let it be. “How are you feeling?” Bannister asked quietly. He was hardly an inch taller than Luciana, and didn’t need to duck his head much at all for their whispered conversation. “I heard what happened to you. None of us have been able to get any details, just that you were captured and interrogated.”

“I was captured,” she answered equally quietly. “Two months. Whips, fire, poisons, illusions.”

Bannister’s face was stern. “You were tortured? And they didn’t tell us that why?”

“ Likely because it’s classified,” she replied. “I specifically asked for no retaliation and thankfully my father in law trusts my judgement. Otherwise we’d be at war.”

“We’re always at war.”

“We’re not,” she said quietly. “Not really. There are skirmishes, battles, arguments. But this isn’t war.”

Bannister sighed and looked up at Lars again. “Does he have to follow us so closely?” he asked Luciana.

“Yes.”

“Oh.” Bannister wet his lips, thinking. “So, how’d you escape?”

“I got angry,” she said with a humourless smile. “Real fucking angry. Fought my way out, walked to Ashenvale, a hippogryph found me and brought me to Darnassus. Malfurion Stormrage stayed with me and healed me for... seven months, give or take.”

“Malfurion Stormrage?” Bannister asked, eyes widening. “As in, their leader?”

“Co-leader. Yes.”

“Why wouldn’t they tell us that?” he asked.

“The circumstances of my escape are still heavily guarded secrets because there are probably still a few agents who would want to see me recaptured,” she said. “And if they could find out how I escaped the first time, and where I went, they might be able to prevent it from happening again.”

“They couldn’t take you out of the city,” Bannister objected quietly. “They’d be skewered on a dozen swords the moment they stepped within range of the walls.”

“That would be an interesting sight,” Luciana chuckled.
“It would,” he agreed. “So, how are you doing up here?” he asked, tapping her forehead.

“I’m fine,” she soothed. “Well, I’m not fine, but I’m doing good. It... It was hard, for a while,” she admitted quietly. “They used illusions and that really messed me up. I couldn’t trust any of my senses, at first. I’m still not always sure about sight.”

“Touch?” he asked, squeezing her tight for a moment.

“Touch is fine. It’s really sight, sound,” she said. “And smell sometimes makes me want to vomit because of my fucking belly sickness,” she grumbled, rubbing at her stomach.

“I heard you were having twins,” he said, smile growing again. “He really did a number, eh?”

“Bann!” she said, aghast, and elbowed him in the side.

“Ow, fuck!” He rubbed at his ribs, grimacing. “That hurt, Luce!”

“Well then,” she said, as though it should be obvious.

Bannister needed a moment to recover, but he continued his questioning. “How’s the Prince treating you?” he asked. “He doing right by you? Keeping you company, making sure you eat and sleep? I still think the whole thing was a bit funny. You told me the King set this up, and I remember you hated the thought of getting married. What changed?”

She sighed. “Bann, sometimes I really don’t think I’ll be okay,” she started. “Ever. I’ve seen a lot. I can’t describe most of the things I’ve been through. Sometimes it’s so bad I start to see things. It’s like I’m there, seeing people get blown in half or run through with a spear.” She swallowed thickly. “And sometimes I start to shake, just... at random, I start to shake and my hands aren’t steady and I get dizzy and I can’t walk or hold anything, and sometimes I can barely make a sound. I don’t even have nightmares. I have night memories. I get twitchy sometimes, I panic at nothing. I dropped a slice of apple on the floor the other day and had a meltdown because I kept thinking, I’m a failure, I’m useless, I can’t even hold a damn slice of apple.”

“It’s that bad?” he murmured, brow furrowed and eyes full of concern.

“Sometimes. Less now that I... Well, I’ll get to that,” she said. “I can’t look at my sword some days even though it’s mine and it’s clean and sharp. Some days I see someone in armour and I freak out. I can’t help it. If someone comes up behind me, or in a blind spot, I’m ready to kill them. Most days I’m jumpy, more alert than I need to be. I can’t always sleep and then sometimes I just feel completely numb. And I need to hide that from most people because I can’t be seen as weak. That would cause so many problems... I’d spent all day in court trying to convince people that I’m not. And that would only make it worse. I have to be seen as strong, unbreakable, even though most of the time I really just want to hide in the closet.”

“You can’t go back,” he said quietly. “Being in the army caused this. You can’t go back there.”

“Yes, I can,” she said. “And I will. Not now, but soon. Because that’s where I belong - in battle. I’m a warrior, Bann. These problems, they’re mostly symptoms of battle fatigue. I have to talk about it and make it seem normal for everyone else suffering from it, but I can’t be too affected by it or I’ll come across as crazy. You know how fickle people can be when they’re in a crowd. But when I’m out there fighting or training, it falls away. I don’t worry about any of it, I almost forget about it. I only have to think about how to win.”

“What about after?” he said. “When you retire, or when you’re too badly injured and you’re discharged? It all comes rushing back, and then what?”
“And then I have Anduin,” she said, smiling softly. “He brings me back down from it. Grounds me. When I start to shake he holds me together and when I can’t sleep he sits up with me and we talk, or read. When I have a meltdown he’s patient, helps me calm down and relax afterward. When I see things he waits it out, because there’s really nothing else to do, and he’s there when it disappears and I come back to the present. He’s there with a blanket, with mint, he talks to me quietly and reminds me where I am, when I am, what’s going on around me. When my medicine doesn’t work and I’m nauseous he eases it with the Light. When I can’t keep anything down and I’m puking my guts out he’s kneeling on the floor in the bathroom with me, the Light in my back to keep my muscles from seizing too hard.”

“You really love him,” Bannister murmured. “When you talk about him you get all mushy.”

She laughed quietly. “Yeah,” she said. “I do. And you know what?”

“What?”

“He says he’s the lucky one.”

Bannister smiled at that, but it only took a moment for it to become pained. “Luce, if you’re suffering like that,” he started. “If you can’t even tell reality from memories, sometimes…”

“I know how to deal with it,” she said, patting his chest briefly. “I am dealing with it. I really am, now. Anduin is always by my side. And Varian…”

“What about him?” Bannister asked.

She sighed heavily. “I love Father,” she said quietly. “I even like Mother. Mostly. But they weren’t parents to me. They didn’t know how to treat me like a child when I didn’t act like they thought I should. They still don’t really know how to treat me. Varian takes it all in stride. He’s been a father to me for years now. Maybe it’s because he’s a warrior, too. I don’t know.”

“You like it there? With them?”

“I’m happy, Bann,” she said. “I feel safe there. I don’t feel like I have to fight. I can relax, I can act my age. I’m only twenty-three. I’ve been through a lot and I’m only twenty-three, and when I know Varian’s there I don’t have to worry about anything because I know he’ll take care of it. I feel like a child should feel when their parent is nearby.”

“I’m sorry, Luce,” Bannister sighed, pulling her into a hug. She wrapped her arms around his back, holding him loosely. She couldn’t hold back a smile if she tried. His hug was exactly as she remembered. “I didn’t know. I knew something was wrong but I didn’t know how to fix it.”

“I’m fixing it now,” she said. “You did your best. You shouldn’t have had to. Thank you, Bann.”

“You’re welcome.” He squeezed her tight for a moment before pulling back. “You sure you’re going to be alright? You haven’t really gained any muscle since you got back.”

“Well, no,” she said. “If I did I might kill the fetus.”

“Oh. Right.” He grinned sheepishly. “I forgot about that. Alright. Well, if you’re planning on going back to the army after, you’re going to need sitters.”

“We have a bunch of nannies and midwives picked out,” she said. “But I’m sure if Uncle Bann wanted to spend a day with the kids no one would object. When are you and Chris getting hitched?”
He choked on his inhale, coughing and trying to wave her words away. “We’re not getting married!” he gasped when he could breathe properly. “Why would we get married?”

“So you can adopt four kids?” she said with a cheeky smile. “I distinctly remember you saying, quite often, that you wanted four kids and two dogs when you grew up.”

“That was twenty years ago!” he cried. “How do you even remember that?”

“Because I’m smart,” she said briefly, and laughed as his face turned bright red. “You don’t have to get married,” she soothed. “But I will be taking him back with me, as he is a part of my squadron. I just thought you wouldn’t want to leave any business unfinished.”

“You won’t let him die,” Bannister said.

“Of course not. But you’re not going to see him much. And who knows? Maybe he’ll find somewhere nice to settle down.”

“He wouldn’t,” Bannister said, but he wasn’t as sure.

“He wouldn’t,” Luciana soothed, patting his arm. “He left the army for you, Bann. He’s not going to leave you behind. But it might be nice to have something firm to come home to.” She waggled her eyebrows and a moment later they heard Lars groan.

“Cap, that was bad,” he complained.

Luciana cackled and looked over. “No one said you had to listen!” she said.

“Bad! I’m telling Victoria!”

“Go ahead! She’ll laugh, too!”

“Why must you continuously make my love life into a joke?” Bannister whined.

“Because it’s funny,” she snorted. “Seriously, Bann. It’s really nice to be able to come home to someone. Even if you’re not married, just saying out loud that what you have is real, that you’ll be waiting for him here, will make a huge difference.”

“How so?”

“You fight harder. You fight smarter,” she added. “Knowing that someone you care about is expecting you to come back in one piece makes it less likely that you’ll do things that might make that difficult.”

“So, what? You want me to tell him to come home soon?”

“Tell him whatever you want,” she shrugged. “It’s your relationship. I’d gotten the impression that you really liked him.”

“I do,” Bannister said softly.

“Then tell him that. And tell me,” she said. “What’s with Desmond? Jillian apparently has a crush on him and Victoria likes her, platonically. And I’m pretty sure Jillian’s a bit sweet on Victoria but Victoria doesn’t really mind Desmond, though he wouldn’t exactly be her first choice.”

“Oh, Des?” he said, chuckling. “He’s in way over his head. He likes Jillian, says something about her gruffness just tickles him the right way. Not like that!” he said hastily, seeing Luciana grin.
“And he says he likes Victoria’s oddness. Deadpan one moment, squealing about dogs the next.” He shrugged. “I don’t really see the appeal of either of those things, but he likes them in those two.”

“He likes both of them?” Luciana asked.

“Yes. And he’s severely intimidated by them both.”

“I see.” She nodded once, slowly. “So Vic likes Jill, who likes Des, who likes both of them but it apparently afraid of them, and Jill sort of likes Vic who doesn’t really mind Des at all. But she might just be saying that because she’s very self-depreciating.”

“Are you thinking what I’m thinking?” Bannister asked, eyes glinting.

“Yep. Let’s go find him.”

Lars followed them, not bothering to ask if he should fetch Victoria. She’d be distracted by the dogs for a while longer and they were mostly safe on Amadeus grounds. Guards patrolled them regularly and while they weren’t Royal Guards, none of them were pushovers. Nancy, being Luciana’s personal healer, followed them silently back to the manor. When they passed the lounge, Luciana hesitated. “You can stay here while we talk to my brother,” she said. “We’ll just be up the stairs and down the hall.”

“I’ll hear you shout,” Nancy said with a smile.
When they reached Desmond’s study, a private room he used when he was helping their father with the trading business with Darkshire, Lars stepped aside. “I’ll wait out here,” he said. “Keep a look out. Shout if you need me.”

“Will do,” Luciana nodded.

“Desmond!” she and Bannister crowed in unison.

“Open the door!” Luciana cried. “Or I will! Even if it’s locked!”

“C’mon, Des!” Bannister added. “You know she’ll do it!”

“Coming!” they heard him shout. He opened the door a moment later, looking worried. “What’s wrong with you two?” he demanded. “Why are you yelling? Why are you looking at me like that?”

Luciana and Bannister each grabbed one of his arms and dragged him back into the study. Lars must have closed the door behind them because Luciana heard it slam shut. Desmond protested weakly when they deposited him unceremoniously on the couch against the far wall.


“What?”

“She knows, Des. She’s known all along,” Bannister said when his brother gave him a look of utter betrayal. “No use in trying to hide it.”

“Speak up!” Luciana said, kicking at his leg.

“Ow, hey! Stop that! Alright,” he sighed. “Alright, you got me. Jillian is absolutely wonderful and Victoria’s gorgeous. What more do you want?”

“Details,” she said, threatening to kick his leg again. He pulled it off the ground, flinching away from her.

“Don’t kick me!” he cried. “That hurts!”

“Then talk!”

“I’m trying to!” Luciana stilled, staring at him in askance, and he sighed again. “Jillian is brilliant,” he said. “She’s honest and speaks her mind, she’s completely unashamed and doesn’t apologize for being the way she is, doesn’t care what others think of her, and she takes care of her friends. And Victoria is... She can find something to laugh about in anything. She found mirth in a loaf of bread, for Light’s sake!” he said, chuckling fondly. “And she loves dogs. It’s... Well, it’s adorable. She gets all excited and happy, just because there’s a dog. She’s blunt, doesn’t beat around the bush. And she’s relaxed, understanding. Doesn’t judge you.” He paused, staring at Luciana. “What? Why are you still looking at me like that?”

“You didn’t answer my question.”

“You didn’t ask me one!”
She pulled her leg back to kick him and he jumped up on the couch to avoid it. “Stop kicking me!” he said.

“Then answer my question! How do you feel about them?”

“I just told you!”

“No, you listed all of their good qualities! What do you want from them?”

“What? Nothing!”

“Look at me in the eye,” Luciana said. “Look at me, and tell me that you don’t want anything from them. Anything to do with them.”

He looked at her, his jaw muscles clenching, and looked off to the side. “I can’t lie for shit to you,” he sighed.

“You can’t lie for shit anyway,” she said. “That’s why Jill likes you.”

“She what?” he asked, looking up again. “She said that?”

“Yes, she did. She likes that you’re honest, says you’re cheery, funny. Vic said that she likes your sense of humour and she said that she finds you a bit dramatic but I get the feeling that it’s just a cover. She likes dramatic.”

“She does?” he asked, sitting up straight on the couch. “She told you that? They told you that?”

“Yes, they did,” she confirmed. “Jillian is a bit wary of people, seeing as she’s cursed and people usually don’t take to worgen so quickly. Victoria is very self-depreciating and would most definitely resign herself to a friendless fate and set you and Jill up herself if that’s what made Jill happy. So I want to know how you feel about them.”

“Why does it matter?” he sighed, slumping back. “I can’t choose one over the other. They’re both wonderful.”

Luciana sighed explosively. “Does no one else actually think of the possibilities?” she demanded. “Bann, you think he has to choose one?”

“Well,” he said hesitantly. “It seems that way. That’s the normal course of action.”

“Since when are we normal?” Luciana said. “Desmond, are you aware that you only have to choose one if they don’t want to share?”

“Eh?”

“Share!” she repeated, leaning down to grab the front of shirt and give him a good shake. “Share! Sharing is caring!”

“What are you talking about?” he asked, trying to pry her hands off his shirt. “Share what? Share who?”

“You!”

“What?!”

“Agh!” She shook him hard and he cried out for Bannister to help him. “Why are you all so
“fucking stupid!”

“I don’t know! Stop shaking me!”

“No!”

“Bann, help!”

Bannister was laughing when he gently disengaged the two. “Alright, Luce, I think he gets the point.”

“I don’t think he did,” she growled.

“I did, I did,” Desmond said hurriedly, straightening his shirt. “You’re saying you want them to share me. What, exactly, does that entail?”

“Exactly what you thought! Not the dirty part,” she said. “Vic’s not really into that. Jill is, though. Those two get along like a house on fire and I don’t really see why they can’t get along like a house on fire without you there.”

“Because I don’t want to get caught in a house fire?”

“Three peas in a pod, then,” she corrected.

“What if I wanted to marry?” he asked. “We can’t marry more than one. You know that.”

“Have a commoner’s wedding, then,” she shrugged. “Or marry Jill, get some nice brownie points from the Royal House for furthering efforts to reconnect with Gilneas, and have Victoria live with you.”

“That seems pretty uneven,” he said, frowning. “I wouldn’t want her to feel left out.”

“Well she’s probably not gonna want a kid,” Luciana said dryly. “Jill might. So marry Jill for the legitimacy, invite Victoria along for the ride - or better yet, let her drive - and have a merry life together. Three heads are better than one.”

“Well, technically there’d be four heads...” Bannister started, and Luciana smacked his shoulder. “Fuck! That hurt! Stop hurting me!”

“Stop being disgusting!”

“You’re worse! I’ve heard the things you say!”

“Well I’m not saying them right now, am I?” She shoved at his shoulder.

“Abuse! Family abuse!” Bannister cried.

“Shut up!” Luciana groaned.

“Make me!”

She took a step towards him and he squealed and hurried away from her. “No, wait, don’t! I’m sorry!”

Desmond was the first to start laughing, and when he pulled Luciana down by the hand onto the couch Bannister straightened, grinning and chuckling sheepishly, and sat on his other side. “I think
it’s been too long since we’ve done this,” Desmond said. “Just had fun together, like we used to.”

“Yeah,” Luciana agreed. “But times changes and we can’t always do what we did as children.”

“We can still laugh together,” Desmond protested.

“Yeah, we can.” Luciana nudged his shoulder with her own. “So, shorty.”

“I’m the same height as you!”

“That’s the joke,” she said. “What do you want? Just Jill? Just Vic? Or both?” She saw him hesitating and nudged him again. “It’s not selfish to want both. You’re not collecting them. If you’ll be happiest all together, then I’m going to make it happen.”

“Whether we want you to or not?” Desmond asked dryly.

“Exactly.”

“I think her crown’s too tight,” Bannister interjected.

“I don’t have a crown,” she said. “Those are only for ceremonies. And we don’t need them, anyway. Anyone could recognize me. Hey, there’s the vrykul lady with the scars! Wait, isn’t that the princess? Why yes, it is!”

Desmond’s shoulder shook against hers while he laughed. “And then they’ll say, who’s that skinny guy next to her? Oh, that’s just the Prince. He’s normal size but he looks tiny next to her.”

“Everyone does!” she added. “It’s amazing.”

They fell silent for a moment, and Desmond spoke quietly when he broke it. “I would want them both,” he said. “I think, if I chose one, I’d always wonder what it would have been like to be with the other. And I’d wonder if I should have let them be together, if they would have been happier that way.”

“What you should do is talk to Victoria while we’re here,” Luciana said. “I’ll talk to her when we return to the Keep. You’ll have a chance to talk to Jill soon too, or you could show it really matters to you and visit at the castle. They’ll let you into the private area if you’re with me.”

“Do you think it’ll work out alright?” Desmond asked in a small voice.

“I think it will,” she replied with a smile, rubbing her hand over his back briefly. “Jill might be stubborn about it, because spending so much time being rejected for the curse has put her a bit on edge. Vic will brush if off at first, might even lie and tell you she’s not interested. Be patient with them and remember why you’re willing to try this.”

“I’m going to trust you on this, Luce,” Desmond said. “Where is Victoria?”

“She’s with the four month pups.”

“Alright. I’ll go and... talk to her, I suppose.”

Desmond heaved himself off the couch and gave them a nervous look. “You should change,” Bannister suggested, gesturing at Desmond’s ink-stained shirt.

“Nothing too fancy,” Luciana added.
“Alright, alright,” he chuckled. When he left, Lars stood in the doorway.

“All clear?” he asked.

“Clear.” Luciana stood on shaky legs, and sighed. “Ugh. I’m only twenty weeks and I feel gross.”

“Here,” Bannister laughed, wrapping an arm around her back. “You feel up to eating?”

“Not really, but I should try anyway.”

“Nancy should have your medicine,” Lars added.

“She still in the lounge?”

“Should be.”

“Alright.”
Normally Luciana would lie down after taking a new dose of medicine. Today she found it was enough to sit back on a comfortable sofa in front of a fire, with Nancy keeping an eye out for symptoms of belly sickness.

When Luciana started to sit up with care to her slowly growing stomach, Nancy laid a hand on her back and helped her. “I’m fine,” Luciana said, turning so she was sitting properly on the sofa. She could sense Lars looming over her from behind and glanced up to offer him reassurance. She didn’t smile, as the scar tissue in her face would make it seem more like a grimace. Instead she let Lars read her eyes, and he relaxed when he saw that she wasn’t lying. “Vic is with Desmond?”

“In his study,” Lars said.

“Good. In that case, let’s get something to eat.”

Luciana was welcomed to the kitchens by a small crowd of family servants.

“It’s so good to see you again!”

“We’re all glad you’re back safe, Lady.”

“You’re growing!”

“How’s the royal life treating you?”

“Still eating like an orc?”

She laughed it off, let the older servants hustle her to a table and present her with food. “Nothing too rich, please,” she said. “I’ve got terrible belly sickness.”

“Do you need something for it?”

“No, no, I just took my medicine. But I’m still a bit sensitive. If you’ve got white meat or fish, that’s better than beef. And definitely better than lamb.”

“We’ll fix you right up,” a cook cried from the back of the kitchens.

Enough was brought out for Lars and Nancy to eat as well, and they were joined halfway through by Victoria. She sat down silently opposite Luciana, and when no one prodded at her for information she reached for a bread roll and the plate of roasted onion.

“We’ll leave soon after we’re done eating,” Luciana murmured. “It was good to get out of the Keep but I’m getting antsy in here.”

“How soon?” Lars said. “I’ll get the driver.”

“Not that soon,” she said. “I’ll check in with my aunt and then we’ll go.”

Luciana watched the kitchen staff. She didn’t want to be swarmed again when she made to leave. At the most opportune moment she slipped out of her seat and the others followed silently. Successfully escaping the kitchens brought to mind the many memories she had of breaking into them hours after dinner. As a child her appetite had grown steadily as she had, and she’d soon found herself always hungry. She wouldn’t receive more than two servings at dinner, as a normal
child wouldn’t even eat that much, so she’d taken to sneaking to the larder for a late-night snack that was more of a second dinner. When the cooks had caught her late one night they’d at first been upset, but then she’d started to quietly cry about always being hungry and they’d grown sympathetic. Before long she’d been making regular trips to the kitchens to eat. They’d sit her down out of the way somewhere with food and she’d watch the goings-on raptly.

She wore a fond smile all the way to her aunt’s quarters. The door to her study was open and when Luciana nudged it open the rest of the way, Talia looked up with irritation that melted into happiness when she saw who it was. “Luciana!” she cried, jumping up and hurrying over to hug the much taller woman around the waist.

“Hey, Aunty,” Luciana greeted, returning the hug for a moment. “How’ve you been?”

“Busy, as always, with your irresponsible behind running all over Azeroth,” she said, waving them all into the office. “But I’m glad to have something to do.”

“Aunty, this is Lars and Victoria from my squadron. Nancy, my personal healer.”


“Lady,” Lars nodded once.

“Nice to meet you,” Victoria said with a friendly smile.

“And it’s good to meet you all. Thank you for taking care of Luciana all this time,” she said. “She had a rough start, but I can see she’s doing much better now. Despite the recent, ah... happenings.” She smiled fleetingly. “Can I get you anything to drink? Have you eaten yet?”

“We just ate in the kitchens,” Luciana soothed. “We’re not going to stay long. I just wanted to see how you were faring.”

“Very well. Thank you.” Talia smiled again. “I should be asking you how you’re faring. Pregnant!” she giggled. “With twins! Of all the situations you’ve gotten into, Luciana, I think you might hate yourself for this one. I know you love children but birthing them is a royal pain in the...”

“I doubt I’ll regret it,” Luciana interrupted with a chuckle. Victoria had known exactly what Talia had almost said and her brows were near her hairline. “This was my choice and I’m nothing if not stubborn.”

“We thank the Light every day for that stubbornness,” Talia said. “I won’t keep you long. I’m just curious to know what your plans will be after birthing your children.”

“I’ll breastfeed for a short time. Maybe a month and a half. That will give me time to recover, as well. I’ll start training soon after that. I plan to return to the army.”

“So soon?” Talia asked, frowning lightly. “You don’t want to stay with your children? I know you missed Frederic terribly when you had to leave Sunday evening.”

“I did,” Luciana said, ignoring the twitch in her gut at the mention of her youngest, and dead, brother. “But they’ll have Anduin, and Varian will never be far away. They’ll have an entire kingdom looking after them.”

“And looking at them,” Talia reminded gently.
“I know. But do you really think Varian would let anything happen to them?”

“No, I suppose not.” She sighed. “I wish you would reconsider returning to the army. It brought you good things, to be certain, but it also brought you and your family terrible pain. Both sides,” she said. “But I’ve always said you inherited Alaric’s hard head.”

“Alaric?” Lars asked.

“The founder of the House,” Luciana answered. “Alaric was of Arathor. He was an officer in the Imperial Guard and for his bravery and service was offered a title and land. He refused, and then after serving in their army for another decade he wanted to move his family to safety. Knowing his reputation, the king gave him permission to move. He was one of the leading forces in the creation of the Kingdom of Stormwind, over a thousand years ago, and he stood steadfast beside the first Wrynn. The Amadeus family was made a Noble House because of his loyalty. This land was claimed several generations ago, after our original lands were destroyed in the burning of Stormwind.” She gestured to the manor at large. “He lived well past his ninetieth year and died in his sleep. We like to say that Death had to take him asleep or there would have been a fight.”

Victoria chuckled and Lars nodded. “He made the right choice, it would seem,” Talia added. “Stromgarde fell, while Stormwind stood. But he and the first members of the House of Amadeus were tough and made their way here, and their descendants survived the sacking and the riots. We stand to this day.”

“Sounds about right,” Lars said. “We going soon? I’ll get the driver.”

“Yes, thank you,” Luciana said, and Lars slipped away.

“Bit of a blunt man,” Talia commented.

“He’s like that, yes,” Luciana said. “So, tell me about Lord Pembrooke.”

“Oh, that’s not going anywhere just yet,” Talia said. “He’s a charming man and I could certainly see us getting along but I’m still needed here. Maybe once my children are ready to take over...”

“It won’t be long now,” Luciana said. “Olivier is twenty-five and he’s got your silver tongue and his father’s quick wit. He’s practical, willing to compromise but unwilling to surrender.”

“He can take over when I’m good and ready,” Talia grumbled. “I’ve still got a few years left.”

“After that, then, you should consider taking Pembrooke to Stranglethorn for some quality vacation time,” Luciana suggested with a slow smile.

“You are terrible,” Talia scolded. “Those years in the army have corrupted you. You’re horrid. Absolutely appalling.”

Luciana was laughing when Lars returned. “Coach is ready,” he reported. “And the kitchens packed you up some snacks.”

“Wonderful,” she praised, and Lars grinned briefly.

She said her farewells to her aunt, bending down so Talia could kiss her cheeks. They made their way quickly through the manor as Luciana was starting to get jittery. She had been cooped up inside, forced to sit still, for several months. She wanted nothing more than to fight. Maybe wrestle someone. She longed to run. She knew she couldn’t and she knew why, but it was mildly frustrating.
Their progress was stalled by Desmond, who approached with a puppy in his arms. He silently offered it to Victoria, who didn’t look at him but accepted the dog. Its ears perked up to her and its tail wagged slowly.

“Hey, pup,” Victoria crooned, kissing its snout. It tried to nip at her nose. She looked up, and handed the puppy back. "Keep him safe for me. I'll come back for him when Luce is safe."/p>

“I’ll see you soon, Desmond,” Luciana promised, guiding Victoria away with a hand on her upper back.

“It was good to see you again, Luce. Say hello to your husband for me.” Desmond had an expression on his face that seemed to be a lost mix of hope and confusion.

“I will.”

The coach was, as before, a bumpy but not altogether unpleasant experience. Luciana had the driver halt halfway to the Keep. “I’m going to lose it,” she murmured, leaning forward to let her hand hang over her knees. Her hands were clasped over the back of her head. “I’m going to fucking lose it.”

Victoria’s hand was soothingly rubbing her back. Nancy placed her hands gently on Luciana’s knees. “What it is?” the priest asked quietly. “What’s wrong, Princess?”

“I want to fight.”

“You can’t yet,” Victoria said. “You’ll lose the little ones.”

“I know. I still want to.”

She heard Lars sigh. “You don’t have to wait much longer,” he said. “When you’re starting your training again we can water wrestle. That spot behind the Keep where the river's shallow is good.”

“You water wrestler without me,” she complained.

“Yeah, we all did,” he snorted. “Maybe you shouldn’t drill us if it’s going to make you envious.”

“I’d murder someone.”

“Probably.”

The coach driver was patient while Luciana tried to regulate herself. When she finally sat up and exhaled, Lars leaned out of the coach to let the driver know to keep moving. Victoria talked in tangents to Luciana to distract her until they could reach the castle.

Luciana took her time walking through the Keep. She was tired of being cooped up like a prize hen and though she knew it wasn’t going to happen she desperately wanted to do something physical, something that would make her lungs burn and her muscles ache. Anduin could see her agitation the moment he spotted her. He was in the petitioner’s chamber, talking to a group of civilians who had become impatient and smoothing things over with practiced ease, when he saw her wander past with a glint in her grey eyes that made them look like steel.

“Lucy,” he called, hurrying after her. She led him just inside the private wing, where only high-ranking nobles and Royal Guards could enter, and the moment the door was shut behind them she practically collapsed against him. “Lucy, are you okay?” he asked worriedly. She felt his Light spread out against her back, radiating into her flesh and through it in a thorough inspection.
“I am going crazy,” she said. “No one’s letting me do anything more strenuous than walking. And I’m not even allowed to go up the damn stairs on my own.”

She felt Anduin relax, and felt only a little guilty for making him worry. “I thought something was really wrong,” he said quietly. “I’m glad it’s something we can fix.”

“I’m not allowed to fight,” she reminded him.

“Fighting isn’t what I had in mind,” he murmured, and she felt one of his hands slide much too low to be proper for such a public setting.

“You’re getting daring,” she commented.

“You like it.”

She hummed in agreement and let him guide her upstairs, to their private quarters. Lars and Victoria found them just inside the private wing, but seeing as they were safely ensconced in the heart of the Keep, the two soldiers headed back outside instead. Luciana didn’t doubt they knew exactly what she was about to do with her understanding and very affectionate husband.

Anduin’s bed was the most comfortable thing she’d ever lay on, Luciana decided. The sheets were immeasurably soft, the pillows were perfectly plump, the duvet was just the right weight, the mattress was the exact firmness she needed, and everything smelled like Anduin. And, right now, it smelled faintly of sex.

That was the icing on the cake, she decided, and it was absolutely wonderful that the bed was so comfortable because she was sprawled over it with the duvet pulled up to her stomach, and her limbs shook with a delightful weakness every time she shifted and her skin still tingled with the Light and the memory of Anduin’s caress. Best of all, her pulse pounded dully in her crotch and she could count her heartbeats by it. And, even better, every now and again she’d see Anduin glance over with the smuggest and most self-satisfied expression she’d ever seen on a healer.

“It’s almost dinner timer,” she heard him say. “Have you rested enough? Or should I tell Father you’re going to bed early?”

She sighed heavily. The decision seemed to be the weightiest she’d made in years. “I don’t know,” she groaned. “Why don’t you tell him why I’m going to bed early and see how red he gets.”

“He wouldn’t get red. He’d say things that would make me go red.”

“Then do that, and come back so I can see.”

The bed dipped and Anduin’s lips landed gently on her forehead. She felt them move as he spoke quietly. “How are you, now?” he asked. “Better?”

“Much.”

“I’m glad. You should get up, at least to eat something. You know if you stay in bed through dinner you won’t sleep tonight.”

“Then we can do this again and I’ll sleep again after.”

“I have meetings with the Explorer’s League tomorrow morning,” he said apologetically, lips meeting hers for a moment in a chaste kiss. He moved slowly, heaving a leg over her hips so he could hover over her and press his weight against her carefully. She exhaled through her mouth.
“Anduin, I may be weak right now but I still have hot blood.”

“Good,” he murmured against her mouth. “We can continue after dinner.”
Luciana reached the thirty-seventh week of her pregnancy with an increased agitation at her lack of physical activity that had Varian alternating between laughter, sympathy, and concern.

“I’m pretty sure breaking your fingers isn’t going to help,” he said, brow furrowed. He was watching her twist a piece of metal spare from the forges that had been worked too much to make into a weapon.

“Either I wring this piece of metal or a neck,” she said plainly. She was currently surrounded by nobles unfortunate or unlucky, or even stupid enough to have made an appointment with her while she was so heavily pregnant. Most were avoiding her gaze and speaking quietly, and she didn’t at all feel bad for scaring them. “I’d prefer a neck, honestly. I never tire of the feel of bones breaking under my hands.”

Varian had been watching her with some humour at the start of the meeting, but now he was firmly concerned. “Thirty minute recess,” he called, and the nobles - despite some of them spending time in the military, themselves - all fled the room. Varian stood and approached Luciana slowly. She was staring a hole in the wall and she knew she must have looked quite crazy at that moment. Her face wasn’t quite as expressive as it had been when she was younger.

“I’m fine,” she said before Varian could ask. “I’ve spent the last eight months sitting down. My body has been screaming at me for seven.”

“I know,” he said, laying a comforting hand on her shoulder. The metal in her hand was twisted and the corners were showing signs of extreme stress. Varian pried it out of her hands and tossed it onto the table. “It won’t be long, now.”

“Can we remove them early?”

“I wouldn’t suggest it.”

She sighed and stretched her arms over her head. “Yes,” she said.

“What?”

“You were going to ask. So I said yes.”

Varian stared at her in askance, until she pulled open her loose coat, pushed her shirt up, and rubbed her round belly. In response, one of the twins pressed their foot against it briefly. As always, Varian’s impossibly light blue eyes lit up in wonder at the sight. He looked at her for permission and she nodded. Reverently, the King placed his wide, rough hand over her belly. A moment later she felt one of the babies kick out, which felt strange to her even after spending almost sixteen weeks with movements from inside her. Varian snatch ed his hand away when he felt it, glanced at her again, and put his hand back.

“You act like it’s going to eat you,” she chuckled, and there was another movement in response.

“I was away during Tiffin’s pregnancy, travelling my kingdom and defending it from invaders,” he said quietly, watching her belly for signs of further movement. “I didn’t get to do this with her. With Anduin. But now I can with my grandchildren. You’ve brought a lot into this House, Luciana,” he said, not looking at her. “You’ve made it a family again.”
She didn’t respond, instead rubbing circles against the side of her belly to encourage the twins to move. Whenever Varian felt it he took his hand away, but it returned a moment later. He startled at each motion like a nervous dog, and Luciana could see the fear in his eyes. Fear, perhaps, of the future, or of his own rough hands. Warriors were not typically meant to hold small things, delicate things that they could break. Luciana was familiar with children, with holding them just so and humming so they felt the deep vibrations in her chest. Varian, she wondered, might have forgotten. She had confidence that he would remember, or relearn, soon enough.

The recess passed with Varian standing over her, watching with wonder and fear as the two babies inside her occasionally moved. When she sat for too long they would act up, as though impatient to get moving - much like their mother. Luciana knew that the recess was almost over and made to sit up, but Varian inhaled sharply and removed his hand to reveal a tiny hand pressed up against Luciana’s skin. The fingers were clearly defined and the palm looked too small to belong even to a baby, and a moment later it was gone.

She pulled her shirt down and closed a few buttons on her coat. Her belly chilled easily, protruding as it was. She straightened in her chair, drank some water, and watched as the nobles filed back into the room. Varian had retaken his seat, his indifferent but slightly amused mask back in place, and the meeting continued.

“To summarize,” Luciana said when she felt enough had been said, not standing as was normal because of her pregnancy. No one dared to comment. “Westfall will be governed by Helliah Shadowstep under jurisdiction of the Kingdom of Stormwind. Efforts to revitalize the land will be overseen by selected members of the Cenarion Circle and the Earthen Ring, who will collaborate with adventurers of the Alliance willing and able to heal the land, its flora and fauna, and its people. Small military detachments will be sent alongside them to rid the land of murlocs, gnolls, and the remains of the Defias. Funds will be needed for these detachments, for rewarding adventurers, for relief efforts and supplies, for the repairs of Sentinel Hill and Moonbrook, for the establishment of flight camps, and for reparation of the people subject to the Defias rule. A full outline will be drawn up by next week and you will all be present for that meeting.”

She was not honouring their efforts by telling them they’d be there. Rather, she was telling them that they would be there. No one objected. Luciana, now more than ever, appreciated having such heavy scarring on her face and neck. It made it hard for people to make stupid objections, and she knew that if they said something anyway it was either important, or they were really stupid. She relished dealing with the latter.

“Any questions?” she asked.

“Your Highness,” Lord Enom Bolthorn stood up, bowing his head to her briefly in respect. “We are wondering, though please do not mistake this for doubting you or His Majesty.” Bolthorn nodded to Varian, then. “We are concerned if it is truly wise to entrust Westfall and its people to the Shadowstep. They are poor, desperate, and she could easily take advantage of them.”

“Helliah is more interested in having a territory to call her own,” Luciana said. She’d met with Helliah one night, several months ago, while washing her face in her own washroom. Anduin had been in his bedroom and Helliah had snuck into the Keep to talk to Luciana with the King’s acknowledgement. Luciana had been warned that she’d pop up at random to talk to her.

The woman was distant, as though not fully connected to reality, but was almost painfully intelligent and capable. She was also honest when speaking to Luciana and told her many secrets of herself and her plans after Luciana promised to keep them unless she felt they endangered her position or her people. “She’ll govern Westfall fairly as she does her own people. She is interested
in seeing the land healed, its people restored, and while her motivations are not charitable she is honest about them. You are all familiar with her reputation?”

Several nodded, or murmured assent.

“It’s well-earned. I have spoken with her, personally, at length. Her plans for Westfall are sound and she will swear as Governor fealty to the Crown and loyalty to its people. Her underground activities will stay as such and she will not force any citizen of her province into personal service.”

“When can we expect the economy to start showing signs of recovery?” Lord Bolthorn asked, seemingly the speaker for the group.

“Helliah expects it to start picking up within three years,” Luciana responded. “Once the land is restored we can expect further progress. The people lack confidence in the kingdom, but they will respond well to Helliah. Don’t expect them to start singing our praises,” Luciana said, using the plural to show solidarity with the House of Nobles. “But they’ll cooperate willingly once Helliah shows them that we’re willing to give them the reins, so long as they react positively. Any other questions?”

“No, Your Highness.”

“Dismissed. I’ll see you all in one week, circumstances allowing.” She gave her belly a pat, and earned a few friendly-seeming chuckles.

She waited until the room was empty save for her and Varian. She accepted his hand and heaved herself out of her chair. “Ugh,” she groaned. “I feel heavy and clumsy.”

“It’ll fade soon,” Varian promised, supporting her weight while she carefully stretched.

“It’s not going to be long,” she warned. “I passed the mucus plug a few days ago, right in the shower.”

“I know. Anduin was nearly hysterical.”

“He was surprisingly calm about it.”

“You didn’t see him when I was talking to him. You were in bed with the healers over you. Anduin, for all his calm and confidence, was nearly panicked.”

“It felt weird,” she chuckled. “I can only imagine what it looked like.”

“Something came out and it was bloody!” Varian said, imitating Anduin’s higher-pitched voice. “Bloody!”

She laughed. “You’d think he’d get used to blood, being a healer.”

“Not when it’s coming out of a very pregnant woman he happens to be married to.”

“He’s the one who got me pregnant,” she said with mild complaint in her voice. “I know he spent the first week doing nothing but reading about it. And the second week asking about it. He should have expected this! I did.”

“I know,” Varian chuckled. “But it can be nerve-wracking. He’s going to be a father. He’s never dealt with a pregnancy before and there’s not much he can do besides soothe your aches and your nausea. He must have been pretty scared.”
She sighed. “Yeah, I know. How is he doing, by the way? He still aches sometimes from the Bell, but he tries to keep it from me.”

“He tries to keep it from me, too,” Varian grumbled. “I’ve learned what signs to look out for. I’ll tell you later, when we have time - in private,” he added under his breath, so that she barely heard him. She, too, knew there were always eyes on them. They were, after all, royalty. “He’s usually just fine. Like today. Sometimes his back or his joints, especially, will act up. During the season changes or if he spent a day with more physical activity than normal, he’ll ache. It’s rare that he can’t handle the pain. It hasn’t happened but twice since his recovery, and each time all we could really do was put him in a hot bath and summon a healer.”

“Why does he hide it from us, though?” Luciana muttered.

“He feels he should be able to handle it himself,” Varian replied, obviously unhappy and looking pained for a moment.

“I’ll break him of that,” Luciana promised quietly. “He doesn’t have to do anything alone.”

“He has you.” Varian rubbed her upper back. His hand was unusually warm - or maybe it was Luciana who was unusually cold. They returned to the Royal Wing, in the heart of the private area of the Keep, where their bedrooms were located and heavily guarded.

Luciana was greeted by Shauna, who was allowed to roam the halls and was often found next to anyone carrying food. “Hey, pup,” she said. “Hey, baby. How’s my puppy? How’s Shauna?” The dog’s crooked tail was wagging as she followed her chosen human back to Luciana’s bedroom. Enaeon was waiting inside with a bit of food and drink for her. “Where’s Anduin?” she asked.

“He is speaking with the midwives,” the draenei answered, moving to take her weight from Varian. “Your Majesty,” he greeted with a nod.

“Enaeon. Get her something to break. She had a piece of spare metal in the meeting but she nearly tore that to bits.”

“I will find something.”

Varian stayed with her until Enaeon returned with a square foot of thick metal mesh. “Oh,” Luciana said, perking up in interest. She took it from Enaeon and experimentally tugged at a few parts. “I like this.”

She took her time picking at it, breaking open the mesh and bending the edges and twisting them this way and that. It was satisfying in a way she couldn’t really explain to Anduin, who came in some time while she was distracted. He didn’t mind her occasional need to break something and sometimes he would watch her with a fond gaze, like he was now. “It’s like a dwarven puzzle box, for warriors,” he had once said, and it was especially accurate now.

When she had twisted the mesh in half and completely destroyed one of the halves, she set them down and sighed. “That’s so satisfying,” she said. “I still wish someone would give me some bones or something. Maybe not beef bones.” They used beef bones to make her favourite soup. “Chicken bones! They splinter.”

Anduin laughed warmly and moved to sit on the bed next to her. “You’re in a good mood,” he said.

“Yeah, I think I started labor about ten minutes ago,” she said, inspecting the undamaged half of
the metal mesh.

There was silence for a minute while she chose a starting point, pulling open the links. “What?” Anduin said dumbly.

“I think I started labour ten minutes ago.”

“That’s what I thought you said.”

There was another minute of silence.

“I’m going to get Father,” Anduin said, slipping off the bed. Luciana was too absorbed in the mesh to watch him go, but she noticed when Varian entered the room behind him.

“What are you feeling?” Varian asked, kneeling on the floor next to the bed.

“My back started to ache so I shifted. Didn’t change. Now my abdomen aches and there’s a pressure building in my pelvis. Very mild tensing a few minutes ago, lasted seventy-odd seconds.”

“Alright. Anduin, stay with her. I’ll go and fetch the midwives.”

“And Enaeon,” Luciana added.

“And Enaeon.”

“I want him to be there,” she said.

“I know. We arranged it months ago.”

“It bears repeating. I want him there.”

“He’ll be there,” Varian promised.


“Yes, I am,” he replied evenly. “You’re going into labour.”

“Yes, I am.”

He chewed the inside of his cheek. “I can ease the aches a bit,” he offered.

“Please.”
While they waited for Varian to return with midwives in tow, Anduin used the Light to ease her back. He helped her stand and walk slowly around the room, occasionally crouching when she felt able to. Anduin babbled all the while about the advantages of being mobile in the first stage of labour, and when Luciana laughed and pulled him in for a kiss he stuttered, and then laughed at himself. “I’m being a bit ridiculous, aren’t I?” he said. “Nervous, when you’ve got the best caretakers in the kingdom.”

“You should be nervous. Your wife is about to give birth.”

He laughed again, ears red, and kissed her gently. She walked around the room a few more times before Varian arrived. He opened the door and people streamed in. “A room’s been set up for you, Lady Highness,” the head midwife said, coming right in and taking Luciana from Anduin. Luciana was much taller than her and it took a second midwife to support her. “Lord Highness, you’re welcome to stay with her until the second stage.”

“Alright.” Anduin had calmed somewhat when the midwives had bustled into the room to pick up spare pillows, blankets, books, and other things Luciana might want or need. Anduin had spent a lot of time learning from the midwives and healers who were familiar with the experience of birth, though he had confessed he felt he would be next to useless while Luciana was in labour. Instead, he’d gone to ask Enaeon to be her birth partner before she’d had the chance, knowing how much she trusted the draenei. When the foreign Common term was explained Enaeon had eagerly agreed.

When Luciana reached the birthing room, not in the city hospital as was normal but in the Royal Wing for safety, Enaeon was waiting. He offered her a wide smile and helped set her up in the adjustable bed they’d brought in specifically for her. “How are you feeling?” he asked, his voice warm and his accent familiar and soothing.

“I ache,” she said. “ Didn’t start long ago. Oh.” She leaned back, and sighed. “Contraction,” she called, and one of the midwives brought up a chair to sit next to the bed. She had a notepad and a pencil in hand. “Pretty weak,” Luciana added. She counted the seconds as she waited for it to pass. “Sixty-eight seconds,” she said, and the midwife wrote it down.

Not a minute later Thalien, an SI:7 agent she recognized from her wedding, slipped in through the half-open door. After him came two healers. Nancy, whom Luciana knew well at this point, and a Glory Seeker who had been chosen after some deliberation. Casey Lanson was a Gilnean, a worgen, and her druidic abilities would compliment Nancy’s Holy Light. Casey was also an experienced midwife and had seen many people through birth, including both of her sisters. She was in human form, as a worgen’s claws would be a terrible idea to add into the equation, and her voice was low and comforting.

“Get her sitting up. Lady Highness, you feel you can walk?”

“Yes.”

“Lord Highness, you can help her. If you can, crouch down or stretch your legs every few minutes. Whatever movements you’re comfortable with. Your body will tell you what it can do.”

“Alright.”

Anduin helped her stand, kept a hand full of Light on her back while she paced the room.
Occasionally she crouched down, carefully, and when she had another contraction she called it out and counted the seconds.

When Luciana felt real pain start in her lower back after an hour of careful mobility, she let the healers know. “Come back to the bed,” Casey said. “Lay her on her left side. That’s it.” Two of the five midwives had set up the bed while she was walking so that when the time came, she could crouch on the bed rather than lie down. It was apparently much easier to give birth, especially for the first time, if you were vertical.

Enaeon stood behind her and provided relief for her ever growing pain. Anduin was in front of her, sitting in a chair and holding her hand. He was talking to her in a low, soothing voice. When she heard him, she realized that she had fallen into a stupor not unlike when she berserked. She let Enaeon know, quietly, and he nodded and said it was to be expected. “Casey is familiar with fury,” he said. “She knows what to do.” Anduin watched, continued to talk as the midwives removed Luciana’s pants and spread her legs to measure her.

“Six centimeters,” one called out. The midwife with the pencil wrote it down.

When Luciana’s contractions were closer together, the most recent being six minutes apart, Casey asked Anduin to step outside and wait with the rest of the group. It sounded like Luciana’s entire squadron was outside, and Varian was keeping order. She heard Bannister’s voice and guessed that someone must have gone to fetch him.

“You’ll be having twins,” Casey said, moving to stand where Anduin had been moments before. “You’ll be exhausted after the first so the second will likely need assistance. You know what that is?”

“Yes.”

“You know what forceps are and how they work?”

“Yes.”

“Are you alright with us using them, should it be necessary?”

“Yes.”

“Good. In that case, roll over. Sit her up, Enaeon.”

Casey measured her again. “Eight centimeters. Seemed you’re going to have a relatively short labour. Lucky girl,” the druid commented. Luciana could sense druidic magic against her skin and though it had been quite some time since she’d last felt it, she recognized it. “Must be all the muscle.”

“I used to be bigger,” Luciana said mournfully.

“You’re still built like a warhorse,” Casey said comfortingly. “Which is dandy, because your strong innards are gonna make this easier. Roll her back on her side. Put a pillow under it. There we go.”

Enaeon manoeuvred a thick pillow under Luciana’s bulging belly to support it, even as she had another contraction. “How is the pain?” Enaeon asked.

“Absolutely terrible,” Luciana said.
“You’re not showing it much,” Nancy commented from the other side of the room. She was preparing various things, notably two baby baths with heating runes to keep the water at a comfortably warm temperature.

“I’ve had worse,” Luciana said mildly, and she saw Enaeon wince slightly. She gave him massive blue hand a pat. “Seriously, though. I’m in a lot of pain right now.”

Enaeon stepped up his pain relief and she felt his Light soothe her back and abdomen for a while. She continued to call out contractions, and all the while the midwives chatted and Enaeon rubbed her hands and her arms to comfort her. “Enaeon,” she said.

“Yes, Luciana?”

“I am going to kill him.”

“That might not be the best idea.”

“He caused this. I’m going to murder him.”

“You love him quite a lot.”

“I am in quite a lot of pain.”

“You will need him alive to care for the babies.”

“That’s true. But Varian can do that. I’ll kill him and leave them with Varian.”

“I think you will need him still,” Enaeon said, smiling weakly when Luciana’s entire body tensed.

“Don’t go murdering anyone just yet,” Casey scolded gently, tapping her shoulder. “Roll back over. Your last contraction was only three minutes ago.” She measured Luciana again. “Ten centimeters. Ready, midwives.”

“How long have I been in here?” Luciana asked Enaeon. He glanced at his watch.

“Nearing the third hour,” he responded.

“That’s not long.”

“Happens a lot with multiple births,” Casey explained, pushing Luciana’s legs a bit further apart. “Nancy.”

The priest stood over Casey while the druid explained to Luciana what she was doing before she did it. Luciana had told her to when they had discussed birthing procedures a month ago. It was in Casey’s best interest if she didn’t startle Luciana with anything. Especially cold things made of metal.

Luciana growled, her mouth closed, and the sound must have surprised Casey because she looked up, eyes wide. “Was that you, Lady Highness?” she asked.

“Yes.”

“Well alright. Head should be breaching soon. Get her up.”

Two midwives helped her sit up, and Enaeon was strong enough to hold her up in a diagonal crouch while Casey watched for the first baby’s head to appear.
Luciana held in her pain, having mostly ignored it until now. She hadn’t been lying when she said she’d been through worse. The pain she had been feeling up until this point had been almost negligible. When Casey told her to start pushing in intervals, the pain increased quickly and soon she was gritting her teeth and growling. “I’m going to fucking murder him.” She quickly dissolved into cursing and growling. “It’s his fucking fault and if he shows me one shit-eating grin I’m gonna shove a fucking chair...”


Luciana wanted to scream but instead she snarled, clenched all of the muscles in her torso and pushed despite the searing pain that shot up her back. “I’m going to fucking murder you!” she howled, knowing that quite a few people who heard her would likely be quite frightened. She took some grim satisfaction in knowing that even heavily pregnant and weaker than usual, she could still inspire fear. “I’m going to push out two goddamn babies and I’m gonna come out there and shove a chair up your ass!”

Enaeon obviously found it hilarious because she could see his pointed teeth as he chuckled quietly to himself. “Push,” he reminded, and she clenched again, letting out a snarl more suited to a battlefield than a birthing chamber.

“I’m gonna kill you!” she bellowed. She felt vindicated when Varian poked his head in, mildly alarmed at the sight of her. “I’m gonna kill him!”

“We heard,” he answered. Luciana knew he wasn’t supposed to come in, but being the King, he did it anyway. He stood just beside the door, out of the way but still very much present. Him being there reminded everyone in the room just how important their task was. They were helping to birth two royal babies. If anything went wrong they’d all be liable, and likely punished however Varian saw fit. And if something did go wrong, Luciana knew nothing would quell Varian’s rage, let alone her own.

Luciana’s first real scream came when the baby’s head pushed past and tore her perineum, the stretch of skin and muscle between anus and vagina. She howled in pain, tensing again and trying to push it out and end it. Of course, it didn’t stop, and she panted and kept pushing. Enaeon did what he could to dull the pain, but it still hurt. More than being whipped, as this pain came from inside and hurt from her neck to her knees. And her head hurt. Everything hurt. Even her fingers hurt from gripping Enaeon’s hand hard enough to break it. As it was, she could feel his bones grinding and groaning. He didn’t even make a face and when she looked, she could see him healing his fingers even as she broke some of the smaller bones.

The first baby came out slowly, and Casey gently tugged at it while Nancy reminded Luciana to keep pushing. “First out,” Casey called, and Nancy disappeared to care for the baby. Luciana heard it squalling, but had no energy to spare to revel in it. Nancy would clean it off, bathe it in Light and then actually bathe it in the warm water. She would clear its nostrils, make sure it was healthy, and then hand it off to a midwife. “Prepare for the second. Keep her pushing, Enaeon.” Casey’s voice was clear, cut through the haze of dangerous fury that was building in Luciana in response to the pain. She fought to keep it down.

“Push, my friend. Keep pushing. You are birthing a child. One child is out. You have one more. Keep pushing. You are halfway through.”

“Shut the fuck up,” she growled, and Enaeon grinned.

The second head breached and Casey called it, but Luciana could feel it as it happened and again fought the urge to scream bloody murder. When the head stretched her already broken perineum
she screamed anyway, and her fury reared up in vicious wrath at the pain. She tried to fight it back down but it didn’t release her and she looked at Enaeon, who read it in her eyes and lay his hand over her shoulder. A moment later she felt his Light surround her, absolutely encase her and wash into her. It dulled the sounds of the birthing chamber, dulled her senses and her nerves, and she calmed for a few moments. Push, she reminded herself, and pushed as hard as she could for as long as she could.
When the shield faded her pain returned fully and she screamed again. “Push!” Casey ordered, and she kept pushing. “Forceps!” Casey ordered. “Luciana, you’re going to feel cold metal against your vulva. It’s me, using the forceps like we discussed. Alright?”

Luciana nodded a few times and Enaeon spoke for her. “Yes,” he said briefly. A moment later the promised cold metal touched her, and she pictured what was going on even as her abdomen rippled, reminding her to push.

“Careful,” Casey said. “Push, Luciana! Keep her up!” Enaeon adjusted his grip and Luciana felt a wave of vertigo pass over her as Enaeon moved her around a bit. “Push!”

“Push, my friend,” Enaeon said.

She pushed.

“Head’s out!” Casey said. “Careful. Keep pushing.” The forceps were abandoned and clattered on the floor as Casey used her hands to slowly tug the baby the rest of the way out. “There we go. Almost through. Push, Luciana. One last push. Come on. One more. Almost done. Push!”

“I am!” Luciana roared, and she saw the nearest midwife flinch away for a moment.

“Out!” Casey said triumphantly. Luciana felt weak, and was glad for Enaeon’s strength and support. “Bowl,” Casey ordered, and a midwife placed a shallow, wide wooden bowl under Luciana. “Watch for the placenta. Enaeon, you know how to induce it?”

“Yes. I will do it.”

His Light warmed her cold skin and soothed her shaking. The effort left her exhausted, weak, but his Light bolstered her long enough to push something else out - the placenta, she thought after a few moments. “No fragments,” Enaeon said.

“Good. Lady Highness, you still want to toss it?”

She looked down at the placenta, bloody and limp in the bowl. “If it ain’t a baby I don’t give a shit,” she said blandly, and a midwife took it away to burn it as Luciana had originally requested.

“Lay her down, now. That’s it. Heal her up.”

Enaeon was the one to heal the bloody tear in her perineum. She was distracted from the sensation of being healed when Nancy brought over the first baby. “Two males,” she said, and the first was joined after a moment by the second. A midwife offered him proudly.

“Healthy and whole,” the midwife said.

“Good,” Luciana mumbled, reaching up with shaking arms to touch the two tiny fat faces. “They’re so small. I don’t remember Frederic being that small.”

“You’re quite a bit bigger than you were thirteen years ago,” Varian said. She’d almost forgotten he was there. He was still standing at the door, waiting. “What will you name them?”

“Give me a moment,” Luciana said to Nancy, who nodded. The babies were taken away for a moment, held protectively and within sight of Luciana. She adjusted herself in the bed so she was
leaning up slightly. “Strength draught,” she said.

“It would be better to sleep for a while,” Casey said, wiping her arms off in the corner with a wet towel.

“Strength draught, and I’m not asking,” Luciana said, and someone handed her a small vial. She tossed back the nearly tasteless potion and waited a minute for it to take effect. It was noticeable - she stopped trembling in exhaustion, her breathing was easier, and she could sit up properly. She motioned for the babies, ignoring the midwife who was cleaning blood and excrement off her privates. Soon after a warm, heavy blanket was laid over her legs, and another was tossed over her shoulders for good measure. There was no hearth in the room.

“Placenta’s burning,” the midwife who had taken it away reported. “Smells something awful.”

“It’ll fade.” Luciana looked up. “Thank you, all of you. Enaeon, you stay right where you are. The rest of you... Unless there’s something else you need to do right now, I’d like a moment with my husband.”

The midwives started to file out. Casey gave her a final check up, lifting the blanket for a moment. “Clean healing,” she commented to Enaeon.

“Thank you,” he nodded graciously.

“Varian,” Luciana said. “You can stay.”

He seemed almost relieved when she said that, and took up a position at the foot of her bed, standing over her protectively. Luciana was reminded strongly of Elwynn forest bears, and how they would stand over their cubs when any threat was near. She was smiling tiredly when Anduin cautiously entered the room, glancing around before his eyes settled on Luciana.

“Oh,” he said simply, and moved to the chair that had been pulled up next to her bed as the others had rushed from the room.

“Two males,” Luciana said quietly. “Healthy and whole.”

“Oh,” Anduin said again, and reached out to touch the forehead of the closer one. “They’re beautiful.” He was giving the babies his soft-eyes-small-smile look, the one he normally only gave to Luciana, and she found she was glad to see it now.

“Aren’t they?” she said. “The left one is going to look more like you, I think,” she said. “Same nose. Big ol’ shnozz,” she teased.

“Excuse me, my nose is perfectly reasonable,” he countered, turning his soft expression to her. “I could hear you threatening to kill me, by the way.”

“I changed my mind.”

“I’m so glad,” he said with no small amount of sarcasm. He looked back at the two babies. Luciana imagined he’d forgotten they weren’t alone in the room when he spoke next. “Half you, half me,” he said quietly. “I... We made two babies.”

“Yeah, and I just shoved them...”

“Would you stop,” he scolded lightly, smiling widely at her. “Give it a rest, just for a moment.” He brushed his hand down her arm, the Light tingling on her skin. She could see it glimmering over
his hand subtly. Anduin gently brushed each baby’s cheek with the back of his pointer finger, the digit glowing faintly with the Light. “They’re beautiful,” he said again. “I’m so proud of you,” he said to Luciana, smiling. He leaned over and kissed her softly. “How badly did it hurt?”

“Very badly. But I’m used to pain. I’m built for it.”

“You got through it.”

“Mm, I did.”

Anduin sighed, staring at the babies. They were both apparently exhausted, and appeared to be asleep. Luciana could feel them shifting in their wrappings. “What will you name them?”

“You don’t want a say?” she asked.

“I know you’ll pick good ones. You likely already have them in mind.”

“I do,” she confirmed. “Let me know what you think of them. This one, on the left,” she said. “Came out first. Nancy kept that in order. I want him to be Alaric.” She glanced up at Varian, who gave her a questioning look. “Alaric Varian Wrynn.”

He stared at her, and slowly his gaze slid down to look at the bundled up baby she wanted to name for him. “I would be honoured,” he said, humbled.

“Good. Alaric Varian Wrynn, welcome to Azeroth.” She leaned forward slightly and kissed his forehead and he stirred, making a tiny noise of complaint. Anduin soothed the baby with the Light in his fingers and the baby quieted again. “And this one,” she said, looking at the second child. “I would name him Bolvar.”

Anduin exhaled sharply. “You would?” he asked. She could see wetness in his eyes and he blinked a few times, swallowing thickly.

“He was like a father to you, no?” she asked. “I’m naming one for someone who’s like a father to me. Only fair you should have the same.”

Anduin chuckled wetly. “Bolvar is a good name.”

“Bolvar Amadeus Wrynn,” Luciana said, looking back at the baby. Her... baby. Her son. “Welcome to Azeroth.” She kissed his forehead and when he made a complaint like his brother had, Anduin reached out to try and soothe him. It seemed to work, but a moment later he made a louder noise. To keep him from having a fit and waking his brother, Luciana shushed him and bounced him a few times. He settled, and stayed that way.

“Well, that’s symbolic,” she murmured.

“What?” Anduin asked.

“Nothing. They’re both healthy, so I’m going to feed them now.”

“Okay.” Anduin helped her partially unwrap the babies so they could lay directly on her, and with trembling fingers he positioned Bolvar while she took care of Alaric.

“This is going to be so much fun,” she said blandly. “Two kids. Two breasts. Both sore at the same time.”

“Would you stop?” Anduin scolded, smiling.
It took a few moments for the babies to realize there were nipples available but once they did, they latched on. Luciana felt too tired to hold both, so she let Anduin hold up Bolvar. He still seemed quite teary-eyed at how she’d named the kids. Their kids.

She smiled down at them. Luciana could feel how light they were, how small and fragile. “I’ll keep you safe,” she murmured. “Don’t you worry about a thing.”

Neither baby appeared to be exceptionally hungry, and when Alaric moved away and whined, Luciana reached up with the edge of the blanket and gently wiped his mouth off. “Hush, boy,” she murmured, knowing he would feel the deep vibrations of her voice in her chest. “Hush, now.” He quieted down soon, and Bolvar finished eating while she was shushing Alaric. “Two,” she said, and laughed softly, bouncing them on her stomach. “You’re going to have your hands full,” she said to Anduin with a smile.

“I’m sure Father would be more than happy to help,” he said with a glance to Varian. “And your brother Bannister seemed eager to help, as well.”

“Mm, he volunteered for babysitting.” She looked up at Varian. “I’d like to sleep for a bit,” she said. “I took a draught but Casey was right. I need to sleep. Come take them.”


“Come here and take a damn baby.”

Anduin laughed and took Bolvar, who was closer to him, and held him carefully in his arms. Varian acted like Alaric was made of glass, and the King’s hands dwarfed the bundled baby. “Careful,” Luciana murmured. “There we go. That’s not so bad, is it?”

“It’s been a long time since I’ve held a baby,” Varian said, shifting Alaric in his arms. “But I haven’t forgotten. Get some sleep, Luciana. You did well. We’ll take care of your sons.”

She smiled slowly. “My sons,” she said tiredly. “My two boys.”

“You picked good names,” Varian praised as she made herself comfortable in the bed, laying down on her sore back. Enaeon was there a moment later, soothing the aches with the Light. “Strong names. They’ll carry them well. They are your sons, after all.”

“And they’re Wrynns.”

Varian’s smile was pained and happy, and Luciana stared at Anduin until her eyes closed.
Enaeon always knew that Luciana trusted him, but until today he’d had no idea what that meant. Not really.
When her bonded, Anduin, had come to him and asked him to be Luciana’s birth partner, he’d been confused. The term didn’t translate directly, but once it was explained Enaeon had been happy to accept. It was an honour to help someone bring a new life into the world, and for his own friend and Captain to ask him instead of a human... Well, the gesture had a heavy impact.

He’d helped her through her pregnancy as he should have, being her healer. He’d expected that she would want him nearby, at least after the birth. To have him inside the birthing room at all was significant. His people were allied to hers, but he was not one of her people. To show such trust in him that she would unquestioningly bring him into the birthing chamber showed great promise for their alliance.

To have him be her birthing partner was even more significant. She’d trusted him, without hesitation, to hold her up, to strengthen her and dull her pain while she birthed her sons. She’d broken three of his fingers, yes, but he took that as a sign of her returning strength. Pain created strength. All draenei knew that suffering was an opportunity to grow.

When Luciana named her sons with Enaeon present, he was shocked. It was an intensely personal and emotional moment. Usually only family would be present for naming. But she hadn’t even looked at him when she’d named her sons, tired and sore. Enaeon had been privy to the naming, to see her bonded’s face when she named a son for an old friend, and to see the King’s reaction when she had named a son after him.

The King had showed immense weakness to an alien, albeit an alien ally - but still an alien, not a citizen of his kingdom, not even a member of his race, not even originally of Azeroth. But Enaeon had been drawn into it without a glance, without question, because Luciana trusted him.

It made his heart heavy to feel it. The Light was with him always, and he spent so much time with it in his heart that he’d almost forgotten what it felt like when the Light reacted on its own. It was not sorrowful. It was happy, joyful, but heavy with it. The weight of Luciana’s trust was not an easy burden to bear, not while he was yet loyal to the Exodar. He could not in good conscience allow it to continue while there was a chance that he would be reporting these events to his superiors at year’s end.

Luciana breastfed her two sons, as they were all tired but healthy. When she handed them off to the two men of her family, she fell asleep soon after. Enaeon stood and approached her slowly, fanning out a net of Light over her prone form. “How is she?” Varian murmured. Anduin was absolutely enamored with the tiny child in his arms, and spoke to him quietly while Enaeon inspected Luciana. Yet Enaeon could feel the Prince’s gaze on him occasionally, sharp and knowing.

“Tired,” Enaeon summarized. “But she will recover quickly, as she always does.”

“Good.” Varian nodded to Enaeon. “I hope you realize what it means that she wanted you here.”

“I do.” He nodded. The King watched him with an unreadable expression while he slowly rocked the child in his arms.

“You have a decision to make.”
“I know.” Enaeon nodded again, and retreated to his chair. He felt almost as tired as Luciana looked. Emotional weight could not be underestimated, and he deliberated what he would do. His first choice was to speak to Luciana, tell her of his burden, and explain that he felt it unjust to continue to be privy to her innermost turmoil and thoughts while he was still under the Exodar’s banner. But he knew, in his heart where his Light resided, that it was not the decision he wanted to make. It was not the right decision. But he felt it was not right to abandon his people, either, for a leader of another race.

His thoughts were interrupted when Varian said, “September 18th.”

Luciana groaned and opened her eyes. She’d been stirring for some time, never one to sleep overlong, and Varian’s voice had disturbed her efforts to rest. “What?” she mumbled thickly, smacking her lips and stretching her arms out over her head.

“September 18th. Their birthday.”

“Oh.” She yawned, stretching the scars on her face, and sat up. Enaeon stood and reached over to move her pillows. She glanced up at him with a tired half-smile. The right side of her face didn’t smile so much anymore, but he had long since adjusted and learned how to read her eyes. “Thanks,” she mumbled, and yawned again. She motioned for Bolvar and Anduin handed him over. “Hey, boy,” she cooed, and Bolvar snuffled and whined. “Yes, I know. What a tiring day, huh?”

“Here.” Varian reluctantly handed over Alaric, as well, and Luciana held them both close to her chest. Enaeon silently adjusted the blanket to cover them and she gave him another look of thanks.

“How long was I out?” she asked.

“Not quite an hour,” Enaeon answered with a glance to his watch. It was gnomish in make, and worked quite well despite being cracked many times, hit with a fireball, and dropped into a river at least twice.

“Okay.” She bit back another yawn. “Well, I’m awake now.”

“I’ll go and make sure things are moving,” Varian said. “There are birth certificates to write up and House records to change.”

“Have fun,” Luciana commented. “Thank you.”

Varian smiled tightly, apparently unable to answer verbally, and opened the door. He shut it a moment later. “How many visitors do you feel up to?”

“Four if they can’t stay quiet,” she said immediately. “Two at a time.”

“I’ll let them know.”

Enaeon watched in silence as Luciana returned her attention to her newborns. Her face was stiff but her eyes were soft, full of love. Enaeon knew that she would prove to be as good a mother as she was a commander.
Visitors

Varian was only gone a few moments before Bannister and Desmond entered. They both seemed disheveled, though Desmond had put some effort into straightening his hair and his rumpled shirt.

“Luce!” Bannister said, hurrying forward and leaning down to hug her with care to the babies. “We could hear you screaming literal bloody murder, so we knew it wasn’t too bad.”

“You wanna try?” she grumbled. “Let me shove a chair up there. See how you like it.”

“No, thanks,” he chuckled. “How are you feeling?” he asked. Anduin stood to let him take the chair, and instead the Prince stood at the head of the bed, his hand a comforting weight on Luciana’s shoulder. His Light trickled down her back, warming her. Desmond brought up a spare chair in silence, bringing it to her other side so he could see the babies.

“Tired as fuck,” she said. “Glad it’s over. And sore as hell. My vagina hurts.”

“Luce. Really?” Desmond asked.


He took it in stride even as he hesitantly reached out. She let him take Alaric, showing him how to wrap the baby in a blanket to keep his body and head warm. “He’s so small,” Desmond said with wonder. “I barely remember, but you were that small when Mother brought you home.”

“Hard to imagine, now,” Bannister said. “Think they’ll grow up like you? Never stop growing?”

“Maybe. Light knows they’ll be tall,” Luciana laughed. She brushed a finger down Alaric’s cheek and he squirmed in Desmond’s arms, making the man smile.

“I think the Wrynn family is going to end up being giants,” Bannister joked. “You’re pretty tall, and the Prince isn’t exactly short... And have you realized how tall the King is? Like, really thought about it? He must be over six and a half feet!”

“Six foot eight,” Anduin said. “When he’s tired.”

“See?” Bannister gestured at him wildly. “You’re going to end up breeding Vrykul!”

Luciana laughed loudly, bouncing Bolvar on her abdomen and making him complain. She shushed him, brushed her fingertips over his cheeks and tapping his nose gently. “Hush, you,” she crooned, and he quieted.

“Like magic,” Desmond said quietly.

“I remember how,” she answered simply.

“What are their names?” Bannister asked after a moment. “We were going to ask the King but he was in a hurry.”

“Alaric Varian Wrynn and Bolvar Amadeus Wrynn,” she answered. “Alaric was born first. Desmond is holding him.”

“Are they identical?” Desmond asked, looking between the two babies.
“No. I think Bolvar might look more like an Amadeus than a Wrynn,” she said. “Same slant at the eyes. And look! He’s even got the frown!”

“He looks pretty grumpy,” Desmond laughed.

“He should be! I just shoved him out of…”

“Lucy!” Anduin scolded gently, but he was smiling. “Must you ruin every moment?”

“Yes.”

He threw up his hands in exasperation and Bannister chuckled. “You learn to live with it,” he commented.

“He’s learning something,” Luciana mumbled under her breath, but Bannister heard her and kept laughing.

“Do you plan to breastfeed?” Bannister asked.

“For six weeks,” Luciana said. “That will give me some time to recover, too. After that I’ll start light training. Lars promised to water wrestle with me.”

“I could never understand why you actually enjoy that,” Bannister said. “I’d rather be strung up and left to rot for a week.”

“I enjoy being in dangerous situations,” she replied honestly. “Gets the blood pumping.”

“And the maniac grinning,” Desmond added with a nod to her.

“Fuck, yeah. Makes my muscles burn and my lungs hurt. I love it.”

“Ugh.” Bannister shuddered theatrically. “We’ll leave that to you, I think.”

She grinned toothily and Enaeon couldn’t help but smile. It had taken some time for her squadron to adjust to her need to be physical, and her love of pain and struggle, but they’d moved past it quickly and it had become something of a challenge to try and keep up with her when she really got going. The entire 113th Company had soon learned that if you could keep up with Luciana, you’d earn her respect, and when she became a Captain, her Brigade had created an official challenge - keep up with Luciana, and you earned a spot on the Brigade’s honour roll. Luciana had taken it in stride, laughing her way through a line of combatants in water wrestling, running, rock-climbing, and fighting contests.

“Take it easy for a while,” Bannister said, patting her knee. “You’ve more than earned it, I think. Get acquainted with your kids.”

“I’ll have to get used to having kids, first,” she said. “Strange to say it. My sons.” She said the words as though taste-testing wine. “My sons, Alaric and Bolvar.” She looked up at Anduin. “Weird, isn’t it?”

“We’ll get used to it,” the Prince replied with a smile.

“Our sons, Princes Alaric and Bolvar. Hey, you’re not the only Prince anymore!” she crowed, looking back up. Anduin groaned.

“Don’t remind me.”

Desmond soon handed Alaric back to Luciana, who took him and unwrapped the blanket so he
could lie against her chest. “We’ll let your squadron come in,” Desmond said. “I think they’re getting pretty antsy. When you started really screaming, Kain had to leave for a while.”

“He’ll be fine,” she said dismissively, but Enaeon and Anduin both knew she wasn’t dismissing the information, only Desmond’s concern. “Yeah, send two in. And warn them to be quiet. I don’t have any energy to spare right now.”

Anduin gently brushed her hair away from her face while they waited for two new visitors. Christopher and Jillian came in first.

“Cute little blighters,” Jillian commented, sitting down in Desmond’s abandoned chair. “That one’s got your eyes.”

“What’re their names?” Christopher asked, taking a seat on her other side.

“Alaric and Bolvar,” Luciana said simply, tiring of repeating their full names. “Alaric’s older. By... how long?” she asked, looking at Enaeon.

“About seventeen minutes,” he replied.

“Yeah. Anyway, he popped out first.”

“So eloquently put,” Christopher teased. He didn’t reach out to take them, and looked nervous, but he did offer his finger for Alaric to grab. The baby’s hand was still very weak but his tiny, fat fingers curled around the proffered digit. “We could hear you screaming,” Christopher said with a smile. “Did you change your mind about murdering your husband with a chair?”

“I did,” Luciana said graciously. “As his services will be necessary to raise these two fucks.”

“Lucy!” Anduin said.

“What? They don’t speak Common yet!”

The Prince chuckled, leaned down to press a kiss into her sweat-matted hair. “Ugh,” he groaned. “You need a shower.”

“I need a lot of things and that’s not high up on the list. I can deal with sweat. I’ve been coated in shit for two days. I marinated in it. I think I can handle some sweat.”

Anduin made a face of disgust. “Why must you say that?” he asked, exasperated.

“I just gave birth. Leave me alone.”

Anduin’s fond smile stayed on his face despite her dismissal. Enaeon watched her carefully for signs of over-stressing, and was surprised to see pain on Anduin’s face rather than hers. When the Prince shifted uncomfortably for the fourth time, Enaeon knew why he looked so unwell. His joints, notably his hips and his knees, seemed to be bothering him greatly, possibly even paining him. Luciana gave him a look of concern, discreet as always, and the Prince shook his head and smiled to ease her worry. Enaeon didn’t know why the Prince’s joints would be hurting. He was yet young. Whatever it was, Enaeon knew that Luciana would take care of it.

When Jillian and Christopher left quietly, he could see that Anduin was thankful. They were both observant enough to see that Luciana was already flagging, still exhausted. One hour of rest was nowhere near enough.
Daniel and Lars came in next. Lars remained standing, but Daniel cooed over the babies enough for both of them. Luciana repeated their names, again, and let Daniel hold Bolvar for a few minutes. “Okay, give him back,” she said, her tone edged with something hard, and Daniel very willingly handed back her baby. “Thank you.”

“They’re adorable,” Lars said gruffly. “Don’t worry about it, Cap. Nothing’s getting through us.”

Luciana offered him a fleeting but grateful smile, and the two men left. They were shortly replaced by Victoria and Kain.

“Oh my gosh,” Victoria said quietly. “They’re so cute.”

“If you say puppies...” Kain warned.

“They’re like human puppies.”

Kain barely held in a shout. “She’s been saying that for an hour,” he grumbled to Luciana, who chuckled tiredly.

“Come on, let her be excited,” Luciana soothed. “Victoria, do you want to hold one?”

“No, that’s okay.” She shook her head quickly. “I don’t want to drop them.”

“If you say so. Kain?”

“Naw, Luce, I’m fine. They should stay with you right now.”

“Okay.”

Anduin graciously took on the task of repeating their full names for Victoria’s benefit, mostly, and Luciana listened with a smile while Victoria updated her on the goings-on of the castle. Everyone was busy sending out messages of the births, and even the kitchen staff was preparing for a great feast. “There’s going to be a breakfast tomorrow morning so you have time to rest up,” Victoria explained. “It’s mostly going to be family, nobles, some invited champions and Glory Seekers, and some randomly selected citizens. I think Desmond went to go take care of that.”

“Alright.” Luciana bounced the two babies a couple of times. “These two aren’t going anywhere near that.”

“People will expect it,” Kain said.

“People will be disappointed. That’s a perfect opportunity for an assassin. The babies are weak, their skulls soft. All it would take is a single hit, or a bump, or even just dropping them. Not to mention the noise and activity would really upset them. I’ll have lunch on a balcony so people can look up at them, but they’re not going anywhere near crowds.”

“Sounds like a plan,” Kain said. “If you want, the squadron will stay with them while you’re at breakfast.”

“I’d appreciate it,” she said with a grateful nod. “Midwives will stay with them, too, and SI:7 and Royal Guards. If I’m not there, they’re getting the next best thing.”

“Can’t be too careful,” Victoria agreed. “At least, not until they can scream for mommy.”

They left to give Lawrence a chance to see the kids. Enaeon was already inside, and when Lawrence was comfortably seated Luciana looked to Enaeon and gestured him forward with a nod.
He sat carefully in the empty chair to her left.

“Cute kids,” Lawrence said quietly. “Healthy?”

“Completely. Having a mother with a body fat percentage appropriate for birth seemed to help,” she added.

“Yeah, bet you can’t wait to start training.”

“You have no idea,” she groaned, letting her head fall back on her pillows for a moment. “I was going insane. Literally going insane. I need to fight! I wanna break things!”

“You seemed to enjoy the mesh I brought you earlier,” Enaeon said.

“I did! It was so much fun to pick at it. Pulling it apart.”

“You can do that again while you’re recovering,” Anduin said, resting his hand against the back of her head. She smiled up at him.

“The King is changing the records at the moment,” Lawrence said. “If you’re wondering, things in Darkshire are going quite well.”

“Yeah? Talk to me.”

Lawrence updated her on the still-growing fur trade, the rising population numbers, the Gilnean worgen who had settled in Raven Hill, the containment wards set up to keep the undead isolated in the cemetery, and Lawrence’s old job in the Town Hall.

“But, now that you’re back I’ll be staying with the squadron,” he finished. “I got a bit flabby, though. I’ve been training with Lars. He’s pretty hard, now. It’s a bit worrisome.”

“He’s fine,” Luciana soothed. “He was always like this, but now he’s embraced it.”

“If you’re sure,” Lawrence said.

“I am. He’ll be fine. He’s got us,” she reminded. “He’s a guerilla fighter. When things get too heavy he knows he can retreat to the squadron. That’ll keep him balanced.”

“Alright.”

Lawrence saw Enaeon’s discreet signal to leave and took it at face value. Enaeon could tell that Luciana was hiding her exhaustion, and he wanted her to rest. When the room was empty of visitors, and quiet again, he spoke. “You should sleep some more,” he said, adjusting the blanket around her. “Prince Anduin, if you wish to take your sons to their nursery, they would benefit from feeling your heartbeat. You may want to familiarize them with your Light, as well. I will watch over Luciana.”


“When your father returns I will let him know where you’ve gone. I’m sure he would be quite willing to join you.”

“Sounds good.” Anduin carefully took Bolvar and Alaric from Luciana, who let them go without much fuss. “I’ll bring them back here when they get hungry.”

“If they shit, watch the midwives change their diapers. Learn how to do it, because if I’m getting
“Alright,” he laughed, carefully leaning down to kiss her chastely. “Get some sleep.”

“I will.”

Enaeon helped her readjust her pillows so she could lie on her back. “Thanks, Enaeon,” she mumbled, eyes already closing. He knew that she was thanking him for much more than fixing her pillows, and it only added to the weight on his heart.
Luciana was woken several hours later by the sound of two squalling newborns. She woke slowly, and while it troubled her she knew it was because of her sheer exhaustion and didn’t let it bother her overmuch.

“Hungry?” she asked blearily, sitting up with Enaeon’s aid.

“Yeah.” Anduin smiled briefly and handed her Bolvar first. “I let the midwives change them but I stayed with them while they slept. Father was there too, but he couldn’t stay. A lot of things are going on right now.”

“I bet.” She opened her sweater and her shirt and held Bolvar up. It took him a few tries to find her nipple and she took Alaric while he was squirming around, trying to find it. “At least I won’t have to rotate. Both breasts, drained at the same time.”

“Always a silver lining, eh?” Anduin asked, yawning. He moved to sit on the edge of the bed next to her, wrapping an arm around her waist and placing the other around the nearest baby.

“Tired?” Luciana asked.

He hummed, leaned forward to kiss her temple. “Exhausted. Not as much as you,” he added.

“Smart man.”

Anduin was content to watch the babies feed. “Our sons,” Luciana murmured. “Didn’t ever think I would say that.”

“Are you glad you can now?”

It took her a moment to respond. “Yes,” she said simply.

“Good.”

Alaric lost the nipple and started to whine and flail his little arms. Anduin chuckled and reached over to help reposition him so he could find it again. He silenced when it was in his mouth. “I made these,” Luciana murmured.

“I helped.”

She grinned up at him. “Yes, and I quite enjoyed your help.” Anduin cleared his throat and looked back at the babies, his ears turning red. Luciana laughed quietly. “I say I made these because I’m having a hard time absorbing it. I end lives, usually. But I just started two.” She shifted Alaric when he started to squirm again. “Anduin, you know that I’m a berserker. If I think that someone is a threat to my... my babies,” she said, the words foreign on her tongue. “I’m going to berserk. Even if I’m still recovering my warrior form. I won’t let it stand.”

“I wouldn’t expect you to,” he said, pressing his lips to her temple again. “If you tell me when you feel a threat, I can help take care of it. Father will, too. We’ll do that so you can concentrate on our sons.” She felt his smile against her skin. “I’m a father,” he murmured. She could feel, faintly, his Light buzzing. She imagined that she could feel it only because she was so familiar with it, and because it was so familiar with her. “I’m a father,” he repeated giddily. “I... You don’t know how much it means to me, Luciana. For so long, for too long, it was just me and Father. And for a while
“You gave me a home,” she whispered. She trusted Enaeon, but her words were personal, private, and she doubted she would even be comfortable with her dog hearing them. She was embarrassed saying them at all, but she wanted Anduin to hear them. “You gave me a family, two things I never had. Not really. Not... guaranteed, I suppose. You gave me a place, people, where I would always be accepted and loved. I’m only returning the favour.”

She wasn’t sure if he laughed or sobbed, or maybe it was both, but she reveled in the soft kisses he laid on her lips and her scarred jaw. “I love you,” he murmured. “I must be the luckiest man in Azeroth.”

“It’s a close tie between you and Varian, I think,” she said. “He seemed about to burst. Something was getting him down, though. I could see it.”

“Mm. He misses my mother, I think.”

“I thought that might be it. Must be bittersweet, for him.”

“He’ll be fine,” Anduin promised. “He’s more excited than sad. Trust me. He giggled earlier when he was rocking Alaric.”

“Did he really?”

“Oh, yes. He sounded a bit drunk.”

Luciana laughed, and the motions disturbed the twins. Alaric immediately started to complain with cries and flailing, fisted hands. Bolvar seemed content to let his brother complain, and focused instead on trying to find the nipple he’d just lost. Watching them made Luciana laugh even harder and Anduin had to step in to help her hold the babies. “Oh, Light,” she said. “I can already see their personalities.”

“I know,” Anduin grinned. “I think Alaric is going to be the fussy one. And Bolvar is just going to give him that frown.”


“You still do it,” Anduin said. “Made all the better by those scars you’re so fond of.”

“I can’t help it! I like to scare people,” she shrugged. “Well, most people.”

“You’ve never scared me,” Anduin promised. “What scares me is losing you. I was scared you wouldn’t come back, every time you left. I was scared when you were taken, when we thought you were dead. That scared me. But I’ve never been scared of you. I always knew that you wouldn’t hurt me.”

“I’m glad,” she murmured, smiling when Alaric released the nipple and fusses. “I think he wants to be burped.”

“I’ll take him,” Anduin said. “Casey showed me how.” He slung a small, soft towel over his shoulders and leaned Alaric over his chest. Alaric wasn’t yet able to hold his head up. Anduin patted his back firmly, bouncing him a few times and encouraging him. “Come on, now. Let’s get it out.” Alaric let out a little burp, and then spit up some of his milk. “There we go! Not so bad, is it?” Anduin said with a smile. Luciana could feel a grin trying to grow on her face. It seemed to
amuse Anduin further, and she knew he found it funny when her scars interrupted her smiles.

“You’re cute,” she commented.

“I’m not cute,” Anduin mumbled.

“Yes, you are.”

He made a face at her and turned away. She watched Alaric, who met her gaze with wide, unblinking eyes. “Hey there,” she cooed. “I’m your mommy.” She gave a little wave and Alaric shoved his fist into his mouth, eyes moving from her to Bolvar. “This is your brother,” she said. “Bolvar, say hi to Alaric.” She bounced Bolvar a few times, as he seemed finished with his meal for now. “Enaeon, hand me a towel?”

“Sure.” He draped a second small towel over her shoulders so she could burp Bolvar, and watched with fascination clear on his face as she bounced him, shushed him when he complained and patted his back. “Why do you do this?” Enaeon asked.

“They take in air when they breastfeed,” she explained. “You pat them like this to burp them so the air doesn’t stay and give them a stomach ache.”

“Ah.” He nodded.

“You don’t have to do this with draenei babies?” Luciana asked.

“No, we have... ah, there’s not a word in Common for it,” he said, shrugging. “But it is an action of the respiratory system. It takes the air and holds it until they stop eating, and then sends it back up.”

“So, the babies burp themselves?” she asked.

“I... suppose they do,” he said.

“Hm.” She smiled when Alaric burped wetly. “There we go! Feel better?” she asked, holding him up so she could see him. He gaped at her blankly, eyes meeting hers unflinchingly. “I think these two are the only children outside my immediate family who can look at me and not be scared,” she said.

“They’re newborns,” Anduin responded, turning to look down to her. “They’re impressionable. They’ll learn to love you. They’ll learn that you’re there to protect them.”

“You think they’ll love me?” she asked.

“They will.” It sounded like a promise. “Even if you’re not always here, I will be, and they’ll have your brothers too. And when you are here I know you’ll give them plenty of reason to love you.”

She smiled softly, brought Alaric forward to kiss his cheeks. “Hey, fatso,” she crooned. “Hey, fatty fat.”

“Lucy, that’s terrible,” Anduin laughed.

“It’s true! They’re so chubby.” She nuzzled Alaric’s cheek and he squeaked. His tiny hands landed on her nose and she couldn’t help the wide smile that resulted.

She handed the babies to Anduin not long after they finished feeding. “Try to sleep a bit more,” Anduin said. “I know you’re eager to get up and about but it hasn’t even been a full day.”
“I will,” Luciana said, and sighed deeply. “But I want to sleep in my own bed. No. I want to sleep in your bed.”

“If you like my mattress so much, we can change yours for a softer one,” he said.

“No, my mattress is fine. I like your bed because it smells like you.” She smiled when she saw his ears turn red. “See when I can go back to our rooms. Maybe when the babies are ready for it, too.”

“I’ll talk to the midwives,” he promised. “Sleep, Lucy.”

“Yeah, yeah.”
Changes and Preparations

Luciana stayed in the birthing room, resting and feeding her sons in intervals of two or three hours, for two more days. While she felt perfectly capable of walking herself over to her room, which had been outfitted with two cribs and listening devices linked to Anduin and Varian’s rooms, she obeyed the healers. As Victoria had laughingly suggested, Luciana only obeyed them because they were healers. It was usually the smart thing to do.

Finally, when Nancy gave her the go-ahead to get up and walk, Luciana was relieved. She had been itching to do something for months, and the last two days had been nothing short of boring.

That boredom was broken when Luciana entered her room and saw Anduin dozing at the round table, a book in his hand. The babies were snuffling, and likely going to be hungry quite soon. Luciana checked on them, first.

“Hello,” she whispered, reaching down into the cribs. They were placed close together, parallel, so someone could stand between them. “How are you doing?”

Bolvar burbled up at her, unable to do much beyond wave his hand at her. Alaric seemed quite content to complain at her, huffing and whining.

“Yes, I know. Soon, babies. Soon. I promise. Mommy just wants to do one thing, first.” She brushed a finger down each of their noses, watching them go cross-eyed trying to watch it.

Anduin hadn’t heard her, and she took advantage of that. “Hello!” she cried, pinching at his sides. He yelped and jumped, nearly tumbling to the floor if Luciana hadn’t been there to catch them. The babies started to cry in earnest at the sudden noise.

“Lucy!” Anduin scolded. “Look what you did!”

“I know exactly what I did,” she said. “It’s time to feed them anyway. How long were you out?”

“Just a while...” Anduin glanced at the clock. “Oh. More than a while.”

She drew him into a long, soft kiss. “Aren’t you happy to see me?” she murmured against his mouth, even as he tugged her closer and wrapped his arms securely around her still-sore back.

“I am,” he replied. “But I think our sons need you right now.”

She smiled. “Our sons.” She gave Anduin one more chaste kiss before slipping out of his arms to go to her sons.

She could feed one while standing, but there were two of them so she picked them up and moved to the couch. She didn’t want to chance dropping one of them. “Yes, yes,” she said as she maneuvered them in her lap to open her shirt. “It’s coming. Relax.” Anduin watched as she breastfed the babies, crossing his arms. “What, you’re not going to help?” she teased.

“No, I think I’m good right where I am,” he replied with a smile. “I could get a wet nurse if you really wanted.”

“No, not for now,” Luciana said, shifting Alaric when he started to lose the nipple. “They’re so small,” she said quietly. “How can they be safe when they’re so small?”
“They have the best guards in the kingdom,” Anduin promised, carefully taking a seat next to her and laying his arm along the back of the sofa. “The best nannies. The best wet nurses. The best healers. The best everything. And they have me, and Father. And you.”

“Only for a little while,” she reminded him gently.

“You’ll visit often,” he said, unsurely.

“Every chance I get. I’ll add a mage to Amadeus. That’ll make it easier.”

“Are you allowed to do that in the army?”

“Not really, but I’m an exception,” she said. “Royal business, and all that.”

“Ah, I see,” Anduin said sagely.

He helped Luciana burp the twins, and return them to their cribs afterward. “They’ll soil themselves soon, I imagine?” she said, looking down at Bolvar. He met her gaze squarely, unblinking, and she reached down and caressed the top of his head gently.

“Yeah, within a half hour,” Anduin replied, slipping his arms around her waist from behind. She tilted her head so he could rest his chin on her shoulder, and leaned back into his embrace with a pleased hum. “My sons,” Anduin murmured. “Our children.”

“Yeah.” Luciana sighed, and smiled. “If anyone makes even a hint of a threat to them, I’m going to kill them,” she said.

“Let Father do it,” Anduin suggested. “He’d be more than happy to.”

“Or let me do it, while you look after them.”

She felt Anduin’s laughter more than she heard it, and smiled in simple pleasure when he kissed her neck softly. “I love you,” Anduin murmured into her neck. “I can’t even say how much.”

“I love you, too,” she replied, turning slightly to kiss him over her shoulder. “And I’m glad I have you.”

Anduin smiled warmly and kissed her properly, tiredly, laying his hands gently around her jaw. “I wish you would stay,” he said. “With me, Father, our sons. But I think, after seeing you slowly go insane these past few months, I understand why you want to return.”

“I want to stay, too, but I can’t be constrained like that for too long,” she said, keeping his close with her hands on his hips. “Like you said, it drives me batshit crazy. I have to move, fight, struggle physically. It’s not enough to just corner people in court and break pieces of metal, though those things can be quite enjoyable. I need to feel the burn in my lungs. I need to hurt for it to be satisfying.”

“Sometimes I worry about you,” he joked. “Not many people would want to be in pain.”

“It’s part of the experience,” she shrugged with a smile. “I’m sure Varian’s the same way.”

“It’s a warrior thing?”

“It is.”

They were interrupted when Alaric started to squall. Obviously he was uncomfortable. “Has Alaric
made a dirty diaper?” Luciana crooned immediately in response, slipping away from a highly amused Anduin to pick up her baby. “Hm? Did you do a doodoo?”

Alaric cried in response.

“I don’t smell anything. Not yet? Are you just not having a fun time right now? Or did you miss mommy? I think he missed mommy,” she said to Anduin, holding Alaric to her chest.

“He’s a bit fussier,” Anduin said, moving to pick up Bolvar. “But when he starts, Bolvar usually isn’t long behind.”

“Bolvar is a bit jealous because he wants to hug mommy, too,” Luciana said, kissing Alaric’s head. “Mm, baby smell.”

“Is that a good thing or a bad thing?”

“Good thing, depending on when they last took a shit.”

“Lucy,” Anduin sighed, rolling his eyes.

“What? They don’t speak Common yet!”

Bolvar was the first to need a diaper change, and when he did, Luciana could smell it clear across the room. “Oh, ugh. Gross. I need to get some air fresheners.”

Anduin was laughing as he changed Bolvar’s diaper, wiping his bottom clean with smooth, practiced movements. Luciana watched him, learning, as he did the same to Alaric. “Seems easy enough,” she murmured, taking Alaric back when he was clean. "It's been forever and a day since I last did this."

“You get used to it pretty quickly,” Anduin said. “Just make sure to cover their privates when you’re changing them.”

“Did you get peed on?” she teased.

“Only once. Father had to do it three times before he remembered.”

Luciana’s laughter shook her shoulders and Alaric whined a bit at the movement. “Hush now,” she hummed. “There we go. Isn’t this nice?”

“You’re a natural,” Anduin said, watching her with his soft look.

“I did this with Frederic. They can feel the vibrations in your chest, if you speak lowly. It soothes them better than just your voice.”

“I’ll have to remember that.”

They set the babies down in their cribs to rest, and moved to the other side of the room. “I think I’m going to sleep in here for a little while,” Luciana said, keeping her voice low so she wouldn’t disturb the now sleeping twins.

“It’s a good idea. They’ll be needy for at least a month. I’ll stay here with you, if you want.”

“Well, yeah. You’re going to be changing them.”

“Don’t you want practice with that?” he teased.
“I had plenty of practice with Frederic,” she grumbled. “If I’m going to be feeding them, you’re going to be changing them.”

“Alright,” Anduin said laughingly, pulling her into a kiss. She tried to pull him closer, tried to meet as much of his body as she could. It was much easier now, when her stomach was relatively flat again. “I got used to having your belly in the way,” he said, leaning his forehead against hers for a moment. “It’s going to take some more readjusting.”

“Get used to it, buddy,” she grumbled, pulling his head back down.

Not long after they settled the babies down for a nap, Varian poked his head in. “How are they?” were his first words.

“Hello to you too,” Luciana said, turning to face him.

“Oh, hi Lucy. Good to see you on your feet.”

She scowled at him, but it broke almost immediately when he opened his arms with a smile. She ducked down into it, tucking herself up and letting him engulf her with his height and mass. “I’m doing alright,” she said into his chest. “Still tired. And sore. But I’m moving now.”

“I can see that,” he teased, kissing the top of her head. She could tell he was sharing a look with Anduin, but what kind of look she didn’t know. Varian released her a moment later and she straightened, smiling up at him. “Have they eaten?”

“Yeah, I just fed them,” Luciana answered. “What’s up?”

“I know you probably want to stay with them, but...”

“But I should make an appearance,” she finished. “I know,” she sighed. “Give me some time to get ready. Who will I be seeing?”

“That’s up to you,” Varian said.

“I’ll see a small group of nobles. I think Genn should be included in that, as well as whatever delegates are still in the city. I can have lunch this week on a balcony at the front of the Keep so people can look up and see us. Maybe I’ll have a draw for a dozen citizens to meet the new Wrynns, a few at a time.”

“You don’t have to decide anything until tomorrow,” Varian said, moving to the cribs. His massive, rough hands were gentle when he reached in to touch Bolvar’s forehead. “But by then you should have a plan.”

“I’ll make one,” she promised.

Varian and Anduin were content to stay with the babies while Luciana visited with the Seneschal to help make a plan. “There are several people I would suggest you see first,” he started. “Among them are our long time allies, the Greymanes, and a handful of people from the Exodar. They know that one of their own was present during the birthing, and they place a great amount of emphasis on the naming of children. It would be wise to continue this.”

“Of course,” Luciana agreed. “And as always, Enaeon will be coming with me.”

“If you believe it wise,” the Seneschal temporized. “Will you then invite your Gilnean scout, as well?”
“Yeah, why not? I need to have a few of them with me, anyway. Lawrence will come along, as well. He’s better versed in politics than the others.”

“I will add them to the table,” William promised, whipping out a clipboard and scrawling some names down. “Shall I send you a list of favourable members of the nobility?”

“Yes, please do. If the Greymanes are there, suggest they bring along one or two of their own nobles. See if there are any viable Ironforge higher-ups in the city, as well. Or, send an invite for tomorrow, or a more private luncheon with some of the dwarves Anduin or Varian are personally familiar with sometime this week. Same thing with Gnomeregan. Also, send out a personalized letter on my behalf to the Pearlfin jinyu. General updates. And I’ll be writing a note to a friend in their ranks that you’ll include in the letter.”

“Of course.”

“Arrange for two nannies to be available during the entire luncheon to look after the twins while I’m eating and speaking with our guests, as well as guards. Schedule it in one of the soundproofed rooms with a vestibule so I can breastfeed in peace.”

“As you say, Lady Highness.”

“There should be a thorough check of all the guests before they enter the room, including the Greymanes and the draenei. They’ll understand. I’ll say a few words about it if need be. Nothing even resembling a weapon, no scarves, cords, or chains that aren’t weak enough to break under very little pressure.”

“But of course.”

“The type of food served tomorrow should be simple, varied fare, well-presented and not too aromatic. Point out in the invitations that two newborns will be attending. Two newborns that I birthed. I certainly wouldn’t appreciate if something were to upset them.”

“To be expected.”

“And another letter should be sent to Knight Champion Leon Servol. I’ll be writing it myself. Send a general notice to 01D Brigade addressed to any members still in their ranks that once served under me. Send a letter to Malfurion Stormrage as well, thanking him for healing him and making my return possible and subsequently, making it possible for me to have children.”

“At once.” She fell silent for a moment and William glanced up from his clipboard. “Is there anything else, Lady Highness?”

“Yes,” she said slowly. “See what we can do about sending a note to Orgrimmar. Something simple that says I’m in Stormwind and am making a full recovery and expect to soon be back on the field.”

“With all respect, Lady Highness, do you think that truly wise? Would the King not object?”

“I will speak to the King first,” she said. “But see about it, anyway.”

“Of course.”

“I assume messengers have been dispatched already to the major hubs of the Alliance?”

“As of yesterday most Alliance cities and towns have received the news,” the Seneschal said. “I’m
told Darkshire had a particularly rowdy celebration.”

She chuckled. “Ah, of course. Do they still have that plaque up?”

“Yes, and it’s been remade twice as they expand their town with revenue from the fur trade.”

“Excellent. Oh! For tomorrow, see if there are any Glory Seekers available. Also, if Commander Celia is free, that would be best, but it’s understandable that she’s quite busy in Draenor. Suggest Casey Lanson for her part in my pregnancy and the birth of the twins. And see if Nancy is available, as well.”

“Of course. Is that all for now, Lady Highness?”

“Yes. I’m sure if I missed something, you’ll be able to take care of it?”

“But of course!”

“Excellent. In that case, I have two babies to coo over.”

“Have fun, Lady Highness,” he said with a smile.
Lunch with Nobles

Luciana’s lunch with nobles was, thankfully, a quiet affair. The Seneschal had been able to communicate that the babies were sensitive to noise, and if one or both of them were to be upset by something Luciana would not be pleased. As a result, all of her guests were very polite and some of them were downright charming with the babies.

Luciana even let a few people hold the babies. She had placed Jillian in charge of keeping an eye on Bolvar, who was for the moment in the arms of a stocky dwarf, while Lawrence kept some of the general attention on himself as he shared progress reports on Darkshire. Luciana had asked him to try and point out, clearly, how effective a continuous support effort could be to a place as decrepit as Duskwood.

Enaeon had been tasked with keeping Alaric safe, even as Tess held the baby and cooed over him. There were three other draenei, all delegates of the Exodar. Luciana could understand some Draenic, and caught a few of the words they’d traded when they first saw Enaeon standing beside her.

“She let you in the birthing chamber?”

“She let you stay while she named her children?”

“How is it you gained her trust? I understand she is a warrior, and would trust you as a healer... but this? This goes beyond that.”

“It may be time for you to make a decision, Enaeon. You have served the Exodar with honour and dedication for many years. But the bond you have with Princess Luciana is clearly a strong one.”

Enaeon was uneasy through much of the lunch, though he hid it admirably even when Lady Ashante drank a bit too much and made comments about his tail and the delicate nature of a baby’s throat. Luciana had her excused from the lunch with an impressive glower, which faded the moment she was gone.

“They’re adorable,” Tess praised, handing Alaric back to Luciana. “Absolutely beautiful. You must be quite proud.”

“I am,” Luciana smiled. “I always liked children. Babies, especially. It’s a bit different when they’re mine, though. I’m a bit overprotective of them.”

“Nothing wrong with that,” Mia interjected, sipping her wine. “I was quite protective of my children, too, until they were about sixteen.”

“Mother wouldn’t let me leave the manor past six,” Tess sighed. “It was so boring.”

“My own Mother tried to do the same,” Luciana laughed. “She tried to keep me from going back to the Military Academy every Sunday evening. Thing is, I could outrun her easily.”

Tess burst out laughing, holding a hand delicately to her throat. “Oh, I can picture it - that’s hilarious!”

“I remember one time she tried to get a dog to catch up to me. I’m not sure what she thought would happen - the dog just kept running. Took two days to find the stupid thing.”
Tess kept laughing, cooing apologies when Alaric started to snuffle and whine in protest of the noise. Luciana bounced him a few times, murmuring, and he calmed. She sent Jillian a meaningful look - Bolvar had been out of her arms too long - and the scout went to retrieve him from the dwarf who had been holding him.

When the babies started to act up, Luciana could tell it was from hunger. “Excuse us a minute,” she said, standing. “Enaeon?” She could see the Exodar delegates watching him as he followed her out of the main room.

“They are hungry?” he asked quietly, shutting the door behind him. What little noise there was from the party was cut off abruptly.

“Yeah.” She held her arms apart, a baby in each, so that Enaeon could undo the row of buttons across the top of her shirt. “You okay?” she asked.

“Fine,” he answered, and she didn’t push.

She took her time feeding and burping the babies, and as she’d planned, she ended up the lunch about ten minutes after they ate. It had gone on for nearly three full hours, which was more than enough for the intentions behind it - to let the people present see the babies, become a bit more familiar with them, and for Luciana to show that though she had two babies in her arms, she remained an opponent they didn’t want to face in court.

She bade them all farewell, thanked them for coming as was protocol, and watched as they filed out of the dining room. Genn stayed behind, murmuring an excuse to his wife and daughter. “I’ll just be a minute,” he said quietly. “I have something to discuss with the Princess.”

Luciana told Enaeon and Lawrence to keep watch in the vestibule, to make sure no one tried to sneak back in or eavesdrop. Jillian stayed in the room, shifting to her worgen form and standing before the door so that if someone did try to get back in, they’d be facing a seven and a half foot tall wolf-woman.

“Genn,” Luciana greeted with a small smile. “Speak quickly - they’re going to need new diapers soon.”

He chuckled quietly, taking a seat beside her and relaxing, his elbows on his knees, hands clasped before him. “I’ll be quick, then. How are you feeling, now that you can move freely again?”

“Much better,” she sighed. “I was going insane. It was worth it,” she said, bouncing the twins a bit. “Make no mistake, it was worth it. But I don’t think I would ever want to do it again.”

“I can sympathize,” he agreed. “Tell me - this dark thing in your chest, has it made any other appearances since you’ve returned?”

“Hm.” She glanced away, thinking back. “No, I don’t think so.”

“And how is your fury?”

“When I first returned, I was tired,” she started slowly.

“I remember.”

“Well, my fury was tired, too. Like it was an extra store of energy, and it had been completely exhausted keeping me alive. It recovered with me. It’s almost back to how it was and I think once I start training again, it’ll be like it was before.”
“Good,” he said quietly. “I could tell you were unsettled, these past few months. I think it will be good for you to start fighting again.”

“I don’t feel quite right,” she said. “I try to explain it to Anduin, and he does try, but he can’t really understand it fully.”

“Perhaps he should see you fight,” Genn suggested. “It might help him to understand.”

“I don’t know,” she sighed. “I told him how I need to be physical, need to fill a burn in my lungs, pain, for it to be satisfying. He didn’t really...” She shrugged helplessly, and Genn reached out to pat her knee.

“He will, in time,” he promised. “Mia came to understand. Anduin will, too.”

“I hope so. I’d hate to lose him over this, after we’ve gotten through so much.”

“In quite a short time period, too.” Genn smiled briefly. “It will turn out fine, Luciana. I know it will. In the meantime... May I?” He gestured to the twins, and Luciana grinned.

“But of course, Grandpa Genn.”

“I think that title would suit Varian best,” he said blandly.

“But you’ve got the grey hair and everything!”

He scowled at her, and it only made her laugh as she let him take Alaric. “This is the fussy one, eh?” Genn said, holding Alaric in the crook of his elbow. “Named for the founder of your house.”

“Yes, Alaric Amadeus.”

“From what I’ve learned of Stormwind’s history, Alaric was one of the ones who stood beside your first King.”

“Yes, he was.”

“And now you stand next to your King,” Genn said softly. “How curious, that an Amadeus should stand at Stormwind’s helm once more.”

“How so?” she asked curiously. Watching Genn hold Alaric was much like seeing Varian do the same. Both were great men, both in size and in personality, and Genn’s hands dwarfed the baby he held. And yet, he was careful with Alaric, gentler than one would think he could be from looking at him. He had many years and many sorrows etched into his face, but when he looked down at the baby it seemed to be inconsequential. He and Varian both held a great fury within them, one that Luciana herself was familiar with, but she could see no hint of it now.

She thought back to the day she’d spoken with Genn in the training fields behind the Keep, how he’d let her tuck into his side like a cold pup - much like what Varian did whenever he hugged Luciana. Genn and Varian were friends, but perhaps even they were unaware of how truly similar they were.

“The last time an Amadeus was welcomed into the heart of the royal court, he became a noble. He stood next to his King, and that King’s son, and then his grandson, until death took him. Now, an Amadeus was invited into the royal court and became a Royal, herself. You stand next to Varian, you will stand next to Anduin, and one day you will stand next to your son - Varian’s grandson. Alaric was present at a time of great change. I wonder, what direction will the kingdom follow
“under you and Anduin?”

“Hopefully a good one,” she said.

“Good for whom?”

She blinked slowly. “Good for the kingdom, of course.”

Genn smiled tightly. “I suppose time will tell us,” he sighed. “Learn from my mistakes, girl. Don’t lock yourselves away from the world. Don’t pretend someone else’s problems aren’t yours, too. It’s all connected.”

“I’ll remember that,” she said softly. Genn handed her Alaric in silence, and stood slowly. He leaned down to whisper in her ear.

“Keep an eye on your sons,” he whispered. “There have been unsettling whispers in the shadows. It seems that having two Princes so close in age has brought some unease.”

“I’ll kill anyone that tries to harm them,” she responded just as quietly, her fury stirring in her chest. Genn must have seen it in her eyes because he smiled grimly and nodded.

“Keep Jillian close. She’ll be the first to hear them coming.” Luciana nodded once, curtly, and Genn straightened and turned to leave. “Oh, and Luciana?”

“Yes?”

“Tell that brat Varian that if he leaves his sodding cloak over my chair again I’m going to castrate him.”

She laughed out loud, and agreed to pass the message along.

Luciana had dinner that night with Varian and Anduin, with a gaggle of caretakers looking after the twins in a room lined with twelve guards, four SI:7, and a healer. She still felt ill at ease without the babies directly in her line of sight, but Varian knew how to distract her and Anduin seemed to know exactly how she felt.

“I could hardly bear for Anduin to be on the other side of the room at first,” Varian explained over roasted freshwater catfish. Luciana remembered that it was one of his favourite foods. “Until he was five or six years old I couldn’t sleep unless we were in the same room. I was so afraid that something would happen the moment I looked away...” Varian sighed heavily.

“Bolvar had to pull me away from you,” Anduin said, smiling slightly. “I can barely remember it now.”

“I didn’t sleep at all for a week,” Varian laughed. “Bolvar locked me in my room like a rebellious teenager, saying how unhealthy it was for me to be so clingy. I spent most of that time cursing him.”

Luciana chuckled. “I think if someone tried to lock me in my room, away from my babies, I’d bust the door down.”

“Your babies are just that, though. Babies. Anduin was already reading, and learning math, and I still had to resist checking on him every five minutes.”

“You had reason to be worried,” Luciana said. “He’s a troublemaker.”
“I am not!” Anduin protested, but he was smiling.

“Yes, you are,” Varian countered.

“Eat your damn fish,” Anduin grumbled.

The night was rough on Luciana, as it had been the previous few nights. Every two or three hours she’d wake up to the twins crying out to be fed, and she’d have to haul herself to a sitting position, convince herself to get out of bed, to move away from the warmth and familiarity of Anduin’s soft snoring and smooth skin, put on her housecoat, pick up the babies, shuffle over to the couch or an armchair, and get them to eat. It was even more of a chore to burp them, but at least after that she could slip naked back into bed, shivering lightly in the cool night air, and wait for Anduin to get up, add a log to the hearth fire, and change their diapers.

And when Anduin rejoined her in the bed, she would wriggle over to him and tangle their legs together, throw an arm over his chest, and bask. It was easy to relax when she was the most dangerous person in the room, and it was also easy to relax when Anduin was nearby. She knew he was capable, could cover for her while she was still weak and tired, and when he turned his head and she felt his breath ruffle her hair, it made her breath catch in her throat. She still marveled at the gentleness he displayed, the easy affection of his hands on her skin that made her chest tight.

“Lucy,” he would murmur. He would breathe in deep, sigh contentedly, and relax against her. “Sleep.”

It was so easy to relax when she was with Anduin. She’d never had this type of intimacy, before him. Where she could press against him and enjoy the feeling of him breathing under her hand, pale against his brown skin, sun-kissed and Light-blessed under her palm. She could feel his heartbeat. She still had a hard time understanding how he could let her get so close while he was so vulnerable. How he would want it, actively seek it. It was difficult, still, for her to express things like that. But Anduin understood now that she was a physical person, and when she tried to tell him things in ways she knew, he would smile at her, soft-eyed, adoring. Luciana thought he understood. Hoped.

It was one of the reasons she’d wanted to have kids. It was easier now, to be sure, than it would have been if she’d regained her warrior form first. And it helped to distract her for the first little while from the horrors she’d experienced, the horrors she had continued to experience every hour she spent asleep, and most hours spent awake. Now she had something else to concentrate on, to exhaust her, to fill her dreams. And now she had a physical manifestation of what Anduin had given her, of what she had been trying to return. Trust, love, family. Three things that only a few years ago she’d been convinced were not meant for her, would be denied her for the rest of her short life.

She had Varian to thank for that. Desperate as he had been for a family, for people he could love, he’d seen himself reflected in her and had brought her into the fold. Maybe it had been pity. Maybe it had been the thought that she would die so that Anduin wouldn’t have to. Whatever it had been, she was thankful. It had been that first hint of affection that had kept her from dying, bloody and howling and empty, on the battlefield. It had been that first touch, Anduin’s deft fingers working the tension from her hand, that had given her one tiny reason to live. One little hope that maybe, if she fought hard enough, if she fought for long enough, she could have a home to come back to.

Varian had given her safety. Anduin had given her hope. Luciana could only wish that she could do the same for them.
Luciana had been impatient to start training again. While she took a certain pleasure in breastfeeding, in providing for her children from her body, she also took great pleasure in breaking practice dummies with her fists and dancing around her opponent with her sword, Oathkeeper.

After breastfeeding for six weeks she handed over the duties to the handful of wet nurses that had been carefully selected, ignoring the soreness that developed in her swollen breasts for a few days. It wasn't any worse than the bleeding that had trailed into spotting, staining all her good underwear and some of her pants. Thankfully, her healers had known how to deal with the worst of it.

The first week with her squadron had been easy, mostly stamina training and core exercises. Luciana relished the burn in her muscles, the trembling weakness she felt after a hard day. She also relished the evenings, when she would take a cool shower and emerge clean into Anduin’s arms. The first time he’d startled her and she’d nearly smacked him, and she’d been poised to apologize profusely - but he found it hilarious and had needed a few minutes to recover from his laughter.

At night, she lay exhausted in bed with him. Every day she worked a different muscle group between running laps around the Keep with Jillian. The worgen had no trouble keeping pace with her for an hour at a time. Kain had actively taken over her training, much like how she’d once directed her squadron’s exercises.

She had also spent the first week watching the wet nurses every night. Anduin was quite busy during the day and stayed with the babies, and when he had an event or a court appearance, either Varian or Bannister would stay with them. Bannister had decided to take Luciana’s offer for a guest room in the same hallway she’d once used as a retreat, before the betrothal had been firmed. It made it easier for him to look after the twins while Luciana and Anduin were occupied.

Every few hours the twins would need to eat, and wet nurses would be brought in. The lights would brighten just enough for the wet nurses to see, and Luciana would wake abruptly and sit up, watching them. She learned from Victoria, who had a regular discourse with all of the caretakers, that she was really quite frightening to most of the wet nurses. Luciana could understand - she slept naked, and since the room was relatively dark she would keep her eyes wide to take in as much light as possible. And, of course, she would stare at the wet nurses while they held her children. After the first few times, Anduin learned to sleep through it - or, alternatively, roll over and snuggle into Luciana’s hip.

The second week was when Luciana started combat training and the first time she water wrestled with Lars, as the man had promised. Despite the falling temperatures and the ice that formed every morning on the river, they warmed up and splashed into it screaming obscenities and trying to grapple. She pulled something in her back, in her left leg, cracked her skull on a rock and earned a few cuts down her arms. She sat patiently, grinning widely, while Enaeon healed her with the occasional exasperated sigh. Anduin wasn’t as experienced with the normally quite common event of her getting hurt.

“You could have seriously hurt yourself!” he said the moment the bedroom door was shut behind them. Luciana sobered quickly. “Head trauma is serious, Lucy, not to mention hypothermia. You could have caused permanent brain damage. What am I supposed to do if something happens to you? You have two children now, Luciana, not just me! I could... I could recover, eventually. But what would happen to Alaric and Bolvar? What would Father do if he lost another loved one? It was irresponsible, immature, careless...”

She wasn’t quite sure what to say to that, because what she would normally say would only anger
him while he was so worked up in his worry. It could wait until later, when he was calm.

Anduin whirled to face her, expectant. “Well?” he prompted. “Aren’t you going to say something?”

“Sorry I worried you,” she said quietly.

He stared at her in disbelief for a few moments, and then the tension ran out of his shoulders. He sighed, and wiped a hand over his face. “Lucy.” he groaned. “That’s not what this is about. You’re reckless with yourself. It’s like you don’t care what happens to you.”

She bit her tongue.

Anduin’s gaze was on her again, something hard in his eyes. “I can’t lose you, Lucy,” he said quietly. “Not again.”

“I know,” she said.

“Do you? Because you came in here covered in blood, your hair absolutely sopping with it, and I honestly thought...” He choked, turned away, and Luciana wanted to reach out. She knew what kind of expression he was making and it hurt her to know she’d caused it.

“I’m sorry,” she tried again, slowly stepping towards him. “I don’t know what to say, Anduin. This is... It’s how I am. I like fighting. It’s like lightning hits me I get hurt fighting. My blood sings, it boils, and it’s like...” She huffed a sigh. “It’s... It energizes me. It makes me feel alive.”

It was the truth, and it wrenched at her heart to see Anduin hunch over the table, like her words weighed on him too much to bear.

“I’m sorry,” she murmured, not sure if he wanted her to approach him or not. “This is who I am, Anduin. I’m sorry.”

“No,” he said. “Don’t apologize for that. Just... I need a moment. Alone.”

“Okay.” She chewed her lip. “I’m going to go see how Genn is doing,” she said quietly. She wished she had some mint. It always helped clear her head. She wet her lips, hesitating with her hand on the doorknob. “I love you,” she said quietly, and slipped out of the room.

The Greymanes had their own area in the Keep, which had been reorganized when Gilneas had rejoined the Alliance. They had been effectively evicted from their homeland, and while work to reclaim it was ongoing, they and their people had a home in Stormwind much how Stormwind’s people had once been welcomed in Lordaeron. Luciana was by now quite familiar with the Greymane Wing, and the guards - a mix of Stormwind and Gilnean Royal Guards - knew her well enough to nod or murmur greetings as she passed.

Genn was ensconced in his study, Mia sitting at the desk with him. The two often worked in tandem. Luciana was allowed entrance by the guards, and when Genn saw it was her, and saw the look in her eyes, he whispered something to Mia. Whatever he said, Mia gave Luciana a sympathetic look and a pat on the shoulder.

The door shut behind her and Luciana was momentarily stalled. She wasn’t quite sure what to do. “Come,” Genn said, resolving her issue. “Sit.” He gestured to Mia’s vacated chair and quietly flipped over some of the documents even a Wrynn shouldn’t be privy to. Luciana didn’t take offense as she knew she would have likely done exactly the same thing. “What’s the problem, Luciana?”
“Anduin’s upset,” she said quietly, tucking her hands under her thighs. “I cracked my head wrestling in the river earlier with Lars earlier and I came in covered in blood. Enaeon healed me, I’m fine. I knew I would be. But Anduin’s really upset now and I don’t know what to do. He doesn’t like that I like to get hurt fighting.”

Genn sighed heavily and leaned back in his chair. “This isn’t going to be resolved in a day,” he warned. “Anduin is a healer. It’s not in his nature to enjoy people being hurt. He’ll have to come to terms with it on his own.”

“I think I made him cry,” she said thickly. Genn reached over to cup the back of her neck, squeezing it gently.

“You’re going to make him cry,” he said. “It’s going to happen. And it’s going to be alright. He’ll worry himself silly over you, make no mistake. But you’re going to make him smile, and that’ll make up for the worry.”

“Will it?” she asked. “He was... It hurt him, to hear me say it.”

“I know,” Genn soothed. His hand wasn’t as rough as Varian’s, but it was just as warm. “But he’ll recover quickly. I have no doubt that as we speak, he’s gone to see his father.”

“Probably,” Luciana agreed. “That’s why I didn’t go to Varian.”

“You came to me, instead,” Genn said quietly. “I’m honoured.”

“You understand,” she said simply. “What it is to be a warrior, I mean. You know what it’s like, when your blood starts to sing even as it’s spilled.”

“I do.”

“He doesn’t. I don’t know if he will. I don’t want to hurt him, Genn. It’s why I want to go back to the army. He sees me fight here, not even fighting an enemy, and it hurts him. I can’t do that to him.”

“You shouldn’t hide what you are from your husband, of all people,” Genn admonished lightly. “Let him see your heart. Encourage him to show you his. It’s a lifelong commitment that you two made, Luciana. And I don’t doubt you did it for a very good reason. He saw glimpses of you, of your true self, when you fought Varian the first time. And he still loves you, he still married you and welcomed you home each time you returned. He’s seeing all of you now, and while it may take some adjusting, I think he’d truly prefer you stay with him, even if it hurts. He’ll adjust. He’ll see you, Luciana. It would hurt him much more if you were to leave him.”

Genn hesitated, and spoke slowly. “I don’t think he could recover if you left him, Luciana. I saw him in the months you were gone. When we all thought you dead. Varian was broken - he’d lost his daughter, his child - but Anduin...”

“Don’t,” Luciana interrupted. “I don’t want to hear it.”

“You need to. I thought the boy was going to wither away. He gave up. For a time I don’t think he saw any point to living. It went beyond losing a wife, Luciana. He’d lost a friend, a family member, a loved one, a promise to always stand together. He lost hope. If you left him he would be alone, just like before, but this time he’d have the added pain of knowing you were still alive, refusing to see him. How much would it hurt you if he did that?”

“I would take it,” she responded.
“That’s your problem, Luciana. You’re still prioritizing him too much. He’s important, yes. You love him, and you want him to be well, of course. But you need to look after yourself as well. You need to have a space where you can be yourself, and be loved for it. Anduin will be that for you, if you let him.”

“I don’t want to hurt him.”

“No life is without pain, Luciana. Light knows you’ve been through enough to know that. I promise you... Look at me.” She met his gaze. “I promise you that Anduin would rather have this pain, and have you, than not have it and lose you. It would kill him to lose you, Luciana. It nearly did.”

She looked away after a moment, staring at her lap. “What I am hurts him.”

“What you are is what he loves. He worries when you’re hurt, just like he should. Did you tell him why you’re so willing to get hurt?”

“I knew Enaeon was there,” she said. “I knew he could heal me. And I’m going to get hurt in real combat. If I’m not used to it, if I freeze because I’m injured, I’ll get killed. I’ll get other people killed. To win a fight you have to be prepared. Getting hurt doesn’t faze me and I can keep fighting through it like it never happened. More than once that’s what won the battle.”

“And did you tell him this?”

“No. He was upset. I was going to wait for him to calm down, first.”

“Next time, say it,” Genn advised. “Even if he’s upset. Say it, and repeat it when he’s calmer. Give him something to chew on so he doesn’t have to make conjectures about it. Right now he’s probably worried you’re suicidal. The last thing he wants, especially now that you have children, is for something to happen to you.”

“He did mention them,” Luciana said.

“And would you want to leave them without a mother?”

“No.”

“Tell him that, then. Remind him of all the things you have to live for. The reasons you’re willing to fight, to be hurt. Make sure he knows that Enaeon was right beside you, and that it’s a reason you weren’t worried about injuries. And give him time to make sense of it. He’ll come to understand, Luciana, and he’ll accept it. He’s already accepted you. I think, if you tried to cut out this part of you for his sake, it would wound him greatly. It would make him feel terrible. I know if Mia felt she had to change some part of herself for my sake, I would feel like I’m an appalling excuse of a husband.”

Luciana sniffed, looked around the study before looking back to Genn for a moment. “Thanks,” she said quietly. “I’m going to give him a bit of time to talk to Varian.”

“Go and get something to eat,” Genn suggested. “Maybe get some tea brought up to Anduin’s rooms.”

“I will.”

Genn gave her neck another squeeze and patted her shoulder firmly. “It’ll work out, Luciana. You love each other. That’s what’s important.”
“Thanks,” she repeated. The guards hardly looked at her when she left.

She went to the kitchens, as Genn had suggested, and ate something that was just short of a full meal. It was barely enough for her rapidly growing appetite. She spoke quietly to one of the kitchen staff, and had tea and cakes sent up to Anduin and Varian, who were likely still talking. She stalled by visiting Bannister to make sure he was doing alright in his new home, and played a game of Squadron, which had started as a drunken game of chess and had evolved with a few more drinks, with Daniel.

It was nearing dinner time when she returned to the royal wing. She ducked into Varian’s office, and when he looked up and gave her a look of complete and absolute understanding, she quickly retreated.

Anduin wasn’t in his bedroom but the door to his office was open and she stood in the doorway, unsure, until he looked up. He didn’t say anything, apparently waiting for her to say something. “I’m sorry I upset you,” she started. “I wasn’t worried about getting hurt or sick because I knew Enaeon was there and he’s always been able to take care of us just fine. I get hurt fighting here because I know that if I’m not ready to get hurt in a real fight I could freeze up and wind up dead instead. Or I could get others killed. I wouldn’t say I enjoy getting injured but I do like it when the physical sensations of a fight almost overload my senses because of the adrenaline. I’ve always been like that. I want to be prepared for battle because I want to be able to come back afterward. I don’t want to leave Alaric and Bolvar without a mother because I wasn’t able to deal with injury and I want to be able to come home and see you.”

It took a few moments for Anduin to respond, and she could see his gaze roving her face, searching. Finally, he spoke. “I’m sorry I exploded at you,” he said evenly. “I could tell I was upsetting you. But when you came in covered in blood...” He hesitated. “I don’t want you to hide from me, Luciana.” He pushed his chair back and stood, approaching her slowly. “I don’t want you to feel like you need to hold back. I just need time to get used to it.”

“I can shower in the warrior house first,” she suggested. “I probably should have anyway. I was tracking mud everywhere.”

“Why didn’t you?” he said.

“Because I like my shampoo and I didn’t want people to stall me in the warrior house. I wanted to come up here and see you.”

His smile was lopsided and he reached up to cup her face. “I understand,” he said. “Like I said, I just need time to get used to it. I couldn’t understand why you would want to get hurt, but now that you’ve explained it a bit better I get it. It’s why I picked up archery - I wanted to be prepared.” He brushed a thumb under her eye and she felt the Light tickle across her cheek. “Luciana, please, don’t hide this from me. I got upset earlier because seeing you bloodied and dirty made it look like you were seriously hurt. I was worried and I didn’t express it well, I know. Just give me time to get used to it. I will. Please don’t hide from me.”

She wanted to smile. “I won’t,” she promised quietly. “Thank you for trying to understand. I know it isn’t easy. I’m a warrior,” she said.

“And warriors are meant to fight,” he finished. “I know. Father told me that.” He smiled. “Can I kiss you?” he asked.

“Yes.”
He kissed her slowly and lovingly, trying to remind her of the gentleness and intimacy she wanted to be able to come home to. She slid her hands under his shirt, resting them on his waist, and let him lead. “I love you,” he murmured between kisses. “I want to understand you. I don’t want you to have to hide from me and I’m going to make sure you don’t feel like you do.”

“I can be a real beast, Anduin,” she said. “You’ve never seen me in a real fight.”

“Then one day soon I’ll have to come and watch you,” he said. “I’m not afraid of you, Luciana. I’ll say that as many times as I have to. I might fear for you, but I never fear you. I’ve never seen any reason to. You’re made to fight, yes, but you chose which direction to take it. You chose to fight for your people, to protect and lead.”

“I can’t always control what I do when I berserk.”

“I’m not afraid,” he promised quietly, kissing her tenderly. “Give me time to get used to seeing you beat up, Lucy. I will. And then I’d like to see you fight, for real. I’d like to see you berserk. And I’ll show you why I’m not afraid of you.”

Luciana wrapped her arms around his waist under his shirt, pulling him flush against her and settling her head against his shoulder. He rested his cheek against her temple and sighed, hugging her tightly. “I love you,” she said softly.

“I know. Thank you.”

Luciana let the smile curve her lips. Anduin smelled lovely to her, like clean linen, something sweet and earthy, paper and ink. “What do I smell like to you?” she asked.

“What?”

“What do I smell like?”

“Hm.” He took a moment to consider. “Well, right now you smell like roast chicken,” he joked.

“You know what I mean.”

She felt him laugh. “You smell clean,” he started. “Fresh. Like damp earth, right after the rain. I can’t quite place it but it’s... It’s not an overt smell. It’s soothing.”

“Petrichor?”

“Yes! Like dark soil, petrichor, and fresh water.”

“That’s a good smell,” she said.

“Yes, it is.” He kissed her temple. “Why do you ask?” She shrugged mutely. “What do I smell like?”

“Clean linen. Sweet and earthy. And paper and ink.”

“I must be doing too much office work, then,” he chuckled.

“I like it.”

“Good. I’m glad.”
Surprise/Unsure

Hand to hand combat was one of her favourite ways to fight, and Luciana took vicious joy in pinning her opponents, in making them yield, proving herself stronger, faster, and meaner than them. It took only a few weeks for her body to become noticeably stronger. Her limbs were once again thick with muscle that strained visibly under her skin when she moved. She enjoyed having the ability to move freely. She relished in her returning strength.

Anduin enjoyed it, too. With the return of her strength and the redevelopment of her muscle, her fury had fully awoken and with it came everything else that sang out when her blood was hot. Anduin was, as a result, currently lazing in his bed, his dark skin still tinted with a blush, and a satisfied smile on his swollen lips.

Luciana was content to watch him, standing naked in her bedroom. She’d left Alaric and Bolvar with Bannister for the day, who had given her a sly wink and a grin when she’d handed them over. Anduin had been watching her progression for a while, patient while she worked through the preliminary stages of exhaustion and weakness. She’d thought it was appropriate to reward him by showing exactly why he’d been patient while she regained her strength.

“See something you like?” he said, stretching languorously. His back had hurt him fiercely, earlier, but Luciana had taken pains to care for him, to massage soothing peacebloom oil into his back and take him gently, and now it looked like he was feeling quite a lot better.

“I see a lot of things I like,” she replied. Her pulse still pounded in her crotch, and she could feel energy still buzzing in her limbs. “But I think you need a break. Maybe a nap. And something to eat.”

“It can wait,” he said, reaching a hand out to her. It flopped to the bed a moment later. “I’ll wait right here.”

“You do that,” she said, leaning down to kiss him and slipping away when he tried to grab her to pull her down. “I need a shower.”

“It can wait!”

“I don’t want it to wait! I feel sticky,” she complained. “Why did you come on my stomach? Now it’s all...”

“Lucy,” he groaned.

“What? It’s your own fault!” She didn’t hear his reply as she entered the washroom, brushing sweat-matted hair away from her face. She shut the door before she hit the switch for the werelights, and when she spun on her heel to turn them on vertigo gripped her, making her stumble into the wooden door with a muted thud. “What the fuck?” she murmured, pressing a hand to her forehead and fumbling for the light switch with the other. “What the fuck?” she repeated.

Her face in the mirror was paler than normal, her eyes squinting and tired. She glanced down at the sink, the motion making the vertigo spike, and she groaned and stumbled to the toilet. Her hands hit the edge of the seat not a moment too soon, as she immediately dry-heaved over the bowl. “Oh, Light,” she moaned. She wasn’t a stranger to vertigo, but it wasn’t fun. She couldn’t think of anything that could cause it, even as she mentally ran through a list of what she’d eaten that day, what she’d done outside with her squadron, with Anduin for a couple of hours... “Oh, fuck me,”
she whispered, bracing her forehead on the toilet seat. “Anduin!” She inhaled slowly, counting the seconds as she exhaled. “Anduin!” Her voice was sharp, cutting, and Anduin was in the doorway a few seconds later.

“What? Lucy, what’s wrong?” He kneeled on the tile next to her, hand immediately going to her back to soothe her with Light.

“Get Enaeon,” she said quietly. “And get the kitchens to send up ginger tea and whatever’s left of my belly sickness medicine.”

Anduin didn’t reply verbally, but he kissed her head with care not to jostle her and left a moment later.

When Luciana heard Enaeon’s voice outside her room, she sighed in relief. “Luciana?” she heard him call.

“Bathroom.”

She felt his hand land on her back, and the Light filled her. “What is wrong, my friend?” he asked quietly.

“Where’s Anduin?”

“In the kitchens. No one else is here.”

“Check if I’m pregnant.”

“What?” he asked, even as he shifted his hand to obey. “How did you know?” he asked a moment later.

“Vertigo,” she said. “I’ve only ever felt it like this when I was pregnant.”

“I see. You are... I think, three or four weeks along.”

“How did that happen?” she asked quietly. “I haven’t had my period at all between being pregnant, breastfeeding, and then training.”

“I think that when you started training you must have given your body’s functions a jolt,” Enaeon explained. “All of them.”

“Three weeks?” she asked.

“I think so, yes.”

She fell silent, and Enaeon didn’t speak, simply rubbing her back soothingly. He obviously didn’t mind that she was naked and sweaty and probably smelled of sex. She inhaled deeply, and lifted her head. “I want a shower,” she mumbled.

“Can you stand?” he said. “Here.” His hand covered the back of her head and his Light battled away the vertigo. “That will hold, until you can have your medicine.”

“Thanks, Enaeon,” she said. He left once he was sure she wasn’t going to take a tumble and crack her head open, again.

Anduin returned while she was in the shower, shivering even under the warm water. She was unsure, and it wasn’t a comfortable state for her to be in. Her husband was waiting for her when
she left the bathroom, and held open a housecoat for her. She gratefully slipped into it, and he tied it for her slowly. “Enaeon won’t tell me what’s wrong,” Anduin said quietly, meeting her gaze. She saw concern and confusion in his eyes. “Are you sick?”

“No,” she said, and wet her lips. She glanced at Enaeon, who was standing still and quiet near the door to the vestibule. What looked to be the entire stash of belly sickness medicine was laid out on the table in the corner of the room. She looked back at Anduin. “I’m pregnant again. He checked. I had a feeling, because of the vertigo. I don’t...” She swayed on her feet and Anduin pulled her to his chest, hugging her close.

“Relax,” he murmured. “Take the medicine, lay down for a while. We can talk about it when you’re feeling better.”

“Okay.”

He helped her sit, drink some tea and swallow the thick mixture that would ease her vertigo. Anduin lay down beside her, stroking her hair while she relaxed and waited for the medicine to take hold even as the effect of Enaeon’s Light faded from her head.

“Better?” Anduin asked, seeing her open her eyes again.

“Yeah.” She sat up slowly, Anduin following her.

“You’re pregnant?” he prompted.

“Three weeks, about. I didn’t get my period, but apparently when you kick start your body you kick start everything in it.”

“Sperm can last a few days,” Anduin said. “We started having sex again not long after you stopped breastfeeding. We didn’t use any protection.”

“I didn’t think we’d need it,” she snorted. “Usually it takes longer than that for a female to start ovulating again after giving birth. I guess I jolted it all into action.”

Anduin rubbed her arms with soft, Light-imbued hands. It eased her shivering. “What do you want to do?” he asked. “If you keep training at this rate, it would end it pretty quickly,” he suggested.

“I know.”

When she fell silent, he pulled her closer, gently, to kiss her cheek, and then her temple. “What do you want to do?” he asked again.

“I don’t know.”

“That’s alright.” He rested his cheek against her head and waited for her to gather her thoughts. “Do you want to speak with Father?” he asked.

“I don’t know.”

“Your brother? Bannister is still in the Keep.”

“I don’t know.”

“Do you want to speak to Victoria?”

“... Yes,” she answered after a moment. She saw Enaeon silently move to the passageway that led
to her squadron’s rooms. He returned minutes later with Victoria in tow.

“Hey, Luce,” she greeted. Luciana saw Pop’s angular head over the edge of her bed, and a moment later he jumped onto the mattress lightly to sit at the foot of the bed. “Heard you got vertigo again.”

“I’m pregnant and I don’t know what to do.”

“Ah, that’s a puzzle,” Victoria answered, sitting on the edge of the bed near Pop. She petted his head absently and he crawled forward, inches at a time, until he could lay his head on Luciana’s leg. He stared at her, flicked his eyes to Victoria, and looked between the two as they spoke. “You just find out now?”

“Yes.”

“Why not take some time to think about it?”

“My body’s going to make the choice for me if I keep training,” Luciana explained. “As it is, even if I stop now, it’s going to keep developing muscle and kill the embryo.”

“Ah,” Victoria said wisely. “How long do you have left until that happens?”

Luciana glanced at Enaeon, who answered for her. “Not long,” he said. “At the rate your body is moving, within a week it will flush the embryo from your system and you will no longer be able to conceive.”

“I’d have to halt it somehow,” Luciana muttered.

“It is possible,” Enaeon said.

She sighed, leaning heavily into Anduin’s body. “I don’t know,” she said quietly. Victoria patted her knee.

“You can think about it for the rest of today, at least,” she said. “Take it super easy. Like, lounge in bed. I’m sure Lord Highness here wouldn’t mind spoiling you for a day.”

“Not at all,” Anduin said, amusement in his voice.

“Shauna will stay with you. Pop can, too, if you want. He’s a big cuddle-bear. Aren’t you?”

Victoria cooed, rubbing the wolf-dog’s face. He patiently sat through a round of heavy affection and baby-voice, giving his head a little shake when it was over. “So, yeah. Just relax here for today, think about it, maybe talk it through with Bannister or someone. Whatever you decide, you got your squadron with you.”

“And me and Father,” Anduin added.

“Yeah.” Victoria gave him a thumbs-up.


“Good!” Victoria hopped off the bed. Pop watched her for a moment before following. “I’m gonna take Shauna out for a run to tire her out. You want me to drop off a list at the kitchen?”

“Plain food,” Luciana said. “Tell them I have vertigo again. They should have noticed Enaeon taking the rest of the medicine from the backroom.”

“Alrighty. Won’t be long,” Victoria promised. “I’ll tell the others to keep watch. Do you want
them to know?"

“Sure,” she said. “But no one outside the squadron. Not even Bannister. Not yet.”


“Okay.”

Whoever was in the kitchens today hurried to send her up some food, and under her plate someone had stuck a scrawled note that encouraged her to feel better soon. Luciana ate slowly on the bed, alone for a short while when Anduin went to speak with Varian. He’d first asked Luciana if she was alright with Varian knowing, and when she’d nodded slowly, silently, Anduin had kissed her head before slipping off the bed.

While she was eating, Varian came into the room through the passageway without Anduin. “Hey, Lucy,” he greeted quietly, sitting next to her on the bed. “How are you feeling?”
“Don’t know. That’s the worst part. I don’t know what to do.”

“I heard.” He took her hand and held it, gently rubbing her knuckles, trying to offer comfort. “I can’t make a decision for you. Just know that whatever you decide, I’ll back you up. Whatever’s necessary, we’ll do it.”

“I know.” She tried to smile, but it fell flat after a moment. “I thought if this happened I’d just shrug it off. I have two sons, healthy and whole. Why would I need another child? But now that it’s happened... I don’t know. I don’t like the thought of giving it up.”

“Could you say why?”

“Not really. Maybe it’s just my stubborn streak.” She smiled weakly. “I don’t know what I’d need to do to bring it to term. I have an idea, but I’m no healer.”

“I can find out for you,” he offered.

“Please.”

Alright. Do you want me to stay with you a while? Or, do you want Anduin?”

“I think I’d like to be alone for a while.”

“Okay. Anduin will be in my room so if you need anything, just give a shout.”

“I will.”

He half-stood, one knee on the bed, to kiss her forehead. “I’ll take care of it, whatever you decide,” he promised before he left.

Luciana went to her room to see her sons. Alaric and Bolvar were able to hold up their heads now, hold her gaze for longer than a minute, gurgle and laugh like only babies did. She managed two hours before returning to the other bedroom and calling out for Anduin. Without a word she gestured him forward, pulled him down onto the bed, and pulled and pushed until they were tangled in a mess of limbs and blankets and pillows. Anduin huffed a laugh, settled his cheek on the pillow over her head, and sighed.

She was content to rest with him until the room was dark, and then she spoke. “I think I want to keep it,” she said. “I think I want to have the child. But I need to know what that will entail, first.”
“Okay,” Anduin said simply. “We can call up Casey and Nancy again. Whoever else we need.”

“Varian is finding out what I’d need to do.”

“Good.” He shuffled about and twisted his body until he was facing her, and laid his hand over her neck. She felt his lips at the corner of her mouth and he smiled and brushed them over her skin so he could kiss her. It raised goosebumps along her shoulders. “In that case, why don’t we just stay here for now?”

“I like that idea.”

“Do you want to get undressed?”

“Yes.”

“I’ll do it. Stay.”

He carefully tugged off her clothes, laughing when she grumbled at having to move around. She heard him moving around the room and a minute later he slipped under the covers, pulling them from under her and then dragging them back up. “Alright?” he asked.

“Yeah. Anduin?”

“Yes?”

“Love me?”

He rolled over her, pressing her down into the mattress. “You want to do this now?” he asked.

“Yes.”

“Who I am, then, to deny you?” he asked, and she could hear his smile as he trailed his hand gently down her side.
Luciana was always aware of her surroundings. Part of it was simply her nature, to be wary of threats either to herself or an ally, to be ready to move to defend or attack - or even help, if someone were to trip or stumble. It also came from sentry duty in Arathi Basin, in standing guard over her sleeping, vulnerable squad mates through the night.

Time passed while she lounged in her bed, and she was completely aware of it all. It passed while she was sprawled over the couch. Anduin was a sweetheart to her, and while she wasn’t sure she deserved it, she let him massage her neck, her shoulders, her arms, all the way down to her hands. She let him feed her while she debated with herself. She kept watch while wet nurses fed her babies, nervous under her stormy gaze, and she watched while Anduin picked up Alaric first to burp him. She stood and silently went to pick up Bolvar to do the same. She held Anduin’s gaze over their children’s heads and shushed Bolvar when he spit up and it upset him.

“Our children,” she murmured, pressing a kiss against Bolvar’s head. Anduin smiled sweetly and did the same to Alaric, who huffed and smacked his tiny hands against his father’s chest. It seemed to Luciana that he wasn’t even yet aware that he had elbows, because he never really used them.

“It still amazes me to think I have kids,” he said. “Especially to think that they came from you.”

“You must have expected you’d have kids someday soon.”

“I did. I think you’re the part that surprised me. Still does. Every time I look at them, I remember how lucky I am to have you. I remember how hard you fought to come back to me.”

“I always will.”

“I know.” There was no hint of doubt in his voice and he gave her his soft-eyed look, adoration and reverence and love, and she still didn’t know what to do with it. She didn’t know how to respond, and so she concentrated on Bolvar, holding him up under the arms and smiling when he met her gaze with wide blue eyes.

“You’re wonderful,” she said. “And your mommy loves you very much. Yes, I do.”

“I can’t wait for them to get a bit bigger,” Anduin started.

“I can. They’re so much easier to contain when they can’t walk. You should’ve seen Frederic,” she said, and it surprised her how little it hurt to say it. “Once he got his feet under him he was an unholy terror. We found piles grass in the oddest of places and Father’s trade papers, torn into strips, in the bald spots he left in the yard.”

Anduin laughed, holding up Alaric like Luciana held Bolvar and moved to stand beside her. He held Alaric up next to his brother, as though comparing them. “I think Bolvar might end up looking a bit more like you, to be honest,” he said. “He’s got a bit of a slant at the corner of the eyes, like you do.”

“Hopefully he won’t get your father’s chin,” Luciana grumbled. “Or choice in hair styles.”

Anduin laughed and nudged her shoulder, bringing Alaric back to his chest. Luciana copied his movements, holding Bolvar in a protective embrace. “I’m a father,” Anduin said quietly, smiling widely.
“It’s been a couple of months,” Luciana said. “You’re still on that?” she teased.

“Yes, I am. Aren’t you?”

“Well.” She hesitated. “I was a bit like a mother to Frederic, even though I was still a child myself. I... When I was with my squadron in the field, I was very protective of them. I called them my boys. I mean, until we got a woman in the team. Jill. Then they were my kiddos.”

“They still are,” Anduin said. “That’s why they’re here, instead of in the army. Because they chose you.”

“Yeah.” She smiled softly when Bolvar tried to burble something in baby-talk at her. Luciana leaned her head back to look at him and he gaped at her, then shoved his fist in his mouth. She chuckled and gently removed it, replacing it with a pacifier. He sucked on it absently, still staring at her. “If I didn’t know better,” she said, “I’d think you were reading my mind. Quite a stare you have, Bolvar.”

“I never thanked you for that,” Anduin said quietly.

“For what?”

“For naming him Bolvar. The first one, Highlord Fordragon, was like a father to me. While Father was gone, and some presumed him dead, Bolvar was the one who stepped in to fill the void that left me in. He did his best to stand up to Lady Katrana, to Onyxia. For my sake. When I heard what happened at the Wrathgate...” He trailed off, gazing into the shadows at the corner of the room.

“I’m familiar with it,” Luciana said, shifting Bolvar into her left arm so she could wrap the other around Anduin’s waist. She gave him a comforting squeeze and he looked down, smiling sadly.

“I was inconsolable. I cried, I screamed, I raged. I wanted him back,” he choked, and Luciana leaned her head against his shoulder, rubbing his hip with her hand. “I didn’t get him back. Father returned, and for a while he wasn’t himself. Too much Lo’gosh, not enough Varian. But he found a balance, and recently he’s been more himself than ever before. Whatever he did with Genn, it helped. Genn helps, by being his friend, his equal. But I always thought of Bolvar when I was hurt. When I had a nightmare I wanted to run to him. For a time, I felt I had no one. Bolvar had been my father.” He swallowed thickly, leaned his head against hers, and Luciana had to bite back her own tears. Anduin was telling her something she hadn’t known, something about himself that no one else had the right to know. Luciana had underestimated how much he trusted her and it hurt her to know that she could break him with that trust.

“I knew a bit about Bolvar. Varian told me a little,” she admitted. “I thought it fitting, to name your son after a man who had raised you. Now you can return the favour. You can look after him like he did you.” When he didn’t respond immediately, she shifted and looked up. He had his head turned away, and for a brief, panic-filled moment she worried she’d hurt him.

“Thank you,” he said, his voice heavy, and he turned to kiss her lips and then her forehead. She tilted her chin down slightly to facilitate it. His face was red, splotchy, his eyes wet, but he wasn’t crying. She hoped it wasn’t because he didn’t want to cry. She hoped it was just that he felt he didn’t need to.

“Well, it seemed only fair,” she said lightly, and felt him smile against her forehead. “Varian is like a father to me. I feel like I grew more with him than I did in the years I spent with my family. I gave Alaric his name. It felt unbalanced to have a twin who wasn’t named for a grandfather. Symmetry, and all that.”
Anduin laughed quietly, chest shaking and displacing Alaric slightly. The baby huffed and cried out, looking around. Luciana smiled and took him from Anduin with a careful, powerful arm. Anduin let her, took advantage of the move to put his hands at her lower back and pull her hips forward. He left room for the babies so they wouldn’t be squeezed, and leaned his head forward to kiss her again. “I love you,” he said. “I can’t even say how wonderful you are.”

“Flatterer,” she said with a smile, moving her forehead to his shoulder. His arms moved, one staying around her waist, the other moving closer to her shoulders.

“It’s true, Lucy. You like to say that I saved you, but I think we saved each other. I was completely alone, and though Father loves me and I love him, he’s my parent. I had no friends. No mother, no uncles or aunts - well, not recently. Not anymore. I had to keep finding new reasons to keep going because I didn’t see any real happiness in my future. You... You offered me complexity, options, choice, power over myself and trust in someone else. You looked at me like I mattered. You called me Prince, but you didn’t look at me like one. I didn’t have to pretend. Not only because you wouldn’t take advantage of my weakness, but because you made me feel like I wasn’t weak. When you looked at me, you focused, like I was the only thing in the room that mattered.”

“You’re a healer,” she murmured. “I always protect the healer. I always protect my healer.”

“Is that really all it was?” he asked. The uncertainty in his voice tore at her.

“No. You’re a beautiful man, Anduin. You have to remember, I was straight off a battlefield. You were a curious young healer, fresh and unmarred, who stared at me with wide, open eyes and smiled like the sun. You offered to ease my pain. You wanted to be close to me. When we’re at war, that’s the kind of thing we think about. Someone sweet, innocent and beautiful, to wash the blood off our faces and love the pain away. I might have made it look easy to keep a distance. It wasn’t.”

“I didn’t know,” he said, wondering. “You did make it look easy.”

“It really wasn’t,” she promised.

“Who’s we?”

“Warriors. Soldiers.”

“Ah. Really?” he asked. She could hear mild disbelief in his voice.

“Yes, really. Keeps you warm on a cold night,” she teased.

“Lucy!” he scolded, and she imagined his ears were quite red.

“What? It’s true!”

“At least put the boys down to sleep. They’re calm now.”

“They’ll need a change soon.”

“Leave it to the nannies,” Anduin said.

“I like the way you think, Lord Prince,” she said as he released her slowly, almost reluctantly. She felt his gaze as she carefully returned first Bolvar, and then Alaric to the cribs. “Mommy and daddy love you,” she crooned quietly to them, brushing fine hair away from their faces and touching their hands and their cheeks. “I love you.”
“I love you,” Anduin echoed. When she looked up his eyes were still on her, soft, with a deep affection that made her chest tight.

Luciana looked down once more to make sure the twins were truly sleeping, and felt a twinge of silly jealousy at how easily they fell into it. “I’ll let the guards know they’ll need nannies,” she said, not looking at Anduin. If she did and she saw that look again, she’d start to cry.

The Prince’s Guard in the antechamber nodded, promising to send for the nannies that were kept on-hand when the babies started to make noise. “It’s my duty to serve and protect them,” he reminded Luciana, a proud smile growing quickly on his face. “I’ll make sure they get what they need.”

“You’re a warrior, and we’ve all heard tales of your exploits. Northrend, Pandaria, Tol Barad, Darkshire, the Basin... And it’s said you’re one of the most powerful warriors in the Alliance. I’m a commoner, Your Highness. My mother’s a washerwoman and my father works in the post office. People like me, we expect to be sent out by nobles, but you’ll never look directly at us. One of my first patrols in the Old Town, I saw you go in the Green Eggs eatery. You looked like normal folk, except for the parade uniform. And I’ve heard all about you. We all have. How you were in the Military Academy since you were a kid, how you grew up to be a soldier, a Knight, learned to fight beside commoners and poor folk with nothing better. You’re out there fighting with us, for us, with battle fatigue and scars and... And then you were captured.” He sobered quickly.

“And?” she prompted.
“And you came back. Torn up, tired, but you came back. I was in the crowds in the Valley at your wedding. I heard your speech. A lot of people doubted what you said, when you said that you were fighting for us. But we know for sure, now, you were telling the truth.” He looked at her again and she felt mild worry that he might cry. “You were out there, fighting, for us, with us, and I’ll be damned to the Void and chained to a Pit Lord if I’m gonna let anything happen to your kids. Your Highness,” he added belatedly. “You’re my Princess, for Light’s sake!”

She regarded him carefully, taking a moment to think. “People like you are the reason I fight,” she said. “Honest folk, citizens. You trust me to lead the soldiers of your army to victory, to keep your city safe so that you may have a safe place to live and prosper. I trust you to keep safe the most precious things I have - my husband, my children. It’s a fair exchange, I think. Thank you for your service, Guard March. I’ll admit, it’s comforting to know my sons have such dedicated guards.”

His smile was nearly blinding.

“I imagine they’ll need their nannies quite soon,” she said, turning to re-enter the bedroom. “I’ll be in the other room with Anduin. We have sensitive matters to discuss. Please let the others know not to disturb us.”

“Will do, Your Highness.”

“I appreciate it.”

She shut the door, and took a deep breath. She’d forgotten what it was like to have someone look at her like that, with the absolute trust one could only give to a superior officer. When her squadron had been in dire straits, surrounded by enemies or stranded without supplies, they’d given her that look. The expression that told her she was in charge, for better or for worse. Lives hinged on her abilities, on her decisions.

It was a heavy weight to hold, but she found she was thankful for it. She’d always felt most capable, most powerful and prepared, when she’d been in control, unquestioned. In situations like that, it was up to her to get her people to safety. She’d sworn to always do so. She’d taken The Knight’s Oath.

_I swear now by my blood and my honour_  
As Knight in the King’s Army  
To take absolute command of my unit  
To respect them, and to accept a burden:  
Their respect, their loyalty, their trust  
Is my weight to bear, in all things.  
My command is their absolute.  
To return them to their loved ones  
To bring them home after the war  
Is my sacred duty, under the Light  
And I will not fail._

_I swear now by my blood and my honour_  
That should my unit be in danger  
I will be willing to sacrifice one life  
To return to Stormwind her children  
Who in serving her and her King  
Are more valuable than my life.  
More valuable than gold, than power,  
Which I will not accept in exchange for their lives, is my unit._
I swear now by my blood and my honour
No bribery, no trickery, can keep from them my command.
No thing, no person, will keep me from their respect.
I will work in tandem, keep harmony between them
As is my duty as their Knight.
And if by my own actions I lose their respect
I lose all that gives me worth
For to betray those under your command
Is Unforgiven.

Under the Light, this I swear:
I am Knight Luciana Amadeus.
I will not fail my squadron.
Chapter Notes

I dunno what happened to all my precious lil commenters but I’m still going anyhoo.

Luciana sighed heavily. Some days she felt as though she had failed her squadron, but it was dashed whenever she spoke to them. Not one of them was dissatisfied with where they’d ended up. It was comforting, to know she hadn’t failed them, that she hadn’t broken her oath to them.

Alaric’s snuffling broke her out of her thoughts and she hurried into Anduin’s room. He watched, shirt in his hand, as she closed the passageway behind her. “Took you a while,” he commented.

“You didn’t know?” Anduin said, surprised. She took the shirt from his hands and tossed it aside, pressing herself to his chest and running her hands over his stomach. He shivered under her touch, gently taking her hands. “You really didn’t know,” he said, leaning back to look at her.

“No, I really didn’t know,” she said, raising an eyebrow. “How could I know? I spent most of my time outside the city.”

“Oh, yeah,” he said, nodding. “You’re a very popular woman, Luciana. You’ve got a fan club in the Cathedral Square, the entire City Guard is alarmingly close to worshiping you, and the Royal Guards all think you shit gold bricks.”

She snorted, shaking her head. “You’re exaggerating,” she said, trying to brush it off. Anduin was serious.

“I’m not,” he responded. “Your kingdom loves you, Luciana.”

She blinked, and then breathed deeply, slowly. “I need to get out more, then. I knew that the general consensus was a positive one.” It was strange to hear it, even stranger for it to come from Anduin. She’d expected popularity, even celebrity, but what she’d heard from Gideon had thrown her. “I’m not really sure what to do with that.”

“Maybe you should get out more,” Anduin suggested. “Not right now. After. You can disguise yourself, maybe wear a ring of illusion, talk to the citizens about their Princess. I think your self-image is a bit skewed, Lucy.”

“It must be completely fucked up,” she corrected. “Sometimes I forgot I’m the Princess. I’m still Knight Captain in my head.”

“You’re something, all right,” he grumbled, and she pinched his side and made him yelp.

“Hush up, you.”

Varian interrupted before she could continue by opening the passageway between Anduin’s bedroom and the King’s private quarters. “Lucy,” he said before the door even opened fully. It
didn’t surprise her that he knew she was there. Where else would she be? “I’ve spoken to quite a few people on the matter of your pregnancy. There are a few options.” His eyes were heavy, serious, and she slipped away from Anduin to speak with Varian, who had halted beside the armchairs in front of the hearth.

“What are they?”

“The immediate suggestion they all presented was to simply continue your training,” he said. “Going with the pregnancy would result in high risks for both yourself and the child.”

“Other options?” she prompted. Anduin opened a drawer in the background. Searching for a new shirt, probably.

“The other options range from relegating you to a wheelchair for nine months and starving you for the next three weeks,” he said, “to putting you into a medically induced coma, starting now, until the end of your first trimester. And, if necessary, to the end of your second trimester.”

It took only a moment. “Coma,” she said.

“Lucy,” Anduin interjected, approaching them with his hand raised to stall their conversation. “This is a heavy decision to make. There are serious risks to your health, serious enough to suggest drastic measures that could have lasting consequences.”

She looked between him and Varian. “I want to have this child,” she said firmly. “Unless we’re both going to die if I go through with it, I’m doing it.”

“There is a chance,” Varian added, unhesitant. His gaze met hers evenly. He was unhappy with her decision, angry even, but his voice was admirably calm. “If you choose to continue training, nothing will happen aside from the embryo being flushed out. You’ll soon become completely infertile once more. If you choose the wheelchair, you’ll likely still lose the embryo because of the momentum your body has gathered during the last few weeks, and your body will be weakened from starvation. If you choose the coma, there will be less chance of losing the embryo, but exponentially higher chances of causing permanent damage to yourself, and possibly dying during birth from complications.”

Anduin took her hand and she regretted looking at him. His eyes spoke volumes and she didn’t want to read it, but she did anyway. He was asking her not to take the chance. I can’t lose you, his eyes told her.

“What would the coma entail?” she said, watching Varian’s face. His nose twitched, as though he wanted to draw back his lips and snarl. He didn’t.

“You’d be set up in a healing nexus, maintained twenty-four seven by a team of healers for three months at the minimum. Muscle development would be completely halted, bone density and blood pressure along with resting heart rate would be lowered, brain activity would be slowed to a crawl, and a lot of muscle mass would be reduced to resources to feed the embryo in place of stored fat.”

Anduin squeezed her hand and she set her jaw against it. He was begging her, now. It killed her to deny him, but she did anyway. He was asking her not to take the chance. I can’t lose you, his eyes told her.

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Anduin squeezed her hand and she set her jaw against it. He was begging her, now. It killed her to deny him, but she was determined even without his support. No, that wasn’t true. She knew she had his support, always. But it still hurt to know he was so unhappy with her decision.

“You wouldn’t be able to eat or drink,” Varian continued, glancing at his son. “For months, you’d be kept live purely through constant healing. Everything would be replaced with healing energy and your digestive system, among others, would partially collapse. The healers would be
combating starvation, dehydration, fatigue, bed sores, and a number of other things. A slight lapse would mean almost certain death. You’d be placing your life in their hands, completely unaware and unprotected. Waking you after three months would risk serious complications and possibly death, if the healers can’t time it right. Six months would only be worse. They’d have to draw you out of the coma into sleep almost instantaneously, restore your digestive system and blood vessels, wake you, and have you eat and drink enough to tide you over through the crash, within three hours.”

“Lucy,” Anduin said quietly.

“How soon would they need to start it?” she asked.

“Tonight, at the latest,” he said. “If you want to have the child, you can’t let your body keep going at the rate it’s been developing for longer than that.”

“Do you have enough healers and guards for it?”

“I’ve already discussed it with Genn. I have a plan set up to cover your absence.”

“I need a minute,” she told him, and he understood. He glanced at Anduin once more before leaving.

“Come get me when you’ve decided,” Varian said, shutting the passageway behind him.

“Lucy, you can’t,” Anduin said immediately, turning her by the shoulders to face him. He was distraught, but nowhere near panic. He’d been through too much in his life to panic over such a thing when staying calm would serve him so much better. Luciana numbed herself to it and hated herself for doing it, though she felt it was necessary. Otherwise she wouldn’t think clearly. She’d simply do whatever hurt him the least. “There’s too high a chance that you’d die. I can’t lose you again, Lucy. Not when it’s preventable. You have two sons, already. You have children. You gave me a family, you gave me what you wanted to. Please.”

“Anduin,” she said quietly.

“Why do you want to have this child so badly?” he asked her. “Is it for me? If it is, I don’t want it. I’d rather have you.”

“Anduin,” she repeated. He watched her, eyes wet with unshed tears, until she spoke. “I don’t know why I want to have it so badly. But I do. And I’ll regret it for the rest of my life if I don’t try. I would be Unforgiven.”

The use of the term Anduin, as a priest, would know intimately made him pause. Unforgiven was the harshest judgement, the heaviest of brands, and to be Unforgiven was to be renounced from the Light, to be removed from society, to be cast out as irredeemable and forever worthless. “No, you wouldn’t,” he said, and shook her by the shoulders. “Luciana, listen to me. You’re worth more than one unborn life. You’re worth a lot more. Luciana, I swear to you. You don’t have to do this.”

“I do,” she said. “I would be Unforgiven. Maybe not to you, not to anyone else, but to myself. I wouldn’t be able to forgive myself.”

“Why?” he demanded.

“I don’t know.” She saw the muscles in his temple jump as he clenched and unclenched his jaw repeatedly.
“I don’t understand, Lucy,” Anduin said.

“I know. I have to try, Anduin. Please.”

He deflated, practically fell forward into her and let her support his weight for a moment. “Lucy,” he whispered, hugging her loosely and then squeezing her as though he was afraid she’d slip away. When he didn’t continue, she spoke.

“I have to try, at least. Anduin, I love you. I love our sons. I love Varian. And I don’t want to die. I won’t leave you. But I have to take the chance. And I really need your support.”

“Oh course,” he sobbed suddenly, pressing his mouth to her shoulder. “Of course I’ll support you. I’ll be right here, with you. I’ll…” He choked, tried again. “I’ll take care of things while you’re gone,” he said lamely. “If you stay with me, I’ll take care of things until you wake up. But you can’t die.”

“It’s a deal, then,” she said, smiling tightly and reaching up to card her fingers through his disheveled hair. “One more child. I won’t die. And you’ll cover for me while I’m under.”

“Promise me,” he said, drawing back to stare at her, unblinking, and fiercer even than she knew he could be. “Make an oath. I know you’ll keep it.”

“I swear to you, Anduin Wrynn, as a warrior, as your wife,” she said seriously. She couldn’t find any humour under his intense gaze that threatened tears. “I will not let this kill me. I will come back to you, as I always do. And I will give you this, one more child, when I do.”

His gaze flicked between her eyes, and then he blinked and nodded once, firmly. “I accept your oath, Luciana Wrynn,” he said. “My wife,” he choked with a wet smile, and pulled her into a kiss. She was surprised at its gentleness, expecting something rough and desperate. But, she wasn’t going away. She swore she wouldn’t die, and he was showing her that he believed her, trusted her enough to believe it by treating her impending coma as though she were just leaving for a stroll through the Old Town.

Varian was waiting for her just inside his bedroom. “You’ve made peace with him?” he asked. His anger rolled off him in waves and Luciana nearly responded in a defensive snarl. She bit it back.

“I don’t need to,” she said.

“No? To your husband, young, with two babies, who you’re going to leave alone? You’re going to die in his home, where he can watch you rot from the inside, and you’re not even going to say goodbye?” Varian advanced on her and she held her ground. His anger, she saw, came from a place of sorrow. Grief, abandonment he’d never been able to let go of. “You are going to make my son watch you die,” he said slowly, towering over her, trying to cow her. He saw the most sensible decision, saw her purposefully go against it. She bit at him, interrupted him before he could build up any more steam.

“I made an oath,” she growled, taking a step forward. It brought her almost nose to nose with him, and she met his glower with one just as intense. “I’m not going to die. And I’m going to give him one more child.”

At that, Varian’s rage eased into something manageable. “You made an oath,” he repeated, and she would have been insulted, would have been angry at his mocking, but he wasn’t mocking her. He was taking her words quite seriously. “You made an oath to him?”

“Yes. I did.”
His eyes, flashing like dark gold under the sun, would have by now made anyone else submit, lower their heads, admit defeat, or acquiesce to his wisdom. Luciana held strong, expecting to somehow stand there, staring down the King, for hours. She was surprised, pleased, when he lowered his gaze - though only for a moment. “You will keep it,” he said. Ordered.

“I will.”

He breathed out, and his fury left him suddenly. Luciana saw that beneath it, as she’d thought, was unrelenting sorrow. “You’ll come back,” Varian said quietly. “You won’t leave us one less. You won’t start us down that path. Not again.”

“I’m a Wrynn,” Luciana responded, her posture easing. She offered no resistance when he pulled her into a hug, tucked her up against his chest and folded down around her protectively. Gratefully, she clenched at the cloth on his back. She hid it, but she was scared. Maybe he saw it. “I have a family to look after. I’m not going anywhere.”
This Is War

Luciana.

You can hear me, at last.

Yet still you are full of fear.

Let it go, Luciana. That space in your heart can be better spent.

who are You

My fury was yours in Durotan. You leaned on my strength in Ashenvale, and beyond.

Genn says You’re Goldrinn

I have many names, Luciana.

what did You mean I can hear You at last

You could not hear me before. Your fear kept me from you.

Do not listen to them, Luciana. They are not who they would have you believe.

I sense your confusion, Luciana. Ask me your questions. I will not lie to you.

They will not tell you anything. They will say pretty words and twist you into something terrible.

Luciana? Can you no longer hear me? Do you longer want to be strong?

They will destroy what you have created. Do not give them an inch.

Who are you?

I told you, Luciana. My strength was yours in Durotan.

You are weakening, Luciana. You have been in this place for months. I cleanse them from your mind, but each time my power in you grows weaker. You must fight them. Fight them away from your heart.

My fury can be yours. Let me lend you my power.

Fight them, Luciana. Fight your fear, and replace it with something stronger. Think of your mate. Think of your pups. Think of your father. Let your pack shield you from their corruption.

Luciana? I can give you power. You can protect your kingdom. You can destroy the ones who hurt you.

You made an oath, Luciana. I witnessed it. If you do not fight them, you will not be able to keep your oath. It will not be you who returns to your mate. It will be the monster you always feared you would become. It will destroy what you have created.
Accept my offer, Luciana. I will give you power. I will make you unstoppable. You will be the terror of your enemies. No one would dare question your rule. You can lead your kingdom to dominion.

Be brave, Luciana.

Who are you?

I am who you see in your father’s eyes. I was there, in Durotan. I kept the barrier firm between worlds so that you could keep your oath to your mate.

Goldrinn.

Yes. To your people, that is my name. To others, I am Lo’Gosh. I am the Ghost Wolf, who walks in death.

Why are you here?

I come to you as I came to your father. You are tenacious, Luciana, under terrible circumstances, under the greatest of adversity. I will give you my fury, Luciana. You will be the wolf. You will be a protector, a leader, as you’ve always strived to be.

Why?

I would return you to your mate. To your father, my scion.

Why? I don’t understand. Why?

Because I see your heart. You have earned my respect, and you have earned my strength. You are strong, Luciana.

I can make you powerful, Luciana. I can give you the power to protect your offspring.

Be brave, Luciana.

I felt Light. Enaeon.

He watches over you.

I feel Anduin.

He keeps your heart. But he cannot reach the roots of their corruption. They are hidden far too deep, in the darkest pit of your heart, where they feed on despair and fear. Fight them, Luciana. Lend me your strength and I will rid you of their influence. They reach your pups through you. Be brave, Luciana. You are strong. Use that strength.

Who are they?

Corruption. Sickness. Perversion of what is natural, what is right.

They can reach my sons?

Through you.
Get rid of them. *Get rid of them. Get rid of them now.*
Waiting

Chapter Notes

No updates until now because I was in Texas! It's fucking hot in Texas. But I got some nice boots.

Bolvar and Alaric were growing quickly. Anduin had a hard time keeping track of it all, sometimes. He had lessons to plan out, food to choose, things to watch and record. He had to summon all of his happiness for them. He had to be bright, for them.

But they weren’t with him right now. They were with his father, learning how to use spoons. They were nearly a year old. And without them nearby, he had no reason to be bright. Not while Luciana was still unconscious. Unreachable.

Anduin had needed to make a difficult decision. The healers had presented it to him months ago. They told him that Luciana would benefit from staying under until the third trimester, when the fetus was stronger and it was less likely they’d lose it in the transition. He had decided to keep her under.

Five months. He had watched his sons grow, alone, without their mother, and now they were eight months old. And Luciana was small again. She was never small compared to other people. But Anduin could see the difference again, see her body deteriorate. He had to resist interrupting the healing nexus with his own Light and waking her for the first month. The second month had been worse. It had been the most drastic.

He knew that she was safe, here, in the Greymane Wing of the castle. Rumours placed in her faraway lands. Some thought she was training in Pandaria. Others thought she was hidden somewhere in Darnassus, or even Gilneas, planning some of the recovery and war efforts. No one had refuted any of these rumours. Varian had rushed to send out missives to those he could trust. Malfurion, Genn, Moira - they were in on the secret. Them, and select few others. Bannister was the only one in her family who knew the truth - that she was, in fact, comatose in the Keep, sleeping away entire months as her belly swelled with a fragile life.

Genn had immediately agreed to keep her in his Wing. “It’s only fair,” he had said. “Somewhat poetic, really. Stormwind shelters us, and we shelter her Princess.” After a week, the guards there had learned to expect Anduin. He had a standing appointment with Genn, supposedly on war efforts and supply management and cultural exchange. He did sometimes have talks with the King, but most of his time in their private wing was spent at Luciana’s bedside.

The dome of energy over her was a glorious sight, and if Anduin hadn’t spent the last five months staring at it he would be now. As it was, he was preoccupied. Luciana’s face was peaceful as it could be with the deep scars she’d earned, and survived. They marked her as a warrior. Anduin had promised himself to tell her he thought they made her beautiful when she woke. Ethereal. A warrior-princess, like those from the old Arathi legends. He had made a lot of promises like it. He had an entire notebook full of them and he’d tell her each one when she woke.

Not if. When. She had made an oath. She’d promised him.
Enaeon’s hand landed on Anduin’s shoulder, almost startling him. Anduin had become accustomed to
the draenei over the past months. His Light was now almost as familiar as Arina’s Light. He
didn’t see her as much as he once had, as his grasp on his healing, and especially his grasp on
Shields, had skyrocketed when he’d really started to use it. But she checked in on him often
enough.

“How is she?” Enaeon asked.

“No disturbance,” Anduin replied. “Whatever it was, it’s been weeks since there’s been any hint of
it.”

Something had disturbed Luciana last month. It had made her brain activity spike, her heart rate
and blood pressure increase, and her eyes had started to move as though she were dreaming. It was
impossible, as she was still comatose. The healers had frantically tried to figure it out, with the
King looming over them, eyes flashing yellow. He had been dark, then, with promises of
vengeance and fury in his gaze. Just as suddenly as the disturbance had started, it stopped. It
reappeared a week later, minor, for only a few minutes. Since then, she’d been at peace - as anyone
should be, in a healing nexus.

Druidic, shamanistic, and Holy energies all worked in tandem to create such a nexus, and for
Luciana, only the best was accepted. Glory Seekers, loyal to the Alliance and sworn to secrecy,
worked alongside two Shadows of Helliah’s court sent as peace offerings and numerous members
of the Cathedral. The Exodar had sent them people who had arrived mere days after Luciana had
made her choice. Velen had seen her decision, and had reacted by sending them trustworthy healers
who swore to keep her secret before Varian could prompt them. Enaeon had greeted them all by
name. It comforted Anduin to know that Luciana had such a strong network around her, even if she
sometimes doubted it. Sometimes, he thought she blinded herself to it. He’d written down in the
notebook that he wanted to find out why she would do that.

“She is fine,” Enaeon soothed. “The worst is over.”

“I thought waking her was the worst?” Anduin asked. He picked up her limp hand, traced the scars
on her palm. They were old, faded, and he had them memorized. He could draw a replica with his
eyes closed. He pressed a kiss to her palm and didn’t react when her fingers didn’t twitch like they
normally would have.

“We have people experienced in these things,” Enaeon replied. “My friends from the Exodar have
done this many times. Avrun has over thirty-seven thousand years of experience in healing and
Monora has been creating, maintaining, and ending healing nexus for centuries. Luciana is in good
hands.”

“I know. I just... I worry.”

“As is natural.” Enaeon gave his shoulder one final pat, and moved to take Casey’s place at the
apex of the dome. It was his turn to stand guard.

“Enaeon, I’m going to bless her,” Anduin warned. The draenei didn’t respond verbally, but Anduin
felt him make room in the nexus for Anduin’s energy. It was easy to unbalance a healing nexus,
but experienced healers could counter it by manipulating their spells and layering them to leave
room for temporary interferences like Anduin.

He reached down into himself, into the place where the Light resided in him, and gave it a tug. It
filled him with familiar warmth, reminded him of nights spend curled up against Luciana’s side,
nights where her body had warmed him like a furnace and her breaths had lulled him to sleep. It
filled him, reached out through his hand to Luciana. He kissed her knuckles, rubbed her palm, and let the Light soothe his anxieties even as it reached Luciana. It felt almost curious, to Anduin, like it was poking at her, waiting for her to react. When she didn’t, Anduin had it settle against her palm. Wherever she was, he prayed she felt it. Felt that she was not alone. Felt him waiting for her. Felt loved.

“I’m right here, Lucy,” Anduin murmured against her wrist. He felt her heartbeat, slow, steady - and prayed. “Just like I said I would be. I’m right here. I’m waiting.”

She didn’t respond. He hadn’t expected her to. It wasn’t yet time to wake her. Next week, they’d inspect her and the fetus and decide. Until then, Anduin had to be patient. He had to swallow his fear, his anxiety. He would continue to concentrate on his sons. His sons, his babies. Luciana had given him two children. She’d give him a family. She trusted him to keep it safe while she was away.

“I love you,” Anduin murmured. He kissed her palm once more, and set her hand down gently by her side. “I’m going to go and see our sons. You’ll see them when you wake up. They’ve grown, Luciana. You’d be proud of them.”

She liked to call him beautiful. It wasn’t the first time he’d been given such compliments and he’d always discounted it, but from her it felt genuine. It felt like admiration, love, honesty. All of the things he needed from a friend, from her. But looking at her, jaw marred by three thick scars, hairline interrupted by a dagger’s mark, her cheek cut from nose to neck, he thought she was arrestingly, dangerously beautiful. She would be a terror as a queen. No one would be able to meet her gaze, but they wouldn’t be able to look away from her either.

Except him. She would give him that look, the look of a drowning sailor offered a rope and a hand up onto the deck. He would smile, try to return it, and reach out. And she would take his hand. It would send a thrill through him, just like it had the first time.

Luciana’s face wasn’t expressive. It was too stiff, too scarred for it. But her eyes spoke for her. Anduin had seen in them, when they were alone, a private look she gave him when her face, her words failed her. Need, want, and desperate trust - like he had been the one to carry her, like he’d been the one who’d pulled her out of a pit. Even thinking about it made him feel embarrassed. She was so open to him. All he had to do was look, and she’d give him everything.

“I love you,” he said, leaning down to kiss her lips softly, and then to kiss her forehead. Enaeon was silent, more concerned with the healing nexus. Luciana was precious to him, Anduin knew. Anduin suspected that he would soon swear allegiance to her, in whatever way was appropriate between them. “I love you, Lucy. I’ll be back tomorrow.”

It was hard to leave the small room. Luciana looked fragile, and Anduin wanted to shield her, throw up a Shield to cover that vulnerability. She’d willingly stepped into it, and that still amazed him.

Anduin had to force himself to turn around, to walk away. He’d spend all day at her side, but he couldn’t. Not now. He had two kids that needed their father.

Just like he’d needed Bolvar. Just like he’d needed his father, who’d struggled with the role at first. Anduin wanted his sons to have the best of him, to have everything they needed to grow strong, wise, and caring. Luciana would be proud of him for how quickly he’d taken to the role. She was a natural parent. Anduin tried, erred, learned, changed, and tried harder. Luciana was worth it. His sons were worth it.
His father greeted him when he entered the nursery. “How is she?” he asked.

“She’s fine. The disturbance is gone.”

“The best damn healers in the Alliance and they still don’t know what it was?”

Anduin shrugged mutely. He had some ideas, but he didn’t speak them. It wasn’t yet time. “She’s healthy now. The danger’s passed, mostly.”

“Forgot about that for now,” Varian sighed, and handed him Bolvar. He wasn’t fussing yet, but Anduin could already smell it. “He needs a new diaper.”

“Thanks,” Anduin said dryly, but he was smiling.

A wet nose poked his ankle while he was wiping the mess off of Bolvar’s bottom. He glanced down to see Victoria’s dog, her boxer terrier. The dog had been a gift from Luciana’s brother Desmond. She’d told Anduin about the odd situation between him, Victoria, and Jillian. Apparently the dog had been Desmond’s way of trying to reassure Victoria that she wasn’t an unnecessary addition, or something. Whatever the reason, she adored the dog. It was goofier than Shauna, less a hunter and more a companion. Victoria had named it Crouton.

“Hello,” Anduin greeted. Crouton’s black tail wagged slowly. He was, at least, aptly named. His fur was the colour of toasted croutons, aside from his tail. Victoria liked to joke that they’d burnt it in the oven.

For some reason, thinking of his name always made Anduin laugh. It was a ridiculous thing to name a dog. But then, so was Popsicle and Margarita. Pop, Maggie, and Tony. Victoria was an odd woman.
Awake

She was swaddled in warmth. There was softness against her skin. There was a tender heat under her skin. It was a struggle to remember to breathe. There were noises, but she couldn’t latch onto any of them. The heat under her skin rippled like a lake under water. It spread up to her neck, warmed her cold cheeks.

She became aware again. It was easier to breathe deeply, now, and she measured her breaths. Her hand was elevated, felt like someone was holding it. Anduin? Luciana managed to twitch her fingers, and the person squeezed her hand for a moment. She heard voices, knew she should understand them, but there was wool wrapped around her head and stuffed in her ears.

She kept breathing deeply, trying to wake up fully. She gathered the energy to move her hand, close it a bit around the hand that was holding it. Now there were two hands, cupping hers, offering strength. She felt the Light. It was Anduin.

She breathed deeply, turned her head to the left, groaned quietly. It was hard to move. She felt so heavy, so tired, and the bed was so warm and soft. Anduin’s Light flowed into her, filling her slowly, and it eased the pressure in her chest. She sighed, shifted her shoulders a bit, moved her jaw and her tongue. One thing at a time. She’d concentrate on moving one thing at a time.

She turned her head again, gathered more energy, and moved her arm. It was a little thing, but it motivated her. She could hear individual words, now, though her eyes remained stubbornly shut.

“Lucy,” she heard. Anduin. That was Anduin’s voice.

“It is time to wake, Luciana.” Enaeon. She’d recognize his voice anywhere.

“Come on.” Anduin again. His Light surged and she breathed in, held it, let it out, and barely managed to get her eyes open. Not fully, not really, but enough. She saw Anduin, and smiled. “That’s it,” he encouraged, smiling widely at her. “Wake up, Lucy. Come on.” He squeezed her hand, rubbed her arm as though trying to warm her. “That’s it. Open your eyes. Good,” he praised. “Try to move your fingers. Good girl,” he said. Where he pressed a kiss to her palm, the skin burned. Her fingers twitched at it and he grinned. “There we go. Can you move your head?”

She turned it on the pillow, and saw Enaeon on the other side of the bed. He smiled down at her. She looked back to Anduin.

“Good. Try to move your other arm.”

She turned her head and moved her fingers. She turned her wrist. She managed to get her arm to slide up, under the duvet. Anduin’s fingers dug into the meat of her palm, massaging it. “You’re doing great, Lucy. Look back at me?” he asked.

She turned her head again to look at him, and smiled dopily. She tried to speak, and it came out as a hum. Anduin chuckled breathily. “Can you move your legs?” he asked.

She bent one knee, moved the other leg slightly.

“Good,” he said, and stood. She felt him kiss her forehead. “Do you think you can speak?”

“Hi,” she said, but it was still more of a hum than a word.

“Can you try again?”
“Hi,” she said, and it was much clearer.

“Good. We’re gonna try to get you to sit up. You want to try?”

“Yeah.”

“Enaeon will help. Come on.”

They got her to sit up against the pillows, leaning back into them. Her belly was round again, and she looked down. “’M fat,” she mumbled.

Anduin laughed, and rubbed a hand over her belly. “It’s been six months, Lucy. They had to keep you under for longer, after all.”

She recalled, somewhat, being warned that it might be necessary. She looked at Anduin and smiled. “Hi,” she said.

“Hi, there,” he replied, smiling and taking her hand again. He kissed her palm and laughed when she poked his forehead.

“Boop,” she said, and laughed breathlessly.

“I need you to start eating, Lucy. Do you think you can?”

“Try,” she said. The first two words didn’t make it past her leaden tongue. “Can try,” she managed.

“Okay. Here.” Anduin helped her, as her arms still didn’t want to cooperate. He fed her small bits of dry chicken, plain potato, some fruit she couldn’t quite identify. He encouraged her to chew and swallow, and helped her drink water. “How do you feel?”

“Kay,” she said.

“Good. Can you eat more?”

“Think so.”

“Okay.”

“Feel sick.”

“What kind of sick?”

“M’ head,” she said, and tried to gesture to her head. Her hand flopped in the air. “Sick.”

“Is it nausea?”

“Yeah.”

“Enaeon, can you...?”

“Of course.”

The dizziness fade and she offered him a smile. “Thanks,” she said.

He rubbed her head gently in response and she hummed in pleasure at the simple contact.

Anduin had her eat a little more but she had to stop. “’M full,” she said, turning her head away
from the piece of fruit.

“Okay. Do you think you can stand up?”

“No.”

“Can you try anyway?”

“Yeah.”

Anduin got her to her feet and she stumbled around, swaying on her feet. Enaeon’s hooves were at
the corner of her vision right before his hands went to support her. “I’ve got her,” the draenei said quietly.

“Alright.” Anduin slipped away and she whined.

“Where you goin’?” she mumbled. “I jus’ woke up.”

“I know you did,” he laughed quietly. He was back a moment later. “I’m right here, Lucy. I’m not
going anywhere. We’re gonna help you walk around the room a bit, okay? And then I need you to
try and eat a little more.”

“Okay.”

She stumbled around on the carpeted floor with Anduin supporting her weight. Enaeon disappeared
for a time, and she only really noticed when he came back. “Oh, there y’are,” she said, slapping his
chest weakly with the back of her hand. “You were gone.”

“Only for a few minutes,” he said. He took her weight from Anduin, but she wouldn’t let go of his
hand until he promised he’d be right back.

She could see straight by her third pass around the room, and she could keep her head up straight
by the fifth. “Enaeon?” she asked. “Where’s Anduin?”

“He’ll be right back,” Enaeon replied. “Come. Let’s keep walking.”

Anduin returned with more food, and fed her standing up. “Hey, are you a bit more awake now?”
he asked.


Anduin grinned and offered her a piece of orange. “Yes, you did. I missed you very much, you
know.”

“Sorry,” she said. “I’m back.”

“I’m glad to see you again,” he said softly.

He helped her eat a bit more, and Enaeon slowly strengthened her with the Light. She felt his
blessings in her muscles, making her buzz with energy and a need to get up and move. “You will
crash soon from the transition from healing energies to true nourishment,” Enaeon explained. “I
will do what I can to minimize it, but it will not be pleasant.”

“Alright,” she nodded. “I guess I should stay sitting, then.”

“It would be a good idea.”
“I’ll stay with her,” Anduin promised.

“Shall I fetch the King?”

“I want to see my kids,” Luciana interjected.

“You will, soon,” Anduin told her, reaching up to run his fingers through her hair and massage her scalp. She hummed, and tilted her head so he could have easier access. “They’ve grown a lot. I’m sure they missed you terribly. They wouldn’t stop crying when they realized they weren’t going to get a goodnight kiss.”

“Did you get them calm?” she asked.

“It took a week, but yes.”

“Good.” Her head spun. “Ugh.”

Enaeon hurried away to find Varian, and Anduin stayed by her side as he’d promised. “I missed you,” he murmured, sitting on the edge of the bed and leaning over her. He pressed his forehead carefully against hers. “Something awful.”

“I was right here.”

“It’s not the same,” he murmured. “You couldn’t hold me. I didn’t hear you laughing.”

“I’m back now,” she said.

“It’s good to see you again,” he said, kissing her sweetly for a moment.

Anduin was sitting straight when Varian entered the room. He wore an expression of absolute relief, and Luciana felt the same well up in her. “Lucy,” Varian greeted, taking a knee next to her bed. His hands were hot around hers and it warmed her. “How do you feel?”

“Fine, but my head hurts.”

“You’re going to crash soon,” Varian said. “You might fall unconscious again for a short time. Ten minutes, at most. Enaeon briefed me.”

“Anduin, my head hurts,” she whined, and he laughed and laid a hand over the side of her head.

“Lay down, and I’ll see what I can do.”

“Where’s Enaeon?”

“He wanted to give us some privacy,” Varian said.

The pressure in her head eased when she was reclined again, and she relaxed into the pillows, closing her eyes. When she opened them, Varian was on the other side of the room, talking to someone - Casey, she identified. Anduin was still with her.

“How long was I out?” she asked bemusedly, struggling to sit up. Anduin supported her weight and fixed the pillows behind her.

“About six or seven minutes. How do you feel?”

“Alright.” She took a moment, mentally inspected herself, and then offered Anduin a grin. “I feel
alright. Bit tired, bit stiff.” She shrugged. “How are you feeling?”

“Utterly relieved.” He reached up and brushed hair away from her eyes. “It’s been six months for me, Lucy. There was a... a disturbance, not too long ago.”

“What do you mean?”

“It’s hard to describe. Something happened to your body that made its functions temporarily heighten.”

“It’s alright now, though?”

“Yes, whatever it was has settled down and there’s no trace of it.”

She nodded a few times, absent-minded. “I couldn’t tell you what it was,” she admitted. “I had a pleasantly dreamless sleep.”

“Good. I’m glad.” He leaned in to kiss her lips chastely. She felt the small smile he’d worn since she first opened her eyes.

“I want to see my kids,” she told him. “And my kiddos. Kids first. And then Thunderer. He must have suffered. And what about Shauna? Oh, Victoria must have taken her.”

>Your horse is fine,” Anduin laughed. “He tolerates me, so I went down to the stables daily to let him into the fields. Father went to go when I was too tired one day and the horse loved him.”

>Of course,” she grumbled. “Stubborn prat likes me because I’m louder than him. He must like Varian because his head’s bigger.”

Anduin laughed outright, catching Varian’s attention. Luciana knew he did, despite not being able to see the King, because a few moments later he was coming around the foot of the bed to stand at Anduin’s side. His hand rested heavily between Anduin’s shoulder blades for a moment before he brought it up to ruffle Anduin’s hair. “Time to go and see your sons, yet?” he asked Luciana, ignoring Anduin’s indignant protest save to smile mischievously.

>Light, yes,” she said, moving to get up.

>Hold on,” Anduin said, going to fetch a house coat. “Here.” He held it open and she slipped into it, letting him tie it at the waist. She gave him a thankful smile, even as Varian offered his arm to support part of her weight.

>They’ve grown a lot,” Varian said. “But they’re still babies. Bolvar is learning how to feed himself with the spoon but he hasn’t grasped forks quite yet. Alaric is still stuck on the function of a plate. He thinks they’re toys.”

Luciana drowned out everything else when she saw Alaric in his crib, head turned, eyes peeking through the bars. She smiled, and then she grinned, and hurried over. “Hey, there,” she cooed, reaching in to pick him up. “Hi.”

He made a noise, smacked at her chin, and then said, “Mama!”

The word made her freeze. He’s spoken. It was a little thing, and easy to say, but he’d spoken. “Oh, Light,” she moaned, holding him to her chest as tightly as she dared. “He said mama.”

Anduin’s arm around her waist grounded her, and she pulled back. “Mama!” Alaric said again.
“Yes, I am,” she answered. “I’m mama. You’re Alaric.”

“Mama!”

“Yes, that’s right.” She kissed his forehead, and placed gentle pecks on his cheeks. He squealed in laughter. “I’m your mama. Do you know papa? Can you say papa?”

“Mama!” He looked at Anduin, whose chin landed delicately on her shoulder.

“Yes, alright. It’ll come.” She swallowed thickly. “Do you know any other words? Can you say anything else?”

“En!”

“En?” She looked at Anduin.

“Enaeon,” he supplied. “He’s been helping a lot.”

“Ah. En! Good.” She kissed the baby’s forehead again. “And where’s Bolvar?”

“Bo!” He turned in her arms and shoved his fist in his mouth for a moment. “Bo!” He pointed with his hand at Bolvar’s crib. Bolvar was braced against the bars of his crib, watching them alertly.

“Right!” She went to pick him up as well. “Oof, you’re getting heavy!” she said to Alaric.

“Here.” Varian gently took him out of her arms. She smiled gratefully when he didn’t move away, keeping Alaric within her range.

“Hey, Bolvar,” she crooned. “Hey, baby. How are you?”

“Mama,” he said, hands on her chin.

“I brought them into your room in the Greymane wing every other night,” Varian explained. “So they could learn who you were, properly. I taught them Mama, first. I thought it would be a nice surprise.”

“Thank you,” she said thickly. She swallowed it down, smiled for Bolvar. “How’s my big baby?” she cooed, nosing his cheek. “How’s my baby?”

He giggled and flailed his hands. “Mama!” he shouted.

“Papa!” Alaric cried, and Varian let Anduin take him. Luciana tracked the movement even as she shifted Bolvar to a better grip over her protruding belly. That was another word he could already say. Mama and Papa. Everyone else, like Bo and En, were relegated to single syllables, it seemed.

Varian’s hand took her head gently so that he could press a kiss to her temple. “It’s good to have you back, Lucy,” he said. “Take care of her,” he said to Anduin.

“I will.”

Varian left them, and Luciana was conflicted. She’d wanted him to stay- she felt heavy and weak and it was so easy to relax when Varian was there, because she knew without a shadow of doubt that nothing could happen to them while he was with them. But she was also thankful, because now she had Anduin all to herself. And to Alaric and Bolvar, but mostly to herself.

“I love you,” she said, pressing against his side. She felt him kiss her head.
“I missed you,” he murmured into her hair. “So much. But I knew you would wake soon.”

“Here I am,” she quipped. “Hey, baby,” she cooed to Alaric.

“Bo!” He flailed his arm at Bolvar, as though trying to hit him.

“Ala!”

“Aww,” she smiled. “They have nicknames for each other.”

“When Alaric called me Papa the first time, not too long ago, I nearly had a heart attack,” Anduin chuckled. “He said Mama first. Father had to correct him while I was still in shock.”

“I wish I’d seen that,” she said, almost regretfully. But, she’d made her choice and she was going to stick with it.

“I do, too,” Anduin said. “But you’ll have chance to see everything else.”

“I will. I’m not going anywhere. I love my little munchkins too much!” She held up Bolvar and nuzzled him again, making him shriek loudly and laugh. “My little monsters! You two are going to cause so much trouble when you’re bigger.”

“I love you,” Anduin repeated, drawing her into a proper kiss. “I love you. I can’t say it enough.”

“I get it,” she snorted when he kept peppering her with kisses.

“Not yet,” he laughed, kissing her nose once before returning to her lips. “I love you. I love you. I love you.”

“Oh, shut up,” she said. Anduin pressed a kiss to her cheek as he passed her.

“You like it,” he teased.

“You like that I’m awake to do things I shouldn’t talk about in front of the kids now that they’re able to repeat what they hear.”

“Lucy!” he said, aghast.

“What? It’s true!”
“Oh my Light! You haven’t changed at all!”

“Neither have you! Dirty, dirty man!”

“Lucy!”
“Anduin tells me I missed your wedding.”

Tess gave a bit of a start when Luciana spoke, looking up with wide eyes from her book. Luciana had slipped into her quarters to try and surprise her. It hadn’t taken much. All she’d had to do was smile at the guards and asked if she could visit with the other princess in the castle for a while. Even the Gilnean guards had a soft spot for her, it seemed, exacerbated now that she was awake and very clearly pregnant. They probably also assumed she couldn’t do much damage while carrying a baby, which wasn’t an inaccurate thought considering her current weakness.

“You did,” Tess replied, marking her place primly and snapping her book shut. “And I’m very upset with you, Miss Luciana.” She pursed her lips, but her eyes were full of mischief as she put the book down on the side table.

“Well, Miss Tess,” Luciana replied, shutting the door behind her. “How can I ever earn your forgiveness for my transgression?”

“There will be opportunities galore, I’m sure,” Tess said dryly. “One should always have at least one warrior in one’s debt.”

“That’s a good plan,” Luciana agreed, walking on still shaky legs to the armchair opposite Tess. She sat down heavily with a grunt, and relaxed into the chair with a sigh. “Oh, that’s comfortable.”

“I know. I love these old things,” Tess agreed with a smile. “It’s good to see you up and about again, Luciana. It was odd to see you lying still for so long.”

“I want to say it took some getting used to, but I was out cold. As far as I know I closed my eyes and then opened them up again,” she shrugged in response. “Anduin and the kids were happy to see me up again, too. But enough about that. Tell me about your wedding. What were your vows?” Luciana asked. “What did you wear? Do you have pictures?”

“Of course I have pictures,” Tess scoffed, her smile growing despite her attempts at smothering it. She stood, brushed her skirts down, and then hurried to collect various things from around the room. When she went behind Luciana’s chair, Luciana didn’t try to turn and watch. Instead she listened to drawers opening and slamming shut again, papers rustling, and photo albums being rifled through. “Here we are!” she heard Tess cry, and the final drawer shut with a click and Tess bustled back into sight with her arms full of a great assortment of things. She was outright grinning while she dumped the things onto the table and dragged it closer to the armchairs with some difficulty. “See, if you were nice and big still, you could’ve moved this blasted thing for me.”

“So sorry,” Luciana sniffed.

“Never you mind that. Look, here we are,” Tess said, handing her a framed photo. Tess and a nobleman from Gilneas Luciana recognized stood in the center. Behind Tess stood her mother Mia, and behind the gentleman stood Genn with his hand on the younger man’s shoulder.

Anduin, Varian, various Gilnean courtiers and people from the lesser-known Alderman family were also scattered to either side of the married couple. They were present only because they were of the second branch of the Greymane family, not Royal but still important. And, should the Greymane bloodline run dry, the Alderman were set to step in as their seconds. Stormwind hadn’t had that luxury in nearly two full centuries.

“It’s been in the family for five generations,” Tess said proudly. “I was the sixth to wear it.”

“Odd that you’re all the same size.”

“Well, the bottom had to be let out a bit for Mother,” Tess quipped.

“Tess!” Luciana scolded, smiling. “Don’t make fun of your mother!”

“Why not?” Tess asked innocently, eyes gleaming with anything but. “No one else would dare!”

“Not even Genn?”

“Oh, especially not Father,” she tittered. “Mother would have him out in the cold for a week!”

“But not you.”

“Oh, no. She adores me.”

“Who wouldn’t?” Luciana grumbled, taking the photo album Tess handed her to replace the larger framed photo. “Gnomish cameras?”

“The best in the Alliance.”

“And I see you got your hands on some draenic jewellery.”

“They were gifts,” Tess explained, reaching over to flip to certain photos to help illustrate. “They gave me some enchanted jewellery, said it wouldn’t tarnish. We’ll see about that, but I must admit it’s all very lovely. They managed to make it seem almost Gilnean.”

“They’re master jewelcrafters.”

“Mm. And Ironforge gave Deacon a wonderfully crafted set of ceremonial armour. Here he is wearing it,” Tess said, showing Luciana a new picture. It featured a dark-furred male worgen, ears perked up and neck arched proudly with his clawed paws lay over the hilt of a decorated greatsword.

“He’s a worgen?” Luciana asked curiously, inspecting the armour with a practiced, keen eye.

“Yes, he is. Father thought it would help rout out the last bit of prejudice against worgen,” Tess explained. “And of course, being one himself...”

“He’d take a shining to Deacon.”

“Yes.”

“It was arranged?”

Tess hummed an affirmative. “Mother doesn’t mind him, but she says he doesn’t know how to be serious. He’s very light-hearted, very kind. Doesn't take himself too seriously.”

“That’s good. Have you taken a shining to him?” Luciana asked.

Tess sighed quietly, folding her hands delicately in her lap. “He’s a very kind man,” she started. “I don’t love him, but I could.”
“That’s good,” Luciana said slowly. “Will you, though?”

“I don’t know, Luciana,” Tess said with a shrug. “But I imagine we’re already becoming fast friends. He tries so hard to make sure I’m happy.” A small but happy smile curved her lips. “You know, we did meet several times before the wedding. Father wanted it to go through, to make sure the line continued and what not, but he also wanted to make sure I would be alright.”

“Of course. Any good parent would want the best for their children.”

“Right. Well, Deacon was so nervous he stuttered and accidentally shifted!” Tess chuckled, brushing her skirts down absently. “That was the first time I saw his worgen form, and only for a moment. It was quite funny, actually, and his ears went back and he ducked his head like a sorry pup.”

Luciana smiled briefly. “He didn’t scare you, then.”

“No, of course not,” Tess replied, waving it off. “I’ve been surrounded by some of the wildest worgen this side of Duskwood for years, Luciana. I don’t frighten easily of wild beasts. He didn’t shift again in front of me. I think he was afraid that I would be afraid of him. Or perhaps he thought I didn’t like worgen. But, Father persuaded him to shift so he could wear the armour for a picture.”

“It looks good on him.”

“Mm, it does,” Tess agreed. “I’m trying to convince him that I don’t mind worgen. In fact, I quite like them.”

“Do you, now?” Luciana said with a mischievous grin. “How much do you like worgen?”

“Luciana!” Tess cried, aghast, and then she burst out laughing. “Oh, you’re absolutely incorrigible! You soldiers are all the same,” she chuckled, gracefully dabbing at her eyes. “Oh, you’re wonderful,” she said. “Bless you. Anyway, he’s not in Stormwind at the moment, he’s in Goldshire for business. But, if you meet him when he returns, perhaps you can convince him to shift. It’s quite awkward right now.”

“Was it awkward on your wedding night, too?” Luciana said with a waggle of her eyebrows. As much of a waggle as she could manage with a face full of scar tissue.

“Oh, you...!” Tess said, smacking at Luciana’s knees. Luciana laughed and ducked away teasingly.

“Easy, easy!” Luciana said. “I’m pregnant, remember?”

“That only makes it fair!” Tess declared, and Luciana smirked.

“Oh, my,” she said lowly. “So the wedding night wasn’t all that awkward, after all.”

Tess stared at her for a moment, and then harrumphed and hopped to her feet to stalk away from her chair. “I shan’t tell you any more until you stop that silly nonsense!”

“Oh, honey, I’m full of silly nonsense,” Luciana called out. Tess had gone behind her chair again. “That, and shit.”

“Then go sit on the toilet!”

Luciana laughed until Tess returned to her seat with a package in her hands. “What’s that?” Luciana asked, eyeing it with a mixture of curiosity and wariness.
“It’s my wedding band,” Tess replied, unwrapping the black silk from the bundle to reveal a crushed felt jewellery box. “Deacon said he’d come back from Goldshire with one to match it.”

“Another heirloom?”

“Yes. The other half was lost in the invasion,” Tess said softly. “Seventeen generations of Greymanes held these bands, and then we lost one of them to the Forsaken’s war machines.”

“So Deacon’s gone out to make a new one.”

“Yes.” She smiled fondly, and opened the box.

“It’s lovely,” Luciana said. The band itself was made of rose gold, with old Highland-style filigree decorating its black belly in sterling silver. It had no jewels, but Luciana could see its age and heaviness.

“It’s called a Highland knot,” Tess explained, her well-manicured nail tracing one of the wire-thin lines of silver. “No one can trace it back to its source. We only know that it comes from Arathi as a symbol of longevity and loyalty. The dwarves use something like it as well. Especially the Wildhammer.”

“I’ve seen patterns like it,” Luciana said absently. The knotted lines were almost hypnotizing, and when Tess shut the box Luciana blinked owlishly and looked up. “So, this Deacon. He’s Greymane, now? Deacon Greymane?”

“Yes, of course,” Tess said as she rewrapped the box. “And he’ll be King beside me when I am Queen.”

“He won’t be the primary ruler, though.”

“No. I think I would let him be a partner, though,” Tess said. “He’s absolutely brilliant, and very well known.”

“Good things to have. But being well-known can bring some trouble.”

“He’s a Royal now, Luciana,” Tess said dryly. “We’re all well-known.”

“True enough. Tell me honestly though, Tess. Do you like him? Do you think you’ll get along with him alright?”

“Of course,” Tess confirmed. “We have to. We’re already married. Don’t worry about me,” she said with a smile, setting the box delicately on the table. “He’s been nothing but a gentleman to me and he’s trying his utmost to make sure I’m comfortable with every step.” Tess eyed her, suddenly wary. “Why the concern, aside from the obvious fact that we’re allies?”


“What, are you going to off him if I say no?” Tess laughed. “Toss him out the window?”

Luciana didn’t respond verbally, and Tess sobered. “Don’t worry about it,” Luciana repeated, and offered a reassuringly smile. “So, you’re pregnant?” she prompted, and then smiled. “How far along? Two months? That’s when your wedding was, no? Someone is impatient.”

“You are terrible,” Tess said flatly. “For your information, I’m only a month and a week right now.”
“That’s right,” Luciana murmured. “Gilnean tradition only has the couple sharing a bed three weeks in, not right after the wedding.”

“Yes, because we’re not all eager to get knocked up like you stupid southerners,” Tess scoffed. “In all seriousness, we did follow the tradition, but not because of that.”

“What, then?” Luciana asked. “You were gonna hop into bed right away and get knocked up like a stupid southerner?”

“Ugh, you,” Tess groaned. “No. He kept getting so nervous when he saw even a pillow that he...” Tess pressed her hand delicately to her mouth and bit back her laugh. “He kept shifting!”

“No!” Luciana grinned. “Really? Oh, that poor man! He’s terrified of you!”

“Terrified of my Mother, more like!” Tess tittered. “Oh, it was so bad! The poor fellow even accidentally shifted in the middle of the night, too, and got fur all over my sheets!”

Luciana let herself laugh loudly, hands on her belly to keep it from shaking overmuch. “Do all worgen do that?” she asked, wiping tears from her eyes. “Shift accidentally? When they’re nervous, or something?”

“Some do,” Tess confirmed, still chuckling. “I think Deacon is just especially nervous because he just became next in line for King.”

“But he agreed to it.”

“Well, his House did, but yes. And apparently,” Tess said, dropping her voice to a conspiratorial stage whisper and leaning in close. Luciana copied her as best she could past her bulging belly. “Apparently, he’s already madly in love with me.”

“Oh, you heartbreaker,” Luciana said approvingly. “Good. Make him work for it.”

“Oh, you are terrible!” Tess laughed. “And did you make Anduin work for it?”

“Hell no. You know me,” Luciana said. “I was a warrior straight off the battlefield. What do you think I did?”

“Rolled over and showed your belly?”

“Basically, yeah.”

Tess giggled again, hiding it behind a dainty pale hand. “You’re terrible,” she repeated with a mischievous smile. “So, I see you’re doing well now. I heard from Father that you had a near miss with your... ah, mass,” she said shortly, waving her hand around as thought to indicate Luciana in her entirety.

“Yeah, that’s why the healing nexus was necessary.” Luciana replied, rubbing a hand over her belly. Something gently brushed up where her hand had passed and Tess cooed. “They had to bring my metabolism, everything really, back down to a normal person’s level. Bit of an emergency state, but we’re okay now. Aren’t we, baby?” she crooned, rubbing her belly again. “We’re okay now.”

“You’re wonderful,” Tess said softly. “May I?” She reached out as though to touch Luciana’s belly, but waited.

“Sure, of course. This is going to be you in a handful of months, anyway.”
“Don’t remind me,” Tess groaned, but she pressed her palm gently to Luciana’s skin. “Oh!” Some hand or foot had poked up at her hand, and she jumped back in her seat clutching her hand like it’d been burned. “Oh, that’s incredible.”

“Isn’t it?” Luciana smiled.

“And you had twins before, too!”

“Yeah, that was a pain in the ass,” Luciana said dismissively. “And the back. And the neck. And the legs. And the...”

“Alright!” Tess interrupted laughingly. “Alright, I get it.”

“You missed the most important one,” Luciana whined. “Oh, you’re going to be peeing all the damn time. Did anyone tell you about that? And afterward you’re going to have to do these exercises to strengthen your pelvic floor so you can hold in your shit, and you’re going to bleed everywhere and ruin all your favourite pants, and...”


“I thought I was wonderful?” she scoffed. “Someone’s indecisive today.”

“Enough, you,” Tess scolded smilingly, smacking Luciana’s knee again.

“Okay, okay. Show me more pictures then. And when’s Deacon getting back? I want to meet this guy.”
Stillbirth

Something was very wrong.

Luciana knew her body. Even though it was different than she was used to, she knew her body. And when something was off, she knew. She could feel it.

She sat up fully, some of the pillows tumbling from the nest Anduin had build for her to lay into. He’d built it every night for a month. “Anduin,” she said, reaching out to shake his shoulder. “Anduin! Get up!” Her voice cut through the night and woke him quickly.

“What is it?” Anduin slurred.

“Get up.”

Her voice was taut, authoritative, and he was alert a second later. “What do you need?”

“Healers.”

“I’ll go.” He kissed her and left, pulling on pants and a housecoat as he went.

She regulated her breathing, trying to somehow sense what was wrong. She had no doubt it was something to do with her pregnancy.

Varian entered the room through the passageway. “Anduin?” he whispered, testing. He must have heard her shout to wake Anduin.

“He’s gone to get the healers.”

“Lucy?” He emerged fully, half-naked, his pants pulled on hurriedly. “What’s wrong?”

“Something. I don’t know what.”

He walked in absolute silence, and the bed dipped when he sat next to her. His hand lay over her lower back protectively. “To do with your pregnancy?”

“Most likely.”

She heard Enaeon’s voice. He sounded harsh, commanding. He was upset. “She is not a fool,” he growled, and she saw his eyes flash as he opened the door. “She does not call false alarms.”

“There is no such thing as a false alarm when it comes to my House,” Varian growled, and Enaeon’s eyes, lit as they were by the Light, flickered as he cast about the room. Luciana knew that Varian wouldn’t forget that comment. He’d know who started it by the day’s end, whatever else happened.

“Krino, Alkaros. Keep the door. Watch for those you do not know. Not everyone is pleased with the Princess right now.”

The two draenei, wide and heavyset male paladins - Vindicators, Luciana could see - had obviously already started their guard shift. They saluted Enaeon and moved to stand in the antechamber, just outside the door.

“Casey, see to Luciana.”
The druid, biting back a yawn, came to her with a hand outstretched. “Let’s see what’s going on, then,” she grumbled. “What let it off?” she asked.

“What alerted me? I don’t know. Something is wrong with my body and it was enough to wake me.”

“Right. Hold still.”

While she searched for the cause of alarm, Enaeon continued handing out orders. “Gideon, fetch the rest of Amadeus squadron.”

“Sir.” He didn’t salute, as Enaeon wasn’t technically a superior, but he did nod sharply and take off through the passageway to their quarters. They’d spread out over the last few months, but they were still close together and kept to their rooms for easy access while Luciana was pregnant.

“Your Majesty, Lord Highness. Please step aside,” Enaeon said.

“I can help,” Anduin said.

“You are tired, Lord Highness, and worried. Please, step aside.”

Anduin acquiesced, but he didn’t move away entirely. He tucked himself into a corner somewhere and watched, hawk-like, over the proceedings. Varian did the same. His gaze was heavy on everyone, reminding them to have a care to remember exactly who they were serving.

“Luciana,” Enaeon greeted, and got right to business next to Casey.

“Can you feel that?” Casey asked, eyes on Luciana’s belly.

“Yes. What is...? The placenta,” Enaeon practically growled. “It’s displaced.”

“What can you do?” Luciana asked.

“It will soon cut off oxygen and nutrients to the child,” Enaeon responded. “Either we try to right it, or we deliver early.”

Varian’s growl, the sound an angry animal would make, spoke for Luciana. She glanced over and saw Anduin’s face, while carefully composed, couldn’t hide the fear in his eyes. Fear. That didn’t belong in his eyes. “What are the risks?” she asked, looking back to Enaeon.

“Trying to right it might make it worse,” he answered. “It might also rupture it and cause infection. Delivering early... The baby will not have fully developed organs. At this time, it will not be able to breathe, eat, or produce enough heat to stay warm.”

“If it can’t breathe...” Luciana started.


She wet her lips. “How would you start the early delivery?”

“Induce it,” Casey said simply. “Sit you up, healer on you, healer on the baby, just like the first one. We’d need an hour, tops, to set up a healing nexus for a premature.”

“Do it,” she said quietly.
“There are risks to your health—” Enaeon started.

“I’m confident in the abilities of the healers surrounding me,” she interrupted. “Prepare the healing nexus.”

“Right. I’ll get on that,” Casey volunteered, standing on stiff legs. “I’ll send for Nancy, too, and Avrun and Monora.”

“I will remain with Luciana,” Enaeon replied.

Varian turned away to return to his room. Luciana didn’t doubt he’d have the entire Keep - no, the entire city up in arms by the time Casey’s hour was up. Anduin was allowed to take Casey’s place, and after a few seconds of hesitation, he rallied himself and offered his hand to Enaeon. The draenei took it, barely sparing it a glance. Luciana could see the faint glow of the Light in their arms, amplified when it joined at their hands. The two Lights seemed to war for a moment before they slid together into one brighter light. It was beautiful to watch, despite the situation.

Cramps started in her abdomen, and she guessed Enaeon was trying to keep her condition and her pain from worsening. She controlled her breathing, and through that controlled her fury. She wanted to rage. But, it wouldn’t help anything, and she tamped it down. Now was not the time for anger. Now was the time for cool heads, reasoning, steady hands. Anduin’s other hand was against her belly and she covered it with her own, sparing for him a brief smile when he glanced up. His eyes were hard with resolve, and lit with golden light.

Amadeus squadron filed into the room silently. All wore harsh expressions Luciana recognized with some pride as the ones they reserved for war. Jillian, in a nervous habit, shifted forms to stand taller and stronger. They all took up positions around the room, out of the way but ever present at Luciana’s side.

“Nexus is up,” one of the draenei called from the antechamber.

“Fetch a wheelchair,” Enaeon ordered to no one in particular. Daniel broke out of the line and the gap was filled as the rest of the squadron spaced out more to cover it.

Luciana allowed herself to be bodily transferred to the wheelchair when it arrived. Now was not the time get take insult at the lack of autonomy. Enaeon wheeled her through the Keep, through hallways lined with guards who watched the procession with intense interest.

The birthing chamber had been hastily prepared, and assistants were still setting up the bed with soft sheets. They added a waterproof layer between them so Luciana wouldn’t have to be moved too much to change the sheets to a clean set.

“Get her up,” Casey said, and Enaeon silently helped Luciana onto the bed. “Every one who ain’t a healer, outside.”

“Lars, Jillian, stay by the door, out of the way,” Luciana commanded. “The rest of you, outside.” Luciana’s cramps were growing more painful by the minute now. “Am I supposed to be in pain right now?” she asked.

“Yes,” Enaeon answered, returning his hand to her belly. “I’m trying to keep the placenta from moving too much more.”

“Draught,” Casey said, handing her a glass full of dark liquid. “Choke it down, Lady Highness, it’s gonna be bitter.”
“Fine.” Luciana threw it back and grimaced as she swallowed. “Ugh.”

“You’re gonna start labour soon, now,” Casey warned, taking the glass and handing it off.
“Clothes off!”

Nancy had arrived while Enaeon had been helping Luciana onto the bed, and she stepped in to help Luciana remove her pants. The priest threw a blanket over her legs to keep her warm. “Let us know when contractions start,” Casey said. “Won’t be long.”

“Yes,” Enaeon answered, concentrating on Luciana. Ribbons of Light cascaded from his palm, swirling loosely in the air over her. His other hand was laid directly against her skin, and the contact point tingled with energy.

“Arun and Monora are maintaining the nexus,” Nancy reported.

“How long will it be?” Luciana asked.

“Two minutes,” Casey answered. “Once the draught catches in your system you’re going to start feeling dizzy, you might lose track of time, and your body’s gonna rush through the procedure. It won’t harm the baby,” Casey soothed, seeing Luciana’s brow furrow heavily.

“I should hope not,” she said lowly. “Considering the whole point of this is to try and keep the child alive.”

“You are aware it might not?” Enaeon said quietly.

“I’ve been aware of that from the start. That doesn’t mean I have to accept it.”

He nodded once.

The room was filled with a static energy, and even Casey’s assistants settled down after their preparations were done. Luciana could feel the contractions, and they moved quickly. Before long, they were short-lived and only minutes apart. “It’s starting,” Enaeon said, and his voice broke the tension. People moved around Luciana and the promised dizziness set in soon after.

“Get her up!” she heard Casey command, and Enaeon helped her up like he had the first time, supporting her weight easily.

“This is going to hurt,” Enaeon warned her. “This will not be like your first time. This is many hours of labour, pushed together to minimize time and risk. All of that pain will be happening at the same time.”

“I’ll manage,” she said through gritted teeth. Her head was starting to pound and she couldn’t keep track of the things moving around her. “Roll call! Officer.”

“Healer.”

“Scout.”

“Soldier.”

At least she had that much. She tried to relax, tried not to tense defensively every time someone moved at the edge of her vision.

“Motivation check!”
“Hoo-rah!” two voices echoed. She forgave Enaeon for not participating, as she could feel his hand on her back anyway.

“Labour will start,” Enaeon reported. To Luciana, he said, “It will be sudden, like a punch to the stomach. Be ready.”

“I am.”

He was right - it felt like her entire body clenched like a fist, and she let out a strangled groan. “Keep at it, Enaeon!” Casey’s voice echoed strangely in Luciana’s ears. Her vision swam and she closed her eyes tightly, gripping Enaeon’s arm as a focus point. “Forceps!” A hand pushed at the inside of her thigh and cold metal touched her vulva. “Keep at it!” Casey said again. “Nancy!”

“I’m here.”

“Help him!”

Another Light joined Enaeon’s and it only intensified the pain. Luciana felt a howl building in her throat and she released it even as she curled forward, her abdominal muscles tightening painfully. She heard Jillian’s uneasy growl somewhere in the back of her head.

“Keep at it! I see the head!”

Luciana didn’t hold back her scream. She hoped it would release some of the pain, even as it ripped through her body. She’d been through hell, but this - this was all of it packed into a very short period of time. But she’d get through it. She always did.

“Forceps!” The metal returned. “Push, Luciana!”

Luciana screamed. She wanted to say that she was already pushing, her entire body was pushing and it felt like her guts were trying to escape and elope with her lungs, but she couldn’t form the words. Instead she snarled, and screamed again.

“Keep at it!” Casey ordered.

Luciana didn’t know how much time passed through the haze of pain and fury that climbed steadily in her core. The pain was making her angry, and it only made her try harder. How dare the world try to take this from her? How dare this happen? She refused to accept it. She would not lose.

“Push! One more, Luciana! Push! Put everything into it!”

“Use your fury,” Enaeon murmured into her ear. “Harness it, and use it. Bring this life into the world.”

She screamed, tucking her chin against her chest, and pushed. She could smell the coppery tang of blood, could see the red on the sheets, and pushed. Too much blood, she was bleeding too much, she was going to die but at least the child would have a chance.

“It’s out!” Casey said. “It’s out!”

Luciana was acutely aware of the lack of sound in the room as everyone collectively fell silent. The baby was not screaming. It was not squalling, it was not whining. It was still.
Enaeon’s Light overwhelmed Luciana for a moment as it surged. He carefully lay her down on the bed. Nancy’s Light soothed her dizziness first, clearing her senses, and without missing a beat she moved to heal whatever damage had been done to her inner musculature by the draught. Whatever had torn or broken, Nancy healed. Whatever blood Luciana had lost was replaced. Whatever danger there was to her life, Nancy warded it off.

Luciana moaned. The baby, her baby, was stillborn. She had fought so hard, refused to give it up. It couldn’t have been for nothing. “No,” she groaned, trying to sit up. “No, no, no, Light, no.”

“Casey,” Nancy said. Her voice echoed in Luciana’s bones, though there was no echo in the room. Perhaps it was because Nancy was healing her. “Give him the baby.”

Luciana looked up. Enaeon’s frame was almost ethereal with the Light that suffused him in entirety. His hands were out, imploring for Casey to give him the stillborn baby. Cautiously, Casey let him take it.

Enaeon spoke in draenic, a language Luciana had learned years ago when he’d first joined her squadron. “In the Light, we are one.” The Light flashed briefly, focused in his hands, and beautiful twisting ribbons of Light circled the baby.

Past her pain, past the sick feeling in her stomach, Luciana felt more than heard a gentle hum. It reverberated in her chest, and she inhaled sharply. “Enaeon,” she said. Her voice broke the silence in the room. “Enaeon.”

“Be born into the Light,” he murmured, and the ribbons of Light sank into the baby past his hands. The glow of it illuminated the room for a brief moment, and then faded - and when it faded, Luciana heard the most wonderful sound.

The baby squalled.

Its face scrunched up, red and wrinkly, and it tried to flail its limbs, upset - but it was crying, and moving, and Luciana choked and cried, her body heaving with sobs. Nancy tried to soothe her with murmured words and comforting hands, but Luciana barely noticed it. She reached out shaking arms to Enaeon, who without a word handed her the baby. Her baby.

Casey had already cut the umbilical cord. The smell of blood was overwhelming. Luciana’s entire body was sore, and pain wracked her, and she didn’t know half of what was going on around her because it was just too much and that should have bothered her like hell - but it didn’t. None of that mattered. She had a daughter. Maybe she wouldn’t stay a daughter. It didn’t matter. Luciana had won. The Light had answered her weak, wavering voice.

“Congratulations,” Nancy said softly. “And good work.”

Luciana wrested control of herself and swallowed her tears thickly. “Female,” she said quietly. “It’s a female.” The Light was with this one. Luciana knew it would stay with her. She would ask Anduin to pray that it would.

“I’ll wash her,” Nancy said quietly.

“Be quick,” Luciana said, and Nancy nodded. “Into the nexus.” She wanted to hold this little baby, protect, hide her away. But the baby needed the Nexus more than the mother and Luciana was not
stupid in her stubbornness.

“Of course.”

Luciana glanced over to her healer. He was sitting in a chair, exhausted, but he raised his head to her and smiled proudly. “Just another day in the Amadeus,” he half-sang.

“Best squadron this side of Ironforge,” Lars added from the door.

“Assassins, and missed meals,” Jillian continued.

“We’re made of mithril ore,” Luciana croaked. She choked back another sob, and breathed deeply. She looked over at Enaeon. “Thank you,” she mouthed. She didn’t have the energy to speak.

“Just another day in the Amadeus,” Enaeon replied, smiling tiredly.

Assistants cleared the bloody sheets from the bed and cleaned the blood off of Luciana’s skin. They made sure she was comfortable and warm, and then quickly vacated the room. By the time Luciana had could see the tiny child safely bundled and bedded into the healing nexus in the corner of the room, there was only three Amadeus and two healers left. And Casey looked absolutely exhausted.

“I’ll go deliver the good news,” she sighed. “And by your leave, Lady Highness, go take a twelve-hour nap.”

“I think that would count as a coma,” Luciana joked weakly. “Yes, go ahead. Thank you, Casey.”

“My honour, Lady.”

She heard Casey’s voice murmur through the door, and braced herself. In moments, people would stream into the room, and more than anything Luciana wanted to be alone with her child, shielding them from the world. With Anduin, and his Light, and their two sons, and maybe Varian. And Enaeon.

Anduin was the first one in the room. His eyes were wet, his cheeks splotchy and red, and he was smiling as he ducked down to kiss her forehead. “Lucy,” he sighed. “Oh, Light, I was so worried.”

“I’m okay,” she croaked. “We’re okay.” She pointed to the healing nexus, and Anduin straightened.

“Oh, my Light,” he murmured, eyes wide. He approached it slowly, and reached down with gentle fingers to touch the baby’s cheek. “She’s tiny.”

“Yeah,” Luciana said. “She... Did Casey tell you?”

“She told us that the baby was healthy, all things considered,” Anduin said, brow furrowed with worry. He returned to Luciana’s side, barely glancing at Varian as the man made a beeline to check on the baby. “What happened?”

“She was stillborn,” Luciana said quietly.

Anduin couldn’t speak for a moment, and he looked back to the nexus. Varian was looking up now, staring at Luciana with dark eyes. “What happened?” the King asked when Anduin couldn’t speak. Luciana, in response, turned her head to look at Enaeon.

The draenei waved tiredly. “I happened,” he quipped. “I’m not sure,” he continued when Varian’s
eyes flashed dangerously. He wasn’t in the mood for jokes. “I saw the child, I heard Luciana cry, and... The Light called to me. It called to the child, through me. I only reached out to join the two. I laid my hands on the child, and the Light filled her and brought her back.”

“Be born into the Light,” Luciana murmured. “You said that.”

“I did.” He nodded. “I am glad I was here,” he said. “Though perhaps if I was not, Nancy would have heard the call.”

“Thank you,” Anduin said quietly. Luciana could see him holding back more tears.

“It was my honour to be an instrument of the Light, Anduin,” Enaeon told him. “It was an honour to be able to do this for Luciana.”

She gave him a brief smile, and turned her head back to Anduin. “I’m tired,” she whined.

“Then sleep,” Anduin told her, smiling softly. He brushed sweat-matted hair from her face. “I’ll keep an eye on things while you rest. Father, I think, won’t leave the baby’s side.”

“Not for an invasion,” Varian interjected from the other side of the room. His hand was inside the nexus with no danger of disrupting it, as he had no magic or healing abilities to speak of. She could see, barely, his arm moving. She could tell that he was touching the baby’s face, or her hands, and Luciana could see the reverence on his face. She breathed a laugh, too wrung-out to do anything else. Her exhaustion was bone-deep and she felt heavy and loose-limbed.

“No more kids,” Luciana said.

“No more kids,” Anduin agreed with a chuckle. He leaned down and kissed her forehead, and she felt his Light trickle down her skin like a loving caress. “Sleep, my love. I’ll keep watch.”

Luciana let her eyes close, finally, and exhaled. She had done her job. She’d won her fight. Now, it was Anduin’s turn.

“What will you name her?” Varian’s voice roused her, though he spoke quietly.

“Freya,” she murmured. “Freya... something Wrynn. I’ll think of something.”

“I know the name,” Varian responded. “A member of your House, from one of the off-branches. She took over Amadeus after challenging its current head to a duel to the death.”

“Adelren was corrupt,” Luciana said. “He was selling people to a slave ring and looked away while the borderlands were invaded and his neighboring Lords slain. He hoped to claim the land for himself. Freya knew it was wrong, rallied the House, dueled him and won, and came to the aid of her neighbours.”

“And she earned quite the name for it,” Varian added. “Freya, the Iron Lady.”

“Why don’t you sleep on it, Luciana?” Anduin suggested gently.

“I think I will,” she murmured. When she felt his hand gently take hers, she smiled and gave it a squeeze.

Luciana woke slowly to sound of a baby snuffling. It was a familiar sound to her, and she smiled and stretched before opening her eyes. “Hungry?” she asked.

“Oh, you’re awake,” Anduin said. He was looking down at her, a book open in his lap. “Yeah, I
think she’s getting hungry. She’s been in the healing nexus for a few hours now. She should be
okay to leave it for a little while.”

“Okay. Bring her here.” She expected Anduin to get up, but Varian was still in the room. “Did you
even leave?” she asked him, smiling and cooing when her daughter made noises at her. “Hey,
you,” Luciana crooned. “Hey, baby.”

“No,” Varian said simply.

Luciana spoke while she fed Freya. “So, how are things going?”

“The entire city is in an uproar,” Varian said. “Someone leaked that Freya was premature and
stillborn, and that Enaeon did... something.” He shrugged one massive shoulder. “So, naturally,
there are rumours flying about everything from Naaru to dragons visiting your birthing chamber
and inspiring some kind of miracle. Some less savoury things as well, but SI:7 is making sure
there's nothing substantial.”

She chuckled, and brushed the fine hairs on Freya’s head. “And what do the healers say about
her?”

“They’ve gotten her systems up to snuff,” Anduin answered. “Her lungs are fine now, her digestive
system is still a bit weak but a few more hours in the nexus will help. She’ll gain the weight she
needs slowly, but she’ll need extra feeding for the first two months.”

“Which means no sleeping,” Luciana grumbled. “Hey, you,” she cooed when Freya lost the nipple
and started to huff. “Yeah, I know. I know. Here.” Luciana moved her head and smiled when the
baby started to feed again. “Thesan,” she said suddenly.

“What?” Anduin asked, startled out of the doze he’d fallen into while watching Freya. “Thesan?”

“Thesan,” Luciana repeated. “It’s an Old Arathi myth,” she explained. “The sun had four siblings,
and they charred and burned the life from the land. A mortal hero destroyed four of the suns, and
the fifth one mourned. It stopped rising each day, and the land froze over completely with ice.
Thesan, a fisherman’s wife, convinced the sun to rise just once more, and when it did the people
rejoiced and celebrated for the entire day. The sun saw how important its light was, and from then
on, it rose regularly every morning. As thanks, the sun shone on Thesan first every morning, and
the bright light and warmth it would gift her with would bring a great fog from the ocean and coat
her gardens with dew. Her gardens grew from a few herbs to an entire forest, and eventually her
gardens grew until eventually they covered all of Arathi in green, repairing the damage once done
by the five suns.”

“Interesting name,” Varian commented. “Freya Thesan Wrynn.”


“Good, because I’m keeping it,” Luciana replied.

Varian sighed. “I’d best go make sure no one’s started a riot,” he groaned, wiping a hand over his
face tiredly. “And clear up some of the more outlandish rumours. For some reason people are
angry you had a kid. You’d think they’d be happy. A new royal baby to coo over, and make a
spectacle of,” he added with no small amount of anger.

“Tell me the ones about the dragons,” Luciana said, effectively distracting him from the deep-
seated anger of having his personal life constantly put on display. She knew the feeling, but for
Varian it must have been worse. The man was a complete introvert. He’d be a hermit if they let
“Don’t,” Varian complained. “Please, don’t. I’ve been listening to the most ridiculous tales all morning.”

She chuckled and let him go. Anduin moved to sit on the bed next to her, wrapping an arm around her back. She settled into his side, sighed out whatever tension was left in her body, and relaxed. “Half your squadron is outside,” Anduin murmured, burying his nose in her hair. “Enaeon is resting. Whatever he did, it took a lot out of him.”

“What did he do?” she asked.

“I’m not sure, honestly, and neither is he. All he could tell me is that the Light called to Freya and worked through him.”

“So, is she a little priest baby?” Luciana joked.

“Maybe. I don’t know,” Anduin said, brushing his fingertips over her scalp gently. “It wouldn’t surprise me if she turned out to be a Light-wielder.”

“Me, neither,” Luciana said. “I... I’m glad Enaeon was here,” she started. “If he hadn’t... done whatever it was he did, I don’t know what I would have done. But it wouldn’t have been pretty.”

“I imagine you would have mourned,” Anduin agreed. “And then you would have gotten angry.”

“I would have become dark,” she said. “I fought, Anduin. I fought for her. I begged the Light to save her. Just this once, to answer me, and not let me suffer. If I’d lost her, if the Light hadn’t called to Enaeon...” she trailed off. “Well, I’m not going to think on it right now. You know what I’m going to think of?”

“What?”

“Not sex,” she answered. “For at least four months. Because this happened the last time I didn’t not think about it,” she said, bouncing Freya a couple of times. “And I’m not going through this again. I’m going to think about training, and fighting, and getting my old form back - again. This time I’m not going to be interrupted. I’m going to think about spending time with my sons, teaching them to walk and talk a bit, and I’m going to think about what to do with Freya, because she’s weak right now and there’s no way a third child is going to have any kind of decent life in the Royal Court. You know what happens to third children,” she said to Anduin. “Especially if they’re female.”

“It won’t,” he promised firmly. “That’s one of the things Father was going to discuss.”

“Bolvar is safe because he’s a twin,” she said. “He’s only minutes after Alaric, and the two are practically glued together, and whatever debates people have about the legitimacy of the records on their birth times will be irrelevant. But her?” Luciana said. “What happened to me is not going to happen to her.”

“It sounds like you’ve already made a plan,” Anduin said.

“I sort of have, yeah. I’m thinking of sending her to the Exodar, with Enaeon to watch over her,” Luciana started. “It’s practically its own giant healing nexus, anyway, and it’s full of draenei. And with Enaeon there, she’d be safe.”

“I know you trust him,” Anduin said. “But, that much?”
“Yes, that much,” she answered, and looked up. “I’m not going to do anything without discussing it with you first,” she said. “I’d be a shitty partner if I did.”

“Thank you,” Anduin smiled, pressing a soft kiss to the corner of her mouth. “It’s an idea,” he said. “I spent time there, training under Prophet Velen. They’re good people.”

“I know. Here, you burp her. I’m too tired.”

“Okay,” Anduin chuckled, throwing a towel over his shoulders to protect them from spit up milk and taking Freya from Luciana’s hands. While he carefully bumped her back and bounced her slightly, he spoke. “It’s an idea,” he repeated. “We could also send her to Northshire undercover. Closer, still safe - with plenty of space, and other children.”

“Not when she’s so small,” Luciana said. “Maybe when she’s a few years older. What about Darnassus, then? The night elves love children, even little pale human babies. New life, and all that. Druids, you know. Healers. And Malfurion would certainly be willing...”
Chapter Notes

In honour of the frankly alarming amount of affection Kaila has for my OC Damran, who is the main feature in the ongoing story named after them.

There was a rattle from the window, and a demonic helmet popped into view. Luciana reacted by sitting up and getting ready to jump off the bed, already growling. She recognized that helmet. But Anduin put a hand on her shoulder, making her pause just long enough for him to speak. “Wait,” he said. “It’s Damran.”

“I know who it is,” Luciana snapped. “That’s the problem.”

“Relax, Princess.” Damran’s voice was smooth and lilting, and Luciana imagined it could shape spells easily. The helmet seemed to melt away, into Damran’s skin, and a moment later they were standing in the room, head nearly touching the ceiling, in otherwise full armour. “Anduin can tell you.”

“Damran shows deference to those who hold command over more than she does,” Anduin explained, though he didn’t take his wary gaze off the demonic abomination in human form. “Since you’re a Princess, you hold sway over an entire kingdom, though you’re still under the King.”

“As he said,” Damran said with a smirk that showed off their sharp, dog-like teeth. “It’s a command thing.” Their gaze flicked down to the baby in Anduin’s arms. “Cute kid,” they commented. “Thought for sure they weren’t gonna make it. Felt the soul all the way across Westfall.”

“What were you doing in Westfall?” Anduin asked.


“Too bad,” Damran purred. “Oh, well. Suppose you’re happy enough with your priest. Lovely man, isn’t he?”

“Stand down,” Luciana ordered, and Damran sighed, retreating slightly.

“Like I said, cute kid. Glad your draenei was able to do his thing. And here I was, all ready to snatch up a royal soul. Ah, well. Maybe next time.” Damran flashed their teeth. “Oh, yeah, and congrats on getting rid of that stench. It stank to the high heavens in his place for the longest time.” They were looking at Luciana, whose furrowed brow seemed to amuse them. “You don’t even know?” they said, and laughed. It grated in Luciana’s ears and she growled and shook her head.

“Know what?” she demanded. “What stench?”

“The sha, girl,” Damran said, their face suddenly an inch from Luciana’s. She snarled and lashed out, breaking Damran’s nose and shattering one of their cheekbones with her fist. She shook the
tingle of pain out of her hand. “Nice hit,” Damran praised, their face healing with visible swiftness.

“The sha?” Anduin asked. “I checked for that. She was clean.”

“It was hidden pretty deep,” Damran answered, glancing up at Anduin, still too close for comfort to Luciana.

“Take a step back,” Luciana ordered, and Damran complied with a too-wide grin.

“The sha was down there pretty deep,” Damran continued as though they hadn’t been interrupted. “I think you know what was holding it down, away from your important bits, even if you don’t know the interesting part.” They nodded to Luciana. “I was all geared up to eat it, and here you are fighting it out on your own. My, how fast humans grow,” they said with a saccharine smile.

“What else?” Anduin asked. Luciana answered without taking her eyes off Damran.

“Genn thought it could be Goldrinn,” she replied. “That thing that kept me going when I escaped? But Varian didn’t see anything.”

“Doesn’t mean it’s not there,” Damran interjected. “Tell you what. I’m feeling generous, with today being a good day and all. I’ll take care of those nasty blighters who are geared up outside while the city’s all tangled up.”

“Geared up for what?” Luciana asked.

“You,” Damran replied, still showing off their rather impressive teeth. “Here and ready to party,” they said. “They don’t like third children. They don’t like you. They don’t like a lot of things but it's not quite time for you to know about that yet. They have a rat in your bedroom and they found out months ago you were pregnant. Again. So, they geared up.”

“Who are they?” Luciana asked. "What do they want?"

“They don't like you,” Damran said. "And anyway. It's no one you’ll miss. Except maybe that one nursemaid," they said conversationally. “Anyway. I’d best head out now if I want to catch them before they catch your sons.”

“Why haven’t we heard anything of this?” Anduin asked.

“Because they’re professionals,” Damran responded. “Just whispers of them, they’re too good for anything else. Don’t worry about it. I’m a professional, too. I know how to plug up leaks in the floorboard.”

“Can we trust its word?” Luciana asked Anduin. Damran, she knew, was dangerous - enough to merit caution even from those they claimed to respect. The only one Luciana knew Damran would actually listen to without fail was Gadreel, the master of the guild Damran was associated with. It wasn’t comforting to have Damran in the room while Luciana was so weak, and while she knew Anduin was powerful, she knew that Damran was more so. It put her on edge, especially with Damran’s lack of respect for personal space.

“They,” Anduin said after a moment, “can be trusted. Damran doesn’t lie.”

“I don’t need to,” Damran added. “Don’t worry your pretty little heads about it,” they said. “You just sit back and relax. Consider this as... congratulations for your new family member.” Damran vanished suddenly, without any hint of teleportation, or even an invisibility spell. Luciana growled and shook her head out. Whatever Damran had done, it made Luciana’s head ache behind her eyes.
“That’s always unpleasant,” Anduin grumbled, brow furrowed.

“How often do you see Damran?” she asked.

“Not often at all. They’ve dropped by I think twice in the past two years, besides today,” he said quietly, rejoining her on the bed. He handed her Freya, and removed the towel from his shoulders. It had a bit of spit on it, and Freya seemed content for the moment. “I think Father knows more about Damran than I do. He seemed to recognize them. Or, at least, one of them.”

“One of them?”

“Yes. Damran explained it to me, when I asked. They’re a collection of mortal souls and a handful of demons, and one of the mortal souls is more powerful and managed to get control of the others. It’s an ongoing process. Damran is the name of the collective, as well as the name of the lead soul,” he summarized. “They told me something about a meshwork they made, but I think if I were a mage I’d be able to better understand it.”

“Can they use magic?”

“Yes,” he said slowly. “I think, whatever skills the unique souls had before, are added to Damran’s skills.”

“That’s kind of alarming,” Luciana said mildly. “Damran is dangerous.”

“Yes, they are.”

“I don’t like it,” she said. “I don’t want them anywhere near the Keep. I don’t want that... abomination anywhere near my children, or near you.”

Anduin regarded her for a moment, and spoke carefully. She had no doubt he could see the fury still roiling in her. “Damran doesn’t lie,” he said softly, caressing the back of her neck with gentle fingers. It cooled her, somewhat. “I’ve never heard anyone say otherwise, even with the abundance of people who’ve been victimized by them, or have played witness to their acts of cruelty. Father seems to trust whatever soul is in the lead.”

“Do you trust them?”

“Trust isn’t the word for it,” he answered. “I believe that Damran is honest. They say what they mean, and they don’t go back on their word. But they are dangerous, and cruel. I’ve heard the things they’ve done.” A minute shudder passed through his frame. “They’re demonic, of that I have no doubt. But they’ve never given me or Father reason to doubt their honesty, and they do have something like respect for us. They say ‘it’s a command thing’, and I think that’s the key. The more... ah, souls you have, the higher up you are, and the more command you hold over those under you. You, Father, and I have an entire kingdom. Damran, I think, has several hundred. Gadreel, their guild master, has several thousand. While Damran is no doubt more powerful than any individual in their guild, or probably even in the kingdom - minus maybe Khadgar - they’ll respect the chain of command.”

“I still don’t like it,” Luciana growled. “Next you see them, tell them to stay away from my kids.”

“I will,” Anduin said softly. He leaned down to kiss her temple, and she gave him a grudging smile. “You’re not worried about what they said? About whispers, and people outside?”

“No,” Luciana replied. “No one has raised the alarm yet. And if you say Damran doesn’t lie, and Damran said they’d take care of it... Well, I’m willing to give them a chance.”
“Before you take out Oathkeeper and take care of it yourself?” Anduin joked.

“You’re damn right.”

Anduin laughed quietly, and Luciana sighed, relaxing again. Her fury was calm now, a dark lake rather than a storming sea. Anduin had that effect on her. “Why don’t you get some more rest?” he asked her. “I’ll put Freya back into the nexus for you.”

“Alright,” she said, reluctantly giving up the tiny baby. “We’re gonna need to fatten you up,” she cooed when Freya mumbled. “Don’t you worry about a thing, baby. We’re gonna make sure you have a good future. No courtier is going to take you from me,” she promised. “Nothing will take you from me, except the Light. Or Varian, if he wants to take a turn holding you.”

Anduin chuckled, and kissed Luciana’s lips softly. “Get some sleep,” he told her. “I’ll keep an eye on things. When Damran’s taken care of the traitors, I’m sure Father will come charging in here.”

“In full armour,” she murmured, eyes already getting heavy. “With Shalamayne.”

“And the other half of your squadron.”

“And a dragon?”

Anduin laughed. “I’m sure something can be arranged,” he said warmly. “Sleep, love.”

“I’m trying, but you keep talking.”

He laughed quietly, and she smiled. She loved that sound.
Caslia Harrowmont was no fool. She was slated to be the next head of her House, before her older brother, because she was the exact opposite of a fool. But she’d be damned if that smirk didn’t take the breath right out of her lungs.

Caslia wasn’t blind, either. She and many others could see how regal and handsome the Princess was, even a week after giving birth to a premature baby. The woman stood tall and proud, as she should, and the glint of complete madness that seemed to live in her stormy grey eyes only accentuated her sharply angled face. And, Light, that jawline, those scars...

It was obvious to anyone with eyes, or ears, or even a nose, that the Princess was really a very attractive woman. She was built for power, tightly corded with muscle hidden under layered fat that was eaten away by relentless training a bit more with passing day. She kept her shoulders back, her chin up, and when her gaze swept the room Caslia was only one of many who had a hard time keeping their eyes up and their cheeks from reddening. There was something dark in the Princess’ eyes, a hunger that Caslia sometimes liked to imagine the Prince might need a bit of help satisfying.

Of course, Caslia was no fool. She knew her thoughts were mere fantasies, and treated them as such. When she imagined trailing her dainty hands over the ragged skin of the warrior-princess, soothing old aches, and running her hands through that luxuriously soft dark hair, she kept it to herself. She was no fool. The Princess was loyal to her Prince. Anyone could see that. Still, they were pleasant thoughts, and Caslia indulged herself every now and again.

Unlike Caslia, who was no fool, Lord Aldrich Kalvis was a complete idiot. They had been in a court meeting only an hour, and already he’d made four passes at the Princess, a handful of flirtatious remarks, given her two winks, and made a sly comment about the Princess’ hot blood. It was infuriating, to see that vile and arrogant man get away with disrespecting the Princess so.

It was quite satisfying for Caslia, and perhaps for many others, when the Princess finally deigned to look at Aldrich. She lazily turned her head, the slightest of smirks turning the left corner of her lips up, the other side too stiff with scar tissue for that simple expression.

“Lord Kalvis,” the Princess said, as though only mildly bemused. “I’m surprised.”

“Your Highness?” he asked. His voice was rich and smooth, and Caslia wanted to strangle it out of him sometimes.

“I’m surprised that you managed to get this far without your father holding your hand.”

The room had become silent when she had first spoken. Partially from respect, but also partially from fear. When Luciana Wrynn was angered, she was known to absolutely destroy the target of her ire. She would not hold back if someone annoyed her. Although in recent months she’d been a bit more volatile, perhaps because of her pregnancies, she was usually quite fair and gave a warning to those she found aggravating. Some hated her for it. They said it was impossible to disagree with her, and therefore she was a tyrant. Caslia was no fool. It was obvious that Luciana was only angered at unnecessary delays, complications, or insults. If you spoke fairly with her, she’d do the same with you. Although, once she made a decision, she expected to be obeyed. Perhaps it was her knight training. It certainly made it easier on the Prince, who only had to deal with those who’d learned their lesson. Anger the Prince and you were given to the Princess. Anger the Princess, and you wished for death.
“Your Highness, I’m not sure...”

“Because you appear to be completely blind, and normally when one is unable to learn how to navigate their world their parent steps in to coddle them and take their hand.”

Now the room fairly exploded with faint murmurs. Caslia didn’t partake. She was eager to see what was about to come. The glint of madness, of fury, of danger in the Princess’ eyes, the slight tightening of her shoulders and back muscles that made it so if you looked at her at the right angle you could see the muscles bunching under her shirt, the threat of a predator about to pounce... It was really quite a sight, to see the power of an animal in her limbs. Caslia felt a mite jealous of the Prince, sometimes, and wondered to herself how she might tame herself a warrior to keep her company on cold nights.

“You have spent the last hour staring at my jaw,” the Princess continued. “You should have been watching my eyes.” Caslia allowed herself to feel a bit of pride. She had been watching the Princess’ eyes, and so she had seen the Princess subtly signaling to the guards stationed along the walls of the meeting room.

“You Highness...!” Aldrich yelped when four of the guards that lined the walls stepped in and seized him.

“You talk of power,” the Princess said as though she hadn’t heard him. Truthfully, it was possible. He was so underneath her that it was pointless for her to hear him. He had nothing of value to add to whatever her brilliant mind had already concluded. “You speak of it as though you have any. You say that power comes from knowledge, from cunning, and that it can be obtained with a mere few words from your silver tongue.” Caslia grinned. He had indeed said those exact words. To call your own tongue silver was too arrogant to allow.

“You Highness, this...!”

“Silence him.”

A guard slapped a metal-plated hand over the lower half of Aldrich’s face. It must have hurt, from the wince Caslia saw from beyond the wall of metal closing in on the Princess' target.

“Put a hand around his neck.

Another guard complied, and the colour drained from Aldrich’s face. He looked around the room, frantic for an ally. No one moved to helped him. Some openly stared in contempt.

“Strangle him.”

The hand tightened.

“Aldrich struggled mutely as he tried to escape.

“I changed my mind. Drop him on the ground. Take three paces away from the table, line up. Turn to me. Drop to your knees. Put your heads on the floor.”

All four guards moved in unison, as though they’d trained for it for years. Moments later Aldrich was coughing, splayed out on the floor in a supremely undignified manner, and the guards were prostrating themselves before the Princess.
“Power,” she said, “does not drip from a silver tongue like honeyed words, Lord Kalvis. It comes from trust, courage, and loyalty. Stand,” she commanded. The guards stood. “As you were.” They returned to their posts in silence. “Get up, Lord Kalvis. You look even more pathetic on the ground than you did four years ago.”

There was a slight titter of laughter that went through the room at her reference of a rather embarrassing event in the Kalvis family’s history. The Princess’ eyes roved over them, and Caslia made sure she was wearing a look of amusement tinged with caution. The Princess always seemed to approve of caution. She even met Caslia’s eyes for a moment, which made her want to grin. She held it back admirably.

“Loyalty is a long and arduous process,” the Princess continued. “My soldiers are loyal me because I spent to many of my waking hours with them. Fighting with them, eating and sleeping with them, becoming one of them. Trust is a connection that is difficult to establish, and difficult to keep. The Royal Guards trust me because I have ever trusted them with myself, with my husband, with my children. I have never led any of my people astray, and I will continue to lead them fairly and with honour so long as they will follow me.

“I say this, Lord Kalvis, because apparently you lack a crucial part of your education and therefore must be made to realize that the royal court does not revolve around you. It revolves around me, at the moment, and it revolves around the King and the Prince and soon around my children. And beyond that, to the core of the court, we all revolve around Stormwind and her people. However, I hear there is some interesting courtly gossip that revolves around you. Do you wish to share it with the rest of today’s council?”

“No, Your Highness,” he said quietly. His voice was rough. The Princess gave him a pleased, mocking smile.

“I thought you might, as you can’t seem to stop talking about yourself today. Are you sure? Perhaps he’s shy,” she said to the room at large, and another quite round of chuckles followed. “Perhaps you’d like me to share it for you. Would you like that?”

“No, Your Highness.”

“Then, pray tell, learn to shut your fucking mouth.” Her voice dropped dangerously on the last four words and her eyes fell from mockingly bright and open to narrow and dangerous as a dagger. The room was once again deathly silent. Caslia was no fool. She never forgot that the Princess was a warrior. A berserker. She never forgot that the Princess was a soldier, a Knight, and had seen more war and death and blood than everyone else in the room combined. It sometimes hid under the layer of nobility that the Princess carried like a rich ermine cloak. But, it was always there, under the thin shroud of civility that was seen in her steely eyes.

“Now,” the Princess said with a benign smile and a brief gesture, an opening of her arms - an invitation. “Who would like to submit a proposal for Westfall’s Militia?”

Caslia let the overeager members of the day’s council speak first. When it was her turn, and the Princess’ keen eyes landed on her, she swallowed down the fear and arousal that sparkled in her and smiled serenely. She shared her House’s proposal for armaments and training, and mentioned that providing them with some veteran warriors who still had the battle in their blood could help to inspire the trainees. That seemed to garner a spark of approval from the Princess, which Caslia treasured like a precious jewel. Only two others in the room had gotten that.

“And for the name,” Caslia finished. “We suggest either the Shadow Watchers, who would keep their keen eyes trained on the shadows that ever threaten to encroach on their lands... Or perhaps
the Dragon’s Bane, as Westfall’s economical plummet could be traced back to the black dragon that once poisoned your House’s vaunted halls, Lady Highness.”

“Powerful names, to be sure,” the Princess commented lightly. “I will take all of your suggestions into consideration. We will reconvene on the matter in three days’ time, at the same hour. Any objections to that?”

There was a chorus of ‘no, Your Highness’, and the Princess nodded.

“Good. In that case, we will move on to the case of the unrest caused by a third royal child.”

Predictably, the room was silent. No one looked away from the Princess. No one dared to show anything but rapt attention, because everyone in the kingdom, everyone in the Alliance knew how protective she was of her young children.

“There appears to be growing sentiments of turmoil in the higher ranks of the kingdom, which sparked when it was revealed that I was pregnant with a third child,” the Princess started. “I don’t have to tell any of the people in this room why I’m displeased with this?” she said, giving them all a moment to shake their heads or mutter a refusal. “Good. You’re all educated on that matter, at least,” she said with a glance to Aldrich, who was still dangerously pale and staring at the table in front of him. “I want to put this disturbance to rest, now,” she said lowly. Dangerously. Caslia had to hide her smile. She quite liked it when the Princess’ voice dropped like that. It promised pain, and she liked to think perhaps a bit of pleasure if she was good. “Any semblance of threat towards my daughter will be met with swift and brutal retribution. I might even be tempted to deliver it myself.” To illustrate, the Princess held out her hand. A guard put a long, thick piece of metal in her palm.

Caslia watched, not letting her surprise and mild alarm show, when the Princess bent the metal around her fingers until it was curled tighter than a dwarf’s beard-braid, as though it were a mere copper wire.

“I do not tolerate threats to my children,” she warned. There was an edge of mithril to her voice. “Any who would question that need only look at what happened to the man who killed my brother Frederic.” She tossed the piece of metal onto the table, blatantly unconcerned with how threatening that move was. And how could she be concerned? Even in her current, weaker state, she was still stronger than steel.

It was truly amazing, the kind of people Stormwind could produce. It was more amazing that the King had found her, picked her out of a pool of young women suited to the court, and chose her for the Prince despite her more... barbaric tendencies. Caslia thought it fit, what with the Prince being a priest.

“I am putting this task to all Noble Houses. Put this disturbance to rest, and I will recognize you for your part in it. There will be no actions taken against my children for a mere accident of birth. My children, all of them, will live a safe and happy life. If anyone dares to suggest otherwise, if they dare to question my will on the matter of my children...” The Princess trailed off. She didn’t finish her sentence. She didn’t need to. “Yes?” she asked, looking at Lady Marina, who had raised her hand to eye level in the gesture used to indicate a question or concern.

“I do not question your words,” the Lady Marina said immediately. “Nor would I ever wish harm upon a child, and certainly not upon one of yours, Lady Highness.”

“Speak,” the Princess said.
“I wonder what your plans are in regards to marriage for either your second or third child?” Lady Marina started. “I know that it is yet early to make firm arrangements. We merely wonder if you will marry one, or both, to solidify alliances, perhaps between Houses or perhaps between kingdoms. And, we wonder what course of action would seem most appropriate to you if your eldest does not choose for himself a wife who could produce heirs.”

“You’re correct in saying it’s yet early,” the Princess said. “I will allow my children to choose their own paths. As their mother I will guide them away from mistakes I have already learned from, but I wouldn’t be able to say I loved them if I could not let them create their own lives autonomous of my will. However great it is. Greater, to be sure, than the harsh deserts of Durotan.”

There was an appropriate amount of chuckling at her quip. No one dared to speak of her torture, save for her. She usually mentioned it in a joke. Usually people were too afraid to not laugh politely.

“That said, I will be sure to keep all doors open until it’s proven they’re not needed,” she said. “If someone were to be able to make a child of mine happy while also cementing a friendship between Houses, or even between Nations, I would be remiss in not considering it. Ah, but that’s far into the future,” she sighed. She reclined in her chair, leaning slightly to the left and bracing her elbow on the chair arm. She rested her head in her hand and the left side of her lips curled in a slight smile. “And if my son Alaric were to choose someone who could not produce an heir, well. There are ways around that. If perhaps he reveals in a few years that he is not, in fact, a he, and some other issue were to arise... Again, there are always ways around it.” She regarded the Lady coolly. “Thank you for your concern over my family affairs, Lady Marina.” She made it clear that she would not speak further on the matter with those words, and Lady Marina retook her seat with poise.

The meeting was concluded soon after, and Caslia made to leave, as did all other nobles save the Princess herself. She likely had another council after this one.

“Lady Harrowmont,” the Princess’ resonating voice called. “A moment of your time.”

Caslia felt a flutter in her stomach and mercilessly crushed it. Now was not the time for petty, girlish crushes. “Of course, Lady Highness.” Of course, she could always enjoy it later, in private. She’d remember those words and that tone, certainly. Perhaps she’d include the guards this time.

The room emptied out save for the Royal Guards, ever stoic and ever loyal in their positions as guardians to the royal family. The Princess straightened in her seat, but did not stand. It was her right as a Royal to remain seated while a noble stood.

“With what may I help you, Lady Highness?” Caslia prompted politely. If only the Princess would look up at her with that damnably rakish smirk. Maybe she wanted a hand, or two, or a tongue, in the bedroom. Perhaps the Prince was looking for a bit of help in satisfying his wife. All lovely thoughts that could wait until Caslia was alone. She put them aside for later.

“I found your proposal for the Militia to be most promising, though of course there are details to be hammered out.”

“Of course,” she said, bowing her head graciously.

“As for the name... Shadow Watchers seems to be quite appropriate,” the Princess continued. “I’d like your permission to use the name even if your proposal is, in the end, not the one chosen. Of course, I would credit your House and allow you to announce the Militia’s name when it is formed.”
“It would be an absolute honour, Lady Highness,” Caslia said. “To hear such words from you, one who knows the military and its tactics and stratagem so intimately, is high praise indeed.”

“Indeed it is,” she agreed, almost affably. She raised her chin, regarded Caslia for a moment - Caslia had to resist shivering when she thought to herself that the Princess was raking her eyes over Caslia’s form, soft and pleasing under her expensive dress - and smiled.

It was an expression not usually seen on the Princess. It was a smirk of sorts, curving her lips and pulling at the eyebrow that still moved with ease. It made her seem a bit jaunty, a bit flirtatious, with a hint of teeth and danger and a feral want that left Caslia momentarily adrift in a sea of confusion and arousal.

“You spoke well today,” the Princess praised, and Caslia had to refocus herself. She wondered if the Princess’ voice was a bit softer, or if it was just wishful thinking. It was almost certainly the latter. “I will see you again in three days. I have high hopes for our next meeting, Lady Harrowmont.”

“As do I, Lady Highness.” Shit, that was much too suggestive. “You, too, speak well. It’s no wonder you were chosen to stand at the Prince’s side.” That was better. Mentioning her marriage to the Prince would put the situation at ease. “If there is nothing else...?”

“There is not.”

“Then, I bid you a good afternoon, Lady Highness.”

“To you as well.”

Caslia made sure to bow demurely, and barely kept herself from outright fleeing the room. She was uncomfortably hot in her dress, now, and very much wanted to take off the bothersome and restrictive garment and-

Best stop that train of thought in its tracks. At least, until she was alone. Perhaps in a warm bath, with peacebloom oil. That would make for a pleasant evening, along with thoughts of the Princess’ wide, thick, deliciously rough hands. How hot would they feel, running over Caslia’s soft skin? She had to repress a shiver of delight at the thought.
Westbrook Garrison had few problems, compared to some other garrisons held by the Imperial Army. Gnolls, an occasional bear, a handful of wolves, and the odd little gang of highwaymen were well within range of the capabilities of Westbrook’s soldiers.

They were still subject to the tri-annual inspections sent out from military headquarters, and the more regular inspections carried out by neighboring officers. Normally this wasn’t an issue, but as James Colburn had heard through the grapevine, so to speak, this inspection was special.

The Princess was coming to Westbrook.

They’d all heard, and celebrated accordingly, when it had been announced that the Princess had given birth to a premature baby, stillborn, that had been miraculously saved by a paladin. Some said it was a human, others said dwarf or draenei. It didn’t matter as much as the fact that there was now a young little Princess in the castle in Stormwind. A third royal baby. The House of Wrynn now had six members, which seemed to most a miracle in and of itself. The House of Wrynn didn’t have the best of luck when it came to keeping family members alive.

It had been a full two months since the little Princess had been born. Already visitors from Stormwind were reporting that the Princess was back to her former glory, accepting challenges from any who could compete with her and beating people bloody. Everyone from adventurers to champions to heroes to Royal Guards were fighting her, and mostly losing. The King was the only one able to truly compete with her, and there were whispers that she had fought twice already with King Greymane in his worgen form. The outcome of those fights went unsaid. James thought it wasn’t necessary - obviously, their Princess had won. King Greymane was a great king, to be sure, and powerful in his own right. But she was a warrior.

It was no rumour that she and the famous Amadeus Squadron were coming to Westbrook tomorrow, along with an entourage of Royal Guards and a military scribe to record comments. James could hardly wait. He’d polished his armour to a bright shine, buffed the dents out of the plates, touched up the blue edging on the metal, and brushed the horsehair on his helmet until it was perfect. He wasn’t the only soldier to go to such pains on his appearance. The others had all done similar. Those with beards or mustaches had carefully coifed them. Anyone with hair longer than the standards had had it trimmed to regulation. Even Marcus, with his ridiculous hairstyle, had cleaned up his image.

Everyone wanted to see the Princess be proud of Westbrook.

James knew it was silly. He was no school child. He was a soldier. He’d spent time in Tol Barad. He’d won battles in Warsong Gulch. He’d played witness to the opening of the Vale. This was something of an early retirement for him. He was only twenty-eight, but he was glad to be away from the worst of the fighting. Westbrook was perfect for him, now. Just enough activity, just enough challenge, to keep him on his toes. Nothing too extreme. No deadly black oil creatures trying to replace his guts with their arms. He knew it was silly. But James spent his entire mess break daydreaming about what the Princess would look like. He’d never seen her up close - he’d been in the crowds welcoming her home two weeks before her wedding. He knew she had facial scars, short dark hair, and skin that was pale compared to native Stormwind skin, tan and darker than a Gilnean. He wondered what her eyes looked like.

During his guard shift, he daydreamed about her. Nothing inappropriate. He wouldn’t dare think anything inappropriate about his Princess. But he wondered what it would be like if her eyes
landed on him during inspection, when he was lined up with the others. She would look him up and down, eyes critical of every last detail... She’d make some sort of expression of approval. A little quirk of the lips, a nearly imperceptible nod, something. Maybe she’d remember his name. Maybe she’d know his name!

It was enough to put a silly, stupid, giddy smile on his face for the rest of his shift. To think that, just maybe, the slightest chance, the Princess might know his name... It made it hard to settle down in his bunk at lights out. But he managed. He needed a good night’s sleep so he could look the part of a soldier in her army, proud to carry the colours of her kingdom. Actually it was the King’s army and the King’s kingdom, but she was the Princess! She was a soldier, like him! Well, a Knight, but still the military! She’d been in the same kind of battles. She still had her squadron with her, for Light’s sake! It was obvious to anyone with half their brain that the Princess was a soldier at heart. It was worth it, in James’ opinion, to pick up the mantle of Imperial defence in her name.

She had proven herself. Worthy of her squadron, worthy of her citizens. Now James had to prove himself worthy of her.

Morning came and James popped awake, quick as always. Today was the day. Today was the day. “Get up!” the Lieutenant called, slamming the door open. “Inspection day!”

All four squadrons were on their feet and dressed in ten minutes, in full plate regalia. The royal colours shone proud on their armour. The mess hall filled and emptied in short order and by the time James was lined up with his squad mates in front of the Garrison, the rest of the Brigade had lined the path leading up from the main road. It was a glorious sight to behold - over a hundred soldiers of Stormwind, shining under the early morning sun, ready to welcome their Crown Princess.

And she, too, was a glorious sight. She sat tall in the saddle of her Westbrook Warrior, a horse originally bred in the Westbrook Garrison itself - that sent a thrill of pride through James, and he was sure it sent a similar one through many others lined up. The horse was massive, energetic and arrogant but her hand was firm and the horse obeyed her.

The Princess wore armour that had been specially crafted for her out of the strongest materials known to the Alliance. Mithril, trillium, and even blackrock had been gathered by adventurers and gathered in the Dwarven District, and sent to Ironforge to the master smiths of the Alliance. Mithril was impossible to cut, nearly impossible to break, and trillium was light and managed heat well. And blackrock, while heavy and sometimes unwieldy, was quickly proving to be even stronger than mithril. It was said that only an elemental lord from the Firelands themselves could damage blackrock.

And they had worked absolute wonders from the metals. Mithril chainmail hung over protective leathers where the plates didn’t cover, and a silver sash decorated with blue was cinched around her waist, over her new sword belt. Her boots were made of intersecting plates, silvery white mithril lining blackrock, and small wolf heads adorned the outer ankles. Her knees were protected by thick leather and mithril chain but otherwise the joints were free for better movement, covered by the curve of the boots that came up over her knees. Her thighs were enclosed in similarly plated trillium that shone with the hints of many hues under the sunlight. Mithril again edged the darker metal, making it nearly impossible to cut through the plates.

Blackrock protected her hips and waist in intersecting plates that moved while she did, accentuated the curve of her hips and the rolling, powerful movements of her stride. Her blackrock belt had a wolf’s snarling mithril face in relief. Her chest was covered in trillium like her legs, plated in a fashion almost identical to that found on the King’s armour, and again edged in mithril.
And over her shoulders were two great blackrock pauldrons. Wolf heads bared their teeth in vicious
snarls, with the wings of eagles sweeping down and out on either side. The wolves had short spikes
coming from their skulls, the most prominent coming from their foreheads - like unicorns. Like the
wolves in the Amadeus family crest. And her helm, too, was plated to look like great crests rose
nobly from her skull. The first came from her forehead, giving the appearance of a crown. The
protective metal covered her nose and jaw, leaving two slanted rectangular holes for her eyes.
Gryphon wings seemed to melt from the blackrock to line the bottom of the helmet, framing her
face. Her eyes were bright in the shadows of her helm, and looked like two pieces of steel, sharp
and dangerous and looking for something to cut.

Her hands still held the reins of her horse. The gauntlets were made of trillium, as blackrock was
difficult to work into such small shapes. Only the back of her hands were covered in protective
blackrock plates, inscribed in blue with the lion’s head of the Stormwind banner. The fingers were
fully encased in small metal plates connected with leather that allowed for easy movement, and the
palms were fully leather. Her elbows were protected in similar fashion to her knees, with leather
and bright mithril chain, but the wrist pieces of her gauntlets had spikes running from the outside
of her wrist to just shy of her elbow. The spikes were longer the closer they were to her elbows.
Behind her flowed a heavy, black cape topped with a mantle of dark forest bear fur that lent to her
appearance a wild, untamed edge.

All of this, James noticed in the short time it took her to reach the start of the path to the Garrison
and dismount. She handed off the reins of her steed, a horse almost as famous as she was -
Thunderer - to a stable hand. A medium-sized dog followed her closely, attentive only to the
Princess. James recognized it as the Amadeus House’s new breed, the boxer terrier. And then,
James saw her fabled sword.

Oathkeeper.

Its wolf-head pommel shone like the sword held its own tiny sun. It wouldn’t surprise James if
some brilliant fire mage had seen fit to enchant the Princess’ sword with such a fine gift as that. His
gaze was taken from the blade when the Princess turned from her horse to face the lines of loyal
soldiers.

“At attention!” the Captain barked. “And, salute! Salute Her Highness, Crown Princess Luciana
Wrynn!”

James was one of over a hundred soldiers who saluted, but he didn’t know how many of them had
tears in their eyes like he did. He doubted some of the fresher faces knew what an honour it was to
have the Princess herself here for inspection. How absolutely amazing it was to have her here,
striding amongst them, to make sure they were at the level they should be, to see to it that her
soldiers had what they needed. Well, the King’s soldiers. One day they would be her soldiers.
James hoped he lived to see that day. James hoped against reason that he could stand at her side,
loyal and trusted, someday soon.

“Motivation check!” the Princess roared.

“Hoo-rah!” James fancied that their voices echoed all the way to Goldshire.

“Good,” the Princess rumbled, and James thought that he could see her eyes curve in a satisfied
smile. She glanced up the path, her critical gaze passing over each soldier, and she reached up to
remove her helm. James saw first-hand the damage done to her face when she swept by him on
foot, her squadron flanking her, Royal Guards keeping the rear with two of their ranks clearing the
way ahead of the Princess. It was customary, but unnecessary. No good soldier of Stormwind
would stand in her way.
Her jaw was mangled, obviously salvaged by a highly skilled healer. The draenei that walked in the center of the group was the obvious choice. James thought that his appearance here would likely confirm that it had been a draenei, probably the very one he looked at now, that had revived the stillborn young Princess. The Princess’ left cheek was bisected by another scar, and another shorter one interrupted her hairline over her right temple. James could see why the Horde would take to calling her Scarjaw. She had a striking appearance. As in, it struck fear and awe into the hearts of both her allies and her enemies.

James held his salute while she passed, nearly wavering when the smell of leather and metal polish wafted on the air, faint, to his nose. It was something he smelled every day, but somehow knowing it came from the Princess made it different.

The Princess reached the end of the procession, standing in the entry to the garrison, and turned on her heel to face the soldiers. “At ease!” she bellowed, her voice carrying easily to even the far end of the line. The Captain joined her a moment later, standing in parade rest to her right, a step behind. Her squadron gathered around her, as James knew they would. A good squadron moved as one. He was lucky to have his own good squadron.

“You all know who I am,” the Princess said when the soldiers were all in parade rest. James smiled privately. Of course they knew. She was the Princess. “You all know why I’m here. Let’s cut the bullshit and move straight to the important stuff. Who has something to report? Anything on local activity to something in the Garrison itself.”

“Sir!” Knight Lieutenant Anthony stepped forward. “Gnoll activity has increased!”

“Any supposed causes?”

“Sir, they may be coming from Westfall!”


James debated with himself while two other Lieutenants stepped up to make their own reports. They’d decided on them a while ago with the Captain so everything would be covered, with no pointless repetition. James planned it out in his head. He would cry Sir! and she would prompt him, and he would say... what? What could he say that was meaningful, that stood out from the rest? What could he say to make a good impression?

While he was worrying over it, the Lieutenants finished their reports, and Luciana spoke again. “I tend to be much more merciful when I’m alerted to a problem, instead of finding it for myself,” she warned. “Don’t try to hide your shit from me, kids. I’ll find it and air it out where the whole fucking kingdom can smell it.”

“Sir!” Marcus stepped up with a stupid grin. James shot him a warning look, which he promptly ignored. “Rats in the larder, sir!”

“Is that so?” The Princess responded, deceptively calm. “I can’t tolerate that. Maybe I should assign some of you soldiers to clear it out. I think, to really make sure we get the rats out, I should have you carry everything out, clean the larder to a spotless fucking spit shine, and carry it all back in. Would that be enough, soldier?”

“Sir!” he said, obviously regretting his words. “We’re not bothered by rats, sir! It’s no problem, sir!”

“Good,” she replied. “I’d hate for an Imperial Army garrison to have a problem.” She looked up
and down the rows again. “Anyone else have some nice words for me?”

This was it! This was James’ chance!

“Sir! It’s an honour to have you here, sir!” Jennifer stepped forward before James could convince himself to move, and he felt a deep-seated frustration and jealousy start to boil in his gut. He tamped it down. It wasn’t necessary. What was necessary was making sure the Princess was duly impressed with his - with their garrison.

“Thank you, soldier,” the Princess said warmly. “I have to say, it’s good to be back on military soil.” She turned to the Captain, and her voice was surprisingly quiet enough that James couldn’t hear a word, despite his proximity.

“To your duties!” the Captain ordered, and the soldiers scattered to obey.

James, luckily, was on interior patrol today. He’d walk the ramparts of the garrison, pace the halls, check the larder and the mess hall for signs of trouble, and keep the tight perimeter around the Garrison itself. He would likely come across the Amadeus Squadron at least once during his patrol.

It took several hours for this to happen. When it did, he nearly pissed himself. He moved to open a door leading to a barrack, something completely normal and ordinary, and it was yanked open from the other side. The Princess stared at him, flanked by only two Royal Guards. The rest of her squadron had apparently scattered through the base already. She was barely a handful of inches shorter than James- how was the woman so tall? - and when she smirked, he froze.

“Looks like I just interrupted your patrol. Apologies, soldier.”

“It’s not a problem at all, Sir,” he stammered. “Truly, it isn’t.”

“I hope not. Patrols are important.” She moved aside to let him pass, and gestured with her chin for him to move through. “Get on now, soldier.”

“Thank you, Sir,” he managed to say. “It’s... It’s an honour to have you here, Sir.”

“So I’ve heard,” she said dryly.

“No, I mean...” he stuttered. This wasn’t the manner of an Imperial Soldier! He drew himself up, stiffened his spine, and steeled himself. “It’s an honour to have you here, Your Highness.”

“Ah, I see,” she hummed. “What’s your name, soldier?”

“James, Sir. James Colburn.”

“Soldier Colburn. Can you tell me why it’s an honour to have me here?”

His brain stuttered and he had to take a moment to collect himself. It was happening. She was talking to him. To him. He had one chance and he did not want to fuck it up. “Sir,” he started. “It’s an honour because... Because you’re a Knight, Sir, and the Princess. You’ve been there. You’ve seen the war.” He gulped. Her gaze felt like a spear. “You’re coming from the right place, Sir.”

“And another Royal wouldn’t be?” she asked softly. Dangerously softly.

“That’s not it at all, Sir,” he said hurriedly. “It’s that you’re coming from the war. Like us.”

She regarded him for another, heart-stopping moment, and smiled approvingly. “I know what you mean to say, soldier,” she said softly. “I haven’t forgotten so soon. I’ll tell you something.”
“Sir?” he faltered.

“I’m more a Knight than I am a noble,” she said, her smile turning a bit mischievous for a moment. “And I’m more a warrior than I am a Princess.”

“Sir.”

She chuckled, and reached up to pat his shoulder. The metal clanged dully and she nodded again for him to move past. “Get back to your patrol, soldier,” she said, almost friendly. “I’ll see you at mess.”

“Yes, Sir!”

Carmella didn’t believe him when, in hushed whispers, he told her he’d spoken to the Princess. She believed him, and he felt a sense of vindication, in mess. The Princess sat at the head of the Officer’s table, just as she deserved, and when her eyes scanned the crowds of soldiers her eyes met his - and she smirked, nodded once as though greeting him, and kept scanning.

“See?” James hissed to Carmella when the Princess sat. It was time to eat. “She looked right at me!”

“I thought you were just dreaming,” Carmella wondered. “The Princess actually spoke to you?”

“Yes! She told me, she’s a Knight more than a noble! That’s why it’s an honour! That’s why she’s here instead of someone else!”

“You think the King couldn’t complete a basic inspection?”

“No, it’s not...!” James said, frustrated. “It’s not good versus bad, it’s good versus better! She’s the best!”

“Alright, alright,” Carmella laughed. “I’m just teasing. We all know how you feel about nobles.”

James had lost his first squadron when a noble’s command had sent them on a suicide mission. He’d always been bitter about it. “Well, she’s not some noble,” he argued. “She’s the Princess.”

“The most noble of nobles,” Carmella said.

“She’s a warrior,” James spat. “She was a Knight Captain. She knows what it’s like. Don’t mock me, Carmella. You know what happened the last time a noble led my squadron. To death. She’s not like that. She’s one of us. And I’d follow her into the Firelands if I had the chance.”

“Alright,” Carmella said, raising her hands for a moment in surrender. “Why not volunteer for Prince’s Guard, then?”

“I’m not good enough,” he said. “I don’t have any illusions about that. I’d rather they get the best.”

“At least you’re not completely lost to idolatry,” she sighed.

“I would follow the Princess into the abyss,” he said quietly. “Because I wouldn’t be following her orders. I’d be following her.”

“Isn’t that the essence of it, though?” Marcus interjected, leaning forward to talk past the man sitting between them. “Isn’t that why she was chosen for the Prince?”

“Those rumours were never confirmed,” Carmella said.
“But she was chosen,” Marcus said. “I overheard the Amadeus cannoneer talking about it with their covert. The King chose Luciana Amadeus to marry the Prince.”

“It’s nice to talk about stories and rumours,” Matthew said. He was normally very quiet. “But the fact is, she’s a berserker. Is it really that good to have a fury warrior on the throne?”

“Her fury kept her alive,” James said. “We all heard about it. About her escape, and the night elves healing her, and her return to Stormwind. It was her fury that kept her going. Without it, we wouldn’t have a Princess.”

“She’s balanced, anyway, with the Prince,” Carmella said wisely. “Healer and the Warrior. Perfect mix.”

“My son never tires of that story,” Matthew laughed. “Healer tames the mighty Warrior, and the Warrior finds a righteous cause in the Healer.”

“It’s a classic for a reason,” Marcus added.

“Right. Well.” James cleared his throat. “She’s the Princess we have.”

“Soon to be Queen,” Marcus said, wagging his eyebrows. “Maybe you can be her paramour.”

“Marcus!” James snapped, aghast. “I would never...!”

“Kidding, kidding!” he laughed. “But, seriously. I think she and the Prince are gonna ascend soon. I mean, they’ve got three heirs, the King isn’t getting any younger, and the Princess is seriously one scary motherfucker. She’s got that part covered, and then some.”

“It’ll take a bit more than that,” Carmella pointed out. “But, I think you’re close. The King is probably training them both intensively so when the day comes, they’re ready.”

“And he’s not going anywhere,” Matthew reminded them. “Even if they’re the high rulers, His Majesty is still going to be there to advise them and make sure they’re prepared.”

“True enough,” Carmella said thoughtfully. “Anyway, that’s not our worry. The Royal House has it well in hand, I’m sure. It’s enough that we serve loyally.”

“Is it?” James murmured.

“What?” Marcus asked. “Didn’t catch that.”

“Nothing,” James said, shoving a fork full of potato into his mouth. Marcus shrugged it off, but James worried. Was it enough to simply be loyal? Was the Princess aware of that loyalty? How could he demonstrate it? How could he prove himself worthy of her banner? Well, the royal banner.

He’d have to think on it later. The Princess was standing to say a few words, and he’d be damned to the Void and chained to a Pit Lord if he missed any of them.
It had been three months since Freya was born, and Luciana was having the time of her life. With a twist of her hips she threw her opponent to the ground, slamming the air from his breath in a whoosh. She snarled down at him, grinning and panting.

“Y-yield,” he choked, and with a swift push of her right arm, Luciana was on her feet. She fell back a couple of steps, her body exhausted and her blood still pumping hot. She looked over to the Keep, where a small area had been set up for people who wanted to watch the people in the training area. Anduin was sitting on a bench, Freya in his lap. He had a pleased expression on his face, his gaze focused solely on Luciana, and she grinned toothily. She felt better than she had in years. Her body responded lightning-quick to her thoughts, her hands were thick and strong like bear paws, and her shoulders rolled delightfully when she fell into parade rest.

The best news she’d received since the Exodar had agreed to keep Freya safe for a handful of years had been delivered that morning. Enaeon, her favourite paladin, had told her there was now no chance she could get pregnant again. And after spending all day wrestling and pinning people to the ground, Luciana was glad for that. She hadn’t yet told Anduin, though he must have known it would happen soon. She thought it would be a nice way to distract him from his father’s impending departure for Commander Celia’s garrison in Draenor.

Luciana shook her arms out and offered her hand to the Royal Guard she’d pinned. He accepted it, still coughing, and she pulled him to his feet effortlessly. She would never tire of that feeling, of the sensation of power and strength in her body, of complete control over it. She watched the others in the training field for a few moments, and then looked back at Anduin and grinned again. He used Freya’s hand to give a little wave and Luciana chuckled. The miniature Princess had gained weight, and now looked the part of a healthy baby. Luciana couldn’t be happier.

She really couldn’t be happier. Her body was coursing with the strength she knew it should have, and that more than anything had corrected the insistent feeling of wrongness she’d been carrying around since the Horde had captured her in the Barrens. It had made her life so much easier to have her body respond to her commands with the base power she knew it should possess. She only wondered what it would be like to really let loose - to berserk - with her body back to a true warrior’s form.

She somehow managed to ignore the challenges people threw at her as she passed. It was difficult, actually, to ignore them. She wanted to fight. She wanted to fight. It hummed in her bones, reverberated in her chest. The need to fight, to shed blood, to break bones, to scream out her rage, had her gritting her teeth behind a closed-lip smile.

“Are you alright?” Anduin murmured, standing to greet her when she was near.

“Can you find someone to watch Freya for a few hours?” she murmured, pressing as close to him as she could without squishing the baby. Luciana felt him touch his forehead to hers for a moment.
“Sure, but why?”

“Because my blood feels like magma right now and I’m either going to fight or fuck. I’d really prefer the latter.”

“Oh.” Predictably, his ears turn scarlet, and it made Luciana want to eat him alive, consume him, take him, draw strangled moans and whimpers and pleas from his throat. Her pulse pounded in her crotch and she had to forcibly keep herself from shuddering and snarling in delight and want at the sensations she’d been missing these past two years. “I thought you wanted to wait?”

“Enaeon said it’s safe,” she murmured, breathing heavily through her nose. Light, she could smell him. “I’ll see you in my room?”

“I’ll try to hurry,” he laughed breathily. She knew what kind of look was in her eyes. Something dark and heavy and wanting. She could tell because she knew Anduin’s tells, and he was reacting to her arousal with a bit of well-contained excitement of his own.

She made her way through back ways and empty halls to her bedroom, where she took a moment to plan. She cleared the floor, pulled off her clothes, closed the curtains, and shut off the lights. The room was bathed in complete darkness, and it took a minute for her to be able to see anything. It might have been nothing, but she was certain her sight wasn’t that good in the dark - and yet, after another minute she could see the outlines of all her furniture clearly. Maybe it was her pounding blood.

Anduin came in through the passageway and she was ready for him. She heard his muffled gasp when she slipped a hand over his mouth and pulled him flush to her chest. Luciana closed the passageway behind them, and once again the room was bathed in utter darkness. But, she could still see. She could feel his quickened breath, and she heard him swallow nervously.

“Scared?” she murmured against his ear. It sent a shiver down his back. “Don’t be.”

“I’m not,” he replied when she slid her hand down to his neck. “It’s not fear.”

“Good,” she said, and then she forced him further into the room. She’d discussed this with him last month, when she’d been particularly frustrated and thinking of good ways to spend the return of excess energy and fury. He’d quite liked the idea of her overpowering him. He’d even wanted to struggle against her, and that had put her off of the idea completely for a time. She would have no way of knowing if he was truly struggling against her, or merely enjoying himself. He’d come up with the idea of a password, a safe word. The moment he said ‘bread pudding’, she’d back off, turn on the lights, give him space, make sure he was okay. But until he said that, or begged for her to let him come, enough, please... he belonged to her.

She forced him over to the bed, feeling him struggle against her grasp. He gasped, panted, groaned against her arms like iron bands around him, and she delighted in it, in the complete unforgiving strength she was using to control him. It was exhilarating in the way she usually only found in berserking, in being wounded, in bleeding and in battle.

“Lucy!” Anduin gasped when she shoved him forward unceremoniously onto the bed. She pulled away, leaving him completely bereft of her, and he helplessly cast around the black room, trying to see. “Lucy?”

She took care in pushing his head against the mattress. He exhaled sharply, and when she moulded herself against his back and pinned him completely against the side of the bed, he whimpered and pushed up against her. She groaned and rutted him harshly, sending him further up the side of the
“Lucy,” he whined, rutting with her. “Oh, Light, Lucy.”

“Beg me,” she breathed, next to his ear. “Fucking beg for it.”

“Please,” he gasped. “Lucy, please.”

“What?” she asked. “Please what?”

“I don’t know,” he said, trying to push up into her hips. “Something. Anything. Please.”

She smiled ferally and fit her hand around the back of his neck, her teeth against the meat of his shoulder, mimicking an animal holding down its mate. She tightened her jaws, growled, and rutted against him roughly. “Is this what you want?” she asked, releasing her hold on him. “You want to be fucked?”

“Fuck me,” he whined, and then gasped when she grabbed him around the hips and hauled him up onto the mattress. She flipped him over onto his back, using her strength judiciously, easily, and listening to the noises he made. Anduin was enjoying it as much as she was, if his gasps and whimpers were any indication.

She was already feeling her pulse pounding in her crotch. She took a moment, a brief pause, to listen to Anduin pant under her. His body was strong, wide. He had the typical Wrynn frame. But she was a warrior. She was the future Queen.

She unbuckled his belt quickly, heard him moan quietly, and roughly yanked off his pants. “You want me to fuck you?” she asked, her voice low. “You want to be fucked?”

“Please,” he choked. He was already hard. It seemed he enjoyed being on the receiving end of the roughness Luciana enjoyed using. She was glad. It meant she had one more thing she could use to please him. “Lucy. Love, please.”

That got her, and she groaned and ground her hips down against his. It didn’t do much for her, but it earned her a loud and strangled groan from his throat, and she smiled, breathing heavily. “You like it when I’m rough,” she crooned, gently smoothing his hair back and then gripping it tight in one powerful fist and giving his head a bit of a yank. “You like it when I hurt you a little, like this.” She gave it another sharp tug, and he exhaled like he’d been punched in the gut. She leaned up, braced her knees to either side of his hips, and brought her head down. She kept her lips just a fraction of an inch away from his, and enjoyed the feeling of his panted breaths against her lips. “You like it when I’m rough,” she repeated.

“Yes,” he answered weakly. “Yes, I like it. Lucy, I like it. Please.”

She let herself grin again and licked a line up his jaw, listening to him moan. She drew her tongue from his chin over his lips, and then took her hand from his hair to force his jaw open. She tasted along his tongue, licked alongside the inside of his teeth, and when she pulled back his cock was hard against her stomach and there was a desperate keen just behind everything panting breath. “You want me to take you,” she murmured. “Don’t you.”

“Yes!” he cried. “Lucy, please.”

His hands had found her overheated skin, his Light already tickling at her flesh, trying to tease her into giving in and just fucking him already. She grabbed his hands and yanked them over his head roughly, pinning them to the mattress and leaving him helpless - save his hips, which he
desperately bucked up into hers.

“Oh,” she groaned. “Oh, that’s nice, Anduin. I love seeing you like this, hot and wanting. Do you want me?”

“Yes, Lucy, I want you.”

“How bad do you want me?” she asked. “Bad enough to hurt?”

“Yes!”

A slow smile took her lips, and she wet them absently. “You want me to make it hurt?”

“Yes!”

“How much do you want it to hurt?” she asked. “Or do you even care? You just want me to fuck you.”

“Yes,” he sobbed as she again rolled her hips down against his hard cock, precum leaking out of the tip. She had already been wet from the fury and arousal pounding through her veins, but seeing him, feeling him like this was making it a desperate need.

“Wait,” she whispered, and when she left him suddenly, cold and without touch, he moaned. “Wait,” she repeated.

There were some toys and lubricant she’d hidden in the nightstand, and she took them out now. She used the silk scarves to tie his wrists together, and then tie them to the posts in her headboard, and he whined and bucked up against her crotch when she was kneeling over him. She groaned, and let her head drop against his chest as she simply enjoyed him for a moment. This soft, sweet, stupidly trusting boy of hers that wanted her so desperately. “Are you ready for me?” she asked.

“Yes, Lucy.”

“Are you ready for this?” she asked, placing the pad of her pointer finger against his anus. His breath stuttered and he froze for a half-second. They’d talked about it at length, before. Anduin had expressed a desire to be penetrated, though not necessarily actively, and when she’d mentioned the plug he’d jumped on it as exactly the kind of thing he wanted. She’d told him he’d have to clean himself out, first, and he’d simply nodded away while she talked. Earlier, Anduin had taken a while to reach her after dropping Freya off with a nanny, and she could almost too easily smell the oils used to help flush out the anus with an enema. She asked to make sure, and also to give him a chance to back out. They could always try again another time.

“Yes,” he whispered.

Just as they’d discussed, she moved so her hips were in between his thighs, holding them open. She distracted him from her hands at his crotch with her mouth at his throat, nipping and sucking and licking. He gasped, moaned, made little noises that caught in his throat that made Luciana’s chest feel oddly loose. He was so vulnerable, under her. So open and giving. She pressed an open-mouthed kiss to his throat, felt the apple in his throat with her tongue. He trusted her so easily. He was so delicate. She could break his ribs with a palm pressed just a bit too hard to his chest. She could bite his throat out with a snap of teeth and a twist. She could smash his skull with her forehead, effortless, quick. She could squeeze her hands into his waist, squeeze him in half - she’d done it before, had crowed in delight at it, and she looked forward to a time when she could do it again. He would die so easily in her hands. She could bathe in his blood. And she didn’t doubt he’d
let her. She didn’t doubt he knew all of this.

“Alright?” she breathed.

“Yes.”

She gently worked one fingertip past the tight entrance, covered in lubricant to ease it, to keep from hurting him. This part wasn’t supposed to hurt. The bites, the bruising grip - that was supposed to hurt. He wasn’t supposed to hurt from this gentle preparation. He wasn’t supposed to feel violated and abused. He was supposed to feel satiated, his needs fulfilled. *Safety and happiness.*

She listened to him pant, saw the blush that was peppered across his chest and shoulders. Luciana kissed and licked at his neck, his jaw, his chest, as she worked a full finger into him. “Alright?” she murmured.

“Yes,” he answered breathlessly. “Oh, yes. Oh, Light.” He let out a long, low moan when she used her other hand to brush the underside of his cock. “Oh, fuck.” He drew it out, moaning with each panting breath whenever her hand teased his cock. It was distracting him quite well, but she had to balance it, keeping him aroused but keeping him from getting too close to coming. She didn’t want him to involuntary tighten his anus while she was trying to loosen it. If her fingers were moving while he did it, it would hurt. This part wasn’t supposed to hurt. That would come after.

“Alright?” she asked again when she had two fingers inside him.

“Yes. Ah!” His legs jumped up and his breath caught for a moment - she’d brushed the tip of her middle finger against his prostate. “Lucy?” he stuttered.

“That was your prostate,” she said. “Felt good, didn’t it?”

“Ye-s-s-s!” She brushed it again, and again a few more times, and he was hard pressed to keep breathing while her other hand was still working his weeping, twitching cock. “Lucy,” he sobbed. “Please, please, Lucy. Light, please.”

“Soon,” she promised, purred, against the side of his neck. “One more finger. Can you handle one more finger?”

“Yes,” he said. She wasn’t sure he was hearing her anymore.

“Don’t come yet,” she warned. “You’re not allowed to come until I do. Can you do that? Maybe you can use the Light somehow. If you can make me come with the Light you can try to keep yourself from coming. Can you try?”

“Yes.”

They’d discussed that, too. Anduin had tried on his own, and had been partially successful - but it was apparently hard to concentrate on the Light while pleasuring himself. Luciana was more than willing to take the chance that it wouldn’t really work now, either. She could always work him up again. It was so easy. He couldn’t be easier to read if he’d written her an open letter.

She got a third finger into him and he was trembling and sweating when she touched her mouth to the underside of his chin. “I’m going to put in the plug,” she said against his neck. “Ready for it?”

“Yes.”

“Alright.”
She coated the plug in lubricant, put more against his already slippery anus, and used her mouth on his skin to distract him and keep him from tensing too much while she slowly worked the plug into him. “Wait,” he choked, and she paused. His legs were trembling against her waist.

“Anduin?” she murmured. She waited for his response.

“Okay,” he said after a moment.

She continued, licking sweat off his chest, kissing his mouth softly. When the plug popped in and settled Anduin moaned and rolled his hips up languorously, wantonly.

“Don’t come until I say you can,” Luciana murmured. “And if you really, absolutely have to, if you feel like you’re going to die, if you can’t feel your legs and you’re sobbing and broken, do you know what to say?”

“Wife, I want to come inside you,” he replied dutifully.

“Good boy,” she groaned as she finally, finally slipped his hard cock into herself. It was thick, so satisfyingly thick, and hot and stiff and he was inside her. He was always in her, in her thoughts, and sometimes it felt like he’d crawled under her skin sometime in the past few years and taken up residence inside her, but this was different. This was physical, and Luciana was a physical being. She was a warrior. Everything about her was physical, bodily, animal.

And, oh, the noise she wrought from Anduin’s throat was so satisfying in a way she couldn’t easily explain. Especially not now, when she could finally grind down on him, slip an arm under his back and press a hand against his side hard enough to bruise.

She let his cries come out, interrupted or outright swallowed some when she kissed him, pressed him down hard into the mattress, and let her own orgasm build. Every time his cock hit her cervix, every time he thrust up wildly, every time her clit brushed his skin or she used the pad of her finger, every heartbeat that sent its echo through her entire torso, it built. “Don’t come,” she reminded him. “I’m gonna come. You don’t come yet. Understand? Anduin, say it. Say you won’t come yet.”

“I won’t come yet,” he managed to say, and Luciana moaned and arched down, pressing her face into the pillow beside him to muffle a sudden and brief roar that petered out into a moan and came. Anduin sobbed once, strangled and loud, and settled for only a moment before continuing to try and thrust up into her, even with her great weight bearing down on him.

“Oh, fuck,” she whimpered, feeling his Light right in her crotch. “Anduin, you fucking little shit, you whore oh my Light, oh fuck—” her voice trailed off, and she came again, much too soon, not at all satisfying compared to some of the orgasms she’d had, but oh, if it didn’t leave a tight heat in her gut.

Lesson learned, she lifted her hips away from his and ignored the pained groan that resulted. “Oh, my Light,” she panted. “Oh. Anduin. You little whore.”

He laughed breathlessly, and shifted his hips. “Please, Lucy?” he begged, licking his swollen lips. “Please, Lucy. Please, fuck me more.”

She clenched her jaw for a moment, debating. “I’m going to turn on the lights,” she said, and saw him nod frantically. She had no doubt he’d do whatever she wanted if she would just keep fucking him. “I want to blindfold you. Can I?”

“Yes.”
“Wait,” she said, and her legs didn’t want to work quite right but she managed. She slipped another silk scarf around his head, careful not to tie up his hair or catch his ears. When that was done she turned up the werelights slowly so she wouldn’t blind herself. “Alright?” she asked.

“Yes.”

“Good. Because I really want to fuck you until you want to die.” He moaned and she clambered back onto the bed, settled down against his hips, and waited. He bucked up, desperate, and she laughed lowly. “You’re going to keep doing that thing with the Light,” she told him. “Because I really liked that. But you need to let it build a bit more. The more I come, the better I come, the sooner you can come. Understand?”

“Yes, Lucy.”

“Say yes, my love.”

“Yes, my love.”

“Good. You can say that instead of my name. I like that.”

“Yes, my love.”

She smiled, bared her teeth, and nipped at the base of his throat. He was stiff, hard and throbbing, and she was wet enough to drip and he slid so easily back into her, like he belonged there. He was crying a bit, tears soaking through the silk, and she kept him going as long as she dared, the Light a flickering fire in her cunt. The Light surged suddenly, and she came again, tearing up with the force of it and pressing down into Anduin, letting it rumble through her with muted sounds of enjoyment and hands that grasped at anything they could reach. One balled up in the sheets. The other found Anduin’s neck, and squeezed. She heard him choke after a few seconds, and let go. He coughed once, breathed hard.

“Are you okay?” she asked.

“Yes, my love,” he answered hoarsely. She leaned up to kiss him.

“Are you really okay?” she asked quietly. “I didn’t mean to do that.”

“I’m fine,” he promised, a loose smile on his face. “Really.”

“You’d tell me?”

“Yes, I would.”

“Good.” She kissed his neck in apology, seeing a red pattern where bruises would form, and her ever-working mind made a note to remind him to heal those before leaving the room afterward. It would embarrass him, he embarrassed so easily. “Then I’m going to keep fucking you. I’m not satisfied yet. That sound like a good idea to you?”

“Yes, my love,” he groaned, and she started fucking him again, rough and hard.

She came twice more, and then pinned his hips down and masturbated while he was inside her. “Lucy,” he gasped. “Love, please. Please, I want to come.”

“What you want doesn’t matter right now,” she panted. “I’m not done yet.”

She groaned, heat trilling up her spine, and leaned down. “Oh, Anduin. You’re a fucking whore. You belong to me. Say it.”

“Lucy...?” he breathed.

“I’m gonna make you come, Anduin. So say it. Say you’re a fucking whore. Say you belong to me.”

“I’m a fucking whore,” he repeated dutifully, stammering and loose. “I belong to you.”

“You belong to me. No one else. Just me.”

“Just you,” he promised. “Lucy, please. Lucy.”

“You wanna come?” she panted, nearing her own climax once more. “Come for me, Anduin. Come inside me. Come on.” It took him a few moments, after resisting it for so long, to let it build the last few notches. “Come inside your wife. Fuck your wife. Come inside her. Fill your wife’s empty womb with the seed that filled her with three children. Come, Anduin.”

That sent him right over, and he choked on a keening howl as he came, his shoulders coming up off the bed, his body shaking with the tension in his abdomen. His thighs were clenched under Luciana’s weight, unable to move past that. She watched him come completely undone, moaning brokenly and shaking and so utterly spent, and made herself come one more time, clenching around his cock. That earned her one more pained moan, and she savoured it as the orgasm rolled through her body, finally sapping the rest of her energy.

Her limbs were loose now, jelly-like and so gratifyingly weak. Anduin could hardly do anything but keep breathing under her, and she braced part of her considerable weight on one elbow. Luciana rested her forehead against his clavicle, listening to his breathing as it slowly evened out. He wasn’t moving, save the occasionally shifting of his arms.

Thoughtlessly she reached up and tugged at the silk around his wrists until they were released. He brought his arms down, the silk trailing as she tugged it off him, and he rested his hands for a moment on the back of her shoulders before letting them fall limply to the mattress. His wrists were bright red from the rub of the scarf and she absently soothed one with gentle rubbing fingers.

“Oh,” he breathed.

She laughed lazily. “I just fucked your goddamn brains out and all you can say is ‘oh’,” she chuckled.

“Yeah,” he agreed easily, and then he breathed a laugh of his own. “You called me a whore. Your whore.”

“Yeah. Should I not do that again?” she asked.

“No. Yeah. I mean,” he stuttered. “Now, it seems... unpleasant. But, in the heat of it, I liked it.”

“You like dirty talk,” she reminded him gently.

“Yeah, I do,” he agreed.

“I’ll keep it in mind for next time,” she promised.

“Next time?” he squeaked. “You’re planning on torturing me again?”
“Ha!” she laughed sharply. “If this is your definition of torture,” she started, and cut it off. She didn’t want to talk about the cell right now. “You want me to take out the plug now or after?” she asked. Sometimes people wanted to wait a bit and cool down, first, but it was Anduin’s body.

“Now, please. Slowly.”

“Of course.”

She carefully worked it out, and when it popped out she held it in her hand carefully and stood. “I’ll be right back,” she said.

“Do you have to go?” Anduin whined. He tried to sit up, and winced and let himself fall back down. Luciana’s brow furrowed.

“Are you alright?” she asked, taking a step back towards the bed. He waved her off.

“Fine, fine,” he said easily. “Just need a moment.”

She eyed him doubtfully. “If your back is hurting, let me take care of it,” she said. “Or is it your hips again?”

“... A bit of both,” he answered honestly after a moment of deliberation, seeing genuine worry in her eyes. He smiled, the expression loose and easy. “Like I said, I just need a moment to let the muscles calm down a bit. I’ll be fine in a minute. Really,” he added. “I learned my lesson last time.”

“The time your knee locked up and you fell down the stairs and had to Shield yourself, right after promising me up, down, and sideways you were perfectly fine?” she said dryly. “Alright. Please, though, if you’re really hurting, tell me. I can help.”

“I will,” he answered.

She smiled. “You could come with me to the bathroom if you really wanted, but it doesn’t look like you can stand just yet.”

“I’ll wait,” he sighed. “I’ll be fine in a minute, and then maybe I’ll get up.”

“Or maybe you’ll be lazy like you always are after we fuck,” Luciana chuckled.

She cleaned off the plug, peed, and rejoined him in the bed. She turned down the werelights on the way to a low level, just enough to see by. When Anduin could stand and his cock was flaccid he stood and limped-tottered to the bathroom, and when he came back and slipped under the covers shivering, Luciana laughed and pulled him close.

“Did you enjoy that?” she murmured.

“Yes, I did.”

“Tell me a bit more than that, then, so I can refine the next time.”

He groaned into her shoulder. “Can we do that later?” he whined. “I’m tired.”

“Alright,” she laughed, kissing his forehead. “But we are talking about it.” She hesitated. “Is your neck really okay?” she asked. “I didn’t mean to do that, but...”

“It’s fine,” he soothed. “Really, it is. Maybe we can try something like it next time. Not quite so
tight, though. I couldn’t breathe at all. Maybe if you squeeze at the sides and cut off a bit of blood flow, instead of at the throat...”

She smiled into his hair. “We can try it,” she said.

“You’re okay with that?”

“Yeah,” she responded. She knew why he was asking. “I can keep a pretty fine control on my strength. Especially now, I find, after spending months redeveloping it.”

“Alright,” he mumbled. She relaxed, let what felt like a year’s worth of tension drop out of her, and sighed. It was quiet now, and Anduin was satiated, and she was fully and completely satisfied for once, and it was overall a very nice feeling.
They didn’t rest for long. Luciana recovered quickly and was fully awake again before the clock struck the next hour. Anduin took a bit longer, but he started to stir well before they were supposed to get ready for dinner.

He groaned and stretched languorously. Luciana could see satisfaction in every line of his body, including the smile that grew on his face before he even opened his eyes. “Hey, sleepy.” She watched him slowly sit up, leaning his weight on his left hand to look down at her.

“Hey,” he mumbled, and smacked his lips. “Ugh, sleepy mouth.”

She chuckled, reaching up to brush some hair from his eyes. “So,” she said quietly.

“So?” he asked, shifting on the mattress so he was sitting up against the headboard, surrounded by pillows.

Luciana crawled over him, moving slowly, feeling her muscles roll under the skin. Anduin’s gaze raked her form and she grinned, drawing herself up his torso and straddling his hips. “So,” she said. “We should talk about it.”

“Allright,” he said, still wearing a small, amused smile. Luciana settled in his lap and settled her arms around him, hands at his tailbone. “I liked you being rough with me.”

“And I liked being rough,” she responded easily. “Did you like it when I grabbed you? Like here?” she asked, placing her hand over his side where she’d gripped him tightly. Just as she’d predicted, it was bruising blue in the pattern of her fingers.

“I did,” he said. “It’s a bit sore now, but I liked it then.”

“Do you want me to do that a bit more often?”

“Yeah. I wouldn’t always want the same sex...”

“Sometimes it’s nice to be gentle,” she agreed. “Slow, or sleepy, or quick. Varied.”

“Exactly,” he said. She wet her lips and leaned in to kiss him softly. He smiled under her lips. “I liked the plug. That was a good idea.”

“I thought it might be,” she hummed. “You wanted to be penetrated, not necessarily taken like that. It’s a good middle.”

He hummed in agreement. “I liked being tied up.”

“Did you?” she murmured, kissing him again, slowly. “Good.”

“I’d like to try tying you up sometime.”

“I’d like to try that, too,” she said. “But not with my hands over my head.”

"Because of..."

"Yes. Maybe to the side, or behind my back. We'll see. Would you want to be rough like I was?”
“I’m not sure,” he replied. “Maybe. I’ll think on that.”

“Good idea.” She kept placing gentle kisses, claiming his lips sweetly. “It’s not enough,” she murmured.

“What isn’t? This?” He gave her ass a squeeze.

“No, you little shit,” she grumbled. “Anything. It’s not enough. I can’t... I can’t express it properly. I just don’t feel like it’s enough. I say I love you and I mean it. Light, do I mean it. But I don’t feel it’s enough.”

“Because you think I’m not getting it?” he tried. “Because I know you love me. I know how much you care. Light, Lucy, you let me impregnate you.”

“I know,” she chuckled. “That’s not it. It’s like... I can’t get the door open all the way,” she said. “I can see through it and you can hear me through it. I can reach an arm in. But I can’t squeeze through.”

“I get it,” he said. “I don’t really know why you’d feel like that but I get what you’re trying to say.”

“Good,” she hummed. She cupped the back of his neck and kissed him slowly, licked at his lips until he opened them, surrendered, and she kissed him soundly. It left his breath a bit harder, his eyelashes fluttering.

“Oh,” he sighed.

“Oh,” she mocked with a fond smile. “Is that all you can say?”

“What else could I say?” he murmured, reaching up to bury his hands in her short hair. Luciana slid her hand around, cupped it over his throat.

“I love this,” she murmured, gently caressing his neck and under his chin.

“What, strangling me?” he joked.

“No, you fuck,” she said without any bite. “This. Softness.”

“My skin is soft...?”

“No. Well, it is. You’re so soft. For me, I mean.”

“I get it,” he muttered, raising his chin when she dipped her head. She peppered kisses along the underside of his chin, down his neck, and rested her lips against his pulse point. “You’re soft too, you now. Like right now. I wouldn’t believe you could be so sweet if I didn’t know you.”

She half-smiled, the left side of her lips turning up much more easily than the right. The right side was pulled down permanently by the three ragged scars on her jaw, and it made her look constantly on the verge of a mightily displeased scowl. It never seemed to bother Anduin, and Bolvar found the scars downright fascinating most of the time. “I wouldn’t believe it of myself, either,” she replied. “If I didn’t know you, I don’t think I could be soft.”

“You would have found someone,” he assured.

“I don’t think so. I wasn’t looking. I didn’t think there was a point.”

“I’m glad Father saw you, then,” Anduin said.
“He was looking for the both of us, I think.”

“He could, of all people.”

“Mm.” She hummed against his neck, drew her lips across his skin until she could kiss along his jaw and then claim his lips again, softly. “And I guess a bit for himself.” She saw Anduin’s brow furrow and explained. “He’s lonely, Anduin. For the longest time he was alone. The only Wrynn left. Then he had a wife, he had a child - and then he lost his wife, and for a while he lost himself. And he’s deathly afraid of losing you. He doesn’t want to be alone again. So he found someone he thought could keep that from happening.”

“You,” Anduin supplied. “He thought you’d protect me?”

“He thought I’d protect you, and maybe help grow the family again,” she replied. “He thought I could understand where he was coming from - and I do. I’d fight like a Pit Lord to keep you safe. I’d come back from the dead just because I was mad enough that someone would even think to hurt you. I would kill a thousand people in cold blood, easily.”

“He’s pretty naturally introverted,” Anduin said.

“He is. That doesn’t mean he can’t get lonely. Being a warrior surrounded by non-warriors can be... isolating. Difficult, at best. He’s also the King of Stormwind. And the things he went through make it hard for him to connect to people. I understand, at least most of it. I’ve never been split in half or controlled by a dragon, but I am a warrior and I’ve walked through bloody hell. I’ve got the scars to prove it.”

“He loves you,” Anduin murmured. “He thinks of you as his own daughter. Which, I guess, you are...”

“In law,” she said. “You’re right. He does.”

“Do you see him as your father, then?”

“Yes. He’s definitely more my father than Bertrand,” she said. “He was a good parent but he couldn’t understand me. Varian can. He does. He’s not afraid of me when I move too quickly, he doesn’t hide in the corner when I get angry, he doesn’t balk from questioning me. It can be hard to raise a warrior if you aren’t one, I know. But Bertrand is a bit of a pushover, to be honest.”

“When it comes to business, he isn’t,” Anduin said.

“No. When it’s about trade, he’s a cutthroat. But when it comes to anything domestic, especially anything to do with my mother, he is. I think he feels sorry for her. She had a Knight lover, you know, before she was betrothed to my father.”

“Really?”

“Yeah.” Luciana sighed heavily, letting her hands slip down Anduin’s back to his tailbone, where they rested. She flattened her palms over his chilled skin and felt him shiver. “He was of middling rank. I think a Captain. He was killed in combat. She spent months waiting for him to come back, and when they announced him dead, she agreed to marry Bertrand. Who, by the way, was pretty well off even without his House. He’s a brilliant businessman.”

“I see,” Anduin murmured. “That’s why she didn’t want you to return to the army.”

“She probably saw the parallel when I was betrothed to you,” Luciana said.
“And you were gone for months, too,” Anduin added. “And I thought you were dead.”

“But you didn’t agree to marry someone else.”

“How could I?” he mumbled, catching her lips in a soft kiss. “You made me an oath. And Father wasn’t the only lonely Wrynn.”

She hummed and leaned her forehead against his, letting him kiss her twice more before smiling and leaning to the side so that her temple was against his forehead. He whined in protest and tried to follow her and she laughed, letting him kiss her cheek instead. “You were lonely?” she prompted.

“Eh? Ah, yeah, I was,” he said, catching his previous train of thought. “I was alone, except for Father. And you say a warrior is isolated around non-warriors, but I’m a priest. He thought... He thought it was best if I was a warrior, like him. It’s why I learned archery, and I was pretty good at it, but I was always shit with any kind of melee. For a while we just couldn’t seem to communicate anything properly. After the Cataclysm it got easier. I think he caught on a bit, especially after I saved his life, twice, with a Power Word: Shield. But, I’m the Prince. I’m not even really supposed to fraternize with other nobility, to keep from showing any favouritism or such. And after Onyxia...”

“I understand. Neither of you wanted to let someone else in.”

“The last time he did, it turned out to be a black dragon,” he said, and chuckled bitterly. “That kind of leaves a mark.”

“Mm. Well, I can promise you that I am not a black dragon. Or any other colour.”

“I think I would’ve noticed it by now.” To illustrate, he bade his Light suffuse her back with gentle warmth, and she shivered at the sensation. It wasn’t unlike water droplets dripping down her skin, though it didn’t tickle quite so much, and it wasn’t just a few isolated strands - it saturated her skin, bled into her muscle and she fancied she could feel it murmur against her bones.

“I never tire of that,” she said, relaxing against his chest.

“I don’t, either.” He wrapped his arms around her back and held her close, setting his chin on her shoulder and pressing his cheek against her head. She felt his breath ruffle her hair.

“I have a question,” she said.

“Ask away. Unless it’s about the bones I keep in the third drawer. That’s private.”

“What?”

She felt his chest bounce with his laughter. “Nothing, just a joke. What is it?”

“How did you get such dark blue eyes when your father’s are so light?”

“Mother’s eyes were blue, I’m told, and Father’s eyes are as well,” Anduin started. “Dark blue, like a deep lake. Actually, they were quite beautiful. After his two halves fused again, they were much lighter. No one could figure out why.”

“Did Lo’gosh have different coloured eyes?”

“I don’t know,” Anduin said. “Maybe? You could ask Father.”
“It’s not a big deal,” she shrugged. “Just a random wondering I’ve had a few times. Blue eyes aren’t usually so light and Varian’s are nearly white sometimes.”

“I know.” He sighed quietly, contently, and she did her utmost to bury her face into the crook of his head. “Hey, that tickles! Your hair’s in my ear!” he complained.

“Deal with it,” she rumbled against his neck. “I ain’t budging.”

He laughed again, and carded his fingers through her hair. “I think we need showers,” he said conversationally.

“It can wait.”

“Bolvar has grey eyes like you now,” Anduin continued. “And Alaric’s eyes are, I think, going to stay blue.”

“Freya’s are turning grey,” Luciana added. “Want to try for a fourth and see if we can even them out?”

“No!” he blurted, and then they both laughed.

“Maybe not, huh?” she sighed. “I think one twin situation and a stillborn scare are enough.”

“I’m glad we have three beautiful children,” Anduin said. “But yes. I think that’s enough.”

“Maybe we should try and get someone to give Varian another brat,” Luciana suggested.

“Also no!” Anduin said.

“Why not?” Luciana asked. “We could at least find him someone to keep him company.”

“Sure, but we don’t need to have another second generation Wrynn running around. That would really only complicate things. Besides, he’s helping to raise our kids. He’s getting the experience without the hassle.”

“Right, because at the end of the day they’re still someone else’s kids,” she said. “But you know he’d still die for them.”

“Without question,” Anduin said.

“And you’re right. Obviously,” she snorted. “His second kid would be on the throne before Alaric, even though he’d be younger, and it would make a big old mess.”


“Agreed.”

“I think he’d like someone calm,” Anduin said. “With a good sense of humour.”

“Not a fighter, definitely. He needs someone to balance him out.”

“Intelligent,” Anduin added.

“And super observant. But passive about it. Someone who’s completely uninterested in the Game. So there’s no chance of them trying to use him for power.”
“Yes,” Anduin agreed. “And they should be kind. Selfless.”

“Giving,” Luciana provided. “Empathetic.”

“Scared,” Anduin said. “Someone who’s scared, who he can protect. But also independent. It’s hard to balance those two,” Anduin said thoughtfully. “Maybe... We can play them. Make him into the safe house, somewhere they don’t have to go to but it’s there if they need to retreat.”

“Almost certainly not a noble. It’s rare that they’re not concerned with the Game, what with how we’re raised,” Luciana pointed out.

“True enough. So, probably a citizen... a civilian. But then they probably won’t be able to get past his title.”

“That will take time,” Luciana said. “But it can happen. It happened with us. But I wasn’t that far below you, anyway.”

“We can work on it,” Anduin said. “Certainly once he notices they’re not trying to use him, it’ll be easier.”

“If we can find a good one, he’ll see that almost immediately.” Luciana hadn’t moved her face from Anduin’s neck and apparently it tickled when she talked, because he tried to shrug her away from his neck. “Alright, alright, I get the point,” she laughed, leaning back and letting her elbows bend over his shoulders slightly. She pulled at him to close the distance between them a bit more, and shifted her thighs around his hips to a more comfortable position. “So. Someone calm with a good sense of humour, non-fighting and intelligent, kind and giving, observant, uninterested in the Game, who he can protect, who can get past his title, who we can trust.”

“Someone who wants Varian, and not the King,” Anduin added.

“And someone who doesn’t necessarily want to be a Wrynn,” Luciana finished. “Long list. What about body type?” she asked.

“I don’t think that matters as much,” Anduin replied. “And honestly I’m not sure what he likes. He doesn’t talk about it. Well, he asked me what I like and had absolutely no problem making me blush, but he never talks about his own preferences.”

“I could try to get it out of him,” she asked. “Obviously he’s going to know what we’re doing.”

“Obviously,” Anduin agreed. “But he’d probably allow it.”

“He’d probably just think we’re amusing ourselves for a while,” Luciana laughed. “So I’ll try to get it out of him? I think he’d like someone soft, to be honest. Not hard and muscular. Maybe slim? I’ll find out.”

“Let’s start by trying to find them by faults, and not virtues,” Anduin said, moving on. “Hidden virtues are good. Hidden faults aren’t such good news.”

“Right,” Luciana replied. “You know what to look for?”

“Generally, but I think you could probably give me some tips.”

“Probably,” she agreed. “I’m trained to pick out weak spots. Okay. Look for someone who fades into the background easily, but their eyes move a lot. They seem to see everything that’s going on in a room, but they don’t get in the way. They don’t stand over people, they’re hyper aware of the
spaces around people, maybe they don’t speak loudly or over people. Sometimes they might be interrupted and they will allow it to avoid conflict. If someone is being aggressive with them, they’ll let it slide. If they’re doing it to conserve energy, if they don’t seem frightened but maybe exasperated or tired instead, that’s a good sign. They’re probably paranoid,” she added. “Or anxious. Or both. They need to be able to handle it on their own, though. And look for people who smile a lot, who easily reassure people or are very patient with others.”

“Not necessarily a doormat, though,” Anduin said. “Actually, not at all a doormat. But patient and respectful, definitely.”

“Yes. Someone who is patient and thoughtful, but not a pushover. It’s all about balance,” Luciana added. “If they speak quietly in a quiet room, that’s a good sign. They’re respectful of the space they’re in.”

“Okay,” Anduin nodded. “What about clothing style? That can tell a lot about a person.”

“I think for Varian it would be best if the person didn’t really care about style,” Luciana said. “Comfort and practicality over style. You’ve seen the kind of thing he wears when he’s in private. Simple stuff.”

“He dresses like a peasant,” Anduin chuckled.

“Or a woodsman,” Luciana countered. “Didn’t you say he’d prefer to live alone in the forest?”

“Oh, yes.”


“Someone who Father has to give reason to trust him,” Anduin said, eyes bright. “Someone he has to be patient with.”

“Someone who’s been hurt, maybe pretty badly, and who needs time to build trust.”

“With all of the little things.”

“If they’re paranoid, he has to prove his intentions are honest. He has to prove they can trust him not to hurt them, either emotionally or physically.”

“That he’s not trying to use them.”

Luciana leaned away to look at Anduin directly. “He has to show them he’s not going to use his authority over them,” Luciana said. “That’s the biggest issue they’re going to face.”

“Oh, Light,” Anduin said, dropping his chin. “That’s going to be hard. How do you prove that?”

“I think I know a way,” Luciana said. “But we’ll figure out a solid plan when we find a viable candidate.”

“That makes it sound so terrible,” Anduin chuckled.

“Yeah, but it’s true,” Luciana sighed again, felt Anduin’s Light fluctuate in her core and fade. A shiver ran down her back and she arched it, her head going back to stretch. She rolled her shoulders tightly, and settled again with a deep exhale. “We’ll think on it for a while,” she said. “Keep our eyes open.”
“I’ll keep an eye out for people who visit the Keep,” Anduin said. “There’s a huge public area I can occupy. The library, the gardens, the Main Hall...”

“I’ll look around in the city on occasion,” Luciana said. “And I’ll keep an eye on the people who visit the training area or the sparring rings in the Old Town. Though I think, really, it’s be best to match him with a non-combatant.”

“Or a magic user,” Anduin added.

“You know what?” Luciana said. “I think it’ll keep him from lingering on the throne too long. I’m not overly eager to take it for ourselves, but there is a limit.”

“He is getting a bit old,” Anduin joked. “But he’ll be around a long time. I don’t think he’s going anywhere when he has grandkids to help raise.”

“Oh, definitely,” Luciana agreed. “I count on him being here a while yet. I just don’t want to be standing around when he’s sixty-five and still high ruler.”

“I think it can wait a few more years, at least,” Anduin chuckled.

“We’ll see. For now, I think it’s almost dinner time.”

“Do you want to shower together?”

“Sure, but shower sex is awfully awkward.”

“Lucy!”
It wasn’t that he was paranoid. Well, he was a little paranoid. Decades of people trying to assassinate you would certainly do that to a man. Watching a trusted friend murder your father in cold blood would do it, too.

Having the senses of a wolf demigod had its advantages, but also some disadvantages. One of the more unpleasant ones was that he could never seem to get enough sleep. Something always woke him, whether it was some inaudible noise from another part of the castle, or an errant thought that strayed into his mind at an inopportune time in his sleep cycle. And of course he’d wake, alert and tensed and ready for a fight, and he wouldn’t be able to relax until he checked the perimeter of his home. For the King, that meant pacing the major halls of the entire castle.

He had to check. He had to be sure. His instincts were screaming at him because now he didn’t have one son surrounded by trustworthy Royal Guards and loyal SI:7. No, now he had an entire pack to take care of, and he’d be damned to the Void if he let anything happen to them. Especially the little ones. He knew Luciana could take care of herself. Light, he’d fought her when she was still young and fresh. Relatively young and fresh. Now she was nearly on par with him, and she had three young children to defend, though one was slated to move to the Exodar soon with her draenei.

Merely checking the Royal Wing wasn’t enough. He had to check the public areas too. There could be any number of dangers hiding there. Assassins, invaders, Horde. He wouldn’t let them take Luciana again. He’d slaughter them all himself, first.

He didn’t carry Shalamayne with him. That would too easily identify him. In his night clothes he looked like a regular man, albeit an abnormally tall one with strangely long hair. He tied it back at the base of his neck, long used to having it there, and ran through his mental list of known locations of readily accessible weapons in the Keep before heading out.

It was nearing one in the morning, and he’d barely slept for an hour before. It didn't matter. Varian felt alert, wound tight like a coil. Anything that jumped at him would get a very nasty surprise from an ex-gladiator who was very famous for a very good reason.

He checked the gardens, sniffed at the air and listened closely. Nothing, except maybe Crithto’s latest excavation attempt kicking the scent of fresh black soil everywhere. He picked up on the hint of the scent of the draenei girl that could often be found playing with Crithto, but nothing was out of there ordinary in the gardens. He moved on.

The petitioner’s chamber was similarly untouched. He smelled various humans, some he recognized, and paper and ink and old, cut wood. A hint of blood made him recall that two farmers arguing over a lost lamb had gotten into a fist-fight that day. The blood did smell human, so he moved on.

The war room, where champions of the alliance could confer with the military experts that drove their campaigns, was empty. The Alliance officers had left hours ago for some well-earned downtime. The smell of armour polish and leather lingered. The scent of wax clung to the walls from the thousands of missives sealed and stamped each day. Varian’s instincts were silent, so he moved on.

The public library was quite expansive, having grown much over the past decade or so. It was labyrinthine, and Varian made sure to check every nook and cranny, sniffing the air cautiously and listening-
He heard a heartbeat in the otherwise still night air. He turned, sniffed again. Human, female. The heartbeat was slow. She was asleep. He found her moments later, her head pillowed on her arms and a handful of old books left open on the table. He watched her for a moment. She didn’t seem nearly physically fit enough to be an assassin, but illusions weren’t rare in the business and Varian was cautious.

He approached her, placed a knife he always kept hidden on his person over her neck and waited. If it was an assassin, they’d react. Her heartbeat hadn’t changed, her breathing was even. Varian retracted the knife, sheathed it, and woke her with a hand on her shoulder.

She let out a quick, short sound that was somewhere between a hum and a groan, and sat up. “Ugh,” she groaned. “Why do I always do this to myself.”

Varian smiled mutely. She was okay, that was good. No sedatives or poisons. “It’s late,” he murmured, pitching his voice so she wouldn’t recognize him. Though, she seemed about half-dead from exhaustion.

“Yes, I can see that,” she said dryly, looking around at the dark library. “Alright,” she sighed, standing and stretching. “I’d best get home.”

“Are you alright to get there?” Varian asked.

“Oh, I’m fine. This happens all the time. I live in the Dwarven District, anyway, not far from here.”

“Good.” He backed up to give her space.

“Thanks for waking me,” she said brightly, gathering her things. She took a moment, closing and stacking the books that belonged to the library, and then she was off, yawning hard enough that Varian heard her jaw crack from a considerable distance.

He watched her go for a moment. She obviously hadn’t recognized him. Otherwise she wouldn’t have been so casual with him. She would have genuflected, used his title, or otherwise shown the respect deserved to a King from his subjects.

He liked her, he decided. Obviously she was dedicated to her studies - he rifled through the books left behind, discovered she had been reading complexly written documents and old scholarly books on social customs, comparing mostly dwarven and human culture. She seemed bright enough, if the level of complicatedness of the texts was any indication. He hadn’t gotten a good look at her, but her voice was pleasant enough to his ears when it was still coloured with sleep, and her scent - Varian sniffed the air over the chair she’d been sleeping in.

Of all the scents Varian had been subject to since his rejoining, this was one of the most pleasing. It was a soft scent, not overt, with multiple layers to it. Such layering, he knew, came from experience and self-awareness. He smelled the wool of her clothes, the fruity something she’d eaten earlier, and her individual scent was underneath those. A damp forest, a mountainside. It was light and honey-sweet with layers of grass and wood and... Why would her scent have fear ingrained into it?

Fear had a specific tang. Varian found it a bit metallic, though Genn thought it was more like sour water. The woman had that metallic hint as a permanent part of her natural scent. That was almost... worrisome. Luciana had metal in her scent, Varian found, but it was not fear. It was the smell of a weapon, a hard edge, the ability to create fear. This woman had fear as her constant companion. Varian worried for her for a moment, mild and easily shaken, and then he brushed it off. He couldn’t look after each individual citizen, no matter how much he wanted to be able to do just
No, he’d have to trust that an obviously independent woman had it well in hand. It had appeared to him that she did have a handle on it, as she’d hardly reacted to him at all save a quick awakening and a well-angled shoulder. Had he made a grab for her, she would have been able to twist out of it. Though he was much stronger than her. That much was obvious by her scent. She had a lot of fat, sweet like honey in her scent.

It stuck in his nose and he gave a snort and shook his head to try and dispel it. Luciana was lucky she didn’t have such an... active blessing. She’d have all sorts of scents stuck in her nose all day and then she’d see how awkward it was to sit down to dinner with your two kids who both smelled faintly of sex. Probably rough sex, too, if the bruises Anduin had been developing alongside the red in his ears was anything to go by. Varian usually just ignored it. No use in embarrassing the poor boy, though Luciana would probably get right into talking about her favourite parts if Anduin wasn’t there. They were warriors, after all, her and Varian, and warriors knew that a body was just a tool to be used. Trained, honed to perfection, and used for whatever purpose they saw fit. If you had a good tool, why be embarrassed? It was better to be proud of it.

Varian knew he didn’t have to check the Greymane Wing. Genn was capable in his own rights, and the senses and instincts of many worgen were even sharper than Varian’s. Not all, but still many. And Genn was the alpha, the patriarch, for all of Gilneas. Varian knew that his senses seemed almost preternatural. As though Genn held a piece of the Ghost Wolf. It honestly wouldn’t have surprised Varian. Genn was... Well, Genn was something else.

Varian returned to his chambers at half past three when he was finally satisfied the castle was secure. The guards usually ignored him when he took his nightly strolls, only nodding or saying a ‘Your Majesty’ or ‘My King’ as he passed. He rarely responded. There was no need to. Nothing in the Keep needed the attention of the guards.

He passed by the kid’s bedroom and heard someone walking around. The Prince’s Guard, he identified by the boots pressing into the carpet. He passed Luciana’s room and heard - nope. He passed by Anduin’s room and it was silent. He entered his room, the lights still off, and glanced around. Sniffing the air yielded a similar result - the room was just as empty as it had been when he’d left it.

His bed called to him. So did the papers sitting on his desk. So did Shalamayne, leaned fondly against his nightstand. The blade’s heart of gold-red molten light seemed to twinkle at him in greeting. He knew it was stupid, but he gave its pommel a little pat as he went to sit on the edge of the bed. The very empty and very large bed.

It was almost comical to think that the King was given such a large bed in the expectation that he’d have someone there to help fill it, maybe two or three someones on particularly fun nights. There was even a snoring room off to the side, unused for over two decades. He remembered fondly the many nights Tiffin had kicked him awake, demanding he go to the snoring room so she could get actually some sleep. He wondered, briefly, if Luciana ever had that problem. They had two bedrooms, anyway. They’d handle it.

Varian settled back onto his bed, not bothering to undress. He’d be awake again in an hour or two and his instincts would again demand he check the perimeter of his home. There were too many dangers to count, too many enemies that would gladly run his family through with blades or pierce them with arrows. He had to protect them as best he could. He wouldn’t lose them like he’d lost everyone else. No, this time he was going to do it right. His father would be the last Wrynn to die bloody and betrayed. Anduin would have a better future. His grandchildren would not suffer like he
had. No scheming courtier was going to tear the House of Wrynn asunder. No disguised evil was going to infect his House. No black dragon would disease the very heart of Stormwind.

He’d given Luciana to Anduin in hopes that she could protect him when Varian couldn’t. She’d had much more to give than Varian could have ever hoped for. He’d brought her into the fold for Anduin’s sake, but also because Varian had hoped that she’d be able to make the House into a family again. She had. In spades, she had. She was a true warrior, and Varian knew there was some friction between her and Anduin because of it, but they loved each other. They’d get through it together.

Varian’s hopes for her had been far exceeded already. She had first looked to him as any Knight should look to their commander. And then she’d allowed him to take a few steps closer, and now she looked to him as any grown child would their father. She trusted him, depended on him when she needed help, and looked to him for guidance, and it was more than he could have ever asked for. He loved Anduin. He loved his son deeply, and would give Anduin both moons and all of Azeroth. But there was an understanding, a connection he’d developed with Luciana that came from a dark place they were both in.

Fury and loneliness made for volatile bedfellows. Sometimes it was all Varian could do to keep from breaking down when he had to come back from a patrol to an empty bed. He had to bite back his jealousy when Anduin and Luciana came into the dining room smelling of sex. It wasn’t even sex that Varian wanted, though sex was far from unpleasant. It was the familiarity, the intimacy, the way they moved together that spoke of the depth of their friendship.

They moved as one because they knew already how the other would move. They had a regular discourse on everything in their lives, they didn’t argue about problems but instead stayed patient with each other and discussed, tried to understand. Varian had only heard them really argue once, when Luciana had cracked her skull open and Anduin hadn’t reacted well to her telling him, finally, that being hurt in a fight felt good. It made one feel alive.

Varian really hated being jealous of his own daughter, but it was easy when she had someone like Anduin to stand next to her. Really, Varian should be able to quell it, but he couldn’t. Not right now. Sometimes it was just too much. Too quiet. He spent too much time working. The only person he thought of as a friend was Genn, and by extension Mia. He wasn’t one for large gatherings and he had never found it easy to hand out trust or friendship. He enjoyed being alone. But he didn’t enjoy being lonely, and that was all he had been for the past… too many years. Really, only his duty to his people was keeping him going.

He sighed heavily. Now wasn’t the time to think about it. If he’d had his way, he would’ve never thought about it. It was easier that way. Dull, listless and dark, but easier. Simpler. He’d have to get used to it again. He’d have to relearn how to hide it. He didn’t want the twins to suffer through his depression. Freya would have some distance for a few years, but she’d be old enough to notice, to remember, when she was returned.


It was better this way. He didn’t want Anduin to suffer worry for his old man. Luciana had bigger things to worry about. She’d have to take over local military planning while Varian was in Draenor. She’d have advisors, of course. Varian knew she was more than capable. She was a genius. She was his daughter, after all. And they had two kids to raise and a third to worry about. Luciana was scheduled to leave in two weeks for the Exodar with her squadron and with Freya. Enaeon would stay with the little Princess and another draenei would replace him temporarily. That would put a
burden on the squadron until they got used to each other.

It was better this way. They had enough to worry about. They shouldn’t have to worry about him, anyway. He was their father. He was supposed to worry about them. He was just a lonely old man. They had their whole lives ahead of them. He wouldn’t burden them with his worries. It was enough that they still welcomed him into their family. It was enough that Anduin still accepted his love, despite past troubles, and it was enough that Luciana trusted him.

He couldn’t ask anymore than that. It would be selfish of him. No, it was better this way.
To Kalimdor

It was harder for Anduin, she imagined, who wouldn’t be seeing their daughter regularly like she would be. Luciana would be traveling all over Kalimdor for the next year at least, and it would make it easier for her squadron’s new portal mage to bring them to Exodar for a visit. They hadn’t actually picked up the mage yet, as they were waiting in the Exodar. But Luciana expected two skilled and sturdy draenei to join her squad: one mage, and one new healer to replace Enaeon. That was a big blow to Amadeus Squadron, but they’d recover. Luciana was confident in them.

Enaeon would be staying behind with her daughter, Freya, to keep her safe and help raise her for the first three or so years of her life. The little Princess hadn’t been able to gain mass and strength like a baby should and was still sickly and weak. Being in a center of Light, just aboveground of an actual Naaru and surrounded by the most Light-blessed people on Azeroth, was expected to greatly aid her. Not to mention that many draenei were paladins or priests and were capable of healing. In fact, Luciana had heard rumours that all draenei had a capability to heal in some function, a part of their blessing from the Naaru.

The fact that Enaeon, well-trusted by both Luciana and Anduin, would be by Freya’s side made it easier. But Anduin still spent the two weeks prior to departure worrying, chewing bloody holes in his lips, gnawing his nails ragged whenever he wasn’t paying attention, and just generally being distressed. Luciana had done her best to distract him, but he still worried. And with good reason - his daughter, only months old, was about to go through a portal to the other side of the world. At least the mage they’d be using was trustworthy. Rennick had apparently created portals for numerous SI:7 operations before and had yet to leak any information he might have garnered from the agents involved.

“It’ll be fine,” Luciana murmured, brushing her hand over Anduin’s hair. She was in full armour, save for her helm, and it would be difficult to hug him without hurting him. Instead they leaned their foreheads together, and she spoke soothingly and promised she’d return soon, promised Freya would be safe and healthy. “Enaeon is with her. You know he’ll protect her.”

“I know,” Anduin said quietly. “I still worry. We’re growing as a family, and now we have to lessen by one...”

“She’s still a Wrynn,” Luciana said. “Our family isn’t lessening. If anything, it’s going to grow again. Enaeon is like a brother to me. He’ll become something of a father or uncle to Freya and she’ll have a dependable guardian to go to when she argues with us. I’m sure she’ll make at least one friend. I’m getting two new squad members, both draenei. We’re not losing her, Anduin. We’re just giving her a fuck-ton of nannies for a few years.”

That got her a mildly hysterical giggle. Still, it was a laugh, and she smiled. “You’re right,” he murmured. “I know you are. It’s still hard.”

“I know,” she soothed. “I know.” She kissed him softly, lingering for a moment. “I’ll be visiting her twice a month for at least a full day each. More, if I can manage. And I will manage. I’ll visit you, too, and let you know how she’s been. If we can plan it we’ll swap for a day and you can take my portal mage to visit her. And visit Velen!” she added. “We’ll make that happen.”

“I’m going to be really busy,” he warned quietly. “Father is going to be in Draenor for a while. He’s leaving soon, too.”

“You’ve got everything you need here?” she asked.
“Yes, I have everything. And everyone. Four Shadows arrived yesterday from Helliah. She’s finalizing plans for Westfall and when the first group for the Shadow Watchers finishes training I’ll be sending them over with a handful of Wildhammer shaman.”

“Good. Things will go well with you leading,” she praised. “I’m sure they will.”

“Don’t sell yourself short,” Anduin replied. “You’ll be coordinating war and relief efforts in all of Kalimdor.”

“Yeah, but I’ve been doing this for a long time,” she said. “I’ve been in training for it since I was a kid.”

“Me, too,” he reminded, and held her face with gentle hands to kiss her. “I love you,” he murmured. “I’ll miss you. I got used to having you here permanently.”

“I’ll miss you, too, my light,” she murmured.

“My light?” he asked.

“You call me my love. I want to have something like that. It seems appropriate,” she said, shrugging one heavily armoured shoulder.

“True enough,” he agreed. “And I do like it.”

“Good.” She smiled, and bumped her nose against his. He smiled and his nose wrinkled in response. “I’ll keep in contact regularly.”

“Promise me you won’t get captured again.”

“I promise,” she said firmly. “Nothing can take me from you. I promise.”

“Good.” He seemed satisfied with that, though there was still a dark shadow of doubt in his eyes. He leaned back, looked her up and down, and sighed. “Take care of yourself. Take care of Freya. Make sure she’s in good hands. Make sure Enaeon has access to nannies and child-healers.”

“I know what do to,” she chuckled. “Worrywart. I’ve been through this a hundred times already with Casey. I’ll take care of it.”

He met her gaze evenly. He gave her his soft-eyes-small-smile look and her chest felt loose, and she smiled. “I’ll send you orders for Kalimdor within two weeks,” he said quietly. “The mage you’ll pick up in Exodar should have her talk-stone ready by then.”

“Alright.” Luciana nodded slowly. “You know what else you can do?”

“What?”

“You can have orders ready for me when I visit. I seem to recall you wanted to try tying me up...?”

“Lucy!” he whispered hotly. “Really? Now?”

“Yeah, why not?” she asked with a crooked grin. “Think on it while I’m away. It’ll help you loosen up after a long day.”

He sighed, smiled fondly and shook his head slowly. “You’re incorrigible,” he said.
“Yeah. You love it.”

“Well, now that you mention it...”

“Oi,” she said, pulling him forward to kiss him, hard and short. “Come up with something good. I want to come home to something nice.”

“I’ll try,” he chuckled. “Take care, love.”

“And you make sure you take breaks regularly, my light. I’ve told the Guard to make sure you don’t push yourself too hard. I think Arina will be stopping by regularly...?”

“You would do that,” he grumbled. His gaze slid up for a moment, and then he looked back to her. “Your people are ready, Lucy. Are you?”

“Always ready for a fight,” she grinned, and kissed him once more. She tried to make it soft, make it a promise, before she pulled away. “I’ll see you soon. I’ll be waiting for those orders.”

“See you soon,” he replied. He clasped his hands behind his back, chin up, back straight, shoulders down, and watched her go. They were surrounded by all manner of people - Royal Guards, Harbor and City Guards, dock workers, adventurers running to and fro, and citizens who’d come to watch the Princess depart with her Squadron.

It wasn’t as glamorous as taking a huge ship, but the portal was ready and waiting for them when Luciana turned around. Anduin had been pleasantly surprised when she’d fallen back from the rest of her group, his forearm held in a careful grip to pull him away, and turned to kiss him goodbye. Normally she wasn’t really a fan of public affections. Anduin thought it looked quite romantic, the warrior Princess off to war and the priestly Prince seeing her off. He expected there would be at least three new favourite taverns songs about them by the week’s end.

Luciana turned when she reached the group, lifted her hand to salute the citizens who’d come to see her off, and then she turned again and disappeared into the portal. Several Royal Guards and half of her squadron had already gone through. When nothing happened, Enaeon stepped into the shimmering magic with Freya in hand. The baby had been dressed in runed clothes to protect her delicate body from any stray magics that wouldn’t touch a healthy adult, but might be able to affect a baby.

The rest of the group filed in and the portal lingered for another minute afterward. When it dissipated, the magic returning to the ambient atmosphere, Anduin focused and let the Holy Light wash away a bit of his tension and worry. A Royal Guard handed him the reins to his horse, a light grey Charger specially armoured for him, and he accepted with a nod and a quiet word of thanks.
Safe As Can Be

Chapter Notes

We're nearing the end! And I'm already halfway through the third part and there's a fourth coming and maybe a short sort of intermission between them. Why am I doing this to myself. (It's because I cry when I think about Luciana and Anduin.)

On the other side of the portal, Luciana waited while her group spread out into formation. She was at the center, her hand on the pommel of her sword, next to Enaeon and Freya. The rest of Amadeus Squadron surrounded them, and around them was a circle of Royal Guards. The caution wasn’t fully merited, but Luciana thought differently, and so it was made that her caution was shown.

“Greetings, Princess Luciana.” The voice was old and worn but still strong. Luciana didn’t know the voice personally, but she knew it could only belong to one person.

“Prophet Velen. We thank you for your hospitality and generosity.” She bowed her head to honour him even as the people around her split to either side, lining up beside and behind her.

“It is my honour to welcome you and your daughter to the Exodar. And Vindicator Enaeon. Welcome back.”

“Thank you, Prophet,” Enaeon said, bowing at the shoulders and lowering his tail in a sign of deference.

“May I see the young one?” Velen asked, looking to Luciana for permission.

“Of course. Prophet Velen, this is my daughter. Freya Thesan Wrynn, of the Royal House of Wrynn of Stormwind.”

“It is a pleasure, young one,” Velen said, leaning down so Freya could see him. She stared at him blankly for a moment, then looked up at the sigil of light floating above his forehead crest, and then she made a noise and tried to pat his face with a tiny hand. He smiled and straightened.

“Princess Luciana,” he said, facing her. “If you would follow me, I will show you the lodgings and accommodations that have been prepared for young Princess Freya and her new guardian. I assure you that you and your daughter are safe here, under the watchful gaze of the Naaru O’ros. Your guards may take the time to enjoy the hospitality that the Exodar offers, if you so choose.”

She regarded her guards, and then her squadron. “Royal Guards, take two hours to explore and relax. Meet back here at the end of your break. If Amadeus isn’t here, Jillian will find you.”

They saluted as one, some saying ‘aye’ or ‘yes, Your Highness’. And then they scattered slowly, some milling about, others making a beeline to something that caught their eye.

“Amadeus Squadron,” Luciana called. “With me. Loose formation.” That meant that though they needed to stay near her, just in case, there wasn’t any immediate danger and they could forgo stiffer formations for a more relaxed pace. “Prophet, lead the way,” Luciana said to Velen.

“Come with me, then.”
He walked slowly through the Exodar, pointing out places or people of interest. Luciana had never been in the Exodar, and while she wanted nothing more than to look up and gape at the complexity of the crystalline walls and strange decor, she kept her attention on Velen and on Enaeon - and by extension, on Freya, who was still safely wrapped in his tree-like arms.

“And here,” Prophet Velen intoned. “We enter the Vault of Lights, where those who would wield the Light in battle come to hone their skills. Priests and paladins both wander these sacred halls. The blessings of the Light upon you who enter it now.”

An unfamiliar Light washed through Luciana and she inhaled slowly. It must have been Velen’s Light. It felt nothing like Anduin’s, and yet somehow they were similar. She recalled that though the two were different in uncountable ways, Anduin had spent some time under Velen’s tutelage and had learned much from the Ageless One. She nodded her thanks to Velen, who only gave her a secretive smile in return.

“It is good to be back,” Enaeon murmured. “I have missed this place. Freya will grow strong here, Luciana.”

“Will she be safe?”

“She will be as safe as she would be in Stormwind,” he promised. “Perhaps more, as we have a Naaru in the basement.” He chuckled at his own little joke and she spared him a brief smile.

“Come, Princess,” Velen said, motioning to the expansive and open area. “Deeper into the Vault is where Enaeon and Princess Freya will be living until the time comes for her to return to Stormwind.”

He led them further in, the draenei native to the Exodar moving aside like water parting for oil. They watched with intense curiosity. It wasn’t often such a large group was welcomed so deep into the Exodar, and though they were all of the Alliance, they were also surrounded by Stormwind Royal Guards.

“Here we are,” Velen’s rumbled through the air, reminding Luciana at once of a great tidal wave and a bare, rocky mountain. “I understood from Anduin’s correspondence that you wished for a regular home for Freya.”

“Yes,” Luciana confirmed, moving out of her group with Enaeon in tow to join Velen. He stood in front of a solid-looking door of some unknown material that seemed to be popular in the surrounding construction. The home he had led them to was built into the side of the Exodar itself, much like the others, and seemed no different from any other home save for the lack of personalized decorations. “We’d like to avoid broadcasting that the young Princess of Stormwind is currently without her guards in a nigh-indefensible home. It’s easier to reach her through this front door than it would be to reach her through an entire castle full of Royal Guards, you see,” Luciana said. “And we don’t want her to be bombarded with visitors every day. Certainly a small number of curious people wouldn’t do much harm, but she’s a baby. She can’t host parties or dinners for large groups.”

“Of course,” Velen said, deferring to Luciana’s authority over Freya as her parent. “Will you be visiting her often?” he asked, taking a crystal etched with Draenic lettering from his pocket and holding it in front of the lock. It clicked, and whirred, and something heavy shifted, and then he opened the door for Luciana and Enaeon.

“At least twice a month,” Luciana replied, watching as he handed the keystone to Enaeon. “Much more often, if circumstances allow.”
“Of course. The portal mage that was chosen for your squadron is highly skilled and dependable. She was for a time a member of a guild I’m sure you are familiar with. The Glory Seekers?” he half-asked.

“Of course. Their headquarters are in Elwynn and they have an office in the Old Town.”

“Yes. She was in their ranks, but voluntarily left when she was asked to join your squadron for her skills in portals.”

“Good to hear,” Luciana said. That was one less thing to worry about. A Glory Seeker would make an excellent addition to any squadron. “When will we meet her?”

“Soon after Enaeon has acquainted himself with his new home.”

“It is a nice place,” Enaeon commented, already moving into the home. “Three stories?”

“And a storage basement,” Velen said. He found something about the situation amusing. Luciana supposed he should. The Prophet of the Naaru, the Ageless One himself, was showing a tiny human Princess and her lumbering Vindicator guardian around their new home. “Freya’s nursery can easily be turned into a play room when she is grown enough for the bedroom.”

“Good, good,” Enaeon murmured.

“On your left lives a trio of child-healers I chose from the ranks of our most skilled healers,” Velen continued. “And on your right is a home repurposed to serve as barracks for ten Vindicators that will be on hand for any emergencies. Or for anytime you need a caretaker for the young one. You may remember some of them from your training days.”

“I will have to visit them sometime,” Enaeon said from the other room. “Aha! The kitchen!”

Luciana chuckled. “He found the food. He’ll be fine, now. I trust there won’t be any issues in feeding a human baby?”

“None at all,” Velen promised. “The foods we harvest here are not foreign to humans, and Darnassus provides us with yet more options. She will be fine,” he promised. “If you have a moment, before we rejoin the others, I would like to share something with you.”

“Of course,” she said, following him to a more secluded area of the house. “What is it?”

“When we first landed on Azeroth, I had a hint of a vision,” he started. “Not nearly enough to merit attention. But as the days passed, I received more fragments. When I first laid eyes upon your bonded, Anduin, the vision was completed and I formed from it a prophecy.”

“Of what?” she prompted when he fell silent.

“Of a human, leading a great army of Light and hope, of people from all races of the world,” he said, dropping his voice so low she could hardly hear him. “Of Anduin, perhaps. He is yet young, but he has become a beacon of hope.”

“I know,” she murmured. “I’ve seen it. I’ve been subject to it.”

Velen gave her another secretive smile. “He brings hope to all whom he encounters,” Velen continued. “But he also brings hope in a form not many would think of.”

Luciana’s mind worked for a moment. Velen was obviously alluding to something. Or someone.
He had drawn her away from Enaeon, who held Freya, for a reason. For privacy, certainly, but it felt more like a warning. “Freya,” Luciana murmured, stiffening. “Enaeon. Enaeon was there because he was chosen for my squadron, which is something you’d have eyes on, being his high ruler. He was there because I trusted him, and through me, Anduin trusted him. He was there to revive her when the Light called out.” She looked up at Velen. “I have to tell you, this is really weird.”

Velen smiled again. “There is more,” he said. “But it is not for today. I am glad that you are aware of the gift Anduin carries within him. You, too, have a gift in your heart, though you may not be able to see it.”

“I only know of my fury,” she said.

“There is strength in you that does not come from anger,” Velen told her. “You are strong because you know what it is to suffer. We draenei know that to suffer is to grow. You made a decision, Luciana, to prevent that suffering wherever you could. Despite the pain you have suffered, despite the scars that mar your body and your soul, you persevered. Even when you did not see hope, you fought for others who you knew needed someone to fight for them. You brought them hope, despite not having any hope for yourself. That is your gift, Luciana. You inspire others to fight, even when the opposition seems insurmountable. Your fury drives you, but it is your tenacity that drives those around you. They see your suffering, they are inspired by you, and they will voluntarily step into your light to fight by your side, to lighten your burden.”

Luciana appreciated his words, but he was waxing a bit too poetically for her and he seemed to know it.

“When the time comes,” he said quietly. “And it will come. You must allow yourself to trust in your light. He will not lead you astray.”

Her eyes narrowed slightly. How had he known she’d called Anduin...? She didn’t ask. She didn’t really want to know. “Thank you for your words, Prophet,” she said with a nod. “I’ll be sure to remember them.”

“Of course.” He laid a gentle hand on her shoulder. “Come. We should rejoin your group, now. Enaeon and Freya will be fine here. Rumours have traveled the city that a human child with a draenei guardian is living here, but the interest of the rumours has already begun to fade. There may be some curious passerby, but none here would find cause to harm either of them.”

“I trust your word, Prophet, if only because Anduin would.”

“I know.” He gave her his apparently signature secretive smile. “As I understand, you are going to Darkshore and then Felwood after this...?”

“Yes. We’ve received news of a surge in demonic activity in Felwood and the locals requested aid. Darkshore is a temporary first stop, unless it proves that the kaldorei there need a few extra set of hands. I’ll be traveling the entirety of Alliance-held or contested settlements in Kalimdor this year.”

“Your skills in planning are needed. You are known to be able to utilize unique skill sets of adventurers to your advantage.”

“Everyone has a use, Prophet. It sometimes takes an outsider to see it, but everyone has something to offer.”
“A good philosophy to have.”

“I only hope it’s enough to keep everyone alive.”

He nodded once, wisely, and they moved to rejoin her squadron.
Amadeus Squadron had two new members. One of them was easier to accept than the other, because one of them wasn’t replacing an old friend. But Luciana had been through this before. Many of her squad members had been through it before.

“Amadeus!” she bellowed. “Meet your two new playmates. Naemete, an ex-Glory Seeker mage with a particular penchant for portals.” Victoria chuckled from the edge of the group. She had brought her wolf-dog Pop along for the tour of Kalimdor, and the beast’s ears were perked towards Luciana while she spoke. “Lokaal, our new paladin healer. Either of you two want to say anything to your new squadron before we head out?”

They’d be taking a boat from Azuremyst to Teldrassil, where they’d stay for the night and Luciana would have a chance to thank Malfurion again for his help years ago. It still struck her as odd, sometimes, to think that so long had passed since she’d escaped the cell.

The Royal Guards had already returned to Stormwind, their duty complete in delivering their young Princess to safety, leaving Amadeus Squadron once again to its own devices.

Naemete was the first to respond. “I’ve always wanted to be an adventurer,” she said, barely containing a wide smile. “I am eager to see more of this world and its people! I have spent too many years cooped up in the Exodar.”

“It’s good to have you on board,” Luciana said with a nod. “Lokaal?” she prompted.

He took a moment before speaking. He was taller than Enaeon, who had in fact been about average for a male draenei, and had the same thick build. Both were Vindicators, after all. “I know that it can difficult to accept new members into a unit,” he started. His voice was a bit rougher than Enaeon’s. “I have spent thousands of years in service of the Prophet. I know. But I am not here to replace Enaeon. I am only here to keep you all alive until the day comes when you can reunite once more. I know Enaeon. We trained together for many years. I will do everything in my power to keep his squadron alive until he can return to do it himself.”

“Good to have you,” Luciana said. “Everyone ready? We’re heading to Darnassus by kaldorei ship! Let’s move!”

They were bringing a handful of mounts with them, as it couldn’t be guaranteed that they’d always be provided with them. Thunderer was among the group of four horses. The other three were Chargers, large and strong enough for the squadron to share mounts when necessary. Lokaal, being a paladin, could summon his own Light-blessed Charger, and thankfully wouldn’t need to bring along one of the massive elekk the Exodar kept as mounts.

They were welcomed to Teldrassil by only a handful of patrolling Sentinels, but the reception in Darnassus was a warm one. They were given temporary but comfortable lodgings for the night, and Luciana could once again enjoy the songs of the little birds that were unique to Teldrassil. She could also take the time to appreciate why Varian would want to remain in the wild instead of the castle if ever he could make the choice without abandoning his kingdom.

She found Malfurion in the morning after getting a good night’s rest. He was still up and pacing the Temple of the Moon, though most kaldorei were already bedded down for the day by this time. Luciana saw him pause, lift his head to sniff the air, and she smiled.
“Luciana,” he greeted as he turned to her. His voice was smooth and warm, just as she remembered.

“Malfurion. It’s good to see you again.”

“And you. Come, let us sit.” He led her to a white stone bench surrounded by the strange purple trees found only in Teldrassil. “How have you been? Busy, I hear.”

“Three kids will do that, yes,” she chuckled as she sat. He joined her a moment later. “I wanted to thank you again for your help. It’s thanks to you I was able to return at all, let alone have children.”

“I only did what I found was right,” he assured her. “As any healer would.”

“It still merits thanks. I imagine it was quite a chore to keep me alive.”

“You were wounded terribly, that much is true. But it is your perseverance that allowed me to heal you. You were strong enough to cling to the mortal realm long enough for me to heal you. That, my friend, is only a sign of your own strength.”

She hummed noncommittally, not sure how Malfurion would take her telling him that it may have been Goldrinn’s blessing.

“But,” he said, sniffing the air again. “There is a change that has been wrought in you. Tell me, what have you been up to while recovering in Stormwind?”

“Having babies, mostly,” she said, and Malfurion chuckled quietly beside her. “Reading. Politicking. Training. Nothing out of the ordinary, or overly strenuous until recently.”

“I see.”

“What is it?”

“Nothing to worry about, be assured. There is merely a different... edge to you now. A new assurance, perhaps, of your abilities, or perhaps an awareness of yourself.”

“Hm.”

After a short pause, he spoke. “You recall reading the Saga of the Ancients while you recovered here?” he started.

“Yes. How could I not? I read it at least three times.”

He laughed. “Yes, you were quite bored with it by the second time. You recall Goldrinn’s tale?”

“Yes. Why?”

“He is said to be the spirit of strength, of tenacity under adversity.”

“Yes, King Greymane also told me this.”

“Did he?” Malfurion asked. “What else did you tell you?”

“He told me that Goldrinn watches over the worgen of Gilneas who drank from the wells,” she said slowly. “He told me that Varian is his scion, and I did speak to Varian about that.”

“Nothing else?” Malfurion prodded gently.
“He told me that it may have been Goldrinn who lent me the strength to escape the cell. Though, Damran told me the sha was buried deep within me for a long while.”

“Damran,” Malfurion said lowly. “That one is an evil all to itself. But I believe the good King Greymane may have been closer to the truth. The edge I see in you now does so resemble what you would find in a worgen who has successfully taken the waters. Do you believe that it may be the Ancient?”

“I don’t know,” she said truthfully. “Several people have told me it could be, or it is, but... for all I know, the Ancients are merely characters in the Saga.”

“They are not only characters, I assure you,” he said, somewhat amused. “I was student to Cenarius for many years, and even now he is a close friend and advises me when I am lost. I fought alongside the Ancients ten thousand years ago, and again in Hyjal when Deathwing’s madness descended upon us. They are very real, Luciana, and should you ever have opportunity I strongly urge you to visit the Shrine of Goldrinn in Mount Hyjal. I think, should you be interested, it could clear up some of the confusion you feel on the matter.”

She hummed again. “I’ll be in Kalimdor for the foreseeable future,” she told him. “I suppose it’s certainly something to keep in mind.”

“That is all one can ever do,” Malfurion said. “For now, though, I believe your squadron is going to Felwood through Darkshore?”

“Yes, the locals there sent out a plea for aid when the demonic activity suddenly increased. I’ll be going there to help plan relief efforts and try to find a way to stem the tide.”

“Excellent. It’s good to know they’ll receive such skilled aid.”

“You flatter me, Malfurion.”

“I only tell the truth. You are well-known to have a tactical brilliance that few among us display, even after living for thousands of years. I look forward to seeing what solutions you can give them.”

“Hopefully I will be able to give them any at all. Demonic armies are not my specialty.”

Malfurion laughed outright at that. “Ah, it will be fine. You are more capable than you would lead yourself to believe. Come. It is almost time for me to rest, but I will see you out.”

“My thanks.”

They passed through Darkshore after their brief rest in Darnassus. Successful reclamation efforts had followed in the wake of relief after the Cataclysm years ago. The night elves there didn’t need Luciana’s particular brand of help, but all the same she sent word to Stormwind to try and renew interest in the area for any newly-minted adventurers.

Felwood welcomed them with an abundance of overly-eager imps, and Luciana found there was a strange sort of satisfaction in catching them under her heels and stomping them into the ground. They would crunch and crackle like brittle chicken bones, and she made it into a game to step on as many as she could before the rest of the squadron caught up to her.

“You have to stop rushing ahead!” Christopher panted as he jogged up to her.

“Why?” she asked. “You kids can keep up just fine.”
“Yes, but you think we like not being able to see you? Last time that happened we lost you!”

That, at least, gave her pause. “Alright,” she sighed. “I’ll slow down.”

“Thank you,” he sighed. “Now. How about we actually do what we came here for, and get to the Emerald Sanctuary?”

“They’ve got some volunteers for cleanup.” Lars had caught up with them. The others weren’t far behind. “Lots of worgen, too.”

“Good. Which way?”

Jillian answered her question. “This way,” she said simply, and led them south.

Felwood was contested between Alliance and Horde, but the demons took precedence. Luciana’s appearance at the Emerald Sanctuary bolstered spirits, and apparently word got out that she was there because within their first week, a veritable army of young, fresh-faced adventurers had built nearly overnight.

“Alright,” Luciana said, looking down at them all. “Let’s get to work! Form parties of three or five, one healer and one tank each, and I’ll find you something to do!”

She handed out missions, or quests as the adventurers liked to call them, of all manners. Clearing out demons was top priority, as the druids of the Sanctuary desperately needed the room to manoeuvre. Luciana helped to prioritize. First she had adventurers seek out materials for magical wards to set up around the Sanctuary and around forward camps. Then, she sent out roving parties to keep out opportunistic Horde, whose numbers had grown in recent years. That was a bit more dangerous, and she made sure the people she sent out had some experience already in cross-faction fighting.

When she felt the Sanctuary was fully secure, Luciana started leading war parties into demon-infested lands to clear the way for research teams. The worgen and kaldorei of Felwood had long been trying to find the source of the stream of demons, but with so many dangers it was all they could do to hang on to their Sanctuary. With Luciana there to bolster their forces with willing and able volunteers, they were able to start researching the fel infections and possible cures, and try to find a way to destroy the portals kept open in the most heavily infested areas.

Luciana didn’t stay long enough to see the full fruition of their labours, something she found dissatisfying, but operations were well underway when she left with Naemete to visit the Exodar. It had been only two weeks since she’d left Freya there with Enaeon, and she’d hardly been able to sleep the first few nights. She was extremely grateful for Naemete’s talk-stone. It was an enchanted, carefully shaped piece of crystal with a twin held by a mage in Anduin’s service, and the two could communicate easily through the stones. Luciana could regularly speak to Anduin through it, with a hint of Naemete’s magic keeping the channel open.

“Thanks for the adventurers,” Luciana said, holding the glowing stone close to her face.

Anduin’s voice was a bit warped, but came through loud and clear. “Glad I could help. All I really had to do was spread word that Princess Luciana was in Felwood with quests to hand out, and three boats left within a day for Darkshore. The sound of portals closing was all you could hear for three days. Popping, day in and day out. I could hardly sleep through it.”

She smiled slowly, feeling at once warm and bitter. Warm, because she could imagine from past experience Anduin’s irritation after a poor night’s rest. Bitter, because she had to imagine it. “Good timing,” she replied quietly. “I’m sorry it kept you up.”
“I’m fine,” he soothed. “I’d much rather sacrifice a few nights then risk you not having enough people for your operations.”

“I’ve got plenty now,” she said. “Enough that I’m going to the Exodar tomorrow with Naemete.”

“I wish I could come.”

“I do, too. We’ll figure out a swap date. I know it’s important to you. At least she isn’t forming memories yet.”

“Yeah, that will be a while yet,” he said. His sigh came across as crackling static. “I can’t talk long. When Father said I’d be kept busy, he wasn’t kidding.”

Luciana chuckled. “I’ll give her a few kisses for you.”

“And say hello to Enaeon for me. And Velen, if you see him.”

“Of course. I love you.”

“Be well, love.”

She handed the stone back to Naemete as its glow faded, and she stored it away. The mage was indeed skilled with portals, and it took only a few moments for her to tear one open. An image of the Exodar shimmered in the air before Luciana, appearing flat as a board no matter where she stood in relation to it.

“After you,” Naemete said.

“My thanks,” Luciana shot back, and they shared a quick grin. Naemete was easy-going, though she became a bit crazed when wielding fire in a fight, and the squadron had welcomed her easily. Lokaal was having a harder time, but he was a steady head in a fight and had thus far done his job well. No one had died yet, at least.
Enaeon was there to welcome Luciana to the Exodar. Of course, he held Freya delicately in his great arms until Luciana could strip off her armour. She was eager to hold her daughter again, and didn’t bother to dress. She was still wearing her under-armour pants. That was enough. Enaeon had seen her at her worst, anyway. There wasn’t anything he hadn’t already seen at least two dozen times.

“Hello!” she crooned, holding Freya up in two meaty hands that dwarfed the tiny child. “Hello, baby! Hello!”

Freya made the typical baby noises, but when Luciana blew a raspberry into her stomach she giggled.

“Did you hear that?” she crowed, looking at Enaeon. “She laughed! Oh, you’re just the cutest thing!” Luciana blew another raspberry and Freya giggled again, and Luciana would have kept doing it until she fell asleep. Fortunately, Enaeon was there to keep her head on straight, and managed to convince her to dress in the spare clothes she’d brought in her pack and sit down to lunch.

The food Enaeon had to offer wasn’t so different from what she’d be eating if she were in Stormwind. Stag meat from the silverpelt of Azuremyst, carrots and oddly purple potatoes spiced with delicate flavours and herbs, and various other things she recognized for what they were.

She stayed the night with Naemete, who wisely held back to let Luciana have a semblance of normalcy with her daughter, and they left in the morning. Naemete had coordinates she’d use to open a portal to a meeting point in Felwood where they’d rejoin the rest of Amadeus. The plan was to travel up to Moonglade, check in with the Cenarion Circle, see if there were any resources they needed that a member of the House of Wrynn could help them secure, and also ask around for any druids willing to travel to Westfall. After that was Winterspring.

Luciana loved Winterspring the moment they stepped out of the mountain pass. The furbolgs had tolerated them, barely, and only because a night elf was there as a guide for Amadeus. Lawrence was the worst off, being the slimmest member of the group. The less reedy soldiers had an easier time of it. Pop surprised them all by being a great fan of large snowdrifts, which he would regularly try to tackle, biting at the snow that flew from the impact. Victoria nearly lost her mind laughing.

Winterspring wasn’t a territory that had a great number of issues. The saber trainers needed help in securing their old camps, which had been taken by a group of furbolg that had been infected with some strange sickness. Luciana took to the battle with glee. There was an added difficulty of wading through hip-deep snow and every night she fell into a satisfyingly exhausted sleep.

Luciana again visited the Exodar during their stay in Winterspring, but only after ensuring her squadron had a safe place to stay for the night. Naemete was always glad to return to the Exodar for a visit, and Freya seemed to enjoy her company well enough. Lokaal was still withdrawn from the squadron, but even he couldn’t resist forever. Fighting together with a group for weeks on end would develop bonds whether or not you wanted it to. Being a healer, they naturally tried to make sure he was taken care of. Luciana thought that perhaps he wasn’t quite used to that.

Hyal was their next stop. Luciana found two days on their voyage south to stay with Freya, and she held long conversations with Anduin through the talk-stones. He seemed frazzled from the Westfall situation, but she assured him that whatever he decided she knew it would turn out well.
She also reminded him to eat well and take regular breaks, and made sure her sons were doing well. They were about two years old now, walking and talking as much as they could, and she missed them terribly.

Luciana recalled Malfurion’s advice, and debated actually following it. One benefit of visiting Goldrinn’s shrine would be that it would give her squadron a break and some nice scenery. One downside was that she wasn’t actually sure she wanted to know if the Ghost Wolf was real, let alone a demigod that had chosen her as a scion. She wasn’t sure her worldview had room for that sort of thing.

Still, Jillian grew more excited the closer they drew to the shrine, and Luciana made the decision to detour on their path to Nordrassil for her sake. At the very least it would give them an opportunity to learn more about the history of the mountain.

They were welcomed to the shrine by its caretakers, mostly worgen and kaldorei. Ian Duran introduced himself by name. Luciana had seen his eyes flicker with interest when he’d spotted Jillian. “Welcome to the Shrine of Goldrinn,” Ian said, holding out his hand for Luciana to shake. He was in human form at the moment, not much taller than her, and seemed somewhat surprised to see her. “Princess Luciana,” he said. “We weren’t told to expect you.”

“Amadeus Squadron is travelling through Kalimdor,” she explained. “There are many Alliance settlements, especially further down south, that are in desperate need of aid. I’m here to help plan, mobilise, and secure resources that might not be accessible to the common folk.”

“Ah, I see. In that case...” He motioned to the camp constructed at the base of the shrine. “You and your soldiers are welcome here as long as you need to stay.”

“Our thanks, Ian,” she said, inclining her helmeted head. He regarded her oddly for a moment. “It was actually on the advice of Malfurion Stormrage that we detoured here on our way to the great tree Nordrassil.”

“I’ll have to send him thanks, too, then.”

Luciana felt his gaze follow her intently as she led her relieved squadron into the sprawling camp. There were some Horde there, mostly orcs. Luciana was almost surprised to see them so close to Alliance, but she guessed that the Ancients would not be particularly interested in cross-faction conflicts. The squadron spread out, but Jillian stayed close to Luciana.

“I think we should go and see the shrine,” she suggested, her ears swiveling this way and that in her excitement. “I’ve never actually seen him,” she continued, following Luciana when the warrior changed direction to climb the short hill to the shrine. “But I’ve felt him ever since I got the bite.”

“I’ve never felt him,” Luciana grumbled. “Well, I might have felt him. But I don’t know if it was him or the sha, like Damran said.”

“Well, now’s the time to find out!” Jillian said brightly, and loped ahead. Luciana paused to watch her go for a moment. She’d rarely seen Jillian this upbeat about... well, anything, except maybe those experimental dates she’d had with Victoria and Desmond after Freya’s birth.

The Shrine of Goldrinn was in a state of minor disrepair, but it held the air of timelessness and skin-prickling age that most stone kaldorei architecture inflicted on Luciana. She climbed the path up the incline, gazed up at the marble pillars seemingly untouched by passing ages save for the vines that crept up their sides.
At the top of the hill, Jillian stood before a gleaming white statue in the shape of a wolf. It stood tall and overlooked the lower valley with ears perked forward, alert and ready. Dozens of white columns held werelights in leaf-patterned brackets to light the area, even in the daylight.

“Isn’t it beautiful?” Jillian murmured past her razor-sharp fangs. “Ever since I heard about this place I’ve wanted to see it.”

“Now you have the chance,” Luciana replied evenly. There were eyes on her back. She spun to face them, but no one stood behind her.

“What is it?” Jillian asked, ears up and nose twitching. “Someone there?”

“I felt eyes on me,” Luciana replied quietly, hand going to her sheath in preparation to draw her sword.

“No one’s here but us,” Jillian told her uneasily. “I ain’t smelling or hearing anything. Not even a heartbeat.”

“Hm.” Luciana looked around, her body tight with tension. Nothing happened and finally, she relaxed, slowly at first. “I don’t know. Might just be spare Twilight magic on the wind.”

“Could be,” Jillian agreed. She turned her head to the direction of the camp. “Daniel is calling me. Lars got into a fight with an orc, sounds like.”

“Go on,” Luciana said. “I’ll stay here for a while. If you need me to step in just howl.”

“Yessir,” Jillian said, flicking her ear at Luciana in place of a farewell.

Luciana watched her leave. When she was sure she was alone, she looked up at the statue. “I’m not expecting some grand gesture of divine favour,” she said quietly. “I’d just like to know the truth. I don’t like this... uncertainty that’s hanging over my escape from the cell. Damran says it was the sha. Anduin says Damran doesn’t lie so I’ll believe them. Genn says it must have been you, and Malfurion says he sees an edge in me that reminds him of the sane worgen. So, what was it?”

Luciana asked. “Were you there, in Durotan? Am I just talking to a statue?” she mumbled, and scoffed. She felt utterly ridiculous, standing here and talking to a chunk of marble. But people she knew, people she trusted, had drawn a path to Goldrinn, and she was at least going to walk to its end.

We meet again, pup.

Luciana shook her head. It felt like a fly was buzzing in her ear.

You came here for the truth. It seems you do not remember the battle we fought together in your heart. I do.

Luciana’s head ached suddenly, and she pressed a cool gauntlet to her face. She remembered a half-dream, a conversation, a protective fury over her children. It was making her dizzy, and she stumbled a step to the right. “Fuck,” she breathed, and opened her mouth to call for help. Obviously the eyes she’d felt before had been an attacker. It was possibly an assassin, or even a team of them. She’d need a hand, especially with the vertigo she’d suddenly been inflicted with. Twilight Cultists? Horde? Who was it?

Fear not, pup. You resist my voice because of uncertainty, because of doubt. Do not let it cloud your judgement. Listen to me, hear me, as you did before. I am already with you. You need only
calm your spirit, and you will hear me once more.

Something sweet wafted under her nose, and the vertigo faded slowly. She recognized that scent. She’d smelled it last when Varian had hugged her, the night before she’d left for the Exodar with Freya. He was fresh after a shower, his hair still wet, and she’d gotten a whiff of his natural scent. Something sweet, like Anduin, but deeper. Like the thickness of honey versus molasses. And... dry fur, the warm-soft smell her dog Shauna left on her sheets after spending the night next to her. And something woody, like a damp forest after a heavy rain. Over it, the crispness of the air after a night of snow.

_I am with him as I am with you. What you see in him, the instinct to protect, to fight, is yours as well. I have only awakened it within you. I have watched over you for many years, Luciana._

She looked up. The statue was not talking to her. Statues didn’t talk. But something did. Something heavy and dark, and indescribably old. Something like what had brought her out of the cell.

“Goldrinn,” she breathed.

Yes.

“I didn’t think you were real.”

_I am as real as you are._

She wet her lips. “Why me?” she asked. It had pressed on her for years, the constant wondering of why why why.

_Because your suffering has made you strong. You did not surrender to the ones who tried to tame you. You refused to fall to those who would see you desecrated. You inspired those around you to fight for their ideals. You took the burdens, the pain, the suffering and misery, and you used it to fuel your fury._

“I don’t understand,” she murmured.

_What is there to misunderstand? You are tenacious, Luciana. You do not surrender, even against impossible odds. You keep in your heart the image of your mate, of your pups, of Varian your father, and you fight for what you love. You fight to keep your oath, to return to him always. You fight not to destroy, but to protect. You know the value of what surrounds you._

“I enjoy fighting,” she argued quietly. “I like crushing skulls under my boots. I like the sound of it. I like to feel bones break in my hands.”

_And yet you always remember the value of the lives you snuff._

“I try to,” she responded. “When I berserk, I forget. All that matters it the next target. The taste of blood.”

_This does not negate what else you hold. You are still a protector above all else. You enjoy the fight, you enjoy the kill, but you hold respect for those you slay._

“Not always,” she said, recalling the orcs in the cell.

_You remember them. That alone is a sign that you respect the value of their lives. I am not_
mistaken, Luciana, despite your fear and self-doubt. The memory of the boy still plagues you. The burden of your brother haunts you. Yet, you continue on.

“Marching ever onward,” she intoned.

Indeed. You are strong, Luciana. And you know the value of your strength. You know how to control it, how to use it to benefit your people. That is always the first thought - how you can bring good things to your pack. Not how you can most easily destroy your enemies, but how well you can protect your people.

“I’m nothing without them.”

As they are without you. Accept my blessing for what it is, Luciana. Do not let fear of yourself cloud your mind any longer. Burn it as fuel, and release the ashes to the wind. Return to your mate forged ever closer to perfection in the molten heart of your fury. Show him what he has seen all along. Show him the guardian of Stormwind.

Luciana glanced back to the camp. There was no sound of anyone approaching. She turned back to the statue, debated for a moment, and then drew Oathkeeper with a singing of mithril from its scabbard. She sank the point into the ground, clasped the hilt in both hands, and bowed her head. Varian had done it. So would she. “Show me the way to rid my heart of fear,” she murmured. “It will not hold me back any longer. I will not keep these parts of myself from him any longer.” She clenched her teeth, kept her breathing even. “I am afraid because I know all too well how hard it is to burn fear from your heart. It would destroy me to see fear in Anduin’s eyes. Fear of me. Varian has never led me astray, even when I myself was blind. If he tells me that you are benevolent, that you can be trusted, I will believe him. Rid me of this fear, Goldrinn, and I am yours as Varian is.”

Well spoken, Luciana. I agree to your exchange.

Heat suffused her. She felt for a brief moment as though she were burning, as though she’d stepped into a fire. It passed soon, leaving in its wake an empty sort of stillness. It was filled with sensations that rushed into her, crashed into her like a tall wave, and her knees trembled with the weight of it.

She was aware of her world like she’d never been. She could smell dozens of kinds of birds even as they flit by overhead. She could hear the murmur of the voices, faraway in the camp below. Even some of their words floated to her on the gentle breeze. Her pulse pounded in her head. She looked at her hand, flexed it experimentally and felt the buzz of energy, of power, in her limbs.

She inhaled deeply, and let it out as she looked up at the statue. “This is how he always feels?” she asked.

You are now as he has been for many years.

She blinked away the dampness that had collected in her eyes with the initial rush of heat. “I...” she started. “This is going to take some getting used to.”

There are many in the camp below who would be glad to help you adjust. There are those who can fight you as you relearn the limits of your physical body. There are those against whom you may test your will and your wit. There are still others who can teach you what it is to live as the wolf. You will be safe here, under my gaze. Take whatever time you need. And when you go forth into the world, carry proudly with you the blessing of Goldrinn.
“Thank you,” she said. With this, she knew, she could protect her children. She could protect her people from whatever threatened them. She could not fight entire legions on her own, no. But she could understand the worgen, the hunters, the druids under her command. She could learn more of her world, more easily guide her people to safety. She could inspire. “I will use it well.”

**I know. Otherwise, I would not have given it to you.**

She bowed her head to the statue even as the feeling of being watched faded. The presence of the Ghost Wolf was gone, but she still felt the buzzing her limbs. She inhaled again, held it, and roared.

Jillian’s howl responded a moment later. It wasn’t her alarm howl. It was a sound of attention, of curiosity. Luciana laughed breathlessly, ripped off her helmet, and sprinted down the hill. The camp waited for her and she reached it before she could even feel the burn of the short run. She felt alive as the forest around her.

“Luciana, what...?” Jillian asked, jogging into view. She came to a slow halt some ways away from Luciana, who grinned at her, helmet and sword in hand. “Are you alright?” she asked slowly.

“I feel great!” Luciana crowed. “You were right, by the way.”

“What? About what?”

“Goldrinn.”

“What?” Jillian demanded. “He’s there?”

“No. Well, he was. Sort of. I heard him.”

Jillian approached her, sniffing the air. “You smell... different,” Jillian said cautiously. She was, Luciana could tell, unsure of how to approach the sudden change.

“Goldrinn’s blessing,” Luciana offered. “He spoke to me. He said that I am now as Varian has been for years.”

Jillian perked her ears forward, her eyes up at something behind Luciana. Then, she returned her gaze to the warrior before her. “That would explain why you smell like wet fur,” she said dryly, and Luciana laughed.

“You’re only jealous because my wet fur smell is more pleasant than yours,” Luciana joked, breaking her stiff stance to walk loosely, assuredly. She caught Jillian around the waist with an arm and they walked back into camp together. She knew now why Jillian always kept away from large crowds. The sheer number of scents from one person had nearly overwhelmed Luciana. But Goldrinn had told her there were people in the camp who could help her adjust. She’d have to trust that she would find them.

“Princess!” Ian called, approaching them with an arm up in a wave.

Or, alternatively, she’d have to trust that they would find her.
Amadeus stayed at the Shrine of Goldrinn for nearly a month. Luciana needed the time to adjust to her new senses more than anything. Ian Duran, the unofficial keeper of the Shrine, was a huge help, and taught her how to control the intensity. He helped her learn how to curb her sense of smell and hearing when it wasn’t necessary to keep them at full strength.

When Luciana visited the Exodar, she gained a new appreciation for Enaeon. Without even questioning her odd behaviour, he changed Freya’s diaper while Luciana hid on an entirely different level of the house until the smell faded. For his patience, she explained the changes she’d undergone at the Shrine and let him examine her.

When Luciana felt that she had enough of a mastery of herself, but also that they’d spent enough time at the Shrine, they moved on to Nordrassil. She hadn’t yet told Anduin of the blessing. She thought it might be best to tell him in person. As it was, she couldn’t wait to see him again. She wondered what his scent would be like now that she could pick up much finer details.

The druids of Nordrassil needed champions more than resources, and Luciana sent for able adventurers who were willing to travel into Twilight-infested territory. With her name on an announcement on the Callboards, they were flooded with volunteers. The first ones there were mages, or people who were friends with mages. They could teleport to Teldrassil and catch a flight from there, which would be a much shorter trip than taking ship around the Maelstrom. Amadeus stayed to help organize the champions into viable war parties and with all hands on deck, they stormed three major Twilight camps. With these victories driving the champions for more, Luciana left feeling confident that they’d do well without her.

They traveled south to Ashenvale. Nordrassil lent them gryphons to shorten the trip across the more dangerous areas of Hyjal. Ashenvale was currently a warzone. Luciana felt ill at ease so close to Durotan, but she hid it well. She hid it from everyone, up until Victoria cornered her and made her talk. She snarled her way through an explanation, but felt much better afterwards. To thank the stubborn woman, she secured some enchanted leather armour for Pop to protect him from orcish attacks.

As Ashenvale was an active warzone they had no trouble calling for more help when it was needed. Higher-ups in Darnassus kept an active eye on the place, so resources weren’t at an emergency state. What they needed was warriors. Luciana lead Amadeus in multiple successful attacks against Horde infantry camps, with adventurers trailing along in their wake to clean up the rest and find any valuable or useful loot. Luciana felt no regret in slaying as many Horde, mostly orcs, as she could.

Still, she kept in mind what Goldrinn had said, and tried not to let those she defeated linger overlong in the world of the living. She dealt death blows wherever she could, and after the battle had Amadeus turn back to slit the throats of any who hadn’t died quickly. Without the rush of battle in her veins, she could take no joy in ending their lives. Still, she found it was necessary. If not to end their suffering, then to minimize potential survivors and information leaks. It wasn’t necessary for the Horde to know that she was again out and about, without any major defenses. She would not be captured again. She had promised Anduin she wouldn’t be taken.

They left Ashenvale after two weeks. When they were safe in a mountain camp, isolated from the rest of the world, Luciana visited Freya again. The little girl was growing quickly now that she was deeply entrenched in a Light-blessed Naaru vessel and with every visit, she grew bigger and more aware of her world. Every time Luciana saw her, she was filled with a joy she almost forgot every
time she left.

The Stonetalon Mountains awaited with more warfare. Luciana let it consume her every thought, as it once had, and found herself wishing she could once again command a Brigade. There was joy in battle, for her. There was also a deep satisfaction in seeing your orders result in a victory, in moving your troops across the map, in using them as you would your own arms.

She fulfilled her wish for command by directing the adventurers that seemed to flock to her wherever she went. Rewards varied from commissions for armour or gold to recommendations on their behalf to military command. One mage requested she file a complaint to the Stormwind Library about books that never seemed to be in stock. Luciana glad filled out the appropriate paperwork for the irate gnome, and watched him teleport back to the city almost before he had the papers in hand. He’d had enough of it, it seemed to Luciana, and had apparently found her for the sole purpose of getting his Light-damned books.

Luciana could have stayed in Stonetalon for the rest of the year, challenging as it was to manoeuvre, but they had a schedule to keep. It was loose enough to give her some wiggle room, but she’d used up too much of it at the Shrine of Goldrinn. It had been necessary, but they needed to keep moving.

Desolace, she discovered, was aptly named. It was a desolate place. Sand and dirt got in her boots and into her food no matter what she tried. They fought their way through local wildlife and centaur raiding parties - to Luciana’s immense joy - to the Cenarion Wildlands. They welcomed Amadeus with relief. They rarely had enough hands on deck to keep the Wildlands safe, left alone further their research into the wildlife beyond their borders or even attempt to retake old territory.

Luciana lent them her mind more than her body, at first, and helped them plan their efforts for efficiency and to reduce waste of time, energy, and resources. She also ended up sending a call to arms to Anduin, who agreed to put it up on the Call Boards in Stormwind and Goldshire.

Anduin also notified her that Tess has given birth to the immense anxiety and relief of her husband. They now had a healthy baby boy named Liam Darius Greymane who would soon be running around the Keep after Alaric and Bolvar. He would be a year and some months younger than them, but still close enough in age that they could be friends. If Alaric and Bolvar would allow it past what Luciana was sure would be their Wrynn pride and Amadeus stubborn streak. Luciana sent her congratulations and well-wishes through Anduin and promised to visit with the baby and Tess when she was back in the city.

Word spread quickly of the Call to Arms and once again, she was flooded with volunteers. She redirected them to botanists and druids, who had them plant trees, kill Burning Blade orcs, and clear centaurs out of Maraudon.

When Luciana was satisfied that the Wildlands druids had the people they needed, she and Amadeus headed out to join the ones sent to Maraudon. Battling centaurs, she found, was much like battling mounted infantry. The adventurers who had been sent ahead learned valuable lessons from stepping back and watching Amadeus fight.

Feralas was an equally unfriendly place, though it wasn’t for lack of green. Rather, it was from the overabundance of it. Victoria joked that it had stolen all of Desolace’s wildlife. They skirted around the tauren-held areas and picked up just over a dozen adventurers. Some of them followed Luciana around with stars in their eyes and when she turned to speak to them, they froze. Kain found it absolutely hilarious and even got Naemete on the ‘tease Luciana about her fanclub’ train.

The adventurers followed them all the way to the old Feathermoon Stronghold. Just before setting
out by borrowed boat to the island, Luciana contacted Anduin to give him updates and took a half-
day to visit the Exodar. Freya could recognize her by sight, and giggled every time her mother blew
a raspberry anywhere within earshot. She had also learned how to crawl, and Luciana watched her
with wide eyes as the tiny little girl slowly pulled herself across the floor of her playroom. With
Luciana’s return by portal to Feralas, they stormed Old Feathermoon.

The naga greeted them with blades and tridents and Luciana bellowed a challenge to any that could
hear her. The kaldorei Sentinels were glad to have them, but after the first day, gave Luciana a
wide berth. She’d berserked, and while she had had an absolute ball, she’d also frightened the
locals. She brushed it off. It wasn’t nearly bad enough for them to treat her with hostility. They
simply gave her some well-merited caution and spoke quietly when she returned still coated in a
thick layer of viscous naga blood, eyes bright and a crazed and toothy grin on her face.

With the naga numbers severely reduced and Luciana’s armour freshly cleaned, they headed
further south to Silithus. The desert was not a fun place, Luciana decided. She was already always a
hair’s breadth away from being too hot and with the sun beating down on her, she became irritable
and snappish. They didn’t stay long because of this, but she made sure to visit all Alliance-held
settlements within reasonable range, and sent messengers back and forth with the others. They had
a call to arms already in action, but she updated it through the talk-stone with one of the Imperial
Army’s Grand Marshals and sent out for professors interested in qiraji and the ancient kingdom of
Ahn’qiraj.

They passed through Un’goro, avoiding the dinosaurs when they could and killing those who
attacked. They ate well as a result, and Jillian marked locations of the gargantuan corpses on a map
they’d hand over to the first group of adventurers who had a Skinner in their midst. The tough and
scaly leather of the dinosaurs could be turned into some nice armour, and the teeth of the
carnivorous raptors especially would make deadly weapons.

Being in the bowl-like structure of the Crater made Luciana nervous, as though the mountains were
slowly closing in. After a short stop at Marshal’s stand, during which Luciana checked on their
situation and handed off the map to a group of seven adventurers of two allied guilds, they were
off. Un’goro had calmed down after the Cataclysm, and people regularly came to the area. It was
popular mostly for research and trade supplies, but there was still a steady influx of fresh faces to
help regulate the area. That meant that Luciana could leave before the mountains actually did start
to close in on her.

Their next stop was Tanaris. On the edge of Un’goro, with her group safely hidden away in a cave,
Luciana took Naemete and visited the Exodar for three days. Enaeon was happy to have her, as
always, and Freya loved to play with anyone bigger than her. Which was, coincidentally,
practically every living thing aboard the Exodar. Enaeon had picked up two cats and an owl as pets
since Luciana’s last visit, and though the owl was quite standoffish, one of the cats was
exceedingly patient with the tail-pulling Freya. The other simply avoided her unless she was
asleep.

With Luciana’s return, Amadeus entered Tanaris with caution. It was one of the last stops in their
year-long travels of Kalimdor and it would make them all feel like idiots if something were to go
terribly wrong so near their return to Stormwind. Luciana hated Tanaris nearly as much as she
hated Silithus - with a burning passion that rivaled the intensity of the sun’s gaze. Tanaris was
worse in some ways. The pale sands reflected the sun and nearly blinded them, until Lokaal
fashioned goggles for them with his remarkable skills in engineering. He used the eyes and hides of
the local basilisks, and they left the corpses for the buzzards, which swooped down and consumed
them within the hour.
Luciana also hated the sand trolls and swung into their wandering groups with reckless abandon. She took out her hatred of the desert on them to spare her squadron. They avoided the qiraji, and at Naemete’s behest visited the Caverns of Time. She had been there, years ago, but only briefly. Some of the bronze drakes that patrolled its winding halls remembered her, and they were welcomed after a brief confusion.

“You aren’t supposed to be here yet,” one drake said to Luciana.

“Yes, she is,” the other argued.

Luciana let them go at it for a while. “Would it be possible for us to rest here for the day?” Luciana interrupted. “I’ve got sand in my boots and it’s very unpleasant.”

“Oh, of course!” the second drake said brightly. “Would you all like a lift down to the cavern?”

“If you wouldn’t mind,” Luciana responded.

Several more drakes were summoned and they were leisurely flown down. The halls of the passage opened a ways down, and Luciana had to avoid looking at it. The Twisting Nether lay beyond and it was actually frightening to think that she could fall out of reality with just a badly placed wing. Naemete, on the other hand, was absolutely fascinated and peppered the air with questions until the drakes landed. Luciana was glad to be out of there the next morning. It was an interesting experience, and she had never met a dragon before, but the walls were making her nervous. Her skin itched whenever she passed by one of the creatures frozen in time that lined the separate passages of the Caverns.

They continued on through Tanaris, stopping regularly to clean sand and grit out of the hooves of their horses. Thunderer had a particularly rough time of it, being the heaviest of them. Eventually Luciana had Naemete cast spells on the mounts to counter part of the effects of gravity to lighten them. Otherwise they would only keep sinking into the pale, burning sand. Pop also needed protective spells for his paws, lest the pads be burned in the unforgiving heat. Victoria cooed over his pathetic, whining form every night.

Gadgetzan was a neutral party, though within their walls Amadeus did encounter a party of aggressive Horde adventurers. Amadeus remained outside while Luciana bartered for rooms at the inn. When she heard Jillian’s loud, threatening growl, she excused herself for a moment and stepped outside. She removed her helm, barked an order to stand down, and waited.

The Horde party that had been staring them down was slow to react. First, one of the two trolls balked. She had seen Luciana’s scarred jaw, and her eyes widened, and then she grabbed at the other troll’s arm to pull him back. Next, a goblin saw her and wisely bowed his head and took a few steps back. The blood elf stared at her wide-eyed for a few seconds, and then smiled uneasily and took a step back to show that she was standing down.

“Is there a problem?” Luciana growled when the two hot-headed orcs continued to throw taunts at her party.

She glared down the smaller one, whose leering grin slowly fell into a slack-jawed stare. “Naarkhan,” she heard him mumble, and then he turned and punched the other in the shoulder. “You fucking idiot! Shut up! That’s Naarkhan’s war party!” he said in Orcish.

That got the other orc’s attention, and he whipped his mostly bald head around to stare at her. “Oh,” he said dumbly.
“You fucking idiot!” the smaller orc repeated, grabbing his friend’s arm roughly and yanking him back. “Now what are we gonna do? She’s gonna fucking kill us!”

Luciana spoke in rough Orcish to them. “Leave, and I won’t.”

The smaller orc looked at her, wariness in his gaze, before nodding once curtly and pulling the other away.

“That could have turned out very badly,” Daniel commented.

“Yes, but it didn’t,” Luciana sighed. “Come on. Into the inn. And don’t get into any more fights. If you start a brawl I’m going to stand back and watch.”

“Aw, Luce!” Kain whined, but he was already grinning again. “You know you’d join in. You can never resist a good brawl.”

“This time, I would. We’re here representing all of Stormwind, and in a way, the entire Alliance. You think it’s funny to act like hot-headed fools and bandy my reputation so it can get dragged through the sand?” she snapped.

“Sorry, Luce,” Victoria piped up, somewhat contrite. “We’ll be good.”

“You will all be good,” Luciana said lowly. She received a chorus of nods and agreements, and let the matter rest. Her soldiers knew better than to make the same mistake twice. Running suicides for years had taught them caution when it came to her orders.

They stayed in the inn for a few days. Luciana had planned a swap day with Anduin while they stayed in the Caverns, and with some carefully manoeuvring and good timing, she and Naemete took a portal to the Mage Tower in Stormwind.

“Welcome, Princess!” a portal mage chirped when they popped into the room.

“Thank you,” Luciana said with a gracious nod, and then took off at a brisk pace.

It was a long walk to the Keep, and Luciana had the idea of taking gryphons. When she approached the flight master he immediately bowed to her. “What can I do for you, Princess?” he asked professionally.

“Would it be possible to borrow a gryphon for a short ride to the Keep? We’ve been walking through a desert for the last few weeks and it’s been exhausting.”

“Of course, Your Highness! I’ll get you a sturdy gryphon right away.”

“Thank you, Longdrink.”

He was smiling widely while he outfitted a gryphon for the short ride. It was a patient, if slow beast, but it lessened the trip by a full two hours of walking so Luciana made sure to give its neck a good scratch before sending it back to the roost.
Visiting Home

Chapter Summary

I unfortunately did not have the energy nor the wherewithal to write out smut for this chapter. But you can imagine there will be some power play, some begging, some chaining/tying-wrists-to-the-bed, possibly a strapon. I dunno, these two get up to all sorts of mischief if you leave them alone for a few hours.

Naemete fell back when they approached the entrance to the Royal Wing. “You can stay in there for now,” Luciana told her, pointing back to the petitioner’s chamber where chairs, food, and drink were provided for those who waited for an audience. “We won’t be... overly long. Probably.”

“Alright,” the draenei agreed easily. “I’ve always wanted to see the castle, anyway.”

“Well, here you are.”

Luciana hastened to the Royal Wing, sparing only a few hurried greetings for the guards she passed. She first visited the twin’s shared bedroom, which was still much too large for only one child to have alone. “Hey!” she crowed. “Mama’s home!” She wasn’t even sure if they’d recognize her, but Anduin had assured her that for the first two months Bolvar had asked for mama every day and night. She had drawn comfort from that for the first little while of her voyage.

“Mama!” one of the boys replied loudly, and she grinned and flung open the door.

“That’s right!” she cried, rushing into the room to grab Bolvar under the arms and swing him into the air. “It’s your mama!”

“Mama!” Alaric said. He sounded mad so she put Bolvar back down and turned to swing Alaric up in the air, too.

“I’m home!” she told him, bringing him in to kiss the tip of his nose. “I’m here for a whole day! And soon I’ll be home for a loooong time!”

“Mama’s home!” Bolvar started to yell. “Mama’s home!”

“Papa said Mama be gone,” Alaric said. “For a loooong time.”

“Only a year!” she corrected. “One year. Maybe a little bit more. But only a little bit. I love you little guys too much to stay away for a loooong time.”

“Good,” Alaric said, and he nodded, and Luciana found it hilarious.

“Lucy!” Anduin’s voice called right before he appeared in the open passageway. She felt his Light wash over her first and it brought tears unbidden to her eyes, and then she saw him smile and she put Alaric down.


She was still wearing her armour, so he took her face in gentle hands and kissed her soundly. When
he pulled away, he was still smiling widely, and she had a hard time letting him move away from her even that much. “It’s so good to see you again,” he murmured. Alaric was attached to his pants leg the moment he stilled in front of Luciana. The kid started to chant, “Papa, papa, papa, papa,” to try and get Anduin’s attention. Luciana chuckled, smiling when she looked down at him briefly.

“I’m glad,” she said to Anduin, and leaned in to press a quick kiss to his lips. “I’ll get out of this armour. Naemete, my mage, is waiting in the petitioner’s chamber for a little while. When are you planning to leave?”

“Later today,” he replied. “I’ll go for the evening, stay the night, spend the day with them and return in the evening.”

“Good plan,” she said. “Freya is growing so quickly. She laughs a lot. Every time I blow a raspberry.”

“What a blow raspberry?” Bolvar asked. His tiny hands looked so fragile against the armour of Luciana’s leg plate, and she put a careful hand on his back.

“When you blow a raspberry,” she said slowly. “It’s like this.” She blew one and he giggled and slapped her leg plate with both hands.

“Do again!” he said, and she obliged three more time before Anduin interjected.

“I think Mama wants to get out of her armour,” Anduin said.

“Armour?” Bolvar said.

“Yeah, this stuff,” Luciana replied, banging her gauntlet against her chestplate.

“Ohh. I think Mama you a dragon.”

She burst out laughing and shook her head. “No, I’m not. I’d like to be one. But I’m just a human with a bunch of metal plates. Come on, let me go get out of my armour. Stay with your papa for a while, okay?”

Bolvar had to be pried off her leg plate. The muted rainbow tones of the dark trillium were absolutely fascinating to him. “Where you got it?” he asked.

“Your grandpa had it made for me after your sister was born,” she replied.

He stared at the metal under his hands with comically wide eyes until Anduin managed to get him off it. Luciana hurried away to strip off the armour, examining it as she went. It was dented, scuffed and dirtied, but the metals used to forge it were some of the strongest materials in Azeroth and beyond and it had held up admirably.

Luciana yanked off her under-amour and hurried to rinse the sweat and dust off her skin in the shower. She pulled on a pair of loose, comfortable pants, but before she could get the shirt over her head, Anduin’s hands slid over her skin to rest on her stomach. She felt his lips touch her shoulder blade and she smiled, letting his Light wash the tension out of her back.

“My love,” he murmured against her skin.

“Anduin.”

She turned, leaned back against the table, and opened her thighs so Anduin could press in, as close
to her as he could manage. She wrapped powerful arms around his back, held him in a vice grip, relaxed, and let him sag against her chest.

“I missed you,” she murmured, leaning her cheek into his hair. “I missed the boys. I miss Freya. I miss Varian.”

“We all missed you, too,” he assured her quietly. “I’m so relieved to see you safe. You have no idea...”

“I’m sorry to worry you,” she said, carding a hand through his hair. “I really am. But I did promise you I’d come back. I will always come home to you.”

“I remember,” he said. “That doesn’t mean I don’t worry.”

“I know. I’m happy you worry about me, anyway. It means I’m important to you.”

“I’m married to you, you idiot,” he grumbled. “Of course you’re important to me.”

She laughed breathlessly, pulled his head back, pressed her nose into the crook of his neck, and inhaled deeply. Automatically her hand went to the back of his head, gentle and caressing. His hair was so soft. He was sweet like honeysuckle and warm like spice tea and milk, and the scent of linen and paper was deeper than she remembered - it was closer to dry wood and sheets mussed after a night of peaceful slumber. And under it all, she could smell a nearly intangible hint of something fiery and clean. She’d have time to guess what it was. That, at least, comforted her.

“What are you doing?” he asked, confused.

“You remember when we were in Hyjal, and took a month to train?”

“Yes?”

“We were at the Shrine of Goldrinn. I... He spoke to me.”

“He what?” Anduin leaned back to look at her incredulously. “You didn’t tell me that.”

“I wanted to tell you in person. It’s nothing bad,” she added hurriedly when his brow furrowed heavily with concern. “You know that Varian is his scion?”

“Yes...?”

“And you remember that when I was in the healing nexus, there was some disturbance?”

“Yes.”

“It was the sha, and Goldrinn. I remembered when I was at the shrine. He reminded me, I guess. He and I, we fought the sha out of me. And he offered me his blessing. I couldn’t understand why. He told me that it was because my suffering made me strong, or some such. I...” She laughed again, grinning as wide as her scar-stiffened face would allow. “He showed me how to get rid of my fear. Not all fear. That would be ridiculous. My fear of myself. He showed me how to stop holding back. I’ll have to keep working at it, but at least now I can.” Her smile softened. “I wanted to come home to you whole, Anduin. I don’t want to hide this part of myself from you. I... I’m afraid that it will scare you. I couldn’t handle that. But I can get past it. I agreed to be to Goldrinn as Varian is, if he could show me how to move past this fear.”

“What fear?” Anduin asked. “What part of yourself? You’re hiding from me?”
“The berserker,” she answered simply. “You’ve never seen me berserk. I always thought it would scare you. You wouldn’t be able to look at me again after seeing me let it loose.”

“That wouldn’t happen,” he assured her immediately. “I know that it’s a part of you. I know you’d never let it turn against me, or our family. And if you couldn’t yet, you’d learn.”

“I know. But I’m still scared. But I’m not going to fight it if a time comes when I need to use it around you. When we’re safe in the castle, or you’re in the Exodar, I don’t need it. But I know there will be a time when we’re both in the battlefield and I’ll let my fury loose completely.”

“I won’t be scared of you. I promise.”

“Thank you,” she said quietly, smiling softly. “You can’t understand what it means for me to have this home, this place that’s always open to me, even with my fury.”

“You’re always welcome with us,” Anduin told her. “You belong with us. We’re your family.”

“I know. But emotions aren’t logical.”

“I know.” He leaned in to kiss her softly, burying his fingers in her shaggy hair. “I love you,” he murmured against her lips.

“I love you,” she replied.

“The kids are with their caretakers,” Anduin said, a smile growing on his face. “And I’m not leaving for at least a few hours.”

“You little shit,” she said fondly. “You just wanted to get me alone so you could fuck me.”

He groaned lowly and pressed close to her, his hips pushing against hers. “I don’t deny it,” he mumbled, kissing along her scarred, mangled jawline. “It’s been ten months. Too long. I’ve been thinking about you, all this time. I thought about tying you up. It was nice, for a while. Then I thought, with your strength, we’d need chains.”

“I like where this is going,” she murmured, smiling and tilting her head up to give him access to her throat.

“And then I thought, you blindfolded me. Maybe I should return the favour.”

“Have you got everything ready?”

“Of course.”

“Then, we’re going to need those hours you bought us. It’s been ten months since I’ve had your cock inside me and I might need a bit of stretching, first. Your cock isn’t exactly small and it feels like fire to have it inside me, but I’m not big enough for your cock right now.” Every time she said the word ‘cock’, he nipped and licked at her neck until, finally, he pulled her away from the table.

“We’d best get started, then,” he said with a smile full of dark promises.
Hours later, when Anduin was exhausted and Luciana’s hips ached and she was loose-limbed and satisfied in a way she rarely was, she took a leisurely shower. While she washed herself she decided to visit Varian’s room. Unfortunately, she was ambushed on her way there. She’d wanted to check the scents that lingered there, try to continue easing her way into reacquainting herself with the familiar-but-not scents of her family. But, as she soon discovered, Bolvar and Alaric had other plans.

“Mama!” Bolvar cried, running down the stone floored hall as fast as his little legs could carry him. “Mama! Mama! Mama! Mama!”

“Hey!” Luciana crowed, reaching down to sweep him up into the air. He settled against her shoulder, in the crook of her arm, so perfectly. She smiled down at him, warmth blossoming in her chest. “How’s my little kiddo?”

“I’m good!” he replied. “Mama going away again?”

“No, not until tomorrow night,” she told him. While she was talking to Bolvar, Alaric attached himself to her leg. He could barely fit his arms around her calf, and she looked down and feigned great surprise. “Well, hey there, Alaric!” she said. “When did you get here?”

“Now,” he told her, and she laughed.

“You wanna come up, too?” she asked, offering her arm. “Come on, then.” She kneeled. “Grab my shoulder, and hang on tight, okay?”

“Mama is strong,” Bolvar said, drawing out the words. “Alaric is fat.”

“A’m not!”

“Now, kids,” Luciana said gravely. “Don’t be mean to each other. You’re twins! Do you know what that means?”

“What?” Alaric asked, a second after Bolvar said it. Bolvar stuck his tongue out and made a teasing noise, and Luciana bounced him in her arm.

“It means,” she said slowly, “that you two were born with a best friend. You know how lucky you are to be born with your very own best friend?”

“Real lucky?” Alaric suggested.

“Really, real lucky?” Bolvar added.

“Really, really, really lucky,” Luciana corrected. “Would you mind opening the doors?” she said quietly to a guard, who nodded and moved to let her into Varian’s rooms. “Family is important. Mama has four siblings. Two older brothers, and two younger sisters. And when we were growing up we were all friends because we knew that even if everyone else didn’t like us, we would still have each other. That’s important, yeah? To have people you know will always love you. And Mama and Papa love you two very, very much.”

“What about Yaya?” Bolvar asked.
“Who’s Yaya?” Luciana said, nonplussed.

“Yaya! Little Yaya! Papa say we have a little Yaya.” Bolvar pouted. The guard shut the door quietly behind them and Luciana brought the kids over to the wide bed off to the side of the room. “This is Grappa’s room,” Bolvar added, looking about as though he’d just realized where he was.

“Yeah, this is Grandpa’s room,” Luciana said, stressing the word ‘grandpa’ so they’d learn the proper pronunciation. “Papa must have told you about your little sister,” she continued. “Her name is Freya. Try to say it? Freya.”

“Feya,” Alaric said dutifully.

“Yaya,” Bolvar said absently.

“We’ll practice,” Luciana sighed. “Did Papa tell you where Freya is?”

“Essoda,” Bolvar said.

“Essodar!” Alaric corrected.

“Exodar,” Luciana said. “Yes, she’s in the Exodar. With the draenei.”

“Like Uncle Kri!” Alaric exclaimed. “Papa say we can say Uncle.”

“He really big,” Bolvar stage-whispered. “And blue.”

“He clip-clops like a horsie,” Alaric added.

“Right, like Uncle Kri. They’re all really nice people, and our kingdom is friends with theirs. When Yaya - I mean, Freya was born, she was really weak and sick. So we asked if the draenei could take her to the Exodar, where they can keep her safe and healthy and she can grow up big and strong like you two monkeys...” At that, she dropped them on the bed and got to work tickling their tummies. Alaric squealed loudly, but Bolvar started flailing his feet and she had to dodge, smiling all the while.

“Tickle monster!” Alaric shrieked laughingly. “Tickle monster!”

“Arr!” Luciana play-growled. “Tickle monster is here to tickle you!” She let them settle after a few moments, giving each soft little tummy a kiss and a raspberry. “The draenei are our friends, and their leader Prophet Velen is friends with your Papa. Actually, Papa learned how to heal from Velen!”

“Papa is real good at heal,” Alaric said wisely.

“Yes, he is good at healing,” Luciana agreed. “And your Mama is friends with some draenei, too. You won’t remember him, but Enaeon was there when you were born. He helped your Mama out a lot, and saved my life a whole bunch of times. And he saved all your aunts and uncles from Mama’s squadron, too. He’s really nice and likes to joke, and cares about his friends a whole lot.”

“Like Mama,” Bolvar said. “Papa said Mama is gone a lot now ‘cause Mama got lots of friends all over the world, an’ Mama gotta help them all!”

“That’s right,” Luciana agreed with a warm smile. “I’ve gone to help all our friends, all over the world. And while I’m helping them, Uncle Enaeon is helping Freya to grow big and strong and healthy and smart, just like you two!”
“We see Yaya soon?” Alaric asked suddenly.

“You’ll see her,” Luciana promised. “Hopefully in just two years. Do you know how old she is?”

“She one and... and a bit!” Alaric answered.

“Right! And how old are you two?”

“We’re almost tree!”

“Three,” Luciana said. “Right. Do you know how old Mama is?”

“Tenty-six!”

“Twenty-six. And how old is Papa?”

“Toonty-four,” Bolvar said.

“Twenty-four,” Luciana laughed. “And how old is Grandpa?”

“He so old,” Bolvar said, and Luciana burst out laughing.

“He’s forty-four,” she told them. “And he’s not that old!”

“He like a say that,” Bolvar said.

“When we get to see Yaya?” Alaric interrupted. “I wanna see Yaya!”

“Yaya is with Uncle Enaeon in the Exodar,” Luciana said patiently. “When she’s four years old, she will maybe come back to Stormwind. Maybe,” Luciana emphasized, because while it was expected that Freya would return to her birthplace after three years, it wasn’t firm. If she needed to stay in the Exodar for her health and her safety, she would stay there with Enaeon until she could return. Such a trip would be hard for two young children, so Alaric and Bolvar couldn’t visit her. Sending them through a portal wasn’t the best option, either, as they’d need expensive protective runes that would take a long time to make. No, it was best to wait until it was safe for Freya to return.

“Wanna see her now!” Alaric cried, face scrunching up.

“You can’t see her right now,” Luciana said. “She’s too little!”

“Wanna see Yaya!”

Luciana sighed. There was a tantrum incoming, she could feel it, and there was no reasoning with young children. Bolvar was starting up too now that Alaric had gotten it in his head to see Freya right now. It was good she was so patient with kids, because there was really no way to bargain with two three year olds. She’d let them cry it out a bit, then distract them, and they’d move on quickly enough.
Luciana didn’t have much time to spare for Anduin when he returned the next evening at nine o’clock. Still, she had Naemete go to the enclosed courtyard to start the process of opening a portal to a non-secured location. Creating a portal to a secured location was easy - Stormwind had one in the Mage Tower, Dalaran had one in the center of their great city. Most main hubs of activity had them. Creating a portal with a set of coordinates was more difficult, and took a bit more time to prepare.

That gave Luciana just enough time to say farewell to her sons, and then to Anduin. To Bolvar and Alaric, she gave kisses all over their chubby faces and two promises to come back soon. To Anduin, she gave a private farewell for which she drew him away, into her bedroom. They left the twins with a caretaker, and Luciana shut the passageway behind them and pulled Anduin into a warm hug. She tried to hold him as close as she could without squeezing, tried to match every inch of her skin to his body. After this, she would have to put her armour back on - but for a few more minutes, her skin was blissfully bare save for her under-armour clothes.

She felt his hand slide into her hair, and then he turned his head to hide his face against her neck. “I love you,” he said quietly. “I miss you whenever you leave. I hope that soon we can stay together. For a while, at least. I hate sending you off. I know you like to travel and I know you’re safe with your squadron, but it’s… it’s hard on me, Lucy,” he admitted. “I don’t like to be alone when I know I don’t have to be anymore. I got used to doing things together, instead of always on my own. I want it to stay that way.”

“I’m sorry,” she murmured, pressing a gentle kiss to his shoulder. “I love you, too. After this I’m going to stay in Stormwind with you, for a while. Varian might need to send me out again but for at least a few months I’m going to be yours and yours alone.” She didn’t promise, because she couldn’t really predict what would happen in the war on Draenor and how often Varian might need her to travel. But she could still offer hope that it was a possibility. She could still offer to fight for it to be real.

“I love you,” Anduin said again, and let his Light wash through her. It cooled her skin, warmed her chest and she inhaled deeply at the sensation of being embraced so fully.

“I’ll be back soon. Two months,” she reminded him. “And then I’m here, just for you. Family dinners every night. Varian can take a portal home every few nights, too, if he remembers,” she joked weakly.

Anduin smiled against her skin. “I love you.”

“I’ll see you again soon, my light.”

She kissed his lips softly, his face held carefully in her battle-worn hands, and when she pulled away, he pulled her back. Finally, he let her go with a sad smile. “I’ll leave you to your armour,” he murmured.

“I’ll see you on my way out.”

She dressed quickly. Though Naemete would need time to create a stable portal, it took forever to get plate armour on. First, protective leathers had to be slipped on and tightened. Then, a layer of mail had to be slid on over that, especially around her knees and elbows. Those joints were not protected by protective trillium like her torso or legs, and needed the added mithril armour over the
leather. Her torso had several interlocking pieces that moved well together when on her body, but could be difficult to get on in the first place.

Blackrock boots were good for crushing enemies underfoot, but were a pain to get on. Her cape was attached to the front of her chest plate with sturdy metal hooks, and rings strengthening the holes in the leather. Her pauldrons went over that. They were useful for dipping down and getting her spiked shoulders under her enemies to toss them, but they were heavy. Her helm, at least, was simple - slip it onto her head. Easy enough.

She inspected Oathkeeper before sheathing the sword slowly to enjoy the sing of the metal. She checked and rechecked her armor, observed herself in the mirror, and left the room. Anduin waited for her outside, in the hall. The guards, though long used to seeing the royal family act like regular people instead of the high and mighty Royals they usually had to present as, were overly polite today. They either looked away pointedly, moved away from Luciana and Anduin, or actually engaged each other in muted conversation.

Whatever they did, Luciana was thankful. Though she loved Anduin and knew he enjoyed public displays of her affection, overt romance was difficult for her. She’d done in on the harbor before leaving ten months ago, but only because she knew she wouldn’t be seeing him much for an entire year and wanted to leave him with the distinct impression that she was absolutely smitten with him. Which was not false, certainly. She just had a hard time showing it around other people, sometimes. Well, often. Almost always.

Anduin sighed in exasperation and removed her helm, careful not to catch it on her ears. She took it from him with a sheepish grin, and he smiled and cupped her face in his smooth hands. “Be careful,” he murmured. “Watch your step. Watch your back. Check your water before drinking it. Build your fire pits properly. Make sure you sleep enough. Eat enough. Don’t let yourself get hurt. Too much,” he added after a moment. “Keep your healer up. Keep an eye on your kiddos. Don’t let them get into bar fights. Don’t engage an enemy you can’t defeat.”

“I know,” she sighed explosively. “Holy Light, Anduin! I know! I’m the one with the military record.”

He laughed. “I know you know,” he said warmly. “I just worry about you. Let me worry,” he told her. “Let me show you I love you, instead of just saying it.”

She leaned in close, and spoke quietly. More for his sake, really. She wasn’t at all bothered by speaking about sex in public, while Anduin would visibly redden at the mere mention of his own sexual experiences. “You showed me yesterday,” she murmured. “I think my memory isn’t that bad quite yet, Anduin.”

Predictably, his ears turned red. His eyes flickered between the guards and though gauging who might have heard. He cleared his throat quietly and pursed his lips at her. “Why must you always try to embarrass me?” he asked.

“Because you’re cute when you blush,” she said. “What?” she demanded when he groaned and hid his face against her chest plate. He didn’t have to stoop down very far to do it - she was barely three inches shorter than him. “It’s true!”

“Lucy!” he scolded, but the effect was completely ruined by the fact that he was practically cowering against her chest. “Really!”

She laughed for a moment, and then pulled him up gently with one hand, the other occupied holding her helm. “C’mere,” she said fondly, and gave him a soft kiss. “I’ll see you soon.”
“Be careful,” he murmured against her mouth. “I’m holding you to your oath.”

“I’d expect nothing else from my husband.”

He smiled, the expression slightly strained, and sighed. He stepped back to let her pass. “Go on, then, love. Your mage is probably conjuring food for the long wait you’re making her suffer.”

“Oh,” she protested with a smile. She moved past him, but changed her mind and pulled him into one last, firm kiss. “I love you,” she told him. “More than you can imagine. More than I can express right now. Never doubt how much I love you, my light.”

“I might doubt a lot of things, and a lot of people,” he replied, eyes shining slightly with what she thought might have been his Light. “But I don’t doubt you.”

She smiled tightly at him and pulled on her helmet. “Give the twins lots of kisses and hugs for me,” she said.

“I always do.”

“I love you.”

“I love you, too.”

She left then before it became impossible. It was hard on Anduin for her to be gone for so long, but it was hard for her to leave. She’d tried to show it, tried to show how difficult it was for her to turn and walk away. She hoped he’d understood. She knew he did, because if anyone’s mind was quick enough to keep up with hers and make the connections she tried to show, it was his. Varian’s, too, but that man was on a whole other level.

Naemete’s portal was still a bit wavy when Luciana found her, but it didn’t take more than a few extra minutes to finalize the stabilization process. “It won’t last long,” Naemete warned, magic flowing in fading ribbons around her fingers. “Let us step through now.”

Luciana went through first, the world materializing around her in seconds. Jillian and Kain had first watch, it seemed. It wasn’t necessary in an inn, but they did it anyway just in case some smartass got the bright idea to attack the Princess’ personal guards. She moved aside for Naemete, who came through a moment later.

“Welcome back!” Jillian greeted. “We had a hell of a time while you were out canoodlin’.”

“And I had a hell of a time out canoodlin’ while you were out here having a hell of a time,” Luciana said with a grin. “Let me tell you, the man is flexible enough to...”

“No!” Kain said firmly. “No. No offense, Luce, but I really don’t want to spend the next two weeks picturing you and the Prince doing private things.”

She cackled and mussed up his scraggly black hair as she passed by him. He squawked at her and brushed it back, away from his eyes. “Fuck off,” he grumbled, but he handed her a key anyway.

“I did that plenty at home, thanks,” she replied, and laughed triumphantly when he cried out wordlessly in complaint.

“So?” Naemete asked, following Luciana into camp. “We are on our way soon to Dustwall?”

“Yeah,” Luciana replied, leaving the room. She guessed the ones to the right were also rented out for Amadeus, as the door handles had ‘Occupied’ signs on them, and her squadron knew better
than to scatter in a potential danger zone. She tested the key, found it worked, and opened the door
in near silence to find Daniel snoring quietly on one of three beds tucked into the small room.
“We’ll take ship to a safe port just off the ruins of Theramore. An Alliance ship will meet us there
about two weeks later. There are Alliance settlements scattered through the marsh. We’ll find as
many as we can in the time we have, try to help out.”

“I would like to see Theramore, if I can,” Naemete whispered. Her eyes glowed in the dark room,
presenting Luciana with two bright points of blue-white light toward which to direct her words. “I
read about the mana bomb that was dropped there, and about the heroes who helped to clear it of
Horde invaders after the fact, to let Lady Proudmoore retrieve the artifact that had powered the
bomb. But I would like to inspect the ruins for myself. I have heard that there are yet still strange
magical remnants that affect the area. The ground itself still acts strangely.”

“Alright,” Luciana murmured. “I can’t make any promises, but we should be able to take a day,
maybe a day and a night in the area. If the magic is unstable we’ll have to camp outside the ruins.”

“I can check, first,” Naemete offered. “It should be easy. It’s not so different from inspecting
potential paths for portals.”

“Alright. We’ll do that, then. For now, though, I want to sleep while it’s relatively safe to do so.”

“Me, too,” Naemete agreed. Luciana saw the draenei smile, even though the room should have
been too dark for a human to see it. Luciana supposed there were more than one advantage to
having the blessing of a wolf Ancient.

As promised, there was a goblin ship prepared for them by their departure date. Word had been
sent ahead that an adventuring party of ten was looking for a ship that would bring them to a port
not often used by Gadgetzan, and when Luciana had sent Lars and Jillian in to ‘discuss’ it with the
dock masters, she’d instructed them to haggle, and then when a decent price was set, offer a large
sum of gold to have their party conveniently fade from the collective memory of the ship’s crew. It
had worked wonders, apparently, to offer then a few thousand gold. To Luciana, who had her own
personal fortune just from being born noble, it was nothing. To the crew of the Mister Biggums, it
was “a heck of a lot of gold”.

They were left alone for the most part. They had their area in the belly of the ship, which was
surprisingly well-made for a goblin contraption - not that that was saying much - and the other
passengers, few as they were, avoided them. Luciana gave off an unapproachable air to those who
even had the chance to glimpse her through the living wall her squadron presented. The glare of her
eyes past the shadows cast by her helm only accentuated it.

There weren’t many others in the ship besides Amadeus Squadron and the crew, anyway. The trip
was a short one, and an unusual one. The ship’s captain had found as many other people as he
could who were interested in voyaging to Dustwallow, but that didn’t matter like it normally
would. The amount of gold Luciana’s group had surrendered had made the trip more than
worthwhile.

They had to take a long trip around the edge of the Thousand Needles, whose waters were choppy
and threatening at best. Luciana was stuck in one room in the belly of the boat for five days. She
could have left, but she didn’t want to risk the crew recognizing her. They’d assumed she was
someone important, sure. Her armour along was worth more gold than any of them would ever see
in their entire lifetime.

But if they found out she was the Princess, not only would they each present a potential
information leak that could lead to assassins and ambushes, they’d also want a lot more gold to
stay quiet. No, it was best if Luciana stayed hidden. Despite knowing this, she was still snappy and aggressive by the time she allowed herself to leave the hold mere hours before they docked.

The marsh was a muggy and hot place, unpleasant and downright dangerous if one stepped on the wrong patch of mud. Still, they had a plan and a schedule to keep, and a ruined city to inspect. They disembarked hurriedly, their packs on their shoulders, and the ship was at the horizon within the hour.

“Where to first?” Lokaal asked when the group stalled on the edge of the land. It was barely a beach, with just a shallow strip of sand full of plant matter and broken seashells and driftwood.

“First, we go to Theramore,” Luciana replied. “Naemete will make sure it’s safe for us to enter. We’ll take a look around, let Naemete get a few readings of whatever it was she wanted, and if it’s safe we’ll camp there the night. If not, well... Get ready for crocolisks.”


“I hate whiners,” Luciana said mildly. “Don’t make me make you do pushups, Chris.”

He wisely kept silent, but he did shoot her plaintive glares every now and again.
It was dangerous to open portals on seafaring ships. Luciana couldn’t visit Freya during the five week trip across the ocean. She had wondered, briefly, why she’d scheduled a ship to retrieve Amadeus from the edge of Dustwallow instead of having Naemete open a portal to Stormwind. She had wondered it only briefly because she remembered a conversation she’d had with Dania, years ago, on the nature of portals. The more people that stepped through, the more frayed the edges of the portal became. Dania had described it as a tunnel through the Twisting Nether, from one hole in reality to another. Without constant maintenance from a skilled portal mage, the portal would weaken and eventually collapse - and it could take someone with it.

Luciana didn’t want to risk losing one of her squad members, nor did she want to separate them needlessly for an extended period of time while Naemete recovered her mana. No, it was best to take ship. The SNS *Ironsides* was a sturdy warship that had made the cross-continental trip many times. It had a full crew and plenty of space for a royal escort. There was no danger of the crew spreading information about Luciana because they were all hardy members of the Stormwind navy.

It was almost a relief to be onboard. Naemete and Lokaal weren’t familiar with human military customs, but they kept their eyes open and followed Luciana. She walked with assurance, having memorized the layouts of Alliance battleships long ago. Few things had changed since she’d left the army. Gun racks had been scattered throughout the ship instead of kept localized in the hold. It made sense, considering the amount of naga attacks that had occurred on deep-sea voyages since the Cataclysm.

The captain of the ship was waiting at the top of the boarding plank. “Your Highness,” he greeted with a stiff salute. “Welcome aboard the *Ironsides*. Quarters for you and your squadron are ready and waiting for you in the belly.”

“Thank you, captain,” she replied with an absent nod. Her eyes flitted about the ship, inspecting it with keen eyes. “How was your trip over?” she asked as the rest of Amadeus filed onto the ship.

“Pretty even, Your Highness. No major scuffles. A handful of naga, but we fired warning shots from the cannons and they scurried off back into the black.”

“Good.” She nodded again.

“Shall I call a salute?” he asked.

“No, let your sailors keep to their duties. I’d like to be off as soon as possible.”

“We’ll need a few hours to restock, mostly water from inland,” he started.

“Not a problem. We’ll get situated in the hold. If you need, you can take a handful of Amadeus with you. Jillian is a hunter,” she said, waving the worgen forward. “Naemete is a mage.”

“I have many spells for invisibility,” Naemete chirped.

Luciana observed her squadron for a moment. “Captain, what supplies were you needing?”

“Water, fruit, and meat, mostly,” he said. “With all respect, Your Highness, I wouldn’t dare talk back to you, but why do you ask?”

“We’ve spent the last few weeks traipsing about the marshes,” she replied, meeting his gaze.
squarely and keeping her tone even. “We’re quite familiar with it, and its wildlife. All of my squad members have skills that proved useful out here. If it’ll lessen the time needed before departure, we’ll head back out and work alongside your soldiers.”

“Your Highness, it’s really not necessary,” the captain tried to insist. “We’ll take care of things. I’ve got plenty of able men and women aboard my ship...”

“Captain,” she interrupted. “I want to set off as soon as possible,” she reminded him. “We’ll shave off a few hours if we head back out for the meat. How do you feel about crocolisk?”

“Like it well enough,” he said. “Your Highness...”

“It’ll be good for your soldiers, too. Give them a break from the ship’s walls.”

The captain seemed mildly displeased, but he hid it admirably, as he didn’t want to chance insulting the Princess. “If you think it’s best, Your Highness...”

“I do. Send your men out,” she said. “Lawrence and Christopher can bring them to the water sources we found.” She gestured and the two men stepped forward. “How long is the voyage expected to be? Five weeks?”

“Give or take a few days, yes. We usually supplement dried land meat with sea turtles and fish caught along the way.”

“We’ll gather enough for four weeks of dried, then, and a fresh meal today. It’ll be good for morale to have fresh meat, no?” she said. It wasn’t a question, though she framed it as one.

“Yes, Your Highness,” the captain sighed, seeing he wasn’t going to be able to refuse. He wasn’t a military captain, and it showed in his bearing, though he was respectful enough considering it was his ship. “I’ll have a party ready for water gathering in ten minutes. Will you be...?”

“We’ll head out now,” she interrupted. “Three hours, I think, will be enough time.” She turned to Jillian, who nodded her lupine head curtly.

“Aye, plenty of crocs sunning ‘emselves out on the beach a bit further north,” she said. “And crabs, all scuttlin’ ‘round Theramore.”

“Good. We’ll have some variety. Lars, how are your knives?”

“Sharp,” he said simply.

“Amadeus!” she said. “Let’s head back down. We’ve got crocs to butcher.”

Their group was one with experience in many fields. After the promised three hours one half of the squadron had gathered a wide and tall pile of dead crocolisks on the edge of the marshes. The other half of Amadeus had their own pile of giant crabs nearer to the ruins of Theramore. The blast that had destroyed the city had significantly affected the local population of crabs, but they’d been left alone for years and the numbers that Amadeus took was next to nothing compared to what they left behind.

The captain of the ship had apparently gotten over his consternation at having the Crown Princess of Stormwind doing dirty work. His sailors were ecstatic nearly to the point of fainting to have her on board, and for their part the soldiers kept a respectful distance and saluted sharply whenever she passed them, despite the fact that she barely acknowledged them. She would, later. Probably at dinner, where they would be eating the animals she’d killed for them.
They had few hours before mess, which they’d eat after starting their voyage. Luciana was already washing blood off her armour when the soldiers sent out for water returned with barrels full of the stuff.

Luciana knew she was safe in the belly of a Class Five fully-manned Alliance warship, and had no problem stripping down to her under-armour. The soldiers around her, however, seemed to find something worth staring at when she sat down in the midst of their barracks, Amadeus quickly doing the same in a loose circle around her. No one outside her squadron could approach her, it seemed. She preferred it that way. She had a place in her heart for soldiers - Light, she still considered herself one - but right now she just wanted to wash the sweat and grime out of her hair, and the gore off her armour, in peace.

When she was satisfied that her armour was in acceptable condition, she borrowed one of the officer’s shower stalls and took a brief shower. It was more of a rinse, mostly just for her hair and to freshen up a bit. Still, she felt better when she was a bit cleaner. She’d be sure to have a good scrub-down when Naemete had the energy to conjure water for it. No use in wasting perfectly potable water in the middle of a sea voyage.

Dinner in the mess hall was nostalgic. It had been years since Luciana had eaten with the rest of the soldiers in mess. Some of her squad members, it seemed, had similar feelings on the matter.

“How long’s it been since we ate at mess?” Victoria murmured. Luciana could hardly hear her, and guessed she was speaking to Jillian. The worgen didn’t reply verbally, and Luciana couldn’t see her, as she was at the head of the pack.

She led the way into mess, left Amadeus to scatter throughout the mess hall to mingle with the other soldiers, and climbed the three short stairs to join the ship captain, the Captain and his officers. They were all standing in parade rest while they waited for her. The hall fell into a deathly silence when she paused in front of the table.

“At attention!” the Captain bellowed. For three seconds, there was the cacophony of chairs being pushed back and boots hitting the floor. Luciana knew they were all standing and facing her.

“Salute Her Royal Highness Lady Luciana, Crown Princess of Stormwind!”

There was again a raucous three or so seconds while the soldiers below all followed protocol and stomped their right foot and then snapped their heels together, their hands at their foreheads in a crisp, official salute.

“Salute!” the Captain said again, and the officers all saluted her - including the nervous ship captain, who would normally not be considered military personnel.

“At ease, officers,” Luciana rumbled, throwing her voice. She turned to face the soldiers. “At ease, soldiers.” They all fell into parade rest and waited. Uncountable pairs of eyes were focused solely on her, wide and attentive. She considered for a brief moment simply forgoing a speech and letting them eat, but she knew they were expecting at least a few words.

“I and my squadron have spent the last year battling our way through Kalimdor, bringing relief and aid to any Alliance settlements we could reach. We’ve fought wildlife, Horde warparties and centaurs. We’ve battled countless qiraji, innumerable demons, and an endless stream of Naga in the old Feathermoon Stronghold. We’ve held fast to our weapons and we’ve brought adventurers and champions to the aid of our people, and our allies. Now, after nearly a year of constantly fighting for our lives and the lives of those around us, we’re heading home for a well deserved leave.”
Luciana glanced around the hall, not meeting anyone’s eyes but making them feel as though she saw them all. She clasped her hands behind her back, rolling her heavy shoulders impressively. “You are the ones chosen to bring us home,” she continued. “We are not sailors, nor marines. We are land soldiers, ground-fighters. We put our lives in your hands in the final leg of our voyage in the firm knowledge that you will carry us safely to our home in Stormwind’s halls.” She smirked suddenly. “And for that, I think you’ve earned a good meal! Enjoy the fresh meat, kids. As you were!” She raised her right hand in a wave, a relaxed salute, and let them eat the meals they’d gathered from the kitchen windows minutes before her arrival.

She joined the officers at their table. Her squadron had taken a seat with the soldiers and seemed grateful to finally be able to eat. She could see Jillian already tearing into a nearly-raw hunk of meat, to the discontentment of her neighbours and the amusement of some others.

“If you don’t mind me asking, Your Highness,” the Captain said when the specially prepared food had been brought over by kitchen staff. “Just to clarify some rumours. Where in Kalimdor have you been travelling? We heard of your actions in Ashenvale and Stonetalon. Very impressive, if you don’t mind me saying. Efforts have redoubled ever since you left.”

“I started in Darkshore,” she said, taking a bite of herb-baked potato. “They have things well in hand, so we moved into Felwood. Brought reinforcements for the worgen stationed there in the Emerald Sanctuary, and helped them rank and plan their needs for the next few years. After that, we traveled north through a few more areas like Winterspring, down again into Hyjal, further south through places like Desolace, into Silithus, across to Tanaris, and up to the marshes. We avoided the Barrens, as they’re mostly Horde-held and moving into it would be seen as overly aggressive and spark unwanted fighting. I did have correspondence with them to determine if they’d need a renewed Call to Arms, and to see what supplies they were lacking.”

“Mostly able-bodied fighters, if I’m not mistaken,” the Lieutenant said.

“Correct,” Luciana said simply.

“So, you’ve been truly busy this past year,” the Captain said. “All over Kalimdor.” He huffed a laugh. “You’ve driven your men hard, Your Highness.”

“My squadron does not have only men, Captain,” she said smoothly. “And yes. I’ve driven them hard. I’ve driven myself harder. As I’m sure you remember, I’m a warrior. I’m built for it.”

“Of course,” the Captain said hurriedly, realizing his mistake. “I’m sure your... soldiers,” he settled, “appreciate having you as their leader.”

“I’d be remiss in my oath to them if they didn’t. Come, tell me of your voyage here. I heard there were naga?”

“Yes, but only a small number...” he assured her.

The meal was fine, though Luciana was growing tired of crocolisk meat. The conversation was stilted as the Captain tried to impress Luciana with his numerous accomplishments at sea, and the Lieutenant bit his tongue at some of the apparently embellished tales. It wasn’t uncommon, and Luciana didn’t begrudge the Captain his attempts at impressing her. The Lieutenant finally spoke up again with something that truly interested her.

“I’m not sure if you’ve heard yet, Your Highness,” he interjected right as the Captain opened his mouth to talk again. “It’s not widespread knowledge. I think it hasn’t yet been shared with His Majesty, either. I heard from my sister in law, who works in the head office as a treasurer.”
“What is it?” Luciana asked when he waited for her to respond. He perked up when she looked at him directly from her place at the head of the table.

“You’ve been slated for a Heart of Valour for the happenings in the Barrens. They’ve been discussing it for years, ever since you returned. Some argued against it, stating your discharge would disallow the bestowing of the medal,” he said, ignoring the sudden silence of the table. “But they’ve since fallen silent on the matter.”

“Interesting,” she said quietly. “I’d expect them to grow silent on the matter. Whether or not someone has been discharged, unless it was done so with dishonours, has no bearing on the bestowing of a medal of honour. You say I’m slated for it?”

“It’s what I’ve heard, Your Highness,” he nodded. “It’s not a guarantee, but...”

“It’s still an honour. Yes,” She hummed absently, taking a sip of wine. It was dry and a bit too sweet for her, but she enjoyed it all the same. It had been quite some time since she’d last been able to enjoy well-made wine. Since they’d left Teldrassil, really. “What made you recall this now?” she asked. Really she was asking why he’d brought it up at all.

“I thought it appropriate,” he told her. “Considering you’ve spent the last year fortifying military and civilian bases alike.”

“True enough, I suppose,” she said easily. “I’ll have to be patient and see what the Council decides, then.”

When she could finally retreat safely from the mess hall without offending anyone, cooks included, she sequestered herself in the barrack reserved for Amadeus.

“You look beat,” Victoria commented. Her naturally brown skin had stood up better than Luciana’s paler self had in the dessert, and she’d likely have an easier time under the scorching ocean sun, as well.

“Ugh,” Luciana groaned, flopping onto her stomach on the bed she’d been given. It was wider and more comfortable than anyone else’s, but she was willing to bet the Captain had a similar one. “Officers. Sucking up. Don’t wanna talk to them again.”

She heard Victoria laugh even as she moved away. Pop’s black nails clicked on the treated wood of the floor as he followed his human.

The bed dipped when Jillian sat on the cot at Luciana’s hip. When the rest of the squadron was occupied elsewhere, some visiting with the off-duty sailors, she spoke. “Can we talk?” she said quietly. She was in human form now and her voice lacked the rough edge it would otherwise have.

“Of course,” she said. “It’s about Des and Vic?”

“Yeah,” Jillian sighed. “I think I want to stay in Stormwind with him, now. But I don’t want to leave Vic behind, or let her go out and get herself killed without me. And I don’t want her to feel left behind, either.”

“I get it,” Luciana soothed when Jillian became agitated. “Have you spoken to her yet?”

“No. You know how she gets about people feelings.”

“Yeah, we all do,” Luciana groaned and sat up. “Alright. Talk to me.”
“What?”


“Ah, right.”

Their conversation was muted, for privacy but also because Jillian was ill at ease about it. A sailor delivered a werelamp to Luciana right before light’s out was called. Her bed was hidden away from the rest of the barracks with a wooden wall she could see had been added recently to the ship, and she listened for the sailor’s footsteps until he was completely out of the Amadeus barrack.

“I think it’s time for bed,” Jillian sighed. “Still don’t know what I’m gonna do.”

“I’m gonna lock you three in a room when we get back to Stormwind,” Luciana grumbled. “And you’re gonna talk it out. Either two of you will die and I’ll kill the survivor for killing two of my family, one of you will die and the others I’ll shove together as pay off, or you’ll figure it out.” She yawned, hard enough to crack her jaw. Her scars pulled at her face and she rubbed her jaw absently until the tingling faded. “But you’re right, I think. I need sleep.”

“Thanks, Luce,” Jillian said quietly.

“Anytime, Jill. It’s what I’m here for. Well, that and stepping on imps.”

“I’ll never figure out why you insisted on doing that.”

“They’re crunchy,” she said plaintively.

Jillian made a noise of disgust as she left. She pulled the curtain shut across the opening to Luciana’s small but private room, and she was bathed in darkness. After only a moment, her eye adjusted and she glanced around the room. Out of curiosity, she leaned up to look in the mirror sitting on the dresser.

Her eyes gleamed like those of an animal. She didn’t look the same as Naemete or Lokaal, whose eyes were blue-white from the Holy Light. She didn’t look the same as Jillian, whose worgen form had the white reflective eyes of any other wolf. Her gaze was yellow and heavy. Her eyes were like Varian’s eyes.

She smiled privately to herself and reclined on her bed. She had a long trip in front of her and she felt she’d need the rest to deal with the Captain. He was good at his job, certainly. But she could only handle so many suck-ups at once. At least the soldiers gave her some space.
Her city welcomed her home with the fanfare and celebrations worthy of a Princess. Anduin, not Varian to Luciana’s surprise, made a grand speech about cooperation between allies and continued efforts to protect the Alliance, its interests, and its homes all across Azeroth’s many lands. Luciana was in a daze as she marched her squadron on horseback through the docks, up the ramps, through the Cathedral Square, around the Dwarven District, and then up into the Keep. They dismounted at the base of the stairs, surrounded by City Guards to keep the crowds of cheering citizens at bay.

Luciana turned, breaking herself out of her dazed state. These were her people, she reminded herself. Her city. Her kingdom.

She raised her hands, asking for silence, and was utterly pleased and surprised when she received it. Almost immediately the dull roar of the crowds turned to a mere murmur, leaving her off-balance for a moment. She would need to spend more time in the city to acclimate herself to this - to the power afforded her merely for her title, her position.

“Citizens of Stormwind!” she cried. “I have traveled nearly the entirety of Kalimdor with my squadron this past year! We’ve traipsed through deserts and forests, rid Alliance-held lands of Horde, naga, and demon alike. We’ve risked our lives to bring relief and aid to our allies. We return to Stormwind, to our homes, tired but glad. We know that our efforts have not been in vain, for each time we see our people alive and well, we know that we are successful! That the Alliance stands, united and strong!” she cried, raised her voice to prompt some cheering. She was not disappointed.

When Luciana raised her hand again, she was rewarded with silence. “We are here, now, to rest and regain our strength. Someday soon, perhaps we will set out again. There are many who would see us destroyed, laid low, and just as I promised you years ago, I will not let that happen! But, for now, I am home!”

She let them cheer, approached the line of City Guards to let some of the people gathered reach out, touch her armour, her cloak. She held out her hand and let the closest people grab it with shaking fingers, words of praise. It always struck her, when faced with the adulation of her people, how very precarious her position was. She was only in power because they respected her. Should she ever fall from their grace, she’d surely be ousted from the House, left to rot for her betrayal of their trust.

After a short while she bid farewell to the people close to her, who could actually hear her, and turned on her heel to rejoin her squadron. Her cloak whirled around her boots, heavy and familiar, its dark fur mantle at the edges of her vision. Amadeus had hung back, standing in formation on the steps leading up to the Keep. When she was close, they reformed around her and followed her up the many steps into the castle itself.

She was welcomed, again, by the various keepers and resident nobility. The Seneschal announced her and her squadron, the Royal Guards kept their stations but saluted her stiffly as she passed. A young squire, recognizable as a servant of a high-ranking Knight by her coat, bowed her head and let Luciana deposit her great crested helm in her hands. The squire followed along behind her, star-struck and wide-eyed. Any nobles she passed she greeted formally, smiling, and let them bow or otherwise honour her.

The feast to welcome her return would be held in a few hours’ time, in the Grand Hall where Luciana and Anduin’s confirmation had been held so long ago. It was already set up, her arrival
having been predicted by messenger bird several days ago. An outfit had already been prepared for her, and the kitchen staff was hard at work. Most of this was lost on Luciana for the moment. All she could really think of was Anduin, her sons, and Varian. She wanted to be with them again.

Varian was still heavily preoccupied with the war in Draenor, which had escalated into a grave and desperate situation after Gul’dan had reappeared to corrupt the jungles of Tanaan. A new structure called the Hellfire Citadel had sprung up in the center of the jungle, and preliminary reports were dire. More news had yet to be delivered from the recon teams. Still, she'd been told that he would be present for her return to the city.

Luciana shook it from her head. She was in the Royal Wing, now, and her squadron had followed her loyally through hell, all the way back to here. She turned to face them. “Thank you all for standing by me,” she said. “Some of you have been here much longer than the others. Some, since my first days as a Knight.”

“Please, Luce, no speeches,” Victoria said. “Just let me go take a shower.”

Luciana laughed. “Alright, alright. Thank you,” she said warmly. “All of you. I couldn’t have done any of this without a steadfast and trustworthy squadron at my back.”

“It was an honour, Your Highness,” Lokaal said with a shallow bow.

“It was also great fun!” Naemete added. “Should you ever have need of a mage again, please take me along!”

“I’ll keep you in mind,” Luciana said with a smile. “Now then. I think Victoria had the right idea. I want to take a shower, and then I want to see my sons. The celebrations really start in about four hours. You’ll all be given appropriate dress and... whatever.” Luciana waved it off. “Go and relax, for now. I’ll see you all in a bit.”

“Go take a load off, Luciana,” Christopher said. “We’ll all do the same.”

“Or take a load,” Luciana said. “I think I heard Seneschal William say Bann is here...?”

“Oh my Light!” Christopher cried, his face turning deep red as he turned and hurried away. Victoria was outright cackling as he ran by her.

“I also think Desmond was supposed to stop by in a little while, if you want to freshen up,” Luciana added nonchalantly. Jillian responded by flattening her ears to her skull and skulking away shyly, pressed against the wall to slip by the others. Victoria, still laughing, followed her.

With that done, Luciana separated from the remainder of the group, which soon fragmented and scattered. Daniel, she heard, was going to show Lokaal and Naemete around the Keep to familiarize them with the places the squadron frequented. Luciana tuned them out when she reached the door to her chambers. One of the door guards gave her a knowing smirk and she frowned at him, making him try to contain his smile and look down, ducking his head slightly. She turned to the squire, who had followed her all the way here.

“You can give me that,” she said, holding her hand out. Her helm was deposited in her hand, and the squire stared up at her. “You can go,” she said. “Thank you for your help.”

“Princess,” the squire breathed, her eyes still impossibly wide.

“What is your name?” Luciana asked when the squire didn’t move to leave.
“Denya, Princess,” the squire said breathlessly.

“Denya. Thank you for your help. I’m sure you have other things to do today. You can go.”

“Princess.” Denya stared at her a moment longer, and when Luciana looked on expectantly, Denya squeaked, fell into a low bow, and then rushed off. Luciana watched her go for a moment.

“I don’t think I was ever that nervous as a squire,” she commented.

“Yeah, but you were a noble,” her door guard commented.

“True, I suppose.” She shrugged it off, and turned to enter the antechamber.

Anduin was just inside, facing the hearth. It was unlit, unnecessary at this time of the year. He seemed preoccupied, enough to not notice her come in. When she shut the door he jumped slightly and turned to face her. A smile broke the stoic expression on his face and he beamed at her.

“Lucy,” he said as she approached him slowly. He reached up to cup her jaw, smiling. “Welcome home.”

“Anduin,” she murmured, eyes softening.

He leaned down to kiss her sweetly, thumbs stroking her cheekbones. “The boys are about to bed down for a nap,” he said, his breath warm against her lips. “That’ll give us a little bit of time, but not much.”

“I just want to hold you,” Luciana murmured. “Help me get my armour off.”

“Alright.” Anduin smiled and kissed her again, briefly.

Her armour was a chore to get on and off, though its protective encasement was the reason she was still alive. “It’ll need some minor repairs,” she commented as Anduin held the collar of the thick leather tunic. She bent at the waist and slipped out of it, leaving it in Anduin’s hands for a moment. “But that can wait a while.”

Anduin made a face when she moved to hug him, and she laughed. “I’ll go take a shower,” she said, smiling at him warmly. “I missed you,” she said.

She only had a short while with Anduin, and she was content to spend it on top of him - literally on top of him. He had taken a seat on the couch while she was in the bathroom, and she had emerged wearing only a pair of shorts to find him reclined against the armrest, pillows at his back. She’d towelled her hair dry roughly and quickly.

Then, without a word she’d sprawled out on top of him, wrapped her arms around his back and laid her head on his chest. Their leg tangled together, and it took a few tries but it was easy with him and she found a good way to fit together with him.
Laying together, with Luciana’s head pillowed on Anduin’s chest, was how Varian found them. Anduin’s hand lay between her shoulder blades, the other gently petting her damp hair. Luciana’s back rose and fell slowly with each breath, and her eyes were closed.

“Is she asleep?” she heard Varian mutter.

“No,” Anduin replied, just as quietly.

Luciana felt Varian’s hand on her back a few moments later. It was wide and warm and familiar, and she smiled, half-smiled, past her scars. She arched her back to stretch and groaned out a breath. “Welcome home,” Varian murmured.

“You, too,” she mumbled against Anduin’s chest. Varian’s hand rubbed her back a few times before he stood. She could hear his hips creaking.

Luciana roused herself a few minutes later, after gathering the energy to do it. She inhaled deeply and stretched, careful not to squeeze Anduin too tightly. “Hey,” Anduin greeted when she looked up.

“Hi,” she smiled. “Where did Varian go?”

“Just into his room, I think.” She pulled herself up to her knees and stepped off the couch. Her thighs were stiff from the sudden halt in activity but it took only a short time for them to become limber once more. Anduin caught her hand as she moved away. “If you can,” he started, “call him Father. Just once. Or even just imply it. He’s had a rough time in Draenor.”

“I heard,” she said, sobering at the mention of the other world. “Gul’dan’s schemes, the fel orcs... I know. He must be having flashbacks to the First War.” She gave Anduin a reassuring smile. “I’ll go check on him.”

“Okay. I love you.”

She leaned over, hand on the arm rest, to kiss him softly. “My light,” she murmured. “I love you.”

Varian was indeed in his bedroom. There were papers, reports, on every horizontal surface. Unused portal runes, half-empty mugs of cold coffee, several empty bottles of wine, plates with crumbs of various foods, and handful of broken pieces of metal were also scattered through the room. “Rough day?” Luciana joked, seeing Varian leaning over his desk, reading something.

He looked up at her, and smiled tiredly. “You could say that,” he said, straightening and pulling her into a hug. “Welcome home,” he said quietly. She felt him lean his cheek against the top of her head.
“Thank you, father,” she said. “I should be welcoming you home, too.”

It took him a moment to respond. “You could,” he said, his voice a bit thick. “But I’ve been back and forth between here and the Commander’s garrison. You’ve only been back once.”

“I haven’t been coordinating war efforts against demons,” she replied. “And I’ve been visiting my daughter regularly. How much time have you been able to spend with your son? Not the Prince, but your son?”

Varian sighed heavily, and readjusted his grip on her. He didn’t comment, instead choosing to respond non-verbally with the warmth of his protective embrace.

“I’m getting old, Lucy,” Varian said after a time. “Too old for this.”

“You’re going to stick around for a while yet,” she said.

“Maybe. But I can’t keep doing this. It’s... too much,” he admitted quietly. “Too long.”

“What are you saying?” Luciana asked, pulling back to look up at him. Her brow furrowed the longer he remained quiet. She could see he was inspecting her, looking for something in her face.

“I’ve been King for almost thirty years,” he said. “I think it’s almost time for me to step down.”

“What?” Luciana asked, dumbfounded. Her mouth worked for a moment. “I’m not ready to be a Queen,” she said dumbly.

Varian smiled tiredly and chuckled. “You are,” he said. “I’m sure you are. You wouldn’t be alone, anyway. Anduin would be there with you, of course. And I’m not going to suddenly dump everything on you. Not like it was on me. I’ll be with you, as an advisor. It’s just... I can’t keep doing this, Luciana.”

“Doing what?”

“Losing.”

Her eyes narrowed. “We haven’t lost anything yet,” she said. “I know things in Draenor aren’t looking good, but...”

“It’s not that,” he sighed. “I’ll see Draenor through to the end. It’s the least I can do. I have a good feeling about it, anyway. Things are coming together. Slowly, but they’re coming together.”

“Is this about that assistant professor?” she asked.

Varian blinked, looked down at her, and smiled wryly. She could see him making the connections in his mind within seconds. “Of course,” he said, acknowledging that of course she’d know about the woman, of course she’d know Varian had been getting close to the assistant professor who’d been working tirelessly for the past year to become a Professor, who’d been going back and forth between Stormwind and Ironforge on the tram to do as much as she possibly could as quickly as she could.

“What happened?” Luciana asked.

“She... I don’t know, really,” Varian said. “I do, but I don’t. I know she was in an... Altercation with her partner. A man who worked in the Dwarven District at a smithy. I know what happened, I know why it probably happened, but I can’t speak to her. She’s stayed in Ironforge much longer...”
than she would normally, and she hasn’t sent word to anyone in Stormwind. She’s sold her apartment here, too.”

“That’s not good,” Luciana said. “You two were pretty close, weren’t you?”

“Close enough that I thought we could call each other friend,” Varian said quietly. “I was... hopeful. It’s not usually the case that I can befriend anyone, let alone a commoner. I went to such extreme lengths to keep her safe, too. From the Court, the nobles, everything. She could be friends with a man, not with the King. You know, everyone wants something. Her, she just wanted to study, and maybe have some intelligent company to talk to.”

“She wanted you for your intelligence and not for your power,” Luciana summarized. “Anduin said as much.”

Varian smiled again, but it was bitter this time. “Of course you two would be playing,” he said. His voice, fond as it was, didn’t match his expression. A moment later, it did. “I don’t know why anyone would hurt her. She deserves better than him.”

“She deserves a King,” Luciana said.

“I won’t be King forever.”

“Doesn’t matter,” Luciana said dismissively. “Once a King, always a King. The crown leaves a mark on your forehead every time you wear it. A red line, right across the forehead...” she joked, drawing her finger across her forehead to illustrate. Varian batted it away from her face, scowling.

“Stop it,” he said, but his eyes weren’t quite so heavy as before. “She deserves better than what he was giving her. She didn’t deserve any of that.”

“But it happened and now she’s avoiding you. Has it occurred to you that she might be afraid?”

“Of what? Me?” he asked, mildly scandalized. “Why would she be afraid of me?”

“What did her partner do?”

“He...” Varian’s eyes flashed with understanding. He didn’t need to say what had happened - Luciana could guess. “He wasn’t happy that she was spending so much time in Ironforge, where he couldn’t reach her,” Varian said quietly. “He didn’t value her work in the University of Explorers.”

“Her work is the most important thing in her life,” Luciana said. “How do you think she feels right now, knowing that a man she trusted valued it so little?”

“Terrible,” Varian summarized.

“You haven’t lost her yet,” Luciana said. “You were doing really well with her.”

“What can I do now, though? I can’t just go to Ironforge.”

“You could, but you’d cause a ruckus,” Luciana corrected. “Send someone. Someone she knows, or at least recognizes. The library has a regular guard, no?”

“Yes, she knows some of them by name.”

“Send one of them. Be nice, though. I can only imagine she’s pretty shaken up, still. She needs to be reminded that she’s got a safe place.”
“A friend,” Varian said, and then smiled at Luciana tiredly. “Thank you, Lucy. I should have thought it out myself.”

“You’re under a lot of stress. And anyway, it’s what we’re here for.” She shrugged. “You gave me Anduin. We wanted to give you something, too.”

“You two are too good to me,” he said, pulling her back into his chest. She gladly wrapped her arms around his back, reveling in the familiar warmth and scent.

“I don’t want to be Queen just yet,” she said. “Not until Freya is old enough to come back.”

“That’s in two years,” Varian said.

“Yes. I want to keep visiting her and that will be impossible if you crown us now.”

“I can wait two more years,” he said.

“We’ll step up a bit to help,” she said. “Anduin would be glad to help you.”

“You two have helped me more than you can ever know,” Varian said quietly. “The top is a lonely place, Luciana.”

“I know,” she responded. “That’s why you built me a family.”

And he had built her a family. He’d started with Anduin, and then himself. He’d made sure her squadron stayed hers, made it so that they were always with her. He’d had Genn choose someone who could fit in like a puzzle and compliment what the squadron already had. He’d made it easy to have kids, taken her decision to have her third child and enforced her will on the matter. He’d added another healer and a mage to her squadron, had had Velen choose two trustworthy people to travel with her for a year - because they both knew that fighting with someone, trusting them with your life, was to make them family.

“You won’t be alone like I was,” Varian murmured into her hair. “You won’t lose yourself to the darkness.”

She bit back the bitter comment she’d wanted to make. Varian was not well. He couldn’t handle hearing that she was still sick inside. Instead, she said, “Anduin wouldn’t let me.”

“Anduin is only one reminder,” Varian said. “Everyone you love, everyone who’s still with you - those are the only ones worthy of seeing you at your weakest, when you’re home after the fight, tired and heartsick. They’re the ones who can welcome home the warrior and see the woman still inside.”

“You didn’t have that,” Luciana said quietly.

“No, I didn’t. And I won’t see you suffer like I did. Before Tiffin. After... after Tiffin,” he said brokenly. “That won’t happen again. No Wrynn will ever suffer like that again.”

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