### Faded Reality

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th><strong>Explicit</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Archive Warning:</td>
<td><strong>Graphic Depictions Of Violence</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category:</td>
<td>F/M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fandom:</td>
<td>Dragon Age: Inquisition, Dragon Age (Video Games)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character:</td>
<td>Cassandra Pentaghast, Various Characters, Solas, Varric Tethras, Female Lavellan, Leliana (Dragon Age), Cullen Rutherford, Non-Lavellan Elvhen Inquisitor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Tags:</td>
<td>Self-Insert, Dreaming of Thedas, Crack, A mage that barely understands how to mage, Crack Treated Seriously, Dread Wolf Take Me, please, Angst, A truly personal self-insert, Dread Wolf Cuddling, Occasional punching of the feels, This story has taken over my existence, send help, Now with shameless art!, Now including Trespasser crap!, Additional angst included for your enjoyment, Panic Attacks, Autism Spectrum, This ain't your typical fanfic, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder - PTSD, Sorry if you came to this fic expecting a Lavellan, But that ain't what we got here, Yes the packaging lies, Everyone lies., No tags-no hits, So I use the shit outta those tags, Make sense? Clear as mud?, Fantastic., Violence, Canon-Typical Violence, Sex, eventually, Fade Tongue, Non-Fade Tongue, Surprise surprise the Dread Wolf likes to bite!, Unintentionally slow burn - oops?, Are you even reading these tags anymore?, Modern Character in Thedas, I'm addicted to adding tags - someone send help or stop me or something!, Thedas Hygiene, Did I mention I don't leave ANYTHING out of this?, Yeah I talk about embarrassing shit in this story get used to it, I have no filter, I love my fans, Seriously you guys are amaze-balls, 'elf-insert' (Credit to gamerphan for that one ♡), Have I mentioned I adore fan art?, Because I do!, If you make fan art of this story I will feature it in the chapter it belongs with!, Free advertisement ftw!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Faded Reality**

by [Author Of Sin](http://archiveofourown.org)

**Summary**

This story is entirely salesman's fault. 🖤

Just a little self-indulgent self-insert in the DAI universe.

Solavellan.

Read tags for more info.
I'm just a writer.
Really. I write books, fan fiction, smut... occasionally poetry and songs.
But when I dream—that's when the magic happens.
Living in Thedas half of the time—as an elf no less—certainly has its challenges and
drawbacks, but the rewards for my perseverance are innumerable.
Join me on my journey, while I use the fine tools my mind provides me with to pick the
locks on every mystery, to solve every conundrum... to open Pandora's box, and steal the
Dread Wolf's heart.

Now including Trespasser spoilers, mostly because they were what I'd already had
headcanoned... oh well. ¯\_(ツ)_/¯

---Abandoned---

Notes

Blame salesman for this crack. It's entirely inspired by her 'Overloaded' fic, which is
amazing and you should go read it- now.
Will be updated whenever I feel up to it. Hope you enjoy.

- Inspired by Overloaded by salesman
The Unwitting Herald

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Scritch scritch scritch. Clack clack clackity clack. Sigh.

"This isn't going well."

I look over to my dog with a lifted eyebrow, and she looks at me a bit like I've lost my mind... then again, she always looks at me like that. I stare right back at her, tongue poking out from between my lips as I see her ear flip back, her head cocked comically. I shake my head with a soft chuckle and go back to writing... or trying to, at least. The words just aren't coming to me. I'm stuck on two stories. Okay, really it's three, but the first two are the most worrisome. Maybe I should've made even one of the characters human, or qunari or something. But no, they're all elves. Why? Because I feel the most connected to the elves. They're the underdogs, the ones fighting to be recognized as something other than knife-ears. It only took me three games to fully recognize their plight. But now? Oh, now I couldn't possibly ignore their struggle. Especially with... him.

Yes, yes, all the multitudes of Fen'harel fans out there probably had a similar experience. But what can I say? I never expected to find someone so like me in every way in a video game, of all places. I never would've thought that the elven god who locked away all the other gods would be the one character, out of all of the wonderful characters there are to choose from, that I'd find so many similarities with. Even before his true identity was revealed, I felt a kinship with the bald egg apostate. Especially once I saw that his deepest fear was exactly what mine is.

Dying alone.

It's a depressing thought.

But enough of that. I've got to figure out where Fen'da'len Lavellan is going next. Yeah so I've got two chapters in beta, that doesn't mean I can sit on my laurels. I've also got to figure out what happens in the joined dreams of Fenlamea Lavellan and Fen'harel. And Abelas, I suppose. That sleepover isn't going to write itself, and I need to update it next.

I sigh, taking a long drink of my diet mountain dew bottle. There's been more than enough coffee consumption in the past few days; I've got to back off of that shit. Getting way too dehydrated for my own good. Lighting up a smoke and setting it in the ashtray before me, I continue trying to get words out of my brain and onto the screen. It's not working. My characters aren't talking, and I can't write everything from my- I mean, Fen'harel's perspective, after all. Wouldn't be fair, would get boring.

Fuck it, I'm going to bed. I've been up twenty-four hours, that's enough for now. I stub my smoke out after one last draw.

With a huff, I put my PC to sleep and stumble my way into the bathroom around the corner, to brush my teeth. Another waste of a day. I barely wrote a thousand words, and I'm not even sure I'm going to keep those- they felt too forced. I'll have to read them again when I wake up, see if they're worth a damn.

Or maybe I'll just play some more DAI. I'm finally doing Fenlamea's playthrough, after all... even though it's not going anything like the story says it did. Sodding beardless Blackwall mod. He's just
too handsome without it! I'm weak, I fully admit it.

I snort half-heartedly at my weakness and glance at my reflection in the mirror over the sink. Same old, same old. I barely look any different at thirty than I did at eighteen. A few gray hairs here and there, that single line between my eyebrows that appears now, whether they're creased or not. Glasses that don't quite correct my vision properly anymore. So strange to just sit back and watch myself aging slowly.

Shrugging, I spit in the sink and rinse my mouth out, then reach for the mouthwash. Ahh, gotta love that cleaning, alcohol-fueled burn. Well okay, not really. But it's for the healthy teeth, right? Right. If I can't have the rest of my health, my teeth should at least be as good as I can make them.

After spitting and rinsing the sink out, I turn to head back to my room with a sigh. This is my life now. I should be happy. I'm finally getting time to do whatever I want, to write, to read, to sit around and play video games. A dream of a life, as I've always wanted.

Why does it feel so empty?

I disrobe and lay my clothes out over the back of my desk chair as I do every night, and crawl into my oversized bed. Well, oversized to me, at least. My dog's not exactly a cuddler - preferring to sleep under the bed like a troll under her bridge, rather than on it - so I supplement with pillows packed tightly around my form, blankets tucked so only my face is exposed to the air from my fan across the room. Comfortable, if only just.

I hear an email notification from my iPod, and summarily ignore it, nuzzling down into my pillow and closing my eyes against the dawn I can see peeking through my blinds - and the black sheet over them - as I try to go to sleep. 'Maybe the 'Fade' will provide some inspiration for my writing,' I think with a short huff of a laugh. As if I ever have anything but nightmares about the world ending, and me dying horribly. Right.

Finally, sleep claims me. I drift for a while, thoughtless, senseless, floating about in a miasma of nothingness. Then, the usual light before my eyelids cracks them open, and I prepare myself for whatever hell awaits as my eyes adjust to the brightness- and see nothing like what I've come to expect.

I see... iron bars. Cobbled stone walls. As my gaze drifts, I'm met with pointy, sharp steel. At that, I jump back in alarm, only to realize I'm surrounded on four sides by men with swords drawn. The light I'd adjusted to was a torch on the wall, barely providing enough light to see by. In my surprised reaction to the folded steel pointed at me, I belatedly realize my hands are bound. If I wasn't surrounded by sharp things, I'd think that was a bit kinky, but as I look down to see what binds me, I recognize with a sudden, sharp, and painful clarity what is actually going on. My hand is fucking glowing. And oh, gods does it hurt!

I'm in the Haven dungeon.

As if on queue, none other than the Seeker herself bursts through the door, making demands as she's prone to doing. Leliana follows her in, but stays in the shadows. My heart begins performing aerial acrobatics in my chest as I understand what this means. I'm the bloody Herald.

Oh, fuck.

'Wait, wait,' my brain corrects me, 'this is just a dream. Just play it through like you would in the game. No need to panic. You control your dreams, even the worst of them, remember?'
Of course, my brain is right. This is just a dream, and a cool one for once. I can handle this.

I respond like the Herald should in the game for a skeptical, but peaceful resolution to the scene. All goes according to plan. Cass unlocks the spreader manacles from my wrists and binds them with rope instead. Damn, that's tight. I rotate my wrists, trying to make them more comfortable. Fortunately, I know I won't be bound for very long, at least.

I'm just about dragged outside, and the light of the Breach is even more blinding than it seems in the game. The countryside is lit up with a wash of viridian hues, the snow reflecting it in overwhelmingly bright clarity. I keep my hands up, shielding my eyes for a touch longer than the Herald in the game does. My eyes have always been more sensitive to bright lights than the average Joe.

I slowly lower them, forcing my eyes to adjust through tears that warp my vision, until I blink them away. I look up at the Breach, eyes wide, mouth agape. It's... beautiful. Well, in a horrible, eat the world kind of way, but still beautiful. Oh man, I'm gonna have to have some long talks with Fen- I mean Solas about this.

Before I can think on that further, what feels like a knife coated in acid begins digging into my left palm, and I can feel the energy of the Breach calling to the anchor in my hand. I clench my hand into a fist, trying to drive the sensations away, even as they drive me to my knees in agony. Ah, so this is what it feels like to have ancient magic trying to tear your body apart. Got it. Fucking ow! Fuck!

Finally, the pain subsides enough that my ears can catch what Cass is telling me. Seal the Breach, save the world, blah be the hero blah trial blah... I sigh.

"I'll help, however I can."

Surprise flits across her stoic features, and she helps me stand, guiding me through a group of people that include Harrit and his hairbrush mustache, all glaring at me like I'm the source of all evil; which, for all they know, I am. I supposedly murdered their almighty Divine, after all, along with everyone at the Conclave. Fucking Andrastians.

Well, one thing I've noticed, I'm not my normal self. My arms are definitely not my regular thick, strong arms, and my usual pudge has been replaced by a... surprisingly flat, skinny stomach. Come to think of it, I am rather more skinny than most of the humans around me.

Wait a minute...

Am I...?

I'm given only a moment to consider it, as we make it past the gates, and my bonds are cut. Once my hands are free, I reach up to brush my hair behind my ears, and- holy shit I'm an elf.

Coughing softly and trying to hide my surprise, I start towards the field of battle, wondering what I look like beyond the obviously finely tapered ears. My skin is every bit as pale as it is in reality, and utterly hairless. So strangely satisfying. No more shaving! Ahh, sweet relief on that count, at last.

The goofy-looking mercenary garb I'm wearing feels cumbersome and ill-fitted, though I suppose I'll need what protection it can offer. I don't know how to fight, after all. It'd be nice if I had a helmet. It feels like... holy shit, I have a cup for my non-junk. I have to bite both of my lips together to keep from busting out laughing. Did I knock out some male merc for this getup? Oh, my, gods.
This is ridiculous. What's more ridiculous, though? That I knocked out some random dude for this disguise, or that I've been wearing it for days of unconsciousness, and they never thought to change it? Or did they put me in it? -So many questions! Shut up, inner Dorian!- I feel a smidge violated at that last possibility, but oh, well.

We're heading down the path that leads to the incredibly unstable bridge - what is it with bridges in this game? They're all either collapsing from age or getting blown up! - when the Breach expands again, overwhelming me with that acid-on a serrated knife feeling once again; burning, ripping, slicing into my palm, splitting it wide. How is it not bleeding? Fucking magic.

I need to go knock myself out on the Breach for a few days, so I can stop feeling this shit. Pain in my dreams isn't this... real. Oh, I feel it, and feel it in spades, but it's remote; a feeling I can put aside to concentrate on what's going on while I feel that pain in the background. This- this I can't just compartmentalize like I usually do. Not good.

Cass helps me up again, and as we head to the bridge, I can't help but wonder what conveniently abandoned weapon will show up next to the crate after the bridge gets blown up. Will I be a rogue, slicing away with daggers? A warrior, bashing faces in with a maul or shield? My muscles don't feel well developed enough for that, so I'm going to guess rogue. Not that you don't need muscles for that, but I'm not a complete stick; I've got some muscles, damn it. Not as much as my real body does, but some.

Maybe I'll be a mage? Nah. I've got bad luck, but surely it's not that bad? An elf and a mage? Solas would be mildly ecstatic, but I wouldn't. The elf stigma is bad enough- I don't need the damn 'You're a mage, you are prone to demon possession, you're a danger to everyone' Chantry rhetoric. No thank you.

Plus, I kinda want to just hit things. If I'm going to have DAI-themed dreams - inwardly giggles like a happy lunatic at the mere thought- I'm gonna use them to get out some tensions. Maybe the ass-kicking will be all the inspiration I need for my stories? Here's hoping.

And there's the bridge blowing up. Tumbling down, down, down. A random brick smacks my head. Of course. As if I needed more pain. Cass gets up just as the random Fade-meteor smacks into the ice not ten feet away, slinging her shield from her back and drawing her sword. I stumble to my feet just as she runs headlong into the demon that sprouts up out of the ground, and I can see the red eyes of the second shade before anything else, as it emerges right behind her.

I look back to the crate, and lo and behold, a fucking staff. Great. Fantastic. I'm a mage, with no training, and not the faintest idea of how to summon any magic, let alone cast it accurately.

Wonderful.

Fuck it.

I grab the damn thing, because if nothing else, I can use it to beat the damn shade over the head. I proceed to do so. I imagine, with some derision, if someone were to be sitting on the sidelines, watching. They would probably wonder what in the 'Maker's name' I was doing, and why I was doing it, before they started laughing their ass off. It is a pretty odd spectacle, after all.

Well, at least I can provide some amusement before I die, because bashing the thing on the head only seems to be marginally working. What I wouldn't give for a dagger right now- or hell, I'll take a staff blade at the very least! But no, I have nothing but this cudgel on a long stick, that really isn't very effective without the magic it's meant to channel. Dorian must be in a lot better shape than I imagined - and believe me, I imagined it plenty - to be able to beat those demons to death in the
Redcliffe Chantry like he does.

Finally, Cass dispatches her demon, and turns to the sight of me holding the shade in front of me at staff's length; keeping its claws off of me by the sheer luck of it being stuck, on one of the barbs at the end of the staff. Fortunately, this gives her plenty of room and a perfect shot to just behead the thing. It gurgles and slithers down into a puddle of black goo at our feet, much to my relief.

That relief is short-lived, however.

"Drop your weapon, now!" Cass demands, pointing her sword at me like I'm some dangerous, out of control being, despite just having seen that I'm about as useless as a slug at combat.

I snort, looking down at the staff, then back up at her. "You're joking right? I only picked it up to keep the damn shade off of me. You were busy. Here, fucking have it if it makes you feel better." I shove it toward her in a nonthreatening manner. "I don't want it."

She eyes the staff and gives me a confused look. "No, I- Are you not a mage? If you need a staff, you should have one. I cannot be everywhere at once, after all." She jerks her chin toward me. "Keep it."

I sigh, shoulders slumping. "If I'm a mage, I'm a poor one. I didn't cast a single spell during that fight."

She tilts her head at me. "Then why did you pick up a staff? You are a mage, I can feel the lyrium in your veins. I have no doubt that you will need to use it, before this day is done."

I groan, bringing the staff back to my side and smacking my free hand to my face. "I have no idea how to cast, or fight, for that matter, Seeker."

"What?!" She looks at me incredulously. "You nearly killed several guards in fits of magic in your sleep, how can you not know how to cast?"

Well, shit. I wasn't expecting that. "I have no clue. I can't remember anything before today." A lie, but a convenient one. And if I'm going to play along with this dream, I should at least try to fit in, yeah? Complete amnesia sounds more likely than only - also rather conveniently - forgetting what happened at the Conclave.

After one of her famous disgusted noises, she rolls her eyes and levels one of her patented glares at me. "Try to cast. I don't have the time or ability to protect you from absolutely everything we will face. You must be able to protect yourself, or this will never work. Concentrate, focus on a target, and will it to be destroyed."

I lift an eyebrow at her like she's lost her gods-damned mind. I snort, looking to the side at a piece of rubble from the bridge. "Yeah, sure, will something into death. Okay." I reach toward the chunk of cobble and concentrate. I can feel... something. I have no idea what it is, but Cass is right, there's some kind of something extra in me that's been bubbling to almost overflowing this whole time. I thought it was just adrenaline. Maybe it's mana?

I have some experience with channeling energy from when I'm awake, I meditate, and know about the flow of power within one's own spirit. But this? Could it possibly translate, or am I just barking up the wrong tree? Well, can't hurt to try, right? I hope.

I take a deep breath and call on whatever it is that's been boiling beneath my skin for the past however long I've been dreaming this, feeling it flow through my arm and fingers, and I slowly close my fist. I draw it back and throw a punch, releasing the energy I'd -hopefully- gathered
toward the rubble. In my clumsiness, it's aimed more towards the side of the bridge than the actual rubble, but it hits! There's an audible *crack* as the mortar and stone splits and spiders outward from the impact point, like a broken mirror.

It wasn't a fancy-looking stone fist or anything, but hell, can't argue with results like that!

"You're a force mage?" Cass asks from behind me, surprise tingling her voice.

I turn back to her and shrug. "I have no idea. Is that something a force mage can do, whatever that is?" I hook my thumb over my shoulder, back at the now-crumbling structure, cringing as more of it falls to the frozen lake.

She nods, seeming a bit impressed. "It is. Force mages are rather rare, I only know of three others in recent history. And they are quite dangerous without training." Now her gaze turns wary. "Do try not to crush any of our allies by accident."

I swallow tightly, grimacing at that prospect. "I'll uh... try not to. Certainly don't want that." Shit. Of course, I would have to be the kind of mage that's more dangerous than most. It doesn't quite... feel *right*, though. In the waking reality, I definitely share more of an affinity with water and air. This is just... what, energy? Pure magic? It doesn't feel natural at all. I decide to ask her about it as we start tromping toward the next fight, over the hill. "What exactly *is* a force mage? I've never heard of that."

"It is a mage that is not bound to an element as their focus," she calls over her shoulder, "You can manipulate the elements, but your strongest attacks will use raw magic to change the face of the battlefield. It takes years to learn proper precision. That is time we do not have. I hope that your willingness to help will not be our downfall."

Wow, gee, thanks, Cass. Such faith. It's a wonder she's willing to turn her back to me, if she thinks I'm that wildly dangerous. Then again, I have no idea what I'm doing, so I really shouldn't judge. She's completely right to doubt.

That sparks a thought: I should learn what I'm capable of in this dream, yeah? Makes sense to me. I see a large rock on the bank of the pond as we move, and I reach out with my hand and my... mana-energy-stuff, to try and lift it. It wobbles a bit, but that's about it. I try again, adding a bit more mana to the effort, and finally, it lifts. I smile at my success, then slowly close my open hand into a fist, trying to break the rock. It slowly crumbles into smaller chunks, and I add more energy to my effort.

Before it's reduced to small pebbles, however, I have to stop. I'm feeling completely exhausted, as if all of that energy that's been jumping about inside me has guttered out and vanished, leaving a thin, bare thread of connecting power. That thread is pulling from somewhere, and I can feel it slowly refilling my personal reserves. So that's what it's like to feel mana regenerating. Weird. If I'm that exhausted after just crushing a rock though, I must have a small mana pool. Or something else is draining it, maybe. Or I'm just stupid, and I put too much power into crushing a rock. Wouldn't surprise me.

It's at this point that I notice Cass had stopped to watch the display, and was now looking at me with something akin to reluctant respect. "What?" I ask.

She shrugs slightly, gesturing to the crumbled rock pile where the large stone had once rested. "That was rather impressive, for someone who does not fully know their own power."

I huff a short laugh. "Yeah well, don't expect me to do that often. I think I drained my mana or
whatever. It's coming back, but it's slow."

She nods and reaches for her belt, handing me three red vials and two blue ones. "Here. I cannot spare any more elfroot potions, but I do have a spare lyrium vial, if you need it. We are low on supplies, so try to only use them if you absolutely need them."

I look at the five tiny, corked tubes in my hand with surprise. They sure looked a lot bigger in the game. Maybe that's what she meant by being low on supplies? I glance back up at her, before returning my gaze to the blue vials. "Should I drink a lyrium one now, or wait for my own mana to recharge?"

"Drink one now," she responds, waving a hand at me to indicate I should go for it, "We don't have time to wait. We've already delayed for far too long."

I nod and pocket the health potions on my left, the second lyrium one on my right. Then, I uncork the little glowing blue vial, and take a breath. "Bottoms up." I tip it back, trying to get it past my tongue in case it tastes horrible, but that thought is completely forgotten once I swallow the thin, milky liquid. Energy, like the caffeine from twenty pots of coffee all at once, surges into my veins, almost making me shout with the shock of it. "Holy shit!" I let slip in wonder, though at a lower volume than I really want to say it.

Cass snorts, shaking her head. "I take it you don't remember having lyrium before, either?"

I shake my head quickly, partly in answer, and partly because I'm trying to clear my head from the rush. "No, I would definitely remember feeling something like that, if I could remember anything at all. Wow!" I look down at the tiny vial in my hand, noting a few drops left, and dunking them back, letting the taste wash over my tongue. Not really a flavor, so much as a sensation- a great rush of energy that dances on my taste buds as if by magic. Probably because it is magic. No wonder Templars get addicted to the shit. Amazing what such a tiny vial can do. I re-cork and pocket the empty vial; no point in being as hazardously wasteful as they're usually depicted being in the game, tossing glass everywhere.

She waves me on, and I follow eagerly, feeling like I could probably close the Breach on my own after that. We come upon another shade and a wraith, and I decide to see what I can do about the wraith, while Cass goes after the shade. I'd always wondered how hitting something that looks like it has no corporeal form at all, could damage these things. But it's a spirit, just like the shade, so I suppose it makes some kind of sense. Sort of.

It cuts my ruminations short with a blast of some kind of spell that leaves me feeling weakened, though not totally useless. Just, like I'm tired or something. Screw that. I decide to see what the staff can do about channeling my magic, and point it at a nearby rock, flinging the rock at the wraith with a lot more ease than I'd had trying to lift one by hand. Huh. So a conduit makes it easier.

Alright, time to try something else. The rock had done a bit of damage, but not nearly enough to make the wraith pop, so I aim the staff at the spirit and begin imagining a cage around it. I'm trying to cast crushing prison, in theory. Cage imagined and pushed around the wraith, I drag the end of the staff backwards, visualizing the movement as pulling the threads of iron bars of the cage back, tightening it. One final tug, and the wraith pops, crushed.

I turn in time to see the shade go down under Cass' gentle ministrations of her sword to its face. I still feel a bit weakened from the wraith's spell, but it's slowly going away; thank the gods, because we've just run into another group of enemies. One shade, two wraiths. Fantastic.
I cast crushing prison on the wraith to the left, while Cass runs off to bash the shade in the face again. That leaves the second wraith un-handled, tossing its weakening spell at Cass. How about no, you fucking demon? I can tell Cass is feeling the effects of the spell- her attacks lack the punch I know she's more than capable of, at full strength. I growl and send a shove of energy at the second wraith through the tip of my staff, just as I'm yanking back with the other end to clamp down on the prison. Even if it doesn't damage it, it'll at least distract it, I hope.

The shoving does its job, and just as the first wraith explodes into nothingness, the second turns its eyeless gaze towards me. Cass is regaining her strength, bashing her shield in the face of the shade, and I'm all out of known tricks to get rid of the second wraith. I don't feel like I can cast crushing prison just yet - huh, so cooldowns really do exist, weird - so it's time for a new trick.

Wait, isn't the default mage attack like... casting whatever element you use from the staff, until special abilities are ready? Okay, but what is my element? If I'm a force mage, I don't have a particular element- oh, duh. It's whatever the staff's enchanted with. It's iron, right? So Lightning. That has potential.

So how does this work, exactly? All that fancy staff twirling I've seen in the game isn't something I have any practice at, after all. Maybe I don't have to?

Holding my staff firmly but loosely in both hands, I fling the unadorned tip up toward the wraith, channeling a bit of mana through the staff.

Something happens, but it's most certainly not electric. The wraith is knocked back, as if punched. I try again with the other, heavier end, sending more mana through this time. The wraith is knocked back several feet, and seems to be flickering, or seizing somehow. Cass finishes the shade and turns to the wraith. I take my chance. Without any grace whatsoever, I slam the lighter end of the staff into the ground, flaring the same amount of mana through the staff as I do for crushing prison. Gods, did that get results.

Instead of being pushed back, the wraith is shoved - as if by the fist of a god - down into the ground. The spirit doesn't even have the energy to explode, it just fizzles into the ether, leaving behind a small crater.

Cass looks over at me with lifted eyebrows, then ponders for a moment, eventually nodding. "Well done. You are learning your talents quickly. Perhaps it is less of a matter of memory, and more... instinct?"

I shake my head and shrug. "I have no clue. I'm just trying different things and seeing what works. I had no idea it would do that." I gesture to the small crater where the wraith once... floated. "I was honestly just trying to channel the lightning I can feel from the staff, but apparently my magic had different plans."

Cass frowns in thought for a moment, then sighs. "Well, you've managed not to crush me so far, so that is something. Hopefully, that trend will continue, once we get to the others who are ahead, fighting."

"Who's fighting?" I ask, because it seems obligatory by this point to follow along with the game's script, after so much deviation.

"You'll see, soon enough. We must hurry," comes her predictable answer.

Of course, I know who we're going to meet, just up these steps. The Storyteller and Dread Wolf are impossible to forget, after all. My nerves flare up as I consider how I should greet them, especially
Solas. If I greet him in elven, he might spew out a ton of words that I've not learned in response, and I'll have to take his esteem of me down a few hundred notches at the discovery.

Maybe just a little elven, then? A mix of trade - english, pfft, how easy is that? - and elven would tell him I'm nowhere near as versed in our supposedly shared language as he is. I'll just be another ignorant Dalish, clinging to misremembered tales of a world where elvhen ruled the land. I almost scoff at the thought. As if! But hey, this is a dream. I can be whatever I want, ignorant Dalish or no.

We rush up the stairs just in time to see a Fade-meteor blast into the archway ahead, instantly killing a redshirt- I mean, random soldier. I veer off to the right and snag the dagger and shield from the chest by the tent, sliding the dagger into my belt and handing the shield off to Cass. She looks it over appraisingly, then nods, shucking her old shield off, in favor of the new one.

I follow her through the archway then, and she drops down from the ledge, flinging herself into the fray with gusto. Two soldiers are fighting in the background, getting smacked around more than they're actually landing any hits. Solas is slinging ice everywhere, slamming his staff down to arc lightning through two demons at once, one of which gives up the ghost and slides into the dirt with a gurgling groan. Varric is jumping back and spreading caltrops out before him, covering his retreat skillfully as he takes aim to resume his attack.

The soldiers in the back need the most help. The others are professionals, they can take care of themselves. I cast crushing prison on the shade currently beating one of the soldiers to a pulp, and the demon shrieks in agony as I draw my staff back, slowly crushing it. It's resisting- obviously shades are a bit stronger than wraiths are, but I keep it up, squeezing the life out of it and threading more of my mana into the strength of the prison. Finally, the shade's life gutters out, and it slithers into death.

I turn my attention to the second soldier, who looks like he's having almost as hard of a time with his shade as the first soldier, and I send a tight grouping of nearby rubble into the shade's face, adding a bit more force to it than my last attempt at this. There! Not quite dead, but definitely dazed enough for the soldier to sink his blade into the thing and be rid of it.

Moments after, Cass, Solas and Varric finish their own adversaries. I hop down, only to have my arm grabbed and slung toward the rift, energy from what could only be Solas himself flowing through my marked hand and activating the anchor. It sputters for a moment, then a steady stream of energy escapes it, flaring wild and bright, nearly burning my hand with the intensity. Then, I feel something like the edges of a great wound being stitched together and healed, and I don't even notice that my arm has been released. The anchor is working under my will alone, until I feel the last edges of the rift close, and yank my fist back to seal it.

How strange. It felt nothing like my own magic, yet I can definitely recognize it as something magical now, instead of just a thing that itches a lot when it isn't trying to rip my hand open. And it felt good, to seal that first rift. Like a small piece of me had been restored with the act, somehow. That's certainly not something that was ever mentioned in the game.

Time for pondering that could come later, however. For now, I have to appear suitably shocked; if I want to maintain the ruse that I'm playing along and don't remember shit.

I look to Fen- shit, Solas with wonder and a bit of my own real curiosity. "What did you do?" I really want to know what that little push of energy I'd felt at first was. Just mana? Or something... wolfy?

Sadly, he answers according to the game's script. "I did nothing- the credit is yours." Ah, so
humble. So manipulative.

I snort a laugh, looking down at the anchor as I shake my head. "Well, at least it's good for something."

Slouching to make himself appear meek, he nods at my half-raised hand. "Whatever magic opened the Breach in the sky, also placed that mark upon your hand. I theorized that the mark might be able to close the rifts that have opened in the Breach's wake, and it seems I was correct."

Cass enters the conversation on queue. "Meaning it could also close the Breach itself."

"Possibly." He nods at Cass, then turns to me with a slight smile. "It seems you hold the key to our salvation."

"Good to know," comes Varric's voice from behind our grouping; not one to be left out in the cold when there's details of a story to be had, "here I thought we'd be ass-deep in demons forever." He smiles at me as I turn, and points to his thickly furred chest as he introduces himself. "Varric Tethras: rogue, storyteller, and occasionally, unwelcome tag-along." He winks at Cass, who curls her lip at him in disgust.

"That's a lovely crossbow you have there, Varric. I've never seen its like," I lie pleasantly.

"Ah, don't make her blush now. Bianca and I have been through a lot together, I'd hate to get jealous after all this time." He grins at me.

"Well, I certainly wouldn't want to leave such a lovely lady out in the cold, after all. Then again, I suppose she gets plenty of compliments already, with that figure." I grin right back.

"Oh-ho! Look out, the elf's got a silver tongue! Sadly, I'm afraid Bianca's a one-dwarf lady, even if she does enjoy a good compliment." He winks at me, then turns to Cass. "Regardless, I'm sure she'll be happy to help once we get to the valley."

Cass slashes her hand like a sword in front of her. "Absolutely not! Your help is... appreciated Varric, but-"

"Have you been in the valley lately, Seeker? Your soldiers aren't in control anymore. You need me." He dons a smile that's as calculated as it is charming, and Cass scoffs, turning away from him in defeat.

"My name is Solas, if there are to be introductions. I'm pleased to see you still live."

I turn as he speaks and nod at his introduction, about to reply when Varric interrupts.

"He means, 'I kept that mark from killing you while you slept.'"

I conjure a small smile of thanks for the trickster. "Ma serannas, Solas. You didn't have to do that."

If the script won't change itself, I'm altering it. I'm not gonna play by the rules in my own dream.

He pauses, the gratitude catching him off-guard for a moment, but he recovers smoothly. "It was necessary, if you were to survive long enough to help us. Your gratitude is welcome, but not required."

I lift an eyebrow at that. Always the sharp tongued one, the Dread Wolf. He barely notices my reaction, turning to look at Cass. "Cassandra, you should know, the magic involved here is unlike any I have seen." Liar. "Your prisoner is a mage, but I find it difficult to imagine any mage having
this power."

Cass nods. "Understood. We should get to the forward camp quickly." She turns and moves off, climbing over a short wall. Solas follows.

"Well," says Varric as he passes me, "Bianca's excited!"

I huff a laugh and shake my head as I trundle on behind them, hopping over the low, broken down wall lightly. I didn't really expect them to let me lead, but just as it is in the game, they step to the side and let me take point. Staff still in hand, I shrug and head down into the small valley, keeping a mental tally of the demons we'll face. An elite shade, a regular one, and two wraiths. I think. This is going to be a long day. But hey, more practice with this weird-ass magic of mine! That'll be helpful with the pain in the ass pride demon fight at the Breach.

I won't bore you with the details, But suffice it to say, even with a few mishaps on my part, we made it alive to the temple.

Just as the vision of me interrupting Coryphyshit's ritual begins, I wake up.

"Well, that's anti-climactic," I mumble into my pillow, eyes barely cracking open enough to see my now darkened window. "Shit." I groan as I realize I'd slept all day. Not that it really matters, but still. I sigh and slowly sit up, rubbing my hand over my face and stifling a yawn. I feel my bed jostling from underneath, and hear my dog flailing against the floor to squeeze her sausage body out from under my bed. She comes around and looks at me with great anticipation, and I can just hear the thoughts running through her head as she looks at me. 'I can go out now? I can go sniff the entire yard and take forever to pick a poop spot? Yes? Good? Go play now?'

I groan at her and get out of bed slowly, ignoring her romping around my legs and pulling my clothes on, while groping at my PC's mouse to wake it up. I enter the passcode to unlock it, then pull the chair out and sit gracelessly, letting my eyes adjust to the brightness of the screen as I scratch my suddenly rather itchy palm. Crestwood. That's where I'll send Fen'da'len Lavellan next. I check my email, and see salesman has posted a new chapter of 'Doughnut Rebel'. I immediately go to read, knowing it'll be a good start to my 'morning'.

She doesn't disappoint. My palm still itches. 'Time for coffee, then writing', I think as I yawn. Definitely coffee first.

Chapter End Notes

❤--Discord--❤

❤ Thanks for reading! If you enjoy the story or this chapter in particular, please feel free to leave a review with your thoughts!❤

❤ I love reading comments and reply to all of them.❤
Okay, This is Getting Weird Now...

Chapter Notes

This story won't shut up. >_< ... <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Blink, blink, blink.

Damn cursor is taunting me, I swear.

Blink- 'Ha! You can't think of anything to write!'

Blink- 'Your stories are ridiculous!'

Blink- 'Get a real job, hermit!'

"UGH, fuck it. Fuck you, you stupid, taunting, blinking atrocity." I flip off the still blinking cursor, as if that's going to make it stop blinking at me from the top corner of the utterly blank page.

Time for a distraction. DAI? Minecraft? Tumblr? None of them sound remotely interesting. I check my email in frustration- nothing new. Not that there aren't several stories I desperately need to catch up on at some point... I just haven't felt like it lately.

Idly, my mind traces back to the dream I'd had the previous night. So strange, dreaming in Thedas. Then again, I suppose it's not that strange, I do write multiple fan fics for the game, after all.

And it's my current obsession. Being a high-functioning autistic person does tend to lend itself to those lovely little obsessions quite well. There's not much I don't know about the damn game series, especially the latest release. Well, aside from the DLC's of said release. Honestly, neither of them interest me, so far as I've seen. So, I haven't bothered buying them. Avvar, first Inquisitor, yeah cool, whatever blah blah blah. Deep roads? Pfft. I got more than enough of the Deep Roads in DAO, thank you very much. The nug king easter egg is cute, but not cute enough for fifteen bucks, sorry.

Am I holding out for the Wolf Hunt DLC? You bet your ass. Well, preferably it and elvhen history in general will be the focus of DA4 instead, if Bioware has any sense. But I'll take a large DLC on the subject, if I must. In any case, until that day comes, I'm stuck playing one of ten Inquisitors that I have save games for. No, wait, eleven now, with Fenlamea.

I take a final sip of the last dregs of my coffee, and sigh, clicking my mouse over to bring up my ridiculously huge (Three gigabytes, and proud of it, damn it.) DAI screenshot folder.

Flipping through my elven Inquisitors, I wonder which one my dream Herald self looked like, if any of them. It'd be nice if I'd looked like Fenlamea. I managed to make her rather pretty. Black hair in a modded pixie cut, ocean-at-sunset-colored eyes, tan skin. Well-placed, faded scars, tracing the pale branches of Mythal's vallaslin as they gently curve up her brow. Tasteful makeup, that accentuates her features properly. It would indeed be very nice to have looked like her.

The tan skin probably makes it a 'no', though. I had pale skin.
I'll probably never know now, regardless. Dreams like that one rarely ever repeat, or continue for me. While I can control the course of whatever dream I'm having, while I'm in it, I cannot choose the dream. I wish I could. I'd never have another horrifying nightmare again, if I could choose not to. Sadly, as much as our personalities may perfectly align, I do not have Fen'harel's ability to manipulate the 'Fade'. Lucid dreaming is as close as I get.

My dog begins her pacing for the day, walking back and forth on a warpath across my room, going under my chair both ways, as always. She sits next to me, looking up at me expectantly. I look back at her.

"Can I help you?"

She wags furiously and edges closer to me, nudging her freezing cold nose under the bare skin of my forearm. I jerk away from the cold on instinct, and rub the chilled snot off on my shirt, trying to use friction to warm the spot.

"Not helping."

I glare at the lab/dachshund mix (Yeah, I don't know how that happened, either. Stepping stool?) next to me, then shake my head, huffing and returning my attention to the blank page before me. From whence did this sudden blockage in my writing come? Wherever it originated, it needs to go right the hell back to base. I've got stories to write.

I start typing, because starting is usually half the battle anyway, when suddenly, my palm begins to itch again. It had shut up after a bit of scratching earlier, but now, it's itching with the fury of Coryphytits when he doesn't get his way. Brat.

Screw it, time to take my hairbrush to it. When fingernails don't do the job, a hairbrush usually does. Snagging said hairbrush from behind my monitor, I apply the bristles to my palm liberally for a few moments. Finally, the annoyance subsides enough to ignore it. Sighing in relief, I set my hairbrush back in its spot, crack my knuckles, and get back to work.

*Several hours later...*

"There! I did a thing!" I declare to my dog, who naturally looks at me like I've lost my mind. Maybe I have. I'm talking to a dog, after all. But I swear she knows english half the time.

I look back up at my screen and check the word count. Three thousand isn't terrible. Nodding in satisfaction, I flip desktops (Ah, the wonders of Windows 10 FINALLY having caught up with Linux in something!) over to my browser to check my email. "Pride's Price" by Exia has a new chapter, so I eagerly go to read it. Oo, Adamant. Oh wow. Ok that's cool. Ahh, good chapter. (Yes, I'm a tease, go read it yourself. It's worth it.) I close out the tab with a smile, and go back to the second desktop to look at what I've written.

While I'm reading, I absently scratch at my palm, because yet again, it's itching. I huff a sigh of frustration at this fact, wondering if a mosquito got to me. Damn bugs. I look at it in annoyance, only to realize I've somehow managed to scratch it almost raw in the time since I've woken up. The hell?

I think back to while I was writing, and remember scratching at it quite fiercely a few times to make it shut up. I decide with a grimace to make a concerted effort to avoid scratching it any more. The last thing I need is an open wound.

Shaking my head, I read the last bit of what I've written, and take a deep, even breath, setting my
fingers to the keys of my keyboard to continue the story.

*Quite a few more than several hours later... Yes, I'm skipping it because I don't want to bore you to death- any more than I have already...* *

I stifle a yawn and crawl into bed, having already brushed my teeth and showered and de-robed for the night. Flopping down onto my pillow and curling my arm under it, I tuck myself in, trying to get comfortable. I feel the bed jostling, hear the thumping of my dog's limbs and the ripping sound of her claws scraping the carpet, as she wriggles her way out from under my bed. I hear her make her way around to the side of the bed I'm facing, and I roll my eyes, sighing. I flip the covers back and smack the bed, inviting her up for her nightly five minutes in my bed. Her choice, not mine. My dog is almost as weird as I am.

She settles down and I toss the blanket back over her, trying once again to get comfortable. I'm about to drift off, when -oh, there she goes- she jumps off the bed, returning to her troll dungeon under my bed. I snort softly and finally drift off to sleep.

The moment we've all been waiting for. Fourth wall? What's that?

This time, there is no floating, or swirling miasma of nothingness. No, this time, it's a blindingly green flash of light that nearly jolts me from my sleep.

"Someone, help me!"

"What's going on here?"

"Run while you can! Warn them!"

"We have an intruder. Slay the elf."

Well, shit.

The vision ends, and I have the beginnings of a massive migraine. Visions are a lot less pleasant in 'reality' than in the stories. They fucking hurt. Naturally, this is exactly when Cass decides to make it worse by yelling at me.

"You were there! Who attacked? The Divine, was she- was this vision true? What are we seeing?"

I grit my teeth against the pain her demands are causing my head, rubbing my temples to attempt soothing the growing headache. I let my hands drop to my sides before I answer her, a growl on my voice as I start, "How many times must I say that I don't remember anything before today, before you realize it must be true? I don't even know my own name; how would I know the answer to this?!"

She seems slightly taken aback by my response, but before she can formulate anything to say to that, Solas speaks up. "Echoes of what happened here... the Fade bleeds into this place." He turns to Cass as she moves over to him. "This rift is not sealed, but it is closed- albeit temporarily. I believe that with the mark, it can be opened, then sealed properly, and safely. However, opening the rift will likely attract attention from the other side."

"That means demons!" Cass translates pointlessly, "Stand ready!"

I sigh heavily as I watch several soldiers and scouts ready themselves. Cass shares a nodding moment with a random archer who is mysteriously never seen again. Then, she nods at me. Welp, time to summon a pride demon. I step up to the rift and lift my anchored hand up, calling the wolf's
magic up and spitting it out onto the crystallized surface of the closed rift. Good to know it's still working, I guess.

The shards covering the rift shatter, and a flash of viridian zaps the -holy fuck that's huge- pride demon behind us. I back up and ready my staff as the spirit-turned-pissed-off-asshole roars and laughs, putting his guard up to full. Well, at least, I'm guessing that's what it's doing. There's no health bars in 'reality', unfortunately.

"Now!" Cass shouts to the archers, who release a completely useless volley of arrows, that bounce off the thing's armored hide harmlessly. Bad timing, Cass.

I'm keeping an eye on the rift. The moment it closes again, I'm opening that sucker. I've played this part way too many times to forget how it goes, damn it. Cass is beating the demon in the shins with her shield, Varric is trying to wedge a bolt or two up its ass, and Solas is flinging ice at it as fast as he can. I'll have to talk to him about how to do all that fancy staff twirling, later.

There we go! The rift has closed and I can actually do something useful! Up goes my marked hand, and a surge of ancient magics later, it's open again. The bigass demon doesn't seem so bigass now, all huffing and puffing on its knees and shit.

I cast that awesome god-fist thing from earlier, right on its head. Ha! it definitely felt that! Just as the spell hits, the demon's head jerks down sharply, and it seems to be straining under the pressure. Damn, what I wouldn't give for a health bar, to see how much damage that actually did.

No more time for that, though, as I notice the two shades exiting the rift, just before it closes again. Naturally, they head straight for me. Because that makes perfect sense. The nearest one is about to bear down on me with its claws, and I raise my staff to block it, just as I feel a strange sensation slide over my skin. At the same time, I see a very soft green shimmer follow the feeling over me. The demon's claw make it past my pitiful blocking attempt, but instead of getting ripped to shreds, there's only the slightest pressure, like a soft caress.

The fuck?

OH. The realization dawns, rather slowly for me: it's a barrier. Makes sense. Thanks Solas! At least, I assume it's him. I sure as hell don't know how to do that. Well, time to kill these idiots then. Crushing prison dispatches the first one, and some rubble smacking weakens the second enough for me to beat the fuck out of its face until it goes down. Works for me. I'm gonna be sore as shit in a few days. Or, whenever I 'wake up'.

With a glance up to the rift to check if it's ready for another bout, I send some more rubble at the pride demon, trying to avoid any of it falling on the combatants below. I manage not to let it fall on anyone, but Solas does trip over it as he walks backwards to get some distance between him and the demon. Well, wolf, that's what you get for trying to mage tank! I shake my head and look back up at the rift. Time to open again.

Varric shoots the next stray shade through the eye, and Solas freezes the second one. I happily toss the largest chunk of debris I can find on short notice at it, shattering it into little pieces. With a nod to Solas, I turn my attention - and hand - to the rift, opening it one last time. Just as it bursts open, I feel the barrier on me go down. Fortunately, nothing's trying to bash my face in at the moment, so it's not a big deal.

I do the god-fist move on the bigass again, pouring a bit more power into it than usual. Success! It tumbles to the ground, and it's gotta be close to death, because I can see its arms trembling as it starts to get back up.
Time for a finishing move, then. I aim my staff at it, because this spell totally drained me last time, and fuck that. I imagine a giant fist around that huge ass mofo, and visualize it crushing the demon, like I'd crushed that mini boulder earlier.

I'm told later - by Varric, naturally - that the sight of a demon that big, crumpling in on itself, was one for the history books. But I wouldn't know, because I'd closed my eyes in concentration by this point. Also, because I never tried this again on anything that humongous. Not a good idea at all, in hindsight. But hey, at least it looked cool.

By the time I released the spell, it wasn't because I chose to, but because I didn't *have* a choice. The thread of my mana that pulls energy from the Fade very nearly snaps, and I end up on my hands and knees, vision fading in and out. I distantly hear someone calling out to me - though they only know me as 'prisoner' - but I can't even concentrate enough to tell who it is.

I fumble as I feel for my right pocket, the unfamiliar outfit causing me no end of problems, as I try to find the damn slip of open fabric. Cass said only use the potions if I absolutely need them, and I desperately need that lyrium vial, in that damn pocket that I *still* can't find.

A faint pressure on the right side of my hip, then a song that clings to my skin as I make out the faint glow of blue before my face. I reach for the glow and totally miss it, but I feel the cool glass pressed into my hand, and I sink to my haunches, tilting my head and the glass back in unison.

Oh, sweet, sweet relief, oh *shit* I needed that. AHH! Lyrium buzz! Fuck! Okay, I'm awake now.

My senses return to me in a rush, sharpening everything around me. I look to my right to see Solas kneeling next to me, raw concern bared on his features for one moment, hidden the next. Smart wolf knew what I needed. Good to know. At first, I think he's going to chew me out for being so reckless, but instead, he purses his lips - *mmm* those lips - and jerks his shiny head back toward the rift.

I nod and stand, moving in range of the gaping hole in the veil, and flinging my mark's power at it. It sputters petulantly, resisting the closure. I push harder, feeling for the edges, binding them together slowly and tightly, until there is nothing left to bind. I yank my fist back to seal it, and it works! It's sealed! I watch the ball of energy shoot up the tether to the Breach itself, and brace as much as I can for the impact that I know is coming... for all the good it does.

I'm shoved utterly off my feet by the resulting shockwave, my head smacking against some of the rubble I'd tossed at the pride demon. Lights out. Goodnight.

I figure at this point, I'll wake up. I mean, it seems like a reasonable point to do so. But no. Not a chance.

You know how in the game, you just wake up in your little house at Haven? Well, what they skip in the game, is what happens in all the little notes you find scattered around that Adan writes, about the days you're knocked out. Yeah, I didn't get to skip that. Honestly, I like this version better.

I'm falling. Well, okay, my body isn't, but my mind sure as hell is. Falling, falling, falling, down into the green sky. I can see the ground, but it's still far away yet, and doesn't seem to be getting any closer, actually. But I'm still falling. What the fuck, Fade? Well, this is annoying.

I can barely catch my breath for the wind whipping past me, but I make a valiant effort anyway, because it feels like my head's about to explode if I don't get some air. In it goes, and a burst of relief flows through my body, almost as strong as the lyrium zinging through my veins. I close my eyes and just let myself enjoy the free-fall, because hey, this is the Fade, and I'll eventually land.
Or die. Or something. Fuck, I don't know, I've never been to the actual Fade!

What does one do in the Fade, if you're not a somniari? Just dream? That seems... boring. Oh, but I'm a mage, so I'll probably have to keep from being tempted by demons and shit, right? Damn. That just sucks all the fun out of it, doesn't it? Well, at least I know that much.

I mean hell, I have a perfect record in the 'game Fade' of never giving in to demons. They're really not that smart, to be honest. I was actually kinda shocked that my companions in Dragon Age Origins and 2 were so easily tempted or fooled. Well, okay, Alistair getting fooled didn't really surprise me much. But the rest of them, yeah that was a bit much. Maybe they were just easily entertained?

As I finish pondering this conundrum, I realize that the wind is no longer rushing past me. I open my eyes, and I'm standing in a forest clearing, with a babbling brook running through it. That's... nice? Is this some memory from my elf's past, or something? I really wish I knew what she looks like. That would be a big hint, as to how I should behave.

Well, this is the Fade, I mean I could conjure a mirror. Then again, if a demon is shaping this dream, it could show me something totally wrong. Well that's useless. Now what? Hmm...

Maybe I can try to shape the dream myself? But I'm probably not a somniari, so that would put a dent in things. Then again... I can dream lucidly. And this is just my dream. Maybe that counts for something? Screw it, can't hurt to try.

I close my eyes and start picturing the Inquisitor's room in Tarasyl'an Te'las.

That's right, I don't call it Skyhold. Deal with it.

I imagine it with the mods I have in place with my real game, because who the hell wants chantry symbols in your room as a mage? Plush, black carpets, a black leather love seat, a mahogany desk with a black marble top. Dalish glass, elven tapestry. The Orlesian sleigh bed, with crimson sheets and a black blanket.

Can you tell black is my favorite color?

Topping it all off with a warm fire in the fireplace, and the mountains as a backdrop, I push the scene outwards with a touch of mana, hoping that works. I slowly open my eyes, and holy shit, it worked! Wait, so I'm a somniari here? Oh, kick ass! Solas will flip his shit! Or, well, as much as that facade of his will allow him to flip his shit. But whatever, this is awesome!

I grin and make my way over to the bed, flopping down on it backwards. Oh wow, this is more comfy than I thought it would be. Wait, is this- holy crap, it's filled with feathers! Ohhhh wow. Lap of luxury here. Damn.

I chuckle and reach over, snagging a pillow and sliding it under my head, resting my hands over my stomach. I could get used to this. I'm looking up at the Falon'din owls above my bed, when I hear a familiar voice.

"Remarkable! You wove this scene together?"

I jerk upright in the bed to see Solas standing by the stairs, looking around the room with a slightly awed smile. Gathering my wits as quickly as I can, I nod. "Yes, though I wasn't sure if it would work. But, well, it did." I shrug, chuckling awkwardly. Yeah, great line. Dumbass.

Despite my mental face palming, he doesn't seem the least bit fased by my lackluster response. "I
had no idea you were a fellow dreamer. You truly did not know until now?"

I shake my head. "No. I can't remember anything before today, as you may have heard me say earlier. I'm surprised you didn't discover this from the days I was knocked out after the Conclave. Surely you slept, at some point?"

He nods his acquiescence. "I did, however I was too busy seeking answers from spirits nearby, to bother finding your dreams, for the most part. I managed to stumble upon your dream once, as I was on the way to speak to another spirit. But there was nothing there, a void. You were likely too weak to attempt forming a scene at the time."

"A void? How odd." I give myself a shake to clear my head. I've got him here, I may as well make use of the time. "In any case, I need to talk to you."

He waves his hand for me to continue, tilting his head curiously at me. "By all means."

I take a breath, and begin, "Being as I don't remember anything before today, I've had to... well, improvise my magic as I go along. I was wondering if you would teach me, ha'hren. You cast so elegantly; there's a bounty of grace and beauty in your every gesture. I would enjoy learning such things, if you are willing to teach them."

I can almost feel the flaring of his pride at the compliment, as he stands a little straighter and smirks as he responds, "I would be happy to teach you anything you like... da'len. But it should wait until we are both able to wake. You need all of your strength to recover, and that would best be served by actually resting. I recommend you stay in this space you have created here, rather than make a new one, as it will stay for as long as you occupy it. I will keep any harmful spirits at bay, so you may rest."

I smile at him, dipping my head in appreciation. "Ma serannas, ha'hren. It seems I am to be in your debt for a long while yet."

He smiles pleasantly, but shakes his head. "There is no debt that you have not already paid. You have done everything we asked of you, without complaint. Helping you only serves to help the world at large. You are the one with the mark, thus you are the only one that can close the Breach and its many rifts. So, by helping you, I help myself." He grins, huffing a laugh. "It is entirely self-serving, I'm afraid."

I chuckle. "Ah yes, I see it now. How could I have been so blind?" I grin at him, then look out the window for a moment, gaze flicking back to him quickly. "Tell me, do you recognize this place?"

He looks about the room, then looks back at me with a slight shrug, shaking his head. "I do not. Should I?"

I hang my head for a moment to hide my smirking visage. Once I lift it again, my features are schooled back into neutrality. "Not necessarily. I simply wondered where it was, as I don't recall it. It just... came to me."

He walks further into the room, looking out of the smaller balcony, gesturing to it. "You haven't shaped anything beyond this, so I am not entirely certain. Perhaps if I were to see it fully formed, I might recognize it."

I slide off the bed and join him, realizing once I'm next to him that, other than the mountains, there is literally nothing outside. I step onto the balcony and take a deep breath of the cold mountain air, then begin forming the scene of the rest of Tarasyl'an Te'las. The courtyards, the garden, the bridge
and guard house. Slowly, the keep comes into sharp focus, and I begin fleshing out details. The main hall. The rickety stairway connecting my room to it. By this point, I am feeling rather haggard, and I stop, gripping the railing for a time as I catch my breath. When I feel steady enough to let go, I turn to him with a small smile and wave him on, walking right past him to the stairs.

"You should not wear yourself out so much when your physical form is under such duress," he chides.

I nod weakly, huffing a small laugh. "You're right, I shouldn't. But I wanted to show this place to you. Since I have no physical frame of reference for it, this will have to do."

I head down the stairs and press on, through the doors and down the rest of the stairs, finally ending up at the door to the main hall. I look over my shoulder, to see if he's followed. He has, and so damn quietly that I didn't even hear him. Figures. I toss him a smile and open the door, stepping out onto the dais where the pointy throne will one day be. I gesture to the hall at large, looking at him questioningly.

He steps out, and I see the recognition flit over his face for a moment, though it's quickly hidden. He turns back to me with a slight shrug. "It is a grand hall, but I do not recognize it. It seems similar to tales I've heard from spirits of a place to the north, but I cannot be certain."

Uh-huh. You lie, Fen'harel, you lie!

I smirk and shake my head, looking off to the doors at the end of the hall with a sigh. No point in pushing it, just yet. This farce can't go on forever.

"You don't believe me," he interrupts my thoughts.

I shrug, still looking ahead and chuckling softly. "It hardly matters whether I do or not. You have your secrets, as do I. You are just as welcome to keep them, as I am to keep mine."

"Exactly what secrets do you think me capable of?" he counters.

Oh, Fen. Fen, Fen, Fen. Why are you tempting me like this?

I grin and turn to him. "Are you so eager to learn mine, that you would reveal yours?" Answer a question with a question, always a good way to deflect.

I watch as he walls himself up. "No, I am not. Though I admit, I am curious. What secrets can the elf who remembers nothing possibly have?"

I bark a laugh, grin spreading across my face. "You know better than to think anyone incapable of lying, Pride. 'Tis true I do not know who I am. Nor do I technically remember what happened at the Conclave, or any of this life before today. But that is not to say I don't remember something else entirely."

He folds his arms over his chest, regarding me speculatively, like a vexing mystery he must unravel. "What is it you remember, then?"

I smirk at him. "You. And this place, weakly as I've represented it. And every person I've met today. I know their secrets, I know their fears, their shame, their joy. I know a different life, where this is but a fairy tale, a legend; a story meant to entertain the masses. A life where I am dreaming this, at this very moment."

At first, he appears alarmed, but at my last statement, he laughs. "You think this all a dream? Oh, if
only it were so. Do you think yourself a god, to have invented all of this? What kind of life is it you supposedly have, that you would use such a horrid tale as mere amusement?"

I snort. "A dreary one indeed. But no, I do not think myself a god, or superior to anyone at all. I simply state the facts as I see them. Do you wish proof of my claims?"

His eyebrow flicks upward, just as he dips his head slightly. "It would help, yes."

I take a deep breath, chewing on my bottom lip as I consider which piece of information to give him. Telling him I know his true identity is too much, too early. I need something less likely to make him flee.

My gaze drifts up to one of the elven tapestries, and a smirk grows on my face, slipping my lip from betwixt my teeth as I look back down at him. "This place," I say, as I gesture to it once more, "is called Tarasylan Te'las. I've theorized it is the very place where the veil was created, but I never had any actual evidence to support that. I also know that you are aware of this keep, and that you lied to me just now, about not knowing."

He snorts, giving me a convincingly skeptical glare. "Yes, certainly, and nugs fly. Very well, tell me what other supposed truths you know."

Oh, he's trying to bait me now. Not happening, Fen. "Nugs may not be able to fly, but there are nugs which are big enough to ride. In any case, I have a question for you. If I were to summon a mirror here, would it show my true reflection?"

He seems taken aback by my swift track switching, but slowly nods. "Yes, it would; however, I do not recommend keeping it summoned for long. Such objects tend to attract demons of vanity, and pride. And you did not answer my question."

I feel well enough again to summon something so simple as a mirror, so I envision a full-length one, right in front of me. A tiny push of mana, and it is realized. One look, and I immediately start laughing.

It's me. As an elf. No vallaslin.

My laughter tapers off into a sigh as I dissolve the mirror, turning to Fen-Solas-hobo egg. "Well, that's something. Hmm, what shall my name be, then?" I fold my arms over my ribs, tipping one hand up to tap my chin with my finger. "Ah!" I say, holding my finger up in a lovely little 'eureka' moment, "I know what to call myself. It is true, after all." I grin and clasp my hands together at the base of my spine, standing tall - for an elf - in pride. "Savhalla, Solas, I am Fen'nas. It's a pleasure to properly meet you. Sort of."

He looks at me a bit like my dog always does. "Wolf soul? Why would you wish to have such a name?"

I shrug. "As I said, it is true. I have the soul of a wolf. I am a den mother, a protector, just, but never cruel. I can be vicious when needed, but also kind. I do not do well outside of a pack, but I also require time alone once in a while." I gesture to my person with a subtle flourish. "Wolf soul."

He lifts an eyebrow. "We shall see. If that is the name you choose, I can hardly dispute that, though your other claims I can and will, if I see evidence against them."

I shrug again. "Feel free to. Now, as to your question, it's not exactly fair, is it? I mean, you've not told me anything of yourself, so why should I speak to my own knowledge?"
"You suggest an equal trade?"

I nod. "I do. It is only just, after all."

He dithers for a moment, adopting a similar posture to the one I'd assumed as I thought of a name for myself. Finally, he lowers his hands to his sides. "What would you know of me?"

Ohhh no, we're not going back to game dialogue. Not after all this wonderful progress. "Where are you really from? Not the village to the north, unless that truly is your place of birth."

Surprise, then suspicion cloud his face, but he proceeds. "It truly is my place of birth. How you knew of it is beyond my reasoning, but whoever told you, it is the truth."

"Huh." I shrug ineloquently. "Alright. Let's see... ah, I have one. But you cannot breathe a word of it, until it is revealed, understood? I only tell you so you have proof when it comes out."

He narrows his eyes at me, but nods. "Very well, continue."

"Cassandra's guilty pleasure is reading one of Varric's stories, a series called "Swords and Shields". It's romantic fluff, and she adores it."

Amused surprise lights upon his face. "Are you perfectly serious?"

Chuckling, I nod. "I am. She tries her best to hide it, but she's caught out eventually. She acts like a blushing virgin about it; it's quite funny."

He laughs. "I can imagine it is. I wish to know more. Ask your question."

I hum in thought for a second, then wave him on, heading back up to the Inquisitorial chambers. "Come, if we are to have a proper conversation, we should be more comfortable."

He trails along behind me willingly, and when we reach the main room, I summon a pair of comfortable armchairs in front of the fireplace, settling down in the one on the left. I wave my hand at the other chair. "Have a seat, make yourself at home." I almost add, 'Oh wait, you are at home,' but decide against it.

He sits, gingerly at first, then more comfortably. "Well done. Chairs in the Fade are not often very comfortable."

I chuckle, nodding in agreement as I recall the few I saw in the game. "True. Alright, spell, razor, or natural?"

He blinks at me. "To what are you referring?"

I snort. "What else? Your profound lack of hair, of course."

"Ah," he says, as I watch slightly embarrassed realization dawn on his face. "It is a spell."

I nod. "Right. Makes you seem more humble, despite your chosen name, I suppose. Alright, well-"

He cuts me off, "Chosen? What makes you think my name was not given to me by my parents?"

I level an 'are you shitting me?' glare at him. "Well, since that's a question, I suppose it's fair. Pride isn't something a parent would name a child. It's a name one chooses when it is all they have left, or it is something they believe they have too much of. To be used as a reminder, perhaps to remind the person to behave humbly."
He purses his lips for a time, watching me carefully. I return a blank look, waiting for his response. "Very astute." He leans back in his chair, folding his hands before him. "Ask."

I sigh, looking into the fire to ponder for a few seconds. I don't want to waste my questions, and I'm not ready to completely tip my hand just yet. I have other cards to play, first. Bloody nothing comes to mind. I know, horrible. I continue to stare into the fire, in hopes that inspiration will dawn. Finally, a spark catches in the tinders of my mind and sets off a roaring flame. I very nearly sigh in relief as I look back at him.

"Can you teach me the art of dun'himelan? I know it's possible to learn it, I'm just not certain how. I've heard it claimed that one can learn by simply studying animals, but I'd like a more direct source."

He frowns slightly. "Why would you wish to learn how to change your shape?"

I smirk. "What is my name?"

His frown clears to a neutral expression. "...I concede your point. It still seems... frivolous."

"Not at all," I insist, "I can use it for many things. Combat, stealth, spying, having fun. I see no harm in it."

He shrugs. "Perhaps. We shall see if you have an affinity for it. I noticed your magic is rather... peculiar. It is quite rare not to be aligned with an element. Your magic is very powerful, but it's wild, crude... even brutish, at times."

"Why do you think I asked for training? I'm fully aware that my magic is not only dangerously unpredictable, but clumsy, at best. I wish to hone it into a proper tool, as much as it can be. I believe it can be done, with the proper guidance," I reply.

He lifts an eyebrow. "And you believe me to be capable of that proper guidance?"

I purse my lips. "I know you are capable of it. I would not have asked, if I was not certain."

He heaves a sigh, and nods once. "Ma nuvenin. We will begin once you recover. In the meantime, we can at least begin to correct your atrocious staff work."

I snort. "You call that staff work? I have no idea what I'm doing. I was literally just using it as a blunt conduit, a means to an end, because casting by hand drains my mana far too quickly."

His eyebrows flick up in surprise. "You can cast without a staff?"

I grimace. " Barely. I mean, yes, I can do it. But like I said, the mana cost isn't worth the end result. It took all of my mana to crush a large rock. That's not what I'd call an acceptable result."

He sits forward, suddenly seeming rather interested in all this. "This spell you refer to, is it the same spell you used on the pride demon, the one that crushed it?"

I nod, unsure why he seems so interested in a spell that nearly kills me when I use it. "Yes, but you saw what it did to me, even with a staff. Granted, the target was a bit larger than a rock, but still."

He waves dismissively. "The size of the target does not matter. The fact that it was successful does, however. It is quite an advanced spell, for someone who is so obviously unpracticed with her own magic. It's not surprising it completely drains you. More importantly, if you can cast without the use of a staff, that can be honed into even more of a useful tool than better staff work. If you can
rely on your staff as mostly a defensive weapon, for blocking and such, it would completely alter your casting style, and allow for more free-flowing combat. It could be quite beneficial for you."

I chuckle. "Well, we'd better get a steady supply of lyrium, if that's the case, because I'll be draining myself quite frequently."

He shakes his head. "No, we'll start out small, and work our way up. By the time you are casting the more complex spells free-handed, you will understand how to use your mana more efficiently. The lyrium will not be needed."

I give him a skeptical look. "...If you say so."

He smirks. "You doubt me, da'len?"

I snicker. "Always, ha'hren."

He frowns deeply. "That is unfortunate. Perhaps, in time, I will earn your trust."

I sigh, turning to gaze into the fire once more. "Perhaps."

Chapter End Notes

❤--Discord--❤

❤ Thanks for reading! If you enjoy the story or this chapter in particular, please feel free to leave a review with your thoughts! ❤
❤ I love reading comments and reply to all of them. ❤
Dread Wolf, Take Me...

Chapter Notes

Translations:
Ma ne em din: You will be my death (You will be the death of me.).
Banal nadas: Nothing is inevitable.
Garas'ara: Follow me, or my version of it anyway.

Here, have a wall of words. *tosses word wall at your face*

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tap, tap, tap, tap. Sigh.

I can tell he's not taking this well.

Drumming his fingers on the claw arm of his chair, within my Fade version of Tarasyl'an Te'las, the wolf looks rather... put out. I really don't know what he expected of me. That I would suddenly trust him, simply because of our shared plight? Doesn't work that way, Eggy.

In fact... you know it doesn't work that way. So, why are you all in the dumps about this shit? Is it because you think I know more than I'm letting on, and you want to know exactly how much?

Well, tough shit. A pity party isn't going to loosen my lips. Other things might, but you're sure as hell not gonna offer them right now. *Cough.*

Time to get his mind off of this. I turn from the mesmerizing fire back to him. "When I was asleep... Cass told me I nearly killed some people with magic. I didn't hurt you, did I?"

The question catches him off-guard, disarming his stony facade for a moment as he looks to me. "No, you did not harm me. I believe your more violent reactions were due to the fact that they were attempting to smite you."

My eyebrows fly up. "They were trying to drain my mana? Why? And what do you mean 'attempt'? Surely I wouldn't be able to resist a Templar's smite in my sleep." I chuckle nervously. That's not... possible. Is it?

He looks over to the fire, settling back into his seat and shaking his head. "They were unable to perform the smite; the mark kept interfering somehow. They said it was as if it shielded you from their power."

I stare at him, stunned. "The mark can do that?"

He shrugs softly, looking back to me, specifically focusing on my marked hand. "There is no way to know what it is capable of. Even if there was an historical reference for such a power, it is unlikely it would behave the same in your hand, as in the hand of another. The power you now wield is as unique as you are."

I snort a laugh, flipping my hand over to gaze down at the scar in my palm. Now that it's stable, I'm able to study it in more detail. Dormant as it is, it is easy to see the marking for what it is: a rune
etched in my flesh. How... odd. Yet, it makes sense. It's magic, after all. I trace the shape of the
rune with the forefinger of my right hand, the sensation it causes almost tickling, and it sends the
mark to flaring slightly. I tilt my head at the reaction, curious.

"It reacts to physical stimuli. Strange. Oh," I turn back to him as a thought occurs to me, "I wanted
to ask you something else. That first rift, I felt... something activate the mark that wasn't me. When
I asked you what you did, that's what I meant. I knew the rift closing was me- or, my anchor,
rather."

He frowns slightly. "Anchor? That is an interesting term for it." His expression clears as he
continues, "But you are correct, I sent mana into the mark that first time. I was uncertain if you
would be able to activate it on your own."

I nod, looking back to my palm, holding it toward him slightly to illustrate my point. "It's a rune," I
say, as I rub the fingers of my left hand over it. "It makes me think of the Fade. I've never seen
another rune like it."

He lifts an eyebrow. "You've seen many runes before, have you?"

I shrug, my gaze still on the mark. "I told you; I've seen this world before. I've studied it in detail,
in fact. It's been a bit of an obsession of mine, lately."

He's silent for long enough that I tear my eyes from my own hand to look at his face. He's still
looking at the rune that his orb created, his own hands steepled before him just under his nose,
against his lips. I really wish I was those hands right now.

Shaking myself mentally, I focus on his expression. It won't do the slightest bit of good for me to
be staring at him with lust on my mind. This is the Fade, after all, even if it's just my dream of it.
Dreaming within a dream... INCEPTION for the win! Okay, okay, enough. Back to his face.

He keeps his eyes steadily fixed on the anchor, looking like he's contemplating the meaning of the
universe. His nostrils flare with a sharp breath and he lowers his hands as he exhales, looking at me
with that piercing gaze of his. "This world you think you come from, what is it like?"

Not the question I expected. I withdraw, taking my own deep breath and exhaling as I look up to
the ceiling. "Well," I begin, "It's much more modern. Humans are the only race, and there's no...
hmm. There's no true magic; not like there is here, anyway. Magic exists, but most don't believe in
it, and the majority that do believe, don't have the talent for it. Science is what most believe in.
There's many religions, and every bit as much strife as there is here, if not more. What natural life
there is left on our planet is similar to that of Thedas, but there's differences. We don't have nugs, or
halla, or harts. Or dragons. There were once creatures that were as massive as dragons, but they're
extinct now, like griffons are here.

"Industry is the main focus of most of the world. Money, power, greed, selfishness... destruction.
Humans as they are now, are a plague on the earth we inhabit. There was a time that we could've
lived in harmony with our habitat, but it is long since past. We live on a planet that we've doomed
with our own hubris. Even if we dismantled everything we've done, and returned to a more natural
way of life right this instant, it is highly unlikely the earth would recover."

I fall silent for a moment, deciding what else I could tell him. A glance at him tells me he's
horrified by such waste. I know the feeling.

I take a breath and continue, "You're completely right to be disgusted by such a thing. I am too.
There's nothing I can do about it, sadly. Strange as it is to say, Thedas is in far better shape than the
world I come from." I grimace, sighing heavily. "But, it's not all bad. There are many beauties and wonders in my world. If you look past the false face of our society, there are many good people, truly beautiful spirits. They are not the majority, but they exist. And there are places in nature that are as yet untouched by our race, which are so beautiful, they steal your breath away." I point at him absentely as a specific place comes to mind. "There's one place that I think of in particular, when I think of Arlathan."

"Arlathan? You have seen the capitol of Elvhenan?" He asks, a mixture of skepticism and wonder in the song of his voice.

I chuckle softly, shaking my head. "No, I haven't. But the way you describe it makes me think of this place. Imagine Arlathan, before the crystal spires and the influence of elvhen structures, in general. The natural forest, the massive trees. The raw magic flowing through the air, unfettered by any outside influences. That is the place I remember. The trees are bigger around than the gatehouse, and reach so far into the sky that you almost can't see the top branches. The entire forest feels thick with energy and life. It's glorious."

He smiles slightly, nodding. "I can imagine it easily. There were many places exactly as you describe, in Elvhenan." His brow pinches now, head tilting, eyes scrutinizing. "Your knowledge of how I would describe Arlathan is... intriguing."

I grin widely. "I told you, Solas, I know things. Let me see... I may be able to remember this somewhat accurately." I try to recall one of his tales of things he's seen in the Fade, though it's difficult to remember exactly how he put it. I may have his personality, but I am nowhere near as lyrical as he is when describing such things.

"I once met an ancient spirit who had conquered nearly all the lands I had discovered." I frown as I try to remember... this probably isn't right, but I continue anyway, "Once, its kingdom was powerful, but it fell, just as all kingdoms do, and it was defeated. Like pride, or rage, it was the Fade's embodiment of a feeling, but I was uncertain which it was. I asked the spirit, and it looked at me strangely, faltering. 'They've forgotten. There remains no word for what I was.'" I smirk at him and shrug. "It's not exactly how you would say it, but that's what I can remember."

An elegantly arched eyebrow relays his surprise. "That is indeed similar to how I would describe my experience. The fact that you know a story I have yet to relay to you is... troublesome, however. What do you expect to gain, with this knowledge of yours?"

I huff a laugh, shaking my head slightly. "Nothing. A better end to the story, perhaps. More lives saved. I would use my knowledge for good, not ill. I've no desire to harm innocents... those deserving a swift death shall have it dealt to them in due course, but I want to save as many lives as possible. I can understand why you would think I'd have ulterior motives, but I truly don't. I fell into this; I never expected to dream such things. I'm glad for it, though. Perhaps it will give me a chance to create the better ending I seek. We'll see."

He frowns, obviously unconvinced. "Why do you care? If this is all but a dream to you, surely the fate of your dream's denizens matter little. What possible worth could you ascribe the figments of a dream?"

Though I understand the reasoning behind his questions, it feels like an accusing slap to my face. "You presume to know my motivations, before you have any certainty of what my character truly is? That is rather forward of you, Solas. Not to mention risky, should you be proven incorrect—which you are about to be."

I lean toward him, resting my forearm on the arm of the chair and leveling my most serious
expression at him. "Even were this just a dream, I would care about the fate of its inhabitants, because I care about everyone, dream or no dream. Ask yourself this: if you were in my place, would you not wish to help those around you, even if you thought it only a figment of the Fade?

"What of the chance that it may not be a figment? What if all of this is real, in one world or another? Would you risk the lives of the innocent spirits of this other world, simply for a lack of faith on your part? Exactly how selfish do you suppose me to be? Just as you volunteered your services, I wish to help, as much as I can." I shrug sharply. "Perhaps it does turn out to be naught but a dream- so be it. If it does, I will at least have the personal satisfaction of knowing I did the best I could, within that dream. Is that not worth something, in the end, no matter how little?"

Resting my case, I relax back into my chair, watching him and waiting for his reply. He seems... cowed, by my answer. Apparently, he did not think me capable of such compassion. He'll learn, eventually. Dirth'ara ma.

"I... apologize." Even that much is not extracted from him without great pain, it seems. "I had not believed you to be in possession of such wisdom. Had I known, I would not have been so quick to judge. I imagine it will not be the last of my errors in my interactions with you."

I smirk softly, the quirk of my lips falling quickly after as I tap my lips with my fingers, contemplating how to respond. "It would likely behove you to not judge a book by its bindings. Perhaps it would be best if you spoke to me, as you would speak to yourself. We are more similar than you might think. Regardless, I accept your apology. It would be poor form not to."

He lifts a cynical eyebrow at my words. "Your suggestions may have some merit; we shall see how much in the days to come." He dips his head slightly. "I thank you for your forgiveness, though it is not your form, but mine, that is poor. My assumption was inexcusable and rude."

I chuckle, letting my head rest on the high back of my chair. "Ah, there is little about your form that is poor, Solas." I straighten and smirk at him. "But come, let us put this behind us and move forward. I've no desire to dwell on unpleasantness. Tell me of a memory you found in the Fade."

The tiniest hint of a smile graces his lips, and he nods his acquiescence. "Very well. I watched a savage human horde go marching toward the battlefront. They sang a soldier's hymn to keep formation. The primal music shook the ground. These savage, unwashed warriors carried harmonies no Chantry choir has mastered. Though their cause was all but hopeless, they sang songs that made the spirits weep."

I smile fondly at him. "That's one of my favorites. It reminds me of a song from my world; though, I doubt it is even remotely similar."

That piques his interest. "May I ask what song it is?"

I laugh softly, a tinge of color rising on my cheeks. "Oh, well... I barely remember any of the words. But I can sing what I remember, if you like."

He smiles properly now, nodding gently. "I would enjoy that, if you are willing." He rests easy in his chair, folding his hands in his lap and watching me with curious eyes.

It makes me nervous.

I clear my throat, sending out a prayer to the cosmos that the altered voice of my elven form can still sing, like my human voice can. I take a breath, and off I go.

"I heard there was a secret chord, that David played and it pleased the lord- but you don't really
"Well, it goes like this: the fourth, the fifth; the minor fall and the major lift- the baffled king composing Hallelujah... Hallelujah... Hallelujah... Hallelujah... Hallelujah." I've got my eyes closed now, remembering as much of the lyrics as I can. My elf's voice is actually a little better than my human voice; I'd like to enjoy showing off while it lasts.

"Well your faith was strong but you needed proof. You saw her bathing on the roof. Her beauty in the moonlight overthrew you. She tied you to her kitchen chair, she broke your throne- she cut your hair, and from your lips she drew the Hallelujah! Hallelujah... Hallelujah... Hallelujah... Hallelujah... Hallelu-Uuu-jah." I draw out the last bit, testing the limits of my elf's far healthier lungs, letting the final notes linger in the air, to drift along the eddies and currents of our surroundings.

As the sound ends, I smile sheepishly and open my eyes, shrugging as I look at him. "I don't remember the rest," exits my mouth, before I even take in his expression.

He's gaping at me in wonder, of all things... and is it just me, or are his eyes a little... glassy? "That... was beautiful, Fen'nas. I was not expecting such a graceful sound to pass from your lips. I-" He hesitates, seeming surprised at himself, but he recovers and strives onward, "I would enjoy hearing you sing again, at any time. You have a gift for it that I would not see squandered in silence."

The blush on my cheeks must be an absolutely furious shade of red. It's true my elf voice is a bit better than my human one, but holy crap! I feel like I just moved Simon Cowell to tears. Okay, okay, don't let it go to your head... much. You just got complemented on your voice by an elf who's probably heard the most glorious, magically enhanced choirs of Elvhenan, that's all. Pfft. Fuck me running.

Words, forming them. You can still do that, right?

"'M-ma ir serannas, Solas. I... I don't know what to say, except, thank you. I will be happy to indulge you, perhaps some time after I stop blushing." I laugh weakly, and swallow my heart back down to where it belongs, as I press my hand to my cheek. It feels like it's on damn fire. Yep, a blush for the ages. Great. Sigh.

He smiles kindly at me, obviously amused and pleased at the effect he's had. Yeah, yeah, gloat it up, ya damn wolf. "I look forward to it." Cheeky shit. "In the meantime, I would be interested in hearing what your plans are, for this world you believe you are dreaming up."

Was that actually a sympathetic subject change? Well damn, color me impressed. I clear my throat and nod, grateful for the derailment. "Certainly. First thing's first, Cassandra will declare the Inquisition of old reborn. After that rather bold move, we'll be heading to the Hinterlands, to speak to the busybody Mother Giselle. She's... well, a pain in the ass, really. But, she kick starts the events that must unfold for the success of the Inquisition, so I'll tolerate her anyway. While we're there, we'll help our forces stabilize the area, stop the apostates and Templars that are endlessly feuding, and acquire better mounts from Horse Master Dennet. We'll assist the refugees, gain a few agents, and expand our influence- as unobtrusively as possible. Eventually, we'll be heading to Redcliffe, to recruit the rebel mages there as our allies, for closing the Breach. That... will not be an easy mission. But first, we take care of other things."

He gestures for me to elaborate. "Such as?"

I take a breath. "Well, we'll have to go to Val Royeaux to speak with the Chantry. That... goes about as well as can be expected; which is to say, not well at all. But hey, we all leave with our
heads still attached. We'll also recruit two party members there, before we leave."

I shrug, moving on. "Let's see... after that, some of our agents will be captured by an offshoot of Avvar in the Fallow Mire, so we'll have to go down there and rescue them. There's also several things to do there, that will bring a much-needed peace to the spirits that keep shoving themselves into the countless dead littering the bog. We'll need to close two rifts there- no wait, three. One of the Avvar will join the Inquisition.

"Then, we'll be called to go off to the Storm Coast, to recruit a mercenary band, lead by a qunari that will join our party personally. We'll deal with a group of bandits there, who are essentially a cult, called the Blades of Hessarian. Once we defeat their current leader, they swear allegiance to the Inquisition by proxy of me, and become our eyes and ears on the Storm Coast. Oh, there's also an enemy stronghold we'll have to take care of there, that eventually leads to an island with a high dragon on it. By the time we're done with all of that, we'll have amassed enough power to recruit the mages."

He blinks at me for several seconds. "That... is a rather detailed accounting of our possible future actions. Are you certain everything you've said will come to pass?"

I shrug. "No way to know for certain, since even my being here could change the course of events. But that is how it's supposed to go, for all that actually matters. Naturally, you will be keeping this information to yourself. Telling others would not be even remotely wise."

He nods absently. "Yes, naturally. How far into the future does your knowledge extend?"

I shake my head, sighing. "I'm not certain. In the... tale of this world, it seems that there is at least a year's worth of time - if not several - between the founding of the Inquisition, and the defeat of our enemy. Many more things happen - and are revealed - in that time, than what I've told you. It's quite the story. Varric will have a field day writing it all. Things that should be impossible happen on a nearly regular basis. The Inquisition becomes a thing of legend, a force for good in a time of great chaos. It will be difficult, but in the end, it is well worth it."

He nods softly, stroking his chin in thought. "It certainly seems so, if your predictions prove accurate. I look forward to verifying them."

I smirk, huffing a laugh through my nostrils. "As do I. I could tell you more, but I believe that is more than enough for now. Once what I've recited comes to pass, I may speak further on the subject. In the meantime, don't you have to wake at some point? Not that I particularly wish to end our conversation, but I'm unsure how time works in the Fade, in relation to the waking world."

He smiles, shaking his head. "Fret not; there is yet time before I must wake. Besides, I have yet to place the necessary wards around the place you've created here, for your protection in my absence. I should see to that, before it slips my mind."

I nod understandingly. "Alright. I'll be... somewhere around here, when you're done."

He graces me with a small smile, and takes his temporary leave. I watch his ass sway unabashedly as he leaves. What? Admit it, he has a damn fine ass. Definitely gotta get a grope in at some point. I amuse myself by shaping the flames in the fireplace into the closest approximation of that ass I can muster. I chuckle and dispel the image, letting the flames lick up in their proper, wild shape. It would hardly do to have the wolf come back to that sight.

I stand and trundle out onto the larger balcony, leaning against the railing and gazing out at the mountain range. I take a deep breath, inhaling the crisp, cool air, welcoming it happily into my
lungs. I love cold weather. Summer heat and humidity can suck a fat one. I live in the south, and lemme tell ya, that humidity is a killer. Take a shower, step outside, you need another shower immediately. It's that bad. Winter is infinitely preferable.

I sigh softly and take a seat with my back to the wall, looking through the railing at the view. With a thought, I brush aside the railing so my view is unobstructed. I wonder if I can call forth music here? Worth a try. I choose the "Nothing Like the Sun" album, by Sting. It's an album I listened to over and over as a child - on cassette tape, naturally - and it's always been one of my favorites. To my utter delight, I hear the beginning chords of "Fragile" begin to caress the chilled air with its melody. It's not the start of the album, but it is one of my favored songs from the list, so I'm more than happy to hear it first.

I bring my knees up and rest my elbows on them, letting my arms hang from there lazily as I lean back and listen to the song. From this angle, the sun is glaring blindingly across the snowy tops of the mountains. I wince and snap my eyes shut against the assault, snapping my fingers with the wish of turning time to night.

A pair of beautifully full moons quickly rise over the mountains, creating the perfect backdrop for the scene. I smile at the image, wishing we could've seen Tarasyl'an Te'las more than once at night, for that extremely brief scene of the main party returning triumphantly from fighting Coryphyfuckface. Having it always be daytime was rather immersion-breaking.

By the time Solas returns, "Straight to My Heart" is playing, and he tilts his head at me curiously. "Is there a particular reason for the change in lighting and... music?"

I startle, having been too absorbed in the music to hear him approach. I snap my fingers again, turning the music off. "Ir abelas, I wasn't expecting you to be back so quickly. And... the sun was blinding me a bit. I like night better, anyway."

He accepts my answer with an empathetic smile. "I understand, better than you might imagine. But that music, what was it? I've not heard its like before."

I chuckle a little nervously, rubbing my fingers together. "Ah, well... it's music I listened to quite a lot as a child. Most of the songs would be a bit too... modern, to be played in company here."

His brow scrunches in confusion. "'Too modern' how, exactly?"

I sigh, my eyes widening and cheeks puffing out on the exhale. "Well, several of the songs have subjects that relate to the events going on when the songs were written. They wouldn't make much sense here, at least, not without explanation. Other songs have too modern of a sound to them. You just may think they sound like senseless racket, knowing my luck."

He levels a disapproving look at me. "Fen'nas, do you truly think I am so stuck in my ways that I cannot adapt, or take things at face value, with an unbiased outlook?"

I snort a laugh. "No, but it's not just a matter of being stodgy. Everyone has their own personal preferences and tastes. I'm simply saying some of these might not be to your preferences."

His expression clears somewhat. "A fair point. However, you do not know my preferences, do you?"

I'd never considered that. What are the companion's music preferences? Huh. Shaking my head, I answer him, "No, I don't. Very well." I shrug and snap my fingers again, setting the song back to "Fragile".
If blood will flow when flesh and steel are one  
Drying in the color of the evening sun  
Tomorrow's rain will wash the stains away  
But something in our minds will always stay  
Perhaps this final act was meant  
To clinch a lifetime's argument  
That nothing comes from violence and nothing ever could  
For all those born beneath an angry star  
Lest we forget how fragile we are

On and on the rain will fall  
Like tears from a star, like tears from a star  
On and on the rain will say  
How fragile we are, how fragile we are

The music continues, Spanish guitar highlighting the mamba beat. The chorus repeats, trailing off into the end of the song. I snap my fingers, tilting my head up at him and waiting.

"That was actually quite beautiful. The lyrics were rather insightful, and the melody was pleasing. Might I hear another?" Genuine curiosity radiates from his every pore.

I grin and nod. "Alright. Let's see what you think of this one, then."

I pick "Sister Moon" from the list, and snap my fingers with a smile. Smooth, melodious saxophone heralds the arrival of the song on the air's whisper, the moon scape perfectly accenting the song's lyrics.

Sister Moon will be my guide  
In your blue blue shadows I would hide  
All good people asleep tonight  
I'm all by myself in your silver light  
I would gaze at your face the whole night through  
I'd go out of my mind, but for you

Lying in a mother's arms  
The primal root of a woman's charms  
I'm a stranger to the sun  
My eyes are too weak  
How cold is a heart  
When it's warmth that he seeks?  
You watch every night, you don't care what I do  
I'd go out of my mind, but for you  
I'd go out of my mind, but for you

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun  
My hunger for her explains everything I've done  
To howl at the moon the whole night through  
And they really don't care if I do  
I'd go out of my mind, but for you

Sister Moon...

I wait for the last notes of sax to fade out, and snap my fingers, looking up with a lifted eyebrow to him at his station, leaning against the window jamb. To my utter surprise, his eyes are closed, and
a look of profound peace graces his features.

He slowly opens his eyes and looks down at me with a soft smile. "Might I hear that one again? I rather enjoyed it."

I smirk and let off a small chuckle, nodding and restarting the song with a snap of my fingers. I could do it without the snapping, but it just wouldn't have the same impact. To me, at least. ...Shut up.

I watch him as the song plays, the moons highlighting his features beautifully. To watch his expressions subtly shift as he listens to the song is a thing of wonder. As if I needed more fodder for the flame I hold in my heart for this damn egg. Le sigh.

By the time the song ends again, I barely have enough concentration left in my head for an absent wave to stop the music. The sheer fact that the wolf god of the elves himself is enjoying music I love, especially this song... if I died right now, I'd die happy. Mostly. Close enough, anyway. Semantics. Sex first would be nice. Sex now would be nice. Stop, stop, stop, bad elf. Baaaaad elf. So naughty. Ugh. Enough!

With a sigh that seems wistful, he opens his eyes and smiles at me. "Do you know more songs like these? I would enjoy hearing more, if you will indulge me."

My heart skips as he sinks into a sitting position, level with me, smile still firmly pressed onto his lips. A shiver runs up my spine that has absolutely nothing to do with the chilly air. I grin and nod, because words are utterly beyond me at the moment. I think just long enough to realize the most perfectly ironic and poignant song is actually on the same album I'm already playing. I wave the queue forward to "Be Still My Beating Heart".

I gather enough sense in my head to warn him, "This song's a little faster, a heavier beat than the other two. But I think the lyrics fit the situation rather well."

I snap my fingers.

Be still my beating heart
It would be better to be cool
It's not time to be open just yet
A lesson once learned is so hard to forget
Be still my beating heart
Or I'll be taken for a fool
It's not healthy to run at this pace
The blood runs so red to my face
I've been to every single book I know
To soothe the thoughts that plague me so
I sink like a stone that's been thrown in the ocean
My logic has drowned in a sea of emotion
Stop before you start
Be still my beating heart

Restore my broken dreams
Shattered like a falling glass
I'm not ready to be broken just yet
A lesson once learned is so hard to forget

Be still my beating heart
You must learn to stand your ground
It's not healthy to run at this pace
The blood runs so red to my face
I've been to every single book I know
To soothe the thoughts that plague me so
Stop before you start
Be still my beating heart

Never to be wrong
Never to make promises that break
It's like singing in the wind
Or writing on the surface of a lake
And I wriggle like a fish caught on dry land
And I struggle to avoid any help at hand

I sink like a stone that's been thrown in the ocean
My logic has drowned in a sea of emotion
Stop before you start
Be still my beating heart

His expression is morose as the song ends. I wave my hand to silence the music, observing him quietly. He's looking down at some point just after his crossed legs, and I can see his eyes shifting side to side below his eyelids, but only just. I see his jaw tighten and release slowly, his fists in his lap echoing the motion. Perhaps my song choice was a bit too much, too soon.

I take a deep, quiet breath, and slowly release it, along with a bit of mana. I send it out as slowly and gently as I can, brushing it against his. Something quite unexpected happens, just as my mana reaches his. The scene around us explodes in vibrant color, every dull tone sharpened into vibrant hues. Details that had once been lacking fill in with precise subtlety, lead surfacing through the patterns in the glass, unfurling from a mass of barely remembered colors. Chips and wear appear in the bricks and mortar of the walls. Shadows and light play against each other curiously, rather than simply existing in a muddle of gray.

Eyes wide, I finally bring my gaze back to his eyes, which are just as wide as mine. I realize I'm still pressing my mana to his, and I bring it back within myself quickly. The details remain, despite the change.

"What was that?" I ask in wonder.

He considers his answer for a few moments, finally shaking his head as he responds, "I am not entirely certain. I have never experienced that drastic of a reaction, to something so simple as another's mana touching mine in the Fade. It definitely warrants further study." He shakes himself slightly, then focuses on me with laser-like intensity. "Why did you choose that particular song?"

My mouth gapes like a fish for a second, before I remember to close it. I end up staring at him like a halla caught in... torchlight? You get the idea. I realize I'm holding my breath, and slowly release it, deflating as I do. I find my words as I drag another breath into my lungs. "It just seemed to fit, like I said. Can we leave it at that, for now?"

He narrows his eyes at me. "I would prefer not to. Why are you so reluctant to tell me?"

I wheeze a disbelieving laugh. "You realize, if I answer that, I'll be answering your original question, right?"
He lifts one eyebrow slightly. "The thought had occurred to me, yes."

I roll my eyes and bring up a hand, pinching the bridge of my nose between my fingers and exhaling a heavy sigh. I keep my current position as I reply, "I'm not ready to tell you yet. I will, when I'm ready. But now is not the time."

He's quiet for long enough that I drop my hand and look at him, finding his eyes already on me, waiting. Likely just as he intended. "This seems like something that is not a personal secret of yours, but some dire thing you wish to keep from me for some other purpose. Am I wrong?"

I heave a sigh, shaking my head. "It's not dire, really. Not to me, at least. But yes, I do have another purpose for keeping it from you."

"What is the purpose?" he fires off without hesitation.

I growl at him. "If I tell you, that rather defeats the purpose, does it not? Yet again, you're trying to subvert my efforts. I am less susceptible to your wily ways than you think, Solas."

He scoffs. "Wily? I am not wily."

I snort incredulously. "You're joking, right? I hope you are."

He frowns. "No, I am not joking. I see no reason to dance around whatever you are holding back from me. I have not held anything back from you, it is hardly fair for you to treat my honesty with dishonesty, is it?"

I wonder how difficult it is to shape shift while in the Fade, because right now, I want to turn into my version of his form - modified for my own preferences, naturally - and bite his nose. Or his ass. I'm not picky. Either one would give him the damn hint more than clearly enough. With a deep sigh, and the soothing of a shudder that races up my spine, I calm myself enough to abandon that rash idea.

"You lied about having knowledge of Tarasyl'an Te'las. You have not directly lied about other things, but lies of omission are still lies, no matter how well-intentioned. That is my answer. My only answer, for the moment." I cross my arms firmly and purse my lips, my eyes daring him to challenge my decision.

He scoffs. "That is your reason for believing me a liar? What proof have you that I know more of this place than I claim? You have given me none."

"The very fact that you give this keep to the Inquisition freely, like it was yours to begin with, like a big fat present of safety, topped with a pretty bow of ancient magic that no humans would think to add to the keystones. The fact that it was rebuilt so many times, yet somehow the elven base is still intact. The fact that I find several arrows of elvhen make wedged in the roof. Elvhen, not elven. The fact that you deny your association with it is either the greatest insult, or the highest compliment you could pay it, and the only reason I'm uncertain is something I'm still not going to tell you."

He barks a laugh. "Conjecture and cobbled together wishful thinking. Just say it, Fen'nas."
I sneer at him. "Liar."

He lifts an eyebrow, entirely unperturbed. "So you claim."

"Manipulator."

He shrugs his head. "I admit that much."

I bare my teeth and get right in his face, practically growling the word at him, "Wolf."

He smirks. "No more than you are, yourself."

At that, I can't help but laugh. I shake my head at him. "Rebel."

I see his Adam's apple bob at that, but he perseveres. "Are you describing yourself? I'm uncertain what your point is, here."

I'm close enough that I could claim his lips without a second thought, and instead, I'm standing here hurling accusations at him. If it wasn't so fucking frustrating, I'd be climbing him like a tree. Probably a good thing it's so frustrating, considering he'd probably never speak to me again if I did kiss him. Then again, if he really is like me... no, stop, bad idea.

I narrow my eyes at him. "If I was speaking of myself, I wouldn't use the words liar, manipulator, or rebel. I am none of these."

I'm close enough that I could claim his lips without a second thought, and instead, I'm standing here hurling accusations at him. If it wasn't so fucking frustrating, I'd be climbing him like a tree. Probably a good thing it's so frustrating, considering he'd probably never speak to me again if I did kiss him. Then again, if he really is like me... no, stop, bad idea.

I narrow my eyes at him. "If I was speaking of myself, I wouldn't use the words liar, manipulator, or rebel. I am none of these."

He tilts his head, and I swear his gaze flicked to my lips for an instant, but he could've just been sizing me up. Why he would need to do that, when I'm standing toe to toe with him, I don't know. But I'm giving him reasonable doubt here, because there's no way I can leave that kind of temptation hanging out there, like a ripe fruit dangling on a branch in easy reach, without a response at this moment.

"You are all of these and more."

Wait, what? The confusion flits over my face before I can mask it. "Exactly how have I lied to you, or manipulated you? I can construe the rebel bit from being a part of the Inquisition, though it's a stretch. But the other two? No. Not even remotely. And 'more' in what way?"

The damnable wolf smirks at me. Tease. "You have manipulated our conversation from the start. I allowed it, because I was curious. I still am. Your lies have been ones of omission and deflection, for the most part. Well played, but not well enough for me to ignore their existence. And you are a rebel, because your very nature demands it. Joining the Inquisition has little influence on that fact."

He grins. "As to more, you are filled to the brim with dangerous knowledge, you are a creature of unknown origin, and you are a mystery that I fully intend upon solving." He straightens his head, and this time, his eyes definitely linger for a second or two, somewhere on the lower regions of my face. I flick my tongue over my lips, they feel suddenly parched. He gives me a curiously concerned look. "Are you aware you are casting?"

I blink once, twice. "What?" My brain feels like it's trying to run through chilled molasses.

He gestures to my person. "You are casting. It is rather distracting."

My brow furrows in confusion. I'm not consciously casting anything. "I'm not... trying to. What am I casting?"
His eyes are widening slightly, every few seconds. "A spell you should not be aware of, for someone so new to her magic." His voice wavers slightly at the end, and I definitely see his Adam's apple bob with a tight swallow this time.

The fuck am I casting? I don't even feel mana leaving me! "I'm not casting anything. There is literally no mana being used by me at all in this moment. If you're experiencing the effect of some spell, it is not from me."

Okay he just held back a shudder. What in the fuck is going on, here?

"If that is truly the case, It would be quite fortuitous if you could learn how to dispel, now. Something is casting a spell on me, and I would rather not be experiencing that particular spell in this moment." He seems truly disturbed by the prospect... whatever this spell is. I suppose some random, unknown thing casting a spell on you would be a mite disturbing.

"I don't know how to cast a dispel! For all I know, I could smack your head against the wall by sheer accident!" I'm rightfully horrified by the prospect, and my mien reflects it.

"Try!" he shouts at me, obviously at his wit's end.

I take a few steps back, and hold my hand out hesitantly, beginning to channel mana up through my arm, when he holds his own hand up.

"Wait. Don't."

I growl and stare at him, exasperated. "Make up your mind!"

"Mana only. Gently." He waved toward himself slowly.

This time, I was the one looking at him like my dog looks at me. Snorting and shaking my head at him, I send a wisp of mana at him... gently. "There. Is there a purpose to this exercise?" I ask him petulantly.

He tilts his head at me. "That was just your mana, no conscious effort at a spell?"

"That's what you asked for, yes."

He seems highly perplexed. "How... unique."

I snort, fed up with whatever this is. "Yes yes, I'm unique, my mark's unique, my magic's unique. Maybe I should've named myself Unique, for all that you keep proclaiming it!" I throw up my hands, letting them fall to my sides. "Care to explain what you're going on about?" I stare at him, waiting for anything resembling actual sense to exit his mouth.

He levels a withering look of impatient annoyance at me, heaving a sigh. "I cannot explain it adequately. Your mana mixing with mine has an unforeseen effect; I've never experienced it before. I would appreciate it if you refrained from brushing your mana against mine, unless I specifically request it, for the purpose of further study."

I gawk at him for a moment, then slowly narrow my eyes, leaning forward to peer at him more closely. I'm nearly face to face with him again before I let loose the slightest trickle of mana to test my theory. His pupils flare wide and black, silvery blue left to ring around the abyss of his eyes. I have my answer.

He clenches his jaw, then opens it to speak. "Did I not just specifically request-"
My hand comes up to stop his squawking, pressing it over his mouth. "Shut up, wolf."

His eyes blow wide in surprised indignation, and he snaps his head to the side, ridding his face of my hand. "Excuse me?!"

"I said, 'shut up, wolf.' I know you're not hard of hearing. Your indignation is pointless. The effect my mana has on you is obvious, try to hide it though you may." I smirk, walking into the room and sitting in my chair with a greatly amused sparkle in my eyes. This has got to be my wishful thinking at work on this dream; there's no way this could happen in any sane reality.

He follows belatedly, pausing before he passes me, fists tightening. "That was entirely unnecessary." He passes on and stiffly sits in the chair beside me, relaxing in increments.

I snort. "Yes, because evading every question I asked about your reaction was necessary, naturally. If I hadn't tested my theory, I would've been left to guesswork, and I can't function that way." I flip my hand over, talking with my hands as I am wont to do. "I understand why you wouldn't want such a reaction revealed, but if you truly are the scholar you claim to be, not sharing knowledge is rather selfish of you. I'll admit, the results are unprecedented, and rather... confusing. But that doesn't excuse hiding them from me, simply for the sake if your pride."

He scoffs, rolling his eyes. "It was not for the sake of my pride. And what results do you think you've uncovered, exactly?"

I curl my fist and rest my chin on it, looking at him with a coy, slightly smug grin. "The eyes do not lie, no matter how much their owners wish they did."

His reaction is slight, controlled, but I see it. Details have always been my area of expertise, after all. "Is that vague reply supposed to convey an actual answer of worth?"

Stubborn wolf. I roll my own eyes and send a steady stream of mana at him, trickling like a small creek over his skin. His body going rigid is unmistakable.

"Stop. Doing. That!" he demands.

I chuckle at him, shaking my head. I withdraw my mana and grin wolfishly. "You were saying?"

"This is vastly inappropriate. Have you no shame, no propriety at all? This is a flagrant misuse of magic," he bemoans this injustice indignantly, waving his hands about dramatically as he speaks.

I laugh, holding my stomach for a moment. I smile at him and huff a snickering sigh. "Yes, because obviously it was my original intention to turn you on with my mana alone. Oh, do continue to tell me how I'm violating all the laws of physics, along with your dignity, by complete and utter accidental chance. You really think I intended this? Like I would know how to use my magic in such a manner, to begin with." I scoff, looking at him with incredulous amusement. "Please, continue to deride my virtue. I do so enjoy being called a tease. It's endlessly amusing."

On this, I'm completely serious, my smile impish.

He huffs, deflating slightly and running his hand over his scalp, head bowed. "Ma ne em din," he mutters miserably.

I snort, smiling crookedly at him. "Banal nadas. Who knows; I could be your life, instead."

"I very much doubt that."

I mockingly pout at his still bent head. "Aw, no need to be like that, wolf. So I can't use my mana..."
on you without embarrassing consequences. So what? Not like I'm a support mage. All of my abilities so far are purely offensive."

He snorts at that. "So I've noticed."

I glare at him. "Not helping. The material point is, it's not like I'll be casting barriers on you or anything during battle. I will do my absolute best to avoid distracting you when we're in combat, I promise. I'm not a moron. I value our lives too much to distract you like that, in such a crucial situation." I chuckle. "Any distraction my mana gives you outside of fighting, however, will be purely because I'm an insufferable tease."

He lifts his head at that, looking over to see my entirely too pleased smile. He scoffs and rolls his eyes slightly. "Is that intended to be comforting?"

I shrug, completely unphased. "I see nothing wrong with some innocent teasing once in a while, so long as it doesn't endanger anyone. Are you going to claim it actually harms you? Because if you do, I will be the first to call wolf shit."

"It is an invasive violation of my privacy, and a means of coercion that I will in no way condone, ever."

That brings me up short. He's completely right. Shit. I dip my head apologetically. "Ir abelas. I got ahead of myself. You are correct, of course. I am sorry I did not think of that sooner." I stand and bow slightly. "You have my sincere apologies. I will not trouble you further."

I pass him and rush to the stairs, thoroughly cowed. How could I have been so fucking stupid? Of course that was completely inappropriate and uncalled for. Fucking fuck. Great. Now I feel like I mana raped him. Wonderful. The one person I wanted to ostracize the least, and what did I do? I let my stupid hormones cloud my conscience. Naturally. I flee down the stairs, practically bashing my way through the door in my haste. What in the fuck had I been thinking? What could possibly excuse such behavior? Banal.

I'm nearly to the door to the main hall when I feel something land on my shoulder that electrifies my nerves. I cry out, whirling to face whatever had assaulted my senses, mana flaring to life around me in a swirling storm- only to see that he'd followed me, silent as a ghost. It was his hand that had touched my shoulder. I gasp for air and close my eyes, trying to bring my mana under control, and my heart along with it, which is now beating a staccato tempo against my ribs. What spell had he used with that touch? Holy shit!

"Fen'nas, are you alright?" he asks, concern in his voice.

I shake my head, still trying to regulate my breathing, and not trusting myself to answer just yet. I put my hand to my chest, trying to calm myself. "What... did you do?" I manage, after several breaths.

It takes a few seconds for him to respond. "I did nothing. Why, what happened?"

I barely trust myself, but I have to look at him at that. "You didn't cast a spell?"

He shakes his head, looking very concerned. "No, I did not."

I bend over, bracing my hands on my knees as I try to clear my head and regain control of myself. Perfect excuse to break the eye contact that is proving to be far too much right now. "Fuck," I swear softly.
"Do you need help? Is there something I can do?" he asks, all innocent compassion. As if that didn't make me feel even shittier.

I nod slightly. "Take... a step... back, please."

He complies, and I feel my nerves take a collective sigh of relief that has me sinking to my knees. He starts to approach again and I hold my hand up to stop him, shaking my head. "Don't, I'm... I'll be fine, just- give me a minute."

I lean on my heels, resting my head and back against the wall behind me, looking up at the towering ceiling above and just... breathing. What is this? Is whatever this affect is we have on each other a Fade thing? It has to be. He put a barrier on me before, and though it felt nice, it was hardly this... whatever this is. It makes no sense. If the effect he has on me is equal to the effect I have on him, he has a fuck ton more self control than I do, because he was nowhere near as flustered as I am about this. Then again, this is the Fade, and aren't emotions a really powerful force here? It creates the ideas that spirits are based off of, after all. Perhaps he affects me so much because I have such strong feelings about him? That... could be it. It seems reasonable, all things considered.

I take a deep breath, and look up at him. He's looking at me very worriedly, as if he's afraid I'm going to fall over dead any second. Oh, wolf, if only you knew. "I think I've figured out what's going on here."

He tilts his head, concern melding into curious confusion. "To what are you referring?"

I wave my hand between the two of us. "This... thing that is affecting us here, with the mana and all that," I say, ever so eloquently.

Understanding dawns on his face, and he nods slightly. "Ah, that. What have you discerned?"

I sigh heavily and maneuver until I'm sitting with my legs crossed Indian-style. "I think the Fade is amplifying our emotional states. I think it's applying that amplification to whenever our mana touches. The... well, when you touched my shoulder, let's just say I got a full blast of what my mana was doing to you earlier. Hugely, ridiculously magnified. I'm just glad my heart didn't give out."

I see the slightest tug of his lips upward, and his features smooth out gently as he sighs and lowers himself to sit across from me. "You would not be killed by your heart giving out here. Trust me, I would know. Other things can kill you, but not that. Defending yourself against the things that can kill you, is a part of the training I will be giving you. As for our... issue, if it is a mutual problem, you need not feel so remorseful about your invasion of my privacy. It seems we are in similar positions, in this case. I am uncertain what caused it, to begin with, but here we are. We must learn to deal with it."

Yes, because that suggestion doesn't bring to mind a thousand images of every way I could possibly deal with it. I slump, cradling my head in my hands and doing my best to make my brain shut up. Ugh, kill me.

"I do not think that would benefit you in any way."

I lift my head and look at him with eyebrows furrowed. "What?"

He gestures to me. "You said to kill you. That would not be beneficial to our current situation."

My blink owlishly at him. "I said that out loud?!"
He chuckles, nodding. "You did."

I lean back, smacking the back of my head none too gently against the wall a few times, clenching my eyes shut. "Dread Wolf take me." You bet your ass I said that on purpose.

I hear a sharp intake of breath from him, and I sigh, righting myself and looking at him in a disgruntled manner, as if I hadn't just told him to fuck me. "Apparently I need to keep a better check on my brain to mouth filter here, if I want to keep my thoughts private. Lovely."

He recovers quickly, smiling sympathetically. "Yes, thoughts can easily become reality here, especially for dreamers like us. You also may want to avoid asking Fen’harel to take you, in his own realm."

I snort. "Yes, because that'll actually happen, just because a random elf asks for it." Please. Pretty please? I make very sure that I don't say that part.

He shrugs softly. "This is the Fade. Stranger things have happened."

Did he just- no. No. I refuse to believe it. Nope. La la la la not listening! "Very funny. Fen'harel wouldn't want me anyway. Pretty sure I'm safe from that possibility."

He cocks his head to the side slightly, expression mildly amused. "And why would he not want you?"

My heart flips, and I swallow, giving him a skeptical look. "I'm not elvhen, for one thing. And are we actually treating why the Dread Wolf wouldn't fuck me as a serious discussion? Really?"

He shrugs again, obviously amused. "You were the one who wanted him to take you, then claimed he wouldn't want you. I'm simply curious why you think that. And you being mortal or immortal would hardly make a difference, in this particular instance."

I roll my eyes and lean my head back, beseeching the rafters for guidance. No? Nothing? Fenedhis lasa. I look back down at him in annoyance. "Fine. Let's say, for the sake of this ridiculous conversation, that Fen'harel was actually here, hearing my plea. What could possibly possess him to actually go through with such a thing?" I wave him on. "Regale me." I bring my knees up and rest my elbows on them, folding my arms and tilting my head at him, waiting.

He smirks. "Any number of things. He's ancient, not dead. You are an attractive woman, intelligent, curious, intriguing. I fail to see why he would not be interested in such a prospect."

I actually laugh at that. How in the hell are we talking about this? Could it just be my self-indulgence in this dream? Probably. But if it is, I'm enjoying it. Fuck it. "Okay, for argument's sake, let's say I accept that for even a second. Why would my intelligence - or my supposed mysteriousness - affect his decision to sleep with me in any way, shape, or form? That makes little difference when looking for a simple fuck. Attraction and chemistry are the two most important factors in this scenario. The rest are irrelevant, unless you plan on making it a more than one time affair."

He grins at me, completely unperturbed by my logic. "Do you think Fen'harel incapable of stalking his prey beforehand, to see if it is to his tastes? Perhaps he is more selective than you assume. Perhaps he has standards, even for those who only warm his bed for a while."

I sigh, then huff a laugh, shaking my head. "Alright, let's assume he is that picky. He has that right, naturally, as does anyone. I still see no reason why he would choose me, above any of the other elves of this age. The one and only thing that makes me unique is this anchor." I lift my left hand.
"And even if that were the deciding factor, what would keep him from simply taking it from me once he is done, and using the power himself? I know he's not a god, but he is a powerful mage, and I doubt that would be beyond him."

He lifts an eyebrow. "That is a fair point, though I am surprised to hear you do not think him a god. But I think he would choose you above the other elves of this age, because out of all the others, you shine like a beacon of light in this realm, the brightest soul in a sea of darkness. I am not saying that simply because of the mark, either. Even without it, you are your own sun. And I do not think he would choose you on a whim, nor would he take the mark from you, since he has no need of it. He would hunt you, and watch you, and observe closely how you interact with the world around you, before making his decision. I also believe that once his decision was made, once he caught you, he would keep you for far longer than one night."

My mouth is suddenly very, very dry. There's no way in hell those words are really coming out of his mouth. This has got to be a figment of the Fade, a demon or something. No fucking way Fen'harel himself is having this discussion with me, about... no. Nuh-uh. Not happening. Never thought I'd wish I didn't know he was Fen'harel before, but I do now.

If this is a demon, he's a lot smarter than the average demon. Guile, maybe? But what's its aim? It hasn't asked anything particularly important of me, and the things I haven't answered, it's stopped asking about. It would have to be a rather powerful demon, because I haven't seen any other spirits of any kind.

What if it really is him? But no, that makes no sense. He's being as forward as I am. We're exactly alike in pretty much every way I can think of, but there's no way he'd be this forward with someone who's practically a stranger to him. Is there? Fine time to doubt my own convictions. Fantastic.

But he's not saying he'd actually do what he's suggesting, right? This is a hypothetical situation we're discussing, and if we all know one thing, it's that the Egg loves to debate. As do I. The only reason I'm doubting myself, is because I'm taking his words as if he's actually going to do what he's saying. Right. Okay, I can work with this.

I really hope he's not a demon.

Here goes nothing.

"Alright, so hypothetically, you're saying the Dread Wolf would hunt me as a mate? That's an unusual concept. Within the realm of very remote possibility, naturally, but still interesting, and odd to consider. But what if the interest wasn't mutual? That would be rather one-sided and rude, I'd think." I tick my jaw to the side, appearing as if I am pondering this deeply.

He smiles softly. "What if it was mutual? You would not know, unless you met him, after all."

Treat this like a philosophical debate. Yes, good. I can do this. I nod, both in confirmation of his words, and my own thoughts. "Perhaps. Debating on that particular matter is pointless without actually meeting him, however. And even meeting him wouldn't necessarily help me determine my interest in such a commitment. I would need to know him, to understand him, first. Only then could I determine if we'd be compatible. And the likelihood that he'd allow me the opportunity to know him in such a fashion is very slim."

He cocks an eyebrow in surprise. "What gives you the impression he'd deprive you of such an opportunity? You do not know him. It's entirely possible he could be more open than you assume."

I dip my head, conceding his point. "Maybe. But, if he's anything like I imagine, he won't show me
the things that would actually be important to my decision."

"What would be important to your decision?" comes his predictable question.

I sigh, leaning my head back and closing my eyes. "Actual honesty. His hopes, dreams, aspirations, desires. His expectations of me, and what he is truly willing to give in return. That he let me share his burdens, whatever they might be." I look at him now. "That he doesn't walk away out of some ridiculous sense of self-sacrificial duty, or because he doesn't wish to hurt me. That he doesn't hide from me who he truly is."

His voice is gentle as he asks, "And if he wasn't willing to give you what you seek?"

I give a pained smile, returning my head and eyes to their resting positions. "I'd probably still love him. My heart's never been very good at listening to my head, especially when my head tries to protect it."

"How very rude of it, to ignore what only wishes to protect it."

I chuckle, nodding in agreement. "Love is stupidly, ridiculously, blind. And the heart often loves that which hurts it the most."

"Truer words have never been spoken."

I smirk. "I try." I breathe deep and push off the wall, standing. I look down at him. "You should wake. Don't want them to start thinking the apostates are colluding in the Fade, to overthrow all the mundanes." I snort, shaking my head.

He looks up at me with a smirk. "Are we not?"

Bright laughter bubbles past my throat, and I grin at him. "Maybe we are, at that." I shrug. "If we are, we're doing a rather poor job of it."

He stands and smiles. "That we are." He gestures for me to follow him. "Garas'ara. I wish to show you something."

He heads back toward the bedchamber, and I follow him after a moment, curious. The door still hangs loosely open from where I'd barged past it in my rush to escape, and I don't bother closing it behind me. He leads the way to the smaller balcony, overlooking the rest of the keep. I come to stand next to him as he looks out over the scene, watching him. He closes his eyes, taking a breath, and I can feel the press of his mana pushing outward into the distance, though he carefully avoids touching it to mine. His is simply a weight that feels heavy here; like a thick, warm blanket.

I look out to where he's directing his energy, and gasp. In the distance, a massive island hangs in the air, with trees and buildings twining and mingling as if by design, a brilliantly shining gem on the horizon. Suddenly, the keep itself begins to change, towers and battlements crumbling and reforming themselves, the original elven architecture taking the place of the imitation that had been built over it. By the time the transformation is complete, I can barely recognize Tarasyl'an Te'las.

"You asked if I know this place. I do, but not as you presented it. I did not lie. This is how the Fade remembers it."

I drag my eyes away from my surroundings reluctantly to look at him, swallowing tightly. He's still lying, but he's showing me far more than I ever expected him to, and for this, I am so grateful I can barely speak.
"Beautiful."

I realize belatedly that my staring at him as I say this, is probably sending a different message than I originally intended. But I'm not going to take it back, not for anything.

He smiles softly, having already turned to look at me when he'd spoken. "I try."

Sly wolf.

Suddenly, I feel a strange pressure, and the scene abruptly dissolves before my eyes. I wake to one of my dad's huge dogs flopping down next to me on my bed and licking my face.

"Gruuuhh Buddy go 'way." I groggily moosh his face away from mine and turn over in bed, sighing. Then I feel my dad's other dog jumping up, and my own joining him, both starting to tousle and shaking the bed terribly. Time to get up, then.

Bugger.

Chapter End Notes

❤--Discord--❤

❤ Thanks for reading! If you enjoy the story or this chapter in particular, please feel free to leave a review with your thoughts! ❤
❤ I love reading comments and reply to all of them. ❤
The Wolf

Chapter Notes

Translations:

Sathan, emma halani: please, help me.
Fen'falon: friend of wolves, or wolf friend.
Sathan'em lanasta: please forgive me.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tap, tap, tap. Chuckle.

I love reading.

Seriously.

It's one of my favorite things to do.

I've probably read around - more like at least - three-hundred-thousand words in the past two days.

Words on a page can make you feel things that are unlike anything you've thought you would experience in your life. Those words on a page form a story, and that story reaches into your mind, heart and soul, turning them into its personal playground. It doesn't have to ask for permission, because you've already given it, just by reading.

And that's wonderful. It's a beautiful relationship, a contract that you enter into with the writer; that you will allow them to play in your head and heart for a few hours, that you will let them set the scene for you. It's not real, it's imaginary. It's fun; the perfect escape from your ordinary life.

And really, you can't spend your whole life reading, because eventually, you'll become too reliant on the content. You'll stop thinking for yourself, expecting the story to fill it all out for you. It's true, that's how the brain works. Sucks, doesn't it?

But it's still one of the best places to get inspiration for writing. So, I read. And I write. And occasionally draw... Fen'harel. A lot.
Like that, for instance.

Sometimes, I sit here, staring at a blank screen.

Fortunately, this is not one of those days.

Today, I'm reading. And I'm really kinda wanting to go to bed, because my dreams lately have been so damn wild. But living to dream isn't any more healthy than only ever reading (*Stares pointedly at Solas...*), so I'm putting it off, just a little while longer.

And hey, I'm trying to do that whole quitting smoking thing again. Let's see how long that lasts this time. I take a hit off the chocolate-flavored nicotine vaporizer as I think of it. We'll see.

I belatedly realize it's seven AM, and I should take my meds. Joy. Sucking down some annoyingly grainy coffee with my pills, I return my attention to the story I'm slowly absorbing.

I finally finished catching up on "Rhapsody in Ass Major" last night, and... last line... Ahh. So satisfying. I just finished another story. No, I'm not listing it. One per chapter is enough. Yes, I'm an ass. Shut up. My story.

Time to write. It's about time I got to that Crestwood chapter for Fen'da'len, yeah? Yeah. Except I never make it that far.

"Fen'nas!"

I freeze. The hell? Nobody this side of reality knows that name.

I slip off my busted-ass headphones and look around, perking my ears to listen (Yes, I can and do move my ears, not unlike an animal, if more limitedly. Shut up.). Nothing. I put them back on, thinking I'm just losing it. Wouldn't surprise me. Not even joking.

"Fen'nas! I know you are here, I can feel your aura flaring."

Because that's not creepy at all. Wait, was that...

I flip desktops to the one that has DAI running, and take control of Fenlamea, looking around. Nothing. No Egg. She's sitting in Tarasyl'an Te'las, in Blackwall's barn.

Okay... apparently I'm truly hallucinating things. Wonderful.

"Fen'nas!" Fuck! Okay that was like, right in my ear! The hell? Solas is nowhere to be seen in the game, of course, because why would he be? So why the fuck am I hearing him say my chosen name?

I feel a rush of panic well up inside me, my eyes widening in uncomfortable tension.

"Fenedhis lasa!" is my quiet, and only response.

"Well, at least now I know there is no head trauma," he says, his voice carrying a clearly wry tone.
"Are you going to open your eyes soon?"

"Open my- what?" I blink, the scene of my room and my desk and screen dissolving and reforming into the scene above my bed at Tarasyl'an Te'las, Falon'din owls and all, complete with Solas sitting beside me. He's looking down at my apparently prone form with amused concern. "What the fuck? How-" I scramble up and out of the bed, very nearly falling on my ass several times, before I manage to disentangle my feet from the sheets. I look around in horror, the onset of a panic attack imminent. "No, no, no, no this can't be... not real, not real, no, can't be-

"Fen'nas, what is wrong?" He approaches me like the frightened animal I am. "Talk to me, if you can. Tell me what you need."

I realize he has the solution. My panicked, wide eyes lock on his concerned ones, trying to convey my desperation with my hands folded together before me, almost praying. "Wake me, please. Just, do it please, wake me up. Now. 'Ma halani." Yes, I am most certainly begging him. Not the least bit ashamed of it, either.

He frowns at me, obviously perplexed and worried. "I cannot wake you, Fen'nas. If I do, you will not properly recover. You need to rest."

I groan in exasperation. "Not wake me here, I mean... just wake me, please!"

I can already tell he's not going to, before he even opens his mouth. He shakes his head, brow furrowing. "I will not! You need rest, Fen'nas-"

I throw my hands up, fisting them in my hair, tugging at it. "You don't get it! I can't just be asleep right now! I was in my world, then I was here, no transition! This is not normal! I'm supposed to be asleep when I'm here! I'm not asleep!"

Understanding, then alarmed curiosity filters over his face, one after the other. "Is that the difference? Fascinating."

"What? What are you talking about?" I look at him like he's grown a second head, because it damn well feels like it.

He dips his -one- head and his expression is apologetically amused. "Sathan'em lanasta. I should explain. Your aura is far stronger now than it was before. I had wondered if it was an effect of you regaining your strength, but if it is from you being here in a conscious state, that makes far more sense."

I scoff, far too agitated to look at it quite as objectively as he is. My heart is pounding. "That's great and all, but could you please wake me up so I can not be just... absent in my own body? I cannot be here right now! I'm not asleep!"

He shakes his head. "Fen'nas, you are asleep here. I cannot guarantee that you will wake in your world, if I should wake you here. It is too great a risk for your health here. If I wake you, and you awaken here in Thedas, there is a chance you would not recover."

I nod as my breath is coming in shallow bursts; I can feel the attack closing in. I take one last chance and look down at my fingers. I start counting. Left has five. Right has five. Wait. No, not possible. This is a dream, in a dream realm, I should not have ten fingers. What is going on here? The only thing I can hear is the blood rushing in my ears to the tempo of my heartbeat. My eyes are glued to my hands; counting fingers over and over again.

"-nas! Can you hear me?"
I jerk my head toward the source of the noise, though recognition of the words doesn't kick in until a few seconds later. I nod dazedly, not entirely registering who is asking until he speaks again.

"Why are you counting?" I can hear relief in his voice, but I don't understand why he's relieved.

My gaze slowly drifts down to my hands, mentally counting them again. Still ten. I hold up my hands, looking at him. "Shouldn't be ten. I'm supposed to be dreaming. Shouldn't be ten."

He appears greatly confused. "You have less than ten fingers in your dreams, in the world you come from? How very bizarre."

I shrug, not exactly firing on all cylinders just yet. "Sometimes less, sometimes more. It's one way we know we're dreaming. Makes lucid dreaming much easier. Moment you know you're dreaming is the moment you can take command of the dream."

"Is that how you realized you were a dreamer, here?"

I shake my head. "No Fade in my world. Dreams are... personal. Can be shared, but not easily. Not a realm, not a place; a state of consciousness." I turn and look at him, trying to convey the urgency of what I'm saying, but not quite sure if I'm getting it across, "I don't belong here, can't be here right now. I have to go, now. Sathan, emma halani, Fen'falon."

He sighs heavily. "Ma nuvenin. This is against my better judgment. Wake up."

I take a deep breath, because it feels like I haven't had any air in years, and open my eyes. I'm right back where I should be... with a bunch of words written on the screen that I don't remember writing. Because that's normal. Well, at least it worked! I'm awake. Right? I count my fingers. Ten. Good. Let's hope it stays that way until I go to bed- if I can even go to sleep, after that. That... yeah. Definitely have to figure out what just happened. My heart's still pounding, but at least I can breathe now. And hear. Still feel a bit dazed, but hey, I'm awake and alive. That's what matters.

And I'm not hearing Fen'harel calling my name from - what I'm beginning to suspect is actually - a parallel universe. Also a plus. Though the parallel universe thing kinda negates it, if it's true. Shit. Fuck.

On the other hand - get it? - my palm itches maddeningly now. I've already scratched it raw; if I scratch it any more, it's gonna start needing some significant bandaging. Honestly, I really don't want to have to explain to my dad why I need the first aid kit. I don't even know why it's itching so badly, so how am I gonna explain it to him? He'll just get pissy and say it's another medical issue of mine to add to the already endless pile. Fuck that pile man- seriously.

You know, I just realized something. And really, I should've realized this when it first started itching. It's my left palm. As in, the palm the mark is on when you're the Herald. The anchor. Fen'harel's Anchor. Why the fuck is my palm itching in that exact spot?! No. It's got to be a coincidence. That makes no sense; why would I get a fucking rash on the spot the anchor's on? That serves no purpose, except to be extremely annoying.

Well, at least it doesn't feel like an acid-coated knife digging it open. Still annoying. And pointless.

Maybe it's a manifestation of my mind's reactions to the dreams? Or... whatever it is? The mind is powerful enough to do such things, after all. Sounds plausible enough. Reasonable, even. Yes, good. I can deal with that weirdness. That makes medical sense, at least, even if it's more than a bit extreme.

I yawn, absently rubbing my left palm to avoid scratching it, and look at the clock. Shit, 12 hours
awake and I'm already tired. Getting older sucks.

I get ready for bed, in case my brain decides it can't stand staying up any longer at a moment's notice, as it is wont to. I set myself back down in front of my PC and really look at what I've written in... my... absence? It's not... terrible, anyway. Huh. I'll give it a better read tomorrow. I really am getting tired now.

With a heaved sigh, a flinging off of my clothes, and a putting to sleep of my PC, I fall into bed.

...

And wake to a dog tongue licking my face. The fuck? Did I not dream?

Wait, no, not possible; I always dream.

I moosh away the face of whichever dog is trying to lick my face clean and turn over, sinking into the mattress and pillows as I turn, the bedding creating a cocoon that's a bit claustrophobia-inducing for my tastes.

Wait. That's not what my bed feels like.

Nor do my dogs normally growl at me.

Or lick my ear-holy-shit-why-does-that-feel-so-good? I cling to the nearest pillow with a whimpering gasp as I ride the wave of that particular sensation, chills pouring up and down my spine as it bows and forces my entire body to tremble with lust. I bury myself under the covers, panting breathlessly, most definitely awake now. I wriggle until I'm turned back around, and I poke my head out from under the covers, trying to get a peek at whatever animal has snuck its way into - what I now recognize as- my Fade bedroom in Tarasyl'an Te'las.

By the time I can see the entire side of my bed that I'm facing, my ears wake up enough to hear the clacking of claws against the stone floor that the rugs don't cover. I realize the sound is coming from behind me, and I flip over just in time to see a very large, very black and fuzzy back flop next to me. Is this...? Is he serious? He's just gonna hog half my bed, in wolf form? Oh, we'll see about that.

He huffs and settles in with a little bit of adjustment. I don't think he realizes I'm actually facing him, or that I'm awake, somehow. Maybe he missed my reaction to the licking of my ear? Because I'm me, I take advantage of this, and slip my right arm under his right front leg, just as I use his soft neck as a pillow.

At first, I'm certain he's going to dislodge me and get out of the bed at such an intrusion. His whole body is stiff, and though I'm pretending my eyes are closed, I can tell his are wide open- all three that I can see on this side.

I curl myself to him comfortably, snuggling into his frame more tightly, nuzzling into his fur lazily, as if I'd simply latched onto him in my sleep. He still hasn't relaxed.

I heave a deep sigh. "Yes, I know who and what I'm cuddling, no I don't care; would you please relax already?"

I can feel his great head moving, sense the weight of his gaze on me. His voice is deeper and a little garbled when he speaks, "Who do you suppose it is, da'len?"

I snort. "Fen'harel, who else?" I snug myself to him tighter as I reveal his identity, casual as you
"...And you assume the Dread Wolf would welcome this... embrace of yours?" he asks, after a few moments of what sounds like shocked silence, by the strain I can hear in his voice.

"You're the one in my bed, Fen'harel. If you can't handle the cuddles, you shouldn't get in the bed in the first place. Besides, you licked my ear. That requires some kind of retaliation, even if it's the mild kind." I gently nip his shoulder - because I'm a biter, shut up - then lay back down with a sigh.

He growls mildly at the nip, but otherwise ignores it, opting to test the waters instead. "You are remarkably unafraid of me, for one who so obviously knows who and what I am." He still hasn't relaxed a single muscle.

I sigh and rub my face into his soft fur, stroking his fuzzy chest with my hand, attempting to calm him some. If he wants to be in animal form, I'm gonna treat him like one. "And that's a problem, why? I know the Dalish fear you, but I also know their tales of you are wildly misunderstood and mostly false. You are not the horrible person they say you are, just as the pantheon were not what the Dalish believe them to be." I pause to thread my left arm under a pillow more comfortably. "I am not Dalish. I like to think for myself, instead of listening to misremembered and incorrect tales, eroded by the sands of time and blatant ignorance. Excuse me for not following the herd. I am no halla."

I hear a sound that is suspiciously like a laugh rumble out of his throat. "No, you most certainly are not a halla. What you actually are, however, remains to be seen. What is your name, da'len?"

I snort. "You jump onto my bed, without invitation, and you don't even know my name? Rather rash of you, wolf." Of course he does know my name, but I'm curious where he's going with this, and I'm nowhere near ready to reveal the ace up my sleeve.

"I was called in my own realm. I came to see who would dare do so. It has been centuries since someone actually called me to them in the Fade. Usually, they are cursing me, not requesting an audience." He shifts slightly, muscles releasing some of their tension, but still tense, ready. For what, I'm really not sure. Rejection? Fat chance. He made his bed, as it were, he can lay in it. As long as he doesn't push me out of it.

I rather like this. It's like a big, warm, fuzzy body pillow that talks. And is actually a myth from the legends of Thedas. I grin at the thought. "I am called Fen'nas." He asked, I may as well tell him, if I want to keep him here. "And when did I call for you? I don't recall doing so. Not that I mind; it's not often you wake to find you're sharing a bed with a figure from ancient history."

I hear that rumbling, laughing sound again, though it's shorter this time. "Your parents issued you this name? That is a very odd choice in names."

I chuckle, hooking my fingers around his left foreleg and tightening my embrace. "No, I gave myself the name. It seemed appropriate at the time."

"At the time? Do you mean to say you regret your choice of a name?" He sounds genuinely curious, his researcher's mind going to work on me, as if I am one of his huge, dusty tomes.

I shake my head, though the action only serves to nestle my face deeper into his fur. I inhale, letting out a sigh. He smells like clean dog, with the crisp tang of herbs. It's rather comforting, actually. "No, I don't think the name has reached the end of its usefulness, quite yet. Perhaps it will one day, but until that day comes, it will serve; both as something to call me besides my titles, and as simple
"Are you, now? Then should you not call forth your true spirit, if you believe it to be true? Why appear as an elf here, where all things are possible? If you are truly a wolf, why not shed the skin of your mortal form, when you have the chance?" His tone is both curious and slightly mocking, his head tilted back to look at me. I studiously don't look back.

I shrug the shoulder I'm not laying on half-heartedly. "I don't know how to. I'd gladly do it if I knew how. And you're avoiding my question."

He chuckles again. "Perhaps I am." His tone is more serious as he trucks right along, "Your appearance here is a matter of will. If you believe you belong in another shape firmly enough, you will become it. This is the Fade, and you are a dreamer; that much I can ascertain just from this place you have created, even if I had not seen your spirit from across my realm. You can be anything you choose to, with enough conviction."

I absorb that information for a minute, softly stroking his arm beneath my fingers. He's been relaxing slightly more, in increments. I wonder how long it'll take him to fully chill out. It's probably freaking him out that I'm so calm about him being here. But really, what's to freak out about? I know him. A masked version, certainly, but I've seen enough hints of his real personality to recognize what he really is.

And I know that more than anything, in the core of his being, what he is... is lonely.

I can relate.

I tighten my embrace, hugging him, then slip back and sit up. "A matter of will, eh? Then let's see if that rings true."

He looks at me curiously, then sits up as well, turning all six blue eyes on me. It's a little unnerving. I give him a small smile, and close my eyes.

Visualizing a familiar large black wolf with ocean-colored eyes, I imagine myself in that shape, in that spirit. I push mana into the thought, feeling the rush from my soul, out into my body, flowing along my limbs to my fingertips and toes. I can vividly feel the transformation beginning, muscles and bones changing and molding into something new, fur growing from my skin, claws emerging from my nail beds. I grit my teeth against a scream of pain and it comes out as a whimper, my throat already having changed into what I am forcing it to be. My entire body is in aching agony, and though I know it is not my physical body, it feels like it is.

By the time the transformation is finished, I am collapsed on the bed, panting and twitching in aftershocks of both real and remembered pain. I dare not open my eyes just yet, but I huff a wry laugh, and decide to test these new vocal chords.

"Satisfied?" is all I can manage, before I have to shut up to continue panting in recovery. My tongue is much more clumsy in this body, and the word comes out slurred. The voice is also slightly deeper, richer than my elven voice.

He doesn't say anything at first, but I feel a cooling, rejuvenating energy flow through me, which feels amazing to my rattled body. I open my eyes and see he is closer to me than I'd thought, and his eyes are softly glowing with power. Is he?- yep. He's healing me. Well, I can't say it's not helping. Though wait... how is it that his mana isn't inducing a heart attack? Come to think of it, why hadn't our -extremely- close proximity this whole time bothered either of us? Is it a different situation when he's a wolf? Does his magic change when he does? Yes, inner Dorian, I have a lot of
"Well done, Fen'nas. You truly did choose a worthy name. Not many are able to complete the transformation the first time they attempt it." He's been looking over my body as he heals it, only turning his gaze to mine when he continues, eyes no longer glowing. "How do you feel?"

I take a deep breath, slowly letting it out. "Much better, now that you've healed me. 'Ma serannas, Fen'harel. Ugh, how did you get used to talking in this form? It's so..." I search for the proper word.

"Cumbersome? Yes, I know. You never quite get used to it, but it is better than being silent, is it not?" He smiles at me, a baring of teeth that is both intimidating and endearing at the same time. He has a lot of teeth. Damn. And I thought I had issues speaking.

"I suppose that's true," I can't help but agree.

I sigh and go about trying to figure out how this new body works, moving my paws and legs experimentally. Tucking them under me, I raise my head and struggle to my feet, sitting up in an approximation of how I understand a wolf should sit normally. My equilibrium is nowhere near used to this yet. I flick my ears about and shake my head, which ends up feeling so good that I shake out the rest of my body too, my fur fluffing rather soothingly. Damn, no wonder dogs shake so much. Shit's like getting a light massage from a million tiny fingers. I'll take it.

I look at him and smile slightly, though I'm not sure how well the gesture translates with my wolf mouth. I'm hoping it doesn't look threatening, at least. Not that he would feel threatened by it, considering who he is, but still. It's odd, it's taking no effort at all to keep this shape. Maybe it's a one-off thing? Magic needed for the transition, but not after? Strange. Not that being a wolf isn't strange enough to begin with, but I've already been struck with one body swap from the whole elf thing, after all. What's one more?

I stand and take an experimental step forward, testing my coordination. Working with so many legs is more complicated than I anticipated, but it's really not that much different than when I ran around the house as a kid on all fours, with the dogs. Except my legs don't bend the same way. And I'm actually a wolf. Fucking... okay, I'll admit it: this is awesome.

I take a few more steps, turning in a circle, and I notice my tail. My fucking tail. I have a tail. Ha!

Oh, I am loving this. I can't wait for him to teach me shape-shifting outside of the Fade. I'm gonna have so much fun with that.

I decide to hop off the bed, so I have more room to stretch my legs, and I'm mildly embarrassed to say that I did not land gracefully. After a bit of flailing, I regain my footing, and I can feel my hackles rising on my back in frustrated embarrassment. I'm not even going to try to look at him right now, because he's probably doing his very best impression of someone who's trying not to laugh their ass off. Nope. Not going there.

Instead, I huff and shake myself again, to get rid of the raised hackles. Then I start to trod about the room, getting used to the way my new limbs work. It's really not that bad, once I get going. I'm up to a nice, steady trot in no time. Not sure how running will work, but I can find out later. I'm more curious if I actually managed the form I was imagining. I mean, obviously, I'm canine, so that part's right. But what about the rest?

I slow to a standstill and imagine a mirror in front of me; a shorter one than before, since I'm not as tall, and push a bit of mana into the thought. It materializes and I look into it, only to yelp and jump back in shock.
That... is not what I expected.

The fur and eye color is right, but I'm huge, almost as big as he is, and I have six eyes, just like he does. The fuck? That's not what I'd pictured, at all. Close, but no. I'd only imagined two eyes, and nothing this... tall. Damn. I lift my lips - a difficult feat as a wolf, lemme tell ya - just to check if I have as many teeth as he does too. That, I definitely don't want.

I sigh with relief when I see a perfectly normal set of canine teeth. I make a few faces in the mirror, because hey, it's there. I want to see what translates from elf to wolf properly. Also I really like seeing myself as a wolf, even if it's a weird as fuck wolf. I'm surprised to see that most expressions actually do translate fairly well. I could get used to this... even with the really, really weird eyes. Seriously, how do they even fit in my skull? So freaky.

I dismiss the mirror, because even with the king of the realm here, there's no point in attracting a demon. I'm practical that way. Plus, I've seen enough demons today, I don't need more. I look over at him and slowly work my way across the room, back to the bed. My jump up to the bed is considerably more dignified than my hop down had been, which I thank my lucky stars for. I settle onto my haunches and tilt my head at him.

"Why do I have six eyes? That's not what I imagined when I pushed the image forward."

He gives a slight shrug of his head. "I do not know. Perhaps it was a subconscious wish? I had no influence on the decision, if that is your assumption. Your appearance is entirely your own design."

I nod absently. "That makes sense. I had thought of Fen'da'len's wolf form for a few seconds when I was pulling my mana forward for the change." I look at him with shock, realizing what I'd just done. "Did I just say that aloud? Crap. I have got to get a filter on that shit." I sink down and cover my face with my paws. Now I have to explain that I write fan fiction to him. Fantastic. Maybe I can twist it somehow to not sound so utterly creepy? Fucking hell. I've written porn starring him. Wonderful. I whimper, my anxiety voicing itself strongly enough to form a sound.

"I take it this Fen'da'len is someone you did not wish me to know about?" is all he asks.

Thank the gods.

I give voice to a strained chuckle, letting my paws slide off of my nose and looking up at him. I sigh and sit up, nodding hesitantly. "Sort of. She's a character in a story I write."

That seems to intrigue him. "You are an author? What kinds of things do you write?"

I shrug, as much as as a wolf can, anyway.

"Fiction of all sorts, mostly. Flights of fancy. Poetry, on occasion. A few songs, here and there. I have one book published, but you wouldn't know it, and really, it's more of a short story than an actual novel. I have plans to continue the story, but I haven't had any desire to do so, lately. Other things have my attention. I can also draw and paint, to a point. And play an instrument or two. And sing." I tack onto the end, as if he hadn't heard me singing less than an hour ago... in his time, at least. If he's gonna keep up this facade, I'll play along, for now. And yes, I know he didn't ask about the rest, but I may as well get all of my creative crap out of the way at once, for the sake of expedience.

He blinks - and lemme tell ya, watching all six eyes do that is a hell of a sight. Not sure how long it'll take me to get used to that one - and smiles softly. "Then you are apparently quite talented. If you've written songs, I would enjoy hearing them, along with any instruments you can play, as
accompaniment."

At that, I snort. "Yeah I'm not so great at all those things, really. I said I can do them, not that I can do them well. The singing and writing I'm alright at, but the rest I just don't practice enough. I'd be happy to sing for you sometime, though. Well, not in wolf form, obviously." I add with a short laugh, "I doubt that would sound like anything worth hearing."

He gives what I interpret as a smirk. "Perhaps not." He tips his head to our surroundings. "Do you plan to remain in this place for your entire recovery?"

Way to derail the conversation, Fen'harel. I shrug my head. "Someone told me that as long as I stay here, the scene will be here. If I leave it, will it disappear?"

He dips his head in a nod. "Yes, unless you consciously will it to continue existing, as you move along the Fade. But that is rather difficult to accomplish for dreamer neophytes, such as yourself. The scene could be recreated here with little effort, however, now that this area of the Fade has the memory of it."

And he just admitted that he knows I'm new to this. How many cards are you planning on letting me see, wolf? I carefully keep a knowing smirk off my face, and ask him a question instead, "Alright, did you have a particular place in mind, then?"

He shakes his head slowly. "No, but surely you have places in mind that you would enjoy exploring in your current shape, since you are as much of a wolf as your name suggests?"

My eyebrow flicks up skeptically. "Why the interest? Why are you here? How did I call you?" If he's expecting me to show him where I want to roam, he's gonna have to give me something.

He tilts his head and smiles at me, which would be distinctly disturbing, if I didn't get the impression from all six of his eyes that it is a kind smile. "You called me when you said to take you." My eyes widen at that, but he moves right along. "I came here, because I was curious what sort of creature would request such a thing. I stay, because you have intrigued me with your lack of fear, and casual openness. It has been a long time since I've encountered either, so I am certain you can understand the interest." He bobs his head in a nod of encouragement. "Show me the place you wish to be as your true self."

I ponder his answers for a few moments. They're honest enough, I suppose... for half-truths. I sigh, giving in to his demand. "Ma nuvenin, Fen'harel."

I close my eyes and picture the Sequoia Redwoods, as I remember them from my many visits and camping trips as a child, and fling my mana at the memories. When I open my eyes, Tarasyl'an Te'las has dissolved, and instead of sitting on a feather bed, we are perched upon the great stump of one of the giant trees. I smile fondly and look about to see us surrounded by acres of huge, bark-skinned pillars of majesty. The branches are so high up, there's no hope of climbing them unless I have wings. But I don't want to climb them, and the scene is incomplete enough to be distracting.

"One moment, it's not quite right just yet. Not... entirely sure how to put this into it, but I'll try," I say, closing my eyes once more in concentration. What I'm trying to inject is a feeling, nothing solid. It's an idea, something your spirit feels, more than anything. I spill some animal life into the forest, as that's easy enough to imagine, then focus on the feeling the place has always evoked for me. I try to capture it, and send my mana coursing through it and out, hoping it works.

I know it's worked, even before I open my eyes, to my utter joy. I grin and look at him as I hear him gasp. "Feel that?"
He nods, smiling. "I do. It is much like the feeling of places where the veil is thin, but more. Almost as if the veil does not even exist. Is this forest a place you have visited before?"

I dip my head slightly. "It is, yes. It's called the Sequoia Redwoods, in my world. I went there many times, as a child. It's always held a special place in my heart and mind, a place where I could feel magic, even if our world's people don't believe in it."

He tilts his head at me, a confused expression clear on his face. "Your world? Are you not from Thedas?"

Ugh. He caught me there. Damn it all. Damn this stupid facade wolf shit. I sigh and explain it - again- as best I can, the abridged version, at least. A few minutes of back and forth, both questions and comments, ensues before it finally concludes. "So no, to answer your original question, I am not from Thedas. But there are similarities, such as this location." I tip my head toward the deepest part of the forest. "Come on, let's explore. There's one tree in particular I want to show you. My father carved it."

He gives me a skeptical look. "Your father carved a tree?"

I chuckle, realizing that doesn't make much sense. "Uh, yes. I meant he carved into the side of it, to create an image. He enjoys working with wood, and is a rather skilled carpenter, though he never made it his profession. I've seen him make art out of firewood, just for fun."

He seems impressed. "Fascinating. Perhaps your creativity stems from your father's influence, then?"

I laugh, shaking my head. "I doubt it. Well, maybe partially. But my mother is the major creative talent in my family. She writes very well, and her art is a thing of beauty. But, it could be a combination of the two, I suppose." I shrug my head softly, then turn away and hop down from the stump, managing not to fall on my face this time, to my great relief.

He follows after a moment, coming up beside me. "Do you remember where this tree is located? Or shall we simply explore until we happen upon it?"

"It's this way," I say, pointing my head toward it. "Probably not where it is in reality, but it's where I put it. There's a lot of other trees with unique carvings and other features to see, as well. One of them has a huge hole completely through its base, to allow for the road that runs through it," I inform him, chuffing a laugh.

"Well then, let us explore. Lead the way."

I grin and take off, letting my memories surface and form the path ahead of us as we go. I press the road tree into the near distance, and take to the path, rushing through the hollowed out base with exultant glee at being able to show him the things I enjoyed as a child. I turn as I pass through it, waiting for him to catch up. He slows to a walk as he comes to the tree, his eyes following the curve of the archway as he moves.

He looks up to the top of the tree as he joins me. "It yet survives, despite the damage. Incredible. Perhaps this forest does have magic in it."

I grin, nodding. "I believe it does. None of the trees have actually been damaged by anything done to them; it's quite remarkable."

I move on, treading at a more placid pace, pressing my memories of the various notable locations into the sides of our pathway. We pause and look at a few different such areas, before we finally...
come to my dad's carving. The monster he'd pressed into the tree has bugging eyes and a wide, open mouth, its tongue lolling out in a wild display that would be rather scary, if it weren't so simultaneously silly.

I laugh and point my nose at it, as Fen'harel sits at my side. "This one is my father's. We camped near it every time we went there."

He seems at a loss for words, for a moment, before he eventually concludes, "It is... certainly creative. Do you have any notion what he was attempting to capture, with this?"

I snort, grinning at him. "Not in the slightest. He has a strange mind. That much, I absolutely did get from him."

He smiles and looks back to the wild monster in the side of the tree. "I will say he is talented, though I am at a loss as to what I am looking at."

I chuckle, nodding. "You're not the only one, believe me." I stand and walk around the tree, viewing the snarling, goofy visage from different angles. "I think it's supposed to be some kind of monster, or demon. I really don't know. He carved several others like it, although none were to this scale. I asked him what they represented, what inspired him to make them, once. He said he had no idea, it was just something to do."

"Something from his dreams, perhaps? One he forgot, that his subconscious urged him to bring to life with his art?" He posits, and I have to agree, it sounds likely.

"Probably. He's never really talked about his dreams, so I don't know. Anything is possible." I toss him a grin. "Come on, let's run."

I jet forward, skirting around my dad's tree and flinging myself through the forest with reckless abandon. Inhaling the scent of the various animal life, of the warm forest floor, of the trees, I revel in the release of just being. Here, I don't have to worry, or think. I can be free to run through miles of woodlands, with only a bit of effort put into the continuation of the scene. It's glorious.

I look back for a moment, and I see the Dread Wolf barreling toward me with a silly grin on his face, which likely matches my own. I laugh at the sight and face forward, the image spurring me on into a joyful burst of speed. After a minute or so of full-out sprinting, I look back and notice he's fallen far behind me. I snicker as a thought comes to mind, and with that thought, a push of mana to make it real.

I dive into the hollowed out downed tree I've created, going still and quiet, waiting. Can I trick the trickster, even a little? Or will he sniff me out immediately? Either way, it'll be amusing to one of us, so win-win.

Soon enough, he practically flies past my little hidey hole, paws thrumming against the forest floor in a flurry of sound and a blur of vision. I wait. How long will it take him to realize he's not following me anymore? Even if it does take a while, will he delay it on purpose? He could trick the trickster of the trickster, after all. It would make an entertaining little game of cat and mouse.

Within seconds, I hear a thump, thump, thump— the steady rhythm of clawed footsteps on top of my little hollow, all the way to the end of it, just outside of where I'm hiding. I see a nose, which is followed by the rest of his upside-down head, peeping down into the tree and looking at me.

"Is there a particular reason you are attempting to hide from me, Fen'nas?" he inquires.

I huff a small laugh. "Just thought it'd be fun. That's the point, is it not? Nothing wrong with a little
hide and seek, even if I'm unsuccessful at it." I get up and move toward him, my eyes locked to his.

"Not my fault you've caught my scent so thoroughly that it only took you seconds to find me," I quip, with a grin and a wink of the eyes on the right side of my head, as I pass under him, out of the burrow.

He hops down behind me, and I can hear the laughter he's holding back in his voice. "Indeed, it is not. But I can hardly be blamed for taking an interest in one so unique as yourself." He smiles at first, but it falls, and he seems distracted as he speaks again, almost reluctantly, "Sadly, I must end my time here, for now. I shall see you again soon, da'fen."

Before I can respond, his presence evaporates into a swirl of smoke, which curls into the void of where he'd been for a moment, dissipating into the air the next.

I sit with a huff. "Rude," I say to nobody in particular. But he called me da'fen! Holy shit. That's gotta be wishful thinking, right? He probably actually said da'len. Yes. Probably. Is it wrong that I hope not?

Well, now what? Explore the Fade? Find some long-forgotten memory? Talk to a spirit? Eh, I'd probably better not risk that last one, just yet. I could return to Tarasyl'an Te'las, I suppose. If I can restore the memory of what he'd shown me, maybe I can explore it as it once was? Maybe even find some secrets that don't exist in the rebuilt version? Hmm. That would be pretty awesome.

I collapse the vision of my recreated Redwoods, and search for the threads of memory that might recall the castle to the Fade's landscape. So far, there's no demons or spirits around, so it's a good chance to get the scene going, before I get swarmed. If I can just find what I'm looking for! I tug on the familiar strings and pull the memory from their pocket in the Fade, weaving them together to reform the scene.

Finally, after a deep breath and a large shove of mana, Tarasyl'an Te'las appears before me, in all its ancient glory. I'm sitting just outside the main gate house, on the bridge. I look back and up, and the huge land mass that I can only assume is either Arlathan itself, or one of the other elvhen cities, is back up and floating behind me. I'll eventually have to take a closer look at that place. If he put it out there with any real details, it's got to be amazing.

For now, I shake my wolf in favor of my elven form, and turn back to the keep's courtyard to start looking around. The architecture of the walls is vastly different than what I'm familiar with; decidedly less Gothic, and much more elegantly curved archways and delicately inlaid stones. The layout of the main area is generally the same, but I can tell whoever rebuilt it definitely only had the bare bones of the original to design the new walls with. Or they really didn't care what the original looked like. One of the two.

Here, the main courtyard is the one with the market stalls and shrines, the throbbing heart of life within the keep's walls. The area to the right has a large stable barn, instead of the pitifully tiny stable we see in the game, that's somehow meant to hold a ton of mounts. Because that's realistic. *Glares at Bioware.*

There's also a small garden area, just down the stairs from the kitchen, filled with various herbs that I mostly recognize, but a few I've never seen. I might restore the garden to the castle, once we get there. That, and the stables. Seriously, Bioware. *Stables.*

I wander to the upper courtyard, finding a slightly different building layout when I reach it. The stone structures are still here, but The Herald's Rest is gone, replaced by... I'm really not sure what this is. It looks like some sort of training area, though I'm not sure what kind of training it would
be. There's no targets, so it's not archery. It's not your average sparring ring, either. I resolve to ask Solas about it, whenever he visits me again in elven form.

I turn from that area and wander through the stone buildings, noting that the armory and dungeons are still in the same place, as is the entrance to the garden... which is now a small archery range. Explains the arrows we find on the roof.

Wait, so... was that roof the original somehow? I look up at it, and it *does* look like the same one. How the fuck did it survive? Magic? Actually, this part of the keep does have a different look than the rest of it in the game. Maybe it just needed some restoration when the second owners came here? Or... oh shit, maybe the original was partially destroyed? There is that giant hole in the middle of the outer dungeon, after all. Come to think of it, the main structure of the keep isn't that far off from elven architecture, really.

I add that to the list of things to ask Solas, which is growing to a ridiculous length, by this point. That's right wolf, you might suspect that I have questions, but I damn well *know* I do. More than a few.

I just can't ask them yet. Damn it.

I head through the door to the main hall, which is largely unchanged structurally. Aesthetically, it is vastly superior. The stones in the walls have a polished sheen to them that gleams in the light pouring through the very elvhen-themed stained glass windows behind the throne dais.

Speaking of thrones, holy crap, *that's* what an elvhen throne looks like? *Damn*, but that's fancy. The throne looks like a tree was made to grow in the shape of an opulent chair, both clear and colored crystals encrusting and surrounding it, some of the branches even trained to grow around them. As I tear my eyes from that sight, I notice that the tables and chairs littering the hall are of similar construct, if significantly less elaborate. Hot damn. Do want! This is amazing!

My gaze travels up to the tapestries lining the walls, and stay on them for a good, long while. Instead of the super simple - if pretty - lengths of fabric with nice trimming and plain symbols, there are woven scenes that tell the stories of various members of the pantheon. Andruil is notably absent. You're sly wolf, but not as sly as you think you are. How the Fade remembers it, my ass. This is *so* your keep. Don't even try to pull that shit. You just slipped up, without even trying to.

I shake my head with a devious chuckle, eyes still roving over the tapestries curiously. Hmm. I wonder... I head into the rotunda's door- and stop the second I pass the threshold.

There is a beautiful desk in the middle of the room, with an accompanying chair that is slightly less fancy than the throne, but looks much more comfortable.

The lower third of the walls are crammed full with shelves upon shelves of books. The top two-thirds of the walls, however, are covered in frescoes. Did he really think I wouldn't explore this place? Is he actually trying to show me who he is? You were too obvious for your own good in the game, wolf, but this is just ridiculous.

He may as well have signed each panel. Almost every single one has some representation of his wolf, either in the foreground, or hidden somewhere in the background, watching the events unfolding.

Here, what can only be the Twins stand with linked hands, one darkened by shadow, the other surrounded by spirits. Fen'harel lies curled around one of his blasted artifacts in the background, looking at them. Not sure exactly what this scene represents, but it's every bit as beautiful as the
rest of his art.

In the next one, an elvhen that looks suspiciously like him -with hair!- is tied to a tree, and what must be Andruil and Anaris are facing off against each other to the left of him, weapons drawn and ready to strike. Apparently that story is at least partially true. Huh.

The next, a dragon flies protectively over a city in the sky, and a defaced archer is pointing their bow at the dragon. Is this depicting the death of Mythal? Morbid. I can understand why he would paint it, though. And why he would deface the archer. He is notably absent from this one.

I move on, the following fresco showing his back in the foreground- head full of hair, which flows down his back like a gentle waterfall. He's holding his glowing foci in one outstretched hand, a similarly lit up staff in the other. In front of him are what's got to be the remaining pantheon, because Andruil and the Twins are among them, and any possible representation of Mythal is missing from the group. Streams of green energy are pouring from the staff and foci, toward the pantheon. Is this... oh shit. This is when he sealed them away! It's got to be!

A similar scene is painted in the next panel, except it's the Forgotten Ones he's sealing away, as the same figure that represented Anaris in the other panel, is counted in their number.

The next panel is something he obviously spent a great deal of time on, as each bit of it is rendered in painstaking detail. There is nothing vague about this one. What is clearly him, is kneeling, broken, before an el'u'vi'an on a hilltop. One hand is raised up and resting flat on the glass, the other curled into a fist next to his now silent foci, abandoned, along with his staff on the floor. His head is bent, expression twisted in agony, tears streaming down his face.

I lift a trembling hand to my open mouth, as tears prick my own eyes and spill down my cheeks, at the vision of utter despair on the wall. I can feel his desolation in every stroke of the painting. My other hand reaches for him in a pointless gesture of sympathy, resting on the bottom of the mural. This should appear in the dictionary, as the sole definition of grief.

When I finally manage to lift my eyes from him, the next scene comes into blurry focus, through the filter of my tears. He is asleep, surrounded by elvhen clad in armor, similar to what Mythal's Sentinels wear. This is the final piece.

I sink to the floor, hugging my knees to my chest and laying my head on my folded arms. How could the Dalish have thought he ran off and giggled like a madman for centuries after that? What filth told such a spiteful tale? Even if this account is altered by being his perception of what happened, it still makes more sense than him laughing at these events that shook the world and doomed his people so. I'd like to find the bastard that first said he laughed at it, and wring his scrawny neck. Trickster or not, it's obvious that he did not want to take this course of action, that his hand was forced.

A bitter seed of resentment for the Dalish plants itself in my heart in this miserable moment. Perhaps this is why Solas showed this to me, to make me understand? Maybe he thinks I know? At the very least, he must think me open enough to accept this version of the story, whether or not I know he's Fen'harel. Message received, wolf.

I close my eyes with a sigh.

When I open them again, I'm in my bed, face-down in a tear-soaked pillow.

Well, shit.
Thanks for reading! If you enjoy the story or this chapter in particular, please feel free to leave a review with your thoughts!

I love reading comments and reply to all of them.
I alone love you
I alone tempt you
I alone love you

fear is not the end of this.

Huff.

After that... dream, or.. visit to an alternate reality, whatever it is, I needed some hours just to listen to music and play DAI.

With the new DLC coming out in a few days, and my anticipation of what's going to happen in it running at an all-time high, it's really best to just work on getting as many of my Quizzies to post-game as I can. It's a good distraction.

But, I can't help the feelings of resentment that I have when I go to the Exalted Plains, and encounter Keeper Hawen and his wayward clan. Did their would-be second run off and sacrifice himself to a demon needlessly, out of pressures that their 'traditions' put upon his shoulders? Abso-fucking-lutely. Was the death of their first and his over-eager assistants preventable? Probably. Was the fate of the elves in general a truly sad shadow of the things they were originally intended to be? Without question.

Does Fen'harel blame himself for all of it?

You can bet your last damn dime he does.

It sickens me.

I turn the game off, because I can't stand to look at those vallaslined faces any longer, and sigh resignedly. Looks like it'll just be Fen'da'len and Nim Cadash, my awesome dwarf archer, that will play the DLC, for now. I've already done all I can for that damn clan of Hawen's, but I can't bring myself to play any more of the game right now.

Really, if I want to, I can just skip to the Arbor Wilds right now, in Fenlamea's game. But that would leave several regions in chaos, and I'm not the kind of person who can just ignore their cries for help.

There's a reason I've never been able to do a play through of DAI where the Quizzie is a rude prick. I'm not a goody-two-shoes by any stretch of the imagination, but I'm not cruel; and most of those options are unnecessarily so.
Black and white.

But there's so much gray in the world; a veritable ocean of it, covering the entire earth in a swirling mass of uncertainty and chaos.

And the Inquisitor must swim through it, and find the rare nuggets of bright light, or voids of darkness, to pluck out and hold forward as the ultimate solution to the problems presented them.

What if this place I go when I dream - and sometimes, frighteningly, when I'm not dreaming - is real? Will the choices I make truly be the best for all concerned?

I don't know. And that terrifies me.

The DLC will give me some hints, yes. Two years pass. That's some time to see what kinds of consequences my choices will have. And fortunately, I'm still very early on in the story. My decisions so far are only the necessary ones. Hell, the only one I actually made was to charge with the main forces, instead of going through the mountain pass. The rest, I had no choice in. At least, outside of the Fade.

How weird is that, really? Dreaming within a dream? And what about when I went there while not asleep? The only way that actually makes sense, is if it really is an alternate reality. How utterly horrifying that is. The fate of an actual reality, on my shoulders? Good gods. I might just vomit. Then die out of sheer terror.

Dying in shock, in a puddle of my own vomit - a fitting end to a life that's gone nowhere.

Fuck me running with a chainsaw. Sideways.

Even just thinking about all of this has my body breaking out in a cold sweat. It's too much. I understand how the Inquisitor feels. And they're a lot stronger than I am, to react so calmly to their fate.

Or perhaps, we really don't get to see their real reaction. Maybe what we see is the brave face they show everyone. We're not always with them, after all. Yes, we control them throughout the story, but we don't get to see a lot of things.

Nights at camp, their companions gathered around them, or sleeping in their tents. The time spent alone in their quarters, or with their lovers, outside of those initial love scenes and kisses. Visiting cities for trade and negotiations. Parties attended with nobility, outside of Halamshiral. How they prepare for their days - how they end them. Who they end them with. Long days of travel on foot and horseback; wiled away with stories, song, and silence alike. Other conversations they have, with their companions and agents and soldiers and servants, beyond what the game lets us encounter. There's so much we don't get to see, even past these missing moments.

Who talks them down from moments of utter panic? Who holds them when all they can do is weep? What happens when all they can do is sit and stare at a wall, overwhelmed by all of the forces arrayed against them; both from Corypheus and what should be home to them? How many times are they held to task on what they've decided, and have no real answers to give?

These are the real questions.

I don't know the answers.

And I'm not sure I want to.
I started playing this game to escape from reality; yet suddenly, I'm being faced with the possibility that this world is actually utterly real, that I must treat it as such, and I have no choice but to decide its fate. How do you even react to that? I don't think there's a precedent for this situation, and if there is, I've never heard of it.

Self-insert stories abound, naturally. There's plenty of fantasy out there, all about being shoved personally into stories that people love. But are any of them real? The skeptic, the realist in me screams that it's impossible.

Yet, here I am.

And, despite my anxiety, I want to believe. Is that so terrible? Should I ignore years of certainty and logic, and give in to what my very soul is crying out for me to accept? Can I? Am I capable of it?

The obvious answer is yes, for me, at least. I've always been prone to wishing fantasy could be reality, at every turn. But should I?

That, I can't answer. Not yet. The me that still clings to what I perceive as reality, firmly demands that I remain grounded in it. Practicality requires it, reason begs for it. No, I can't decide this yet. It can wait.

Pushing it out of my mind for now, I pull the small mirror from beneath my second monitor, and set it before me, looking into it. Moments of looking at my physical form are rare in this reality. I don't see physical beauty. I don't care about it. I care about souls. Is your soul beautiful? If it is, I will be attracted to you, regardless of your physical form. I've heard lots of people claim the same, but in the end, what they actually do care about is the physical. It's sad, tragic, really. The physical fades. The physical ages and withers, gone in a matter of moments. The beauty of the soul is eternal. The soul is what you will have until your last breath, and beyond.

My odd curiosity now in the physical, is in the differences between this reality and the other. I remember the face that looked back at me from the mirror in Thedas. Thinner, firmer, ears tapered elegantly back to a point. My dark auburn hair was fuller there, the eyebrows more finely shaped. The strong bones of my face were more defined, less pudge to get in the way. But for all the differences, my eyes were the same. That is what draws me in now.

I have always found the old adage, of the eyes being the windows to the soul, to ring true. You can look at someone and see what they are feeling, if you pay attention to the eyes. You can see fear, arousal, panic, joy; everything that truly matters in life can be housed within the eyes.

I am elated to know they are the same in both realities. It means that my soul is the same; it hasn't been altered, or twisted somehow. Even the anchor has had no effect on it. Now, when he asks me if the anchor affected my spirit, I can answer with surety.

I give a small, satisfied sigh, and put the mirror away. I hear my medication alarm and swipe the screen on my iPod to dismiss it, reaching for my medicine box to flip the tab for Sunday open, dumping the concoction into my palm. I realize with a start that I haven't eaten yet, and huff, setting the pills on my desk to go off in search of food.

I come back with a banana, and a ham and cheese sandwich, devouring the banana first. I refuse to have a repeat of what my gut put me through yesterday. No thank you. I tear off the excess bit of ham and leave it on the paper plate for my dog, since it's one of the few human foods she will gladly eat. She's a pickier eater than I am.
Oh, her name is Nesmay, in case anyone was wondering.

I'm Shane. Yeah, I know, weird name for a woman, get over it. It's not my birth name, just the name I go by now, when people aren't calling me by my nickname... which I might give you. Later.

Speaking of food, I wonder... what kinds of food will I have to eat in Thedas? Oh, gods. That... might be an issue. I suppose it depends, though. Do I have the same health issues in Thedas, as I do here? That could be a problem. Then again, with magic, perhaps those issues could be solved by healing? Or some herbal remedy? There's got to be something. My problems aren't new ones, after all.

I'll have to keep a mage with me at all times, though; in case I have an allergic reaction to something I haven't tried yet. What a pain. And how embarrassing. Ugh. The great Inquisitor, taken down by an allergy to some stupid herb, that's used for healing. Or some wolf shit like that. How ridiculous would that be?

Groaning at the thought, I finish the last bite of my sandwich. I drag the pills off my desk and toss them back, taking great swallows of diet mountain dew to choke the horse pills down. Then, I turn my attention to my PC and open a blank document, readying myself to write. I've got to do something productive today, to balance out all the game playing - even if I'm just writing about the game...

That's still being productive, right? Right?

Fuck it.

*Several hours later...*

"There, thing done," I say to Nesmay, who looks up at me sleepily, then goes back to drowsing on the floor by my blu-ray player... that I never use. No, I'm not addicted to the internet! Not at all! Snort.

The way my chair slants from sitting on it cross-legged, day after day for years, immediately declares its contradiction to my lies. Shut up, chair. YOU KNOW NOTHING! Ahem.

Yeah I need a new chair.

DLC first.

Plus, this one has just the right back height to pop my back properly, which I am doing right now. *Snap, crack, pop!* Ahh, so satisfyingly limbering. Yeah yeah, bad for me, I know. Ninety percent of what I do is bad for me. Hell, probably more than that. I'm quitting smoking, get off my back about the rest. Heh, get it? Off my back? Yeah I'm a dork. Shut up.

My dad and step mom are calling me out of my hermit hole in my room, wanting to take me out to eat again. I sigh and get up, leaning out of the doorway to face the den where they sit, watching something or rather on the screen, though it's paused for their summons. They're both seated in their recliners, the closest of which my dad is spread out in, his back to me. I smile inwardly at my dad's largely bald head, and look over at my step mom as I pat my dad's bald spot, the most common sign of affection and communication we have these days. He grunts in response.

"I just ate. Maybe next time?" I say, and my step mom nods with an understanding smile.

"Sure, we're-" and she launches into a three-minute long diatribe of where they're going to go, and
what they're going to do once they get there. After eating. She concludes with, "I just thought you might want to come with."

I shake my head, gritting my teeth behind a smile meant to soothe, "No, I'm good, thanks. Have fun, though."

"We will. My shoulder's been-" And on she goes, talking about her shoulder trouble. She had surgery on it years ago. It never ceased to be a bother. While I sympathize... yeah. I nod and comment in the right places, then pat my dad's head again and back away into my room as politely as possible, retreating from the endless waterfall of words.

I love my step mom, I really do. But she's an earful. She also re-arranges my kitchen, leaving everything in disarray, every time she comes to visit... which annoys me to no end. Fortunately, she only comes to visit on random weekends; on Holidays or the odd occasion when she has a bit of time off work. She lives on the other side of the state. Yes, it's a weird situation. But it works for them, and they're happy. That's what matters.

Also, I can handle her better this way, in small doses. The small doses lets me love the kind, giving person she is, and ignore the rest, for the most part. One of her sons... my step brother, I guess, has a son of his own, which makes dad happier than a pig in shit. It's unlikely I'll ever give him grandchildren, so I'm glad to see him enjoy this part of his life.

She's good for my dad. That's all I care about, in the end.

I retreat to my PC and settle back down, half dancing with Nesmay as she greets me like I've been gone for a century, as she always does. I grin at her and shake my head as we finish our little dance, then turn back to the throbbing pulse of my room. I read over what I've written, and decide it's good enough to pass on to my editor for review. Yes, editor, not beta. She edited my book for me, and still edits Breach.

Off onto the internet I go.

*Many more hours later...*

Bed time. Shower, teeth, clothes off. PC sleepytime. I flop onto the bed and curl my pillows and blanketed sheet about me, flipping them back to allow for Nesmay's five minute nap, and adjust things until I'm satisfied. Drowsiness overtakes me, and I barely notice Nesmay sliding off the bed like a blob of ooze, before I drift into sleep.

I wake to the smell of a sweetly sharp tang of smoke drifting up my nostrils. Odd. My nose is usually the last of my bits to wake. I peel my eyelids open to a slitted crack, peering out at the gently lit rotunda. At first, I think I'm alone. Everything is as it was, I'm still seated on the floor, with my legs hugged to my chest, knees damp with tears. Ugh.

But where's the smell coming from? It doesn't smell like the place is on fire, it smells more like... pipe tobacco smoke, or something near to it. More herb-y.

I rub the sleep from my eyes and slowly push myself upright, realizing I must've been in that position for some time, because I feel stiff and sore, even numb in places. I stretch lazily as I give my surroundings a better look, and realize the chair by the desk is turned toward me. Sitting in it, easy as you please, is Solas, hands in his lap holding some ornate thing that resembles a smoking pipe. My sight drifts up to his face, which sports a small smile, amusement tugging at the corners of his lips and dancing in his eyes.
"On'dhea, Fen'nas. Sleep well? Or, perhaps, wake well? Which is it truly, I wonder?" he asks, tipping the end of the pipe up and toking on it gently, letting the smoke seep from his nostrils in little tendrils as he leans his head back in his chair, relaxed.

I pause. He's right- it's both and neither, for all I can tell. I end up shrugging a stiff shoulder. "On'dhea, Solas. I don't know. Both? Neither? I doubt we'll know, for some time, if ever." I tip my head at his pipe, eying it curiously. "What are you smoking?"

He lifts an eyebrow and eyes the pipe himself, then holds it out to me. "Do you wish to try it?"

I look at the proffered pipe with apprehension. I hadn't expected him to offer it so freely. I am by no means certain how it will affect the lungs of this elf form of mine. If he'd offered it to my human self, I wouldn't hesitate. I've yet to meet anything, tobacco or herb, that I couldn't handle. "I... maybe? Is it strong?"

He shrugs. "Not particularly. It effects each person differently, but the smoke itself is not overly strong, compared to most." He's still holding it out to me.

I take a step forward and gingerly lift the ornate pipe from his hand. It is a work of art, delicately inlaid with mother of pearl and precious metals, mingling effortlessly with beautifully blown glass, in vibrant colors that indicate it has seen countless years of loving use. I know many a smoker of a certain herb that would pay dearly to own such a piece, let alone whatever the bowl of it holds.

I gesture to him with it gently. "This is a beautiful piece. I don't recognize the smell of the smoke; I'm assuming it's something specific to Thedas?"

He smiles, dipping his head forward slightly. "Try it, and see for yourself."

I realize I have no method of providing a flame - there aren't exactly lighters handy in Thedas. I look at him sheepishly. "Um, I don't... how do I light it?" I can feel the tingle of a blush on the tips of my ears. Damn it all.

He merely chuckles and waves me closer to him. I comply and he holds his hand over the bowl as I kneel before him, cupping the top as gently as I cup the bottom, and looks at me with a nod. I place my lips against the end, and begin to draw slowly, tasting a softly sweet and spicy smoke flow across my tongue. I break away from the pipe slightly, turning my head and drawing the smoke into my lungs, holding it for a moment, unsure how long I'm meant to do so. I exhale after a few seconds, a stream of smoke that is thicker than I thought it would be, exiting my lips and flowing into the air. Not a cough in sight. Holy hell that was smooth.

I look back to him with a quirked eyebrow, lips formed into an impressed smile. "Very nice. Should I take another hit, or should I wait?"

He smirks, waving me on. I draw from the pipe again, as he gestures for me to take a longer draw. I lift a skeptical brow, but obey, filling my mouth with the wonderfully flavorful smoke before I pull away, letting my head fall back this time as I draw my mouthful into my lungs. Definitely a heavier, thicker feeling this time. But still there is no sharp, catching feeling, nothing to make me want to cough.

I'm about to exhale when his voice pierces the silence. "Hold it, until I say otherwise."

I look back down at him, giving him a look that asks, 'Are you sure?' He nods, and I shrug with my eyebrows, leaning back again to wait.

After several more seconds, "Now."
I let go the stopper in my throat over my lungs, and let the captured air escape slowly. I note that the smoke is much thinner than it was the last time, despite my heavier draw, just before I close my eyes in exultant relaxation. I recognize this feeling- oh yes. It's a little different, but just as boneless and soothing. I feel the gentle press of it seeping into my very soul, releasing endorphins and sending my body into a free fall, that makes me let out my next breath of air in a deeply amused chuckle.

I'd almost forgotten that I was holding the pipe as I let my head tilt forward in its natural position, gracing him with a crooked grin. "You might want to take... this," I say eloquently, gesturing to the pipe with the hand not cupping the bowl of it.

He grins in return and gives a small laugh, lifting the pipe from my grasp. "Am I to understand that you enjoy this, then?"

Nodding slowly, still smiling in bliss, I slide off my heels and shift until I lean into the front of his chair beside his legs, letting it support the weight of my shoulder. "I do, I do. Reminds me of something I used to smoke in my world, but a lot um... less harsh. Tastes good. This, I mean. That did too, but not as pretty." I laugh at that terrible description and correct myself as quickly as I can in my lax state, waving the hand not supporting me for emphasis. "I mean, not pretty, I mean this tastes more... spicy, sweet, not sharp and pine-y. And apple-y." I tag onto the end.

He smiles, nodding. "I understand, Fen'nas, you need not explain. Smoking elfroot is more like what you describe, I believe. It also has a similar effect, though not quite as powerful, nor as long-lasting."

I grin and lean my head against the arm of his chair, inadvertently displacing the hand he was about to rest there, which ended up with his fingertips in my hair. I can live with that. Apparently, so can he. I snicker at the thought, and look up at him adoringly. "So what is this?" I ask, eyes struggling to stay open as his fingers slowly move through the strands of my hair. Does he even realize he's doing that? Whatever, who cares? It feels amazing. I'm not about to complain, or even mention it, lest he stop.

How do I keep ending up in situations like this with him? So weirdly wonderful.

"It is a mixture of herbs, some of which no longer exist in Thedas, as we know it. It is only one blend of many, that were used in ancient times. I have seen the makers of these blends, hard at work, in the Fade. It is a fascinating process. Many of them took countless hours to create, using methods that are long since lost to time. Some still exist, but they cannot claim the artistry that once permeated such professions. It is one more thing that was lost." He rests the pipe on the desk, secure from either of us, and I reach up to pat his knee comfortingly.

"It's not lost, as long as someone remembers it. Ba... banal'halam." I nod, proud that I’d remembered the words in my hazy state. "Banal'halam, Solas. You remember. And now, I know about it, and you can show me, teach me. Nothing is lost, which can be remembered."

A pained, kind smile slips onto his lips, and he curls his fingers under my chin, lifting it gently. I look up at him with an encouraging smile, full of projected hope that he understands, and sees what I see. An absent thought of wondering how he can touch me at all slides through my consciousness, but his gaze drives it away before it can form a question on my lips.

"You are such a bright light in all of this darkness, Fen'nas. You amaze me." The smile he gives me is as genuine as any I've ever seen from him, and I return it in full.

"I'm not trying to be anything more than what I am, Solas. I am what I am, no less, no more. I have
a hope for this world, that I can't have for mine. I'm finding it less and less likely that this world doesn't exist outside of my dreams." At this my smile falters, worry creasing my brow, but I push through it. "If that really is the case, I want to do the best I can for it, whatever that may be. Up to, and including, bringing back at least a piece of what was. A real piece, not what the Dalish have deluded themselves into thinking they're doing."

He arches an eyebrow at this. "You do not agree with their efforts?" His fingers have not left my chin. I wonder if it's as absent of a gesture as the hair stroking had apparently been.

I sigh sadly. "They do not possess the knowledge to actually do what they seek. Their efforts are commendable, but clumsy, and will ultimately result in little success, if any. It's sad, but they are shadows of what they are meant to be." I huff a self-depreciative laugh. "Much like my human self is a shadow of this self, in a way. But this self would have no place in my world. Just as, I suppose, you feel you have no place here."

Now his fingers leave my face. Did I go too far? Maybe. But I don't regret my words. They're true. His hand returns to the armrest, carefully avoiding where my head would lay if I rested there again. I can feel the walls coming up around him. It hurts.

I try not to let it show on my face. I don't know how well I succeed.

"You presume to know what I think and feel, without actually knowing me. You have only recently met me, how could you know what I feel?" His words are sharply spoken, if softened by the effects of the herbal blend we've been smoking.

I sigh softly. "Solas, I told you- I know you. I know you better than you think, in fact. You hide behind that mask, but I can see through it, wolf." I get up and lean over him, bracing my hands on the winged back of his chair and looking into his eyes. "I see through into your soul, and do you know what I see?"

He snorts unkindly, shaking his head. "I am certain you will tell me, whether or not I wish to hear it. Go on then, regale me."

No, this... this isn't how I wanted this to go. Shit, fuck, fenedhis! I let that damn smoke, whatever it is, get in the way of my brain. Fucking fuck.

Fuck it. I'm tired of hiding. He's all but handed me the answers himself anyway, may as well make it official that I know.

One corner of my lips tug into an annoyed frown, and I sigh, leaning down and displacing his arms from the armrest and using it to frame my upper body around his, leveling my face with his. "I see an elvhen that is displaced from his time, an elvhen who longs for what he cannot have; an elvhen who firmly believes that what he sees all around him is wrong. I see an elvhen that wishes with all of his soul to fix what he thinks he broke. I see an elvhen who looks at those shadows out there," I point in a random direction behind me, "and sees almost nothing familiar but an ear shape. I see an elvhen who has a kind, generous heart, that aches at the sight of what this world has become. And I know that heart feels more alone than you think anyone can possibly imagine."

I stand and turn to the mural on the wall, of him weeping before the el'u'vi'an, pointing to it as I look back at him. "I see grief; grief that runs deeper than any ocean, regret that could blanket the entire world in its weight, and indeed does, in a way. I see duty that binds you, like chains of steel, to the past. I see determination to see it through, to the end. I see the path you must tread, and I know what it costs you to follow it- what it cost you to follow it before." I lower my hand and face him fully, kneeling before him once more. "Don't ever assume anything about me, rebel wolf. You
will find yourself eating your words, as you are about to."

It takes a moment for him to hide the deeply pained shock on his face, but he does it, with great effort, and plasters on a mask of incredulous derision. He scoffs, though the sound lacks the teeth he likely wanted it to have. "Baseless assumptions. You cannot actually believe that. Your theories are impossible. Even were they not, you could not be certain of this, after only knowing me for so short a time."

Really? He's actually... Oh, no. We are *not* doing this.

I snarl as anger courses through my veins, obliterating the effects of the herbs with adrenaline. I rise to my feet, slashing my hand before me, cutting the air between us like a knife. "Enough! Play your games with others if you desire, but I am sick of being mocked for my supposed ignorance, when I *know* I am correct. Must I speak to you so plainly that you cannot escape true understanding of my words?"

I lean down again, fingers digging into the armrests so hard they creak, as I glare into his eyes. "You are He Who Hunts Alone, and I have caught your scent, wolf. Deny it all you like, but I know you, and you will *not* treat me as if I do not. I am offering you an ally in your cause; a cause which I share whole-heartedly. If you spit on that, then I have no further words for you, and you may retrieve your foci - *and* your damnable power- on your own."

I stand there, leaning over him and staring at him in defiance, as his face runs through a gambit of emotions. Surprise, panic, realization, pity- his own defiance. He finally settles on neutral acquiescence, his head bowed slightly, as if all the weight of his past is bearing down on him in this moment.

I sigh, my anger leaving me with the action in a rush that deflates me. "Fen'harel, look at me, please."

A look that speaks to his longing for hearing that name again whispers across his face, replaced by grief, then simple sadness as he raises his head to match my gaze with his.

"I will gladly help you, old wolf, if you will let me. I did not mean I would abandon you. I simply want there to be an understanding here. I meant what I said, when you visited me as your wolf. I am not afraid of you. I do not believe the Dalish tales of you, not for one second. I never have."

I relax my grip on the arms of the chair, bringing one hand up to cup his face gently, a soft smile flickering across my face. "You are not the only one here, holding back the truth and wearing a mask for others, in exchange for acceptance."

I lean forward and press my lips to his shiny head, before retreating entirely, backing away from him to give him space to breathe and think.

I step quietly to the first of the frescoes, folding my hands at the base of my spine as I look up at it. What forgotten story does it tell? It's obviously something of significance, or he wouldn't have painted it. Every other painting here depicts a momentous occasion in his ancient life, just as the paintings in the Inquisition's time do; though those are as much for the Inquisitor's life, as they are for his. This can be no different.

Another thing to ask him about. Now that he knows I'm aware of his true identity, I can ask him, finally. But one thing at a time. I glance back to see if he's still here. I can see his foot sticking out from the edge of the chair, splayed out as if he's slumped in his seat. Probably torturing himself. Broody wolf.
I sigh and make my way around the room, keeping my eyes on the paintings, with an occasional glance toward him, to make sure he hasn't abandoned me. By the time I've rounded to where I can see him fully, I realize he is indeed slumped in his chair, brow braced on the fingers of his downturned hand. Definitely brooding. Sigh.

Well, nothing for it.

"You know, I really like the whole brooding look. It adds to your overall 'prince of ancient Elvenhan in hobo disguise' vibe. It actually makes it a little hot." I smirk at him playfully, trying to lighten the mood.

He lifts his head from his fingers and glares at me. He's annoyed! Good. That reaction is better than nothing- it means I'm getting to him. "I am not attempting to be... 'hot'." Pfft. I can almost see him air-quoting the word. "What reaction would you have me give, to the news that my deception has failed? Should I dance for glee? Should I run off to the corners of the world and laugh?"

At this, my features darken. "No, you should not. And I don't believe that fucking story for a single moment. You show me this," I wave my hand to encompass our surroundings, "and expect me to ever believe that story again? No. I refuse. If you did laugh, it was in ironic agony; in maddened grief. Only a fool would believe otherwise, if they knew you."

He shakes his head, eyes casting down and to the side. "If you know me so well, what justification do you ascribe to my actions?"

He looks back up at me now, gaze piercingly blue. "Tell me, what could possess me to gift my orb to a blighted madman? Fascinate me with how you can simply brush aside my deception of everyone, as if it is nothing," he demands, waving his hand as if sweeping everything from the table of life, wiping the slate clean.

A tiny smile plucks at my lips as I hold his gaze. "You truly wish to know?"

"Yes!" He grabs the arms of his chair, leaning forward, almost pushing himself from his seat. "Tell me how you can accept me as I am so easily, how you can dismiss my history as nothing more than casual circumstance." Now he does stand, coming before me and staring down at me, arresting my body against one of the two blank spaces on the wall and flattening his palms on it, to either side of my head. He leans down until he is face to face with me, no escape. "Make me believe you."

I can hear my pulse in my ears, a dangerous mixture of adrenaline and lust coursing through my veins at his proximity. Ah, so this is still a problem. Perhaps it was the herbs that suppressed it? Interesting. I can see he's far from unaffected himself, and he's not even trying to hide it now. Is it because I know, now? No reason to deceive me anymore, I guess. I smirk and reach up in the space between us to trail a finger from his temple, down the line of his cheek and jaw, to the tip of his chin, my eyes following my fingertip as I go. When I reach his chin, I grip it tightly between my thumb and forefinger. He hisses a sharp intake of breath, either not expecting the action, or more affected by my touch than he'd previously let on.

"If you truly did gift it to him, it was in an attempt to retrieve your power," I tell him, my voice huskier than I intend. Can't help it, I'm in too deep, can't stop now. "You had no way of knowing he would survive unlocking it. You rightly - so far as you knew - assumed he would die in the process, and you would be free to Waltz in and pluck up your foci from the ashes, to fully restore yourself, and go on about your business. It was a good plan- until he resurrected and shattered all of your hopes in one fell swoop. So, you joined the rag-tag bunch of people that were the only ones trying to put a stop to the 'madness' of a hole in the veil."
I widen my eyes dramatically and smile at my own words, then scoff as I continue, "As if the Fade and reality being one is such a terrible thought." I grin for a second, then return to a more serious expression. "Regardless, you couldn't let him accomplish his goals, so you fashioned an identity to present to those wishing to help, and offered your expertise to them. Helping them was an admirable thing to do, and if you got your power source back at some point, so much the better. It would be the easiest way to do so- put you in the best position. You could wheedle your way into the good graces of those in charge, pacify their fears of a wild hedge mage, and prove yourself invaluable to their cause."

I let my fingers slip from his chin with one final caress of his skin, letting my hand swing free to my side. "It's a solid plan, really. Your facade often cracks a bit much for your liking, but it remains in place until the end. Until you abandon them." I let pain flash on my face for a moment, replacing it quickly with a tormented smile and a heavy swallow. "And me."

"I had not intended to reveal that I knew who you were so early. But, I suppose there are benefits to letting me imbibe in something that lowers my defenses so." I chuckle mirthlessly. "It was a good ploy, wolf. Ply me with herbs that would obliterate my guard, and let the truth flow out. Don't get me wrong; I don't blame you for doing it. I would have done the same in your stead, had I the knowledge and tools at hand. I have many questions, naturally, now that the truth is here, between us. But the one I truly wish answered..." I huff a small, agonized laugh and look down at the floor, shaking my head. I try to hold my emotions back, walling them up as stoically as possible, with tightly closed eyes and a shaky breath.

I hear him move before I feel the electricity of his touch on my chin, guiding me to look at him again. "Speak, Fen'nas. I believe you. Tell me your question." His voice is burdened with kindness, the smallest of smiles tilting the corners of his lips up, sympathy fighting desire in his eyes as he looks at me.

I can't hold his gaze for more than a few seconds at a time, it's just too fucking much. The energy flowing between us is suffocating in its intensity - more than just arousal, but emotions far more than should be felt at this moment - and now that I know he at least feels the arousal part of it as strongly as I do, I just... can't. It feels wrong, somehow. Like cheating for a victory I would rather achieve on my own power, of my own will. The ache in my chest to just show him what my question is, stubbornly refuses to go away.

I shake my head, freeing it of his grasp and dipping it again, clamping my eyes shut against tears that try their best to well up, despite my attempts. I hear his lowered voice, feel his breath fan the eddies of air passing over my ear, making me shudder at his nearness.

"Dirtha 'em, Fen'nas. Dirtha," he croons.

I gasp a choking sob, shaking my head in steadfast refusal. No. My voice wavers, but my intent is clear, "Ar ju'tel'dirtha ma, Fen'harel. Ar tela..." I hesitate, as this will give him fuel, but he needs the truth to understand why I refuse him, "Das ara vhen'an o'danal."

I hear a short, sharp intake of breath, which I only catch because he is so close. A slow exhale caresses my over-exerted nerves, sending a shiver down my spine and slowly making its way back up.

"Ma nuvenin, da'fen. I will not press you now." He lifts my head with his fingers beneath my chin once more, as he backs up and looks at me with imploring kindness. "What else would you ask of me?"

The relieved gratitude is sure to be plain on my face, though I press it down, past the tear that had
managed to escape at my pseudo confession. He watches it fall and brushes it from my cheek gently, prompting a wrinkling of my nose and a smile as I sniff and swallow my emotions down. My reaction broadens his smile slightly, a sight that sends my heart to singing. I ignore it as much as possible, and consider how to answer him, looking off somewhere over his shoulder in thought. There are so many questions; how do I pick one to start with? Ar tela.

I huff a laugh, a genuine one this time, letting my eyes meet his again. "There's so many, I'm having trouble choosing how to start," I admit, glancing down and shaking my head with a snort, then looking back up with a bracing breath, nodding toward the room behind him. "Let's go... sit. I'll think, and tell you when I decide."

He dips his head with a smile, and backs away, turning to the side, one hand outstretched to the room in invitation. "Sathan, mya'ma," he says, ever the congenial host.

I bow my head gently in turn, slipping past him quietly to perch my butt on his desk, looking back at him with a smile and waving my hand to his chair in returned invitation. He chuckles softly and saunters over, taking his seat with a huffed sigh, looking up at me with expectant curiosity. I hold my finger up for him to wait, and brace my hands against the edges of the desk on either side of my hips, looking ahead with a mask of concentration. I can see him smirk in my peripheral vision, and he folds his hands in his lap as he settles in to wait.

I try to think of the million questions I had before the DLC was announced, before I began my calculated system of theory crafting, based on the new information the teaser had given me. I don't want to ask anything that could conceivably be answered by that. Besides, if this is my dream - instead of some reality somewhere - he would only answer things that I have a theoretical answer on, with the reply I have in my head. I don't want that. I want real answers, not phantom limbs, jerking in response to the predetermined questions and responses in my fucked up brain.

But what could I possibly ask that wouldn't give that kind of result? Shit. Doubt is a bitch and a half, man.

I sigh and shake my head, biting my lip in frustration. This will not do.

"Having trouble, da'fen?" he asks, looking at me with a mildly amused smirk.

I side-eye him and roll my eyes. "Yes, I am, Fen'harel. There's several problems that keep me from speaking freely. Each one is frustrating, all on its own. Together, they make me want to scream and pull my hair out." I huff and let my head hang in hopeless defeat.

I hear a chuckle quickly snuffed, and when he speaks, his voice is the essence of sincerity. "What are the issues you face? Perhaps I can assist in some way?"

I sigh and lift my head, looking at him carefully, studying him. I shake my head sharply, looking away again. "Din. Nothing you can say will help, really. My doubts of the very veracity of this place would make anything you say in response suspect to a great deal of scrutiny, and likely even outright dismissal. As much as I wish you could help, it's just not possible. If this is a dream, you will react and answer as I believe you will. If it is not, and you answer in the same way, I will still assume it's a dream. The problem lies in the fact that I know you too fucking well." I sigh heavily and look up to where the rookery will one day be, seeking guidance and finding none.

"So you assume," he says, and I look down at him curiously.

I snort. "So I know, Fen'harel. I may not know every detail of your past, but I know your personality, your rhythm of speech, the way you think. I can all but read your mind, because I
know myself. And we are more alike than you'd ever believe." I tilt my head in a slight shrug. "Or maybe you would. I believed it, after I got over the shock. That took a while, though. More time than we have right now. And I've no intention of trying to force you into agreement, so the thought is pointless, really."

He shakes his head slightly. "No thought is ever pointless. I admit, you and I are alike, in many ways. I am uncertain how far reaching those similarities are, or what it would even signify, if the likeness is indeed a complete one. It matters little, at present. What matters is that you have doubts upon doubts, which - while they do you credit from a reasonable standpoint - are keeping you from acting. That gives neither of us any credit. Now ask, da'fen."

Fucking hell, why does he have to be so perfect? Not that I'm... perfect... okay, shut up, I'm having a moment here. Shit. My throat tightens almost painfully as I slowly collect myself and nod my acquiescence. Whether this is a dream or reality of some sort, fuck it. I'm tired of doubting everything, of second-guessing absolutely every thought and gesture. Enough, already.

I slide off the desk and stand before him, crossing my arms and looking at him with a devious smirk. "Ma nuvenin, Fen'harel. The form you so boldly came into my bed with- is that your true form, or what you use to... give a 'friendlier' face to your image, to those you do not wish you frighten off?"

Surprise flits across his face, eyebrows skewed in shocked appraisal. He doesn't seem the least bit shamed by the whole flopping into my bed thing. Right on target. "An astute observation, and question, da'fen. I must ask what gave you the impression that it was different, however. Have you seen an altered version of the form you witnessed?"

I nod, a smirk dancing on my lips. "I have. One with glowing crimson eyes and fur that curled into the air like a smoking mist of menace, tongue flicking out over its chops hungrily, claws poised to strike. It was dark, mysterious- and tantalizingly beautiful."

He quirks a skeptical eyebrow. "You realize this is the vision the Dalish have of me, do you not? Would you ascribe truth to their myths now, after all you have claimed to decry their falsehoods?"

I hum a short laugh. "Legends start somewhere, wolf. There is almost always a kernel of truth amongst the lies." I tilt my head at him, smiling. "Is this one of them?"

He folds his hands before him, heaving a sigh, eyes narrowed at me. He nods, once. "There is some truth to that one, yes. I suppose you wish to see it, now that you know of it."

I shrug, conveying nonchalance where there truly is none within my heart. I definitely want to see it. But I can wait. "It's not an emergency. I'd be glad to see it, whenever you feel comfortable showing it to me. No sooner," I smirk at him, straightening my head as the smirk turns to a grin, "no later."

He huffs and looks off to the side, obviously feigning annoyance. My smile remains firmly plastered on my face. He waves his hand at me. "Very well. Next question."

I chuckle and regain my seat on his desk, which he rolls his eyes at. I studiously ignore him, taking a deep breath. "Alright, why, exactly, did you decide to lick my ear?" I eye him, pointing at my ear to emphasize my point, before lowering my hand back to the desk, looking at him pointedly. He won't escape this one.
He gapes at me a moment, cheeks flushing prettily, all the way up to the tips of his ears. He closes his mouth and a sheepishly impish smile shapes his lips. He tilts his head slightly as he responds, "It was revenge, I suppose, for your earlier taunting. A bit more direct than yours had been, I admit, but you did exact your vengeance, in the end."

I snort, rolling my eyes. I shove off the desk and move with such force that I push the chair back a few inches, when I lock my hands on its arms, leaning down and growling in his ear, "You should know better than to tease a she-wolf, Fen'harel. We are not known for holding back." I deeply inhale his scent, and snap at the corner of his jaw, just under his earlobe, never actually touching him.

He snarls, and before I can back away to return to my seat, his long fingers have formed manacles around my arms, holding me there firmly as he leans up and replies, "Are you certain you wish to play this game, da'fen?" I feel ice rushing through my veins, originating from where he grasps me, and shiver, gasping softly in his ear. "I am the Dread Wolf, and I do not play fair."

I am so, so, so fucking tempted to bite him right now. You have no idea. Just a taste. My mouth is open, panting against his neck, salivating at the very thought. But this is what he thinks I will do. I did just say I would not hold back, after all. With more self control than I even know I'm capable of, I shut my mouth with a click of my teeth, still panting heavily. I chuckle darkly, twisting my arms from his grasp and standing, grinning down at him with wild eyes, that I have no doubt are naught but black circles of lust. I take a deep breath, flicking my tongue over my upper teeth and baring them from behind my lips slightly in a taunting grin, shaking my head.

"No, you don't." I gather my mana quietly, keeping my grin up. "But neither do I."

I fling my gathered mana at him, and turn, fleeing the room on fleet foot, heading for the courtyard. Before I make it to the steps, he catches me, arms like steels bands around my waist and teeth sunk deep into the crook of my shoulder. I cry out, in both shock and arousal, my head falling back to rest on his shoulder, though the rest of my body fights to be free. My fingernails claw deep crescent moons into the skin of his wrists, my feet scrambling for purchase as he lifts me away from the ground to deny me any leverage.

A strangled groan escapes him as he bites harder, then releases, lapping his tongue over the mark he's created and soothing it with his lips. Another moan, this one crafted of pure sin, is dragged from somewhere in the depths of his soul, followed by words made husky and rough with undeniable lust. "Ma rodhe venirast." He licks and kisses his way up the side of my neck, then slides his tongue along the bottom edge of my ear, making my entire body snap outward, like a bow taught against its string. "Siu'or hyn."

I have no idea what he's saying, but it sounds amazing. I know enough elvish to get by, but he's gone well beyond my knowledge here. I want to know, though. Oh, so, so much do I want to know. I also desperately want to turn around and give him the same attentions he's giving me, and more. I'll look up the elvish when I wake up, if I can remember it... as if I could forget it. Gods, I've got it bad.

He has the tip of my ear in his mouth, and is doing gods know what to it, which is making my toes curl uncontrollably. I'm hyperventilating little gasping moans, and I don't give a good gods damn that I'm showing him exactly what he's doing to me. He damn well knows; no point in hiding it.

My hands have moved positions, curling around his arms and pulling them more tightly around me, not wanting this to end. I don't give a fuck right now. Let him know how much I want him. "Fen'harel veradha 'em, sathan. Sathan, sathan, sathan!"
Distantly, I realize I've said this out loud, and blush harder than my arousal had already driven me to. He hums a deep laugh that vibrates along my ear and sends a shiver through my whole body. He tightens his grip around me, pressing me to him hungrily and grinding his now obvious hardness against my ass. He releases my ear with a wet pop that makes me twitch, and leans into my ear, his voice molten honey.

"Are you certain that is what you want, da'fen?" His words pull a shudder up my spine, and I swallow around a dry throat, stilling. I try to find my center in the maddening euphoria his nearness and teasing creates in my everything, and very nearly fail. I take a deep breath, inhaling our combined scents, a headily intoxicating concoction that I'm certain is meant to drive all sane thought from my mind in every moment of every hour, for the rest of eternity. I try for words as I release the breath, only eliciting a whimper as he drags the tip of his nose from my earlobe, down the side of my throat, and back up.

Do I want this? Fuck yes. But not now. Not... now. I have to find the semblance of reason that will let me deny him in this moment. I have to find it now.

Another sharp breath, and I somehow manage to shake my head. "No. Not... now. At some point, yes. Absolutely yes, please, with everything I am. But now is not the time, much as I despise the very thought." I shiver unpleasantly with loss, as I feel his arms begin to slacken their grip. I turn when they're loose enough and cup his face with my hands. "Believe me, Fen'harel, I want to, nearly more than anything. But it wouldn't be right. Not now. Not when it's only lust, for you. Not when it's only... whatever this thing is that's affecting us, influencing your actions. It wouldn't be fair, to either of us."

I press a chaste kiss to his lips, trying to show him that I mean what I say, then break it, sliding my hands from his face and backing away.

He shakes his head. "No. I will have one last prize from you. I won't leave it like this."

He sweeps me into his arms, devouring my lips in a kiss that breaks every part of me, and very nearly shatters the resolve of my words, spoken only moments ago. His tongue divests me of further thought, as it begs entry into my mouth, and I open eagerly, letting him explore and taste me, as I return the favor with reckless abandon. His tongue drinking me up like a man finding a river after days in the desert. His hand slides down to my ass and pulls me to him, slipping his thigh between mine in his classic move, which results in a spectacular moan that he swallows eagerly, returning his own. The sound caresses my ears like the softest fur.

Fuck. Me. Please. No. Ugh, no, stop. Fuck. There's a script here, that we've utterly abandoned. It's been left in the dust by this... thing between us. Gods, I wish I knew what the hell it is. But it's definitely not love on his part, though he's kissing me like it is. It's way too soon for those kinds of feelings to be real on his end. This has to end, before I really do lose my resolve.

Fortunately, he makes the decision for me, slowly straightening and releasing me, his lips the last thing to linger in soft pecks against my own. When he backs away, I lean toward him for a moment, drunk on him and his gloriously adept attentions. I straighten belatedly before I fall on him, or my face, and look at him through my lashes. "Evil. Pure evil." I grin impishly. "More." I snap my teeth at him, then continue grinning at him crookedly, shaking my head with a resigned sigh. "Just... not now. You probably think I'm crazy for denying you, but trust me when I say I feel crazy. I just can't do this," I gesture between us, "yet. In time, maybe. We'll see."

Gods, how strange this role reversal feels. But the situation's changed. I'm pursuing him, yes, but
it's out of love, not lust. Well okay, yes, lust too. But love is more important. And it's not there for him yet. Now, it may never be. Damn it all. He probably just thinks of me like one of the pursuits of his youth, at this point. Well, aside from the anchor. And the whole last hope for Thedas thing. Balls.

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

On'dhea: good morning.
Banal'halam: the concept that even in death, nothing is gone, so long as there is someone alive to remember it.
Dirtha 'em, Fen'nas. Dirtha: Tell me, wolf soul. Speak.
Ar ju'tel'dirtha 'ma: I will not tell you.
Ar tela: I cannot.
Das ara vhen'an o'danal: to prevent my heart from breaking.
Sathan, mya'ima: please, after you.
Ma rodhe venirast: you taste divine.
Siu'or hyn: like the sweetest wine.
Veradha 'em: take me (lit., "plunder me").

❤--Discord--❤

❤ Thanks for reading! If you enjoy the story or this chapter in particular, please feel free to leave a review with your thoughts! ❤
    ❤ I love reading comments and reply to all of them. ❤
Well, this is awkward.

We're back in the rotunda; he's sitting in his chair, I'm perched back on his desk again, and neither of us has said a bloody word. Am I the only one who's feeling awkward here? It's entirely possible. I covertly glance in his direction, and his gaze is shifted off to the side, his face a mask of concentrated effort to appear at ease. His hands are folded, but his thumbs are picking at each other. Nope, not the only one feeling awkward.

Good to know.

Now what?

Fucking hell, it's not like this is the morning after we fucked or something! And isn't that a thought? Unf. Okay, brain, concentrate. Questions. You have them. Yes. Okay, good.

I push off the desk and stride over to the mural depicting the Twins. "I can guess at the meanings and stories behind the other frescoes, but this one eludes me. What's the story here?"

I turn back to him, and he pokes his head out from behind his chair's back, looking first at me, then up at the painting. "Ah." He stands and strolls over to my side, remaining a respectful distance from me. "It is merely a painting of the two amongst the Evanuris that I actually considered my brothers, for a time. Later, Falon'din became much too bloodthirsty. Dirthamen retreated to his keep, drowning himself in his secrets like a dragon with its hoard, refusing visits from anyone, save his twin. He very nearly did not attend the final gathering." He gestures to the scene of him locking them all away. "Falon'din had to physically drag him out, kicking and screaming."

I nod, understanding why Dirthamen would retreat like he did. His twin's turn to wanton massacre, in his lust for death, would be enough to drive anyone to seek the comfort of solitude. There were likely other factors too, but that alone could've done it easily. I move ahead, past him, to the painting of Mythal's murder. I point to the archer. "Who is the defaced archer? Andruil?"
He blinks sharply. "What path did you follow to that conclusion?"

I shrug. "It just seemed a likely fit, if any of the stories ring true at all. She was hunting slaves for sport by that point, was she not?"

His features darken slightly as he nods resignedly. "She was; long before that, in fact. It... was not just her, but she loosed the final shot, with one of the arrows June had crafted for her. It was indeed the use he had intended for his creation. When I confronted him, telling him it was his arrow that had struck the killing blow, he swore to never again craft a weapon of any kind, trying to appease me. But it was too late; I had already made my decision. His oath fell on deaf ears."

I want to reach out to him in comfort, and almost do, until I remember. Fucking... whatever this shit is, it's beyond frustrating. I huff a sigh and walk to the desk, lifting the pipe in my hands and bringing it back to him. "Can you-" I point to the bowl, letting my gesture finish the question.

He quirks an eyebrow at my request, but complies, cupping his hand over the bowl and providing the flame as I draw deeply from the pipe's mouth. I suck the smoke in and hold it, pointing at the pipe, then at him as I hand it to him. Now he really looks confused, beginning to shake his head. I level him with a firm glare, jabbing my finger at him insistently and placing the pipe firmly in his hand. He looks at me incredulously, then rolls his eyes with a sigh and points the pipe at me, instead.

I release my hit, which I've held so long that I can barely see a hint of smoke on the exhale, and take a breath, filling my lungs with fresh air as I shake my head. "No. You take a hit, So I can fucking touch you without this... thing bothering either of us. The herbs in that pipe keep... whatever our issue is away. For me, at least. Did it do that for you?"

His brow pinches in consideration, eyes looking off to the side while he thinks about it. After a moment, his gaze meets mine again, and he nods. "It did, actually. I had not considered it before. That is an... unusual side effect for this blend. It is meant to enhance magic, not dampen it."

I shrug my head, starting to get that boneless euphoria all over again. "Same thing happens when we go wolf. I think it's just a matter of altered states or something. It's only when we're both sober and..." I gesture to both of us ever so helpfully, "elf, elvhen, whatever, that we get this issue. I really want to know what's causing that. I mean, my theory's nice and all, but there's got to be more to it. S'not like you had a ton of emotions about me to begin with; other than 'she's got the anchor, she's got my mark, etcetera, etcetera'." I point at him again, noting he still hasn't done anything with the pipe but stand there, holding it out to me. "Smoke."

I see the muscles of his jaw twitch, just before he sighs and turns the pipe back around, pressing it to his lips... then looking at me expectantly, gesturing to the bowl.

I look at him like he's lost it, then proceed to tell him he has, with a snort. "Are you serious? I'm a... whatever a force mage is. I'm still not clear on that one. I don't know fire. Water is my element in my world. That's the exact opposite of fire, in case you didn't know."

He levels a glare at me, pulling the pipe from his lips to speak. "You are as capable of fire as any mage is. Not to mention that this is the Fade, and you are a dreamer. Simply think of fire, and it will exist." Without any further instruction, he presses the pipe to his lips once more, and points to the bowl with a demanding expression.

I scoff and roll my eyes. Right. Okay. Fine. I can to this. Fire. For the first time. Stoned off my ass. Fantastic.
I look at him and shake my head. I hold my hand out, palm up, because no way in hell am I going to try this on that delicate piece of art in his hands yet; I'll blow it to bits. Granted, this is the Fade, he could just make a new one. But still, it's the principal of the thing that has me practicing first. Fire... right. I sigh and shake myself, trying to concentrate. I imagine a small ball of fire in my hand, pushing a tiny wisp of mana into the thought.

I'll be damned- I saw a flicker of something fire-like, for a second there. It went out almost too quickly to catch it, but it was there. Maybe... oh. It probably needs a steady stream of mana to actually sustain itself. Okay, let's do this!

I narrow my eyes at my outstretched palm, pooling a larger bit of mana and slowly letting it seep out of my palm, while imprinting the visual of flame on my effort. There! Oh, wait- that's... veilfire. Huh?

The tiny, weak flame dances slowly on my palm, flaring its blue light faintly against my skin. I look up at Fen'harel with a quizzical brow arched. "Why is it veilfire? That's not what I was trying to do."

He lowers the pipe and gives me a patient, knowing look. "How did you summon it? Did you imagine the image, or feeling of the flame?"


He nods in understanding. "That is because the magic you are used to wielding is the very essence of magic, in its raw form. It requires little more than vague inclination to bend it to your will. Elemental magic is far more specific: you must feel the spirit of what you are trying to summon, in order for it to manifest."

"Ah." I look back down to my palm and remember how I felt, staring into a roaring fire. The wild, deadly, searingly powerful emotion it created within me, that welled up and warmed my soul with its flickering tongues of light. I project that feeling into the mana flowing through my palm, and watch as the cool blue flames surge into a dangerously delightful orange. I grin up at Solas, proud of my accomplishment.

He nods his approval. "Excellent. Now put it to use in a practical application." He lifts the pipe to his lips once more, gaze flitting down the the bowl and back up to me in quick succession, his instructions clear.

I look down to my hand and thread the mana down along my finger, letting it gather on my forefinger's tip, as the flame follows its path, eagerly lapping up the fuel of my mana. I move my fingertip to hover just over the bowl of the pipe, waiting as he draws the flame into the herbs, sucking it down sharply and turning center of the natural herbal motif into a glowing orange ember. He nods encouragingly as he fills his cheeks with the smoke and pulls away, letting a single ring escape, before breathing it back in, along with the thick cloud lingering in his mouth. He hands the pipe back to me, waving toward the desk.

I nod and stroll leisurely over to the desk, taking another hit with my little flame, then setting the piece on the surface with care. I dismiss my mana and the fire with it, then head back to where Solas is standing with his eyes closed, letting the smoke drift from his nostrils bit by bit. By the time he's fully released the breath and drawn a new one, I'm standing in front of him again, smiling at him fondly. When he opens his eyes and sees my expression, he gives me a mildly confused look, which quickly smooths out into his own smile.

I gently take his hand, patting it with a smile, before I lead him back to his chair. After he's seated,
I unceremoniously scoot his legs to the side a bit. Then I sit sideways in the space I've created; curling myself into his chest, my knees tucked to my own chest, feet on the other side of his legs. I settle in and nuzzle into his shirt with a purring sigh.

"Fen'nas, what... are you doing?" he asks me, his incredulity crystalline in his voice.

I chuckle, lifting my head and nuzzling into his neck. "Snuggling."

Silence is his only response, for some time. I notice his right hand clinging precariously to the arm rest, and reach out to it, taking it in my own. I slowly, gently work my fingers into the muscles of his long hand, trying to help him relax. Massage was something I learned early, being born to a mother who was constantly tense and needing deep tissue work. I never minded, really. I enjoyed helping her relax for once, and it taught me a very useful skill, which I've employed many times in my life.

I work my way outward; from his wrist, to his palm, knuckles, fingers and tips. Then I start the process all over again, pressing more heavily as I go for the first few rotations, working every finger all the way to the tip, from thumb to pinkie. Once I'm sure all the knots are smoothed out, I start lessening the pressure on each trip. Finally, my touch is near feather-light, a simple trailing and tracing of random patterns along the planes of his skin.

I raise my gaze from my task to look at him, and his eyes are closed, all possible objections he may have had soothed away, just as I'd hoped they would be. I wonder if anyone's ever done this for him before.

Most likely. He's lived long enough to experience every form of physical, mental, spiritual or magical pleasure, and then some. Probably a thousand times over. A million, even. I haven't got a fucking chance. I could show him every single skill I've developed over my comparatively minuscule years, and no matter how good I might be at it, it wouldn't compare to what he already knows.

How can I live up to that impossible standard? Ar tela: I cannot.

What, then, can I do? What should I do? Give up this impossible pursuit? Ha! Not a bloody chance.

Ah, hell.

"You seem deep in thought, Fen'nas." Shit, I was hoping he was asleep. Or at least not paying that close attention to me. "Is there a particular conundrum I can assist you in solving?"

I glance at him with a small smile, shaking my head and looking back down to his hand, resuming the light stroking motions I'd abandoned in my pondering. "No. My worries are my own. You can't really say anything to help them go away. Not these, at least."

I devote the attention of both my thumbs to my work, gently holding the back of his hand in my cupped fingers, trying to distract us both.

"May I ask what your worries might be? Or are they private?"

Shit.

At least he left me an out, even if it's sort of a lie.

"It's... private, yes. Just my distracted musings, don't let it bother you. Come on, let me turn around and get your other hand." I pat his knee and swing my legs out of the seat, preparing to stand, when
he snakes his fingers over the sides of my hips and pulls me straight back into his lap, crooking his chin over my shoulder and laying his left hand in my lap. I peer at him in amused surprise, only to see him looking back at me with an expression that says, 'What?' as if this is a perfectly normal activity for us.

I snort and shake my head, delving into my task with a light-hearted sigh. Pampered, spoiled wolf.

As if I'm not the one enabling him, every step of the way.

What, little ole' me, enabling the Dread Wolf to be a wonderfully relaxed puddle of contentedness? Never!

*Snort.*

I feel his inhale and slow exhale as I work on his hand, and smile when I feel him leaning more and more heavily on my back. I glance at him, careful not to move my head, and discover his eyes have closed yet again. Either he's not had this done very often, or he really enjoys this sort of attention. I start to feel a bit better at the thought. Even if he has experienced more than I can possibly give him, the fact that he can savor this small attention from me is reassuring. It sparks a dangerous thing to flaring within my heart: hope.

I feel I should explain something to you, my dear reader. I am under no delusions, here. I know it is most likely, that even were I to somehow finagle an actual relationship - dare I say, romance? - with this elvhen, that he's still going to leave me behind, in favor of his damned duty. I'm fully aware that his duty comes first in his mind, and why. I approve, even. If I held the knowledge and resources with which to save our own world, I would do so in a heartbeat, no matter what sacrifices had to be made- no matter where my heart lay.

But is it so wrong to hope that he might let me help him, anyway?

I know full well that hope is a dangerous and wondrous thing, and can lead to just as much heartbreak and tragedy, as it can bestow cherished wonder and beauty. But I refuse to give it up. If I give up hope, I am nothing, a wisp of a thought in the breeze, a dandelion seed floating along without direction.

My knowing his identity is only the first step. I must prove myself an ally that will actually benefit his cause, if I am to have any chance of fulfilling my desires. To wit, I will not give up until he has taught me absolutely everything he can; about magic, history, what was lost, what can be gained. It is indeed a boon that I am rather skilled at absorbing vast amounts of information, on whatever fascinates me, is it not? Autism may just pay off here. Whaddya know?

By the time I'm swirling patterns into his palm and letting them flare out to his fingertips, he is nearly collapsed on my back in lax repose. I beam at my accomplishment, and bring his other hand into my lap, devoting one of my hands to each of his, mirroring the motions of my fingers on his skin evenly. Minutes stretch on, unnoticed, the ministrations of my fingers and the rhythm of his breathing creating a trance all its own. I close my eyes, letting the sensation lull me into a semi-meditative state; still keeping myself grounded, but allowing my mind to explore.

I stand in the grand medieval hall of my mind's eye, the stone fire pits lining the center of the long room lending a warm, brazen light to the cobbled floor and fading to darkness in the arcing, vaulted ceiling above me. I trail along the right side of the space, the many doors embedded in the wall piquing my interest one by one as I pass. Each one is unique in some way, and represents a memory. Some are tiny, barely enough to squeeze through; others are so tall they have to curve at the top, to conform to the gentle slope of the ceiling.
These memories are all different; some full and vivid, clearly recalled, others vague and washed out, barely a figment. They are both mine and not; the remembrances of lives I can only find here, in the depths of my being. It took years to find even the ones I've recovered, and though they are many, I know it is not a complete accounting. There are large chunks of lives that I only have glimpses of here, which are missing. I have not been able to recover them as yet, despite my best attempts. I may never be able to.

The first time I found this place, I thought it the result of an overactive imagination. There were few doors back then, barely enough to form a thread to what was. The very first memory I saw is still the strongest of all.

It was of a great black she-wolf, with sea-colored eyes, running through a darkened forest. I have never felt so free as when I was her, in those first few moments.

This part is no fiction, dear reader. You may scoff and call it nonsense, or call me crazy, if you like. I will be the last one to try and stop you. I believed it to be impossible too, at first. Skeptics of past lives abound, and I was firmly counted amongst their numbers, for many years.

Be a skeptic, please. Scrutinize everything you see, I implore you. It will help you find your truth more than anything else could. I cannot tell you what is true for you. I only know what is true for me.

This is the root of my fascination with fantasy becoming reality. It started here, and grew, until it became a glorious, ancient tree; growing from the seed buried deep in my soul. If I am wrong for this; for wishing something more could exist, for believing it does... then I never want to be right. This is what allowed me the room to grow into the writer I am today. This is what made me reach for more than what I knew to be real.

But, enough of my ramblings, real or not. Back to the story, yes?

I trace my hand along the wall, my fingertips grazing over rough wood, stone, metal. Some doors have chains over them, never to be opened again. Some stand ajar, welcoming all comers. Some, I have not figured out how to open. Perhaps I am not meant to. Curiosity demanded that I try, once upon a time. Now, I am mostly content to let them be, to wait and see if they one day decide I am worthy.

But these are not my destination in this moment. No, now I am ambling toward a very familiar door, well worn wood stained green, the tarnished ring that serves as a door pull meeting my fingers with warm welcome. I smile and press the door open, letting it swing free on its hinges, and step onto the green clearing in the forest's center. It is night, as it always is when I first come here; the full moon hanging far up on the fabric of the black sky above me. It is a cool and comfortably humid night, not too dry, not too sticky.

As always, I feel her before I see her, and I turn to look across the clearing, catching the iridescent glint of her eyes in the moon's light before anything else. I smile and hold my hand out in greeting. She pads over to me, sniffing at my hand and nuzzling under it in her own salutation. I chuckle and sink softly to my knees, cupping her massive furred head in my hands and pressing my brow to hers, our eyes meeting one instant, closing the next.

Now, I am her, just as she is me. I open my eyes, which now pierce through the darkness almost as if it doesn't exist, and I turn to the depths of the woods, taking off toward it with an exultant thrill stoking the flames of my soul.

When all else feels wrong, when the world is full of madness and strife, when I have nowhere else
to turn; this is my solace. To run free, without restrictions, in a world where humans are rarely encountered, in a time where remote villages and tiny hovels are the height of civilization. This is my freedom, my release. There can be no greater peace, in my mind.

I run, unfettered by thought or care, along the forest floor, dashing between tree trunks and under low-hanging branches alike in my glee. I pause to drink from a babbling brook I encounter, lapping the cool water up, more refreshing than any drink I have had in this life. I glimpse a glimmer of moonlight in the water's skin, and look up to see it full and bright; laden with a wash of rejuvenating light that beams its welcome at me fondly. An unbearably joyful rush of pleasure floods my veins, and I tip my head back to howl, unashamed and true; singing my love to my mistress.

A sound that doesn't belong pierces the scene with deadly accuracy, shattering it like the shards of a broken el'u'vi'an.

"Fen'nas, what is this?"

I gasp and startle, bolting upright and searching frantically with every sense to gain my bearings. The forest is still here, but I'm sitting, and I feel something alive beneath and behind me, breathing and warm. I look down to see a pair of hands beside my own, and slowly realize I am no longer in my mind anymore. I'd let myself dive too far, and come back up too quickly.

"I... sorry." I start to remember where I am, to understand what's going on. "Right. Apologies, I was meditating... perhaps a little too deeply. My fault, I shouldn't have let myself get so distracted."

I take a breath, trying to clear my mind and dismiss my memory from the Fade, but he clasps my hand, stopping me.

"Wait. Tell me what this is, before you dismiss it. I heard a wolf just as I woke you; was that you?"

I hesitate, unsure how much I want to tell him. I tilt my head slowly, considering my words and righting my head as I speak them, "In a way, yes. She is what I was trying to become, when I took my lupine form here. She is likely what I will try to copy, when I do it again."

"May I see her?" he asks, voice both curious and gentle.

I squirm a bit at first, but realize he will see her at some point anyway. Conjuring an image of her is far more practical than trying to become her again right now, so I summon her with every ounce of feeling that I ascribe to her existence in my mind, then send her out into the space just ahead of us with a rush of mana. She appears, just as she does every time she meets me in the memory, and carefully picks her way over the forest floor, heading toward us. I reach out to her, and thread my fingers through her thick fur as her head meets my hand, caressing her lovingly.

"She is beautiful," he murmurs, eyes trained on her, "What is her name?"

I chuff a laugh. "Fen'nas."

He tilts his head away to look at me easier, his expression confused. "But that is your name. Did you name yourself after her?"

I turn to him with a vulnerable, hesitant smile, locking my gaze with his as I shake my head. "No. She... is ara'nas. She is my soul. She is why I gave myself the name." I look back at her with love in my eyes, a soft smile on my lips. "She is my freedom, my solace, my peace. She is everything true within me that exists, and some things that there are no names for. She is what I once was."
"How do you mean, 'once was'? Do you no longer embody those aspects?" he queries, as he lifts his hand to let my wolf sniff it, curling his fingers under her chin when she accepts him without question.

I smile sadly at him. "Banal'halam, Solas. I remember her- I remember being her. In doing so, she is never lost. She is a part of me, just as I am a part of her. We will never be apart, so long as I remember her."

"How do you remember being her? Are you able to change shape in your reality?" He moves his hand to just behind her ear, scratching gently. I can almost feel it, the shadow of another part of this memory clawing at my senses.

I give a remorseful chuckle, shaking my head. "No; sadly, we cannot. The truth is, I believe I was her in a past life. We do not have immortality, we never have. But some of us remember more than we should. Not many are open enough to see and remember, but a few of us are. This is not the only memory I have, but it is the earliest." I nod at her. "She is from a time when humans easily could have lived at peace with the earth, if they had thought to preserve it."

He cups his hand over her snout and runs it back over her head, smoothing her fur back. "How long ago do you believe she existed?"

I level a curious look at him. "You believe me?"

He shrugs gently, retreating his hand from her and settling it back in my lap. "I have few reasons not to. I know little of your world, beyond what you have told me. I do not see your memory of a past life - no matter the form - as being any different from experiencing a memory in the Fade, here in Thedas. Would that not seem just as strange, in your world?"

I snort a surprised laugh, nodding in agreement. "True enough." I wave her forward, and she sets her paws on my knees, sitting on her haunches, looking at me. "I don't know how long ago it was, exactly, but it was before any of our own ancient civilizations were established. Well, as anything but small tribes in the middle of nowhere, at least. The world was largely unexplored at that point, and the largest sign of civilization that could be found was small villages, comprised of mud or stone huts with thatched roofs. Most people settled near waterways, for access to fishing and irrigation."

I pause, cupping her jaw in my hands and running my thumbs over her cheeks lovingly. "It was a simpler time. Different gods were worshiped, though many preferred to revere nature, rather than some nebulous deity. Magic was still believed to be real, back then. It was many years before it became something reviled, something people were killed for practicing."

"Killed?" his voice interrupts me, shock and horror carrying the word to my ears, on a river of sickened repulsion.

I nod solemnly. "Yes. That was quite a few centuries later, but there were many executed during that time, both innocent and guilty, because magic was considered heretical to the religion that was accepted by most at that point. Anyone that was even accused of it could be killed, under the very slightest suspicion. It... was a very dark period. It lead to the few who practice today being considered very odd, or even evil by many, in several mainstream cultures."

I look back at him, catching his stunned features barely masking the sadness in his eyes. "Almost makes the circles seem merciful in comparison, doesn't it? Not quite, but almost. At least the circles usually let the mages live, once they pass their harrowing."
He scoffs bitterly. "Yes, but those found outside of circles are just as ridiculed, just as hunted. I suspect we shall see many examples of the circle's 'mercy', in the coming months. I wonder how palatable you will find their gentle ministrations, once you have seen what lengths they are willing to go to in their pursuit of caging those with magical talent? Have you felt the agony of a Templar's smite? I can assure you, it is not an experience worth repetition."

I lift a hand from her cheek to halt him. "Solas, you mistake my meaning. Ir abelas, I did not mean to insinuate that the Chantry's supposed 'solution' to magic is in any way the correct path to tread. I know it's not. I am vehemently anti-Chantry, and always have been. Well, I'm against its policies, at least. Its religion is... up for debate. But, regardless of its arguable piety, it is a corrupt organization that has wormed its way into the heart of Thedas like a plague, infecting nearly everything it touches. We have a similar organization in my world, but it doesn't hold the power it once did, fortunately. Where Thedas had exalted marches, we had the crusades. Similar function, similar result. It was no better than the Qun."

I turn to her and lay my hand back on her cheek as I continue, "Believe me, I have no love for the Chantry, circles, or Templars. There's a reason we're going to recruit the mages, instead of the Templars. Their imprisonment must end- as should all of Thedas's imprisonment, from the shackles of the veil."

I feel his posture stiffen, though only his closeness allows me to hear the sharply drawn breath that accompanies his newfound tension. "Then you are aware of my plan?"

I dip my head in admission. "I am. I also have some idea of what was lost, when the veil was created. Wonders created and sustained by magic, obliterated in the severing of it. Immortality fading. Magic itself living less than a half life. I understand, well as I can, for not having witnessed it happen. I want to help you restore what was. I want to help you bring down the veil, and free us from our tranquility."

His muscles relax minutely, and I feel the rush of air from his sigh pouring across the side of my neck. "Ma tela, da'fen. It is impossible. Where I must go, you cannot follow."

I twist to look at him, a frown creased into my brow. "Why? You seek to enter the Fade and take down the veil, do you not? I know you have plans for dealing with the other Evanuris. I can physically enter the Fade, and bring others with me. I could be your key, Solas. I would be willing to do that for you, once I retrieve your foci. So please, enlighten me: what is preventing me from following you, exactly?"

He shakes his head. "It is not merely the Fade I must enter. Were that the case, I would take you up on your offer, gladly."

I lift an eyebrow curiously. "The Black City?"

He hesitates only a moment, before dipping his head in assent. "Just so. Even as a dreamer, you would not be able to enter there: you are not strong enough to breach the wards on your own. The few who have tried, were corrupted by the darkness of the sacrifices they committed to gain entry. You've witnessed the result, first hand."

"True enough. What about after the veil is down? Will I be able to help you then?"

"You would wish to help me, when the world you know is in utter chaos? Would your talents not be better served by helping those around you?"

I quirk a skeptical eyebrow. "Isn't that what you'd be doing? If I help you, I am helping the people
of Thedas. Helping them recover, helping them understand, rebuild, adjust. I imagine many changes will have to be accounted for, and the people of Thedas will need guidance, if any of them are to survive. Who better to guide them, than those who understand what has happened the most?"

He eyes me quizzically. "You seem remarkably interested in assisting me in performing a deed that could destroy this world, to make way for a new one. Why?"

I shrug. "I care about this world as much as my own, but it needs drastic reform. And you don't know for certain that it will be destroyed, or you would have said it outright. Since that is the case, there is a chance for some to recover, to be reeducated, to adapt. The Inquisition will be long disbanded by then, so my duty to it will have ended. Exactly what else should I spend my time on, but this, at that point? Besides, it would be nice if you could find a way to take your mark from me, after that. I certainly won't need it, with the veil being down."

"...Ir abelas, Fen'nas, but that is likely impossible. The Dread Wolf I may be, but I am diminished from my slumber, and even were I not, it is entirely possible I could not help you. The mark was meant for myself alone; its very design was derived from my power. Your theft of it may have been accidental, but it was the most unfortunate accident that could have befallen you. I tried to remove it when I first sat by your side, before you woke," he pauses, sighing deeply and shaking his head, taking my left hand in both of his.

"It is embedded in your flesh, entwining itself with your soul in such a way that I have no hope of separating the two as I am, and perhaps not even as I once was. The longer it remains with you, the more it will become a part of you. But, like all things worth having, it will inevitably only bring you pain. I am sorry. I would have spared you this, had I known."

Well, hell. That's rather grim. "So what, it's just going to decide to blow up one day and kill me?"

He dips his head slightly. "In a way, yes. It will seek out its rightful owner. If it must destroy its thief to return to its source... well, it will try. I can keep its more volatile nature at bay for a time, but there will come a point where even I will not be able to tame it, if I have not succeeded in removing it by then."

I snort at the irony. Of course the anchor would have some kind of shitty consequence, and naturally I would be the one wielding it. I've always had the worst luck of anyone I've ever met. And no, that's not me throwing a pity party. It's just fact.

Pretty sure I'm making up for one of my past lives' karma.

"Well, know any healers capable of growing limbs back, or a really good prosthetic crafter?"

He quirks an eyebrow at me. "You are comfortable with that fate?"

I shrug slightly. "It's no worse than some of the things I've had to deal with in my... well, in the other world. I learn to adapt, and I move on. It's not easy, but it's something I've got a lot of practice with. Not that it won't be a big change, I'm not saying that; but it won't be the first time a part of my body decided to take a break, or ceased to function all together. I'll survive, as I always do, or it'll be the thing that finally kills me."

"You are quite grim and fatalistic, for one so young," he observes.

I smirk at him. "I would've thought you'd approve. You're pretty grim and fatalistic yourself."

He nods his acquiescence. "True, but I have many reasons to be so."
I chuckle lightly. "And I don't? You just told me I'm either going to lose my hand, or my life, to your damn mark. I'd say that's more than cause for a bit of morbid sarcasm."

"You have a point. It will be several years before it becomes a problem, however. In the meantime, I will search for ways to remove the mark safely. I know of none currently, but I will look." He hesitates for a moment, gently stroking his fingers over the anchor as he pulls his thoughts together. "I am... uncertain what to think of your offer to assist me. Having an ally who knows my goals and actually applauds them is... not something I am used to. I will consider it; that is all I can say for now."

I dip my head in acceptance. "Ma nuvenin. I will await your thoughts on the matter. Just don't wait until it's too late."

He gives me the tiniest of smiles. "I will try not to keep you waiting, da'fen."

Suddenly, the scene dissolves, and I wake in my bed. Groaning, I roll out of bed, dress, and wake my PC up. I blink tightly at the painfully bright screen, but my roving mouse pointer stills over the date, displayed in bold white letters on the splash screen.

It's been two days since I went to sleep.

What the fuck?!

Chapter End Notes

Sorry it took me a while longer to get this one out folks. I hit a snag toward the end (it was Trespasser-induced) that just would not getfo. But I shot it, and it went away. Hopefully I'll be able to keep up with this better now. Kick my ass into gear if it's been a while, will ya? Oh, and by a while, I mean a week or so, not five hours. :P <3

Also, if you want to discuss the reincarnation thing, feel free. But don't just race to the comments for a flame/bash fest, please. That's not what the comments are for, thanks. (˘ ˂̢˘ )

♥--Discord--♥

♥ Thanks for reading! If you enjoy the story or this chapter in particular, please feel free to leave a review with your thoughts! ♥

♥ I love reading comments and reply to all of them. ♥
"Morning sleepyhead. I was wondering when you'd wake up."

I snort, mind still in shock. "Yeah... tell me about it. Don't know what that was about."

My dad smiles slightly in sympathy. "Well, you're awake now."

"Yeah, I guess." I shake my head, turning off toward the kitchen in search of breakfast. Two fucking days. I haven't slept for that long since the -second- time I almost died. Which, coincidentally, was the same day my dad got into his motorcycle wreck, all those years ago. It was a shitty day, overall.

I whip together some nameless meal from the random food stuffs available, and take it back to my room with me, plopping it onto my desk and sliding my ass into my chair. Ah, eggs and cheese on toast. That's what I made. Got it.

I sigh and dig in without further ado. Long sleep oddity aside, it seems to be just like every other day. I check my email—holy shit that's a lot of fic updates. Apparently I really was out for two days. Damn.

My gaze flicks up from the eggy-cheesy-toasty concoction I'm stuffing in my face, to the pinned tab of the elven language lexicon, which I immediately click. I want to know what he said when he... heh. Gods, if this isn't a dream... phew! Yeah, okay, actual translation please.

"Ma... you... rodhe. Rodhe, rodhe, rodhe." I scroll down the list, then decide it's not fast enough and use the search instead. "Taste. Oh. Oh my. Okay. What am I tasting like?" I type in venirast and nearly choke on the last bite of my breakfast.

"Divine?! Holy fuck!" My eyes are probably the size of saucers, and my throat is suddenly undeniably dry. What was the second part to what he said? There was a second part, right? Holy shit, there was a second part to that. My heart's already about to give out on the first part!

What the fuck was it, though? Seeyouor heen. That... can't be the actual spelling. I sigh and start scrolling, giving up on the search, since there's no way in hell I'm spelling that properly. Slowly, I piece together what was said, finding the process much like when I create new translations for phrases in my stories.

"Siu... sweetest. Okay, what's or?" I end up finding out it's a suffix that means 'like,' or 'with the nature of'. "Okay, like sweetest. Or sweet-like... or something. Makes sense, I think. And the last... heen or whatever?" That one takes a bit of searching, but I finally arrive at the word which most closely fits it. "Siu'or hyn: like the sweetest wine." I slump back in my chair, absorbing everything he'd said in those two sentences. "'You taste divine, like the sweetest wine.' Holy balls. I turned him down after he said that?"

I replay the memory with the translation, supplanting the elven words with english, in the tone he'd used... and proceed to nearly squirm my way out of my chair and fall down to the floor. It's at this point I realize that it's likely a very good thing that I didn't understand his words at the time, because there's no way in fucking hell I would've been able to refuse him, had I known what he was actually saying.
That... wait.

Wait just a fucking minute.

How in the sh*t did I not know what he said? If this was a dream, I would've known exactly what he said, no need to look it up.

Oh.

Oh, *Fuck*.

It's...

It's real.

No...

No, no, *no*.

I can't... wait-

No!

*Thinking* it could be some nebulous alternate reality, and it actually *being* an alternate reality... those are two *very* different things. Two very different things that cannot *possibly* apply to this situation.

Right?

*Fuck me*.

It's *real*. Fucking... really real. It's not just my wishful thinking, or creative dreaming.

Punching a gaping hole through the moment, the annoyance my palm has become over the past week suddenly roars into sharp focus. What was once furious itching, now turns into the familiar, acid-coated, slicing torment I remember from before the Breach. I grit my teeth around seething breaths as I try to refrain from screaming and alerting my dad in the next room. I grip my wrist and stare down in shocked disbelief at the rune now etching itself in agonizingly perfect relief into my palm, glowing softly in the darkness of my room and sputtering with barely contained power.

NO! NOT FUCKING POSSIBLE!

We're not doing this. NO, I refuse. I just found out this fucking mark is going to *kill* me - or take my hand - in the other world; I am not going through that here too! This is fucking... NO! This shouldn't be possible!

I freeze in place, gaping at what is now clearly the stable anchor, branded into my flesh. The grip of my right hand around my left wrist is tight enough to cut off blood flow; almost as if it thinks it can deny the existence of the mark, if it kills the hand with a lack of blood. Better to cut it off now, right?

No, hold on. Stop. That... this... I can't!

*FUCK*!

I have to talk to Solas about this. Now. Yesterday. Holy sh*t. How do I... there's got to be a way to
talk to him. He's contacted me while awake before, how do I do it in reverse? Can I?

"Solas?" I try hesitantly, closing my eyes and wishing with all my strength that it works. The anchor hisses at me in agitation, and I barely keep down the whimpering scream that tries to eek its way out of my throat.

"'Ma halani, Solas, sathan," I try again, failing to keep my voice even this time and choking on the last syllable in distress. I can handle a lot on my own. This is not included in that 'lot'.

"Fen'nas?" I hear his voice, and it's the most blissfully welcome sound I've ever heard. I take a shaking breath that feels like the first in a century of suffocation, and open my eyes to the sight of the rotunda in the Fade. I'm still seated on him, and he's looking at me over my shoulder quizzically.

I realize that either no time has passed here, or he just let me sleep on his lap. Sweeping the thought away, I turn to face him as I frantically arrive at the point. "Solas, I was just in my world, and the mark appeared on my hand. I'm still awake there. I'm not trying to wake from here right now, but I just realized this... it's all real, Solas. All of it. It's real, and I have the mark in both realities, and I'm scared. I don't know what to do!"

I watch the surprise flit its way across his face, his eyes darkening with clouded worry. "You have the mark in your world as well? How is that possible? Even if both realities exist equally, you do not share a body between the two worlds. The magic cannot be split between two hosts; it is impossible."

I shake my head sharply. "I have no idea how it happened. My palm's been agitated ever since I started dreaming... or... I guess, coming here. But I just saw it fully manifest- magic, rune and all, on my palm, in my reality. The impossible has happened, and it was as painful as this one was." I lift my anchored hand and huff as I let it fall back to my lap. "Now what do we do about it? What can we do?"

He blinks at me, and I can almost see the thoughts buzzing through his head, the gears cranking away and spitting out oil and smoke in over-exertion. He levels me with a serious expression, enslaving my gaze with the abyssal blue of his eyes. "You are awake now in your world, yes?" At my quick confirmation, he continues, "I am going to attempt something; a test, to hopefully determine what we are really working with. Relax as best you can."

I nod and take a deep breath, letting it out slowly. "Alright."

He takes my marked hand in both of his, then presses it palm-first to my chest, covering it with his hands and holding it there firmly. Then, a magic I don't recognize immediately begins to filter through my consciousness, originating from our connected hands. I gasp, as I begin to feel the connection of my soul from the reality of Earth press through the fabric of this reality. The anchor flares and burns against my chest and his hands, but he presses on, spreading his mana along the line of the connection, testing the strength and flavor of it thoroughly.

The magic of the mark is searing us both with agonizing intensity by the time he finally stops, and he sucks in several breaths, as if he's just surfaced from the floor of a deep ocean. He returns my hand to my lap and - to my utter astonishment - weaves his fingers tightly with mine.

"You surprise me at every turn, Fen'nas. Already, you have performed feats deemed impossible by today's standards; yet you continue to do so, over and over, oblivious to the fact that your mere existence is an impossibility."
I frown, craning my head to the side to look at him. "What do you mean? I'm not the impossible thing, the mark being on two versions of me, there being two realities that connect like this... those are the impossible things. I'm just... me."

He has the nerve to actually smirk at me. "That is likely what makes it possible, to begin with. The mark has accepted you as a host- and not only you, but your soul. I had wondered why it was so resistant to my efforts to remove it, why it had somehow prevented the Templars' smites, even in your sleep. It has become more than it was ever meant to be."

I level my most frightened, confused mien at him. "Solas, please, just tell me what's going on. So far, you've given me a lot of nebulous information, and that's it. Clarification would be infinitely helpful."

He smiles softly in wondrous sympathy. "I mean to say, Fen'nas, that I was wrong. The mark will not destroy you. It cannot do so, unless it wishes to destroy itself. You and the mark have become one."

My heart stops.

What?!

After what feels like eternity, my heart restarts.

I stare ahead at the floor in utter shock, while he continues to expound upon this new revelation, utterly heedless of my shock.

"It is very likely the actual cause of the rift between our realities. Such powerful magics would be the only means to breach that barrier. I tasted the strength of the veil between our worlds clearly; I could sense no other weakness. Something pierced it cleanly, with precision and purpose. Through it, a thread connects you to the other reality, if barely. It is doubtful you would be able to traverse the breakage physically, even with the mark. But I believe it was the needle that made the hole to begin with."

I'm too stunned to speak. It's all fucking real, and I'm... No. I have to find my voice, and find it now.

I stand, starting to feel the effects of the herbal smoke wear off from my body here. It's the slap to my senses that I need to make my mouth start working again. I have distance and sense now. Good. With that in hand, I turn to him and begin, "Solas, if this is true, you're saying that what's allowing for the anomaly is quite literally you. It's your magic. Everything that's happened, it's all been you, every bit of it. Even the spell that our mana casts on each other here, is due to what you've done. It should all be impossible, yet here I am."

He tilts his head, and I can tell he's turning the notion over in his mind, dissecting and digesting it, savoring every flavor down to the last molecule. "That... is not inaccurate, Fen'nas; though it was certainly not intentional. I am uncertain how to counteract our reaction to each other's mana, or what effect it could have on your connection to this world, if I were to attempt-"

I sigh and shake my head, holding my hand up to interrupt him. "You say the mark won't kill me, that it's a part of my soul now- does that mean... that as long as it exists, I exist?"

I hear the click of his teeth as his mouth shuts. He straightens his head and folds his hands before him, pondering my question. His gaze lowers, searching the floor for answers, which he seems to find, just before he looks back up at me. "It is impossible to say for certain, but it would seem so,
yes. The magic was made to never degrade, or be destroyed. It was not, however, meant to merge
with a soul. Why it was able to deviate from its intended path, is something that will take a great
deal of study to discover. I believe stabilizing it fully is what caused it to manifest on both sides. If
you have the mark in both worlds... it might be possible that your magic would exist in both
worlds, as well. It would explain much, if that were to be the case."

I frown at him. "Explain what, exactly?"

"Why your aura is so much stronger when you are awake in your world. Why it was able to
stabilize simultaneously in both worlds, with such relative ease."

I snort incredulously. "'Ease'?! You call that easy?"

He nods, relaxed as you please. "Comparatively speaking, yes; quite easy."

I huff a disbelieving laugh and look up to what will one day be the rookery above us, collecting
my sense in little snippets, from the dust motes filtering through the light of an open window. His
silence speaks volumes to his understanding of how I'm feeling. Right now, I can't handle a single
inch of input from any source but my own mind, and even that's questionable.

Casting my gaze back down at him, I see he is waiting patiently for me to speak.

What am I supposed to say?

What does one say in this situation?

Well, I don't know.

What I do know, is all I want to do is run.

So I do.

I pull my mana around me, pressing it into my physical shape, changing it to my wolf as hurriedly
as I can, and bolt from the room. He might've caught me quickly before, when I was on two feet,
but my wolf is faster. I bound down the stairs and out of the courtyard within ten seconds, slipping
through into the raw Fade surrounding it with reckless abandon. If he's following me now, I don't
even care. I need to run. I need to sort this shit out. I need... fuck.

No, not to fuck, I'm just cursing. Though that might help, actually. No, just... shut up.

I need to absorb this slowly, piecemeal. I can do the all at once dance about as well as anyone, but
if this is going to actually make some semblance of sense anytime this year, I need to break it
down. For now, I'm focusing on getting as far away from him as possible. I need space. I might
love him - too much for my own damn good - but right now I don't want love, or comfort, or
anything but silence.

I sprint until I can't any longer, slowly coming to a stop beside a large boulder, slicked with the
moisture that coats everything in the Fade. I wonder, as I catch my breath, if that's just a Fade
thing, or if the whole world will be like that. Once the veil is down, that is. Wet and slippery and
spirit-y. Or something.

Not that it really matters. I've already promised him my help to create that world, in whatever
capacity he's able to accept it.

Did I make the wrong choice?
If I'm... one with the anchor, what kind of effect will that choice have on me? Am I just his puppet now? Am I merely a fen'falon destined to guard the Dread Wolf, like the lupine companions of the Emerald Knights? Am I his agent? What am I, now?

Before today, I could've had a definitive answer to that question. I was Fen'nas: elf, Inquisitor, ally of Fen'harel, and bearer of his key into the realm he created.

Now? I don't know.

I come to a precipice that looks over a great valley, and sit on the edge, looking out over the fogged land stretched out below me.

Who am I?

Am I the shifting mist in the valley? Am I the land beneath it? Am I the air, thick with moisture, cloying and heavy? Am I the light that glimmers off the moisture, or the shadow it creates?

Where do I belong? He says there is a thread that binds me to both worlds, through the barrier between them. How long can that continue? Is it indefinite, or will there come a day when I must choose between the worlds? Should I choose? Presumably a lack of choice would end in some dire consequence, or my death. Perhaps that would be the kinder option.

I don't think I can choose between the two worlds. I don't... really belong in either. I've always been considered weird, an oddity on Earth. In Thedas? I'd be a heretic, an apostate; every bit as outcast and rejected, if not more. I'm not the Inquisitor Thedas needs. I'm sure Cass would agree.

I feel a presence slide along my flank, and whip around, snarling at the invader; a wraith who merely looks at me with a curious smirk.

"You are rather a tasty morsel, for him to have let wander alone. How odd that he did not pursue. Perhaps you have reached the end of your usefulness to him."

Its voice is slick, like oil- dark, rich, seductive... wrong.

I close my eyes and shake my head, heaving a sigh. I've attracted a demon. Fantastic.

"Alright, what's your name, and what are you offering?"

"My, my, so blunt and brash. No wonder he let you go. He would most certainly not approve."

I roll all six of my eyes. "Yes, because presuming to know him intimately has gone just brilliantly for so many others," I intone, sarcasm a thick perfume on the air that flicks from my tongue.

"Answer my questions or begone, demon. I will not give you another chance."

It has the audacity to chuckle at me. "And what do you think you're going to do to me, if I don't comply, mortal? I have as many chances as I like. So answer the questions, or leave; before I tire of your existence."

"Wrong."

A hint of fear colors their tone, barely covered by a thin layer of bluster. "How am I wrong?"

I sit, preparing my little diatribe with an almost bored huff. "I'm not mortal. Or hadn't you heard? And I can destroy you. It's kind of my job. So answer the questions, or leave; before I tire of your existence."

It quirks its head at me curiously. "Is that so? An immortal demon hunter? Well then, I'll be happy to answer, oh deadly hunter. I am guile, and I offer nothing, for the moment. Perhaps that will"
change one day, but for now, I simply sought this introduction. Also, I am no demon. Ask him, he
knows me well. I am one of the few he would ever allow near you. Farewell for now, Fen'nas; we
shall speak again soon."

Before I can respond, the wraith dissolves into the ether. I snort and glance back in the direction I’d
come from, pondering guile's words. If it spoke the truth at the end there, then Solas is still near. I
can't see him, but maybe...

With a sigh, I send my mana out, thinking perhaps I can root him out with that; but before I get
more than a few feet out, I hear his voice.

"I am here, Fen'nas."

I look to the side, and there he is, looking at me with six red eyes, fur as black as midnight curling
little swirls of smoke into the air. I huff my laugh and turn from him, padding to the edge of the
cliff once more. After a few ticks, he joins me; eyes scanning the valley as I look out toward the
horizon instead.

"You chose a beautiful location for your pondering," he tries, valiantly attempting to lessen the
tension.

I chuckle and summon a rattan papasan chair at my side, then hop in, lazily curling into the bowl of
the cushion. "I didn't choose anything. This is just where my trail ended. And I'm still not sure I'm
ready to be talking just yet."

He tilts his head and looks over the seating I've summoned, nodding to it. "Is this meant to be some
form of chair, or is it a bed?"

I allow myself a soft laugh at his expense. "It's a bit of both, really. But officially, it's a chair." I
schooch to the side a bit, in anticipation and invitation. "Hop up, if you like. It's designed for more
than one person."

A few moments of skeptical inspection later, he jumps up, halting his momentum by planting his
front paws on the lifted section of the bowl, which summarily tips the chair over. I manage to ride
out the calamity in the bowl section, snickering to myself and trying to suppress my merriment... at
least, until he recovers from his tumble and makes his way over to the bowl; dipping his nose over
the edge of it and giving me the dirtiest look I've ever seen a wolf give.

I smile over at him innocently. Somehow, he manages to make his look even dirtier. It's actually a
little impressive.

"I may have failed to mention that gravity still applies when using this chair. Ir abelas," I tack onto
the end, my cheekiest smirk firmly in place.

If looks could kill, the one he's giving would obliterate me, and the swath of the Fade behind me,
for miles upon miles. As it is, it's only turning my smirk turn into a shit-eating grin (Okay
seriously, who the fuck coined that phrase? Who the hell is happy eating shit? Well, some people, I
suppose, but that's... yeah. No thank you.).

He huffs, frustrated annoyance clear on every inch of his face. "Somehow, I do not believe your
apology is sincere. Perhaps if you had been similarly thrown from the chair, I might be more
inclined to listen."

I bark a laugh (Quite literally, it comes out as a bark.), and shake my head, standing and making my
way out of the bowl section, to the damp ground. I turn, and with a tip of my head - and a wash of
mana - the bowl of the chair returns to the base. Once again, I hop up into the cushion and settle down. "You can always try again, if you think you can master the balance required, Dread Wolf."

Yes, I'm goading him. I really shouldn't, considering realistically, I have horrible balance; but It's better than actually trying to sort the situation right now. This is how I'm coping. As Cass would say: deal with it.

"A seat should not require balance of any sort in order to sit in it. I shall summon my own."

I snort. "Giving up so easily? That's not like you, old wolf."

He snarls and turns, a chair of the regular sort materializing before him. "I wish you would not call me that."

I frown slightly. "What, 'old', or 'wolf'? Both are accurate descriptors, you know; especially in your current state."

He folds himself into the chair and huffs at me. "Ancient though I may be, there is little purpose in pointing out the obvious, is there?"

"Aw, am I bruising your pride, falon? Ir abelas, I'll be nicer the next time I'm having an identity crisis." That... ended more bitterly than I wanted it to. Oh well, it's out there now.

He frowns, cocking his head slightly as he looks at me with open concern. "An identity crisis? I was unaware you were undergoing such distress. I thought your identity had already been established, days ago."

Has it really been days? Shit. Oh, right. Asleep for two of them. Fuck. I should probably check on my real... I mean, Earth... human, self. Yeah. That.

Fuck, this is gonna get confusing. Varric would have a field day with it all.

If I ever told him.

Who knows? I just might. *This shit is the weirdest: The Inquisitor... Fen'nas... Tale.* Yeah no.

Huh. Am I still a Lavellan? Yet another thing to add to the pile of 'Who and what am I?'

I'd say the lack of vallaslin is probably a pretty strong case for the 'no' side of the field on that question, though. We'll find out, I guess.

I surface from this mire of introspection, to notice that he's looking at me expectantly.

Oh, right. He asked me something.

"You just gave me a lot of information, which kind of put all of the things I understood to be true before that in jeopardy of being... well, complete lies. I ran, because I needed time to sort it out."

"And did you?" he asks, gently.

"Nope," I answer, with a sharp shake of my head, "I didn't really get the chance. I was in the middle of beginning the process, when guile showed up and decided to be randomly annoying, then you revealed your presence, and here we are."

He shifts on the chair, leaning against the arm slightly. "Perhaps I can assist? I do not claim to be an expert on identities beyond my own, but I may be able to answer some questions for you, if you
wish to ask them. Or, I could simply assist you in working through your thoughts, if you wish."

I huff and glance off to the side, letting my eyes linger on the edge of the cliff for a time, before returning to his dark visage. "Why the interest?"

He straightens, a slightly amused expression on his furred face. "You somehow managed to bond with my magic on an intrinsic level, you come from another world, in which you have also manifested that same magic, your mana affects me in a way I have never thought to experience... and you ask me what my interest is? Is it not obvious?"

I sigh and look back to the cliff. Yep. Exactly how I thought he'd answer. "So, you want to help the anomaly that bears your magic off the edge, essentially. Fair enough, I suppose. Fine then, I'll ask." I turn back to him with a bland expression. "Am I just your puppet now? An agent of Fen'harel? Do I have no further use, or value for you, than the odd case that somehow managed to make your magic her own?"

Before I can blink, he's shifted back to his elvhen form, slipped to his knees before my comfy throne, and cupped my face in his hands. "Listen to me. You are no one's puppet, agent, or case but your own. The miracle of my magic entwining with your soul is only a very small part of my fascination with all that you are, compared to everything else. I know there is much, much more to you than this, Fen'nas; only the blind and moronic could avoid understanding of this simple truth. Your value is beyond reckoning, and has nothing to do with my mark. You will be the savior of this world, likely many times over; and though it will never thank you as you deserve, I will. Count on it."

I blink at him stupidly for a few seconds, then slowly nod, as much as I can with my head captured by his hands. Drama king. He didn't have to go and kneel all fancy and shit, sheesh. Not that I'm complaining. Much. Wish I wasn't a wolf for the whole thing. Oh well. "Ma serannas, Solas." I dip my head softly in respect. "I appreciate your honesty, and support. It is more helpful than you know."

He smirks softly, kindness warming his eyes. "I have some idea. I would not wish upon you the solitary path that I have walked. It is not a healthy one for those of... our nature."

Is he... is he saying what I think he's saying? I slant my head and stare at him with mild awe. "Have you decided to let me help you, then?"

He shrugs, as if it is a small matter, and lets his hands fall from my face, to rest on the edge of the chair's bowl. "It is no longer my decision to make. For whatever reason, my magic chose to bind itself to your soul. I will not, cannot ignore this. The reason will reveal itself in time; but in the meantime, I will see you properly prepared for your role. We will begin training as soon as you are ready."

A distraction sounds good, actually. I huff a small sigh before I speak, "I need to check on my other self, maybe put her to bed. I don't trust whatever keeps her awake and functioning while I'm here. Not yet, at least. But when I get back, I'd like to begin."

He nods. "Ma nuvenin, da'fen. And perhaps you should trust yourself a bit more. What is guiding you there, is likely the same thing that guides you here, and there is very little difference between it and your waking self."

"That... is sadly not as comforting as you likely meant it to be." I curl my lip in disdain for the thought.
He dips his head slightly. "Apologies. I cannot guess what this is like, for you. I am uncertain how to comfort you."

I give a tight little smile. "Don't worry about it." I hesitate, clearing my throat unnecessarily in discomfort. "Could you... well, wake me, please?"

He heaves a sigh and nods in acceptance of my request, his lips forming a thin line as he purses them. "Wake up."

My mind is yanked from the Fade abruptly, and I wake sluggishly, blinking in groggy half-awareness at my surroundings.

It takes a moment for me to realize that I'm lying down.

And that I'm not in my room.

Chapter End Notes

For those curious what a papasan chair is, here ya go: Have a picture!

❤--Discord--❤

❤ Thanks for reading! If you enjoy the story or this chapter in particular, please feel free to leave a review with your thoughts! ❤

❤ I love reading comments and reply to all of them. ❤
Oh, hell no.

Beige. Mother-fucking beige.

*Shudders*

No. Just no. This won't be happening. I refuse.

It's the first thing I see when the film of extended sleep finally clears from my eyes. A grand beige motif with summer stone clasps, covering my body from jaw to feet.

The only thing that distracts me from this atrocity is the elven servant girl, collapsing and prostrating herself before me, like I'm some holy saint or something. Me. A saint. PFFT. Right.

"What's your name, friend?" I ask her, interrupting her babbled apologetic diatribe.

"Sirin, milady." She seems awed that I would stoop to even ask her such a thing.

"Alright then, Sirin; good to meet you. I am Fen'nas. Please get up." I wave my hand upward and give her a small, kind smile.

She slowly complies, seeming confused at the idea, but following orders anyway.

I give her a pleased nod when she stands, and join her, rising from my small—if comfortable—bed. "Good. Now please, for the love of all that's sacred, help me find something to wear that isn't beige." I grimace at the word, as if it is a filthy thing, a plague on all of existence, a thing worse than Coryphynutsack himself... because it is.

Her eyes widen at my request, giving me a slightly confounded look before nodding, moving toward a trunk set against the wall with hurried steps, speaking as she moves, "Any particular color preference, milady? We can 'ave something ordered, if there's nothing in 'ere that suits you."

"Black, red, green, blue—anything that isn't bloody beige. I'll even take white, if it's all that's on offer." I scrunch my nose in mild contempt at the thought, then tack on one last requirement: "Not yellow though; yellow hurts my eyes, almost as much as beige."

She bows her head deeply. "A'once, milady." She turns and opens the trunk, delving into its contents for a replacement that isn't quite so horrific. A few moments of digging, and her fingers emerge less naked than they entered the piles of cloth—covered instead in the hems of a hunter green shirt, with gold embroidery and fastenings, and a dark chocolate brown pair of breeches. "Will this suffice, milady?" she asks, as she turns to me, items on display over her hands.

I grin, nodding my hearty approval as I lift the cloth from her fingers. "That will do very nicely, Sirin, thank you. Would you please tell Seeker Cassandra that I'll be along shortly? I'll join her at the Chantry as quickly as I can change clothes."

She cocks her head at me curiously. "Milady doesn't require help getting dressed, then?"

My eyebrow flicks up, and I look down to the clothing in my hands, turning it over in study. It
appears fairly simple, if a bit... button and leather lace-heavy. But hey, I can reverse-engineer how to fix it all up from the atrocity I'm already wearing. Probably.

I grace her with a semi-confident smile and shake my head. "I don't think so. Maybe come back here after you inform the Seeker, just in case?"

That garners the first smile from her, and it feels like I've just earned the world. "O'course, milady. I'll be along shortly."

"Appreciate it, Sirin," I manage to say to her retreating back, just before it disappears behind the now closing door.

With a soft chuckle, I set the clothing she picked out on the bed, and begin plucking at the fastenings of the beige monstrosity that's currently providing me with a modicum of modesty. The shirt is simple, the clasps much easier to dislodge than I'd feared. The breeches are a bit more complex—the knot tying the laces off is one I have zero experience tying. After finally getting it to unravel, I try re-tying it a few times, to get the hang of it. The results are less than perfect, but it'll stay tied well enough... I hope. If my breeches fall down, I'll just tie a fucking bow, tuck the ends under the hem, and be done with it.

I sniff at myself, sure that it's probably been a few days—at minimum—since my last bathing, and wondering if I should make an attempt at freshening up. Surprisingly, I find nothing offensive. They must've given me a sponge bath. How... awkwardly kind.

With that conundrum resolved, I untie the laces and slide my breeches off; substituting them for the dark, rich, supple leather affair that awaits my lower half. I slip them on and smile at the feel of the soft hide against my skin. I tie the knot—or something close enough to it—and reach for my shirt, pressing my arms through the sleeves and beginning the buttoning process. In rather short order, I'm dressed and mostly ready for my debut.

I look around for a mirror, so I can fix what is probably some pretty atrocious bed head, and find a small one propped on a corner table. It'll do.

I hunt about for something that resembles a hairbrush or comb, locating a double-sided comb shoved in a small drawer. Good enough. I settle in front of the mirror and start taming my rat's nest into something akin to order. Just as I'm nearly finished, I hear a knock on the door.

"Come in!" I call over my shoulder, keeping my gaze locked to the knotted mess I'm de-tangling in the mirror.

"I came back, just like you said, milady. Looks like you managed the dressing just fine; anything else I can 'elp you with?"

I finally manage to work through the knot in my hair, and turn, gracing her with a small, guiltily imploring smile, "There is, actually. Not sure if you've been informed, but I don't remember much before the day I tried to seal the breach, so I have a lot of catching up to do. If you could stick with me, and teach me about things like... basic hygiene, I would be in your debt."

Her eyes look like dinner platters in their already over-sized sockets, illustrating with perfect clarity exactly how absurd my request is.

I know.

But I don't have a choice.
"I... if you like, milady. But wouldn't it be better if you got a 'andmaiden for that? I'm not sure I could do the job properly."

I blink at her stupidly for a moment, before my brain's GPS catches up to her current location. "Oh! No, I don't mean you have to actually help me with doing it, I just mean tell me, or show me how to do it. I can manage it on my own, once I know how."

She seems to shrink into herself as she wrings her hands and replies, "Oh. Well, that's... not so bad, then. I suppose."

I chuckle warmly and turn back to the mirror to continue the fight with my mop. "Don't worry, Sirin. It's a simple job, and the quicker I learn, the faster I'll be out of your hair. Then you'll have a favor from me to call on, whenever you wish. Is that fair?"

"More than fair, milady. What would you 'ave me do when you're out and about?"

I shrug. "Whatever you like. If you need to be off doing something else, then attend to that. I don't want to get you in trouble." Distracted, I huff at the reflection of my visage in the mirror. "Is there anything I can use to tie this hair of mine back? Something simple and sturdy would be ideal."

She opens the drawer next to the one I got the comb from, and fishes a thin leather cord out of it, handing it to me quietly.

I lift it from her fingers and look it over skeptically. After a moment, I nod my approval. "Thank you, Sirin."

It's not the best solution ever, but it'll do until I can figure out something better. I wrap it about the ponytail I've combed into the back of my head, and tie it off with a bow as tightly as I can manage on my own. It probably looks terrible, but who cares? Cass wears her hair in a braided ring around her head like a working class woman; it's not like anyone here actually cares about fashion. Except maybe Leliana. And Josie. Cullen's just trying too hard—because someone compared his hair to noodles, I'm sure of it.

Hmm. The only downside to having my hair back like this, is it makes my ears that much more obvious. Or is that a downside? Really, it shouldn't be, but this is Thedas we're talking about.

Fuck it. If they don't like elves, they won't like me to begin with, no matter how much I hide my ears. Not like the ears are the only feature that defines an elven. The willowy body—even if I'm not quite as willowy as most elves, I've noticed—big eyes and pronounced nose bridge are dead giveaways, even if I hide my ears. There's no hiding my race, so I may as well put it on display, for all the world to see.

I set the comb on the table next to the mirror and stand, turning to Sirin with a wary smile. "So, am I presentable?"

She nods slightly. "You are, milady. The 'air's a little..." she hesitates, either afraid of insulting me, or lacking the vocabulary for what she's trying to convey.

"Severe? Plain? Terrible?" I offer.

She shakes her head. "No, milady. It's... very bold. If I might speak plainly, milady?"

I wave her on. "Of course. Please, speak your mind when you're with me. I won't learn, otherwise."

"Very well, milady. You may wish to wear your 'air down, since it's short anyway. It'll 'ide your
ears better." She looks a bit like she's swallowed a toad as she finishes.

I nod my understanding. "I had thought of that, actually. But there's no hiding what I am, so what's the point? I'd rather be practical. I have no time for holding someone's hand through their prejudices; if they want to be insulted by my existence, they're going to do so, regardless of my hairstyle. I'm not going to pander to their ridiculous egos."

She gasps softly at my proclamation, hand flying to her chest. "But milady, they'll insult you more if you just shove it in their faces like that."

I shrug. "So? If they want to call me a knife-ear, then I can do one of two things: I can prove to them that their assumptions are true, or I can show them exactly how wrong they are. If I do the latter, if I take the high road, will it not be better for elves overall? If I'm to bear this Herald title, should I not be a good example of what elves can be, what contributions to society they can make, given the chance?"

She bites her lip, looking at me like she approves, but is still plagued by worry. "It might 'urt more than it 'elps, milady. Just... please, be careful?"

I smile kindly at her, nodding in agreement. "I will, Sirin. I might not remember much, but I remember how to behave." I shrug, smirking as I tack on: "Mostly."

A heavy sigh issues from her, along with a less than comforted expression at that lack of true assurance. After a moment, she gestures to the door. "You should be goin', milady. Seeker Cassandra was very cross with me when I reported to her without you next to me."

I snort. "That's just Cassandra."

Her eyes widen. "You know the lady Seeker, milady?"

Shit. I try for nonchalance as I shrug off her question. "By reputation only. She is the Hero of Orlais, after all; and Right Hand of the Divine. Her story is well-known—though I'm sure she would claim some or most of it is exaggerated. Typical heroic bravado and such."

She gives me a small smile. "I'm sure, milady."

"Fen'nas," I smile as I gently correct her.

She smirks. "Of course, milady Fen'nas."

I snort and shake my head, then heave a sigh as I look long and hard at the door. Time to face the music. "Wish me luck," I murmur aside to her, then step toward the door.

"Good luck, milady Fen'nas."

They're the last comforting words I hear until much later today.

"That's the Herald of Andraste!"

"Wasn't she supposed to close the breach?"

"Andraste herself sent her from the Fade!"

So many voices, talking about me, the things I've done; half of them lies, the rest only partial truths.
So many eyes, scrutinizing me from every angle; some looking on with reverence, others with simple curiosity, still others with hatred not yet soothed.

So many souls that will be lost, if I do not somehow act to preserve them.

But should I? Are the sacrifices made at Haven not a motivation, in the end? They are a tragedy, yes; most certainly. But does it therefor follow that they cannot be a beacon, a rallying call, something to fight for, so their deaths are not in vain? It is all a part of the ruthless calculus of war, and I must learn to play by those rules, if anyone is to survive this. Horrible, but true. There is little I can alter, before my changes completely wipe away our chances at victory. I must see this through.

My ruminations are cut short, as I'm suddenly faced with the massive Chantry doors, looming over me like gargoyles—menacing, ominous, intimidating. I lay my hands on the cool wood, worn smooth with centuries of use, take a deep, bracing breath... and push.

The doors offer little resistance, their hinges are well oiled—this is the Chantry, after all—and before I know it, I'm walking down the center of the Chantry hall, rising eddies of sound reaching my ears from behind the comparatively tiny door ahead of me. I know who and what will greet me there, but even knowing as I do, I pause mid-way to my destination, listening to the shouted objections from both sides. Chancellor Roderick's fear is understandable, as is Cass' defense of me. Leliana even jumps in to provide her two coppers.

I realize all at once that I've moved, and I'm standing just outside the door now. May as well go in. I raise my hand to press the door open, but instead, my hand hovers, just over the iron bands binding the wood of the door together. I hesitate, clenching my other hand into a fist.

This is real. Every action and reaction will be weighed and tallied. I cannot be found wanting, or all will fall. Already, I lack the combat training required to be effective on a battlefield. Already, I must rely on my "newfound" allies to teach me what must be done.

But perhaps that is the key. My allies, I mean. I have them, after all—it would be silly not to make use of them. What else are allies for?

Sure, eventually at least some of them will become my friends, if not all... but for now, they are my greatest assets. If they will not help me, if they will not assist in molding me into the hero Thedas needs, no-one will. My actions are my own, certainly, but I am not alone on an island. Not entirely.

I have allies. And for now, they are my strength, my shield, my sword.

With this thought lodged firmly in my mind, I shove the door open, and peer past the two Templars guarding it, to see Cass pointing her finger angrily at Roderick.

Naturally, he turns at my interruption, and calls for my arrest.

"Belay that, and leave us."

I barely keep the smirk off my face when the Templars obey her, and I witness the baffled shock on Roderick's face.

I won't bore you with a retelling of the entire scene. It happens just as it does in the game, with one difference... but that's not until the end, after Cass has shaken my hand. The scene usually cuts right to the founding of the Inquisition, with epic, sweeping cutscenes and such... yeah that doesn't happen in reality, obviously. Would've been awesome if it did, but no.
"Your lack of training needs to be addressed, Herald. You may be our only key to sealing the rifts, but we cannot protect you, if you cannot protect yourself." Cass pauses, taking a breath and looking to Leliana, then back to me. "It is true you helped us during the initial battle, but magic such as yours—left untrained—is not only needlessly reckless, but extremely dangerous. Solas said you would be training with him?"

I nod. "Yes, though if you do not find his tutelage sufficient, I will certainly listen to any suggestions. Do you have another mage tucked away somewhere, who knows more of the Fade, spirits, magic and its dangers? Not to mention this mark." I hold up my hand, palm forward, sparking the anchor for emphasis.

At that, she actually hesitates. Score! "I..."

Leliana saves her, pressing her own hand out toward me placatingly. "We do not. But that is not to say you should solely train with him. There is more you can learn than simply magic; indeed, there is more you should learn. If you were to have your magic blocked somehow, you would need a way to defend yourself that does not rely on the Fade. We are all ready and willing to give you any training you require—you only need ask."

After a moment of thought, I dip my head gratefully toward her. "I appreciate it, Nightingale. I do see the wisdom in such training, of course; though I'm unsure where I should begin with it. Any guidance in that regard would be most helpful."

Cass interrupts, apparently having found her tongue somewhere between Leliana's offer and my acceptance. "Learning to block properly would be a good start, I think. And the strength gained by wielding a sword is very useful, even when it is not your primary weapon. I am willing to train you, or Commander Cullen could, I suppose. Whoever you are more comfortable with."

Leliana nods her agreement, then adds her input, "Archery could also be helpful, to improve your aim and coordination. I would be willing to teach you the basics, and I am certain Varric will give you some pointers, if you ask."

"Sounds good. I'll take it all under advisement, but I think I should learn to control my magic, first and foremost. After I train with Solas for a bit today, I'll seek out one of the other specialists. Thank you both for your input, and for volunteering to help." I give them each a firm nod.

Leliana smiles sweetly. "We are happy to assist. In the meantime, I have reports to get to, if you will both excuse me."

Bows and excuses are exchanged, and she passes from the room, silent as the dead of night. I turn to Cass and grace her with a small smile. "I should like to speak to you soon, Seeker. Perhaps later today?"

She nods her acquiescence. "As you wish, Herald. I will be by the recruits, training."

"Of course. I'd best be on my way to Solas, then. Be well, Seeker." I tip my head politely and turn to the door, sweeping from the room in a muffled rush, my leather boots quietly scuffing the stone floor.

Once free of the Chantry's trappings, I head directly to the left, taking the shortcut behind the Apothecary and looking out to where I expect to see Solas, pondering the breach.

Except, he's not there.

I blink, searching about for any sign of a bald, raggedly-garbed apostate, and find not a glimpse.
Huh. Odd.

"Oye, you lookin' for the bald elf?" comes a familiar voice from behind me.

It turn to see Adan, wiping his hands with a small cloth, looking at me expectantly. I nod. "I am, yes. Have you seen him?"

He points with the cloth at the house to the left. "He's in there, last I saw. Usually disappears in there about this time of day. Dunno what he gets up to inside in the middle of the bloomin' day, but that's where you'll find him." He resumes cleaning his hands with the rag. "While I've got you, how are you feelin'?"

"Fine, thanks. Not too much worse for wear, considering."

He nods approvingly. "Good. Don't let it be said my healing did anyone wrong. It was touch 'n go there for a while, but you pulled through. Damn good thing too. I hear you're the one what's stabilized that damn hole up there." He jerks his cloth-adorned hand toward the breach. "Appreciate it. I'll appreciate it more when it's actually closed for good."

I chuckle half-heartedly. "Yeah I know the feeling. You're the one who patched me up?"

"Aye, name's Adan. Someone had to do it."

"Well thank you." I give him a small bow of gratitude. "Is there anything I can do to return the kindness?"

He snorts. "Yeah, well, you're welcome. You can pay me back by saving the world. But if you're really lookin' to help, there's some notes on a formula Master Taegin was working on, and he left 'em somewhere when he went to the Conclave. I've looked, but I can't find 'em anywhere. Maybe you'll have better luck."

"I'll look into it. I'd like to repay you at least somewhat, if I can."

He nods and gestures to the cabin. "Aye, go on then. You won't find 'em lolligaggin' around here."

Hardass. I smile and turn from him, making my way over to the cabin door. I rap on the door and settle against the wall next to it to wait. There's no telling how long he'll be. If he sequesters himself in the house at the same time every day, I'm likely disrupting his routine, which will probably annoy him. Tough. He offered training; I'm here for training.

I knock on the door again, hoping to get a bit more of a response from inside than silence.

"A moment!"

He sounds... groggy. Did he just wake up? How strange. Has he been going to sleep in the middle of the day to talk to me, or is there some other purpose for this little daily nap? My sharpened hearing picks up a scuffle of feet scraping the wooden floor in a lazy pattern of footsteps, just before the louder sound of the door handle rattling reaches my ears. I push off the wall and face the opening door.

"Ah, Fen'nas. So you truly are awake here. I thought you might be."

I smirk at the image he presents to me: rumpled clothes, the seam of some fabric he'd lain on pressing a line into his cheek, the lowered eyelids, the sleep-addled voice and shortened sentences. So this is what he's like when he wakes.
It's fucking adorable.

My smirk melds into a fond smile as I tilt my head, nodding as I do so. "Yes, I am awake. Cassandra just declared the Inquisition reborn. I thought you should know. Also, I'm here for training. Apparently I'm to train with everyone else here, as well."

He lifts his eyebrows, eyes shifting back and forth in a moment of thought, before he nods his understanding. He sighs and opens the door wide, stepping aside to sweep his hand out into the room in invitation. "Then by all means, enter."

I tuck myself into the cottage, quickly taking in the unmade bed, scattered papers littering the desk, an aura of cold from the direction of the vegetables on the counter of the small kitchen area. I settle myself cross-legged onto the floor, and glance up at him. "Now that I have a moment to breathe, I really, really need to check on my other self. It's been well over an hour here since I arrived, and I think time works differently between the two worlds. When I had you wake me before, I'd done several hour's work in the short time I was absent. When I woke in my world last, I'd been asleep for two whole days."

He pauses, quirking his head at me curiously. Slowly, a soft smile works its way onto his lips. "Ah. I believe you will find that no more than an hour has passed, this time. What you likely experienced before, was the difference in time of the Fade, versus what most these days call 'reality'. Regardless, do you actually have a means to return your consciousness to that world? I doubt my suggesting that you wake will work, now that you are truly awake."

I blink at him stupidly for a few seconds. Shit. I hadn't considered that. "I... do not." I grimace, then entreat him with a hopeful smile. "Suggestions?"

He snorts a half laugh, straightening and shaking his head softly. "None that have any guarantee of success."

I slump, deflated in the misery of defeat, head hanging morosely as my eyes fixate on my folded hands in my lap. "Damn it."

"Indeed," I hear his voice floating closer through the air as he continues, "would that I knew how to assist you, but sadly, you are on your own in this particular matter. Trial and error, perhaps? What method did you use to bring yourself here prematurely?"

I scoff, shaking my head as I slowly raise it to glare at him. "I called aloud for you. "'Ma halani, Solas, sathan," I said, and you answered. I blinked, and I was here." I shrug, heaving a sigh and looking off to the side. "I have none in my world that I can call to, in that way. At least, not any that could be there physically to answer." I let my gaze drift back to his face. "My dog would be the closest one, and she can't exactly verbally reply."

He quirks an eyebrow at me, the barest hint of a smirk tugging the corner of his lips up. "You keep a dog as a companion in your world?"

I chortle at his choice of words. "I do, yes. She has been my neurotic little friend for close to six years now. She's saved my life, twice—I would not be here without her."

He gives me a smile tinged with both fondness and regret. "Then it is a pity I will never meet her. I would thank her, if I could."

I laugh softly. "She would say "you're welcome" with a panting smile and one ear comically flopped back, I'm absolutely sure of it."
He chuckles and joins me on the floor, sitting opposite me and crossing his legs. "She sounds like an ideal companion. Perhaps you will find a similar spirit here, in time."

I give him a smirk that's almost a grimace, then shake my head. "No. She is as unique as you find me to be. I've always had the strange feeling that when she passes, her spirit will remain with me. I can't explain it, but she's always felt very tied to me. She found me when she was nothing but a tiny little black fur ball, barely old enough to keep her eyes open. She'd crawled across my yard and came right up to me, before I'd even realized she was there, then stopped and looked up at me, just waiting. I picked her up, and we've never been apart since. No idea where she came from, or how she got there, but she's been a blessing."

He nods thoughtfully. "It may well be that she will stay with you. Only time will tell. You certainly care for her enough that she might wish to remain, if she had the choice." He eyes me critically for a moment, then continues, "I want you to try something. It may work, it may not; but you will not know unless you try. Call to her."

My eyebrows fly up in surprise. "Call to her? Like I called to you?"

He nods. "Yes. She may not be able to speak, but if she is so intrinsically tied to you as you believe, she can answer in other ways. It cannot hurt to try."

I scoff, shaking my head. "Yes, and nugs can fly," I quip, throwing his own skeptical words from days ago back at him.

He lifts a reproachful eyebrow at me. "Fen'nas, do you plan to argue everything I tell you to do during training?"

My teeth click as I snap my jaw shut. Damn. Okay then. "Fine, if you insist, I will call her."

That eyebrow lowers, his features softening at my acquiescence. He gestures for me to proceed.

I take a breath and close my eyes, exhaling a sigh. I concentrate on Earth, on my human self, and call her.

"Nesmay."

I wait.

Nothing.

I huff and try again, adding a sing-song quality to the sound, "Nesmay, c'mere." I click my tongue a few times.

In the darkness, something touches my thigh.

I gasp and open my eyes to the sight of my dual monitors, my hands on the keyboard, and as my gaze travels down, Nesmay looking up at me with adoring expectation of scritches. Naturally, I comply, and laugh in my relief. It worked!

I look up at the time on the screen, and it's only been an hour and a half since I last checked it. I'll be damned.

Clever wolf.
❤--Discord--❤

❤ Thanks for reading! If you enjoy the story or this chapter in particular, please feel free to leave a review with your thoughts! ❤
❤ I love reading comments and reply to all of them. ❤
Baseline Readings

Chapter Notes

Apologies for the delays, peeps. I had some RL health issues that popped up and bit my nose off, and I also got a new graphics card, so I've been playing DAI and a few other games on amaze-balls ultra graphics for a week. I can't guarantee that I'm back to the schedule I had when this story started, but I'll try to get back into the swing of things. Thanks for your patience, guys. <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Clever, clever wolf.

I shake my head in amazement at the words displayed on the screen—words I do not remember writing, but which absolutely carry my writing style—and scoff in stunned shock.

He was completely right.

The... 'me' that is me when I'm not here, is every bit as 'me' as I am. And if that's not a convoluted and circular train of thought, I don't know what is.

Then again, is there anything about this entire situation that isn't confusing as hell? Psychiatrists would have a field day with this. I'd absolutely be committed.

Yeah, definitely best not to tell anyone on this side. Ah, hell.

I slump in my chair and grind the bridge of my nose between my fingers, trying to stave off the headache that's forming behind my eyes. This whole thing is breaking my brain. I'm going to drive myself crazy with worry, I just know it. When I'm here, I'll be worried about what I'm doing or saying in Thedas, and when I'm in Thedas, I'll be—slightly less—worried what crazy thing I'm saying here. Fucking balls.

There has to be some solution to this. I'll speak to Solas about it, once I go back. In the meantime, I need to check on the people in my life. I don't want to spend too much time here, because I really, really need to get cracking with the training in Thedas; but I need some assurance that things are okay here, so I'm not distracted.

I get up and head into the den—deftly avoiding the dogs littered on the floor as they wake and look at me curiously—and lean against the partition wall between the den and dining room, facing my dad in his chair. He's looking at his TV screen on the opposite wall, par usual, scrolling through some random news article.

"What'cha doin'?"

"Readin'."

"Ahh."

Yeah, that's the general extent of conversation between my dad and I. It works for us, usually. The only variation is when he comes across some bit of news that angers him, and he wants to rant
about it, or when I see something he's reading that I disagree with, and we get into a debate about it. Yes, a debate, not an argument. Arguments between us are reserved for real life things, that actually affect us personally. Like me not working on my books.

*Sigh*

I struggle to think of a way to ask him if I've done or said anything odd in the past hour. That the writing style is the same is pretty solid evidence, but I'm curious if this other me is as adept—or rather, inept—at social interaction as I normally am.

Then again, if I know my dad—and I do, probably better than I'd like—if I'd done something odd, he wouldn't wait for me to ask him about it. He'd just tell me.

I wait for a few more seconds, glancing over what he's reading, and push off the partition, heading to the kitchen. If he wants to mention something, I'll give him ample opportunity. I'm really not hungry—it's only been an hour since I ate, after all—but I grab an apple from the fridge anyway, just to have an excuse for being in there... not that I've ever actually needed one. It wouldn't be the first time I've gone into the kitchen and come back out empty-handed.

I cut up the apple and set it on a small paper plate, taking it with me after I clean up. I head for my room, casting glances aside in my dad's direction, waiting for him to say something. He doesn't stop me.

I end up back in my room, shoving the plated apple onto my desk, slumping in my chair once again and staring ahead at my Solas desktop wallpaper. Well, one of them, anyway. Noo, I'm not obsessed at all, what could possibly give you that impression?

Hey, at least it's regulated to my PC only. Not like it's all over my walls. Or bedspread. I don't have Solas body pillows. Don't believe me? Look back a few chapters at the picture of Nesmay with my glasses. She's laying on my bed.

I pop an apple slice in my mouth and contemplate some things as I chew. Is this... 'other me' capable of handling things like decisions and social interaction? Solas seemed to think the elven 'other me' was no different than, well, me. Mayhap the same can be said of the human version? It certainly seems so, from the available evidence. The 'other me' also seems to spend most of her time writing, which I can totally deal with. Takes some of the pressure off of me, after all. But how much can she really handle? Is there a limit? And if not, are my little 'visits' actually necessary, on either side?

So many questions; so few answers. Solas may be able to provide some of them, but there's no way even for him to know them all yet—there's just not enough data.

For now, I have to somehow find a balance between the two worlds. Being awake in one, while I sleep in the other, provides at least a partial solution, but there's still anomalies to be accounted for.

What if our camp is attacked in the dead of night? What if my dad wakes me up for something? Not to mention the fact that I have to truly sleep at some point—the brain can't handle being awake forever. Not very well, at least...

I was awake for five days once. By that last day, I was seeing things that weren't there. Some of them scared the shit outta me. I'd rather not repeat the experience, thanks.

Granted, my bodies—yeah, the shock on that hasn't worn off yet. Having two bodies, two lives: who the fuck really wants that?—will actually be getting the rest they need. But the brain needs it
too.

This whole thing is *fucked*.

There's a thousand things to consider, a hundred situations to account for, and two entirely separate lives relying on one soul: me.

Fucking hell.

I sigh heavily and toss another apple slice past my lips, shaking my head at this whole thing. What, exactly, am I supposed to do here?

I don't have a bloody clue.

The people I would normally talk to about important shit like this... well, they already think I'm 'quirky', 'adorably nutty', 'eccentric', and other similar nonsense. I don't need to add fuel to *that* particular flame. They're *all* neurotypical. I love them, and I trust them, but I don't want to risk it. Who would believe my story, anyway? That Solas does is only a testament to how similar we truly are, and how understanding and compassionate he is. Which hey, don't get me wrong, that's *great*! But it doesn't help me right here, right now.

Wait... didn't he say something about my magic possibly existing on this side, too? Ah, *hell*. Like I need *that* on top of everything else.

Actually, if it really is here, I could technically use it to my advantage.

I think.

That thought makes me sit up in my chair. I've got literally acres of room to practice, just outside my back door. But I wonder, how different will it be on this side? I mean, it's not like we've got the Fade here. Then again, we don't have the veil, either. Maybe it's a little like Thedas was, before the veil? Maybe we just chose the scientific path of development instead. If magic really does exist on this plane, like I've always believed it does, then this could potentially work.

I can always try. What's the worst that could happen? Probably shouldn't ask that aloud.

I stuff the last two apple slices in my yapper and click over to the weather report for today—77° and partly cloudy. Perfect. My kind of weather. Well, for this time of year, at least. Semantics.

Time to experiment. I'll take Nesmay out as a cover. Not like I generally go outside by myself. I did mention I'm not exactly in the greatest of health, right? Yeah, my weight is part of it. But hey, I quit smoking, so that's a start.

I realize I'm probably going to want to use a staff, since there aren't exactly lyrium potions handy, and remember the gift a shaman once gave me, back when I lived in Georgia. Conveniently enough, it's an actual staff, that he apparently spent days in a trance-like state with, burning beautiful patterns into it. After he gave it to me, I adorned it with leather, an obsidian glass arrowhead, and a set of bones from the foot of a dog I once had, named Shadow. I might tell you about her someday, but not today.

Regardless, I couldn't ask for a more convenient conduit of my magic on this side. I smile as I grab the staff from beside my dresser and head out the back with Nesmay in tow, eager to start testing a few things—like if my magic even exists here, for starters.

Establishing a baseline will be the most important part. So, something simple to begin with.
Freezing water should be easy, if I really do have magic. How fortunate that it's been raining cats and dogs for weeks, thanks to that strange hurricane off the coast—I’ve got what basically amounts to several small lakes in my yard to practice on.

The moment I descend the last step of the back porch staircase, I reach for that energy I've so freely been using in Thedas, aiming to channel it through the staff as ice. My affinity for water should hold true here, at least.

I hope.

The last thing I need on this side is to have the grand gift of making magical craters in the ground. I somehow doubt I could hide that sort of magic for long.

I tromp past the puddle Nesmay's currently peeing in, over to the fifteen foot wide one behind the barn. As I travel, I gather energy—Or, at least, I try to— around me, focusing it into the staff. I step up to the soggy edge of the mini pond and dip the unadorned tip of my staff into the water.

Moment of truth. Here we go.

Shrugging, I heave a sigh, and with it, I plunge the gathered energy into the staff, channeling it down into the water—focusing on the intent of ice, cold, freezing.

It isn't until I try to lift my staff back up that I realize I've closed my eyes... and that something's happened.

I pry my eyelids open and aim the shrinking violets of my eyes downward, only to remain fixed there for some time in shock.

My staff is stuck.

In solid ice.

Well then. I'd say the baseline's been established. Now what?

I yank on the staff, trying to dislodge it from the slab of ice I've rendered into existence, and huff in annoyance when it doesn't budge an inch. Fantastic!

Well, I can't just leave it there. It's not exactly made to weather the elements—it's a mostly ornamental and sentimental piece, really. If I was going to have a real staff, it would probably be something metal, or at least made of driftwood, for durability. I certainly wouldn't decorate it with items that hold precious memories. In any case, I need to get it out of the ice. Maybe fire? If it melts the ice in the process, all the better. I just have to make sure I don't catch the staff itself on fire—or the barn. Or myself. Yeah that in particular would be bad.

I try to remember the lesson Solas taught me in regards to channeling fire, and press the feeling flame evokes into my... well, I suppose it's my mana. What else do I call it? Strange as it is to have it here, there's no point calling it anything but what it is.

This time, I watch as my mana flares bright orange flame out of the staff's end, sending heated light through the surface of the ice—right before it melts, giving way to a bubbling storm of angry water. I smile at the result, and—carefully—spread the effect out to the rest of the water, melting it quite efficiently.

There's a moment, once I'm done melting the ice, when I'm not entirely sure I can stop the flames. They feel so incredibly powerful, like the fire is the sun, and I am the moth caught in its orbit. I
shake myself and cease the flow of mana, though the feeling still nags me in the back of my mind. Why is this pull so strong? Definitely something to keep an eye on.

So, my magic definitely works in this reality. Incredibly easily, in fact. Perhaps it is like Thedas before Fen'harel's veil. But if that's the case, why aren't there any immortals, and why doesn't the whole world know that magic is a real and viable thing?

I take a breath and let it out slowly as I lift my left hand, studying the rune branded into my palm. The anchor is probably completely useless here, if my theorizing rings true. I could test it, I suppose... then again, it's probably a bad idea. If there is a veil here, and if demons, spirits, etc. exist here too—well, trying to open a rift, unprepared for that possibility, would be suicide.

I snap my head up and look about as I actually feel a presence at my side, only to see Nesmay bolting past me toward the door. Apparently, she finished her business while I made life-changing discoveries. Well, at least we've both been productive, I suppose.

I trudge off toward the door behind her, pondering what to even do about my findings. So what if I have magic here. Realistically, it means very little, in the grand scheme of things. If people were to find out about it, it would have one of a few possible outcomes.

I could be locked away, hidden from sight—labeled touched in the head, mad, a lunatic. People generally don't want to be around persons with such confining labels.

People could actually accept the fact that magic exists, and would still try to lock away anyone who was able to tap into it.

Wars could and probably would be fought over it, just like they are in Thedas.

Or, literally nothing would happen. People are so desensitized these days, it's entirely possible that they'd see me use my magic, they'd 'ooh' and 'ahh' for a few moments, then go on about their business like nothing out of the ordinary just occurred.

Such things are likely wasted on this world. It is too far gone to benefit from it, sad as that is.

So I am left with secrecy as my only real option. Hardly the first big secret I've had to keep. I'll manage—I always do.

I head inside and Nesmay dashes through the kitchen the moment the door's open. I trail more sluggishly behind her, par usual. I keep my hand wrapped around the parts of the ornaments on the staff that make noise, to keep my dad from turning in his chair to see what the sound is. The last thing I need is him ranting at me about practicing witchcraft on his property, especially when it's actually not entirely true this time.

I pat him on his mostly bald head as I pass behind him, and slip into my room without incident, setting the staff aside and grabbing Nesmay's food bowl to refill it. Returning with her food a moment later, I set it town and fold myself into my desk chair, resting my chin on my fist and staring into Solas' penetrating gaze on my desktop. No, that wasn't meant as a punny innuendo.

I need time to think about all of this, but mulling it over alone is about as useful as taking my brain out and bouncing it against a wall. That is to say: not very.

A second brain to bounce against that wall may end up with some brain matter transference, and perhaps even an idea or useful thought or two, if I could only be a bit lucky. I already have several facts confirmed now, so I've done all I can on this side. For the moment, at least. Time to call the wolf. Hopefully I haven't moved from where I was...
"Solas?"

Silence.

I close my eyes and sigh, repeating myself a bit more insistently, "Solas?"

"Milady? D'you want me to fetch Messere Solas?"

I almost chuckle as I hear Sirin's voice, and I open my eyes to her hovering nearby, uncertainty clouding her expressive features.

I shake my head and smile softly. "No, Sirin, but thank you. I must've drifted off for a moment there." Hey, I have to cover my ass somehow. I'm back in my cabin, and I have no idea how I got here. I'm standing near my bed and... oh. Ah. Okay then.

Yeah I'm naked. Fortunately, there's a bath that's been drawn just across the room, which explains my state of undress. The only question is, have I already bathed, or have I yet to? Hmm. Well, my skin doesn't feel tight, like it always does after washing, so that's probably my answer right there.

I gesture to the bath with a glance at Sirin. "I'm guessing that's meant for me?"

She gives me a strange look. "You don't remember ordering a bath, milady?"

Oh, sod. How am I going to explain the situation to her, in a way she'll understand? I don't even think she's a mage, she'll probably freak out if I tell her I'm from another bloody world!

But there's nothing for it, unless I just want to lie to her for however long I know her. Oh, I could do it, that's not the problem. The problem is, I don't want to. I spent the first half of this life lying, stealing, cheating... I've been free of that shit for going on five years now—I've no interest in breaking that record, not even in another reality.

I sigh and lean down to pat the bed, then head for the bath as I speak, "Have a seat, I'm going to tell you a story."

I proceed to give her almost the same spiel I gave Solas, if a bit simplified and less mystical. It takes some finagling, and an inordinate amount of reassurances, omissions and explanations, but after a bit over an hour of conversation, she finally relents.

"...so that's why I asked for your help with learning hygiene and such. I have some idea about it all, but I only know some things. A finer point I would like to explore right now, for instance," I elaborate, as I finish sliding my breeches on, "is where exactly I should relieve myself. I'd also love to know where I should go for food, and what kinds of food are available. Also, is there some sort of perfume or oil or scent I should be wearing to ward off body odor, and where do I get that?"

Yes, I have a thousand questions about all of this. I will admit to having looked up medieval hygiene—and actually finding it a lot less disgusting than you'd think... mostly—to have a clue of what I was supposed to do, but I also know Thedas is more advanced in those matters than Earth was in that time frame. I mean, look at Dorian. One look at that man, and you can clearly see proper hygiene is a thing in Thedas.

She chuckles nervously—apparently her unease can only settle so far, and really I can't blame her—and points toward the back wall of the cabin. "There's a few privies just inside the outer wall, and there's always your chamberpot, milady. Food comes from private pantries or the tavern; 'ere in 'aven, at least. It can be brought to your cabin, or you can get it yourself, if you like. I can 'ave a list of what's on offer every day brought to you, and you can decide from that. Most use the oil from
crystal grace petals as a deodorant—there's a bottle right over there, the one with the dropper. Some use special 'air oils, pomades, or other perfumes, but those are 'arder to come by."

I give her a thankful smile, and turn to pluck the aforementioned bottle from the dresser. I look back at her and hold it up to indicate it. "This one?"

She nods her affirmation. "Yes, milady. Use it sparingly though, too much is overpowering, even to the 'umans. One or two drops under each arm should do jus' fine." Her nose scrunches up in disgust as she continues, "More than four an' you'll reek of the stuff."

I snort and shake my head. "Duly noted, and thank you, Sirin."

I open the bottle and cautiously take a whiff of the tan-colored oil within. It's pleasant and vaguely floral, though I'm not entirely convinced of its ability to keep B.O. under control. But hey, if it's what everyone uses, it must work, right? Otherwise, they wouldn't use it. I tip two drops of the thin oil onto my fingers, and slide them over my underarm, then repeat the process on the other side. I glance at Sirin, an inquisitive look on my face. "Did... I do that right? I didn't see another way of doing it."

That gets the first genuine sign of mirth from her I'd seen all afternoon, in the form of a soft little giggle. "You 'ave a very straightforward approach to things, milady, but that is an acceptable way of doing it, if a bit... masculine."

I lift my left eyebrow and snort a laugh. "There's a feminine way to do it, and I managed to err on the masculine side? That figures. That's actually pretty typical of what I do in my reality, too."

She holds her hands up placatingly. "It's a perfectly acceptable, and practical way to do it, milady. I meant no offense."

My brow pinches in a confused frown, though my smile hardly falters as I look at her. "I'm not offended in the slightest, Sirin. What gave you the impression I was?"

I can see her backpedaling, before I even finish speaking. "Oh, nothing milady, I just didn't want to offend."

I shake my head. "No, no, this won't do." Before the fear can creep into her eyes any more than it already has at that statement, I continue, setting the bottle aside to lift my hands imploringly toward her, "Sirin, listen to me. Remember what I said at our first meeting? If you don't tell me, I won't learn. If I'm displaying conflicting behavior like that, tell me. Be discrete about it, of course, but make sure I know." I sigh heavily, rubbing my neck while I hang my head and slouch, as if suddenly weighed down with the burdens of the whole world. "If I'm to be upheld as the Herald of a prophet everyone loves, I should at least act the part, yes?"

She's silent for a few seconds, then I hear a sharp little huff of breath, and the scraping of chair legs across the floor. I look up just in time to see her patting the chair she's pulled to the middle of the room, her expression firm, but kind. "Sit. You'll do none any good like that, milady Fen'nas."

I quirk my eyebrows at her, wondering what she means, but comply, settling into the hard chair and trying to get a look at her, where she stands behind me. To my utter surprise, before I can get a good peek in, I feel her fingers bracing on my shoulders, and digging into the muscle soothingly.

I snort a shocked laugh, shaking my head as I lower it gently in relaxation. "I didn't realize shoulder massages were a part of this arrangement. It's going to end up being a pretty massive favor I owe you, isn't it?"
She doesn't miss a beat. "Only if you wish it to be, milady. You requested my 'elp, I'm giving it. You worry too much, about everything. Someone needs to make you relax, at least a li'l."

I smile softly, chuckling with my chin resting against my chest. She's good at this. "You are... completely correct, about all of that, Sirin. Why does it somehow not surprise me in the slightest that you noticed?"

I can feel her shrug through her hands. "Someone 'as to. Besides, you've trusted only me an' one other with your secret. If you think I'm not honored that the 'erald 'erself trusted me, a nobody— you've got 'nother thing comin'. I'll take care of you, as best I'm able to, milady. I'm no 'andmaiden, but you didn't choose this any more than I did. I'll do what I can."

I smile and pat her left hand gently in appreciation. "Thank you, Sirin. Really, you've been a great help already."

She slowly finishes my shoulder rub and pats my right arm in return as she moves around me. "I'll go fetch the menu for the day, milady. You should eat something. It's likely been days since you 'ad naught but broth. I'll not be the one that lets you starve."

I chuckle and smile at her retreating back. "Appreciate it, Sirin."

I sigh as she closes the door behind her, then stare at the wood and iron barrier to the outside world for a few moments.

This is it. This is my... other life. It's real, and I have to live it, somehow—however I can.

I'm not even halfway through my first full day, and I'm already staring off into the ether, searching for answers in nothingness. Perfect.

Meet your Herald, Thedas.

Chapter End Notes

❤--Discord--❤

❤ Thanks for reading! If you enjoy the story or this chapter in particular, please feel free to leave a review with your thoughts! ❤
❤ I love reading comments and reply to all of them. ❤
Awkward Beginnings

Chapter Summary

Translations:

Mor'fen: big wolf

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

This is a very fascinating wall.

Well, okay, it's not the wall that's fascinating. Really, nothing about what I'm doing is fascinating. Staring at a wall, feeling overwhelmed, barely functioning well enough to breathe properly... yeah, not fascinating at all.

I do have to make a decision, but I need more information before I can do that.

I also really need to pee.

That privy out back is sounding better and better by the moment—though I've no doubt it's probably nothing more than a hole in the ground with a seat over it, if that much.

But I've got to wait for Sirin to get back with that menu. I could leave her a note, I suppose... then again, there's no guarantee that she can read—or that I can actually write in a language she would understand, even if she can read. The fact that I speak Common is purely a coincidence of it actually being bloody English, after all.

I don't even want to think of the reasons why I didn't need to go earlier. Chamberpots are a thing here, and I really, really don't want to think about that. I'm not having anyone empty out a fucking pot of my piss if I can help it. I'm no poncey noble prick. I'll gladly accept instruction on proper hygiene in this age, but I can do it all myself, thank you.

Ugh. The logistics of making this all work are... staggering, frankly. Imagine yourself in my shoes, for a moment. Thrust into a world of a thousand years ago, forced to learn how things work all over again, folded and shoved into a body not wholly your own... how well would you really fare? Can you truly blame me for staring at walls?

A knock at the door interrupts my fourth wall musings. "Enter!" I call, shifting my focus to the cottage's entrance.

It's Sirin, thank every deity in existence. "Ah brought the list, milady, and I can tell you what's likely to be the best if you like."

I accept the list she hands to me gratefully, and look at it, realizing it's hand-written. Did she write it, or did Flissa? Either way, it's written in a script I remember seeing in the game, and it's one I definitely can't read.

Well, shit.
I bury my unease in favor of necessity, setting the list aside. "Thank you, Sirin, but I really have to use the privy now. I was just waiting until you got back, so you didn't wonder where I'd gone. Any last-minute tips on using said privy? What... um..." I clear my throat uncomfortably. "What do I use to wipe?" I finally manage, my voice pitching up a few octaves, and nearly jumbling the words together to form one long one in my rush to get it out.

She blanches, her face clearly betraying her discomfort with my question, but she seems to swallow it down about as well as I did. "Well you're a mage, milady. From what I understand, they use magic to clean up after. I couldn't say 'ow, but that's what I've 'eard. As for the common folk, we use old rags and wash 'em out in the river, usually."

I barely manage to keep the disgust at hearing that little tidbit off my face. At least, I'm fairly sure I managed to. Swallowing firmly to keep bile from rising up out of my stomach, I nod to her and give her what's likely more of a grimace than a smile. "Thank you, Sirin. I'll take that under advisement."

She dips her head and takes her leave. I follow quickly, then veer off to head toward the side of the Chantry, in hopes of finding this 'privy'. It takes a minute, but I eventually do spot a building that I don't remember from the game—a long, low, wooden structure with multiple flimsy doors on it. Looks like a medieval port-a-potty, alright. Certainly better than a hole in the ground, though probably no more sanitary, knowing my luck.

As I approach, I note there's symbols carved on the tops of the doorframes, most likely indicating who should be using each one. Considering I have no clue what the symbols mean, and going in the wrong one could either be disastrous or just mildly embarrassing, I pause, looking back and forth at the various doors with anxious uncertainty.

"The far left."

I whirl around in alarm, only belatedly recognizing the voice.

"Shit you scared me! How are you that quiet?" I reprimand our resident Spymaster, earning the tiniest fragment of a smirk on her lips for my near heart attack.

"Years of practice, Herald." She gestures to the last privy on the left, ushering me towards it and dismissing me in one movement, efficient as always.

I dip my head in a tiny bow of thanks and turn, heading for my destination.

Turns out, privies aren't the worst thing, really. The little building has a rudimentary kind of plumbing in it, in the form of water from some stream directed about six feet under the row of seats, starting at one end of the building, and draining into a cesspool at the other end. It smells horrendous, but it works. The splashback must be impressive, with that much height, but I'm not very interested in finding out how much truth there is to that, right now.

Going is easy. Cleaning up after... well...

There's no such rag as Sirin had described hanging about, so I'm assuming you're supposed to keep a personal rag for that. Makes more sense than a communal one, at least. It's still disgusting.

In any case, that means I'm left to either drip-drying, or figuring out the way to magically wipe myself on the fly. At least, if I can't figure out the magic side, I'm hairless, so the drying will be easier. Not sure how much of a plus that is, but hey, at least my bladder is finally empty.

So... how do I do this?
Frost is out, I don't want to freeze my bits off. Fire is out for the same reason in reverse. It seems a bit rude to use spirit magic—I mean, really, what's the difference between asking for a spirit's help, and using an actual wiper servant? No, thanks. So, what does that leave? Solas is the only mage I can ask, and he's not exactly handy right this moment... not that I would want him to be, considering the circumstances.

I suppose I could attempt something from my force magic... but what? Everything I know of that I can actually do is a bit too... well, explosive.

Guess I'll have to improvise.

I call my mana forth, trying to evoke images and feelings of cleanliness in my mind, and summon the result to my fingertips. I wave the energy toward my nethers... and proceed to nearly fall into the stream below my precarious seat in shock.

That was not the effect I was going for, thank you very much libido!

I cough to hide a whimper, praying to any deity that will listen that I hadn't actually made any... sounds in commemoration of that particular sensation. Good gods I do not need rumors spreading of the Herald masturbating in the privy. Fuck my lives.

After a few tense moments of listening for any sign that someone was actually around, I relax back onto the cold stone seat, and slump forward with my elbows on my knees. Well, I suppose I could just... slide my smalls and breeches back on and hope for the best? Maybe run to Solas and get the embarrassing question out of the way? Hell, it's better than risking another accidental masturbation session. I'd rather risk Solas' scorn for a few moments than the possible scorn of all of Haven, at them hearing their supposedly holy Herald gets off on being in the privy. Thanks, but no thanks.

I slowly stand with a reluctant huff, and bend over to grasp my ankled clothing. As I start to shimmy my smalls up my legs, I pause, tipping my head slightly and rotating my hips a bit, experimentally. Huh. I'm... actually not as wet as I thought I'd be, especially considering... yeah. *Cough.* Maybe I had time to air dry, in all my deliberation? Or that magic trick I did partially worked? That would be a bloody miracle, but even if it did, I really need a better—well, less risky, at least—way of doing it. There's no guarantee it'll work for the backside, after all. Off we go to pester Solas, then.

After a final check to ensure my breeches are secure, and that I don't have anything horrid sticking to me anywhere, I quietly exit the privy. I look around, and come away relieved to see that there was nobody around for my little performance. Excellent. Luck on my side, for once. Who'd a thunk it? I'll take what I can get.

I make my way to the other side of the Chantry, doing my best not to cringe every time I hear a line from the Chant of Light. Shuddering at the last echoing stanza that rings through my skull, I slip between the Apothecary and what will one day be Dorian's cabin, heading for the egg's little house on the hill. He's actually standing outside this time, arms akimbo and head tilted toward the sky—likely thinking about the veil, or the Fade or something. C'mon, you know I'm right.

I approach him from behind, snow and gravel crunching beneath my boot soles, and I know he can't possibly have missed my presence, but his gaze stays steady on the sky. I tap his shoulder gently. He turns, gracing me with a slowly building smile and wizened eyes.

I return his smile. "Pondering the mysteries of the universe?"

He snorts a soft laugh, half shaking his head as he responds, "Not of the universe, no. Of your
existence, and the impossibility of it, perhaps. I have heard tales of you already—the blessed Herald of Andraste, come to save us all."

I bark a laugh. Apparently we can't escape the script entirely. Maybe that will one day change. "Am I riding in on a shining steed, a dragon, or a nug?" Hey, if it won't change itself, I'm happy to assist.

The shocked amusement shines on his face, as he lets out a more robust laugh than I think I've ever seen him give in the game. "I believe I would like to see you try to ride a dragon or a nug someday. Either would be ridiculous, and I'm certain riding a dragon would only add to your legend."

I giggle, shaking my head and glancing down to my toes as I shuffle them. "You're probably right." I look up with a smirk as I continue, "Varric wouldn't be able to resist writing about that."

He nods his agreement. "You are likely correct. Jokes aside, the title you now have to uphold is necessary to the Inquisition's success. Without you, there is little to base its formation on, since the most they could do in your absence is keep chaos at bay, for a little while. You are the heart of this struggle now. But, as you yourself have said, the heart is often fickle, even with the best of intentions. I'm curious where you will guide them," he juts his chin out toward the rest of Haven, then looks to me with a studious gaze.

I heave a heavy sigh, looking out over the small village with a burdened heart. I blink against the glare of the midday sun on a soldier's helmet as he passes below, and images of Haven burning flash behind my shuttered eyelids.

_Smell of burning flesh rises to my nostrils, wafting up and coiling through the air with the inevitable decisiveness of death. Flames flicker and snatch at the simple wooden shanties, screams of the trapped innocents lifting to the sky to join the cacophony of misery. A child's eyes peer out through the crack a fallen board in the side of a hut provides, and a small arm reaches out to me, eyes begging salvation of me. My heart and mind lurch into full blown panic at the sight of her in danger. Before I can reach her, the hovel collapses, mercifully shielding her death from my eyes; but it doesn't lessen the blow of the knowledge that I wasn't in time to save her._

With a sharp intake of breath, the muscles in my neck tense, jerking my head to the side slightly. It almost feels like one of my PTSD flashes, and every bit as intense. The fuck? I haven't had one of those in _years_. Don't tell me this is going to give me a whole new set of traumas to add to the list. Please, _gods_ tell me that's not going to happen.

I glance over at Solas, hoping beyond hope that he didn't notice anything amiss, but fuck me running if he isn't looking at me with overt concern in his eyes. _Shit._

Suddenly, his expression clears somewhat, and he takes a breath, gesturing for me to follow as he turns toward his cottage door. "You are underdressed for this weather, da'len. Come, sit by my fire a while, and warm yourself."

It's one of the worst excuses I've ever heard, but it'll do. I nod my head and rub my hands on my arms to try coaxing some heat into them; only partially for the sake of the ruse, in the end—I'm actually pretty chilly out here. Could have something to do with not having gone to Harrit yet for my armor. Oh well, I'll get around to it, after I deal with... this.

I follow him inside and feel the power of the tiny spell he flings at the logs in his fireplace, setting them alight instantly. I shut the door behind me and step toward the fire, reaching cold hands out toward the flames. I run the scene through my mind, trying to understand where I'd even seen a similar one before. Usually my flashes are of past experiences, but I've never experienced Haven
burning in person, let alone seen the child that invaded the vision. I sigh as I realize my hands are trembling, and shake them out in frustration.

I look over at Solas, who has remained a mercifully silent observer for these events. "I have... shit, I don't know what you'd call it here. It's something that some people develop after traumatic events—they get flashes of what happened, or sometimes they become completely immersed in the memory, unable to leave it until it's done with them—we call it shell-shock, or post traumatic stress disorder, in my reality. It's something I've had since I was very young. For me, it's usually only quick flashes of a random particularly bad memory. Sometimes it hits pretty hard, but it's usually manageable. This one though..." I frown and shake my head as I trail off.

His voice is gentle when he finally speaks, after a short pause, "It was different from the rest?"

I nod softly. "Yes. It wasn't something I've been through personally. I know it's going to happen, but I've never physically been there for it. And there was an element in this one that I've never seen before." I shake my head in confusion as I turn to stare into the flames and recount the memory. "There was a child there, and she died; I couldn't save her. I felt... I don't know. I felt a strange attachment to her, like I knew her somehow. Like she was the most important thing in the world." I look over to him and hug my ribs, trying to stave off the shaking in my gut. "I couldn't see her well enough to tell if I actually know her, but she was special to me, somehow, in the moment."

He releases a tense breath, gaze dipping to the floor before he looks back up at me. "Have you ever had a child?"

I shake my head immediately. "No. I... can't. At least, not in my reality. I have no idea about here, or what this body might've had before I... well..." I snort at the irony. "Shit, I make it sound like I'm possessing this body, like a spirit or something. Anyway, no, as far as I'm aware, I've never had a child. She—" I cut myself off, running the part of the scene when I first saw her through my head, over and over.

"She looked a bit like me, actually. Not like an offspring, but like me, as an elf." I explain, ever so eloquently. I look back at the flames in shock. "Fuck." I sink to the floor, sitting cross-legged as I continue to stare off into the flames.

I almost jump when Solas speaks again. I'd forgotten he was there. "Perhaps it is a portent of some sort. It is certainly not outside the realm of possibility. Rivaini seers often witness odd things in dreams." He quietly joins me on the floor at my side, facing me. "May I ask what else happened in this vision of yours?"

I snort. "Yes, because all everyone needs is the blessed Herald of Andraste to come down with a case of visions." I wave my hands dramatically in the air and roll my eyes as I drop my hands to my lap. I shake my head and sigh. "But, to answer your question, I saw Haven burning."

His eyebrows fly up, shocked worry covering his face like a shroud. "Burning? You said this is going to happen. When?"

I shrug, half in laziness and half in reaction to the chill in my spine. "After I close the Breach, the first time. Armies marching ever onward, stopped only by the weight of the mountain. They burn Haven, and leave many dead in their wake." I look away from his face, unable to maintain eye contact—even with the murderer of worlds; oh, the irony—in the depths of my regret. "I can only save so many, after all."

His voice carries the frown his face must display. "You speak as though you carry the burden of survival in the face of loss, yet you yourself admit to not having lived through it yet. Do not allow
the weight of what will come to rest on your shoulders, before it must. Such a weight can shatter even the strongest of wills, and I would not see yours broken so."

I smirk, glancing over at him and catching the raw, genuine concern in his eyes. It snaps my attention, and I don't look away, this time. "Ma serennas, ha'hren. But I was born to bear such burdens. My will has a knack for survival that seems to humble most people. I survive. It's what I'm best at. While I certainly won't turn away offers of help to ease the burden, I will survive, either way."

He gives me a sad little smile, and reaches out impulsively, halting halfway and retreating his hand as he seems to think better of the gesture. He speaks as if I hadn't just witnessed his hesitation, "Somehow, I believe you, da'fen."

I chuckle softly, the left corner of my lips perking. "As you should. You have survived, have you not?"

Ah. Perhaps that wasn't the best thing I could've said, if the darkening of his features are anything to go by. Oh well, too late to take it back now.

Eventually, he gives a tiny nod. "So I have. That is not to say I am completely intact, nor that you should aspire to copy my example, however."

I level a knowing look at him. "Nobody is truly intact, Solas—least of all us. That they let us out of our cages at all is a testament to how damaged they realize we are. They only set us loose because they take pity on us, and because they know we can cause the most damage, broken as we are. You know they'll try to cage us again, the moment we become inconvenient. But I think we can escape their clutches, long before that happens."

I'm graced with an infinitesimal smile for that sentiment. "You are likely correct. You still plan to assist me, then?"

I nod. "I do. I'll stay with the Inquisition until it can no longer benefit either of our goals, then disband it and join you, wherever you may be. I will not wait around to be leashed and shut away. No matter what happens, I would rather face the new world with eyes open. Even if it kills me."

He shakes his head. "Mere survival is not the best of options, da'fen. Surely you wish for more."

I huff a laugh. "Survival is the only option, Solas. How do you think I've survived so long?" I lean in with a smirk. "By refusing to die."

I sit back and heave a soft sigh and a little snort of a chuckle. "On that note, I have a few dozen questions for you."

His features soften as a smile tugs at his lips. "Then by all means, ask."

I take in a breath, deciding which to inquire after first. "After I called my dog, what happened? When I came back, I was back in my cabin, and I ended up having to tell Sirin all about my little
situation. I'd like to avoid repeating that with anyone else, if possible.”

"Ah. You declared that you had a wish for a bath, and promptly left. Following you to ensure your safety seemed ill-advised, considering your chosen activity."

I snort and lay back on the floor, folding an arm behind my head as a pillow and resting my free hand on my stomach. "Fantastic. Well, I woke in my reality to see I'd written nearly a chapter of words, and read them over, only to realize that the writing style was exactly mine. Which, all things considered, is a good thing... if incredibly creepy. Then, I took my dog outside and took a staff with me."

I grin up at the rafters above me, taking a breath as I continue, "Turns out, I can summon both frost and fire in my reality. I didn't test anything else, but that at least means I can practice some of what you teach me here. So, that's something. Once I figured that out, I went back inside, called on you, Sirin answered, and here we are." I turn my head to look at him. "Sort of."

He lifts an eyebrow curiously. "'Sort of?' Who is this Sirin you keep mentioning?"

I open my mouth, only to snap it shut, then open it again. "Sirin is the servant who found me when I woke. She and I have an agreement for her to teach me... some things... about this world. Anyway, I took a bath, told Sirin about my being from another world—which, all told, she actually took rather well, considering—and um... heh, well, I... actually have a rather awkward question to ask you."

"How awkward?" I'm pointedly looking up at the very interesting rafters by this point, but I can practically hear the raised eyebrow in that question.

I clear my throat. "Very." I take a bracing breath. "Sirin is helping me with things like basic hygiene in this age, and she mentioned that an old cloth is generally used... um... after the privy, for cleaning up. But she also mentioned that mages use another method for that, but, since she's not a mage, she had no particular insight aside from that. I may have... improvised a bit in the end, but frankly, the method I did find was a bit..." I trail off, really having no idea how to explain that while my method may have worked—maybe?—it also resulted in masturbatory results. Yeah, not going there with him, especially not... yeah no.

"Unsatisfactory?" he guesses, bless him.

I cough, eyes widening as I barely clamp down on my head when it wants to shake a veritable 'no' in response. "Ah, not the word I would've chosen, exactly. It did the job, I think. Not completely sure."

He huffs, obviously growing impatient at my hedging. "Fen'nas, speak plainly, or do not speak on this at all."

"Gah!" I groan, as I fling myself into an upright sitting position and glare at him. "Fine! But remember you said that," I remind him, pointing at him for emphasis. "I experimented with a spell to clean myself after I urinated in the privy by the Chantry, and I ended up near orgasm, but dry, ironically. Is that plain enough for you?"

I can see by how tightly he's clenching his jaw, and by how carefully he's controlling his breathing, exactly how hilarious he thinks my little outburst is. I glare daggers at him.

Naturally, that breaks the dam of his control.

I have never heard so much snorted laughter in my life.
I roll my eyes and sigh, partially in annoyance, and partially in relief. He took it better than I'd hoped, at least. Now if he'd just stop laughing at me, it'd be grand.

Oh, he's doubled over. Wonderful.

"I'm glad you find this so hilarious, but it's hardly helpful."

He waves his free hand at me, his other hand clutching his stomach as he raises his face to look at me through squinted eyes, fighting off laughter to speak. "Ap-pologies, I"—snort—"a moment, please."

I roll my eyes even harder, heaving a sigh for the ages as he continues to choke on his tongue at my expense. I gather my mana and aim a tiny shove at him, effectively laying him out on his back in short order. Ah, there we go—that, at least, seems to've bled some of the humor out of him. He reaches up to wipe his eyes, his titters dying off slowly, but surely. Finally. Never thought I'd actually be annoyed at seeing him lose it like that, but when it's at my expense, well... I'm sure you can understand.

A deeply contented exhale issues from him, followed by a grunt as he rights himself, an apologetic smile on his face. "Ir abelas, Fen'nas. And... ma serannas. I have been in need of a good laugh for some time, though it should not have come at your expense. For that, I apologize. For what it's worth, I do not believe I have ever heard that particular complaint, in all my long years." He gives me a lop-sided grin. "It was well worth hearing."

I snort, gracing him with a grudging smile. Damn wolf. "Well at least one of us benefited from my awkwardness." I can see him trying to apologize again, and wave him off, moving on. "Anyway, now that it's out, you can help me learn the real spell for that particular task. It might not be combat related, but it's still a part of life here, and I need to know it."

He nods his acquiescence. "You are correct, of course. Can you demonstrate the spell you used? If it worked, we may be able to modify it for your purposes. I would rather start from a basis you're familiar with, than try to teach you an entirely new concept, if what you have will suffice."

I'm sure my face reflects my uncertainty at his request. "Well, I'm not completely sure it did work, actually. I mean, it's possible I just air dried in the time it took me to dither about until I just tried something."

"You may have a point, but show me anyway. Even if the spell turns out to be nothing like the proper one, at least you will know."

I hesitate with bated breath, then release it in a puff and hold my hand out, recalling the magic that I'd used earlier. I focus on him as the formed spell gathers in my hand. "There. What do I need to do from here?"

He scoots closer to me and reaches his hand out, and I can feel his mana probing mine gently. Huh. It doesn't hit me like it does in the Fade. Theory confirmed. Good to know.

Nodding, he shifts his gaze to me and gestures toward my hand. "You have the spell's basis there, but you've added a few unnecessary elements to the actual manifestation. I assume you were worried you might harm yourself with the spell?"

I tilt my head in surprise. "I was, yes. Force mage and all that. So far, all of my basic magic has been pretty brutally... well, violent."

He smiles at me patiently, his tone instructional as he nods and continues. "Your magic is only as
violent as you wish it to be. You are uniquely gifted in your abilities, da'fen. You can mold your power into anything you can imagine; whether it be a hurricane of destruction, or a gentle caress. Your worry gave your spell the element of pleasure, to overcompensate for your fears of harming yourself. You need not fear your own magic, so long as you respect it. It is no more or less dangerous than any other tool or weapon, and you should treat it as such."

Heeding his words of wisdom, I start adjusting the spell, fine-tuning it until I'm satisfied. I keep it summoned in its modified state, and look back at him for his appraisal.

"Better." He nods his approval. "You can adjust it more as you see fit, but that will work for any personal cleaning you may require from here on out. Are there any other spells of a similar nature you wish to learn?"

I flick an eyebrow up curiously. "Such as?"

He smiles, and begins to teach me.

For the next three hours, I immerse myself in his tutelage, casting spell after spell, each with varying purposes and degrees of usefulness. Did you know, there's actually a tiny barrier spell you can have constantly cast on your teeth? I never have to brush my teeth again, if I don't want to. Gums and tongue are another matter, but he teaches me a spell for that too. There's a reason you don't see anyone with bad teeth in the games—and it's not just that Bioware's being lazy. Cavities are repaired with healing magic. Seriously.

Sadly, I find I don't have an affinity for healing. At all. I almost manage to crack my tooth when I try. Solas claims it's my lack of control that's the issue, but I don't want to risk it. He might be right there to fix it, but still. I'm finicky about my teeth. And my eyes. Anyway, not the point. He says I should try again when I've learned finer control of my magic. I may have to one day. We'll see. Until then, I pity anyone who thinks they can rely on me to heal them, just because I'm a mage. I'm more likely to break a bone than mend it.

We're starting into mnemonics of basic elemental combat spells when he gets this tiny smile, like he's just been reminded of a private joke. "You were wrong, after all."

"Pardon?"

He smirks. "You said you would need lyrium if you were to do any extended freehand casting. I have not felt your reserves dip below half full this entire time." His smirk turns smug as he continues, "Perhaps it is not lyrium you need, but control."

I concede his point with a dip of my head. "You're likely right. I never claimed to be an expert in magic, if you'll recall. I still don't feel comfortable going into combat without a staff, though—even if I just end up using it to block."

He shakes his head slightly, a soft smile on his lips. "There will come a day when you will no longer need a staff, or weapon of any kind to protect yourself. Until then, I will show you everything you need to know. You will want for nothing that is within my power to teach you, this I swear."

I return his smile. "That's a mighty solemn vow there, mor'fen. I'll hold you to it."

I get a quirked eyebrow for my efforts. "And how do you propose to do that, da'fen?"

I give him a coy smile. "I can be rather inventive, if pressed, mor'fen. At the very least, I can truss you up and tickle you until you tell me more."
He snorts. "That sounds like something that could happen on any given day of the week in Orlais. Surely you can come up with something more interesting."

That earns my most devious grin. I won't tell you what I said, but suffice to say, I know how to make the Dread Wolf blush from cheeks to ear tips.

Chapter End Notes

❤ --Discord-- ❤

❤ Thanks for reading! If you enjoy the story or this chapter in particular, please feel free to leave a review with your thoughts! ❤
❤ I love reading comments and reply to all of them. ❤
Settling In

Chapter Summary

Have an early chapter. <3

Translations:

Dar'eth: go safely
Sule tael tasalal: until we meet again

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It's over too soon.

I could spend all day listening to his voice, hearing him approve and disapprove of my various summonings; his gentle patience as he corrects my little manifestations a soothing balm to my very soul. I would be happy to stay here, listening and doing, casting and pulling wisps from beyond the veil that I'm beginning to actually feel now—a constant presence that covers the world like a damp blanket over everything.

It's stifling. Like living in the desert your whole life, then moving to a jungle, and trying to go on a jog and breathe through the curtain of pure moisture surrounding and clinging to everything around you. It's possible, but you sure as hell can't last as long as you're used to, and it's painful until you get used to it. Thing is, I'm not entirely sure I can get used to it. Now that I can feel it, it's a constant pressure in the back of my mind. Solas assures me that feeling will improve with time, but that it will never truly go away, so long as the veil is still in place.

It fucking sucks, frankly. I want it gone, just because of that wet blanket feeling I have constantly now. I can't imagine how he must feel, with everyone around him pretty much being tranquil, in comparison to what he knows. What Pride hath wrought, indeed.

Veil aside, I'm more than loathe to leave his company. He's one of only two people I don't have to pretend for here, and I'm starting to understand a small fragment of how he sees everyone, from this. They might not be tranquil to me, but they're... not in the know, to say the least. It's very restricting.

I've thought about telling them, about cluing them in to what's going on with me, into a thing or two about the very near future—I'm not completely stupid, I know telling them anything too far in the future could be disastrous—just so I'm not running around, hiding the truth from them all. I do actually care about these people, after all—it's not like I haven't spent a year of my life writing about them, thinking about them, theorizing about it all. Yes, I'm that obsessed. I'd gladly write for Bioware if I had the chance.

Wouldn't that be ironic?

Regardless, I haven't decided what I should do, regarding my circumstances here. It seems almost counter-intuitive to lie to them, after all the time I've spent being truthful in my life, but it's
probably the best option. I mean, there's endless potential here, really. A thousand different threads splay out before me, all leading to possible futures that could occur, all starting with the choices I make in the next few years of this life.

The next few years...

Holy shit. Yes, I just now thought of that. This... this is going to be happening for years. Shit. I usually don't even make plans more than a week ahead of time, if that much.

Well, I won't be bored for a while, at least... or possibly ever again.

Especially if I'm having 'visions', or whatever the hell that PTSD-like flash was. The eyes of that little elven girl keep passing through the forefront of my mind, pinching my expression when it happens. Solas has started to notice that little pinch, despite my attempts to hide it. He hasn't said anything about it yet, mercifully. Doesn't mean he won't, at some point. Everyone has their limits.

We're exploring the fundamentals of a few more practical spells, when a knock resounds from his door. He puts a hand up to signal that I should stay, and rises to greet our interrupter. He only opens the door a few inches at first, but lets it swing wide with a resigned sigh as he recognizes the knocker.

"Seeker." He nods his greeting, which she returns with a smaller, almost minute nod. He turns to look at me as her gaze slips past him and zeros in on my seated form. "Have you come to retrieve the Herald, then?"

She gives a firmer nod in confirmation, folding her hands at the base of her spine, which goes ramrod straight. "I have. She declared earlier that she had a wish to speak to me. I did not think I would have to hunt her down to grant her an audience, but here we are. She also has other trainers to see today."

I smile and stand, stretching stiff muscles and stepping for the door. "That I do. Thank you for the reminder, Seeker. I do believe I would've let the sun set on us, casting the time away, had you not intervened with reality." I look to Solas and dip my head in thanks. "Ma serannas, ha'hren. Sule tael tasalal."

He inclines his head softly. "Dar'eth, da'len."

I send him a smile as I pass him, one he returns with a subtle twitch on the corner of his lips, just before he passes from my view. Cass turns and moves off, obviously expecting me to follow, which I do, reluctantly.

I love Cassandra, really, I do. Seriously. Enough that I even sat and watched the animated movie about how she became the Hero of Orlais and all that jazz. It was all quite dramatic, with sweeping storylines that carried you along easily 'til the very end. There were unjust deaths, horrid plots, deception, love, trauma, drama, valor—all the goodies you look for in a really great heroic story.

Which is exactly why I'm pretty much scared shitless of her.

Don't get me wrong: I know she has a softer side, and I know she doesn't mean me any harm. That doesn't make her any less intimidating. Hell, I'm more comfortable with Leliana than I am with her, and that's saying something.

 Probably that I don't have a very good sense of self-preservation.

Oh, well. I'm still alive, so it must not be too far off.
She leads me out of the village gates, toward her usual training area. Well, I call it a training area. We all know it's just the place where she beats the shit out of helpless wood and sackcloth dummies all day long.

But I digress... ridiculously.

As she reaches her usual station, she turns and sizes me up with a single pass of her scathing gaze. She sighs heavily and turns, bending over—and giving me a simply glorious view of that backside of hers... what? I said she was intimidating, not that I don't have eyes—and sweeping her hands down to pick up... two practice swords. Ah, shit. She turns to me, holding one of them firmly by the hilt, the other by the dull blade, offering it to me. Shit, shit. Now comes an awkward conversation. Fantastic.

"Um, Seeker, I'm afraid (Literally, but I don't say that.) you may have the wrong impression of what I meant when I said I wanted to have a conversation. I meant actual words, not a training session."

She tilts her head at me, a bit like a confused bird. It would almost be endearing, if she weren't still insistently shoving a sword toward my hand. "Is there any reason we cannot do both?"

Ah, fuck. I cough awkwardly, trying to hedge around the fact that I'm just terrified of her as tactfully as I can. "Ah, no, but I had actually planned to do my training with the Commander, if it's all the same to you. I haven't had a chance to speak with him yet on the subject, but I can do so, once we finish speaking."

At that, finally, mercifully, she lets the sword slump to her side, then tosses it over by one of the dummies, along with its pair in her other hand. "Very well, if that is your preference. But know that he will not go easy on you. He is used to training Templars and recruits, not soft mages."

Excuse you? I'm not soft! Well, not in this body, at least. Okay, softer than you, certainly—but shit, pretty much any woman would be, in comparison. "Heh, yes, well I don't recall hearing very many tales of you training them, either. And frankly, Seeker, I'm glad that he won't go easy on me. I'm not looking for someone to go easy on me, I'm looking for someone that might actually feel some remorse for handing my ass to me over and over, day in and day out, until I get the idea. I get the feeling I'll garner more remorse from his side of the fence than yours. No offense intended."

There goes that bird-like head tilting again. Apparently I confuse her. She straightens as she speaks, "None taken. I am uncertain what remorse for such things has to do with anything, but I will not object, if you prefer it. He will be an excellent trainer, until you delve into more advanced techniques. But I have a feeling, if you make it to that point, you will seek me out on your own."

I bow my head softly in acknowledgment. "It is entirely possible you are correct, Seeker."

"Cassandra," she corrects me, sternly but kindly.

I smile. "Cassandra. If we are to be on a first name basis, however, I would appreciate it if you would call me Fen'nas."

She frowns slightly. "Fenas? Is that an elven name?"

"Fen'nas," I correct her gently, then pause. I continue with a winning smile, "Actually, you can just call me Fen, if you like. I've heard it's easier. And yes, it is elven. It means wolf soul."

"Wolf soul? Is there a particular reason for such an odd name?"
I smirk, nodding. "There is. I picked it because it fit, for many reasons you may one day discover and wholeheartedly agree with. For now, merely know that I am dedicated to our cause of restoring order, and I will do anything in my power to assist, up to and including giving my life for it, if it is called for." I give a small bow to demonstrate my sincerity.

She eyes me skeptically. "We shall see. I suggest you begin training, unless you wish to give your life prematurely, to some bandit's stray arrow."

I smile softly. "A wise suggestion, Cassandra. I'll go speak to Cullen in a moment. First, I would like to get to know you a little better..."

Yes, I'm giving the game script room to roam for a bit. I really hadn't had a particular conversation topic in mind, when I asked to speak with her. Yes, I'm a poor planner. You'll learn that about me, if you haven't already.

I nod and comment in the right places, paying enough attention to the conversation to appear invested. Yeah it's a little rude, but as long as she's none the wiser, who cares? She gets to talk, I get brownie points, and I don't have to grit my teeth quite as much that I can't just hit the space bar to skip parts of the conversation. Sorry. I really do love Cass' character, but she is a child of the Chantry. Most of her dialogue at the beginning is just frustrating. Not my fault.

When I told Solas I was as anti-Chantry as they get, I wasn't joking. I hate the way they deal with mages, I hate how they leash good men and women—who start off only wanting to do the right thing—with lyrium, then shit on them in turn. The Chantry is nothing but a slew of hypocrites, with the few good people being crushed and ground down under the majority's heel.

If you're pro-Chantry, you may wish to stop reading. I will never agree with that, sorry. You realize the 'Maker' is Solas, right? And that Andraste is Flemeth, pre-Mythal? Yeah. Let that sink in for a bit. The Chantry and its followers are just as bad as the Dalish. Worse, actually. Just saying...

Anyway, our conversation does eventually come to a close. It was altered a bit, since technically, what should've been our first conversation—the one where she asks you if you believe in the Maker—never happened. Bits of that conversation bleed into this one, such as what she's asking me right now—

"Tell me, do you believe in the Maker?"

Oh, Cass. Cass, Cass, Cass! Don't ask me shit like that! Ugh, fine. "Would it surprise you to find that I do? Before you answer that, let me specify that it is not the Maker as you believe him to be, that I believe exists. And when I say I believe in his existence, that is literally what I mean. I don't mean that I have actual faith in his deity."

I can practically taste the disapproval rolling off of her. Oh well—she asked. "Why does it somehow not surprise me a bit that our Herald happens to be a complete heretic? It does seem to fit with our luck thus far."

I smirk, dipping my head in assent. "True enough. But don't worry, I won't be intentionally spreading my heresy. I'm smart enough to understand the concept of self-preservation, and it is in my best interests that the Inquisition remain and grow. If my public silence on that particular matter is required for that to happen, then I'm happy to oblige." I finish my little proclamation with a sarcastic bow at the waist.

It earns me one of her patented disgusted scoffs. I feel like I just won an Oscar. "I am certain there
will come a day when you will not be able to resist. When that day comes, let us pray I am there to punch you squarely in the face to shut you up."

My bark of laughter can't be helped after that one. Once I manage to silence the snorting, I grace our resident Seeker with a charming grin. "I think we'll get along just fine, Cassandra." I lean in and my grin turns cheeky. "You watch. You may want to punch me one moment, but the next, you'll be asking me if I've read the latest issue of Swords & Shields. You'll see."

She blanches, then flushes, her eyes wide as an indignant cry escapes her lips. "I will not! I've never read that kind of rubbish in my life! Of all the scandalously ludicrous accusations you could possibly..."

She keeps on, and I just stand there, smirking at her with my arms crossed, hip cocked, watching with great amusement. It's like watching an Orzammar native dwarf grouse about falling into the sky. Eventually, she ends her tirade, only to glare daggers at my still smirking face.

"Are you quite done, Cassandra? Don't get me wrong, I'm enjoying watching you try to deny it all more than you can know, but regrettably, I do have to speak to Cullen at some point today. I can always come back after, if you'd like to resume your state of denial at a later time."

"You! I—fine! Go, then!" She waves me off sharply, her agitation clear.

I chuckle, shaking my head slightly. "You want to punch me, don't you?"

She glares at me, but I can tell her heart's not in it. "Do not tempt me."

I grin and raise my hands in surrender. "Far be it from me to ever tempt harm upon my person, Cassandra. Good day to you, fair lady."

I hear another disgusted noise aimed at my back as I saunter off in Cullen's direction. Two Oscars in one day! Ca-ching!

She'll love me one day, you watch. Just not today.

Totally worth it.

A few steps toward Cullen, and I hear the familiar lines, "There's a shield in your hand, block with it! If this man were your enemy, you'd be dead!"

I snort and watch Cullen turn to instruct one of the Templars in his command not to go easy on the recruits as I approach, and I can almost mouth the words verbatim. I stop just short of actually doing so, but it's a near thing.

The conversation starts as it always does. He accepts a report as we stroll to the end of the tents, talking all the way. The man is a marvelous multi-tasker. I can't read and talk at the same time to save my life.

"Forgive me, I doubt you came here to hear a lecture." He's so adorably awkward. I should romance him again sometime; it's just too sweetly dorky to resist forever.

"No, but if you have one prepared, I'd love to hear it!" Yes, I'm flirting with him. I always do, even when I intend to romance someone else. And I'm beaming him my most charming smile, to boot.

Naturally, he acts the blushing Ferelden virgin he is about it. It's painfully cute.
After a bit of awkward stuttering, we make our way back to the head of the tent rows, and I finally get to the point.

I take a deep breath, and begin, "It's been brought to my attention, that I should be training with as many of our experts as I have the opportunity to train with. Not just mages, but warriors and rogues as well. I agreed, and clearly see the wisdom in having as much combat training as possible under my belt."

I wave him on, heading toward the end of the tents again, just to have something to do besides awkwardly standing there. "Thus, I've come to you, Commander. I've heard you don't go easy on those you train, and that is exactly what I'm looking for. Your expertise as a former Templar will no doubt be invaluable in training. I realize you already have a lot on your plate, and I understand if you don't have the time, but I wanted to bring the request to you first, before I went to another."

We've reached the end of the tents, and are back to standing about awkwardly again, as he tilts his head at me curiously. "You're asking me to train you as a Templar?"

I shake my head and hold up a hand to stop that train of thought. "No, I'm not trying to join the Order, but the swordsmanship would be useful, I believe. That is what I'm wanting to learn."

He still seems confused. "You were just speaking to Seeker Cassandra, could you not have asked her?"

I snort. "Actually, she assumed I would be training with her, before I ever asked. But I would rather train with you, if you have the time. If not, it's no problem, just tell me. I know you have an army to run."

He huffs a small laugh. "An army? I don't know if I'd call it an army just yet. Even so, I barely sleep as it is."

I frown slightly. Is that because he can't sleep for the nightmares, or that he literally doesn't have time? "Perhaps you should delegate a bit more, Commander. And if that doesn't work, take a day off and watch them all run around like idiots until they learn how to accept your delegating properly. They'll figure it out, eventually, either way."

He chuckles softly, shaking his head. "If only it were that simple." Ah. It's the lyrium then. "I'll consider your request, Herald. I may be able to set aside some time each day, though that might not last for long, if the Inquisition's army grows significantly."

I nod my acceptance. "Of course. I imagine Cassandra will be quite happy to take over, at that point. Kicking me to the dirt a few hundred times seems right up her alley." I smirk and incline my head to excuse myself. "Thank you for your time, Commander. I won't take up any more of it."

"Certainly, and please, call me Cullen if it's just us. He blushes prettily even at that small concession."

I smile. "Then feel free to call me Fen, if it's just us. Be well, Cullen."

He returns the smile softly. "And you, Fen."

There. I've set up a daily playdate with Cullen. Well, hopefully, anyway. I really don't want to have to resort to Cass before I have to. I head out towards the logging stand I know our requisitions will need, plucking a leaf off an elfroot plant as I go. I wonder if I'm really gonna have to gather hundreds of these little shits to build the mage tower, garden, and clinic area. Fucking hell, I hope not.
I head into the lone house just inside the last wall, to grab old Taegin's notes. Looking down and absentmindedly studying the script on the pages as I exit the cottage, I notice something odd. It looks... wait just a fucking minute.

You're shitting me. It's literally English letters, written backwards and upside-down. Well ain't that some shit. How the fuck am I gonna learn to write and read like that? I mean okay, at least it's English, but what a bunch of convoluted shit! Fuck you, Bioware! Fucking really? It's so simultaneously clever and lazy... I almost wish I'd thought of it myself. Well hell, 'Common' is English, why should the writing be any different?

Beyond annoyed at my discovery, I trudge out to the logging stand. Hang on, how am I supposed to claim this thing? It's not like I actually carry around Inquisition banners everywhere. Maybe I just report the locations? That's gonna be a pain—I'm directionally challenged as it is. You best bet I can beat feet to a perfect rhythm in the Hinterlands, though. I know that place so well, it's stupid. I'll still probably end up spending a month there. There's just so much crap to do there!

I huff and plonk my ass on the low stone wall edging the logging site, kicking my heels against the wall. It's as I'm sitting here, watching the idiot rams knock into trees and each other in equal measure, that a mad thought springs to mind.

Solas never wears shoes, right? Why is that? Are his feet just petrified in his old age, or do elves have some kind of special immunity to the elements... centralized in their feet? I mean, he does wear warm—grandpa sweaters—clothing usually, so obviously at least some parts of him need insulation, right? Or is that just for appearance's sake? I mean, the shirt I'm wearing right now isn't exactly the thickest thing in the world, yet I'm not cold. I was earlier, oddly enough, before I went into his cabin. But that's actually the first time I can remember being uncomfortable due to the weather, since I woke up in this reality.

Fuck it, I'm gonna find out the truth of this issue. I sling my right leg up on my left knee, and start unlacing my boot.

"I was curious how long it would take you to divest yourself of your footwear."

I shouldn't be surprised. I really shouldn't. Sadly, I'm a jumpy shit, and I squeak, then proceed to fall over backwards off the wall. Fortunately, the wall is actually built into a sloping incline, so it's a rather short distance to fall. I just end up resting in a leaning back position. It's rather comfortable, actually; if a bit wet, thanks to the snow... which is decidedly not as cold as it should be.

I groan, running my palm down my face to try and chase my embarrassed flush away. "A little warning next time, if you will—the next wall I perch on is not likely to be so conveniently cushioned."

He simply chuckles and takes a seat next to me on said wall, entirely unperturbed by my complaint. "If you would not restrain your aura so tightly around your person, I would not need to give you any warning—you would already know I was there. But please, don't let me interrupt you. I believe you were freeing your feet from those shemlen prisons you're wearing?"

I snort and heave a sigh, grunting as I right myself on the wall and wincing at the glare of the sun off of his shiny head. "Okay, I understand the practicality of being bald, believe me, but do you really have to shine the damn thing? You're a fucking solar panel!"

It's only after he merely raises a disdainfully confused eyebrow at me for my efforts, that I realize what I've said. "Ah, shit. Forget I said the solar panel bit, please. The rest is still valid, though."
"I do not 'shine' my head, da'fen. What is a solar panel?"

A sigh deflates me, and I slump on my perch in annoyance. "It's something we use in my reality to harness energy from the sun. It was actually kind of a shitty comparison, it was just the first thing I thought of, for some reason."

He smirks. "Do you always say the first thing that comes to mind?"

I shoot a glare in his direction, before I reconvene my efforts to shuck my boots off. "Do you always sneak up on people and comment on their footwear?"

"I do not sneak. I already informed you what you could do to detect my presence, if you do not take my advice, I'm afraid I cannot help you."

I roll my eyes and finally manage the first boot off. I stretch my toes inside the stocking they're currently housed in, then strip it off, stuffing it in the discarded boot. He watches my progress with amused curiosity.

"I'm surprised you even put them back on, after your bath."

I huff a laugh. "You remember that I'm not actually an elf inside this head of mine, right? I didn't grow up frolicking in the woods, sleeping in ara'vels or under the stars. I don't know about this body's childhood, but mine was nothing like that."

He sighs. "I do recall your origins, yes. My statement has little to do with your identity or origins, however. It is a lack of physical need for such trappings that made me curious, that is all. Elvhen do not require such elaborate footwear, since only the most extreme of weather can actually affect us."

I nod understandingly. "I was wondering about that, actually. Thanks for confirming it. But if that's the case, why was I actually cold outside your cabin, just after you said to come inside and warm up?"

He smirks. "I cast a subtle frost spell on you, to enhance the believability for any possible observers. Your reaction had to be at least somewhat genuine, after all."

I snort, shaking my head as I pry the second boot off. "And you claimed you weren't wily. I knew that was wolf shit, the second you said it."

"Disappointed, da'fen?"

I grin at him, setting my boot aside and peeling off the second stocking. "Not in the slightest, mor'fen."

Chapter End Notes

❤ Discord ❤

❤ Thanks for reading! If you enjoy the story or this chapter in particular, please feel free to leave a review with your thoughts! ❤️
❤️ I love reading comments and reply to all of them. ❤️
Chapter Summary

So... truth time. I'm actually trying to do a chapter a day. I don't know how long I'll be able to keep that up, which is why I didn't tell you guys yesterday. I've never tried this before. So, bear with me while I experiment a bit, and hopefully I can keep this going for a little while. ♡

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"So what's the story here?"

I nod toward my naked feet, as I swing my legs through the air before me.

"What story would you have me tell, da'fen?" He lays back against the embankment behind us as he talks, "It's not so much a tale to be told, as it is a simple fact of our biology. The fact that it is true for you does confirm one of my suspicions, however."

I look at him over my shoulder, eyebrow peaked. "Oh? What suspicion was that, then?"

His smirk is almost sad as he replies, "That you are one of the People."

I turn to him fully, both eyebrows at full tilt in my surprise. "What?! Are you saying what I think you're saying?"

He nods solemnly. "Our resistance to the elements only carries so far down the bloodlines. For you to still possess that trait, your body would have to be at least as old as the veil—likely far older, in fact."

I fall gently back against the incline, a puff of air escaping my lungs as I impact. After a moment of silent staring at the blue sky, a soft curse escapes my lips.

"Are you disappointed in this news, da'fen?"

It takes a few seconds for me to parse that question, with all the other information flooding my brain right now. I shake my head slowly. "No, not disappointed... more like, I don't know. Shocked? I mean, if that's true, who am I, really? I don't have vallaslin, so either I had it removed at some point, or I wasn't a slave. So what does that leave?" I turn to look at him finally. "Do you know this face?"

His expression falls slightly. "I do not, da'fen. I have been trying to recall a face like yours, ever since I first saw you. Ir abelas, I cannot tell you who you were. Would that I could—it would likely solve many a mystery surrounding your existence."

I sigh softly, running my hand over my face and turning back to the sky. "Maybe the Sentinels know."

"Sentinels?"
I look back at him and nod. "Yeah, Mythal's Sentinels. We'll run into them eventually, at her temple in the Arbor Wilds. Abelas isn't too happy about our shemlen intrusion when we get there."

He huffs a laugh. "I imagine he wouldn't be happy with anyone's intrusion but Mythal's, by now."

I smirk and nod my agreement. "Truth. Any idea why he calls himself sorrow? Or is that just an elvhen thing, calling yourself different qualities, vices and virtues?"

He hesitates, but after a moment, begins to explain, "In Elvhenan, it was common to name yourself for your strongest aspect, like a spirit does. It was partially due to the multitude of spirits who took physical form in those times, but it was also a matter of practicality. Declaring yourself in such a fashion, eased your path into your place in society. Honor, Sorrow, Pride, Justice; these were aspects that Mythal treasured. To truly embody any of those aspects all but guaranteed Mythal's gaze would turn your way."

If he's saying what I think he's saying, that means... "So then, were you a spirit that took physical form, or did you name yourself Pride to get her attention?"

"What makes you think I would specifically vie for her attention, either way?"

I side-eye him. "Let's see, you locked away the other Evanuris for killing her, raising the veil and blanketing the world in a barrier that dampened all magic, and essentially made everyone mostly tranquil. I'd say that's a pretty strong case for you being a devotee to Mythal, in one capacity or another."

"...You have a point." He pauses, seeming to gather himself before he begins again, "To answer your original question, I was a spirit first, but I did not remain so for long. It was Mythal that found me and took me beneath her wing, showing me what could be. I was naive and young for a spirit—I barely even knew what aspect I embodied when she began, but she guided me with a gentle hand and careful wisdom. By the time I became a physical presence, I was fully ready for the transition. It was still a shock, of course. It's never easy. But my nature survived the trial intact. I do not think it would have, without her guidance."

I stare at him for long enough to be rude, stunned and in awe over how much sense that actually makes. It fits so perfectly, I don't know how I didn't consider it before. Fortunately, he doesn't seem to mind the staring, and he turns to look at the sky with a soft smile, tacitly allowing my rudeness to continue without interference.

The snow we're laying in has melted from the heat of our bodies, soaking both of our shirts, yet I can't bring myself to care about the wetness in my shock. I can't help but wonder how many others there are, who were once spirits like him. To think Cole was not the first of his kind, and in fact may be one of the last. No wonder Solas treasures spirits so much—no wonder he fights for Cole to have the chance to return to the Fade.

"How long have you been in a physical form?"

He looks back at me the moment he hears my voice, and smiles as the question lifts into the air around us, then falls softly to his ears. "I do not know the exact amount of time, da'fen. Time was barely measured at all when I first became what I am. I did not consider my age until much later, and by then there was no way to know for certain. I believe it has been approximately five thousand years since the moment I did think to consider it, if that helps."

I huff a laugh, shaking my head in wonder. "It doesn't, but that's alright. I really didn't expect you to have a definitive answer on that one. Thank you for telling me, though. You being a spirit..."
well, it actually makes a lot of sense, and explains many things. Your views on spirits, for one."
He frowns slightly. "Are my views truly so unusual to you?"

"No." I shake my head. "Not at all. Not to me, at least. I agree with your views, personally, but I know there are many here who don't."

He chuckles, though there's barely any joy in the sound. "Do you mean in Haven, or in this entire world?"

I smile sadly. "Both. It's tragic, but I do understand this world's viewpoint, even if I don't agree with it." My sad smile turns into a slightly bratty smirk. "I'm not from this world, so I can afford to disagree with it if I want to."

He returns his own smirk. "True enough." His smirk melts into worry quickly. "Has knowing my origins altered your opinion of me in any way? Do you still wish to accompany me, when you are done with the Breach?"

Seriously? He gives me the key that unlocks the answers to a thousand of my questions, and he assumes I'll think less of him for it? Ugh, this elf.

Rather than verbally answering him, I lean over and plant a kiss right on his lips, sliding my hand up over his cheek gently. I back off after a moment and smile down at him. "Does it seem like I've changed my mind about you?"

He purses those gorgeous lips of his, brow pinching slightly as he considers. He answers after a few seconds of deliberation, "I believe the answer to that is twofold: yes, you intend to stay with me when all of this is done, and yes, your opinion has been altered slightly, though not in any manner I was expecting."

My eyebrows fly up in surprise at that last bit. "Oh? Do tell."

His gaze seems to take my measure as he looks at me, then he sucks in a breath and explains, "I seem to recall you saying that you did not wish to pursue a physical relationship, since our desires and emotions were not equal in this matter."

Understanding dawns. Ah. Shit. "Ah, so, because I kissed you, you're assuming I've gone back on my previous declaration?"

He dips his head in assent.

I sigh and barely avoid rolling my eyes. "Yeah, okay, that's a perfectly reasonable assumption, I grant you that. However, I think you're missing the point of why I refused you in the first place, because it sure as fuck wasn't because I didn't want you. Quite the opposite, actually."

His face is a beautifully conflicting mixture of confusedly amused incredulity. "You refused me because... you want me?"

With a growling huff, I turn and sit up, realizing belatedly that he'd raised his arms on either side of me, as if to welcome me into his arms. Because he's not already tempting enough, without returning the affection. Wonderful.

"I already told you why I refused you when I did so, v—Fen'harel." Shit on a brick, I barely managed to cover that one up. I seriously need to install a brain to mouth filter.
"Vhen'harel?" He snorts. "I do not believe anyone has ever called me that."

I groan, reaching up to pinch the bridge of my nose in frustration. "It was a slip of the tongue, please feel free to ignore it."

I can hear the smile in his voice. "If you insist. But yes, I do recall your reasoning. You claimed outright that I do not love you, thus it was not worth pursuing."

I whip round and gape at him for a moment, until my gaping turns to a glare. "That is not what I said, and you know it! Stop twisting my words, harellan!"

He snorts, a grin tugging at his lips. "Isn't it? You did not say it exactly as such, but that was the intent of your refusal, was it not?"

I cross my arms and shake my head, bitterly chewing on my lip as I listen. "I never said it wasn't worth pursuing. I said it wasn't right to do it when you... you... alright yes, when there's no love on your side. And I don't want to use the effect our mana has on each other in the Fade as a means of coercion. None of it is right!"

I whirl to face any space that doesn't contain him in its depths, hugging my ribs tightly as I aim toward Haven and start walking. I can't handle this right now. I don't know if I ever could, really. Sadly, like usual when I run from him, I don't get very far.

"Fen'nas, wait." His fingers curling into the crook of my left elbow halt my progress. I stubbornly stay in place, unwilling to face him.

He huffs and circles me to stand in my path, instead, hands on both my arms now, holding me gently in place. "Asha, don't run. Not from this."

I glare at him and huff. "Exactly what do you want me to do, Solas? This is not something I can just wish or magic away, nor do I have any desire to. It is what it is." I look dejectedly off to the side. "I'm not going to pretend that I'm not completely ridiculous in this, I know I am. But I just... I cannot justify pursuing anything with you, as one-sided as things are. I just can't. It's not right."

His thumbs stroke my arms softly, and I hear a rumbling in his chest that almost sounds like laughter, but doesn't quite make it up his throat. "I don't know what's more amusing: that you presume to know what my feelings are on the matter, or that you're so adorable when you're trying to take the moral high ground."

I snap my gaze back to his face, a frown furrowing my brow as I stare at him in perturbed confusion. "I am not adorable, moral high ground or no! And what else should I assume your feelings could possibly be? You haven't even known me a week, that's hardly enough time to make the kind of decision that—"

I never get to finish that sentence.

He leans in and pulls me to him all at once, lips a searing heat against mine as I fumble over my shock. Belatedly, my libido reminds me there's someone kissing me, whom I very much want to be kissing, and I start to return the gesture—a bit timidly, at first, then with more gusto, as I find he doesn't seem to be interested in stopping any time soon.

His arms thread around my waist, fitting as though they were made for that purpose alone. I reach my own arms up to wrap around his shoulders and neck, fingers dancing up to trail along the bottom blades of his ears. That garners a sinful groan, which I swallow eagerly, a whimper escaping me that screams of my desperation to hear that sound from him again.
No!

Stop it!

Damn it all.

I can't do this. I can't. Fuck the moral high ground, this isn't even about that. This is about me being selfish. I want him to love me, because I don't want to be the only one with actual feelings about this situation. I want to be loved as much as I love. Is that so wrong?

It takes a few moments for him to realize I've stopped reciprocating, but when he does, he withdraws, looking at me with concern. "Is something wrong, da'fen?"

I sigh my regret and look him in the eyes as I nod. "Yes. You are under the impression that my resistance is due to some moral high ground wolf shit. It's not. It's purely selfish."

He gives me a small smile. "I know."

I quirk my head in confusion. "You know? How?"

A knowing smile that I want to kiss from his lips forms, and before I can act on my ridiculous impulse, he speaks, "Those refraining from indulgence for moral reasons do not kiss like that, da'fen. Yours is the desperate kiss of someone who wants nothing more than to give in, but refuses to, unless their requirements are first met. It vexes and torments you, but still you persevere. You are stubborn in your refusal. Stubborn, beautiful, and proud." He shakes his head, smiling fondly. "You were right—you and I are very alike."

I regard him evenly, watching carefully. "Why did you kiss me?"

"To cut to the truth, root it out, and expose it."

I lift a curious eyebrow. "Indeed? And what did your search reveal?"

"That I have a great deal more digging to do, before I uncover the whole truth."

A smirk pulls at the corner of my lips. "Then perhaps you should get started."

"I believe I will."

...Damn him.

Chapter End Notes

❤--Discord--❤

❤ Thanks for reading! If you enjoy the story or this chapter in particular, please feel free to leave a review with your thoughts! ❤
❤ I love reading comments and reply to all of them. ❤
Morning in Thedas

Chapter Summary

In which I get my ass kicked, and give zero shits about bathing privacy. The scandal! This chapter also contains sausage prejudice. You have been warned. Translations at the end, because spoilers. Sort of.
Love you babes! ♡

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

I grunt, falling back yet again, for what feels like the hundredth time this morning.
I'm definitely gonna have bruises.
Cullen informed me last night that we'd begin a daily training regimen in the morning. He was true to his word, as I expected.
He's also kicking my ass, which I also expected. I'm just glad Cass isn't around to witness it. If she thought I was soft before... ugh.
He's had to correct my grip on the hilt of the practice sword at least five times. Apparently, I have weak wrists. His blows, even when I do manage to block them, go right through my flimsy guard.
Fortunately, despite my weakness and ineptitude, I was completely right about him having remorse for laying me out on my ass. The poor man looks like he's kicking a mabari pup, every time I earn a new bruise.
Finally, it seems like he's kicked enough mabari pups for the day. "That's good for today. I expect to see you here again tomorrow, same time." His voice is firm and commanding, as it should be.
I nod and start to turn away, but he halts my progress with a hand on my shoulder. His voice is much softer when he speaks again, almost taking on that breathy quality that makes me go a little weak in the knees. What? Just because I happen to love one particular person, doesn't mean I'm fucking dead to everyone else's charming qualities! "Go see a healer before then, please. You'll still be sore, but at least you'll be able to move."
I add a smile to my nod this time. "Thank you, Cullen. I'll be here."
Sirin will make sure of that. Good gods the racket she made, waking me this morning. Pretty sure she woke up whomever lives next to me, too. I swear I saw a few glaring eyes peering through the windows as I slogged my way out of the gates. Have I mentioned I hate mornings? Yeah. I hate mornings. I don't mind 'em at all when morning comes at night, like I'm used to. But this before the ass crack of dawn shit is for the birds.
I head back to my cabin, where I'm greeted with Sirin, who is standing by the tub... which is full of steaming water. When did I order a bath? Not that I don't need one, but still. I give her a quizzical look. "Who ordered the bath?"
"Nobody, milady. But I knew you'd want one after rollin' about in the dirt all mornin', so I drew you one."

I blink stupidly at her insightful forethought. "Well... thank you, Sirin. That's very quick thinking on your part, I applaud you."

The faintest of color tints her cheeks, and she nods. "'Twas nothin', milady. Will you be orderin' breakfast this mornin'?"

Food. Yes. Good. Those were literally my thoughts when she asked that. "Yes, I will. Could you get today's list for me?"

She nods sharply. "Already done, milady."

She proceeds to rattle off the various foodstuffs that are available for breakfast this morning, as I start to strip out of the padded jack I'd worn for training.

Oh, that's a thickly padded shirt, made to be worn as protection without armor, if you didn't know. Cullen wore the same thing. Yes, it was distracting at first. But after the tenth time of being knocked to the ground, I got over it.

I drape the garment around the back of my desk chair as she finishes listing breakfast foods, some of which I have to get her to describe to me, since I've no fucking clue what they are. The fuck is a tardy loaf? A loaf that's late?

Turns out, yeah, pretty much—it's day-old bread, which means it's not old enough to be called hard tack just yet. So particular!

Apparently there's also fresh fish available, since some kind soul decided to go ice fishing.

I wave her off as I strip out of thin breeches. "Just pile whatever seems good on a plate. No sausage, though," I specify, pointing at her with a stern look until she nods. I'm not a fan of sausage. Never have been. But everything else today sounds fine.

She dips her head and backs up a few steps as she replies, "As you like, milady."

I smile at her as she leaves, and peel off the rest of my meager clothing after she closes the door behind her. I'd worn some very simple, light clothes that Sirin had shoved at me in the bleary moments after she'd woken me. Frankly, I'm quite certain I was only wearing them correctly because she was there to point out my stupidity, when I tried to put my breeches on backwards. Like I said: not a morning person.

I toss each item on my bed, then step into the steaming oasis that is my bathtub. Lemme tell ya, there's not many things I enjoy about regular life here in Thedas, as opposed to Earth... but this is one of them. I don't know why, but baths here are so much better than baths on Earth. Maybe it's because everything else is harder, slower, and dirtier in comparison? Probably. But the relief my de-knotting muscles are screaming almost makes it worth it. I should probably stretch after I get out. Ooch! Yeah. My back will thank me tomorrow if I do, I think.

Cullen said to go see a healer sometime today too, so that means... oh boy. Solas.

Warm, soft lips, fingers caressing paths into my skin that burn like flame, only to be soothed by ice, seconds later. The soft scrape of my shirt as it shifts aside for his hands at my waist. Tongues dancing around a tempest of desire that grows more volatile with each passing second. How could I have possibly presumed to know what passion truly was, before this moment? Lips parting in a
basic, desperate need for air—who needs air? My dizzy mind screams its body's demand at me, heedless of my desires. Brows pressed together as we suck in deep lungfulls of our physical form's barest necessity.

"I believe I am close to the truth," he says, between gasps of breath, "but I still require a bit more study to reach the heart of the matter."

Who am I to deny him?

"You're a quick study. I'm still looking, myself," I manage, grinning at him as I finish.

He smirks. "I was unaware the inquest was a mutual one. I shall endeavor to provide my best reference material."

I giggle at him, knowing it's impossible he could kiss me any more thoroughly or skillfully than he just did. "Please do," I egg him on anyway.

His smiling mouth descends on mine, and I soon realize I was wrong. So, so wrong.

A knock interrupts my reverie, and I snap my eyes open to look at the sound's source. Damn, I'd... really been deep in that memory. Then again, can you blame me? I'd pay to never forget that one. Yeah, okay, so we just kissed, but it was still one hell of a kiss.

"Come!" I call to what is likely Sirin, returning with breakfast.

Who enters is neither Sirin, nor are they carrying breakfast.

I lift an eyebrow and tilt my head curiously as I watch him come in and turn, closing the door behind him before he even sees me. When he does spin about to face the room, he has a smile on his lips, which is quickly wiped from his face and replaced with a fierce blush.

"I—oh. Apologies, I did not realize—I should go." He starts to turn for the door, but I stop him.

"Why? I've nothing you haven't seen before, mor'fen. And really, how much can you actually see, from all the way over there? I'm not exactly floating, after all."

He keeps his back turned as he replies, "You are comfortable with my presence as you bathe? That is... rather practical of you."

I snort a laugh. "Turn 'round, Solas. Practical or no, there is no point in you talking to a wall, is there? Might I ask the reason for your early visit? Not that I mind in particular, it just seems... unusual."

He turns and smiles at me, his head tilted just slightly. I can still see the remnants of a blush that refuses to leave as he speaks, "Does it? Ah, I suppose it must, considering we have not had many interactions in the early hours of the day before now. Regardless, I came to begin assisting you with your staff technique, as you requested when we first met in the Fade. I assumed you would be finished with Cullen's training about now, so it seemed an ideal time. Apparently, I was only partially correct."

I grin and chuckle. He's babbling. How adorable. I lean on the side of the tub closest to him, and look at him through wet lashes. "Solas, atisha. Is this making you uncomfortable?"

His blush darkens, but he shakes his head. "Not particularly. I am more concerned for your reputation, than my own, in this case."
I bark a laugh at how ridiculous his worry is. It's sweet, but it's ridiculous. "Ara emith nisathe sule
em." I sink back into the depths of the water as I speak, enjoying the warmth of the water while it
lasts.

I've already turned to grab the soap bar and a cloth to wash with, when I hear his retort, "Melahn ar
amast na emith sul ma, da'fen."

I start to lather up the washcloth as I frown at him. "Ahnsul?"

"Ahnsul uth'geronash sul em."

I chuckle and look at him with kindness in my eyes. "Sentimental fool."

He frowns slightly, all embarrassment apparently gone in the little storm of this debate. "How am I
a fool?"

I lift an eyebrow as I scrub at my neck. "Because you're more concerned with protecting me, than
protecting yourself. That is not only extremely counter-intuitive, it's pure nonsense."

He levels a sombre gaze at me. "You believe it nonsense to want to protect the sole means of this
world's salvation?"

I snort a laugh. "No, I find it nonsense to want to protect me. I find it infinitely practical to defend
you, the actual savior of this world."

His gaze turns hard at that. "I am not this world's savior."

I speak up before he can continue, "What are you, then? The great destroyer? Is that how you see
yourself? Because it's not how I see you."

Just then, a knock makes us both jump.

"Come in!" I call, and he half rolls his eyes as he turns and opens the door. It's Sirin, this time, and
she's carrying two plates, both heaped with food.

She nearly drops them when she sees Solas. "Oh! I—" she looks at me in question, "Should I come
back later, milady?"

Solas and I begin to answer her at the same time.

"No—"

"No, I—"

He looks back at me, and I raise an eyebrow at him. "Are you milady?" I ask, smirking and trying
to hold back a laugh.

He flushes and looks like he's about to fish up some excuse from the dregs of his wit, when I hold
up a dripping hand and look to Sirin. "It's alright, Sirin. Solas came to help me with my staff work."
I glance down at the food perched precariously in her hands and smile back up at her. "Are you that
hungry, Sirin? I'm never going to eat all that, and neither are you." I level a knowing smirk at her.

She blushes darkly, eyes shifting back and forth in their sockets. They finally rest on Solas and I
can see her swallow, just before she rips her gaze from him, to rest back on me. "I got it for all of
us, milady. I saw 'im 'eaded 'ere on my way to the tavern, figured we could all use something to eat.
I couldn't carry three, so I just piled extra on. I 'ope that's alright."
I smile softly at her and nod, gesturing to the desk. "It's perfect, Sirin; I applaud your initiative. Just put it on the desk. You two can go ahead if you like, I'll eat whatever's left."

"I... yes, milady." She moves to the desk, and I turn to notice Solas' eyes trailing her as she goes.

He draws his shoulders back, clasping his hands behind him. "I would have appreciated a warning about your Mistress' current activities, da'len. If you saw me heading this way, it would have been a simple matter."

I roll my eyes at him. "Solas, leave it be. I don't care if you're here during my bath, and neither should she."

He only glances at me, before returning to his staring at the object of his ire. "I would prefer to hear her excuse, if it is all the same to you."

I frown at him, more than a little perturbed. "It's not the same, actually. I—"

Sirin interrupts our bickering, nearly shouting her objections, "I saw you two out past the gates! I figured after that, she wouldn't mind you bein' 'ere, considerin'. If I was wrong, then I'm truly sorry. Milady Fen'nas doesn't seem like the type to be bothered by such things."

Finally, that silences him. For the time being, at least.

After a moment, I laugh at the utter silliness of the situation. I smile at Sirin. "Well, if you know about our little moment, then it's perfectly understandable that you'd come to that conclusion. I'm certain you didn't mean anything by it, so no harm done." I wave them both toward the food on the desk. "Go, you two, eat. I'll finish washing up and join you in a few minutes."

Sirin gives a little bow. "As you say, milady."

Solas merely lifts an eyebrow at me, likely in indignation at being ordered around after being so summarily silenced. Eventually, with a heavy sigh, he heads over to the desk and seats himself.

Sirin drags over a footstool and sits as well, pulling one of the plates towards her.

After I see them both dipping into their plates, I lean back and get down to scrubbing myself clean, now that I don't have an actively observing audience. My lack of modesty only extends so far, after all. I do prefer to wash myself in relative solitude. It's not required, it's just more relaxing.

Sirin excuses herself from the makeshift table after a while, and bends to the chest containing the clothing they've assigned to me. From it, she first pulls a peasant shirt, then a ring velvet and silk brocade vest. Then, after laying those carefully aside, she pulls out a simple pair of cotton breeches, some clean smalls, and a breast band. Bundling them all together, she moves to the bed, and begins laying them out.

The moment she finishes, she moves to the side of my tub and smiles at me softly. "Do y'need anything else, milady? I should be gettin' to my other chores, if you've no further need of me."

I smile up at her kindly, and shake my head. "No, Sirin, thank you. You're free to go. Don't work too hard."

She dips her head and backs away, bowing to Solas and I both as she retreats. "Good day, milady, Messere Solas." She exits and closes the door behind her.

The moment he hears her footsteps fade into silence, Solas pipes up, "You treat her remarkably
well."

I lift an eyebrow and snort a laugh. "Did you expect me to whip her and send her on her way with nothing but a few breadcrumbs?"

He frowns at me and sighs, pushing his plate away from him, then turning fully in his chair to observe me. "No, but you must admit you went above and beyond what propriety generally calls for. Most do not allow servants to eat before them, and certainly not from the same plate."

"Well," I say, then splash water over my shoulders to rinse them, "I don't see her as a servant, so that might have something to do with it. She's been a friend to me, ever since I woke up. She might do some things for me here and there that a servant would do, but it's as minimal as possible, by design. Most of what she does, I never asked her to do. But I'm thankful she does them, all the same."

"I see she chooses your clothes."

I shrug. "She has good taste, and knows what I prefer." I stand from the water and reach for the towel she'd set out for me.

"And that is?"

I smirk as I snap the towel open and drag it around my person, tucking the edge of it over to secure it. "Not beige, not yellow."

"Any particular reason you dislike those colors?"

I look over at him and he's eying me curiously, heedless of my undressed state. He got over it, then. Good. "Beige is an offensive color, and yellow hurts my eyes to look at for very long. Simple."

He nods thoughtfully. "Are there colors you do prefer, then?"

I smirk at him. "Why are you fishing, mor'fen?"

"I have neither pole, nor bait, so how could I possibly be fishing?"

A bark of laughter spills from my throat, tossing my head back with the force of it. I shake my finger and grace him with a coy grin. "You're funny, mor'fen. Seriously though, why do you want to know what colors I prefer?"

He folds his hands calmly in his lap as he responds, "Is it so wrong to wonder? People often see the world in shades of their favorite colors. I'm simply curious what the world looks like to you."

I shouldn't be surprised at how insightful that is, but I am. I sigh and move to the dresser, calling around the partition wall to him as I quickly apply the crystal grace oil to my underarms, "Black is my favorite color, followed closely by red. Then it's cobalt blue, hunter green, and royal purple, in no particular order." I put the bottle away as I finish, and move around the wall, glancing at him on the way to my clothes. "Satisfied?"

I catch his smirk, just as I turn away to begin dressing. "You should know better than to ask me that, da'fen."

I huff a laugh and shake my head as I slide my smalls on. "Of course I should, how foolish of me. You'll never be satisfied. It's a matter of pride that you always strive to greater heights."
"Or deeper lows. One must experience all things to the fullest, to understand them."

I let the towel drop after I shimmy my breeches on, giving him a perfect view of my bare back as I reach for my breast band. I smirk as I begin to don it, and look over my shoulder at him. "All things, mor'fen?"

His smile is patient. "All things, in time, da'fen."

I chuckle at the irony and turn to look straight ahead again, as I reach for the peasant shirt. "Now he listens."

"I need time to think, da'fen. There are... considerations."

My fingers pause over the garment, my breath hitching in my throat. No. No, no, no, he didn't just say that line. Too early! This... ugh! This is ridiculous! And yet...

I take a quick breath and grasp the shirt, threading it over my arms and pulling it on. I snag the vest and swing it over my back as I slot my arms through the holes. I start lacing and buttoning, turning to him as I finish. "Take all the time you need. I'd rather you be sure of your decision, whatever it is."

I watch as relief floods his features, and he smiles brightly at me. "Thank you. For now, I believe it is time to begin work on your staff technique."

I nod, gracing him with a small smile. "So it is."

He stands, and I grab my staff as we head outside into the bright, clear morning.

Chapter End Notes

Translations:
Ara emith nisathe sule em: My reputation is dust to me.
Melahn ar amast na emith sul ma: Then I will protect your reputation for you.
Ahnsul?: Because?
Ahnsul uth'geronash sul em: Because it is eternally valuable to me.

❤--Discord--❤

❤ Thanks for reading! If you enjoy the story or this chapter in particular, please feel free to leave a review with your thoughts! ❤
❤ I love reading comments and reply to all of them. ❤
Chapter Summary

In this chapter: Solas hilarity, and I discuss something that'll probably get my tits handed to me on a platter by a few people. Also, an introspective moment on the topic of age, and we explore the mysteries of sandwiches.

Chapter Notes

Have a gaggle of translations:

Venavis: stop.
Sa sahl: one moment.
Sou'alas'rajelan'en: force mages.
Da'rahn: little thing, basically, 'no problem'; shortened version of "de da'rahn": It's a little thing/it's no problem.
Te'olathe'lan: foolish person with no social skills.
As'an tua ma tel'tune: they make you uncomfortable. Literally: they to make you not comfortable. Close enough. :P
Vin: yes.
Y'ar eolasa ahnsul as'an ala'em: but I understand why they need me.
Melahn'an ma ha'el o'is: then you are wiser than most. Literally: then you wiser than most. 'Are' is implied(Mostly because I can't find 'are' in the damn lexicon.).
Pala adahl'en: go fuck a forest. ...and yet that is in there. Will wonders never cease?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Venavis! Sa sahl, sathan."

I hold my hand up, my staff laying beside me, split and frayed, in two pieces. I lift myself from my back onto one elbow, shaking my head as I look at the splintered wood and sigh. "Bloody useless thing," I mutter under my breath.

He'd paused for a moment, as I'd asked, but I can hear him taking a breath already, preparing to attack once more. It's fucking relentless.

And I thought Cullen's training wore me out.

Sad thing is, he keeps fucking healing me, so my exhaustion isn't physical at all—it's entirely mental... as is his training regimen. We've been at it since breakfast, tucked away outside the walls, far enough from prying eyes that the only who might see us, would be those who already knew we were out here—likely Leliana's people, if anyone.

I roll out of the way, over my shattered staff, grabbing the lighter end of it as I move. I'd wanted both ends, but yeah, I'm sadly not that coordinated. I barely manage to block the next hit, which sweeps upwards from the ground, kicking mud up with it that slaps against the barrier he's cast on
me, and slowly slides down.

That the mud landed right on the part of the barrier that covers my face seems to matter little. The Dread Wolf is a merciless teacher.

I can't see past the muck, and before I can even reach up to slap it off the barrier, he's behind me, his staff tight enough against my throat that it makes me cough.

His breath whispers across the blade of my ear, voice low and even, calm in his instruction, "Your enemies will not wait for you to clear your vision, da'fen. Your eyes can and will deceive you. You should not rely on them so."

Alright...fine! He's been pestering me to loosen my aura for the past four hours; I'm sick of hearing it. He wants to see my aura loosed, so be it. He's got me surrounded, so I'll have to be the epicenter anyway. I don't know jack about spirit magic, but something like a mind blast would be perfect. I struggle against the staff at my throat as I envision how the spell should occur—how it should be an explosive force that shoves everything away from me—and once it is firmly in my mind, I dump about half my mana into it, and cast.

It ends both better and worse than I expected.

I'm free of everything—him, his staff, the mud, his barrier, all of it—but, well...

I turn to see where he ended up, and almost have a heart attack. At first I think he's been hurt—he is shoved about a foot deep into a snow embankment, after all—but then I see him slump with an annoyed sigh... and then the snow over him collapses on him. I see the snow rise and fall in what can only be another sigh of frustration, and I just...lose it.

The king of the Fade, fabled betrayer and wolf god, feared by every Dalish in Thedas, vanquished by the physics of snow.

By the time he makes his way over to me, I'm curled up in a ball in my own snow cocoon, tears of laughter streaming down my face.

"I'm glad you find this so amusing, da'fen, but you do realize your minor victory is at an end, do you not?"

I manage to calm myself enough to open my eyes and look up at him, and he's leaning on his staff, gazing down at me with a mildly annoyed expression, eyebrow lifted and lips pursed slightly. I huff one last laugh and start to sit up, flicking my fingers against his leg in reprimand for his stodgy behavior.

"I'm sure my victory would care, if this were any less ridiculous than it is, ha'hren." The sarcasm is thick on that last word, lemme tell ya. I stand and look at him expectantly.

He deliberates for a few seconds, then nods. "Your means of escape was adequate, if risky. Using that much power in the middle of a fight, could seriously damage your chances of actually winning that battle. Even were that not the case, using such a spell could harm, or at the very least, distract any allies who are fighting with you. Neither is a desirable outcome, as I'm certain you understand. It was... inventive, however. I believe that is the first time I've seen you use that spell."

I nod my affirmation. "It would be, since that was the first time I'd used anything like it. I was trying for something like a mind blast, but I don't think that's what happened."

He shakes his head. "No, this is a mind blast." He presses two fingers to his temple, and not a
second later, I'm staggering back in an effort to keep my feet under me. He lowers his hand back to his staff, and resumes speaking, as if he hadn't just knocked me back three feet. Then again, I did just knock him straight back into a snowbank, so I guess that's more than fair.

"What you used was something with considerably more power, as I'm certain you noticed. I believe the colloquial term among Sou'alas'rajel'an'en for it is a 'nova'. It is capable of pushing anything near you away in a wide radius, at the expense of using up or dispelling any beneficial effects active on your person, such as a barrier, as well as a significant amount of mana."

He tilts his head, giving me that look, like he's studying me, like a bloody specimen. "It is a rather advanced technique; I am surprised you came upon it on your own so soon."

Because that's not worrying or anything...

I clear my throat awkwardly. "Well, at least I know about it now. Knowing is half the battle."

"Indeed." He nods. "It was quick thinking, and for that I commend you. I would appreciate it if you would warn me, the next time you decide to experiment, however. It was pure good fortune that landed me in the snowbank—there is no guarantee that such a soft landing will be available, the next time you cast a new spell. I would rather not have lived all this time, only to perish in a training accident."

I blanch, my mouth opening around an apology, but his raised hand halts my words.

"Do not apologize. You have learned two lessons at once, and I am no worse for wear. You do not need the element of surprise when training with me, da'fen. Simply remember that, and all will be well." He lowers his hand to clasp around his staff once more, and I take a breath.

"'Ma serannas, ha'hren." I dip my head in lieu of a bow. "I will do my best to remember the lessons."

He grants me a tiny smile. "That is good to hear. Come, we are done for today. Join me for a meal; I'm sure you are just as famished as I."

I grin at him and walk with him toward the gate. "I'd like that. But... you might have to order for me. I'm not completely sure about the foods here, yet. Unless you feel like explaining what's available, that's always an option. That's what Sirin does for me, usually."

"Ma nuvenin, da'fen. I believe explaining the foods you are unfamiliar with will be more beneficial in the long run." He smirks. "I will be happy to assist in your culinary education."

I give a short laugh. "That's very generous of you, mor'fen. 'Ma serannas."

He flicks his hand as if brushing the thought away. "Da'rahn. Your survival here depends on many things, but one of them is an understanding of the flora and fauna, and what is and is not safe to eat. I am well versed in this, and I will gladly lend my expertise to you. I am curious about one thing, however."

"Oh?"

He nods. "Why do you call me mor'fen?"

I huff a laugh. "Likely for the same reason you call me da'fen, though our wolves aren't exactly dissimilar in size... at least, not in the Fade. I just figured it to be a corresponding term to da'fen, that's all."
He gives me an incredulous look. "Big wolf? Is that how you see me?"

I smirk, then return a mocking version of his incredulity. "Little wolf? Is that how you see me?"

He snorts and focuses back on the gate as we near it. "Fair point. Perhaps... ha'fen? You did call me that, once, though it was in Common."

My eyebrow flicks up in surprise. "I recall you telling me not to call you that, immediately after. Are you changing your mind?"

He sighs, pressing the heavy left door of the gate open and waving me on. He answers just as I pass him. "Perhaps, but only for you."

A shiver races up my spine that raises the hairs at the back of my neck. I take a deep breath and step aside to clear passage for him, taking a moment to compose myself. When he moves through, I eye him curiously. "A concession for me alone? Tempting, but there's one problem with your proposal."

He seems amused as he asks, "And that would be?"

I smirk impishly. "I'm as old as you are."

He eyes me skeptically. "How certain are you of that, Fen'nas?"

My smile is smug as I start up the steps, taking them sideways while I speak in quiet confidence. "Very. Even if my body is only as old as the veil, my soul is much older. A soul and a spirit are quite similar things, are they not? In their most basic form, at least. It's entirely possible that I am as old as you are. I could even conceivably be older. We have no way of knowing."

He seems to ponder that, as we head up the second stairs and toward the tavern, our pace leisurely. "It is a point worth considering," he concedes, "but as you said, there is no way to truly confirm it. It would be fascinating to know the truth of the matter."

"That it would," I agree, as I note that Varric is absent from his usual post. Must be in the tavern. "In any case, what we do know is more than enough grounds to refuse calling you ha'fen. If I did that, you'd have to return the favor. Ironic though it may be, I'm not sure how long I could suffer such a nickname to persist. We are both old wolves, you and I."

He opens the tavern door for me, his expression fondly thoughtful as I pass him. He closes the door behind him and gestures toward a free table. I nod and head toward it, fully intent on seating myself, when he skirts behind me and pulls one of the chairs out, holding it in wait. I blink at him for a moment, then smile and move to sit in the chair, my mind reeling. Chivalry is apparently still going strong in this age. Who'd a thunk it? I'm about the farthest thing there is from a proper lady, but hey, I can appreciate manners when I see them.

He sits himself after I'm all tucked in, folding his hands in his lap as he regards me with careful curiosity. His voice is soft, and I strain a bit to hear it over the din of noise around us. "You are unused to being looked after. I find that troubling. Have manners decayed so badly in your... experience, that women are not shown proper respect?"

I snort a quiet laugh and take a breath, smiling and shaking my head at his question. I look at him with no small bit of trepidation mixed into my amusement. "You want the truth?"

He nods. "Of course."
I sigh and lift my forearms to rest on the tables edge, weaving my fingers together and looking down at them as I speak, "Yes and no. There are some who still observe the manners you're talking about, but it's fairly rare by this point. The opinion I'm about to spout would make me unpopular if I said it... there, but it's partially our fault. Women, I mean. What we did helped in a lot of ways, but it also stripped away a lot of the good things we had, because too many took it too far. By this point in time, most men have given up on trying to use those kinds of manners, because a lot of women would actually take time out of their day to bitterly correct him, saying they're not weak, they can do it themselves. Not that I don't agree, to a point, but... having some of the old manners back would be nice."

I chuckle and shake my head, finally looking up at him as I continue, "Then again, that's like saying I wish we could go back a thousand years and change history, so we don't trash our home. It's just not going to happen. Maybe I'm just too old-fashioned." I shrug.

Flissa arrives at our table before Solas can respond. "Oh, hello Your Worship! I was wonderin' if you were ever gonna come in here, and here you are. Well, what'll you have?"

I smile kindly at her. "Depends on what you have. Do you happen to have a list we could look over? I know Sirin gets one from here."

She looks confused for a moment. "'We'?
" she turns to the other chair and finally sees Solas. "Oh! I'm sorry, I didn't notice you there, Messere Solas. The usual?"

"Actually, I would prefer to see the list the Herald requested as well, if that is available."

"Of course! I'll grab the lunch menu and be back in just a moment, then."

I smile at her. "Thank you, Flissa."

She beams at me like I just handed her the moon, and fritters off toward the counter to get the menu. Fame and notoriety—depending on who you ask—is definitely something I'm going to have to get used to in phases. For now, it's just... odd. I'm good at watching people, reading them, but interacting with them? Not so much. I'm a bit of a te'olathe'lan, really. The foolishness comes and goes, but the awkwardness never truly leaves."

"As'an tua ma tel'tune."

My eyes snap back to Solas as I hear him almost adding to my own thoughts, his voice understanding, soothing. I take a deep breath and nod as I let it out. "Vin. Y'ar eolasa ahnsul as'an ala'em."

His smile is kind, almost pleased, though there is a hint of pained recognition in his eyes. "Melahn'an ma ha'el o'is."

I manage a small smile in return, just before Flissa makes her way back to us, the menu clenched tightly between two fingers as she waves it in front of her, then plonks it on the table, her face the picture of accomplished triumph. "There y'are, just wave me over when you're ready and we'll get you two taken care of, alright?"

I force a brighter smile onto my face and aim it at her. "Sounds good. Thanks again, Flissa."

She grins at me. "Anytime, dearies!" She spins and flits off to take care of another patron.

I give a soft laugh and slide the list over to Solas.
He glances down at the list, then back up to me, brow stitching together in a confused frown. "Do you not wish to read it yourself?"

I clear my throat awkwardly. Shit. "I um... well, I can try, but it'll be slow," I say, hoping he gets the idea.

Fortunately, he's as clever a wolf as he ever is. Comprehension dawns quickly on his face, and he takes up the menu without further comment, and begins rattling off various foodstuffs.

Eventually, I figure out what I can order that sounds halfway decent: two thin slices of 'tardy bread', a thick slice of ham, and a slice of ram cheese. I select ale for my beverage, since I know it'll be mostly water anyway, and it's likely to be safer to drink than actual water. Probably, anyway. Plus, I'm not taking medications that keep me from drinking alcohol in this reality, so bottoms up!

Flissa looks at me a bit oddly when I give her my order, but takes it anyway, along with Solas' much simpler order of stew and a thick slice of fresh bread. Whatever, I'm not afraid of day-old bread. I had some for breakfast, as a matter of fact.

Huh. Maybe it was all the slices that she was confused by? Oh well. I want a ham sandwich, is that so wrong?

*Goes and grabs an actual ham sandwich as I'm writing this.*

Moving right along...

"An unusual order. Is that something you would eat normally?" he asks, blessedly avoiding the obvious end to that question of 'on your world'. Such a smart widdle woofie. Who's a smart woofie? You are!

Oh good gods, where is my brain going? I don't talk like that, I swear. Not even to Nesmay. That dog knows English, thank you very much.

*Face palms into oblivion.*

Anyway...

I nod, keeping with the theme of not completely blowing my cover with my response, "Yes, quite commonly, actually. Just watch what I do with those components. You'll see," I add, with a smile. I really have no idea if they've got normal sandwiches in Thedas. I think I remember something about little ones at Halamshiral, but I could be mistaken. Either way, if they don't know about them, they're about to see their blessed Herald eat one.

It doesn't take long for Flissa to come back with our food, despite the apparent oddity of mine. "There y'are, if you need anything else, just holler."

I thank her again and wait until she turns to start slapping my ham sandwich together.

Solas watches curiously, lifting an amused eyebrow as I finish. "You wanted a ham and cheese sandwich? Why not simply order one?"

I give him an 'are you shitting me' look, then roll my eyes. He laughs at me softly, and I glare at him. "Fantastic. Well, how am I supposed to know?"

He smirks, clearly still holding his mirth back. "You could have asked, Fen'nas. I would have shared the information freely. Who knew sandwiches could be such a well-kept secret?"
I narrow my eyes at him and pick up my oh-so-mysterious sandwich. "Pala adahl'en," I snip, then take a big, defiant bite out of my sandwich, as I watch him choke on his tongue in his efforts to keep his laughter quiet.

His stew was cold by the time he finally shut up and got to it.

My revenge was served cold. Muahahahaha.

Chapter End Notes

❤--Discord--❤

❤ Thanks for reading! If you enjoy the story or this chapter in particular, please feel free to leave a review with your thoughts! ❤
❤ I love reading comments and reply to all of them. ❤
An Interpretation of Pride—The Three Tests

Chapter Summary

A treat for you, my lovelies: an entire chapter, in Solas' POV. Covers chapters three through five. I thought about just making this another story, and shoving both into a series, but I like this idea better. If you think the other option would be better (If this is too immersion-breaking or whatever.), just tell me, and I'll see what I can do. Since it's Solas' POV, the crack is pretty damn minimal, but imho, it's some of my best writing, so here you go. This is today's chapter. Enjoy. ♡

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

He is inordinately pleased.

And yet, completely baffled, at the same time.

He sits in his keep, in the very room where he'd spent so many nights in both pleasurable conversation with his true kin—spirits, he would answer, if anyone had ever bothered to ask him—and in physical pleasure, writhing in ecstasy on the bed with whatever person—or persons—had attracted his attention that year. Physical pleasure was something he'd explored thoroughly in the centuries after he became corporeal. He took great pride in his abilities—both physical and magical—as they grew, learning every technique he encountered until he perfected it, practicing some for months until he was certain of his skill.

And yet, despite his vast experience, few things gave him more pleasure than the sound of this woman's voice, lifting into the air with strange lyrics, harmonizing sounds that sang to his soul, his spirit self. Nothing had reached that part of him for centuries untold, not to mention actually forcing it to rise up and take notice in such a fantastic revolt against his hard-earned control.

He's heard many, far more talented voices, belting out choruses that made him smile, or brought tears to his eyes; but somehow, this elf, with her unpracticed—albeit pleasant, he would not do her a disservice by denying it—voice was the one that brought his entire being to its knees. Luckily, he'd managed enough self-control not to physically kneel before her, but it was a near thing.

He would excuse it as a figment of the Fade—but no, that isn't true, either. They might be in the Fade, but he'd heard most of those other voices through the filter of memories reenacted by spirits here, and none had touched him as deeply this asha's simple song.

Why?

It makes absolutely no sense.

He needs to watch her carefully, and be certain to keep himself in check. He cannot afford distractions.

* * * * *

Impossible!
How could such a vexing situation even occur? He keeps his head bowed into his supportive hand, knowing that if he dares to look up, he will see her smirking at him impishly, and he is uncertain his control would endure the sight.

The effect her mana had on him...

If any true gods had ever existed, he would be praying to them right now, to hide the racing of his heart from the senses of this unsettlingly bewitching woman. She's already born witness to one reaction he had no hope of controlling, and he has no desire to have her see another. His desire for something else, however...

* * * * *

Well, at least their discomfort is mutual.

Not that this truly eases any worries on his part, especially not over the oddity of this whole exchange—a woman from another world, one seemingly worse off than this one, who knows what will happen, what needs to happen, and who somehow manages to perplex him at every turn? How could he possibly ever relax his guard around her? How much does she know? She looks at him like she holds the secret of life itself behind those eyes, and after tonight, he might actually believe it if she said she did.

After a rather... intriguing conversation about whether the Dread Wolf would take her or not, he resolves to test her, to see how consistent her story truly is.

* * * * *

First, he tries his wolf; barging into 'her' bedchamber and exacting some small revenge for her teasing, before claiming his bed—practically out from under her—almost ignoring her presence in it entirely... until she simply wraps her arms around him and nuzzles into his neck, as if this were an everyday, normal occurrence for her. He fights down a shiver of pleasure as he feels her breath warming his fur, and wonders where that reaction even came from.

She proceeds to baffle him yet again, telling him exactly who he is, and informing him flat out that she does not fear him. His shock at this turn of events is only overshadowed and broken by the fact that she actually wants him to relax. Relax! As though he were not considering fleeing, for fear that she may be some unknown force from this other world, that could somehow be more powerful than himself!

But no, he has never once sensed any truly unusual amount of power from her... perhaps she is as she says she is? Even as little sense as that makes, it is... adequate, at relieving at least some of his
concerns. For now.

When she leaves him to make an attempt at her true self, he feels her absence keenly, his back and neck chilling almost instantly. He chalks it up to pure physics, rather than admit she has any sort of unknown—and absolutely terrifying—power over him.

That she actually manages the transformation on her first attempt is shocking—even he had to try a few times to get it right—though the drain on her mana for her efforts is obvious. To his surprise, he's healing her before even deciding to do so, almost by instinct. He nearly stops in his bewilderment, but when he reaches for her with his own mana, he knows it was the right instinct—as troubling as it may be—and continues to heal her.

The sight of her eyes, when she first opens them, is a jolt to his system. It should be impossible—her entire situation should be—yet there she lays, blinking up at him blearily with her six ocean-colored eyes. She acts as if her success is but a small victory, nothing to celebrate, but he can tell from the way her aura practically vibrates that she's beyond elated.

He receives another shock when she finally manages to stand—he doesn't have to lower his gaze more than an inch to look into her eyes. Fascinating.

Her inelegant descent from the bed would have caused great laughter under normal circumstances, but instead, it only hearkens back to when he made his first clumsy steps in this shape. He stays silent, though he smiles at the scene before him.

When she shows him the forest from her memories, he's struck with awe at the beauty and wonder of the place she summons, even before its completion. Memories of the grand forests of Elvhenan flash before his eyes, superimposing themselves on the scene before him in near perfect replication. Perhaps this world she calls home is not so different from his, after all.

She leads him through her memories, showing him small, man-made wonders in the midst of majesty. At first, the damage to the trees disturbs him—if any had done such things to the forests of Elvhenan, there would have been harsh consequences—but he looks up to see thick greenery, and realizes every single tree has somehow survived the traumas inflicted on them. And not merely survived, but thrived. What is this place?

More impossible things, from this impossible woman.

She invites him to run, and he chases after her, exultant in the hunt, even though he is not truly hunting her—not yet. He catches the light gleaming off of her tail as she skids to a halt and darts into the hollow log. What is she playing at? Perhaps that is it—a game of hide and seek? How juvenile. And yet...

He smirks and powers past her position, casting his gaze aside as he passes to confirm her location. He catches a glimpse of her, huddled in the dark recesses of the hollow, eyes and mouth wide with glee, tail curled about her seated form. The memory of that image sticks in his head, and despite his confusion at its persistence, he allows it to stay.

He slows and turns, trotting silently back to the closed, shorter end of the felled tree, and jumps onto it. He walks to the other end, not bothering to quiet his steps, and leans down at the edge, tilting his head under the lip of the rotted out tree. Her expression is one of alert curiosity, until their gazes meet, and she rolls her eyes, abandoning her hiding spot.

"Not my fault you've caught my scent so thoroughly that it only took you seconds to find me."
She misses how his eyes widen when she has the audacity to *wink* at him after such a scandalous comment. He shakes himself slightly, and descends from the ledge, laughter creeping into his voice, "Indeed, it is not. But I can hardly be blamed for taking an interest in one so unique as yourself."

He feels one of the wards surrounding his waking self being disturbed, and quickly makes his excuses, before forcing himself awake. He peers cautiously around him, pretending to remain asleep, until he sees the culprit: a tiny human woman in light scout armor—one of the Nightingale's people. Void take that damn woman—she's been nothing but a thorn in his side since he first offered his assistance.

A quick Fade step, and he has the scout's ear between his fingers, already dragging them towards the door. He opens said door and pushes them out of it, affecting a menacing voice and expression in his frustration, "Tell the Nightingale that if she wishes to know something about me, she may inquire after it herself. If I see another of her spies in my quarters again, I will not be so merciful as I was to you." He slams the door in the agent's face.

* * * * *

The second time he tests her, he is himself, but he is armed with the tools he needs to induce a sufficiently relaxed atmosphere that she may finally slip up, and tell him the secret she has been hiding from him.

She has been careful, and he gives her credit for her efforts. Indeed, if he were anyone but himself, it is likely he would not have suspected anything at all. But she has admitted to keeping *something* from him, and he *will* have the truth of it.

He searches for the flavor of her magic—a thing he's come to rather enjoy over the past three days, to his confused consternation—and finds traces of it, leading to his study. The traces are fragile, but steady, and as he makes his way into the large, round room, he understands why.

She's curled into herself, cheek resting on her knees, asleep.

Not yet sleeping in her reality, then. Her magic is always a quiet thing, when it is her other self inhabiting her body here. It takes someone with great skill at reading magical auras to recognize the difference, but he sees it, clear as if she were wearing a sign 'round her neck. Any of the People would have the skill, even the lowest slave. They were born with such insights, unlike the shadows in this age.

He glances at the frescoes on the walls, and heaves a laborious sigh. He wonders if she knows what the images mean. A small worry flits through his thoughts that she may have inferred his identity from them, but he brushes it aside. He had carefully skirted her pointed insistence that Tarasyan Te'Las was his, instead distracting her with the version of it that the Fade recalled with such effortless clarity. She had appeared to swallow the half truth, but he would use caution, just in case.

He cannot help but confess his curiosity to himself, as he watches her from his chair, and prepares his pipe. What if she *did* know? What if she'd known all along? Was *that* her secret, or was it some other dark thing that clouded her eyes whenever he confronted her about it?

If she did know, what would he do? What *could* he do?

She is necessary for this world's survival. There will soon come a time when this world's survival is no longer a concern, but for now, he will give as much mercy as possible to its denizens. For all
the Dalish revile him, he is not the monster they insist he is. Not once were his concerns anything but the welfare of the People. He'd done all he could to ensure it, for as long as he was able. A thousand safeguards, a hundred safe havens, a million eternal beings, all of whose souls turned the air in his lungs to ash with their passing. It was never, ever enough. It never could've been.

He takes a breath and lights the pipe, clearing his mind of all thought as he enjoys the flavor... and soon after, the effects, of the herbal blend. He tamps the herbs down into the bowl of the pipe carefully, and draws another thick plume of smoke into his lungs, savoring the fond memories it evokes for him.

His momentary reverie is broken by a soft sigh from the previous object of his concentrated pondering. He looks up to see her slowly waking, blinking at her knees with a small frown. She shakes her head and stands, eyes closing as she transitions into a languid stretch that lifts her shirt, revealing a toned stomach to his watchful gaze. When she notes his presence, it is with so little surprise that he's actually a bit surprised himself. Is she truly so comfortable with him? How... odd.

He greets her politely, and her voice—despite having the groggy quality of the newly awoken—is calm and accepting as she returns the greeting, then immediately inquires after the herbs in his pipe. He could not have planned it better if he'd tried. He offers it to her, and after some minor hesitation, she kneels at his feet and accepts his offer.

To his astonishment, he finds his smile as she relaxes under the herb's influence is genuine. Then again, how could it not be? She's feeding right from his palm. When her head comes to rest under his hand, he only hesitates for a moment before threading his fingers through silken strands, knowing that the motions will help ease her into a relaxed state even more quickly than the herbs alone. That he finds himself actually enjoying the false comfort he gives her, is of little consequence.

She asks after the nature of the herbs once again, and he explains their origins through the filter of his 'saw it in the Fade' facade. He despises using such a thin disguise, but it seems to work, despite its nearly transparent nature. How blind these shemlen are, that such things so easily thwart their understanding of the truth!

But then, she lights a candle in the darkness yet again, as she attempts to comfort him. "It's not lost, as long as someone remembers it. Ba... ban'alham." She nods, seemingly pleased with herself. "Banal'halam, Solas. You remember. And now, I know about it, and you can show me, teach me. Nothing is lost, which can be remembered."

His heart stutters, and he feels a chunk of ice slide from the glacier of his soul at her words. He lifts her face toward him with gentle fingers, and smiles at the hope in her eyes. "You are such a bright light in all of this darkness, Fen'nas. You amaze me."

He almost feels guilty for tricking her, but trick her he must. If anyone would understand, he reasons, it would be her.

Her comments on his feeling of displacement brings him up short. The loss of even the tiny contact he'd made with her skin pains him to a distressing degree. Again, he dismisses it as anything but what it is, insisting it is his annoyance at her assumptions that induce the feeling.

Then, she stands, bracing herself on the arms of the chair, and he lifts his gaze to her eyes. In them, he sees a glimmer of truth. Finally.

It's almost a relief, when she begins to speak.
That is, until she begins to spout knowledge that she should not be remotely aware of.

She hurls the information at him like an accusation, though there is no anger in her eyes. What he does see there confuses him greatly.

Compassion, pity, sympathy. He blinks. Passion, outrage; somehow not aimed at him, but at the shadows wearing vallaslin, who call themselves the heirs of the Dales. A shiver races up his spine. Adoration, acceptance, an offer of assistance... *understanding that is bone-deep and rooted in the depths of her soul.* He takes a breath that very nearly shudders at the power of her emotional tempest, a hurricane that he can see swirling in her aura, drawing spirits that press against his wards, to the point of nearly shattering them.

Who is this creature? What is she?

He confronts her, demands to know how she can simply accept him, his history, what he is, what he's done, without even the smallest question. He surrounds her, his hands on either side of her head against the wall her back is pressed to, and leans down to ensure eye contact as she explains herself. She *teases* him with her touch, rattling off the details of his plans as if reading a market list, simple, succinct, whole—his entire plan laid bare to her carefully curious soul. And yet, despite knowing all of it, she accepts him without question or doubt—*agrees* with him, even... and gives him a piece of the puzzle that he's been missing from the beginning.

How could he have been so blind? No, he has to confirm it, before he will accept it as truth.

* * * * *

The third time he tests her, he is nowhere near prepared for her reaction.

The way she responds to his touch, how hard she fights at first, how quickly she gives in, how utterly luscious her skin tastes between his teeth... it's overwhelming. Pure and utter sensation, eclipsing everything in his long, long memory of pleasurable events.

He shocks himself when he actually offers to fulfill her desires, eagerly lapping up every ounce of stimulation she provides him and grinding into her as she presses back against him. The way he fits between the cleft of her cheeks is agonizing *perfection*.

Then, somehow, she denies him. *How?* Surely he was not the only—

Before he can even finish that thought, she turns in his slackened arms and assures him of her desire most ardently. He can see the plain truth of it in her eyes, her pupils a black abyss, surrounded by the thinnest sliver of green, blue, and a hint of... is that gold? How had he not noticed before now? His gaze is drawn down to her lips, and he shakes his head, denying her immediate departure. If she wants him that badly, he will have more than just a taste before he releases her.

A kiss. Such a simple thing, in concept; yet so unfathomably complex, in practice. Their first leaves him gasping, grasping, hungry for more; leaning in and taking, giving, needing, wanting, feeling, wishing; leaving no room for breath or will or *thought*.

This... *this* he could become addicted to. Her mouth is a heady drug, her tongue an agile dancer on the stage of her lips, which caress his in a silken haze of tortuously glorious passion. He never wants to leave.

He slips his thigh between hers to further tempt her to stay, to let him indulge a while longer, *just a little while longer*. His deft hands slide her along the most pleasurable path for her, and the moan
his trouble earns him is worth any effort, any crime, any sin he could commit. His ears twitch at the sound of it, every ounce of his being standing up and paying rapt attention to her pleasured sigh.

Despite his best efforts to ignore it, there is a pinprick of dissatisfaction in the back of his mind that refuses to leave. When he finally diverts some small part of his concentration to it, he realizes it is the essence of her previous objection to their current activities, though she certainly doesn't seem adverse to them at the moment. A beat, and understanding floods his mind, and that understanding is the one thing in this reality, or any other, that could ever compel him to stop.

She loves him.

But he doesn't love her.

The inequality of that equation pierces his heart, as sharply as any arrow or knife, and he finally, with the deepest reluctance, finds the will to pull away.

That he misses her presence against his form immediately, in a soul-achingly sort of way, does not escape his notice. Nor does he try to excuse it, or brush it aside. Instead, he allows it to consume him, even if just for a moment, to experience it to the fullest. By the time he truly surfaces from the depths of that chasm, he understands it—understands her—far better than he'd hoped.

With that understanding, he finds his center—finds his patience.

He will wait.

Chapter End Notes

❤--Discord--❤

❤ Thanks for reading! If you enjoy the story or this chapter in particular, please feel free to leave a review with your thoughts! ❤
❤ I love reading comments and reply to all of them. ❤
Debauchery

Chapter Summary

Sorry for being a tad late today, I had a very late start, due to reading multiple, wonderful smuts.
_Totally worth it._
Anyway, I'm going directly to bed, so any unanswered comments will be answered when I wake up! (I LOVE waking up to comments, btw! ♡)
Love you all way too much to be healthy! ♡

Also, wanted to say that if you want to contact me on skype (Or whatever else.), or just chat in comments on my chapters, _please_ feel free to do so. I love talking to my readers, to an absurd degree. ♥♥♥♥♥ _♡_♥

Also _also_, I was wondering if you guys might appreciate something like a forum to discuss my stories in? Or is that too ridiculous? I have no idea, I'm just tossing ideas out there to make it easier for everyone. Let me know! ♡

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

My oh-so mysterious sandwich was excellent.

As was the company.

Varric wasn't in the tavern at first, but he did come trundling in, a bit after we'd both finished eating, while I was still sipping on the ale.

"Herald! And Chuckles! I didn't expect to see you here!" He leans in conspiratorially. "What finally broke your resolve? Was it the ale? I bet it was the ale." He winks. "It's got nothing on The Hanged Man's ale, but it's a damn good substitute." Gesturing to the side of the table, already pulling an empty chair from another one, he asks, "Mind if I join you?"

Solas answers him and begins to stand before I can so much as bat an eyelash. "Actually, I was just leaving; you may have my seat, if you like."

Varric actually manages to look hurt. "Aww, leaving so soon? But you don't have a tankard, which means you haven't even tried the ale! C'mon, Chuckles, don't leave the party yet!"

Solas lifts a stern eyebrow at the dwarf, though the effect is nearly ruined by the twitch of a smile at the corner of his lips. "I believe I will survive without it, thank you, Master Tethras." He looks to me and dips his head cordially, expression softening with an actual smile. "Thank you for your company at lunch, Fen'nas. If you have need of me, I will be by my cabin."

I return his smile and nod. "And thank you for yours. I may stop by later," I say, patting my stomach with a smiling glance to Varric, "if I don't end up drinking Varric under the table by the end of the day."

The Dread Wolf purses his lips in disapproval at the notion, but says nothing of it.
"Oh-ho, you want to put your money where your mouth is, Herald? You're an untested opponent, but I know an interesting wager when I see one." He looks up at Solas. "You sure you want to miss this, Chuckles? Could be a hell of a show."

"I shall pass on the debauchery, thank you." Solas' face is the picture of seriousness, to the very end. "I would not wish to see you bested so easily, Master Tethras."

I shoot a subtle, curious look at Solas, but Varric cuts off any possible response I could've received.

"Ohh, hey now, that sounds like a challenge. You want to get in on the bet, Chuckles?"

Solas shakes his head, a soft smile on his lips as he starts to move toward the door. "No, thank you. I'm certain I will hear the results all the way from my cabin, either way."

Varric barks a laugh. "Ha! You're probably right about that," he calls after Solas, turning back to me with a grin. "So, you in, Herald? I'm curious to see how well Andraste's Herald can keep her liquor." He leans in, lowering his voice to just the right level that I'm sure only I can hear him—must be something he perfected after years of hanging out in The Hanged Man with Fenris and Merrill. "C'mon, let the troops see you loosen up a bit, it'll be good for morale."

I let my gaze wander for a few fleeting seconds to look about the room at the soldiers and scouts seated close to us, who all either quickly look away, or seem very absorbed in their drinks. Hmm.

I grab my tankard, which is less than half full by now, and chug the lot. I slam it back down to the table, empty, and send my most roguish grin Varric's way, widening my eyes as I speak in challenge. "You're on for the contest, durgen'len. But I'm not betting." I laugh, shaking my head and lowering my voice as I lean in toward his ear, which he accommodatingly aims up at me. "Let someone else get in on that if they want to. Hell, start a betting pool, if you really want to. I've no money." I shrug and back off, looking up to seek out Flissa's flouncy self.

"I'll lend you a bit," he murmurs, holding his hand out as if to shake mine, smiling and speaking softly through his teeth, "here, in my hand, shake it. They won't want to bet if they don't see you doing it. Probably think it's sacrilegious to bet against the Herald or some shit."

I smile right back at him, careful not to move my lips when I reply, "'Preciate it, Varric." I shake his hand and come away with a copper bit in my palm.

He raises his voice back to normal levels, speaking clearly again, "C'mon, Herald, just a little bet? What's a little money between friends?"

Goading little shit.

I roll my eyes at him. "Fine." I shove the hand with the bit into my pocket, fiddling in it for a second or two, as if searching for something, and letting the bit slide down to my fingertips. I draw my hand out and plonk the bit on the table. "There. Satisfied?"

He shrugs, looking unimpressed. "Not really, but it'll do, this time. I assume you're betting on yourself?"

I nod firmly, a sure, sage expression on my face. "I am, indeed. I walked out of the Fade, durgen'len. What chance do you think you have?"

He sucks in a breath and snatches his fingers up, shaking them as if putting out a match. "Ooh, burn Herald! But as I recall, you fell out of the Fade. I don't think that counts, but it's a good try." He winks at me, the sod.
I roll my eyes and he grins, then turns to wave Flissa down. "Flissa, darling! A round for the Herald and I, and keep 'em comin'!" She nods her acknowledgment as he turns back and takes the seat Solas occupied previously. He reaches for a pouch on his belt and first pulls out a short pipe, then a stem extension, which he screws into the pipes stem, and draws on it; likely testing for clear air flow. He nods slightly to himself, mumbling as he unties another pouch from his belt, and puts it on the table, untying the drawstrings and reaching in, pulling out a pinch of some kind of dried flora that he begins to pack the pipe with.

"What's that?" I ask, curious. So many people smoking in this reality! It's probably healthier stuff than I used to smoke though, by far. A lot less chemicals, for one. It makes me miss having my vaporizer.

His heavy brow lifts as he looks up at me, distracting him from his rote, concentrated movements. "It's a pipe."

I roll my eyes and snort. "Well yes, I'm aware of that; I meant what are you packing into it?"

He eyes me curiously. "You smoke, Herald? I wouldn't have pinned you as the type. In answer to your question, though, it's elfroot and a few other mind-numbing herbs I've forgotten the names of, cut with a very, very precise amount of blood lotus. Can't have too much of that shit, after all, or I'd be trying to climb the walls."

My jaw drops, though I quickly snap it back shut and lean in, incredulous amusement sure to be clear on my face as I lower my voice to ask, "You're smoking hallucinogens in the middle of a tavern full of the faithful?" I grin impishly at him. "Ballsy move, durgen'len."

He smirks at me and shrugs, like it's nothing. "I like to live on the edge. You want some? Maker knows it's probably the most pleasant thing you'll find around here to take your mind off things."

"Mm, tempting, but I'll pass, for the moment. I'd rather not try it first in public, if you get my drift. Later. Once we're outta here."

He nods, accepting my conditions, and just then, Flissa arrives with our first round. He grins up at her as he accepts his tankard. "Thanks, darlin'. Put 'em on my tab, if you will."

She smiles and inclines her head in assent. "O'course, Master Tethras." She turns her smile on me and dips in a tiny curtsy. "Your Worship." I return her smile and she flits off to the bar.

I grab the handle of my tankard and look to Varric, waiting for him to finish packing his pipe and join me. He sets the packed pipe on the table and fiddles with the first pouch on his belt, retrieving a wooden match. After a few failed attempts at striking it, I clear my throat softly and summon a flame to my fingertip, hiding it behind a hand from the rest of the room. No point freaking them out with my magic. Damn Thedosians.

He hesitates for a moment, thinking it over, then nods and leans forward, just as I move my hands to hover over the bowl of his pipe. A successful lighting and a nod of thanks later, he leans back, taking a long draw on his pipe and looking at me like he's trying to figure out a challenging puzzle. Finally, after he exhales what little smoke is left from him holding it for several moments, he speaks.

"Where are you from, Herald? I don't recognize your accent at all. I'd say you were a Marcher like me, but then I hear that occasional little twang you add in, and I'm lost again." He pauses, taking another hit off the pipe and letting it out before he starts again, "I could almost say you were from Rivain, but that doesn't fit, either." He tamps his herbal blend down into his pipe and tries the
match once more. I end up lighting it for him all over again. Fortunately, that gives me time to consider how to answer him.

I smirk as I let my mana die down, along with the flame. "I could tell you, but then I'd have to kill you, and I'd really rather not. I have a feeling we'll get along famously, and I'd like the chance to find out. Besides, I wouldn't want Bianca to get lonely. A lady like her needs a rather dashing companion, after all. Not many could fit the bill like you do, durgen'len."

He snorts, nibbling on the mouthpiece of his pipe, before pointing it at me, in lieu of a finger. "You're a tricky one; too smooth for a mage. You sure you're not a rogue?"

I chuckle, nodding firmly. "Yes, but I was instructed that I should seek some training from you, or Leliana. Apparently a well-rounded Herald makes for a happy Inquisition." I shrug. "Who knew?"

That gets a laugh out of him. "They want you to train with me? Why? What am I gonna teach you—how to be short enough that people don't notice you?" He snorts and shakes his head. "They're crazy. 'Sides, even if I had skills I wanted to teach, I don't have the patience." He pauses and sighs, looking at me with a small grimace. "Then again, I'm not sure you'd be entirely safe going with the Nightingale. Shit. I dunno, Silk. I'll try, that's all I can promise."

I lift an eyebrow, smiling at his concession, but curious about one thing. "Silk?"

He shrugs softly, then nods. "Yeah, Silk." He moves his hand through the air slowly as he speaks, "Smooth as silk, you know."

I smirk. "That's your nickname for me?"

"If the shoe fits... Besides, it's better than whatever that name was you gave me the other day." He waves a hand at me like my name offended his sense of a good time. "Silk fits, and it's easier to remember. Congratulations, you are now Silk."

I snort and have to fight to hold back laughter as an image flashes through my head of the both of us, after some fight, and I'm completely caked in mud. I look at Varric, and he's grumpily handing me a silk hankie that has his initials embroidered in the corner, to wipe my face clean.

Why this scene pops into my head, I have no idea; but I'm pretty sure I'm about to turn purple from holding back the laughter. I fold my forearms on the table before me, and bury my forehead in them, attempting to hide my face, at the very least.

"Shit, Silk, what's so damn funny?"

Shit silk? Oh, my, fucking, gods. PFFTHAHAHAHA!

Yeah, that's about the time I lose it. No hiding the laughter now. I'm pretty sure there's at least half of a tavern full of the faithful staring at me, as I basically howl with laughter like a madwoman. Oh well, fuck 'em. I need this laugh.

Finally, with wet lashes and tear-streaked cheeks, I calm down enough to explain what hit me so hard with a case of the funnies. He gives a shocked little laugh, and reaches into one of the hidden pockets in his vest, and I shit you not, he pulls out a red silk handkerchief, with V.T. embroidered on the corner. "You mean this?"

I stare at him. "You're shitting me. You mean you... you actually have one?" I clap my hand over my mouth to keep myself from devolving into cackled laughter this time.
He rolls his eyes, gesturing with the hankie. "Hawke gave us all one with our initials in the corners, after we came back from the Deep Roads... well, the first time, anyway. She swore it was Leandra —er, that was her mother's name—that insisted she give us all silk hankies, but I'm pretty sure Hawke just thought it was funny. Shit, I don't know. She never would tell me, and after Leandra died, well... I didn't have the heart to ask again. Anyway, what brought that oh-so-hilarious image to mind, if I may ask?"

I shrug. "I have no idea, honestly. It just popped into my head." I nod at him. "You sure you wanna keep calling me Silk? Last chance to change your mind."

He snorts at that, turning his pipe over to tap the ashes from the bowl on the edge of the table. "What, is there a ban on name changing I don't know about?"

I smirk at him and shake my head. "No, but I do plan on starting a journal to record all of this strange shit here soon, and I'd like to have the official nickname, if I'm to have one."

His brow pinches slightly. "You makin' notes for a book or somethin'? Most people I know don't keep journals. Not these days, anyway."

My brow lifts in surprise. Really? Huh. I shrug nonchalantly. "Oh well. I'm not them. And maybe I will write a book, when this is all over. Writers should write, after all."

Now I've definitely got his interest. "You're a writer? What do you write?"

Oh boy. Here we go.

*Three hours, and six rounds later*

"...And she said, "Looks like the Duke has... fallen from grace!""

I laugh, because of course I laugh, it's one of the classics, it would be rude not to laugh. And it was funny, so why not?

He joins me with a light, fond chuckle, then stares into his tankard with a soft smile. "I miss her sometimes. But, she's better off wherever she is, than getting mixed up in all this."

I nod understandingly, then a thought occurs to me. Oh man. Oh I have to ask. "That hankie she gave you... do you know if anyone else's was red?"

He tilts his head, staring at middle space in thought. Slowly, he starts to shake his head. "No, I don't think so. Why?"

I scratch at my cheek as I try to think of a delicate way to put this. Fuck it. "Well, I'll not say how I know this, but... she's sweet on you, durgen'len. Or, at least, she was when she gave you the hankie."

He frowns in confusion, eyeing me a bit like he's not sure if I'm cuckoo crazy, or crazy like a fox. He glances down at my ale and juts his chin out at it, lifting his own ale. "Drink. I say you're full of it. Even if it were possible for you to know that, she never said a word. Hawke isn't exactly the type to stay quiet about anything." He waits until I have my tankard in hand, then chugs his.

I follow suit. And... yep, I need to pee now. I slam the empty tankard down and hold my hand up. "I have no answers for you, but I shall return. Nature calls."

He tries to object, but I wave him off as I stand and head for the door. There's no way in hell I'm
telling him how I know what I know, not unless I want to just tell him everything. I might, some day. But not today.

The afternoon sun glints off the armor of every soldier I pass, pinging me in the eye with its insistent, annoyingly laser-like accuracy. I hate cloudless days.

I arrive at the privy, close the door behind me, and make quick work of my breeches and smalls, settling on the seat and finally giving my bladder the treatment it deserves for being so fucking patient with me. Ahhhh, much better. I gather and fling the proper spell at my nethers, fwoosh-cleaning them with glorious efficiency. Up with the smalls and breeches, a quick lacing, and off I go, back to the tavern.

I'm not even a little tipsy yet. Huh.

Images of Legolas drinking Gimli under the table poke my brain, and I smirk, wondering if something similar is about to happen here. I should probably bother Solas for the answer before I go back, but screw it, I'll find out.

I enter the tavern to the sight of several civilians and a few soldiers exchanging money with Varric, and I grin. I seat myself, and wave Flissa over. Varric turns back to me, waving off the last person entering the betting pool, their money in hand. "Making a tidy profit here, for someone."

I grin at him. "Excellent. I'm sure whomever wins will be quite happy."

Flissa finds herself free, and flounces her way over to us in a flutter. Fluffernutter. Moving on... "Need another round?" she asks, smiling brightly.

I nod, then speak up, "Yes, but Flissa, do you have anything stronger back there? The ale's good, but we're having a drinking contest... frankly, I have things to do, places to go. I'd like to get to them in a more timely fashion, if possible. Something a little stronger would help us decide the winner more quickly, don't you think?"

Make it seem like it's partly her idea, she might be more willing to actually part with the good stuff, if she has any. She looks to Varric, since he's the one paying. "Is that alright with you, Master Tethras?"

He nods, smirking at me, before glancing up to her with a smile. "That's fine, darlin', go ahead."

Flissa smiles and patters off to find whatever qualifies as stronger than ale around here.

Varric's smirking at me like he's the cat that just caught the mouse—me being the mouse, in this case. "You trying to end this quicker for some reason, Silk? Got a beau to go meet up with or somethin'?"

I chuckle at him. No way I'm giving him that much ammo before he damn well earns it. "No, but I do have other things to do today, durgen'len."

Flissa returns before he can respond, depositing a large jug of what appears to be some sort of wine... or something. For all I know, it could be fermented dragon piss. Yeuch. Moving on...

"There y'are! That's about the strongest thing we've got." She grimaces and taps the tabletop. "Try not to get any on the table, it'll melt the varnish off."

Holy shit. Well, I did say stronger... paint thinner was not what I had in mind, though. I nod and smile at her. "Maybe keep the ale coming then, as a chaser?"
She nods happily and grabs our tankards for a refill, then prances off again.

I'm watching her get the ale when I hear the jug scraping across the surface of the table, and turn to see Varric pushing it towards me. "Well, you wanted it, so you get first shot. May as well get started."

He's looking at me like he doesn't actually expect me to do it. Ohhh, Varric. You don't know me.

Uncork, tilt, swallow until it burns so bad I almost choke, set it back on the table, make sure I swallow, then cough a lung up. Oh, fuck me that burns!

With tears in my eyes and a pounding in my head, I push the bottle of fire water over to him. Gods be damned, I've had moonshine smoother than that. By light years. I'm gonna have indigestion tonight, for sure.

I wipe my mouth and look at him with miserable expectation, daring him to join me in my misery.

He cringes at me, then shifts his gaze with great reluctance to the juggernaut jug of dragon piss' tenth cousin removed's pissbucket of paint thinner's red-headed stepchild... by arranged marriage. Yes, it's that bad. I'm a little worried it might actually kill him. Then again, he does own The Hanged Man...

He heaves a heavy, heavy sigh, grabs the neck of the jug... and tilts it to his lips.

To his credit, I'm fairly certain he swallowed as much as I did. To his slight discredit, I'm fairly certain that was the moment he started down the path to frying his brain for the day.

Flissa kept the ales coming, but we mostly stayed on whatever the fuck was in that damn jug for the rest of the afternoon. By the end of it all, I actually wished I was drunk. At least then, I might not feel the pain my stomach was experiencing at that moment. Pretty sure that shit was peeling away the lining. I wouldn't doubt it for a second.

Fortunately for my stomach lining, that was about the time Varric passed out.

Unfortunately for my guilty conscience, that was also the moment that I found out—from all the outcries of disappointment in the room, and the piling of money in front of me—that Varric had bet, not on himself... but on me.

The hell?

Did he somehow know what I am? Or are all elves this resistant to the effects of alcohol? Or is it just elven mages? My gaze flicks up from the dozing dwarf, past the small pile of money in front of me, and bores into the wall, in the direction of the hobo's hut. I've got questions for you, egghead.

I huff and look around, only to notice the tavern's completely emptied out, aside Flissa and Maryden. Well, shit. Were they all just hanging around to see who won? I know Haven's boring as shit, but damn, that's just sad.

I sigh and wave Flissa over one final time. Seeing as—for once—she has no other customers to distract her, she scampers on over the moment she sees my flailing.

"Your Worship?"

I sigh and drag the jug over to me, stuffing the cork into the damn thing and setting it in front of
her. "Take that dragon's piss away please, and take whatever he owes you out of this pile of money I've apparently won. I'm gonna try to figure out which of the pouches on his belt is the money pouch, and stuff all this in there. So don't worry, I'm not stealing from him. Fair enough?"

She nods. "More than! I'd never accuse Andraste's Herald of stealin'. You do what you need to, Your Worship." She smiles and leans down to pick out the money she's owed, giving me a wonderful view of her cleavage in the process. What? It's there. I'm gonna look.

When she withdraws, I pick a few silver pieces out of the pile and hand it to her. "For putting up with our shit. Just leave him here, and keep an eye on him. Don't let him get robbed blind, please. I doubt I could pick him up, so unless you can wrangle someone else into moving him, he can sleep it off here."

She curtsies, apparently pleased to earn a few extra coins. "Thank you, Your Worship. I'll take good care of him, don't you worry." She smiles and trots off again.

I sigh and stand, moving over to Varric and rummaging through a few of the pouches, until I finally find one that jingles like money. I slip it from his belt and start sweeping the coins off the table and into it. It takes a bit longer than I'd anticipated; apparently there's some heavy betters in the Inquisition. Anyway, I eventually get the job done, and with a much heavier jingle than before, I tie the coin purse back onto his belt. I sigh and pat him on the back, shaking my head as I make my way out of the side door.

The fire in my gut has died down a bit, though it's all sloshy now—ugh. I hate this feeling. Mimicking a pot-bellied pig in my head, I slosh my way up to Solas' cabin, finding him in his usual spot: staring up at the chasm into his realm in the sky.

"Enjoying the view?"

He smirks. "Enjoy the debauchery?"

I snort, shaking my head. "Not nearly as much as I should've. Why can't I get drunk? I was drinking something that made Varric pass out in eight rounds, and I'm fairly certain it burned some of the lining of my stomach off, yet I'm sober as the day I was born. Please explain, oh wise one."

He laughs, eyes shining with mirth, and motions for me to follow him. I huff a sigh and follow, because of course I do.

He leads me into his cabin, and shuts the door behind us, before launching into a very long-winded explanation, which I will shorten for you, because as much as I love Solas, he can be a damn windbag when he really gets going. And I'm not talking about the way he gets in the game about the Fade or spirits, this is a whole other handbag here, folks.

Suffice to say, apparently ancient elvhen have a remarkable tolerance for alcohol. They can get drunk, however. It is the fact that I am both elvhen and a mage, that has me sober as a rock. Apparently mages metabolize everything twice as fast as non-mages. Explains why I've never seen a fat mage, at least. He says that by the time I actually drink enough to get drunk, I'll have alcohol poisoning. Lovely. Well, at least I know I can win any and all drinking contests, in theory.

Except maybe against Bull. I'm not gonna test my luck against him. He's a lot bigger than me, which automatically means he can handle a fuck ton of alcohol.

No thanks.

Varric was enough.
Thanks for reading! If you enjoy the story or this chapter in particular, please feel free to leave a review with your thoughts!

I love reading comments and reply to all of them.
Chapter Summary

In this chapter: I get in a pissing match with the Dread Wolf. Shots fired. No ambulance needed... mostly. I swear, we fight like an old married couple... Also, this one's dark. Sorry. It just kinda... happened. Also, welcome to a partial guide for 'How Fen'nas Thinks'. It is by no means all-inclusive, but it is a peek. And yes it's dark, but it gets better at the end. If you cry at all reading this, be comforted with the fact that I cried writing it. I'm sorry. v.v

Also! I asked last chapter, if anyone would be interested in having a forum to discuss my stories in. I got a bit of positive response, so I'm sending the question out into the ether again, to see what you guys think. Please let me know, either way.

Translations:
Ahnas ra suleva?: what's that mean?
Ar verema na i'mar uren, Fen'harel: I'm about to take you by your ear, Dread Wolf.
(Like the old Dalish saying, "Take the Dread Wolf by the ear if he comes", said to be taught to their hounds, to protect their Dalish owners while dreaming in the Fade.)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Time to get outfitted.

I might need a crap ton more training before Cass, Varric and Solas will truly feel comfortable going anywhere with me, but I should still get the order for my armor and staff in.

What, did you think you just go to an armor or weapon assembly table, and put masterworks together in ten seconds flat?

Yeah, no.

Welcome to reality.

Well, as real as Thedas gets, anyway.

I ask Solas if he would like to accompany me, to point out some of the better materials, or to suggest alterations that would be better suited to a force mage, and after a moment's consideration, he nods his agreement. "I may have a few ideas, though most of the specifics will be up to your personal preference. I only recall some things that may help, for your first set of gear."

I smile at him. "I'm grateful for any help I can get, believe me. I've some small idea what I'm doing with this, but any assistance you can give will be appreciated. I'm sure experience will win out, over what little I can remember."

I ask him. "I'm grateful for any help I can get, believe me. I've some small idea what I'm doing with this, but any assistance you can give will be appreciated. I'm sure experience will win out, over what little I can remember."

He leaves his own staff and battle gear—or what passes for battle gear with him, damn hobo—behind in his cabin, and we head toward the door. Before we make it very far, he stops me with a hand on my shoulder. "Fen'nas, wait. I have something that may help, actually." He walks over to a
small nightstand and opens the drawer, pulling something out and closing the drawer before I can see what it is. He turns and holds it out to me. "My apologies, I actually meant to give this to you earlier."

'It' turns out to be two rolls of thin, brown leather. I tilt my head curiously at them, until understanding dawns, just before he explains.

"They are wrapping, for your feet and legs. I can show you how to use them, if you like," he offers, a kind smile on his face.

I grin at his proposition, and eagerly nod my acceptance. "Yes! Please, thank you. That's very generous of you."

He chuckles, shaking his head softly. "Da'rahn, lethal'lan." He gestures for me to follow. "Garas, dhama." He points to a chair in the corner.

I get what he means and take a seat, though the word is unfamiliar. I only know so much elvhen, after all. "Dhama? Ahnas ra suleva?"

He gives a slightly baffled laugh at my question. "You know so much, yet so little. How is that possible?"

"Ar verema na i'mar uren, Fen'harel," I growl, "Just tell me."

He lifts an eyebrow, a smile spreading across his lips. "Are you now?" He leans down with the most deliciously devious smirk on his face, letting his eyelids lower in what's got to be an affectation of lust. "I'd like to see you try, ha'fen."

Bastard!

Well, this devolved quickly.

I attempt a reaction a sane person would give, as I carefully control my breathing, trying to hide how embarrassingly quickly my heart rate just ratcheted up. "Please just tell me what 'dhama' means, Solas. No need to behave uncivilly." I try for an unaffected air, looking at my nails and sighing in a bored manner.

Sadly, he doesn't buy it. I'm pretty sure he completely missed it, actually.

"What's wrong, ha'fen? Suddenly realize you can't keep up with me, so you decided it's better not to try?"

Okay, that's it.

With a metered rush of mana, I send him careening into the opposite wall. Not hard enough to actually break anything, mind, just enough to knock him down. Really, it mostly just knocks the painting above him down, which conks rather sharply onto his head, just as he starts to get back up. Lucky for me, that delays him just long enough for me to reach him, and flick my middle finger hard on the tip of his left ear. I then heave a sigh of satisfaction, promptly return to the chair—sitting and crossing my right leg over my left—and resume looking at my nails. I do fail miserably at hiding the satisfied smirk my victory has earned me, however.

I hear a shuffling, and see him starting to get up, just over the edges of my knuckles.

"Harellan," he spits, as he stands and dusts himself off.
I focus on him, letting my hand lay in my lap and tilting my head at him. "Just how am I harellan?"

"You cheated," he grumbles.

I scoff. "I did not! You wouldn't back off, so I retaliated."

"Your victory is hollow, I hope you realize that." He points at me for emphasis.

I roll my eyes. "I don't care about my stupid victory—hollow or not, it's your fault, regardless."

He gapes at me. "How is it my fault?!"

"You wouldn't back off! You're every bit as stubborn as I ever was, I swear. At least we're even on that front." I fold my arms over my ribs and glare at him.

He lifts an eyebrow. "You've no right to be cross with me. You could have injured me with that stunt."

My jaw drops. "I beg your pardon? I—"

"You shall have no pardon—not until you finally learn your lesson!" he interrupts, storming over to me to get back in my face all over again, pointing his finger at me as if it's a weapon, "You have nowhere near the experience required to know with surety that your spell would not damage me, so do not attempt to say you had it under control, because you most certainly did not! Your magic is not a toy, Fen'nas! It is dangerous to treat it as such! It is a tool, not a toy. When you understand that concept, then you can ask my pardon, and I may be merciful enough to give it. Until then, you will sit there, and consider this fact, until you can convince me that you comprehend it enough to release you upon the unsuspecting world you're supposed to be saving!"

With that, he straightens, and turns with his hand outstretched toward the door. I can feel the snap of his mana against the veil, and the solidity of the spell he uses on the door. He pivots and casts the same spell on the windows. When he's finished, he looks at me, shakes his head, and gives me his back as he crouches down to pick up the painting and hang it back on its nail. Then, he moves to his desk and sits, the chair scraping across the floor as he tucks himself into the desk. I feel the vibration of his barrier from across the room as he raises it, and that, that, is what finally breaks the dam of my shock, with a dagger straight to my heart.

That is the moment I realize that he doesn't trust me.

And why should he? My assurances of helping him are just words, so far as he's concerned. He doesn't know me. Not really.

He doesn't know that I'd sooner see the world burn, than ever actually hurt him.

And that right there, is half of my problem.

Silent tears roll down my cheeks. I refuse to sob. I wouldn't dare let him think I was just sitting in a corner, feeling pity for myself. No, no, that wouldn't do at all.

I angrily wipe the tears away, forcing my breathing into an even, slow rhythm, taking deep, slow breaths, and letting them out even slower. I've done this before. Too many times to count. Panic, or a bad memory might take me by surprise, and tear my mind to shreds, but heartache? Emotional pain? That I know. Pain is an old friend. Pain is a constant.

There's a reason I love to laugh, and it has nothing to do with just being some jovial person or
whatever bullshit I might come up with to excuse it to people when they ask—and yes, they do ask, annoyingly frequently. Like it's a crime to laugh, or something. I laugh, because without the laughter, I will drown in the ocean that is my pain.

I have a penchant for survival, as I've said before. But survival, well... it leaves a lot of scars in its wake. And a whole fuck ton of wounds. Some of 'em are still gaping wide, even; unhealed as the day they were ripped into me. Gotta leave a few open, you see, or the lack of pain makes you forget you're still alive. Not good. Been there. Don't want to be there ever again.

So, I let the pain of this one stay. It'll force me to remember. I'm not so great at remembering, but when it comes to events like these, the ones that cause a new hurt... you better bet your ass I'll remember them.

Cole's gonna have a fuckin' field day with me.

My lips shrug in something closer to a grimace than the smirk I'd intended, at that thought. The truth is, he's more likely to avoid staying around me for any extended amount of time, no matter how much he might want to help. And I wouldn't blame him a bit, if that turns out to be the case. I don't want to hurt him with my hurt, anyway. Poor guy's got enough pain to deal with.

I lift my gaze to Solas' form, watching as he writes something on a sheet of paper. I can tell he's still angry, by the tension in his shoulders, the terse, quick movements of the quill. I can't see his face very well, but I can just imagine the scowl that likely resides there at this very moment. It's probably pretty impressive. The fact that I can get to him like that is a little worrying, though.

Don't get me wrong, I understand why he's angry. I would be too, if our positions were reversed.

But I wouldn't still be fuming like he is, at his current level of investment. And I'm not really even talking about his investment in me, I'm talking about the Inquisition—or hell, the whole world, for that matter. The guy's got compassion by the bucket loads, don't misunderstand me; but at this stage, he's barely even decided to stick around until the world he suddenly seems so concerned with is actually saved. I think about his final words to me, before he turned away. I replay the memory in my head, over and over, like an old record player that got bumped and keeps repeating the same part of the song.

"...until you can convince me that you comprehend it enough to release you upon the unsuspecting world you're supposed to be saving!"

Is he disappointed in my inability to get out there already and fight? Is he just thinking about all the people that are out there right now, dying, while we sit in comfort and relative safety? Does he somehow think I haven't considered that? What is he really trying to accomplish, by keeping me here? He knows I could escape, if I really wanted to. Dump a little extra mana into that nova ability I pulled out of my ass earlier, and there'd be nothing but a crater here.

Not that I'd actually do that, but the point remains: his wards are just for show, and he knows it. Hell, that barrier he's insisting on keeping up is probably just in case I do try some fool shit like that.

Who the hell does he think I am? I am many things, but a complete moron is not one of them.

Yes, he's absolutely correct, my magic is not a toy. I wholly agree. And yes, shoving him against the wall with it was... well, dumb as fuck, really. Whether I had it under control or not, I should've thought better of it. I... I—
Shit.

I done fucked up, is what I did.

And this is when we come full circle, ladies—and any gents who may be reading. Hi there!—to the moment of realization, the one where I understand where I goofed. Well, more than just 'goofed', really, but I digress.

I want to reach out, to apologize. But no, I should probably sit and think for a bit longer... and give him more of a chance to cool down. If he really is like me, he'll need a bit more time, before he'll be able to see past his nose long enough to comprehend that my apology is actually sincere.

From the jerky movements of his quill, I'd say I'm probably right about that. I am curious what he's writing about, though. I wish I could be writing. I should see what I can do about getting a pair of journals, later. One for my thoughts on Solas, and one for everyone and everything else, naturally. The one for everything else, I'd keep in a place he could find, if he really wanted to get to it. The one for him though... that, I have an idea for. It's an idea I quite possibly won't be able to actually use, but it's an idea.

Oh, right. Supposed to be pondering the fuckup I made. Sorry, once I solve a problem in my head, I generally move along at a rather rapid pace, to whatever happens to snag my attention in the next microsecond. I'll uh... attempt to look suitably perplexed and chastised then, shall I?

I should clarify: yes, I have learned the lesson. My current attitude is not a reflection of the gravity I am actually giving that lesson, and my apology will be aptly contrite and regretful, as it should be. And genuine, that too. But as I said, I move on from things quickly, once they've been dealt with in my head. Do most people dwell on crap like that? Is that a neurotypical thing to do, dwelling on shit you've already figured out? I'm actually asking, because I don't know. Anyway, moving on. Heh.

I watch Solas carefully, waiting for the tell-tale signs that I give when my anger begins to cool. Heavy sighs, pausing to think, moments of staring at walls as I ponder whether my anger is fully justified or not, and if I should just get over myself, or stay pissed... yeah. I don't often truly lose my temper. Seriously, it's a rare event. But when I do, it's best to just... let me go fume somewhere, in solitude and silence.

Which is exactly why I'm making as little noise as possible, while I stare at him from my time out chair. No doubt, he's probably got his aura loose or some shit, and he can probably feel my presence—because that's not creepy at all—but even if that's the case, I'm still gonna give him whatever time and space I can, because I know I'd want it.

Naturally, that's the exact moment when some idiot knocks on the door.

Oh boy. I pity the fool who decided now was an excellent time to come bother him.

I can see he's tensed at the sound, and holding perfectly still—likely in a bid to see if the person will just assume he's not home, and go the fuck away—but his efforts avail him nothing. A second, then a third set of knocks sound against the door, and he growls at it as he turns to glare at the offending wooden barrier. His chair screeches against the floor under the strain of him shoving it back as he stands. The sound makes me wince when the sharpness of it hits my ears, but he seems wholly unaffected as he marches with the air of a rage demon in full fury toward the door.

A flick of his fingers dispels the ward, and he flings the door open as if he wants to break it open, then glares at the person occupying the space beyond as though they are the source of all evil in
the universe.

"What?!" he demands, and it takes very little effort to imagine steam rising from his bald head in little billowy wisps, as his rage cooks his brain.

"Ah! Not... so loud, Chuckles. Shit. What's got you in a mood?"

Oh, crap. No, no, Varric doesn't deserve the Dread Wolf's wrath, least of all now. *Shit.*

Blessedly, Solas stays his tongue, opting instead to let the durgen'len continue, since he's likely to anyway, without any prompting. I can see his fists clenching, though. *Not. Good.*

"Anyway, I'm here looking for Silk, did she come here after I passed out?"

Oh, *Varric, no. Why?*

Solas has had enough. "I do not know a Silk, and even were I to, it is likely I would suggest she change her name to something that doesn't resemble one a prostitute would adopt. As I do not make a habit of harboring, nor engaging the services of prostitutes, I suggest you search elsewhere, Master Tethras. Good day." And with that, he slams the door in poor Varric's face, and returns to his desk. He flings the ward back onto the door, almost as an afterthought, and resumes writing, as if nothing had interrupted him in the first place.

I grit my teeth in frustration. He's not going to take my next words well, but they must be said.

"That was unworthy of you, Solas. He was asking after *me*. No matter how valid your anger with me is, Varric did not deserve that."

There, I said my piece, and even slapped an admission of my understanding in there. It's not an apology yet, but it'll get there. Varric was more important.

He doesn't turn, or even stop the scratching of his quill on the paper, as he answers, "You are in no position to admonish me, da'len. Have you forgotten the purpose of your containment, already?"

I sigh softly. I'm 'da'len' again. Fan-fucking-tastic. There goes a serrated edge to add to the knife in my heart. "No, I have not. I was actually waiting for a while, before I apologized. But then Varric knocked, and you snipped, so I spoke up ahead of schedule."

Now, he turns to look at me, resting an arm on the back of his chair as he twists to look at me fully. "Is there a particular reason you chose to delay your apology?"

I nod, keeping eye contact, now that I can actually do that. "Yes. I wished to wait until you had a chance to attain a bit more peace before I spoke, to avoid another... incident." I pause, take a breath, let it out, and begin, feeling—oddly—much calmer than I had a moment ago. "I understood the lesson soon after it was given, along with several other things you apparently wished to convey. I apologize for my misuse of magic. It will not happen again. If I may be excused, I need to find Varric and find out what he needed, and apologize to him, as well."

He frowns, apparently perplexed. "Exactly what 'other things' do you believe I wished to convey?"

My expression is neutral, as it has been since the beginning of my apology. I stand and fold my hands at the base of my spine as I explain, "You wished to make it clear that you do not trust me. I understand why, please do not worry. I would not trust anyone who behaved as I have, either. It is also clear that I have been removed from most any good esteem I had in your eyes. I shall endeavor to do better, ha'hren. May I go, now?"
Anger, confusion, shock, an echo of pain, then skepticism flash in his eyes, before he finally answers. "What? No, you may not go. Explain to me how it is I have supposedly conveyed these things to you, without any knowledge of actually doing so."

I stay at parade rest and answer him, as evenly as I had before, "You conveyed your distrust with the maintenance of a barrier for the entire duration of my containment, as you refer to it, thus indicating your expectation of an attack. Your return to referring to me as a little child was the identifying factor for your lack of regard."

He gives me a pained little smile and softly shakes his head. "Fen'nas, come here, please."

I comply, taking the six easy strides quickly, and looking down at him expectantly.

He gazes at me for a moment, almost as though he's searching for something, then sighs and reaches for an open book that's resting next to the paper he'd been writing on. He pulls the book to him, and looks at me. "Can you read?"

"I can read English, which is my native language, yes. It is what you call Common, here. But I do not think I can read Common, at least not without significant time spent to parse the differences."

He taps a finger on the book. "This book is an introduction to spirit magic. I am currently translating it from Elvhen to Common, and I'm on the chapter covering barriers. I had my barrier cast to take comparative notes. It's clear the author was not very proficient at maintaining barriers, though he was better at a clean dispel than I am. I called you da'len because I was attempting to ensure my point was clearly understood. No other reason. My esteem of you has not been altered in the slightest. I admit, I am somewhat curious to know what drove you to believe I could be so fickle."

I suddenly feel like I can breathe again. The knife in my heart slowly drags its way out, searing the flesh as it leaves and cauterizing the wound, leaving an ugly scar as a reminder of this moment. I can almost taste the returning blood flow to my emotional network as the heart of it resumes pumping, and mentally shake myself out of the neutral stupor my brain had forced me into, as a defense mechanism.

Yes, I can and actually have done that before. It was forced, the first few times. After that, it just sort of became automatic, and that's when it started to become a problem, because sometimes I wouldn't realize I was in that state, and I would miss the few good things that happened in between the bad. I do not recommend it. If you haven't, or can't do that, count yourself lucky. I've stayed in that state for years at a time once or twice, to maintain sanity in bad situations. It's a bit like how I imagine being tranquil is. It's very unpleasant, and a large part of why I am so bloody anti-Chantry. Make sense? Clear as mud? Good. Moving on.

I stumble over my own brain, trying to catch up to how I should even react to what he's said, how I should answer him.

He must've noticed something, because he smiles, and it's that little smile he gets when he sees something dear to him, and it makes my heart flutter like a damn teenager. "Welcome back, da'fen."

I swallow tightly, managing a smile as I try to hold back tears and almost fail. I huff a laugh and nod, swallowing once more before I respond, "Thank you. How did you know?"

He smiles fondly at me and takes my hand in both of his, holding it gently. "We all have different ways of shielding ourselves, da'fen. I recognized yours the moment I saw it, because it was like
looking in a mirror, and seeing my own. If it helps, I was glad to see you came back so quickly."

I nod and smile gratefully at him. "It does, thank you. Your question, though... honestly, I don't
know the answer. I don't know why I thought you could be so fickle. I've never seen you like that,
even... before I met you. I think it was just... everything I was seeing, that pointed to one
conclusion in my paranoid mind." I laugh and roll my eyes, looking off to the side and shaking my
head. "I don't know." I look down at our hands, because though I can't quite look him in the eyes at
this moment, I want to at least acknowledge his presence. "Ir abelas."

He shakes his head. "No need to apologize. You have already done enough of that today. I forgive
you. I believe the lesson was actually learned this time." He smiles as I look up to meet his eyes,
and nods toward the chair I'd vacated. "Come, I promised to show you how to wrap your feet and
legs properly. After that, I will go with you to find Varric, and I will apologize. You were correct—
that was unworthy of me."

He stands and gently leads me back to the chair. "I am curious, however—why does he call you
silk?"

I laugh, and explain it to him. I'm starting to find that I don't even mind it now. Silk, that is. It
doesn't always fit, especially in moments like these, but when it does, when I am smooth as silk... I
actually really like being her.

For now, I'm embarrassed to say, when Solas knelt down and began wrapping my foot with his gift
to me... I was anything but her.

But that's okay.

He was smiling, anyway.

Chapter End Notes

❤--Discord--❤

❤ Thanks for reading! If you enjoy the story or this chapter in particular, please feel
free to leave a review with your thoughts! ❤
❤ I love reading comments and reply to all of them. ❤
With Fortitude

Chapter Summary

I'm sorry I'm late. *shame face*
I slept fucking ELEVEN HOURS and I got up late and... just here, have chapter. 🌹
This will be the last time I ask about this, and I'm only asking again because I got NO feedback at all last chapter, though I asked for feedback either way... :P ♥
Would any of you like a forum to discuss my works on? If yes, awesome! If no, that's cool too! I'd just like to know, either way. I got a little interest two chapters ago, but I wanted to confirm with the rest of you wonderful people.
So there ya go. ♥

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LOVE YOU GUYS!!!!
♡♡♡♡♡♡♡♡♡♡♡♡♡♡♡♡♡♡♡♡♡♡♡♡♡♡♡♡♡♡♡♡♡♡

ALSO ALSO!!!!!

Saber_Sloth Just did this ADORABIBBLE drawing for this chapter!!!
Fen’nas and Bobber
IS THAT NOT THE CUTEST? *flails*
GO TELL HER HOW CUTE IT IS! <33333333 :D

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

I'm a blushing mess.

I didn't expect him to actually wrap both of my feet and legs! Hell, I didn't expect him to wrap one! This is... I'm... AH!

I try to maintain a calm exterior when he looks up to me with a smile as he finishes, but I'm certain my blazing cheeks give me away, despite my efforts. *Sigh.*

I manage a sheepish smile, and thank him for showing me—though I'm fairly certain I don't actually remember anything but thinking over and over again how good his light touches felt, even through the thin leather.

I tear my eyes away from his face to examine his handiwork, and soon discover the true purpose of the wrapping. Once applied, the multiple thin layers form a single layer that's both flexible, and thick enough to actually function as... armor.

That's... ingenious, actually. The aesthetic and practical ingenuity of the Elvhen, at work right there, just over my skin.

How fucking awesome is that?

My awed excitement shines in my voice, and on my face as I look back up at him and speak, "It's... armor. That's incredible! I always thought it was primarily practical decoration—something to protect the feet, and look good at the same time, but it's actually light armor, isn't it?"

He nods, amused at my wonder. "It is. I'm pleased you like it. There are many such methods that we can employ to properly equip you for battle. I am not a master crafter, by any means, but I can give your craftsmen a few ideas, if you like."
My face lights up as my excitement heightens. "Yes! Please! I would love to see what could come out of that. I've seen some examples of elven armors, and they were beautifully crafted. Something even remotely similar would be wonderful. We probably don't have the crafting materials to make anything too spectacular just yet, but we'll get there."

He chuckles, obviously amused by my enthusiasm. "I would be pleased to collaborate with your craftsman, to provide any insights I am able to. You are one of the People; you should be outfitted as one."

My blush is probably a legendary shade of red by now, but I can hardly bring myself to care, such is my exuberance. "Thank you, Solas—this is all very generous of you."

He simply smiles. "Nonsense. I refuse to tempt fate by leaving you ill-equipped to deal with whatever we are to encounter." He stands and offers me his hand. "Come, we should seek Varric out—I must apologize, then I will leave you in his capable hands to seek out the craftsman."

I smile and slip my hand into his, though I barely use his assistance. I earn a curiously amused look at that, and I blush. Again. "Thank you. That seems like a sound plan. I need to speak to him about a training schedule, anyway."

He nods, still smiling. "As you say." He gently lowers and drops my hand, then moves to open the door, holding it for me. I head out into the late afternoon sun, shielding my eyes as they adapt to the brightness, and shifting my weight from one foot to the other as I slowly get used to the feeling of the wrappings. I get the sense they'll be like a second skin in short order—it already feels oddly natural. Then again, I generally go barefoot, or wear thong sandals on earth, so, it's really not much of an adjustment.

I hear the door close and hear the scuff of his feet as he comes to stand beside me. I look over to see him smiling softly at me.

"Shall we?"

I grin at him. "We shall."

He grins back at me, and we start down towards Varric's usual hangout, skirting around the tavern. A pair of soldiers exit the door in front of us, and I can hear Maryden singing, her voice and the steady strumming of her lute filtering through the din of the tavern's occupants, before the door swings shut. It reminds me of one of the songs she eventually sings, that I sometimes wonder if Solas himself wrote. I hum it softly as we near Varric's spot, which I can now see actually contains the dwarf himself, warming his hands at the fire.

"Durgen'len!" I call out as we approach, "How are you feeling?"

He turns and winces at my volume, then sees Solas and gives him a wary glare, before returning his attention to me. "Not so loud, Silk. My head will thank you at a lower volume." He nods at Solas. "Chuckles," he grumbles.

"Master Tethras," Solas begins, "I find I must apologize for my behavior. I'm afraid I was already rather upset before you knocked on my door, but that does not excuse my directing it at you. You did not deserve my ire, and I regret that you even saw me in such a state. My most sincere apologies." He actually adds a small bow at the end, shocking the shit out of me.

Varric seems similarly affected. "Well, shit, Chuckles; it's... alright. I figured something was going on. Everything okay now?"
Solas nods, adding a small smile. "Yes, I am much better now, thank you. Apologies, I would stay, but I promised Fen'nas I would speak to the craftsman, on some ideas I have for her armor and staff. If you will both excuse me, Fen'nas, Master Tethras." He dips his head slightly at both of us and takes his leave.

When he's out of earshot, Varric turns to me, with an expression that screams 'Did that actually just happen?' and gives a shocked little laugh. "Well, shit; I didn't expect an apology from him, of all people. What did you say to get him to do that?"

I snort, giving him an incredulous look. "If you honestly think I had any influence on him, you're sorely mistaken. All I told him was that his angry reaction toward you was unworthy of him. He's the one that decided to come with me to apologize."

"Ahh," intones Varric, looking like he just solved all the mysteries of the universe, "so you were in there. I thought you might be. I'm surprised you hadn't told him about the nickname yet. Or had you? Shit, you hadn't, had you? Tell me you hadn't."

I'm a little confused at his worry, but I shake my head. "No, I told him later, why?"

His relief is palpable. "Because, if he'd actually known... well, you heard what he said. I'd've had to go..." He reddens slightly. "I dunno, kick him in the shins, or something."

I laugh, unable to help the image of that scenario playing out in my head. I fall to my knees, and grab the dwarf before he can object, throwing my arms around his shoulders and planting a kiss on his cheek. "You're far too sweet, durgen'len. Don't ever change."

He pats my back awkwardly. "Okay, okay, enough of that," he says gruffly.

I smirk and back up, letting my hands fall to my knees and sitting comfortably on my heels.

He's red as a beet. It's fucking adorable. He rolls his eyes and waves upward. "C'mon, get up, Silk."

I shrug, staying where I am. "So what? Let 'em stare. Unless you prefer staring at my crotch," I grin at him impishly, "in which case, I'll be happy to oblige."

"Andraste's flaming ass! Fine, sit there, if you're so keen on it." He huffs a sigh, and he's trying oh, so very hard to maintain that gruff exterior, but I can see the sparkle in his eye. He's not fooling anyone, least of all me. "You know, I know another elf who used to pull the kinda shit you just pulled, too. But she was Dalish. You sure you're not Dalish, Silk?"

I snort at the implication. "Why, are all Dalish open with affection—especially with those outside their clan?" I ask, pointedly.

"Well, no. Good point. I'd say it's just an elf thing, but we both know that's bullshit." He eyes me like I'm a puzzle again.

"Why, are all Dalish open with affection—especially with those outside their clan?" I ask, pointedly.

"Well, no. Good point. I'd say it's just an elf thing, but we both know that's bullshit." He eyes me like I'm a puzzle again.

It just makes me smile. "It's just individuals, durgen'len." I reach out and pat his shoulder. "Don't worry, I'll try not to embarrass you too often."

He snorts, finally giving up on the gruff mask. "Why is that not the least bit reassuring?"

I shake my head, flashing my best grin at him. "I dunno, Broody, why isn't it?" I stick my tongue out at him, then laugh at my own foolishness.
He joins my quiet laughter, then grimaces. "Ooh, ow. Shit, Silk, you're hazardous to the recently drunk. Oh, speaking of which—" he cuts himself off and reaches for his coin purse.

I hold my hand up. "No, durgen'len. Keep the money. You will need it more than I, soon enough."

He frowns at me, but relents. "Fine, if her holiness insists. So, why do you keep calling me 'child of the stone'? You know I'm from Kirkwall, right?"

I smirk. "The fact that you know what durgen'len means, makes me wonder at the privacy of my conversations with anyone in Elvhen, durgen'len."

He waves me off. "I have no idea what most of the other words mean, but that Dalish girl I mentioned?" He waits for my nod. "She told me that's what they call dwarves."

I smile kindly. "Then you should know that there's no differentiation between surfacer dwarves and those born underground. Just as I am a tarasyl'lan: a child of the sky—despite never having seen Arlathan, let alone being born there." I pause, tipping my head in thought. "Far as I can remember, anyway."

He eyes me cautiously. "Yeah, about that—you still having memory troubles? That really wasn't just a terrible attempt at putting the Seeker off your trail?"

I shake my head. "No, I really don't remember anything of my own life, previous to the day I came out of the Fade. I remember other things—some world history, names, places; but nothing of my own past. Even my name was something I gave myself; I have no idea what it was before then."

He seems pensive as he nods, tentatively accepting my answer. "That's a tough break, Silk."

I snort. "Tell me about it. I don't even know if I'm a virgin or not."

A laugh barks out of his throat before he can stop it. "Maker's balls, Silk, don't tell me things like that! I don't need to know!"

I laugh, a hearty thing that crawls straight up from my belly, as I lean back and close my eyes, holding my stomach with one hand and bracing behind me with the other. When I come down from the sky, I pat Varric's cheek fondly. "You're too easy to embarrass, durgen'len. I'm not even trying!" I grin at him and shake my head slightly.

He scoffs, waving me off again. "Not all of us were born in the sky, oh tar-a-syl-lan. I don't know how they do it up there, but those of us on the ground prefer not to know those kinds of details about our holy figures."

I make a rather undignified sound with my lips. "Yeah, okay, dur-gen-len. Anyway, I came over here to ask when you wanted to do that training I asked you about in the Tavern.

He lifts an eyebrow. "Preferably when I'm not hung over. Other than that, just whenever we're both free, really. I don't much care for schedules; I've got enough of those with my publisher."

I chuckle, nodding sympathetically. "I can understand that. Alright, I'll let you recover from your hangover and come by tomorrow. How's that sound?"

He shrugs. "It'll sound better if we can avoid discussing our esteemed Herald's virginity, or lack thereof."

I grin cheekily at him and wink. "No guarantees."
He grumbles, and I giggle at him. I stand and brush my wrappings off. "See you tomorrow, durgen'len."

He gives a little wave. "Seeya, Silk."

I give off a happy little sigh, and head for the gates. The sun's hanging low enough in the sky, that by the time I'm halfway down the first set of stairs, it's completely hidden behind the walls. Damn. Later than I thought. I pick up my pace a bit, and move through the gates, turning left toward the smithy.

As I approach, I notice Solas and Harrit standing at the armor assembly table, obviously deep in conversation, their backs turned to me.

I move quietly to one of the nearby workstations, perking my ears to listen in, but most of their words keep getting interrupted by the clanging of hammers on steel. Giving up, I stand just behind them, in the small space between, and peer nosily at what they're working on. At least I can hear them, now.

Not that Harrit's saying much. A lot of 'hmm's' and 'hmph's', mostly. Solas, as usual, is doing most of the talking.

"...can alter this larger buckle to accept a sigil. If we adjust this strap slightly to the right, a hood can be added to the robe. I will be happy to enchant individual sections as you complete them. Hello, Herald."

I snap my gaze up to him, from the plans they're drawing out on large sheets of paper, and smile. "Hello, Solas. I see you've already begun working on the armor; can I do anything to help?"

Harrit's rough voice answers me, "You can get me better materials than we have. No point using low-grade stuff to make this, you want higher quality leather, stronger buckles, and thicker sinew for the stitching; not to mention softer metals for plating, if you really want all the decoration."

I give him a nod. "Naturally. Do you perhaps have some light armor I could use to get all of that? And have you begun on a staff at all, or was that to start after the armor?"

He jerks his thumb over his shoulder. "There's armor over there for you, and we've got a few staffs set out; pick whatever one you want."

I dip my head in gratitude. "Thank you, Master Harrit."

He looks like he's just swallowed something foul. "None of that 'master' stuff, Herald. I know my craft, but I'm nobody's master, least of all Andraste's Herald."

I smile. "I meant it as simple respect, nothing more; but of course, if you prefer."

He nods with a little affirmative grunt, and I smile, then turn to the gear stash he'd indicated. The armor is the simple vest jacket that covers down to your thighs, which you get when the Inquisition is founded. Fair enough. I shrug that on, and it settles surprisingly well onto my frame. They must've taken measurements when I was out for three days. Yay... joy. Not awkward at all...

Brushing those thoughts aside, I move over to where a veritable gaggle of staffs are leaning against the wall. Not a single one of them is the same. Hell, a couple of them look like higher tier staffs I remember seeing. Interesting. I wonder if those were salvaged from the conclave. Morbid thought. Practical, though.
I skim over a few that look like I'd hurt myself with them, more than the enemy, and set them to the right as instant rejections.

That leaves nine I can choose from.

This one has that hooked blade that looks wicked, but I'd probably end up gouging a friendly's eye out with, so no. I set it aside with the rejects.

This looks like the default Inquisition staff. Safe, but boring. I set it between the two sets of staffs, in the 'maybe' section.

The next one looks like the one I always give Dorian, with the skull and the tentacles. Hmm. It's high tier, I remember that much. I set it to the far left, ahead of the pack. Not to my tastes, but it's a good one.

I notice my left hand already fondling one towards the middle of the left set, and I focus on it. The wood is darker, feels worn and old—really old—but sturdy. The top is intricately carved, and houses a pale, sea-colored crystal, that glows softly at my touch. The other end is capped with what looks like a simple dagger blade, if a bit longer. The grip is black leather, clearly lovingly cared for, over many years.

It's bloody perfect.

Well, at least, it suits my aesthetic sensibilities. I'm not completely sure if it's sturdy enough, or if... shit. I wonder if my magic will... I don't know... harmonize with it, or whatever. Yeah, I know, this isn't Olivander's Wand Shop, but still. Even in my limited understanding of magic, I know that some energies don't mix well.

I carefully let a tiny trickle of my mana seep into the staff, and I'm surprised when I feel something cold in the center of it. Does it have a metal core? That would certainly give me some assurance on the sturdiness front. So far, so good.

I let a bit more flow into the staff, sending it first toward the blade, which vibrates softly when my mana reaches the blade's tip. Good sign or bad? Hmm. Undecided.

I try the other end, swirling energy through and around the wood until it reaches the crystal, and—holy shit!

The crystal lights up like a fucking solar flare, illuminating the smithy and surroundings in a wash of light that... how the hell? I'm staring at the ground, and the light looks like it's shining through the water of a lake. The entire area looks like it's underwater. It's beautiful. Peaceful.

I look up at the crystal, and notice something... odd. There's a... I don't even know what to call it. An... airy blob? It's like a bubble with smoke in it, that's softly glowing. And it's flitting around the head of the staff like... wait. Is that a wisp?

As if sensing my thoughts, the thing hovers down in front of me, and boops me on the nose. I blink and move my head back, staring at it—probably cross-eyed—in stunned fascination.

Is anybody else seeing this shit, or am I on drugs?

I look over my shoulder, seeking out Solas, and find him watching me, a soft smile on his face. Everyone else seems utterly oblivious; to the light, the wisp, everything. The hell? Is this some mage-only-club thing? The wisp flutters into my vision again, and repeats the nose-booping.
Okay, that's it. Answers. I need them. I look at Solas, and crook my finger at him, gesturing for him to follow me as I let my mana sink back into me, and take the staff with me. Obviously I'm keeping the thing, it's not even a question. Even with the weird boopy sprite thing. Boop. Heh. Shut up.

I wait until he's next to me, before heading out of the smithy with him on my heels. I smile at Cullen as we head past the tents, and my smile broadens when he blushes and quickly looks away.

The sun's setting as we pass through the gate behind the lone old apothecary's cabin, and I can taste the crisp flavor that settles into the air in the sun's absence. It's gonna be a cold night. Wonder if I'll feel it?

We reach the logging stand, and I settle on the wall, propping the staff in front of me and just... looking at it.

Solas settles next to me and gently nudges my shoulder with his. "You chose well. It is a curious piece. Spirits, even small ones, do not often attach themselves to objects. The previous owner must have had a more open mind than most mages of this age, to both attract, and allow such a thing. It speaks well of you that it decided to show itself, especially in a first encounter."

I let my mana sink into the staff again, illuminating the area, and the little booper comes out to play again. "Is it just a wisp, or is it a full-fledged spirit? Does it have a purpose of its own?"

The little thing boops me again. "It likes you. As to its nature, you could ask it, yourself."

Solas chuckles at the display. "It looks you. As to its nature, you could ask it, yourself."

I sigh ponderously. My first time speaking to a spirit. Well, other than Solas. But he's not much of a spirit anymore, is he? Alright, let's give it a go. "Hello there."

It boops me.

I giggle at it and shake my head. "So, what are you, then?"

It just hovers for a moment. I tilt my head at it. It tilts its... self at me. I snort and straighten my head. It makes a tiny noise, like a sneeze, and straightens. I laugh. It titters. What a silly little thing!

I look at Solas and lift an eyebrow. I can see it turning to look at him, too, in my periphery.

Solas looks charmingly amused, but says nothing, only pointing my attention back to the booper.

I look back at it, and it is no longer just a little blob, but something more like the wraiths... only... not. It's not green like the demon wraiths, or rust colored, like the spirit of Command in Crestwood. It's the color of the light, coming from the staff. The only reason it can even be seen clearly, is because it's still softly glowing, with its own light.

I blink in surprise, and tilt my head the other way, leaning in to look at it more closely. Just as before, it mimics me, and I smile at it. "Hello again."

"Hello."

How utterly appropriate. Its voice has an almost watery sound to it—not like it's drowning, more like warbling, shifting... still quite understandable, but definitely otherworldly.

I smile at it, and straighten my head. "I am Fen'nas." I gesture to Solas. "This is Solas. It's a
It tilts its head the other way, apparently giving up on copying me. It looks to Solas, then back to me. "You do not fear."

I huff a small laugh and shake my head. "No. Should I?"

It straightens its head and seems to think for a moment. "No. But most do fear him. They do not know him."

I look back at Solas, understanding dawning. I turn back to the spirit and shake my head. "You're right, they don't. So, who are you? What is your purpose?"

It leans in so quickly that I barely have time to blink, before it's in my face. Its eyes bore into mine with the focus only a spirit can muster, and I feel like it's looking straight into my soul. It probably is.

As quickly as it barged into my personal bubble, it exits, and begins what I can only describe as some form of transformation. Swirling mists surround and suffuse it, molding and shaping and tearing it apart, only to reform it once more, bit by bit; until piece by piece, the spirit reshapes itself into a vaguely elvhen shape, fully armored, with a massive shield and a sword of pure veilfire flame.

It is beyond badass.

It kneels, though I'm not sure which of us it's kneeling to, as it seems to be looking between the two of us. Its voice lowers in pitch—though the watery quality remains—as it speaks again, utter confidence bracing its tone. "I am finally given true form, after centuries of waiting for a worthy purpose. Thank you. I am Fortitude. I am your sword, and your shield. I am your armor. I am your guardian; from now until your last breath."

Stunned, I look to Solas for guidance. He was a spirit, after all, he would know what to do with this.

"What do you seek, in return for this service?" See? He knows what to ask.

Fortitude replies, "I seek nothing but the ability to serve in this capacity. I will serve no other."

I speak up, because it's not clear, and I need it all clear. "To which of us are you offering this service?"

"To both. It is not his decision, however; it is yours. He was once spirit, still is, partly. I will not allow a spirit to make the decision." It looks at me. "You are... different. Spirit, yet... not. It is acceptable."

I blink, frowning in confusion at that description. 'spirit, yet not?'

The fuck?

Solas speaks up before I can ask, "Why both of us? If it is her decision, should it not be her that you serve?"

At that, Fortitude hesitates, but only for a moment. "You are... the same. To serve either is to serve the other. It matters not. I can and will serve both. She has already decided."
I startle at that, looking between Solas and Fortitude. "I... have?"

It nods. "Your heart decided, before your mind could hear it."

I look to Solas for a hint, a helpful witticism, *something*. "Solas, toss me a bone here. Is it *bound* to me... us now? Or... what..." I fling my hands up uselessly, then gesture at Fortitude, still kneeling before us, and look at Solas helplessly.

A tiny smile tugs at the corner of his mouth, and he shakes his head. "Calm yourself, Fen'nas. It is no more bound than it wishes to be. To us, at least. I am uncertain whether it is bound to the staff or not, at this point. It is possible that any binding on it was destroyed when it decided its purpose. There is a danger, however, to it. An enemy mage could still bind it, if it is not bound to anything, or anyone else."

I turn to the spirit, narrowing my eyes at it. "How are you manifesting here? Is it through the staff?"

Fortitude tilts its head. "It... was. But I do not believe I am bound to it, any longer. It is strange. I have been trapped in that staff's focus for a thousand years, possibly more. What age is this? Who among the Evanuris currently rule?"

*That* takes both Solas and I aback. I keep my trap shut, letting Solas take the lead on that one. I'm not touching that topic with a hundred-foot-pole.

After a moment, Solas speaks, his voice taking on a tremulous quality I've never heard before, "Which of them was in power, the last you heard?"

"The All-Mother."

Solas gasps, his eyes widening. "You have been trapped, for all this time? Who bound you to the staff?"

Fortitude grimaces. "A priest of Falon'din. I was one of The All-Mother's Sentinels, in life. Falon'din gave my soul to the priest as a gift, for his loyalty. A loyal soul for a loyal priest."

A look of profound sadness comes over Solas' face. He holds his hand out to Fortitude, and gives it a sad smile. "Come, my friend. See what you have missed."

The spirit moves to him on its knees, and touches his hand. After a moment, it drops its hand to its knee, and stares at the ground. Solas retreats and waits.

A long moment later, Fortitude looks up at him, then at me. "I knew people feared him in this age, but I knew not why. I understand, now."

I lift an eyebrow. "Do you still believe he should not be feared?"

It nods. "Yes. But I understand their fear, now; even if I do not share it." It turns back to Solas. "I will serve. I do not yet have the strength to manifest as you have, but I will. Until then, I have other means of protecting you both."

I can't keep my trap shut any longer. "Such as? And how will we keep other mages from binding you? We'll be fighting mages very soon, I don't want to risk you. Also, what made you choose fortitude?"

Fortitude smiles. "A man from the future smiles. "So many questions!"" It chuckles, and its
mimicry of Dorian in that moment, though fleeting, is nearly perfect. My heart feels a twist of longing for the man I know will be one of my best friends.

The spirit continues, "You have a fascinating wealth of knowledge. It will be interesting to see what you do with it. To answer your questions: I can fortify your resistance to magic and, to a lesser extent, to physical harm. I can influence some small things in this world, though I will not be able to truly fight until I can be as he is." It gestures to Solas. "The binding is a risk. I have no answer for you, unless you were to bind me yourself, and I can sense neither of you wish to."

It pauses, and stands finally, facing me and bringing its shield up, then placing its fisted hand over it. "This is familiar to you?"

It takes a few seconds to click, as to where I'd seen that image before, but when it does, I find I can barely breathe.

My mother's family crest is a shield with a raised fist over it.

The motto beneath it: "FORTITUDINE".

...'With Fortitude'.

Chapter End Notes

❤--Discord--❤

❤ Thanks for reading! If you enjoy the story or this chapter in particular, please feel free to leave a review with your thoughts! ❤

❤ I love reading comments and reply to all of them. ❤
I'm sorry!

So, a thing happened yesterday. I'm not going to go into it, but it kept me from being in a state of mind that I could actually write in. The thing is fixed now, but I still had a hell of a time writing this chapter. Regardless, I'm sorry I didn't get one out to you guys yesterday, but here, have chapter. *tosses chapter at you guys*

ALSO!!!

I got enough of a positive response to the question of the forum, that I actually made one. It's simple, and I've basically only made main rooms with the story titles on them; but I've had a friend test it, and you guys can easily make accounts and post very quickly and smoothly. So yay! ♥ :D See my usual contact info spiel at the bottom of the chapter for the link! ♥

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

I sit here, in what's slowly starting to become my favorite little sanctuary, and stare ahead at a faintly glowing fist, pressed over a massive shield.

I have no words that could possibly justify being spoken. I am stunned, beyond belief.

'A spirit just chose its purpose, from a random memory in the recesses of my fucked up brain! The fuck?!!'

"Not random," says Fortitude, conviction in its voice as it slings its shield onto its back, "It was a strong image in your own history; personal, solid, cherished. One of few things you clung to, in a childhood awash with strife and agony."

And there's my tongue. Ah, hello tongue. "Alright, let's... leave my traumatic childhood out of this, shall we? I've enough traumas scheduled to occur here, as it is." Time to change the subject. Past time. "So, why did you choose that image? There's a lot of images in this head, after all; you could've chosen all kinds of things."

It shakes its head. "It is not merely an image for you. You took it as a challenge, and you succeeded at it, beyond your wildest dreams. You survived, with fortitude steeling your spine and guarding your heart and mind. Your family's crest became your shield, as it should. Your bloodline is strong, full of survivors. Some failed, but most did not. It is commendable. It is worth embodying."

And there goes my tongue again. "Well, thanks. I think," I manage, just before it goes.

Fortitude smirks. "You are welcome." It turns to Solas, giving me the time to regroup. "You are one of her caretakers, yes?"
Both Solas and I blink at that.

"I am one of her trainers, if that is what you mean."

The spirit shakes its head. "No, it is more than that. You train her, look after her, ensure she is healthy; in body, soul, and mind." It pauses for a moment, turning its head slightly, as if listening. It nods when it apparently finds what it needs. "The armor plans you discussed with the craftsman; I wish to see them. I repaired the armors of The All— of Mythal's Sentinels. I was killed for refusing to compromise the armors of her personal guard. I will also help you create a set for you to wear."

Solas is quick to signal his refusal. "No, I cannot—"

"They will not care, if she insists it be done." Fortitude interrupts, pointing at me. "She has a great desire to see you armored properly. It will be done."

Solas turns to me with a look of great confusion. "You have never expressed such a desire."

"She harbors many things she does not reveal, Pride. On most, she is impeccably wise to remain silent. Others..." the spirit looks at me and smirks. Smirks! Cheeky shit. Its smile broadens as it continues, "Others, I will be speaking to her about, later. They should be known."

I give it an incredulous look. Lovely. It's as bad as Cole.

And I probably shouldn't have thought about that, because now, Fortitude is openly staring at me, with that soul-baring intensity it seems to love. Finally, it seems to have gotten all the information it wanted on the subject.

"Fascinating. Physically, without any transitioning? Powerful, indeed." It nods to itself. "Powerful indeed." It tilts its head at me, switching gears from ponderously intent to curious in an instant. "'It'? Why? I was—a-male."

My eyebrows shoot up with that line of inquiry. "Would you prefer I think of you as male, then?"

It— he, apparently, nods. "It is what I will be, what I was, what I am. As much as I can be, in this form."

I dip my head in assent. "Alright, if you prefer. I'm curious, what did you mean earlier by "spirit, yet not"? I wasn't aware I was a spirit at all. Well, aside from the whole... reincarnation thing."

It— shit! He shrugs. "It is partly that, and partly the one you suppress when you are here. She is you, yet not you. You are both intrinsically tied together, yet you have separate identities. She has been attempting to speak to you, for some time."

What?! "Speak to me? How would she even do that?" I snap my focus to Solas. "You said she was as I am, that I should trust her."

"As you should," Fortitude interrupts. He likes doing that. "She is trustworthy. I should very much like to see her, in this body. It may answer a few of your questions, though likely not all. She reached out to you in the..." He pauses, doing that listening thing again. "I—" His brow pinches, then suddenly, he straightens, eyes blown wide as he gasps. Oh, shit. That's the face of recognition.

He reaches out, hand cupping my cheek, though I can only feel it as a press against my aura, which is still as tightly bound to the surface of my skin as it was the moment I first woke up.
"She... you survived? He—we all thought you dead! No! Wait! I..." A profound expression of saddened disappointment shrouds over his face in a matter of seconds. "Ir abelas. I do not think she wishes me to speak on this, yet." His hand retreats, and he wraps his fingers around his opposite arm, looking dejected.

At first I think to reach out and comfort him, as baffling as whatever just happened was, but then I realize I can't touch him, so, that's out. I turn to Solas, instead, looking at him with what is probably the epitome of a 'what the fuck?' face.

Solas gives me the most elegant shrug I've ever seen for my efforts, and shakes his head. Okay then, no answers there. I swing my focus back to Fortitude.

He heaves a heavily burdened sigh, then straightens, releasing his arm and looking me in the eyes. "Apologies. I wish I could answer the questions spinning in your thoughts, but I cannot. I am bound by oath not to speak of these things, unless I am released by her, or my superior. I cannot break that oath, not even for you." He shakes his head and looks to Solas. "Nor you. I am sorry."

I lift my hand to his cheek anyway, even knowing I won't be able to actually touch him, but to my utter astonishment, I actually... am. My eyes widen just as his do—apparently it's a surprise for him too. He adds another gasp to the mix for extra shock value. Like it needed more.

It's not like touching regular skin, it's like... fuck, how do I explain it? If you haven't felt the snap of your mana against the veil, how the skin of it around you feels to your aura, it would truly be impossible to describe, because that is what it feels like. Not the heavy, wet blanket part, but the way it feels to brush against it with magic. It's only when he lifts his hand to cover mine, and leans his face gently into the touch with a smile, that I realize the probable reason I'm able to touch a bloody spirit.

It's my left hand.

Well, shit.

He chuckles, nodding. "I could not have said it better myself." He's got his eyes closed now, enjoying the touch. I try not to think of how fucking long he's gone without the simplest pleasure of an innocent touch, because if I do, I know I'll just cry.

Ah, crap, I'm thinking about it. Damn it all.

A soft smile forms on his lips, and he reaches his free hand out, gently settling it on my cheek and wiping the single falling tear away. Only then do I belatedly realize it—I can feel him, too, as more than just a brush along my aura, as an actual physical presence—even if just barely. And that's when I get the immediate urge to hug him. Everything else be damned, if I can give him a simple comfort like that, you'd damn well better bet on me going for it. Before I can second-guess my decision, I go for it. I keep my left hand in contact, just in case that's a requirement of this whole surreal and otherworldly situation. I close in—

And hit a semi-solid mass. Holy fuck, it worked! Mostly, anyway. There's parts of him that aren't quite visually there, and those parts I pass right through, but the rest of him is solid enough, and I wrap my arms around the solid bits as best I can, and hold on.

After a moment, I feel his arms wrap around me, and a disbelieving chuckle escapes him. "I can hardly recall the last time I was touched by anyone but myself... thank you."

I grin and reach up to slide my hand over his hair comfortably, letting him enjoy the moment of
contact. "You're welcome."

'I'm sorry.' I can't say it out loud, or I'll break. But I want him to know.

He nods softly, and I feel it against my shoulder and neck. I smile, glad he heard.

It is strange, this embrace that carries into existence beyond the physical; but I would not miss it for the world. This lonely spirit chose us, wants to protect us; and I'll be damned if I don't give some small favor in return. It's a start.

"It is more than enough, worry not. It is far more than I could've hoped for, when you touched that staff." He gently retreats, bracing his forearms with mine in a signal of friendship. "You have granted me more than I can properly repay, but I will do my best."

I shake my head softly. "There's no need to repay it—there is no debt. I am happy to have helped."

He smiles. "I know." He slips his hands from my arms and folds them behind his back. He looks over at Solas and chuckles, shaking his head. "Do not worry. There could never be any danger of changing that."

I look to Solas—who has remained oddly quiet this entire time—for an explanation, but none seems forthcoming.

"Da'rahn." He waves it off smoothly.

Uh-huh. Sure. You should know better, wolf. I glare at him and sigh. "Tel'da'rahn, but fine, if you insist. For now."

He huffs and glances toward the town for a second, before looking back at us. "We should return to the village, lest the Commander send a search party. Dinner is likely being served in the tavern."

I lift an eyebrow at him. 'Right. You just want an escape from my scrutiny. You think you're so sly, wolf.' I shift my gaze to Fortitude, and the tiniest smirk pulls at the corner of his lips at my thoughts. I snort and turn to retrieve my—apparently fucking ancient—staff, send my mana to the crystal to light our way, and wave my spirits on. I almost snort at that thought. My spirits. How ridiculous is that?

Fortitude does snort, shaking his head as he moves to follow.

I smirk back at him, then look to Solas on my left, who seems very confused. I sigh and trudge on, making footprints in the fresh snow that I've just noticed is slowly drifting down from the sky. We were under trees before, so I hadn't even realized. Ah, I love snow.

By the time we make it back to the gates, Solas and I are both coated in a thin layer of sparkling snow, and I grin at the thought that we look like the two out of three who didn't escape an impromptu glitter explosion.

As we're heading up the steps toward the tavern, I glance to Solas, a question from days ago on my mind. "So when did you want to start teaching me to change my shape?"

That seems to bring him up short, for some reason. Just an unexpected question, maybe? He recovers too quickly to really get a solid read on his expression. "Whenever you wish. We can begin after dinner, if you like."

Alright. This made him skip a beat why? I nod my head, about to answer, when Fortitude
interrupts, as he is wont to do.

"He did not expect to become, tonight."

'Become?' Then it dawns on me. 'Ohh, become... oh. Ah. Wait what? He's gonna do... and be... Oh wow.'

"Ah. Well, if you need time to prepare, we could always do it later this week, maybe?" I offer, shrugging.

Solas shakes his head. "No, it is no trouble; merely an adjustment in my evening plans." He smiles at me. "I was not doing anything particularly interesting, anyway. We can start tonight, and continue after your training with the Commander, in the morning. Do not think you will be escaping staff practice, however. That is far more important than the ability to turn into various animals."

I sigh heavily, rolling my eyes as I reach the tavern door, stopping before I open it to look back at him petulantly. "Yes, ha'hren. I'll practice my twirls in the Fade, if I must." I pause, realizing my staff is still in my hand, and grimace slightly. I've no clue how to make it suck onto my back like you see in the game. I'm certain the look I level at Solas is utterly pitiful. "Um, how do I... what do I do with this?" I indicate my staff sheepishly.

He chuckles and holds his hand out for it. When I hand it to him, he takes a moment to look it over, then nods approvingly. "It is well-made. To answer your concern, this is how you stow it for travel." He spins it slightly, aiming it at his back, then... lets go. I watch with rapt attention as I sense his mana curling around the wood and positioning it correctly on his back—then forming some sort of spell I'm unfamiliar with, which secures it in place.

I blink, eyebrows lifting in surprise. "It's magic that holds it there?" At his nod, I continue, "But doesn't that drain your mana constantly?"

He gives a half nod. "Yes, but the drain is so small that it is negated by the speed of your mana replenishment. Regardless, you will not wish to use this method in the tavern. Simply set it against the wall, near your seat. It is unlikely any will bother it. Most are too afraid of magic to touch a mage's staff."

I nod as he hands my staff back to me. "Alright. Ma serannas, ha'hren. I'd appreciate it if you could teach me that spell later. It'll come in handy, I'm certain."

He smiles. "Of course. Perhaps we should eat, first?" he asks, gesturing to the tavern.

I realize I've been standing there, blocking the door this whole time, and blush softly. "Right, yes, good idea." I clear my throat and push the door open, heading in with my spirity troupe. At least non-mages can't see Fortitude yet. That would be... awkward.

The spirit snickers behind me, but says nothing.

We head for the two nearest empty seats, which, surprisingly, are the same we'd used earlier today. Otherwise, the tavern is mostly packed, and several people are drunkenly dancing to Maryden's song. I haven't heard this one before, come to think of it. Huh. It's a jovial thing, high and light; the kind of music that makes you want to get up and dance. Makes sense why the drunks are dancing, then. No lyrics so far, but it's a pleasant tune. Probably too loud in here for singing, anyway. That her lute can sound above the racket is impressive; she must be strumming hard. I should tip her before we leave.
Fortitude, who has taken up station at the side of the table, nods. "She would indeed appreciate it," He smirks, "if you had any coin."

"Shit. I forgot. It's a good thing the Inquisition's footing the bill for our food, or I'd starve, at this rate." I scoff and look over to see if Flissa's anywhere near free enough to come over.

"Indeed. I myself had very little in the way of funds when I arrived; it is fortunate they accepted my help as quickly as they did."

I nod, turning back to him, since it's obvious Flissa is swamped for the moment. "Well, it won't be much of an issue soon, once we start getting out in the field. It shouldn't be too difficult to get some money going, once we're lopping heads off and looting the treasure troves of our enemies."

He nods and hmm's in reply, looking out over the other patrons curiously. Probably didn't care for my conversation topic. Then again, it's not exactly dinner-appropriate conversation, either. Not that we're eating yet, but still.

I look out at the room for Flissa again, just in time to see her bounding over with a flushed smile.

"Your Worship, Messere Solas! What can I get ya?"

I smirk. She's practically yelling to be heard over the dancing drunks, which are singing loudly to no beat or song I can hear. If that's supposed to be the words to Maryden's song, she needs a rewrite. "I'll take whatever's good, hot, and isn't sausage," I answer her.

She nods, smiling. "Very good, Your Worship, I know just the thing." She turns her smile on Solas and gets his order, before traipsing off to the counter.

I'm fairly certain she's the happiest person in the entire Inquisition. Good for her.

Speaking of the Inquisition, it seems like half of it—such as it is—is actually present tonight. Four more people walk in, going straight to the bar when they find no tables to sit at. We need a bigger tavern.

"You will have one, soon." Fortitude comments.

I nod, still looking out at the hustle and bustle around us. "I know, it just feels like we need a bigger one already, that's all. This one's already packed, and I know there's plenty waiting."

Fortitude shrugs, and I'm relieved to note it's a far less elegant thing than what Solas had managed, earlier. At least that wasn't the Elvhen's natural shrug, and I just missed out somehow. "They manage. Most take meals in their homes."

"Makes sense." I sigh, looking back to our own table, and leaning on it slightly. "Still, it won't be long before there will be lines. We should be gone from here before that, if possible."

Solas speaks up. "What do you suggest?"

I shake my head. "Can't be sure until later. We can't move yet, that's certain; but I recommend at least getting unnecessary civilians out of here, by the time we close the Breach. We'll also need some skilled stonemasons soon as we get there." I chew on my lip, considering. "Carpenters, too... cook and serving staff—preferably not just elves." I sigh, shaking my head. "I'm thinking too far ahead. I know that. Still, never hurts to plan."

Just then, Flissa arrives with our food, plunking two tankards, then the platters down on the table.
with a smile. "There y'are, enjoy!" She twirls and heads off before I can thank her.

Shrugging, I look down at what she brought me. I see what looks like roughly mashed potatoes, a slab of meat, and a thick slice of bread. Well, looks hearty, at least. Not the most healthy selection in the universe, but it'll fill my stomach. Solas is already sopping a corner of his bread with the stew in front of him. Didn't he eat that for lunch? Yeesh. Variety is the spice of life, Solas. Use the spice!

Fortitude is giving me an oddly amused look, but says nothing as I tuck into my food. Silence prevails as we quickly eat our dinners, then stand, bringing the dishes to Flissa for a change. I say goodnight to her, and grab my staff as we leave out the side exit, ambling toward Solas' cabin. A pair of soldiers passes us on their way to the tavern, but otherwise, the way is empty and quiet; the snow crunching below our feet the only real sound. Solas opens the door as we reach the little house, and holds it until we're inside. I stamp my feet to rid them of the snow, while Fortitude settles in a corner; apparently content to observe.

Solas gestures to the large rug on the floor. "Dhama, sathan. I will join you in a moment."

Shit. I never did get him to tell me what that stupid word means. I mean I get the general idea, but I like to know specifics. I thrive on specifics—

"It means 'sit'."

I look up at Fortitude with a smile. "'Ma serannas. I ended up tossing him at a wall, last time I asked him about it." I point to Solas with annoyance. "He seemed more intent on teasing than teaching, at the time."

Fortitude chuckles and shakes his head.

Solas huffs and raises an eyebrow at me. "The point was to teach you a different lesson. It was learned. Language lessons can come later; after you learn to control your magic." He sits across from me, about four feet away. "Please be silent for a moment; I need to concentrate."

I nod and watch as he closes his eyes, giving me the perfect excuse to stare at him unabashedly. If they can't see you staring, it's not entirely rude, as long as they don't catch you. Or so I like to tell myself, anyway. It's not true. But that's okay. The view is worth the lack of manners.

Solas shifts slightly and I look down, predicting that he'll open his eyes in a moment.

He does. "Pay attention, and study it in detail. You must taste the spell with your aura, not just your mana. Reach out and feel it, learn it, understand it. I cannot teach you this spell with words alone."

I dip my head and flare my mana out toward him, pushing my aura out behind it, like he'd shown me this morning. It isn't that I don't get how to loosen my aura, it's that I just... don't feel comfortable with doing it, yet. I'll get there. Anyway, back to what he's doing.

I watch carefully as he begins casting, and I get the feeling that he's slowing the spell down somehow, for my benefit. It slowly builds around him, gradually growing in strength, until it apparently can't be slowed down anymore. I'm pretty sure I've got the idea of the spell at this point, though another demonstration would certainly help.

That's not what's got my attention right now.

What does, is Solas himself, rather than his magic.
He's transforming, and I swear the shape he's adopting is his...

Wait.

No.

No way.

Stunned shock overcomes me as I stare dumbly at what he has become.

The two eyes I'm staring into are ones I've longed to see again in reality, for centuries untold.

For you see, the eyes I'm seeing, the ones that are slowly blurring through the watery filter of the tears stinging my own eyes...

Are the eyes of my wolf.

Chapter End Notes

❤ --Discord-- ❤

❤ Thanks for reading! If you enjoy the story or this chapter in particular, please feel free to leave a review with your thoughts! ❤
❤ I love reading comments and reply to all of them. ❤
Transformations

Chapter Summary
Hey guys!

First off, I want to let you all know that I posted some conversation starters in the forum, with questions to get some speculation going on each of my current stories! If you're interested, go check it out!

Second, time for some real talk. I want to say that, while it's been fun, I may not be able to keep up with this daily posting thing. I'm thinking maybe 3-4 chapters a week, maybe one per story? As it sits, I have zero time for pretty much anything but writing Faded Reality. I love this story, but I know myself, and I know if I keep going like I am, I'm gonna burn out. Nobody wants that. I want you guys to keep getting the content you enjoy, and I want to keep giving it to you. Just... at a reduced pace. Third, speaking of pace, I realized while writing 19, that if I keep up the current pacing in this story, I will be shoving Corypheus into the Fade around the time I'm 90 years old. *Cough.* Soo, with that in mind, here's what I'm gonna do: I'll have times where I focus on something, like a particular moment, or a big decision, or a pivotal battle or whatever; but, otherwise, (Cont.)

Chapter Notes

(Cont.) I'm going to speed things up. So yeah, there's that. Don't worry, the flavor of the story will remain, we just won't be doing every second of every day from now on. Did you know that the day this chapter takes place in, has been going for seven chapters? Yeah, no way I can maintain that kind of pacing for a couple year's worth of time in the Inquisition. It's just not happening. Don't worry, it'll still be Faded Reality. I'm just speeding up the boring parts, that's all. ♡

Without any MORE further ado, have chapter. *tosses chapter* ♡

Translations:
Nas'falon: soul mate, lit. 'soul's guiding friend'.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I don't know what to do with myself.

Really. I don't.

My wolf is in front of me, and I desperately want to touch her, embrace her, as I normally would in memory, but she... is a he. And he is also Solas.

Not that this would normally stop me, but... he asked for time.

My rampantly indecisive thoughts are interrupted as Fortitude speaks, "Pride wishes for me to convey his instructions, as he finds himself unable to speak in this state. He instructs you to study this shape carefully, since it is your chosen form. He expects you to reach out and gain true understanding of its every nuance. He will remain as your wolf, until he believes you have learned it properly. He also understands that you cannot gain full comprehension of it without tactile experience, so he will submit to a closer inspection, as needed."
I frown slightly. "Why can't you speak? We both could, in the Fade."

Fortitude translates, "He is uncertain. He believes it to be a defect of the copy you summoned in the Fade, as he duplicated it perfectly. He adds that you never actively became that wolf, so it is possible that it is a malady confined to that particular entity."

I'd almost be insulted, if it didn't make a strange kind of sense. I mean, the wolf I remember being wasn't a magical construct—it was just a wolf. Literally, an animal with my soul in it. I focus on Solas. "You can't alter the vocal chords to produce speech?"

I see Fortitude shaking his head out of the corner of my eye, just as Solas lowers his with a sigh. "He relays that he tried, but was met with resistance. It is baffling; he has never had issues altering a shape before. He literally cannot change a single characteristic of your wolf—it is exactly as you presented it, in every way."

I tilt my head at him, and smile as I realize why. "Ah. She is not yours to change. I wager I'll be able to change her, once I learn."

Solas huffs a sigh. Fortitude translates, "It... is possible, though unlikely. He has never encountered such an oddity, regardless of whether or not your theory proves to be true."

I nod understandingly. "Fair enough. We'll find out when we get there."

Solas dips his head in what I can only assume is a nod. I scoot closer to him, then reach out with hand, mana, and aura, all at once. I brush my hand over his head, and he closes his eyes and submits, just as he said he would, as I begin to make a study of the wolf I know so well. It's surprising how perfectly he did manage to summon her, actually. Everything, even down to the little patch of gray fur on her lower stomach, and the one clear claw on her left rear paw, is there. I come back around to the front, and lean in, carefully studying her facial features in detail. He's still got his eyes closed, obviously expecting me to start petting him again; but when no such event occurs, he opens them, and summarily yips, with a slight scramble backwards.

Fortune is laughing, and I look at him in bewilderment for an explanation. "He did not expect you to be so close. You startled him."

I blink, then look back at Solas, who is avoiding looking at me entirely, tail tucked between his legs. "I startled you? Good gods, mark the date! The impossible has happened!"

I grin as I hear Fortitude snort, and Solas finally manages to look at me, only to give me the most deadpan glare I've ever seen from a wolf. He huffs and moves to his previous position, sitting and looking at me quite grumpily.

I pout at him. "Oh, come on, Solas. I never get to surprise you—you're always sneaking up on me. Isn't it about time the situation was reversed, at least once?"

Fortitude scoffs, and I look at him as he seemingly waves the thought away, like a pest. "Do not believe his bluster. He simply wanted to see what you look like when you pout."

I snap my focus back to Solas, who is now using the skin of my own wolf to grin sheepishly at me. I roll my eyes and sigh, then leave the matter behind me, as I go to inspect what will be my tail. As I curl my fingers around the tail and gently run them down its length to test the volume of the bushy hair there, I hear what sounds like a growling whine exit the front end of Solas. I look at him quizzically. "Do you have a problem with me inspecting my tail?"
Fortitude answers, after a momentary pause, "That... was neither a sound of displeasure, nor voluntary. He wishes for me to convey that you should ignore it, and continue."

Naturally, I don't ignore it. I continue stroking his tail as if I'm complying; all the while sending comments and questions out to Fortitude. 'Right. Have I ever let anything he said or did alone? You know I'm not gonna just drop this, so what's up? Has he got a tail fetish or something?'

I would've continued, but a cough from the spirit has me looking at him with a lifted brow. He's giving me a wide-eyed look, and very subtly nods when he knows I can see him. I clamp my hand over my mouth to keep from busting out laughing at his confirmation, my own eyes going wide with a mixture of shock and effort to stay silent.

I very carefully school my features as I turn back to Solas, and continue petting his tail. In a stroke of stupendous fortune, Solas somehow missed that little altercation, and it seems like he's working very hard not to let those little noises escape him... but only partially succeeding.

I am... I just can't. I cannot stay quiet anymore. The noises, the implication of what those noises mean, the fact that we all know he loves asses, and that tails just so happen to be one of my favorite things to play with... and that's the thought that has me falling backwards onto the rug, holding my gut, and just losing it.

It's but a moment before Fortitude joins me—though his laughter is more subdued—which leaves the Dread Wolf to look at us both like we've lost our ever-lovin' minds.

After I've finally calmed down enough to sit up, I notice that my wolf has been replaced with Solas'. Apparently he got tired of not being able to talk. It's his true wolf too—six red eyes and all.

I take a deep breath that my lungs love me for, and smile at him. "Savhalla, Fen'harel. Isn't it a bit risky to be in that form here, outside of the Fade?"

He tilts his head just slightly. "I ensured none were in the vicinity, before changing. It will be simpler to teach you, in this shape. I believe you have learned what you need to, for your wolf. I applaud your thoroughness. Do you require another demonstration of the spell?"

I shrug. "'Require' is a strong word for it, but I would like to see it again, if you don't mind. There's a few elements I'm not completely sure of."

He nods. "Certainly." I watch attentively as he quickly shifts back into his normal self, then begins the process again, even more slowly this time. I make sure to reach out and taste the spell, so his effort isn't wasted. I can't help but wonder if the process is as painful and exhausting as it is in the Fade, because if it is, he's hiding it well.

I guess I'll find out soon enough, because I've already caught the bit I was missing from the spell.

By the time he's his wolf again, I'm already casting. I close my eyes as I push the image of my girl to the front of my mind, and she shines like a beacon that's guiding me home.

I make one small modification, and push my mana firmly into the spell; letting it wash over my skin, and dig deep into my bones, muscles, and organs. This magic feels nothing like my regular magic. The flavor of it is different, wild somehow, untempered. The feel of it on my skin is like a thick velvet, soft, but clinging, dragging along as it moves and lighting my nerves aflame with sensation. A scent that is feral and tempting curls its way into my nose and over my senses. There is no pain, no exhaustion; but there is pure adrenaline.

Opening my eyes is an adjustment—I'm shorter than I was, and my vision's changed a bit. I can see
into shadowed corners a little better, make out details that I had missed, even with my elven eyes. It's almost exactly as I remember, when I was her. A bit shorter though, which is strange.

Oh well. Time to see if I can talk.

I look at Fen'harel, who has his head tilted at me, and send my voice out into the void.

"So did I do it right?" Blech. It's a lot sloppier than in the Fade, but I'll work on it. It's also... oddly higher pitched than it should be.

Fen'harel opens his mouth to respond, but Fortitude interrupts, "You performed the spell correctly, but the shape is... not what you intended. Unless you intended a very young wolf, in which case, you succeeded. But we both know that is not true."

'What?!' I look back at Fen'harel, since I'd turned to Fortitude when he spoke. "How is it possible that both times I've transformed, it's been into something other than what I had envisioned? Aren't spells supposed to work based on how you envision them in your mind? And don't tell me I didn't have a clear enough image, because we all know that's wolf shit."

Before he can respond, I reverse the spell and sit sullenly on his cabin floor, waiting for an answer worth hearing.

Fen'harel sighs, and lays down, looking for all the world like one of his statues that are dotted all over the Dales and various temples. Well, other than the eyes. Did he actually pose to have those carved?

"Did you make any modification to the image?"

Shit. I grimace slightly, and nod. "Yes, I changed the throat, so I could speak. Don't tell me I'm just going to have to give up on speaking?"

Fen'harel and Fortitude share a look, before he focuses back on me. "Unless you wish to use the form you summoned in the Fade, it is possible. Have you any idea as to why you can speak with the younger version of her, but not the fully grown one?"

I shake my head. "No. There's nothing in the memory to suggest any valid reason for it. If there is a reason, I don't know it."

He sighs, pondering for a moment. "Was she ever gravely injured, that you know of?"

I nod. "Yes, but she healed from it, and it wasn't damage to her throat. She could howl and bark and growl just fine, right until the day she died."

"Is there a particular reason you remember her? Did anything in particular happen to her, or was it just a fond memory?"

A smile tugs at my lips. "There's a lot of special things about that memory, actually. Hers is the first life I can remember from Earth. I also met my, well... my nas'falon, in that life. He was the one who injured her. To be fair, she injured him first." I chuckle, shaking my head at the memory.

"But, that doesn't really help us." I sigh, moving on. So much for that. "I suppose I could use my Fade wolf, but... I don't know. She might be a bit much for most people to accept. Then again, that might be a good thing, for combat."

Fen'harel nods. "It could work for combat, yes. That still leaves the matter of explaining her to your
followers, however."

I shrug. "I could claim I worship Fen'harel, and want to emulate him. It's about as believable as most of the shit they believe about elves these days—more, really. That excuse could even work for you, if you wanted to use your wolf. Once they see me doing it, and know that you taught me how to shapeshift, they won't even bat an eyelash at you using it too. I'd recommend using the version you first visited me as, though."

He huffs and turns back into Solas, apparently done with being his wolf for the moment. "I would rather you didn't even pretend to worship me. I certainly won't claim to."

I sigh heavily. "It's a ruse, Solas. We're not going to build Fen'harel shrines in the Chantry, I promise. It just gives us an excuse to use a tool that does no harm to anyone but those who wish us harm. Is that really so terrible? You've used the name and the image to help others before, how is it any different now? We're still fighting a powerful enemy to save innocent lives. They may not be elvhen lives, but they're still innocent, and worth saving. So explain the difference to me."

He glares at me. "The difference is the damage such a claim will do to your reputation. Have you no thought of how the Dalish or city elves will view you, as a worshiper of a supposed god they despise?"

I scoff, rolling my eyes. "Because the Dalish will already welcome me with open arms for my bare face. And as for the city elves, most of them are Andrastian. The ones who aren't, barely remember the versions of the stories that the Dalish tell, which are wrong to begin with! Your point is what, now?"

I can see his jaw muscles working as he bores his gaze into my eyes. It's a bloody staring contest. Lovely. We've been reduced to this, apparently. I fold my arms over my ribs and tilt my head, waiting for him to give in. I've the higher ground, and he knows it.

Soon enough, he narrows his eyes at me, gives a petulant snort, and tersely turns away. His hands flit up for a moment, in a shrug of helplessness. "Do as you feel you must, then. I do not approve, nor will I claim to worship myself, of all the ridiculous..."

I roll my eyes. "Yes, because they obviously must know that the apostate hobo is the Dread Wolf. Of course, how could I have missed their sudden burst of brilliance? Well! Time to go home, they've already figured out how to save the world without us." I plant my hands on my hips and purse my lips, glaring at him, daring him to come up with something else for me to debunk.

He points a finger in my face, about to rail against something, I'm certain.

Until I bite his finger, that is.

For a moment, he's speechless, staring at where his finger is lodged between my teeth, up to just past the first joint. I'm not biting hard, just holding him there, looking at him as if I don't have his finger hanging out of my mouth, waiting for him to continue.

Eventually, he finds his tongue. He's about to speak, when I flick my own tongue against the tip of his finger. That shuts him up. It also makes him blush from cheeks to ear tips, and he wrests his finger from my mouth in short order, before I can do anything more scandalous. He clasps his hands behind his back, doing everything in his power to compose himself, and failing miserably.

He can be a smooth egg, believe me, I know. But just like Silk, he has his moments. This is one of them. He turns and slowly moves to sit in a chair, studying the rug for a time, before looking back
up, and pointing at me again, from his new position of relative safety.

I snap my teeth at him, and smirk.

He lowers his hand.

And just like that, the Dread Wolf learned a new trick.

Good boy.

Chapter End Notes

❤ --Discord-- ❤

❤ Thanks for reading! If you enjoy the story or this chapter in particular, please feel free to leave a review with your thoughts! ❤
❤ I love reading comments and reply to all of them. ❤
"That was uncalled for."

I shrug. "Call it my tasteful edit."

"Tasteful? How was that tasteful? It was childish, at best."

I snort, shaking my head as I finally turn to look at Fortitude, who is looking right back at me with disapproval. "I'm thousands of years old, no matter how you slice it. I can't be a little childish once in a while? Besides, it tasted plenty fine to me," I end, with a smirk that borders on devilish.

Apparently, he can't hold it back any longer, and he snorts, a barely restrained smirk on his face as he waves me off. "Fine, fine. You win."

"If the two of you are quite finished, I believe I should like to go to bed now," Solas interrupts, and we both look at him as if we'd almost forgotten he was there.

"Aw, so early, ha'hren?" I smile at him. "Alright, fine, we'll go," I say, waving Fortitude on. I call over my shoulder as I head for the door, "On'nydha, Solas. Sweet dreams."

"And to you, Fen'nas," I hear, just before I close the door behind me.

Fortitude huffs a small laugh when we reach the bottom of the steps, and I toss him a curious look. He smirks at me and leans toward my ear, as if it would make a difference, when nobody but mages can hear or see him. "He wanted you to stay."

A chill races down my spine as I hear those words. "Well, he should've been more up front about it, then. I'll not play those kinds of guessing games. If he wants something, he should say it."

He smirks at me. "You are very bold with such proclamations. He is from a time when subtlety was prized in such matters, because it was a rarity, and considered all the more alluring."

I snort and shake my head as we pass by the tavern. "That's all well and good, but it won't work for me. Besides, he asked for time. I plan to give it to him, unless he states otherwise. And possibly even then."

The spirit lifts an eyebrow at me. '"Even then'? Are you certain you can hold out as long as you claim? It is not always easy to see the heart's desire, but yours is as clear as the noon sun, Shane."
I startle and almost trip down the steps toward my cottage when I hear my actual name. I look at him in alarm, and think my response, rather than voicing it, 'Don't... don't get too used to calling me that. You know why I picked the name I did. It's more appropriate, anyway.' I heave a sigh of relief when we reach my door, and I quickly get us inside and close the shutters tight. It's not much, but at least people won't be able to see me talking to thin air.

Fortitude chuckles, and settles languidly on my desk chair, utterly at ease. "Yes, it certainly would not do to have the prophet of a false god blathering to the ether, would it?"

I snort a laugh and sigh loudly as I flop onto my bed, exhausted. Damn this has been a long day. Didn't even realize how tired I was. "No, it wouldn't. As for whatever my heart's desire is, it really doesn't matter, until there's an even playing field. If that can even happen, at this point. It's probably all too convoluted by now for that to actually work." I give a half-assed shrug, too tired to resist the pull of the blanket against my vest. "If it is, I'll live. Won't be the first time I pined after someone who didn't return the sentiment."

"Mm," he hums, unconvinced, shaking a finger side to side at my statement. "Not like this, fen'asha. This will distract you, this thing you harbor for him. It will fester until you can no longer ignore it. What will you do, at that point, if he has not developed what you hope for? How much patience do you truly have?"

I lift a brow at him, pursing my lips. "You know the answer to that, hale'elgar."

He snorts. "Hale'elgar? You think I am a fox?"

I smirk, nodding slightly. "Foxes are clever, as are you. I'm certain you can figure it out, oh clever one."

He shrugs, dipping his head in assent. "Perhaps. Now tell me, fen'asha: why do you keep them all in the dark?"

I sigh heavily. I had a feeling this one was coming. "Because how well do you think they'd believe me, if I did tell them? Solas was one thing—I had enough information on him to force his belief in every truth I gave him. But the rest? Sure, I have little things I know about them, some bigger than others, but certainly not enough to convince them. The fact that Solas knows is only because I trust him, and believe in his goals. We are united on that front, at least."

Fortitude seems pensive for a time. When he does speak again, his voice is softer, as if he's worried it's a delicate subject, "You have not told him everything. If you trust him, why hide such things from him?"

I frown at him in confusion. "What have I kept from him? I told him of my world, I told him as much of the future as seemed appropriate at the time, I showed him many things that even those dear to me do not know... what else is there to tell him?"

I scoff and shake my head as I turn it to look up at the rafters. "It doesn't need any more convincing. I know this is real, no matter how little sense it might make. As for the games... well, would it actually help matters if I told him that? I mean I already said it was a story, and that's true.
It just happens to be a highly interactive story, where you get to change what happens." I shrug. "It's no different than just imagining a world written in a book, and wondering how it could be different, really."

He chuckles half-heartedly. "Perhaps. But how are you going to hide the fact that you know the places you will travel—as if you've been there? How will you hide your knowledge of where to go to find objects you are sent after, or where the enemy bases are? These are things you must consider, and plan for, if you intend to keep them in the dark. And what happens if you are found out?" He shakes his head with a sigh. "I know you are an expert at manipulation and keeping up with a vast web of lies, thrown as a wide net across hundreds of people, but how long until the guilt eats you alive? You have a good heart, beneath all of it. I would not see it corrupted, beyond what damage has already been done to it."

I snort. "I'm not a spirit, hale'elgar. I have woven many such webs before, and have yet to become so utterly corrupted that I could not cut my way out. Your concern is appreciated—welcome even—but I will not go under so easily as that. You worry too much."

He sighs softly. "You are more spirit than you believe, fen'asha. There is old corruption buried deep in your soul that you keep hidden in a box, locked away tightly in hopes that none will notice it. You know full well it is there, and yet think you can somehow do nothing to be rid of it? What madness is that, fen'asha? If that is not the madness of a corrupted spirit, then I do not know what is."

It takes a minute to parse what in the blazes he's talking about, during which I turn back to look at him with a frown. That frown only deepens when I come upon the only thing he could be referring to. "Are you talking about what I did in past lives? The shit I'm paying for, and have been, for a good while now?"

He bows his head in confirmation.

I snort and turn back to the rafter-gazing, brushing off his concerns with a casual wave. "That's been going on for several lifetimes, if you didn't know. It's nothing new. It'll go away when my debts are paid, simple as that. I keep it locked down for different reasons. It's not to hide it; it's to keep it from happening again."

"Are you so unchanged that you would allow it to happen again?"

Huh. I hadn't actually thought of that. Foxy makes a good point.

He snorts as he hears that particular thought. "First I am a fox, now I am 'Foxy'? Shall I call you 'Wolfy', now?"

I giggle and look over at him with a grin. "If you want to. Though Solas might get confused. Then again," I add, chuckling, "maybe we should do it just for that. Confusing him would probably make my day."

He huffs a tiny laugh and shakes his head. "I can believe it. For now, you should rest, Wolfy."

I sigh and sit up, swinging my legs over the side of the bed and standing, as my fingers go for the clasps on my vest. "I'm certainly not going to argue that point. This day has done me in, something fierce." I toss my vest over the footboard of the bed, and reach for my peasant shirt. "Pretty sure tomorrow's gonna be worse though. I just have that feeling." I chuck the blouse over the vest, and go to work on my breech laces.
"It is likely your feeling will prove correct, then."

I finally get my laces loosened and look at Fortitude over my shoulder. "Why?"

He shrugs. "Wolves have good instincts."

I smirk and shake my head as I lean down to shuck my pants off, happy to let my legs breathe for
the night. It's then that I remember the wrappings, and that I have no idea how to unwrap them, let
alone wrap them back up in the morning.

Ah, damn.

The bastard's voice is smug as he asks, "See what I mean, about being distracted?"

I turn and glare at him. "Unless you can help me figure these out, shut it, Foxy."

He grins at me and bows slightly, like the imp he is. "I can indeed lend my assistance, Wolfy, if
you would but request it politely."

I roll my eyes and lean my head back as I groan. "Fine," I give in, as I look back down at him and
school my features with significant effort into a pleasant smile. "Would you please instruct me in
how to wrap and unwrap these?"

He smiles graciously and dips his head in a tiny bow of assent. "I would be delighted, my lady. If
you could do me the honor of lending me some modicum of physical presence, I would be happy to
show you, actually. Perhaps you can manage a bit less distraction, this time?"

I narrow my eyes at him, but keep my smile plastered on as I sit on my bed. "Of course."

He smirks and kneels before me, waiting.

I sigh and lay my hand on his shoulder, lending him the power of what I can only guess is the
anchor, so he can take on a semi-solid form.

He smiles his thanks, and gets to work, artfully unwrapping my leg with the skill of someone who's
done it a thousand times. Considering who he is, he probably has.

By the time he reaches the last part, where the wrapping begins, I've realized I likely could've done
it myself, if I'd cared to. He leans back and gestures toward my other—still wrapped—leg, and I
nod, reaching down to start the process.

"The unwrapping is simple," he begins, in an instructive tone, "but the wrapping takes time to
learn. I doubt Pride expected you to learn it from one demonstration."

I huff a laugh. "I certainly hope not, because I've no idea what I'm doing. Will you be here in the
morning to correct what will likely be my failed attempt at wrapping them?"

Fortitude chuckles and nods. "Yes, I will. Worry not, I shall see you wrapped properly before going
off to do battle with the shem Commander. Now lend me your aid, and I will show you how to
wrap it once. Then you can try."

We spend an hour practicing. By the end of it, I feel like I might have a rudimentary grasp on the
concept, though more practice would certainly help. A lot more, actually.

I thank Fortitude for his help, and he gives me a nodding smile as he slips through the closed door,
like a whisper on the breeze. Creepy.
I catch his snicker on the other side of the door, and roll my eyes as I flop back onto my bed, snuffing the candles and drawing the flames into my hand, to make a little ball of fire for my amusement. It's good practice, and my mind isn't quite ready to sleep, just yet. I let the light die, replacing it with veilfire, and watching the cool flames lick up from my palm. I love veilfire. It's so calming.

The light slowly fades as my concentration wanes, and exhaustion takes over. My mana sinks back into the deep pool it naturally settles into within me, and my hand slumps to my side, eyes sliding shut in the defeat of wakefulness.

Chapter End Notes

--Discord--

❤ Thanks for reading! If you enjoy the story or this chapter in particular, please feel free to leave a review with your thoughts! ❤
❤ I love reading comments and reply to all of them. ❤
Chapter Summary

In this chapter: An actual friend of mine gets dragged into my tale, and we make several fascinating—and somewhat alarming—discoveries about reality. Foxy Fortitude is especially foxy.

If you'd like to chat with the co-author for this chapter, Steph, you can find her here, on tumblr: Battle-Nug. Toss her an ask! She's a wonderful comic artist out of Cali, who's currently getting her Bachelor's degree in art. She and I are long-time internet friends, and yes, we really do call each other 'dude'. We're dorks. Deal with it. ❤

AHHH! Saber_Sloth did it again! Go lookit the cuteness! ❤

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

I wake, lacking dreams once more, in my own bed, on Earth.

It gets confusing, after a while; this dance between worlds. Already my mind is starting to fray. What's real and isn't? The lack of true sleep isn't helping, that's for damn sure. I know if I try to sleep here, I'll just go back to Thedas.

Balls.

With a sigh, I push myself upright, and blink blearily at a semi-translucent aqua-colored fox.

Wait.

What?!

It blinks right back at me, apparently just as surprised as I am. It tilts its head, studying me.

Then, it speaks.

"Fen'nas? That… yes, it is you. Fascinating. I did not expect to come across so easily. The veil between our worlds is not so strong as Pride seems to believe."

That cadence…

"Fortitude?"

It— he, apparently (Here we go again.), blinks at me again, then nods, as if it's the most obvious thing in the world. "Yes. The magic in your world works very oddly; this was the only form I could muster here."

He seems entirely unperturbed by the notion. He looks around, seemingly noticing the room for the first time.

I get the sudden urge to hide my entire room. It's not messy, by any means. It's actually rather tidy.
It's just… this is where I write about Thedas. This is where I see that world. This is my life, small though it is.

There's a spirit from my dreams, in my reality, and he's curled on the foot of my bed.

And he's a fox.

A spirity-looking fox, sure—but he's still a freaking fox!

I did not bargain for this shit.

A moment of brilliance pierces my muddled thoughts, and I whip my head to the left, in search of the numbers on my alarm clock. Noon. Sunday.

Perfect.

I scramble over and hang halfway off my bed as I reach for my phone, uncaring if Fortitude sees my out of shape, human self in the process. To hell with it, this is more important. Besides, he'd probably already picked it out of my head in Thedas, anyway. I wonder if he can still hear my thoughts?

He doesn't seem inclined to answer any of them if he can, so I shake my head and poke around in my phone's contact list, until I find the one friend I have that might actually believe all this shit. If I'm very lucky. And if she can see the spirit fox sitting on my damn bed, once I wrangle her over here.

That's a lot of fucking 'if's'.

But I've got zip for choices, so fuck it.

Steph just so happens to be the one friend I have who actually plays the games, who knows anything beyond, "Oh yeah, that's that game with the dragons and shit, right?"

Yes, I had someone ask me that. Not their proudest moment, nor mine.

I stab my fingertip onto the 'call' button, the moment I hit her number.

I wait for the ringing in my ear to end, and just about breathe a sigh of relief when I hear her voice on the other end of the line.

"Hey dude! What's up?" Steph says, cheerfully.

"Dude, hey I was wondering if you might wanna come over today? I've got a couple of things I wanna show you, and some news, if you've got some time? Up to you, but… I kinda need someone to talk to." Okay half truths there, but I mean, what am I going to say, really? 'Oh hey, so I sleep and wake up in Thedas, so like, that's a thing.' Yeah, no. Well, actually… yes, probably. But not over the phone.

"Uh, yeah man of course," she replies, sounding concerned, "I can come over in a bit. Is that okay?"

Even if Fortitude can't sense anything at all, he can probably taste my relief in the air, at this moment. "Yeah! Sounds great. Want me to pick you up, or you drivin'?"

"I can drive, no worries! Unless you had your heart set on it," she laughs.
I chuckle, though the sound is more nervous than I'd like. "Nah, I'm good. Have at it. How long until you leave?" Her house is about twenty minutes away, and I need a shower to clear my head. And I should make some coffee, for both of us.

"I've just got to finish this chapter for art history and I'll be right over. So, probably an hour? I'll text you before I leave."

I nod at the wall in front of me, as if she can see me. "Sounds good. I need to get a few things done before then anyway. Seeya then!"

"See you in a bit bro!"

I hear the click as the line goes dead, and finally, finally let loose the sigh that's been threatening to be heard for the past five minutes. I turn and look at Fortitude with no small amount of wonder. How in the hell did he make it across like that? Are all spirits able to do that? Shit, I hope Cole never gets sucked across by accident. That could end badly.

"So, I'm guessing you can't hear my thoughts here, since you've replied to nary a one of them."

He tilts his head at me. "Is it normal to reply to everyone's thoughts constantly? I had assumed I may wish to take on a different tact, since I am not certain if I can be seen by mundanes, here. Do you prefer having the answers to your thoughts spoken aloud, then?"

Well, shit. He's got me there. "No, I didn't mean that so much. It's good you're not interested in doing that, actually. I was just curious if you actually could still hear my thoughts, that's all. You said the magic works differently, and I know it does, so I wasn't sure."

He shrugs his head. "I am a spirit there, I am a spirit here. It is the same concept, though the execution does seem a bit different, I admit. In answer to your question, I can indeed still hear your thoughts. They are every bit as loud as they are in Thedas, in fact."

I smile sheepishly at him. "Ah. Well, sorry to be so loud, then. I'm gonna go take a shower and make some coffee; feel free to... hang out? Make yourself at home, is what I mean, I guess."

He merely nods and curls into himself, a comfortable little ball of ethereal fuzz on my bed. So cute!

I shrug, and head off to the bathroom. 'Not my fault you happen to be a cute little fox.'

Shower, clothes, coffee, breakfast. I'm sitting back on my bed, watching a furball sleep, when my phone dings an incoming text.

ST: omw :3

I smile and toss a quick confirmation her way. I turn the screen off and look at Fortitude. Still sleeping. The trip over must've worn the poor lil' bugger out. Didn't even think spirits slept, to begin with.

A twenty minute nap doesn't sound terrible, actually. Well, if I don't end up in Thedas, that is. Shit. Fuck it.

I lay back and close my eyes. Worst comes to worst, I can just go back to sleep in Thedas, and wake up here again. Ugh.
Next thing I know, I'm being woken up by Steph, pounding on the window next to my bed. The hell? Did I actually sleep? I don't remember any dreams… then again, I wasn't asleep long. I point her toward the front door, and head there myself once she nods. I can ponder the weirdness of my sleep schedule later.

I unlock the door and wave at her through the storm door as she comes up the steps to the porch. I open the door for her and let her in, shutting and locking everything behind us as I greet, "Hey, sorry about that. Fell asleep, I think."

"No problem dude," she says pleasantly, a smile shining bright on her face before it shifts into slight worry, "So what was it you wanted to talk about? You sounded kinda off."

I rub my neck and huff a nervous laugh as I lead the way to my room. "Well, there's a few things, actually. And… you're probably not gonna believe a word of any of it without some kind of proof, so…" I trail off, shrugging and gesturing for her to go ahead of me, as I reach my door. Maybe she'll just *see* Fortitude, and it'll be as simple as that? That would be nice. Probably won't happen though.

"Uh… okay. That sounds ominous," a nervous huff of her own escapes her lips as she sits on the edge of my bed, "Just hit me with it… when you're ready, of course."

I climb onto my bed and set my back against the wall, sighing heavily and steeling myself. Wish she'd actually seen him. Not that it would make this *easier*, necessarily… Right. Let's do this. "So, here's the thing. For the past week or so, I've been having these… oddly realistic dreams. And I may or may not have discovered some really strange shit about the universe during all of that. Also, I can do magic. And Thedas is real. So uh," I laugh a bit frantically, "yeah. There's that. *'And I plainly suck at explanations.'* Shut up, brain. *Not* helping. I swallow tightly and bite my lower lip as I sheepishly look at my friend, awaiting her reaction to all of that… well, *insanity*.

She stares at me, disbelief, confusion and severe skepticism crossing her face as she struggles to find a response of any kind. Her mouth opens and closes a few times, one hand poised in the air before she finally finds the words to speak.

"That's… pretty wild dude," she eventually says, a confused frown gracing her brow as she purses her lips in a grimace, hand dropping back to her lap. "Are you sure these aren't just like… Really lucid dreams? I mean you have lucid dreams right?"

I huff a self-deprecating laugh. "Yeah, I do that. I really thought that was what it was, at first. But I've run every test I know of, and Steph… it's *real*. I know it sounds absolutely fucking *bonkers*, I know. Believe me, I know. But it's true. Hey! Wait, you want proof? I've got it by the boatload. No joke."

She blinks once before stuttering out an affirmative. "Y-yeah. Sure I, uh, think I need that. No offense."

I ponder which bit of proof to show her first, and the obvious answer quite literally slaps me in the face, when I smack my left palm to my forehead. I laugh and hold the offending hand out to her, palm up, and send the tiniest spark of my mana to the anchor. Naturally, it sputters at first, then flares into life, highlighting the runic details around the seam of the deep scar.

"HOLY FUCKING SHIT," she screams, jumping back reflexively.

I smirk at her. "That enough, or should I show you the *real* magic?"
Her mouth gapes open, soundless for a moment, until a particularly fierce pop from the anchor echoes in my small room, and apparently shocks her tongue loose. "Holy shit. *Holy shit!* That—that looks like—that looks like the fucking anchor. Oh my god. Ohhhh my god!" Her eyes transfix on the mark, fingers twining through her long hair at the scalp, visibly tugging at the golden brown strands.

I let the anchor die away, closing my left hand into a loose fist and drawing it back onto my lap, before holding my right hand out. "Give me your hand. May as well see the whole kit-n-kaboodle, if you're gonna see any of it."

Steph just nods wordlessly, holding her hand out. I can't tell whether she's scared witless, or just in complete shock. Either way, I gently take her hand, and close my eyes, imagining gentle heat and pressing the smallest hint of mana into the thought. I channel it out of the pool in my gut, up through my chest, down my arm, and into my hand, letting it flow into hers with calming warmth. I smile at her, and gesture for her other hand. When she hands it to me, I go for the complete opposite, trailing a line of ice along the outer edge of her palm. I look at her with an inquisitive expression, as I release her hand.

"Oh my god…" she mutters, looking at her hands with astonishment, "How did you do that?"

I huff a small laugh. "I'm a mage, apparently. Want to see something really wild?"

She nods wordlessly again, but with more eagerness this time.

I smirk and scooch my way off the bed, snagging my staff and beckoning for her to follow. I lead the way to the back door, and out into the back yard. The rains have backed off some, but there's still huge puddles in the yard—perfect, for what I have in mind.

I cast a wary eye towards our lone neighbor's house, but surprisingly, they're not home. I smile at that small victory, and head to the nearest mini lake. Dipping the unadorned end of my staff into the edge, I wave her over to the side of the large puddle.

"Watch," I say, with a devious smile.

I slide my gaze to the water, take a breath, and visualize *cold*. I push about a quarter of my mana into the thought, down through my arms, into the staff, and beyond, threading through the water like the spidered veins of a broken mirror. By the time I look back at Steph, it's frozen solid.

She too, it seems, is frozen solid. "What the fuck…" she mutters under her breath, "How are you doing that?"

I chuckle softly. "The same way I'm about to do *this*."

I look back at the frozen water and flame jumps to mind, ready and eager to devour. I breathe deep and press my mana into the feeling, letting it rule me for a few, blissful moments, as I coil the spell down through my staff. The ice around the staff melts almost immediately, and begins to boil. I keep on, spreading the flame out under the water, twisting the staff into the ground as I spin the spell around and through it, churning across the water like a hot knife through butter.

When I finally make it stop, the entire puddle is bubbling violently. I send silent tendrils of frost out to calm it, then remove my staff and turn to Steph with a small smile. Curious, I reach my mana out to her, flicking it gently along her aura. I grin when I feel a tiny, hidden flame flick back.

"Well, what do you think?"
"I think I need a drink…" she huffs, a slight chuckle at the edge of her voice, "So… so you're a mage? Like… like the fucking Inquisitor?" she turns to me, blue eyes wide with shocked wonder.

I shrug. "A mage, yes. The Herald, yes. The Inquisitor… not yet. Haven is still a thing. Very much a thing, actually. Time seems to work at about the same pace there, as it does here." I pause, giving her an evaluating look before continuing, "So, do you want to learn?"

"Wait, what? I don't even know how this is possible, how can I learn—" she gestures wildly to the cooling puddle, "THIS?!"

I chuckle at her stunned bewilderment. I hold my staff out to her. "Take this. You'll need it."

She takes the staff, holding it cautiously, apparently worried it might spontaneously burst into flames. Though, I suppose I can hardly blame her, after the display it helped create. "Uh… okay? But I'm pretty sure I'm not a mage. I mean, I play one, sometimes, but like… that's it, dude."

I smirk. "Mhm." I reach out and curl my mana around the little pool of hers within her gut, gently coaxing it to come out and play. A flicker responds, only briefly, before going silent. I frown in consternation. "Hmm. Your mana doesn't like me, it seems." I continue to prod as I speak, "It could be… ahh. Interesting." I hold a finger up. "Stay here. I'll be right back."

Before she can respond, I'm up the stairs, and headed for my room. I find Fortitude still laying on the foot of my bed, tail curled over his nose, sound asleep. If I didn't need him, I'd have just let the poor thing sleep. Nothing that cute should be woken before it wakes on its own. But, I've got no choice. I reach over with my anchored hand, and gently shake him awake.

I grace him with a soft smile. "On'dhea, Foxy. C'mon, I've got an interesting case to show you. My friend seems to be in need of a spirit's aid to get her mana to wake up for the first time. I thought maybe you could help her."

He looks at me, blinking a few times, before he yawns widely. He sighs and stands, stretching lazily, then moving to follow me. We're halfway to the back door when he asks, "What makes you think she is a spirit mage?"

I glance at him and respond quietly, "When I touched her mana with mine, it felt like you do when I touch you. I wouldn't be surprised if she ends up being a healer or something; it would suit her personality."

The spirit remains silent as we head out the back door, and I find Steph still standing there, eyes tracing the patterns burned into my staff, before she adjusts her gaze to take me in.

"Back." I jerk my thumb over my shoulder, back at Fortitude. "I brought someone who might help. Dunno if you can see him yet, but I've got a spirit of Fortitude with me. He might be able to zap your mana to life and get you started. Won't know until we try, but it's worth a shot."

"I see what you meant," the spirit murmurs, going quiet and moving around Steph curiously, eyes on her as he goes.

"Yeah I definitely can't see anybody but you," she says, looking behind me before her eyes settle on mine again. "What exactly are we doing? And what's this about my mana? I told you I'm not a mage, I can barely believe you are!"

I chuckle and share a look with Fortitude, who stands beside her now. "What do you think, can you work with that?" I ask the spirit, holding a finger up to Steph, asking her to hold on.
He sighs. "I can make an attempt. I promise no more than that. This world is a strange one, and I am uncertain how well anything I do here will work. Perhaps lend me your aid in trying to bring it out, as I work on it?"

I nod. "Can do." I look back up to Steph. "I know it all seems very strange, but I need you to pay attention and follow my directions exactly, alright? You do have mana, but it may require all three of us to awaken it for the first time. So eat a focus sandwich and let's do this thing. I need you to remember the last time you had an adrenaline rush. Remember that feeling, because it's going to come back in a minute here, and you're going to need to catch it, and draw it out. When it happens, it's gonna be all about will, so until you're used to it, it's gonna be a little tough, but you'll get it. Got it? Can you do that for me?"

She looks down at the staff clutched loosely in her hands, obviously mulling over what I said. "Fuck it," she mutters to herself, bracing her feet against the ground, "Okay. I'm ready."

I give her a nod of solidarity, smiling at her. "Good woman." I look down to Fortitude. We share a nod, and begin. I hold my hands toward her and reach out with my mana, teasing and coaxing hers, gently at some times, roughly at others, as Fortitude begins… well, whatever the hell he's doing down there. He could be humping her leg, for all the attention I'm paying.

He scoffs. "Hardly."

I chuckle and concentrate on my own job, and I can feel the beginnings of the pool's awakening, as it starts to flex its newly discovered muscles. It's barely a fledgling yet, but it's there. I open my eyes and focus on Steph's. "Pay attention, you should feel it soon."

She nods, closing her eyes and taking a breath, letting it out slowly and tightening her grip on the staff.

I smile my approval and redouble my efforts, pricking and prodding at the edges of what feels like a balloon that wants to burst.

Then, it does. I feel the overflow as it finally releases, pressing in and around us like a tidal wave of warmth. I look at Steph and she looks up at me, eyes wide with stunned, vague recognition.

"Holy shit," she breathes, looking down at her hands as they grip the staff so tightly her knuckles are white. "That… that's magic?" she asks, voice tinged with reverent astonishment.

I smile and nod my confirmation. "It is. Try to channel it into your hands, and from there, into the staff. Right now, you're not worrying about a spell, just your mana. Clear your mind and just let it travel through you, like a river."

She gives a harried little nod. "Okay, I'll… try."

I smile at her reassuringly, and wait as I feel her mana slowly spreading from somewhere in the middle of her ribcage, on upward and out. Her excitement really ramps up when her mana reaches the staff, and sees it softly glowing with unspent, direction-less energy.

"Holy shit. It's... you weren't kidding, it's real! How is—this shouldn't be possible!" She gapes at me, her lips teetering on the edge of breaking into a frantic grin. "I'm a mage?"

I chuckle and grin at her. "Yep. You're some kind of spirit mage; you'll have to figure out what kind yourself. Could be a healer, could be anything. But, I think you should be able to see Fortitude now, if you're ever going to." I gesture to the fox spirit just behind her. "Meet Fortitude, who I've taken to calling Foxy, for obvious reasons. Foxy, Steph."
She turns and double takes, clearly stunned at seeing a spirit for the first time. "Oh! Um, hi," she greets, with a little wave, clearly unbalanced by everything she's been through today, but trying to be polite regardless. "Didn't see you there! Nice to uh... meet you." She mumbles softly, "I think."

Fortitude looks up at her and snorts. "You need not fear me. I am Fortitude, not Rage, or Vengeance. In any case, I am pleased to make your acquaintance... Steph." He looks up to me. "Have you further need of me, for the moment?"

I frown slightly. "Not that I'm aware of, but you're welcome to hang around, if you like."

He dips his head slightly. "My thanks, but I believe I shall retire to my own world. This one is... a bit strange for my liking, and I do not care to remain in this form any longer than I must."

I nod understandingly. "Ma nuvenin, hale'elgar. Dar'eth."

He tilts his head in acknowledgment and promptly disappears.

I smirk and look back up at Steph. "So, want to practice? You've got it, but now you have to learn how to control it. I can help, if you want me to."

"I uh... think I might have had my fill of excitement for the day," she manages, looking at the staff with a charged up sort of apprehension. "I need to let this sink in, before I start doing fucking magic." Her voice holds a bewildered tone on the last word.

I spread my hands up with a smile. "Absolutely, I understand. Do be careful of calling on it by accident, though. It can happen. Just keep practicing with bringing it out, so you can recognize it better. That'll help you avoid any accidents."

"Yeah I don't think I'll be doing that anytime soon, definitely not without you. Thanks for the warning though, I'll uh... try to not blow anything up." She cringes at that last bit; likely at how suddenly real the possibility of that sentiment coming true has become. "I'll see ya later, okay? I'll text you tomorrow."

"Alright. Thanks for coming. Drive safe."

She grants me a small smile. "Sure thing, dude." She hands me my staff and heads around the side of my house, to her car.

I know she'll text me later. Might even call, if she's got enough questions—once the shock wears off, at least.

I sigh and go inside, making a beeline for my room. I need to check on people, and see what... 'other me' has been writing... and possibly publishing. I grimace at that thought as I key my computer on.

*Many hours later...*

I hear my phone ding.

I reach over and click the screen on, keying in my passcode. I have one new text.
ST: Dude! I just healed a papercut!

I grin at the screen.

Sometimes great risks yield great rewards.

Chapter End Notes

❤ --Discord-- ❤

❤ Thanks for reading! If you enjoy the story or this chapter in particular, please feel free to leave a review with your thoughts! ❤
❤ I love reading comments and reply to all of them. ❤
A Series of Thoughts

Chapter Summary

Translations:
Ma myathash'em: You honor me.
Te: no. Derived from tel: not.
Telahna: shut up. Actually, it means 'hush', or 'be quiet', but in this case, I'm using it as 'shut up'.

Dates:
Verimensis: January

Chapter Notes

(Notes on the dates: I would've asked Solas about the dates, and with him being a scholar, he would give me the fancy words for the months, as well as the common ones. Being the tit I am, I would choose the fancy words, because I like fancy words. I got these from the DA wikia. According to that, there are thirty days in each month, and twelve months total. Being as I'm terrible at math, I wouldn't know the actual dates unless someone told me, so I'd go by days of the week, instead. According to Dorian in the red lyrium future, Nine Forty-Two Dragon is a year ahead in the future, so, by that reasoning, it's obviously the year Nine Forty-One of the Dragon Age.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Third Tuesday, Verimensis, Nine Forty-One Dragon

Dear Diary,

Heh. That address seems a bit silly, doesn't it? It always has to me, at least.

Anyway, since I doubt anyone will be able to read it—at least, without some serious study—I think I'll write these in English. Even if someone did manage to parse the differences between Common and English writing, my penmanship is atrocious enough that it'll keep most prying eyes away. Ooh, I bet if I wrote it in cursive, it'd be even worse!

Hahaha I win! Solas might still figure it out. Or Dorian, if he ever wanted to pry that badly, but anyone not a scholar would likely have a time working it out, so I should be relatively safe. Plus, who, besides those two, would be irreverent enough to dig into the 'holy prophet's' personal thoughts? Well... Sera, probably. Frankly, if she does figure out how to read it, good on her. Yes, that's right, you, pat yourself on the back, if you are reading this properly. Oh, and Leliana, or one of her people, naturally. But whatever.

I digress. This whole living in Thedas thing is... strange. Threnn gave me an odd look when I asked about obtaining these journals. Apparently it wasn't a matter of getting the materials, or even
having them made, but the sheer fact that I'd asked for it in the first place. Seriously, does nobody write personal journals in Thedas? Is that just not a thing? So weird.

Varric seems to have adopted me, almost as one of his 'people'. I still get the sense that he's got that whole 'she's the Herald, she's on a pedestal' mentality going on in the background, but I think we'll get past that, at some point.

Our little training bouts are fun, but I definitely don't think I'm cut out for stealth. I mean, I can sneak as well as anyone, but my balance is still shit, as it always has been. My aim's been improving, though, so that's something.

Cass still scares the shit out of me, but we're starting to get a little more comfortable around each other, at least.

I asked her about Anthony, but she's not ready to talk yet. I did manage to pry the story of how she became the Hero of Orlais from her, and I think she's finally backed off from the whole idea of punching me. For now.

Leliana and I get along rather well. That surprised me, frankly. I generally don't care for her much in the—i almost write 'games' here, but quickly edit that in my head, just in case—stories, but in person it's... different. They all are, a little bit. I mean yes, they're definitely still themselves, but... I don't know. It just feels different, somehow.

She's much more prone to gossip than she is in the stories, though she still keeps a tight lip about most things. I'm not usually one for gossiping, but she's a good source of information—obviously—about our fledgling organization, and its people. That much I can greatly appreciate, as it keeps me grounded, and tied to these people a bit better. Hopefully that keeps up, as time goes on. I'll need it.

Josie is an absolute doll. I love her, seriously. She's not exactly my favorite in the stories, but in person—I don't know why, really—she's just adorable. She's always so very delicate about everything, and so courteous, that I can't help but enjoy her presence. She's very careful to guard her expression most of the time, but even with that, I can tell she is as genuine as they come.

She's already asked me if anyone's been calling me 'knife-ear', and I assured her, if anyone ever did, I would handle it, as delicately as possible. Surprisingly, she seemed a bit relieved at my assurance. Apparently she sees me as capable of the subtlety required to deal with that situation. I'm glad to know I have her trust on that, at the very least.

Cullen is a good trainer. Oh, he pounds me into the dirt on a daily basis (Not like that, you pervs! *Snerk*), but I'm learning, and that's what matters. He's stopped having to correct my grip on the sword, and we've moved on to learning more than just blocking, finally. I'm starting to get the hang of some parrying and a few counter-attacks here and there, but progress is slow.

I don't have the strength in this world that I have in mine, and this body has obviously never been a warrior.

He seems pleased with my progress, but still pushes me just as hard as he did the first day, if not harder. Tiring as it is, I'm grateful for it. I know I'll be better off for his pushing, when I get into real combat.

It's really helping out with my staff work, too, which brings us to Solas.

He also seems happy with our training sessions. I'm learning control, by inches. It's a struggle. A
real struggle, actually. But I'll get there, and he agrees. I've been meditating a lot with him, and we work on mana manipulation every moment we can spare.

Our magic works well together—better than I'd hoped, even. His feels familiar, even without the mark, and he's commented on it as well, so apparently it's not just me. Good to know.

My staff has held strong for every session, not a single sign of wear. Sometimes we use practice staffs, if we're not going to be working with magic at all, but honestly, that's rare.

I've been branching out into various other schools of magic in my spare time—what little there is of it, now—especially spirit magic. Fortitude helps me with that. I could ask Solas, but... I don't know, it just feels like intruding somehow? I'll probably get over that sooner than later, but I'll practice with Fortitude, for the time being.

Fortitude has taken to occasionally appearing as the fox he's manifested as—more than once, by now—on Earth. Usually it's only around me, but occasionally he does it around Solas, too. That earned him a raised eyebrow the first time, but he merely shrugged and curled his tail around his feet as he sat to observe our training.

He's been invaluable during those training sessions too, since he can sit on the sidelines and see things even Solas misses, from his perspective.

He even managed to teach Solas something the other day, which both surprised and amused the hell outta me. I've noticed Solas practicing what he was taught, when he thinks I'm not looking.

Fortitude and I told Solas about the spirit's visits to Earth. Solas seemed both shocked and fascinated at the same time, and urged extreme caution, since it is in no way certain what affect traversing the barrier between our worlds could have on Fortitude. I think the only reason he wasn't pissed as hell about the whole thing was because it was Fortitude's choice to begin with, and has been, every single time. Fortitude says he's slowly getting more used to the magic on Earth. He has been lasting there a lot longer lately than he did at first, so he's probably right. Not sure if that's a good thing? We'll see, I guess. Again, his choice.

All in all, the past few weeks have been an experience. I've gotten to know everyone better, and become friends with a few of the soldiers and villagers. We usually meet in the tavern for a drink at night, and discuss our days. Seems to help morale a bit, so I'm certainly not going to stop. I won't be able to do that with the whole of the Inquisition once we really get going, but the more grounded I stay, the better. Like Sera said: "Get in good, before you're too big to like". It's absolutely true.

On the other side of the fence, Steph has been coming over a lot lately, and we've been helping each other learn. I've started teaching her staff work, and she has her own staff now, though it's a good bit simpler than mine. I've had to take off some of the dangly bits of my own, so they don't get damaged. It's not just a mostly decorative piece, anymore.

Eventually, I'll need to get a better one. This one won't last too much longer if we keep up with the training, which I fully intend to.

Steph's starting to get the hang of healing, and has begun experimenting with barriers lately, which helps a hell of a lot when one of us doesn't block well enough. Preventing the bruises is better than healing them, after they're already there. Takes less mana, too.

Anyway, I should end this entry. I need to do some other writing.
Fen'harel en'an'sal,

Fen'nas.

I let loose a satisfied sigh and close the journal, binding it with the thick leather straps and taking a breath as I concentrate on the ward I cast on the knot. It's a little spell Solas taught me, that confuses anyone who has illicit purposes in mind, if they try to untie the knot. It's not an unbreakable ward, by any means—but it's not harmful, so I'd rather use that, than some sort of trap or anything.

I get up and tuck the journal under my mattress, then reach for its unsullied twin on my desk, as I sit once more. This journal, I've had to do some experimenting with, to ensure I could hide it as I want to. Fortitude assures me that my efforts have born success, which is the only reason I finally feel comfortable writing in it.

I take quill to rough paper, and scratch a few paragraphs down, then blot the ink and allow it a bit of time to dry, before I seal the journal shut.

The next part takes focus.

I drag a gentle stream of mana down my arm as I take the small book in my left hand, and I activate the mark, using my mana to direct it in encompassing the diary alone. I press my hand forward through the tiny slit in the veil the spell creates, and lay the journal down, quickly retreating and sealing up the minuscule tear.

That's right, I'll be hiding that journal in the Fade. Well, a pocket of it, at least. Think of it as a bag of holding. Sort of. I can't put other things in there, so actually, it's a bag of holding that only holds one thing.

It's risky, but what better place to hide away the secrets I want nobody to know? I'm very careful to avoid doing it when Solas is asleep, so he won't be alerted to the tear as he walks the Fade. Him reading the diary wouldn't be so bad, really—but him finding out that I use such a reckless method of hiding it away... yeah, that wouldn't end well. Even Fortitude barely agreed to help me with the idea, and he only helped ensure it was successful on the other side, the first time I tried it. He refused to have any part in it after that, and I don't blame him.

As it is, though, I'll have access to it from anywhere. That was half of the point, when I first thought of the hiding spot. And if I manage to dream in the Fade again, I'll be able to write in it while I'm there. It's just more convenient, all around.

Well, so long as I'm not caught.

I sigh heavily at that thought, then stand and start for the door, grabbing my staff along the way. Time for afternoon practice at Solas' cabin.

I'm going to insist we work on transformations when I get there, since I don't feel anywhere near as competent with that, as I do with most of the other things we've covered. He's been concentrating more on the combat and practical applications of magic, which is great; but I still think this is every bit as practical, whether he wants to acknowledge it or not.

The spell itself actually costs very little mana, and I believe it could give me an edge in combat; not only for intimidating our enemies, but for the added agility, and the ability to use my own body as a weapon. It has its vulnerabilities, certainly—but so does every other method of fighting in existence. That argument isn't going to hold water with me, if he tries to make it. Plus, I can still
cast while it's active, so really, there's less of a drawback than it might seem.

By the time I finish mulling over these thoughts, I've arrived at his door, lifted my fist up, and knocked.

I feel the brush of his mana over mine, quickly followed by, "Come!"

I push the door open to the increasingly common sight of him at his desk, pouring over some tome or other, scribbling notes on the top sheet of his usual stack of paper beside it. I smile at him, despite the fact that he hasn't looked up yet, and shake my head as I turn to close the door.

"I've found you reading more and more lately, Solas. Is there something in particular that holds your interest in these books of yours?" I smirk as I settle down into what's become my spot on his rug.

He finally looks up from the pages and twists in his chair to give me a soft smile. "It has been a long time since I've had a pupil to teach. I find myself in need of more information, especially regarding your particular school of magic. As you know, Sou'alas'rajel'an'en are not common, nor do I have much experience teaching one, beyond what I have taught you. To put it simply: I am trying to ensure that your magical education is as complete and correct as it can be. I would not see your talents squandered for lack of proper instruction."

Aw! I'm actually a little touched. I grin up at him. "Ma serannas, ha'hren. Ma myathash'em."

He smirks and dips his head. "You are welcome."

"Your vocabulary is improving, though your pronunciation still needs work. I assume your source is a written account?"

He nods. "Just so. We can begin on Elvhen, once you have learned to read Common easily. That is a far more practical skill; since you will need it frequently, if what you claim does come to pass."

I shrug. I'd told him about the whole Inquisitor thing a few days ago, so he's been pushing me even harder than he already was to get used to written Common. "True enough. I can practice that on my own, though. I'd like to work on transformations while I'm here today, if that's alright with you."

He sighs, and I can already tell he's going to object, before he even opens his mouth. "There are other things you should be concentrating on, Fen'nas. I only humored your interest in that as a passing fancy; showing you the spell was not meant to encourage your use of it as a main ability. Even I do not use it in that way."

I huff and barely keep my eyes from rolling. "You only wish to use it to show off. Such displays are unnecessary."

He purses his lips, narrowing his eyes at me. "What? Where did you get that impression from? It certainly wasn't me."

He shakes his head. "I did not need to 'get it' from anywhere. Do you imagine I have ever used the wolf as a means to do anything but intimidate, or make a spectacle? It is not as practical for combat
as you seem to believe, da'fen."

I narrow my own eyes at him. "I know exactly how practical it is for combat, Solas. I was a wolf, I know how combat as a wolf works. I'm probably rusty as anything by this point, but I still remember, and I was far from helpless. It has vulnerabilities, just as any other method of fighting does; but it can be useful, if used correctly."

"I will not condone its use in combat, especially not at the expense of you being able to speak, should you need to."

I frown in confusion. "What? No, I'm not talking about using my wolf, Solas. Well, not the one I used to be. We've talked about this already—I'd use the one I summoned in the Fade. That would work better for intimidation anyway, were I to use it for such a frivolous reason. Which I won't, because I'm not stupid enough to waste mana for posturing alone. I'm not a teenager, trying to show off for some pretty girl."

He lifts a brow. "Are you so certain of that? Because your argument for this sounds very much like that of a young child's."

I tick my jaw to the side slightly and glare at him in annoyance. "Alright fine. Forget it. I'll practice on my own, if you're so against it. What else would you have me learn, then?"

He sighs, turning to cap his ink pot and stand, gesturing toward the door in invitation. "I believe Fortitude spoke of your desire to have me armored over a fortnight ago, did he not? I have remembered a few other adjustments I would like to make to your armor design, and you should speak to Harrit about my armor, if you must insist upon its creation. We will be leaving for the Hinterlands in the next few days, so it would be prudent to search for the materials we shall require, while there."

I purse my lips, but nod and get up, striding past him to the door. As usual, he skirts around me and opens it, just before I can reach out for it myself. I almost snort at his insistence in what he dismisses as merely 'looking after' me, but he's been so consistent with it, I figure it really is just his genuine wish to keep up with his version of decorum. So be it. 'When in Rome', as it were.

It's a cloudy day for once, and snow is drifting lazily down from the clouds that blanket the sky, in a pillowy shield against my nemesis. The Sun, if that wasn't clear. Despite my slightly annoyed mood, the renewed sight of what most would call dismal weather brings a small smile to my face. Solas is unusually quiet as we walk to the forge, and I peek over at him subtly, trying to get a read on his mood. Hmm. He's got the stoic mask on that he usually reserves for public use, and it's really plastered on tight today. My powers of observation can only pierce so deeply, but his posture is quite stiff, even for him. Something's got him on edge. Maybe it's the armor thing? Is he truly so worried that something as simple as proper armor is going to break his cover? Good grief.

"Nobody will care about the armor, Solas."

He slides a glance my way, shaking his head slightly. "I simply do not see the point in it. It is only under the reasoning of your insistence, and Fortitude's, that I'm willing to go along with this, at all."

I roll my eyes and sigh. Stubborn egg.

Fortitude joins us at the forge, and we work together until we are all satisfied with the state of our armor plans. All told, it takes about three hours to draw up everything we need, and get it all ready for Harrit. Once we come back with supplies, I'll be setting him to work on them. I make a list of
everything we need to collect, then clean up my own work space and turn to head back toward
town, alone. I feel Solas' mana flick against mine just after I pass the small stable area, and look
back to see him jogging to catch up to me.

He tilts his head as he reaches my side, his brow frowning slightly over a soft smile. "Is this an
escape attempt, da'fen?"

I snort and shake my head. "No, I'm just done with the forge. Why, _should_ I be escaping from
something?" I note Fortitude has joined our little procession, and toss a small nod at him.

Solas shrugs. "Nothing that I am aware of, no. You simply seemed eager to leave."

I lift an eyebrow at him. "Was there a particular reason to stay? Job's done, I've got the list," I wave
it in the air beside me, "why remain?"

He plucks the list from my fingertips, looking down at it with interest, which quickly turns to
confusion. "This... ah. This is in your language, then?"

I huff a laugh and snatch the list back from him. "Yes, it is. Did you expect me to make the extra
effort to write it in Common? It's a list, not a manifesto."

He shrugs again. "It would have been good to practice, and I'd prefer to be able to read the list as
well, since it is not only your armor that we need materials for. My memory is not infallible."

I chuckle softly. "Neither is mine. That's why I made a list. If you like, I will make an effort to
write a second list for you in Common, later."

He smiles and dips his head in gratitude. "'Ma serannas, da'fen. I would be curious to see if I can
read the list as it is, however. You have mentioned that written Common is very similar to your
English, and I admit, it would be an interesting challenge."

That makes me skip a beat. Shit. I should've known he'd get curious about it, eventually. There
goes my ability to write in a language nobody reads. I force a half-hearted laugh. "Well, I have
terrible handwriting, so even when you do manage to decode it, you may have trouble with it from
that alone." I reluctantly hand him the list, crossing the fingers of my other hand where he can't see
them as I say, "Good luck." Yes, it's childish, shut up.

Fortitude dips down to whisper in my ear, "Liar."

I growl softly at him, and Solas looks at us both with an uplifted eyebrow. "Have I missed
something?"

"No," I reply, before Fortitude can, "Foxy is just being a pest."

The spirit snorts. "Says the harellan."

I clench my jaw shut and come to a grinding halt as I close my eyes in frustration. "Te, _tel_harellan,
hale'elgar. _Telahna!"

I can _hear_ the smirk on that damn spirit's face when he retorts, "Te, _ma_ telahna."

I sigh and ignore him. Instigating little shit.

He chuckles. "Only because you're so easy to goad, Wolfy."

I roll my eyes behind closed lids, and take a breath as I open those lids and try to move on.
"Do I even want to ask?" comes Solas' query, voice thickly laced with apprehension.

Before I can reply, Fortitude shifts to Solas' side, and leans down to murmur something in his ear.

I watch, cringing, as comprehension floods Solas' features. He looks at me with surprised concern written on his face, easily read as an open book. "You do not truly believe I would invade your privacy in such a manner, do you? Your journals are not mine to read, da'fen."

I heave a rough sigh and level a scathing glare at Fortitude.

He shrugs, floating off with a tiny smirk on his face.

'Harellan!'

I return my focus to Solas and release a breath, deflating slightly as I do. "I... no. And yes. Mostly no, but, I..." I trail off with a frustrated groan, smacking my palm to my brow.

I feel a hand on my shoulder, but I don't dare look up. My cheeks are a brilliant shade of red, if the heat in them is any indication.

"I promise you, Fen'nas, I will not read your journals without your express permission to do so. I understand and respect the privacy of personal thought, and likewise, the importance of keeping a record of it. I would not violate it for mere curiosity, no matter how deep the well of that curiosity may be."

I spread two of my fingers apart to peek up at him through the shield of my hand. "That's not as reassuring as you seem to think it is."

He smirks, shrugging slightly as he slips his hand off my shoulder. "I said I was curious—not that I would act on it. You've nothing to fear from me, on that count, I assure you."

I lower my hand from my face, since it feels like it's cooled off some, and take a breath as I resume my trek into town. "I suppose that's all I can ask for, then. Though, you will have a distinct advantage over me on that front, for quite some time to come."

His eyebrow flicks up at me as he pushes the gate open for us. "Oh? What advantage might that be?"

I tip my head at him in thanks as I pass. "You'll know how to read English, but I won't know how to read Elvhen."

"Ah," he says, sounding slightly smug for the revelation, "you assume I keep a journal, then?"

I shrug carelessly as we head up the steps. "Whether you do or not, you keep many notes that I would be just as curious to read."

Solas tilts his head at me with a fascinated expression in his mien. "You wish to read my research notes? Is there a particular reason for this desire? They are dry reading."

A ghost of a smile forms on my lips. "Dry reading or no, I would still read them."

There's a pause, before he speaks. "You did not answer my question. I shall reiterate more simply: why?"

I look over at him, letting the smile tug a bit more firmly at my mouth. "Because you wrote them."
Now it's his turn to come to a grinding halt. He stares at me wordlessly, eyes just wide enough to indicate his surprise. "That is..." he deliberates, then finally settles on, "well."

I grin at him and reach up to gently pat him on the cheek, before I turn to continue toward the tavern for dinner.

* * * *

Third Friday, Verimensis, Nine Forty-One Dragon

Dear Diary,

We left for the Hinterlands this morning, after Cassandra deigned to declare that I was ‘sufficiently trained to not be completely useless, at least’. More like, if we waited any longer, more lives would be lost than can be excused by more time spent just training. Oh well, I can deal with that too. We’ve yet to see any action, shockingly.

We did get to help someone whose wagon had the wheel come off, though. Solas managed to scare the piss out of the wagon owner by lifting the wheel-less side of the axle up with magic, while Cass and I hoisted the wheel back on. The moment the wagon was fixed, the guy tossed us a clipped thanks and quickly went on his way. Seems that good ol’ fear of magic is still going strong in Ferelden. Fucking hypocrites.

Anyway, we’re settled down in an impromptu camp, comprised of two tents and four bedrolls, with a fire for cooking. Even more surprising than the lack of action—aside from idiots with wagons—was who volunteered to cook: Solas! I mean, I guess he probably would know how to, after a year spent feeding himself between waking from uthenera and now, so it probably shouldn’t astonish me at all. I think it was more that he volunteered to, rather than being called upon, that awed me a tiny bit.

I digress. Apparently we’ll be another day’s walk to get to the edge of the Hinterlands, then another two hours or so to reach Scout Harding’s location. Cass is insisting we push through to Harding’s location tomorrow, and I don’t blame her. I’d rather get the walking over with, myself. I’ll feel a lot safer with even a few of our troops stationed nearby, and a dedicated healer waiting back at camp to take care of anything Solas can’t handle.

I’ve never been afraid of death itself, per se—the dying alone thing aside, that’s a whole other ball of wax—but injury is just not something I look forward to. Needing to have someone take care of me is not the least bit enjoyable, in any capacity. I prefer to look after myself, if I’m able. It’s not that I’m a bad patient or anything; I just don’t like inconveniencing people.

So that’s my aim for this trip. Don’t get maimed. Seems like a reasonable goal, yeah? I thought so. I mean, scars, okay, that’s fine. I really don’t mind scars. But not being maimed would be good. Y’know, for the whole continuation of the Inquisition and all that.

Gods help anyone who decides to put leeches on me, or bloodlets me, or says my ‘humors’ are out of balance... I mean, I don’t know for sure if they actually do that here, but still. Just no. My humors are just fine, unbalanced as they are, thank you. Go away and bring me a mage healer, please.

Fortitude came with us, of course. It’s been a hell of a struggle to reply to his nearly endless chatter with thought alone. I really hope he’s not gonna keep this up for the entire outing. We’re slated to be out here for quite some time, and I really don’t know if I can handle a month or more of ‘brain-talking’, as I’ve dubbed it. Let’s hope once we get more settled into the Hinterlands, he discovers a
more interesting pursuit than picking our brains at a near-frantic pace. Poor thing's been cooped up so long, I do feel sorry for him, but still...

Right, anyway... so Solas just came back from hunting with a ram slung over his shoulders. That's a lot of meat for four people. Damn. Then again, two of us are mages, and we do eat a lot, so maybe it's not a total waste. Looks like dinner and breakfast are gonna be ram meat. Mostly anyway. We do have hard tack and water, of course.

Oh! Well, this should be interesting. Solas just asked me if I know how to dress a ram. The answer is no. I mean... I dressed a squirrel once? And... some chickens and a turkey or two? What? I grew up in the country. Yeah gotta go, he wants me to get some hands-on training. Fun fun. Guts before dinner. Yay. Let's just hope I don't manage to cut open the intestines. Or anything inside that gut, really.

Fen'harel en'an'sal,

Fen'nas.

Chapter End Notes

❤--Discord--❤

❤ Thanks for reading! If you enjoy the story or this chapter in particular, please feel free to leave a review with your thoughts! ❤
❤ I love reading comments and reply to all of them. ❤
A Matter of Perspective

Chapter Summary

The song mentioned in this chapter can be heard here: “Funny”. The original song and lyrics are protected by copyright. And yes, that's me singing. ♥

First part of the chapter is in Solas' POV, if that wasn't clear. ♥

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The second time they kiss, he thinks he's beginning to understand.

The press and pull, the give and take, the ebb and flow of their passions, sweep them along in the current of life with the ease of a long-cherished memory come to bear on the winds of the Fade.

But this is not the Fade.

He is not in uthenera.

Not anymore.

The more time he spends here, with her, the more he comes to realize that truth.

The year he wandered awake before his magic found her, he could almost convince himself that what he'd awoken to was merely a drawn out nightmare—one he was having trouble stirring his mind from. Perhaps a demon had broken past his iron-clad wards and fashioned this dream reality for him, to torture his mind.

But no—this is reality, now.

The reality he created.

The devastation that truth evokes in him is more vast and conflicted than he believes she can fathom—should ever have to fathom. But she tries, oh, she tries.

Every day she shows her support in a thousand tiny ways. A look here, a touch there, a word in between that reaches into him and grasps, then yanks at the wall he's erected around himself—dislodging another brick in his carefully laid masonry.

Day by day, she picks at that wall, and as the moons rise each night, he finds another piece of it missing, another chink in his armor.

Even now, coated to her elbows in blood that slowly coagulates and flakes on her skin, she works at him, without seeming conscious of her efforts. She looks to him, seeking his approval or correction on her actions, waiting to act until he directs her on the proper path.

As if he is someone she should seek to emulate.

She doesn't always listen, of course—he truly would worry if she did—but when she looks to him
for instruction, eyes alight with curiosity and even wonder, who is he to deny her?

So far, his concerns are yet to actually be warranted. She has proven on many occasions that she has her own mind, and her own opinions. She makes a hundred decisions throughout her days, without any input from him at all.

Perhaps it is merely her unfamiliarity with actually living in this world, that has her soaking up his tutelage in anything beyond the magical insights he has to offer. Will she one day stop seeking his approval and instruction?

Will he have any armor left, if that day ever comes?

And even if she does stop, will she simply find another way to continue chipping away at his hard-earned control?

He wouldn't put it past her, not for one second.

For now, he watches, and guides her when she needs it, as she skins and guts their dinner. She's taken to the simple task with a gusto that amuses him, and though there is little skill in her performance, she seems to enjoy the chance to learn, despite—or perhaps because of?—the cruor and simplicity of the act.

He thinks he will teach her to hunt, once she learns to properly dress her kill. She should know how, if she ever finds herself in need of the basic skills of survival she obviously lacks.

It is odd, the dichotomy of who she is.

He finds himself pondering that dichotomy with a frequency that alarmed him at first, but less so, as time moved on.

She has a body that will live on, heedless of the rigors of time, the soul of one every bit as ancient as he; yet there, quietly concealed within that experienced facade, is the mind of someone with a mortal's utter lack of permanence. Oh, she understands that permanence, and accepts, even embraces it. But somehow, despite this, she behaves as though it would be no surprise to her if she died in the next minute, the next breath.

He supposes it is a wise mentality to have, in a sense. There is no guarantee any of them will live through this situation, after all. She has steadfastly refused to indicate who will live or die in this future she predicts—one that has proven entirely accurate, thus far.

That is also something he is keeping a wary eye on. She herself has observed that her very presence could alter the events she is aware of, and she was wholly correct to voice her caution.

Time will out, it is true; but he's realized he would much rather see her survive the trials ahead, if he has any say in the matter.

To that end, he is teaching her everything he knows. When the limits of his personal knowledge are tested, he will seek out new limits—from spirits, tomes, and any other source he can find.

If she is to be his ally, if she is to remain with him in the long run, he would have her know everything he does, and more. She will be well-equipped for the future she insists they create together.

And she does insist upon helping him, despite her apparent lack of confidence in her survival from one moment to the next.
She seems to gain abundant joy in baffling him, at every turn.

She is gregarious and bold at times, yet solitary and shy at others. He knows her to be capable of charming anyone, but she is also easily flustered, and blushes often. He takes great delight in watching her act out the patterns that ruled his youth—often joining in and testing her, prodding until he can discover what small, insignificant thing will make her flush this time.

He finds their debates and arguments—while infuriatingly frequent, at times—to be rather... stimulating, and charming, in an odd sort of way. She often challenges him to look at things from a new perspective, to see with a broader view, or to pluck out the details he may have missed before.

She is a very physical creature, always reaching out to gain some form of contact with those around her. He assumed her affections were reserved for him at first, but he's since witnessed her touching practically everyone, to varying degrees of intimacy and comfort. He once spared a thought to the fact that this was one of their differences, only to recall that he'd reached out to others just as much, before his world came crashing down around him.

She reserves a special kind of touch for him, though it is not what he expects, in any sense. They are wholly innocent on the surface—those tactile moments between them—and yet, just below the skin of these gestures is a sensuality so entirely primal and alive that it sometimes steals the very air from his lungs.

They have not kissed since that moment outside the gates, and, aside from the little touches she saves for him, she has left him alone, since his request for time. At least, in that sense. They are hardly ever separate in any other sense, unless she is busy training, or off charming half of the Inquisition, and blushing at the rest—sometimes both, at the same time.

He almost expects her to press him for an answer—any answer, especially on the occasions that he catches her gazing at him with a kind of sad, patient smile, when she thinks he isn't looking.

Even Fortitude did not expect her to last as long as she has.

But she merely smiles that little smile, and goes back to her studies.

That is not to say that she's given up on their verbal repartee, nor that she has ceased flirting mercilessly with him, every opportunity she gets. Then again, he's not exactly innocent in that regard, himself.

But he wants to see what can truly come of this, on his side.

To that end, he's begun the first stages of courting her, in the old style.

Oh, he's perfectly aware of the more 'modern' conventions of courting in this age, but he wants to be more subtle about it all—partly to give himself time to think. He's modified the old methods to more appropriately match the faster pace of a mortal existence, but they are still the same overtures.

The few times she inquires about his behavior, he claims he is merely 'looking after her', and she eventually drops the matter. She still gives him the odd bemused look, once in a while. He is certain, by the time she catches on, he will have figured out his answer, and likely given it to her.

He follows as she moves to a nearby stream to wash the blood off of her arms, keeping a watchful eye on their surroundings as she kneels down to scrub. She Breaths a happy sigh that stirs him from his mired musings.
"Well, that was invigorating," I say, tossing a smile at Solas over my shoulder. "At least I managed not to cut my fingers off."

He huffs a laugh. "I hardly think you are so clumsy as that, da'fen."

I shrug, slinging water up on my arms and scraping some of the clot from my skin into the creek with my fingernails. "I do try to be more careful with knives, but accidents happen." A self-deprecating laugh issues from me as I continue, "And I think you have a higher estimation of my gracefulness than is realistic, Solas."

"Not at all. I simply know what you're capable of. If I did not think you could handle dressing our dinner, I would not have volunteered you for the job. Regardless, it is done, and your fingers are no worse for wear."

I snort lightly, shaking my head as I summon a tiny ball of veilfire for light, and pick out a smooth rock to scrub some of the more caked on gore off. "I suppose not. That was a big kill for just four people, though. Were you counting Fortitude, in your calculations of mouths to feed, or was that just what you found when you went out?"

He scoffs and shakes his own head. "I would not count a spirit without a physical form in that number, I assure you. The only other fauna I sensed in the area were rather too small to suffice, unless I wished to kill off an entire family of fennecs. So, I chose the single ram, instead. It seemed the more merciful, between the two choices, and if some of it feeds that family, so be it."

After a moment, I nod approvingly. "More practical than I thought, then. Fair enough." I look over my shoulder at him, eying him speculatively. "Is there a particular reason you're hanging around, while I wash up? Not that I mind, it just seems like a waste of time."

He shrugs, seemingly unaffected by any such concerns. "I do not see ensuring your safety as a waste of time. Even you are uncertain of your survival, despite your understanding of events."

That surprises a laugh out of me. "And you think, what, that a bear is going to jump out of the bushes and attack me? Don't tell me you're going to try to accompany me, every time I have to use the privy. That would get old, quickly. Immediately, even."

He frowns at me, pursing his lips disapprovingly. "No, I would not accompany you. I will insist that you set wards when you do so, however—and if I find that you have been lax in your efforts, I will insist upon setting them myself."

I gape at him, my veilfire light sputtering out, then laugh in disbelief and flick water at him from my now clean hands, as I stand and turn to face him. "Brat." I smirk and curl my finger to hook under his chin. "You just want to see me naked again."

Even in the pale light of the moons, I can see his skin darken in a blush, despite the scoff he affects. That he doesn't deny my claim immediately is telling, though. Instead, he takes a steady breath and replies, "Were I to wish such a thing, I could think of much more pleasing methods to achieve my goal, da'fen."

My smirk pulls into a crooked grin as I add another two fingers beneath his chin, and edge a half step closer. "Is that so?" I flick my ears forward. "I'm all ears, Solas. Do tell."

He tilts his head slightly and before I realize his plan, he's lifted a hand to trail his finger up the bottom blade of my left ear, effectively silencing any objections I may have had, as every nerve in
my body lights up like a fireworks show. My toes curl into the dirt, and my hand drops from his chin to his shirt, gripping it tightly in my fist as my eyelids droop in pleasure.

I only just manage to keep the sound threatening to escape my throat tamped down, knowing that though we're out of sight, we're not so far away that I could avoid Varric and Cass hearing that kind of noise. A shuddering breath does manage to slip through, but it is quiet enough that we are the only witnesses to it.

When I finally manage to calm my breathing to a reasonable rate for speaking, I level him with a glare—which is no doubt utterly ruined by the desire that must still be blowing my pupils wide. "Unfair, Solas. A simple knowledge of physiology does—" I take a harried breath and continue, "—not constitute a valid response to that question." I smirk, and suck in another breath, releasing his shirt and giving him a playful, mild shove back. "As you can plainly see, I am still fully clothed. Your demonstration was insufficient to yield the results you sought."

He snickers softly, smirking at me as if highly amused. "You assume there was only one step to my supposed demonstration. That was only the first—of many."

I frown and take the lead, using the faint glow of the campfire as a beacon to find my way back. That... was not easy to turn away from. But, it's my own fault. I shouldn't bait him like that, especially when he's still... 'considering'. I sigh and settle down by the fire, tossing a stray stick into the flames as I watch them greedily lick up into the air, just as I greedily lap up any attention he deigns to give me. How must he see me, when I display myself so plainly?

Common, likely. A common girl looking for a common lay in a common age.

No, no—that's unkind, to both of us.

I must've sighed, or made some expression of unease, because Varric pipes up, concern in his voice, "You alright, Silk?"

My gaze darts to his, and I smile at him, nodding softly. "I'm fine, durgen'lin. Just thinking ahead."

He hums a sound that tells me he's unconvinced. "Anything you'd like to share?"

I shrug and look back to the fire. "Just worried. I don't want anyone to get hurt because of my incompetence. I'm better than I was, certainly; but I'm still no expert. It's a valid concern."

He tilts his head in a shrug, but waves me off. "Ah, don't worry so much. You'll figure it out, soon enough."

I huff a laugh, picking a blade of grass from beside me and twirling it before the light of the blaze. The strips of ram meat—cooking on a cobbled together rack high above the tongues of flame—are beginning to smell rather tasty. My stomach rumbles in agreement. "I hope you're right, durgen'lin. I promise to do my best not to catch your chest hair on fire."

He snorts, hand reaching for his furred chest in reflex. "Please do. That's a stench nobody wants to smell, believe me."
I chuckle, lifting my gaze from the fire to his face. "Speaking from personal experience, I assume?"

He tilts his head at me in affirmation. "Blondie caught more than one of us in the crossfire—a few times, actually. He really liked his flames. Come to think of it, that probably should've been the first hint that there was something not quite right there. But, when Hawke insists on vouching for someone, you tend to listen. Even when she turns out to be wrong."

I nod at him. "You should lend me a copy of "Tales of the Champion". I haven't read it, or if I have, I don't remember. I'd like to know what happened."

He smirks softly and reaches into his pack (Because yes, everyone carries a pack, it's not just Solas.), digging about for a few moments before procuring a rather familiar-looking tome from its depths. He stands and edges around the fire, handing the book to me with a fond smile. "There you are. Don't mind the dagger-shaped hole in the first forty pages—it was used in defense of my..." he slides a scathing look to Cass, "reputation, a month or so ago."

Cass scoffs and rolls her eyes, but otherwise ignores him as he trundles back to his spot on the other side of the fire.

I smile and hold the book up as I look at him. "My thanks. I'll take good care of it."

Solas tends to the ram meat, Cass takes out a whetstone and begins sharpening her sword, and Varric pulls out his pipe as things quiet down. I lay the book on my lap and gently crack it open, the leather binding creaking softly as I turn the pages to the beginning of the story.

I'm starting to get better at reading Common, but it's still a frustrating struggle, especially when I really just want a summary of what the Hawke in this time-line did. What decisions did she make, who did she romance, who did she kill? I could ask Varric, I suppose, and I'm absolutely certain he'd be happy to tell me, but I'd rather read his account for myself, despite the obstacle of having to translate. It's not that bad, really; it's just... slow.

"You know," the author's voice interrupts me, just as I get halfway through the first sentence, "you should let me read something you've written, sometime. I seem to remember you saying you were a writer, that day we had the drinking contest."

I snort, looking up at him with a smile. "I did, but I don't write in Common, durgen'lin. I shrug. "There are not many things I've written that would warrant a translation, regardless."

Cass jumps in, before Varric can respond, "Why do you say that?"

I chuckle, shaking my head. "Because I somehow doubt the faithful will want to know that their Herald writes nothing but sad love songs, a smattering of depressing poetry, and smutty stories."

Cass does her best imitation of a surprised, blushing fish, while Varric laughs heartily, slapping his knee. Solas merely looks at me with a curiously amused smirk.

Varric levels a smile at me as his mirth tapers off. "You a bard, Silk? You don't hear of regular folk writing songs very often, unless they've got musical aspirations."

I shrug slightly. "Not a bard, really; though I can sort of sing. Most of the instruments I know how to play are... well, I haven't seen any around lately. Even if I had, I'm not that good at playing them, so it's no great loss, believe me."

"She is diminishing the value of her vocal skills, I assure you," comes Solas' interjection from left field, "likely in an attempt to avoid a performance."
I narrow my eyes and glare at him, pursing my lips in annoyance. Traitor. "Harellan."

He merely smirks, as he begins to divvy out meat, bread and water to each of us in turn, saving mine for last. He crouches in front of me and smiles encouragingly as he holds my dinner out to me. "I believe they would enjoy it, da'fen. I know that I would. At least consider it?"

I sigh and take the tin plate and—surprisingly chilled—waterskin from him, settling the plate in my lap and taking a drink from the water as I consider the idea. I cork the skin and set it aside before I answer him. "Fine." I look to the others. "But don't expect anything amazing. All you'll get from me tonight is a short song I wrote when I was fifteen, and don't blame me if it makes you sad or something."

Varric leans forward with a curious smile, Cass nods her understanding, and Solas sits, leaning back and relaxing as he watches. That, more than anything, makes me nervous. Why he felt the need to press me on this, is something we'll be discussing later.

I close my eyes, take a breath to calm my nerves as much as I can, then take one more, and begin.

You took my heart
and you took my money
I never thought
that it’d be funny

But then I saw
what love can do
and then I realized
what you said was true

You said that I’d never love again
when all I wanted was a dear, true friend
You said that I’d never make it in this world
when all I want, is to live ‘till the end

You took my heart
and you took my money
I never thought
that it’d be funny

I open my eyes, and I’m met with applause from our little group, though the loudest applause is from Cass’ direction. I smile shyly and duck my head slightly to try and hide my flushing cheeks.

Suddenly, a much louder sound stiffens my spine and drowns out even Cass’ ardent applause—

The bellowing of a thunderous roar.
❤ I love reading comments and reply to all of them. ❤
"GET BACK!"

*Fuck!*

I'm already flattened against a damn tree as it is—what, do I have to get *behind* it?

Hell's *bells.*

I don't know what it was that attracted the creature to our camp, but it's big, it's ugly, and it's *angry.*

I already managed to cripple one of its legs with a well-timed fist of god—as I've come to call the move—but it doesn't seem to have slowed the damn thing down one bit.

Then again, it having three other perfectly serviceable legs might have something to do with that.

It points its over-sized, scaly head in my direction and rears back, gathering its breath for what can only be another gout of flames. Solas is nowhere near ready to cast another barrier.

Behind the tree it is!

I swing myself around the thick trunk and shrink in on myself as much as I can, just in time to feel the heat curling around the sides of the tree. Thankfully, most of it misses me; though the edge of my sleeve does catch, but I'm able to pat it out quickly enough.

I cast a glance aside and see Varric loading a new cartridge into Bianca, and Solas, just beyond him, flinging ice from his staff.

I retreat from my position of relative safety, my own staff gripped firmly in my hands as I assess the situation quickly as I can. Cass has firmly regained the drake's attention, and I can feel the power of the barrier Solas casts on her, just before I see the shimmering light of it gloss over her skin and armor.

That would be great, except the drake is now aiming its flames at Solas and Varric.

Probably because it's weak to frost. Which Solas is chucking at it left and right.

Damn it Solas, what have I said about mage tanking?!

Oh wait, I never actually said anything. Oops.
Well, I've been practicing barriers with Fortitude... no time like the present to use them!

I call on him for help, my intent clear in my head, and I feel a surge of power flooding through my veins—the answer to my plea.

I reach out and feel for my friends, slicking the shield over their skin as thickly as I can in the few seconds available to me. Solas is easy to find and cast on, though Varric gives me some trouble—likely his lack of connection to the Fade is hampering my efforts—but after a second, I manage to wrap the barrier around him too, like a cooling sheet of Fade armor. Or something. I don't know, it just works, okay?

Well, mostly.

A few seconds later, the sulfuric stench of burnt hair reaches my nostrils, and lo and behold, Varric is smacking his palm to his chest, suffocating the last few embers of his singed chest hair. A cursory glance at the rest of him reveals he's otherwise—mostly—undamaged, though, so that's something. His nose might say otherwise. Mine too, actually. He tosses a disgruntled glance at me, then focuses back on the drake with Bianca, landing a few solid hits in its thick hide.

There's no time to dwell on his disapproval, because the drake apparently didn't like being so thoroughly thwarted in its efforts to fry my companions, and it turns the yellow, softly glowing slits of its eyes on me. Again.

Fucking wonderful.

It snaps at Cass as she hacks into its side and gets a good stab in, but she blocks the attack with her shield, and it looks back to me, then lunges. I sidestep as best I can, but it barrels past me and knocks me down, landing me flat on my back. I'm—extremely—lucky to keep hold of my staff, because it comes back around for another attack, and I'm nowhere near able to stand up yet.

It towers over me, sure of its victory, and just as it dives down to bite my head off, I snap my staff's blade up into its mouth and shove.

This is where things get dodgey.

See, drakes have this weird half-life for a few minutes after they lose their heads. It's not any conscious effort on their parts—obviously, with the whole severed spinal cord thing—but more of a base survival thing that's programmed into their DNA. They're a bit like nugs in that sense, except they don't last as long.

Sadly, I didn't know this, when I shoved the blade of my staff through the beast's neck. I thought the fight would be done and over with.

Nope.

Of course not.

The moment it loses that vital connection to its head, the entire body of that thing begins to writhe, like something that just crawled up out of a deep, dark hole to the core of the earth. I barely manage to avoid getting sliced to ribbons by the claws that sink into the dirt perilously close to me, and I'm not so lucky on the second volley, as it finally clicks that I need to get away from this thing.

One set of claws curls into the flesh at my hip, just below where the armor covers, while another slices into my face. I'm fairly sure the only reason it doesn't do more damage to my face than it
does, is because Solas just manages to get the beginnings of a barrier on me—though it's not in time to avoid the talons currently embedding themselves in my pelvic bone.

Those talons are ripped from my flesh only a moment later, as Cass charges right over me, shoving the mindless drake back and away. The death grip I have on my staff is the only thing that keeps it from going right along with them, but once the immediate danger passes, I let it fall to my side limply for a moment.

Just a breath. Need to catch my breath.

Why is my throat so sore?

All I can hear is my heartbeat, thundering in my ears.

The battle continues, Cass beating the damn thing to a pulp, Varric trying to turn it into a pincushion, and Solas looking like he's doing his best to freeze the beast solid—and casting worried glances my way every few seconds.

I try to lift my staff to continue helping, but find I don't have the strength. I lift my hand instead, and reach out with the same spell that I'd crushed the Pride demon with, settling it firmly around the raging corpse of the drake, as it blindly rakes its claws in every direction. Just before it manages to land what looks like I could be a solid hit on Cass, I start to squeeze.

It seizes, limbs constricting tightly against its body, then breaking, shattering as I push harder. I can't keep my head lifted to see it anymore, but I hear the wet, snapping, grinding sound of a large body being folded and compressed violently in on itself. That I can hear it over my thudding heartbeat brings a grimace of a smile to my face. I'm glad to hear it, ecstatically happy that our foe is being demolished.

Distantly, I realize this is probably shock taking over, but I can't seem to care very much. Funny, you'd think I would care about that.

The next thing I feel is the press of a calloused hand on the still whole side of my face, urgently turning my attention to its owner. I note the green magic sliding freely from the other hand that doesn't quite rest on my face, and I shake my head.

"No," I manage to say, and my throat is ragged, raw when I speak, making the words rasp out of me like rough grit sandpaper on my flesh, but I have to get this out, "hip's worse."

He shakes his own head, eyes wide in the light of his magic as he continues to cast. "No, it isn't."

I frown in vague confusion, but rather than try to argue, I sigh, coughing up some fluid that catches my breath as I do. I belatedly notice that it tastes like metal and life, and it's only then that the full scope of what that damn puddle of slowly congealing blood, bones, and scales did to me begins to sink in.

The initial, immense pain of it tearing into my hip had partially numbed me to the extent of the damage from the second blow. Now that I'm paying more attention, I feel... oh shit. How did I only just notice?

There's pain in spades, all down the left side of my face and neck, and I wince as I feel the shredding, stinging sensation of it all begin to set in properly. Naturally, the wincing doesn't help, and I hiss as that particular pain washes over me.

I feel very wet, and sticky, and it's only when I feel the warm fluid drop down and pool into the
shell of my ear, that I realize I'm bleeding like a stuck pig. Ah, yes. Head wounds. I've had those before. Bleed like there's no tomorrow, which, if the blood isn't stopped, might actually not be too far off.

His face comes into sharp focus now, and I see what I'd missed before as it flashes in his eyes, as it presses a deep worry line into his brow.

It's fear.

He's afraid.

Of what? The drake is dead. Definitely dead. Puddle of guts and crushed bone dead. What is there for him fear, now?

His gaze flits over my face, his brows drawing even closer together as he clenches his jaw, closing his eyes in concentration. The glow from his hand brightens, and I worry for a moment that he's pushing himself too hard, until I look behind him and see Fortitude pressing his ethereal hand to Solas' shoulder, his own brow furrowed with concern.

Well, shit.

And here I was, hoping not to get maimed.

Maybe I should've hoped to live, instead.

Chapter End Notes

💖 --Discord-- 💖

💖 Thanks for reading! If you enjoy the story or this chapter in particular, please feel free to leave a review with your thoughts! 💖

💖 I love reading comments and reply to all of them. 💖
These Truths the Maker Has Revealed to Me

Chapter Summary

There is a somewhat paraphrased quote by Madame de Stael later in the chapter. Just wanted to give credit where it's due.

Thank you to all you lovelies who put up with the cliffhanger. ♥

Re: the lyrium thing: look at the DA wiki, under lyrium. Believe it or not, this headcanon is derived from canon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"It seems I was wrong. I owe you an apology."

I look over my shoulder at the spirit behind me, lifting an eyebrow as I try to recall where I'd seen it before.

It takes a moment, but then it hits me, as I remember the voice.

"Ah, Guile. What are you on about?"

It tilts its head at me. Rather than speak, it gestures to the space in front of me.

I turn to look, and there, I see Solas bent over my prone, unconscious form, still pouring healing magic into me. Cass is kneeling down on the other side of me, shifting worried looks between my face and Solas'. Varric stands at my feet, Bianca still out and cocked, as he keeps an eye on our surroundings. Fortitude hovers behind Solas, his hand reaching into the hobo's shoulder, lending his strength as best he can.

I watch the scene unfolding with a vague sort of fascination. I move toward it, and surprisingly, my view actually shifts as I move. I kneel down above my head, and lean in to get a better look at the damage.

"Shit," I murmur, as I gaze down at the rent flesh on the side of my face and neck. It's slowly stitching itself back together, but a check of Solas' expression tells me that he doesn't think it's fast enough.

I move over to examine my hip, and suddenly it really doesn't seem as bad as it felt. Well, not in comparison, at least. It's bloody, yeah, but it's not the carnage that's torn into my head region.

I sigh and lift my gaze to Guile. "So I passed out? Or he knocked me out, either way. I know I don't come here when I sleep normally."

Here. The Fade. The place where I'm outside my body, watching as Solas tries desperately to heal my throat well enough that they can shove an elfroot elixir down it.

Yeah, it's that fucked up.

How had I not noticed?
Then again, the blood I coughed up should've been a small hint.

"It happened too quickly for you to notice. He put you to sleep to make it easier for he and Fortitude to work. You kept ripping up the healed muscle with all of your... moving." Guile spits the last word, as if moving is a vile thing, done by disgusting worms called people.

I frown at that, but move on without comment. If the spirit doesn't like people, that's its problem. I jut my chin at it. "So what did you mean about apologizing?"

It seems to consider my question for a moment, before it answers, "I thought you a mere toy, a pawn on his board of the world. His actions tonight proved me wrong, more than any other. He is near exhaustion, yet still he persists. It will empty him if he continues like that."

At the spirit's words, my focus snaps back to Solas. I can see the sweat beading on his brow, the trail of it that rolls over the bridge of his nose, all the way down to the tip—dropping off and landing with a tiny splash against my left pauldron. His hands are trembling slightly with the strain of his effort, and his face is a mask of almost pained concentration. I watch as he grimaces, then pours a final burst into the spell, before he lets it fizzle out completely.

The words are muffled when he speaks them, warped by the barrier of the veil, but I can just make them out, "Give her a potion, now!" He falls back on shaking arms that he barely manages to brace behind him as he finishes, chest heaving and mouth gasping for breath.

Cass already has a vial ready, and quickly—but surprisingly gently—holds the mouth of it to my parted lips, slowly pouring the contents onto my tongue. She massages the side of my throat that wasn't recently sliced open, encouraging me to swallow the bitter concoction. My body belatedly complies; the automatic response sluggish, but active.

When that bottle empties, and Cass looks to him for direction, he weakly gestures for another. She readily acquiesces, draining a second potion into me, down to the very last drop. When she looks to him again, he grimaces.

I watch as Fortitude kneels beside him. His voice, when he speaks, is much clearer, "Are you certain, Pride? You know the potential cost."

I frown my concern at the question, and spare a glance at Guile, in the hopes it will clarify.

"He does not take lyrium. He only used it for a single period of time, for a specific purpose, long ago. But he is considering it again, now. For you." Guile focuses on me, its eyes bright green wisps of light in its sockets. "You should be careful coming here, from now on, little wolf. He is about to declare you a most tempting target, for the less savory denizens of this realm."

"What is the cost Fortitude mentioned?"

The spirit tilts its head. "You do not know the cost of the song the stone sings? I can hear it within you, when you are not here. So can your little friend, Fortitude. So can he." It looks to Solas and points a thin finger at him.

"The Seeker can feel it, pulling her toward your blood like a moth to flame. The durgen'lin has lost the song—he has been too close to the sky, for too long. He is the only one of us deaf to its call."

I blink at it in confusion, and it laughs harshly at my reaction. "You think Templars the only ones affected by the song? Oh, da'len, how high the price of your ignorance."

I growl at the spirit. "Speak plainly—tell me what the cost is! Surely one vial will not hurt him."
It sighs, and drifts close to Solas' side, cupping the back of his skull with its faded hand. "Every
time a mage uses it, they put themselves at risk. In the time before the great corruption, those with
magic and power used the song to excess, to strengthen the music of their summonings. They paid
the price for their greed. Their own families could not recognize them, they were so misshapen.
Oh, they gained the power they sought, no question; but they lost all that they once were, in the
process."

It moves from Solas, to me, reaching down and holding my head as it had his. "The Evanuris made
the same mistakes. Some, more than others. He watched, as his brethren changed, as they became,
and he made a promise to himself that he would not be as they were, that he would not partake. He
broke his promise for only one reason, and he poured the excess into his orb, filling it to the brim.

"The first, shattered. The second, the third. With each failure, a piece of the power was lost.
Finally, he found the proper material to craft his vessel from, and it did not break. It never broke,
no matter how much magic he gave to it. For years, he rationed, and consumed the smallest
amounts he could, always giving the excess to the orb, never keeping it for himself. When it was
finally, blissfully full, he sealed his brethren away. They were nearly all monsters, by the end."

I stare in horror at the spirit, wondering how I'm only now hearing about this.

It chuckles, tilting its head at me as it smiles the smile of an old, wise teacher, who looks upon
their young, foolish student with amused disappointment. "Why do you think he sealed them away,
da'len? Oh, certainly, he was furious for their betrayal of Mythal, but there was more to it than
simply that. He looked upon the ones that should have been his brethren, and he realized that they
were unrecognizable, even to him. They came to him only because he promised them a greater
source of power than even the song could provide. He tricked them, and when it was done, they
were forever lost. They traverse the Fade now, mindless and aimless."

It grips my jaw in both of its hands, and dips down to stare into my eyes, its gaze boring into me
like a physical pressure. "That is the cost of the song, da'len. Are you certain you would have him
pay it?" It releases me from its grasp and backs away, regarding me steadily for a moment, before
turning and floating off.

I scramble to my feet and place myself right in front of Fortitude, putting one thought into my head
and hoping against all hope that he can hear my plea, 'Don't let him use the lyrium!'

Fortitude frowns, lifting his eyes to some distant point ahead of him, eyes narrowing, then
widening. He looks at Solas and leans down, placing his hand on his shoulder again. "Pride, she is
refusing your choice. She does not wish for you to make it."

Solas frowns, tilting his head slightly as he looks to my body's face.

After a few seconds, Fortitude replies to the thoughts in Solas' head, drawing the information from
mine, "She knows about the song, knows about your brethren. She does not wish for you to pay
that price; not for her sake, or any other."

Solas' frown deepens, and Fortitude responds, "Yes, her mind is in the Fade. I cannot see her from
here, but I can hear her, and she has spoken to Guile."

Solas snaps his attention to Cass. "Seeker, do not move her. In another half candlemark, give her
two more elfroot tonics." He hands her two from his own belt. "I must speak to her, where she can
be reached in the Fade; it is a matter of utmost importance and urgency. I shall regain some of my
mana while there, to heal her a bit more when I wake. I will not sleep long."
Cass seems baffled, but something in Solas' mien must convince her to comply. She nods hesitantly, and takes the vials from him. "I will do as you request, though this hardly seems the time for a nap."

He huffs a tiny laugh and shakes his head. "I assure you, it is *exactly* the time for a nap. I will wake soon."

She nods again, and without further ado, he lays next to my body and casts some spell over his face that I don't recognize, but definitely want to learn. Later. When all of this crazy shit isn't going on.

I watch as he sits up out of his body, like a spirit rising from his physical form, and blinks, looking about with a worried expression. When his eyes settle on me, relief floods his face and he breathes deeply as he stands. He takes a step forward, hands reaching for me, and before I know it, he's enfolded me in his arms. I smile into the shoulder of his wool coat and thread my own arms around him, his jawbone necklace digging its teeth into my chest as I crush him to me with my hug. I give bear hugs. It's a thing.

"You need me to take the lyrium, da'fen."

I clench my teeth, my embrace slackening just enough to lean back and look at him, but not release him. I firmly shake my head. "No. Absolutely not. If I'd known what it can do, I never would've taken it myself. I'm not about to let you take it, after hearing that you've already had so much of it. I don't care if you put every ounce of the power it gave you into the foci, it still went *through* you and into that damn orb, and I *will not risk you*. Not for me, not for anything. Not like this. It's not right."

He gives me that smile of his, the one where he sees something so precious that it almost pains him. He releases his hold on me to sweep his fingers over my brow, then trails them down and softly folds the ends of them under my jaw, his thumbs stroking the hollows of my cheeks.

I wrap my fingers around his wrists, and look at him, brow furrowed with worry, every ounce of my body language imploring him to listen to reason as I slide my thumbs over the backs of his hands in a gentle caress. "Please, Solas. You've already drained yourself once. Let the potions help me, until you can get your mana back on your own. I refuse to be the reason we lose you to the damned song. I won't let it happen."

He sighs and lowers his brow to mine, closing his eyes and just... resting there, for a moment. When he pulls away, I can see resolve in his eyes. No. I won't allow it.

I have *one* opening I can clearly see, that he doesn't even realize he's allowing me. I take it.

Releasing his wrists, I curl my fingers behind his neck and lean up, pressing my lips to his, which are parted slightly in shock. I use that opening to slide my tongue across the gap, letting it flick in to prod at the tip of his and pressing my thumbs gently over his earlobes, earning a surprised, soft moan, which I happily swallow and return.

His hands slowly fall from my face to my neck, one lowering to the small of my back as he pulls me to him gently, but firmly. He recovers from my little surprise admirably, and starts to lead the kiss—a slow and thorough affair, exploratory, gentle, the kind of burn that slowly builds until it explodes...

But he never lets it get that far.
Instead, he utterly outplays me.

He kisses and licks his way to just below my ear, then leans up, his voice low and sweet like the purest honey when he speaks, "It is not your choice, 'ma fen. Wake up."

Awareness seizes me like the stunning sharpness of a slap to the face.

And oh gods there is so much pain!

I can hear him calling out to Cass, demanding a lyrium draught; claiming I've woken before it was time, and he needs to heal me now.

I don't have the physical strength to contradict him—I barely have the wherewithal to stay conscious with the weakness of blood loss weighing my body down like lead. Even my eyelids feel like they have their own individual weights attached to them, and it is a struggle of monumental proportions to pry them open enough to see.

I can hear the song as the glowing blue vial is passed over me, and I try to object, but only manage to start up a cough that racks my frame and steals my breath away.

I hear him telling Cass and Varric that he has this in hand, that they should check to make sure the camp is secure. I wonder why he sends them away—camp is only twenty feet or so from here as it is, how much privacy could that really allow, if that's what he wants?

He uncorks and swiftly downs the lyrium, and I can practically feel the humming power that courses through his veins the moment he swallows. Tears of agony form in my eyes, but they have very little to do with my own physical pain.

I manage to turn my head enough to gaze at Fortitude, who is very carefully not looking at me, his expression hard, guilt flickering at the edges.

Cass and Varric move toward camp behind him, casting worried glances back at our little grouping as they go.

I try to look at Solas, but soon it's too bright, I can't see through the light of his healing magic—it's blue this time, not green—and in my confused, somewhat betrayed state, my mind idly wonders why he's using creation magic instead of spirit.

That question gets Fortitude's attention, but he quickly looks away, shaking his head softly.

'Damn it all, why? What's so fucking important about this that would possess him to accept this absurd risk to heal me? This isn't right!'

My throat's starting to feel much better, but it hardly registers as I stare at Fortitude, demanding an answer.

He sighs heavily and looks at me. "Do you truly not know?"

I blink slowly, lids sliding over dry eyes as he moves to my side, opposite Solas. 'If I knew, I wouldn't be asking, would I?'

He gives a cursory glance to Solas, as he shifts his healing efforts toward my hip, then the spirit focuses back on me. Being careful with his words, then. Got it. Message received. Get on with it. The damage might be done already, and Solas seems no worse for wear—this time—but I still need answers.
He seems to take my measure as he sits there, pondering his reply, and finally sighs, responding on the next breath, "It is the emblem of eternity, it confounds all notions of time; effaces all memory of beginning, all fear of an end." He smiles, then continues, "You carry it within and without, a constant reminder of everything you hold dear, of all the things you refuse to let go of. It sustains you in the lonely moments, and keeps you warm through the coldest nights. It is the source of the light that shines in your soul."

I blink at him again, and it takes less effort this time, though the fact that it takes any effort is still taxing my patience. 'Love? Are you saying he's—'

I stop mid-thought, when Fortitude nods softly. I stare at him, more than a little dumbfounded. 'No, it's not possible; it's too soon! There's no way he could be feeling that yet! And even if he were, that doesn't excuse him going directly against my wishes, risking—'

"Doesn't it?" Fortitude interrupts, smirking slightly.

Even my brain stutters under the weight of that question. 'I—well it... no! Even if... if what you claim is somehow true—which I very much doubt, by the way—it still doesn't justify him going directly against my wishes on the matter! I don't want him risking it, no matter his feelings, or lack thereof. How many times do I have to say it's not fucking right, before it sinks in?'

Fortitude shrugs his eyebrows. "I am not the one you must convince."

...True enough. I can feel some of my strength returning to me now, and the wounds I'd suffered are closed, if not quite fully healed.

I look to Solas, and after a few moments, he finally finishes healing all he can on my hip. He breathes what sounds very much like a sigh of relief, and lets his flagging mana sink back into the pool in his gut. He looks at me with a soft smile, and leans down, sweeping a stray lock of hair out of my face.

"How do you feel?"

I swallow tightly, uncomfortable in more ways than one, but nod as I begin to speak, "Better. Thank you." It only feels like a very fine grit sandpaper as I talk now, which, all things considered, is a vast improvement. Tell him we'll be speaking later, please,' I tack on for Fortitude, who conveys my requested words readily enough. We're still well within earshot of Cass and Varric, and I've no interest in them hearing that part of the conversation.

Solas smirks. "Good. You will be sore for a few days, and the deeper tissue will need more healing before it is fully repaired, but I can help you move to your bedroll, when you feel ready."

Fortitude provides Solas' mental response, "He says, 'Of that, I have no doubt. Please know that I had only your wellbeing in mind, and I will not apologize for my actions. I would do it again.'"

I snort softly, resisting the urge to roll my eyes, only because it would take more effort than I feel like expending at the moment. I may no longer be in dire straights, but I'm dog-tired. Too tired to argue anymore, really. I take a breath and sluggishly lift my arm to wave Solas toward me. "May as well. Too tired to do much else but sleep."

He nods and starts to help me up, going slowly and letting me adjust to being semi-vertical again, until he summarily cuts the issue off at the root and slings me up into his arms in a standard-issue princess carry. I cling to him and shut my eyes tightly against the wave of dizziness that hits me, and the pinch of sore muscles at my neck and hip. "Sh-shouldn't strain yourself. Lyrium only does
so much," I manage to stutter out, through the spinning of the world that continues behind my closed eyes.

I can feel his chuckle rumble through his chest, and I lay my head against his shoulder, leaning into the warmth and comfort he provides.

"I'm fine, 'ma fen. We'll both be resting, in a moment."

His reassurance doesn't soothe my concerns, but curiosity takes precedence and shoves my worry aside for a moment. "You forget your nickname for me, or just chose a new one?"

He looks down at me with a soft smile. "Do you prefer the old one?"

I shake my head slightly, my eyelids drooping sleepily as I grace him with a mildly delirious smile. "Nope. I'll be your wolf, if you want. Long as you return the favor, sometimes."

I feel the gentle press of his cheek to the top of my head as he slips into one of the tents.

It could be my wishful thinking, or my overtired mind at work, but I swear I hear one last thing from his lips, before he casts me into the Fade once again.

"Always, 'ma fen. Always."

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, believe me: Fen’nas isn't done talking about this.
See you again soon, my lovelies! ♥
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♥--Discord--♥

♥ Thanks for reading! If you enjoy the story or this chapter in particular, please feel free to leave a review with your thoughts! ♥
♥ I love reading comments and reply to all of them. ♥

Also, if you want to see what Fen’nas looks like, here she is!
Fen’nas Slideshow
I will be updating it regularly with new shots, as I play through the game. ♥
Punching All Bees

Chapter Summary

I have no excuse that is valid enough to actually satisfy anyone. Writer's block is a big one, though. As is depression. And Elder Scrolls Online. >_>

I'm sorry, guys. I can't say how often I'll update, but I'll... try. Even getting this one out has been a true struggle.

I love you all, and I'm sorry it's been so long.

Translations:

dahn'direlan: idiot, moron, lit: one who punches bees.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Ugh.

Waking up after you've nearly died is... an experience.

Not one I'd actually recommend, by any means; but an experience, nonetheless.

But hey, I'm alive, which means the Inquisition will go on! Yay.

Definitely need to put a warning label on the recruitment brochure: caution, drakes hurt.

No, that's... dumb. Did I really just think that? Damn. Must've hit my head harder than I thought.

A quiet snort lets me know that Fortitude is nearby, and actively listening.

'Yeah, yeah; morning to you too,' I think at him, and finally pry my eyes open slightly.

It's dark in the tent, and I don't see any daylight peeking out from anywhere, which means it must still be nighttime. Firelight pierces between the untied tent flaps, slicing a long knife of ochre down the middle of the tent, between the two bedrolls. I notice this because I've turned over, and it's now that I realize Fortitude is in the tent, and that he's actually Foxy.

I smile softly and reach up to rub my eyes, only to stop a few seconds later, when I come to the understanding that the left side of my face is still swollen and very tender.

"Yes," he says, "Pride has been trying to keep the swelling down with an ice spell every half candlemark, but it only helps so much. Now that you are awake, he'll want to speak with you. I will go retrieve him. Your other two companions are eager to converse with you as well, but he has kept them away with excuses. They will not accept them for much longer, so you should prepare yourself."

I snort at that. 'Great. Well, thanks for the warning.'
I can hear the smirk in his voice, though it doesn't really show on the face of the fox he appears as. "It is no trouble. I will return in a moment."

I sigh and look up at the ceiling of the tent blankly. The soft aqua glow of Foxy dissipates as the last bit of his tail slips through the tent's side, and all that's left is the single blade of light from the fireplace, which dances like its source on the back wall. I'm left to watch that dagger of light stab toward the roof of the tent a few dozen times, until Foxy returns, bringing his glowiness back with him.

"He will be along in a moment." Foxy curls into a ball of ethereal fuzz beside me, before he continues, "Pride does not wish to cause a stir, so he is waiting until it is time to administer another ice treatment."

I nod my comprehension, even though Foxy isn't looking at me, and take a deep breath, letting it sigh out of me in a rush. 'How long was I asleep?'

He takes his own breath—do spirits actually need to breathe?—and answers, "Several hours. The whole party is on edge. They decided to double up on shifts, since we were surprised the first time. The durgen'lin is asleep now, I believe. It is difficult to tell, cut off as he is. The Seeker has become more and more insistent as the night has gone on, upon being allowed to see you the moment you wake." He huffs a laugh, his voice amused as he continues, "I should not be the least bit surprised if she actually does follow him into the tent this time; she's been considering it for the past three occurrences."

I snort softly, rolling my eyes a bit. 'Sounds about right. How is he?'

He gives me a measured look, as if he's weighing the benefits of actually speaking on the subject. After a moment, he sighs, and responds. "His thoughts are chaotic. He did not anticipate this outcome, and it baffles him more than he likes. You are a puzzle to him—one to which he feels he does not have all the pieces. It frustrates him, nearly as much as it intrigues him. His mind has not yet caught up to what his heart has already long understood and accepted."

Foxy sprawls next to me, stretching out with his back to my side. "It is both amusing and annoying to listen to his warring emotions and sentiments. They refuse to be silent, actually."

That drags a laugh out of me, one my sore face punishes me for. 'I imagine that would get annoying, yes. I bet—'

I never get to finish that thought, as just then, Solas peeks in through the tent flaps, interrupting and spilling more light from the fire into the tent in the same moment. He slips past the flaps and settles down next to my upper body; the sword of orange light splaying across part of his face revealing a mixture of worry and relief in his mien. He purses his lips on a smile and reaches out with a faintly glowing hand, moving it just over the skin on the left side of my head and neck.

A chilled feeling brings a surprising amount of relief along with it, enough that I give off a sigh in expression of it.

He smiles a mite more freely at the sound, and brings his other hand out to rest on my right cheek.

I smile back, and lean into the affection slightly, wishing for all the world that I could hear his thoughts in this moment. But I'll settle for his touch, any day, in the absence of that knowledge.

"How do you feel?" is the first thing he asks me. He asks me that a lot, I've noticed.

I huff a soft little sound of amusement and shrug one shoulder as best I can. "Like I've lost some
blood. And sore, a bit swollen. But better than when it happened." I would stop there, but something pricks at the edges of my hazy memory, which then comes roaring into sharp focus the moment I give it the slightest bit of attention.

I grip the wrist of the hand cupping my face, my eyes blown wide with concern as I stare at him desperately while trying to lean up, despite his other hand coming up and bracing against my opposite shoulder in an effort hold me down. "You didn't take more, did you?" I demand, "No more lyrium. No more. I won't allow it. I will heal myself before I let you heal me again with lyrium in your veins. Don't do it again, never do that again, please, please don't. I..."

I realize belatedly that my breathing is rapid, panicked, and that I've worked myself up into a frenzy of worry on this issue, now that the actual danger has mostly passed.

He's giving me a somewhat penitent, sympathetic look; and curls his free fingers around mine as they keep hold of his wrist. He shakes his head softly. "I have not taken any more, since the vial you saw me drink. I know I went against your wishes, but there was no alternative. I had no wish to —" he pauses, seeming to reconsider his words, mouth hanging slightly open, gaze cast off to the side, as if the proper words could be found on the wall of the tent.

He seems both pained and relieved as he turns back to me, the bobbing of his Adam's apple as he swallows tightly the only real indicator of his distress. "The Inquisition could not have survived your loss. Taking on the chance of corruption from the lyrium was an acceptable risk, in this case."

And this is the moment in time when I first slap the Dread Wolf.

I then point my stinging finger in his face, and give him my most stern look—and believe me, it's a doozy. My voice is chilled, low, and sharp when I speak, "You do not decide that. The next time you get the hare-brained idea in your head to risk your entire being for the sake of an insignificant speck in the eye of history, tell me, so I can slap the idea right back out of your head. I am not worth risking your corruption, Solas. I never have been, and I never will be."

I soften as I quickly continue, laying the hand that slapped him against his swiftly reddening cheek with a gentle ice spell, "Please, don't make me hit you again, dahn'direlan. I would really rather not. Ever."

The shock and indignation that splays across his face at my slap is only mildly dimmed by the gentleness of my final gesture, and further inflamed by my words. "You would take away my right to choose, and even punish me for what you see as the wrong choice in this matter? Do you not see the fault in this restriction?"

I smirk and make an attempt at some spirit healing on his cheek, which does seem to have some positive results, as the redness growing there suddenly fades in the spell's wake. My practice with Steph and Foxy looks to be paying off. Good to know. "Of course I do. From your perspective, at least. From mine, all I see is the benefit of not losing someone I care about, for stupid reasons."

He purses his lips in disapproval. "You still consider your survival an unworthy reason?"

I give an impatient huff. "Yes, in this case, I do. We've gone over this before, Solas."

"Yes, you have," interjects Foxy, from his previously silent position, somewhat squished between Solas' knee and my side. Or, as much as a spirit can be squished by two beings that can only partially touch it—damn it, him.

By unspoken, mutual agreement, we release the holds we have on each other, and look to Foxy.
Solas is the first to speak. "Do you have something to add to this conversation, Fortitude?"

"So glad you asked!" he replies, "Neither of you are wrong, or right, here. You both have excellent reasons for not wanting the other to perish, but you're going about expressing them in the wrong way."

I snort incredulously. "What would you suggest, then? I'm a bit too tender to bash my head against this particular wall at the moment."

Foxy sighs softly, and deigns to lifts his head enough to look at us properly. "Face each other."

We do so, dubious expressions on both our visages as we gaze upon each other, waiting for his instruction.

"Now say, 'Ar—"

"What is taking so long in there? Has she woken? Is..." Cass pokes her head into the tent. "Oh. Hello, Herald. I am glad to see you awake; Solas has been preventing me from checking on you myself, since you fell asleep. How are you faring?"

I smirk at Cass, more thankful for her interruption than she'll ever know. "I'm not bad at all, considering. Solas did an excellent job of patching me up. I really wish I'd known about drakes going crazy when they... well, lose their minds." I snicker quietly, giving a somewhat guilty look to Cass, who purses her lips on a very unamused glare.

I flick my attention back to Foxy for a thought, 'Were you going to have us say what I think you were?'

Foxy snorts. "Well, we shall never know, now."

"Fenedhis lasa, Foxy."

I narrow my eyes at that. "That's what I was trying to get you to do, Wolfy."

Foxy barks a laugh. Literally. "Well, we shall never know, now."

I narrow my eyes at that. "Fenedhis lasa, Foxy."

Foxy barks a laugh. Literally. "That's what I was trying to get you to do, Wolfy."

Narrowed eyes snap wide and a light blush creeps onto my cheeks, as I just so happen to have looked up at Solas right before Foxy said that. I make an attempt at schooling my features, and quickly turn back to Cass, who blessedly begins responding to my statements.

"Well, I am glad to have such a competent healer in the party, then. And yes, it was remiss of us not to include such information in your training." She grimaces slightly. "I'm afraid we often forget that you have no memory of life before the Conclave. It... must be difficult."

I chuckle softly, shaking my head. "Not as much as you might imagine. Figuring out daily living, and learning the combat has really been the hardest part. Not remembering clearly... I think it's honestly a bit of a blessing. If there are things in my past that I should not be proud of, I don't recall them. Then again, I suppose that could be a double-edged sword. But hopefully, I can avoid making any truly dire mistakes."

"It is good that you are surrounded by people wishing to help you," Solas interjects, "so you are less likely to fall prey to such things."

Cass nods her agreement. "Yes, that's true. Hopefully you will remember your past more, as time goes on." She nods again, appearing to ponder something, unfocused gaze drifting off to the back wall of the tent. She shakes herself slightly and focuses back on me. "In any case, I am glad to see you recovering." She turns to Solas. "Will she be able to move in the morning?"
Solas shakes his head. "I don't recommend it. I still need to complete her healing, and moving her now would only lengthen her recovery time. Perhaps by noon, but no sooner—and possibly not even then."

Cass grimaces, then nods on a sigh. "Understood. If you are that concerned, we will wait the day out, but we leave on the following morning. No further delays, Maker willing."

Solas and I both wear subtle smirks at her last comment.

"I'm sure your Maker will be merciful, Cassandra," I say, as diplomatically as possible.

She huffs and levels me with her best scolding mother impression. "He is your Maker too, you know."

I smile coyly, gaze flicking to Solas for just a moment before quickly snapping back to her. "That remains to be seen." My smile softens to something less shrewd. "For now, I should very much like to heal and rest, so I can recover as quickly as elvhenly possible. If you would be so kind, please inform the durgen'lin that I've recovered enough to converse, when he awakens."

She's entirely dissatisfied with my answer, as is evidenced by the sourness on her face. With a sigh, her expression returns to her most neutral 'disgusted look'. "As you wish, though I would like to hear Solas' thoughts on having Varric visit you. As your healer, he knows best what would help you recover."

Solas gives that elegant little shrug he seems to enjoy displaying. "I see no harm in it," he says, leveling a chastising look in my direction, "so long as you do not challenge him to another drinking contest."

I scoff at the suggestion. "Oh, how will I ever help myself? Out in the middle of nowhere, with nary a drop of alcohol in sight to challenge the durgen'lin with! The tragedy!"

That earns me glares from all three of my companions, though Foxy's is ruined by the snicker he doesn't quite manage to silence.

Cass ducks out without much further fuss, merely excusing herself to her watch duty. Foxy remains, maybe-squished between us; though, if he is, he doesn't seem to mind.

Solas turns back to me with a soft sigh, and a studious expression. "I feel we may never conclude this argument, 'ma fen. I may understand your perspective, but I will never agree with it, just as it seems you see mine, and refuse to agree. Perhaps it is best to simply agree to disagree, for now, at least."

I sigh and purse my lips, dissatisfied with his answer, but.. really, what other answer do I expect him to give? "Fine," I grant him, "we'll drop it, for now. But I'm not done with this."

He gives me a somewhat pained, but amused look. "I did not expect any less, 'ma fen."

I watch him for a moment, uncertain where his thoughts lay. I settle on, "Well good. I'm glad we understand each other," as my ever-so-brilliant response.

Solas half-smiles at me, huffing out a tiny laugh. "More than I previously thought, it seems. You continue to surprise me, 'ma fen. I look forward to more surprises from you."

I arch an eyebrow and smile in surprise. "Then I'll try not to disappoint."
❤ --Discord-- ❤

❤ Thanks for reading! If you enjoy the story or this chapter in particular, please feel free to leave a review with your thoughts! ❤
  ❤ I love reading comments and reply to all of them. ❤
Well, Here Goes Nothin'

Chapter Notes

*Flies in.*

*I live! Have chapter!*

*Flies back out!*

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Funny how things happen, sometimes.

It's a few hours before I receive a visitor that isn't a woman that scares me to pieces, or wasn't once a spirit. This time, it's the *least* Fade-attuned member of our party—silhouetted by the faint light of pre-dawn, and the still crackling fire behind him—who appears at the mouth of the cave that is my tent, flinging the tent flaps wide open to make way for his entry into my temporary abode.

"Silk!" he exclamis, wide smile not quite covering the tired worry in his eyes, "how are you? I came as soon as I could," he adds, jerking his left thumb over his shoulder, "Grumpy and Grumpier out there wouldn't let me visit until just now." All the while, he shuffles farther into the tent, settling on the bedroll opposite my own with hands folded on the lap of his crossed legs, a kind and concerned smile on his face.

I laugh softly, reaching over to lay my hand on his and give them a reassuring squeeze. "I'm fine, durgen'len, you can call off the Thedas-wide Carta drake hunt, now." I grin as best I can, patting his hands and returning my own to my side. "Seriously though, I'll live. Just waiting on the swelling to go down, now. Solas would probably disagree, but that's what *I'm* waiting on, at least."

Varric snorts a soft laugh, shaking his head. "Yeah well, you're right; I somehow doubt Chuckles would agree with that. He's been fussing over you like a mother hen; shit, I didn't think he had it in him."

I make the effort to roll my eyes at that one, and send a small glare Varric's way. "Really, Varric? *An elf thing* is the best you can come up with?" I scoff and shake my head. "..Anyway, the vast majority of the people I consort with on a regular basis, within the confines of the Inquisition, are human." I smirk and reach over to pat his right hand a few times. "I know exactly three elves, two dwarves, and countless humans. I can assure you, it's not an elf thing."

The dwarf seems rather taken aback at that. "Well damn, Silk, I didn't realize you held Chuckles in such high regard. Is that just an elf thing, or do you really feel that strongly about him?"

I make the effort to roll my eyes at that one, and send a small glare Varric's way. "$\text{Really, Varric? An elf thing?} "$ I scoff and shake my head. "$..Anyway, the vast majority of the people I consort with on a regular basis, within the confines of the Inquisition, are human." I smirk and reach over to pat his right hand a few times. "$I know exactly three elves, two dwarves, and countless humans. I can assure you, it's not an elf thing."

He shrugs, tacitly allowing my hand patting, slightly condescending though it may be. "$Hate to break it to you Silk, but being surrounded by humans is even more of an excuse to stick closer to
your own kind. But alright, I get the point; you like the bookish, stodgy, angry at the world types. Sure," he concedes, talking quite eloquently with his hands as he does, "what's not to like?"

I frown slightly. "How do you figure he's angry at the world? Saddened by it, maybe, but angry?" I look to him for clarification.

He shrugs his hands before letting them fall back to his lap. "He's always going on about how much better it used to be, how everyone who doesn't agree is an idiot. Then there's all the Fade stuff."

He waves off the whole idea as something unsavory, "Euch, even thinking about all that gives me a headache. Hawke tried to drag me in there one time, can you believe it? Wanted to save an elven mage kid we'd already saved once; apparently he had some weird connection to the Fade too, like Chuckles. Didn't act anything like him about it, though. He seemed almost as scared of it as the rest of us were."

I tilt my head slightly in a returned shrug. "It's just how he sees the world. Everyone's different. It's not that he can't see it for what it is, or that he's blind to those in need of help. Trust me. Watch him. I think you'll see more in him to admire than fault, by the end of things." I chuckle slightly. "Or maybe not. Shit, I can only speak for myself, after all."

He huffs a little laugh, a half smile tugging at the corner of his mouth. "Hm. We'll see. I'll give it a shot, but don't make me go changing my nickname for him at this point."

"Hah!" I bark, and immediately regret it, the grin that forms turning to a grimace the second it becomes reality. "Ah, damn, shit, ow. Ugh. Right. Anyway," I continue, looking to Varric, "I doubt there'd ever be any danger of that, durgen'len. He absolutely deserves the nickname, from an outsider's perspective. He does have much more of a sense of humor than you'd think, but he doesn't often laugh. It's appropriate."

Varric smiles more fully at that, and nods. "Well good then, at least it won't be a total loss."

That same smile slowly falters and fades, as he seems to come upon a fairly unpleasant memory of some sort.

"I ah... well, I don't mean to be a stickler for details here, Silk. But, before the attack, that little love song you sang us... you said before that you wrote it when you were fifteen. If you're wanting to stick to the story of not remembering anything, you may want to watch out for little slip-ups like that. They could blow your cover."

I blink at him a bit stupidly for a few moments, before I catch up. Is he actually—

"Varric, it's not an act." Ah, there's my tongue—thanks, tongue. "I really don't remember any of the life this body had before it fell out of the Breach."

He frowns at me in apparent confusion. "'This body'? It's your body, Silk. Who else's would it be, exactly?"

Time to spill the beans, then. Am I going to have any secrets by the end of this? Probably not.

"Well, it's like this..."

*Skips ahead forty minutes of explaining the same crap over again.*
"Shit, Silk."

It seems to be the catchphrase for me with him. He's been saying it over and over, really, so I guess it's stuck now. Regardless, I'm sitting here, waiting for him to make heads and tails of my existence. Good luck, Varric. Good luck. He's been rubbing his beardless jaw, staring at the ground, for several minutes now.

"That's... that's rough, Silk. I'm still not sure whether I should even believe it, but if it's true... damn." He lowers his hand to his lap, ceasing his mandibular caress, and looks at me, taking a deep breath, and sighing it out, almost miserably. The cause for that misery becomes clear the moment he speaks.

"You're never going to let me publish that, are you?"

I snicker, then grin at him, and shake my head. "As a fiction, sure. But not as a part of the main, non-fiction story, no. That wouldn't work, and you know it. The Herald that knows this world as a story? Nooo, no, that wouldn't do at all. The Chantry would have it blacklisted the moment they learned of it. Best to publish it as an amusing fantasy, and let them be none the wiser. They can huff and puff about it, but in the end, it's still fiction, and you'd be well within your rights to write it."

It takes a moment for him to answer, and when he does, it's with a shrewd, calculating expression and tone. "You've thought about this, haven't you? How long have you been thinking of telling me?"

I shrug a hand, pursing my lips in a slight pout of consideration. "Oh, probably since I realized this is actually a real place that I go to when I sleep. I usually decided I wouldn't tell you, but... as long as you keep this out of the main story, I don't see the harm in it. You know who's aware of it, and I trust your discretion."

He dips his head slightly, still seeming not quite all here. "Still not sure about you keeping it from everyone, if it is true. If you know things that could help our fight, wouldn't it be in our—shit, in your best interests to use that information? And if you know things..."

Steely eyes snap to meet mine. "What do you know about me, exactly?"

I grimace somewhat and sigh. "I'm not going to tell you about anyone else, Varric. But as for you... well." I begin to tick a list off on my fingers.

"You and your brother Bartrand went with Hawke into an ancient thaig that housed a red lyrium idol. He stole the idol and left you to die. Later, he went mad under the influence of a mere sliver of the idol, the main idol having been sold off to Meredith Stannard, the Knight Commander of Kirkwall's Circle. She had it forged into a sword, which gave her ridiculous, terrible powers, and drove her mad; eventually turning her into a red lyrium statue."

Tick two. "You own the Hanged Man, and kept a room there for many years beforehand."

Tick three. "You know a woman, a dwarf, whom your crossbow is named for. I'll say no more of her, for both your sakes, but I know."

Tick four. "You know where Hawke is. Don't worry, I don't want to know. Yet."

I toss my hands up slightly, giving up the finger ticking game in favor of a shrug. "Good enough yet?"
"Andraste's flaming knickers, Silk," he murmurs quietly, "Do you know the color of my smalls, too?"

I snort and turn my gaze up to the roof of the tent. "No, my understanding of you isn't quite that detailed, durgen'len. But you are not the only one I know a good bit about. Every major player in the Inquisition, current and future, has secrets. I know some of them. I would know more, if I knew the history that created the world of Thedas in its current state. I'll need some information on that, since there's no way for me to know without reading it, or asking about it."

He nods absently. "I can get you what you need, or tell you, if you like. Though, why you'd believe me, if you know me that well, is beyond me."

I eye him with no small amount of consternation. "Yes, I do know you, Varric, which means I know that there's kernels of truth in nearly every word you speak. They just have to be picked out of the chaff."

Varric sighs and pulls out his pipe, packing it like it's busy work, with rote motions that lack his usual flourish. He seems to be considering the depths of space, with the thousand yard stare he's giving the tent's wall. He lights the herbal mixture, and takes a puff, sucking the smoke in through his mouth, and letting it seep from his nostrils in little ringed tendrils, in the stillness of the tent. Turning the pipe, he offers the next hit to me. I gently refuse.

"Thanks, but no. After I've recovered, if there's time. I'd rather experience it with a clear head and a clearer conscience."

He shrugs, and turns the pipe back, the orange embers blazing in the brightening dim of the tent. I turn my gaze to the mouth of our little refuge, and note a gray tone to the light that creeps through the cracks. The campfire's light would be minimal in comparison now, though I can smell something beyond the herbal smoke that smacks of food. A rumble from my stomach reminds me that I didn't get to finish my dinner last night, and I suddenly realize I'm actually rather hungry.

Varric snorts, eyes carrying the spark of amusement as he looks at me. "Your stomach and I agree. Past time some food was had around here. Most of us are civilized folk, after all, though I'm not too sure about our dear Seeker."

I smirk. "Oh, she'll come around. They all will, if I do my job right."

He tips his pipe toward me, then back into his mouth as he finishes, "Then here's to you doing your job right, however that is."

I sigh, nodding softly, and return to my roof-staring. "Here, here."

Chapter End Notes

❤ --Discord-- ❤

❤ Thanks for reading! If you enjoy the story or this chapter in particular, please feel free to leave a review with your thoughts! ❤
❤ I love reading comments and reply to all of them. ❤
The Journey That Matters

Chapter Summary

Wheeee! ❤

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It's not long before Solas' bald pate produces itself from between the tent's flaps. He glances at me, then turns his azure concentration upon our resident dwarf. "While I appreciate your concern for my patient, Master Tethras, she needs rest," he intones pointedly.

Varric had looked up sharply at the elf's intrusion, listening quietly, then nodding to his mild admonishment and summary dismissal. "Alright, alright," he offers to Solas, waving him off, then smiles down at me and pats my arm. "Let me know if you need anything, Silk. I'll be right outside."

I return his smile, and nod as best I can. "Of course, durgen'lin. Go," I say, half stifling a yawn as I add, "I think I actually do need rest, now."

He gives my arm a squeeze, and tips his head toward me. "You rest, then. Bianca and I will keep the nasties away. Deal?"

I chuckle softly, and nod my confirmation. "Deal."

Varric smirks and levers himself to a stand, ambling out of the tent after Solas backs out and lifts the flap aside for him. The shorter man murmurs something soft to the taller one, then passes beyond my concentration.

Solas enters my convalescing residence, and settles himself on the other bedroll, cross-legged. "How do you feel?" he asks, for what is probably close to the thirtieth time, just since I got injured.

I snort softly, lazily sliding my smiling gaze over to him. "As well as I felt the last time you asked me that, ha'fen."

A small smirk tugs the corner of his mouth aside, and he nods understandingly as he reaches out to slide his touch alongside my face, with his cooling ice. "And I will likely continue to ask it, despite your teasing. It is a valid question, born of both my concern, and of the concern of a healer looking after his patient... regardless of the age of either."

I nod gently, a smirk touching my lips with its mirth. "Of course. A tool for diagnosis. Makes sense," I intone, somewhat distractedly, my eyes closing. "Mmm.." I moan softly, as the soothing cool seeps into my inflamed, sore flesh. His hand pauses in its journey, and I lean into the touch without apology.

"It seems you feel a great deal better than you did this morning, ma'fen. Have you been holding out on me?" he asks, his tone teasing enough that I open my eyes to look over at him to gage the truth of the sound. He's smiling softly. Cheeky shit.
"I have, yes, but not on that account," I answer evenly, holding his gaze.

His brow quirks in curious surprise, eyes narrowing slightly in scrutiny. "Is that so?"

I don't deign to answer, closing my eyes again and leaning back into his touch with a contented sigh. "I was warned away from the Fade, while you were healing me," I tell him, instead.

"By whom?" I can hear the confusion in his voice, and I can almost feel his eyes impatiently searching my face for the answer.

I smirk, but stay otherwise still. "Guile. It said your actions last night would paint a target on my back, for any spirits wishing to tempt me."

He sighs, his hand slipping from my face. I follow its path with my eyes, as he lifts it to his brow, rubbing it gently over eyes pinched in either frustration or pain. "She is correct, sadly," he provides, after a moment, lowering his hand with a gentle sigh.

'She? Hmm.' I nod. "I thought as much. I suppose that means I'll have to be extra careful, from now on. I don't often wander into the Fade when I sleep, but it does happen. I should be prepared."

He dips his head in agreement. "Yes, you should. For now, until I feel you are sufficiently trained to withstand them, I will simply accompany you, whenever you enter the Fade."

I send a small, skeptical glare his way. "Yes, eminently practical, Solas. I'm certain if I get knocked out in the midst of battle, that would be an absolutely perfect time for you to take a nap with me."

That bursts his bubble. Almost quite literally, as a released breath escapes him—as though he'd been holding it—and near deflates him, spine bowing in defeat. It take a moment for him to respond. "..Much as I am loathe to admit it, you are correct, I cannot do that. I—" he sighs again. "We will simply have to continue our training on the road, as often as possible. There is much to be done, before I will be comfortable setting you loose on the Fade, without supervision."

I snicker sharply. "You seem to think I'm a force of destruction, something to be reckoned with, instead of what I am: a neophyte Fade walker."

He smiles kindly, almost apologetically. "I would not say a force of destruction, no. Certainly something to be reckoned with, however. I did not jest when I said you shine like a beacon in the Fade. Were my wards to fail, corrupted spirits from across the realm would flock to you, like moths to a flame. The onslaught would be untenable."

I swallow tightly as I feel my throat closing at the thought. "I—" I clear my throat and try again, "I certainly hope that doesn't happen."

He smiles gingerly and takes my left hand in both of his. "As do I. It would.. well. It would not be an acceptable loss."

A small snort escapes me, as I turn my head to look back up at the tent's roof. "Yes, I'm sure the Inquisition would suffer for their hypocrisy, keeping an abomination as their leader."

I get the sense that he shoots me a look of disdain, but since I'm stubbornly glaring holes through the roof, I don't actually witness it. "I meant it would not be an acceptable loss for me. But no, the Inquisition would not survive, nor would this world. Which is why we must prevent that from ever happening."

I sigh and look back at him, gaze softening. "Then we will."
It's a relief when Solas finally declares me fit enough for travel. He still fusses over me, and won't hear of me toting the entire contents of my pack, though I do insist on carrying quite a bit of it, in the end. He still shoulders some of the heavier items, himself. Despite his objections on that front, we're setting out by mid-morning, the following day.

Cassandra seems both frustrated and relieved, but says little to indicate either.

Varric is already lighting up his pipe, in preparation to deal with all the nature.

Solas goes between fussing over me, and commenting on the various sights he's seen in the Fade during his journeys in the area.

I'm just happy not to be as much of a burden as I was a day ago. I'd very much like to not do that again anytime soon, thank you.

I imagine my companions would all agree, for their varying reasons.

Regardless, we're finally moving, and that seems to have lifted the spirits of all concerned.

We start to see clear signs of the over-zealous Templars, and crazed mages tearing their way through the land, as the evening approaches. But, despite the battles tearing through the surrounding countryside, it doesn't snuff out the natural beauty of the Hinterlands.

We've still got another half-day of walking before we reach Scout Harding's position, when Cass takes it upon herself to make her opinion clear on what we should do. "I recommend we continue through the night, Herald. It will be more tiring, but the sooner we arrive at a fortified position, the better, especially with you still recovering. I would feel much more confident in our chances to actually do something about the state of the Hinterlands, if we could arrive early, and be well-rested before we set out to deal with things."

I glance aside at her as I walk. "And how do you suggest we remain hidden as we move, with your eyes unable to pierce the dark? We cannot afford to light torches to show the way, not in enemy territory."

Her voice turns somewhat steely as she replies, "I will manage. It would not be the first time I've had to move in darkness, and there will be light from the moons to assist me."

I shrug my head slightly. "Ma nuvenin."

I catch her looking at me with a frown. "Is that elvish?"

I toss a nod in her direction. "A bit of both, I suppose. Why do you ask?"

It's a moment before she answers. "Practicality, and curiosity both, I suppose."

I arch a brow at her. "Is that so? I suppose you're wondering if I'll slip up when speaking to some diplomat, and reveal myself for the supposed heathen I am?"

She tilts her head, though whether its in acquiescence or consideration is difficult to tell, at first. "It is partly that, yes. But, though you certainly have the capacity for such brash thoughtlessness, you
have not often displayed it. In fact, I have only noticed you using it on myself, which I find odd. Do I offend you, Herald?"

I sigh softly, and shake my head. "Fen'nas, or Fen, Cassandra. Believe me Andraste's Herald as you like, but I have a name. As for your offensiveness, or lack thereof... it.. is not a matter of being offended, Cassandra. You are... well, you are **intimidating**. And you're also staunchly Andrastian. So," I offer, talking with my hands, "you scare the shit out of me, and I don't agree with you, which only serves to further scare the shit out of me."

She actually **laughs** a bit, before she responds, "Am I truly so frightening to you?"

I nod immediately. "Absolutely. Now, that doesn't mean I don't trust you, that I won't come to you for thoughts or advice, or that I won't do my best to befriend you, over the course of our time together. But it is a factor in **how** I approach you." I shrug, ever so eloquently. "It's as simple as that."

Cass nods softly, then takes some time, seemingly to digest that information. A few minutes later, she takes a breath, and continues, gently, "Can I ask what it is about me that frightens you so?"

I nod again, less tersely. "You can, and you may. The answer is twofold: you are a powerful warrior and woman in your own right; a legend. And you hold a position of great power, in one of the most powerful organizations in Thedas. To summarize, you are a very powerful woman. It would make me an utter fool, if I did not have a healthy fear of you, if a respectful one."

I note a soft flush of crimson on her cheeks at my words, and I look ahead with a subtle smile, offering her a modicum of privacy. A few seconds later, she responds, "You flatter me, Fen'nas. But there is little need to fear me, in truth. Our goals coincide, regardless of our differences in belief, and you have shown nothing but the most sincere dedication to your calling. I would never willingly hinder your progress, just as I would never hinder ours. Your progress is our progress."

I toss a small smile at her. "I know, Cassandra, believe me. I don't fear you because I think you'll hinder our progress, I fear you because I think you'll punch me if I say the wrong thing. Well, partly, anyway."

She sends a less than pleased glare in my direction. "I would not punch you now, unless you did something incredibly stupid."

I shrug my head. "And if I did, I would thoroughly deserve it. Just ah... try to avoid the eyes. And teeth, if you would."

The seeker rolls her eyes. "I make no promises."

We continue, much like this, until night falls, antagonizing each other until we finally both grow tired of it. Varric and Solas are fairly quiet, as they scout ahead, though occasionally Varric launches into one of his Tales of Kirkwall™, or Solas regales us all with some ancient fact or another.

Eventually silence falls, and I begin humming, mostly to keep the oppressiveness of the night's gathering gloom away.

Finally, that gloom breaks my will to deny it, and I also fall to silence, as we continue our trek.

Even Fortitude remains in solemn silence, as he walks beside me, now. He's kept to Solas' side during the day, but he seems to find some sort of solace in my presence, at night. I haven't thought to ask him why, yet.
"I cannot explain it adequately," he responds to my thought, "I am simply drawn to you more than he, at night."

I shrug softly, rather than respond, as if shrugging at an internal question, one to which I do not know the answer. Despite the oddity of my nocturnal magnetism, his presence beside me is a comfort. It is also a nice break for my eyes, thanks to the soft light he lends to the surroundings. It helps me to steady our Seeker, when she inevitably stumbles over a tree root she doesn't see in the dark.

"Damn!" she curses, as I help her stand. "It.. is darker than I had anticipated. You may have been correct to question my judgment on the wisdom of this."

I gesture upward toward the treetops covering our path. "You just didn't take the tree cover into account. If we were out in the open, you'd be seeing just fine, most likely. The moons are waning, so their light through the leaves is minimal. If... you would like, I can be your guide, Cassandra."

I watch her waver under the weight of that decision. "I.." a resigned sigh. "Perhaps that would be best, yes. I can hardly even see you, let alone the ground."

A nod, and I'm patting my right shoulder, the one nearer to her. "Put your hand on my shoulder. Lean on me, if you need to. I'll do my best to keep an eye out for anything that might trip either of us up."

I look back at Varric, noting his eyes glinting at me in the moonlight, just as Solas' do. Just as mine probably do. "Durgen'len, could you take point, and help me keep us going steady?"

He tips his head at me. "Sure thing, Silk."

I smile at him, and dip my own head in gratitude. "Thank you, Varric."

He pauses on his way to pass us, and smiles at me, before moving on. I smile back, if a bit confusedly.

Fortitude clarifies, "He likes it when you address him by his name, as opposed to durgen'len."

Oh.

That... makes a lot of sense, actually.

I feel the surprisingly light pressure of Cass' hand resting on my shoulder, gloved fingers curling over the curve of the muscle and bone there gently.

The feeling reminds me of exactly how little protection we have right now.

We've got to get everyone better armor.

Cass is in mostly leather, with bits of mail and plate, Solas is in his grandpa sweater vest, Varric... well. Varric seems to prefer running around with his chest exposed. I swear, someday, he's going to die of pneumonia, if someone doesn't stab him in the heart, first. My armor survived mostly intact from the drake attack, but certainly not without damage. It will all need replacing as soon as can be.

If we came up against a group of Venatori, or red lyrium Templars right now, we'd be massacred. No question. Skill can only cover so much, when your armor is crap, and you have a rather untrained group member to contend with.
"You worry for them."

I glance aside at Fortitude, nodding subtly at his observation as I face forward again. 'Yes. There's a lot that can go wrong. Too much. We need supplies, badly. If you spot something I miss, tell me. Mineral, leather, herb, food, whatever. If I can't fight worth a damn for these people, I want to at least serve some useful purpose.'

I note him nodding and facing forward himself, in my periphery. "I understand. I, too, sought such a purpose, for a very long time. It is noble of you to seek out whatever you can do to help. I commend your desire."

I snort softly. 'It's hardly the only thing that's needed here. They need me to be a better fighter. They need more people, better funding. They need a Herald that actually believes.'

He shakes his head. "No. They need exactly what they have, in a leader. They need a skeptic, someone with an open mind such as yours. The supplies and people will come, in time. It will be alright, Fen'nas. They have more faith in you than you suppose."

I squeeze my eyes shut for just a moment, and take a slow breath. 'Then their faith is misplaced. I am no Herald, and certainly not Andraste's."

He gives no visible reaction to that. "Misplaced or no, their faith is powerful, and their faith is what matters, in the end. What people have faith in, they will follow, to their dying breath. I have witnessed many a leader with less skill and less noble goals than yours succeed because of faith, lethal'lan. You do these people a disservice, if you believe yourself incapable of leading them."

I don't reply. Instead, I chew on my cheek, and concentrate rather loudly on the path before me.

He sighs. "Ma nuvenin, Fen'nas. Believe what you will. But I speak the truth as I have seen it, in the hearts and minds of those who follow you."

I bite hard enough to draw blood on accident, and release my abused flesh. 'I know. That's what worries me.'

It's his turn to fall silent, now. Even Solas is quiet, which, considering the topic, is surprising. I look back at him for a moment, and see his eyes watching the ground before him distantly, expression thoughtfully troubled. I turn my gaze back to front, and sigh softly, commenting to Cass on a set of roots we're approaching.

It's fairly smooth sailing from there on out, only pausing here and there for a difficult patch of terrain, and once for a cliff we have to navigate around. Some wolves get nosy here and there, but seem to have the sense to leave us alone. By the time the red dawn greets us, I'm actually starting to recognize my surroundings. It's... not quite the same as it is in the game. But, it's close enough that I do recognize it. Great! If I can avoid my legendary case of an utter lack of direction cropping up, we should be gravy. Then again, it is the Hinterlands. I got this. I think.

A warm fire, and a short, freckled, adorably pretty scout greets us on our arrival. After she briefs us, and succinctly disappoints Varric with her lack of knowledge on his books, we set up our tents, and promptly pass out. I would say I'd be happy for the rest, except I don't rest. Not really. My body does, but my mind, well...

Before I pass out, I'm on my bedroll, not tucked in at all, still in a shirt and pants, because fuck getting under the covers, it's too warm here for that nonsense.

Solas is similarly laid out, on the other bedroll, arms up, hands tucked under the rolled up blanket.
that serves as his pillow.

He turns his head and looks at me, and I return the favor, watching him curiously. He smiles, and reaches over, brushing some hair off my brow. I feel his magic spark to life against my aura, and close my eyes as the soft glow of it suffuses the air around us. I feel the gentle healing energy he applies to my still vaguely sore face and neck, and the light trickle of it across my skin as he moves down to apply his healing to my hip.

That part is a bit more painful than my face. A deeper injury, I suppose. But the healing spell he uses on it doesn't hurt. It itches a bit, as it soothes, but there's no pain, aside the general residual soreness from walking all that distance.

He apparently finishes this stage of healing to his satisfaction, and breathes a sigh. He plucks my left hand from my side with his right, and enfolds my hand with his.

The next moment, I take a breath, and open eyes I don't remember closing, to the sight of the place we just were... in the Fade.

Chapter End Notes

❤--Discord--❤

❤ Thanks for reading! If you enjoy the story or this chapter in particular, please feel free to leave a review with your thoughts! ❤
❤ I love reading comments and reply to all of them. ❤
The Destination is Nice, Too

Chapter Summary

Holy fuck nuggets, 30 chapters! I'm pretty sure that's the farthest I've ever gotten in a story, ever. Welcome to my biggest mile marker! Hope you've all enjoyed the ride, and that you continue to do so! ❤

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Shit."

Yep. Brilliant. That's the word for it, good job, brain!

"Apologies, perhaps I should have warned you before I cast the spell."

I whirl to face the source of the voice, relieved to register both the voice and form as belonging to Solas. I clear my throat unnecessarily, and nod, belatedly. "Ah... yes, that would have helped. Though, I don't think I'll ever get used to that. It's rather abrupt. Did I even close my eyes?"

Yes, these are the important questions.

He huffs a tiny laugh and smiles at me. "Yes, just before you succumbed. I also cast wards to protect us both, before I joined you, in case safety was a concern."

I nod blankly for a moment, then shake myself, and stop nodding, instead blinking a few times at the soggy rock beside me. It's probably a spirit of... minerals. Or um... persistence, more likely. That rock wasn't there in reality, was it? I know the Fade is just a reflection of the reality we normally see, so... I'm babbling in my own head. Fantastic.

"Ah, yes, I mean, it was a concern." I nod firmly, though it probably seems more like I'm trying to convince myself, than agree with him. I am.

He reaches out, and gently takes hold of my arm. "Fen'nas, are you alright? You seem... flummoxed."

I laugh, the sound somewhat panicky. "Do I? I do. Ah. Well. Ir abelas, I am alright."

He arches his brow at me skeptically, and lowers his hand.

Just then, a third voice makes itself known. I blink, hard, and turn to stare at its source.

"Worried, wondering, sounds beyond sight; do I? I do. Do you? Lacking confidence—but confiding—falling, frail; calling, seeking, but not hearing, finding. Wishing, but not hoping, never dare hoping. She worries she'll fail you. The others, too. But mostly you."

Black smoke curls in the humid air, where once a pale young man with a big, floppy hat stood,
only to fade in memory once he again appears, in front of me. He stares right back at me, and I know, deep inside, that he's looking directly into my soul.

"You know me. Why don't I know you?"

A question I dare not answer, yet. Instead, I greet him, with a growing smile. "Hello, Cole."

His head tilts. "That is my name. But it's not the name he knows me by." He points to Solas. "How do you know that name? How do you know me?"

Solas begins, "Compassion, Fen'nas is a unique case—"

"That's not her name, either. But it is true."

Solas gives me a dammingly inquisitive look.

"He'll ask you about it, later."

That turns Solas' attention back to Cole. "Thank you, Compassion. I believe the translation is unnecessary, in this case."

"It helped," I provide, before Cole can respond.

Cole just beams that small little smile he gives when he's pleased.

Solas sighs. "Yes, well. As I was saying, Fen'nas is a unique situation. She is—"

"Soul in another world, but here, trapped there, or is it here? Which side, where do I belong, which path to take, which choice to make? Worried and wondering, harried and floundering." He looks from me to Solas. "I want to help."

Solas sighs again, and looks aside to me, likely noting the adoringly joyful look I'm giving Cole, in turn. He faces Cole again, before I can tear myself away to return his stare.

"It seems the help would be welcomed. I was not expecting to see you so soon. How went your visit to the Templars?"

Cole's features turn somber at the question. "Black hearts give blacker orders to light souls, souls that are trained to accept, even when it tastes wrong. A demon whispers lies in ears that hear it as truth." Cole casts a sad gaze toward the rock next to me. "It will end badly."

"It usually does, when lies are fed as truth to the unwitting." I supply, following his gaze to the rock, and leaving it there.

"You're not going to help them." It's not a question, or even an accusation. Just a simple statement of fact.

I shake my head. "No. I can't. Helping them avoid their tragedy would make way for a much larger tragedy; one that would swallow the world in its horror. I cannot allow that to happen. My thoughts go with them, but that is the most I can do. I don't have the forces to send after them, and solve the other problem. Nor would I risk those forces on such an endeavor. There's nothing to be done."

Cole shifts uneasily for a few moments, picking at his hand wraps, then nods, hat flopping with the motion. "I understand."

Solas sighs in what sounds like resignation, then nods as well. "Then come to us when you can."
There is much work to be done, and we will all need you, before this is over."

"Now?" Cole asks, tilting his head.

Solas holds his hand up, shaking his head slightly. "Best to wait until we wake, at the least, unless you wish to remain hidden until we're aware enough to excuse your presence."

Cole looks at me with a curious mien, and replies, "I will wait, and listen."

Solas lets his hand fall, and nods. "Very well. I suggest finding a good excuse for you to be there. The original plan has failed, so a new one is necessary. Perhaps step in to save a life, if it becomes necessary?"

"She thinks like you, Solas. And like me. She wants to help you." He finally turns his piercing blue gaze to Solas, who in turn seems only mildly surprised by the summary switching of tracks.

"I know, Compassion..." he glances aside at me. "Cole. Come to us, when you can."

Cole nods, and looks back at me with a smile, only to disappear, leaving vapor behind.

I chuckle, and turn to smirk at Solas. "He's early. It'll be good to have him here, though."

He smiles slightly, and nods his agreement. "He seems to have a calming effect on you. I think he would approve, if he knew."

I smile. "I think you're right. He'll find out, probably sooner than later. He's had that same effect on me, since the first time I saw him. When nearly everyone else misunderstood his words, I didn't. He makes sense. Spirits in general do." I shrug. "To me, anyway."

"To me, as well." A pleasant moment passes, before he asks, "So, tell me, are there any other spirit friends of mine that you know?"

I blanch slightly, and take a breath. "..Yes. One. Wisdom."

"..You speak her name with dread. Why?"

I look away, swallowing around the tightness of my throat. "She... is destroyed. I'm not absolutely certain if there's a way to save her. I will try, but there's... no real way for me to know. There was no way to save her, in the story. She was too far gone, by the time we get to her. But, I want to try, if it's even remotely possible."

When I finally manage to look back up, pained shock is splayed across his visage, along with a mote of hope, floating in the stream of his emotions. It takes a few seconds for him to reply, and when he does, his voice is uneven, somewhat cracked, "I... thank you, for telling me. And for wishing to try. That alone means more to me than you know. If I may ask, how does she...die?"

One side of my mouth pulls into a grimace. "A trio of idiot mages summon and bind her, tofight for them, when they're beset by bandits. She is, naturally, corrupted by the compulsion, and becomes a demon of Pride, which of course turns against the mages, once the bandits are all dead. We break the binding stones, and free her, but by then, it is too late. You grant her the only release that is available to her, and all that made her your friend is lost."

He looks lost in a land of sorrow. I take his hand in mine, and lift it, pressing my lips to his knuckles. "I will do all I can to make sure it doesn't happen here."
He nods slowly, gaze drifting hazily over to meet mine. "Thank you."

I smile kindly, and nod in return. "Of course."

* * * * *

It takes some time, before he's able to concentrate on our purpose here, but eventually he finds his center. We spend the morning, and a small part of the afternoon, in the Fade. I learn how to recognize various demons, and out, or resist them. By the time we wake, I'm more grateful for time flowing differently in the Fade than I ever have been. I learned a lot, though there's still much to discover, I'm absolutely certain.

We're woken, quite rudely, by Solas' wards going off. We both jolt awake with a start, though I end up sitting straight up in my bedroll, from a dead sleep. He is the calmer, and more practical of the two of us, merely having his hand out, and a spell called to it, ready to fling at the intruder.

...Which turns out to be Varric.

"Whoa, whoa!" He throws his hands up, defensively. "Shit, I get it, alright! Blame the Seeker!" He points back at what must be her, though I can't see her from this angle. "She wants you two awake, we've just gotten reports of escalating activity nearby. It's all hands on deck."

I nod at him, and Solas' magic retreats. It isn't until I note what Varric's gaze has now settled on, that I realize Solas and I are still holding hands, from when he'd cast me into the Fade this morning. Solas seems to realize it at the same moment, and his hand gently retreats from mine. I swallow, and look back up to Varric with a plastered on smile. "Alright, thank you, Varric. We'll be out in a moment."

He nods, though it seems a bit reluctant. "Sure thing, Silk."

The tent flap falls back into place with the dwarf's absence, and I go about getting myself ready. I rub the sleep from my eyes, and cast a few small hygienic spells on my person. I do my best to comb my hair back into a tie, but it seems I don't do the greatest job of it, as Solas' hands rest on mine, when I try to finish tying it off. "Lasa'em, ma' fen."

I'm reminded of my mom doing the same thing, when I was a kid. "Let me, Shanna." And I'd give up in a huff, and hand her the hairband, slumping in a sulk as she fixed my horrendous hairstyling. ..And yes, my name is Shanna. I know, I said Shane. Shane is... well, Shane is who I became, for a long while. But Shanna is the name I was given by my mother. So there, now you know.

So it takes me a while to trust. Deal with it.

I let my hands slide from beneath his, and pool in my lap. I manage not to slump, or sulk. Much.

I'm not sure where he produced it from, or why he has one, but I feel the bristles of a brush scraping gently across my scalp. And in that moment, I am gone.

See, I have this thing, where if you brush my hair, or massage my scalp, or pull my hair in a sexual way? I'm... yeah. It's a thing. ❤

..To varying degrees, obviously. I'm not gonna orgasm if you braid my hair. But I just might fall asleep in a boneless puddle. Fair warning.

I actually am starting to slump a bit now, though it's in relaxation, not a bratty sulk. I let out a
contended sigh as my eyes close, muscles loosening and ridding themselves of some of the tension and soreness of our journey.

I hear a soft chuckle as he continues to brush my hair. "I take it you enjoy this?"

Another contented sigh is my only response for a few seconds, until his hands pause their work. "Mhmm," I finally manage, as coherent a response as he's getting, until I come out of this relaxation coma. His fault. The void did he get a brush from, anyway? Whatever, I don't care, I'll take it. The bristles feel firm, but soft... must be horse hair. Amazing.

A snicker comes from him this time, and I can almost feel his amused staring at the back of my head. "I see. I have discovered the fastest method of calming you, then?"

I make a tiny, wordless sound of confirmation, and he snorts, continuing his efforts unimpeded. He makes no further comment, until he concludes his fiddling, and I feel him gently tugging my hair into the leather strip. "There are better methods than this to bind your hair, if you wish to learn them. Some are frivolous, but there are many practical means to achieve the same effect. It can even be accomplished with magic, if you like. In fact, the basis of that spell has its roots in your own school of magic."

I murmur a distracted hum of a laugh, and shift backwards until I solidly deposit myself onto his lap, leaning my head back against his shoulder. The ridiculously pleased smile on my face is probably pretty legendary, but I don't even care. "You can teach me whatever you like, ma'fen. I will listen with rapt attention, I assure you." His surprise at my boldness fades after a few seconds, and he slides his arms gently around my waist. "However," I amend, resting my hands on his, "much as I'd absolutely love to stay right here for a good, long while, I think Cass will literally have our heads if we don't get out there."

"Hmm," and a soft sigh, is his only response for a bit, as he rests his chin on my shoulder. I turn just enough to sneak a curious peek at him out of the corner of my eye.

His response to that is nuzzling his face into my neck, effectively hiding his expression, and divesting me of any concern over it, as he showers soft affections on my skin.

The subtle rocking of my ass against his thigh, and soft moan from my lips are plenty indication of how I feel about his current attentions.

The dark chuckle he breathes into the side of my neck only serves to intensify his utter and complete claim over my nervous system, as a shiver races up my spine. "I've discovered how to instantly calm, and excite you, within minutes of each other. Should I feel as accomplished as I do?"

I smirk and huff a small laugh at his query. "Yes, yes, you should. Usually only one of those is discovered by a single person, ever. I would applaud, but I don't want to lose one ounce of contact with you."

Ah. I hadn't meant to say that last bit. Well. Yeah I deserve the blush that earned my cheeks. Damn it.

His teeth nipping my skin, the soft, moaning growl, and the tightening of his arms around me speak volumes to exactly what he thinks of that slip. I gasp softly at the nip, and grind a bit more fervently against his thigh, left hand risking the loss of contact with his hand to gain contact with the back of his head, encouraging him to continue his attentions to my neck—or any part of me,
really—quite pointedly.

At first, he gives in, seeming happy to oblige, but after a few panted seconds, he lifts away from my neck, and murmurs in my ear, "We should stop, ma'fen. Ir abelas, I know it is.. difficult. But you are correct, we should.. we have a duty to perform. There will be time for this, later."

I'm about to foolishly ask if that's a promise, when he impishly sucks my earlobe into his mouth, and gently nibbles on it.

*Good enough!*

*Gods, so good!*

---

**Chapter End Notes**

❤❤--Discord--❤❤

❤ Thanks for reading! If you enjoy the story or this chapter in particular, please feel free to leave a review with your thoughts! ❤

❤ I love reading comments and reply to all of them. ❤
Chapter Summary

Sorry for the initial confusion with the publishing of this chapter, I forgot how to format.
HOW DO FORMAT?
WHAT AM SKY?
>_<

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

*Fourth Monday, Frumentum, Nine Forty-One Dragon*

Our fist day in the Hinterlands is... frenetic. Why the hell won't either side listen? It's like they're both so fucking fanatical that they've evolved beyond ears!

Or they just don't care.

Is that it? They've gone so long being zealots, being either the oppressors or the oppressed, that they just can't see beyond their own noses any longer?

Shit.

Sad thing is, I almost understand. You live so long under an iron fist, and all you can see of anyone beyond your own is enemy. It's a bad state of being, but it happens. Conditioning, brainwashing... it's a more powerful thing than anyone thinks.

And more easily disseminated throughout society. It's not the obvious propaganda that brainwashes people. That doesn't work, until they're already conditioned to react to it. It's the things we tell ourselves and each other, word of mouth, what we learn in school, what we're force-fed to believe, no matter our original beliefs.

It happens all the time. Every day, everywhere.

So I guess I get what makes them close their ears, if I think about it. Critical thinking, am I right?

Anyway, it was a shit day, but at least I got our first real bit of information: fucking Orlais. Val Royeaux. The Chantry Mothers, and the demon Seeker, leading the Templars astray.

What a fucking circus.

But, at least it makes an impression.

Shit, nobody will even talk to us, until that happens.

Still a circus.

"You write in it while in the field? Well, at least you are dedicated." I look up to see the tired eyes
of my wolf, as he slips into the tent, his gaze on me and my journal. I smile slightly, then dip my head—and concentration—back to the page, as I apply my quill to it.

_Cass wants to head straight to Val Royeaux, but personally, I’d rather fix the Hinterlands, first. There’s plenty to get done here, so I’d rather just get it over with._

_We plunged through and got to Master Dennet today, so at least we’re not constantly on foot anymore. That’s helpful. Well, for travel, at least. It’s impractical to use them in general, in such a small area, unless we’re going from one end of it to the other. But even then, it’d be a pain to coordinate having the horses when we need them. Too bad we can’t just summon them, like in the story. A simple whistle, and bam! Transportation for weary fighters. Anyway, reality is much more stark than a story. Even as long as the story took to complete, this will take longer. Gods…_  

_Right. Well, I’d better sign off, for now._

_Fen’harel en’an’sal,_

_Fen’nas_

A gentle heat spell dries the ink, and I slip the thin leather marker into my current place, and close my journal, binding it with the spell. As I pack up my writing kit, I glance over to see Solas laid back, grasping a small, familiar bit of paper between his fingers. I smirk as I clean my quill and put it away. "Have you translated it yet?"

He glances over at me, as if surprised, then back at the page with a slight frown. "Partly. I'm uncertain if it is your supposedly terrible penmanship that prevents further translation, or if the letters simply do not correspond, as you claim they do."

I frown myself, and lean over, looking at the list, then at him. I point at the chicken scratch writing, and ask, "Which part is giving you trouble?"

He points to a particular word. "This is eluding my translation the most, though there are others."

I snicker and settle back against his makeshift pillow, next to him. "Perhaps because it's not translatable _directly_ to common trade."

He rolls his head to give me an incredulous look.

I roll my eyes and jab a finger at the phrase on the paper. "Fen’harel en’an’sal," I translate, then drop my hand to my stomach with a sigh.

He just frowns at me. "Why would you write that?"

I shrug half-heartedly. "Practice. It's my sign-off for my journal entries."

"But, why?" He seems utterly, genuinely perplexed.

"Remember what I told you in your cabin, about my wolf? For dun'himelan?" I remind him, gently, subtly.

Recognition dawns on his features. "You intend for others to read your journal?"

I snort and level a smirk at him. "$Do you really think that every single person who could get their hands on it, wouldn’t? Even after I, myself sink into obscurity, the legend," I wiggle my hands about dramatically, "$of the Herald of Andraste will live on, and people will want to know what I
said. What I was about. Who I was. What better way to discover that, than from her probably publicized journal, appropriately edited by the Chantry?" I snort again and thumb the binding of my public journal, then slide it into my pack.

"You would be comfortable, having your personal thoughts published, for all Thedas to read?"

I give him an incredulous look. "Not in the slightest. Which is why they won't be. I fully plan to be in control of what gets published, and what doesn't. This," I pat my pack, just over the journal, "is merely a guideline, and something for those close to me to read, should they decide to be nosy. And, if they manage to translate it, they will find some rather interesting, odd notions, and discover that their Herald worships a trickster. Altogether an entirely odd experience. As intended."

He frowns slightly, though a smirk tugs at his lips. "So you intend to deceive them?"

I shake my head. "Not in the slightest. If they come to me, asking after the things in that journal, I will be glad to correct them. If they assume the words to be truth, they will find themselves highly confused, and wanting answers. It's designed to have them come to me about it, to learn the truth of the matter; thus exposing themselves, in the process."

He chuckles slightly, and shakes his head, eyes lifting to grace the roof with their stare. "It is.. oddly clever, in a way." He looks back over at me, smiling softly. "I suppose I should expect no less."

* * * * *

What I wouldn't give for coffee.

I can almost taste it, in my desperation. It's nigh-on a month since I've been able to actually taste it, and it's starting to get to me. Oh, we have coffee in Thedas, believe me. It's just expensive, and impossible to get out in the field, unless you happen upon a particularly well-off merchant on the road, who's actually willing to sell his supply. A rare event, indeed.

We certainly haven't been that lucky. We've been in the Hinterlands for about a month now, and honestly, we're all pretty ragged.

Go fetch this! Kill these! Gather them! Bludgeon those! Carry that! It's endless.

I don't mind, usually, until people start adding petty shite they could easily get themselves, and it gets a bit teeth-grindingly aggravating. But, naturally, I did insist on getting done with the Hinterlands first, and seeing as I'm the wonderful Herald, I have reputation to uphold. So, off we go, to rescue the puss from the tree.

Not really, but close enough.

Honestly, as much as I hate the very idea of Orlais, it'll be a relief to be there, instead of here. Progress, at least. This is progress, true, but that's more progress. This is still more important, for now. I'm gaining the hearts of the people, and that's a more powerful force than any organization could ever be. So, I'll buck up and deal with it all.

For now.

* * * * *
"Fuck me."

"Fen'nas! That's hardly appropriate!"

I turn a withering glare toward Cass as we walk, then heave a deep sigh. "Probably not, but at this point, I'm past caring. What do they want from us? In the past two days, I've mucked out a stable, and delivered a baby. I'm not the damned stable boy, nor am I the midwife! Not saying I'm above those tasks, because I'm not, but for crying out loud, I'm just..." I trail off, with another sigh, rubbing my neck and turning away.

"Tired?" Cassandra supplies, helpfully, her tone a bit sardonic.

I snort and nod, my only reply.

"Perhaps we should make a break for Val Royeaux, at this juncture? It seems that most major tasks have been completed here. All the rifts are closed, and all major threats dealt with. It may be prudent to return later, or send some of your troops after the rest of the issues in this province." Ah, the voice of reason from the mouth of a wolf.

I stop and turn, looking at my wolf with an evenly considering expression.

Varric adds, a bit eagerly, "I can't believe I'm about to say this, but I agree with Chuckles. Much as the people's goodwill is important, your soldiers represent you as much as you do, by now. I'd say we're due some civilization, after all this wide-open countryside."

I arch a brow at Varric, tempering the smirk that threatens to prick at my lips just before it appears. "I see." I look back at Cass. "Is this a universal opinion, then? Shall we personally abandon Ferelden for the time being, and continue to Orlais, leaving the rest to our best?"

Cassandra looks between the three of us, a thoughtful expression gracing her features. She takes a long breath before she replies, "It would seem to be the wiser of two options, for the moment. I would recommend returning after we've done all we can in Val Royeaux, however."

I dip my head in a nod. "Then we are agreed. Thank all the fucks that've ever fucked. Let's—"

"Fen'nas!" Cass interjects, her frustration more than evident.

"What?" I snap back, "I can't get out all my foulness before we talk to the Chantry? I mean, would you rather I slip here, where no ears but your own can hear me, or would you rather I spew it all over the Maker's most holies?"

"Neither," she grinds out, between clenched teeth. She about faces and heads for camp, apparently finished with the conversation.

I shrug and follow, muttering every curse I know under my breath, head bobbing and face animating antagonistically at her back. Fortitude snickers behind me somewhere, Varric echoing the sentiment slightly more subtly a moment later. Solas is probably glaring at the back of my wobbling head with a disapproving stare. I couldn't care less. I'm happy to be done with this place, at least until after Val Royeaux.

After.. after is Dorian. Something to look forward to, at least.

We've seen hide nor hair of Cole's fair head, outside of the Fade. He's appeared a few times, spouting a few dozen lines of helpful, if alliterative phrasing, before promptly disappearing. He's probably been around, just not letting anyone remember him yet.
I wouldn't know.

We're back at camp by noon, packing up our supplies and gear. I head down to the Crossroads with my little group and purchase the best armaments they can supply us. It's not custom-fit, but it's less ragged than the crap we came in with. Best to put our shiniest foot forward in Val Royeaux, even with the crapshoot it ends up being. First impressions are everything in this world, I've noticed.

Bedecked in our newest, we head back to camp and mount up, turning our blessedly fresh mounts toward Orlais with no small amount of trepidation and relief.

Ever onward.

Chapter End Notes

❤--Discord--❤

❤ Thanks for reading! If you enjoy the story or this chapter in particular, please feel free to leave a review with your thoughts! ❤

❤ I love reading comments and reply to all of them. ❤

Works inspired by this FFR'nas And Company by Saber_Sloth

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